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<http://www.vox.com/2016/7/6/12098622/immigration-worries-economy-security>

New poll: Voter worries about immigration mostly aren't about the economy

Voters express a range of concerns about immigration to the United States, but according to new polling done in partnership with Vox by Morning Consult, a nonpartisan media and technology company, concerns about physical security — crime and terrorism — are more important than concerns about jobs and the economy.

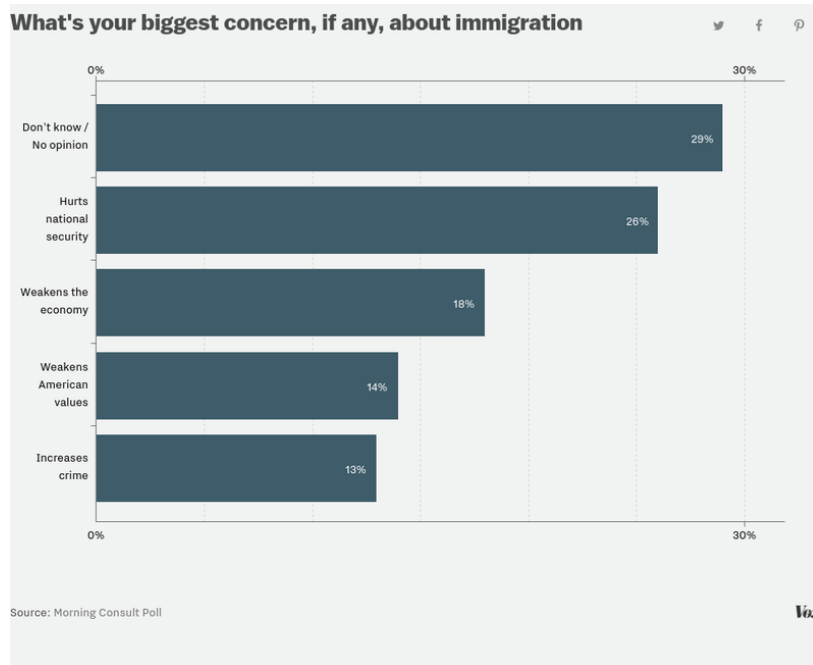
Complementary to that analysis, Americans' views about immigration differ substantially according to where the immigrants are from; immigrants from Europe and Asia are viewed much more positively than immigrants from Africa and Latin America, and immigrants from the Middle East are viewed least positively of all. The poll also shows that this dynamic is heavily influenced by the specific views of white Americans — while black and Hispanic Americans evaluate the impact of European and Latin American immigrants similarly, for example, white Americans are much more enthusiastic about immigration from Europe than from Latin America.

Voters worry that immigration makes them unsafe

On a policy level, respondents to the poll essentially endorse the status quo on legal immigration, with 39 percent saying it should be decreased while 32 percent say it should remain the same and just 16 percent want to see it increased. But attitudes toward

immigration are broadly negative; 50 percent describe immigrants today as a "burden on our country," while only 34 percent agree that "immigrants today strengthen our country."

When it comes to why, specifically, people are worried about immigration, concerns about national security and crime appear to be much more prominent than concerns about the economy.



