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Around the World, More Say Immigrants Are a Strength Than a Burden

Publics divided on immigrants' willingness to adopt host country's customs

BY Ana Gonzalez-Barrera and Phillip Connor

FOR MEDIA OR OTHER INQUIRIES:

Ana Gonzalez-Barrera, Senior Researcher
Phillip Connor, Senior Researcher
Stefan Cornibert, Communications Manager
202.419.4372
www.pewresearch.org

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Terminology

Immigrants are foreign-born individuals living outside their country of birth, regardless of their citizenship. Refugees and asylum seekers are a subgroup within this broader population. The terms “immigrants” and “migrants” are used interchangeably in this report.

The terms “**asylum seekers**,” “**asylum applicants**” and “**refugees**” are used interchangeably throughout this report and refer to individuals who have applied for asylum. Seeking asylum does not mean applicants will necessarily be permitted to stay in the country where they have submitted an application.

“**European Union**” in this report refers to the 28 nation-states that form the European Union (EU). At the time of the Pew Research Center’s Spring 2018 global survey, the UK was still part of the European Union.

Around the World, More Say Immigrants Are a Strength Than a Burden

Publics divided on immigrants' willingness to adopt host country's customs

Majorities of publics in top migrant destination countries say immigrants strengthen their countries, according to a 2018 Pew Research Center survey of 18 countries that host half of the world's migrants.

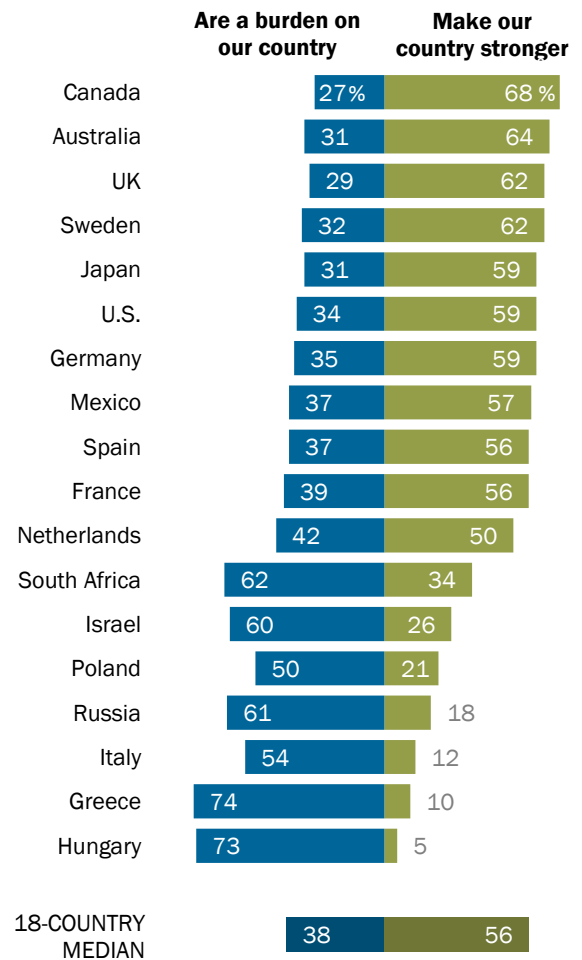
In 10 of the countries surveyed, majorities view immigrants as a strength rather than a burden. Among them are some of the [largest migrant receiving countries](#) in the world: the United States, Germany, the United Kingdom, France, Canada and Australia (each hosting more than 7 million immigrants in 2017).

By contrast, majorities in five countries surveyed – Hungary, Greece, South Africa, Russia and Israel – see immigrants as a burden to their countries. With the exception of Russia, these countries each have fewer than 5 million immigrants.

Meanwhile, public opinion on the impact of immigrants is divided in the Netherlands. In Italy and Poland, more say immigrants are a burden, while substantial shares in these countries do not lean one way or the other (31% and 20% respectively).

