

How Trump and Non-Trump Republicans Differ on Immigration Policy

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While Republicans have been concerned about immigration since the Chicago Council first started asking about the issue in 1998, those concerns [reached new heights](#) starting in 2016. It's no coincidence that just one year prior, Donald Trump entered the GOP primary race. He launched his campaign in 2015 with an all-guns-blazing approach to the issue of immigration, calling for the construction of a border wall in the southern United States and strengthening the "enforcement arm" of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement office. Trump's rivals for the 2024 GOP presidential nomination vary in the extent to which they embrace his extreme views on immigration, but they generally also signal a tough approach to the issue as one of their key strategies to attract voters.

These policies seem to mostly align with Republican supporters among the US public, whether they are "Trump Republicans" who express a very favorable view of the former president (47% of Republicans) or "non-Trump Republicans" who express a somewhat favorable or unfavorable view (53% of Republicans).¹ Majorities of both camps consider immigration a critical threat to the United States and support using the US military to prevent immigrants from crossing the southern border. But there are large disparities between Trump and non-Trump Republicans on legal immigration levels and whether

¹ Among the overall US public, 27% self-identify as Republican party supporters. See the Methodology section for more details on "Trump Republicans" and "non-Trump Republicans".

undocumented immigrants should be provided a path to citizenship or be forced to leave the country.

Key Findings

- Trump Republicans consider immigration the most critical of all potential threats facing the United States (88%). A majority of non-Trump Republicans also consider immigration a critical threat (67%), but not as threatening as cyberattacks, weakening democracy in the United States, or the development of China as a world power.
- Two-thirds of Trump Republicans say legal immigration should be decreased (66%). A slight plurality of non-Trump Republicans say legal immigration should remain at present levels (42% vs. 38% decreased)
- When asked about undocumented immigrants currently working in the United States, non-Trump Republicans are far more likely than Trump Republicans to prefer a path to citizenship immediately or after a waiting period (51% vs. 32%).
- A slim majority (54%) of Trump Republicans support deportations for undocumented immigrants working in the United States. Only 29 percent of non-Trump Republicans agree.
- Large majorities of Trump Republicans (92%) and non-Trump Republicans (67%) would support using the US military to prevent immigrants from coming into the United States from Mexico.
- Smaller majorities of both groups would also favor sending US troops to combat drug cartels in Mexico (72% of Trump, 57% non-Trump Republicans).

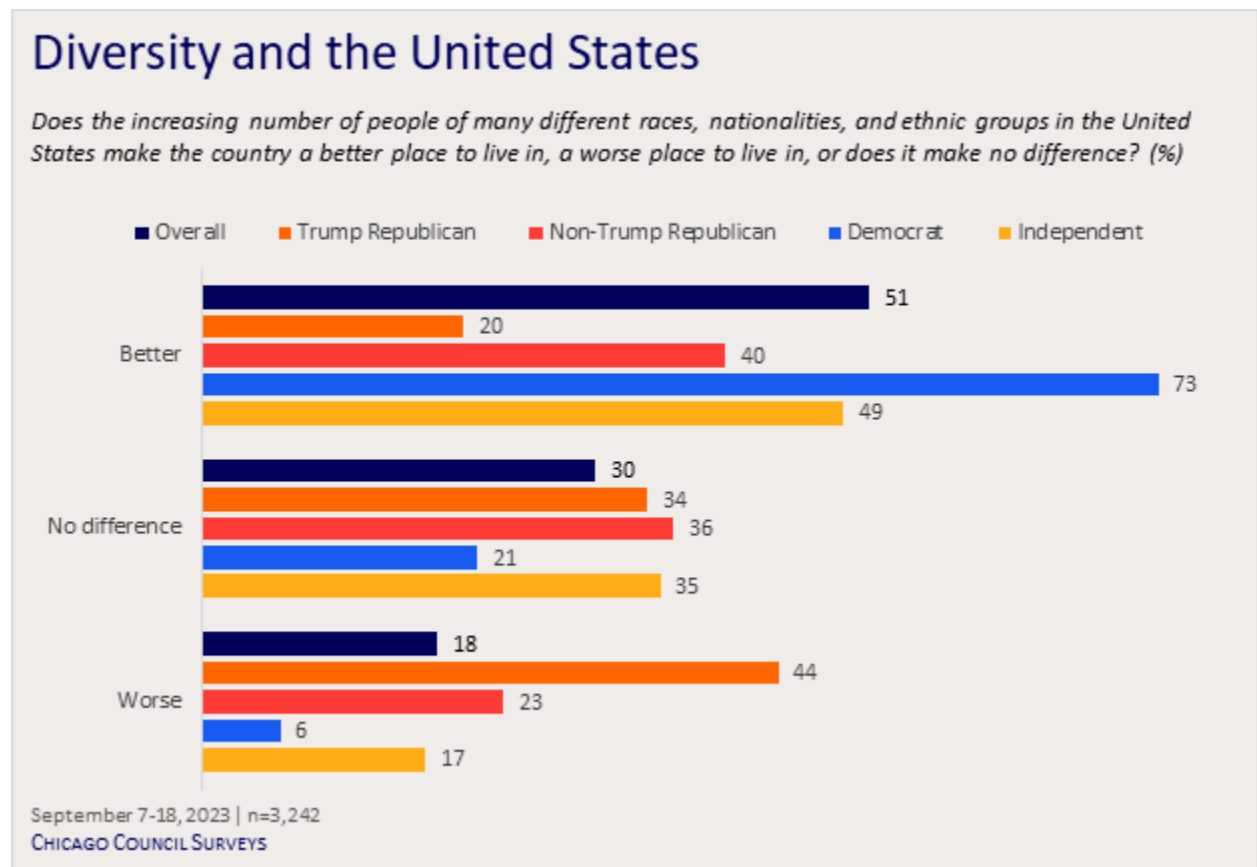
Increasing Diversity: Good or Bad for United States?

