

The More Trump Hates, the More America Rejects His Hatred

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By William Saletan



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[William Saletan](#)

Will Saletan writes about politics, science, technology, and other stuff for **Slate**. He's the author of *Bearing Right*.



Trump thinks the country stands behind him on these issues. "Under the Constitution, the American people get the final say [on] who can and cannot enter our nation," White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer [declared](#) Wednesday. "And they've spoken loud and clearly through our laws."

But when Americans are asked directly, they don't support Trump on these issues. Whites, whatever their feelings about Trump's economic message, don't support his policies against Muslims or undocumented immigrants. Men, whatever their feelings about abortion, don't condone Trump's treatment of women. The more Trump hammered these issues in his campaign, the more the public turned against his ideas. If he thinks the election was a mandate for what he's done this week, he's in for a surprise.

Let's look at the issues, one by one.

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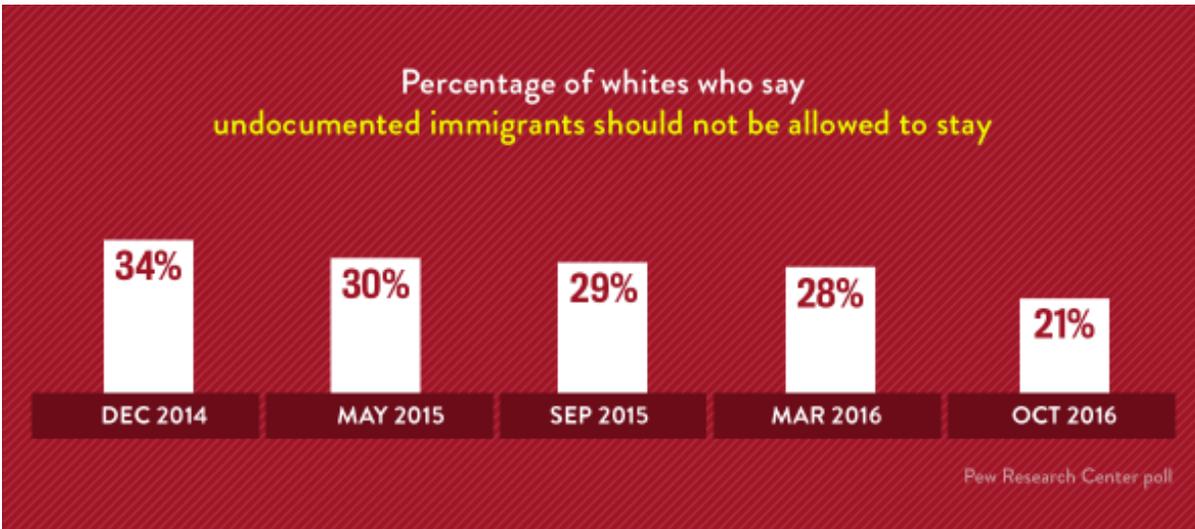
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Deportation. In June 2015, Trump kicked off his campaign with a tirade against undocumented immigrants. He called them [rapists and drug mules](#) and vowed to build a "great wall on our Southern border." Later, Trump [proposed](#)

a “[deportation force](#).” That message earned him a fan base on the right. But white Americans, for the most part, didn’t follow Trump’s lead. They rejected it.

