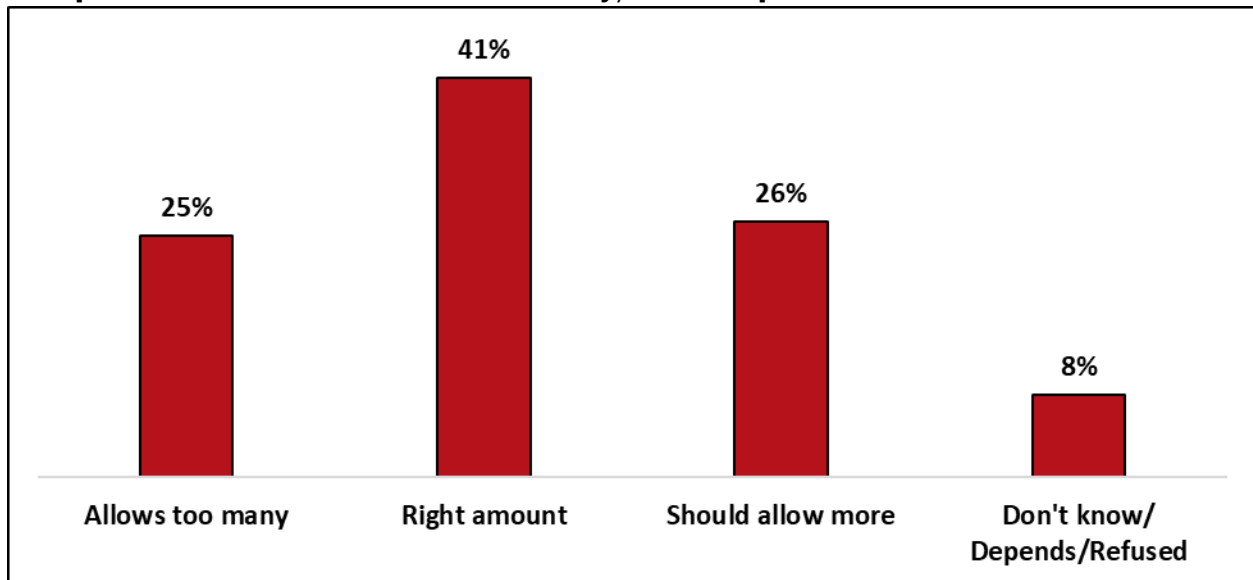


APM Survey

What do Americans think about immigration? And why?

January 31, 2020

A plurality of Americans think the United States admits the right number of immigrants; one quarter thinks the U.S. lets in too many, another quarter thinks it should let in more



Question: "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?"

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.

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 December 10 to 15, 2019 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 three of the survey's questions:

1. 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?
2. Which comes closest to your views about recent immigrants who have come to the U.S. in the past 10 years or so: There are too many immigrants living in your local community; you would like to see more immigrants living in your local community; or your local community has the right amount of immigrants?
3. And in a few words, why do you feel that way about the number of immigrants in your local community?

Note that in the first and second questions, the first two answer options were rotated so that an equal number of respondents heard each option first (“too many” or “more”), to avoid possible order effects in the results. The third question is open-ended: interviewers recorded respondents' answers verbatim, and these answers were later coded into categories for analysis.

To see whether Americans' opinions on these topics vary according to demographic, social and economic characteristics, we analyzed the results of each 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), educational attainment (high school or less, some college or Associates degree, Bachelors or graduate degree), household income (four groups), and political affiliation (Republican, independent, Democrat). In most cases, this report only shows the categories that have significantly different responses from one another. The number of respondents in each group are detailed in the methodology report that accompanies this brief.

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>.

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 election: battleground, likely Republican and likely Democrat. 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:

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 composition respondents’ counties of residence AND the political leanings of respondents’ state of residence.