In the speech in which he formally announced his presidential run in 2015, Trump stunned many by alleging that Mexico was sending immigrants to the United States that are “bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists.” This set the tenor for [his plans once in office](#). After his inauguration, Trump signed an executive order to [limit travelers](#) from seven largely Muslim countries for 90 days, began [building a wall](#) along the US southern border, and implemented [family separation](#) for immigrants seeking to enter the country.

Out of office, the former president’s views—and those of other Republicans—have grown increasingly hostile toward immigrants. Recently, Trump had to [deny cribbing from Adolf Hitler](#) after saying that immigrants are “[poisoning the blood of our country](#).” He has revealed plans to take his anti-immigration policies to an [even more extreme level](#) if he recaptures the presidency in 2024.

His Republican primary challengers vary in their rhetoric and statements on immigration, but they all pledge to enact policies that will curtail immigration, especially undocumented immigration. All of them [have endorsed constructing the southern border wall](#), even Nikki Haley, who had previously questioned the idea. All of them place a high priority on deporting undocumented immigrants living in the United States. And all endorse ending birthright citizenship for children of unauthorized immigrants born in the United States.

These proposals have found a welcome audience among the Republican Party’s base. And indeed, among the overall American public, Republican Party supporters are more likely than average to say that increasing the numbers of people of many different races, nationalities, and ethnic groups in the United States makes the country a worse (33%) rather than better (30%) place to live. Closer analysis reveals that the attitudes of Trump Republicans are driving that number, with 44 percent saying increasing diversity makes the United States a worse place. Non-Trump Republicans are closer to the overall average (with 23% saying it is worse). Just 20 percent of Trump Republicans say increasing diversity makes the country a better place compared to 40 percent of non-Trump Republicans.



Immigration as a Critical Threat

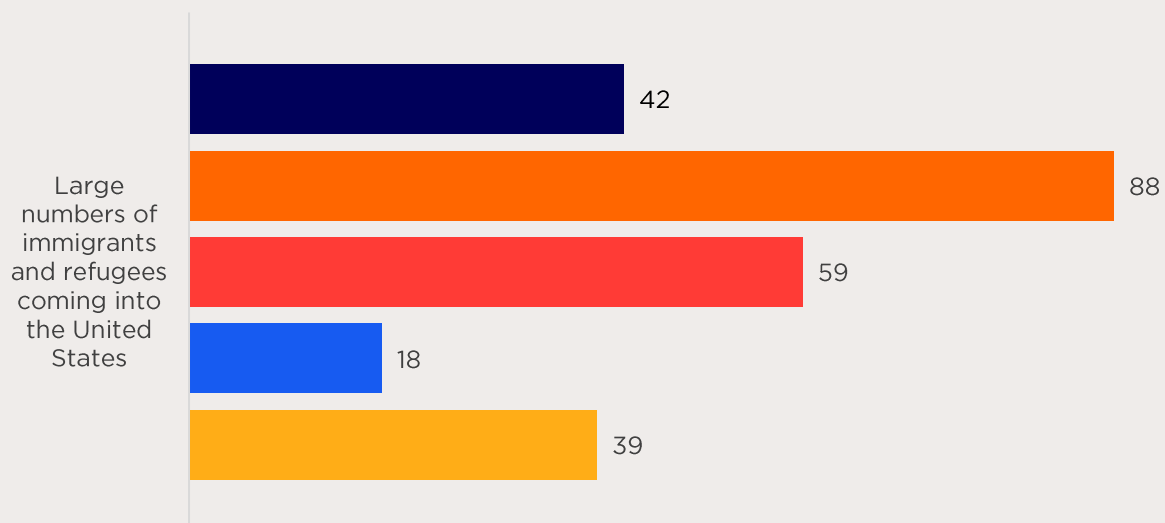
A large majority of Republican Party supporters continue to see immigration as a top threat to the United States (72%); in fact, immigration has consistently rated as one of Republicans' top threats since the question was first asked in 1998.

