

Publics Around the World Say Governments Should Act to Prevent Racial Discrimination

Most Countries See Progress in Racial Equality; Some Do Not

March 20, 2008

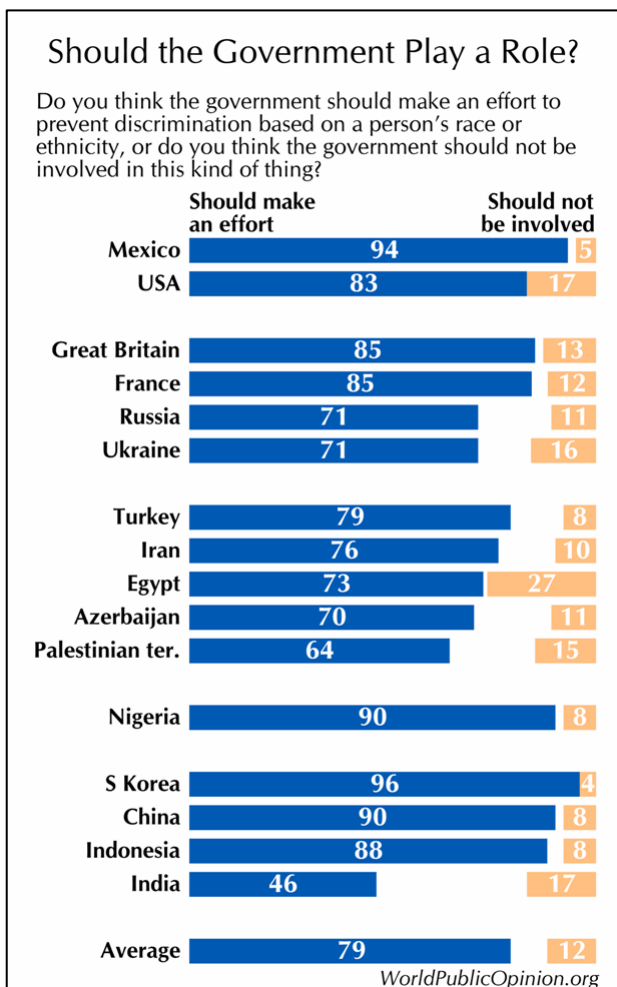
Very large majorities around the world say people of different races and ethnicities should be treated equally. In nearly all countries surveyed, large majorities agree that governments should take action to prevent racial discrimination, and in most of them majorities think they need to do more.

In 15 out of 16 countries surveyed, large majorities say that employers should not be allowed to discriminate based on race or ethnicity and that it is the government's responsibility to stop this from happening.

In 11 of the 16 countries, most believe treatment of different races has grown more equal over the course of their lifetime, but in five countries this is not the case.

These are some of the findings from a poll of 14,896 people in the Americas, Europe, Asia, the Middle East and Africa conducted by WorldPublicOpinion.org, a collaborative research project involving research centers from around the world and managed by the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) at the University of Maryland. Interviews were conducted in 16 countries representing 58 percent of the world's population: Azerbaijan, China, Egypt, France, Great Britain, India, Indonesia, Iran, Mexico, Nigeria, the Palestinian territories, Russia, South Korea, Turkey, Ukraine, and the US.

WorldPublicOpinion.org has released the poll in advance of International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (March 21). This year also marks the 60th anniversary of the UN General Assembly's adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which



declares that all are entitled to the same rights and freedoms, regardless of race, language, religion, sex or other status.

Racial and Ethnic Equality

Majorities in all 16 nations consider it important for “people of different races and ethnicities to be treated equally.” In 13 countries, majorities say this is “very important.” On average, 90 percent say that treating people of different races and ethnicities equally is important, with 69 percent saying it is very important. No more than 13 percent in any country say it is not important.

Overwhelming majorities say racial equality is very important in Mexico (94%), China (90%), and Britain (87%), along with large majorities in the United States (79%), Indonesia (75%), Turkey (73%), Egypt (71%), South Korea (71%), Nigeria (71%), the Palestinian territories (70%), France (69%), Azerbaijan (68%), and Iran (62%). Smaller numbers agree in Russia (37%), India (44%), and the Ukraine (50%).

