

Views on Affirmative Action: Assistance, Yes; Preference, No

Americans overwhelmingly favor an affirmative action system that assists women and minorities – but only if it doesn't do so by disadvantaging white men.

The distinction is in line with the one drawn by George W. Bush, whose administration last week filed legal briefs opposing affirmative action programs at the University of Michigan, saying they rely on unconstitutional racial quotas.

While the majority in this poll shares Bush's view, that's not so among one important subgroup – black Americans, a majority of whom support preference-based programs, and whose support for those programs has grown in the last two years.

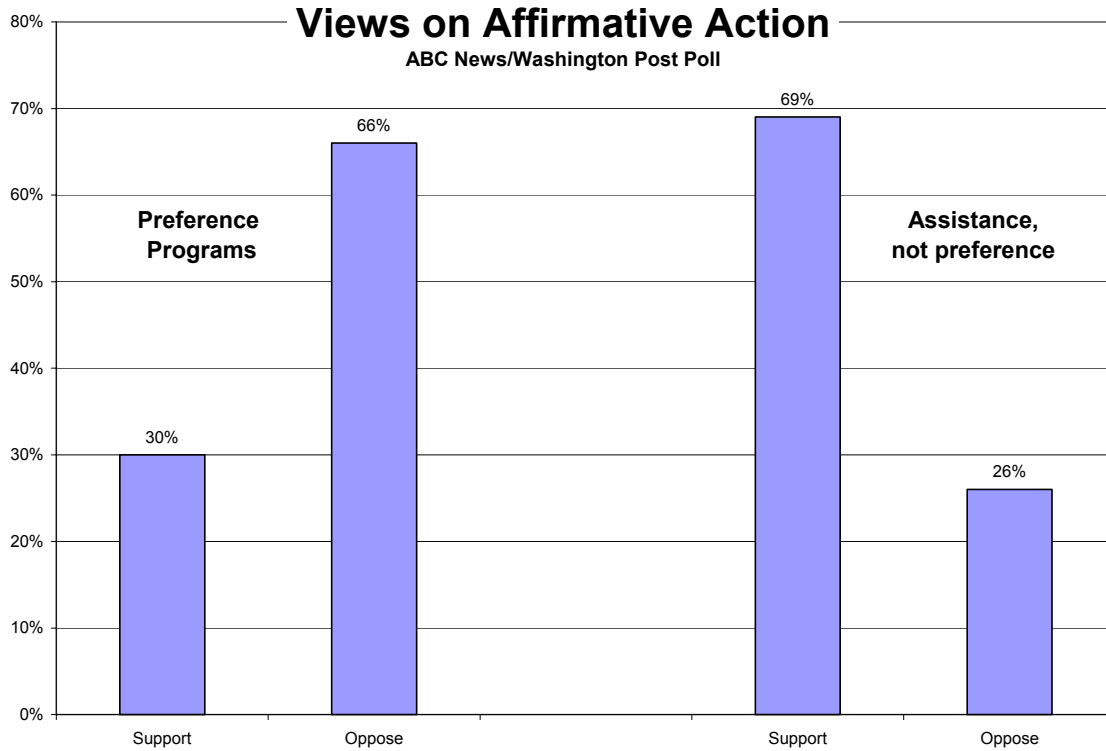
Overall, two-thirds of Americans oppose preferential programs – ones that “give women, blacks and other minorities preference over white men getting into college, getting a job, or getting a promotion.” While the level ranges, opposition includes most women, most people of other races (neither blacks nor whites), and majorities across major political and ideological lines.

The view is vastly different, however, when it comes to programs that give women and minorities “assistance – but not preference.” That wins broad support across groups, from nearly seven in 10 Americans overall.

	Preference programs		Assistance, not preference	
	Support	Oppose	Support	Oppose
All	30%	66	69%	26

These views are little changed from an ABC/Post poll two years ago, with one exception: Support for preference programs among blacks has grown from 52 percent then to 65 percent now.

Polling on affirmative action requires close attention to wording. Questions that use the positive phrase “affirmative action,” without defining the program or specifying whether or not preferences are applied, find majority support. But as this poll shows, the presence or absence of preferences is a critical factor in views on the issue.



GROUPS – As noted, the level of opposition to preference programs ranges among groups – they’re opposed by 81 percent of Republicans, 79 percent of conservatives and 76 percent of older Americans, compared to 54 percent of Democrats, 53 percent of liberals and 56 percent of younger adults. On the other side of the issue, 76 percent of black men support preference programs, compared to 57 percent of black women.

