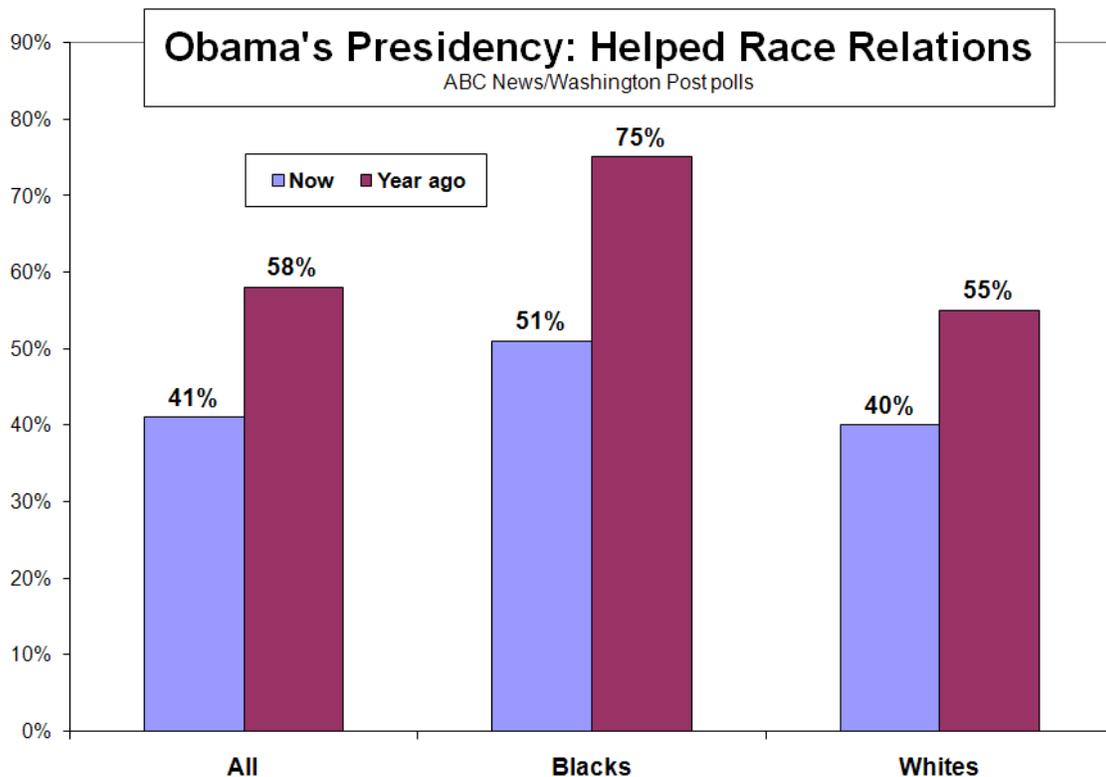


The President and Race Relations: Fewer See Gains, but Hopes Persevere

Views that Barack Obama's presidency has improved race relations have faded since he took office, and on this Martin Luther King Jr. Day most Americans say blacks have yet to achieve racial equality in this country. Yet hopes persevere, and most African-Americans and whites alike continue to see Obama's election as a sign of progress.

While the sense of a positive change has faded across racial lines, the biggest drop has occurred among blacks. As he took office a year ago, 58 percent of Americans said Obama's presidency had helped race relations; fewer today, 41 percent say so. It's fallen by 15 points among whites – but more steeply, by 24 points, among blacks.



Nonetheless almost all blacks, 96 percent in this ABC News/Washington Post poll approve of Obama's performance in office, 75 percent "strongly" so. Fewer than half as many whites approve of Obama, largely reflecting longstanding political predispositions, with blacks more than twice as apt as whites to be Democrats.

Moreover, even with fewer seeing actual improvement, the number of Americans who say Obama's election represents progress for all blacks, rather than just an individual success, has held essentially steady, at 64 percent, including two-thirds of whites and seven in 10 African-Americans.

In another measure, just 37 percent of Americans think African-Americans have achieved racial equality in this country – including just 11 percent of blacks themselves, half what it was a year ago. Nonetheless an additional three in 10 adults, including nearly four in 10 blacks, think they “will soon.”

OBAMA/POLITICS – The decline in the sense that Obama has improved race relations mirrors his overall job approval rating, down from 68 percent a month after he took office to 53 percent now. He's held essentially steady among Democrats, as well as among blacks, while losing support in other groups. Among whites, Obama's job rating has fallen from an initial 61 percent to 44 percent today.

The last president rated this low at one year was Ronald Reagan, likewise caught up in an economic downturn. Reagan did better than Obama among whites, chiefly reflecting the nature of his base – whites accounted for nine in 10 Republicans and Republican-leaning independents then, as they still do now. By contrast, whites now account for just 62 percent of leaned Democrats.

