



Building an All-In Nation

A View from the American Public

Survey research by the Center for American Progress and PolicyLink,
in partnership with the Rockefeller Foundation October 2013

Introduction and summary

It is an undeniable fact that the United States is becoming increasingly diverse, rapidly heading toward the day when there will no longer be any clear racial or ethnic majority in the U.S. population. Already, more than half of newborns today are children of color, and demographers predict that more than half of all youth will be of color before the end of this decade.¹ As youth drive this demographic change, each generation is becoming more racially and ethnically mixed than the one before.

According to Census projections, by 2043, non-Hispanic whites will become a minority of our population. By 2050, they will be only 47 percent of the U.S. population, with communities of color combining to form a solid 53 percent majority. Hispanics will make up 28 percent of the population, up from 16 percent in 2010, and African Americans will make up 13 percent, about 1 percentage point higher than their level in 2010. Asians will make up 7 percent, up from 5 percent in 2010, and another 0.7 percent will be made up of American Indian/Alaska Natives, unchanged from their 2010 levels. Finally, multiracial individuals should double in size, from their current 2 percent of the population to 4 percent by 2050.²

Earlier this year, the Center for American Progress and PolicyLink released *All-In Nation: An America that Works for All*—a comprehensive book analyzing these changing demographics and exploring policies to ensure that a more diverse workforce is prepared for the jobs of the future and that all people are in a position to contribute to and benefit from economic growth. The goal of the book was not only to stress the moral need to ensure greater opportunities for all people but also to highlight the clear economic benefits for the entire nation of reducing racial and ethnic disparities in education, employment, and other areas. As part of this research project and as a complement to the book, CAP and PolicyLink joined with the Rockefeller Foundation and Latino Decisions to assess how Americans view issues of rising diversity and policy proposals to better integrate these communities into the mainstream of American society and its economy.

We set out to answer a number of questions about the public's understanding of a changing America, its reactions to rising diversity, and its possible support for a new equity agenda that would lift up both whites and communities of color and help improve our overall economy. Among the questions explored are:

- Do Americans have a clear understanding of the current and future demographic make-up of U.S. society and the workforce?
- How open are Americans overall to diversity? Do they see more opportunities or more challenges with rising racial and ethnic diversity in our nation?
- Are there differences in attitudes both between and among specific communities of color and whites?
- How concerned are people about the racial, ethnic, and economic inequalities in American life?
- Would Americans support or oppose policies and investments to help reduce these inequalities?

This study is one of the largest of its kind. It is based on nearly 3,000 total interviews with Americans, including large oversamples of the African American, Latino, and Asian American communities. The breadth and depth of the study allowed us to get a clearer picture of exactly how Americans are reacting to ongoing social and demographic change.

Methodological note

Latino Decisions conducted a nationwide telephone survey of 2,943 Americans from June 11 to July 10, 2013. All respondents were 18 years of age or older and were contacted by live callers, with five total call attempts made to each number. A base sample of 2,000 respondents was randomly selected from a nationwide random-digit-dialing, or RDD, sample, with contact made to both landline and cell-phone-only households. In addition, oversamples were completed to targeted telephone numbers of African American, Latino, and Asian households, both landline and cell phone only. The total sample includes 1,319 white non-Hispanic respondents, 505 African American respondents, 502 Latino respondents, 515 Asian respondents, and 102 respondents of “other” races or ethnicities—American Indians and others who do not identify as either white, African American, Latino, or Asian. Latino respondents were given the option to answer the survey in either English or Spanish, and Asian respondents were given the option to answer the survey in English, Chinese, Korean, or Vietnamese. The overall sample contains a nominal margin of error of plus or minus 1.8 percent. The white subsample has a margin of error of 2.7 percent, and the African American, Latino, and Asian subsamples each have a margin of error of 4.4 percent.