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

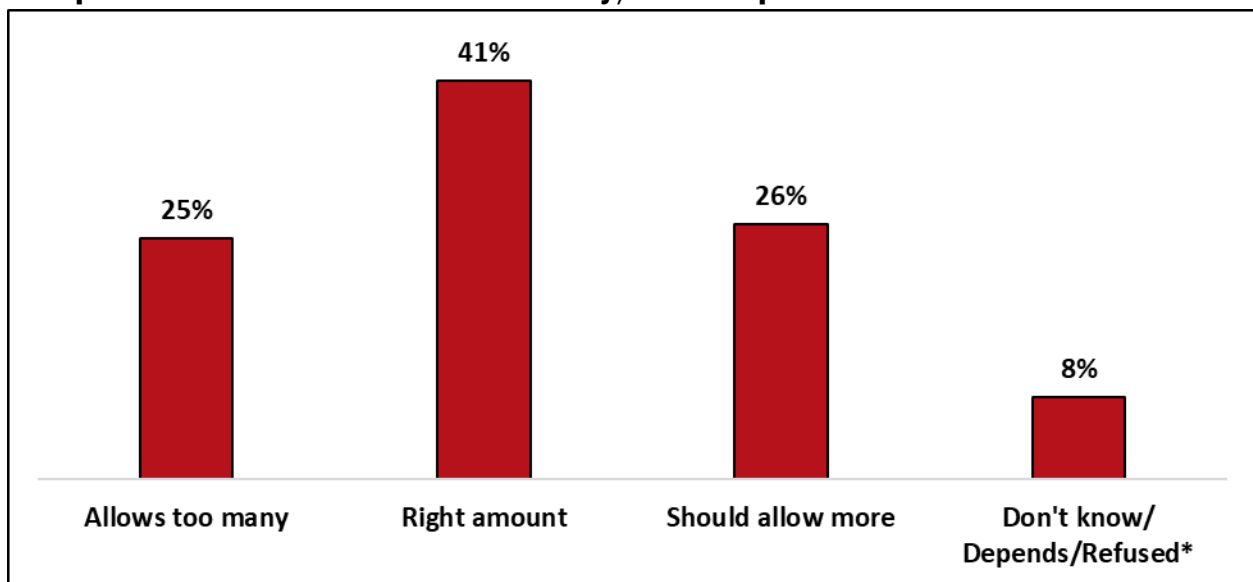
<https://www.apmresearchlab.org/s/immigration-survey-transparency-disclosure-and-methods-january-2020.pdf>.

Attitudes toward national immigration levels

Four in 10 American adults think the U.S. accepts the right number of immigrants into the country. Besides the nearly 1 in 10 who said they “don’t know,” “depends,” or refused to answer the question, the remainder of adults are evenly split between thinking that the U.S. allows too many people to immigrate into the country and that the U.S. should allow more immigration.

For context, it is helpful to know that about 14% of the U.S. population—44.7 million people—are foreign born. According to Census Bureau estimates, there was a net increase of about 1.5 million immigrants for each year from 2014 to 2018.² According to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, just over 1 million immigrants received “lawful permanent resident status,” for each year during that same period.³

A plurality of Americans think the United States admits the right number of immigrants; one quarter thinks the U.S. lets in too many, another quarter thinks it should let in more



Question: “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?” (* 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.

² Author’s analysis of U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey Data available via Minnesota Compass (<http://www.mncompass.org/immigration/population-trends#1-10779-g> accessed 1/8/2020).

³ <https://www.dhs.gov/immigration-statistics/yearbook/2018/table1>, accessed 1/8/2020.