Of all the potential threats asked of respondents in the 2023 Chicago Council Survey, the largest difference between Trump and non-Trump Republicans is on the threat from immigration. Nearly nine in 10 Trump Republicans consider immigration a critical threat (88%, up from 79% in 2017) compared to 59 percent of non-Trump Republicans (43% in 2017). For Trump Republicans, immigration is deemed the highest of all potential threats. Non-Trump Republicans perceive a greater threat from cyberattacks, weakening democracy, and China, and they are equally likely to rate political polarization a critical threat as to rate immigration as one.

Threats to the United States

Below is a list of possible threats to the vital interest of the United States in the next 10 years. For each one, please select whether you see this as a critical threat, an important but not critical threat, or not an important threat at all: (% critical threat)

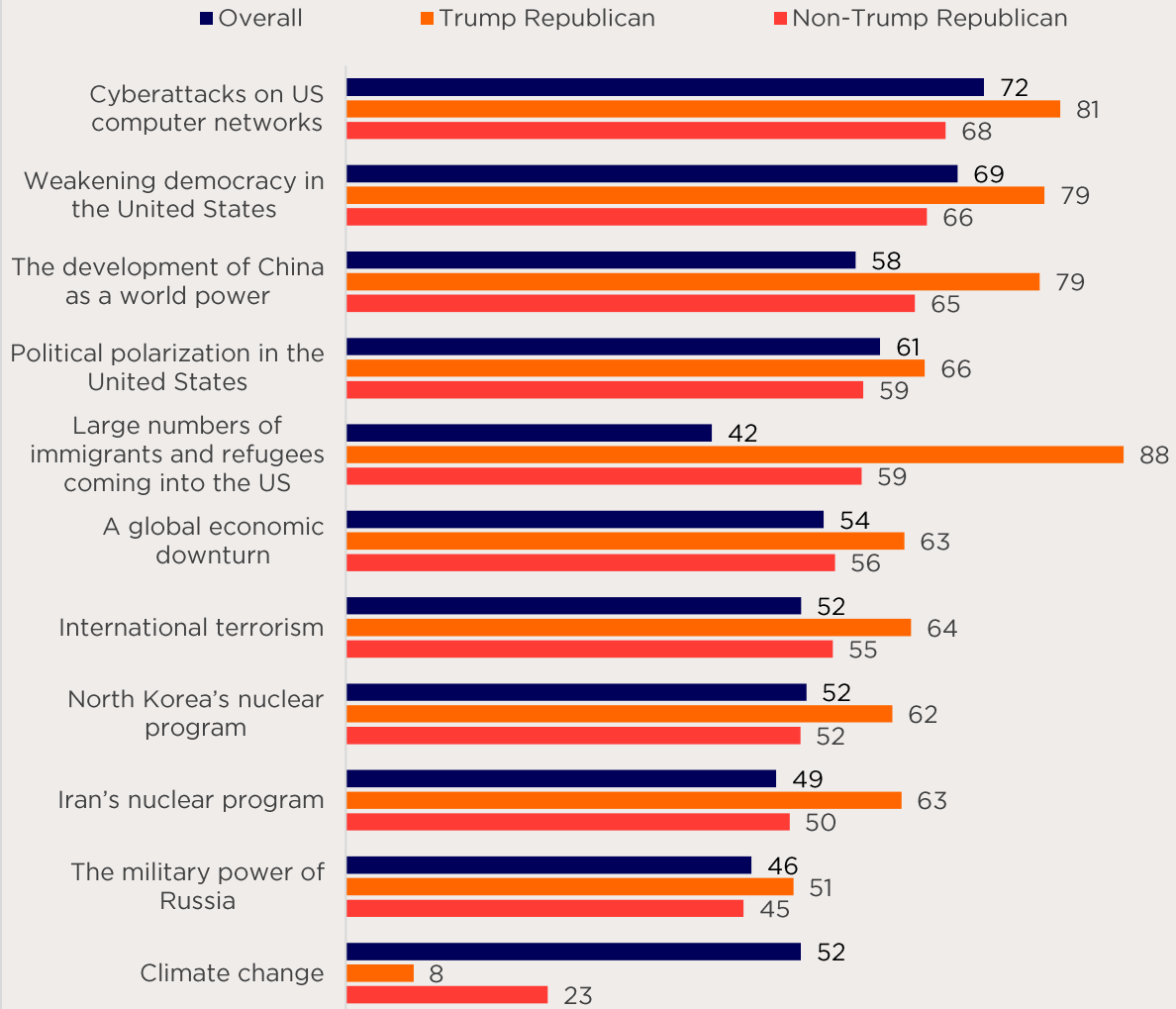
■ Overall ■ Trump Republican ■ Non-Trump Republican ■ Democrat ■ Independent