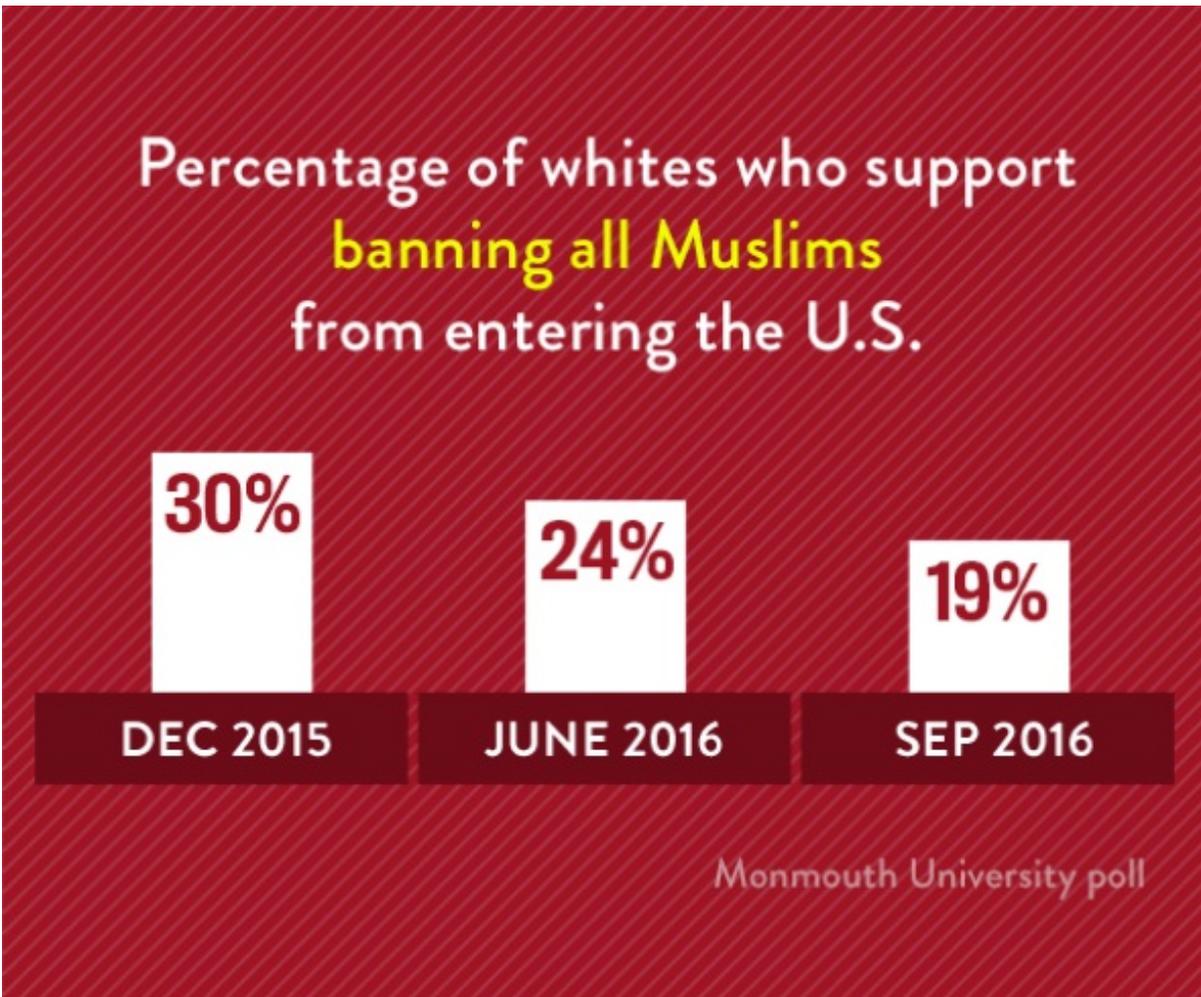
In July 2015, shortly after Trump’s campaign launch, [34 percent](#) of whites polled by Fox News said illegal immigrants should be deported. Sixty-one percent chose the alternative offered in the survey: “a system for them to become legal residents.” For the next 15 months, Trump pounded the immigration issue. But when the Fox News pollsters repeated their question in October, they found that white support for deportation hadn’t increased. It had fallen from 34 percent to [21 percent](#).



In survey after survey, researchers saw the same trend. In Pew polls from [December 2014](#) to [October](#), the percentage of whites who said undocumented immigrants shouldn’t be allowed to stay in the country sank from 34 percent to 21 percent. (White support for deportation also declined.) In CBS News/*New York Times* polls from [May 2015](#) to [September](#), the percentage of whites who said illegal immigrants should be required to leave fell from 33 to 24. In Quinnipiac University polls, the percentage of whites who said illegal immigrants should have to leave fell from 39 percent in [November 2014](#) to 34 percent in [July 2015](#) to 28 percent in [November](#). In the same polls, the percentage of whites who said illegal immigrants should be allowed to stay and eventually apply for citizenship rose from 43 to 52 to 57.

