

Growing Partisan Divides on Immigration

Craig Kafura, Research Associate

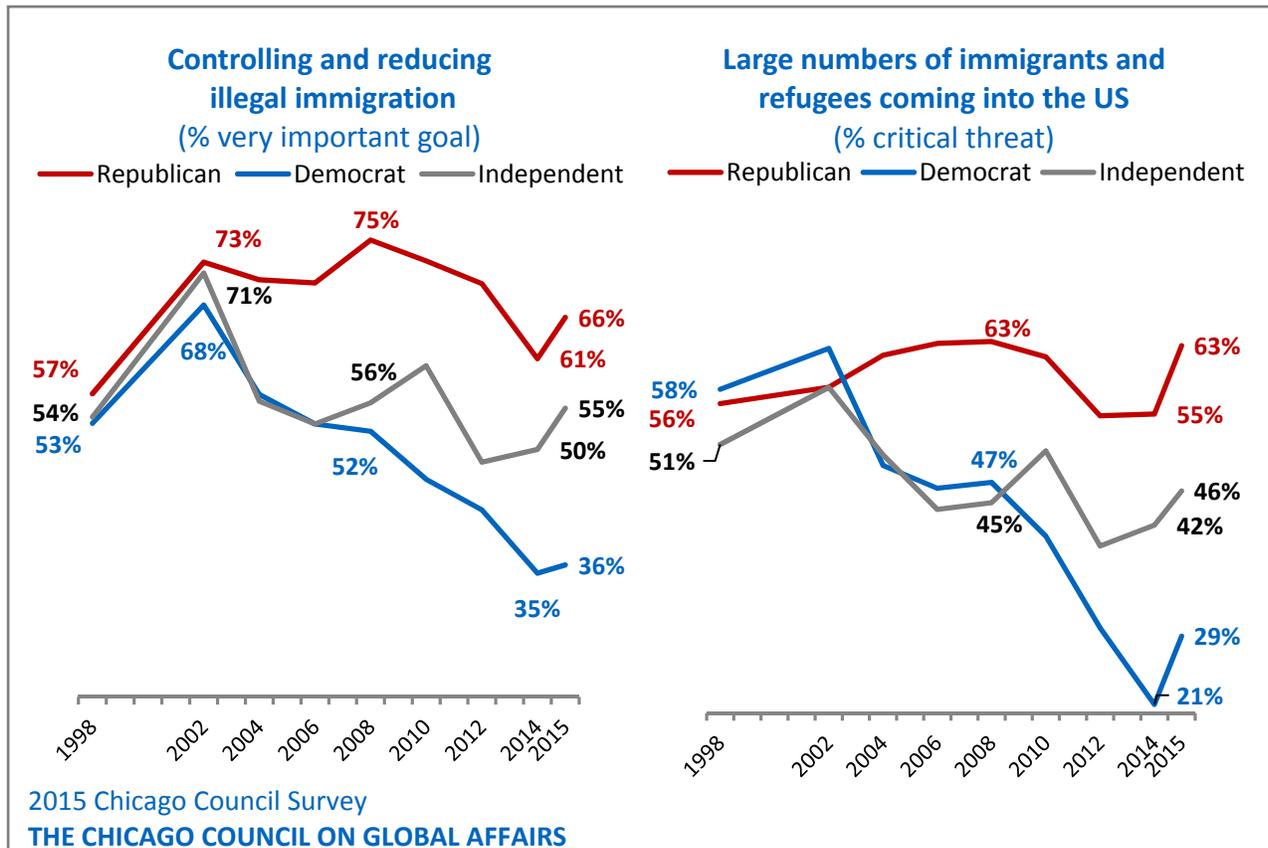
Sara McElmurry, Assistant Director, Immigration

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Partisan Gap on Immigration Issues, Driven by Democrats' Shifts, is Widest Yet

Partisan divides on immigration issues are at their widest points in The Chicago Council Survey's 20-year history of polling on the topic. Democrats' immigration concerns have dropped dramatically over the past 20 years. By contrast, Republicans continue to consider immigration as large a threat as they did in previous years, even as net migration from Mexico is at net zero¹.

