

Black Opinions & Voting Behavior

*A Policy Briefing Presented by the
Center for Urban Renewal and Education*

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Background & Summary

The Center for Urban Renewal and Education (CURE) advances a mission of fighting poverty and restoring dignity through messages of faith, freedom and personal responsibility.

There is value in understanding the attitudes and political behavior of our major target population – black Americans – so we best know how to present and advance this agenda with this population. This is also a topic of interest to many Americans that can help inform public debate and policy solutions.

In this policy briefing, we provide an overview of black voting behavior in presidential elections over 84 years, from 1936 to 2020. We also analyze recent polling data to gain insight into what opinions and attitudes may be driving the political/voting behavior of this population.

As the Party of Abraham Lincoln, Republicans allied with black Americans in the wake of the Civil War to pass the 13th, 14th and 15th Amendments to the Constitution – abolishing slavery; granting citizenship and civil rights to emancipated black Americans; and guaranteeing that the right to vote could not be denied based on “race, color, or previous condition of servitude.”

White Democrats in the South disenfranchised many blacks during the 1870s, 1880s and 1890s with poll taxes and other irregular practices. Democrat President Woodrow Wilson subsequently initiated segregation in the federal government and in Washington, D.C. after his 1912 election. Accordingly, blacks largely voted for Republican presidential candidates through the 1932 election.

Following the Great Depression and enactment of Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s (FDR) New Deal, FDR garnered strong black support in the 1936 election and blacks have voted for the Democrat presidential candidate in every subsequent election. In 1964, Republican presidential candidate Barry Goldwater opposed the Civil Rights Act and black American support for Democrat candidates became much more pronounced.

There have been 14 presidential elections since 1964. This policy briefing examines the differences in black voting behavior in the 1964 to 2020 elections period from the 1936 to 1960 period. We ultimately look at where this situation stands today and what factors might have an impact in the future.

Key observations from the polling data presented below are:

1. Black Democrats are ideologically atypical of overall Democrat voters in that blacks self-identify as less liberal on certain issues.
2. On matters related to faith, religion, and morality, black Democrats poll more like white Republicans or Independents than they do white Democrats.
3. On matters concerning perceived fairness and inequality and perceived racism, and sympathies for large, activist government, blacks poll more closely with Democrats.

It seems reasonable to surmise that black concerns regarding fairness and inequality, and their inclination to believe that government is the means by which these problems can be solved, define black political behavior more than religious values.

This presents an additional question that merits consideration going forward. Why do black Americans feel so strongly that government is the means for addressing fairness and inequality?

We offer one hypothesis here.

Other major changes were taking place in the country when the Civil Rights Act was enacted in the 1960s. At the same time, there was a surge in support for activist government. Along with civil rights, President Johnson championed the “Great Society.” This period brought forth Medicare, Medicaid, government housing and welfare programs as part of the War on Poverty.

Government transfer payments as a percentage of the federal budget increased from 35% in the late 1960s to 70% in 2020.

Because the achievements of the civil rights movement were defined by political activism, it might be reasonable to conclude that perceived benefits of political activism and government solutions in all areas of American life had a disproportionate impact on the attitudes of black Americans.

Presidential Elections 1936–2020: The Black Vote

Black Americans have been a stalwart voting bloc for the Democrat Party over the last century. However, in 1964, the year in which the Civil Rights Act passed into the law, the

character of this support changed dramatically, with black support for Democrats sharply increasing. This reality has remained consistent until now.

In seven presidential elections from 1936 to 1960, the average percentage of the black vote for the Democrat presidential candidate was 70%. Average support for Republicans was 30%. Black support for the Republican candidate reached a peak in 1956 when Eisenhower received 39% of the black vote.

This picture changed dramatically in 1964. The Democrat candidate in 1964, Lyndon Johnson, received 94% of the black vote and the Republican candidate Barry Goldwater received 6%.

