

**UMass Lowell
Center for Public Opinion
Survey on Race, Privilege and Policing**

August 20-25, 2020

N=1000 American Adults

The sample has an adjusted margin of error +/-4.0%

See <http://uml.edu/polls> for full questionnaire/topline results and detailed methodology disclosure.

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HIGHLIGHTS

In the wake of George Floyd's death, which sparked outrage across the nation and spurred racial justice protests, UMass Lowell has conducted a national survey asking respondents about race, discrimination, and systemic racism.

Our results highlight how Americans have responded to police violence against Black Americans and how their attitudes about discrimination and policy have been shaped by recent events. But, we also go further, studying American attitudes about systemic racism in other facets of American society – in the workplace, education, the free market, and housing.

In this report, we focus on how both race (white vs Black Americans) and levels of individual racism (racial resentment) affect how people view instances of systemic racism and corrective measures by the government/changes in public policy.

We find consistent differences in how whites and Blacks experience opportunity, access to education and housing, police fairness, etc. We also find that racially progressive whites often view discrimination as a greater problem than Blacks while racially resentful whites tend to deny the existence of systemic racism. Our survey also shows that whites have yet to connect Black disadvantage or structural racism to their own position in society. While many acknowledge discrimination against Blacks, only a few recognize that systemic racism creates privileges for them.

RACE & POLICING

A majority of American adults think that policing in this country is not fair – 51% say that Blacks are treated less fairly than whites in their interactions with police, compared to 41% who say they are treated the same. Another 7% say whites are treated less fairly than Blacks. Among Black respondents, the perception that Blacks are treated less fairly is higher, at 73%, while nearly half of white respondents, 48%, think Blacks are treated less fairly than whites.

Among white respondents, there is a clear split in answers to this question by party ID, ideology, age, and how a respondent scores on racial resentment, a metric political scientists often use to represent *symbolic racism*. Democrats, liberals, Americans under the age of 50 and those who score low on the racial resentment scale are all far more likely than Republicans, conservatives, Americans older than age 50, and those scoring high in racial resentment to think that Blacks are treated less fairly than whites by the police.

When asked about police shootings and the effect it has on public discourse, Americans are divided: About 44% believe police shootings raise important issues about race that should be discussed but 43% assert the opposite, namely that police shootings are getting too much attention. Only 13% do not express a clear opinion on this matter.

There are of course racial differences: Only 14% of Blacks in the survey said shootings were getting more attention than they deserved and 70% of Blacks thought shootings raised important issues on race.

Whites were more divided. Four in 10 say shooting raise important issues but 49% say they are receiving undue attention. Racially resentful white Americans overwhelmingly (88%) said shootings caused race to get attention that was overblown. Racially progressive white Americans almost unanimously agreed that shooting raised important issues about race.

Personal Experiences

There are vastly different reported experiences among respondents in their interactions with police when we compare white respondents to Black and Latino respondents in our survey. Respondents were asked if they had *personally* ever been treated different by the police because of their race or ethnicity. While 15% of respondents said they were treated poorly by police because of their race, nearly equal numbers said they received preferential treatment (12%) because of their race, while the vast majority reported no difference in treatment because of their race. However, Black respondents (38%) were *more than five times as likely* as white respondents (7%) to say they were treated poorly by the police because of their race. Black respondents were also nearly five times more likely to say they were treated poorly by police (38%) than they were given preferential treatment (8%). We see similar numbers for Hispanic/Latino respondents, 31% of whom reported being treated poorly by the police because of their race/ethnicity compared to just 9% who said they were given preferential treatment because of their race. Meanwhile, white respondents were nearly twice as likely to say they were given preferential treatment by the police because of their race (13%) than to say they were treated poorly because of their race (7%).

But what about remedies to prevent discriminatory policing?

Americans do not support efforts to ‘defund’ the police. When asked about their support for the re-allocation of police budgets to programs like mental health, social work and education, the majority of

Americans think police budgets should be left alone. Fifty-four percent say police budgets should remain untouched, compared to 32% who are for reallocation and 14% who are unsure.

