

Centering Race, Centering Government:

A Study of Public Understandings of Government,
Race, and Responsibility for Change



Image credit: Diane Diederich Photography

Introduction

2020 was a tumultuous year—COVID-19 plunged the nation and the world into health and economic insecurity, with particular distress among historically marginalized populations. The police-involved murder of George Floyd, captured on video and coming after years of similarly unjust deaths of Black people at the hands of the police, sparked social justice protests nationwide. As the protests unfolded, some Americans reconsidered their views on race, but a backlash also emerged—from groups explicitly backing the “thin blue line” to those rejecting the rhetoric of defunding the police—placing policing and government funding forefront in the conversation about racial justice and discrimination in the United States.

The size, scope and urgency of need and action on multiple fronts, begs the question: In what ways, if any, did American views of government and race change in response to these events? In particular, what if any role do Americans see for the government in ensuring equity?

To find answers, Topos, in partnership with the Othering and Belonging Institute, and with the support of the Annie E. Casey Foundation and Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, undertook an extensive research effort that included in-depth cognitive elicitations before and after the November 2020 elections, and a nationwide survey in Fall 2021. The research was designed to get at the intersection of government accountability and racial equity. Specifically, the research addresses multiple questions:

- How do Americans view their relationship with the government?
- What do Americans think about race, racism and responsibility for addressing inequities?
- What can we learn about what views have shifted, if any?
- Beyond the obvious partisan and demographic characterizations, what can we discover about how Americans cluster based on their shared attitudes?
- What concepts can win American support for government action on racial equity?

These are difficult questions beyond the scope of one research effort, but we are confident this study provides a great step forward, with new insights to add to our national conversation about how to form a more perfect union.



Executive Summary

The analysis that follows is based on qualitative research with a cross section of 62 Americans, as well as a national survey of 1,732 respondents, including oversamples of Latinx, Black and AAPI respondents. The report is comprised of three distinct, but related components:

1 The Landscape of Public Opinion

A review of what Americans think about their relationship to government, our nation's attention to race and responsibility for addressing racism, and a range of relevant attitudes concerning racial resentment, authoritarianism, color blindness, equitable investment and so on.

2 A Typology at the Intersection of Government Accountability and Racial Equity

Using Latent Profile Analysis, five clusters emerge that are distinct in how they understand the issues, providing insight for what unites and divides Americans on the role of government in addressing racial equity.

3 Message Strategies

A review of three message strategies, each with unique outcomes, to be deployed in targeted situations.



The Landscape of Public Opinion

Government

American dissatisfaction with government is rooted in citizens' perceived distance from government. Few Americans discuss the government in possessive terms such as to say the government is "ours" or that "we" are the government. Instead, the government is perceived as a distant "other" in which the people have little say. This discontent occurs across segments of society—from people of color who have experienced the hostile neglect of government to those on the right who feel that government is no longer responsive to their concerns.

What drives people's frustration and disappointment is a sense that the government isn't working for the people, so the net result is that more feel the government has a negative, rather than positive impact

on most people's lives. They want the government to do more to solve problems.

In particular, they want the government to do more things that benefit average Americans. Across race, Americans believe the government benefits the wealthy more than - and perhaps at the expense of - Americans who are poor or middle class. Few believe that government actions benefit the American public. Many see a government that favors some races over others: More than any other race, government works for white people, according to all racial groups but especially according to people of color. In contrast, far fewer think government works for Black people, again according to all racial groups but especially according to Black respondents.

At the same time, Americans have not given up on having a government that works for the people. Fully 85% of Americans believe that people working WITH government could make at least some amount of difference, with 60% saying it can make “a great deal” or “a lot of difference.”

Race

Racism presents perhaps the deepest challenge in American life. Audiences bring their own complex—and often hidden or even subconscious—perspectives to the issue.

This research finds some similarities and some stark differences among racial groups in how they understand race and racism. For example, Americans across race agree it is harder to be Black in America and reject assertions that competition between the races harm white people. Americans across race readily agree with sentiments that recognize unfairness, but not necessarily unfairness grounded in race. Many see “color blindness” as a desirable solution, though it is clear that interpretations of this term may differ considerably between groups.

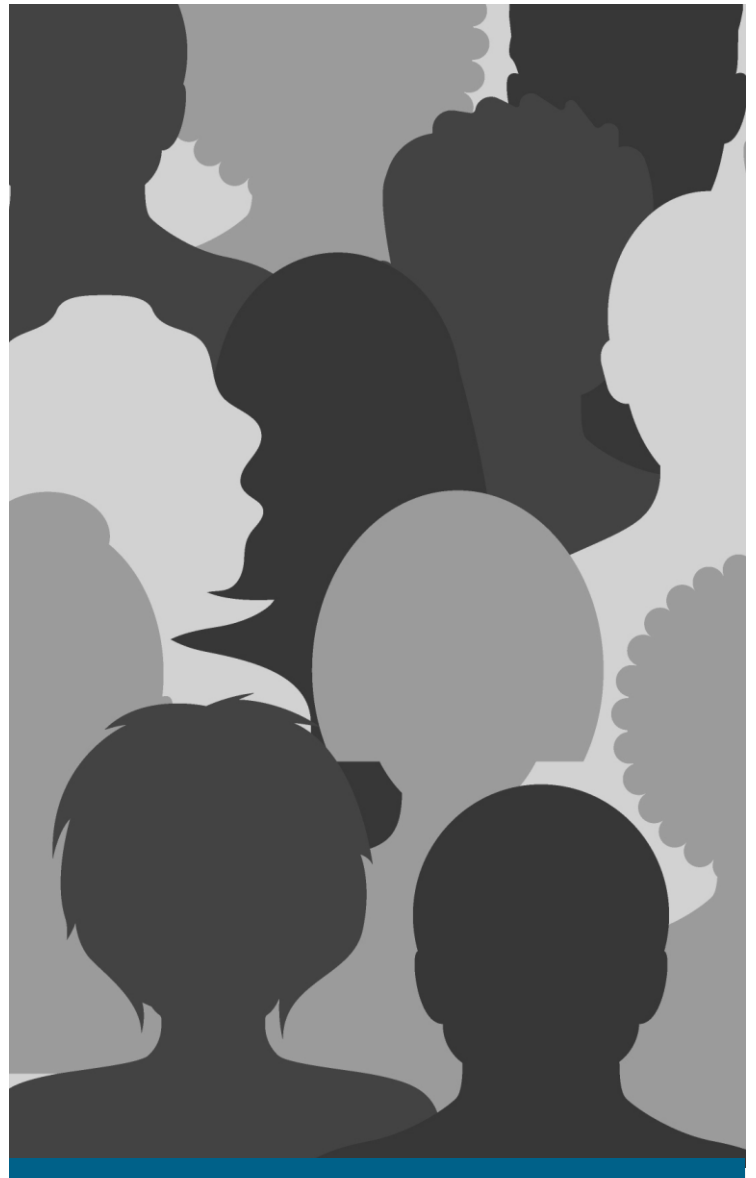
However, Americans disagree on whether we give too much or too little attention to race, and attitude statements that are explicit about race are the statements on which Black and white non-Hispanic respondents most disagree with each other. Latinx individuals caught between the racial binary in the US consistently find themselves between the opinions of white non-Hispanic and Black respondents. Race is a difficult concept in the Latinx community, moving beyond the Black-White binary to include issues of colorism, anti-ethnic sentiments, and anti-Blackness within the Hispanic community.

Perhaps the most fundamental challenge we as a society face when it comes to race and racism, is the disconnect in understanding the basis of racism in America. Americans overwhelmingly agree that racial discrimination exists, but disagree on the source of that discrimination. More point to individual racism than structural racism, and that gets in the way of supporting a role for the government in addressing racial disparities. If individuals are to blame for racism, then it is a non sequitur to ask the government to solve it.

Due in part to the assessment that discrimination is individual, not structural or systemic, people are mixed in how much government should do to improve conditions for Black people. If individuals are to blame, then it makes sense that people find it hard to see how the government could make a difference.

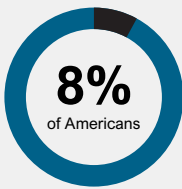
This research strongly suggests that current public discourse on race would benefit from an explicit discussion of the government's role. Making government accountability a centerpiece of the conversation on racial issues allows people to see how policies shape lives. Without giving people clarity on possible government actions, it is easier for opponents of racial justice to fearmonger as to what the government might do to ameliorate racial discrimination and inequality.

Furthermore, even when racism is grounded in individual action, there is still a role for government to intervene and ameliorate some of its effects. In fact, one of the strongest messages tested included a specific example of tackling individual-level discrimination.

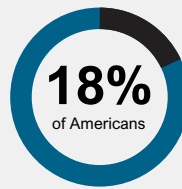


Typology Profiles

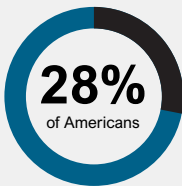
This research leads to a typology designed to provide a roadmap for understanding how racial attitudes reshuffle the landscape of preferences on government action. The typology presents a constellation of clusters that fall within three major domains. First of these is the *Advocate* domain, which assembles individuals who believe the government should make special efforts to address social and economic racial inequality. Next is the *Moveables* domain, which largely consists of ambivalent individuals who appear largely conflicted on what the government could or should do. Finally, we present the *Objector* domain, which gathers together individuals who articulate fairly clear opposition to seeing the government making special efforts to address social and economic racial inequality, but for different reasons.



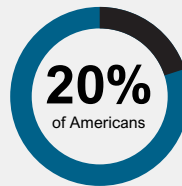
Pragmatic Advocates strongly want the government to do more to address racial inequality despite being skeptical that government has a positive impact on people's lives along with a generally low sense of political efficacy.



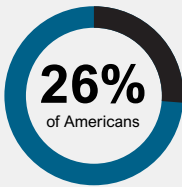
Idealistic Advocates want the government to do more to address racial inequality, in accordance with their widely-held belief that racial discrimination stems mostly from discriminatory policies, systems, and institutions.



Muddled Movables are hesitant on the question of whether the government should make special efforts to address racial inequality, but are more persuadable than other clusters.



Conflicted are rugged individualists who largely endorse a hard work, personal responsibility ethos despite viewing American society as being plagued by pervasive race-based discrimination.



Hardline Objectors are staunchly opposed to increasing government's role in any capacity under any pretenses while broadly rejecting notions suggesting Black people face greater discrimination than do white people.

The value of this type of analysis is that it brings into focus the latent or hidden attitudes that direct understanding and action. With this knowledge, communicators and advocates can more effectively connect with base and persuadable groups.

Message Strategies

Committed advocates across the country are working hard to address racism in order to create progress. Until we find effective ways to get through to audiences and build commitment to change, or at the very least soften those most in opposition, we will continue to suffer as a country from injustices and inequalities that threaten lives and livelihoods, as well as tensions and divisions that threaten our social fabric and democratic processes.

This research strongly suggests that current public discourse on race would benefit from making government accountability a centerpiece of the conversation on racial issues.

The Government Role message is a helpful model for how to convey that the government has a key role to play in addressing racial disparities, and is particularly helpful for those who are stuck in seeing racism in individual/interpersonal terms as opposed to the role of policies in creating and addressing inequities. It is extraordinarily effective at centering race in the conversation and in boosting people's support for action by the government.

The Community Investment message is most effective for inspiring a sense of personal agency, and for promoting a belief that positive change is possible.

The Segment Challenges message is effective for engaging those who are normally resistant to a conversation about race, and for promoting the idea that there are solutions, including policy solutions, that can help us deal with challenges.

Implications

Taken together, our results depict an American public that is dissatisfied with how our government has impacted the lives of everyday Americans, yet who maintain a desire for government to play an important role in solving society's most pressing issues.

As it concerns racial inequality - perhaps *the* most pressing issue - many Americans believe it imperative upon the government to serve a more active role in addressing disparate outcomes and their underlying causes. Many more accept that the nation has a checkered history on race, with key institutions such as government often ignoring and even compounding the problem.

The key tasks moving forward are to reassure the public of the possibilities available when people work together with their government while making the case for the public to work with government to disintegrate systems and structures that promote further racial discrimination and socioeconomic inequality.

This report engages with this task, detailing a way forward for this essential work.



Definition of Terms

RACE

Throughout, the report includes the following definitions of race:

- Latinx includes all people who self-describe as Latino or Hispanic, regardless of race
- Black includes all people who self-describe as Black
- AAPI includes all people who self-describe as Asian American/Pacific Islander
- White non-Hispanic includes all people who self-describe as white but not Latino or Hispanic

Conventions for group labels and capitalizing racial and ethnic groups are evolving. This report uses the following: Latinx, Black, AAPI and white non-Hispanic. When referring specifically to gender in the Latinx community, Latino and Latina are used.

AGE

"Younger" and "Older" refers to those under 45 years old and those 45 or more years old.

EDUCATION

"Those with no more than a high school education" includes those with a high school degree as well as those with some or no high school education.

"Those with some college education" includes those who have taken some college classes but have not completed a bachelor's degree.

"Those with a bachelor's degree" includes those who have at least a bachelor's degree, meaning this category also includes those with a master's or PhD.

COMMUNITY DIVERSITY

References to whether a person lives in a "very," "somewhat," or "not so diverse community" are based on people's self-description.

RELIGION

References to whether religion is "extremely" or "very important" are based on people's self-description.

SHIFT

Responses in a survey like this can be volatile and shift back and forth over the course of the survey, in ways the topline percentages don't convey. That in mind, some questions were asked before and after exposure to a message (or no message) to determine who moves and in which direction. "Move toward" means any movement in direction of the preferred response (increased support for government to do more, for government action on behalf of Black people, increased belief that people can make a difference, etc.) and "move away" means any movement away from those preferred responses. To be more specific, "move toward support for government doing more" includes both those who move from somewhat to strong support for government doing more, as well as those who move from "somewhat against" to "don't know."



The January 6th insurrection was particularly infused with a language of “taking back our government.” The rioters were determined to reclaim their government from what they believed to be the nefarious forces that had stolen the election from President Trump.

For people of color, however, hostile neglect by government, a government seemingly disinterested in representing communities of color, likely drives response.

