



ISSUE BRIEF

HOW MICHIGANDERS ARE THINKING ABOUT IMMIGRATION

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Overview

This report draws on data collected by the [Detroit Metro Area Communities Study](#) (DMACS) and the [Michigan Metro Area Communities Study](#) (MIMACS) and highlights attitudes toward immigration in four jurisdictions in Michigan: Detroit, Flint, Grand Rapids, and Ypsilanti. The Detroit survey was administered from June 22, 2023 through August 29, 2023, and captures the views of a representative sample of 2,501 Detroit residents. The surveys in Flint, Grand Rapids, and Ypsilanti were administered from January 15, 2024, through March 18, 2024, and capture the views of representative samples of 704 Flint residents, 1,379 Grand Rapids residents, and 673 Ypsilanti/Ypsilanti Township residents. This report offers an overview of attitudes toward immigrants across these municipalities, as well as key factors that are associated with attitudes toward U.S. immigration policy. Results have been weighted to reflect the population of the survey areas. See [full results from DMACS surveys](#) and [full results from the MIMACS surveys](#).

Introduction

Between February and April 2024, Americans listed immigration as the single most important problem facing the country, making it likely to be among the most important factors shaping the 2024 election.¹ Yet while Michigan is shaping up to be one of the most consequential states in the November presidential election, little information is available to understand how Michiganders are thinking about the issue of immigration.²

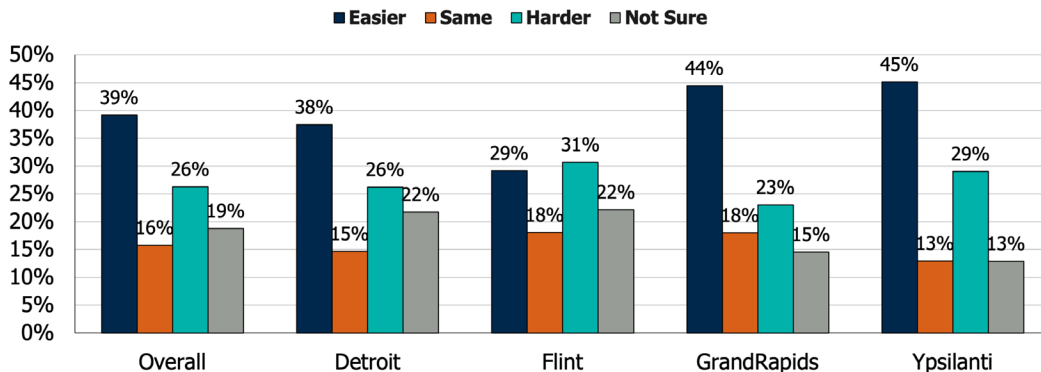
In this brief, we examine Michiganders' views on the issue of immigration. While Michigan does not have as many foreign-born residents as many other states,³ U.S. border and immigration policy shapes the experiences of Michiganders. The entire state of Michigan is considered a border zone,⁴ or an area within 100 miles of an external boundary of the U.S., which gives U.S. Customs and Border Protection the power to operate throughout the entire state. Additionally, immigration has played a prominent role in how many Michigan elected officials and community leaders have sought to reinvigorate local economies devastated by population decline and disinvestment.^{5,6,7,8}

Overall, residents across Detroit, Flint, Grand Rapids, and Ypsilanti were divided on the matter of legal immigration.

- A plurality of residents in Detroit, Flint, Grand Rapids, and Ypsilanti held favorable attitudes toward immigration, with about 2 in 5 residents (39%) stating that it should be easier for foreigners to immigrate to the U.S. legally.⁹
- A smaller share of residents (26%) of these cities felt that it should be harder for foreigners to immigrate to the US legally.
- Sixteen percent of residents felt things should stay about the same, and immigration should not become easier or harder for foreigners. A similar share of residents (19%) said they either did not know or were unsure if they thought it should be harder or easier for foreigners to immigrate legally to the U.S.

Figure 1: Attitudes toward Legal Immigration, by Jurisdiction

"Do you think it should be easier or harder for foreigners to immigrate to the U.S. legally?"



