

The Role of Prejudice and Discrimination in Americans' Explanations of Black Disadvantage and White Privilege

Do Americans believe prejudice and discrimination are important factors in explaining racial inequalities in the United States? Do these factors help explain whites' success? Do the effects of prejudice and discrimination create a form of white privilege?

New survey data from the American Mosaic Project can shed some light on these questions. Over 2,000 Americans were asked to give their opinions about racial inequality in the United States. Half of those surveyed were asked about black disadvantage and the other half were asked about white privilege.

77% of people asked believed that prejudice and discrimination against African-Americans were important in explaining why African-Americans have worse jobs, income, and housing than white people. When looking at the responses from specific racial groups, we found that this percentage increased to 91% for African-American respondents. Only 74% of white respondents believed prejudice and discrimination were important in explaining this disadvantage. This gap of 18 percentage points between African-American respondents and white respondents shows an important difference between these two groups understanding of the causes of racial inequality in our country. It is interesting to note that 84% of Hispanics felt prejudice and discrimination were important, putting the percentage for this racial group to fall approximately halfway between blacks and whites.

Table 1: Percent of Americans that believe Prejudice and Discrimination are important factors in explaining black disadvantage, by Race

All Americans	Whites	Blacks	Hispanics
77%	74%	91%	84%

Data come from the American Mosaic Project Survey (N=2086), University of Minnesota 2003

63% of people asked believed that prejudice and discrimination in favor of whites is important in explaining white advantage. Said another way, two-thirds of respondents see a form of white privilege and believe prejudice and discrimination play an important role in benefiting whites.

When looking at whites only, this percentage drops slightly to 59%. On the other hand, 83% of African-Americans and 84% of Hispanics saw prejudice and discrimination as important in explaining whites' greater success.

Table 2: Percent of Americans that believe Prejudice and Discrimination are important factors in explaining white advantage, by Race

All Americans	Whites	Blacks	Hispanics
63%	59%	83%	84%

Data come from the American Mosaic Project Survey (N=2086), University of Minnesota 2003

The difference again here between whites' views and the views of African-Americans and Hispanics shows an important contrast in how whites and nonwhites view and understand the effects of prejudice and discrimination in our society today.

The American Mosaic Project is a multi-year, multi-method study of the bases of solidarity and diversity in American life. The principal investigators of this project are Doug Hartmann, Penny Edgell and Joseph Gerteis at the University of Minnesota, and the project is funded by the

Edelstein Family Foundation of Minneapolis, MN. The survey portion of the project consists of a random-digit-dial telephone survey (N=2,081) conducted during the summer of 2003 by the University of Wisconsin Survey Center. The survey was designed to gather data on attitudes about race, religion, politics, and American identity, as well as demographic information and social networks. More information about the project can be found at www.soc.umn.edu/amp.