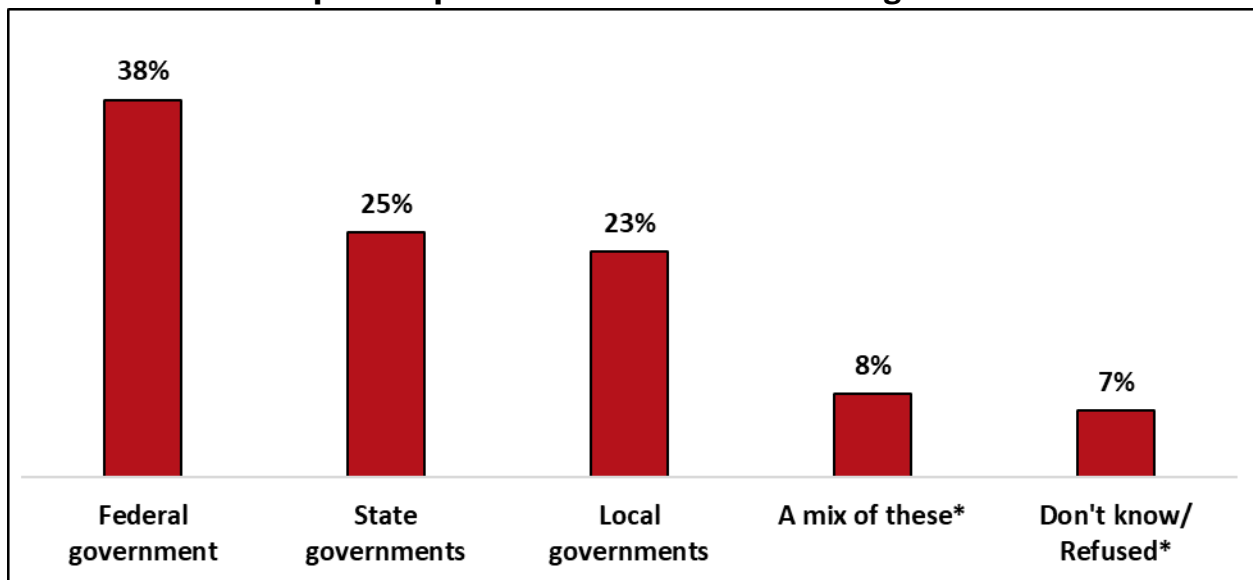


APM Survey

What do Americans think about refugee resettlement?

February 21, 2020

A plurality of Americans thinks the federal government should decide where refugees are resettled. About one-quarter apiece believe that state or local governments should.



Question: "Now thinking specifically about refugees; that is, those who have fled their home country due to persecution or conflict and were allowed to settle in the U.S. Do you think decisions on where refugees should be resettled should be primarily left up to the federal government, state governments, or local governments?" (* Option not read to respondent; recorded only if volunteered.)

Source: APM Survey, December 10-15, 2019. N = 1,003 U.S. adults age 18 or older; overall margin of error is +/-3.5 percentage points.

Context: Recent changes in refugee policy

In September 2019, President Donald Trump signed Executive Order 13888, "[Enhancing State and Local Involvement in Refugee Resettlement](#)." The Administration's stated purpose behind the executive order was to allow states and counties greater control in the process of refugee resettlement. Currently, the President decides the annual refugee "ceiling"—the maximum number of refugees the U.S. will resettle. The Trump Administration's [2020 federal fiscal year ceiling of 18,000 refugees](#) was the lowest number allowed in the four decades since the United States passed the 1980 Refugee Act, which standardized the process of refugee resettlement through the creation of the Office of Refugee Resettlement (within the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services).

Following the signing of this executive order, select states and counties across the country voted or otherwise decided whether they would continue resettling refugees. However, in January 2020, a federal judge [temporarily blocked the directive](#) from President Trump that sought to give local governments power to accept or deny refugees at the point of primary resettlement. (Thereafter, refugees are free to move about the country and live in any community, just as any other legal U.S. resident.)

