
Americans' Views on Immigration: Selective, Not Simple

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Americans' views on immigration are more structured and conditional than is often assumed. Many differentiate between types of immigrants, policy objectives, and perceived trade-offs.

Between December 8 and 18, 2025, Florida State University's Institute for Governance and Civics (IGC) surveyed a nationally representative sample of 1,533 U.S. adults—including an oversample of 263 Florida residents—to examine how Americans think about immigration policy across multiple domains. A follow-up recontact survey conducted between February 24 and March 3, 2026, with 1,188 respondents, included additional questions on deportation and preferences over different forms of legal immigration. Key findings include:

- **Americans support deportation policies, but their preferences are conditional rather than absolute**

Half of respondents support either deporting all unauthorized immigrants (38%) or those with even minor criminal records (12%). Just 3% are opposed to deportation altogether.

- **Americans who think immigrants receive more government assistance are more likely to support limiting immigration**

Americans generally perceive immigrants as less likely than native-born Americans to receive public assistance. However, those who perceive immigrants as receiving more assistance are more likely to support limiting immigration from countries whose immigrants, on average, receive more in benefits than they pay in taxes.

- **Americans are divided on limiting immigration based on economic impact, but they broadly support excluding immigrants who hold extremist views**

Respondents are split and often uncertain about restricting immigration from countries whose immigrants, on average, receive more benefits than they pay in taxes. Large majorities, however—including a majority of liberal respondents—support denying entry to immigrants who hold extremist views.

- **Americans distinguish between temporary and permanent immigration**

Many Americans support expanding temporary, work-related migration while taking a more cautious approach to increasing permanent immigration. This pattern appears across ideological groups, even as broader disagreements persist.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past few decades, immigration has emerged as one of the most polarizing issues in American politics. Discussions of immigration in the United States often revolve around a number of key questions. Do Americans support deporting all unauthorized immigrants or just those who have committed serious offenses? Do Americans distinguish between permanent immigration and temporary, work-related migration? How do perceptions of immigrants' use of government assistance shape support for restricting immigration? Should the country apply restrictions based instead on immigrants' beliefs and values?

To better understand how Americans think about these issues, the Institute for Governance and Civics surveyed 1,533 U.S. adults in a nationally representative survey conducted between December 8 and 18, 2025, including an oversample of 263 Florida residents. A follow-up recontact survey was conducted between February 24 and March 3, 2026, in which 1,188 of the original respondents participated. The recontact survey included additional questions on deportation preferences and views on different forms of legal immigration.¹

The findings show that Americans' views on immigration are more complex and conditional than is often reported. Rather than taking a single position on immigration overall, many differentiate

between different aspects of immigration policy—such as enforcement, economic needs, and the criteria on which immigrants should be admitted—and perceived trade-offs.

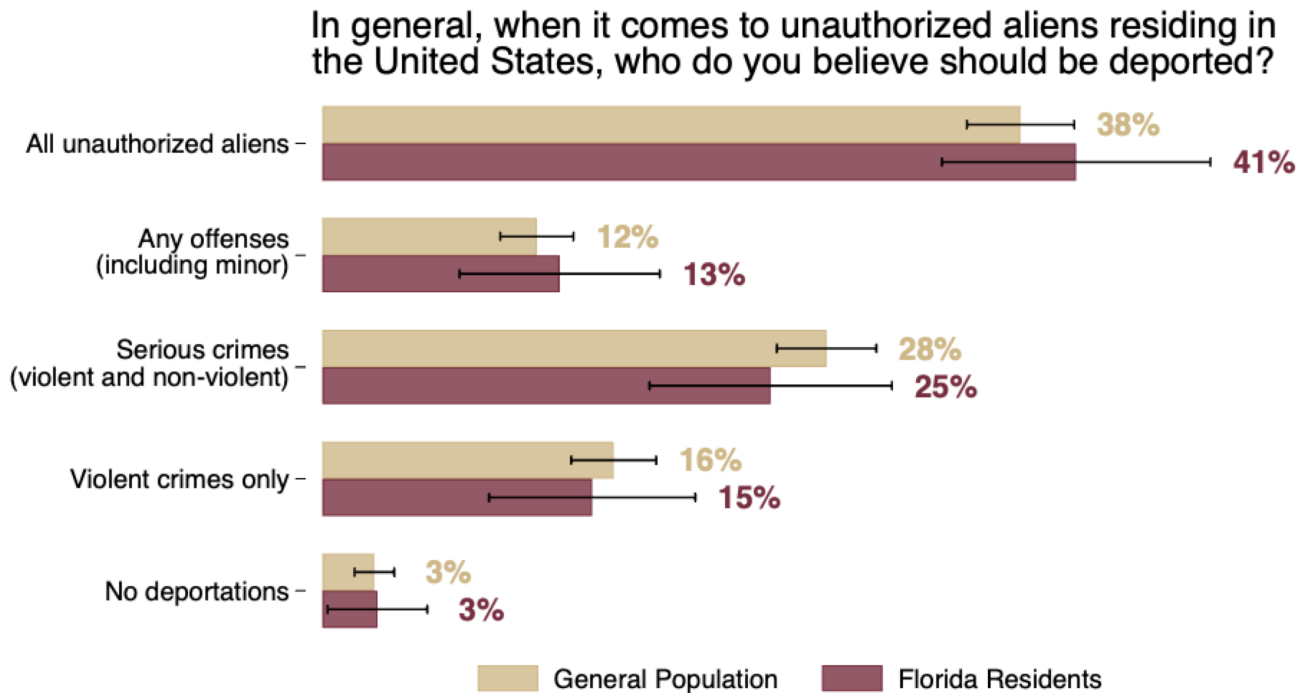
AMERICANS' VIEWS ON DEPORTATION LEAN TOWARD BROAD ENFORCEMENT

Americans do not uniformly approach deportation as a one-size-fits-all policy; instead, many differentiate based on an immigrant's criminal history.

As shown in Figure 1, Americans' views on deportation span a range of positions. At the most expansive end, 38% of respondents support deporting all unauthorized immigrants. An additional 12% support deportation for immigrants who have committed any offense, including minor offenses. Some favor limiting deportation to those who commit serious crimes (28%) or violent offenses only (16%). At the most limited end, 3% oppose deportation altogether. These categories are cumulative, meaning that support for broader policies includes support for more limited ones.

Support for broader deportation policies increases steadily as respondents become more conservative.

Figure 1. Deportation Policy Preferences, National and Florida Samples



Note: Estimates are weighted to represent the U.S. adult population nationally (n = 1,186) and adult residents of Florida (n = 203). Responses are based on a “select all that apply” question asking which categories of unauthorized immigrants should be deported. We classify respondents by the most expansive level of deportation they support. For example, respondents who support deporting individuals who committed minor offenses are coded as supporting deportation for all more serious offenses. “Not sure” responses (n=35) are included in the data but not shown in the chart.

DEPORTATION PREFERENCES VARY SHARPLY BY POLITICAL IDEOLOGY

As shown in Figure 2, support for broader deportation policies increases steadily as respondents become more conservative.

Among liberals, 73% say deportation should be limited to those who commit either serious (43%) or violent (30%) crimes. Only 8% support deporting all unauthorized immigrants, while an identical 8% oppose deportation altogether.

Conservatives, by contrast, are far more likely to support broad deportation policies. Seventy-seven percent support

either deporting all unauthorized immigrants (65%) or those with even minor offenses (12%). Just 20% limit deportation to those who commit serious (14%) or violent (6%) crimes.