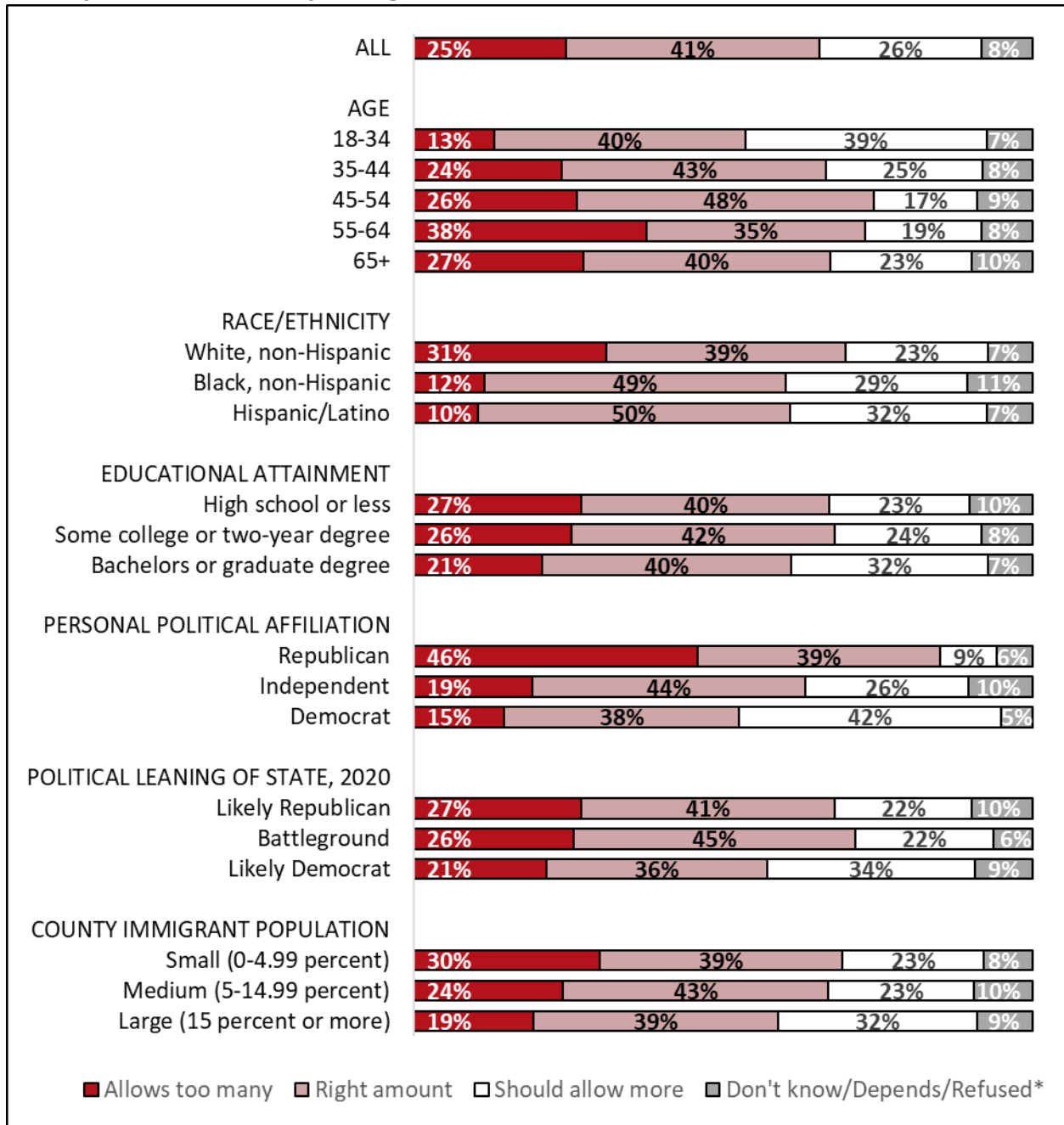
This representative survey of 1,003 adults allows us to compare American attitudes across a variety of groups toward the level of immigration that should be allowed at the national level. The main takeaway from that analysis is that a plurality of nearly all groups thinks that the U.S. currently allows in the “right amount” of immigrants.

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

- A higher proportion of younger adults favor admitting more immigrants than is the case among older adults, including 2 in 5 of those under 35, compared to 1 in 5 of those over 45.
 - The age group 55 to 64 is one of the few groups identified in this survey where the proportion of respondents who indicate that the U.S. admits too many immigrants exceeds the proportion of those who think the U.S. allows in the correct number (38% versus 35%, respectively).
- A much higher proportion of non-Hispanic Whites—31%—think the U.S. admits too many immigrants. Far fewer non-Hispanic Blacks and Hispanics share that opinion (12% and 10%, respectively).
- Nearly one-third of those with at least a four-year college education think the U.S. should allow more immigrants into the country; less than one-quarter of those with less education share that opinion.
- The largest differences in attitudes toward U.S. immigration levels break along party lines:
 - A 46% plurality of Republicans think the U.S. admits too many immigrants.
 - The proportion of Republicans who think the U.S. allows too many immigrants into the country is triple the proportion of Democrats who share that opinion (46% and 15%, respectively).
 - A plurality of Democrats (42%) think the U.S. should permit more immigration.
- The answer patterns of those living in battleground states for the 2020 presidential election are very similar to the results from likely Republican states: only 22% of respondents in both battleground and Republican-leaning states favor letting in more immigrants, while 34% of those living in Democratic-leaning states feel that way.
- 30% of those from counties with a relatively low immigrant population think the U.S. allows in too many immigrants, compared with 19% of those from counties with higher immigrant populations.
 - Nearly one-third of those living in counties with relatively high immigrant populations favor allowing in more immigrants.