From 1964 to 2020, the average percentage of the black vote for the Democrat candidate was 88%, 18 points higher than the average from 1936 to 1960. The average vote for the Republican candidate in this more current period has been 10%, 20 points less than the 1936-1960 average. Black support for the Democrat candidate peaked in 2008 when President Barack Obama received 95% of the black vote and Republican John McCain received 4%.

On the night after Obama's election (November 5, 2008), Gallup Poll daily tracking found that 71% of American voters – including 61% of McCain voters – viewed his election as one of the most important advances for black Americans in the past 100 years.

In a November 7, 2008 analysis of the poll's findings ("Americans See Obama Election as Race Relations Milestone"), Gallup Senior Scientist Frank Newport further noted that 67% of Americans "say a solution to relations between blacks and whites will eventually be worked out, the highest value Gallup has measured of this question." However, in a June 17, 2020 article ("American Attitudes and Race") Newport said, "by the end of his [Obama's] administration, attitudes on race had soured rather than improved."

How America Has Changed Since 1964

Certainly, the watershed event of 1964 was the passage of the Civil Rights Act.

The support of President Lyndon Johnson for the Civil Rights movement, coupled with the opposition of Republican presidential candidate Senator Barry Goldwater to the 1964

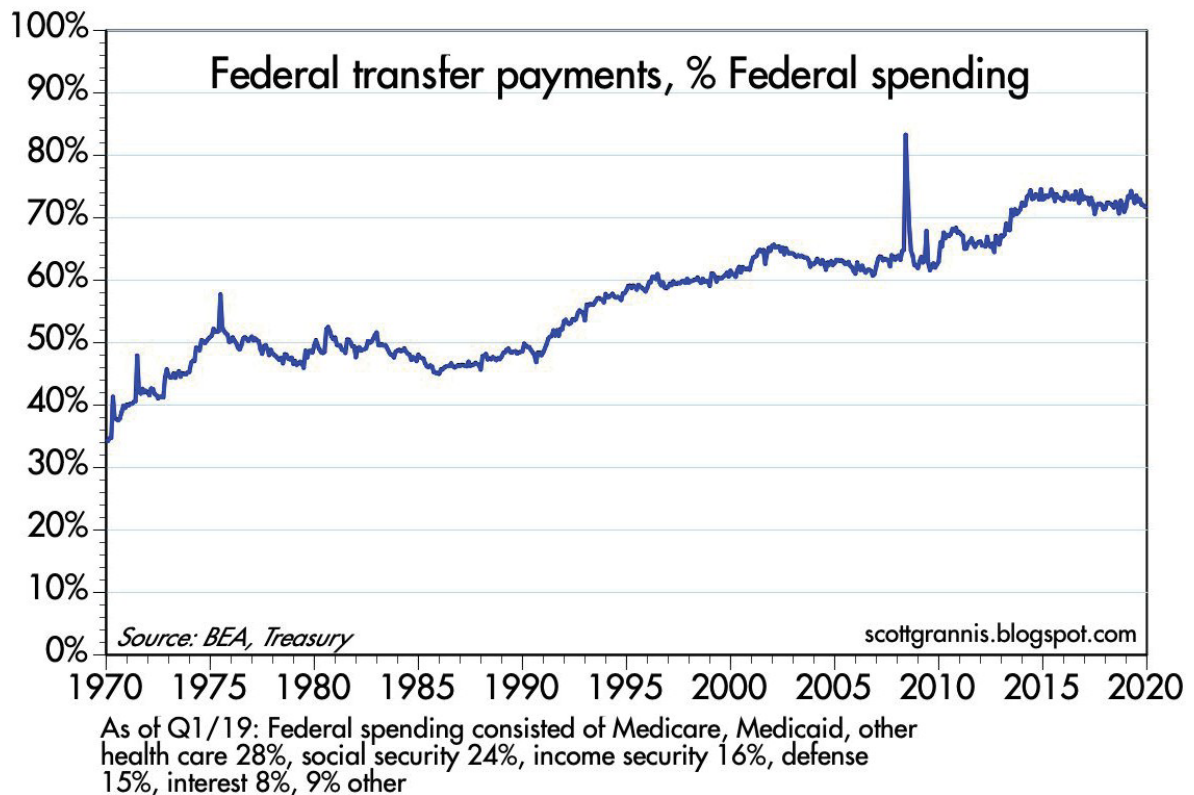
Civil Rights Act, drove the most pronounced support of black voters for the Democratic Party candidate in history.

