Boundaries in the American Mosaic

Preliminary Findings Report, Summer 2014

The American Mosaic Project - University of Minnesota

Boundaries in the American Mosaic
Executive Summary and Preliminary Findings

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Introduction

The American Mosaic Project (AMP) is a research initiative housed at the University of Minnesota designed to contribute to our understanding of what brings Americans together, what divides us, and the implications of our diversity for our political and civic life. We are most concerned with how Americans themselves understand the nature and consequences of diversity for their own lives and for our society as a whole. How do Americans understand ethnic, religious, and racial diversity? How do Americans respond to calls for greater recognition of diverse groups and lifestyles? How do our ethnic, racial, and religious identities shape the way we understand the obligations of citizenship and our vision of "the good society?"

The first wave of the project, a nationally representative telephone survey conducted in 2003 with support from the David Edelstein Family Foundation, measured attitudes about diversity, racial and religious identities, and discrimination. Through in-depth interviews and fieldwork across the country, we further explored the various contexts in which Americans experience diversity, focusing in particular on religious interfaith organizations, neighborhoods, and festivals. From 2005 to 2011, the research team published fourteen papers with the results in *American Sociological Review, Social Problems,* and *Sociological Theory*, as well as a range of field-specific journals. In addition to broad studies of Americans' visions of diversity, topics also included more specific examinations of anti-Semitism, negative attitudes about atheists, gender and family in religious communities, and critical whiteness theories. The 2003 survey data is archived at the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR) at the University of Michigan and the Association of Religion Data Archives.

Ten years later, with support from the National Science Foundation, we designed the Boundaries in the American Mosaic Survey as an online follow up and extension to the original AMP project particularly focused on the social and economic conditions associated with Americans' attitudes towards racial and religious diversity. The survey was fielded in the early spring of 2014. Our results indicate a number of trends consistent with the 2003 data as well as some new insights into what is troubling to the national community, who is blamed for these social problems, and what these attitudes may mean for the future of social policy formation in the United States.

AMERICAN VALUES AND PUBLIC PROBLEMS

What holds us together, and what worries us?

Diversity and Individualism

Many Americans feel good about having a diverse society, and they view the benefits of a diverse society through a lens of individualism.

- About **85%** somewhat or strongly agree that they value having people who are different from them in their communities and rate their experiences with different people positively.

- **71%** say that Americans can have different values and traditions, as long as they all follow the same rules and laws.

- **57%** say that people should be seen as individuals rather than members of groups.

- While half of Americans do not think everyone has equal opportunities in the United States, **almost 70%** agree that everyone can make it if they work hard enough.

Social Problems: Politics and Markets

However, sizable groups also notice problems in American society. The biggest threats are economic and political.

- **30%** rate their current financial situation as worse than five years ago.

- **43%** disagree that the American Dream will be alive for their children or the next generation.

- **58%** see a shortage of good jobs as a very serious problem in the United States today.

Percent of Americans rating these problems as "very serious"
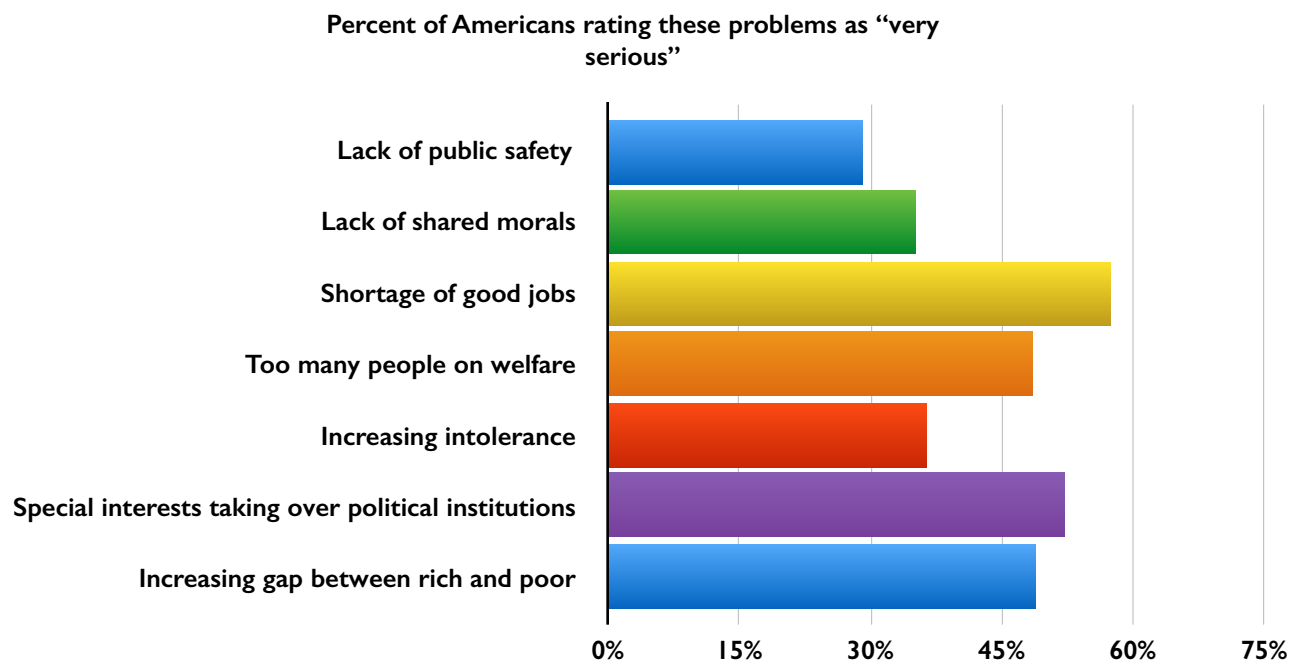
SHARED VISIONS AND MARRIAGE - 2003 COMPARISON

