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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION
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CONFLICTED VIEWS OF AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

As the U.S. Supreme Court prepares for what could be a landmark ruling on the issue of racial preferences in college admissions, a new Pew Research Center nationwide survey finds a growing majority of the public supporting the general idea of affirmative action. But the poll results also reflect the public’s complicated and sometimes contradictory attitudes about the subject.

There is support for the rationale of affirmative action – such as overcoming past discrimination or increasing the diversity of students in college. But at the same time, Americans question the fairness of such programs, the rationale notwithstanding.

When the details of specific affirmative action programs are raised, public reservations increase. Further, when people are questioned about programs involving *preferential treatment* for minorities, opinion turns negative. On all questions about affirmative action there are predictable racial differences in opinion, but significant gender differences are evident as well, even when the issue of gender inequality is not mentioned in the question.

Relatively few people – white or black – report having real life experiences with affirmative action: only 16% overall have been helped or hurt. Among those who’ve been affected, whites generally say they were hurt while blacks say they have been helped.

Varied Responses to Affirmative Action		
In order to overcome past discrimination, do you favor or oppose affirmative action programs...		
...designed to help blacks, women and other minorities get better jobs and education?	Favor	63
	Oppose	29
	DK/Ref	<u>8</u>
		100
... which give special preferences to qualified blacks, women and other minorities in hiring and education?	Favor	57
	Oppose	35
	DK/Ref	<u>8</u>
		100
.....		
All in all, do you think affirmative action programs designed to increase the number of black and minority students on college campuses:		
...are a good thing or a bad thing?	Good	60
	Bad	30
	DK/Ref	<u>10</u>
		100
...are fair, or unfair?	Fair	47
	Unfair	42
	DK/Ref	<u>11</u>
		100
.....		
We should make every possible effort to improve the position of blacks and other minorities, even if it means giving them preferential treatment.*	Agree	24
	Disagree	72
	DK/Ref	<u>4</u>
		100
*Asked in July 2002		

Majorities Approve of Affirmative Action, But Many Have Doubts

In the current poll, conducted April 30-May 4 among 1,201 adults nationwide, 63% say they favor “affirmative action programs designed to help blacks, women, and other minorities get better jobs and education.” There is somewhat less support (57%) when the question specifically mentions giving “special preferences” to women and minorities. A more pointed Pew question last year that stressed “preferential treatment” but did not mention affirmative action, past discrimination or women, found only 24% supporting “every possible effort” to improve the position of minorities.

Both versions of the general question – with and without the reference to “special preferences” – found greater support for affirmative action than in 1995. In addition, the mention of special preferences made more of a difference in 1995, when 58% favored affirmative action when no reference was made to preferences, compared with 46% in the version mentioning preferences. In the current survey, there is only a six point gap between the two versions of the question.

The distinction between the general idea of affirmative action and the use of racial preferences matters much more for whites than for nonwhites: 86% of nonwhites favor affirmative action in general, and 82% favor racial preferences. Among whites, 58% support the general concept, but only 49% support preferences for minorities. Most of the difference in the impact of the reference to preferences occurs among whites with a high school education or less: 66% favor affirmative action in general, but only 51% favor it with racial preferences. Among college educated whites, the same percentage (51%) favor affirmative action whether preferences are mentioned or not.

	Aug.	
<i>Prefs. not mentioned</i>	<u>1995</u>	<u>Now</u>
	%	%
Favor	58	63
Oppose	36	29
DK/Ref	<u>3</u>	<u>8</u>
	100	100
<i>“Special preferences”</i>		
Favor	46	57
Oppose	46	35
DK/Ref	<u>8</u>	<u>8</u>
	100	100

<i>Programs that...</i>	White	
	<u>Women</u>	<u>Men</u>
<i>...help blacks, women and other minorities get jobs & education</i>	%	%
Favor	66	48
Oppose	26	41
Don't know	<u>8</u>	<u>11</u>
	100	100
<i>...raise # of minority college students</i>		
Good thing	60	48
Bad thing	28	43
Don't know	<u>12</u>	<u>9</u>
	100	100

College Admissions

More people think affirmative action programs in college admissions are a good thing than think they are fair. Overall, a solid majority of 60% say such programs are a good thing. Even a majority of white respondents (54%) agrees with this sentiment. Only 30% overall say they are a bad thing (35% among whites). The vast majority of African-Americans see these programs as good (87%), and two-thirds of other nonwhites agree (67%). Over three-fourths of Hispanics (77%) like them. More white women than white men see affirmative action in college admissions programs as a good thing (by a margin of 60% to 49%).