Totally incompetent to deliver "common sense" legislation. Too much pandering to fringe groups. Disinterested in actually "SOLVING" the southern border CRISIS. Fectless (sic) Congress!! (White, non-Hispanic man, 69 years old)

"...the suspicions are that in like a lot of the swing states, they've already shown that people who had been dead now for years, somehow magically voted and I'm sure there's all sorts of things." (Latino, 39 years old)

The Democrats and Republicans are so busy fighting one another they forget about the people. (Black woman, 58 years old)



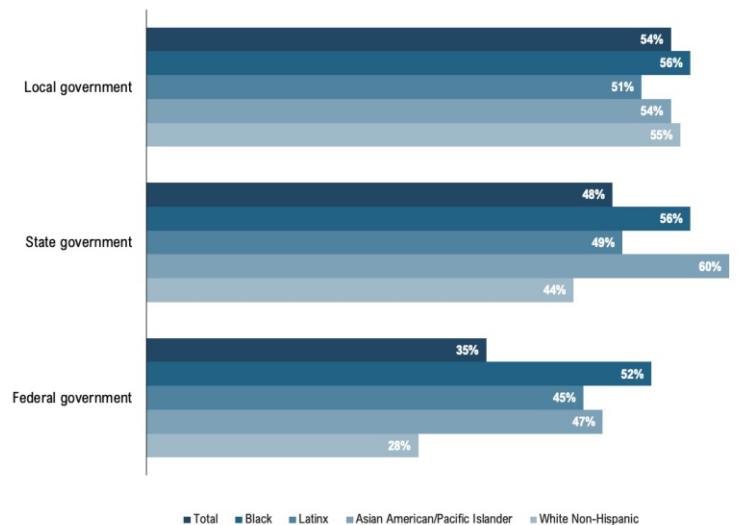
Over half of Americans agree, “People like me don’t have any say about what the government does” with over a quarter agreeing strongly (59% agree, 28% strongly agree). While agreement is high across demographic groups, it varies significantly by presidential vote and race.

Along voting lines, Trump voters are far more likely than Biden voters to believe they don’t have a say: Trump (74% agree, 39% strongly agree), Biden (45%, 16%).

Along racial lines, it is white non-Hispanic respondents who report the highest levels of disaffection: white non-Hispanic (63% agree “People like me don’t have any say about what the government does”, 28% strongly), followed by Latinx (56%, 31%), Black (50%, 29%), and AAPI (46%, 23%) respondents.

Furthermore, agreement within the Black and Latinx communities is fairly consistent across subgroups, but among white non-Hispanic respondents there is wide variation by education and region. Less educated white non-Hispanic respondents are more disaffected than more educated respondents: those with a high school diploma or less (72% agree “People like me don’t have any say about what the government does,” with 42% agreeing strongly), followed by those with some college education (69% agree, 31% strongly), and those with a bachelor’s degree (49%, 12%). White non-Hispanic respondents who live in the West are most likely to agree (73% agree, 35% strongly), followed by those living in the South (65%, 30%), the Midwest (61%, 25%), and the Northeast (48%, 18%).

Trust in Government
How much trust do you have in each of the following to look out for the best interests of you and your family? (% Great Deal/Fair Amount)



Trust in government is low across all levels of government, but trust in the federal government is particularly low among white non-Hispanic respondents.

Overall, just one-third have trust in the federal government (35% say “great deal” or “fair amount of trust,” 7% “great deal”), while slightly less than half trust the state government (48%, 8%), and a majority trust local government (54%, 8%). Trust in government has been declining since Vietnam and Watergate, with brief upticks around major events such as the September 11th attacks.

This research shows that Black and Latinx respondents tend to rate all levels of government similarly, while white non-Hispanic respondents drive the particularly low level of trust in the federal government.

While there is little gender gap between white non-Hispanic men and women on these measures, there are significant gender gaps in the Black and Latinx communities with men stating more trust than women. Among Latinx respondents: federal government (54% of Latinos compared to 37% of Latinas have a “great deal” or “fair amount of trust”), followed by state government (56%-42%) and local government (61%-41%). Among Black respondents: federal government (56% of Black men compared to 49% of Black women have a “great deal” or “fair amount of trust”), followed by state government (64%-49%), and local government (62%-51%).

By region, Latinx respondents in the West and Black respondents in the Northeast are particularly trusting of all levels. Among Latinx respondents who live in the West: federal (50% have a “great deal” or “fair amount of trust”), state (55%) and local (57%). Among Black respondents who live in the Northeast: federal (61% “great deal” or “fair amount of trust”), state (71%) and local (72%).

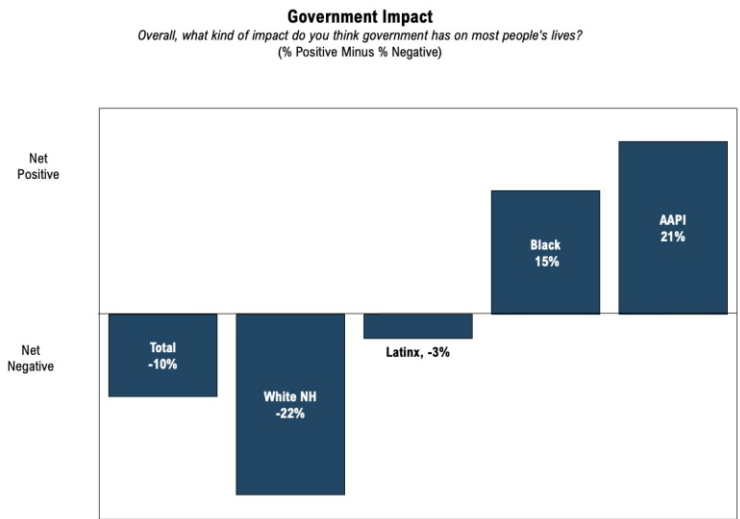
More educated respondents express higher trust for all levels of government. Those with a bachelor’s degree or more are more trusting of local government (64% “great deal” or “fair amount of trust”), followed by state government (53%) and federal government (40%).

While Biden voters are more trusting of all levels of government, the gap is particularly striking at the federal level: 50% of Biden voters and 19% of Trump voters have a “great deal” or “fair amount of trust” in the federal government; 56%-42% for state government; and 63%-52% for local government.

What drives people’s frustration is a sense that the government isn’t beneficial generally:

- **More Americans see the government as having a negative rather than positive impact on people’s lives.**
- **More than 6 in 10 want the government to do more to solve problems, with half feeling strongly about it.**

Overall, Americans have a harsh assessment of the government’s impact on most people’s lives, with half saying it has a negative impact (50% “negative,” 17% “very negative”) and far fewer saying a positive impact (40% “positive,” 9% “very positive”), a net negative rating of -10 percentage points.

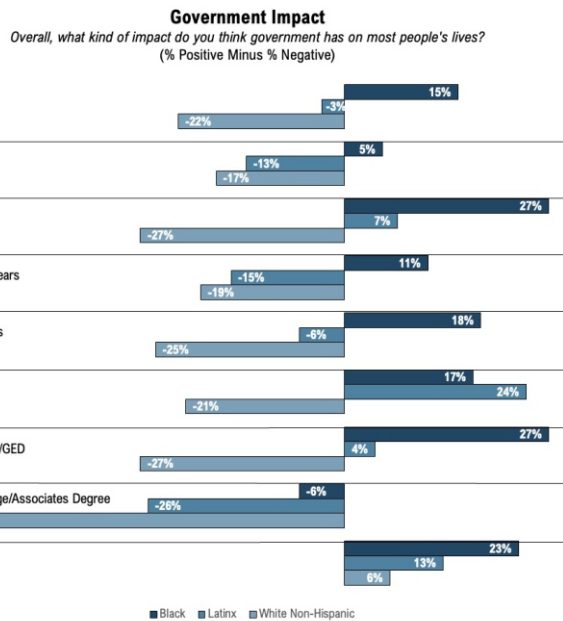


As grim as these numbers seem, they represent an improvement from the first time Topos asked this question in March 2015. Then, just 30% gave the government a positive rating and 55% gave a negative rating, for a net negative score of -25 percentage points.

There is a strong correlation between race and views of the impact government has on people’s lives, with white non-Hispanic respondents providing the most negative assessment (37% positive impact, 59% negative impact, net negative -22 points). Meanwhile, AAPI respondents are the most positive (54%, 33%, +21 points), Black respondents are net positive (47%, 32%, +15 points), and Latinx respondents are divided (39%, 42%, -3 points).

Patterns differ dramatically within racial categories:

- Nearly all subgroups of white non-Hispanic respondents have a negative view of the government's impact, though some are more negative than others. Men have a more negative view of the government's impact than women (net -27 points, -17 points). Education among white non-Hispanic respondents has an even greater effect, with high school graduates giving a negative assessment (-27 points), those with some college giving an even more negative assessment (-51 points), and those with a bachelor's giving a net positive assessment (+6 points).



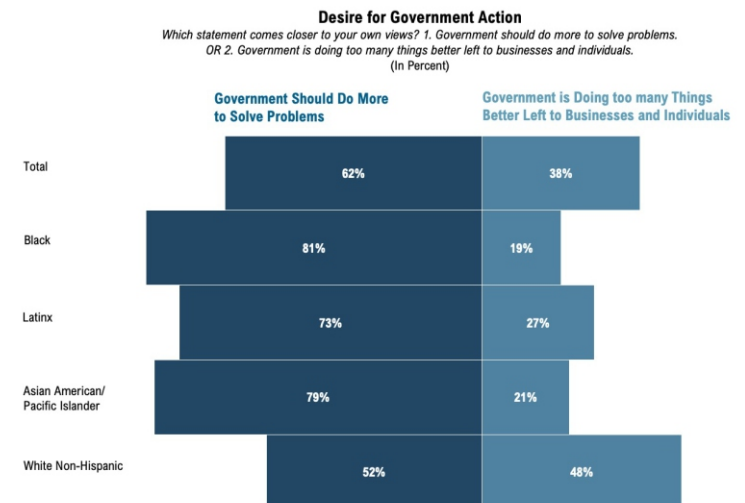
- Among Latinx respondents, Latinos are net positive (+7 points), while Latinas are net negative (-13 points). Age corresponds highly with Latinx respondents' views on government's impact, with those over 55 having the highest net positive view (+24 points), and those 35-54 years old and under 35 years old having net negative views (-6 points, -15 points). Education also correlates with Latinx respondents' views: those with some college are strongly negative (-26 points), high school graduates are mixed (+4 points), and those with a bachelor's degree are net positive (+13 points). Among Latinx respondents, the West is the only region with a net positive rating (+9 points).

- Nearly all subgroups of Black respondents have a favorable view of the government's impact, though some are more favorable than others. Black men have a more positive view than Black women (net +27 points, +5 points). Views on government's impact also correlate more strongly by geographic region than age and education among Black respondents. Those who live in the Northeast give the most positive assessment (+34 points), followed by the South (+19 points).

Those who live in the West are mixed (+3 points) while those who live in the Midwest lean negative (-5 points).

View of government impact is a central difference between Biden and Trump voters: Biden voters are far more positive about the impact of government (57% positive, 32% negative, net +25 points), especially men who voted for Biden (63%, 27%, +36 points), while Trump voters are firmly negative (20% positive, 75% negative, -55 points), especially men who voted for Trump (19%, 78%, -59 points).

People want MORE, not less from the Government. Americans want the government to do more to solve problems and half feel strongly about that (62% “government should do more to solve problems,” 50% strongly), while just 38% choose the opposing view that “government is doing too many things better left to businesses and individuals” (29% strongly).





People of color feel an especially strong desire for more problem solving by government, with Black respondents providing the highest response (81% overall, 70% strongly), followed by AAPI (79%, 61%), then Latinx (73%, 59%), and finally white non-Hispanic (52%, 41%) respondents.

While desire for more problem solving by the government among Latinx and Black respondents is relatively consistent across subgroups, opinion differs greatly by gender among white non-Hispanic respondents. Many more white non-Hispanic women agree that the government should do more problem solving (65%

“government should do more to solve problems,” 48% strongly) compared to white non-Hispanic men (39%, 35%).

This is also a big source of disagreement between Biden and Trump voters, with many more Biden voters siding with the view that the government should do more to solve problems (87% “government should do more to solve problems,” 71% strongly) while Trump voters believe the government is doing too much (76% “government is doing too many things better left to businesses and individuals,” 63% strongly).

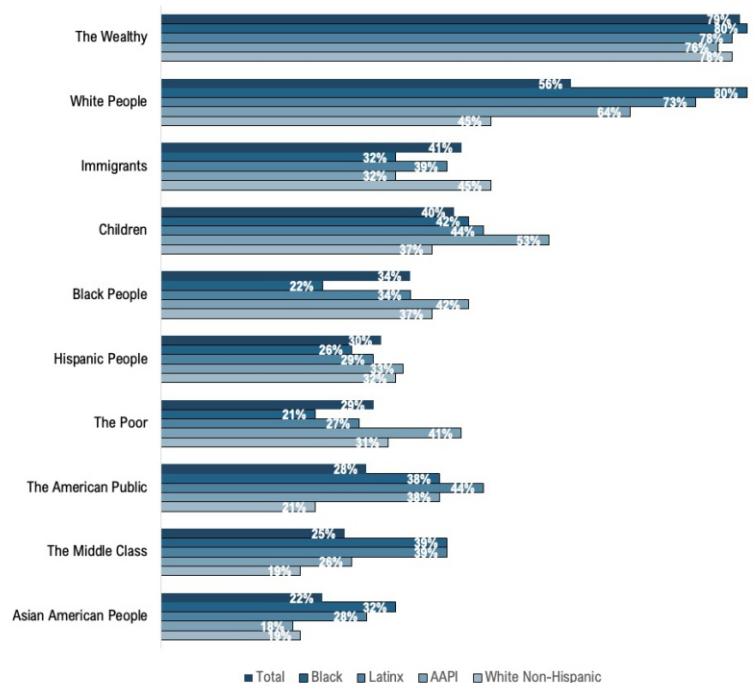
Part of people's frustration is a sense that the government works for people other than them.

- All Americans agree that government actions benefit the wealthy more than the middle class, the poor or the American public.
- Responses about the extent to which government actions benefit different groups differs by race.

Government actions benefit the wealthy. Nearly 8 in 10 Americans believe the government benefits the wealthy (79% usually/often) as opposed to the poor or middle class (29%, 25%). Less than 3 in 10 (29%) believe that government actions benefit the American public usually or often.

Responses about the extent to which government actions benefit different races differs somewhat by race. For the most part, people across race agree on many of these categories. Across race, people believe the government benefits the wealthy, and not the poor. White non-Hispanic respondents are far less likely than people of color to believe that government actions benefit the public or the middle class.

Who Government Works For
Rate How Often Government Actions Benefit Each of the Following Groups.
(% Usually/Often)



- Overall, a majority (56%) believe that government actions “usually” or “often” benefit white people, and this response correlates strongly with race. Black respondents are most likely to believe the government benefits white people (80%), followed by Latinx (73%), AAPI (64%), and white non-Hispanic (45%) respondents.
- In contrast, 34% overall believe government “usually” or “often” works for Black people, but Black respondents are the most critical: 22% of Black respondents say government actions “usually” or “often” benefit Black people, followed by Latinx (34%), white non-Hispanic (37%) and AAPI (42%) respondents.
- When it comes to benefitting Latinx people, responses are fairly constant: Latinx (29% say “usually” or “often”), compared with Black (26%), white non-Hispanic (32%), and AAPI (33%) respondents.
- AAPI and white non-Hispanic respondents are more critical of government working on behalf of Asian American people: AAPI (18% say “usually” or “often”) compared with white non-Hispanic (19%), Latinx (28%) and Black (32%) respondents.