Half or more in many destination countries view immigrants as a strength

Immigrants today make our country stronger because of their work and talents OR Immigrants today are a burden on our country because they take our jobs and social benefits



Source: Spring 2018 Global Attitudes Survey, Q54a.
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Countries surveyed hold half of the world's migrants

The 18 nations surveyed contain more than half (51%) of the world's migrant population, or some 127 million people, according to [United Nations](#) and [U.S. Census Bureau](#) estimates.

Countries with some of the world's largest immigrant populations were surveyed, including more traditional destinations like the United States, Canada and Australia that have seen waves of immigrants arrive since [at least the 19th century](#). Also surveyed were more recent destination countries in the European Union such as Germany, the United Kingdom, France, Spain, Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden and Greece, all of which experienced immigration waves [after World War II](#).

Japan and Israel were also surveyed. Japan is [making efforts](#) to attract more migrants due to its aging population. Israel has been a destination for immigrants since it enacted its 1950 [Law of Return](#) for Jewish people worldwide. Russia was surveyed since it has one of the world's largest foreign-born populations. At the same time, South Africa continues to be a top [destination country](#) for many Africans.

Also included in the survey were some newer destinations. Mexico, for example, has become an increasingly important destination and transit country for migrants fleeing violence from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. Similarly, Hungary became an important transit country for migrants entering Europe during the [refugee surge that peaked in 2015](#). And although Poland for many years was a country of emigration, it has seen a recent wave of immigrants from [Eastern Europe](#).

Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are top immigrant destinations that were not surveyed. Pew Research Center does not have a history of conducting surveys in these countries.

Immigrant populations in surveyed countries, 2017

	Foreign-born population	% of world's migrants
U.S.	44,410,000	18
Germany	12,170,000	5
Russia	11,650,000	5
UK	8,840,000	4
France	7,900,000	3
Canada	7,860,000	3
Australia	7,040,000	3
Spain	5,950,000	2
Italy	5,910,000	2
South Africa	4,040,000	2
Japan	2,320,000	<1
Netherlands	2,060,000	<1
Israel	1,960,000	<1
Sweden	1,750,000	<1
Mexico	1,220,000	<1
Greece	1,220,000	<1
Poland	640,000	<1
Hungary	500,000	<1
TOTAL	127,430,000	51

Note: Numbers are rounded. Total is based on unrounded numbers.

Sources: For the U.S., Pew Research Center analysis of 2017 American Community Survey representing immigrants living in the 50 states and the District of Columbia; for all other countries, United Nations data.

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In the U.S., the nation with the world's [largest number of immigrants](#), six-in-ten adults (59%) say immigrants make the country stronger because of their work and talents, while one-third (34%) say immigrants are a burden because they take jobs and social benefits. Views about immigrants have shifted in the U.S. since the 1990s, when most [Americans](#) said immigrants were a burden to the country.

Meanwhile, in six European Union countries surveyed, public opinion about the impact of immigrants has changed since 2014. That was the last time the Center asked European publics this question. It was also before [hundreds of thousands](#) of asylum seekers arrived on Europe's shores in 2015. In Greece, Germany and Italy, three countries that experienced [high volumes](#) of arrivals, the share of adults saying immigrants make their countries stronger dropped significantly.

By contrast, public opinion shifted in the opposite direction in France, the UK and Spain, countries surveyed that received fewer asylum seekers in 2015. In all three countries in 2018, majorities said immigrants made their countries stronger, up from about half who said the same in 2014.¹

While majorities in many of the 18 countries surveyed see immigrants as a strength, this opinion is not equally shared across all groups within countries. In most countries surveyed, those on the left of the ideological spectrum are more positive about immigration's impact on their country than those on the right. Similarly, in many countries surveyed, those with higher levels of education, younger adults, and those with higher incomes are more likely to say immigrants make their countries stronger because of their work and talents. (See [Appendix B](#) for group breakdowns.)

Views on the impact of immigrants in Europe have shifted since 2014

% who say immigrants today make our country stronger because of their work and talents

	2014	2018	Change
Greece	19	10	-9
Germany	66	59	-7
Italy	19	12	-7
Poland	24	21	-3
Spain	47	56	+9
UK	52	62	+10
France	45	56	+11

Notes: Statistically significant differences in **bold**.