The majority of Blacks, however, support reallocation of funds (52%) and only 33% of Blacks are in favor of keeping things as they are. Racial resentment polarizes views on this topic: 91% of racially resentful whites want to keep budgets for the police, while 91% of racially progressive whites want to reallocate them.

When asked about initiatives to curb unfair policing, namely to *create a citizen review board in their town/city that would be made up of racially representative community members to review police actions and determine punishments for inappropriate actions* the majority of Americans believe it is a good idea: 35% strongly favor, 30% somewhat favor and 18% somewhat oppose and 17% strongly oppose the idea.

Creating such a review board is especially popular among Black Americans 52% of Black compared to 33% of white Americans support the idea. White Americans are ten times more likely to oppose a review board (20% of whites compared to 2% of Blacks). Liberals are also far more in favor of a review board than conservatives (56% strongly favor vs 16% strongly favor). Racially progressive Americans are more supportive than racially resentful Americans: 73% of racially progressive Americans support vs. 48% of racially resentful Americans who strongly oppose and 26% who somewhat oppose the review board.

RACE & EMPLOYMENT

A central tenet of the American Dream is that hard work brings about professional success, but Black Americans are less likely to say they can access jobs, and less likely to view hard work as a path to success. Interestingly, they also feel more efficacious in using their network to expand opportunity to others.

Discrimination on the job: Perception and experience

Do Americans believe that Blacks and whites are treated differently on the job or at work? Overall, 34 % of Americans said that Blacks were treated less fairly than whites, 58% said there was equal treatment and 8% said they see whites being treated less fairly than Blacks. Note that while there is some evidence that a majority of Americans believe that Blacks face unequal treatment from police, there is not evidence that a majority views systemic racism and inequality in other sectors of society, like work. As you will see, we find similar results for views on systemic racism in education, and access to the free market.

In what is certainly a theme of the data we present throughout this survey, there were pronounced racial differences in how Blacks and whites perceive the prevalence of discrimination while working: while 64% of whites believe everyone receives equal treatment only 21% of Blacks say the same. Blacks overwhelmingly (73%) say that Blacks are treated less fairly. Only about one quarter of whites (26%) say the same. Whites high in racial resentment are about four times more likely to say Blacks and whites are treated equally than white Americans who are racially progressive (84% compared to 22%).

Ideology also plays a large role in how people perceive fair treatment at work, especially among whites: Four out of 5 conservative whites (80%) believe there is equal treatment. This belief is almost half as prevalent among liberal whites (43%).

When asked directly whether they have ever experienced discrimination at work (by being treated differently in a work environment because of their race) 2 out of 3 of all Americans (66%) say they have

not been treated differently, 10% say they received preferential treatment due to their race or ethnicity and 24% say they were treated poorly because of their race or ethnicity.

A closer look at race shows that 76 % of whites say they experienced no differential treatment because of their race compared to only 40% of Black Americans. Just over half of all Black survey respondents say they have -- at some point -- been treated poorly because of their race, compared to only 15% of whites who say the same.

Hard work pays off, but less for Blacks

Overall, Americans believe that “hard work directly contributes to [their] success.” Our poll shows that 43 percent of all Americans strongly agree with the statement and another 33 percent somewhat agree. Only about 14 percent of Americans say they somewhat disagree with the notion that their hard work contributes to their success and just under 10 percent strongly disagree.

There are racial differences in how efficacious people feel in their ability to leverage hard work to obtain professional success, however. Blacks are twice as likely to say that they *strongly disagree* with the notion that their hard work directly contributes to their success (18% of Blacks vs. 9% of whites). And even though more Blacks than whites (by a 3 percentage-point difference) say they strongly agree that their hard work culminates in professional success, Blacks are less inclined to somewhat agree that hard work contributes to professional success (24% vs 35%).

Access to jobs

Blacks also report having to work harder to get their jobs. When probed about their agreement or disagreement with the statement “I had to work harder than my coworker to get my job” only 14% whites strongly agreed while 37% of Blacks felt they worked harder than their coworkers to attain their employment.