September 7-18, 2023 | n=2,051
CHICAGO COUNCIL SURVEYS

Republican Views of Critical Threats

Below is a list of possible threats to the vital interest of the United States in the next 10 years. For each one, please select whether you see this as a critical threat, an important but not critical threat, or not an important threat at all: (% critical threat)

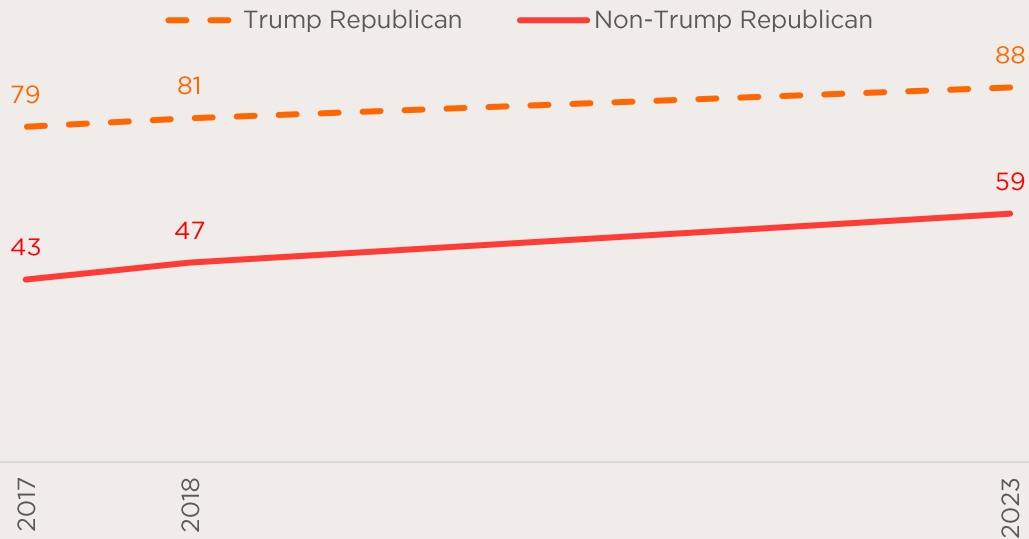


September 7-18, 2023 | n=varies (2,051 to 2,070)

CHICAGO COUNCIL SURVEYS

Rising Immigration Concerns among Republicans

Below is a list of possible threats to the vital interest of the United States in the next 10 years. For each one, please select whether you see this as a critical threat, an important but not critical threat, or not an important threat at all: *Large numbers of immigrants and refugees coming into the United States* (% critical threat)