Who do we trust in public and private life?

To assess the extent to which Americans trust different social groups in the United States, the BAM survey replicated and extended a set of two questions from the 2003 American Mosaic Project Survey asking respondents whether they thought members of these groups shared their vision of American society and whether they would approve of their child marrying a member of each group. While the change in survey methodology from telephone to web survey prevents a perfect comparison across time, data from both waves together highlights a number of interesting trends.

On the "shared visions" question, a measure of trust in public life, reported rates of distrust were higher for *all* social groups in the 2014 BAM survey. More notable is the change in group order. **Muslims have now surpassed atheists with the highest rates of distrust.**

Additionally, this new data suggests that distrust varies for different religious minority groups. **Atheists, Buddhists, and Mormons all have high rates of distrust, but respondents expressed lower levels of distrust for "spiritual but not religious" Americans.**

Finally, the addition of economic outlier groups in 2014 shows that **welfare recipients and the wealthiest Americans are among some of the most distrusted groups in public life today, while respondents' expression of racialized distrust is relatively low compared to these groups.**

Percent of Americans Who Say These Groups "Do Not At All Agree" With Their Vision of American Society
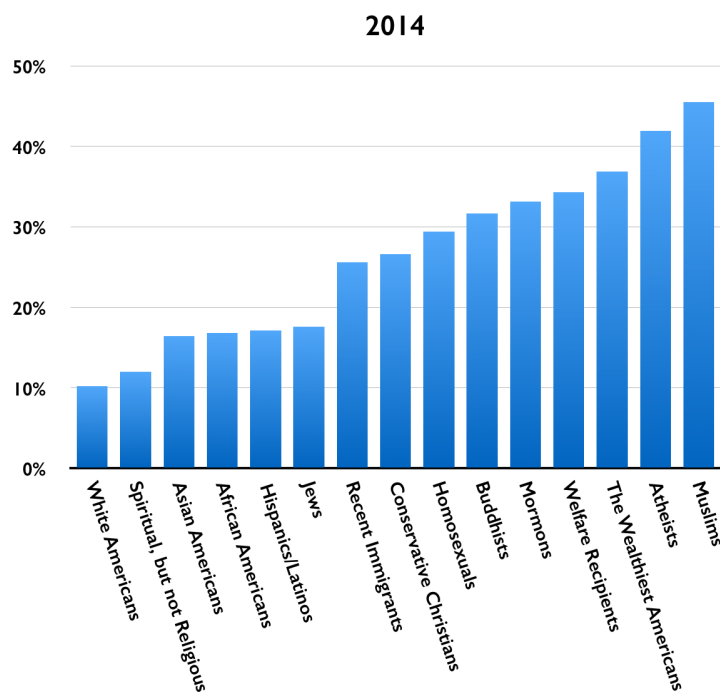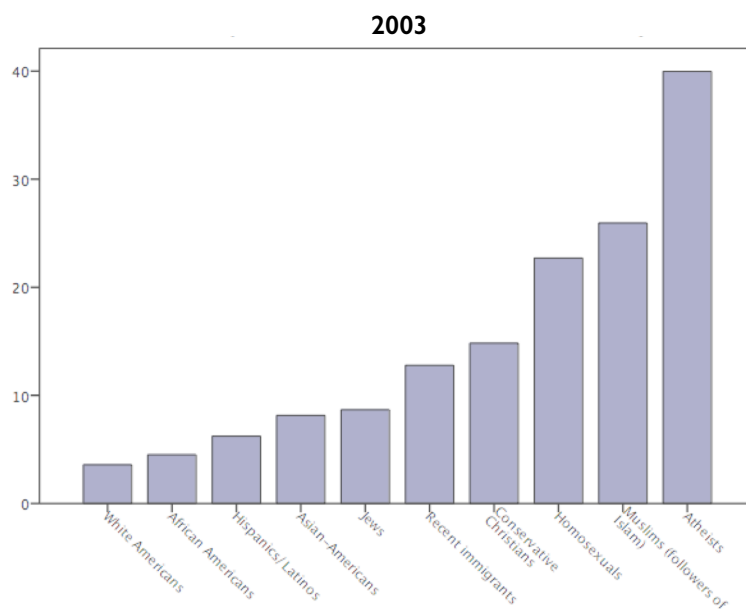
Percent of Americans Who Would Not Approve Of Their Child Marrying a Member of These Groups