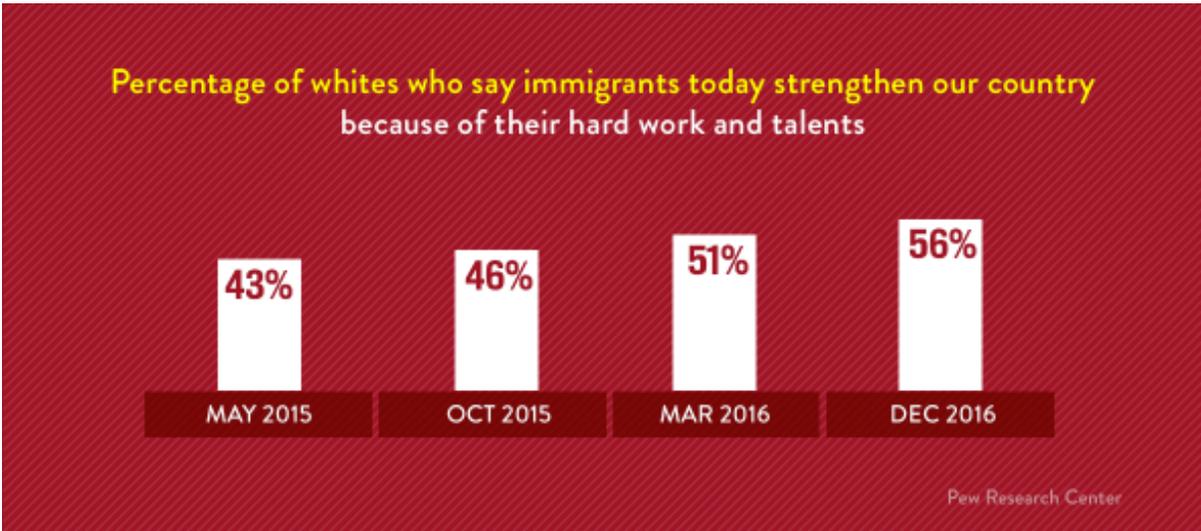
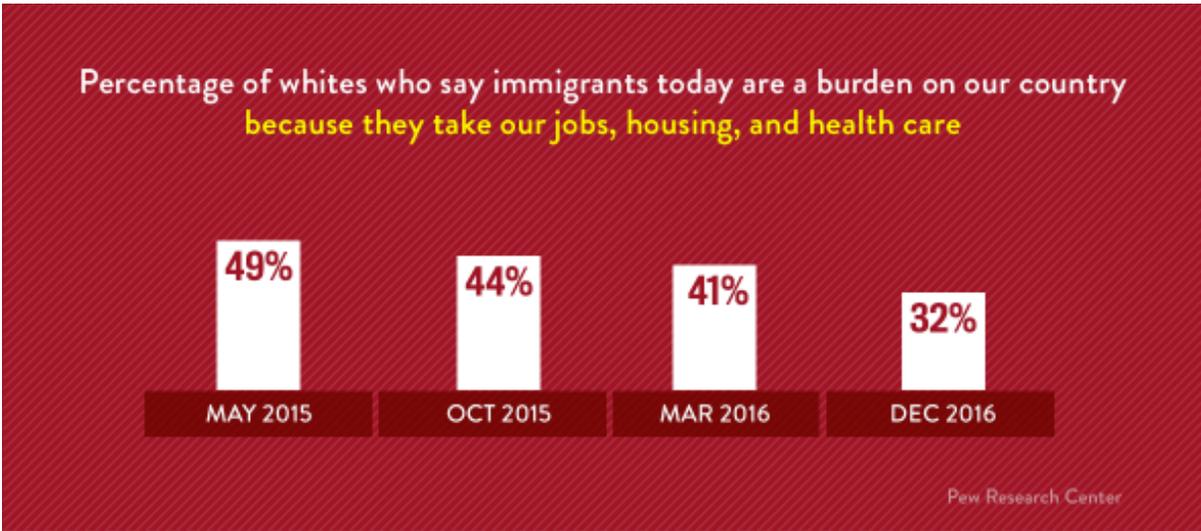
Trump’s wall idea went south, too. In July 2015, an *Economist/YouGov* survey found that whites [supported](#) “constructing a large wall along the border with Mexico.” By August, they [opposed](#) it. The same thing happened in Fox News surveys: In November 2015, by a 12-point margin, whites [favored](#) a wall. In September, by a 2-point margin, they [rejected](#) it. In December, a month after Trump’s election, a Fox News poll found that whites, by a 12-point margin, [didn’t want a wall](#).

