

Poll: Americans' views of systemic racism divided by race

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In the wake of outrage across the nation and racial justice protests spurred by the deaths and injuries of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Jacob Blake and other Black Americans, more than half of Americans

believe policing in the country is not fair, according to a new national poll released today by the UMass Lowell Center for Public Opinion.

The center conducted an independent, nonpartisan national survey asking 1,000 respondents about race, discrimination and systemic racism and found from policing, to the economy to the workplace, race divides Americans' views of many issues.

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

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

When asked about police shootings and the effect on public discourse, Americans are divided: About 44 percent believe such an incident raises important issues about race that should be discussed, but 43 percent said police shootings are getting too much attention. Only 14 percent of Blacks surveyed said shootings are getting more attention than they deserve and 70 percent of Blacks thought shootings raised important issues on race. Four in 10 whites say shootings raise important issues but 49 percent say they are receiving undue attention. Racially resentful

white Americans overwhelmingly (88 percent) said shootings caused race to get attention that was overblown. Racially progressive white Americans almost unanimously agreed that such incidents raised important issues about race.

The poll found many different experiences reported by respondents in their interactions with police based on race, whether white, Black or Latino. Fifteen percent of all respondents said they were treated poorly by police because of their race, nearly equal numbers said they received preferential treatment (12 percent) because of their race, while the vast majority reported no difference in treatment because of their race. However, Black respondents (38 percent) were more than five times as likely as white respondents (7 percent) to say they were treated poorly by the police because of their race. Similar results were seen for Hispanic/Latino respondents, 31 percent of whom reported being treated poorly by police because of their race. Only 7 percent of white respondents said they were treated poorly because of their race.

"This finding is particularly noteworthy. The idea in this country that there is discrimination in law enforcement does not come from the news for many people of color—it comes from personal experiences," said Joshua Dyck, director of the Center for Public Opinion and associate professor of political science.

As a remedy to such issues, a majority of Americans polled do not support efforts to defund the police. Fifty-four percent said police budgets should be left as they are. However, a majority of Blacks polled, 52 percent, support reallocating funds from police budgets.

When asked about creating a citizen review board at the municipal level made up of racially representative community members to review police actions, the majority of Americans polled—65 percent—favor or strongly favor the idea. The idea is more popular among Blacks (52

percent) vs. whites (33 percent).

A central tenet of the American Dream is that hard work brings about professional success, but Blacks are less likely to say they can access jobs and Black respondents were twice as likely to say that they strongly disagree with the notion that their hard work directly contributes to their success (18 percent of Blacks vs. 9 percent of whites).

Blacks surveyed also reported having to work harder to get their jobs.

Overall, a slight majority of all Americans polled said that Blacks often face hurdles such as discrimination when looking for a job. Fifty-three percent of Americans say Blacks face job discrimination, 13 percent are unsure and 34 percent say there is no discrimination. Eighty-three percent of Blacks polled said that Blacks face discrimination and only 7 percent say Blacks have the same chance as whites, compared to 41 percent of whites who said Blacks and whites have the same chance.

Overall, 56 percent of Americans polled favor affirmative action programs and 44 percent oppose them. Eighty-four percent of Blacks polled are in favor of affirmative action.

A third of Americans, overall, believe that Blacks and whites are treated differently on the job and 58 percent said there is equal treatment. There was marked difference in the opinions of Blacks and whites polled: 64 percent of whites said everyone receives equal treatment, compared to 21 percent of blacks. Seventy-three percent of Blacks polled said Blacks are treated less fairly, compared to 26 percent of whites. Asked if they were ever treated differently at work because of their race, 76 percent of whites said no compared to 40 percent of Black respondents. Fifty-two percent of Black respondents said they have at some point on the job been treated poorly because of their race, compared to 15 percent of white respondents.

When asked how Blacks and whites are treated in shops or businesses, 60 percent of Americans said they feel both are treated the same, but while 66 percent of whites believe that is the case, only 25 percent of Blacks agree. Sixty-three percent of Blacks polled said they are treated less fairly.

Thirty-four percent of Americans said they believe that the educational playing field is equal. Eighty-one percent of Black respondents said they see education as unequal and only 10 percent said their children have the same opportunity as white children. Whites are four times as likely to believe America's children start out on equal footing: 41 percent of whites believe the quality of education is the same for Black and white students and less than a majority (44 percent) recognizes education as a cause of inequality.

The poll found Americans are divided about government action to improve the social and economic condition of Blacks. A slight plurality of respondents says some help is needed (43 percent), but the majority (57 percent) are either undecided or opposed to systemic help. Blacks are more likely than whites to support government intervention on their behalf (66 percent vs. 40 percent) and are half as likely to say no government help is warranted (21 percent vs. 40 percent).

"To me the biggest take-away from this survey is that our data show that whites do not connect the disadvantages faced by Blacks to their own advantage. Whites have yet to understand the full extent of the privileges structural racism bestows upon them. While many whites readily say that Blacks are discriminated against, they do not see how the lack of opportunity for Blacks translates into more opportunities for whites," said Mona Kleinberg, assistant professor of political science who designed and analyzed the poll, along with political science major Lindsey Kilpatrick of Manilus, N.Y., and Maddi Hertz, a 2020 graduate from Andover. "Making the connection that when one group receives

less another group gets more is what whites need to see more clearly if we want to end white dominance in the U.S."

"By studying what people believe and highlighting differences through in-depth scientific [public opinion](#) polling, we are seeking to add to ongoing and much-needed discussions in this country of racism, social justice and discrimination. Our poll uncovers much in the different perspectives and experiences of whites and Blacks, and in the varying policy attitudes of Americans who believe that we have serious problems with racism and discrimination in this country and those who do not. We hope that this information is useful to the ongoing discourse on how to make our society a more just and equitable one," said Dyck.

More information: More detailed poll results—including how ideology and the concept of "racial resentment" affect views—are available at www.uml.edu/polls, along with topline and methodology.

The poll surveyed 1,000 American adults. The poll was designed and analyzed by the Center for Public Opinion and fielded by YouGov from Aug. 20 through Aug. 25. The adjusted margin of error is plus or minus 4.0 percent. Full poll methodology is available at www.uml.edu/polls.

Provided by University of Massachusetts Lowell

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