2003

Compared to the "shared visions" question, respondents in 2014 expressed relatively lower levels of disapproval for intermarriage across all groups than the 2003 sample. **While atheists had the highest rate of marriage disapproval in 2003**, **they were surpassed by Muslims, "homosexuals," and welfare recipients in the 2014 sample.**
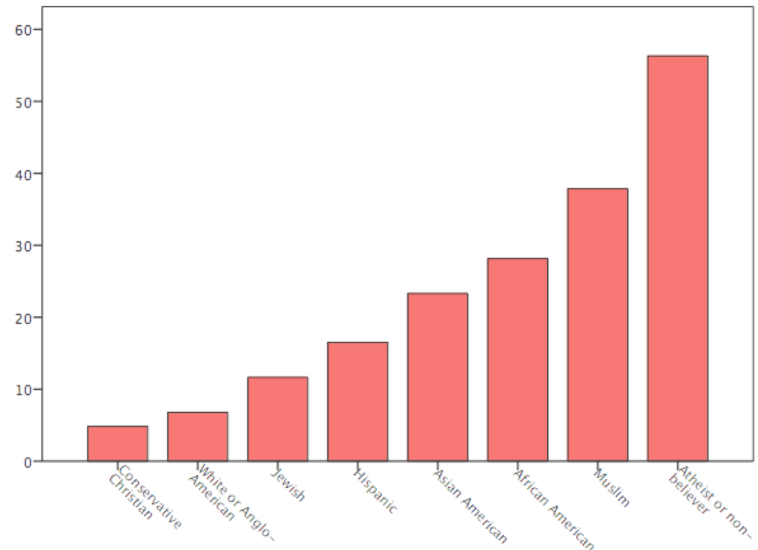
In the widest spread across the two question sets, **respondents rank the wealthiest Americans amongst those least likely to share their vision of American society, but also have some of the lowest rates of disapproval for marrying them**.

2014

Americans again split on religious minority groups for approval of intermarriage, and show **higher rates of distrust for Mormons and Buddhists than conservative Christians and the "spiritual but not religious."**

Nevertheless, 71% of Americans believe that public schools should teach about the religious diversity of the United States.
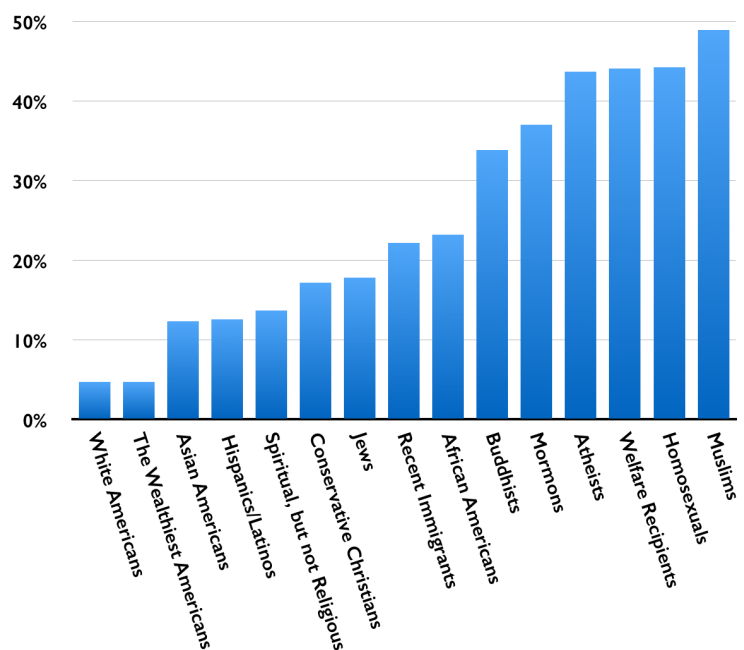
THE "THREAT SCALE"

Which groups are blamed for social problems?

When respondents are asked about social problems in the U.S., most are reluctant to blame any particular social group. Those who do, however, frequently blame Muslims, atheists, conservative Christians, recent immigrants, and African Americans.

