

**How Immigration Attitudes in America Vary Depending on Political Party  
Affiliation, Race, and Generation**

Marisol Figueroa

Department of Personalized Learning, Northern Arizona

UniversityCCSU 351W: Interdisciplinary Research & Writing

Professor Pamela Hunter

December 22, 2022

## **How Immigration Attitudes in America Vary Depending on Political Party**

### **Affiliation, Race, and Generation**

Immigration has long been a hot-button issue in America. America, after all, has more immigrants than any other country in the world; we have over 40 million people living here that are foreign-born (Budiman, 2020). Hosting such a large number of immigrants influences our country's culture, economy, and foreign policy, so the issue of immigration is bound to elicit controversy among the American public. Immigration attitudes in America can range from embracing to hostile. Those who espouse positive attitudes towards immigration generally believe that immigrants "strengthen" rather than "burden" the US, oppose increasing deportations, support providing paths to legal status to those who entered the country illegally, and do not regard illegal immigration as a "major problem" in America. In contrast, those who espouse negative attitudes towards immigration generally believe that immigrants "burden" rather than "strengthen" the U.S., suppose increasing deportations, do not support providing paths to legal status to those who entered the country illegally, and do regard illegal immigration as a "major problem" in America. As evidenced by the extensive research conducted by the Pew Research Society, certain U.S. political parties, racial/ethnic groups, and generations are more likely to harbor positive attitudes towards immigration than others. Thus, immigration attitudes in America vary depending on political party affiliation, race, and generation.

American immigration attitudes differ based on political party affiliation.

Republicans and Democrats could not have more distinct attitudes towards U.S. immigration.

For starters, Republicans and Democrats disagree over what the “most pressing priorities” are for the nation’s immigration system (Oliphant & Cerda, 2022). On the one hand, Republicans place particular importance on border security and deportation of illegal immigrants (Oliphant & Cerda, 2022). On the other hand, Democrats place greater importance on providing paths to legal status to those who entered the country illegally (Oliphant & Cerda, 2022). 91% of Democrats and Democrat leaning independents favor providing immigrants who came to America illegally as children with legal status, whereas only about half (54%) of Republicans and Republican leaning independents say the same (Krogstad, 2020). It goes without saying that Republicans and Democrats “sharply disagree” upon whether illegal immigration is a “major problem” in America today (Gramlich, 2019). In a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center during the 2018 midterm elections, three-quarters of registered voters who planned to support the Republican candidate in their congressional district said that illegal immigration was a “very big problem” in the country, compared to a mere 19% of voters who planned to support the Democratic candidate for Congress (Gramlich, 2019). Thus, clearly, those who are affiliated with the Democratic Party are more likely to harbor positive attitudes towards immigration and those affiliated with the Republican Party are more likely to harbor negative attitudes towards immigration. And so, in that way, immigration attitudes in America vary depending on political party affiliation.

Immigration attitudes in America also vary depending on race. Out of all U.S. racial and ethnic groups, Latinos harbor the most positive attitudes towards immigrants. This is likely due to the fact that one-third of the American Latino population and half of the American

Latino adult population are immigrants (Moslimani, 2022). Furthermore, Latinos make up the largest share of undocumented immigrants in America (Moslimani, 2022). Around 40% of the roughly 20 million Latino immigrants in the U.S. and one in eight of all Latinos in the U.S. are undocumented immigrants (Moslimani, 2022). According to a survey by the Pew Research Center, 53% of U.S. Latino adults say they know someone who is living in the U.S. without authorization (Moslimani, 2022). Nearly four in ten (39%) of American Latinos say they worry that they, a family member, or someone close to them could be deported (Moslimani, 2022). And about half of U.S. immigrant Latinos say they fear that they or someone close to them could be deported (Moslimani, 2022). Thus, because a significant portion of American Latinos are immigrants and/or know someone who is in this country without authorization, they are more likely to harbor positive attitudes towards immigrants and embrace pro-immigration policies. Regarding the topic of immigration policy, Pew Research Center's survey demonstrates that Latinos place high importance on allowing undocumented immigrants to stay in this country legally (Krogstad & Lopez, 2021). A "clear majority" of U.S. Latino adults (84%) said that there should be a way for undocumented immigrants in the U.S. to be able to stay in the country legally if certain requirements were met, versus only 69% of U.S. adults overall who said the same (Moslimani, 2022). And nine in ten Latinos (88%) said they favored granting legal status to immigrants who came to America illegally as children, which is more than any other ethnic group (Krogstad, 2020). In contrast, when it comes to the immigration goal of "increasing deportations", only 18% of U.S. Latinos categorized this as "very important", the least of any ethnic group (Krogstad & Lopez, 2021). With regards to other ethnic groups,