We also analyzed the results to this question by gender and income, but these further comparisons did not find significant differences in response patterns from the national findings.

Relatively high proportions of older adults, Whites, and especially Republicans think the country allows in too many immigrants



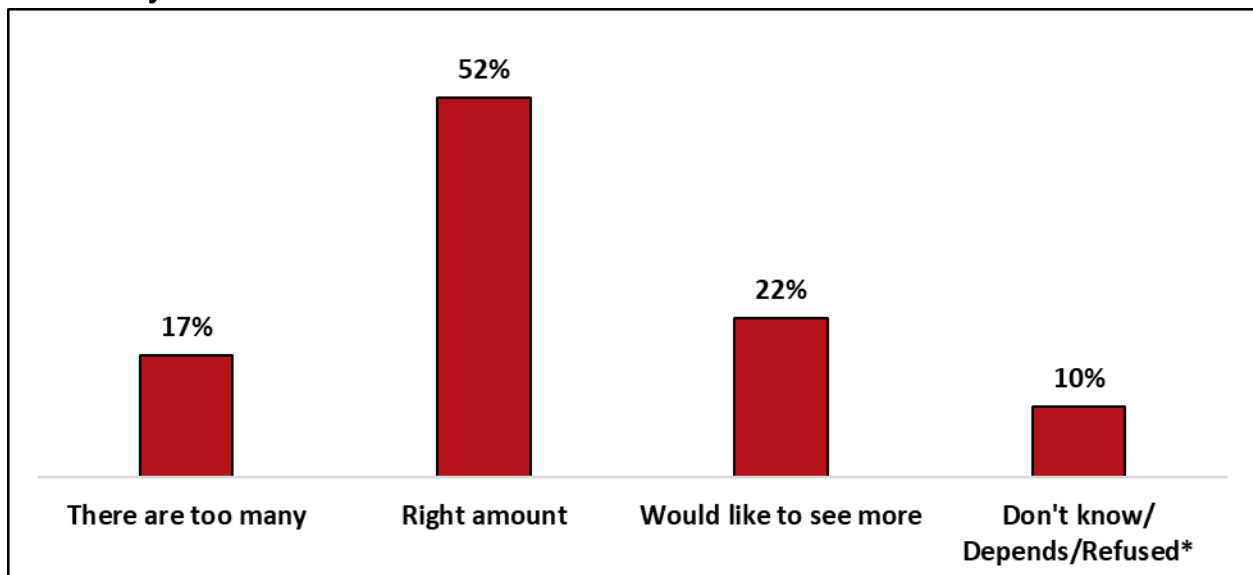
Question: "Do you think that the U.S. allows too many immigrants into the country, that the U.S. should allow more people to immigrate into the country, or that the country currently allows in the right amount of immigrants?" (* Option not read to respondent; recorded only if volunteered.)

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.

Attitudes toward immigrants in “your local community”

Overall, Americans’ attitudes toward immigrants in their local communities are similar to their attitudes toward U.S. immigration levels. When asked to think about recent immigrants who have moved to the country “in the past 10 years or so,” just over half of all American adults believe that they have the right number living in their local community. Somewhat more Americans say they would like to see more immigrants in their local community (22%) than say “there are too many” (17%).

Just over half of Americans feel that “the right amount” of immigrants live in their local community



Question: “Which comes closest to your views about recent immigrants who have come to the U.S. in the past 10 years or so: There are too many immigrants living in your local community, You would like to see more immigrants living in your local community, or Your local community has the right amount of immigrants?”