Intolerant of Others

Don't Share Morals or Values

Threat to Public Order and Safety

Don't Contribute to My Community

Take Jobs and Resources

Want to Take Over Political Institutions
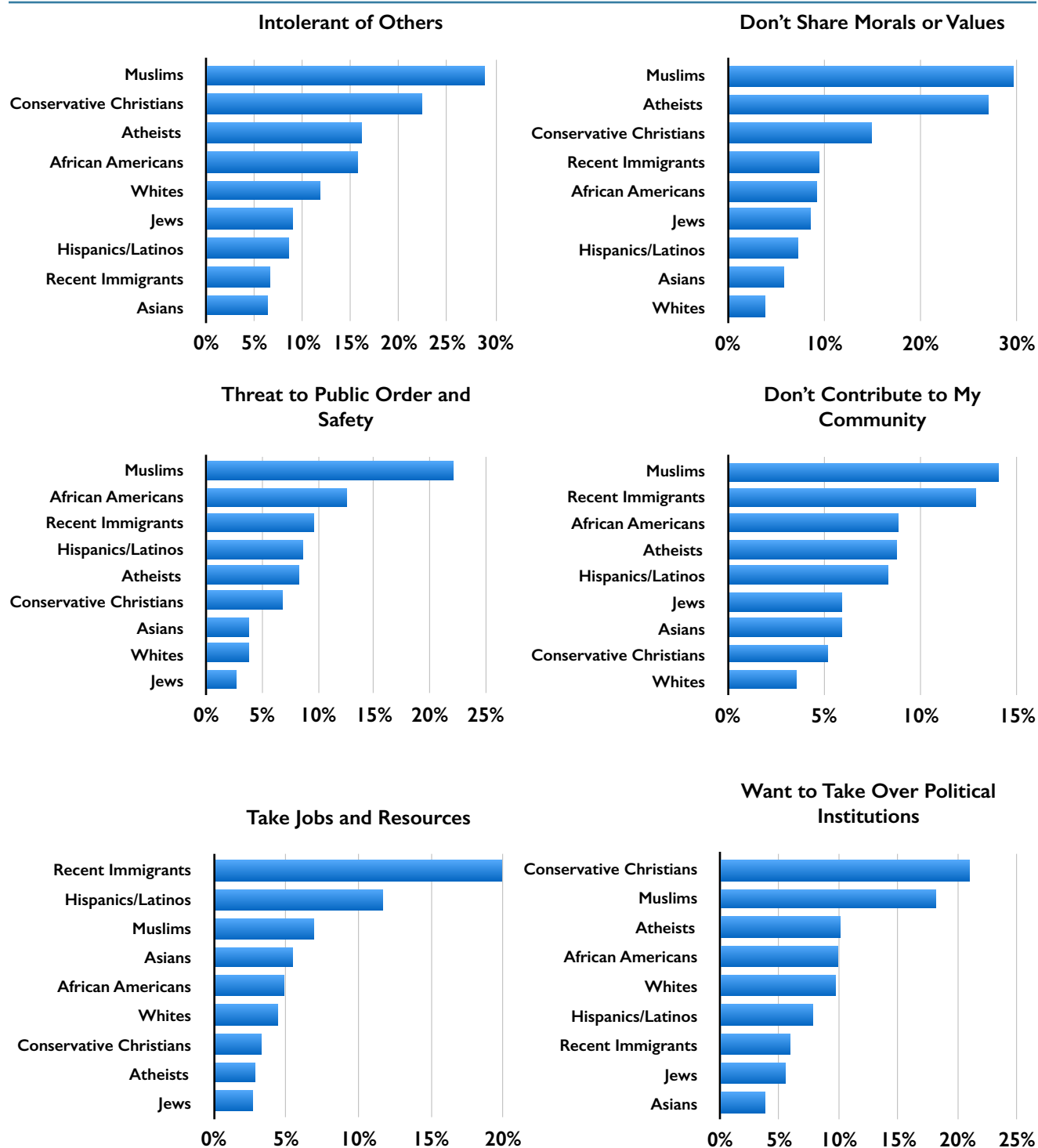
CIVIL LIBERTIES AND SOCIAL OUT GROUPS

Does distrust lead to denying rights?