But significantly more people worry about the fairness of the programs. Less than a majority overall (47%) say they are fair, and 42% say they are unfair. Black-white differences on this question are much smaller than on the question of whether such programs are a good thing or not. Among whites, 43% think the programs are unfair; 35% of blacks agree, as do 41% of other nonwhites. But Hispanics are much less concerned about the fairness of the programs: 70% say they are fair and only 27% see them as unfair.

	White	Black	Hispanic
	%	%	%
Good thing	54	87	77
Bad thing	35	5	17
Don't know	<u>11</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>6</u>
	100	100	100
Fair	45	58	70
Unfair	43	35	27
Don't know	<u>12</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>3</u>
	100	100	100
<i>Difference</i>	+9	+29	+7
Number of cases	1021	80	77

The Impact of Affirmative Action

Only a small fraction of the public (16%) reports having been directly affected by affirmative action programs. Overall, 11% say they've been hurt, 4% have been helped. Among blacks, 14% say they have been helped by such programs, while 5% say they've been hurt. Among other non-whites, about equal numbers have been helped (11%) and hurt (13%).

Most Hispanics say they've been unaffected, but 4% say affirmative action has helped them and 8% say it's hurt them. By a margin of 13% to 2%, whites say they've been hurt rather than helped – and more white men (17%) than women (9%) say this. As many white liberals as conservatives say they've been hurt.

	Helped	Hurt	Not affected	Other/DK
	%	%	%	%
All	4	11	82	3=100
Whites	2	13	84	1=100
Men	1	17	81	1=100
Women	3	9	86	2=100
Liberals	7	15	76	2=100
Moderates	2	10	87	1=100
Conservatives	1	14	83	2=100
Black	14	5	77	4=100
Hispanic	4	8	87	1=100

A significant number of people – though much less than a majority – perceive that affirmative action programs stigmatize minorities. Overall, 27% of Americans – including 26% of whites and 37% of blacks – say that most people attribute minorities' successes in business and education to racial preferences, rather than their own skills and abilities.

The Affirmative Action Debate: Still Below the Radar

Despite the flurry of press attention to the University of Michigan case, relatively few people – 18% – report having heard very much about the case, and fewer –12% – say they have been very closely following news about the affirmative action debate in general. Despite being more interested in public debate over affirmative action, Blacks are more likely than whites to have not heard about the University of Michigan court case.

The case is more visible to the college educated (36% have heard a lot about it), than to the less educated (only 10% of high school graduates have heard a lot). And the issue of affirmative action has attracted much greater attention from liberal Democrats (27% following very closely) than from Republicans, independents, or moderate Democrats.

ABOUT THIS SURVEY

Results for the *May News Interest Index* survey are based on telephone interviews conducted under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates among a nationwide sample of 1,201 adults, 18 years of age or older, during the period April 30 - May 4, 2003. Based on the total sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling and other random effects is plus or minus 3 percentage points. For results based on Form 1 (N=602) the sampling error is plus or minus 4.5 percentage points; for Form 2 (N=599) the sampling error is plus or minus 4.5 percentage points.

In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION PROGRAMS

	<u>Good</u>	<u>Bad</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>Fair</u>	<u>Unfair</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>(N)</u>
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Total	60	30	10=100	47	42	11=100	(1201)
Sex							
Male	54	36	10	43	48	9	(577)
Female	65	24	11	52	35	13	(624)
Race							
White	54	35	11	45	43	12	(1021)
Non-white	80	12	8	56	38	6	(169)
Black	87	5	8	58	35	7	(80)
Hispanic*	77	17	6	70	27	3	(77)

BASED ON WHITES ONLY:

Sex							
Male	49	52	9	39	51	10	(479)
Female	60	28	12	49	36	15	(542)
Age							
18-29	64	27	9	56	36	8	(144)
30-49	57	36	7	46	43	11	(368)
50-64	55	33	12	45	43	12	(293)
65+	46	39	15	34	45	21	(208)
Education							
College Grad.	52	39	9	43	49	8	(371)
Some College	41	51	8	34	58	8	(260)
High School or Less	61	27	12	50	34	16	(387)
Region							
East	50	37	13	50	41	9	(191)
Mid-West	57	38	5	45	43	12	(261)
South	53	33	14	41	44	15	(349)
West	57	33	10	45	43	12	(220)
Party and Ideology							
Conservative Rep.	36	54	10	26	62	12	(223)
Moderate Republican	57	31	12	47	41	12	(132)
Cons./Mod. Democrat	61	26	13	55	33	12	(184)
Liberal Democrat	77	22	1	66	32	2	(86)

* The designation Hispanic is unrelated to the white-black categorization.