Between 1998 and 2002, similar majorities of Democrats, Republicans, and Independents viewed large numbers of immigrants and refugees as a critical threat, and controlling and reducing illegal immigration as a very important goal. But beginning in 2002, Democrats' concerns steadily decreased, so much so that by 2015, levels had dropped by more than 20 percentage points. By contrast, concern amongst Republicans and Independents has fluctuated less than 10 percentage points on both questions.



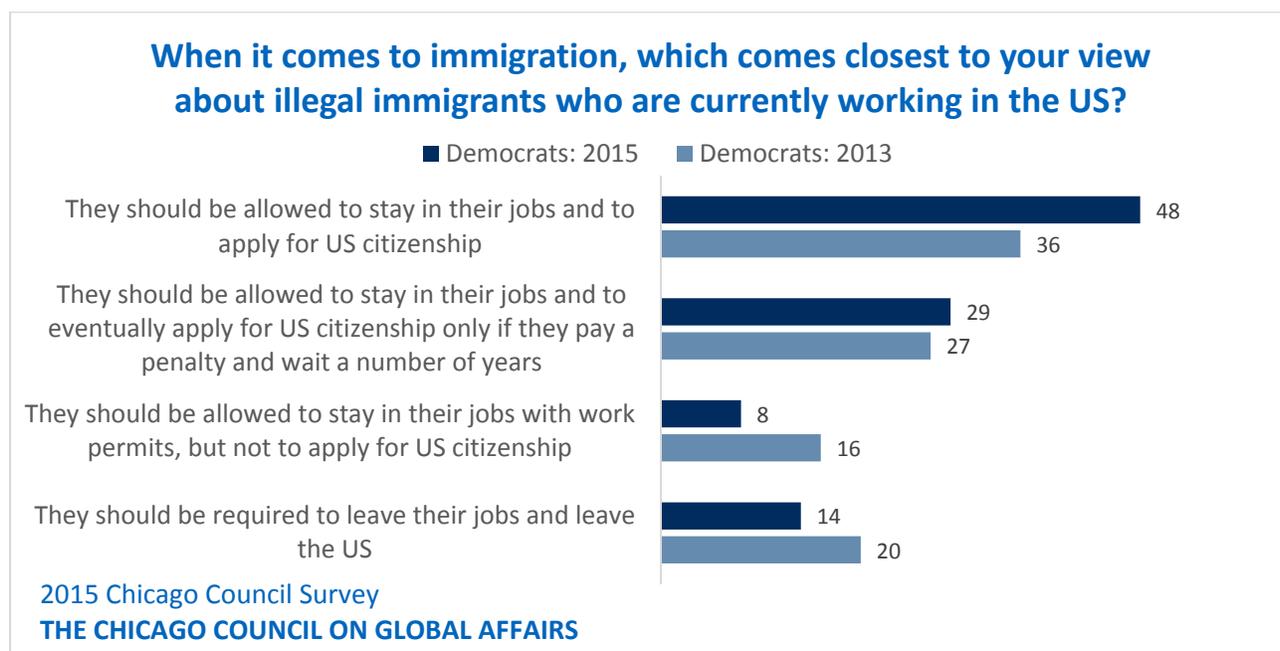
¹ Ana Gonzalez-Barrera and Jens Manuel Krogstad. "What we know about illegal immigration from Mexico." Pew Hispanic Center, July 15, 2015.

In 2015, majorities of Republicans (66%) and Independents (55%), but only a minority of Democrats (36%), say that controlling and reducing illegal immigration is a very important goal for US foreign policy. Similarly, Republicans (63%) are far more likely than Democrats (29%) or Independents (46%) to view large numbers of immigrants and refugees coming into the US as a critical threat.

Given Democrats' shifts on the issues, partisan gaps on these two questions are at record levels: 34 percentage points on the perceived threat of immigrants coming to the US, and 30 percentage points on the goal of controlling and reducing illegal immigration. Out of the 20 threats and goals polled in the 2015 Chicago Council Survey, questions about immigration produced the second largest partisan divide, after climate change.