As shown throughout this report, Americans are much more open to diversity and more supportive of steps to reduce racial inequalities than is commonly portrayed in politics and the media. Furthermore, Americans are more likely to see opportunities from rising diversity than they are to see challenges. They understand the problems associated with inequality in society and strongly support new steps and investments to reduce these inequalities and expand economic opportunities. Although differences remain between rising communities of color and whites in terms of openness to diversity and support for new policies to close remaining social gaps, many of these distinctions are more ideological in nature and less about race and ethnicity.

Some of the most important findings and conclusions from the study include:

Americans vastly overestimate current and future levels of diversity. When asked to estimate the current percentage of the U.S. population that is composed of racial and ethnic minorities, Americans are considerably off the mark. The median response—49 percent—indicates that the typical American thinks we are nearly a majority-minority nation already; the actual percent of the nation that is a minority is about 37 percent.³ These overestimates are prevalent across racial groups. Asians were the closest in their estimation, with their range of responses averaging 43 percent, followed by whites with an average of 48 percent, Latinos with an average of 50 percent, and African Americans with an average of 53 percent.

And Americans' prediction for the share of the country's population that will be composed of communities of color by the year 2050—62 percent—considerably exceeds the Census Bureau's 53 percent projection.

Americans overall are not pressing the panic button about rising diversity in society. By and large, positive sentiments about opportunities from rising diversity tend to outweigh negative concerns about rising diversity. Using two unique composite measures—one that combines levels of agreement with eight statements about the opportunities from rising diversity and one that combines levels of agreement with eight statements about concerns with these changes—we find that the average scores on the opportunity index are higher—with a mean of 51—than average scores on our concern index, which have a mean of 44. This relationship holds true across racial groups.

Despite the general acceptance of demographic change, there is considerable variation by race and ethnicity in terms of openness to rising diversity. Our 160-point composite openness index—which combines the responses across all 16 opportunity and concern questions, with 160 being the most open to diversity and zero being the least open to diversity—shows a mean score for the overall population of 86.5, with African Americans reporting a mean of 93, Latinos a mean of 90, Asians a mean of 97, and whites a mean of just 84. Interestingly, these differences are driven mostly by divergent views about the opportunities from rising diversity—where whites are not as optimistic as people of color—rather than by concerns about diversity, where differences are smaller.

The younger generation and those with higher levels of education exhibit much more openness to rising diversity. Generally, openness to rising diversity goes down with age and up with education. The youngest age group—Americans ages 18 to 29—reports a mean score of 92, compared to the oldest age group—Americans ages 65 or older—which scores an average of 80 on the index. High school graduates score an 83, while postgraduates score a 96. In contrast to variation by race, differences in openness by age and education are primarily driven by concern issues, where the older and less educated are more pessimistic, rather than opportunity issues. This suggests that as rising generations replace older ones and as America becomes a more educated society, concerns about rising diversity will recede and openness to diversity will increase.

The greatest opportunities from rising diversity are associated with the potential for more economic growth and greater innovation and competitiveness for businesses. Two of the top three opportunity scores were received for the ideas that, “A bigger, more diverse workforce will lead to more economic growth,” with 69 percent of respondents agreeing, 16 percent disagreeing, and a mean score of 6.9 out of 10; and “Diverse workplaces and schools will help make American businesses more innovative and competitive,” with 69 percent of respondents agreeing, 15 percent disagreeing, and a mean score of 6.8. In addition, the notion that, “The entry of new people into the American workforce will increase our tax base and help support our retiree population”—with 59 percent agreeing, 24 percent disagreeing, and a 6.2 mean score—received a high level of support.

The greatest concerns about rising diversity are related to its impact on government services and the availability of jobs. Sixty-two percent of Americans agree that with rising diversity, “[t]here will be too many demands on government services” in the future, and another 54 percent agree that “[t]here will not be enough jobs for everybody.” In contrast, other more-traditional concerns about diversity do not appear to be that pressing to Americans. The items recording the lowest levels of agreement include, “There will be no common American culture,” with 36 percent agreeing, 39 percent disagreeing, and a mean score of 4.9; “There will be more inequality,” with 38 percent agreeing, 35 percent disagreeing, and a mean score of 5.1; and “Discrimination against whites will increase,” with 42 percent agreeing, 37 percent disagreeing, and a mean score of 5.1. Unsurprisingly, whites—particularly older and more-conservative whites—express far more concern about a possible rise in discrimination against whites as diversity increases than do people of color. Sixty-one percent of white conservatives and 56 percent of whites ages 65 or older agree that discrimination against whites will increase due to rising diversity.

