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## Republicans and Democrats have different top priorities for U.S. immigration policy

BY [J. BAXTER OLIPHANT](#) AND [ANDY CERDA](#)

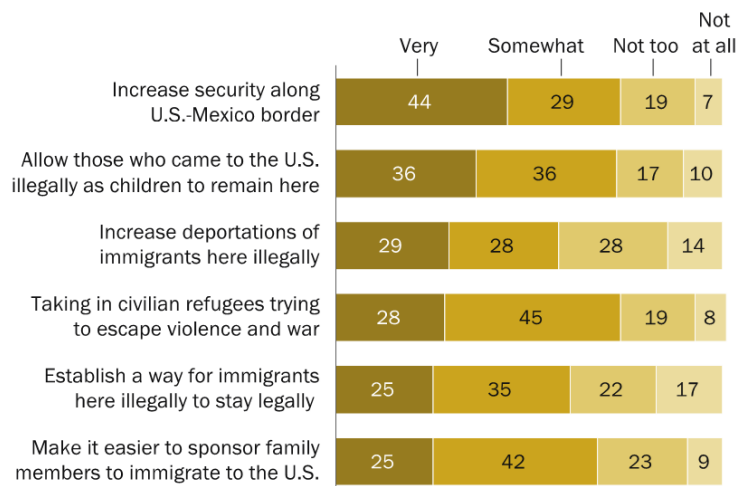


U.S. Customs and Border Protection agents detain migrants attempting to cross into the U.S. from Mexico on Aug. 20 in San Luis, Arizona. (Nick Ut/Getty Images)

Republicans and Democrats differ over the most pressing priorities for the nation's immigration system. Republicans place particular importance on border security and deportations of immigrants who are in the country illegally, while Democrats place greater importance on paths to legal status for those who entered the country illegally – especially those who entered as children, according to a new Pew Research Center survey.

### Majorities of Americans view increased border security, legal status for children brought to the U.S. illegally as important immigration policy goals

% who say each is a \_\_\_\_ important goal for U.S. immigration policy



Notes: See topline for full question wording. No answer responses not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Aug. 1-14, 2022.

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Still, there are some areas of overlap between Republicans and Democrats, and there are sizable ideological differences in immigration goals within each partisan coalition, with conservative Republicans and liberal Democrats expressing more intense views than others in their parties.

As the number of people [apprehended for illegally crossing the southern border](#) has reached record annual levels, about three-quarters of Americans (73%) say increasing security along the U.S.-Mexico border to reduce illegal crossings should be a very (44%) or somewhat (29%) important goal of U.S. immigration policy. Nearly all Republicans and Republican-leaning independents (91%) say border security should be an important goal, while a smaller majority of Democrats and Democratic leaners (59%) say the same, according to the survey of 7,647 U.S. adults conducted Aug. 1 to 14.

#### How we did this ⊕

Majorities of Americans also say taking in civilian refugees from countries where people are trying to escape violence and war (72%) and allowing immigrants who came to the

country illegally as children to remain in the U.S. and apply for legal status (72%) should be important goals for the immigration system. Each of these priorities garners more support from Democrats than Republicans.

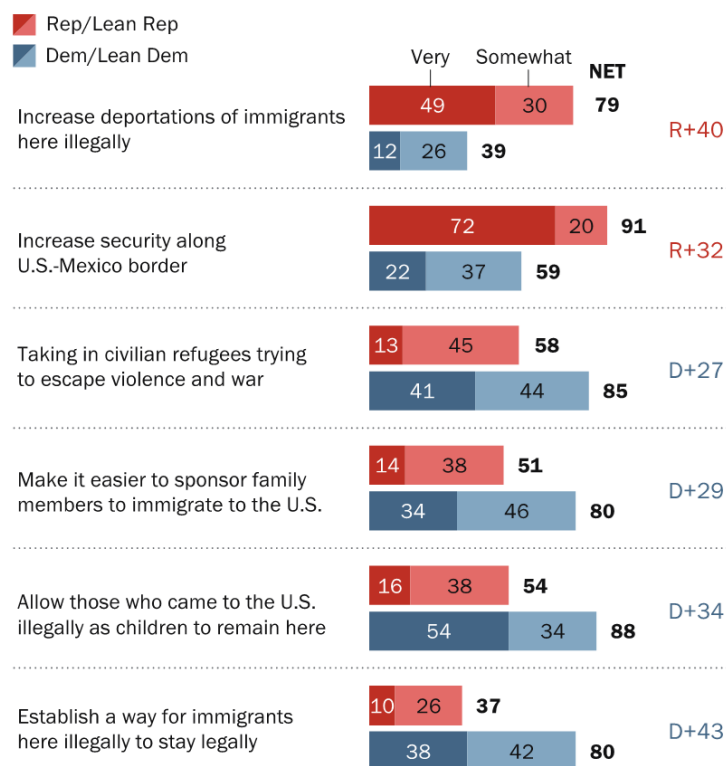
About two-thirds of the public (66%) wants the immigration system to make it easier for U.S. citizens and legal residents to sponsor family members to immigrate to the U.S., while six-in-ten say establishing a way for most immigrants currently in the country illegally to stay legally should be an important immigration policy goal. A similar share (57%) says that increasing deportations of immigrants currently in the country illegally should be a very or somewhat important goal of U.S. immigration policy.