Overall, 4 in 10 say government actions usually or often benefit immigrants and children, but the groups driving those responses are distinctly different. When it comes to children, those most likely to assert that government actions benefit them are people of color, younger, less educated respondents, especially younger men (56% say government actions “usually” or “often benefit children”), non-college educated men (47%), Latinos (54%), Black men (50%), Black people under 35 years old (55%), and Black people with no more than a high school degree (52%).

When it comes to immigrants, those most likely to assert that government actions benefit them are older men (50% say government actions “usually” or “often benefit immigrants”), non college educated men (53%), Trump voters (68%), white non-Hispanic men with no more than a high school degree (62%), and Latinos (49%).

At the same time, Americans have not given up on having a government that works for the people.

Fully 85% of Americans believe that people working WITH government could make *at least* some amount of difference, with 60% saying it can make “a great deal” or “a lot of difference.” Responses are generally consistent across racial groups, with Black respondents being most likely to assert that working together can make a difference (66% say “a great deal” or “a lot of difference”), followed by AAPI respondents (53%). Other subgroups with a high percentage of belief that working with the government can make a great deal or a lot of difference include 25-34 year olds (67%), 35-44 year olds (65%), those with a bachelor’s degree (69%), especially women with a bachelor’s degree (71%), and Biden voters (71%). While age made no difference among Latinx respondents, Black respondents 55 years and older tended to be more enthusiastic about the difference people can make (71% say “a great deal” or “a lot of difference”), as well as younger white non-Hispanic respondents (67% of those under 35 years old). In fact, according to Pew Research, majorities of Americans believe that the federal government has a major role to play across a variety of policy areas. From protecting the nation from terrorism and natural disasters, to securing the economy, both Democrats and Republicans want to see the federal government playing a major role.

Pew Research Center, April 25 - May 1, 2022, n=5,074

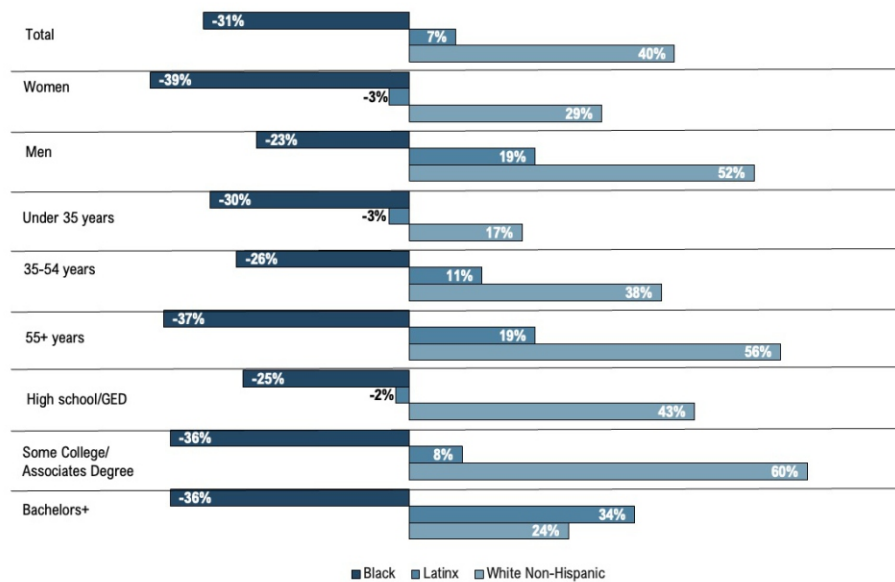


On Race

Americans of different racial backgrounds differ on whether we give too much or too little attention to race and racial issues in our country.

Attention to Racial Issues

In general, when it comes to how much attention we give to race and racial issues in our country, do you think we give too much, too little, or about the right amount of attention?
(% Too Much Minus % Too Little)



Overall, 53% of survey respondents say we give “too much attention to race and racial issues in our country,” while 31% say “too little” and 16% “about the right amount of attention.” This represents a higher percentage of respondents saying “too much attention to race” compared to findings from Pew in 2019 and 2017.

Black respondents consistently say there is too little attention to race, white non-Hispanic respondents consistently say there is too much attention, and Latinx respondents are mixed with older, more educated Latinx leaning toward too much attention and younger less educated leaning toward too little attention..

Trump voters nearly universally believe there is too much attention to race (88%), especially men who voted for Trump (91%). In contrast, half (50%) of Biden voters say too little, especially women who voted for Biden (54%). Still, 30% of Biden voters think there has been too much attention to race.

A majority of Americans (56%) say events of the past year have changed their view of racism in America.

Response is relatively consistent across race: AAPI and white non-Hispanic respondents are the most likely to say their view of racism has changed (59% each), followed by Latinx (54%) and Black (47%) respondents. Response is also fairly even across the presidential vote with 61% of Biden voters and 51% of Trump voters saying their views have changed. Within Latinx and Black respondent subgroups, response is consistent. Among white non-Hispanic respondents, however, those most likely to say their view has changed are women (63%), those under 35 years old (69%), those with a bachelor’s degree (65%) and those who live in the Northeast (68%) and Midwest (66%).

Importantly, not everyone who says their view has changed, has changed for the better. In an open-end follow up, 31% of all respondents say something sympathetic such as “racism exists” or “is worse than I thought,” 10% say they are more aware of racism, while about 10% say something unsympathetic such as racism is overstated.

It has made me realize how quickly hard earned progress can fade away. Also, how many people have continued to hold twisted, prejudiced views right below the surface just waiting for the opportunity to unleash them. I find these times sad and very frightening. (White non-Hispanic man, 71 years old)

I came up in the times when racism was a problem. I remember when I had to sit at the back of the bus. I remember seeing signs that said whites only. I remember when Martin Luther King was killed for helping bring the races together. I thought all that was in the past until Trump reminded me that it is still happening. Trump stirred the pot when he became president. (Black woman, 68 years old)

I never thought our country was this racist. BLM changed my opinion of that, also the killing of black and brown people has changed my opinion. (White non-Hispanic woman, 57 years old)

Racism is being used to divide this country. Most Americans, around 98% could care less about your color or race. The 98% is sick of being called racist. We are one of the most diverse ethnic countries in the world. Yes, we can always improve, but if we are so racist, why does everyone want to move here? (White non-hispanic man, 66 years old)

It’s made me feel a bit annoyed. It’s like the go to for almost everything. (Latina, 33 years old).

Americans agree it is harder to be Black in America and reject assertions that competition between the races harm white people, though many believe reverse racism is real.

Overall, two-thirds believe it is more difficult “to be a Black person in this country than to be a White person” (66% “great deal” or “fairly more difficult,” 33% “great deal”). A majority of respondents in every racial group agree, though more Black (91% “great deal” or “fairly more difficult,” 66% “great deal”) and Latinx (78%, 43%) respondents feel that way than AAPI (63%, 27%) or white non-Hispanic (58%, 24%) respondents. Within racial groups there are patterns by age and education:

- Among Black respondents, there is a slight correlation by age and education with older and more educated respondents feeling most strongly: <35 year old (87% “great deal” or “fairly more difficult,” 60% “great deal”), 35-54 years old (92%, 62%), 55+ years old (94%, 76%); those with no more than a high school degree (89%, 59%), those with some college education (91%, 71%), and those with a bachelor’s degree (95%), (72%).
- Among white non-Hispanic respondents, age and education each strongly correlate with response, with younger and more educated respondents feeling most strongly: <35 years old (70% “great deal” or “fairly more difficult,” 30% “great deal”), 35-54 years old (49%, 23%), 55+ years old (57%, 20%); those with no more than a high school degree (54%, 15%), those with some college (46%, 22%), and those with a bachelor’s degree (70%, 33%).
- Among Latinx, the most striking difference is regional: Northeast (86% “great deal” or “fairly more difficult,” 71% “great deal”), South (74%, 35%), and West (77%, 45%).

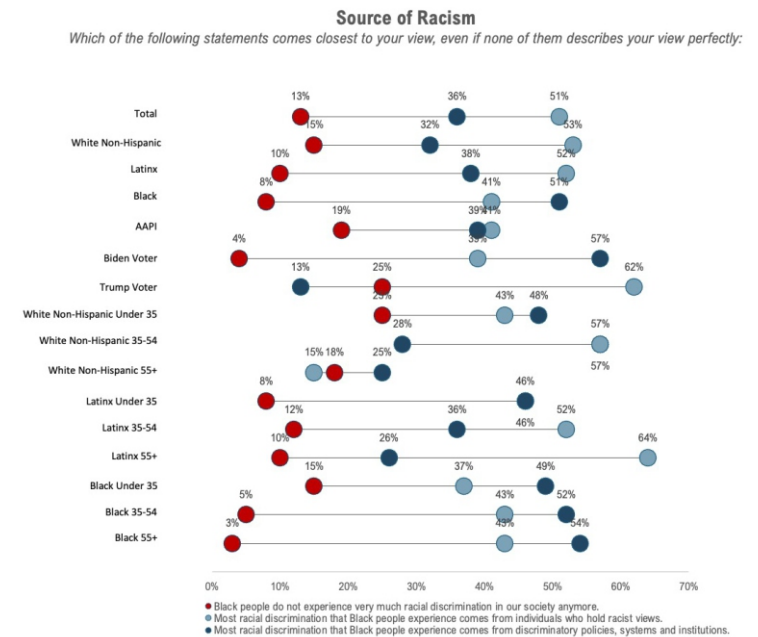
Similarly, a majority rejects the statement, “Many White people are unable to find a job because employers are hiring minorities instead”: just 21% say that is “extremely” or “very likely” while 57% say that is “slightly” or “not at all likely,” with general consistency across racial groups.

And yet, a majority agrees (57% agree, 30% strongly agree) with the statement, “Reverse racism, or racism toward White people, is real.” White non-Hispanic respondents are most likely to agree (67% agree, 37% strongly agree), followed by Latinx (46%, 21%), Black (39%, 17%) and AAPI (28%, 20%) respondents.

It’s horrible across both sides and politics and the general media are making it worse on both sides. Everyone is awful to each other and it’s not just anti-black there are plenty who are racist against whites, Mexicans, or any other race. The idea that there is no way to be racist to a white person has been completely proven wrong at this point. The overall social climate simply sucks. (White non-Hispanic woman, 27 years old)

On all of these measures, Biden and Trump voters are in dramatically different places. Biden voters overwhelmingly agree it is harder to be Black in America (90%), reject that White people are unable to find a job because employers are hiring minorities instead (75%) and just 36% think reverse racism is real. In contrast, only 39% of Trump voters believe it is harder to be Black in America, a majority (59%) say it is likely that White people are unable to find a job because employers are hiring minorities instead, and fully 83% believe that reverse racism is real.

Perhaps the most fundamental challenge we as a society face when it comes to race and racism, is the disconnect in understanding the basis of racism in America. Americans overwhelmingly agree that racial discrimination exists, but disagree on the source of that discrimination. More point to individual racism than structural racism, and that gets in the way of supporting a role for the government in addressing racial disparities. If individuals are to blame for racism, then it is a non sequitur to ask the government to solve it. Of course, it is possible to remind people of the ways in which government intervenes in individual discriminatory behavior and thereby make a case for government accountability. At the present time, however, it is clear from these results that those who blame individuals for racism are also holding individuals responsible for change.



Americans believe racism is real but point to interpersonal dynamics over systemic ones. Only 13% overall say, “Black people do not experience very much racial discrimination in our society anymore.” Half (51%) believe, “Most racial discrimination that Black people experience comes from individuals who hold racist views.” And 36% believe, “Most racial discrimination that Black people experience comes from discriminatory policies, systems and institutions.”

Across subgroups, substantial percentages point to individual racism as key. However, like so many other attitudes, this response differs along racial lines. For most white non-Hispanic and Latinx respondents, racism is personal (53% and 52% respectively), for most Black respondents racism is structural (51%), and AAPI respondents are mixed with 41% pointing to individual racism, 39% pointing to systemic racism and 19% rejecting that there is much anti-Black discrimination today.

Response correlates with age, with younger people more likely to point to systems and older people more likely to point to individual behavior. Correlation with age is particularly strong for white non-Hispanic and Latinx respondents, though the pattern exists with Black respondents as well.

A majority of Biden voters point to systemic factors (57%), though 39% point to individual factors. Trump voters point to individual racism (62%) or reject that Black people experience much discrimination today (25%).

Finally, there is some regional variation, with a majority of those who live in the Northeast pointing to systemic factors (53%) while a majority in the Midwest point to individual factors (57%). Most Southerners also point to individual factors (50%), though a significant percentage reject that Black people experience much discrimination (19%).

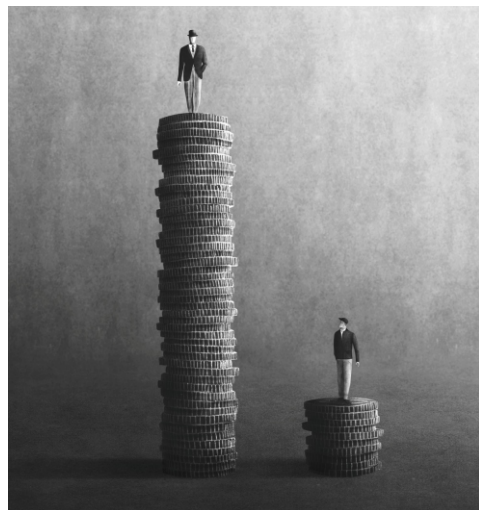


Image Credit: Montes-Bradley Photography

This “individual perspective” on discrimination is further reinforced by people’s view on who is responsible for addressing racism: “Individuals” is the top response, all levels of government combined is a distant second, though federal is the level of government chosen by most.

(See tables on next two pages)

Looking just at participants’ first response in who is most responsible for addressing racism in society, “individuals” is the top response for most, but especially for white non-Hispanic and Latinx respondents for whom racism is personal, not structural. At the same time, a review of people’s combined first and second responses shows an opening for a role for government.

Furthermore, people reject the idea that “Racism is going away naturally over time” (52% disagree). Majorities of every group except AAPI reject that idea, again suggesting an opening for a conversation about the choices we make together through government to address racial disparities.