Wide Support for Government Action

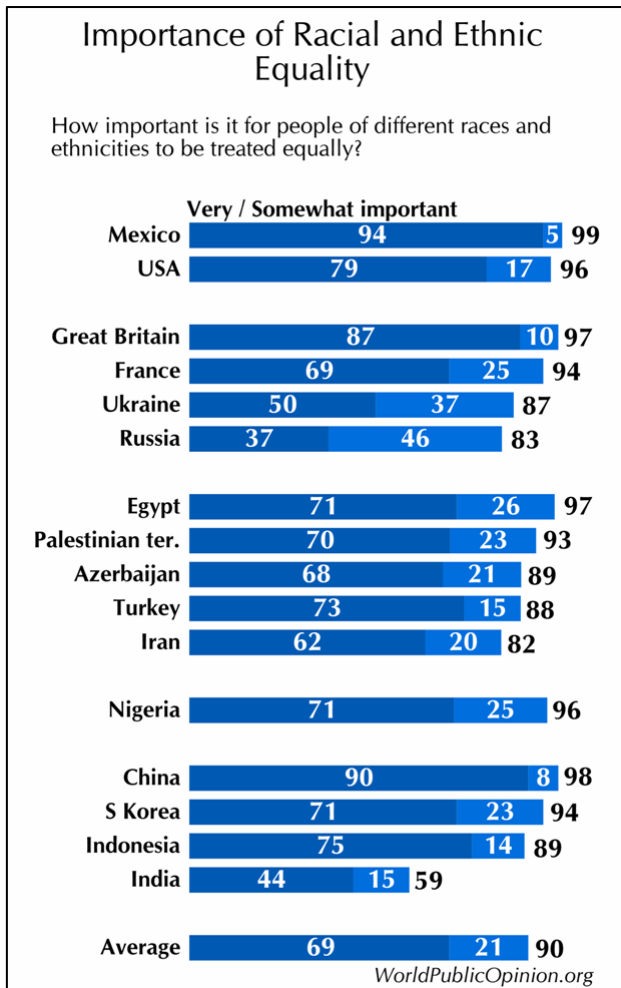
Majorities around the world agree that governments should act to ensure that minorities are treated equally. On average, 79 percent agree that the government “should make an effort to prevent discrimination based on a person’s race or ethnicity,” while just 12 percent feel that the government should not be involved.

Support for government action is greatest in South Korea (96%), Mexico (94%), China (90%), Nigeria (90%), and Indonesia (88%). Very large majorities also favor such efforts in Britain (85%), France (85%), the United States (83%), Turkey (79%) and Iran (76%).

Only in India does less than half of the public (46%) favor government action. Seventeen percent oppose such action while large numbers are uncertain.

Many Think Governments Should Do More

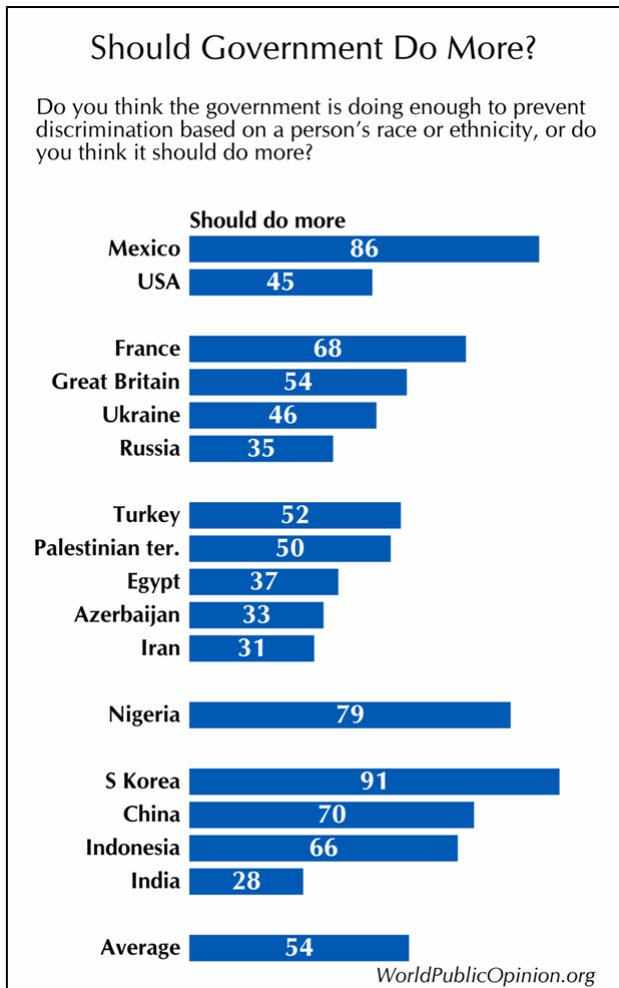
In 10 of the 16 nations polled, the most common view is that governments should go further to prevent racial and ethnic discrimination. On average across all nations polled, 54 percent say the



government should do more, while 22 percent feel it is already doing enough. Just 5 percent volunteer that their government already does too much.

