

Getting a grip on immigration: the citizens' view

HARRY VAN DALEN

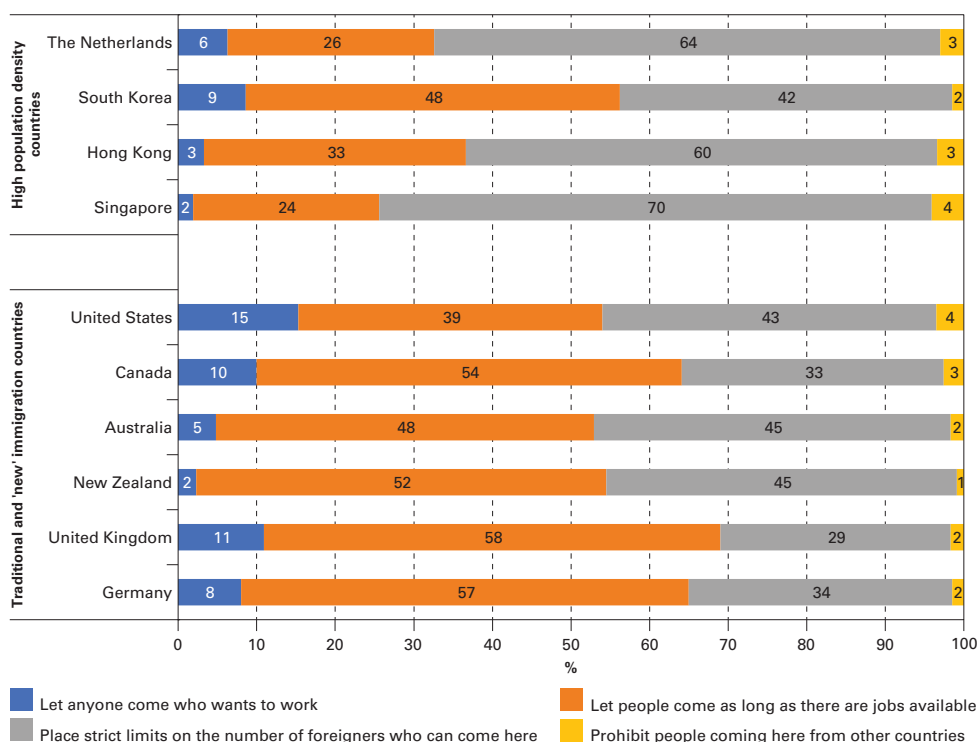
What is the citizens' view on immigration policy? Should labour migration be given priority no matter what or should governments be more restrictive? The World Values Survey shows that countries with a very high population density are far more restrictive than moderate or low-density countries. Citizens in traditional or new immigration countries show a markedly different attitude.

Migration policy is a hotly debated issue in many developed countries. Some right-wing politicians view it as a boon, and some liberal politicians consider it a bane and the more nuanced politicians take the middle ground. Far-right politicians in particular often state that the borders should be closed. But what do citizens have to say on the topic? Are they likely to support such strong statements? And do the demographic circumstances of the country in question matter? Countries or city states with a high population density are likely to be more selective regarding who should cross their border than countries that are sparsely populated. High-density countries like the Netherlands or Singapore are likely to encounter more congestion problems in, for instance, housing, infrastructure, and land use, compared to low-density countries like Canada and the U.S.

How do citizens look upon the contribution of immigrants to their country and what is their stance on immigration policy, The World Values Survey offers some light on how coun-

try settings but also the attitudes of citizens may matter in welcoming or restricting immigrants. The figure below shows in a nutshell how citizens living in countries with a high population density differ from traditional and 'new' immigration countries. In high-density countries, a majority of citizens wants strict limits on the number of foreigners entering their country. South Korean citizens differ markedly from the other three countries, but this might very well be because due to having the world's lowest fertility rate of 0.7, the threats associated with population ageing loom large in South Korea's future. The citizens in new and traditional immigration countries are far more focused on the labour market potential of immigrants and not on setting strict limits. They often do not face the complicating factors of a densely populated country. Canada, for example, with its current population of 40 million inhabitants (4 per km²) is striving for the goal of 100 million citizens in 2100. Canadian policy makers explained this goal in their 'Century Initiative': "Our population growth is tied to our quality of

Opinions of citizens on how their government should carry out immigration policy, 2017-2022



Note on data: US refers to 2017, Australia, Hong Kong, Germany and South Korea to 2018, Canada, New Zealand and Singapore to 2020 and the Netherlands and UK to 2022. Source: World Values Survey.

DEMOS is published ten times a year, normally in Dutch, with the aim of promoting knowledge and awareness of population issues. Inquiries about manuscripts for DEMOS can be addressed to the editorial board.



Material from this publication may be reproduced freely, provided that credit is given to DEMOS, NIDI and a copy of the publication in which the material appears is forwarded to NIDI. The people depicted in the pictures do not appear in the text and have no relation to the contents of the text.

NIDI is an institute of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW) and is affiliated with the University of Groningen (RUG). NIDI conducts scientific research on population issues.

colofon

DEMOS is a publication of the Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute (NIDI).

Editorial board
 Harry van Dalen, managing editor
 Peter Ekamper, (web)editor
 Nico van Nimwegen, editor
 Lin Rouvroye, editor
 Juul Spaan, editor
 Maaike van der Vleuten, editor

Address
 NIDI/DEMOS
 P.O. Box 11650
 NL-2502 AR The Hague
 The Netherlands

Telephone ++ 31 70 356 52 00
E-mail demos@nidi.nl
Internet demos.nidi.nl / www.nidi.nl

Printed by Royal Van der Most
Layout/DTP www.up-score.nl

life. If we have more people, we have a larger workforce and we create more economic activity." What is perhaps even more striking is the attitude in European countries, like Germany and the UK, where citizens show themselves to be very open to the labour market potential of immigrants. Population ageing and expected labour market shortages can apparently cause a change of heart. The Dutch viewpoint is markedly different: 67 per cent of the Dutch want strict limits and this is in strong contrast to the UK or Germany with respectively 31 and 36 per cent who want strict limits. Right now the Dutch, in particular the older citizens, feel that immigration numbers are 'out of control' and see it as high priority to regain control.

Harry van Dalen, NIDI-KNAW/University of Groningen and Tilburg University, e-mail: dalen@nidi.nl

LITERATURE:

- Haerper, C. et al. (2022), World Values Survey: Round Seven - Country-Pooled Datafile Version 5.0. Madrid, Spain & Vienna, Austria: JD Systems Institute & WVSA Secretariat.
- Van Dalen, H.P. (2023), Nederlanders terughoudend over migratie, *Demos*, 39 (9), pp. 1-4.