However, that was more than half a century ago. What else has happened that has changed America?

The presidency of Lyndon Johnson was defined by civil rights but was also defined by the beginning of a new era of big government. Johnson called it the Great Society.

The chart below shows that from 1970 until 2020, the percentage of the federal budget consisting of transfer payments – funds moving from taxpayers to other private citizens by way of various government programs - doubled. It went from 35% of the federal budget in 1970 to 70% in 2020.

This is another factor to keep in mind in considering the major shift in black voting for the Democrat Party since the 1960s.



American Blacks Differ from Democrats on Their Ideology

According to 2022 Gallup polling, U.S. adults break down ideologically as follows:

U.S. Adults		Republicans	
Conservative	36%	Conservative	72%
Moderate	35%	Moderate	22%
Liberal	26%	Liberal	5%
Democrats		Blacks*	
Conservative	10%	Conservative	21%
Moderate	36%	Moderate	47%
Liberal	54%	Liberal	30%

- *The percentages for blacks are based on 2023 data, courtesy of Gallup Analytics*

Whereas more than half of Democrats are liberal, only 30% of blacks describe themselves as liberal.

Liberalism seems to define, on average, Democrat Party voters. But black voters do not fit comfortably into this mold.

94% of Republicans are either conservative or moderate, 46% of Democrats are either conservative or moderate, and 68% of blacks are either conservative or moderate.

Ideologically, blacks fall between Republican and Democrat averages. Yet, black voting has been almost 90% aligned with Democrats.

Other Factors Defining Black Voters

Church & Politics

Is it essential or important for clergy/houses of worship to offer sermons on political topics?

Pew Research 2021

	Essential	Important, but not essential	Total
Black Adults	24%	38%	62%
All U.S. Adults	13%	30%	43%

CONCLUSION: *Blacks are much more supportive of church/clergy involvement on political topics than the broader American electorate.*

Religion & Morality

Is belief in God necessary to be moral? "Yes"

Pew Research 2021

Black Adults	54%
All U.S. Adults	32%

CONCLUSION: Blacks vastly exceed the broader American populace in their conviction that belief in God drives moral behavior.

Should clergy perform same-sex ceremonies? "Yes"

Pew Research 2021

Black Adults	44%
All U.S. Adults	52%

CONCLUSION: Blacks are less supportive of clergy performing same-sex ceremonies than U.S. adults overall.

Church Attendance Monthly or More

Pew Research 2021

Black Adults	43%
All U.S. Adults	32%

CONCLUSION: Black adults are considerably more likely to attend religious services on a weekly or monthly basis than U.S. adults overall.

Inequality

U.S. is Divided into Have/Have-Nots - "Yes"

Gallup 2019

Democrats	57%	Republicans	24%
Blacks	70%	Hispanics	38%

Self-Identification as Have/Have-Not

Gallup 2019

Democrats		Republicans	
Have	52%	Have	71%
Have-Not	40%	Have-Not	18%
Blacks		Hispanics	
Have	37%	Have	34%
Have-Not	57%	Have-Not	57%

CONCLUSION: *Blacks are more likely than Democrats and much more likely than Republicans and Hispanics to believe that the U.S. is divided into Haves and Have-Nots. While more than a third of blacks (37%) nonetheless view themselves as Haves (slightly more than Hispanics in this self-identification), a strong majority of Hispanics (61%) do not believe the U.S. is divided into Haves and Have-Nots.*

Racism & Civil Rights

Racism against black people is widespread in the U.S. today. "Yes"

Gallup 2021

White	59%	Democrats	91%
Blacks	84%	Republicans	34%

Civil rights for black people have improved in my lifetime. "Yes"

