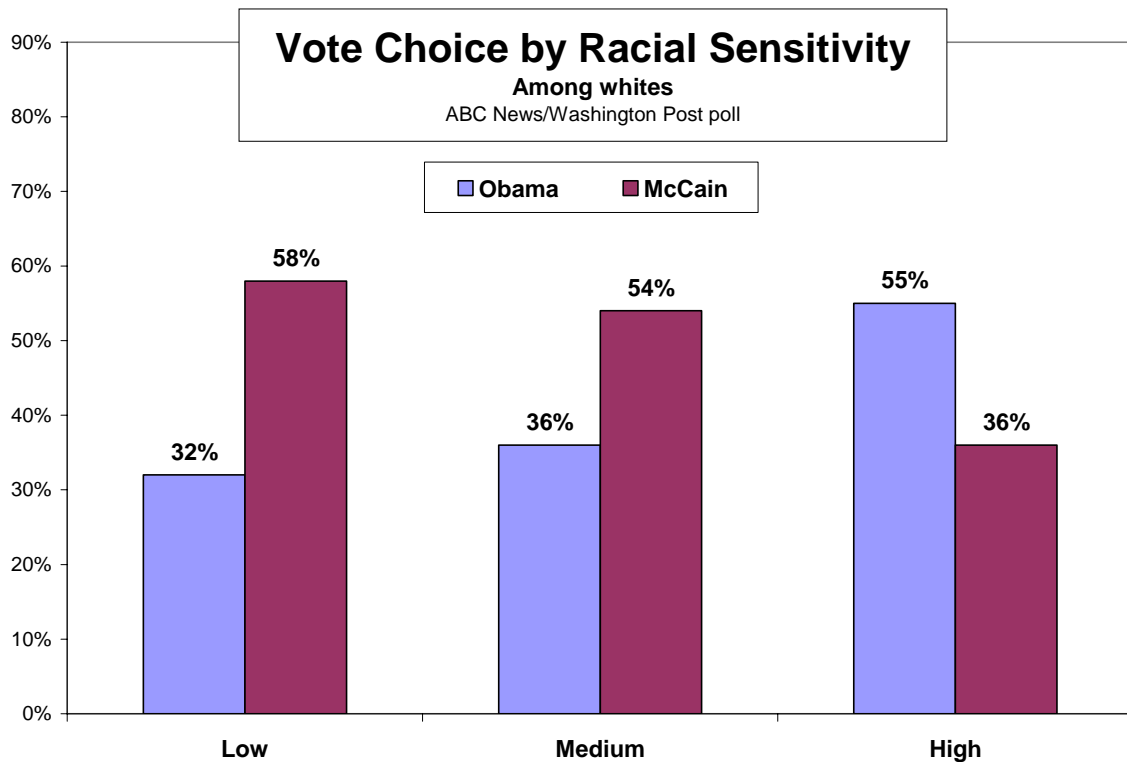


Obama's Candidacy Underscores Crosscurrents of Race and Politics

Racial attitudes among white Americans show little if any net effect on Barack Obama's candidacy for president, an ABC News analysis finds, because negative views toward Obama among the least racially sensitive whites largely are balanced by pro-Obama sentiment among those with the highest racial sensitivities.

