

Survey Data Reveals Broad Support for Assisted Voluntary Return

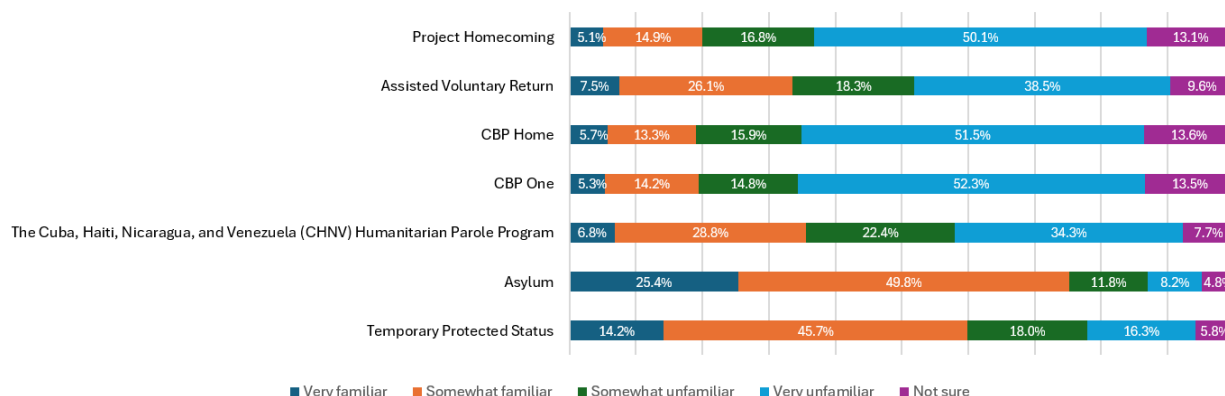
Report | October 9, 2026

Most Americans support Assisted Voluntary Return (AVR) as an alternative to deportation, a recent survey reveals. Assisted Voluntary Return is an alternative to deportation that allows migrants to return to their home country voluntarily and with organizational support. The process is not forced by authorities but rather initiated by the immigrant by using the CBP Home mobile application. Programs such as **Project Homecoming** provide resources to facilitate migrants' return to their countries of birth, including airfare, the forgiveness of certain unpaid civil fines, and \$2,600 per person upon return.

The online survey was conducted from September 9 to September 25, 2026, by the polling organization YouGov on behalf of the Center for Latin American and Latino Studies at American University. It gathered the views of **5,000 English-speaking registered voters** on a variety of immigration policy-related topics. The margin of error is: +/-1.5%. The pool of participants was structured to be demographically representative of likely voters. White Americans, those living in the South, highly educated Americans, and people aged 65 and over are slightly overrepresented. The views of Spanish-only speakers, permanent residents, and non-citizens are not included.

In order to benchmark the responses about Project Homecoming, we asked about the familiarity of respondents with this and related programs and organizations. **Awareness was limited, but the program features presented in this study generally moved opinion toward support.** Regarding awareness, 56.8% of respondents said they did not know Assisted Voluntary Return (AVR) was an option, 10% were not sure, and 66.9% were unfamiliar with Project Homecoming. Overall, 35% of respondents said they were familiar with CBP Home before answering this survey, very similar to familiarity with CBP One.

How [familiar or unfamiliar] are you with each of the following:

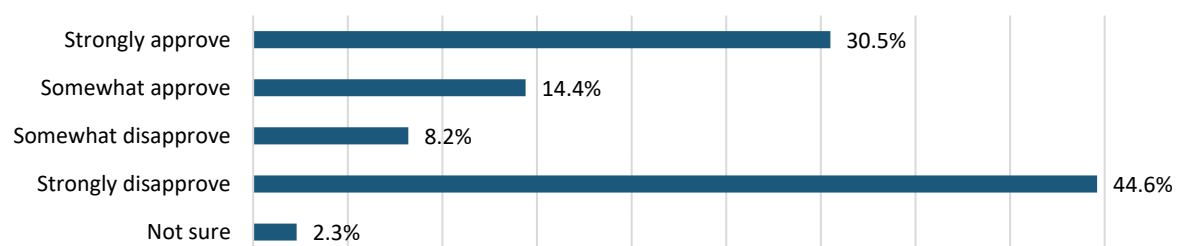


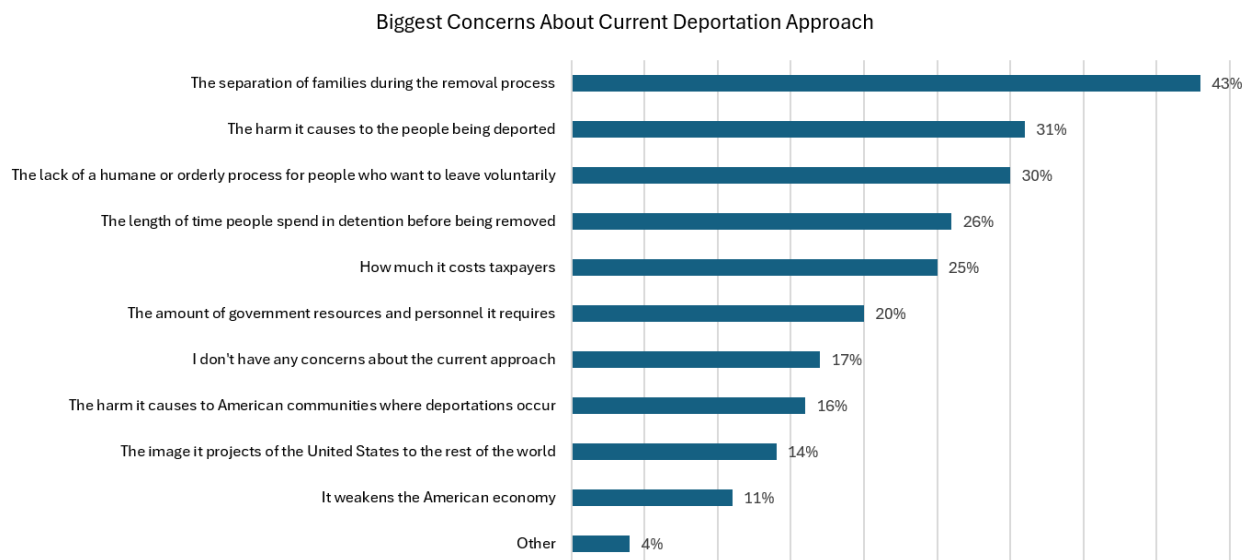
The majority of respondents strongly agreed with statements emphasizing the humanitarian and practical benefits of voluntary departure. More than eight in ten respondents (85.2%) agreed that “if someone is going to be removed, allowing them to leave voluntarily is more humane than deporting them in restraints.” Additionally, **80%** agreed that “a voluntary departure is a good option for people who want to return to their country of birth but can’t afford to do so on their own.” Together, these findings indicate general agreement with assisted voluntary departure for individuals who lack the financial means to return on their own.

Respondents' Assessment of Current Immigration Policies

Only 33% of respondents chose “immigration policy” as one of the top 5 issues facing the country. A majority of respondents disapproved of President Trump’s handling of immigration (**52.8%**), 30.5% strongly approved of it with **44.6%** strongly disapproving and 50% do not trust ICE to handle deportations fairly. People were worried about the negative effects of forced deportations, especially for those deported and because of the family separations they cause.

Do you approve or disapprove of the way President Donald Trump is handling immigration?

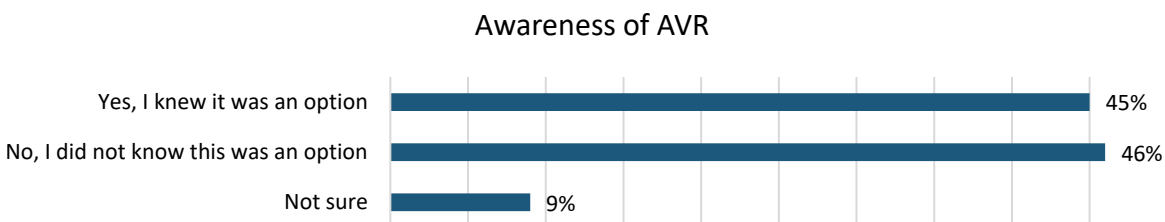




Information about the cost of deportation flights substantially reduced support for forced deportation. Among respondents, **57.4% reported becoming less supportive** of forced deportation after learning that an “ICE Air” deportation flight costs \$6,045 per person—more than seven times the cost of a commercial flight.