September 7-18, 2023 | n = 505
CHICAGO COUNCIL SURVEYS

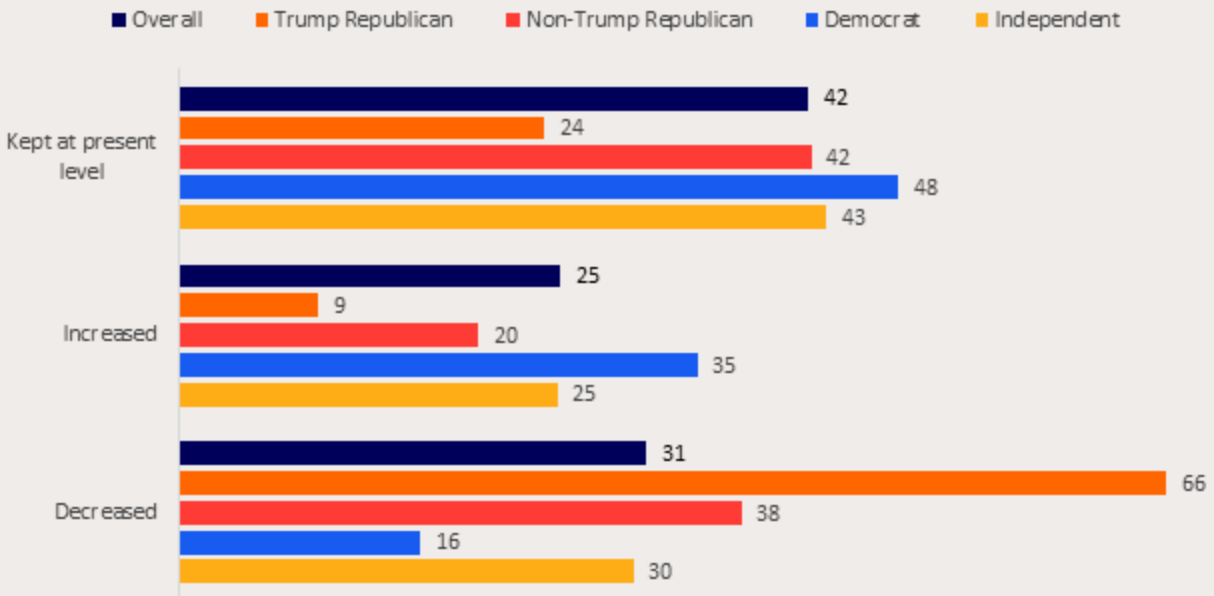
Big Divides among Republicans on Whether to Decrease Legal Immigration

The GOP presidential contenders focus less on immigrants who enter the United States legally than they do on those who enter illegally, but they have proposed some restrictions on legal immigration as well. Nikki Haley has said she thinks legal immigration should be based on [business needs and “merit.”](#) In fact, [surveys by the Public Religion Research Institute](#) have found that Americans across the board are more welcoming toward skilled versus unskilled immigrants.

In the 2023 Chicago Council survey, half of Republicans overall (51%) say legal immigration should be decreased (34% same, 15% increased). But there is a large disparity between Trump and non-Trump Republicans on legal immigration. While two-thirds of Trump Republicans say that legal immigration should be decreased (66%), only 38 percent of non-Trump Republicans agree. A slight plurality of non-Trump Republicans prefer to keep immigration at present levels (42%).

Legal Immigration Levels

Should legal immigration into the United States be kept at its present level, increased or decreased? (%)