* 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 general results, this survey lets us compare Americans’ attitudes toward the number of recent immigrants in their local communities. That analysis shows that the largest proportions of every group we analyzed in this survey thinks that “the right amount” of immigrants live in their local community. In some cases, however, attitudes differ in interesting

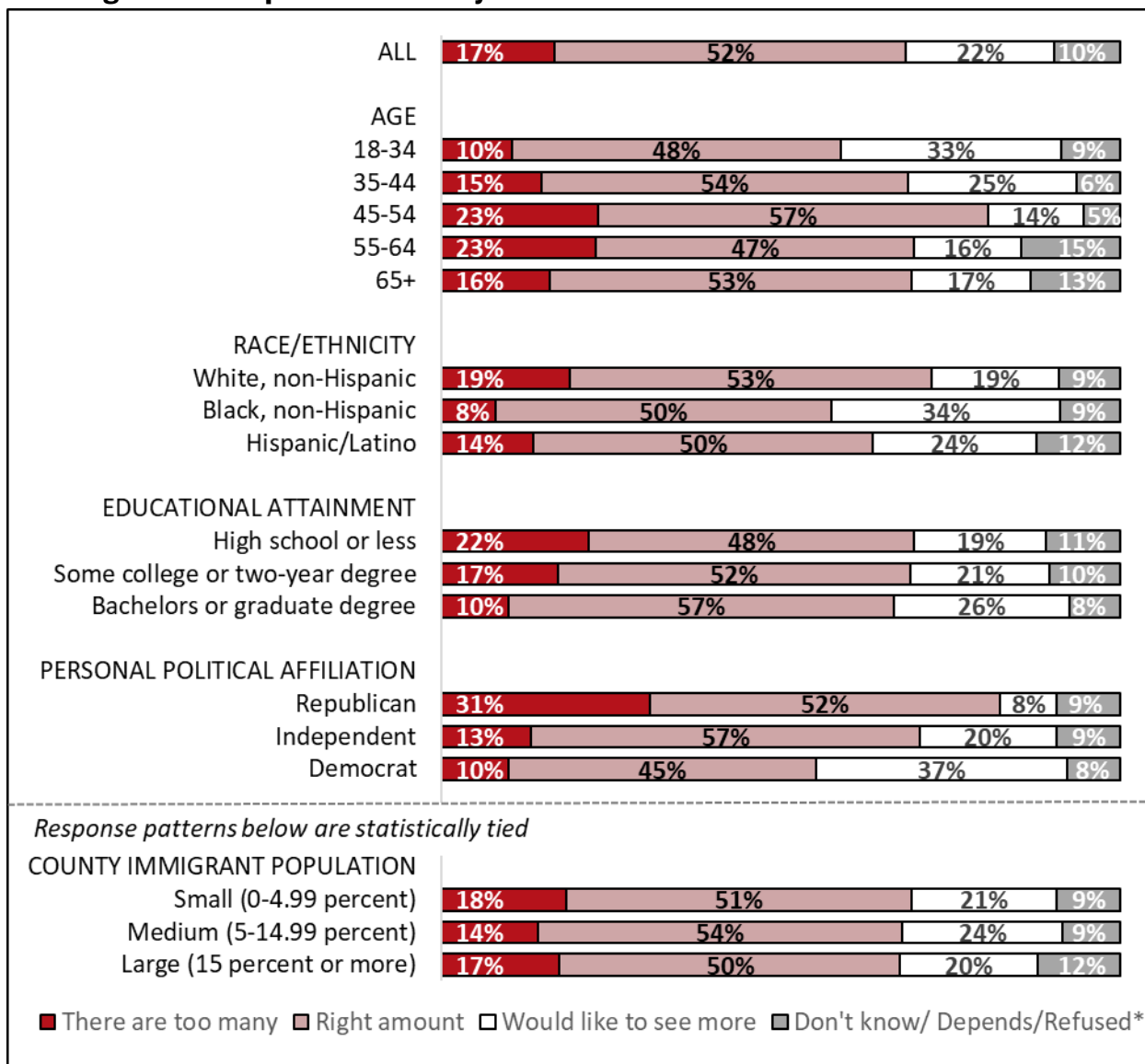
ways. Groups whose response patterns differ significantly from one another are shown in the following graph. Some of the key findings are:

- Nearly one-quarter of those age 45 to 64 think there are too many immigrants in their local community.
- One-third of non-Hispanic Blacks say they would like to see more immigrants in their local community, compared to one-quarter of Latinos, and one-fifth of non-Hispanic Whites.
- The proportion of those with a high school degree or less education who say there are too many immigrants in their local community is twice as high as the proportion of those with a college degree or more education who express that same opinion (22% compared to 10%).
- About half of Republicans, independents, and Democrats alike say that their community is home to the right number of immigrants. However:
 - Three times as many Republicans as Democrats say there are too many immigrants living in their local community (31% compared to 10%).
 - Over four times as many Democrats as Republicans say they would like to see more immigrants in their local community (37% compared to 8%).