After being asked to "think about the groups you believe are most likely to cause problems," respondents reported whether they thought these groups should have a number of legal privileges related to speech, privacy, and access to the social safety net. Americans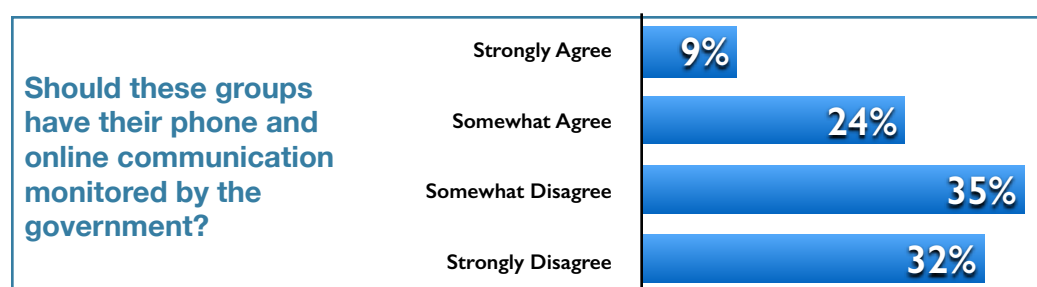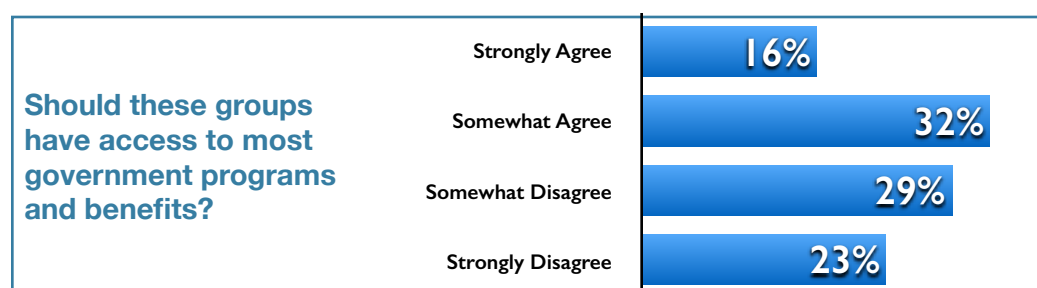 split fairly evenly between agreeing and disagreeing that distrusted groups should have a range of these rights, but a larger majority (67%) disagreed with increased government surveillance of targeted populations.

Should these groups be allowed to hold demonstrations?

Strongly Agree	21%
Somewhat Agree	38%
Somewhat Disagree	24%
Strongly Disagree	17%

Should these groups be allowed to teach in public schools?

Strongly Agree	17%
Somewhat Agree	34%
Somewhat Disagree	29%
Strongly Disagree	21%

Should these groups have access to most government programs and benefits?

Strongly Agree	16%
Somewhat Agree	32%
Somewhat Disagree	29%
Strongly Disagree	23%

Should these groups have their phone and online communication monitored by the government?

Strongly Agree	9%
Somewhat Agree	24%
Somewhat Disagree	35%
Strongly Disagree	32%

RELIGION IN AMERICAN CULTURE

Freedom of belief, but with some strong standards

Religion plays a key role in the way Americans think about public problems

- Americans highly appreciate religious freedom; **93%** said it was important for the U.S., and **80%** said the separation of church and state was important.

- When faced with a tough decision, almost **30%** strongly agree that their religious beliefs are more important than scientific knowledge or what friends and family think, and **20%** strongly agree their beliefs are more important than America's laws.

- **Almost 60%** of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that society's standards of right and wrong should be based on God's laws.

Changing demographics in a "Christian" nation

One of the major recent trends in American religious life has been the growth of religiously-unaffiliated populations. Our sample is about **35% non-religious**: 20% claim 'no particular religion', 7% are spiritual but not religious, 4% identify as atheists, and 4% as agnostics.

- While 50% of respondents said this trend was "neither a good nor a bad thing," **40%** thought it was a bad thing.

- Respondents split 50/50 on whether the U.S. is a Christian nation, but 65% of those who said yes also said that was a good thing, and **42.9%** of those who said no also said that was a bad thing, suggesting they thought the U.S. *should* be a Christian nation.

- **About 50%** of respondents each thought that being religious and being Christian, respectively, were important for being a good American.

- **About 73%** of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that religion divides people in society today, and **52%** thought religious leaders have too much power and influence in society today.

Challenges for religious minorities, especially Muslims and Atheists

While anti-atheist attitudes remain high—**44%** would disapprove if their child married one and **42%** say they don't share a vision of American society—slightly fewer Americans express specific grievances about atheists.

- **36%** say atheists lack a moral center, **27%** think they are elitist, and **22%** think they are more likely to engage in criminal behavior.

Islamophobia is far more widespread among respondents. In addition to **46%** who say they don't share a vision of society with Muslims and **49%** who would disapprove of marrying a Muslim:

- **61%** think Muslims are more loyal to their religion than America.

- **39%** think Muslims are becoming less like other Americans.

- **30%** think Muslims have too much power in American society.

COLORBLINDNESS?

Racial division and explanations for inequality

Overall, a majority of Americans agree that racial divisions persist in the United States.

- **80%** agree or strongly agree that race divides people in America today.
- **75%** agree or strongly agree that they feel a connection with others in their racial group.
- **74%** disagree or strongly disagree that "race no longer matters in the United States."
- **70%** disagree or strongly disagree that racism will "soon be a thing of the past."

They also observe racial inequality and see diversity.

- **70%** agree or strongly agree that whites have lots of advantages in American society.
- **57%** somewhat or strongly disagree that all people in the U.S. have equal opportunities.

However, **71%** also somewhat or strongly agree that they are "colorblind," that is, they don't see race.