Overwhelming numbers of South Koreans (91%) and Mexicans (86%) support greater government efforts along with 79 percent of Nigerians. Large majorities also support further government action in China (70%), France (68%), and Indonesia (66%) while more modest majorities hold this view in Britain (54%) and Turkey (52%). Pluralities agree in the Palestinian territories (50%) and Ukraine (46%). Indians, Americans, Russians and several Muslim publics express more mixed views.

The largest percentage opposed to government action against discrimination is found in India, where 38 percent say that the government should not be involved (17%) or that it is doing too much (21%). However, as Yashwant Deshmukh, director of the WPO network's Indian partner Team C Voter, comments, this lower number may be due in part to the robust affirmative action programs in favor of the lower castes implemented by the Indian government. He explains that the question of race or ethnicity is seen "as more relevant to the Indian caste system."



Americans hold divided views: 55 percent say the government is already doing enough (38%) or should not be involved (17%) but a robust 45 percent say the government should do more. Results are similar in Russia, where 39 percent say the government is doing enough (24%), too much (4%) or should not be involved (11%) but 35 percent think it should do more.

Three Muslim countries have mixed views. In Iran two out of five (40%) say the government already does enough to prevent racial and ethnic discrimination and another 10 percent say it should not do anything. But nearly a third (31%) think it should do more. Egyptians are almost evenly divided between those who say the government should take further action (37%) and those who say it does enough (36%). In Azerbaijan, 34 percent say the government does enough and 33 percent want it to do more.

Majorities See Improvement

In 11 of the 16 nations polled, majorities say that over the course of their lifetime people of different races and ethnicities have come to be treated more equally. On average, 59 percent say

people of different races and ethnicities are treated more equally than in the past, including 20 percent who say much more equally. Only 19 percent believe people are treated less equally than before and 14 percent say there has been no real change.

The United States and Indonesia have the largest majorities (82% in both) saying that racial and ethnic minorities enjoy greater equality than in the past, followed by Britain (79%), China (78%), and Iran (76%). The United States (42%), Britain (39%) and China (34%) have the largest percentages saying such minorities are treated “much more equally.”

Palestinians are the one public that does not perceive such progress. A majority of Palestinians (54%) say people of different races and ethnicities are now treated less equally than in the past while only 27 percent say they get better treatment.

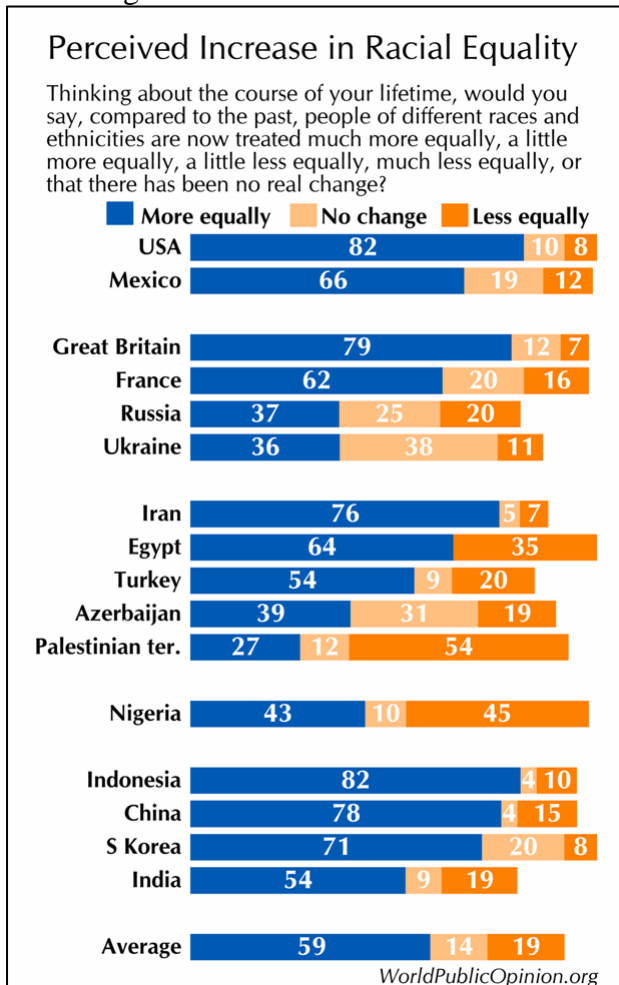
Views are mixed about whether minorities are treated more equally in four countries: Nigeria (43% more equal, 45% less equal, 10% no change) and three former Soviet states, Ukraine (36% more equal, 11% less, 38% no real change), Azerbaijan (39% more, 19% less, 31% no change) and Russia (more 37%, less 20%, no change 25%).

