

Mobilization,
Change, and Political
& Civic Engagement
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Election 2008 and Beyond, WAVE 2

FACT SHEET: POLITICAL EFFICACY

Key Findings Include:

- In contrast to Wave 1 of this study, Black respondents were the most likely to believe that the government is working for them. White Respondents were the least likely.
- However, White respondents are three times as likely to report believing in the fundamentals of the American political system as Black respondents.
- Black respondents are also the least likely to feel like a full and equal citizen, and the most likely to believe that poor people are treated like second-class citizens in America.
- Black and Latino respondents were more likely to think that they can make a difference than White and Asian respondents on many survey questions.
- White respondents are the least likely group to believe the federal government should apologize to anyone for past injustices (e.g. slavery, Japanese internment camps).

External Political Efficacy: “Is the government working for you?”

White respondents were more likely to report feeling that “the leaders in government care very little about people like me.” Black respondents were the least likely to agree with this statement. The percentages of respondents who strongly agree with this statement are:

- 18% of White respondents
- 9% of Black respondents
- 13% of Asian respondents
- 10% of Hispanic respondents

The same trend appears when respondents were asked if they thought the government is run by a few big interests looking out for themselves and their friends. The percentages of respondents who strongly agree with this statement are:

- 26% of White respondents
- 14% of Black respondents
- 19% of Asian respondents
- 18% of Hispanic respondents

The same trend appears once again when respondents were asked how much of the time they thought they could trust the government in Washington to do the right thing. The percentages of respondents who replied “almost never” are:

- 18% of White respondents
- 8% of Black respondents
- 11% of Asian respondents
- 14% of Hispanic respondents

Still, Black respondents are the least likely to feel like a full and equal citizen. The percentages of respondents who strongly agree that they feel like a full and equal citizen are:

- 30% of White respondents
- 10% of Black respondents
- 25% of Asian respondents
- 20% of Hispanic respondents

Latino and Asian respondents agreed more than Black and White respondents with the statement that “each person’s vote is counted and valued equally.” The percentages of respondents who strongly agree with this statement are:

- 15% of White respondents
- 12% of Black respondents
- 19% of Asian respondents
- 20% of Hispanic respondents

Black respondents were *much* more likely to report that the government treats most immigrants better than it treats most Black people born in this country. The percentages of respondents who strongly agree with this statement are:

- 9% of White respondents
- 27% of Black respondents
- 4% of Asian respondents
- 4% of Hispanic respondents

More Black respondents than any other racial group reported that in the U.S. poor people are treated as second-class citizens. The percentages of respondents who strongly agree with this statement are:

- 15% of White respondents
- 34% of Black respondents
- 15% of Asian respondents
- 12% of Hispanic respondents

Black respondents were the most likely to think that the federal government should apologize to African Americans for the slavery that once existed, but Latino and Asian respondents also agreed with this statement much more than White respondents. The percentages of respondents who strongly agree with this statement are:

- 21% of White respondents
- 68% of Black respondents
- 56% of Asian respondents
- 45% of Hispanic respondents

The same trend appears for Asian respondents concerning the federal government apologizing for the internment camps that existed in the country during World War II. White respondents disagree much more than any of the other groups. The percentages of respondents who agree with this statement are:

- 29% of White respondents
- 62% of Black respondents
- 62% of Asian respondents
- 56% of Hispanic respondents

Many more Black respondents believe that “big change” is needed in the U.S. The percentages of respondents who agree with this statement are:

- 53% of White respondents
- 72% of Black respondents
- 55% of Asian respondents
- 59% of Hispanic respondents

Internal Political Efficacy: “Can you make a difference?”

More Black respondents than any other group strongly agree that by participating in politics they can make a difference. The percentages of respondents who agree with this statement are:

- 8% of White respondents
- 19% of Black respondents
- 10% of Asian respondents
- 15% of Hispanic respondents

Black respondents are also the most likely to believe they have the skills and knowledge necessary to participate in politics. The percentages of respondents who agree with this statement are:

- 11% of White respondents
- 14% of Black respondents
- 6% of Asian respondents
- 7% of Hispanic respondents

More Black and Latino respondents than White and Asian respondents believe that the efforts “of a single individual such as yourself” can be very effective in producing real change in the country. The percentages are:

- 2% of White respondents
- 16% of Black respondents
- 4% of Asian respondents
- 12% of Hispanic respondents

The same trend appears when respondents are asked if they feel the efforts of organizations and groups working in communities can be effective in producing real change in the country. The percentages are:

- 8% of White respondents
- 22% of Black respondents
- 10% of Asian respondents
- 24% of Hispanic respondents

The same trend appears when respondents are asked if they feel elections are very effective in producing real change in the country. The percentages are:

- 6% of White respondents
- 20% of Black respondents
- 8% of Asian respondents
- 22% of Hispanic respondents

A greater proportion of Black respondents believe change has occurred in the country since Obama took office. The percentages of respondents who believe at least some change has occurred are:

- 62% of White respondents
- 82% of Black respondents
- 70% of Asian respondents
- 65% of Hispanic respondents