

# Black Americans more upbeat but fear worsening racism, poll finds

By **Tim Craig, Emily Guskin and Scott Clement** Washington Post, Updated June 16, 2023, 5:26 p.m.

An overwhelming share of Black Americans think the US economic system is stacked against them and a slim majority believe the problem of racism will worsen during their lives, according to a Washington Post-Ipsos poll that explored the attitudes of the country's second-largest minority group.

The poll finds that Black adults worry they are marginalized and under threat by acts of hate and discrimination in their day-to-day lives. Most also say it is more dangerous to be a Black teenager now than when they were teens.

Nonetheless, nearly half of Black Americans say it's also a "good time" to be a Black person in the country, up from 30 percent in 2020, when the United States was gripped by political divisions during Donald Trump's presidency, and from 34 percent last spring, after a white supremacist killed 10 Black people at a Buffalo grocery store. The poll was conducted among more than 1,200 Black adults over two weeks in late April and early May.

The rise in some optimism comes amid an uptick in financial well-being. The poll finds 31 percent of Black Americans say their financial situation has gotten better over the past year, up from 25 percent in 2022. Nearly 8 in 10 Black Americans say their finances have been stable or improved in recent years. Still, Black Americans are less likely than white Americans to rate their finances positively.

Fewer Black Americans also report that they have been treated with less respect or received poorer service because of their race than they did in 2011, although most say those incidents still occur at least “once in a while.”

When it comes to the nation more broadly, however, Black Americans are uneasy over the nation’s political and cultural environment and believe most white Americans don’t trust them. Follow-up interviews with respondents show a variety of factors fueling these concerns about the future — a rise in hate groups and gun violence, and new laws in Florida and other states regulating the teaching of Black history and racism.

These concerns suggest — even as 86 percent of Black Americans say they are very or somewhat satisfied with their lives — the cumulative impacts of extremism and political tension is driving widespread worry about the future of race relations.

“Yeah, you can get jobs and you can work up to a certain standard of living,” said Renay Roberts, 40, who settled in Atlanta about two decades ago from Jamaica and works in the health care industry. “But it’s fear. It’s the constant fear. ... And it’s all about race. ”

Roberts mentioned specifically the Republican-led backlash to movies and books with Black characters as well as her belief that growing numbers of mass shootings are motivated by racial bias. She said she also fears her two teenage sons could be harmed by police or become victims of gun violence.

“I fear for them every day,” Roberts said. “I tell them, ‘Don’t cover your head with a hood, and try to get home before dark.’ Why is it more different for us than any other race?”

In the Post-Ipsos poll, 69 percent of Black Americans say it is a “more dangerous” time

today to be a Black teenager than when they were the same age. Just 4 percent say it is a less dangerous time while 25 percent describe the environment for teenagers as being “about the same.”

Nearly 6 in 10 Black adults say they are very or somewhat worried they or someone they love will be attacked because they are Black.

Asked about the April shooting of a Black 16-year-old in Kansas City by an 84-year-old white man after the victim approached the wrong house when trying to pick up his younger siblings, 85 percent say it is a sign of broader problems in the treatment of Black people by white people, compared with 54 percent of white Americans who say this.

On other fronts, as well, there were sharp differences between the views among different racial and ethnic groups.

The Post-Ipsos poll finds 3 out of 4 Black adults are “very” or “somewhat” concerned about states stopping the teaching of Black history, and nearly 7 out of 10 are concerned about public schools banning books that touch on the topic of racism, including nearly half who are “extremely concerned.” Just over 7 in 10 are concerned about states stopping public schools from teaching the history of racism in America.

About half of white Americans overall say they are concerned about each of these.

Black Americans are more inclined to sense a gulf of distrust, with 8 in 10 Black Americans saying white people trust Black people “not too much” or “not at all” in the United States overall. Seven in 10 white Americans feel that Black people distrust white people.

Concerns about public stances in certain states extend to Black Americans’ belief that they are not getting a fair shake from the country’s political system.

Over 6 in 10 Black adults say they were worried when GOP lawmakers in the Tennessee House voted this spring to expel state representatives Justin Jones and Justin Pearson, both Black Democrats, for leading a gun-control rally at the Capitol. They later were reinstated to the body after votes by local officials.

Nearly 8 in 10 Black Americans also say they have “very littl” or just “some” political power in the United States.

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