

MAY 9, 2013

But Little Agreement on Specific Approaches

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## Most Say Immigration Policy Needs Big Changes

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## But Little Agreement on Specific Approaches

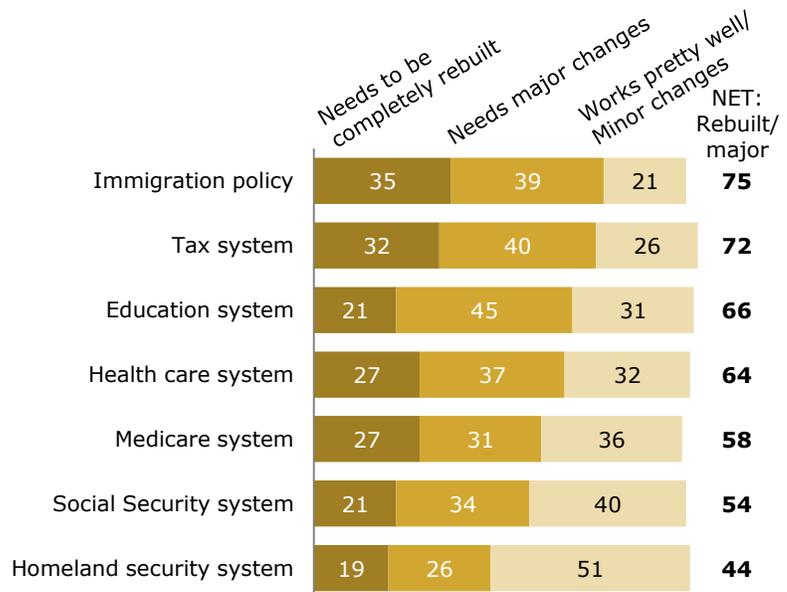
# Most Say Immigration Policy Needs Big Changes

Americans overwhelmingly say the nation’s immigration policy is in need of sweeping changes. Overall, 75% say immigration policy needs at least major changes, with 35% saying it needs to be “completely rebuilt”—among the highest of seven policy areas tested.

Yet the broad public agreement that immigration policy should be revamped is not matched by consensus on how to deal with illegal and legal immigration.

The latest national survey by the Pew Research Center, conducted May 1-5 among 1,504 adults, finds that 73% say there should be a way for illegal immigrants already in the United States who meet certain requirements to stay here. But fewer than half (44%) favor allowing those here illegally to apply for U.S. citizenship, while 25% think permanent legal status is more appropriate.

### Most Say Immigration Policy Needs Overhaul



PEW RESEARCH CENTER May 1-5, 2013.

These views are virtually unchanged from March, suggesting that last month’s bombings at the Boston Marathon have had little effect on overall public opinion on this issue. [In a survey released last week](#), 58% said that the Boston attack and the immigration debate are mostly separate issues, while 36% said the attack should be an important part of the debate on the immigration bill.

When it comes to legal immigration, relatively few (31%) see current levels as satisfactory, but there is no consensus as to whether the level of legal immigration should be decreased (36%) or increased (25%)

Meanwhile, securing U.S. borders looms over the debate: 53% of Americans say there is a lot more that the government can be doing to reduce illegal immigration at U.S. borders. Just 13% believe there is little or nothing more the government can do to tighten border security.

Majorities across all demographic and political groups think there is more the government can do to secure the borders, but there are ideological differences over how much: 68% of conservative Republicans say the government can do a lot more on border security, compared with just 37% of liberal Democrats.

While most Americans see immigration policy in need of major changes, [last week's survey](#) found that the public has yet to fully engage with the congressional debate over immigration legislation. About one-in-five (19%) are following the immigration debate very closely. Only about half (46%) know that the immigration bill before Congress would allow people currently in the United States illegally to stay here while applying for citizenship; even fewer (37%) know the bill was introduced by a bipartisan group of senators. And nearly four-in-ten (38%) have no opinion about the immigration legislation before Congress, while 33% favor it and 28% are opposed.