Response options read as: "Immigrants today make our country stronger because of their work and talents [OR] Immigrants today are a burden on our country because they take our jobs and social benefits."

Source: Spring 2018 Global Attitudes Spring Survey. Q54a.

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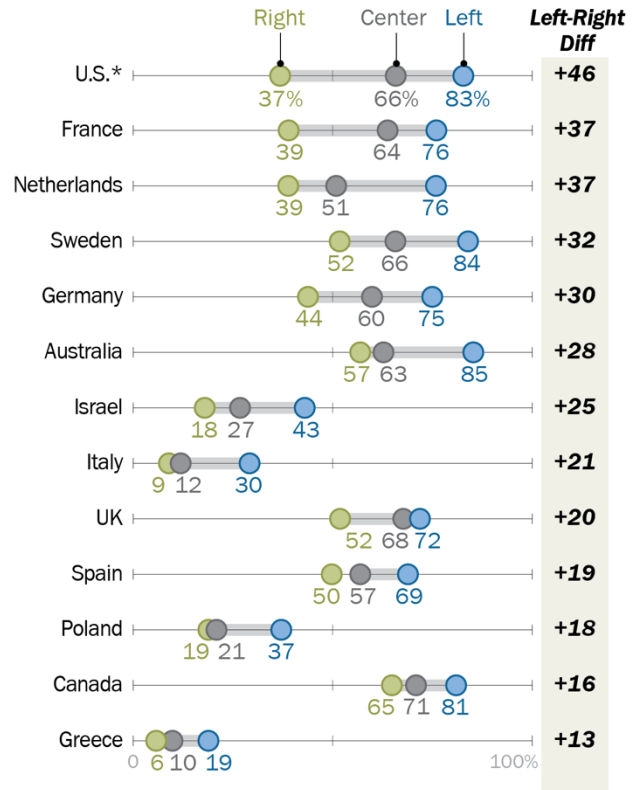
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¹ The survey question was not asked in other countries in 2014.

Also, in all countries surveyed, those saying they want [fewer immigrants arriving in their countries](#) are less likely to view immigrants as making their countries stronger.

Immigrants viewed more favorably among those on the ideological left

% who say immigrants today make our country stronger because of their work and talents



*In U.S., ideology is defined as conservative (right), moderate (center) and liberal (left).

Note: All differences shown are statistically significant.

Source: Spring 2018 Global Attitudes Survey. Q54a.

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Publics split on immigrants' willingness to adopt their societies' customs and way of life

Attitudes are mixed on immigrants' willingness to adopt the destination country's customs or wanting to be distinct from its society. A median of 49% among countries surveyed say immigrants want to be distinct from the host country's society, while a median of 45% say immigrants want to adopt the host country's customs and way of life.

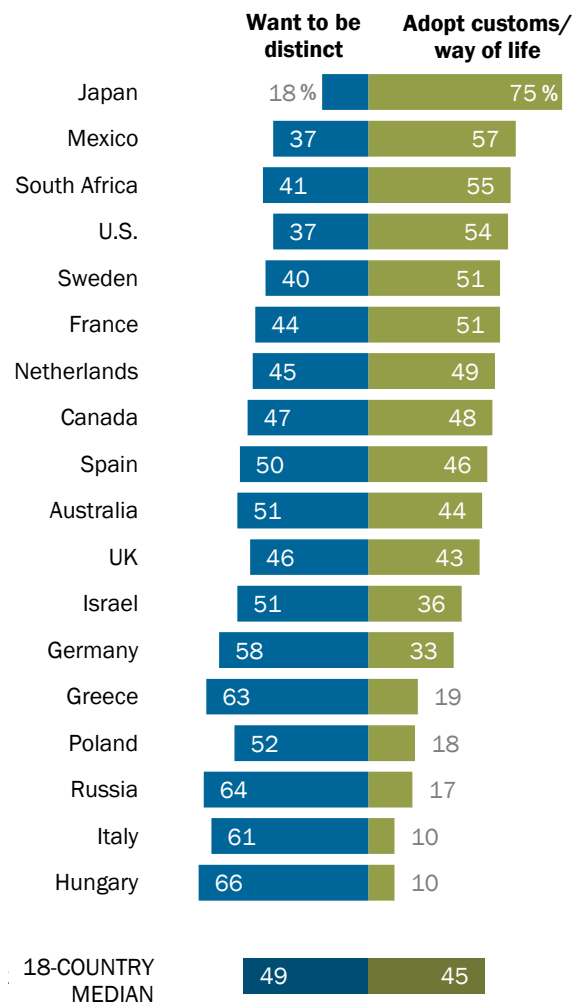
In six destination countries – Japan, Mexico, South Africa, the U.S., France and Sweden – publics are more likely to say immigrants want to adopt the host country's customs and way of life than say immigrants want to be distinct.