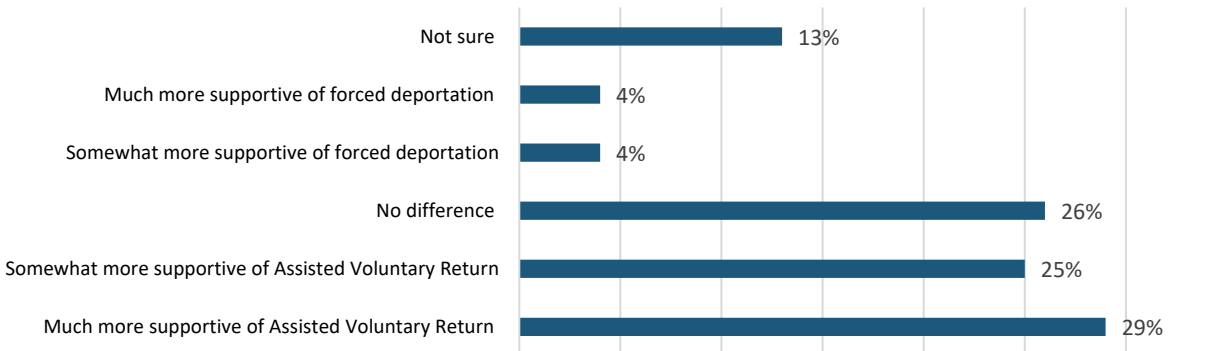
Awareness of AVR, Arguments, & Support

Awareness of Assisted Voluntary Return was relatively evenly divided among respondents. While 44.7% reported that they already knew this was an option, **45.8% were unaware** that individuals without a serious or violent criminal history may be able to voluntarily end their immigration case and receive assistance to leave the country. An additional 9.5% were unsure. Those who were not aware of AVR were given more information.



Once informed about AVR, 54% expressed greater support for AVR than forced deportation, including 29% who were much more supportive. By comparison, only 8% favored forced deportation over AVR.

Now that you know AVR is an option, does this make you [more or less] supportive of it compared to forced deportation? (N = 2,765)



The survey also assessed the persuasiveness of several arguments related to AVR. **Pro-AVR arguments were generally more persuasive to respondents**, “People who want to go home but can’t afford it require a real option. This program provides one. More than 113,000 people have already chosen to use this program;” and “Whether you favor strict enforcement or a more compassionate approach, Assisted Voluntary Return delivers better outcomes than forced removal. This program saves American taxpayers billions of dollars when compared to forced deportation,” convincing **72% of respondents**.

Anti-AVR arguments were less consistently persuasive to respondents. The most convincing, that “without serious consequences, people will just come back,” persuaded 46.7% of respondents and failed to persuade 42.0%. It was the only critic statement with more respondents convinced than unconvinced, and the margin was narrow. The other critic arguments fell short. Between 32% and 40% found them convincing, while 42% to 55% found them unconvincing. The claim that strict enforcement is the only real deterrent was weakest, with 31.9% convinced and 55.0% unconvinced.

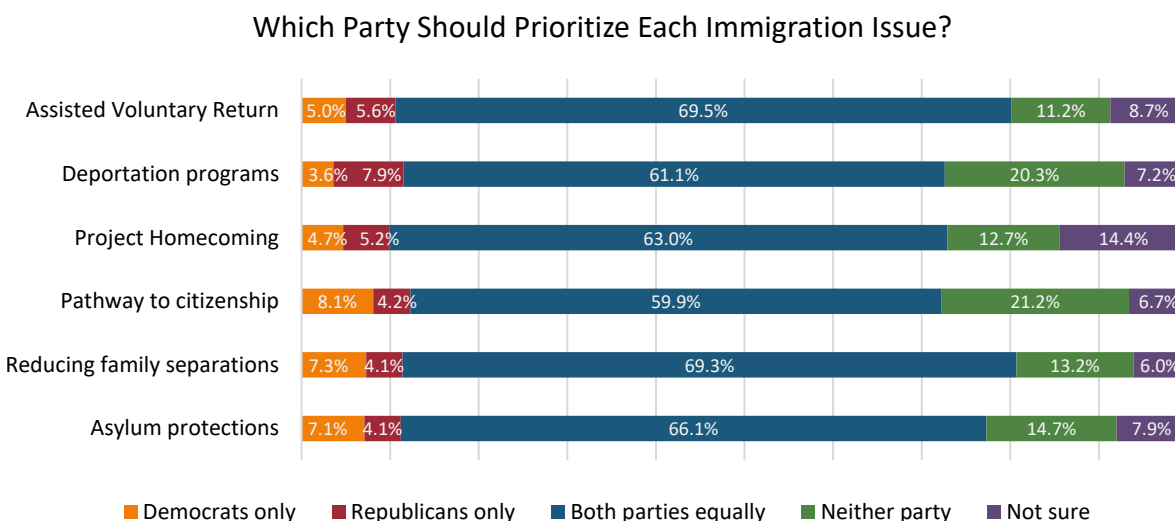
After hearing Pro- and Anti-AVR arguments, respondents were more than eight times more likely to support AVR. 62.5% said they were more likely to support AVR. Another 20.7% reported no change, and 7.7% said they were less likely to support it. A further 9.0% were not sure.