Therefore, at the time of this writing, the prior longstanding system remains in place—wherein the federal government decides the number of refugees to admit, and then works in consultation with states and designated nonprofit organizations to help refugees reestablish their lives in communities all across the country. Local and state governments *may not* choose to deny refugee resettlement at the present time.

This national survey regarding Americans' views on refugee resettlement was conducted December 10-15, 2019—after the signing of the executive order but prior to the preliminary injunction in January 2020 that has temporarily blocked the order.

The survey asked Americans which level of government should have the primary responsibility for deciding where refugees may be originally resettled.

Introduction

This nonpartisan, nationally representative survey provides new information about the American public's opinions related to immigration and refugee policy. Data collection was conducted by SSRS.¹

The APM Research Lab conducted this survey with America Amplified – Election 2020, a Corporation for Public Broadcasting-funded public media initiative that prioritizes community engagement in reporting on political and election issues.

This brief summarizes the results of the following question:²

Now thinking specifically about refugees; that is, those who have fled their home country due to persecution or conflict and were allowed to settle in the U.S. Do you think decisions on where refugees should be resettled should be primarily left up to the:

- *Federal government*
- *State governments, or*
- *Local governments?*

Note that the answer options were rotated so that an even number of respondents heard each option first, thus avoiding possible order effects in the results.

To see whether Americans' opinions on this topic vary according to demographic, social and economic characteristics, we analyzed the results of this question by gender (women, men), age (five groups), race and ethnicity (only three groups are available in this survey: White, non-Hispanic; Black, non-Hispanic; and Hispanic), highest level of educational attainment (high school or less, some college or associate's degree, bachelor's or higher degree), annual household income (four groups), and political affiliation (Republican, independent, Democrat). This report only features the categories that have significantly different response patterns from one another. The number of respondents in each group are detailed in the methodology report that accompanies this brief.

We also calculated the percentage of immigrants in each respondent's county of residence. Separately, we analyzed all 50 states' recent presidential election history and created three categories relative to the upcoming 2020 Presidential election: battleground states, likely Republican states and likely Democratic states. States where the margin of victory was within 5 percentage points in the 2016 presidential election are considered battleground states, as are Ohio and Iowa, which both flipped from blue to red during that cycle. The remaining states are classified as likely Republican or likely Democrat, based on 2016 outcomes.

¹ For additional details about the methodology used in this survey see:

<https://www.apmresearchlab.org/s/immigration-survey-transparency-disclosure-and-methods-january-2020.pdf>.

² An earlier brief from this survey summarizes results from three questions related to immigration. Please see <https://www.apmresearchlab.org/america-amplified/immigration>.

Likely Republican

Alabama
Alaska
Arkansas
Idaho
Indiana
Kansas
Kentucky
Louisiana
Mississippi
Missouri
Montana
Nebraska
North Dakota
Oklahoma
South Carolina
South Dakota
Tennessee
Texas
Utah
West Virginia
Wyoming

Battleground

Arizona
Colorado
Florida
Georgia
Iowa
Maine
Michigan
Minnesota
Nevada
New Hampshire
North Carolina
Ohio
Pennsylvania
Virginia
Wisconsin

Likely Democrat

California
Connecticut
Delaware
Hawaii
Illinois
Maryland
Massachusetts
New Jersey
New Mexico
New York
Oregon
Rhode Island
Vermont
Washington
Washington, DC

We then cross-referenced survey results separately with these two variables—the immigrant share (as a percent of total population) of respondents’ counties of residence, and the political leanings of respondents’ state of residence.