To examine how Americans explain racial division and inequality without seeing race themselves, we randomly gave our respondents one of two questions asking them to explain either racial disadvantage or racial disadvantage. Respondents most frequently blamed African Americans' disadvantage on the prejudice of others and differences in family upbringing, while they explained white Americans' advantages with hard work, family culture, and access to a good education.

On average, African Americans have worse jobs, income, and housing than white Americans. How important is each of the following factors in explaining this situation?	On average, white Americans have better jobs, income and housing than others. How important is each of the following factors in explaining this situation?

Disadvantage African Americans   Advantage White Americans
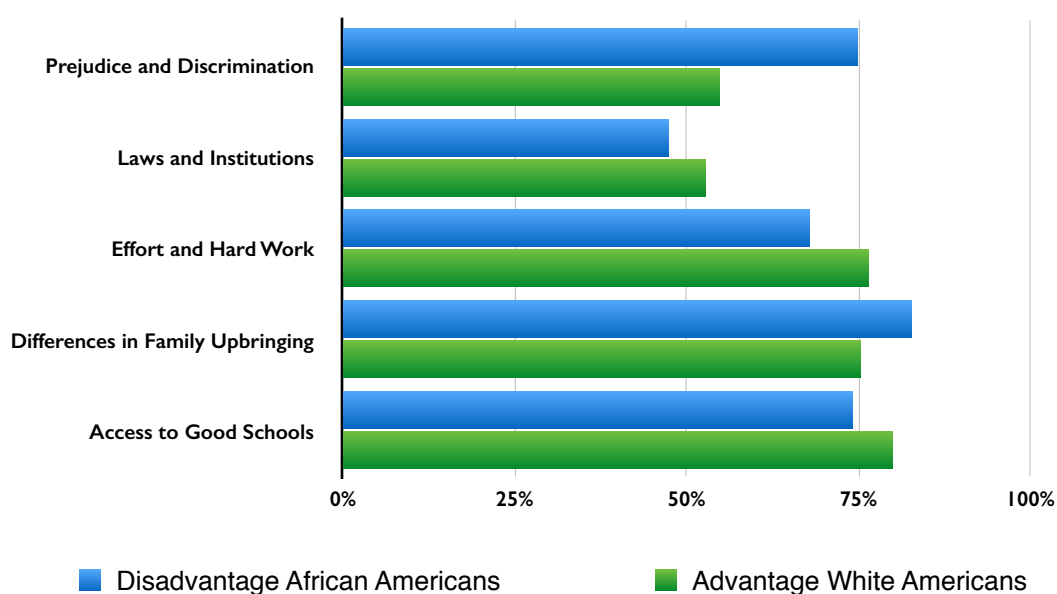
CORRECTING RACIAL INEQUALITY

Which policies have public support?

While Americans recognize racial inequality in the U.S., their support for policies to correct the problem varies widely with the way such policies are named and framed.
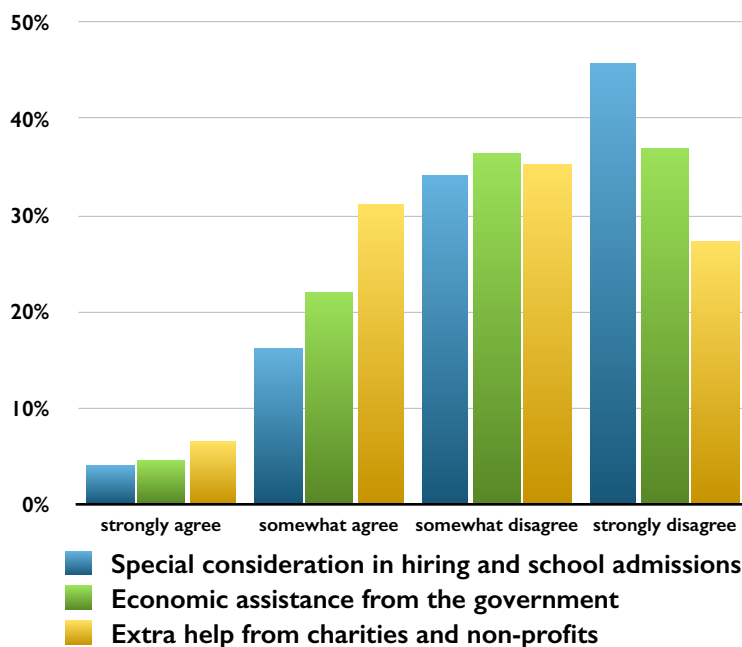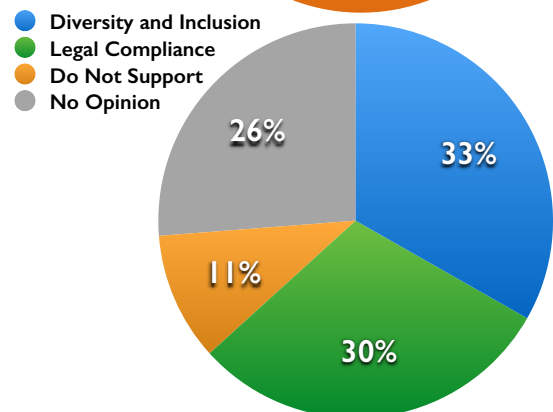
Affirmative Action