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## Public's Views of Policies toward Illegal and Legal immigration

	March	May
	%	%
<i>Immigrants currently in the country illegally who meet certain requirements...</i>		
Should have a way to stay legally	71	73
To apply for citizenship	43	44
To apply for permanent residency only	24	25
Don't know	4	4
Should not be allowed to stay legally	27	25
Don't know	2	3
	100	100
<i>Legal immigration into the U.S. should be...</i>		
Decreased		36
Kept at present level		31
Increased		25
Don't know		8
		100
<i>When it comes to illegal immigration at U.S. borders, government can do...</i>		
A lot more		53
Somewhat more		30
Not much more		8
Nothing more		5
Don't know		4
		100

PEW RESEARCH CENTER May 1-5, 2013. Q25-Q29.

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## Policies in Several Areas Seen as in Need of Major Changes

Three-quarters of Americans (75%) say that immigration policy either needs to be completely rebuilt or needs major changes. Just 21% say immigration policy works pretty well and needs only minor changes.

Nearly as many (72%) say the nation's tax system is in need of a complete overhaul or major changes. Majorities

also say that the education system (66%), the health care system (64%), the Medicare system (58%) and the Social Security system (54%) should be completely rebuilt or undergo major changes. Fewer (44%) say the Homeland Security system needs a major overhaul.

While there are partisan differences in views of specific policies toward immigration, taxes and other issues, Republicans and Democrats are more in sync when it comes to the need for changes to major polices and national systems. Nearly eight-in-ten Republicans (79%) say that immigration policy should be completely rebuilt or undergo major changes; 76% of independents and 72% of Democrats agree.

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### Modest Partisan Differences in Views of Major Policy Changes

*Percent saying program needs major changes/or to be completely rebuilt*

	<b>Total</b>	<b>Rep</b>	<b>Dem</b>	<b>Ind</b>	<b>R-D diff</b>
	%	%	%	%	
Immigration policy	75	79	72	76	+7
Tax system	72	75	69	75	+6
Education system	66	65	67	67	-2
Health care system	64	58	65	69	-7
Medicare system	58	56	52	63	+4
Social Security system	54	59	50	55	+9
Homeland security system	44	48	38	47	+10

PEW RESEARCH CENTER May 1-5, 2013. Q14.

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## Large Majority Say Those in U.S. Illegally Should Be Allowed to Stay

Overall patterns in opinions about how to deal with those in the United States illegally have changed little since late March. (For a full demographic breakdown, see [“Most Say Illegal Immigrants Should be Allowed to Stay, But Citizenship Is More Divisive.”](#) March 28, 2013.)

There are partisan and ideological differences in these opinions: While 63% of conservative Republicans favor providing legal status for those in the United States illegally if they meet certain requirements, just 37% say they should be allowed to apply for citizenship. Nearly a quarter of conservative Republicans (23%) say people in the U.S. illegally should be allowed to apply for permanent residency, but not citizenship.

More than eight-in-ten liberal Democrats (85%) favor letting those in the U.S. illegally stay legally. By nearly three-to-one (62% to 22%), liberal Democrats say that those here illegally should be allowed to seek citizenship rather than permanent residency.

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### Partisan, Ideological Differences in Views of How to Deal with People in U.S. Illegally

	Should be allowed to stay legally	And be able to apply for ...		Should not be allowed to stay legally	DK
		Citizenship	Permanent residency		
	%	%	%	%	%
Total	73	44	25	25	3=100
White	70	43	24	28	2=100
Black	75	45	25	24	1=100
Hispanic	85	50	34	9	6=100
Republican	63	35	25	34	3=100
Cons Rep	63	37	23	34	3=100
Mod/Lib Rep	65	31	30	32	3=100
Independent	74	43	27	23	2=100
Democrat	78	52	24	20	2=100
Cons/Mod Dem	74	45	26	24	2=100
Liberal Dem	85	62	21	14	2=100

PEW RESEARCH CENTER May 1-5, 2013. Q25-Q26. Whites and blacks include only those who are not Hispanic; Hispanics are of any race. “Don’t know” responses to question about citizenship/permanent residency are not shown. Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.

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## Most Don't Think Legal Status Would "Reward" Those Here Illegally

A majority of Americans (56%) do not feel that giving people in the United States illegally a way to gain legal status would be like rewarding them for doing something wrong. About four-in-ten (37%) say giving them a way to obtain legal status would be tacitly rewarding wrongdoing.

Most Democrats (64%) and independents (58%) say that giving those in the U.S. illegally a way to gain legal status would not amount to a reward for bad behavior. Republicans are divided: 49% say it would be like rewarding them for wrongdoing, while 44% disagree.