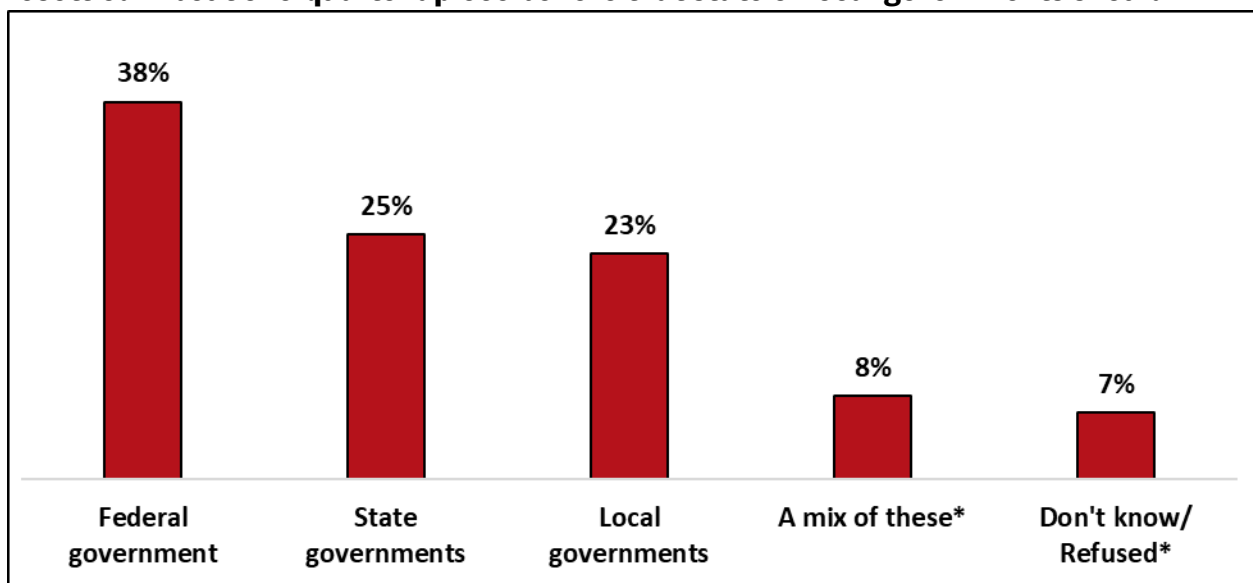
A detailed description of this survey’s methodology and sample characteristics, as well as the standard transparency disclosures required by the American Association of Public Opinion Research, the Roper Center, and CNN, are available at:

<https://www.apmresearchlab.org/s/immigration-survey-transparency-disclosure-and-methods-january-2020.pdf>.

Americans' beliefs about refugee resettlement

When asked if the federal, state, or local government should make “decisions on where refugees should be resettled” nearly 40% of Americans say “the federal government.” About one-quarter (25%) say “state governments” and roughly another quarter (23%) say “local governments.” We did not define “local government,” but respondents may have been thinking about councils, commissions, or other governments operating at the county, city, or town level.

A plurality of Americans thinks the federal government should decide where refugees are resettled. About one-quarter apiece believe that state or local governments should.



Question: “Now thinking specifically about refugees; that is, those who have fled their home country due to persecution or conflict and were allowed to settle in the U.S. Do you think decisions on where refugees should be resettled should be primarily left up to the federal government, state governments, or local governments?” (Option not read to respondent; recorded only if volunteered.)*

Source: APM Survey, December 10-15, 2019. N = 1,003 U.S. adults age 18 or older; overall margin of error is +/-3.5 percentage points.

In addition to the overall results for all Americans, this representative survey of 1,003 adults allows us to compare beliefs about what level of government is best suited to make decisions about refugee resettlement, across a variety of groups. The main takeaway from that analysis is that the largest proportion of every group we analyzed thinks the federal government is best suited to make these decisions.

In some cases, however, attitudes differ in interesting ways. Groups whose response patterns differ significantly from one another are shown in the graph appearing on page 7. Key findings include:

- Men are somewhat more likely than women to favor the *federal* government deciding where refugees are resettled (43% versus 33%, respectively). While women are more likely than men to prefer state- or local-level decision-making, both men and women are *most likely* to name the federal government as their preference.
- Nearly one-third of young adults (age 18-34) think *state* governments should decide where refugees are resettled—the most likely group to say so among all age groups.
- While about 40% of both Republicans and Democrats favor having the federal government decide, only one-third of independents feel similarly. More independents expressed a preference for *local* decision-making (26%) than either Democrats (19%) or Republicans (21%).

