

**A global index of anti-immigrant xenophobia: associations with cultural dimensions, national well-being, and economic indicators in 151 nations**

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For data and interactive map see <https://mohsenjoshanloo.weebly.com/maps--data.html>

## **Abstract**

The Gallup World Poll was used to develop a global index of anti-immigrant xenophobia. The data were collected in 151 countries between 2016 and 2020. Results suggest that xenophobia has stronger associations with cultural variables (e.g., power distance and allocentrism) and well-being variables (e.g., eudaimonic well-being and positive affect) than with economic and social indicators (e.g., national wealth, perceived injustice, and good governance). Globalization is not significantly correlated with xenophobia. Results indicate that this new global index is a valid measure that provides an up-to-date assessment of national xenophobia with much broader coverage than previous indices.

## **Introduction**

Anti-immigrant xenophobia is defined as a hostile attitude toward non-natives (Yakushko 2018). While racism means fearing or disliking people primarily because of their skin color, xenophobia means fearing or disliking people because of their nationality or because they appear foreign (McInnis 2021). Evolutionary approaches suggest that group-based prejudices, including xenophobic attitudes, are deeply rooted in human nature. Early humans lived in small groups, and individual survival depended critically on support from one's group, which likely competed with other groups for resources and land. This led to a preference for one's own group and a bias against other groups. This bias, which aided the survival of early humans (e.g., by protecting group resources), remains strong in modern times (Friend and Thayer 2015). Research continues to examine why levels of xenophobia fluctuate over time and why nations and regions differ in their xenophobic tendencies. Socioeconomic circumstances play a critical role in the increase or decrease of xenophobic tendencies at certain times and in certain contexts. For example, countries that have recently experienced more violent conflict or have lost territory and sovereignty tend to have stronger anti-immigrant sentiment (Hiers, Soehl, and Wimmer 2017). False information is another contributing factor. Studies have shown that misinformation about immigrants spread by politicians and social media platforms influences public discourse in significant ways (e.g., Chenzi 2021).

Globally, xenophobic attitudes have proven difficult to change. Even though younger people in high-income countries are less xenophobic than older people, xenophobia has

not decreased significantly in many of these countries (Inglehart 2018). This is most likely due to the huge influx of immigrants and refugees who may be seen as a threat to local economies or traditional values by majority groups in host societies. Furthermore, terrorism has created widespread anti-foreigner sentiment, which is reinforced by extensive media coverage of terrorist attacks (Inglehart 2018). With the rise of authoritarian populist movements cultivating xenophobic sentiments in many countries, as well as the political success of some of these groups, xenophobic beliefs have received much attention in recent years (Rodrik 2021). Similarly, the Covid 19 pandemic is projected to increase xenophobic sentiments around the world (Esses and Hamilton 2021). As a result, ongoing global research on xenophobia is direly needed.

Questions related to xenophobia, included in multi-national surveys such as the World Values Survey (WVS), the European Social Survey (ESS), and the Eurobarometer, have proved invaluable in shedding light on the state of xenophobic attitudes in different countries and in tracking xenophobic trends regionally and globally. Using these data, previous research has examined the nomological network of anti-immigrant xenophobia. In addition to micro-level predictors of xenophobia (e.g., educational attainment and employment status), contextual variables such as economic quality, unemployment rate, right-wing party vote, and migration stock have received much attention in previous research (for a review, see Ceobanu and Escandell 2010). Cultural values such as individualism/collectivism have also attracted some attention as correlates of xenophobia (e.g., Leong and Ward 2006; Scheepers, Gijssberts, and Hello 2002). However, not much is known about the relationships between xenophobia and other variables such as national well-being.

### **The present study**

This study aims to broaden current research on anti-immigrant xenophobia in multiple directions. The study encompasses 151 nations, the largest sample size used in xenophobia research to date. While various multi-national studies, such as the ESS and the WVS, include xenophobia-related questions, the data accessible from these valuable sources cover a significantly smaller number of nations. The most recent wave of the WVS, for example, includes fewer than 60 countries/territories. The present study also

analyzes data gathered over recent years, offering an up-to-date assessment of xenophobic sentiments throughout the world, most relevant to current decision-making. The main goals of the study are described below.