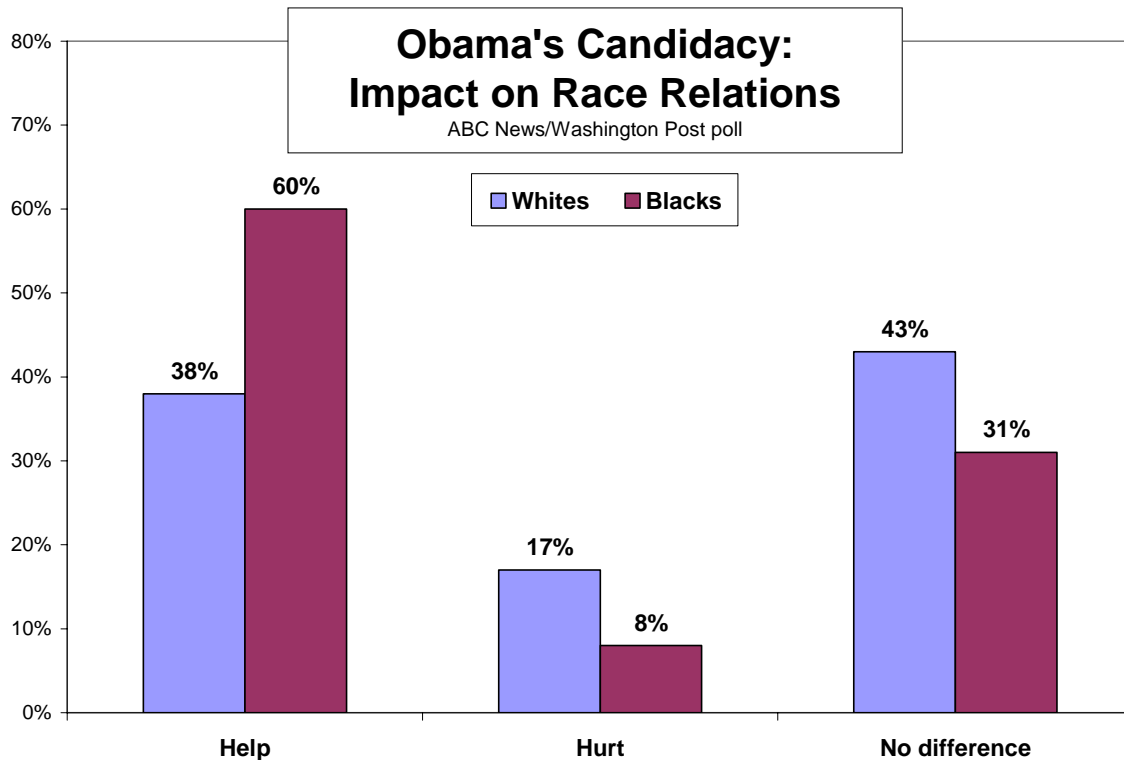
Three in 10 whites express less racially sensitive views, such as having some feelings of prejudice or believing that blacks in their communities do not experience discrimination; they hold generally critical views of Obama and favor John McCain for president by a 26-point margin. But an additional two in 10 whites are at the high end of racial sensitivity – and they favor Obama by 19 points.

The middle ground, half of white Americans, favors McCain by 18 points. All told, he leads among whites by 12 points – almost exactly the average for Republican presidential candidates in the last eight elections.



HOPES – More broadly, this ABC News/Washington Post poll finds that while the milestone established by Obama's candidacy hasn't changed basic views of race relations, it's inspired hopes for improvement among blacks, as well as more positive responses than negative ones among whites overall.

Only about half of all Americans, 51 percent, say race relations in this country are good, unchanged from an ABC/Post poll five years ago. But just over four in 10 think Obama's candidacy will improve race relations, nearly three times as many as think it'll hurt.



Those hopes peak among blacks: Sixty percent think Obama's candidacy will help race relations, while just 8 percent see it hurting. Far fewer whites, 38 percent, think Obama's candidacy will help, but still that's twice as many as think it'll do damage.

CURRENTS – Beyond these views are deep crosscurrents in racial attitudes. On the positive side, a record number of whites and blacks alike say they have a friend of the other race – 92 percent of blacks and 79 percent of whites, both new highs in polls dating back a generation. The growth of interracial friendships has been dramatic; in 1981 just 54 percent of whites, and 69 percent of blacks, reported a friend of the other race.

Have a friend of the other race		
	2008	1981
Whites	79%	54
Blacks	92	69

At the same time, three in 10 Americans admit to harboring at least some feelings of racial prejudice of their own – 30 percent of whites, and about as many blacks, 34 percent. And nearly half of whites (48 percent) and more than half of blacks (54 percent) say blacks in their own community experience racial discrimination.

IMPACT – As noted, an index based on these views finds that a significant group of white Americans – three in 10 – can be described as less-sensitive toward racial issues. These are whites who don't have a black friend, and/or don't think blacks in their community experience discrimination, and/or have feelings of prejudice (at least two of the three).

There's a political impact: Whites in this group are much less likely than others to view Obama favorably, more favorably disposed to McCain on issues and personal attributes and less apt to say they'd vote for Obama if the election were today. These less racially sensitive whites favor McCain by a wide 58-32 percent margin – nearly 2-1.

Yet the views of these whites are counterbalanced by the preferences of the most racially sensitive whites, a smaller group (21 percent of whites) but broadly pro-Obama. These are whites who have a black friend, who think blacks in their area suffer discrimination and report no personal feelings of prejudice; they support Obama by 55-36 percent.

The middle group, half of all whites, fall between the low and high racial sensitivity groups; they favor McCain by 54-36 percent – not quite as broadly as the low-sensitivity group, albeit still by a substantial margin.