While the survey demonstrates broad public support for the implementation of AVR policies, AVR advocates have more work to do if they wish to translate that public support into political pressure. Only 45% of respondents were aware of the existence of AVR or similar programs prior to beginning the survey. The gap between public awareness of AVR and public support for AVR once made aware of it suggests that AVR advocates should work to publicize the issue. If they are successful, AVR stands a good chance of gaining majority support among the public, especially in the context where

survey respondents show strong opposition to forced deportation and negative ICE media portrayals.

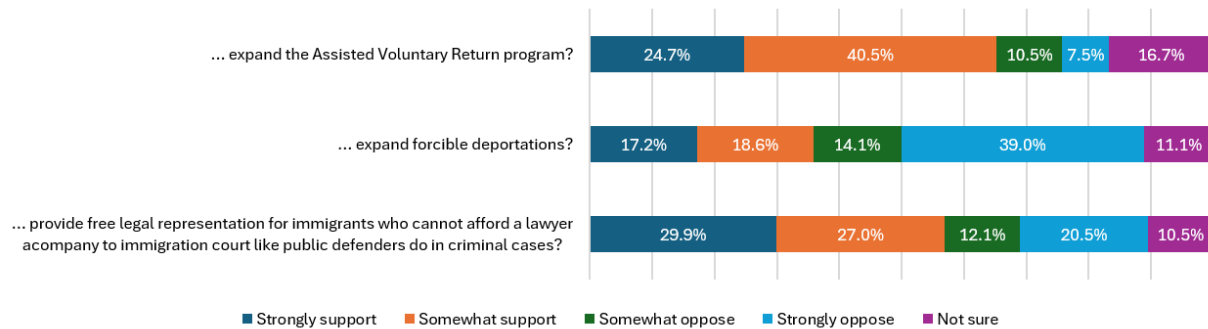
AVR Policy & Politics

Respondents overwhelmingly supported AVR-friendly policy, with 70% supportive of politicians from both parties prioritizing the issue and 66% supportive of increased funding for AVR initiatives.; and 63% thought both parties should support Project Homecoming. Support for other immigration policies and issues was similar, suggesting voters want both parties to work together to improve the immigration system.



Respondents showed greater support for reallocating existing Department of Homeland Security funding toward Assisted Voluntary Return and legal representation than toward expanding forcible deportations. A majority of respondents (56.9%) also supported using DHS funding to provide free legal representation for immigrants who cannot afford an attorney. Nearly two-thirds (65.2%) supported allocating federal funding to expand AVR, including 24.7% who strongly supported and 40.5% who somewhat supported the proposal. Only 18.0% opposed expanding AVR.

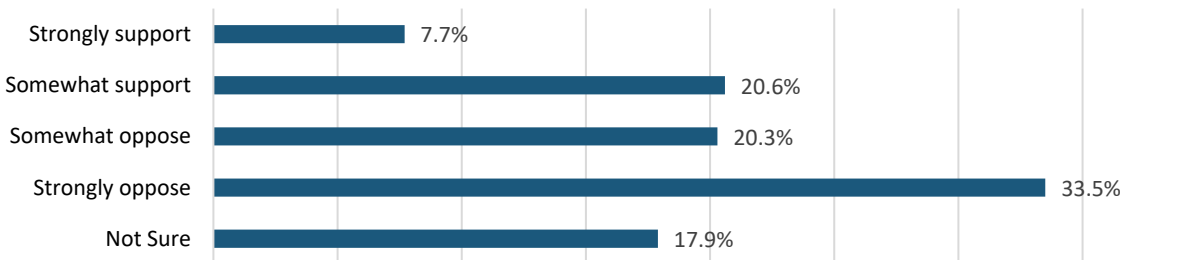
Do you [support or oppose] Congress allocating federal funding from the existing Department of Homeland Security budget to...