*Goal 1.* The primary goal of this study was to develop a new global index of anti-immigrant xenophobia using the Gallup World Poll (GWP) data.

*Goal 2.* To be considered valid, the new index is expected to have a high correlation with existing global indexes related to xenophobia. Another goal of the study was to examine the association of the new index and the relevant variables of the WVS, including beliefs that immigrants have a negative impact, disliking immigrants as neighbors, and generalized trust.

*Goal 3.* This study aimed to broaden the nomological network of anti-immigrant xenophobia by including factors that are typically used in global xenophobia studies (e.g., national wealth, employment rate, and migrant stock) as well as mostly disregarded contextual variables (e.g., ecological stress, allocentrism, religiosity, perceived injustice, and various aspects of national well-being).

*Goal 4.* Globalization is the process that creates connections between people and enables the flow of people, products, money, and ideas across borders. In this process, national borders disappear, national economies, cultures, and technologies merge, and complex interdependent relationships emerge (Gygli et al. 2019). Intergroup contact theory suggests that globalization improves cross-border contact between people and therefore may reduce xenophobic attitudes (Mewes and Mau 2013). On the other hand, researchers have argued that globalization may fuel right-wing populist movements that tend to take an anti-immigrant stance (Kaya and Karakoç 2012; Rodrik 2021). This study sought to re-examine the relationship between globalization and xenophobia. The study uses the KOF Globalization Index (Dreher 2006; Gygli et al. 2019), which measures the economic, social, and political dimensions of globalization.

## **Methods**

### **Participants**

The core data for developing the new index came from the Gallup World Poll (GWP). The

GWP includes the three immigration-related questions described below. The majority of nations have responded twice to these questions, mainly in 2016 and 2019 (see Supplementary Tables 1–3 for more information). Over 5 years, altogether, 303,613 individuals across 151 countries responded to the xenophobia questions. The mean age of the sample was 41.984 years ( $SD = 18.006$ ), and 53.797% of the sample were women. Supplementary Tables 1–3 provide sample sizes and demographic information for each year and country.

### **Gallup World Poll variables**

All available GWP data collected during 2016–2020 were used to construct national averages.

### **Anti-immigrant xenophobia**

Anti-immigrant xenophobia was measured by three immigrant-related items: "Now, I would like to ask you some questions about foreign immigrants – people who have come to live and work in this country from another country. Please tell me whether you, personally, think each of the following is a good thing or a bad thing?" "Immigrants living in (country)," "An immigrant becoming your neighbor," and "An immigrant marrying one of your close relatives." Participants responded by choosing either a "good thing" or "bad thing" in response to each question (other recorded responses are "depends," "don't know," and refused). The answers to these questions reflect both a dislike of immigrants and the extent of social distance a person wishes to maintain between self and immigrants (e.g., Bogardus 1933). Three national scores were calculated to determine the proportion of people per country who indicated that each item is a "bad thing." The three national variables were then averaged to create an index of anti-immigrant xenophobia. The Gallup-based xenophobia scores calculated and used in this study are provided in Table 1.