Gallup 2021

Whites	70%	Democrats	66%
Blacks	57%	Republicans	80%

CONCLUSION: *Blacks are much more aligned with Democrats in believing that racism is widespread in the U.S. today. However, the partisan and racial differences are fairly modest - and the views more positive – about long-term progress that has been made on civil rights for black people.*

Educational & Job Opportunities

Black people have an equal chance to get a job for which they are qualified. "Yes"

Gallup 2020

White	62%
Blacks	31%

A person in the U.S. has an opportunity to get ahead by working hard. "Yes"

Gallup 2019

Upper-Income	64%	Middle-Income	65%	Lower-Income	64%
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Black children have an equal chance to get a good education. "Yes"

Gallup 2020

White	65%
Blacks	38%

Parents should be able to designate tax dollars to send their child to the public or private school of their choice. "Yes"

RealClear Opinion Research, February 2023

White	71%
Blacks	73%

CONCLUSION: *Black Americans have a much more negative view than white people about opportunities in key areas of their lives, with only half as many believing they have an equal chance to get a job for which they are qualified. This feeling does not seem to be driven by an individual's income level, as the Gallup data suggests that upper, middle, and low-income Americans have virtually identical views about their opportunity to get ahead by working hard.*

The killing of George Floyd and other highly publicized and racially charged incidents seem to have reinforced the view of many black Americans that they are not treated fairly and the deck is stacked against them. Black and white Americans are nearly identical in their view that parents should have the opportunity to send their children to the school of their choice, but a clear majority of blacks do not believe their children have an equal chance to get a good education.

Role of Government

Government should do more to solve problems. "Yes"

Pew Research 2021

White	47%	Dem/Lean Dem	81%
Blacks	76%	Rep/Lean Rep	23%

CONCLUSION: *Blacks and Democrats are similarly aligned in believing that government should do more to solve problems. Most Republicans have a starkly different view about the proper role of government.*

Looking Forward

In 1956, President Dwight Eisenhower attained a post-New Deal high of 39% of the black vote after abolishing segregation in the military, integrating Washington, D.C., and hiring more black Americans in the Foreign Service than ever before. Richard Nixon was able to garner 32% of the black vote in his razor-thin loss to John F. Kennedy in 1960, but Republican support plunged to 6% in 1964 with Barry Goldwater's opposition to the Civil Rights Act.

Under President Donald Trump, black Americans saw real median income grow by 7.9% in 2019 – a record one-year increase that brought the black income level to a new high. The black poverty rate fell by 2 percentage points to a record low. The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted this progress in 2020 and another tragic event took a toll on Trump's standing with blacks and many other Americans – the death of George Floyd and the public perception that Trump made racial tensions worse after Floyd was killed.

During the first five months of 2020, Trump attained the highest job approval ratings of his presidency – 49% in five different January – May Gallup tracking polls. Following Floyd's death on May 25, Trump's approval dropped by 10 points in the next Gallup poll and to 38% in a June poll.

In an early June 2020 NPR/PBS News Hour/Marist poll, 67% said Trump had mostly increased racial tensions - including 88% of African Americans, 73% of Independents and 63% of whites.

In 2021, Virginia Republicans narrowly won all three statewide races – Governor, Lieutenant Governor and Attorney General – in a state Trump lost by 10 points in 2020. While Trump garnered 12% of the black vote nationally in 2020, he only carried 10% of the black vote in Virginia. Gov. Glenn Youngkin and Attorney General Jason Miyares each garnered 13% of the black vote, while Lieutenant Gov. Winsome Sears – a black woman – won 16%.

One state is a small sample but the modest gains in the black vote attained by Youngkin and Miyares are another indicator that Republicans have a long way to go in gaining substantial support from black voters. However, the Gallup and NPR/PBS/Marist polling done in the aftermath of George Floyd's death seems to suggest that white voters also react adversely if they believe blacks are being treated unfairly or that a political figure is contributing to an increase in racial tensions. That dynamic may have been a factor in the Virginia Republican candidates performing better than Trump among white suburban voters.