As might be expected, those who favor finding a way for those in the U.S. illegally to stay in the country legally do not view a path to legal status as a reward for wrongdoing (by 67% to 27%). By nearly an identical margin (69% to 26%), those who oppose legal status for those here illegally do see it as a tacit reward for wrongdoing.

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### Legal Status Not Viewed as Tacit Reward for Wrongdoing

<i>Is giving those in U.S. illegally a way to gain legal status like rewarding them for doing something wrong?</i>	Yes	No	DK
	%	%	%
Total	37	56	7=100
Men	43	50	7=100
Women	32	62	6=100
White	39	55	6=100
Black	36	58	6=100
Hispanic	29	62	10=100
College grad+	30	65	5=100
Some college	39	54	7=100
High school or less	41	52	7=100
Republican	49	44	7=100
Democrat	29	64	7=100
Independent	38	58	5=100
<i>Among whites</i>			
College grad	31	64	4=100
No college degree	43	51	6=100
<i>Those in U.S. illegally should ...</i>			
Be allowed to stay in U.S. legally if they meet certain requirements	27	67	6=100
Not be allowed to stay legally	69	26	4=100

PEW RESEARCH CENTER May 1-5, 2013. Q30. Whites and blacks include only those who are not Hispanic; Hispanics are of any race. Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.

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## Half Think the Government Can Do a Lot More to Secure Borders

About half of Americans (53%) say the government can do a lot more to reduce illegal immigration at U.S. borders, while 30% say there is somewhat more the government can do. Just 13% say there is little or nothing more the government can do to reduce illegal immigration at the borders.

Majorities or pluralities across most groups say the government could do a lot more to tighten border security. Republicans (64%) are more likely to express this view than are independents (53%) or Democrats (45%).

[In February](#), 47% said the priority for dealing with illegal immigration should be to improve border security and strengthen law enforcement, as well as to create a path to citizenship. Fewer said the priority should be just border security and stricter law enforcement or just a path to citizenship (25% each).

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### Most Say There Is More Government Can Do to Stem Flow of Illegal Immigration at Borders

*How much more can the government do to reduce illegal immigration at U.S. borders?*

	<b>A lot</b>	<b>Some-what</b>	<b>Not much/Nothing</b>	<b>DK</b>
	%	%	%	%
Total	53	30	13	4=100
18-29	43	37	17	3=100
30-49	51	31	14	4=100
50-64	63	23	12	2=100
65+	57	29	10	4=100
White	55	29	13	2=100
Black	55	33	9	2=100
Hispanic	37	32	18	12=100
College grad+	50	30	19	2=100
Some college	54	31	12	3=100
HS or less	56	29	10	5=100
Republican	64	24	8	3=100
Independent	53	29	15	3=100
Democrat	45	37	16	3=100

PEW RESEARCH CENTER May 1-5, 2013. Q29. Whites and blacks include only those who are not Hispanic; Hispanics are of any race. Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.

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## Views of Legal Immigration

When asked about the optimal level of *legal* immigration to the United States, 36% say it should be decreased, 31% say it should be kept at its current level, and 25% say it should be increased.

These views are modestly changed from March 2006, before the last major congressional debate on immigration. At that time, 40% said legal immigration should be decreased, 37% said it should be kept at its current level and 17% favored increasing legal immigration.

Hispanics are divided in views of legal immigration: Approximately equal percentages say it should be decreased (32%), kept at its present level (29%) and increased (28%). A plurality of whites (39%) favor decreasing the level of legal immigration, while just 22% say it should be increased and 32% say it should be kept at its current level.

Democrats are split over the appropriate level of legal immigration. Meanwhile, more Republicans favor cutting back on legal immigration than increasing it (41% to 20%), while 33% favor maintaining the status quo.