Ypsilanti and Grand Rapids residents were more likely than residents of Flint and Detroit to favor making legal immigration easier.

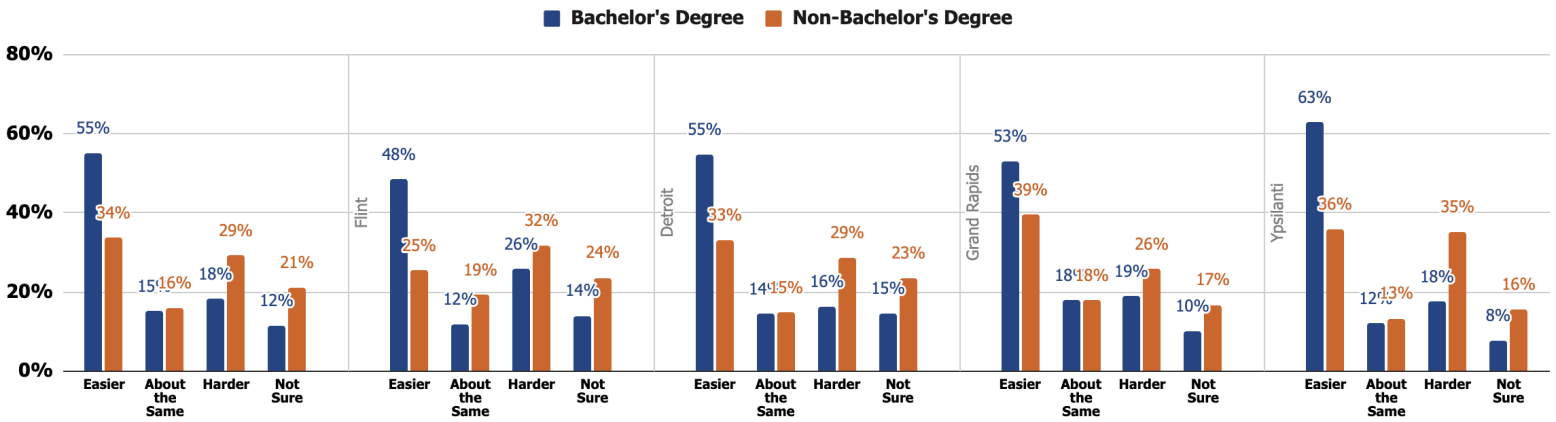
- Forty-five percent of Ypsilanti residents and 44% of Grand Rapids residents thought it should be easier for foreigners to immigrate to the U.S. legally. Roughly 1 in 4 residents of Ypsilanti (29%) and Grand Rapids (23%) felt that it should be more difficult for foreigners to immigrate to the U.S. legally.
- In Detroit, about 37% of residents favored making the legal immigration process easier, slightly fewer than the share of residents in Grand Rapids and Ypsilanti who held this position, while 26% percent of Detroit residents favored making it harder.
- Residents of Flint were more evenly divided in their attitudes toward immigration, with 29% of residents indicating that it should be easier for foreigners to immigrate to the U.S. legally and 31% of residents indicating

that they thought it should be harder for foreigners to immigrate to the U.S. legally.

- Relative to residents of the other cities, there was a larger share of residents in Flint (22%) and Detroit (22%) who indicated that they were unsure about changes to immigration policy. A sizable, but smaller share of residents in Grand Rapids (15%) and Ypsilanti (13%) shared this uncertainty about immigration policy.

Figure 2: Attitudes toward Immigration, by Educational Attainment

"Do you think it should be easier or harder for foreigners to immigrate to the U.S. legally?"



Some of the variation in attitudes toward immigration across jurisdictions can be explained by the relationship between education and immigration attitudes.

- Residents of municipalities in which a higher share of residents have a bachelor's degree, like Grand Rapids (in which 39.3% of residents have a bachelor's degree) and Ypsilanti (in which 37% of residents have a bachelor's degree), were, on average, more supportive of making it easier for foreigners to enter the country legally, than

residents of municipalities in which a smaller share of residents have bachelor's degrees, like Detroit (in which 16.9% of residents have a bachelor's degree) and Flint (in which 12% of residents have a bachelor's degree).