Muslims. In November 2015, Trump called for domestic surveillance of [mosques](#) and [Muslims](#). Again, whites didn’t follow him. In Pew surveys from [December 2015](#) to [August](#), the percentage of whites who said Muslims in the United States “should not be subject to additional scrutiny” (beyond what other people faced) rose from 57 to 64. Meanwhile, in Pew polls taken in [September 2014](#), [December 2015](#), and [December](#), whites gradually shifted from saying that “the Islamic religion is more likely than others to encourage violence” (by an 11-point margin) to saying that “the Islamic religion does not encourage violence more than others” (by 8 points).

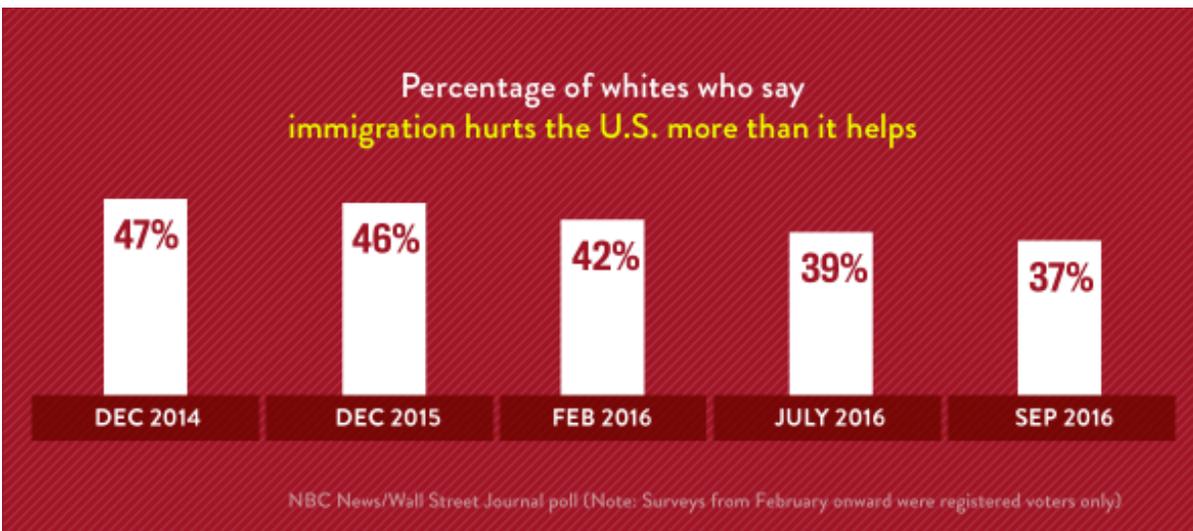


In December 2015, when Trump proposed a “complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States,” most Republicans backed the idea. But most whites were cool to it, and over time they turned colder. A few days after Trump’s announcement, a Monmouth University poll found that 62 percent of whites opposed “banning all Muslims from entering the U.S.” Thirty percent favored the idea. By June, opposition had increased: 66 percent of whites opposed a ban, while 24 percent still favored it. By September, 72 percent opposed a ban, and only 19 percent still favored it. When the proposal was rephrased as a “temporary ban on Muslims who are not U.S. citizens,” white support was higher, but it still declined over time. In a May ABC/Post survey, whites endorsed a temporary ban by 8 percentage points. In August, they opposed it by 4 points. In January, when an ABC/Post survey asked about “banning most Muslims who are not U.S. citizens from entering the United States,” whites opposed it by 19 points.