What group, if any, do you think is the most responsible for addressing racism in society? (First Response)

	Total	White Non-Hispanic	Black	Latinx	API
Individuals	39%	44%	26%	37%	29%
Federal Government	20%	17%	29%	19%	28%
Schools and Universities	4%	4%	3%	4%	4%
State Governments	6%	6%	7%	9%	7%
Local Governments	6%	6%	7%	4%	11%
Businesses	2%	1%	3%	3%	1%
Places of Worship and Other Religious Organizations	6%	6%	6%	6%	3%
Civic, Charitable and Other Non-profit Organizations	3%	3%	4%	4%	1%
Another Group	5%	6%	3%	2%	6%
None of These	9%	8%	11%	13%	10%

What group, if any, do you think is the most responsible for addressing racism in society? (Top Two Responses)

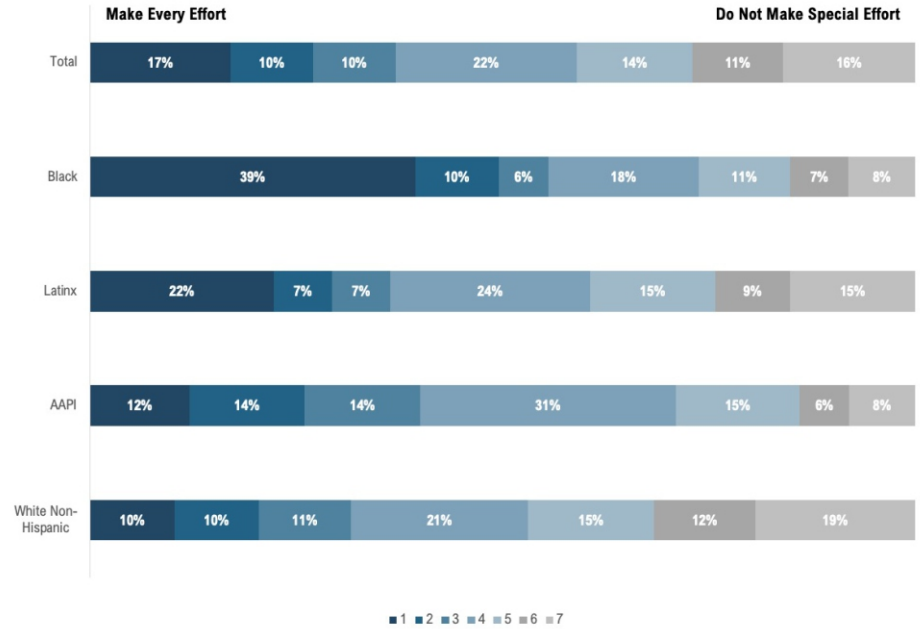
	Total	White Non-Hispanic	Black	Latinx	API
Individuals	52%	58%	37%	49%	39%
Federal Government	33%	29%	46%	30%	49%
Schools and Universities	13%	12%	8%	15%	18%
State Governments	20%	16%	30%	25%	29%
Local Governments	16%	16%	18%	17%	13%
Businesses	8%	7%	9%	10%	3%
Places of Worship and Other Religious Organizations	16%	19%	11%	10%	10%
Civic, Charitable and Other Non-profit Organizations	12%	14%	10%	11%	6%
Another Group	5%	6%	5%	3%	6%
None of These	9%	8%	11%	13%	10%

Due in part to the assessment that discrimination is individual, not structural or systemic, people are mixed in how much government *should* do to improve conditions for Black people. If individuals are to blame, then it makes sense that people find it hard to see how the government could make a difference.

On a 7-point scale that ranges from “Some people feel that the government should make every effort to improve the social and economic condition of Black people” to “Others feel that the government should not make any special effort to help Black people because they should help themselves” most Americans are mixed. Black respondents firmly believe the government should make every effort, while other racial groups aren't so sure: Black (50% top two box “government should make every effort to improve the social and economic condition of Black people,” 15% top two box “government should not make any special effort to help Black people because they should help themselves” for a mean response of 3.0), followed by AAPI (25%, 14%, 3.7), Latinx (29%, 24%, 3.9) and white non-Hispanic (21%, 32%, 4.3) respondents.

Government Action for the Condition of Black People

Some people feel that the government should make every effort to improve the social and economic condition of Black people (1). Others feel that the government should not make any special effort to help Black people (7).



Pluralities believe diversity makes the nation better.

Nearly half (48%) believe that “having an increasing number of people of many different races, ethnic groups and nationalities in the United States makes this country a better place to live” while just 16% say it makes it “a worse place to live” and 36% say it “doesn't make much difference either way.”

This response is far lower than Pew trends which was as high as 58% “better place to live” as recently as 2018, and the percentage of Americans saying “a worse place to live” is far higher than Pew trends going back to 2015.

While there are differences by race, education seems to matter more in people's response to this question. For example, most racial groups respond similarly, except for AAPI respondents (60% say diversity makes the country “a better place to live”), followed by Black (53%), Latinx (47%), and white non-Hispanic (46%) respondents. Instead, education drives response: just 35% of those with no more than a high school education say “better” while response is higher among those with some college education (50%) and those with a bachelor's degree (63%).

College educated women are particularly likely to say “better” (69%). This correlation with education is particularly strong among white non-Hispanic and Black respondents. Among Latinx respondents, it is just those with a bachelor's degree who stand out (60% “better”).

Among Latinx respondents, Latinos are far more likely to say “better” (56%) than Latinas (39%), who are more likely to say it doesn't make much difference (44%).

Finally, far more Biden voters say “better” (68%) than “worse” (7%), while the response is divided among Trump voters (31% “better,” 30% “worse”).

Americans across race readily agree with sentiments that recognize unfairness, but not necessarily unfairness grounded in race. Most see “colorblind” as the goal, as opposed to targeted solutions.

Most Americans agree on ideas such as helping the poor no matter their race, that not every community is treated equally, and that the government should be “colorblind.” Across race, they also reject the notion that racism is going away naturally over time.

Majorities across race also agree that government should take steps to reduce inequalities between races—higher agreement than for addressing income inequality and much higher agreement than government having programs to make up for the racial discrimination of the past, which garners strong enthusiasm from Black respondents and a majority of Latinx respondents.

On many other measures, as indicated on the chart, Black respondents and white non-Hispanic respondents are VERY far apart, with Latinx typically landing somewhere in between the two groups. The widest differences are in response to the statements that are most explicit about race, such as:

- Over the past few years, Black people have gotten less than they deserve. (69% of Black respondents agree compared to just 44% of Latinx respondents and 33% of white non-Hispanic respondents)
- The government should have programs that help make up for the racial discrimination of the past. (69%, 52%, 35%)
- Generations of slavery and discrimination have created conditions that make it difficult for Black people to work their way out of the lower class. (69%, 45%, 38%)
- Reverse racism, or racism toward White people, is real. (39%, 45%, 67%)

Note that AAPI respondents consistently respond “neither agree nor disagree” to all of these statements, therefore the percentage of AAPI who agree is consistently lower. Looking at net responses instead suggests their views more closely align with Latinx respondents than the other two racial categories.

Attitudinal Statements
(% Strongly + Somewhat Agree)
Agree/Disagree with the following statement:



Profiles of the Typology Groups

Racial attitudes remain a key organizing principle in American politics; some argue it is *the* key organizing principle. Partisan allegiances, ideological orientation, and policy preferences are all indubitably linked to individuals' beliefs concerning the root causes of racial inequality, in particular the social and economic disparities that plague African Americans.

To this end, the Topos Partnership, in collaboration with the Othering and Belonging Institute, has devised a typology that is designed to provide a roadmap for understanding how racial attitudes reshuffle the landscape of preferences on government action. We accomplish this by assessing individuals' fundamental views on race and racial inequality, their beliefs about social (i.e., government) and individual responsibility for addressing said inequality, and separately their broader beliefs about and preferences for government intervention. This typology organizes the American public in accordance with preferences toward scaling government efforts to address racial inequality, and avoids classifying Americans based on support or opposition to specific policy proposals.

The value of this type of analysis is that it brings into focus the latent or hidden attitudes that direct understanding and action. With this knowledge, communicators and advocates can more effectively connect with base and persuadable groups.

This typology presents a constellation of clusters that fall within three major domains. First of these is the *Advocate* domain, which assembles individuals who believe the government should make special efforts to address social and economic racial inequality. Next is the *Movables* domain, which largely consists of ambivalent individuals who appear largely conflicted on what the government could or should do. Finally, we present the *Objector* domain, which gathers together individuals who

articulate fairly clear opposition to seeing the government making special efforts to address social and economic racial inequality, but for different reasons.

- **Pragmatic Advocates**
- **Idealistic Advocates**
- **Muddled Movables**
- **Conflicted**
- **Hardline Objectors**

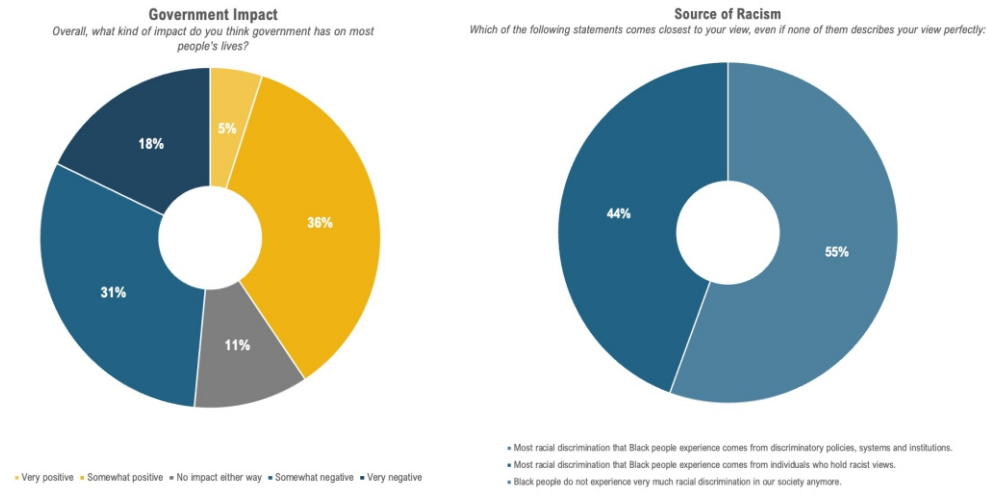
As detailed above, Pragmatic Advocates and Idealistic Advocates broadly support having the government do more to address racial inequality. Between the groups, Pragmatic Advocates diverge from Idealistic Advocates on questions about structural vs. interpersonal racism, Pragmatic Advocates are more likely to attribute racial inequality to primarily structural causes, but to a lesser degree than Idealistic Advocates. The groups also diverge on whether increasing racial diversity is good for the country. Importantly, they diverge in their sense that the government listens to people like them, and has a positive impact on people's lives.

Muddled Movables diverge from the "Objectors" in their diagnosis of the causes behind racial inequality. The Objectors largely agree that "if Black people would only try harder they could be just as well off as White people," and that "Irish, Italian, Jewish and many other minorities overcame prejudice and worked their way up," and that "Black people should do the same without any special favors." Very few Muddled Movables agree with these positions.



Pragmatic Advocates (8% of Americans)

Pragmatic Advocates strongly want the government to do more to address racial inequality despite being skeptical that government has a positive impact on people's lives along with a generally low sense of political efficacy.



Overview

Pragmatic Advocates are a generally pro-government group that believes the government should take great care to address racial inequality.

While their views of government's impact on people's lives skew negative (48% vs. 41% positive), a vast majority would prefer government do more to solve people's problems (92%, including 78% who feel this way "strongly") rather than do less (8%). Still, these individuals tend to see themselves as having less of a say in government (61%).

This class largely believes that it is harder to be Black in America than to be white in America (97%) and are the strongest believers that the government should give significant effort toward improving the social and economic condition of Black people (76% top two box, including 59% who say the government should make "every effort" top box).

Members of this class are more likely to say racial discrimination comes from policies and institutions (55%) rather than individuals (44%) and of a range of actors, more believe racism is a problem for the federal government to solve (38%) than an issue for individuals (33%). On this question, state (6%) and local (3%) governments have less salience among this group compared to the other classes.

Largely Black, Latinx, and female, Pragmatic Advocates are the only majority-minority group within the typology.

Government Action for the Condition of Black People

Some people feel that the government should make every effort to improve the social and economic condition of Black people (1). Others feel that the government should not make any special effort to help Black people (7).



High Alignment

GOVERNMENT INTERVENTION

- Pragmatic Advocates overwhelmingly agree that the government should have programs that make up for past racial discrimination (81%).
- 77% say the government should make every effort to improve the social and economic condition of Black people, an average of 1.9 on a 7 point scale, the highest of any group.

RACIAL RESENTMENT

- The vast majority agree on the pervasiveness of discrimination as an obstacle for Black people (90% agree that, “Generations of slavery and discrimination have created conditions that make it difficult for Black people to work their way out of the lower class”).
- Further, there is overwhelming disagreement with statements that question the work ethic of Black people (i.e., 85% disagree with the statement that, “It’s really a matter of some people not trying hard enough; if Black people would only try harder, they could be just as well off as White people”).

POLITICAL EFFICACY

- Only a quarter feel they have much say in government (24%), while most (60%) feel that they do not have much of a say.

Mixed Sentiments

SYSTEMIC VS INDIVIDUAL RACISM

- Pragmatic Advocates are more likely to believe that racial discrimination stems mostly from discriminatory policies, systems, and institutions (55%) rather than individuals who hold racist views (45%).

DIVERSITY

- Most (59%) say the increasing racial diversity in the United States makes the country a better place to live, but 37% say it makes no difference either way.

Demographics

- The smallest typology group:** This class makes up just 8% of the population.
 - The only cluster with a majority of people of color:** 48% Black, 25% white non-Hispanic, 23% Latinx, 2% AAPI, and 2% Native American.
 - Predominantly female:** Unlike the other typology classes, each of which possesses a nearly even gender split, the Pragmatic Advocates cluster is largely composed of women (69%) vs. men (31%).
 - Generationally diverse:** 27% of the class is aged 34 or younger. More than half are aged 45 or older (54%), including a quarter who are aged 65 and older (25%).
 - Educationally diverse:** Americans who report having at most a high school education make up the largest portion of the class (46%), followed by those who report having had some college (34%), and then those with a bachelor’s degree (20%).
 - Regionally diverse:** A plurality hail from the American South (43%), with similar shares hailing respectively from the Northeast (20%), Midwest (18%) and Western United States (19%).
- We did it Joe:** Pragmatic Advocates keyed Joe Biden’s 2020 election victory, with 94% having supported the now-sitting President in his contest against Donald Trump (2%).

Strategic Implications

This group is already convinced that structural racism is a problem that needs government intervention. However, they are skeptical that the government will do the right thing, in part because they believe that people like them have little say. The strategic goal to engage this group is to show examples of how government action makes a tangible difference in people’s lives and to be explicit about expectations for government when it comes to racial discrimination.

A message about the difference community investment makes causes Pragmatic Advocates to shift strongly toward saying the government should do more (+24 points) and increases their belief that people working together can make a difference (+10 points). A message that is crystal clear about the concrete expectations we should have for government when it comes to racial discrimination also causes Pragmatic Advocates to shift strongly toward wanting government to do more (+11 points) and increases support for government action on behalf of Black people (+7 points).