September 7-18, 2023 | n=3,242
CHICAGO COUNCIL SURVEYS

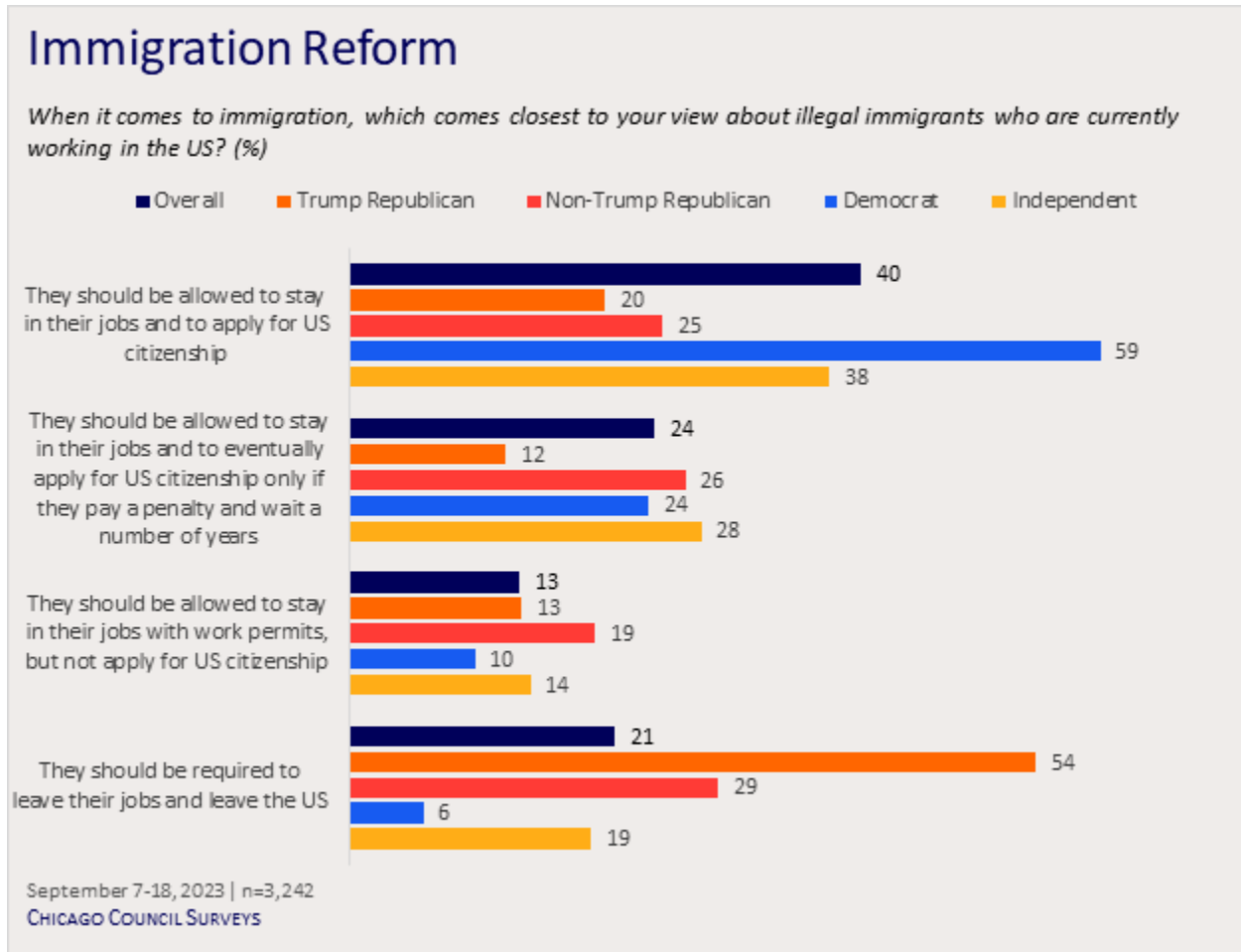
Majority of Trump Republicans Support Deporting Undocumented Immigrants

Trump has expanded his immigration plans from the policies he enacted while in office to include [far-reaching raids to find and deport undocumented immigrants](#). Ron DeSantis and Haley, while not outlining quite as comprehensive an approach, have also vowed to [deport undocumented immigrants](#). Each candidate has also proposed [ending birthright citizenship](#) for children born to undocumented parents.

Among Republicans overall, there is some division on whether undocumented immigrants working in the United States should be offered a path to citizenship. Roughly four in 10 say undocumented workers should be allowed to stay and become citizens immediately (22%) or after a penalty period (20%). Just as many say they should be ordered to leave their jobs and leave the country (41%). But there are large differences within the Republican camp. A slim majority (54%) of Trump Republicans support deportations for undocumented immigrants working in the United States compared to just 29 percent of non-Trump Republicans. Compared to 2017, the percentage supporting deportations among Trump Republicans has grown (from 45% in

2017 to 54% in 2023). Non-Trump Republicans have not shifted much (25% in 2017 to 29% now).

Non-Trump Republicans are far more likely than Trump Republicans to prefer a path to citizenship immediately or after a waiting period (51% vs. 32%). This is a decrease for both groups. In 2017, 45 percent of Trump Republicans supported citizenship for undocumented workers with or without conditions as did 62 percent of non-Trump Republicans.



Send in the Cavalry?

Each of the remaining GOP presidential candidates has suggested sending a branch of the US military into Mexico, either to prevent immigrants from crossing the border or to intercept the transport of fentanyl. The legality of such a measure is in question, but it has not stopped the candidates from promoting these forceful ideas.