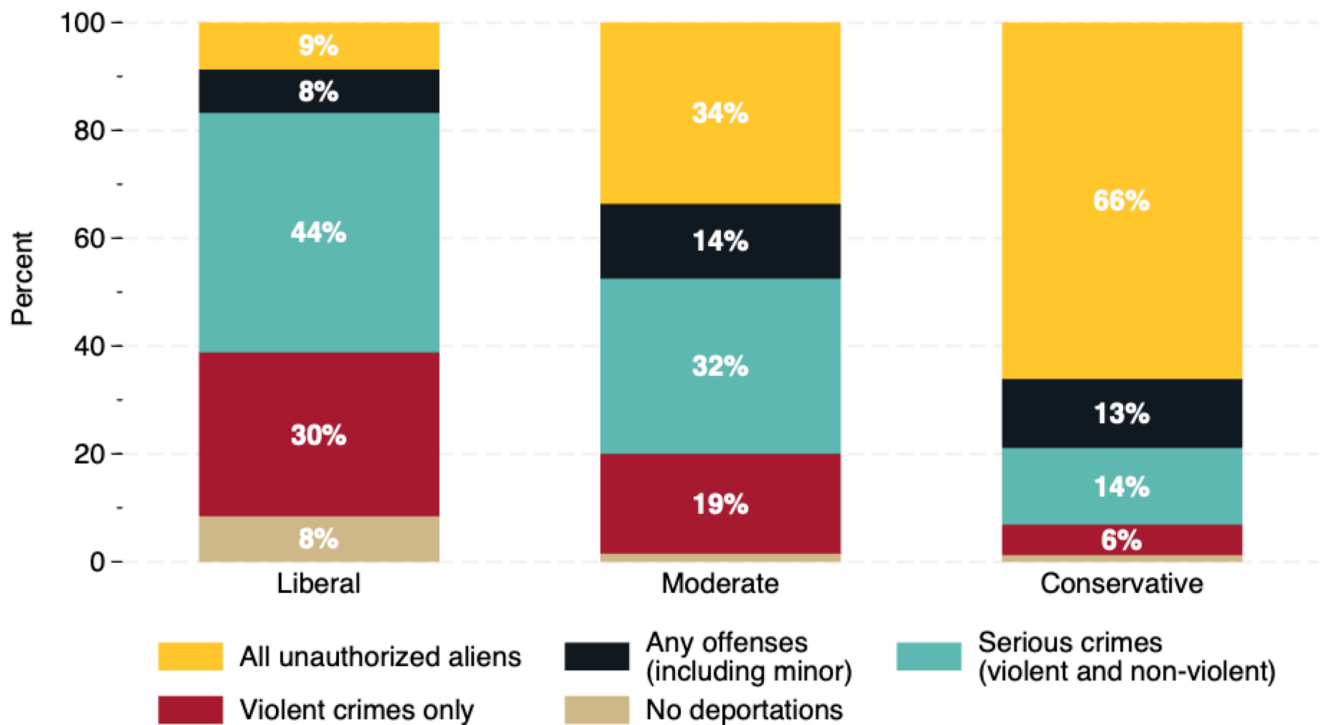
Respondents indicate that they believe native-born Americans receive government benefits at higher rates than immigrants. These perceptions, however, vary sharply across ideological groups.

Moderates fall between these positions. Forty-five percent support

either deporting all unauthorized immigrants (32%) or those with minor offenses (13%), while 49% prefer limiting

deportation to those with serious (31%) or violent (18%) criminal histories.

Figure 2. Deportation Policy Preferences, by Ideology



Note: Estimates are weighted to represent the U.S. adult population nationally (n = 1,147). Responses are based on a “select all that apply” question asking which categories of unauthorized immigrants should be deported. We classify respondents by the most expansive level of deportation they support. For example, respondents who support deporting individuals who committed minor offenses are coded as supporting deportation for all more serious offenses. “Not sure” responses (n=33) are excluded from the data. Respondents who refused ideological self-identification (n=6) are excluded from the analysis.

THE PUBLIC GENERALLY PERCEIVES THAT IMMIGRANTS RECEIVE LESS PUBLIC ASSISTANCE THAN NATIVE-BORN AMERICANS

Respondents were asked to estimate the share of immigrants and native-born Americans who receive government assistance, choosing from the five ranges shown in Figure 3.² Americans generally

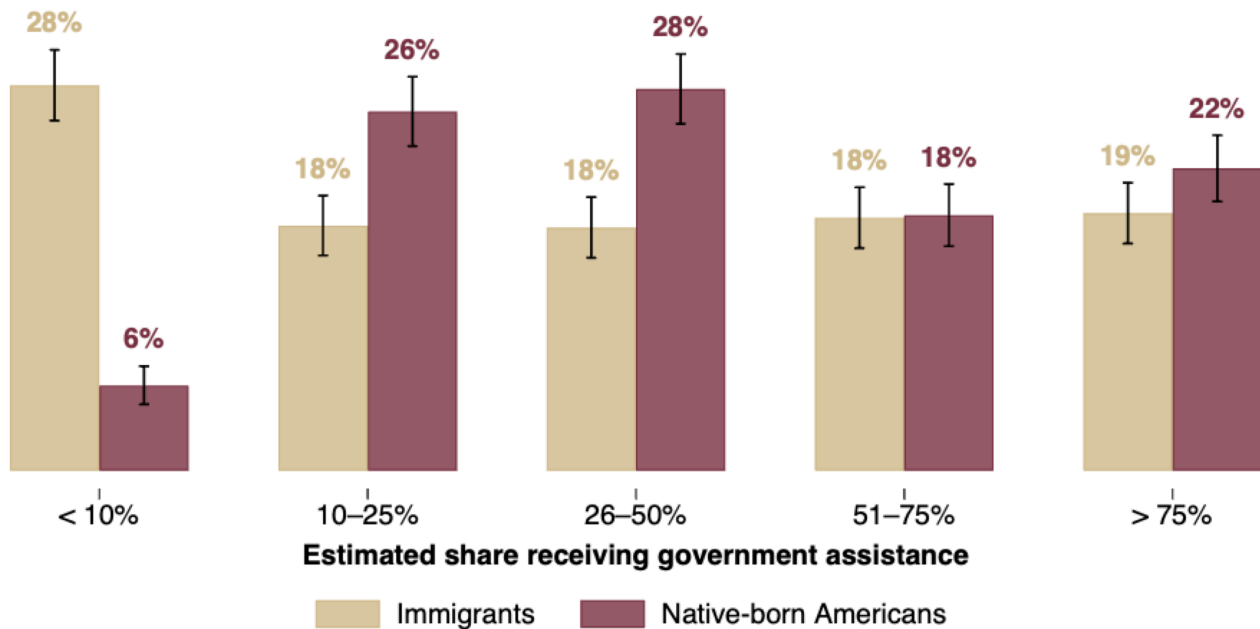
perceive immigrants as less likely than native-born Americans to receive government assistance. Most respondents place both groups within similar ranges, but immigrants are much more likely to be placed in the lowest category of assistance use. Twenty-eight percent estimate that fewer than 10% of immigrants receive government

assistance, compared with just 6% who say the same about native-born Americans.

By contrast, respondents are more likely to place native-born Americans in higher ranges of government assistance use. For example, 26% estimate that 10–25% of native-born Americans receive assistance, compared with 18% for

immigrants. Similarly, 28% place native-born Americans in the 26–50% range, compared with 18% for immigrants. Differences at higher levels are more modest: 40% of respondents place native-born Americans in the 51–100% range, compared with 37% who estimate the same for immigrants.

Figure 3. Estimated Government Assistance Use: Immigrants vs. Native-Born



Note: Estimates are weighted to represent the U.S. adult population (n = 1,388). Bars show the share of respondents selecting each estimate of government assistance use for immigrants and native-born Americans. Estimates adjust for question version and display order. Respondents who did not provide a substantive estimate for one or both groups (e.g., “Not sure”; n = 145; 9%) are excluded from the analysis.

Overall, respondents indicate that they believe native-born Americans receive government benefits at higher rates than immigrants. These perceptions, however,

vary sharply across ideological groups. Liberals are far more likely to place immigrants in the lowest categories of assistance use, while conservatives are

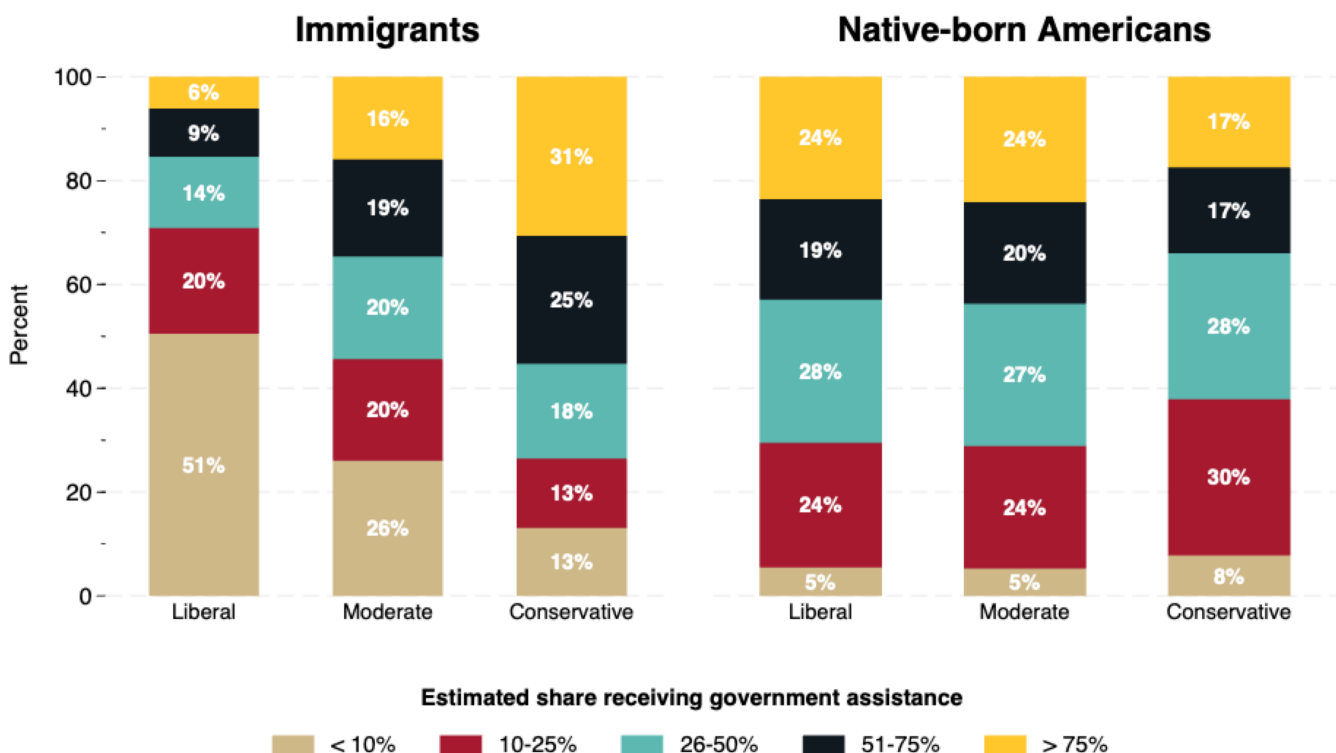
much more likely to place them in higher categories.