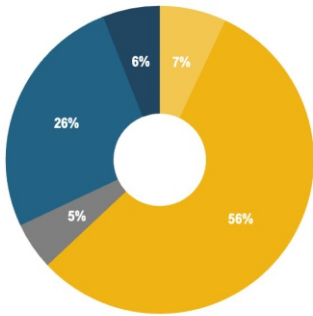


Idealistic Advocates (18% of Americans)

Idealistic advocates want the government to do more to address racial inequality, in accordance with their widely-held belief that racial discrimination stems mostly from discriminatory policies, systems, and institutions.

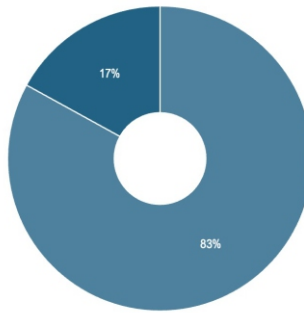


Government Impact
Overall, what kind of impact do you think government has on most people's lives?



Very positive Somewhat positive No impact either way Somewhat negative Very negative

Source of Racism
Which of the following statements comes closest to your view, even if none of them describes your view perfectly:



• Most racial discrimination that Black people experience comes from discriminatory policies, systems and institutions.
 • Most racial discrimination that Black people experience comes from individuals who hold racist views.
 • Black people do not experience very much racial discrimination in our society anymore.

Overview

Idealistic Advocates are a pro-government group with a positive view of a diversifying nation (85% believe that increasing racial diversity is making America a better place to live), and a clear belief that the government should do more to address racial inequality.

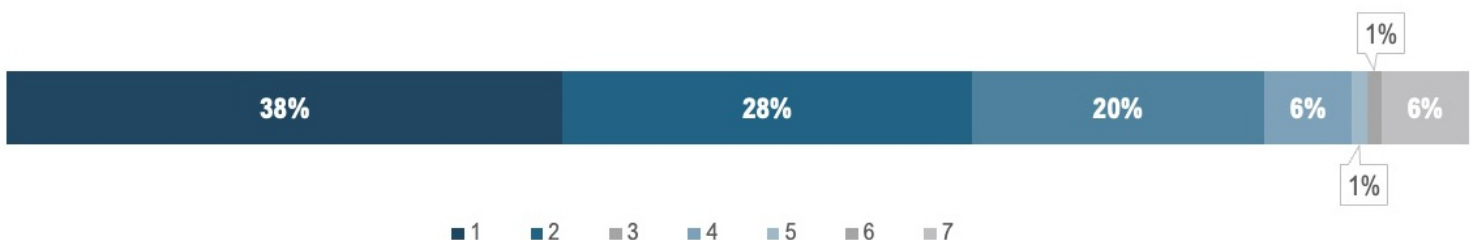
Government is commonly viewed as having a positive impact on people's lives (63%), 92% say "government should do more to solve problems," including 74% who feel "strongly" about that. In addition, Idealistic Advocates possess a higher sense of political efficacy than any other typology group; while 45% agree with the statement "people like me do not have any say in what the government does," nearly as many (43%) disagree.

These individuals believe racism is a rampant problem in America, evidenced by their universal belief that it is harder to be Black in America than to be White in America (100%). They view racial discrimination as largely systemic and structural (83%) rather than interpersonal (17%). Thus, group members largely believe the government should invest significant effort toward improving the social and economic condition of Black people (66% top two box, including 38% who say the government should make "every effort").

Demographically, this group is highly educated (67% have earned a bachelor's degree or higher) and predominantly white non-Hispanic (69%).

Government Action for the Condition of Black People

Some people feel that the government should make every effort to improve the social and economic condition of Black people (1). Others feel that the government should not make any special effort to help Black people (7)



High Alignment



HAVING GOVERNMENT

PROGRAMS THAT MAKE UP

FOR PAST RACIAL

DISCRIMINATION

- Idealistic Advocates overwhelmingly agree that the government should have programs that make up for past racial discrimination (87%).



RACIAL RESENTMENT

- Idealistic Advocates overwhelmingly believe that racial discrimination stems mostly from discriminatory policies, systems, and institutions (83%) rather than individuals who hold racist views (17%).

Mixed Sentiments



POLITICAL EFFICACY

- While much more likely than other groups to feel that they have real say in their government (45%), nearly as many feel they do not have much say in government (43%).



DETERMINANTS OF SUCCESS

- Idealistic Advocates split on a statement pair contrasting the argument that “success in life is determined by forces outside of most people's control” (48%), with the argument that “everyone has it in their own power to succeed” (52%); each of the other typology groups overwhelmingly selected the latter statement.

Demographics

- **The second-smallest typology group:** But, accounting for 18% of the U.S. population, this class is more than double the size of the near peer Pragmatic Advocate cluster.

- **Predominantly white:** Non-Hispanic whites account for 69% of the cluster, followed by Black (11%), Latinx (9%), AAPI (8%), and Native American/Alaskan Native (2%) people.
- **Gender balanced:** As is the case with most clusters discussed here, the group is split half and half between women (51%) and men (49%).
- **The youngest typology class:** More than a third of Idealistic Advocates are between 18 and 34 years-old (39%). One third are aged 35 to 54 years-old, 11% between 55 and 64, and 18% aged 65 or older.
- **Highly educated:** By a large margin, this class is the most highly educated group in the typology (67% have earned a bachelor's degree or higher; 31% have received a master's degree or higher).
- **Not so Southern:** While Southerners make up a plurality in each of the other clusters, only 23% of Idealistic Advocates come from the South. Instead, the class is mostly concentrated in the Northeast (28%) and West (27%), with 21% hailing from the Midwest.
- **All Biden:** President Biden captured 99 percent of the Idealistic Advocates' vote in 2020.

shift strongly toward wanting government to do more (+21 points) and increases support for government action on behalf of Black people (+6 points). Problematically, such a strong focus on the government's role decreases their sense that people can make a difference (-15 points). A message that focuses on the challenges that different segments face, featuring challenges and solutions for Black Americans, boosts this group's desire for more government action (+12 points).

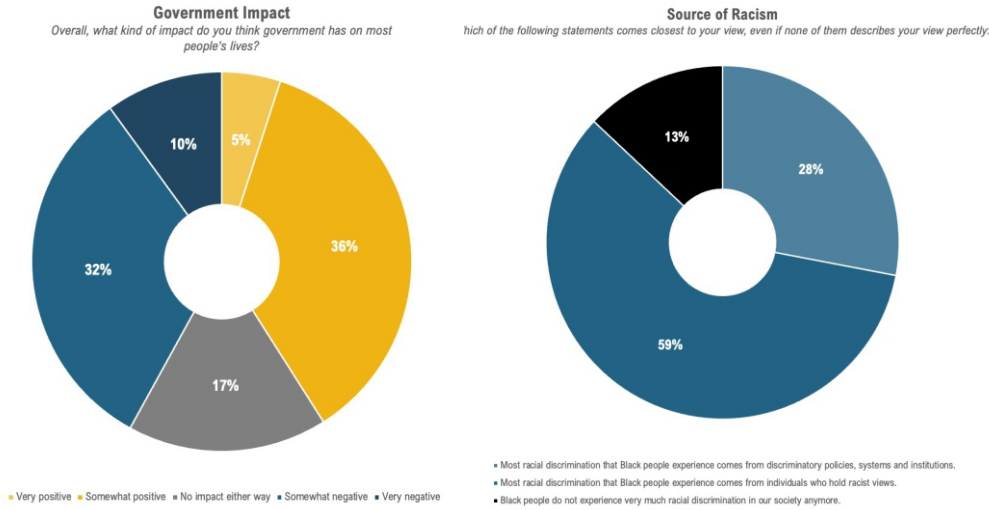
Strategic Implications

This group is deeply convinced that increased government efforts are a necessary next step to address the racial inequality that stems from what they see as pervasive structural racism. It is a problem that needs government intervention. However, this predominantly non-Hispanic white and highly educated group tends toward an idealism that many people of color do not seem to share. Also, this group hesitates a bit more than the Pragmatic Advocates when asked whether the government should “make every effort” to address racial inequality. The strategic goal for engaging this group could be ensuring that individuals do the work of becoming better allies.

Idealistic Advocates want to hear a message about race. A message about the concrete expectations we should have for government when it comes to racial discrimination causes Idealistic Advocates to

Muddled Movable (28% of Americans)

Muddled Movable are hesitant on the question of whether the government should make special efforts to address racial inequality, but are more persuadable than other clusters.



Overview

The Muddled Movable hold generally favorable views about government. Members are split on whether the government has a positive or negative impact on people's lives (41% positive vs. 42% negative) though most believe the government should do more to solve problems (63%). They are also mixed on political efficacy; nearly as many agree with the statement that "people like me do not have much say in what the government does (34%) as there are people who disagree (35%)".

These individuals largely believe that racism is a problem in today's society, evidenced by the 70% who agree that it is harder to be Black in America than to be White in America.

They see racial discrimination as largely interpersonal (59%) than systemic and structural (28%). Only 20% say government should have programs that help make up for racial discrimination of the past, and only 15% say the government should invest significant effort into improving social and economic conditions for Black people. Members of this class are slightly more likely to say racism is a problem for individuals (38%) than they are to say it is an issue to be solved by the government (31%, including 15% who say federal government, 8% state government, and 8% local government).

This group is generationally balanced and evenly divided between non-Hispanic white people and People of Color.

Government Action for the Condition of Black People

Some people feel that the government should make every effort to improve the social and economic condition of Black people (1). Others feel that the government should not make any special effort to help Black people (7).



■ 1 ■ 2 ■ 3 ■ 4 ■ 5 ■ 6 ■ 7

High Alignment

AUTHORITARIANISM

- Only 39% of Muddled Movables agree with the statement that, “What our country really needs is a strong, determined leader who will crush evil and take us back to our true path.”

Mixed Sentiments

HAVING GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS THAT MAKE UP FOR PAST RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

- The majority (51%) neither agrees nor disagrees that government should have programs that make up for past racial discrimination; just 20% agree that government should have such programs, while 29% disagree.

INDIVIDUAL VS. SYSTEMIC RACISM

- Muddled Movables lean toward believing that racial discrimination stems mostly from individuals who hold racist views (59%), rather than from discriminatory policies, systems, and institutions (28%).

POLITICAL EFFICACY

- Only 21% feel they have much say in government; a plurality (44%) feel that they do not have much say in government.

Demographics

- The largest typology class:** Overall, 28% of Americans can be classified as Muddled Movable.
- Racially diverse:** Half non-Hispanic white (49%), 25% Latinx, 14% Black, and 10% AAPI respondents.
- Gender balanced:** As is the case with most

clusters discussed here, the group is split half and half between men (51%) and women (49%).

- Generationally balanced:** This group is an even balance of younger groups (14% aged 18-24 years old and 15% aged 25-34 years old), middle aged Americans (16% aged 35-44 years old and 17% aged 45-55 years old), and golden aged groups (20% aged 55-64 years old, and 18% aged 65 years and older).
- Educationally diverse:** Overall, 37% indicate having completed high school as their highest level of education. Fewer than one third possess a bachelor's degree (18%) or higher (11%). Sixteen percent indicate having some college education, with another 9% having completed an Associate degree.
- Southern and Western:** Muddled Movables are most concentrated in the Southern (41%) and Western States (25%), with 17% hailing from the Northeast, and 16% from the Midwest.
- Majority Biden:** In the 2020 election, this group favored Joe Biden over Donald Trump, 52% to 41%.

A message that focuses on the challenges that different segments face, featuring challenges and solutions for Black Americans, boosts this group's desire for more government action generally (+9 points), but makes little difference in their support for government action on behalf of Black people.



Strategic Implications

On the one hand, few members of this group believe the government should make special effort to address racial inequality, or even that the government should have programs focused on righting the wrongs of past racial discrimination. On the other hand, these individuals appear especially persuadable on this issue.

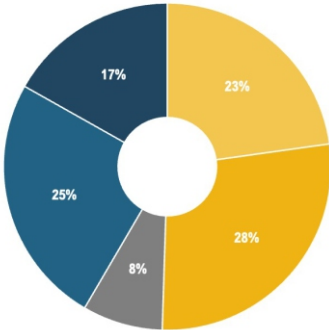
Muddled Movables are most moved by a message about the difference community investment makes. Exposure to such a message causes this group to shift strongly toward saying the government should do more (+8 points), increases their belief that people working together can make a difference (+14 points), and increases support for government action on behalf of Black people (+11 points). A message about the concrete expectations we should have for government when it comes to racial discrimination also increases support for government action on behalf of Black people (+10 points), but does not influence other measures.

Conflicted (20% of Americans)

The Conflicted are rugged individualists who largely endorse a hard work, personal responsibility ethos despite viewing American society as being plagued by pervasive race-based discrimination.

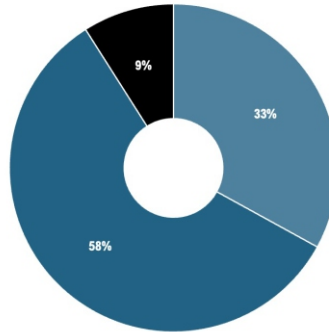


Government Impact
Overall, what kind of impact do you think government has on most people's lives?



Very positive Somewhat positive No impact either way Somewhat negative Very negative

Source of Racism
Which of the following statements comes closest to your view, even if none of them describes your view perfectly?



- Most racial discrimination that Black people experience comes from discriminatory policies, systems and institutions.
- Most racial discrimination that Black people experience comes from individuals who hold racist views.
- Black people do not experience very much racial discrimination in our society anymore.

Overview

The Conflicted are generally pro-government, but have conflicting views on government's role in addressing racial discrimination.

Members of this group tend to believe that the government has a positive impact on people's lives (51%, including 23% who say "very positive") and overwhelmingly believe that the government should do more to solve people's problems (75%, including 69% who feel this way "strongly"). Despite these positive sentiments, individuals in this class are very likely to agree that they don't have much say in what the government does (69%).

This class overwhelmingly believes that it is harder to be Black in America than to be White in America (77%), but just 20% say the government should make a special effort to improve social and economic conditions for Black people, with slightly more (26%) saying the government should not make such special efforts. At the same time, however, 71% agree that the government should have programs that help make up for racial discrimination of the past. The Conflicted are a majority White group (54% non-Hispanic White), with most individuals aged between 18 and 44 years old.

Government Action for the Condition of Black People

Some people feel that the government should make every effort to improve the social and economic condition of Black people (1). Others feel that the government should not make any special effort to help Black people (7).



1 2 3 4 5 6 7

High Alignment



HAVING GOVERNMENT

PROGRAMS THAT MAKE UP

FOR PAST RACIAL

DISCRIMINATION

- Despite strongly embracing personal responsibility as a prescription for overcoming racial discrimination, class members do largely agree that the government should have programs that make up for past racial discrimination (71%).