Immigrants. Trump didn’t just target refugees and border-jumpers. He portrayed all immigrants as a threat, arguing that they took jobs and brought hostile religious ideas, and that even their American-born kids and grandkids didn’t assimilate. But whites didn’t buy it. In May 2015, just before Trump launched his campaign, a Pew survey asked whether immigrants “strengthen our country because of their hard work and talents” or “are a burden on our country because they take our jobs, housing and health care.” At that point, by a 6-point margin, whites said immigrants were a burden. By October, after four months of Trump’s immigrant-bashing, whites had switched to “strengthen,” by a margin of 2 points. By March, the margin for “strengthen” had grown to 10 points. By December, it was 24 points.



Surveys by NBC News and the *Wall Street Journal* confirmed the trend. In [December 2014](#), whites said by a slight margin, 47 percent to 44 percent, that immigration hurt the United States more than it helped. By [December 2015](#), a few months into Trump's campaign, the gap was gone. Whites were almost evenly split, with a 47 percent plurality saying immigration helped more than it hurt. In 2016, the NBC/*Journal* poll shifted from adults to registered voters, which theoretically could have made its samples slightly more conservative. Yet the percentage of whites who said immigration hurt the country kept falling. It sank to 42 percent in [February](#), 39 percent in [July](#), and 37 percent in [September](#).



Racism. In a September [Quinnipiac survey](#), 31 percent of whites said Trump’s “participation in the birther movement, which said that President Obama was born outside the United States,” negatively affected their view of him. (Four percent said it positively affected their view of him.) In a [Bloomberg survey](#), 60 percent of Americans said they were bothered by “Trump’s long-standing leadership of the so-called birther controversy which wrongly questioned whether the first black president was a natural-born citizen and so eligible to be president.” In an October [YouGov survey](#), 59 percent of whites said they were bothered that Trump had been sued by the government “for discriminating against potential tenants based on race.”

When pollsters asked bluntly whether Trump was a racist, whites hesitated. In two *Politico*/Morning Consult polls taken in October, pluralities of whites—[47 percent](#) and [48 percent](#), respectively—said he was racist. In YouGov surveys from August to October, whites split evenly on that question, with 44 percent saying yes and 44 percent saying no, on average. But when other terms were substituted, Trump fared poorly. In the same YouGov polls, whites agreed, by an average plurality of 45 percent to 41 percent, that Trump was “bigoted.” (Hillary Clinton came nowhere near these numbers: By a 2-to-1 ratio, whites said she was neither racist nor bigoted.) And in three *ABC/Post* polls from [July](#) to [September](#), whites affirmed by an average of 51 percent to 46 percent that Trump was “[biased against women and minorities](#).”

Clinton overstepped public opinion when she [claimed](#), at a fund-raising event on Sept. 9, 2016, that “you could put half of Trump’s supporters into what I call the basket of deplorables ... racist, sexist, homophobic, xenophobic, Islamophobic, you name it.” In a [YouGov survey](#) a week later, only [36 percent](#) of whites agreed with that statement. But in the same poll, when whites were offered a range of estimates as to what share of Trump’s supporters were racist, 45 percent selected “about half” or more. And a plurality of whites, 43 percent to 35 percent, agreed that Trump “has intentionally tried to win support from white nationalists and racists.”

Prejudice. Some pollsters removed the R-word and focused on Trump’s message rather than whether he was personally bigoted. When the question was posed that way, whites were clearer in their judgment. In Quinnipiac polls taken in [August](#) and [September](#), whites agreed, by an average of 55 percent to 41 percent, that “the way Donald Trump talks appeals to bigotry.” In a September [ABC/Post poll](#), whites agreed, 55 percent to 38 percent, that “Trump is trying to win support by appealing to people’s prejudices against groups that are different from their own.”

Trump framed his incendiary appeals as an antidote to “political correctness.” That message resonated with many whites. But over time, their sympathy declined. In June, a Quinnipiac survey asked whether there was “too much political correctness” or “too much prejudice” in the United States. By a [20-point margin](#), whites said there was too much political correctness. By November, a week after Trump’s election, the margin had [dwindled to 12](#).