For example, Figure 4 shows that 51% of liberals, compared with just 13% of conservatives, estimate that fewer than 10% of immigrants receive government assistance. By contrast, 56% of conservatives, compared with 15% of

liberals, estimate that more than half of immigrants receive assistance.

In sum, liberals tend to view immigrants as less likely than native-born Americans to receive government assistance, while conservatives tend to believe the reverse.

Figure 4. Estimated Government Assistance Use: Immigrants vs. Native-Born, by Ideology



Note: Estimates are weighted to represent the U.S. adult population (n = 1,382). Bars show the distribution of respondents across categories of estimated government assistance use for immigrants and native-born Americans, by ideology. Respondents selected from five ranges (<10%, 10-25%, 26-50%, 51-75%, >75%). Estimates adjust for question version and display order. Respondents who did not report their ideological identification (n = 6) and/or did not provide a substantive estimate for one or both groups (e.g., "Not sure"; n = 145) are excluded from the analysis.

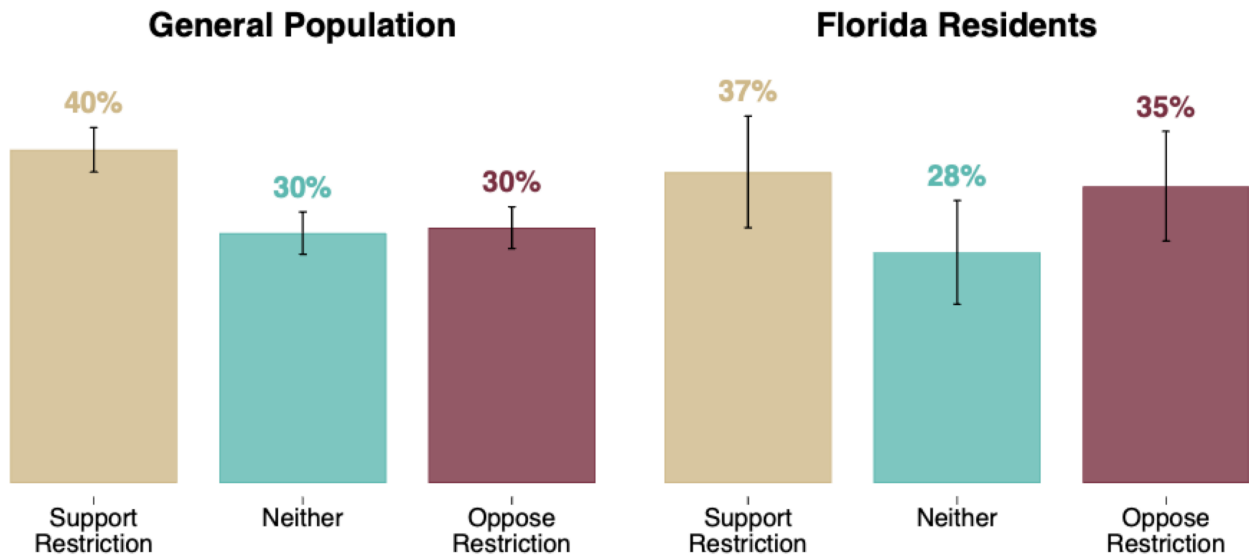
**PERCEPTIONS OF ASSISTANCE USE
INFLUENCE SUPPORT FOR FISCAL-
BASED IMMIGRATION RESTRICTIONS**

Another economic related question is whether Americans believe immigration should be limited from countries whose immigrants are perceived to receive more in government benefits than they pay in taxes. As Figure 5 shows, Americans are divided on this issue, with

opinion leaning towards supporting limitations. Forty percent of respondents support limiting immigration on these grounds, while 30% oppose such restrictions; another 30% neither support nor oppose them. Florida residents (right panel) show a similar pattern, with slightly lower support (37%) and somewhat higher opposition (35%).

Figure 5. Support for Limiting Immigration Based on Perceived Fiscal Impact

Suppose the United States continues to admit immigrants each year. To what extent would you support or oppose limiting immigration from countries whose immigrants, on average, receive more government benefits than they pay?

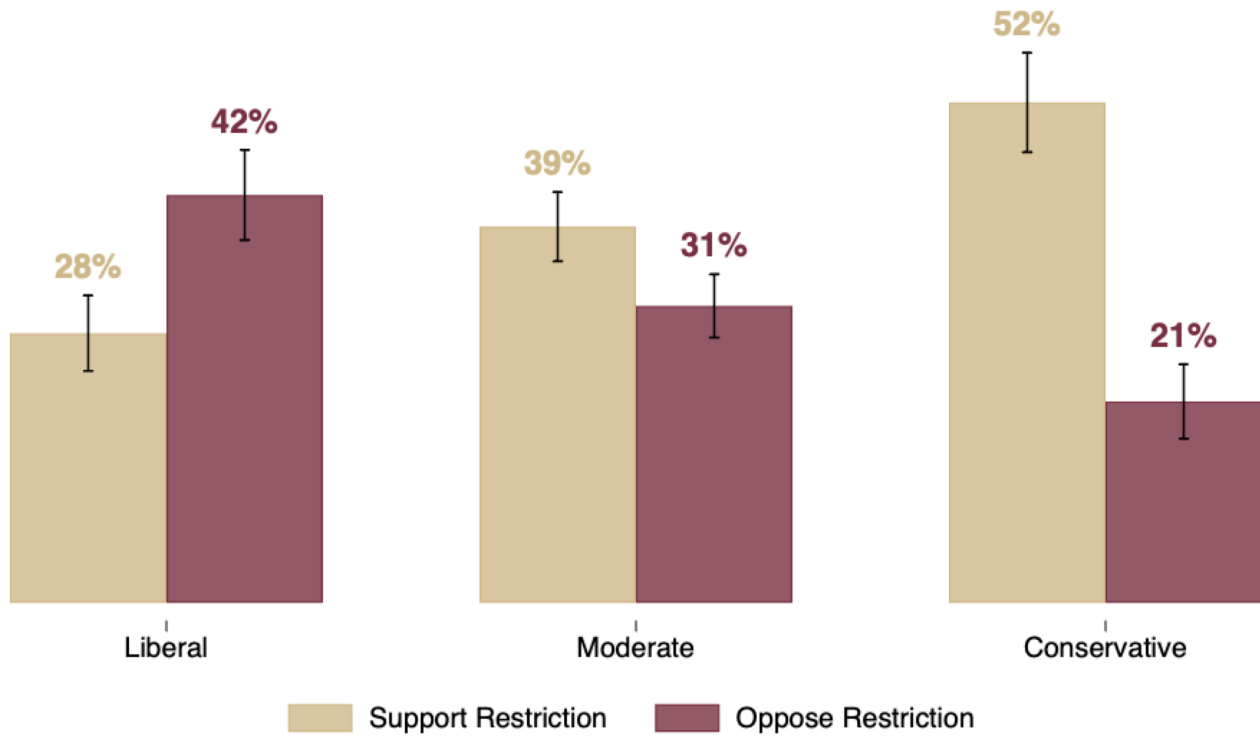


Note: Estimates are weighted to represent the U.S. adult population nationally (n = 1,533) and adult residents of Florida (n = 263).

Americans, however, are not equally divided on this policy. As shown in Figure 6, 52% of conservatives support the policy, while just 21% oppose it. Moderates lean toward support, but by a

narrower margin (39% vs. 31%). Among liberals, the pattern reverses: a larger share oppose the policy (42%) than support it (28%).³

Figure 6. Support for Limiting Immigration Based on Perceived Fiscal Impact, by Ideology



Note: Estimates are weighted to represent the U.S. adult population (n = 1,524). The outcome is based on responses to the question: “Suppose the United States continues to admit immigrants each year. To what extent would you support or oppose limiting immigration from countries whose immigrants, on average, receive more government benefits than they pay in taxes?” Gold and garnet bars show the shares in each ideological group that gave a “Support” and “Oppose” responses, respectively. Estimates adjust for estimation question version and display order.