### Legal Immigration Levels into the United States Should Be...

		Increased	Kept at present level	Decreased	DK
		%	%	%	%
Total		25	31	36	8=100
White		22	32	39	7=100
Black		37	30	27	6=100
Hispanic		28	29	32	11=100
18-29		32	32	30	7=100
30-49		28	32	33	6=100
50-64		22	29	41	9=100
65+		15	34	41	10=100
College grad+		30	36	25	9=100
Post grad		37	32	22	9=100
College grad		26	38	27	9=100
Some college		24	35	35	6=100
HS or less		23	26	44	8=100
Republican		20	33	41	7=100
Cons Rep		20	33	40	7=100
Mod/Lib Rep		17	34	44	5=100
Independent		24	30	38	8=100
Democrat		29	32	31	8=100
Cons/Mod Dem		25	31	37	6=100
Liberal Dem		35	36	21	8=100
Northeast		26	33	34	7=100
Midwest		19	30	45	5=100
South		27	33	33	7=100
West		26	29	33	12=100
<i>Among whites</i>					
College grad+		30	37	25	9=100
No college degree		19	30	45	6=100

PEW RESEARCH CENTER May 1-5, 2013. Q27. Whites and blacks include only those who are not Hispanic; Hispanics are of any race. Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.

## About the Survey

The analysis in this report is based on telephone interviews conducted May 1-5, 2013 among a national sample of 1,504 adults, 18 years of age or older, living in all 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia (751 respondents were interviewed on a landline telephone, and 753 were interviewed on a cell phone, including 401 who had no landline telephone). The survey was conducted by interviewers at Princeton Data Source under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates International. A combination of landline and cell phone random digit dial samples were used; both samples were provided by Survey Sampling International. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. Respondents in the landline sample were selected by randomly asking for the youngest adult male or female who is now at home. Interviews in the cell sample were conducted with the person who answered the phone, if that person was an adult 18 years of age or older. For detailed information about our survey methodology, see <http://people-press.org/methodology/>

The combined landline and cell phone sample are weighted using an iterative technique that matches gender, age, education, race, Hispanic origin and nativity and region to parameters from the 2011 Census Bureau's American Community Survey and population density to parameters from the Decennial Census. The sample also is weighted to match current patterns of telephone status and relative usage of landline and cell phones (for those with both), based on extrapolations from the 2012 National Health Interview Survey. The weighting procedure also accounts for the fact that respondents with both landline and cell phones have a greater probability of being included in the combined sample and adjusts for household size among respondents with a landline phone. Sampling errors and statistical tests of significance take into account the effect of weighting. The following table shows the unweighted sample sizes and the error attributable to sampling that would be expected at the 95% level of confidence for different groups in the survey:

<b>Group</b>	<b>Unweighted sample size</b>	<b>Plus or minus...</b>
Total sample	1,504	2.9 percentage points
Republicans	399	5.7 percentage points
Democrats	489	5.2 percentage points
Independents	529	5.0 percentage points

Sample sizes and sampling errors for other subgroups are available upon request.

In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

**PEW RESEARCH CENTER FOR THE PEOPLE & THE PRESS**  
**MAY 2013 POLITICAL SURVEY**  
**FINAL TOPLINE**  
**May 1-5, 2013**  
**N=1,504**

**QUESTIONS 1-5, 9 PREVIOUSLY RELEASED****QUESTIONS HELD FOR PREVIOUS RELEASE****NO QUESTIONS-6-8, 10-13****ASK ALL:**

Now thinking about the way some things work in this country ...

Q.14 Do you think **[INSERT ITEM, RANDOMIZE – OBSERVE FORM SPLITS]** in this country works pretty well and requires only MINOR CHANGES, do you think it needs MAJOR CHANGES, or do you think it needs to be COMPLETELY REBUILT?

		<u>Works pretty well/ Only minor changes</u>	<u>Major changes</u>	<u>Completely rebuilt</u>	<b>(VOL.) DK/Ref</b>
a.	Immigration policy				
	May 1-5, 2013	21	39	35	4
	Jun 15-19, 2011	26	43	24	6
	February, 2006	23	41	27	9

**ASK FORM 1 ONLY [N=740]:**

b.F1	The health care system				
	May 1-5, 2013	32	37	27	4
	February, 2006	20	46	32	2
	January, 2005	27	50	21	2
c.F1	The tax system				
	May 1-5, 2013	26	40	32	3
	Jun 15-19, 2011	34	38	24	3
	February, 2006	35	39	22	4
	January, 2005	50	29	17	4
d.F1	The Social Security system				
	May 1-5, 2013	40	34	21	5
	Jun 15-19, 2011	41	34	18	7
	February, 2006	35	36	26	3
	January, 2005	47	34	15	4