40% of Americans support affirmative action policies at colleges and universities, mostly for the purposes of ensuring equal access to education. However, about a third of the population explicitly does not support these policies.
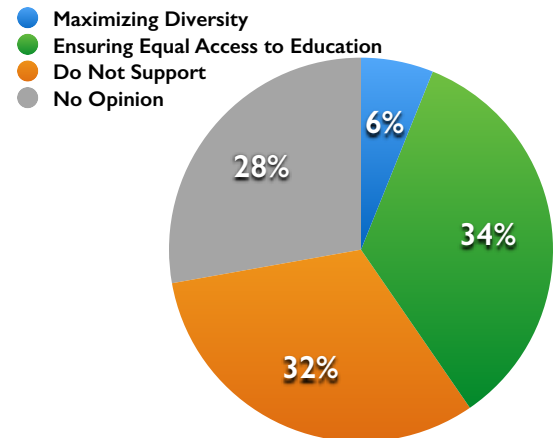
Anti-Discrimination Law

More Americans support anti-discrimination law in the workplace, with about 30% each supporting the policies for the ideals of diversity and inclusion and the practice of legal compliance.

- Maximizing Diversity
- Ensuring Equal Access to Education
- Do Not Support
- No Opinion

6% / 34% / 32% / 28%

- Diversity and Inclusion
- Legal Compliance
- Do Not Support
- No Opinion

33% / 30% / 11% / 26%

- Special consideration in hiring and school admissions
- Economic assistance from the government
- Extra help from charities and non-profits

Lower Support for Race-Specific Policies

However, when these policies are framed as "special considerations" in hiring, economic assistance, or charitable giving for African Americans in particular, public opinion is much less supportive. Up to 46% of Americans strongly disagree with this framing of affirmative action.

THE MILLENNIAL DIFFERENCE

Are the boundaries shifting with time?

Across many of these questions, age was a significant predictor of differences in opinion. When broken down into categories, 18-24 and 25-34 year olds showed distinct differences from older cohorts.[1]

Shared Visions

When asked which groups shared their vision of American society, this cohort was *less* distrusting of atheists, Muslims, and homosexuals. However, they were also *more* likely to say Mormons and Jewish people did *not* share their vision.

Intermarriage

This cohort was also more likely to approve of their children marrying an atheist, a Muslim, a Buddhist, an African American, someone of the same sex, and someone on welfare.
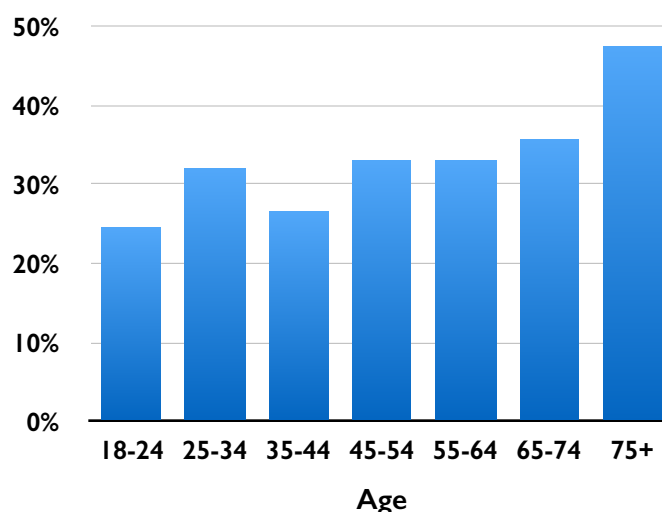
Religion in Public Life

Members of this cohort were less likely to say that the separation of church and state or the free exercise of religion were very important for American society. They were also less likely to say that religion was important to them, that a president should have strong religious beliefs, and that society should be based on God's law. Instead, they were more likely to say that religion divides people today. Finally, when asked whether the United States was a Christian nation, younger respondents were more likely to say either yes, and that this was a *bad* thing, or no, and that this was a *good* thing.

Racial Diversity

Younger respondents had a different take on diversity than older respondents—they were slightly more likely to say that diversity "makes life interesting" or that it "brings different perspectives that help us solve problems," and less likely to say that it "makes us who we are as a nation."

Younger respondents were also more likely to support affirmative action policies for both ensuring equal access to education and maximizing diversity.

Percent of Americans who do not support affirmative action policies

Bar chart showing percent of Americans who do not support affirmative action policies by age cohort: 18-24 ≈ 25%, 25-34 ≈ 32%, 35-44 ≈ 27%, 45-54 ≈ 33%, 55-64 ≈ 33%, 65-74 ≈ 36%, 75+ ≈ 47%. X-axis labeled "Age."