A key question is whether these policy attitudes are related to how respondents perceive immigrants’ use of government assistance relative to native-born Americans.

Figure 7 shows a clear relationship: as respondents become more likely to view immigrants as receiving more government assistance than native-born Americans, support for limiting immigration increases, while opposition declines. This pattern appears across ideological groups, though it is somewhat

stronger among liberals.

For example, among liberals who estimate that fewer than 10% of immigrants and more than 75% of native-born Americans receive assistance, just 21% support the policy, while 54% oppose it. Among those who estimate the reverse, support rises to 61%, while opposition falls to 16%.

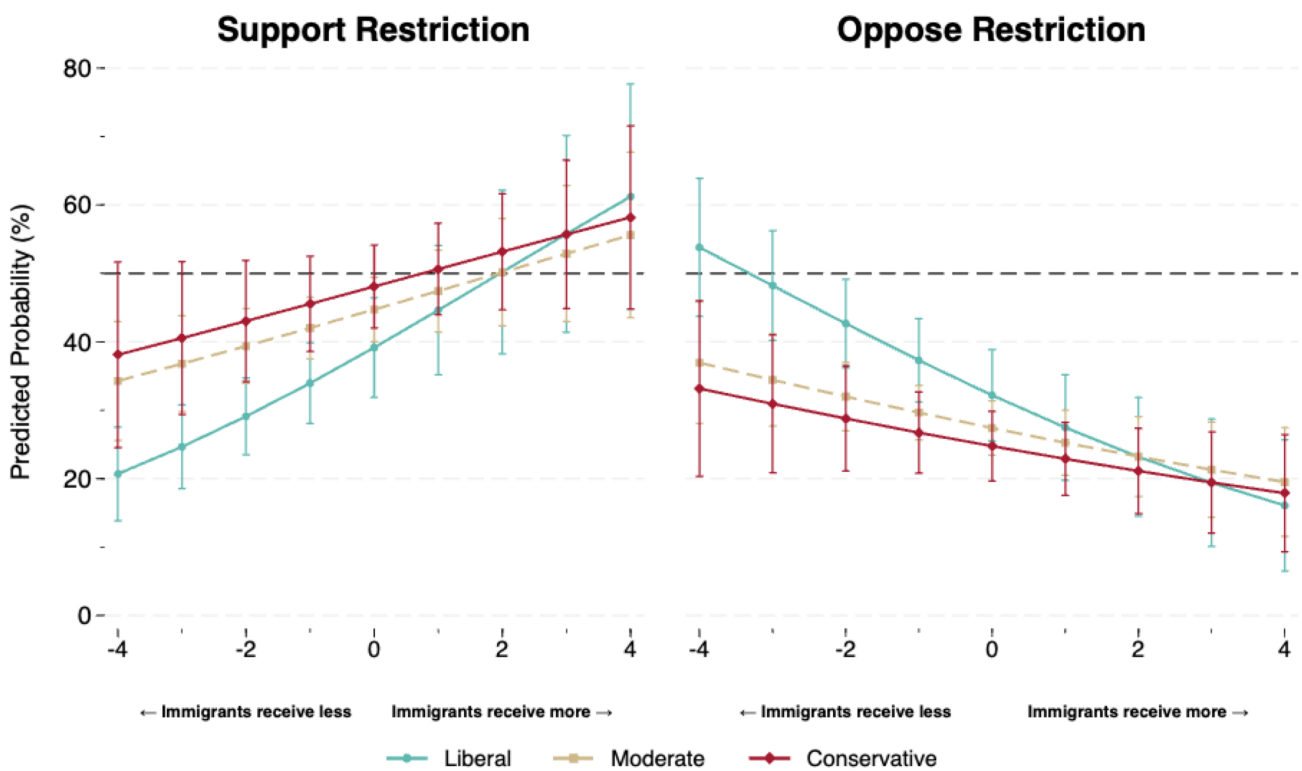
Meanwhile, conservatives exhibit relatively high levels of support even when immigrants are viewed as receiving less. For example, even among

who place immigrants in the lowest category and native-born Americans in the highest, support (38%) still exceeds opposition (33%).

Taken together, these results indicate that perceptions of immigrants' relative use of government assistance are closely associated with support for limiting immigration on fiscal grounds. At the same time, conservatives' views appear less contingent on these perceptions than those of liberals.

As respondents become more likely to view immigrants as receiving more government assistance than native-born Americans, support for limiting immigration increases, while opposition declines.

Figure 7. Support for Limiting Immigration Based on Perceived Fiscal Impact, by Ideology



Note: Estimates are weighted to represent the U.S. adult population (n = 1,304). The x-axis represents the difference between respondents' estimates (1 = <10%, 5 = >75%) of immigrant versus native-born public assistance use, yielding a scale from -4 to 4. Lines in the left panel show the predicted probability that respondents in each ideological group support limiting immigration ("Strongly support" or "Somewhat support"), while lines in the right panel show the predicted probability of opposition ("Strongly oppose" or "Somewhat oppose"). Estimates adjust for question wording, display order, and demographic characteristics.⁴ Respondents who did not provide estimates (e.g., "Not sure"; n = 200, 13%) are excluded.

AMERICANS SUPPORT DENYING ENTRY TO IMMIGRANTS WITH EXTREMIST VIEWS

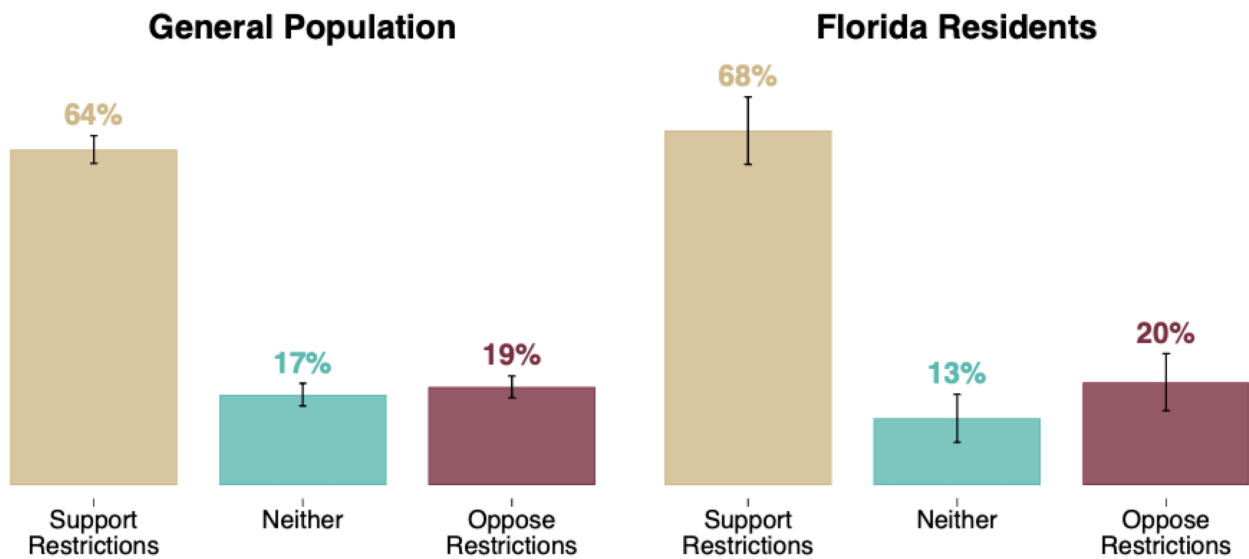
Americans also form immigration policy positions based on perceived cultural and value-related concerns about immigrant groups. We asked respondents whether they the U.S. should restrict entry for immigrants who hold extremist views, such as endorsing violence against religious minorities, denying equal rights for women, or

supporting harsh punishments for homosexuality.

As shown in Figure 8, Americans express broad support for such restrictions. Sixty-four percent of respondents support denying entry on these grounds, compared with 19% who oppose and 17% who neither support nor oppose. Florida residents show a similar pattern, with slightly higher support (68%) and somewhat lower neutrality (13%).

Figure 8. Support for Denying Entry to Immigrants with Extremist Views

To what extent do you support or oppose the United States denying entry to immigrants if they personally hold extremist or illiberal beliefs—such as supporting violence against religious minorities, denying equal rights for women, or endorsing harsh punishments for homosexuality?



Note: Estimates are weighted to represent the U.S. adult population nationally (n = 1,533) and adult residents of Florida (n = 263).