**ASK FORM 2 ONLY [N=764]:**

e.F2	The Homeland Security system				
	May 1-5, 2013	51	26	19	4
	Jun 15-19, 2011	55	24	13	8
	February, 2006	39	36	19	6
f.F2	The education system				
	May 1-5, 2013	31	45	21	2
	Jun 15-19, 2011	32	47	19	2
	February, 2006	35	45	16	4
	January, 2005	36	45	17	2
g.F2	The Medicare system				
	May 1-5, 2013	36	31	27	6
	Jun 15-19, 2011	38	33	21	8
	February, 2006	26	42	28	4

**NO QUESTIONS 15-16, 21-24****QUESTIONS 17c, 18-20, PREVIOUSLY RELEASED****QUESTIONS 17a,b HELD FOR PREVIOUS RELEASE****ASK ALL:**

On another subject ...

Q.25 Which comes closer to your view about how to handle immigrants who are now living in the U.S. illegally? **[READ AND RANDOMIZE]**

**ASK IF ALLOWED TO STAY IN THE COUNTRY (Q.25=2) [N=1,093]:**

Q.26 And do you think immigrants who are in the U.S. illegally and meet the requirements should **[READ AND RANDOMIZE]**

May 1-5 <u>2013</u>		Mar 13-17 <u>2013</u>
25	They should not be allowed to stay in the country legally	27
	There should be a way for those who meet certain requirements	
73	to stay in the country legally	71
44	Be able to apply for U.S. citizenship	43
25	Be able to apply for permanent residency, but not U.S. citizenship	24
4	Don't know/Refused <b>(VOL.)</b>	4
3	Don't know/Refused <b>(VOL.)</b>	2

**ASK ALL:**

Q.27 Should LEGAL immigration into the United States be kept at its present level, increased or decreased?

May 1-5 <u>2013</u>		Mar <u>2006</u>
31	Kept at present level	37
25	Increased	17
36	Decreased	40
8	Don't know/Refused <b>(VOL.)</b>	6

**CBS/NEW YORK TIMES TREND FOR COMPARISON:**

	Kept at <u>present level</u>	<u>Increased</u>	<u>Decreased</u>	<b>(VOL.)</b> <u>DK/Ref</u>
April 24-28, 2013	35	25	31	8
Sept 10-15, 2011	36	19	38	7
April 28-May 2, 2010	44	17	31	8
April 5-12, 2010	35	16	41	8
July 7-14, 2008	38	23	32	7
May 18-23, 2007	39	20	35	6
March 7-11, 2007	30	18	48	4
May 4-8, 2006	39	22	34	5
April 6-9, 2006	33	16	45	6
October 3-5, 2005	30	11	51	8
July 29-August 2, 2005	32	13	51	4
January 12-15, 2004	34	16	45	5
July 13-27, 2003	37	9	48	6
December 7-10, 2001	29	9	59	3
September 20-23, 2001	29	11	57	3
September 13-14, 2001	29	10	53	8
October 23-27, 1996	35	8	50	7

**NO QUESTION 28****ASK ALL:**

Q.29 When it comes to reducing illegal immigration at U.S. borders, do you think there is a lot more the government can do, somewhat more, not much more, or nothing more that can be done?

May 1-5

2013

53 A lot  
30 Somewhat  
8 Not much  
5 Nothing  
4 Don't know/Refused **(VOL.)**

**ASK ALL:**

Q.30 In your own view, do you feel that giving people who came to the U.S. illegally a way to gain legal status is like rewarding them for doing something wrong, or don't you think of it this way?

May 1-5

2013

37 Like rewarding them for doing something wrong  
56 Don't think of it this way  
7 Don't know/Refused **(VOL.)**

**NO QUESTIONS 31-35, 39, 43-45, 54-55, 64-68, 73-74, 76-77, 81-83****QUESTIONS 36-38, 40-42, 46-53, 56-63, 69-72, 75, 78-80, 84 HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE****ASK ALL:**

PARTY In politics TODAY, do you consider yourself a Republican, Democrat, or independent?

**ASK IF INDEP/NO PREF/OTHER/DK/REF (PARTY=3,4,5,9):**

PARTYLN As of today do you lean more to the Republican Party or more to the Democratic Party?