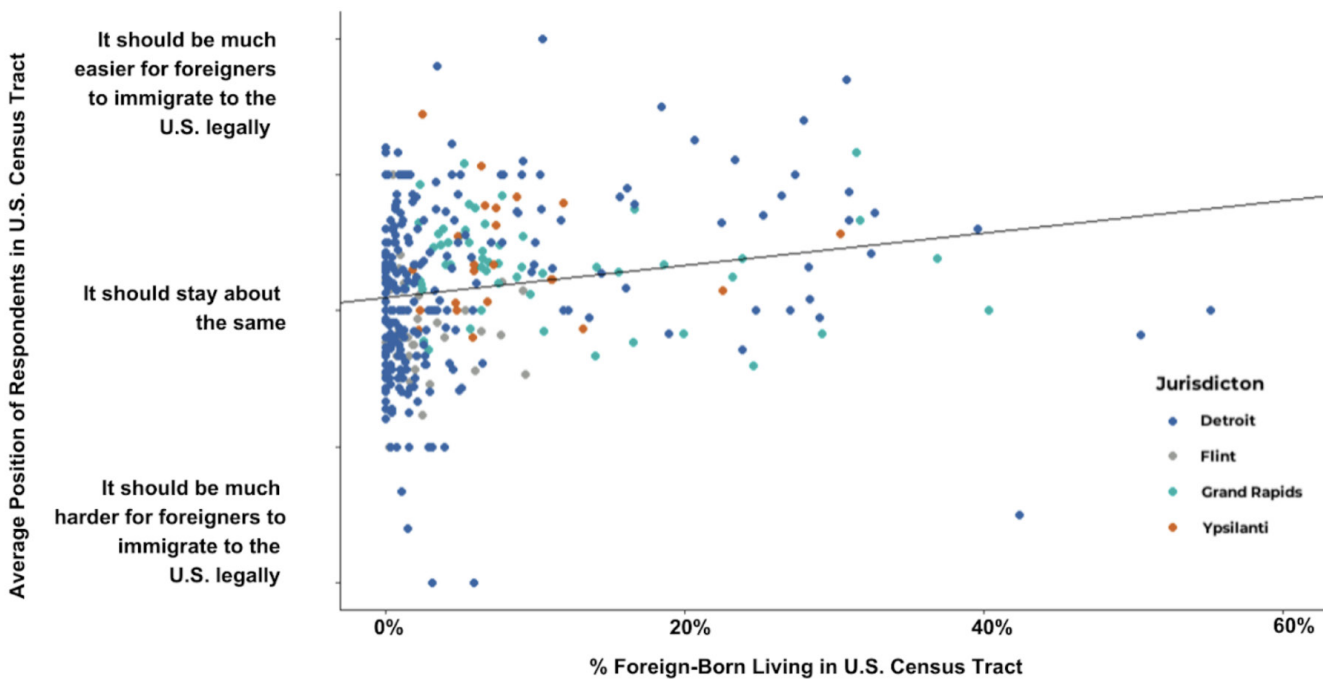
- Overall, 55% of residents with a bachelor's degree living in Detroit, Flint, Grand Rapids, and Ypsilanti supported making

it easier for foreigners to immigrate to the U.S. legally. By comparison, only 34% of residents of Detroit, Flint, Grand Rapids, and Ypsilanti who did not have a bachelor's degree held the same view.

- Residents of Detroit, Flint, Grand Rapids, and Ypsilanti who did not have a bachelor's degree (29%) were more likely than residents with a bachelor's degree (18%) to believe it should

be harder for foreigners to immigrate to the U.S. legally. However, residents of these cities without a bachelor's degree (21%) were also more likely than residents with a bachelor's degree (12%) to say that they were not sure of their views on U.S. immigration policy. Residents with and without a college degree were equally as likely to say immigration policy should remain the same.