Overall, a slight majority of all Americans recognizes that Blacks often face hurdles such as discrimination when looking for a job. Fifty-three percent of Americans say Blacks face job discrimination, 13% are unsure and 34% say there is no discrimination. There are racial differences. Eighty-three percent of Blacks assert that Blacks face discrimination and only 7% say Blacks have the same chance as whites. Forty-one percent of whites assert Blacks and whites have the same chance while 46% say Blacks face discrimination. Liberals are far more likely than conservatives to recognize racial discrimination (80% compared to 25%). Racial resentment affects responses in a now familiar pattern: 83% of racially resentful whites believe Blacks have the same chances as whites, while 95% of racially progressive whites believe Blacks face discrimination.

Overall, 20% of Americans strongly favor and 36% somewhat favor affirmative action programs (56% total) and 22% somewhat and 22% strongly oppose these programs (44% total). Given the experiences reported above, it is not surprising then that Blacks overwhelmingly are in favor of affirmative action: 42% strongly and 42% somewhat favor these programs (84% total) while only 3% strongly oppose them. Younger Americans are more supportive of them, as are women and liberal Americans. Racial resentment affects support for affirmative action. Racially resentful Americans oppose affirmative action (either somewhat or strongly) by 89%, whereas Americans who are not racially resentful support (either somewhat or strongly) affirmative action at 92%.

Privilege at work: Blacks and whites report similar efficacy at work

Our next questions asked Americans about their privileges at work: agency, flexibility, and networking power. Blacks report similar agency, similar levels of flexibility and more networking power than whites.

We first asked whether Americans agree with the statement that they “design important aspects of [their] own work and contribute new ideas.” An affirmative response to this questions indicates that a worker has agency, a privilege, at work. Overall, 23% of Americans agreed strongly that they design important aspects of their work and contribute new ideas, another 40% agreed somewhat, 21% somewhat disagreed and 16% strongly disagreed. Interestingly, Blacks (36%) were more strongly in agreement with this statement than whites (21%). Whites were almost twice as likely to ‘somewhat agree’ with this statement than Blacks (43% compared to 22%). Thus, while Blacks are more likely to strongly agree that they have agency at work, overall, whites report having more slightly overall agency at work (64% for whites, 58% for Blacks).

Next, we asked about flexibility at work by prompting individuals to indicate their agreement with the statement that “I can considerably slow down my pace of work when I want to.” Only 18% of Americans strongly agree and say they can slow down when they want to, 40% somewhat agree, 27% somewhat disagree and 15% say they have no flexibility. When averaging strongly and somewhat agree responses whites (59%) and Blacks (61%) report similar access to a flexible pace of work.

Finally, we asked to what degree Americans agree or disagree with the notion that they can use their professional network to either help themselves or a friend advance their career. Only 10% of all Americans strongly agree that their network can help them or their friends improve their career. Another 32% somewhat agreed. Thus, overall, about 42% or, a little less than half of Americans feel they can take advantage of their professional network. The remainder (58%) either somewhat or strongly disagrees with the idea that they have networking agency.

Blacks feel somewhat more efficacious than whites when it comes to the benefits of networking. Forty-eight percent of Blacks say they either strongly or somewhat agree that they or their friends benefit from their professional networks, compared to 40% of whites who say the same.

What do we make of these results? How can we see that Black respondents report clearly facing more discrimination at work, but also feeling more efficacious when it comes to their work social networks? While we can only speculate, it’s likely that the two are in fact connected. In the face of discrimination, we would hypothesize that Blacks are more likely to develop robust networks and build social capital at work to counteract discrimination.

RACE & MARKET INTERACTIONS

Everyday Market Interactions

Next we asked a series of questions designed to tap into experiences with systemic racism in every day life. We asked Americans about experiences with discrimination in local shopping, national retail chains and malls, and local entertainment (e.g. bars, restaurants, movie theatres).

When asked whether Blacks and whites are treated differently or the same *in neighborhood shops or small businesses*, the majority of Americans feels both groups are treated the same (60%) and about one in three Americans (32%) believes that Blacks are treated less fairly.

But when we take race into account an expected pattern emerges: While 66% of whites believe Blacks and whites are treated the same in neighborhood shops and small businesses, only 25% of Black Americans agree. In fact, according to 63% of Black Americans they are treated less fairly. Only 27% of whites agree with that sentiment.