OPENNESS TO AUTHORITARIANISM

- Nine in ten among the Conflicted agree with the statement that, “what our country really needs is a strong, determined leader who will crush evil and take us back to our true path,” including 69% who agree strongly.



POLITICAL EFFICACY

- Only 14% feel they have much say in government, while most (69%) feel that they do not have much of a say.

Mixed Sentiments



INDIVIDUAL VS. SYSTEMIC RACISM

- The Conflicted lean toward believing that racial discrimination stems mostly from individuals who hold racist views (58%), rather than from discriminatory policies, systems, and institutions (33%).



RACIAL RESENTMENT

- A compelling cleavage emerges between class members who are white vs. members of color. Responses to questions that comprise the symbolic racism or racial resentment scale reveal that people of color within this group demonstrate a pattern of “holding both stories” with respect to racial

discrimination. That is, they are just as likely to attribute racial inequality to obstacles facing Black people (i.e., “over the past few years, Black people have gotten less than they deserve”), as they are to attribute to problems of work ethic (i.e., “It’s really a matter of some people not trying hard enough; if Black people would only try harder they could be just as well off as White people.”)

Demographics

- One fifth of Americans:** Overall, 20% of Americans are classified as Conflicted.
- Racially diverse:** Majority non-Hispanic white (54%), 25% Latinx, 16% Black, and 4% AAPI respondents.
- Gender balanced:** As is the case with most clusters discussed here, the group is split half and half between women (52%) and men (48%).
- The second youngest class:** 37% of this class is aged 34 years old or younger.
- The least college-educated typology group:** For most in the class, their highest level of education is a high school diploma (62%), followed by some college or Associate degree (21%). Only 17% have a four-year college degree or more.
- Least in the Northeast:** Just 13% hail from the Northeast. A plurality hail from the South (41%), with 24% from the Midwest, and 22% from the West.
- Lean Trump, but with a catch:** Overall, the class slightly favored Donald Trump over Joe Biden in the 2020 election, 51% to 48%. However, people of color from this cluster were as likely to favor Joe Biden over Trump (62% to 37%), as Whites were likely to favor Trump over Biden (65% to 34%).

Strategic Implications

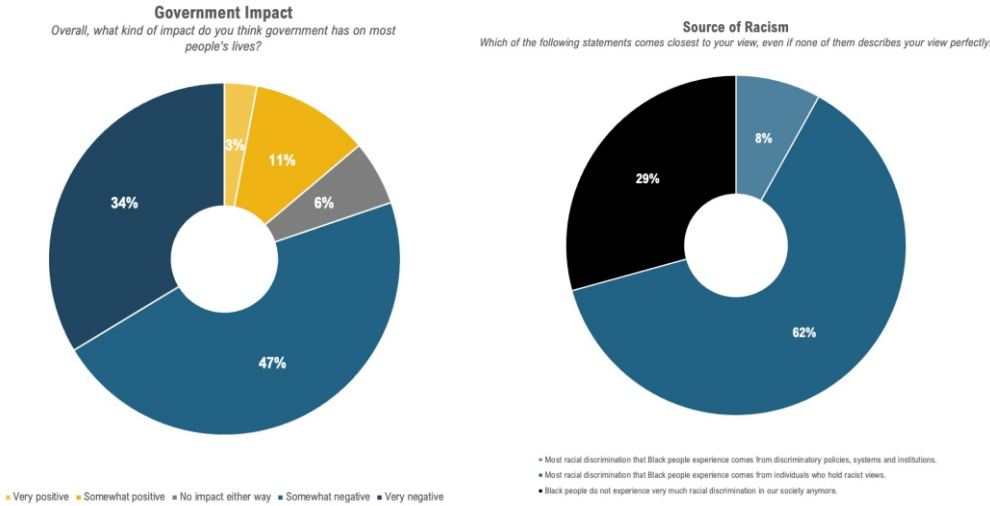
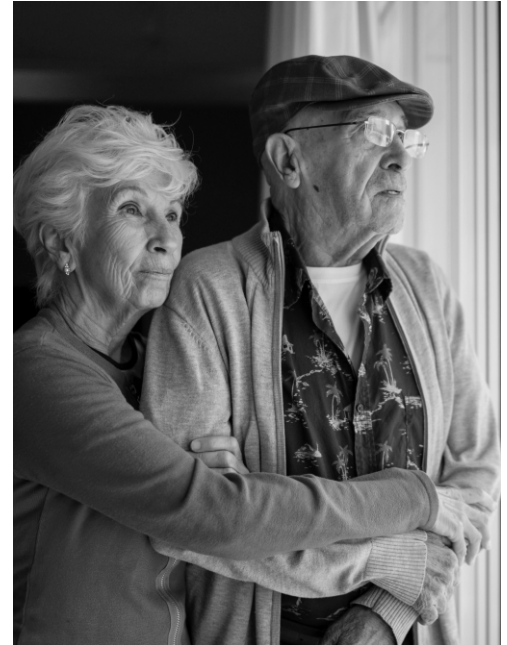
This group is sensitive to the issue of racial discrimination and they do tend to express support for seeing some efforts by government to right past wrongs. The biggest challenge with this group is their steadfast allegiance to the creed of personal responsibility. The strategic goal for engaging this group lies in making the case that government action is necessary and can make a difference in eliminating the barriers that have kept many – and especially Black people – from getting what they deserve.

Due to their adherence to rugged individualism, the Conflicted need a crystal clear message about the concrete expectations we should have for government when it comes to racial discrimination. This is the only message of the three tested messages that results in gains instead of losses with this group. It causes the Conflicted to shift toward wanting the government to do more (+4 points) and maintains support for government action on behalf of Black people (+1 point). It also increases their sense that people can make a difference (+8 points).



Hardline Objectors (26% of Americans)

Hardline Objectors are staunchly opposed to increasing government's role in any capacity under any pretenses while broadly rejecting notions suggesting Black people face greater discrimination than do white people.



Overview

Hardline Objectors are deeply cynical about government, and largely believe that the government does more harm than good.

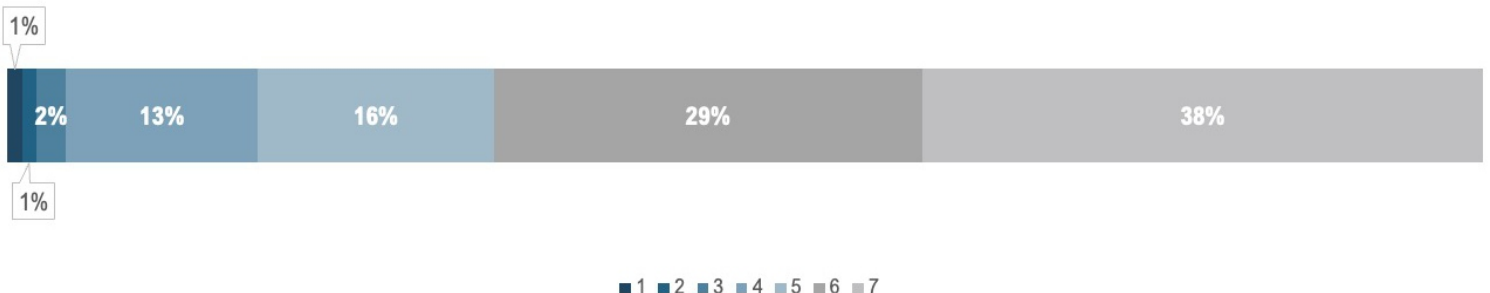
Members of this group overwhelmingly believe that government has a negative impact on people's lives (80%, including 34% who say "very negative"), and feel strongly that government is doing too many things better left to businesses and individuals (81%, including 71% who "strongly agree" with this sentiment). Accordingly, individuals in this class are very likely to agree that they don't have much say in what the government does (76%).

Foreshadowing their views on the government's role addressing racial inequality, members in this group tend to believe that it is no more difficult to be Black in America than to be White in America (60%). Accordingly, 67% believe the government should make no special efforts to improve social and economic conditions for Black people, and 87% disagree with the statement that "the government should have programs that help make up for the racial discrimination of the past". Members of this class largely believe that individuals are the key actors most responsible for addressing racism in America (52%), while very few assign responsibility to the government (15%, including 10% who say federal government).

Hardline Objectors are predominantly white non-Hispanic and the oldest of the five typology classes (more than half are aged 55 years and older).

Government Action for the Condition of Black People

Some people feel that the government should make every effort to improve the social and economic condition of Black people (1). Others feel that the government should not make any special effort to help Black people (7).



High Alignment

HAVING GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS THAT MAKE UP FOR PAST RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

- There is nearly universal agreement that government should not have programs that make up for past racial discrimination (87%).

INDIVIDUAL VS. SYSTEMIC RACISM

- Hardline Objectors are much more likely to believe that racial discrimination stems mostly from individuals' racist views (62%) rather than from policies and institutions(8%); 29% say Black people no longer face much discrimination.

OPENNESS TO AUTHORITARIANISM

- Eight in ten Hardline Objectors agree with the statement that, "What our country really needs is a strong, determined leader who will crush evil and take us back to our true path," including 55% who agree strongly.

GOVERNMENT'S EFFECT ON DIFFERENT RACIAL GROUPS

- The vast majority (75%) say government actions are only sometimes or rarely beneficial for white people. Meanwhile, seven in ten say that government actions are usually or often beneficial to immigrants. Somewhat surprisingly, an even larger majority say government actions are only sometimes or rarely beneficial for Asian American people (79%), than say the same with respect to white people (75%).

Mixed Sentiments

RACIAL EQUITY

- There is little disagreement among Hardline Objectors as a group. There is, however, less alignment in responses to the prompt, "I am optimistic that we can make things more equal between races"; 49% agree, 12% disagree, and 39% selected a neutral response.

Demographics

- The second-largest typology class:** Overall, 26% of Americans cluster into the Hardline Objectors group.
- The Whitest typology class:** This cluster is 87% white non-Hispanic, 12% Latinx, 4% AAPI, and 1% Black and Native American/Alaskan Native people respectively.
- Gender balanced:** As is the case with most clusters discussed here, the group is split half and half between men (53%) and women (47%).
- The oldest class:** About half are aged 55 years and older (50%), including 28% aged 65 years and older. Another 21% are aged 45 to 54 years old.
- Educationally balanced:** A plurality have received some college or completed an Associate degree (38%), 30% have, at-most, a high school education, while 29% are four-year college graduates or more.
- Least in the Northeast:** Only 12% of Hardline Objectors hail from the Northeastern United States. A plurality hail from the South (41%), followed by the West (25%), and Midwest (22%).
- Stump for Trump:** Hardline Objectors overwhelmingly supported Donald Trump (90%) over Joe Biden (9%) in the 2020 Presidential election.

Strategic Implications

This group is deeply opposed to a more active government, especially for the cause of attempting to fix racial inequality. These individuals are united, in part, by their high scores on the racial resentment scale as well as their openness to authoritarianism. This makes them a very difficult group to engage. At the same time, each of the three tested messages causes positive movement of some type, so there may be residual pickup among these clusters when targeting other groups.

Message Strategies

Introduction

Committed advocates across the country are working hard to address racism in order to create progress. Until we find effective ways to get through to audiences and build commitment to change, we will continue to suffer as a country from injustices and inequalities that threaten lives and livelihoods, as well as tensions and divisions that threaten our social fabric and democratic processes.

On a challenge as deeply rooted and complex as racism, multiple strategies are necessary. *Different goals require different approaches*: Defeating cynical, “dog-whistle” candidates, energizing a political base, changing the practices of doctors or teachers, promoting public investment in neglected (or actively excluded) communities, advancing a race-forward policy agenda, decreasing race-based distrust between different population groups, transforming the culture to tackle injustice—varied objectives like these cannot be met with just one or two narrative approaches. While there are commonalities and best practices, communicators in particular contexts need tailored strategies to be most powerful.

A number of researchers, scholars and practitioners around the country have done great work identifying helpful strategies for different objectives. To this body of work, we add three messaging approaches designed to encourage people to see an active role for the government in addressing the wellbeing of Black people.

This research strongly suggests that current public discourse on race would benefit from an explicit discussion of the government's role. People easily default to thinking of race and racism in individual terms, rather than influenced by systems and structures. Making government accountability a centerpiece of the conversation on racial issues, allows people to see how policies shape lives.

Defining “Message Effectiveness”

A lot of message testing relies on simple agreement or self-assessments of the convincingness of an idea – there is always, by definition, a “winner.” What these methods can't tell you is what people “hear” in the message, whether they will remember it tomorrow or in ten minutes, what actions or conclusions it leads them to, whether it shifts, in any manner, the way they previously thought about the matter, and whether they are likely to act in new ways as a result. In short, it can't tell whether any of the candidate messages has the potential to move the needle in understanding or behavior.

Topos, on the other hand, holds itself to a much higher bar. For a concept to be considered successful, it must prove sticky, durable, and transferable. People exposed to the idea must not only be able to describe it in their own words, but they also must be able to (and choose to) apply it to new contexts, and to persuade others to recognize its value as a common-sense way of seeing the issue. Finally, there should be evidence that people see in this concept implications for a new way of acting. Specifically, we ask ourselves several straightforward questions, namely, do respondents:

- Understand what a given message is trying to convey (clarity), or mishear/misinterpret the main idea?
- Retain the essential idea (stickiness), or quickly shift attention to something unrelated?
- Show an ability to pass the idea on to others (viral potential), or does the idea end with them?
- Shift their views in the right direction (perspective shift), or does their thinking stagnate or even backfire (reinforcing default and often unhelpful ideas)?

- Feel more confident in expressing their point of view (empowerment), or do they quickly fold under pressure?
- See their own role and responsibility for acting, or transfer responsibility elsewhere or even believe nothing can be done to change things?

It turns out that meeting these requirements sets a shockingly high bar. Many messages are misunderstood, backfire, are quickly forgotten or don't lead to support and action.

Phase 1: Qualitative Message Testing

The first phase of research (conducted late 2020 to early 2021, both before and after the November 2020 election) confirmed past findings about effective messaging approaches. While one hypothesis was that the events of 2020 (pandemic, response to the deaths of Black people at the hands of police, economic crash) would fundamentally change how Americans view race and the role of government, our qualitative research found that the deep, underlying issue dynamics continued to be much the same as before 2020.

Qualitative research explored how Americans respond to a set of messaging concepts related to race and policy, which in turn informed selection of the messages for the survey.

Researchers looked for evidence that messages are convincing, resonant, clear, memorable, engaging, etc., as well as more specifically that they help people appreciate the important role of government policy in promoting equity and wellbeing more broadly.

Based on these criteria, the qualitative research identified a set of ideas that people tend to respond to well to across racial/ethnic lines, including the following:

Stories of successful collective action, showing that people/communities – e.g. the people in a given Black or Latinx community – can successfully come together to insist on what their community needs. Such stories create optimism that positive change is possible, and trigger a big-picture, collective view.