Workplace Discrimination

Majorities in 15 out of 16 nations agree that employers do not have the right to discriminate. Asked whether employers should be allowed to “refuse to hire a qualified person because of the person’s race or ethnicity,” on average three out of four (75%) say employers should not be able to base hiring decisions on race, while just 19 percent believe they should.

Majorities against workplace discrimination are largest in France (94%), China (88%), the United States (86%), Indonesia (84%), Britain (83%), and Azerbaijan (82%).

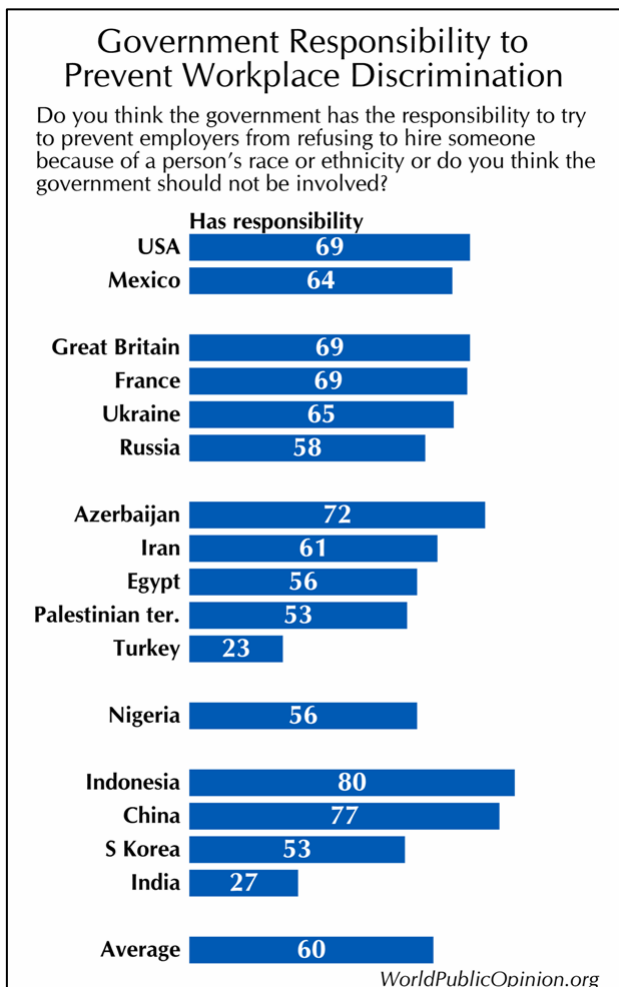
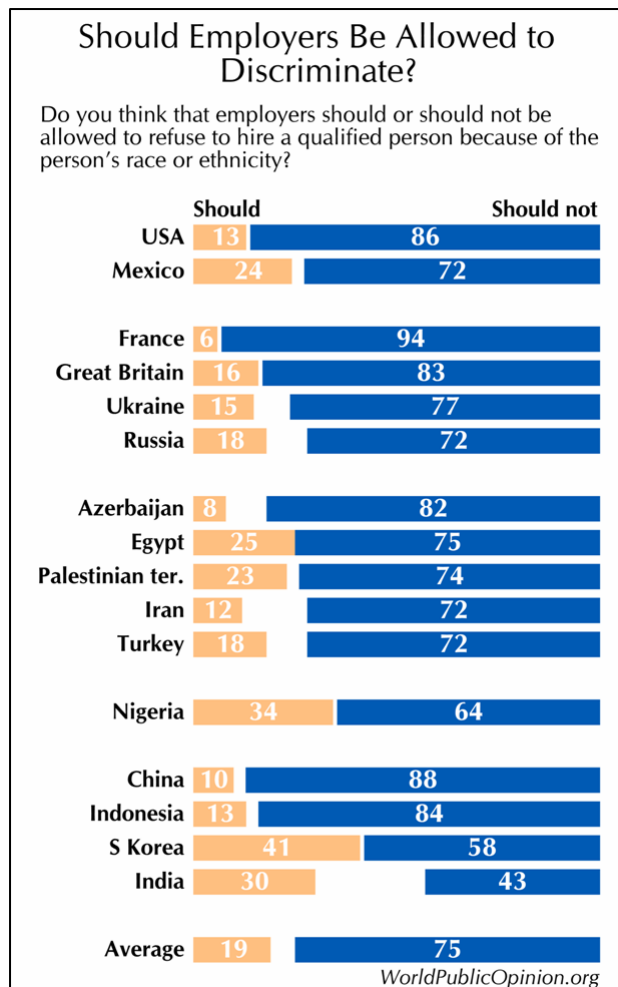
Again, India stands apart from the other countries polled. Although a plurality opposed such discrimination, an unusually high 30 percent says that employers should be allowed to reject jobseekers because of race or ethnicity. Relatively large minorities also agree that employers should be free to hire whom they choose in Nigeria (34%) and South Korea (41%), though in both cases, majorities are opposed (64% and 58%, respectively).