Democrats Increasingly Back Employment, Citizenship for Unauthorized Immigrants

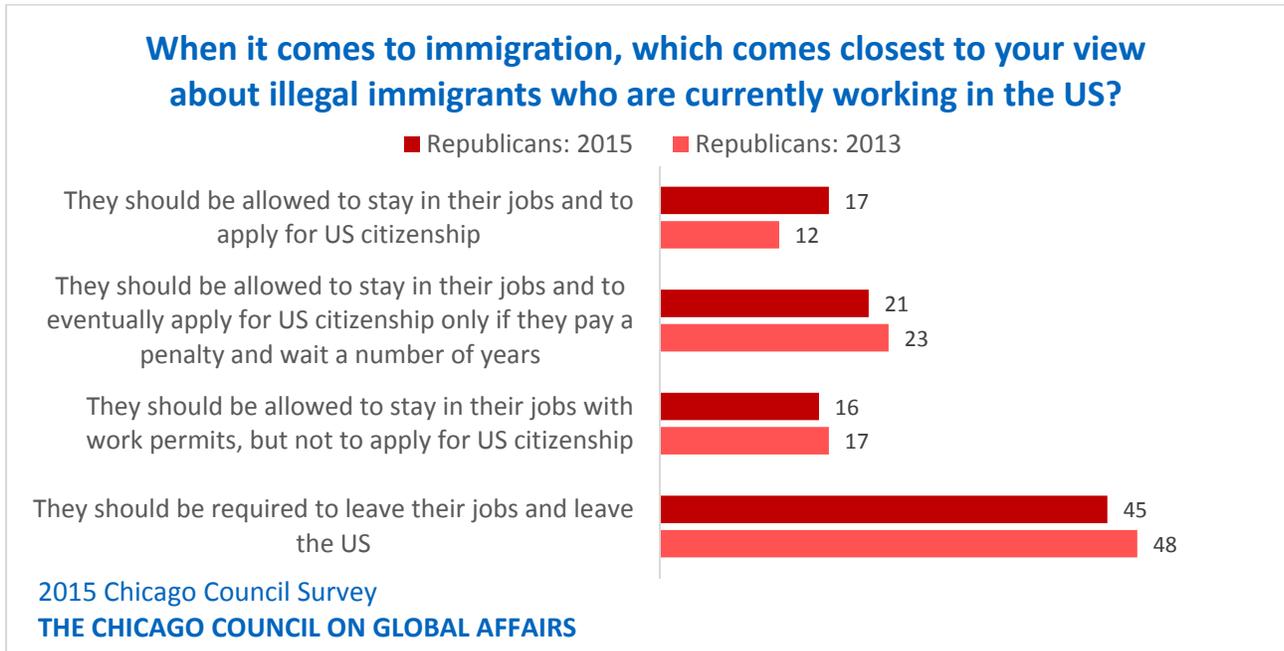
Concurrent with a decreased sense of threat from immigration, more Democrats now back various versions of a pathway to citizenship for illegal immigrants than they did two years ago. In 2013, six in ten Democrats (63%) favored citizenship for illegal immigrants. Today in 2015, nearly eight in ten (77%) say the same, either now (48%) or after paying a penalty and waiting a number of years (29%).