Ninety-two percent of racially resentful whites believe Blacks are treated the same as whites in neighborhood businesses while only 23 % of racially progressive whites say the same. Thus, whites low in racial resentment have similar impressions of treatment by race as Blacks do.

When asked about equal treatment in *larger shopping malls and retail chains*, the numbers mimic those above asking about fairness in smaller neighborhood establishments.

When asked about *fair treatment in entertainment venues like restaurants and bars or movie theatres*, reported discrimination by Blacks decreases only slightly: Fifty-four percent of Blacks feel that they are treated less fairly than whites in entertainment venues (compared to 61% in retail chains and malls and 63% in small neighborhood businesses)

Thus, all in all there are pronounced differences in experiences. Americans of different racial groups report very different assessments of fairness. Whites overwhelmingly believe Blacks are treated equally while Blacks report the opposite impression. Only whites who are low in racial resentment seem to share the same impression as Blacks, namely that Blacks are treated unfairly.

Housing

Do whites and Blacks perceive housing discrimination differently? We prompted respondents to evaluate the following statement: "Some people think that Blacks have the same chance as whites to get any housing they can afford while others think Blacks are frequently discriminated against in the housing market, even when they are qualified renters and buyers." Half (50%) of all Americans said they believed there was at least some discrimination, 14% were unsure and 36% believe there is little to no housing discrimination. Blacks and whites differ greatly in their response to this question: three in 4 Blacks say there is discrimination compared to 45% of whites who say the same. Only 9% of Blacks believe there is no or little discrimination, compared to 42% of whites. Eighty-three percent of racially resentful whites are convinced that Black and white children have the same chance at receiving a good education while racially progressive whites think the opposite: 98 percent of racially progressive whites believe there is at least some systemic disadvantage faced by Black children in education.

RACE & EDUCATION

In addition to employment, policing, and market interactions, education is an important place where systemic racism occurs.

When it comes to education, the majority of Americans recognize the disadvantage of being a Black child. That said, about 1 in 3 Americans believe that the educational playing field is equal. Overall, 34% of all

Americans say that Black children have the same chance as white children to get a good education, 14% are unsure, and 53% say that Black children are systematically disadvantaged.

Black Americans beg to differ on this issue: More than 4 in 5 Black Americans see education as unequal. Eighty-one percent say Black children are disadvantaged and only 10% say their children have the same chance as white children. Whites are four times as likely to believe America's children start out on equal footing: Forty-one percent of whites believe the quality of education is the same for Black and white students and less than a majority (44%) recognizes education as a cause of inequality.

Racially resentful whites overwhelmingly believe education is equal (81%) compared to racially progressive whites who overwhelmingly think education is a site of systemic disadvantage (94%).

EXPERIMENTAL EVIDENCE - PRIVILEGE

Taken together, this survey suggests that many whites recognize systemic disadvantages that Black Americans face, but our survey shows that this does not mean whites view themselves as benefactors of inequality. Many whites acknowledge discrimination but only half recognize Black oppression as contributing to their privilege.

We embedded an experiment where we randomly assigned half of our survey participants to one of two groups. Random assignment to these two groups means that there are no differences between the two groups in terms of race, age, ideology, etc. We then presented each group with the same question but we varied the question slightly. One groups was asked about discrimination and the other was asked about privilege. When we asked whether "discrimination against Blacks made [them] upset." About half of all respondents 'agreed a lot'. When asked whether "white privilege made [them] upset, only a quarter of all respondents 'agreed a lot.'

This shows that whites do not connect the disadvantages faced by Blacks to a sense of white privilege or white advantage. It also suggests that whites have yet to understand the full extent of the systematic privileges structural racism bestows upon them – which is a crucial prerequisite for change.

It is not surprising that our survey also shows that Americans are quite divided about government action to improve the social and economic condition of Blacks. A slight plurality of people say some help is needed (43%) but the majority are either undecided (20%) or opposed (37%) to systemic help. Blacks are more likely than whites to support government intervention on their behalf (66% vs. 40%) and are half as likely to say no government help is warranted (21% vs. 40%). Women, liberal, and younger Americans are more in favor of government intervention to enhance Black economic and social equality. Racially progressive Americans are very supportive of government action – 94% say they want to see government intervention, compared to 78% who are opposed and racially resentful.