The classifications appear robust: Being a member of either the low- or high-sensitivity group predicts whether a white American will support Obama or McCain, even when other factors, such as partisanship, ideology, demographics and issue preferences are held constant. Being in the middle group independently predicts candidate support when compared with higher-sensitivity whites, but not compared with low-sensitivity whites.

Compared with the high-sensitivity group, low-sensitivity whites include more conservatives, Republicans, senior citizens and Catholics; the high-sensitivity group for its part includes greater shares of 18- to 29-year-olds, liberals and secular adults. While the low-sensitivity group is both larger and more pro-McCain than the high-sensitivity group is pro-Obama, these other factors are part of the reason, not racial sensitivity alone.

WHITE VOTE – Obama's standing among whites overall is about average for a Democratic presidential candidate, although there's been quite a range. As noted, whites favor McCain by a 12-point margin, 51-39 percent. It's hard to attribute that to race; George W. Bush won whites over John Kerry by a broader margin, 58-41 percent, and over Al Gore by 54-42 percent. Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush won whites by anywhere from 19 to 29 points in 1980, '84 and '88, according to exit polls.

That said, it's the Democrats who've done better with whites who've won presidential elections – Jimmy Carter, who lost whites by just 5 points in 1976, and Bill Clinton, who came within 1 point of Bush among whites in 1992 and within 3 points vs. Bob Dole in

1996. That's no surprise, since whites constitute a large majority of voters, albeit a shrinking one – 77 percent in 2004, vs. 90 percent in 1976.

BLACK VOTE – Blacks, meanwhile, remain fairly monolithic in terms of presidential preferences – not because there's a black candidate, but because they're the single most loyal Democratic voting bloc. Ninety percent of blacks support Obama, just as 88 percent backed Kerry in 2004 and 90 percent voted for Gore in 2000.

A bigger question for African-Americans is not the direction but the size of their vote; they've accounted for 8 to 11 percent of voters since 1976, about their share of the adult population. With a black candidate leading the Democratic ticket, black turnout might rise disproportionately in a show of affinity voting.

But it might not; indeed that did not happen during the Democratic primaries. Turnout was up across the board, and blacks, like other Democrats, increased their participation. But blacks did not vote in disproportionately greater numbers: They accounted for 19 percent of all Democratic primary voters, about the average for Democratic primaries in past years.

HISPANICS – Another key group in the racial mix, Hispanics accounted for fewer voters than blacks in 2004 – 8 percent, well under their share of the adult population. One reason is the number who are ineligible to vote given their lack of citizenship.

In 2004 Bush made inroads among Hispanics, usually a Democratic group, and this year they favored Hillary Clinton over Obama by nearly a 2-1 margin in the primaries; that makes them a group to watch. On average in the last two ABC/Post polls, however, Obama's been supported by 71 percent of Hispanics, roughly the share Clinton won in 1996, the best for a Democrat since Carter's 76 percent in 1976.

WHITES/MORE VIEWS – It's not just in vote preferences that racial sensitivity levels impact whites' views on the election. Among low-racial sensitivity whites just 48 percent see Obama favorably overall; that rises to 56 percent in the middle group and 67 percent among highly racially sensitive whites. And just 33 percent in the low-sensitivity group think Obama has the right kind of experience to be president, compared with 41 percent in the middle and 60 percent of high-sensitivity whites.

Thirty-one percent in the low-racial sensitivity group think Obama would do “too much” as president in terms of representing the interests of African-Americans; that drops to 16 percent in the middle group and 11 percent in the high-sensitivity group. Just 29 percent in the low-sensitivity group see Obama's candidacy as helping race relations; that grows to 36 percent in the middle group and 54 percent of more highly racially sensitive whites. And 43 percent in the low-sensitivity group say the race of the candidate has any importance in their vote choice; that falls to about three in 10 in the middle- and high-sensitivity groups.

On other measures it's whites with the highest levels of racial sensitivity who stand out. Only 38 percent in this group see Obama as a “risky” choice, compared with 53 percent

in the middle group and 60 percent of less racially sensitive whites. Those with higher levels of racial sensitivity also are much more likely to be enthusiastic about Obama’s candidacy overall.

	Whites – racial sensitivity		
	Low	Medium	High
Obama: Favorable	48	56	67
Obama: Right experience	33	41	60
Think Obama would “do too much” for blacks	31	16	11
Say Obama candidacy helps race relations	29	36	54
Say race has <i>any</i> importance in vote	43	32	29
Say race very or somewhat important in vote	25	19	22

All told, just 21 percent of whites say the race of the candidate is very or somewhat important in their vote – and Obama’s support is essentially the same among those who say race matters and those who say not. The index of racial sensitivity digs deeper into these views, but still suggests that, given the differences between more and less racially sensitive whites, Obama’s race shows little if any net effect on vote choices overall.