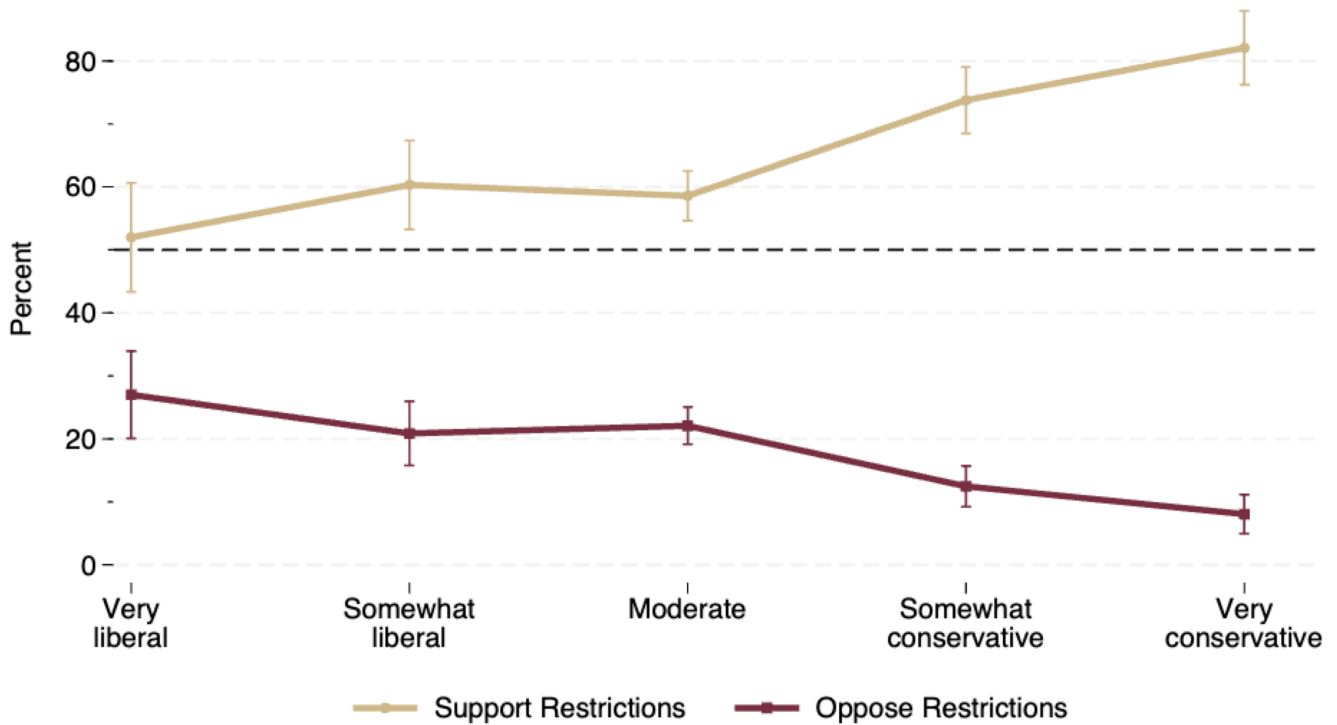
Responses to this question vary by ideology, though perhaps not to the extent one might expect (Figure 9). Even

among very liberal respondents, a majority (52%) support denying entry to immigrants with extremist views.

Support is slightly higher among somewhat liberal (60%) and moderate (59%) respondents, and higher still among somewhat conservative (74%) and

very conservative (82%) respondents. This pattern persists after adjusting for demographic, socioeconomic, and other political characteristics.

Figure 9. Support for Denying Entry to Immigrants with Extremist Views, by Ideology



Estimates are weighted to represent the U.S. adult population (n = 1,524). The gold line shows the percentage of respondents in each ideological group who “Strongly support” or “Somewhat support” denying entry to immigrants with extremist or illiberal beliefs, while the garnet line shows the percentage who “Strongly oppose” or “Somewhat oppose” this policy. “Neither” responses are included in the data but are not shown in the chart.

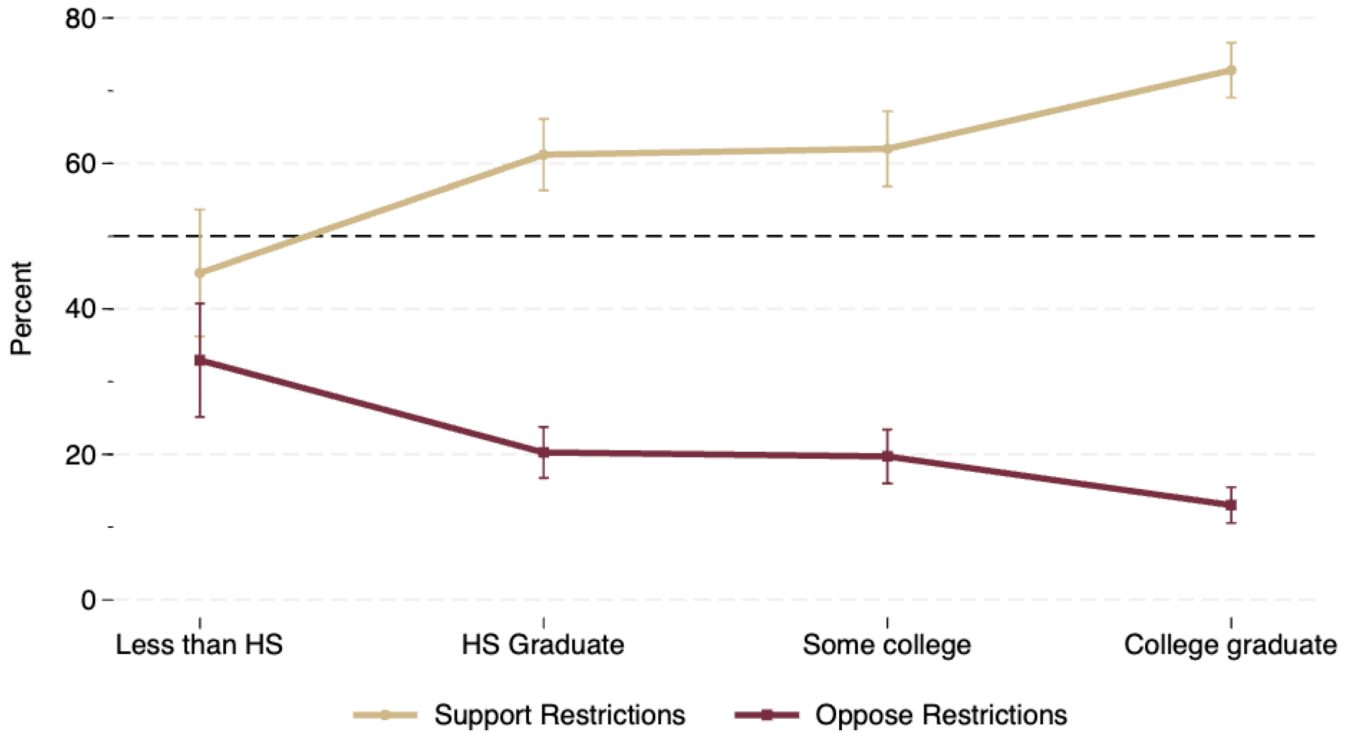
Higher levels of education are often associated with more liberal attitudes on immigration. In this case, however, support for restricting entry of the basis of extremist views increases with education.

We observe a similar pattern by education—even after adjusting for political, demographic, and socioeconomic differences. As shown in Figure 10, support stands at 46% among respondents without a high school diploma but rises to 73% among college graduates. This pattern is notable given that higher levels of education are often

associated with more liberal attitudes on immigration. In this case, however, support for restricting entry on the basis

of extremist views increases with educational attainment.

Figure 10. Support for Denying Entry to Immigrants with Extremist Views, by Education



Note: Estimates are weighted to represent the U.S. adult population (n = 1,519). The gold line shows the percentage of respondents in each educational attainment group who “Strongly support” or “Somewhat support” denying entry to immigrants with extremist or illiberal beliefs, while the garnet line shows the percentage who “Strongly oppose” or “Somewhat oppose” this policy. “Neither” responses are included in the data but are not shown in the chart.