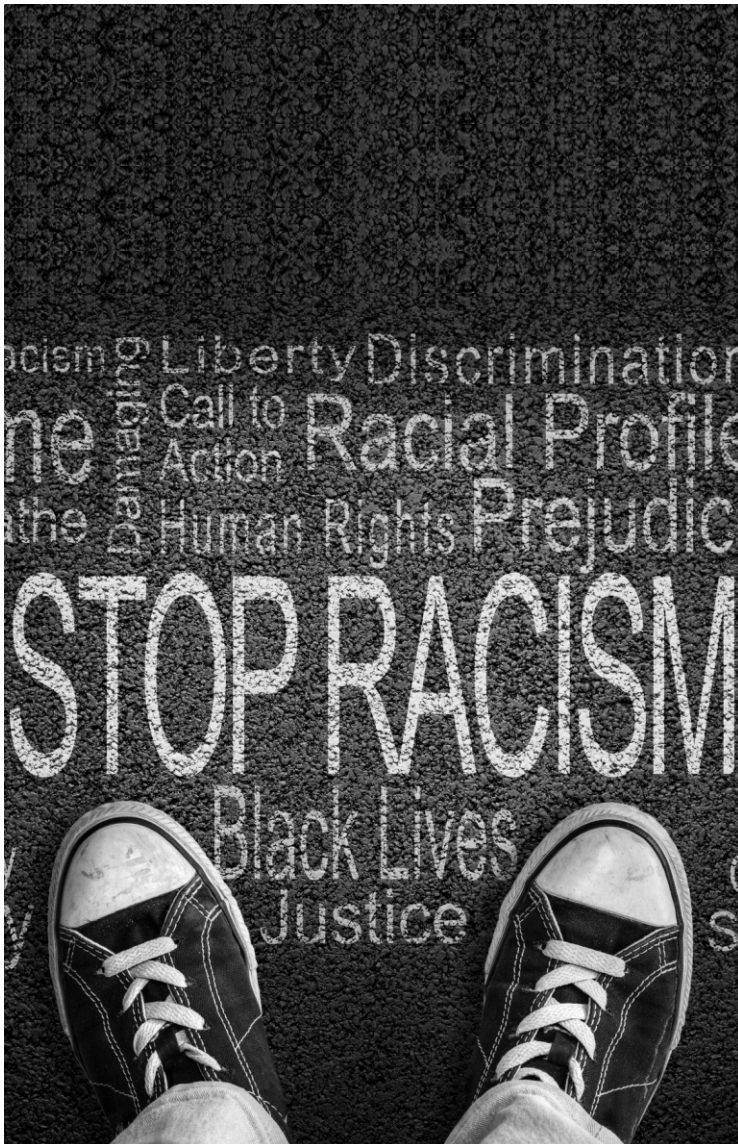
The idea that communities thrive based on basic public investments – and suffer when they do not receive them. This is an important basis for disparities among communities. Some communities – including ones defined by race – struggle because they have concretely gotten less investment in the basics.

The idea that Government has several specific, concrete roles when it comes to addressing race-related topics – preventing discrimination, making sure policies don't put people of color at a disadvantage, and correcting for the past (recent) harms of racism. When these are laid out in a clear and objective way, they can stick with people and trigger engaged and constructive discussion.

Our representatives should be more like us, which can only happen if we reduce money as a factor/barrier in the election process. By default “more like us” tends to mean fewer wealthy older white men in charge, and therefore more diversity of gender, age, class, race, etc. Many people across races agree this type of change is positive and important in principle, and are engaged by the idea of making it happen.

Wealthy people can afford to give up some tax breaks, so that we can invest more in things all communities need. This is a widely accepted perspective, and helps create the sense that improvements are possible if we handle taxation differently.

People in various demographic categories/segments (including as defined by race/ethnicity) face particular struggles the rest of us can't relate to - and there are steps we can take to reduce those challenges, which opens the door to people considering why public policy should take race/ethnicity into account.



In People's Own Words

I mean, really the government, everyone that seems to be in the government, that's over 60 or 65, really need to retire and people need to start coming in who are younger. And, well, it just doesn't make sense that there are so many people who have old ways of thinking who are still in the government. People who were fine with people being discriminated against with Jim Crow are still in government. If those people are still in government, then of course we're not going to see any changes we need to really. (Black man, moderate, 35 years old)

And there does seem like there's disparities, you know, women, other races being in the higher offices, but I also don't think people shouldn't be given those offices just because, but it does mean it's mostly owned by a bunch of frumpy older men probably don't know what, I guess. (White woman, moderate, 33 years old)

Interviewer: What about the paragraphs I read to you? Is there anything that stuck out from them?

Interviewee: The change, have I seen any change in my communities, in other communities. It may be I just need to research what change is going on... find out what the change is and perhaps be a part of that change. (Black woman, conservative, 51 years old)

We're talking about equity and everybody getting a seat at the table and all this stuff, and there are two old men up here, um, fighting on TV about who is going to be the best person for that job, you know? And it was just so kind of indicative of what we're facing, because that's how it's been. It's been old white men telling us exactly what to do and when we should do it, interpreting all these things. (White woman, conservative, 36 years old)

These effective ideas, which reframe government and our relationship to it, share some important features, including:

- References to solutions / paths forward
- Recognition that government needs to do better
- Clarification about HOW things work, causes, mechanisms, etc.
- A “big picture” view that doesn't focus on specific individuals (but can be illustrated through stories of people, communities, etc.)
- A collective perspective (acting together on behalf of many)

Findings from the qualitative round of research informed the messages tested in the survey.

Note that other concepts, such as those that make up the Race-Class Narrative or Implicit Bias, etc., were not included because a great deal is already known about them from prior research, or because they were not as closely connected to questions about government accountability for addressing race.

Phase 2: Quantitative Message Testing

Each message tested in the survey was evaluated based on two chief components: 1) open-ended questions or “TalkBack” testing in which people respond in their own words and 2) close-ended questions in which people select categories of responses.

In their Own Words, Open-Ended Questions

“TalkBack” message testing focused on asking participants (in two different questions) to repeat back immediately the information they had just read in the online survey. Respondents' own words were then coded for references to both text-specific ideas and broader themes we hope participants will notice. The objective for TalkBack testing is to determine whether the messages convey clear and sticky enough ideas for participants to repeat/express them actively following only a brief exposure, as well as which messages make it more likely people will continue to think and talk about the core ideas of the survey – race, government's role, problems and solutions. If messages don't convey clear and sticky ideas, they are unlikely to have an impact on thinking about the topic.

This exercise sets a very high bar related to focus and retention, particularly as it occurs late in a survey where many other perspectives have been mentioned and primed. When even a quarter of participants repeat a specific idea from the text, this is evidence that it has stuck particularly clearly.

By the Numbers, Close-Ended Questions

Comparing responses to key attitude questions related to government and race before and after exposure to different messages (or no message) allows us to spot shifts in thinking. Does a given message push attitudes in the right

directions? Or any direction? This is a very high bar, and any measurable shift suggests something important is occurring.

Specifically, four questions were included early in the survey and then again after message testing to determine if the message shifts people's thinking on the topic:

- 1 Which statement comes closer to your own views – even if neither is exactly right? Government should do more to solve problems OR Government is doing too many things better left to businesses and individuals
- 2 Thinking about problems facing the country, how much difference do you believe that people working together with their government can make in solving the problems you see? (a great deal of difference, a lot of difference, some difference, a little difference, no difference at all)
- 3 Some people feel that the government should make every effort to improve the social and economic condition of Black people (1). Others feel that the government should not make any special effort to help Black people because they should help themselves (7). Where would you place yourself on this scale?
- 4 What group, if any, do you think is the most responsible for addressing racism in society? (individuals, federal government, schools and universities, state governments, local governments, businesses, places of worship and other religious organizations, civic, charitable and other non-profit organizations, another group (volunteered)).



Tested messages

Based on the qualitative round, several concepts were selected as especially relevant and worth learning more about.

Participants were split into four groups for portions of the survey, a Control group, and three groups in which participants were exposed to a single message, specifically:

Government's Role

Experts say the government has several specific roles to play when it comes to combating racism in America. At an event near Chicago, a community leader named three roles: “1) protecting people from discrimination, 2) making sure government policies are fair to everyone, and 3) helping repair the harm that racism has done.” Participants at the event agreed on several proposals for government action, including enforcement of existing laws against unequal treatment by employers, banks, schools, etc.; and more openness about how Black and Hispanic residents are being treated by the criminal justice system and school system. To help repair the lasting harm of racism, the group is proposing specific solutions to fix racial gaps in health and wealth. As the community leader pointed out, “the challenges aren’t simple, but there are concrete ways to move forward toward the kind of equitable society we all want to live in.”

Note: In qualitative testing, this approach has been successful in conveying government’s role in practical, graspable terms that help broad audiences see how and why policy remains relevant when it comes to race-related topics.

Community Investment

We all know that communities need certain things in order to thrive - good schools, roads, public safety, health facilities, parks, etc. But as a community leader in Chicago put it, “neighborhoods that are mostly Black or Hispanic have tended to get less investment in all these things, and that holds them back. On one side of town there’s a new high school while just a few miles away the high school is more than 50 years old, with all the maintenance problems you’d expect. One side of town has a popular park, while the other has vacant lots.” The community leader points out that by closing some tax breaks for powerful people who don’t need them, the state would have plenty to invest in all communities, including communities of color. When under-invested communities become thriving communities, it leads to healthier families, better jobs, and more people with money to spend in local businesses.

Note: A focus on the important role of particular investments in communities, and the idea that some communities have received more than others, has helped broad cross-sections of audiences see a structural rather than personal view of race-related challenges, and to see that policy solutions are clear and relevant.

Segment Challenges

Experts point out that various groups of people face serious challenges others may not relate to. For instance, many senior citizens used to go without medicines because of the costs, rural people may lack transportation to get to work, and so on. As one community leader in Chicago put it: “We’re focusing on concrete challenges that different segments of our state face, and effective steps to make them more manageable. For seniors, we’ve expanded prescription coverage, and for rural workers we’re looking at new bus lines.” Experts say that narrowing in on these so-called “segment challenges” is the best way to be effective and efficient with public investments. The community leader continued: “Challenges faced by our Black residents include being generally viewed with more suspicion, doctors incorrectly assuming they have higher pain tolerance, and a lack of childcare in their communities. We can learn from solutions that have been effective in other states like training for healthcare providers to make treatment and outcomes more equal, and expanding affordable childcare, including in Black communities.”

Note: In qualitative testing, this concept has been effective in bringing race-dismissive audiences into a constructive conversation about race-related challenges and solutions. By embedding the discussion of race-related challenges and solutions within the context of more familiar, less charged situations related to groups such as the elderly or those with serious health conditions, this approach avoids triggering immediate resistance among those otherwise inclined to dismiss conversations about race. (Of course racial challenges are very unlike age, geography or other challenges, but the less-charged context allows people to hear why race matters—it opens the door to a deeper conversation.)



Findings Across All Messages

Messages Break Through

Topos message testing sets a much higher bar than most approaches, which rely on self-assessment of convincingness, or a rank order of agreement. To be effective, people must hear in our message what we intend to convey. That in mind, it is extraordinarily difficult to develop ideas that get attention. On a topic like race, where many people immediately default to old, familiar ideas, it is particularly difficult to break through.

All three of the tested messages are clear and sticky, with roughly equal numbers of people able to mention a key theme in their open-ended responses: Government Role (86% mentioned a key theme), Community Investment (85%), and Segment Challenges (82%).

Furthermore, a majority could repeat back at least one core, text-specific idea in their open-ended responses: Government Role (55% mentioned a core, text-specific idea), Segment Challenges (54%), and Community Investment (57%).

One of the most striking overall findings from the survey is that *all messages stick with a majority of each racial group, including with white non-Hispanic respondents*. Since by all measures white non-Hispanic respondents are less receptive than people of color to support government action to address racial disparities, it is exciting to identify a strategy that moves them in the right direction. These individuals are more likely than people of color to repeat the key ideas and language from the texts. For instance, 82% of white non-Hispanic respondents mentioned one or more overarching themes such as race, government's role, policy solutions, etc., compared to 72% of AAPI respondents, 62% of Black respondents, and 55% of Latinx respondents.

We hypothesize that one explanation for this pattern may be due to the ideas in the messages being newer and more striking to white non-Hispanic people so they mention more than one distinct idea, while people of color, for whom these ideas are likely to be far more familiar, may be more likely to reduce their takeaway to just one idea.

Different Messages, Different Positive Impacts

Overall, the story suggested by the data is that different frames have different effects on people's thinking, and that each of the tested approaches has important merits, and is likely to be useful in particular contexts.

- **The Government Role** message is a helpful model for how to convey that the government has a key role to play in addressing racial disparities, and is particularly helpful for those who are stuck in seeing racism in individual/interpersonal terms as opposed to the role of policies in creating and addressing inequities. It is extraordinarily effective at centering race in the conversation and in boosting people's support for action by the government.

- **The Community Investment** message is most effective for inspiring a sense of personal agency, and for promoting a belief that positive change is possible.
- **The Segment Challenges** message is effective for engaging those who are normally resistant to a conversation about race, and for promoting the idea that there are solutions, including policy solutions, that can help us deal with challenges.

A fuller discussion of the dynamics of each message follows.

Finding: Control

For the most part, opinion stays consistent from the beginning to the end of the survey. It is interesting, however, that just getting people to consider race, without any exposure to persuasive messaging, creates some movement in people's understanding of the issue.

The most notable shift in the control group overall, is a +5 percentage point jump in those who believe people working together can make a great deal of difference.

When it comes to whether the government should do more as opposed to the government doing too many things, there is a small (+3 percentage point shift) in those who strongly believe the government should do more.

There was no notable change in people's belief that the government should act to improve the conditions of Black people.

Finding: Government's Role Message

This message is effective in making the case that the government should do more to solve problems, including doing more to improve conditions for Black people. It puts race at the center more than the other two messages and is effective with a range of attitudinal clusters including some clusters that are resistant to the other messages. At the same time, perhaps because it makes such a strong case for the government's role, it reduces personal agency. This can be a foundational message for any conversation with the goal of building public will for government accountability or government solutions on racial issues.

In Their Own Words

As they reflected on the text, large percentages mentioned a key theme from the text (86%), a policy (65%), a problem (72%), or a solution (74%). Fully three quarters (74%) mentioned race, 16% specifically mentioned "Black" or "African American," 58% mentioned racism and 51% said the government should address race-related challenges—far higher than the other tested messages.