Figure 3: U.S.-Born Residents' Attitudes toward Immigration, by Size of Foreign-Born Population in U.S. Census Tract¹⁰



Proximity to immigrants also matters. Consistent with past research, U.S.-born residents living in neighborhoods with more immigrants – who may be more likely to have contact with immigrants – tend to have more favorable attitudes toward immigration.^{11,12}

- Notably, this pattern holds even when looking at the attitudes of only U.S.-born residents. In Figure 3, we use a dot to depict every U.S. Census tract in Detroit, Flint, Grand Rapids, and Ypsilanti. Those dots with higher positions along the vertical axis reflect the U.S. Census tracts where residents, on average, believe that it should be easier for foreigners to immigrate to the U.S. legally. Those dots with

lower positions along the vertical axis reflect the U.S. Census tracts where residents, on average, believe that it should be harder for foreigners to legally immigrate to the U.S. These dots trend in the higher direction as they move further to the right on the horizontal axis, conveying that the average position of all U.S.-born respondents residing in a given U.S. Census tract becomes more supportive of making it easier

for foreigners to immigrate to the U.S. legally as the share of foreign-born residents living in that U.S. Census tract increases. This is true in U.S. Census tracts across Detroit, Flint, Grand Rapids, and Ypsilanti

- On average, for every ten percentage point increase in the share of a census tract's population that is foreign-born,

there is a roughly three percentage point increase in the degree to which U.S.-born residents living in that census tract support making it easier for immigrants to enter the country legally.

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Endnotes

- 1 Brenan, M. (2024, April 30). Immigration named top U.S. problem for third straight month. *Gallup*. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/644570/immigration-named-top-problem-third-straight-month.aspx>
- 2 Spangler, T. (2024, May 5). Michigan is important swing state for Biden, Trump in 2024 presidential election. *Detroit Free Press*.
- 3 Harding, H. & Mackay, H. (2023, December 7). Census highlights Michigan's lack of foreign-born, out-of-state transplants. *The Detroit News*. <https://www.detroitnews.com/story/news/local/michigan/2023/12/07/census-highlights-michigans-lack-of-foreign-born-out-of-state-transplants/71817449007/>
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- 5 One Detroit Staff. (2023, December 13). Global Detroit shares the importance of immigrant inclusion in Michigan's population revitalization. *One Detroit*. <https://www.onedetroitpbs.org/american-black-journal/global-detroit-shares-the-importance-of-immigrant-inclusion-in-michigans-population-revitalization/>
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- 7 El Central Staff. (2024, June 18). Expand Michigan's Population with Immigrants and Newcomers. *El Central*. <https://elcentralmedia.com/expand-michigans-population-immigrants-and-newcomers/>
- 8 Barrett, M. & Moore, L. (2021, October 4). Immigration is saving Michigan from population loss, but state falls far behind national averages. *MLive*. <https://www.mlive.com/public-interest/2021/10/immigration-is-saving-michigan-from-population-loss-but-state-falls-far-behind-national-averages.html>
- 9 Respondents were asked: "Do you think it should be easier or harder for foreigners to immigrate to the U.S. legally?" Response options included, "much easier," "slightly easier," "about the same," "slightly harder," "much harder," and "not sure."
- 10 The y-axis of this figure plots the tract-level average of responses to the question: "Do you think it should be easier or harder for foreigners to immigrate to the U.S. legally?" Responses options included "Much Easier," "Slightly Easier," "About the Same," "Slightly Harder," "Much Harder," and "Not Sure." These response options correspond to the points on the y-axis, with "Not Sure" collapsed with "About the Same" at the middle point on the axis.
- 11 Rocha, R. R., & Espino, R. (2009). Racial threat, residential segregation, and the policy attitudes of Anglos. *Political Research Quarterly*, 62(2), 415-426.
- 12 Fetzer, J. S. (2000). Economic self-interest or cultural marginality? Anti-immigration sentiment and nativist political movements in France, Germany and the USA. *Journal of ethnic and migration studies*, 26(1), 5-23.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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Learn more at www.michiganceal.org/research-outreach/mimacs