AMERICANS DISTINGUISH BETWEEN TEMPORARY AND PERMANENT IMMIGRATION

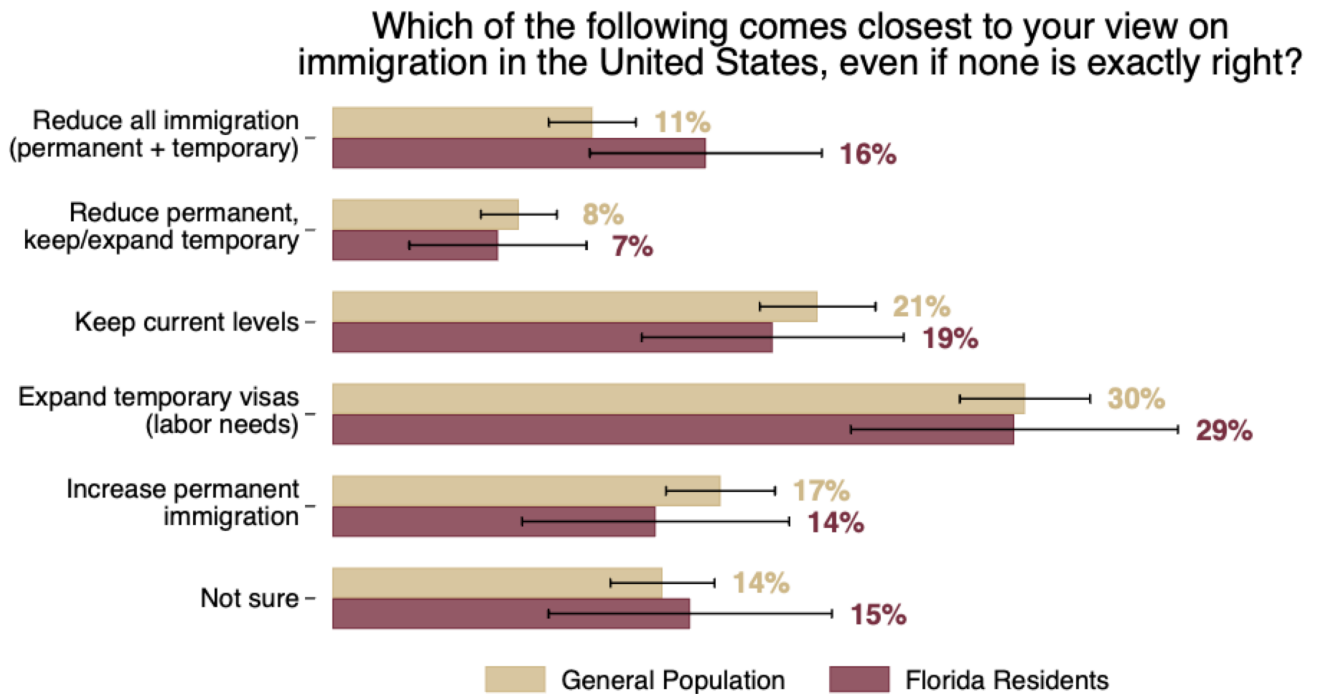
Up to this point, our survey has not distinguished between immigrants who seek to live permanently in the United States and those who enter for temporary, work-related periods. This raises a key question: do Americans view these forms of immigration differently?

To address this question, we asked respondents which of several approaches to immigration policy comes closest to their view. As shown in Figure 11, Americans’ views are far from uniform. The most commonly selected option (30%) is expanding temporary work visas to meet labor needs. Fewer Americans favor increasing permanent immigration (17%). A small share of Americans

support reducing all forms of immigration (11%), while others support more targeted approaches, such as reducing permanent immigration while maintaining or expanding temporary

flows (8%). Twenty-one percent prefer maintaining current levels of immigration, and 14% percent are not sure which policy they would prefer.

Figure 11. Temporary vs. Permanent Immigration Policy Preferences, National and Florida Samples



Note: Estimates are weighted to represent the U.S. adult population nationally (n = 1,188) and adult residents of Florida (n = 203).

As with previous questions, preferences vary significantly by ideology (Figure 12). Liberals are most supportive of both expanding temporary work visas (38%) and increasing permanent immigration (34%), while showing little support for reducing immigration overall (2%) or for reducing permanent immigration while maintaining or expanding temporary work visas (5%).

While moderates strongly favor expanding temporary visas (32%), they are much less supportive of increasing permanent immigration (13%), suggesting a preference for more targeted, labor-based migration.

Conservatives exhibit a different pattern. While 22% support expanding temporary work visas, conservatives are also more likely than other groups to

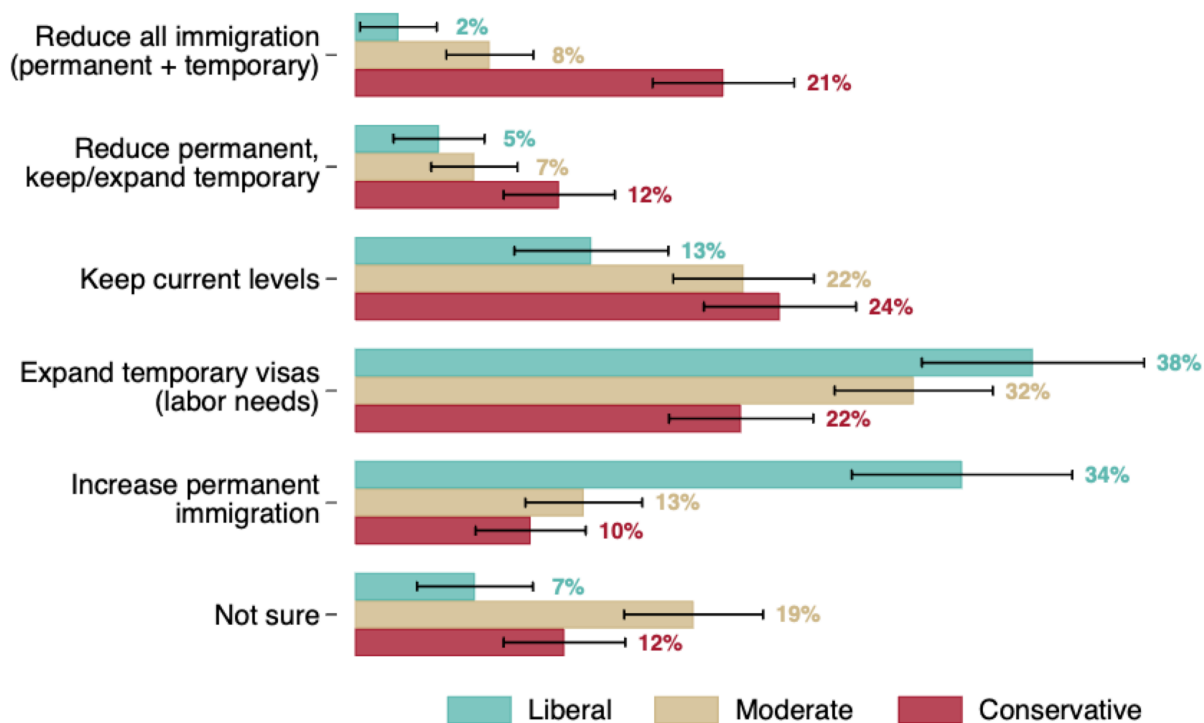
favor reducing immigration overall (21%) or limiting permanent immigration (12%). Notably, their most common preference is to keep all forms of immigration at current levels (24%). Just 10% favor increasing permanent immigration.

These results offer important nuance that is often missed by survey questions that focus just on preferences for more or less immigration in general. Consistent with other surveys, conservatives are the most supportive of reducing immigration—but just 21% favor reducing all forms of

immigration. Larger shares support either maintaining current levels or adopting more targeted approaches, such as expanding temporary, labor-based migration while limiting or holding constant permanent immigration.

Rather than taking a single position on whether immigration should increase or decrease, many Americans distinguish between types of immigration and favor policies that expand temporary, labor-based entry while placing greater limits on permanent settlement.

Figure 12. Temporary vs. Permanent Immigration Policy Preferences, by Ideology



Note: Estimates are weighted to represent the U.S. adult population nationally (n = 1,182). Respondents who refused ideological self-identification (n=6) are excluded from the analysis.

CONCLUSION

Public debates often portray Americans as deeply divided over immigration, with opinions reduced to whether immigration should increase or decrease and whether unauthorized immigrants should be deported or allowed to stay. The findings presented here suggest a more complex reality. More broadly, Americans' views on immigration appear more structured and conditional than is often assumed. Across multiple domains, Americans' views are not simply permissive or restrictive but instead reflect distinctions between different policy goals and perceived trade-offs.

When it comes to deportation, Americans do not adhere to a one-size-fits-all policy even though their views lean toward strictness. Half support broad deportation policies or the removal of immigrants with even minor criminal records, while others favor limiting deportation to unauthorized immigrants who have committed more serious offenses.

Evaluations of immigration policy are also shaped by perceptions of immigrants' fiscal impact. On balance, Americans tend to view immigrants as less likely than native-born Americans to receive public assistance. However, those who perceive immigrants as receiving more assistance are much more likely to support limiting immigration from

countries whose immigrants, on average, receive more in benefits than they pay in taxes.

At the same time, not all bases for restricting immigration generate the same degree of division. While Americans are divided—and often uncertain—about whether immigration should be limited based on perceived fiscal impact, there is far greater agreement, cutting across political lines, when restrictions are tied to immigrants' beliefs and values.

Finally, Americans distinguish among different forms of legal immigration, rather than taking a single position on immigration levels overall. Many express support for expanding temporary, work-related migration while taking a more cautious approach to permanent immigration. This pattern appears across ideological groups, even as they continue to differ in their broader views on immigration policy.

In the end, these findings show that Americans are neither purely “pro-immigration” nor purely “anti-immigration.” Rather, their opinions depend on the specifics of the policy. Most take a selective, practical approach: they support deporting unauthorized immigrants who have criminal records, favor expanding temporary work visas to meet labor needs, and support denying entry to immigrants who hold extremist or illiberal beliefs.