### Wide partisan and ideological differences on immigration policy

For every policy asked about in the survey, there are sizable partisan differences in perceived importance. Still, for many policies included in the survey, majorities in both parties say it should be at least a somewhat important goal.

#### Republicans prioritize border security as very important immigration goal; Democrats more likely to view path to legal status as very important

% who say each is a **very/somewhat** important goal for U.S. immigration policy



Note: See topline for full question wording.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Aug. 1-14, 2022.

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About nine-in-ten Republicans and Republican-leaning independents (91%) call increasing security along the U.S.-Mexico border an important goal, including 72% who say it should be a *very* important goal.

While a majority of Democrats and Democratic leaners (59%) say border security should be at least somewhat important, just 22% view this as *very* important – 50 percentage points less than the share of Republicans who say this.

About eight-in-ten Republicans (79%) say increasing deportations of immigrants currently in the country illegally is important, with nearly half (49%) calling it *very* important. By comparison, 39% of Democrats view increasing deportations as very or somewhat important, including just 12% who see it as very important.

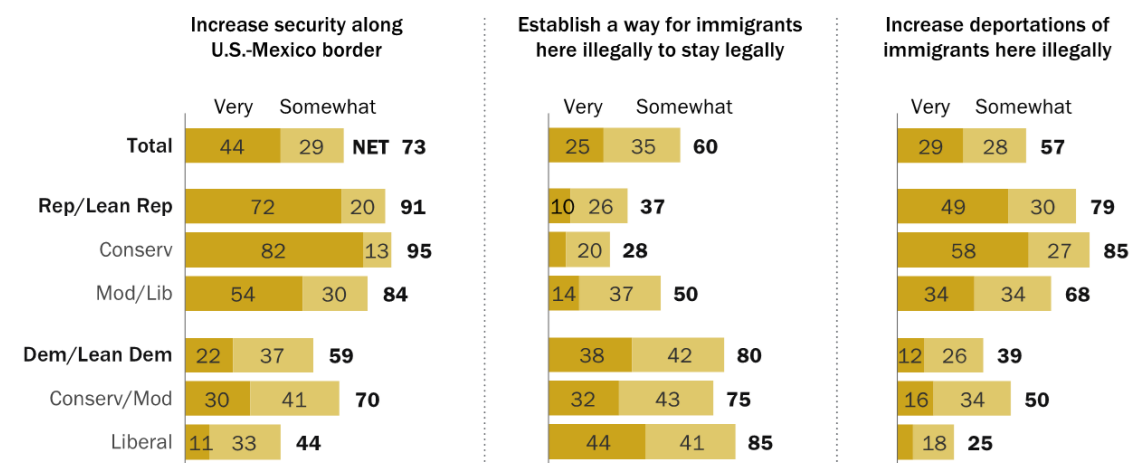
Democrats are more likely than Republicans (80% vs. 37%) to say that establishing a way for most immigrants currently in the country illegally to stay in the U.S. legally is an important goal for the nation's immigration system. About four-in-ten Democrats (38%) view this as a *very* important goal, compared with 10% of Republicans.

Majorities in both parties say that taking in refugees from countries where people are fleeing war and violence is an important goal. Nonetheless, more Democrats than Republicans view it as important (85% vs. 58%). Around four-in-ten Democrats (41%) say that taking in refugees is *very* important, while just 13% of Republicans say the same.

Conservative Republicans are the most likely to express strong support for more restrictive immigration goals such as increased border security and increased deportations, even when compared with others in their party. Liberal Democrats, by contrast, are the least supportive of these restrictive goals while being the most supportive of establishing a path to legalization for undocumented immigrants in the country.

## Democrats ideologically divided on importance of U.S.-Mexico border security, increased deportations; Republicans differ on establishing a path to legal status

% who say each is a *very/somewhat important* goal for U.S. immigration policy



Note: See topline for full question wording.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Aug. 1-14, 2022.