Japan is an outlier: A large majority of the public (75%) says immigrants want to adopt the country's customs and way of life. This country, whose aging population and low birth rate make [immigration relevant](#) for its population growth, has [recently changed](#) its policies to attract more foreigners. Views about immigrant integration in Japan could be linked to the [low number of immigrants](#) the country hosts and that many immigrants in Japan are ethnically [Japanese](#).

By contrast, in eight destination countries – Hungary, Russia, Greece, Italy, Germany, Poland, Israel and Australia – more people say immigrants want to be distinct than say they are willing to adopt the host country's customs. Majorities hold this view in Hungary, Russia, Greece, Italy and Germany. In addition, sizable

Views on immigrants' willingness to integrate are mixed

Immigrants in our country today want to adopt our customs and way of life OR Immigrants today want to be distinct from our society



Source: Spring 2018 Global Attitudes Survey. Q54c.
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shares of people in most of these countries refused to choose one option or the other when asked this question.

In many countries surveyed, younger adults, those with higher levels of education and those on the left of the political spectrum are generally more likely to say immigrants are adopting the country's customs and way of life (see [Appendix B](#) for group breakdowns).

Publics are less concerned about immigrant crime than the risk they pose for terrorism

In recent years, security concerns about immigration have become part of the public debate in many countries. Some of these concerns are about crime and immigration, while others are about terrorism and immigration.

Immigrants and crime

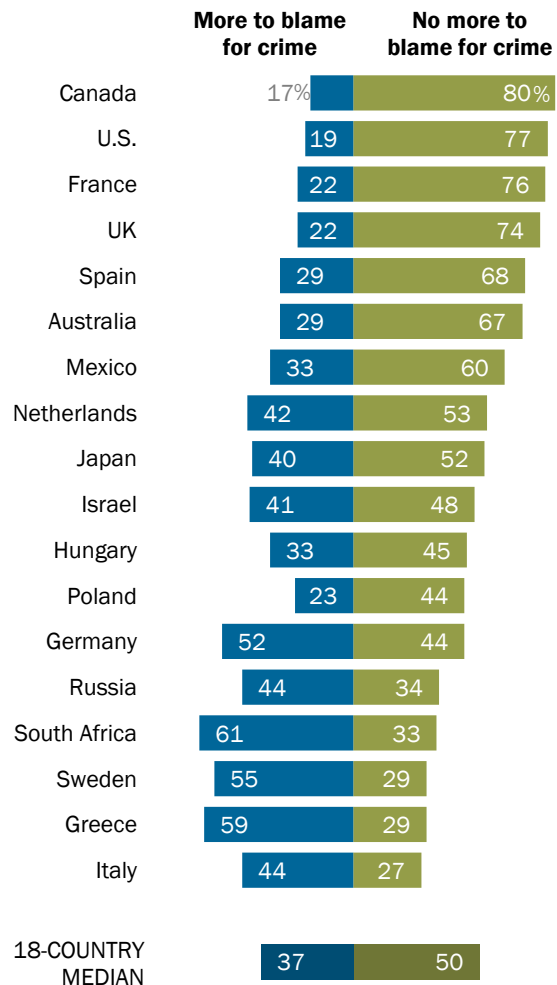
In several immigrant destination countries, large majorities say immigrants are *not* more to blame for crime than other groups. This is the case in Canada, the U.S., France and the UK. Among other countries surveyed, only in South Africa, Sweden and Greece do majorities believe that immigrants are more to blame for crime than other groups.