Americans strongly support a new equity agenda designed to reduce racial and ethnic inequality and create the conditions for everyone to participate in the economy. More than 7 in 10 Americans—71 percent—support “new steps to reduce racial and ethnic inequality in America through investments in areas like education, job training, and infrastructure improvement,” compared to the just 27 percent who are opposed. This includes 63 percent support among whites. In addition, 54 percent of Americans say such steps would help the economy overall, compared to the 10 percent who think they would hurt the economy. Whites are 49 percent and 11 percent, respectively, on the same question. Finally, 61 percent of Americans say they would be willing to invest “significantly more

public funds to help close [the] gap in college graduation rates” between black and Latino students and white students, compared to the 36 percent who say they are not willing to make such investments. Again, while whites are lower than minorities in their support, they still endorse this proposition by a margin of 53 percent to 46 percent.

Ideological attitudes about individual and collective action explain many of the differences in the support for an equity agenda. Americans are essentially split on the relative value of individual versus collective action, with 49 percent of the public agreeing that our economic challenges are common and that we all need to work together and 47 percent believing that Americans are basically on their own and cannot count on others to help them. Racial splits are sharp on this basic framing of American life, with majorities of African Americans, Latinos, and Asians agreeing that we should “work together” on common economic challenges—69 percent, 54 percent, and 52 percent, respectively. A majority of whites—52 percent—believe that Americans are “on their own” and cannot count on others. These basic ideological views, in turn, produce sharp differences in support for an equity agenda among whites. More than two-thirds of whites—67 percent—who strongly agree that they are on their own, for example, oppose government intervention in the economy to promote equity. In contrast, a clear majority of whites—53 percent—who strongly believe that we must work together on common economic challenges support government efforts to reduce inequality.

Lower education levels for blacks and Latinos and poverty-level wages are viewed as the most serious problems associated with inequality in America. We tested a variety of facts related to inequality to see which were regarded as most dire. The three most-serious problems were as follows: 1) “Forty-eight percent of black eighth graders and 43 percent of Latino eighth graders score below basic on math and reading tests, compared to 17 percent of whites,” with 88 percent of respondents saying this is a very serious or a serious problem; 2) “A quarter of all jobs in the United States now pay below poverty-level wages,” with 86 percent of respondents saying this is a very serious or a serious problem; and 3) “One in four children under age 5 live in poverty, including around two in five black and Latino children,” with 85 percent of respondents saying this is a very serious or a serious problem.

The potential for a better-prepared workforce and reductions in overall poverty are the most convincing reasons for Americans to support a new equity agenda.

We also tested a range of research findings on the benefits of eliminating racial inequality to see which ones motivated respondents to support \$120 billion a year in new investments to achieve that goal. The two most convincing reasons for Americans to support such investments are as follows: 1) “The estimated 42 percent of the workforce who will be black or Latino by 2050 will be better prepared for the jobs of the future,” with 69 percent of respondents saying that reason is very or somewhat convincing; and 2) “13 million people will be lifted out of poverty,” with 65 percent saying this reason is very or somewhat convincing. The least convincing reason to support a new equity agenda is the projection that “average incomes would go up by \$3000.” Fifty-four percent of respondents said this was very or somewhat convincing.

Let’s examine Americans’ attitudes toward rising diversity in greater detail.

The Center for American Progress is a nonpartisan research and educational institute dedicated to promoting a strong, just, and free America that ensures opportunity for all. We believe that Americans are bound together by a common commitment to these values and we aspire to ensure that our national policies reflect these values. We work to find progressive and pragmatic solutions to significant domestic and international problems and develop policy proposals that foster a government that is “of the people, by the people, and for the people.”