Blacks' longstanding preference for the Democratic Party appears to be associated with basic preferences on the size and role of government. Whites by 63-33 percent say they prefer smaller government with fewer services, the view more generally attributed to the Republican Party. African-Americans, by contrast, say by 62-36 percent that they prefer larger government with more services.

IMPROVED? – Beyond racial differences, the sense that Obama has improved race relations is starkly different among partisan and ideological groups. A quarter of Republicans and conservatives say so, compared with 59 percent of Democrats and 63 percent of liberals. In the political center, just 37 percent of independents say it's helped.

There are regional and age differences too. Just 36 percent of Southerners say Obama's election has improved race relations. And even fewer seniors think so, 28 percent nationally, compared with 44 percent of those under age 65.

PROGRESS – As noted, even with a lower sense of actual improvement, 64 percent of adults do see Obama's election as representing progress for all blacks, and that's essentially unchanged from its level a year ago. It was a bit higher, though, in summer 2008, when 71 percent said his nomination represented broader progress.

On this, while blacks and whites largely agree, there are partisan differences. Seventy-two percent of Democrats see Obama's election as a sign of progress for all blacks, compared with 59 percent of Republicans. Also, not surprisingly, people who think

Obama's presidency has helped race relations are much more likely to see his election as a sign of progress for all blacks.

EQUALITY – King, born Jan. 15, 1929, declared in his famous “I Have a Dream” speech in August 1963, “Now is the time to lift our nation from the quicksand of racial injustice to the solid rock of brotherhood.” In the view of many it has not come.

As noted, 37 percent of Americans say blacks have achieved racial equality, up a scant 5 points from 2008 but leaving more than six in 10 who say otherwise. The number of blacks who say African-Americans have achieved equality rose from 11 percent in 2008 to 20 percent at the time of Obama's inauguration a year ago. It's back to 11 percent now.

There are continued hopes. Nearly four in 10 blacks and three in 10 whites think racial equality will be achieved soon. But such are the challenges that one in three blacks, and one in five whites, don't think equality will be achieved in their lifetimes.

Still, relatively few – 17 percent of African-Americans, and 7 percent of whites – think racial equality will never come.

METHODOLOGY – This ABC News/Washington Post poll was conducted by telephone Jan. 12-15, 2010, among a random national sample of 1,083 adults, including landline and cell-phone-only respondents, with an oversample of African Americans (weighted to their correct share of the population) for a total of 153 black respondents. Results for the full sample have a 3.5-point error margin; for blacks, 8.5 points; and for whites, 4 points. Click [here](#) for a detailed description of sampling error. Sampling, data collection and tabulation by TNS of Horsham, PA.

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ABC News polls can be found at ABCNEWS.com at <http://abcnews.com/pollingunit>

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Full results follow (*= less than 0.5 percent).

1-35 held for release or previously released.

36. Do you think Barack Obama's election as president (represents progress for all blacks in America more generally), or do you think it (is only a single case that does not reflect broader progress for blacks overall)?

	Progress for all blacks	Only a single case	No opinion
1/15/10	64	30	6
1/4/09	65	22	13
9/14/08*	71	19	10
8/22/08*	71	21	8
Blacks			
1/15/10	70	27	2
1/4/09	64	22	14

9/14/08	79	12	9
8/22/08	76	19	5
Whites			
1/15/10	66	29	5
1/4/09	66	20	14
9/14/08	71	19	10
8/22/08	71	21	8
Hispanics			
9/14/08	68	22	10

* "...Obama's nomination for president..."

37. Do you think Obama's presidency has done more to (help) or more to (hurt) race relations in this country, or has it not made much of a difference?

	Help	Hurt	Hasn't made much difference	No opinion
1/15/10	41	12	47	*
1/4/09*	58	7	28	7
6/15/08**	42	15	40	3
Blacks				
1/15/10	51	4	44	1
1/4/09	75	3	18	3
6/15/08	60	8	31	2
Whites				
1/15/10	40	12	48	*
1/4/09	55	7	31	8
6/15/08	38	17	43	2

* "...Obama's presidency will do more..."

** "...Obama's candidacy will do more..."

38. Do you think blacks (have achieved racial equality, will soon achieve racial equality, will not achieve racial equality in your lifetime, or will never achieve racial equality)?

	Have achieved	Will soon	Not in lifetime	Will never	No opinion
1/15/10	37	31	19	8	4
1/16/09	35	38	17	6	3
9/14/08	32	37	20	5	6
Blacks					
1/15/10	11	38	32	17	3
1/16/09	20	36	23	18	3
9/14/08	11	41	30	14	4
Whites					
1/15/10	40	31	19	7	4
1/16/09	38	38	17	5	3
9/14/08	39	36	18	2	5
Hispanics					
9/14/08	25	41	18	7	8

39-43 held for release.

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