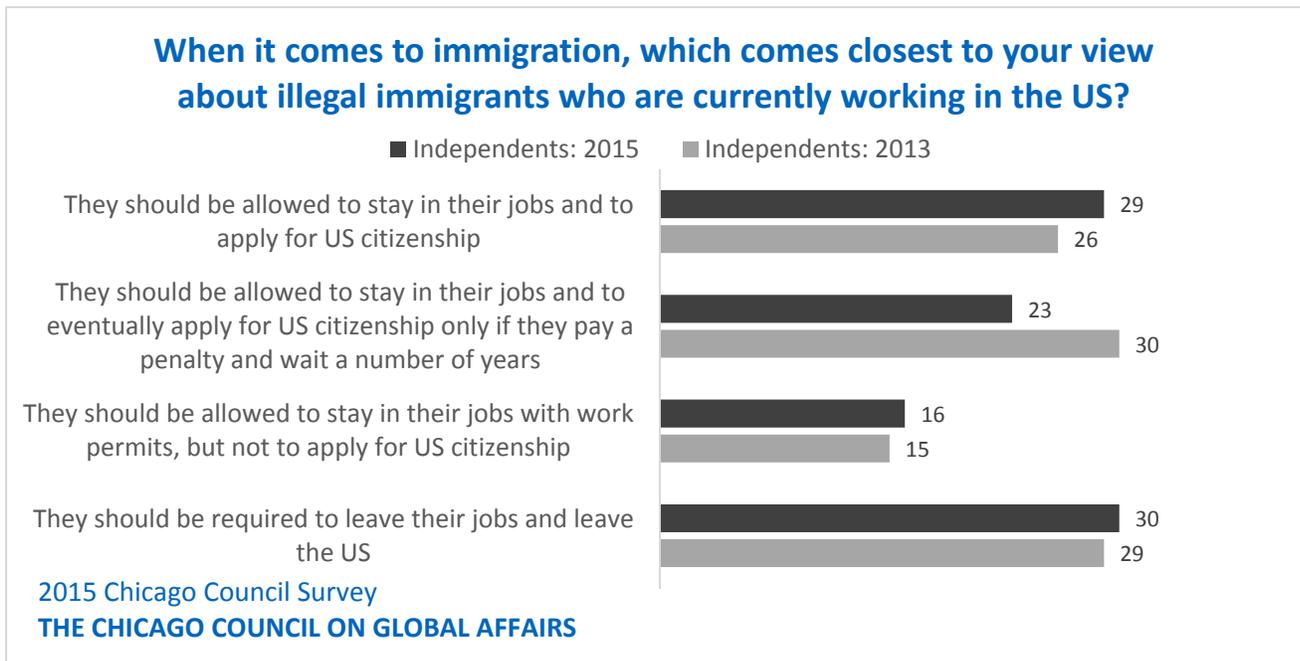
In contrast, Republicans' views have changed little since 2013.² While a majority of Republicans (54%) also say that illegal immigrants currently working in the US should be allowed to stay in

² The debate over how to refer to unauthorized immigrants in the United States has long been a contentious issue, and with good reason: the words used to refer to these immigrants affects how Republicans respond to policy questions about immigration. Amongst Republicans, support for “undocumented” immigrants being allowed to apply for US citizenship jumped ten percentage points, to 48 percent—and an additional 10 percent said that they should be allowed to apply for work permits only.

their jobs, only a minority of Republicans (38%) support allowing them to apply for US citizenship. Republicans are more likely than other partisan groups to favor requiring illegal immigrants to leave their jobs and the US (45%).



Like Republicans, Independents' views remain largely unchanged from 2013—but unlike Republicans, a majority of Independents support a path to citizenship (52%), either now (29%) or after a waiting period with penalties (23%). Support for deporting illegal immigrants is also lower among Independents, with only three in ten in favor (30%).



About the Chicago Council Survey

The analysis in this report is based on data from the 2015 Chicago Council Survey of the American public on foreign policy. The 2015 Chicago Council Survey was conducted by GfK Custom Research using the KnowledgePanel, a nationwide online research panel recruited through an address-based sampling frame. The survey was fielded between May 25 to June 17, 2015 among a national sample of 2,034 adults, 18 years of age or older, living in all 50 US states and the District of Columbia. The margin of error ranges from ± 2.2 to ± 3.1 percentage points depending on the specific question, with higher margins of error for partisan subgroups.

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About the Authors

Craig Kafura is a research associate for public opinion and foreign policy. Sara McElmurry is the assistant director of the immigration initiative. Special thanks to public opinion studies intern Riena Yu for her assistance in preparing this report.