Table 1  
*Xenophobia Scores*

Country	Score	Country	Score	Country	Score	Country	Score
1. North Macedonia	68.00	39. Kosovo	36.29	77. Honduras	23.75	115. Ivory Coast	12.48
2. Montenegro	64.58	40. Poland	35.51	78. Kenya	23.70	116. Argentina	12.39
3. Thailand	62.93	41. Madagascar	35.32	79. Philippines	23.17	117. Jamaica	12.38
4. Serbia	62.31	42. Namibia	34.80	80. Saudi Arabia	22.93	118. United Kingdom	12.16
5. Iraq	58.89	43. Northern Cyprus	34.44	81. Morocco	22.90	119. Venezuela	12.10
6. Malaysia	58.21	44. Zambia	33.93	82. Costa Rica	22.70	120. Comoros	11.83
7. Hungary	55.45	45. India	33.53	83. Uzbekistan	22.56	121. Senegal	11.73
8. Bosnia Herzegovina	55.30	46. Malta	32.66	84. Brazil	21.96	122. Turkmenistan	11.44
9. Croatia	54.62	47. Malawi	32.50	85. Mauritius	21.74	123. Togo	11.13
10. Israel	53.86	48. Kyrgyzstan	32.40	86. Cyprus	21.41	124. Austria	10.98
11. Afghanistan	52.88	49. Peru	31.87	87. Kuwait	21.02	125. Singapore	10.80
12. Pakistan	52.24	50. Botswana	31.84	88. Gabon	20.97	126. Gambia	10.71
13. Jordan	52.01	51. Lithuania	31.78	89. Ukraine	20.82	127. Taiwan	10.66
14. Myanmar	50.06	52. Colombia	31.65	90. El Salvador	20.53	128. Norway	10.65
15. Turkey	49.64	53. Ecuador	31.15	91. Mozambique	20.23	129. Benin	10.58
16. Slovakia	49.12	54. Uganda	31.00	92. Central Afr. Rep.	19.83	130. Netherlands	10.56
17. Czech Republic	49.07	55. Panama	30.75	93. Cameroon	19.75	131. UAE	9.85
18. Cambodia	48.50	56. Laos	30.65	94. Azerbaijan	19.18	132. Germany	9.84
19. Mongolia	47.25	57. Libya	30.39	95. Zimbabwe	18.46	133. Uruguay	9.76
20. Indonesia	47.12	58. Somalia	29.81	96. Chile	17.52	134. Guinea	9.60
21. Latvia	45.67	59. Mexico	29.55	97. Ghana	17.23	135. Switzerland	9.22
22. Guatemala	45.03	60. Bolivia	29.42	98. Congo Brazzaville	17.05	136. Nigeria	8.49
23. Egypt	45.01	61. Hong Kong	29.02	99. South Korea	17.01	137. United States	8.48
24. Greece	44.78	62. Nepal	28.35	100. Nicaragua	16.65	138. Mali	7.82
25. Lebanon	43.40	63. Lesotho	27.90	101. Armenia	16.51	139. Burkina Faso	7.73
26. Slovenia	43.33	64. Dominican Republic	27.48	102. Finland	15.72	140. Portugal	7.29
27. Bulgaria	43.08	65. Bahrain	26.79	103. Paraguay	15.50	141. Sierra Leone	6.83
28. Georgia	42.45	66. Eswatini	26.64	104. Niger	15.48	142. Vietnam	6.52
29. Algeria	41.42	67. Belarus	26.53	105. Albania	15.22	143. Rwanda	6.42
30. South Africa	40.83	68. Tajikistan	26.35	106. Bangladesh	14.88	144. Spain	6.29
31. Tanzania	39.80	69. Liberia	26.08	107. Mauritania	14.84	145. Sweden	5.09
32. Iran	38.71	70. Tunisia	25.79	108. Italy	14.52	146. Ireland	4.89
33. Russia	38.66	71. Haiti	25.07	109. Denmark	14.39	147. Australia	4.76
34. Palestine	38.58	72. South Sudan	24.80	110. Chad	13.90	148. Luxembourg	4.76
35. Romania	37.98	73. Belgium	24.77	111. Japan	13.51	149. New Zealand	4.37
36. Sri Lanka	37.92	74. Moldova	24.71	112. China	13.06	150. Canada	4.32
37. Estonia	37.47	75. Kazakhstan	24.25	113. France	12.94	151. Iceland	3.26
38. Yemen	37.20	76. Ethiopia	23.99	114. Congo Kinshasa	12.80	Average	26.41