Surprisingly, the size of the immigrant population in the respondent’s home county is unrelated to response patterns to this question. In other words, statistically similar proportions of people from counties with small, medium, and large immigrant populations³ say the federal, state and local governments should direct where refugees resettle.

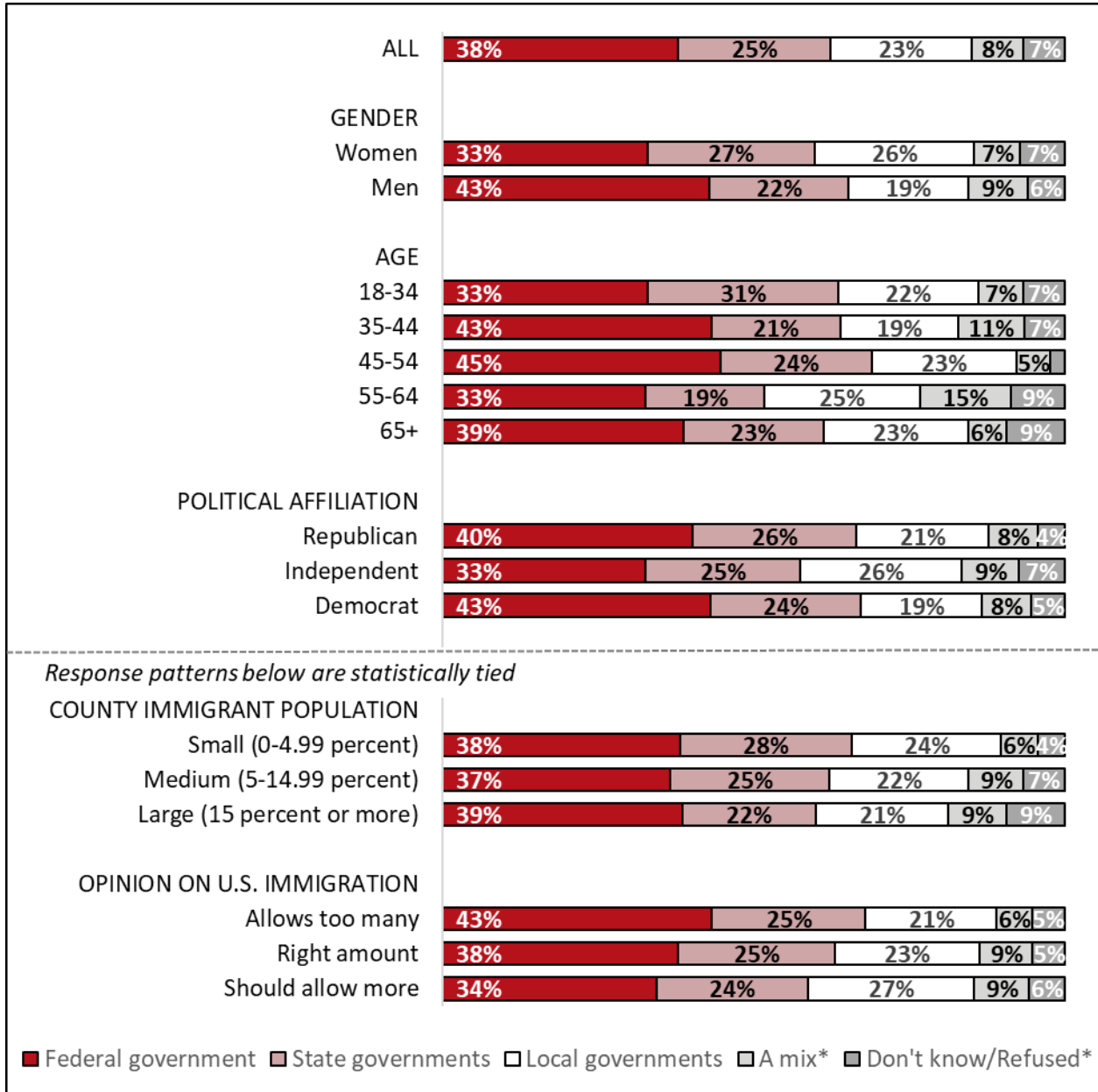
In addition, Americans’ opinions on national immigration levels (as revealed by [additional questions on this same survey](#)) are not strongly related to the opinions people have about refugee resettlement.⁴ For example, among those who think the U.S. admits “too many immigrants,” 43% think that the federal government should make decisions regarding refugee resettlement. Among those who think the U.S. should admit more immigrants, 34% believe the federal government should make resettlement decisions. This 9 percentage point difference is *not* a statistically meaningful difference in this particular comparison.