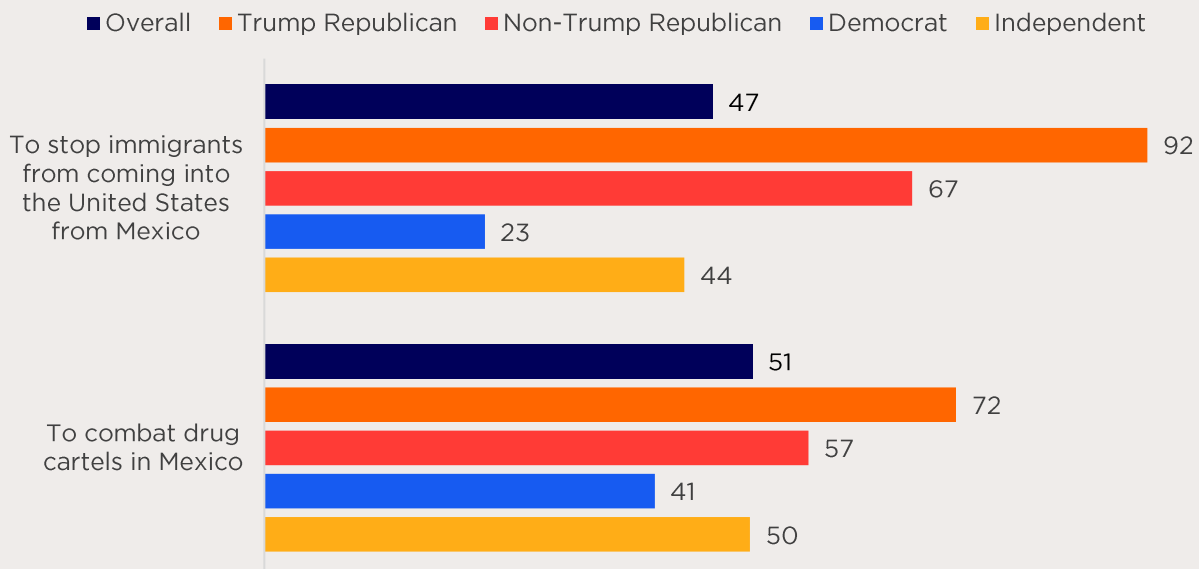
These proposals are also quite popular among the Republican public. Eight in 10 Republican Party supporters favor sending US troops to stop immigrants

coming into the United States from Mexico (79%). And two-thirds favor using US troops to combat drug cartels in Mexico. Both readings are much higher than the average for the overall US public.

Majorities of both Trump and non-Trump Republicans support using military force for these goals, though they vary in intensity. Nearly all (92%) of Trump Republicans favor using the US military to prevent immigrants from coming into the United States from Mexico versus two-thirds (67%) of non-Trump Republicans. And seven in 10 Trump Republicans (72%) favor sending the US military to combat drug cartels in Mexico compared to 57 percent among non-Trump Republicans.

Using US Troops to Stop Immigration, Fight Cartels

There has been some discussion about the circumstances that might justify using US troops in other parts of the world. Please give your opinion about some situations. Would you favor or oppose the use of US troops: (% favor)



September 7-18, 2023 | n=3,242
CHICAGO COUNCIL SURVEYS

Methodology

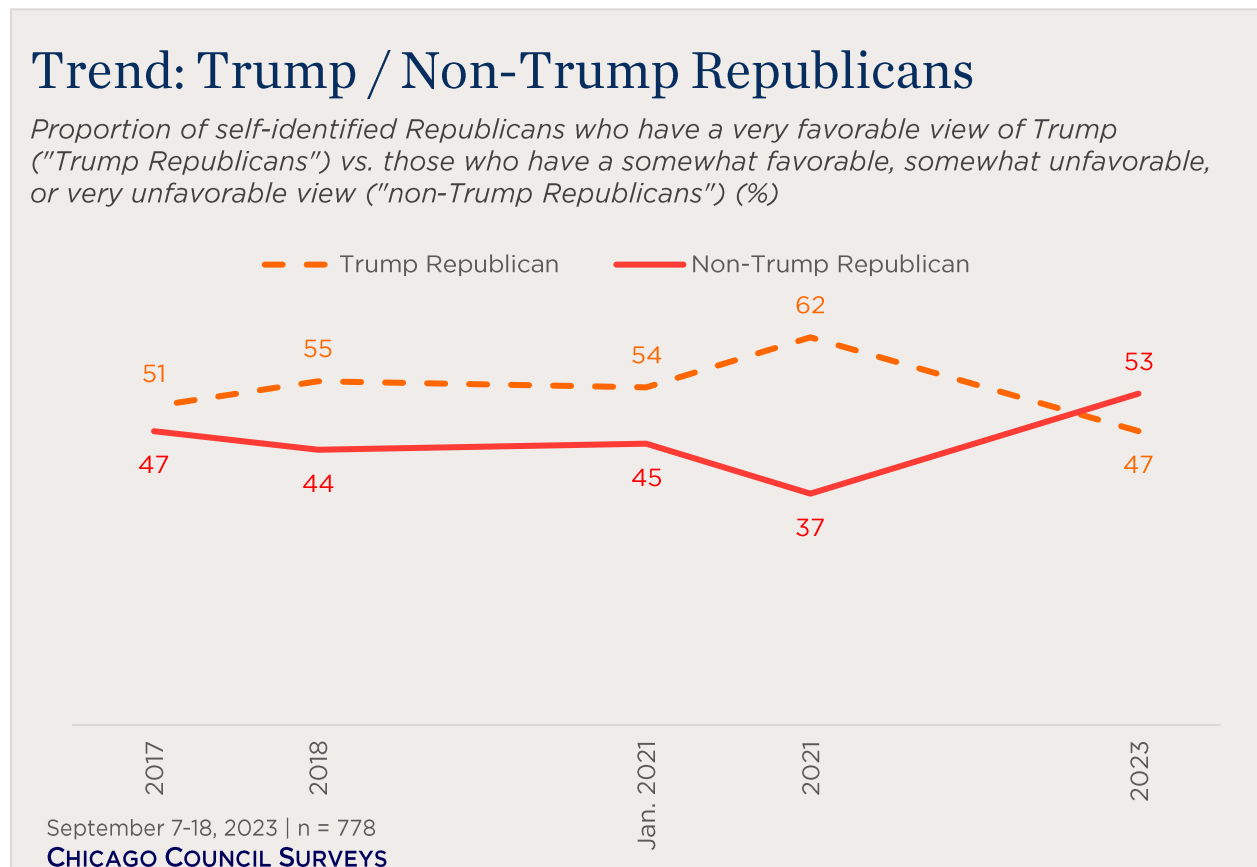
This analysis is based on data from the 2023 Chicago Council Survey of the American public on foreign policy, a project of the Lester Crown Center on US Foreign Policy. The 2023 Chicago Council Survey was conducted September 7-18, 2023, by Ipsos using its large-scale nationwide online research panel, KnowledgePanel, in both English and Spanish among a weighted national sample of 3,242 adults 18 or older living in all 50 US states and the District of Columbia. The margin of sampling error for the full sample is ± 1.7 percentage points. The margin of error is higher for partisan subgroups or for partial-sample items.