In the Netherlands, Japan, Israel and Germany, opinions are split on the impact of immigrants on crime. In four other countries where views were mixed, substantial shares refused to choose either of the two statements offered – Italy (26%), Hungary (17%), Poland (15%) and Russia (14%).

In countries where majorities see immigrants as a strength, majorities also tend to say immigrants are not more to blame for crime. Notable exceptions are Germany and Sweden, where majorities say that immigrants strengthen their countries, but pluralities of adults say that immigrants carry more responsibility for crime.

In many countries, half or more say immigrants no more to blame for crime

Immigrants in our country today are more to blame for crime than other groups OR are no more to blame for crime than other groups



Source: Spring 2018 Global Attitudes Survey. Q54b.
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Immigrants and terrorism

Publics across top migrant destination countries are split on whether or not immigrants increase the risk of terrorism in their countries.

In six countries, majorities believe immigrants do not increase the risk of terrorism in the host country. These include all surveyed countries in North America (Mexico, Canada and the U.S.), as well as Japan. Publics in France and Spain, two European countries that were not at the center of the 2015 refugee crisis, also hold this view.

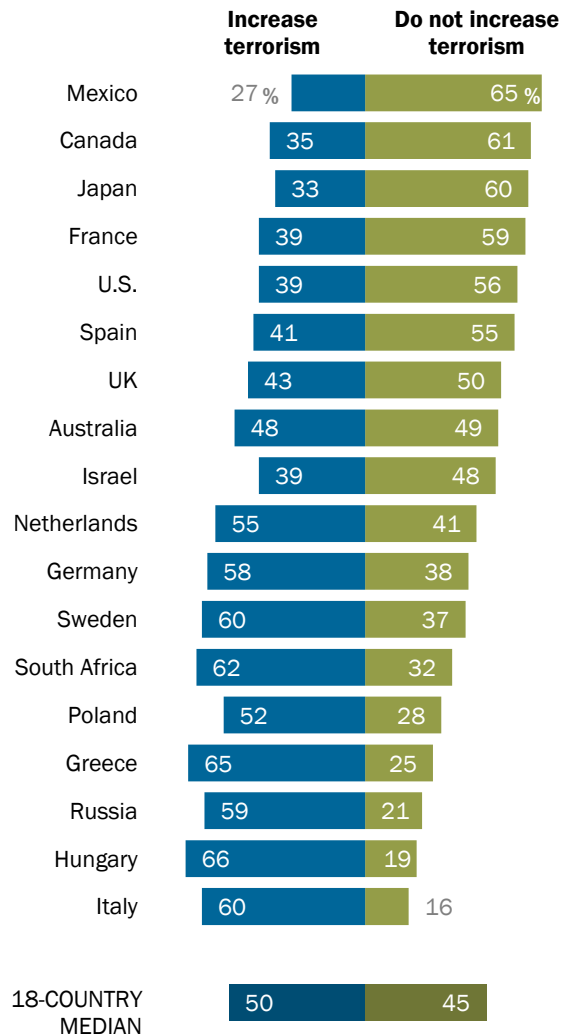
By contrast, majorities in seven European nations – Hungary, Greece, Italy, Sweden, Russia, Germany and the Netherlands – believe immigrants increase the risk of terrorism in their countries.

Views on the topic are divided in the UK, Australia and Israel. In Poland, half (52%) of the public says immigrants increase the risk of terrorism, while 28% say they do *not* increase the risk of terrorism. But a substantial share in Poland (19%) also refused to respond one way or the other.