				(VOL.)	(VOL.)	(VOL.)	Lean	Lean
	Republican	Democrat	Independent	No preference	Other party	DK/Ref	Rep	Dem
May 1-5, 2013	25	32	37	2	1	3	14	16
Mar 13-17, 2013	26	33	34	3	1	3	14	15
Feb.13-18, 2013	22	32	41	2	*	2	15	19
Jan 9-13, 2013	25	32	38	2	*	2	15	16
Dec 17-19, 2012	21	32	38	4	*	4	15	14
Dec 5-9, 2012	23	33	38	3	1	2	14	19
Oct 31-Nov 3, 2012	26	34	34	3	1	3	13	16
Oct 24-28, 2012	28	33	33	4	*	2	12	16
Oct 4-7, 2012	27	31	36	3	1	3	15	15
Sep 12-16, 2012	24	35	36	2	*	2	14	16
Jul 16-26, 2012	22	33	38	4	*	3	14	15
Jun 28-Jul 9, 2012	24	33	37	3	*	3	15	17
Jun 7-17, 2012	24	33	39	2	*	2	17	17
May 9-Jun 3, 2012	24	32	36	4	*	4	13	14
Apr 4-15, 2012	24	31	39	3	*	2	15	15
<b>Yearly Totals</b>								
2012	24.7	32.6	36.4	3.1	.5	2.7	14.4	16.1
2011	24.3	32.3	37.4	3.1	.4	2.5	15.7	15.6
2010	25.2	32.7	35.2	3.6	.4	2.8	14.5	14.1
2009	23.9	34.4	35.1	3.4	.4	2.8	13.1	15.7
2008	25.7	36.0	31.5	3.6	.3	3.0	10.6	15.2
2007	25.3	32.9	34.1	4.3	.4	2.9	10.9	17.0
2006	27.8	33.1	30.9	4.4	.3	3.4	10.5	15.1
2005	29.3	32.8	30.2	4.5	.3	2.8	10.3	14.9
2004	30.0	33.5	29.5	3.8	.4	3.0	11.7	13.4
2003	30.3	31.5	30.5	4.8	.5	2.5	12.0	12.6

## PARTY/PARTYLN CONTINUED...

				(VOL.)	(VOL.)	(VOL.)	Lean	Lean
	Republican	Democrat	Independent	No preference	Other party	DK/Ref	Rep	Dem
2002	30.4	31.4	29.8	5.0	.7	2.7	12.4	11.6
2001	29.0	33.2	29.5	5.2	.6	2.6	11.9	11.6
2001 Post-Sept 11	30.9	31.8	27.9	5.2	.6	3.6	11.7	9.4
2001 Pre-Sept 11	27.3	34.4	30.9	5.1	.6	1.7	12.1	13.5
2000	28.0	33.4	29.1	5.5	.5	3.6	11.6	11.7
1999	26.6	33.5	33.7	3.9	.5	1.9	13.0	14.5
1998	27.9	33.7	31.1	4.6	.4	2.3	11.6	13.1
1997	28.0	33.4	32.0	4.0	.4	2.3	12.2	14.1
1996	28.9	33.9	31.8	3.0	.4	2.0	12.1	14.9
1995	31.6	30.0	33.7	2.4	.6	1.3	15.1	13.5
1994	30.1	31.5	33.5	1.3	--	3.6	13.7	12.2
1993	27.4	33.6	34.2	4.4	1.5	2.9	11.5	14.9
1992	27.6	33.7	34.7	1.5	0	2.5	12.6	16.5
1991	30.9	31.4	33.2	0	1.4	3.0	14.7	10.8
1990	30.9	33.2	29.3	1.2	1.9	3.4	12.4	11.3
1989	33	33	34	--	--	--	--	--
1987	26	35	39	--	--	--	--	--

## ASK REPUBLICANS AND REPUBLICAN LEANERS ONLY (PARTY=1 OR PARTYLN=1) [N=600]:

TEAPARTY3 From what you know, do you agree or disagree with the Tea Party movement, or don't you have an opinion either way?

May 1-5 <u>2013</u>		Mar 13-17 <u>2013</u>	Feb 13-18 <u>2013</u>	Jan 9-13 <u>2013</u>
28	Agree	43	36	35
8	Disagree	7	9	10
61	No opinion either way	47	52	51
2	Haven't heard of (VOL.)	1	1	2
1	Refused (VOL.)	1	3	2