Question: All in all, do you think affirmative action programs designed to increase the number of black and minority students on college campuses are a good thing or a bad thing?

All in all, do you think affirmative action programs designed to increase the number of black and minority students on college campuses are fair or unfair?

PEW RESEARCH CENTER FOR THE PEOPLE & THE PRESS
MAY 2003 NEWS INTEREST INDEX
FINAL TOPLINE
April 30 - May 4, 2003
N=1201

Q.5 Now I will read a list of some stories covered by news organizations this past month. As I read each item, tell me if you happened to follow this news story very closely, fairly closely, not too closely, or not at all closely?
[INSERT ITEM; ROTATE OBSERVE FORM SPLITS]

<i>SUMMARY TABLE</i>		Very <u>Closely</u>	Fairly <u>Closely</u>	Not too <u>Closely</u>	Not at all <u>Closely</u>	<u>DK/Ref</u>
a.	News about the current situation in Iraq	63	29	6	2	*=100
b.	The lung disease called "SARS" ...	39	39	15	6	1=100
f.	The murder of Laci Peterson ...	31	31	21	16	1=100
d.	North Korea's nuclear weapons program	27	40	22	11	*=100
h.	News about government budget problems in your state	26	34	19	20	1=100
e.	George W. Bush's tax cut and economic stimulus plan	25	36	22	15	2=100
g.	Debate over eliminating affirmative action programs	12	24	28	34	2=100
c.	The race for the Democratic presidential nomination	8	19	31	41	1=100

TRENDS

g.	Debate over eliminating affirmative action programs	12	24	28	34	2=100
	August, 1995 ¹	20	32	24	23	1=100

ASK FORM 1 ONLY [N=602]:

Q.8F1 In order to overcome past discrimination, do you favor or oppose affirmative action programs designed to help blacks, women and other minorities get better jobs and education?

		<u>Aug 1995</u>
63	Favor	58
29	Oppose	36
<u>8</u>	Don't know/Refused	<u>3</u>
100		100

ASK FORM 2 ONLY [N=599]:

Q.8F2 In order to overcome past discrimination, do you favor or oppose affirmative action programs, which give special preferences to qualified blacks, women and other minorities in hiring and education?

		<u>Aug 1995</u>
57	Favor	46
35	Oppose	46
<u>8</u>	Don't know/Refused	<u>8</u>
100		100

¹ In August 1995 the story was listed as "Proposals to eliminate affirmative action programs."

ASK ALL:

On a different subject...

Q.14 How much, if anything, have you heard about a recent Supreme Court case dealing with the University of Michigan's admissions program that takes RACE into account, as well as grades, activities and other factors when deciding who to admit. Have you heard a lot, a little, or nothing at all about this case?

18	A lot
36	A little
46	Nothing at all
<u>*</u>	Don't know/Refused
100	

Q.15 All in all, do you think affirmative action programs designed to increase the number of black and minority students on college campuses are fair, or unfair?

		<u>Form 1*</u>	<u>Form 2</u>
47	Fair	46	49
42	Unfair	41	42
<u>11</u>	Don't know/Refused	<u>13</u>	<u>9</u>
100		100	100

* On Form 1 Q.15 preceded Q.16. On Form 2 Q.16 preceded Q.15.

Q.16 All in all, do you think these programs are a good thing or a bad thing? **[IF RESPONDENT NEEDS QUESTION REPEATED, ASK IN FULL: All in all, do you think affirmative action programs designed to increase the number of black and minority students on college campuses are a good thing or a bad thing?]**

		<u>Form 1</u>	<u>Form 2</u>
60	Good thing	59	60
30	Bad thing	30	30
<u>10</u>	Don't know/Refused	<u>11</u>	<u>10</u>
100		100	100

Q.17 In your own personal career and education, have you ever been helped or hurt by an affirmative action program, or has this never affected you? **[IF "YES", PROBE: "Helped or hurt?" IF "DON'T KNOW" ENTER AS DK WITHOUT PROBING]**

16	Yes
4	Helped
11	Hurt
1	Both (VOL.)
82	No, not personally affected
2	Don't know (VOL.)
<u>0</u>	Refused (VOL.)
100	

Q.18 When a member of a minority group achieves success in business or education ... just your impression ... do most people think they got ahead because of racial preferences, or do most people think they got ahead because of their skills and abilities?

27	Because of racial preferences
62	Because of their skills and abilities
4	Both / Mixed (VOL.)
<u>7</u>	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)
100	