

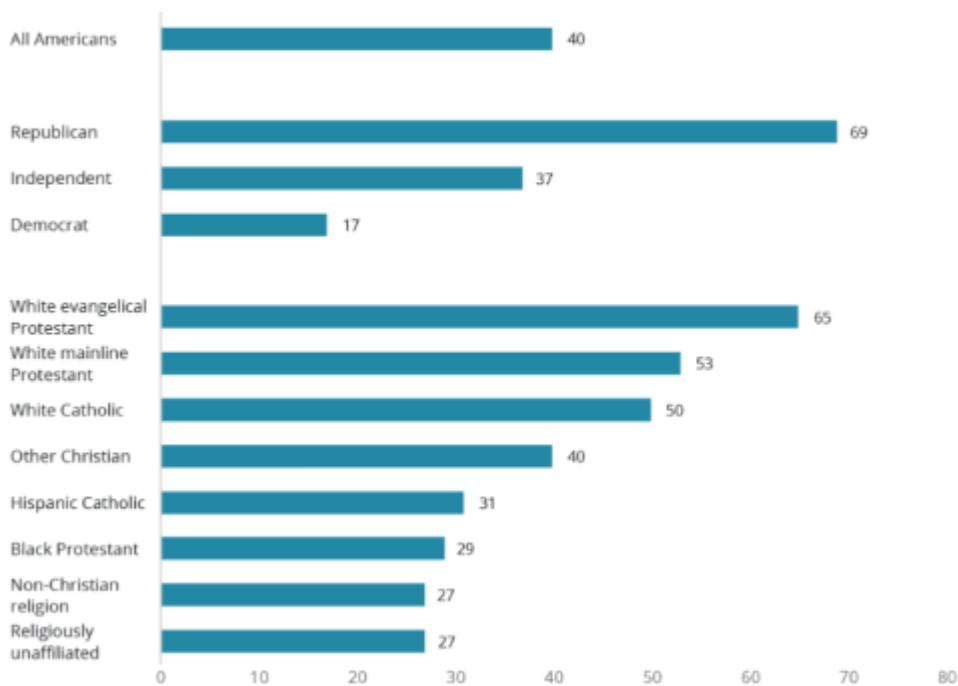
New survey: Republicans and White evangelicals are outliers in fear of immigrants invading US

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FIGURE 1. Republicans and White Christian Groups Most Likely to Think Immigrants Threaten Traditional American Customs and Values

Percent who believe the growing number of newcomers from other countries threatens traditional American customs and values:



Source: PRRI 2022 American Values Survey.

The gap between US adults on immigration is steadily widening as conservatives increasingly embrace anti-immigrant attitudes that include a belief that migrants are invading the United States to displace White citizens, according to new research by Public Religion Research Institute.

The new PRRI study, released January 17, finds 55 percent of Americans consider arrivals from other nations as a strength for US society, compared to 40 percent who describe immigrants as a threat to national values and customs.

Republicans (69 percent) and White evangelical Protestants (65 percent) lead the way in fear of immigrants. By contrast, only 17 percent of Democrats, 37 percent of independents, 31 percent of Hispanic Catholics, 29 percent of Black Protestants, and 27 percent of religiously unaffiliated US adults say they fear immigrants are eroding the nation's character and traditions.

Race also is a factor in attitudes toward immigrants, PRRI reported: "White Americans (46%) are notably more likely than Hispanic Americans (31%), Americans of another race (31%), and Black Americans (28%) to think that newcomers threaten traditional American customs and values. Furthermore, white Americans without a four-year college degree are notably more likely than those with a four-year college degree to hold this view (53% vs. 34%)."

The concept of cultural replacement also was found to be on the rise among many US adults, the survey found. "The 'great replacement' theory—a conspiracy theory touted by white supremacists that claims nonwhite people are invading or immigrating to the United States in order to push white voters and citizens into the minority—appears to be becoming more mainstream among the political right."

PRRI reported 30 percent of US adults "completely or mostly agree with the statement 'immigrants are invading our country and replacing our cultural and ethnic background,'" compared to 64 percent who said they either completely or mostly disagree.

"Republicans (55%) are the outliers, as they are more than four times as likely as Democrats (12%) and twice as likely as independents (27%) to agree."