### Other GWP variables

Life satisfaction was measured with a question asking "Please imagine a ladder with steps numbered from zero at the bottom to ten at the top. The top of the ladder represents the best possible life for you and the bottom of the ladder represents the worst possible life for you. On which step of the ladder would you say you personally feel you stand at this time?" with response options ranging between 0 = Worst possible and 10 = Best possible. The future life satisfaction item was a follow-up question: "on which step do

you think you will stand in the future, say about five years from now?" Positive affect was measured using two items asking if the respondent experienced enjoyment during a lot of the day yesterday and if he or she smiled or laughed a lot yesterday, with a yes/no response format. The negative affect measure consisted of four items asking if the participant experienced worry, sadness, stress, and anger during a lot of the day yesterday with a yes/no response format. The national eudaimonic index (Joshanloo 2018) was used to measure optimal functioning. This index is composed of seven GWP items measuring learning experience, social support, respect, efficacy beliefs, sense of freedom, and pro-sociality. The perceived injustice index (Joshanloo, Weijers, and Bond 2021) is based on four of the GWP items that inquire about the participants' judgments of their local police force, efforts to deal with the poor, judicial system and courts, and the treatment of women with respect and dignity in their city/country. Allocentrism was measured by a single item included only in 2020–2021. Participants were asked to indicate whether they thought people should focus more on themselves or others. A variable was constructed to reflect the percentage of participants in each culture who chose to focus on others. Finally, a national variable was created based on the percentage of participants in each country who reported being born in another country. Because this variable had a high skewness (3.328) and kurtosis (14.733), it was log-transformed. Religiosity was measured using the proportion of the individuals in each country that reported religion to be an important part of their lives (Joshanloo and Gebauer 2020).

### **World Values Survey variables**

The data for the WVS – Wave 7 (Haerpfer et al. 2020), collected during 2017–2020, were used. As with the GWP items, the WVS items were aggregated into nation-level indices. One survey item asked the participants "On this list are various groups of people. Could you please mention any that you would not like to have as neighbors?" A variable was constructed to indicate the percentage of the participants per country that picked immigrants. Another question asked "Now we would like to know your opinion about the people from other countries who come to live in your country – the immigrants. How would you evaluate the impact of these people on the development of your country?" Respondents answered this question on a scale from 1 = Very bad to 5 = Very good. The variable was reverse-scored such that higher scores indicate the belief that

immigrants have a bad impact. Finally, the generalized trust variable shows the percentage of people in each nation that picked "Most people can be trusted," with the other response option being "Need to be very careful."

### **Variables from other sources**

Variables from other sources are described in Supplementary Table 4.

## **Results**

### **Factor structure of xenophobia**

The three variables were highly consistent at the country level with a Cronbach's alpha of .967. A principal component analysis showed that a single factor explains about 94% of the variance in the scores (Eigenvalue = 2.822), with factor loadings ranging between .956 and .964. A composite xenophobia index was calculated by averaging the three items for each nation. These scores ranged between 3.26 (Iceland) and 68.00 (North Macedonia), with a mean of 26.408 (SD = 15.529). The deviation from normality was not excessive, skewness = .606 and kurtosis = -.447. National scores are shown in Table 1 and Figure 1.