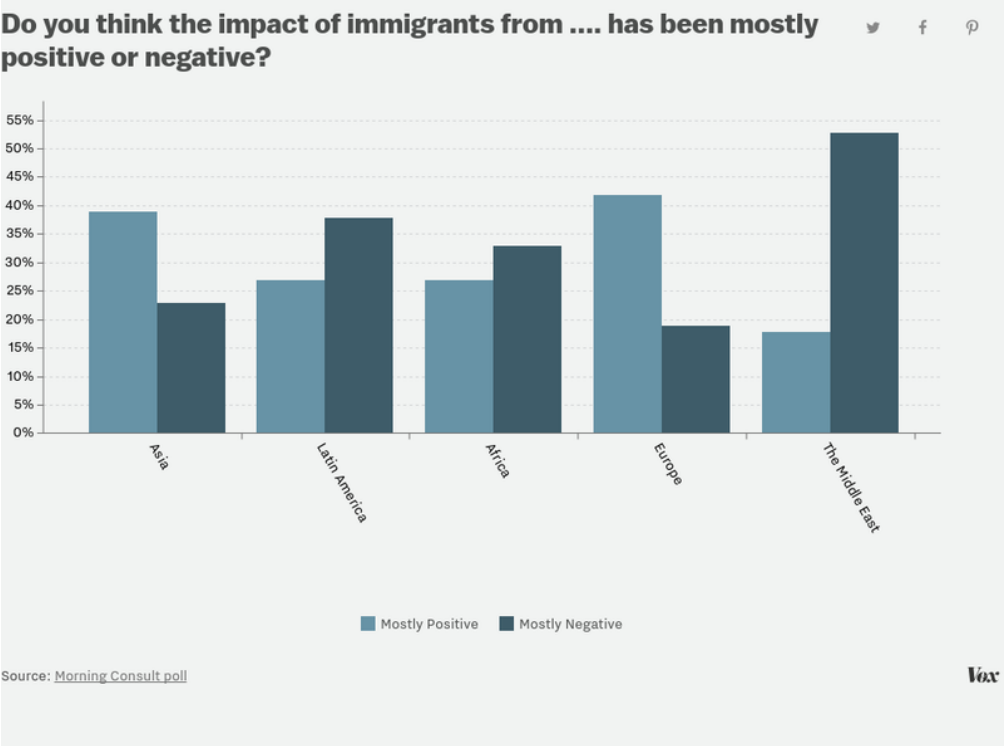
When Morning Consult asked an open-ended question, several respondents volunteered concerns related to the Zika virus as a reason for wanting to see immigration levels reduced.

Limiting the sample to working-class voters, defined as those without a college degree, national security (24 percent) still trumps the economy (20 percent) as a top concern about immigration, with crime named by an additional 13 percent of non-college respondents. Low-income respondents with household income below \$50,000 are similarly more likely to cite security (24 percent) than the economy (20 percent) as their main worry about immigration.

European and Asian immigrants are viewed more favorably

Theoretical models of the labor market suggest the economic impact of a new immigrant on you should be a function of the extent to which that immigrant is similar to you — carrying competitive skills — rather than different and carrying complementary ones. Research finds that, for example, an influx of Latin American immigrants tends to reduce the earnings of other recent Latin American immigrants (who speak the same language, cook similar foods, etc.) while generally increasing the pay of native-born Americans who speak English fluently.

Our poll finds, however, that Americans are most positive in their assessment of immigrants from Europe, followed by Asia, and least positive in their assessment of immigrants from the Middle East.



Delving into the crosstabs, we find that this dynamic is especially pronounced among white Americans.

African Americans are slightly more favorable (34 percent versus 29 percent) about immigrants from Europe than immigrants from Latin America, but whites are drastically more enthusiastic (43 versus 25) about European immigrants.

Similarly, while whites and Hispanics are about equally likely (43 percent versus 44 percent) to say that immigrants from Europe have a mostly positive impact on the United States, Hispanics are 10 percentage points more likely to say this about immigrants from Africa.

An anxious electorate — but not about the economy

The economy is deeply relevant to immigration policy for the simple reason that incumbent politicians with a strong economy at their backs tend to be reelected no matter what, and thus have leeway to pursue whatever kind of immigration policy they like.

But there is a reason Donald Trump kicked off his campaign by talking about rapists sneaking over the border from Mexico and launched it into the stratosphere with a plan to ban Muslims from immigrating to the United States. A substantial body of experimental academic research shows that worries about crime and the identity of immigrants are very prominent in driving attitudes toward immigration, with labor market models taking more of a back seat.

Treating worry about immigration as displaced economic anxiety is useful for pundits and politicians because it lets them pivot to comfortable ground — either it's, "Just adopt my economic program and the xenophobia will go away," or else it's, "No need to look too hard at my economic program, because my immigration program will fix the economy."

But there's little sign that this is how voters think about the issue. The number of voters calling for a reduction in immigration levels fell steadily during the 1990s when the economy boomed and crime fell. It spiked not when the economy turned down in the spring of 2001 but when foreign-born terrorists hijacked planes and used them to knock down the World Trade Center. A successful counter to anti-immigration politics is ultimately going to need to either cede ground to these concerns about physical security, or else explicitly persuade people that they are misguided. Talking about the economy is neither here nor there.