The core, text-specific ideas participants echo back from this paragraph include:

- Government should protect people from discrimination (37%)**
- Government should help repair harms from racism (32%)**
- Government should ensure policies are fair to all (30%)**
- Government has 3 roles in addressing racism (26%)**

Regarding more specific, narrow points from the text, the following are most often mentioned:

- Government should address racial gaps in health, wealth (19%)**
- Government should enforce existing discrimination laws (16%)**
- Government should address how Black people are treated by public systems such as criminal justice, education (11%)**

Race is central to people's understanding of this message, with fully 74% mentioning race in response to the TalkBack test – far higher than the other tested messages.

By the Numbers

In addition to the strong TalkBack measures, responses to the close-ended questions also demonstrate that this message is very effective in making the case that the government should do more both generally and specifically on behalf of Black people. Overall, there is an 8 percentage point increase in those who express strong support for the government doing more, and a net 6 point shift toward people believing the government should do more for Black people. It is a compelling message for a range of attitudinal clusters. At the same time, it is mixed in its ability to inspire a personal agency, undoubtedly due to its focus on government responsibility.

Government Role Message Shifts After Exposure

	Govt Should Do More	People Make a Difference	Govt Should Act for Black People
Pragmatic Advocates	+11	-	+7
Idealistic Advocates	+21	-15	+6
Muddled Movables	-7	-4	+10
Conflicted	+4	+8	+1
Hardline Objectors	+10	-12	+5

The Government's Role message causes the biggest before-after bump with respect to the important question of whether the government should do more to solve problems. Overall, it leads to an 8 percentage point increase in those who express strong support for additional government action. Taking all shifts into account it leads to a net +6 point shift toward government action: 15% move toward believing the government should do more, 9% move away, 47% stay solid in their belief the government should do more and 29% stay solid in their belief that the government does too much. In addition, many groups shift toward wanting the government to do more after seeing this message: Idealistic Advocates (net +21 points), Pragmatic Advocates (+11), and even Hardline Objectors (+10) show increased support for the government doing more. Among demographic groups, those showing the greatest increases in support for government doing more include: various groups of women, especially women who voted for Trump (+19) as well as those who voted for Biden (+18), younger women (+21) and those without a college degree (+18). This message shifts people who live in the Midwest (+18) and West (+22). It also creates shifts among Latinx voters (+11). Notably, older men and men who voted for Trump shift away from wanting the government to do more (-15 respectively).

Overall, there is little movement in average support for having the government improve conditions for Black people. However, there is a great deal of shifting on this measure, resulting in a net +6 point shift toward action: 12% move toward having government improve conditions for Black people, 6% away, 24% stay solid in believing government should take action, 28% are solidly in the middle and 30% stay solid in believing government should not improve conditions for Black people. Those more likely to shift toward believing government should take action on behalf of Black people include: Black respondents (net +13 points), older women (+13), women without a college degree (+10), women who voted for Trump (+16), those who live in communities with some diversity (+12), and Muddled Movables (+10).

This message is mixed in its ability to inspire personal agency, which makes sense due to its exclusive focus on the role of government to make change. On the question of who has responsibility for addressing

Survey responses are typically far more volatile than topline measures indicate. That in mind, the analysis tracked each person's response before and after exposure to a message (or no message), categorizing their movement as either "toward" a particular response, "away from" a particular response, or solid/unmoving in their response. Then, to arrive at one summary number, the percentage moving "away" was subtracted from the percentage moving "toward" to arrive at a net response that explains the pattern of movement.

race, government or individuals, the most notable before-after shift arose among those in this group (who, of course, read a text focused on this very point): Preference for Individual responsibility dropped (-9) and federal and state responsibility gained (+2 and +5, respectively).

That in mind, it makes sense that overall this message leads to a 3 percentage point decline in the percentage of people who believe people working together can make a great deal of difference. Some groups grow in their belief that people working together can make a difference, including Latinx (net +14 points), women who voted for Biden (+7), and those in the Conflicted cluster (+8). But several other groups, shift away from believing that people can make a great deal of difference, including: white non-Hispanic respondents (-15 points), older men (-10), men with a college degree (-15), Trump voters (-18), especially women who voted for Trump (-26), men who voted for Biden (-13), those who say religion is extremely important to them (-16), Idealistic Advocates (-15) and Hardline Objectors (-12).

Deployment of this message then rests on the consideration of which treatment outcome is more important: shifting the onus of “fixing” racism from individuals to government or impacting the personal agency of voters. The need to increase acceptance of government’s role in addressing racial inequality may be worth a short term hit on personal agency.

Findings: Community Investment Message

This message empowers people to take action and to believe the government should do more. However, race is more likely to fall out of people’s thinking after exposure to this message compared to the other two approaches. This message inspires personal agency, with a 6 point jump in the percentage of people who say that people working together can make a great deal of difference in addressing problems. It increases strong support for the idea that the government should do more, but it shows little change in support for government action to improve conditions for Black people. Pragmatic Advocates and Muddled Movables are particularly influenced by this message as are Latinx respondents. This approach even causes some Trump voters to move in the right direction. When the goal is to engage people in collective action for change and/or to build public will for investment in neglected communities, this message is a sound approach.

In Their Own Words

As they reflected on the text, large percentages mentioned a key theme from the text (85%), a policy (69%), a problem (62%), or a solution (52%). One third (32%) mentioned race, 31% specifically mentioned “Black” or “African American” and 12% said the government should address race.

The core, text-specific assertions participants repeat back from this text include:

Public investment leads to better communities (41%)

Those at the top should pay more in taxes (33%)

Black communities have received less investment (21%)

We should invest more in Black communities (16%)

In terms of more concrete ideas from the text, participants are most likely to mention the following:

Public systems such as schools/roads/public safety, etc. (46%)

A comparison between communities with more/fewer resources (44%)

Open-ended testing confirms that this approach is most likely to allow the topic of race to fall out and not be mentioned as people summarize the key points. Often the responses focus only on class – rich neighborhoods vs. poor neighborhoods as opposed to neighborhoods that are primarily Black for instance. One-third (34%) of the responses became solely about class, which was particularly the case among white non-Hispanic respondents (43%). Race is mentioned in just 32% of this group’s TalkBack, compared to Segment Challenges (50%), and Government’s Role (74%).

By the Numbers

Turning to the before-and-after shifts in close-ended questions, as expected from the qualitative testing, this message is particularly effective for promoting a sense of personal agency, with an increase in belief that people working together can make a great deal of difference and an increase in those who strongly feel the government should do more. It does not, however, do much to move people’s assessment that the government should do more to improve the conditions of Black people.



Community Investment Message Shifts After Exposure			
	Govt Should Do More	People Make a Difference	Govt Should Act for Black People
Pragmatic Advocates	+24	+10	+1
Idealistic Advocates	+4	-1	+5
Muddled Movables	+8	+14	+11
Conflicted	-11	-5	-9
Hardline Objectors	+6	-2	+1

This message is particularly effective for promoting a sense of personal agency, with an overall 6 percentage point increase in those who believe that people working together can make a great deal of difference. Confirming experience in qualitative research, those who need reassurance that positive change is possible – including the Pragmatic Advocates (net +10 point shift) and Muddled Movables (+14) groups — are boosted by this message, as are several demographic groups including: women who voted for Biden (net +16 points), those who live in areas that are not diverse (+18), those who say religion is extremely important to them (+16), Latinx respondents (+13), men without a college degree (+12), and men who voted for Trump (+8). Those most likely to shift away from a belief that people can make a difference include: those who live in the Midwest (net -20 points), women who voted for Trump (-12), and men who voted for Biden (-8).

Like other messages, this one also causes an increase in those who say they strongly believe the government should do more to solve problems (+4 percentage points). Taking all shifts into account, there is a net +5 points toward believing the government should do more: 12% move toward believing the government should do more, 7% move away, 53% stay solid in their belief the government should do more and 27% stay solid in their belief that the government does too much.

Those who shift most toward wanting more government action include Pragmatic Advocates (net +24 points) and Muddled Movables (+8). Demographically, those more likely to shift toward government action include: those who live in areas that are not very diverse (+17), older women (+13), women without a college degree (+10), and white non-Hispanic participants (+10).

A weakness of the message is that it leads to little change in support for government acting specifically to improve the social and economic condition of Black people, which makes sense since the open-ended analysis suggests that people are far less likely to mention race in response to this message.

Overall, there is little change in response to the idea that the government should help Black people (only 0.1 improvement in the mean response, +3 percentage points in the top two box). There are some groups who shift toward believing government should take action on behalf of black people: Muddled Movables (net +11 points), those with a bachelor's degree (+11), men who voted for Trump (+11), women who voted for Biden (+10), and those who live in the South (+9). Notably, the Conflicted cluster moved in the wrong direction (net -9 points).



Findings: Segment Challenges Message

Overall, this message effectively makes a case for government action, including government action to improve the social and economic condition of Black people. Consistent with qualitative testing, it is helpful for engaging audiences who are normally resistant to race-related conversations including Idealistic Advocates, Muddled Movables, and even Hardline Objectors. Those who live in the Northeast move in a positive direction across all measures. Older women, and women who voted for Trump are more likely to support government action. At the same time, some of these same audiences become less convinced that people can make a difference (perhaps due in part to the strong push for government solutions), including women who voted for Trump, Hardline Objectors, and less educated women.

In Their Own Words

As they reflected on the text, large percentages mentioned a key theme from the text (82%), a policy (42%), a problem (70%), or a solution (68%). Half (50%) mentioned race, 33% specifically mentioned “Black” or “African American,” 19% mentioned racism and 16% said the government should address race. This suggests that people are hearing race in this message, even though it starts with a non-race context.

In the open-ended questions that ask participants to repeat or summarize what they have read, the key themes that stick from this message are:

- Different groups face particular challenges (38%)**
- Black people face particular challenges (25%)**
- Government can and should help with segment challenges (24%)**

With regard to the particular examples in the text, the following are the most often mentioned by participants, showing how the broader context is helpful:

- Seniors face challenges related to medications (26%)**
- Rural people face challenges related to transportation (24%)**
- Focusing on segment challenges is most efficient approach (13%)**

Beyond mentioning that Black people face challenges, some of the particulars related to race are also repeated:

- Black communities face challenges related to childcare (9%)**
- Black people face challenges related to doctors' assumptions (9%)**
- Training for providers can make healthcare more equal for Black people (8%)**

Generally, race is mentioned in open-ended responses by half of respondents (50%). As communicators develop messages in this conceptual direction, it will be important to incorporate sticky, attention-getting, race-based examples.

By the Numbers

Turning to the before-and-after shifts in close-ended questions, this message moves a number of audiences in the right direction, including not only Idealistic Advocates, but also the Muddled Movables, and even Hardline Objectors. Older women, and women who voted for Trump are more likely to support government action after hearing this message. Some of these same audiences become less convinced that people (as opposed to government) can make a difference – perhaps because they are focused on the kinds of steps only the government can take – including Hardline Objectors, women who voted for Trump, and less educated women.

Segments Message Shifts After Exposure

	Govt Should Do More	People Make a Difference	Govt Should Act for Black People
Pragmatic Advocates	+2	+1	+1
Idealistic Advocates	+12	-2	+2
Muddled Movables	+9	+1	+2
Conflicted	+4	-1	+4
Hardline Objectors	+4	-9	+7

Overall, the Segment Challenges message results in a +5 percentage point increase in those who say they strongly believe the government should do more to solve problems. Taking into account all the movement for and against government action, there is a net 7 point shift toward people wanting government to do more: 14% move toward believing government should do more, 7% move away, 50% stay solid in their belief government should do more and 29% stay solid in their belief that government does too much. Those most likely to shift toward government action include: Trump women (net +15 points), the Idealistic Advocates (+12) the Muddled Movables (+9 points), and those who live in the Northeast (+17) and West (+12).

Presumably because it doesn't focus on this idea at all, the Segment Challenges message creates very little before-after impact with respect to whether people working together can solve problems (+1 point overall). For some of the swing or opposition groups, it even moves people *away from* a belief that people can make a big difference, especially: Trump women (net -21 points), those who say religion is very important to them (-16), women without a college education (-9), Hardline Objectors (-9), and white non-Hispanic respondents (-6). But again, these “losses” with respect to people working together are at least partly offset by the increased view that the government has a role.

With respect to the question of whether the government should make every effort to improve the social and economic condition of Black people, the message causes no shift in the average response, but it does increase intensity. The percentage of people selecting the top two responses jumps by +4 percentage points. Taking all shifting into account, even Hardline Objectors (net +7 points) show positive movement on this measure, as do those who live in the Northeast (+16 points) and Midwest (+10), while those who live in the West move away (-11). Black respondents shift in the right direction (+10 points), while Latinx respondents shift away (-7). And those who say religion is very important to them move in the right direction (+11 points).

Conclusion

During a period of intense national urgency, where injustices facing Black Americans were thrust into the national spotlight, and where the essential role of government in people's wellbeing was unmistakably evident, we continue to see barriers in people's understanding of the need for government action to improve the social and economic wellbeing of Black people. To be sure, there has been progress: many Americans have re-considered what they think about race and more are demanding an active government that works for the people. At the same time, long-standing challenges remain: most Americans feel distanced from our government which seems more interested in acting for the wealthy than for the poor or the public more generally, and more interested in acting for white people than for people across race and ethnicity.

It is clear from this research that a missing element in the conversation on race in America has been the role of government. For most Americans, racial discrimination is interpersonal, not structural or systemic. The result of this limited understanding is that people hold individuals responsible for change, rather than all of us collectively through our public institutions. Making crystal clear the specific expectations we have for our government when it comes to racial equity begins to shift those understandings.

Some Americans, like the Pragmatic Advocates, want the government to do more to improve the social and economic conditions of Black people, but their life experience tells them not to expect too much. They need and want to be engaged in change, and to get confidence that change will matter in their lives and communities.

Some Americans, like the Idealistic Advocates, welcome a conversation about structural racism, and become more engaged and enthusiastic about solutions when presented with messages about a leading role for the government.

Muddled Movables need clarity on what the issue is about, and are most easily reached through the work we can do together to address community inequities.

The Conflicted see racism, but their rugged individualism gets in the way of their understanding of the structural and systemic dynamics of the issue. “You're on your own” seems to be their default mindset, so clear, concrete, basic expectations for government is the only approach that makes gains, or prevents backsliding, with this group.



Lastly, Hardline Objectors want to dismiss the issue entirely—they don't trust the government, don't want government intervention, and don't want to think about race. Still, as a by-product of communications to other audiences, gains can be made with this group.

Making government accountability a centerpiece of our national conversation on race will go a long way toward achieving the equitable, thriving America we seek.

About Topos

Topos has as its mission to explore and ultimately transform the landscape of public understanding where public interest issues play out. Our approach is based on the premise that while it is possible to achieve short-term victories on issues through a variety of strategies, real change depends on a fundamental shift in public understanding. Topos was created to bring together the range of expertise needed to understand existing issue dynamics, explore possibilities for creating new issue understanding, develop a proven course of action, and arm advocates with new tools to win support.

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