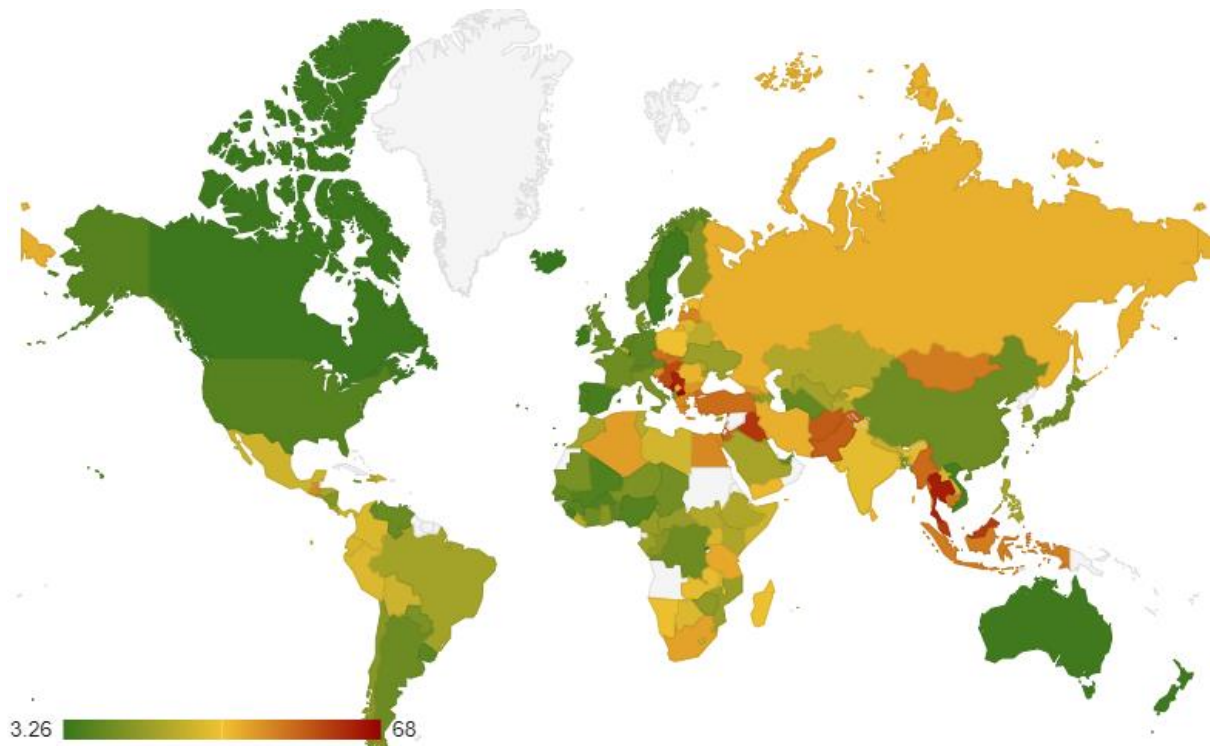


Figure 1. Anti-immigrant xenophobia in 151 countries. Lower scores are in green, moderate scores are in yellow, and higher scores are in red.

### **Correlations with other xenophobia variables**

The new index of xenophobia was significantly correlated with the three WVS variables related to xenophobia (N = 48). As can be seen in Table 2, the correlations were strong for the two variables that referred to immigrants. In addition, the new index had a moderate negative correlation with generalized trust. These results support the convergent validity of the new index.

Table 2  
*Correlations*

	Correlation with Xenophobia	Number of countries
World value survey variables		
Immigrants have negative impact	.717***	48
Dislike immigrant as neighbors	.580***	48
Most people can be trusted	-.450**	48
Cultural dimensions		
Individualism	-.325**	67
Power distance	.427***	67
Masculinity	-.024	67
Uncertainty Avoidance	.300*	67
Religiosity	.155	145
Allocentrism	-.344***	116
Well-being		
Eudaimonic well-being	-.381***	151
Negative affect	.114	151
Positive affect	-.331***	151
Life satisfaction	-.222**	151
Future life satisfaction	-.382**	151
Socio-economic-ecological variables		
Income inequality	.001	93
Globalization	-.010	146
Ecological stress	.157	145
GDP	-.004	144
Peace	-.228**	146
Governance	-.213**	148
Education	-.002	148
Perceived injustice	.215**	151
Percentage born in a foreign country	-.202*	151
International migrant stocks	-.144	147
Unemployment rate	.261**	147

Note. \*\*\*  $p < .001$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*  $p < .05$

### Relationships with cultural dimensions

As shown in Table 2, xenophobia was unrelated to masculinity and religiosity. It had moderate correlations with uncertainty avoidance (+), individualism (–), and allocentrism (–). The strongest correlation was with power distance (+).

### Relationship with well-being variables

As shown in Table 2, xenophobia was not associated with negative affect. Other

correlations were weak to moderate, negative, and significant. The strongest correlations were with eudaimonic well-being and future life satisfaction.

### **Relationship with social, economic, political, ecological, and demographic variables**

Xenophobia was unrelated to income inequality, ecological stress, GDP per capita, international migrant stocks, and education. It had weak and negative correlations with peace, good governance, and the percentage of the national sample born in foreign countries (based on the GWP). Xenophobia was positively and weakly correlated with perceived societal injustice and unemployment rate.