It’s hard to track public opinion on this subject, because questions that were asked about Trump and women late in

the race weren't asked earlier. But Trump's sexist excuses and retorts didn't go over any better with men than his racist appeals had gone over with whites. In a *Politico* poll taken on Oct. 10, shortly after the video came out, [59 percent](#) of men said Trump was a sexist. When the question was repeated three weeks later, [62 percent](#) said he was a sexist. In a YouGov survey conducted Oct. 22-26, men said by a margin of [11 percentage points](#) that Trump didn't respect women. A week later, the margin was [14 points](#).

In *Politico*'s October polls, 59 percent of men said the video made them [less favorable](#) toward Trump, and 41 percent said the video gave them a "[less favorable view of the Republican Party](#)." In a [YouGov poll](#), 54 percent of men also said they were bothered by "Trump's remarks about former beauty queen Alicia Machado, including calling her 'Miss Piggy' when she gained weight." In a Public Policy Polling survey, 60 percent said Trump's criticism of Machado's weight was "[inappropriate](#)." In an [ABC/Post poll](#), 67 percent of men disapproved—and 52 percent strongly disapproved—of how Trump was "handling questions about his treatment of women."

In short, Trump's sexism turned men against sexism. His racism turned whites against racism. His immigrant-bashing helped immigrants. His Muslim-bashing helped Muslims. And yet, despite all of this, he won. Fifty-eight percent of whites and 53 percent of men voted for him.

So are all of these polls baloney? Doesn't the election tell us what men and white people really think—that they don't give a damn about women and minorities?

No. It doesn't.

To begin with, it's not true that the polls missed legions of bigots. National surveys did overestimate Clinton's margin, but only by 2 percentage points. And if they did systematically miss some Trump voters, that wouldn't explain why views on these issues shifted away from Trump in each pollster's samples during the campaign. Politically correct lying wouldn't explain the shift, either. On issue after issue, something changed.

The simplest explanation is that people are complicated. Some folks who didn't like Trump's conduct or the ugly side of his campaign voted for him anyway. They were more upset about other things.

The election wasn't a mandate for chauvinism.

Take this question in the Election Day [exit poll](#): "Does Donald Trump's treatment of women bother you?" Twenty-nine percent of voters said it bothered them not much or not at all, and Trump got nearly 90 percent of their ballots. Another 20 percent of voters said his treatment of women bothered them "some," and Trump got three-quarters of their ballots. But that wasn't enough to win. To win, Trump needed help from the 50 percent of voters who said his treatment of women bothered them "a lot." And he got it: 11 percent of them supported him. If he had lost even a quarter of that 11 percent, he would have lost Florida, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. Clinton would have won not just a plurality of the popular vote, but a majority.

Yes, it's upsetting that Trump's misogyny wasn't a deal-breaker for these people. But don't write them off. They're part of the majority that understands this behavior is wrong.

Most of Trump's supporters also disagreed with him on immigration. When they were asked in the exit poll whether undocumented immigrants should be deported or "offered a chance to apply for legal status," 53 percent of Trump voters chose legal status. And in a [Pew survey](#) that began during early voting and ran through Election Day, only 3 percent of whites and 5 percent of Trump voters said racism wasn't a problem in America.

There's no sign that concern about bigotry has abated since the election. In mid-November, [37 percent](#) of whites polled by Quinnipiac said that in the wake of Trump's victory, they were "more concerned about discrimination and violence against minorities." By January, that number had climbed to [43 percent](#). In November, 36 percent of whites said "prejudice against minority groups in the United States" was "a very serious problem." By January, that number had risen to 42 percent.

There's no guarantee that polls will continue to move against Trump or that the public will stop his agenda. That's up to us. And his election, even with 46 percent of the vote, shows that many Americans still don't see sexism and bigotry as disqualifying. They don't yet understand, or perhaps care, that toleration of discrimination is how discrimination persists. That should trouble all of us.

But the election wasn't a mandate for chauvinism. It doesn't show that whites liked Trump's attacks on immigrants or Muslims. It doesn't show that men liked his attacks on women. They didn't, and they like it less every day. The people are on our side, and they get the last word. Let's make sure they deliver it.