METHODOLOGY – This ABC News/Washington Post poll was conducted by telephone June 12-15, 2008, among a random national sample of 1,125 adults, including an oversample of African Americans (weighted to their correct share of the national population), for a total of 201 black respondents. The results from the full survey have a 3-point error margin. Sampling, data collection and tabulation by TNS of Horsham, PA.

The index of racial sensitivity was constructed using affirmative responses to three questions: having an interracial friendship, believing African-Americans experience discrimination in their community and not harboring feelings of racial prejudice. High sensitivity was defined as positive responses to all three questions (21 percent of whites), medium sensitivity as affirmative responses to two of three questions (50 percent) and low sensitivity as positive to only one or none of the three questions (29 percent).

A regression analysis to predict vote choice using the racial sensitivity index controlled for demographics (including sex, age, education, income, marital status and region of the country), partisanship, ideology and candidate preference on issues and attributes.

Analysis by Gary Langer.

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

Media contact: Cathie Levine, (212) 456-4934.

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

1-36 Previously released.

37. Generally speaking, do you think race relations in the United States are excellent, good, not so good or poor?

		--- Positive ---			----- Negative -----			
		NET	Ex.	Good	NET	Not good	Poor	No opinion
6/15/08	All	51	4	47	47	36	12	1
	Whites	53	3	50	46	36	10	1
	Blacks	36	4	32	63	43	20	1
1/20/03	All	52	3	49	45	35	10	3
	Whites	54	2	52	43	36	7	3
	Blacks	44	4	40	55	37	18	1
6/8/97	All	31	1	30	68	46	22	2
	Whites	33	1	31	66	46	19	2
	Blacks	24	2	23	75	42	34	1
5/7/96	All	28	4	24	69	44	25	3
	Whites	28	4	24	70	47	23	2
	Blacks	20	1	20	76	38	38	4
4/30/92	All	21	1	20	77	45	32	2
	Whites	24	1	23	75	47	28	1
	Blacks	11	1	10	88	29	59	1
3/3/92	All	32	2	30	66	45	21	2
	Whites	34	2	32	64	44	20	2
	Blacks	21	2	19	78	48	30	2

38. Do you think Obama's candidacy will do more to (help) or more to (hurt) race relations in this country, or won't it make much of a difference?

		Help	Hurt	Won't make much difference	No opinion
6/15/08	All	42	15	40	3
	Whites	38	17	43	2
	Blacks	60	8	31	2

39. Do you yourself know any (black/white) person whom you consider a fairly close personal friend? (Asked of non-blacks about blacks, asked of blacks about whites)

		Yes	No	No opinion
6/15/08	All	81	18	*
	Whites	79	20	*
	Blacks	92	8	0
6/12/05	All	76	24	*
	Whites	75	25	*
	Blacks	82	18	0
1/20/03	All	77	23	*
	Whites	75	25	0
	Blacks	83	17	0

6/8/97	All	74	26	*
	Whites	71	29	*
	Blacks	83	17	0
5/7/96	Whites	69	31	*
	Blacks	77	22	1
10/3/89	Whites	66	34	*
	Blacks	80	20	*
1/14/86	Blacks	69	30	1
3/6/81	Whites	54	46	*
	Blacks	69	31	*

40. (AMONG THOSE WITH BLACKS IN COMMUNITY) Do you think blacks who live in your community experience racial discrimination, or not? IF YES: Do you think it happens often, occasionally, or rarely?

		----- Yes -----				No
		NET	Often	Occas.	Rarely	opinion
6/15/08	All	51	16	20	9	47
	Whites	48	13	27	8	49
	Blacks	54	15	26	12	44
1/20/03	All	45	12	27	6	52
	Whites	43	10	26	7	55
	Blacks	59	23	28	7	40

41. If you honestly assessed yourself, would you say that you have at least some feelings of racial prejudice?

		Yes	No	No opinion
6/15/08	All	30	69	2
	Whites	30	69	1
	Blacks	34	65	1

Compare to:

If you honestly assessed yourself, would you say that you have at least some racist feelings?

10/19/99	All	34	66	*
	Whites	32	67	*
	Blacks	40	60	1

42-44 Held for release.

END