CORRECTION (May 2, 2019): The original data for South Africa was incorrect in the chart, “Majorities in many European migrant destinations think immigrants increase risk of terrorism.” These numbers have been switched to correctly show that 32% of South Africans say immigrants do not increase the risk of terrorism and 62% say immigrants increase the risk of terrorism.

Majorities in many European migrant destinations think immigrants increase risk of terrorism

Immigrants today increase the risk of terrorism in our country OR Immigrants today do not increase the risk of terrorism in our country



Source: Spring 2018 Global Attitudes Survey. Q54d.
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Majorities in many countries think immigrants in the country illegally should be deported

Majorities in most immigrant destination countries surveyed support the deportation of people who are in their countries illegally.

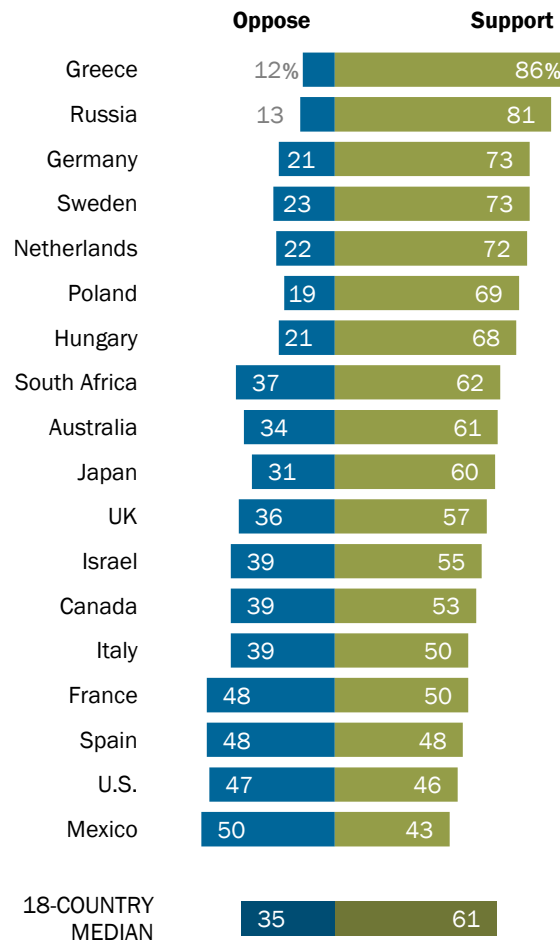
In seven of the 10 EU countries surveyed, majorities support the deportation of immigrants living in their country illegally. In 2007, between 1.7 million and 3.2 million unauthorized, or irregular, migrants **were estimated** to be living in the 10 EU countries surveyed. The number of asylum seeker applications has increased following the 2015 refugee surge. Since then, the number of **rejected asylum applications** has increased substantially. Many of these rejected asylum seekers may continue to reside illegally in Europe.

Similarly, majorities in Russia, South Africa, Australia and Japan also support deporting immigrants living in those countries illegally.

In the U.S., public opinion is divided on the issue. About half (46%) of the public supports deporting immigrants residing there illegally, while the other half (47%) opposes their deportation.² The Center estimates **10.7 million** unauthorized immigrants lived in the U.S. in 2016, which represented less than a quarter (23.7%) of the U.S. immigrant population. The number of unauthorized immigrants in the U.S.

Half or more in several countries support deporting immigrants living in their country illegally

Thinking about immigration, would you ___ deporting immigrants currently in the country illegally?



Source: Spring 2018 Global Attitudes Survey. Q53b.
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² When the Center **asked about this issue** in the U.S. in a different way, a significantly lower share – 20% – said “undocumented immigrants should not be allowed to stay in the country legally,” while a large majority (79%) said “there should be a way for them to stay in the country legally, if certain requirements are met.”