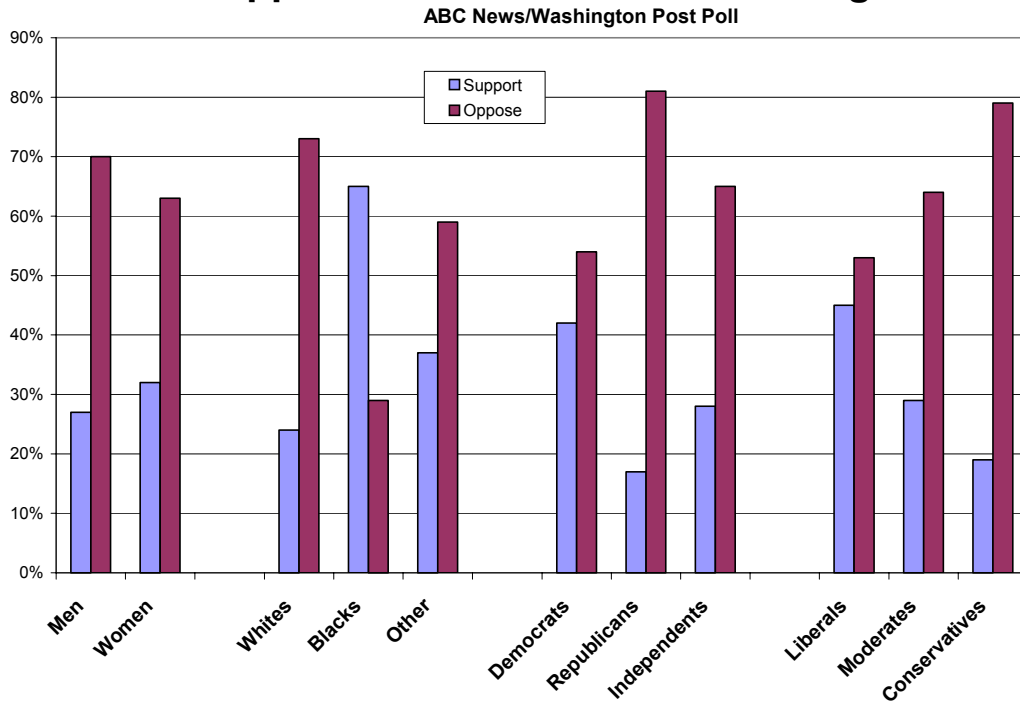
Such gaps close dramatically when it comes to programs that offer assistance without preferences.

	Preference programs		Assistance, not preference	
	Support	Oppose	Support	Oppose
Men	27%	70	68	29
Women	32	63	70	23
Whites	24	73	67	28
Blacks	65	29	79	19
Other	37	59	74	23
White men	20	77	67	31
White women	26	70	68	25
Black men	76	20	71	27
Black women	57	36	84	13
Democrats	42	54	75	22
Republicans	17	81	61	35
Independents	28	65	73	22

Liberals	45	53	78	21
Moderates	29	64	73	22
Conservatives	19	79	60	37
Age 18-30	38	56	73	22
Age 61+	18	76	54	36

In undergraduate admissions, Michigan automatically has given minority applicants 20 points (out of 150), and marked their applications for a second look. The law school doesn't award points, but counts race as a factor in admissions. The Bush administration says both procedures amount to quota-based discrimination. The schools deny any use of quotas.

Support for Preference-Based Programs



METHODOLOGY – This ABC News/Washington Post poll was conducted by telephone Jan. 16-20, 2003, among a random national sample of 1,133 adults, including an oversample of 211 blacks. The results have a three-point error margin for the full sample, 6.5 points for blacks. Fieldwork by TNS Intersearch of Horsham, PA.

Analysis by Gary Langer.

ABC News polls can be found at ABCNEWS.com on the Internet at:
<http://abcnews.go.com/sections/us/PollVault/PollVault.html>

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Results follow.

13. On another subject, do you support or oppose government and private programs that give women, blacks and other minorities preference over white men getting into college, getting a job, or getting a promotion?

	Support	Oppose	No opinion
1/20/03	30	66	4
1/15/01	28	69	3

14. Do you support or oppose government and private programs that give women, blacks and other minorities assistance--but not preference--getting into college, getting a job, or getting a promotion?

	Support	Oppose	No opinion
1/20/03	69	26	4
1/15/01	73	25	2

END