Poll Information

This study was conducted online between December 8–18, 2025 by Social Science Research Services (SSRS) using a probability-based opinion panel. The sample consisted of 1,533 respondents age 18 or older, including an oversample of 263 Florida residents. The margin of error for total respondents is ± 2.7 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

A follow-up recontact survey was conducted between February 24 and March 3, 2026, with 1,188 respondents from the original sample. This wave included additional questions on deportation policies and preferences over different forms of legal immigration.

Weighted demographic characteristics of the survey group are presented in Table 1 on the next page.

Table 1. Descriptive Characteristics by Survey Sample

Category	Main Survey Sample	Florida Sample	Recontact Survey Sample
Sex			
Male	49%	49%	50%
Female	51%	51%	50%
Age			
18 to 29	20%	18%	15%
30 to 49	34%	30%	34%
50 to 64	23%	23%	24%
65 or older	23%	28%	27%
Race/Ethnicity			
Non-Hispanic White	60%	53%	63%
Black	12%	15%	11%
Hispanic	17%	25%	15%
Asian	7%	3%	6%
Other	4%	3%	4%
Income			
Less than \$50,000	43%	40%	39%
\$50,000-\$74,999	16%	19%	17%
\$75,000-\$99,999	13%	16%	13%
\$100,000 and over	29%	24%	31%
Education			
Less than HS	9%	8%	8%
HS Graduate	28%	29%	27%
Some college	26%	27%	26%
BA Degree	21%	23%	22%
Postgrad / Prof. Degree	15%	12%	17%
Parent Status			
K-12 Parent	26%	23%	25%
Not a K-12 Parent	74%	77%	75%
Stated Party			
Democrat	29%	26%	29%
Republican	29%	32%	31%
Independent/ Something else	42%	42%	40%
Political Ideology			
Liberal	23%	18%	22%
Moderate	44%	46%	42%
Conservative	33%	36%	35%
N	1,533	263	1,188

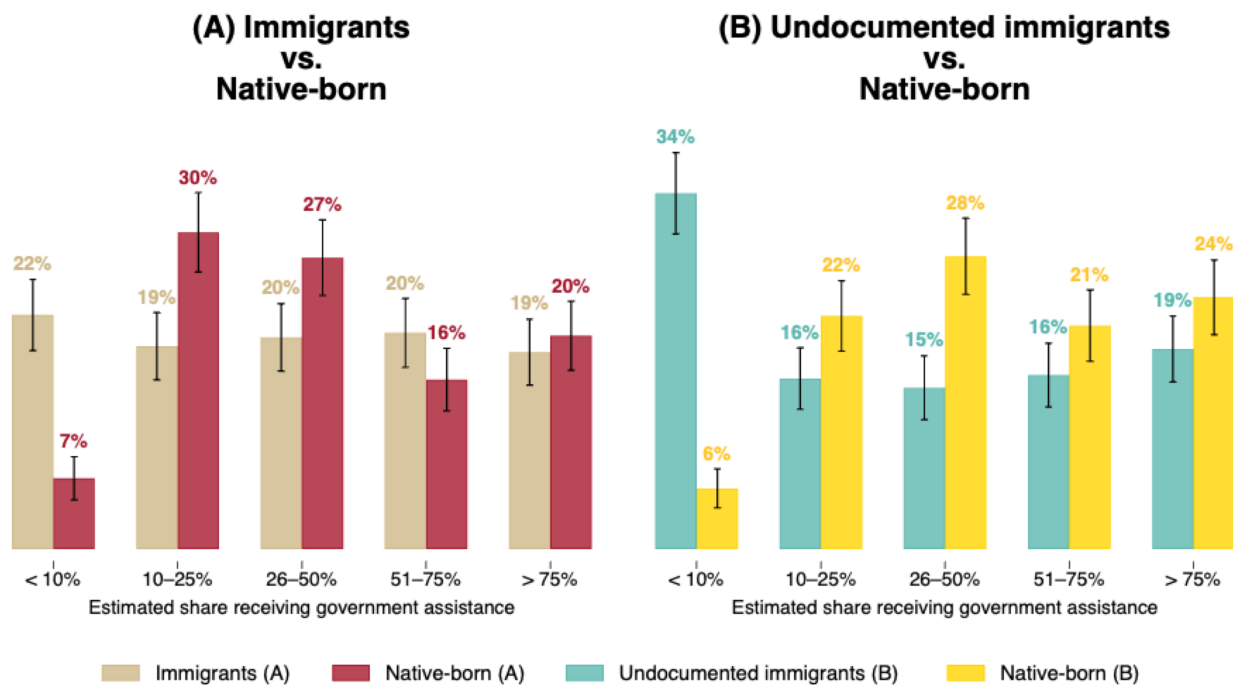
APPENDIX A

A1. Effects of Immigrant Framing on Perceptions of Government Assistance Use

Respondents were randomly assigned to estimate the share of either “immigrants” or “undocumented immigrants” who receive government assistance, alongside estimates for native-born Americans. This design allows us to assess how question wording influences perceptions of assistance use.

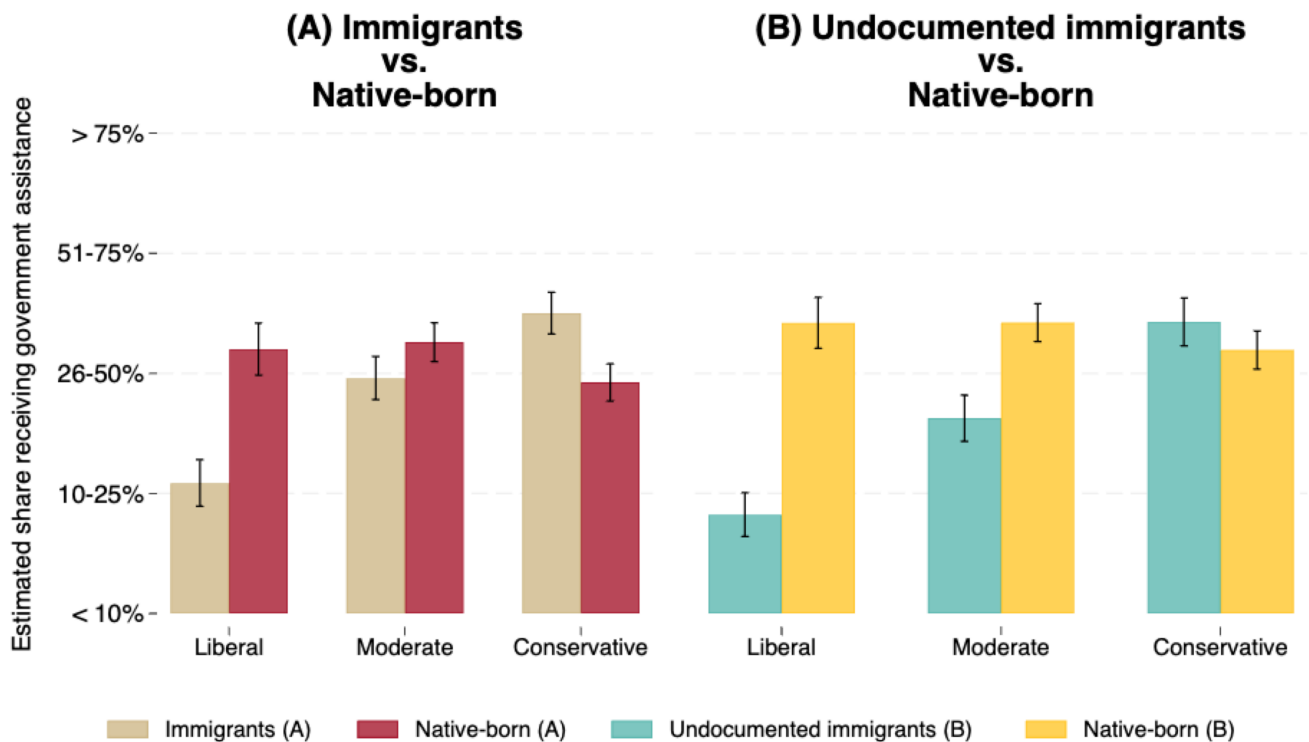
Figure A1A shows that respondents form different estimates depending on how immigrant groups are described. When asked about immigrants in general (Panel A), respondents tend to place immigrants and native-born Americans in similar ranges, with most estimates falling between 10% and 50%. One notable difference appears at the low end of the distribution: 22% of respondents estimate that fewer than 10% of immigrants receive government assistance, compared with just 7% who say the same about native-born Americans.

Figure A1A. Estimated Government Assistance Use: Immigrants vs. Native-Born, by Immigrant Framing



Note: Estimates are weighted to represent the U.S. adult population (n = 696 in Panel A; n = 692 in Panel B). Bars show the share of respondents selecting each estimate of government assistance use (x-axis). In Panel A, respondents were asked to estimate the percentage of “immigrants living in the United States” and “native-born Americans” who receive “some form of government assistance—such as food, housing, or healthcare benefits.” In Panel B, “immigrants” was replaced with “undocumented immigrants.” Estimates adjust for potential display-order effects. Respondents who did not provide a substantive estimate (e.g., “Not sure”) for one or more groups (n = 200; 13%) are excluded from the analysis. These responses are not associated with experimental condition or question order.