Perhaps more surprisingly, the size of the immigrant population in the respondent's home county is unrelated to response patterns to this question. While county might be a broader area than the "local community" referred to in the question, it is notable that statistically similar proportions of those from counties with small, medium, and large immigrant populations say there are too many immigrants nearby, just as statistically similar proportions say they would like more immigrants in their area.

We also analyzed the responses to this question by gender, income and the political leanings as categorized earlier (likely Republican, battleground, likely Democrat), but these further comparisons did not find significant differences in response patterns from the national findings.

Relatively high proportions of younger adults, Blacks, and especially Democrats would like to see more immigrants in their local community; no difference based on proportion of immigrants in respondent's county



Question: "Which comes closest to your views about recent immigrants who have come to the U.S. in the past 10 years or so: There are too many immigrants living in your local community, You would like to see more immigrants living in your local community, or Your local community has the right amount of immigrants?" * 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.

What reasons do people give for their attitudes toward immigrants in their communities?

To better understand why people feel the way they do about the number of immigrants in their local communities, we asked a follow up question: “In a few words, why do you feel that way about the number of immigrants in your local community?” For purposes of analysis, we coded answers with similar themes together.

Note that we coded up to three answers for each respondent, since some people gave several reasons for their responses. Also note that respondents sometimes gave reasons that did not seem to align with the answer they gave to the previous question: For example, some people who indicated that there are too many immigrants in their community responded to the open-ended question with remarks that are positive toward immigrants.

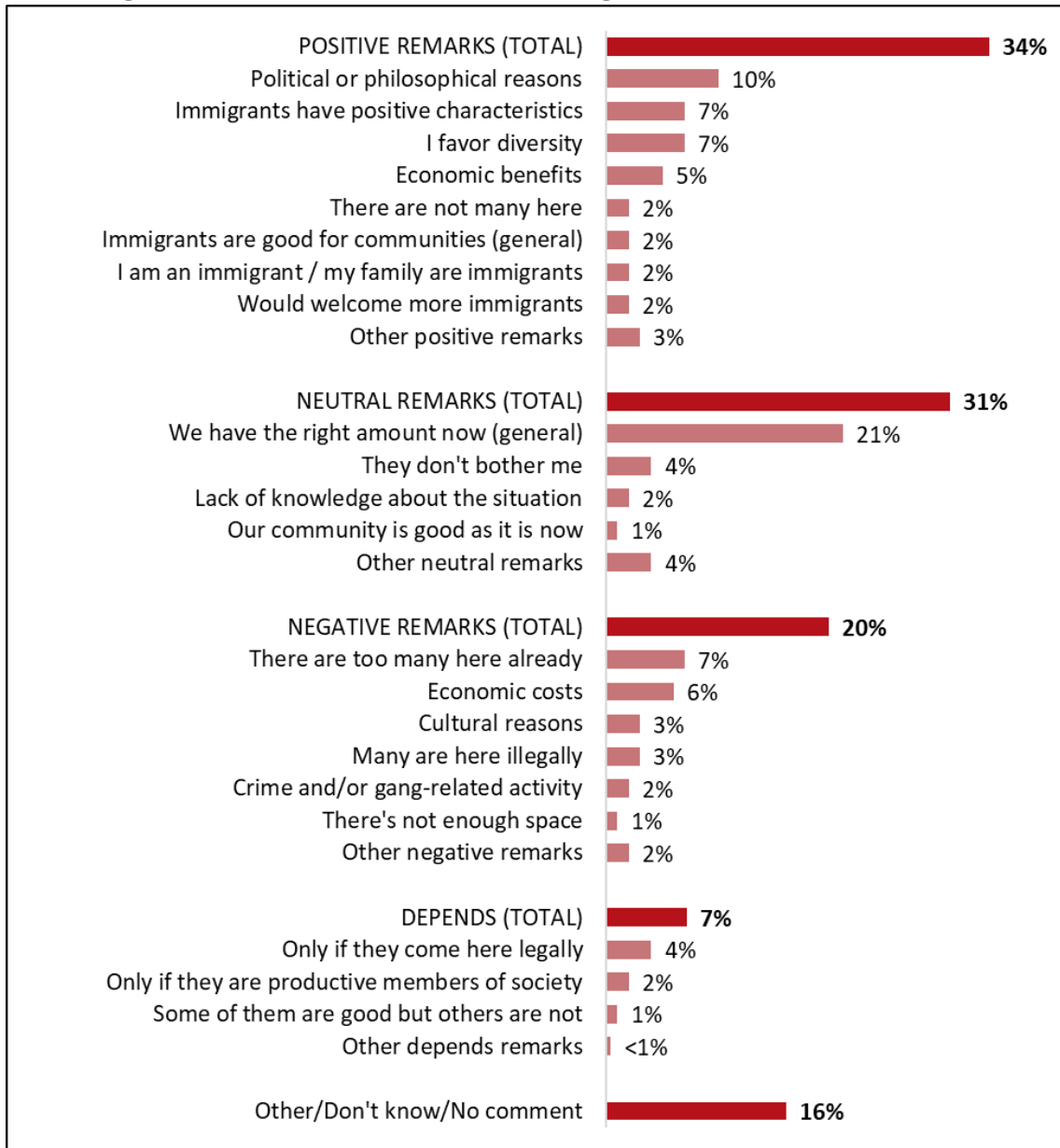
Overall, about one-third of responses indicate positive feelings toward immigrants, and nearly another third expressed neutral remarks. Positive responses were split among those who gave political or philosophically-based remarks, those who highlighted specific positive characteristics they see in immigrants, those who expressed valuing the diversity brought by immigrants, and those who believed that immigrants positively benefit the local economy.