Several polls in 2024 show Trump making significant gains with black voters. A February 2024 CBS/YouGov national poll of likely voters found Trump winning support from 23% of black voters in a head-to-head matchup against Biden. A May 2024 New York Times/Siena College poll in six battleground states also showed Trump winning 23% of black voters in a head-to-head matchup. However, Trump's support from black voters dropped to 14% when voters in the battleground states were given a five-candidate option that found Robert Kennedy gaining support from 11% of black voters.

A closer look at data in the CBS/YouGov poll shows that 81% of black voters say the economy will be a major factor in how they vote, 77% say crime will also be a major factor, and 69% say the situation at the U.S./Mexico border is either a crisis or serious problem. Forty-four percent of black voters believe the economy is currently in bad condition and 41% think the economy was good under Trump. Twenty-six percent of black voters believe the Trump presidency was either excellent or good and 26% also believe Trump fights for people like them.

Following the controversy about the 2020 presidential election, Republican governors and legislators moved to enact election integrity measures in their states – arguing that they’re trying to make it easier to vote but harder to cheat. President Biden, Democrats in Congress and their political allies branded these efforts as “Jim Crow 2.0.” They fought fiercely against the Republican measures at the state level and have tried to pass national legislation that would override all of these state laws.

Democrat opposition to Republican election law efforts – and some other proposed policies — seeks to reinforce the perception among many black voters and others that Republicans are insensitive to black concerns about inequality. Trump and Republicans may make gains among black voters if they can convince them that their economic, border security, and educational choice policies provide better opportunities for blacks to get ahead, and that support for the police will help to reduce crime in black communities. However, broader support will only be attained if black voters are convinced that Republican candidates genuinely understand their concerns about inequality and are committed to working with them to overcome obstacles to long-term success.

CURE is a policy and research center dedicated to fighting poverty and restoring dignity through messages of faith, freedom and personal responsibility.

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Star Parker

Founder & President

CURE was founded by Star Parker in 1995. Parker holds a bachelor's degree in marketing and International Business from Woodbury University and has received numerous awards and commendations for her work on public policy issues. In 2016, CPAC honored her as the "Ronald Reagan Foot Soldier of the Year." In 2017, Star was the recipient of the Groundswell Impact award, and in 2018, Bott Radio Network presented Star with its annual Queen Esther award.

Serving on the National Religious Broadcasters Board of Directors and the Board of Directors at the Leadership Institute, Star is active in helping other organizations that impact the culture, particularly for younger generations. To date, Star has spoken on more than 225 college campuses, including Harvard, Berkeley, Emory, Liberty, Franciscan, UCLA, and University of Virginia.

She is a regular commentator on national television and radio networks including the BBC, EWTN, and FOX News, and the author of four books: *Necessary Noise: How Donald Trump Inflames the Culture War and Why This Is Good News for America* (2019); *Uncle Sam's Plantation: How Big Government Enslaves America's Poor and What We Can Do About It* (2003/2012); *White Ghetto: How Middle-Class America Reflects Inner City Decay* (2006); and *Pimps, Whores and Welfare Brats: From Welfare Cheat to Conservative Messenger* (1997).



Marty Dannenfels

Vice President for Government Relations and Coalitions

Marty Dannenfels is Vice President for Government Relations and Coalitions for CURE. He tracks proposals from the White House, executive branch agencies, Capitol Hill, and the policy community—particularly as they relate to culture, race, and poverty—and shares CURE’s ideas on free markets, religious freedom, personal responsibility, and other policy matters.

Dannenfels previously served as the presidentially-appointed Staff Director of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, and as Senior Policy Advisor at the White House Office of Public Liaison. He has served in senior policy, government relations, and external relations positions with the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Energy. Dannenfels has also served as Senior Policy Advisor and Coalitions Director for the House Committee on Energy and Commerce, and as Legislative Director for a Member of Congress.

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