majorities of Black American (81%), Asian American (76%), and White American (70%) adults express support for allowing immigrants to stay in the U.S. legally, but it is still less than the support expressed by Latino Americans (Krogstad, 2020). Majorities of Black American (82%), Asian American (72%), and White American (69%) adults also support granting legal status to immigrants who came to the U.S. illegally as children, but their support is still less than that of Latino Americans (Krogstad, 2020). So, in summary, majorities of Black, Asian, and White Americans have positive attitudes towards immigration (with Black Americans having the most positive attitudes, followed by Asian Americans, then White Americans), but the most pronounced positive attitudes towards immigration come from Latino Americans. Hence, in such a manner, immigration attitudes in the U.S. differ depending on racial background.

Additionally, American immigration attitudes vary depending on generation. Between generations, there are sizable differences among immigration attitudes (Jones, 2019). The younger generations are more likely to have positive attitudes towards immigrants than the older generations. This is evidenced by a poll taken by the Pew Research Center in which three-quarters of millennials (75%) stated that immigrants “strengthen” instead of “burden” the United States (Jones, 2019). In contrast, only 63% of Generation X, 52% of Baby Boomers, and 44% of the Silent Generation said the same (Jones, 2019). As evidenced above, the older the generation that’s being polled, the less positive attitudes they hold towards immigrants. This may be attributed to the speculation that younger people tend to be more tolerant of differences than those who are older. So, in such wise, immigration attitudes in the U.S. vary depending on generation.

Thus, immigration attitudes in the U.S. vary depending on political party affiliation, race, and generation. Public attitudes towards immigration have the potential to influence U.S. immigration and foreign policy. Also, negative public attitudes towards immigration have the potential to cause racial discrimination, hate crimes, and militant foreign policy. So, it is crucial for us to have an awareness of U.S. attitudes towards foreign policy and an understanding of the factors that could influence them. By examining what factors could cause one to harbor negative attitudes towards immigration, we would be better equipped to initiate a dialogue to open their hearts and minds. The future of our nation depends on our ability to inspire these changes.

## References

Budiman, A. (2020, August 20). *Key findings about U.S. immigrants*. Pew Research Center.

<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/08/20/key-findings-about-u-s-immigrants/>

Gramlich, J. (2019, January 16). *How Americans see illegal immigration, the border wall and political compromise*. Pew Research Center.

<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/01/16/how-americans-see-illegal-immigration-the-border-wall-and-political-compromise/>

Jones, B. (2019, January 21). *Majority of Americans continue to say immigrants strengthen the U.S.* Pew Research Center.

<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/01/31/majority-of-americans-continue-to-say-immigrants-strengthen-the-u-s/>

Krogstad, J. M. (2020, June 17). *Americans broadly support legal status for immigrants brought to the U.S. illegally as children*. Pew Research Center.

<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/06/17/americans-broadly-support-legal-status-for-immigrants-brought-to-the-u-s-illegally-as-children/>

Krogstad, J. M., & Lopez, M. H. (2021, April 20). *Most Latinos say U.S. immigration system needs big changes*. Pew Research Center.

<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/04/20/most-latinos-say-u-s-immigration-system-needs-big-changes/>

Moslimani, M. (2022, February 14). *Around four-in-ten Latinos in U.S. worry that they or*

*someone close to them could be deported.* Pew Research Center.

<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2022/02/14/around-four-in-ten-latinos-in-u-s-worry-that-they-or-someone-close-to-them-could-be-deported/>

Oliphant, B. J., & Cerda, A. (2022, September 8). *Republicans and Democrats have different top priorities for U.S. immigration policy.* Pew Research Center.

<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2022/09/08/republicans-and-democrats-have-different-top-priorities-for-u-s-immigration-policy/>