

FACT SHEET: Political Efficacy, Trust, and Perceptions of Fairness

As part of the Mobilization, Change, and Political and Civic Engagement Project, the Election 2008 and Beyond Survey (Wave 1, fielded October 17–November 3, 2008) asked 3,180 Black, Hispanic, Asian, and White respondents about their attitudes related to fairness and equality, political efficacy, and proposed voting reforms.

Key findings include:

- Perceptions of political efficacy were reported differently across racial groups. Black and Hispanic respondents were much less likely than Asian and White respondents to believe that the government cares about them.
- Asian and White respondents were much less less likely than Black and Hispanic respondents to believe that they can make a difference by participating in politics.
- Black and Hispanic respondents were less likely to believe that in the United States everyone has an equal chance to succeed.
- Black respondents were generally less likely than White, Hispanic, and Asian respondents to believe in the fairness of the legal, economic, and political systems in the United States.
- White respondents were far less likely than Black, Hispanic, and Asian respondents to support policies that would make voting easier.
- Blacks were more likely than Whites, Hispanics, and Asians to believe that the government treats most immigrants better than Black people born in the country.
- Nearly a majority of all racial and ethnic groups surveyed believed that big change is needed in the country.

Fairness and Equality in the United States

Hispanic and Black respondents were the least likely to agree with the statement that everyone in the United States has an equal chance to succeed. The percentages of respondents who agreed with this statement are:

- 33% of White respondents
- 17% of Black respondents
- 14% of Hispanic respondents
- 29% of Asian respondents

Black respondents were far less likely to agree that the American legal system treats all groups equally. The percentages are:

- 25% of White respondents
- 7% of Black respondents
- 21% of Hispanic respondents
- 27% of Asian respondents

Black respondents were also far less likely to agree that everyone has a fair chance in the American economic system:

- 27% of White respondents
- 9% of Black respondents
- 23% of Hispanic respondents
- 29% of Asian respondents

Hispanic and Black respondents were less likely than White and Asian respondents to report believing in the fundamentals of the political system like the Constitution:

- 40% of White respondents
- 28% of Black respondents
- 26% of Hispanic respondents
- 42% of Asian respondents

Black respondents were the least likely to strongly agree that they feel like a full and equal citizen in this country with all the rights and protections that other people have:

- 34% of White respondents
- 14% of Black respondents
- 24% of Hispanic respondents
- 24% of Asian respondents

Hispanic and Asian respondents were less likely than White respondents and far less likely than Black respondents to believe that the government treats most immigrants better than it treats most Black people born in this country. The percentages are:

- 19% of White respondents
- 31% of Black respondents
- 8% of Hispanic respondents
- 14% of Asian respondents

Black respondents were twice as likely as White and Hispanic respondents and more than three times as likely as Asian respondents to strongly agree that poor people in the United States are treated as second-class citizens. The percentages are:

- 16% of White respondents
- 33% of Black respondents
- 16% of Hispanic respondents
- 9% of Asian respondents

Making a Difference and Producing Change

Hispanic and Black respondents were more likely than White and Asian respondents to strongly agree that by participating in politics, they can make a difference. The percentages are:

- 16% of White respondents
- 26% of Black respondents
- 29% of Hispanic respondents
- 15% of Asian respondents

Black respondents, followed by Hispanic respondents, were far more likely to believe that “big change” is needed in America today:

- 53% of White respondents
- 77% of Black respondents
- 67% of Hispanic respondents
- 49% of Asian respondents

Hispanic and Black respondents were also more likely than Asian and White respondents to believe that the efforts of single individuals such as themselves can be very effective in producing real change in the country. The percentages are:

- 4% of White respondents
- 15% of Black respondents
- 16% of Hispanic respondents
- 7% of Asian respondents

Hispanic respondents, followed by Black respondents, were more likely than Asian and White respondents to believe that the efforts of organizations and groups working in communities can be very effective in producing real change in the country:

- 8% of White respondents
- 22% of Black respondents
- 26% of Hispanic respondents
- 13% of Asian respondents

Hispanic respondents, followed by Black respondents, were also more likely than White and Asian respondents to believe that elections are very effective in producing real change in the country:

- 6% of White respondents
- 21% of Black respondents
- 29% of Hispanic respondents
- 9% of Asian respondents

Voting Reforms

Black respondents were much more likely than other groups to strongly agree that everyone with a felony conviction should be allowed to vote once they have served their time:

- 11% of White respondents
- 32% of Black respondents
- 13% of Hispanic respondents
- 9% of Asian respondents

White respondents were much less likely than other groups to strongly agree that elections should be held on weekends when people have more time and flexibility. The percentages are:

- 12% of White respondents
- 21% of Black respondents
- 31% of Hispanic respondents
- 22% of Asian respondents

Black and Hispanic respondents were also far more likely than White and Asian respondents to strongly agree that employers should be fined if they do not allow workers adequate time off to vote. The percentages are:

- 17% of White respondents
- 31% of Black respondents
- 30% of Hispanic respondents
- 16% of Asian respondents

White respondents were the least likely to strongly agree that all young people 18 and over should be required to vote before they are allowed to graduate from high school, enter college, or receive a driver's license:

- 7% of White respondents
- 17% of Black respondents
- 23% of Hispanic respondents
- 14% of Asian respondents