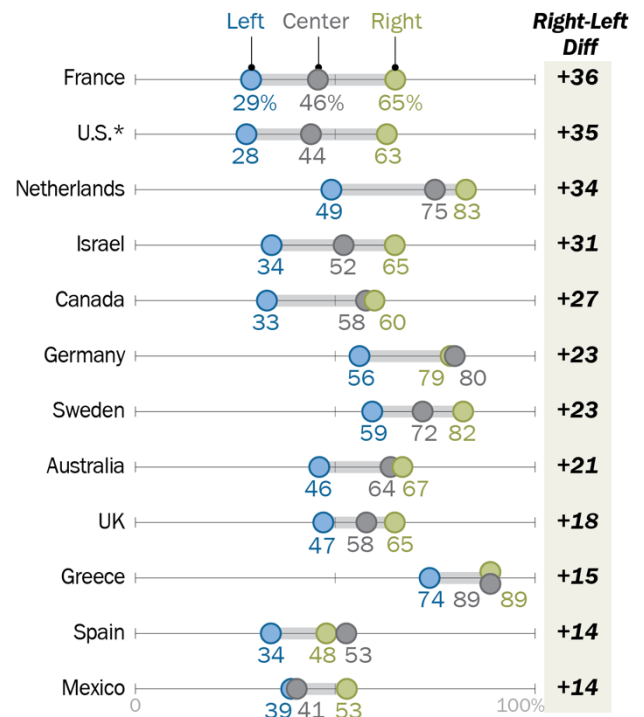
has been falling since 2007 and is now at levels last seen in 2004.

In Mexico, fewer than half (43%) say they support the deportation of immigrants living there illegally. In recent years, Mexico has experienced an [increasing number of migrants](#) entering the country without authorization from Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador. Mexico has historically been a migrant-sending country: About 12 million people born in Mexico live outside the country, nearly all in the U.S. Among those in the U.S., [nearly half](#) are unauthorized immigrants.

In most countries surveyed, those on the right of the ideological spectrum are more likely to support deportation. Similarly, older people in several countries surveyed are more likely to support the deportation of immigrants living illegally in their countries (See [Appendix B](#)).

More people on the ideological right support the deportation of immigrants living in their country illegally

% who support deporting immigrants currently in the country illegally



*In U.S., ideology is defined as conservative (right), moderate (center) and liberal (left).

Note: All differences shown are statistically significant.

Source: Spring 2018 Global Attitudes Survey, Q53b.

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Methodology

About Pew Research Center's Spring 2018 Global Attitudes Survey

Results for the survey are based on telephone and face-to-face interviews conducted under the direction of D3 Systems Inc., Kantar Public UK, Kantar Public Korea and Langer Research Associates. The results are based on national samples unless otherwise noted. More details about our international survey methodology and country-specific sample designs are [available here](#).

[Detailed information on survey methods for this report](#)

[General information on international survey research](#)

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Appendix B: Demographic tables

Immigrants today make our country stronger

% who say immigrants today make our country stronger because of their work and talents by demographic group

	TOTAL	Age				Education*			Income**		
		18-29	30-49	50+	Youngest-oldest gap	Less	More	Diff	Lower	Higher	Diff
	%	%	%	%		%	%		%	%	
Australia	64	80	64	56	+14	55	79	+24	60	68	+8
Canada	68	76	70	64	+12	57	77	+20	62	76	+14
France	56	65	59	50	+15	43	53	+10	46	63	+17
Germany	59	67	54	58	+9	53	74	+21	56	63	+7
Greece	10	22	10	7	+15	9	13	+4	8	13	+5
Hungary	5	3	6	4	+1	5	6	+1	8	4	-4
Israel	26	25	27	25	0	23	29	+6	23	28	+5
Italy	12	21	12	10	+11	11	19	+8	13	14	+1
Japan	59	67	63	54	+13	55	66	+11	56	62	+6
Mexico	57	69	55	48	+21	50	68	+18	57	59	+2
Netherlands	50	61	53	43	+18	43	61	+18	45	54	+9
Poland	21	19	23	21	-2	18	32	+14	22	21	-1
Russia	18	27	17	15	+12	20	18	-2	15	23	+8
South Africa	34	40	30	30	+10	35	33	-2	35	32	-3
Spain	56	64	59	50	+14	49	73	+24	51	62	+11
Sweden	62	65	66	59	+6	56	72	+16	63	61	-2
UK	62	73	63	58	+15	56	79	+23	55	70	+15
U.S.	59	74	62	50	+24	53	67	+14	55	64	+9

*For the purpose of comparing educational groups across countries, we standardize education levels based on the UN's International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED). Less education is secondary education (ISCED 0 to 3) or below and more education is postsecondary or above (ISCED 4 or higher).