Majorities in 14 out of 16 nations believe that the government has the responsibility to stop employers from discriminating. On average, 60 percent believe that the government has the responsibility to take action against such practices, while just 14 percent believe it does not.

Indonesians (80%) and the Chinese (77%) believe overwhelmingly that the government should try to prevent discriminatory hiring practices, followed by Azerbaijanis (72%), the French (69%), Americans (69%), Britons (69%), Ukrainians (65%), Mexicans (64%), and Iranians (61%). More modest majorities agree in Russia (58%), Egypt (56%), Nigeria (56%), the Palestinian territories (53%), and South Korea (53%).

Two countries differ: Turkey and India. Only 23 percent of Turks say that the government has the responsibility to take measures against workplace discrimination and 43 percent say it does not. Among Indians just 27 percent say that government has this responsibility, while 20 percent say it does not.



COUNTRY-BY-COUNTRY RESULTS:

AMERICAS:

MEXICO

[Reforma](#)

Mexico has the largest majority of any country polled saying that it is very important for people of different races and ethnicities to be treated equally, and the second-largest majority believing that their government should do more to prevent racial discrimination. However, while a majority perceives that equality is growing, Mexico is among the countries where relatively few feel that that people of different races and ethnicities gained *much more* equal treatment over their lifetime.

- A nearly unanimous 99% believe that it is important for people of different races and ethnicities receive equal treatment, including 94% who say it is “very important.”
- 94% of Mexicans say the government should make an effort to prevent discrimination, including 86% who believe it “should do more.” Only 7% say the government is “doing enough.”
- A large majority (72%) says that employers should not be allowed to discriminate on the basis of race or ethnicity, while 24% believe they should. A majority (64%) believes the government has the responsibility to try to stop employers from doing so.
- Two-thirds (66%) of Mexicans say that treatment of racial and ethnic minorities has improved over their lifetimes but only 11% say it has improved much more. Nineteen percent say there has been “no real change” and 12% say such minorities are treated less equally.

UNITED STATES

[Program on International Policy Attitudes](#) / [Knowledge Networks](#)

Americans are the largest majority reporting that people of different races and ethnicities have gained much more equal treatment during their lifetime. Americans widely believe that the government should make an effort to prevent racial and ethnic discrimination, but a majority says that the government is already doing enough in that regard or should not be involved in such efforts.

- 96% believe it is important that people of different races and ethnicities be treated equally, including 79% who say it is “very important.”
- Most Americans (83%) say the government should take measures to prevent discrimination based on race or ethnicity. But according to a majority (55%) the government is already “doing enough” (38%) or it “should not be involved” (17%).
- 86% believe that employers should not be allowed to turn away qualified applicants on the basis of race or ethnicity and 69% think the government has the responsibility to prevent this form of discrimination.

- More than four in five (82%) say they have seen treatment of minorities improve over their lifetime. Among the publics polled, the United States has the largest percentage saying minorities are now treated much more equally (42%).