Religion is another indicator of the likelihood to accept or reject the White supremacist theory of replacement. White Christians are most likely to believe in the concept, including 51 percent of White evangelicals and 41 percent of both White mainline Protestants and White Catholics.

"In contrast, 26% of members of other Christian religions, 21% of members of non-Christian religions, 21% of religiously unaffiliated Americans, 19% of Black Protestants, and 19% of Hispanic Catholics agree with this statement."

Race and generation also generate stark dividing lines on the belief that immigrants are marginalizing Whites, PRRI added. "Among racial groups, white Americans remain the most likely to agree with this cultural replacement statement, with 36%

agreeing, compared to about one-fifth of Hispanic Americans (21%), Black Americans (19%), and Americans of other races and ethnicities (22%).”

Older adults tend to agree more with replacement theory, with 43 percent of people 65 and older agreeing immigrants are attempting to replace White people. Agreement declined steadily among descending age groups, culminating with 19 percent of those 18 to 29 years old.

Media consumption also correlates with belief in replacement theory and in the overall view of immigrants as a threat to US customs and traditions, PRRI said. “Those who most trust conservative television media (76%) or Fox News (74%) are significantly more likely than those whose most trusted news source is a non-television source (42%) or a mainstream television source (28%) to say that newcomers from other countries threaten traditional American customs and values.”

Openness to conspiracy theories is yet another influence, with 60 percent of QAnon believers espousing cultural replacement views compared to 11 percent of QAnon rejecters. “Notably, nearly eight in 10 Republicans who are QAnon believers (79%) also believe in replacement theory.”

The survey examined how supporters of high-profile politicians and political candidates view these issues.

“Among those who view President Joe Biden favorably, only 14% agree that immigrants are replacing our country’s culture and ethnic background. By contrast, majorities of those who have favorable views of former President Donald Trump (56%) and Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis (54%) agree with replacement theory.”

Christian nationalists also lean heavily toward viewing immigrants as threats to traditional US life and that Whites are being marginalized through immigration, PRRI said.

“The majority of Americans who agree that God intended America to be a new promised land for European Christians also agree with replacement theory, with 55% holding these views. Distinct partisan differences appear once again: 70% of Republicans who believe God intended America to be a new promised land also view immigrants as an invading force, compared with 39% of Democrats.”

The level of fear around immigration also depends on how US adults view the condition and direction of the nation. The survey found only 17 percent of those who believe the US is headed in the right direction also see immigrants as threats to their way of life, compared to 48 percent of those who say the country is on a downward trajectory. Negative opinions about immigrants were higher among Republicans who believe their way of life has changed for the worse (74 percent), compared to 60 percent of Republicans who see positive change.

Positive or negative views about the direction of the nation also influence attitudes toward cultural replacement theory, according to the study. “Americans who say things in this country are going in the wrong direction are more than twice as likely as those who say things are going in the right direction to agree with replacement theory (36% vs. 14%).”

US adults who believe the nation’s traditions and values have changed for the worse since the 1950s are more likely to say immigrants are invading the nation than those who see positive change, at 45 percent and 16 percent respectively, PRRI said. “Among people who say American culture has worsened, Republicans (61%) are three times as likely as Democrats (20%) to agree that immigrants are invading the country.”

The PRRI survey also looked at attitudes toward citizenship for Dreamers and toward allowing Afghan and Ukrainian refugees into the nation.

“Nearly six in 10 Americans (57%) say immigrants living in the United States illegally should be given a way to become citizens, provided they meet certain requirements,” PRRI reported.

Views varied by partisanship on pathways to citizenship for immigrant children brought into the nation by their parents. “When it comes to Dreamers, Democrats (66%) are more than three times as likely as Republicans (18%) to support a pathway to citizenship or permanent residency.”

A significant majority of US adults (60 percent) said they favor accepting Ukrainian refugees into the nation versus 45 percent who think Afghan refugees should be granted entry into the nation.

“Not surprisingly, Americans who think immigrants pose a threat to traditional values and customs are notably less likely than all Americans to favor accepting

more refugees from Ukraine, with 44% expressing support, but this number is even smaller when it comes to refugees from Afghanistan, at only 18%," PRRI reported. "Similarly, Americans who think immigrants are invading our country and replacing our ethnic and cultural background are notably less likely to favor accepting more refugees from Ukraine (43%) and even less likely to favor accepting those from Afghanistan (15%)." —Baptist News Global