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Around eight-in-ten conservative Republicans (82%) say increased border security should be a very important goal for U.S. immigration policy; about half of moderates and liberals in the GOP (54%) say the same. Similarly, about six-in-ten conservative Republicans (58%) say increasing deportations of immigrants currently in the country illegally should be a very important goal, compared with about a third of moderate and liberal Republicans (34%). (Conservative Republicans account for about six-in-ten of those who identify with or lean toward the GOP.)

Among Democrats, conservatives and moderates are more likely than liberals to say more restrictive goals are very or somewhat important to U.S. immigration policy. Seven-in-ten conservative and moderate Democrats say increasing border security should be a very or somewhat important goal, compared with 44% of liberal Democrats. Conservative and moderate Democrats are also twice as likely as liberal Democrats (50% vs. 25%) to say increasing deportations should be an important goal.

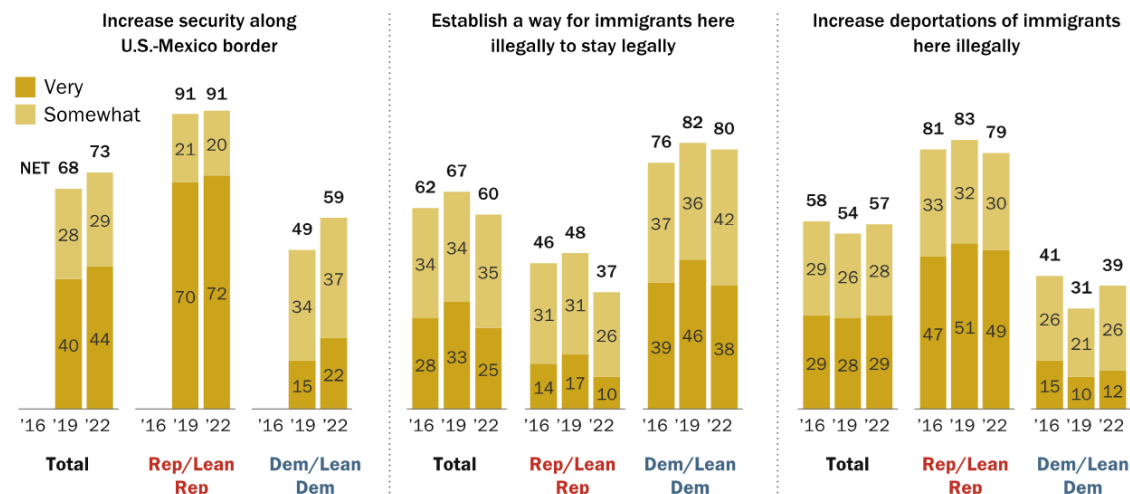
Liberal Democrats are the most supportive of creating a way for most undocumented immigrants to stay in the country legally: 85% say this should be an important goal, including 44% who say it should *very* important. Three-quarters of conservative and moderate Democrats see this as an important goal, including 32% who see it as *very* important. Among Republicans, half of moderates and liberals say a path to legal status should be an important goal, while only about three-in-ten conservatives (28%) say the same.

### Modest changes in views of U.S. immigration policy

Many of the public's views about immigration policy goals have been largely stable over the past few years. For example, views on taking in refugees are roughly the same as in 2019, and views on allowing immigrants who came to the U.S. illegally as children to apply for legal status are largely unchanged from 2016. There has been a modest increase in the share of Americans who say increasing deportations of immigrants here illegally should be a very or somewhat important goal (57% today vs. 54% in 2019).

### Share of Democrats rating border security as important policy goal has increased since 2019; fewer Republicans view path to legal status as important

% who say each is a *very/somewhat important* goal for U.S. immigration policy



Note: See topline for full question wording.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Aug. 1-14, 2022.

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There has been a 5 percentage point increase in the share of the public who say increasing security along the U.S.-Mexico border to reduce illegal crossings should be an important goal (73% today vs. 68% three years ago). This increase is largely driven by a 10-point increase in the share of Democrats who say this (59% today vs. 49% then).

Support for a pathway to legal status for most immigrants currently in the country illegally has declined over the past three years. Today, six-in-ten adults say this should be an important goal, down from 67% in 2019 and similar to the share who said this in 2016 (62%). The decline reflects a decrease among Republicans – especially conservative Republicans. In 2019, about half of Republicans (48%) said this should be an important goal; today, just 37% say the same.

Note: Here are [the questions used](#) for the report, along with responses, and [its methodology](#).

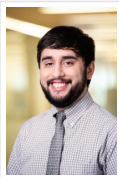
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