We also analyzed the responses to this question by income, race and ethnicity (non-Hispanic White, non-Hispanic Black, and Hispanic), educational attainment, household income, and the likely political leaning of the state in the upcoming 2020 election, but these further comparisons did not yield significant differences in response patterns from the national findings.

³ “Small” indicates an immigrant share of the county population below 5%. “Medium” indicates 5%-14.9% immigrant share, while “large” indicates immigrants represent 15% or more of the total population at the county level. These data were sourced from the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey.

⁴ Question wording: “Do you think that the U.S. allows too many immigrants into the country, that the U.S. should allow more people to immigrate into the country, or that the country currently allows in the right amount of immigrants?” For full results from this question, see <https://www.apmresearchlab.org/america-amplified/immigration>.

The largest proportions of all groups say the federal government should decide where refugees are located. However, women, young adults, those age 55 to 64, and political independents are less likely to share that opinion.



Question: "Now thinking specifically about refugees; that is, those who have fled their home country due to persecution or conflict and were allowed to settle in the U.S. Do you think decisions on where refugees should be resettled should be primarily left up to the federal government, state governments, or local governments?" (* Option not read to respondent; recorded only if volunteered.)

Source: APM Survey, December 10-15, 2019. N = 1,003 U.S. adults age 18 or older; overall margin of error is +/-3.5 percentage points.

About the Survey

The survey was conducted by SSRS on its Omnibus survey platform. Interviews were conducted from December 10-15, 2019 among a sample of 1,003 respondents in English (968) and Spanish (35). Interviewing took place over the telephone, including both landline (300) and cell phone (703). The margin of error for total respondents is +/-3.46% at the 95% confidence level. All data are weighted to represent national parameters of the adult population.

For additional details about the sample and survey methodology, as well as transparency disclosures relevant to the American Association of Public Opinion, the Roper Center and CNN, please see: <https://www.apmresearchlab.org/s/immigration-survey-transparency-disclosure-and-methods-january-2020.pdf>.

Acknowledgments

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About the APM Research Lab: Bringing Facts into Focus

The APM Research Lab is a division of American Public Media that informs the public about challenges and opportunities facing families, communities, and organizations throughout the nation. Our mission is to foster an engaged democracy by inspiring curiosity, inquiry and discussion through fact-driven, credible research and analysis. Our Values: Independent, Useful, Informative, Non-partisan.

The APM Research Lab conducts research projects of all types—surveys, data analysis, literature reviews, and more—and informs the work of partner organizations and the broader public through traditional reports, as well as data visualizations, blog posts, interactives, presentations, and other platforms.

We are a member of the American Association for Public Opinion Research’s Transparency Initiative and abide by its standards. See <https://www.aapor.org/Standards-Ethics/Transparency-Initiative/>.

In addition to philanthropic support and partnership, we are happy to entertain requests for proposals and other contractual inquiries related to research and analysis.

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