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[1] To assess age cohort differences, we conducted chi-square tests for significance across seven age cohorts in the study. Significant relationships were double-checked with ordered logit regression models between particular attitude variables and a continuous age variable. All relationships reported were significant at conventional levels (p<.05) in both tests. These tests to not imply that youth *causes* differences in opinion*,* and are only intended for descriptive purposes.

METHODOLOGICAL APPENDIX

The data from this national survey was gathered from a sample of the GfK Group's KnowledgePanel. GfK's KnowledgePanel is a probability-based online panel consisting of approximately 50,000 adult members. From 1999 to 2008, KnowledgePanel recruited participants through a random digit dialing (RDD) sampling method based on a sampling frame of US residential landline telephones. After 2009, KnowledgePanel adapted an address-based sampling (ABS) technique that randomly samples addressing using the U.S. Postal Service's Delivery Sequence File. Approximately 97% of American households are covered by KnowledgePanel's current sampling methods. Addresses chosen are mailed an advance letter requesting them to participate in the panel, followed by up to 14 phone call requests for up to 90 days. Those agreeing to participate in KnowledgePanel are compensated with either Internet access and a personal laptop or a cash incentive program per survey for those already owning a personal computer. Respondents are assigned to no greater than one 10-15 minute survey per week and are limited to between four and six surveys per month.

Recruited from the KnowledgePanel sample, the Boundaries in the American Mosaic Survey is a nationally representative sample of non-institutionalized adults in America, oversampled for African Americans and Hispanics. The sample was drawn from panel members using a probability proportional to size (PPS) weighted sampling approach. KnowledgePanel members received an email link to the web survey from GfK to participate in the BAM Survey, followed by email and phone reminders after three days of non-response. Data collection took place between February 28, 2014 and March 16, 2014. Of the 4,353 people that were contacted, 2,521 completed the survey for a survey response rate of 57.9%. Compared to similar nationally representative surveys, the BAM Survey has a higher response rate than average, especially considering the low contact rate (Holbrook, Krosnick, and Pfent. 2008). Research on non-response bias in KnowledgePanel samples has found no significant differences in respondents and non-respondents related to the goals of the survey (Heeren et al 2008). Studies using Heckman selection procedures have shown that self-section bias is not as an important factor in participating in KnowledgePanel surveys (Camerona and DeShazob 2013). The median survey completion time was 28 minutes.

Data in the BAM Survey are weighted using base and stratification weights from the KnowledgePanel sample combined with survey specific weights for the BAM sample. The base weight corrects for under-sampling of telephone numbers unmatched to mailing addresses, oversampling of certain geographic areas, oversampling of African American and Hispanic households, and ABS oversampling stratification within the KnowledgePanel. Additionally, KnowledgePanel uses a panel demographic post-stratification weight to adjust for sample design and for survey non-response. These further adjust for Spanish-speaking populations in the U.S. Post-stratification adjustments are based on March 2013 data from the Current Population Survey. Combined with these base and post-stratification weights, the BAM Survey is weighted to account for survey non-response and oversampling of African Americans and Hispanics.

The combination of a web survey and the GfK Knowledge Panel offers a number of advantages over other survey methods. The chief concern about web surveys in general is access to the Internet and availability of computers for low-income individuals. However, households without Internet access that are selected for KnowledgePanel are provided a laptop computer and free internet service. Web surveys are also advantageous in that people may

report sensitive information more accurately on web-based versus telephone surveys (Tourangeau and Yan 2007). A web survey is also more useful for the BAM survey because it allows researchers to quickly ask grid questions about multiple identity groups.

A primary goal of the BAM survey was to replicate items from the American Mosaic Project (AMP) to assess trends in key measures. The AMP was collected using an RDD based sample, while the BAM primarily uses ABS techniques. Though RDD sampling was the best methodological choice in 2003, increasing numbers of Americans, especially younger Americans, do not have land lines and only use cell phones, or who use call privacy and screening technologies (Blumberg and Luke 2011; Chang and Krosnick 2009; Link et al 2008; Smyth et al 2010). Further, telephone surveys continue to increase substantially in operational costs due to difficulties in reaching respondents to complete surveys (Curtin, Presser, and Singer 2005). These challenges meant that an RDD survey was no longer the best option to reach a random sample of Americans and so we decided to change survey modes. Research demonstrates that differences we see between the AMP and BAM are most likely due to changes in attitudes, rather than a change in survey mode, as forced choice format questions produce similar results in web, mail, and telephone surveys (Smyth et. al. 2006). Further, a recent comparison examining survey mode effects between a probability-based telephone survey and a probability-based web survey found no significant differences in accuracy between the two surveys (Yeager et al 2011). Finally, recent research on longitudinal surveys also demonstrates that changing the survey mode does not necessarily affect researchers' ability to analyze change in forced choice questions (Dillman 2009).

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