Neutral responses include the single most common specific category of responses: 21% of those surveyed said their community currently has the right number of immigrants. Interestingly, about 26% of those come from counties with larger immigrant populations, compared to about 16% of those who live in counties with smaller immigrant populations.

About 1 in 5 gave an explicitly negative response, indicating either discomfort with immigrants or dislike of immigrants. Seven percent of responses were equivocal “it depends”-type responses, indicating both benefits and negative consequences from of immigration.

The following graph summarizes those responses, and the tables that follow provide several examples of the positive, negative, neutral, and “it depends” remarks made by survey respondents.

About one-third of respondents offer positive or neutral remarks when asked for the reasoning behind their attitudes toward immigrants in their local communities



Question: “And in a few words, why do you feel that way about the number of immigrants in your local community?” (A follow up to the question “Which comes closest to your views about recent immigrants who have come to the U.S. in the past 10 years or so: There are too many immigrants living in your local community, You would like to see more immigrants living in your local community, or Your local community has the right amount of immigrants?”)

Note: The categories above were developed based on common themes among the responses. Some responses included several reasons and each response was assigned to up to three categories; therefore percentages sum to more than 100% and sub-categories sum to more than the TOTAL responses.

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.

Examples of positive remarks

Comment	Age	Sex	State	Political affiliation
"Because they are more than welcome, everyone has the right to come to the U.S."	59	Man	OH	independent
"The ones that are here, they are settle into the community and they are good neighbors."	71	Woman	VT	Democrat
"So far we're almost filling the needs for jobs in Manufacturing, we have a good balance in jobs currently."	77	Man	NC	Republican
"Its very diverse, and that I really like that."	61	Man	FL	Democrat
"Isn't too many here, they are progressive."	43	Man	DE	independent
"I just met a nice variety of nice immigrant people."	81	Woman	MI	independent
"Because the people in either side of me are immigrants."	66	Woman	VA	independent
"We have a great diverse culture where I live in."	45	Woman	MN	independent
"Because they are good and hard working people."	66	Woman	FL	Democrat
"I see hardworking people and therefore they're very welcomed."	65	Woman	WV	Republican
"The immigrants I know are wonderful people and have proven themselves to be good Americans"	72	Woman	WY	Republican
"I feel that would benefit a greater diversity in the community."	71	Man	WA	Democrat
"Because the united states was build upon the right of allowing immigrants to enter the country, and I believe this was a great way to build it..."	60	Man	MA	Democrat
"We are all immigrants, that's what our country was built on."	50	Woman	MI	Democrat
"I feel very comfortable with them."	89	Man	PA	independent
"I like diversity it makes us better and stronger, my family is immigrant."	44	Woman	IN	independent