Support for Voluntary Departure Incentive

A majority (53.8%) opposed the U.S. offering a financial incentive similar to Sweden's program.

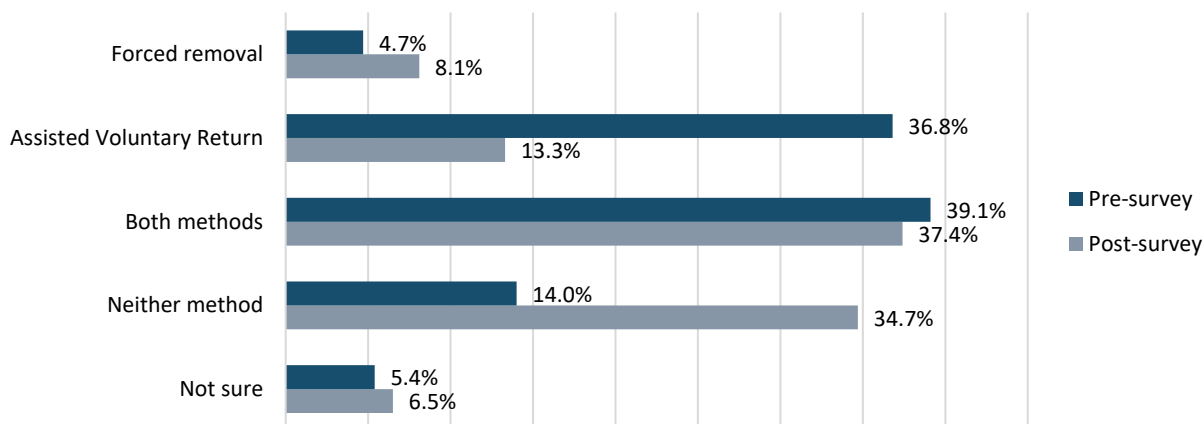
Some countries offer financial incentives to encourage voluntary departure. For example, Sweden offers immigrants payments to leave the country, up to \$34,000. Would you [support or oppose] the U.S. offering a similar incentive?



Preferred Removal Approach

Overall, respondents continued to express strong support for AVR as an approach to immigration removal. Before the survey, 36.8% of respondents preferred AVR for individuals without a criminal record, while an additional 39.1% favored using AVR alongside forced removal depending on individual circumstances. These views remained relatively stable following the survey, with 34.7% selecting AVR and 37.4% supporting a combination of both approaches. **Across both the pre- and post-survey measures, the majority favored either AVR alone or a combination of AVR and forced removal, while forced removal alone remained a considerably less popular option.**

In a situation where someone is going to be removed regardless, which approach do you think is better?



Support for Member of Congress Funding

The majority of respondents supported congressional funding for Assisted Voluntary Return as an alternative to forced deportation. Nearly seven in ten respondents (69.6%) said they would want their member of Congress to support funding that would allow ICE to offer AVR before or immediately upon detention, including 28.9% who said, “definitely yes” and 40.7% who said, “probably yes.” In contrast, only 14.9% opposed such funding, while 15.5% were unsure.

Cutting funding for Assisted Voluntary Return could have electoral consequences for members of Congress. Overall, 43.0% said they would be less likely to vote for a member of Congress who supported cutting AVR funding, compared with 17.1% who would be more likely to do so. Another 27.7% reported that such a vote would make no difference, and 12.3% were unsure.

Opposing mass deportations can increase electoral support for members of Congress. Overall, 41.0% of respondents said they would be **more likely to vote for their member of Congress** if that member opposed mass deportations, including 28.2% who would be much more likely and 12.8% who would be somewhat more likely. In comparison, 33.5% said they would be less likely to vote for them. Another 17.3% said it would make no difference, while 8.3% were unsure.

Read the report on our website:

<https://www.american.edu/centers/latin-american-latino-studies/survey-data-reveals-broad-support-for-assisted-voluntary-return.cfm>

More information about the survey at:

<https://www.american.edu/centers/latin-american-latino-studies/index.cfm>

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