Partisan identification is based on how respondents answered a standard partisan self-identification question: “Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what?”

The 2023 Chicago Council Survey is made possible by the generous support of the Crown family, the Korea Foundation, and the United States-Japan Foundation.

About “Trump Republicans” and “Non-Trump Republicans”

Among the overall US public, 27 percent self-identify as Republican Party supporters. For the purposes of this analysis, “Trump Republicans” refers to those Republican Party supporters who express a very favorable opinion of Donald Trump (47% of overall Republicans, 13% of the public overall). Non-Trump Republicans are those who express only a somewhat favorable or unfavorable view of the former president (53% of overall Republicans, 14% of the public overall). The proportion of Republicans who hold a very favorable view of him has varied over time, with generally just over half of self-identified Republicans holding a very favorable view of Trump (see below figure).



Demographically, Trump and non-Trump Republicans look similar aside from education. Trump Republicans are notably more likely to have a high school education or less, while non-Trump Republicans are more likely to have a bachelor’s degree (or a more advanced degree).

	Trump Republican	Non-Trump Republican
Gender		
Male	50	49
Female	50	51
Age		
18-29	17	16
30-44	22	22
45-59	24	28
60+	38	34
Education		
Less than High School	9	6
High School	41	27
Some College	31	28
Bachelors Degree or Higher	19	39
Race/Ethnicity		
White, Non-Hispanic	82	78
Black or African American, Non-Hispanic	2	2
Other, Non-Hispanic	5	8
Hispanic	11	12

About the Chicago Council on Global Affairs

The Chicago Council on Global Affairs is an independent, nonpartisan membership organization that provides insight—and influences the public discourse—on critical global issues. We convene leading global voices, conduct independent research, and engage the public to explore ideas that will shape our global future. The Council is committed to bringing clarity and offering solutions to issues that transcend borders and transform how people, business, and governments engage the world. Learn more at thechicagocouncil.org and follow [@ChicagoCouncil](https://twitter.com/ChicagoCouncil).

About the Lester Crown Center on US Foreign Policy

Established in 2018 with a transformative gift from the Crown Family, the Lester Crown Center on US Foreign Policy is driven by the belief that the public plays a critical role in determining the direction of US foreign policy and that an informed and engaged public is critical for effective policymaking. The centerpiece of the Lester Crown Center is its annual survey of American public opinion and US foreign policy, the Chicago Council Survey, which has been conducted since 1974. For the latest research from the Crown Center, follow [@ChiCouncilFP](https://twitter.com/ChiCouncilFP).