**Respondents with a household income below the approximate country median are considered lower income. Those with an income at or above the approximate country median are considered higher income.

Note: Statistically significant differences in **bold**. Response options read as: "Immigrants today make our country stronger because of their work and talents [OR] Immigrants today are a burden on our country because they take our jobs and social benefits."

Source: Spring 2018 Global Attitudes Survey. Q54a.

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Immigrants wanting to adopt our customs and way of life

% who say immigrants in our country today want to adopt our customs and way of life, by demographic group

	TOTAL	Age				Education*			Ideology			Left-Right Diff
		18-29	30-49	50+	Youngest-oldest gap	Less	More	Diff	Left	Central	Right	
	%	%	%	%		%	%		%	%	%	
Australia	44	56	46	37	+19	38	53	+15	60	45	35	+25
Canada	48	42	53	46	-4	43	51	+8	57	47	48	+9
France	51	58	52	48	+10	47	55	+8	64	57	39	+25
Germany	33	38	32	32	+6	29	44	+15	43	34	26	+17
Greece	19	28	16	18	+10	19	18	-1	20	17	18	+2
Hungary	10	9	11	10	-1	9	11	+2	28	13	7	+21
Israel	36	39	38	33	+6	35	38	+3	48	37	32	+16
Italy	10	12	9	8	+4	9	14	+5	17	15	7	+10
Japan	75	77	80	71	+6	71	80	+9	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Mexico	57	69	57	48	+21	53	64	+11	55	58	62	+7
Netherlands	49	62	50	43	+19	45	55	+10	72	51	37	+35
Poland	18	19	21	16	+3	17	21	+4	23	25	16	+8
Russia	17	19	19	15	+4	17	17	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
South Africa	55	60	51	54	+6	54	56	+2	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Spain	46	62	45	41	+21	44	52	+8	58	45	41	+17
Sweden	51	53	52	51	+2	45	62	+17	73	57	41	+32
UK	43	54	30	36	+18	38	56	+18	56	44	33	+23
U.S.**	54	63	54	50	+13	53	55	+2	72	61	37	+35

*For the purpose of comparing educational groups across countries, we standardize education levels based on the UN's International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED). Less education is secondary education (ISCED 0 to 3) or below and more education is postsecondary or above (ISCED 4 or higher).

**In U.S., ideology is defined as conservative (right), moderate (center) and liberal (left).

Note: Statistically significant differences in **bold**. Response options read as: "Immigrants in our country today want to adopt [country's] customs and way of life OR Immigrants today want to be distinct from [country's] society"

Source: Spring 2018 Global Attitudes Survey. Q54c.

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Support for deporting immigrants in country illegally

% who support deporting immigrants currently in the country illegally

	TOTAL	18-29	30-49	50+	Oldest- youngest gap
	%	%	%	%	
Australia	61	51	57	68	+17
Canada	53	36	57	56	+20
France	50	33	46	60	+27
Germany	73	53	76	78	+25
Greece	86	85	82	89	+4
Hungary	68	63	64	72	+9
Israel	55	52	57	56	+4
Italy	50	49	49	52	+3
Japan	60	59	74	53	-6
Mexico	43	37	43	49	+12
Netherlands	72	57	75	75	+18
Poland	69	67	72	67	0
Russia	81	77	79	84	+7
South Africa	62	54	65	68	+14
Spain	48	43	53	45	+2
Sweden	73	62	75	75	+13
UK	57	45	55	63	+18
U.S.	46	39	48	48	-9

Note: Statistically significant differences in **bold**.

Source: Spring 2018 Global Attitudes Survey. Q53b.

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