Figure A1B. Estimated Government Assistance Use: Immigrants vs. Native-Born, by Immigrant Framing and Ideology



Note: Estimates are weighted to represent the U.S. adult population (n = 695 in Panel A; n = 687 in Panel B). Bars show average estimates (on a 5-point scale corresponding to the percentage ranges on the y-axis) of government assistance use by ideology. In Panel A, respondents were asked to estimate the percentage of “immigrants living in the United States” and “native-born Americans” who receive “some form of government assistance—such as food, housing, or healthcare benefits.” In Panel B, “immigrants” was replaced with “undocumented immigrants.” Estimates adjust for potential display-order effects. Respondents who did not report their ideological identification (n = 6) and/or did not provide an estimate for one or more groups (n = 200) or are excluded from the analysis. These responses are not associated with experimental condition or question order, though moderates are somewhat more likely than liberals or conservatives to select “Not sure.”

When respondents are instead asked about undocumented immigrants (Panel B), these patterns shift. Thirty-four percent estimate that fewer than 10% of undocumented immigrants receive government assistance, up from 22% in the immigrants condition. At the same time, respondents become more likely to place native-born Americans in the highest two categories: 45% estimate that a majority (51% or more) receive assistance, compared with 36% in the immigrants condition. By contrast, 35% place undocumented immigrants in this range.

Taken together, these results indicate that Americans generally perceive immigrants as less likely than native-born Americans to receive government assistance—and undocumented immigrants as less likely still. These differences are driven in large part by

the increased share of respondents placing immigrants in the lowest estimation category. Notably, describing immigrants as “undocumented” also increases estimates of assistance use among native-born Americans.

These patterns vary sharply across ideological groups (Figure A1B). Liberals are far more likely to place immigrants—and especially undocumented immigrants—in the lowest categories of assistance use, while conservatives are much more likely to place them in the highest categories. For example, 40% of liberals estimate that fewer than 10% of immigrants receive government assistance, compared with just 11% of conservatives. Among undocumented immigrants, this gap widens: 56% of liberals place them in the lowest category, compared with 18% of conservatives. Conversely, 56–57% of conservatives estimate that a majority of immigrants or undocumented immigrants receive assistance, compared with just 11–12% of liberals.

By contrast, ideological differences in estimates of native-born Americans’ use of government assistance are more modest. In the immigrants condition, 39% of liberals and 26% of conservatives place native-born Americans in the highest two categories (51% or more). In the undocumented immigrants condition, these figures rise to 46% and 38%, respectively.

Overall, these results indicate that the same framing cue shifts perceptions in different ways across ideological groups. Describing immigrants as “undocumented” tends to lower estimates of immigrant assistance use among liberals and moderates, while increasing estimates of native-born assistance use across groups, with the largest shifts among conservatives.

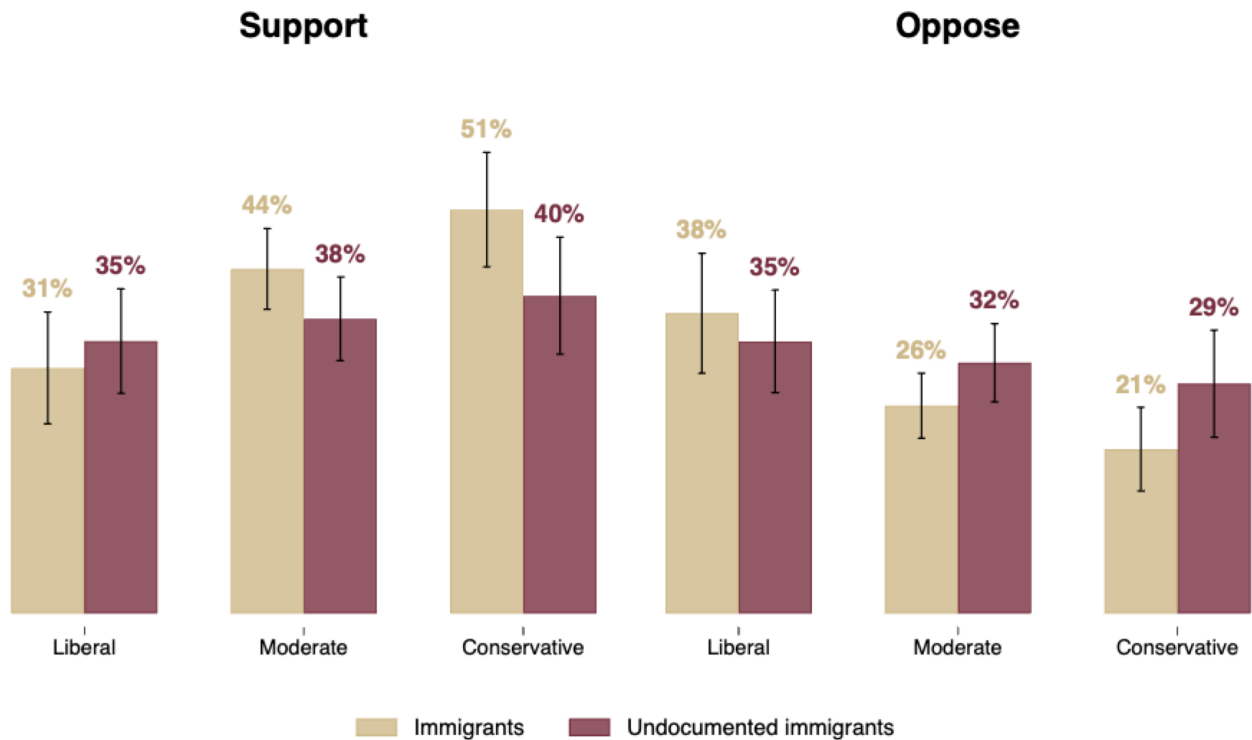
A2. Effects of Immigrant Framing on Support for Fiscal-Based Immigration Restrictions

We next examine whether this variation in perceptions translates into differences in policy attitudes.

Support for limiting immigration from countries whose immigrants are perceived to receive more in government benefits than they pay in taxes varies depending on the framing used in the prior estimation question. In the overall sample, support is 6 percentage points higher among respondents who received the “immigrants” framing (43% vs. 37%), while opposition is 5 points lower (28% vs. 33%).

Although these differences are modest in aggregate, they vary meaningfully across ideological groups (Figure A3). Among conservatives, the framing effect is pronounced: those who received the general “immigrants” version are 11 percentage points more likely to support limiting immigration (51% vs. 40%) and 8 points less likely to oppose it (21% vs. 29%). Moderates exhibit a similar but smaller pattern. Among liberals, by contrast, the pattern reverses, though these differences are small and not statistically distinguishable.

Figure A2. Support for Limiting Immigration Based on Perceived Fiscal Impact, by Immigrant Framing and Ideology



Note: Estimates are weighted to represent the U.S. adult population (n = 1,493). The outcome is based on responses to the question: “Suppose the United States continues to admit immigrants each year. To what extent would you support or oppose limiting immigration from countries whose immigrants, on average, receive more government benefits than they pay in taxes?” Bars in the left panel show the predicted probability that respondents in each ideological group support limiting immigration (“Strongly support” or “Somewhat support”), while bars in the right panel show the predicted probability that respondents oppose such limits (“Strongly oppose” or “Somewhat oppose”). Estimates are shown separately by immigrant framing in the prior estimation question (immigrants vs. undocumented immigrants). All estimates adjust for estimation-question display order, race/ethnicity, age, gender, education, household income, marital status, household composition (number of adults and children), census region, homeownership, metro status, employment status, and party affiliation. Respondents with missing data on any covariates (n = 40) are excluded from the analysis.

To assess whether these effects operate through respondents’ perceptions of assistance use, we incorporate measures of the perceived difference between immigrant and native-born assistance rates. When these perceptions are taken into account, the direct effect of immigrant framing on policy support is no longer statistically distinguishable from zero, both in the full sample and within ideological groups.

By contrast, perceived differences in assistance use emerge as a strong and consistent predictor of policy attitudes. Respondents who are more likely to view immigrants as receiving more government assistance than native-born Americans are substantially more

likely to support limiting immigration, regardless of how immigrant groups are described.

These findings suggest that question wording influences policy attitudes primarily by shaping respondents' underlying perceptions, rather than exerting an independent effect on preferences.

¹ Responses to immigration items in the main survey do not differ significantly between respondents who participated in the recontact survey and those who did not, suggesting that attrition is unlikely to bias the results.

² Respondents were randomly assigned to receive questions referring to either "immigrants" or "undocumented immigrants." Differences by question wording are examined in Appendix A.

³ Results are substantively similar when adjusting for demographic, socioeconomic, and political characteristics.

⁴ Specifically, we control for age, sex, education, race/ethnicity, household income, marital status, number of children (0–17) in the household, number of adults (18+) in the household, census region, employment status, homeownership status, metro status, and party affiliation.