Examples of neutral remarks

Comment	Age	Sex	State	Political affiliation
"No problem with immigrants."	74	Man	IN	Republican
"Not a lot of minors or minorities in this community."	39	Man	OH	Democrat
"Its fine."	38	Man	NY	Republican
"I don't get out too much."	65	Man	FL	independent
"To be honest with you I don't have that many, I don't have any trouble with them."	73	Man	OH	Republican
"Everyone minds their own business."	74	Man	NJ	independent
"Cause it's out of my control therefore I have nothing to do with it."	60	Man	SC	Democrat
"Just seems fine."	63	Woman	IA	independent
"We don't seem to have that many."	96	Woman	MA	Democrat
"Because is a large community I guess I don't know too many immigrants."	59	Woman	WA	Democrat
"I don't know we do not have too many, it would not matter to have more."	65	Woman	OH	Republican
"We don't have any."	40	Woman	NH	independent
"I haven't noticed any real difference."	75	Man	NJ	Republican
"Anywhere they are I'm fine."	55	Man	AR	Republican

Examples of negative remarks

Comment	Age	Sex	State	Political affiliation
"Thirty or forty packed in one house."	18	Woman	NE	independent
"I've been around long enough to see when they bring around a lot of people from different areas that the government has allowed to come in to this country, and the government has given them certain leeway to them that the average person living here already has no access to."	75	Woman	PA	independent
"Because there's so many coming in. There's so many coming in that is not going to work, we can't take care of all these people."	60	Woman	CO	independent
"Because is getting overpopulated too many people."	43	Man	ND	independent
"In the country I don't know if the immigrants will do well. I don't want them worried about the violence."	56	Woman	OH	Democrat
"I don't think we can afford to take care of any more people that have not born here."	60	Woman	NH	Democrat
"We been robbed by some of them, due to criminal activity."	68	Woman	WI	Republican
"Not enough jobs."	61	Woman	GA	independent
"Because they overwhelm our system, they cost all of our money, there is not enough jobs."	41	Man	NJ	Democrat
"Because there aren't enough jobs in the United States and the immigrants are taking them all and there isn't enough room for all of them."	78	Woman	MN	independent
"Just a lot of immigrants around."	68	Women	TX	Republican
"There are too many people coming to us."	72	Woman	AL	Republican
"Because people coming in taking advantage to opportunities and not doing it the right way through the right channel, becoming citizens."	71	Man	NM	Republican
"It cost too much to take care of them."	63	Man	ME	independent
"I feel if they are not legal they should not be here they should speak English first and come here."	50	Woman	MD	Democrat

Examples of remarks indicating “it depends”

Comment	Age	Sex	State	Political affiliation
“This is a local community people here usually work together and help each other, and the immigrants I see here just think about themselves. The majority of them are very indifferent, but they are a huge exception and they do fit in the community quite well.”	70	Man	NJ	independent
“Is not that well immigrated community, and I'll like more legal immigrants and illegal immigrants should be sent home.”	64	Man	GA	Republican
“I think immigration is good for the country if it is done the correct way we are a nation built on immigrants.”	70	Woman	NC	Republican
“Democrats should not allowed that many illegal immigrants, only legals, no problem with the legals. Illegals should be kicked out from our country.”	69	Woman	FL	Republican
“First of all, some of them are good some of them are not.”	90	Woman	FL	independent
“If they can take care of themselves not by the government its fine they come to the U.S.”	78	Woman	KY	none given
“Because they are not so many. I live in Long Island and I like all my neighbors, most of them are hard working immigrants. I am fine with that.”	75	Woman	NY	Democrat
“If they are legal they’re more than welcomed.”	58	Man	WV	Republican
“I feel okay they’re close to California. IF they come from another far country they are more aggressive.”	86	Woman	CA	Democrat
“As long as immigrants are coming legally, I am fine.”	67	Woman	MD	Republican
“I mean really I don’t care, I am ok with immigrants as long as they come in legally.”	61	Woman	OH	Republican
“I just feel that way, if they have a job and they know the language it's okay but if they come and make their own flag I don’t want them.”	78	Woman	NY	Republican
“They need to come in legally, so the government know who they are.”	78	Man	KS	independent

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>.

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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, demographic analyses, literature reviews, and more — and informs the work of partner organizations and the broader public through traditional reports, as well as infographics, 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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