### **Relationship with globalization**

As shown in Table 2, xenophobia was not associated with globalization.

## **Discussion**

Immigrants are not equally accepted or tolerated by host societies. The way immigrants are perceived and treated in these societies is important not only for the mental health and welfare of immigrants but also for the prosperity and cohesiveness of the host societies. This study sought to quantify the extent of anti-immigrant xenophobia worldwide by creating a new index with the broadest coverage to date. The results add to and enhance our knowledge of global xenophobic tendencies. For example, while Inglehart (2018) relies on existing WVS data to conclude that “the Iraqi public has the highest level of xenophobia of any society for which data are available from recent surveys” (138), the current study finds that four countries (Northern Macedonia, Montenegro, Thailand, and Serbia) are ahead of Iraq in terms of xenophobic attitudes. The countries with the lowest scores were Iceland, Canada, New Zealand, Luxembourg, and Australia.

Which countries have the strongest xenophobic attitudes? The results of this study showed that more xenophobic countries tend to have lower levels of generalized trust, individualism, allocentrism, psychological and subjective well-being, and peace. They

have worse governance, greater power distance, greater unemployment, fewer foreign-borns, and their people feel more injustice. There was no correlation between xenophobia and factors such as income inequality, globalization, ecological stress, wealth, and education. Overall, the correlations were stronger for cultural values and well-being variables than social and economic indicators. A combination of subjective/psychological unhappiness and greater power distance and collectivism seem to be a reliable signifier of higher xenophobia in a nation.

An important finding was the negative relationship between xenophobia and subjective well-being, which was stronger than that between economic indicators and xenophobia. These results suggest that, in particular, higher levels of hope (e.g., that life will be good in the future) and optimal psychosocial functioning (e.g., adequate social support and freedom in life choices) are associated with lower levels of xenophobia. Although causal inferences cannot be drawn from correlational analyses, this relationship is worth further investigation. This may suggest that investing in improving the psychosocial capital of populations would be a useful tool in keeping alarming levels of xenophobia in check. Individual-level research also shows that optimal psychological functioning (e.g., secure versus insecure attachment) is associated with lower bias against foreign groups (Saleem et al. 2015). These findings are also consistent with the multiculturalism hypothesis (Berry et al. 2021), which suggests that people who feel secure about their place in society and have confidence in their identity are more likely to accept people who are different from themselves. In the discourse on xenophobia, therefore, governments and policymakers should pay more attention to psychosocial/subjective well-being, individual identities, and feelings of security. It would also be beneficial for global studies of xenophobia to pay greater attention to psychological drivers at the macro level, rather than just focusing on social and economic factors. Of course, this does not mean that the solution to xenophobia is exclusively psychological. From a socioeconomic perspective, the modern world order is largely responsible for the conflicts that lead to the failure of some fragile nations and the emergence of immigrants. At the same time, the unjust economic order is responsible for the emergence of a population in host societies that feels vulnerable, fearful, and angry about their circumstances and perceives immigrants as an additional threat (Peterie and Neil 2019).

Globalization was not associated with xenophobia in this study, suggesting that globalization neither increases nor decreases anti-immigrant sentiments. It is worth noting that another study found a positive relationship between globalization and xenophobia (Kaya and Karakoç 2012). Apart from the fact that the research designs and measures of globalization were different, the sample of the latter study consisted of only 61 countries, which may have contributed to the different results. Overall, these findings suggest that globalization is not a key factor in anti-immigrant attitudes and that it is not a comprehensive solution to xenophobia.

It is noteworthy that the current study, using nations as the unit of analysis, offers insights into the global status of xenophobia and provides a holistic understanding of the phenomenon of anti-immigrant xenophobia. Nevertheless, the findings cannot be readily used to understand local or national issues without further investigation. Various factors interact to increase or decrease the level of xenophobia in a country at a given time. Clearly, to better understand the extent and trends of xenophobia in a country, local findings need to be placed in the context of global findings. This would be a fruitful way to apply the results of the current study in future research.

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