EUROPE:

FRANCE

[Efficienc 3](#)

The French public has the largest majority saying employers should not have the right to discriminate based on race or ethnicity, and a large majority believes the government should do more to prevent discrimination. Large majorities also see equal treatment of people of different races and ethnicities as important and believe they are now treated more equally, although only a few see large gains in this area.

- A very large majority (94%) of the French say equal treatment of different races and ethnicities is important, including 69% who consider it very important.
- 85% say the government should try to prevent discrimination based on race or ethnicity, while more than two-thirds (68%) say that the government should be doing more. Only 18% say it is already doing enough.
- More than nine in 10 (94%) agree that employers should not be able to discriminate, the largest majority among the countries polled. Sixty-nine percent say the government has the responsibility to try to stop such practices, while 23% say it does not.
- 62% of French respondents say treatment of racial and ethnic minorities has improved over their lifetimes, but only 12% say such groups are treated much more equally. Twenty percent say there has been no real change and 16% say treatment is less equal than before.

GREAT BRITAIN

[Chatham House \(Royal Institute of International Affairs\)](#) / [GlobeScan](#)

Britain has one of the largest majorities supporting the importance of equal treatment for people of different races and ethnicities, and has a very large majority favoring government efforts to prevent discrimination, although significantly fewer call for the government to do more in this regard. A large majority also believes that people of different races and ethnicities are now treated more equally than in the past.

- 97% say treating people of different races and ethnicities equally is important and 87% say it is very important.
- Most British respondents (85%) believe that the government should take action to prevent discrimination. Only a modest majority (54%) says the government needs to do more, however. About a third (31%) feel the government is doing enough now and 16% say it should not get involved in such matters.
- A very large majority (83%) says employers should not be allowed to deny jobs to qualified people because of their race or ethnicity. More than two-thirds (69%) say that

the government has the responsibility to stop such discrimination, while only 13% say it does not.

- Four in five (79%) say people of different races and ethnicities are treated more equally than in the past, including 39% who say they are treated “much more equally.”

RUSSIA

[Levada Center](#)

Russians are one of a few publics which express mixed views about whether racial and ethnic equality has improved compared to the past. A large majority favors the government making efforts to prevent racial and ethnic discrimination, but only one in three believe the government should do more. A large majority rejects employers having the right to discriminate based on race or ethnicity.

- 83% of Russians agree that equal treatment of people of different races and ethnicities is important, although only 37% say it is very important.
- A strong majority (71%) thinks the government should make efforts to prevent racial and ethnic discrimination, though only 35% say it should do more and 24% say it already does enough.
- Russians have mixed views about whether racial and ethnic minorities have won greater equality: 37% say they are better off, 20% say they are worse off and 25% say there has been no real change.
- 72% say that employers should not have the right to refuse to hire people based on their based on race or ethnicity. A majority (58%) believes that the government has the responsibility to prevent employers from doing so, while just 13% say it does not.

UKRAINE

[Kiev International Institute of Sociology](#)

Ukrainians are one of a few publics which hold mixed views on whether improvements in racial and ethnic equality have occurred during their lifetime, although a large majority feels that equal treatment is important. Large majorities also agree that employers should not have the right to engage in discriminatory hiring practices and that the government has the responsibility to prevent this from occurring.

- A large majority (87%) of Ukrainians believe that equal treatment of different races and ethnicities is very (50%) or somewhat important (37%).
- 71% of Ukrainians say that the government should make efforts to prevent racial and ethnic discrimination, including 46% who feel the government should do more, while only 19% say it is already doing enough.
- Ukrainians have mixed views about whether there have been gains in racial equality during their lifetimes: 38% perceive no real change, 36% say minorities are treated better and 11% say worse.
- More than three-quarters (77%) believe employers should not be allowed to turn away qualified jobseekers because of race or ethnicity, and 65% feel the government has the responsibility to prevent this from occurring. Very few say it does not (10%).

MIDDLE EAST/EURASIA:

AZERBAIJAN

International Center for Social Research

Azerbaijanis are among the publics with the smallest percentage—less than four in ten—saying that there has been improvement in racial equality over the course of their lifetime. Although a majority of Azerbaijanis believes the government should make efforts to prevent racial and ethnic discrimination, they are divided on whether the government should do more on this front and a significant number believe the government already does too much. However, a majority thinks that employers should not have the right to discriminate based on race or ethnicity, and they are among the largest majorities believing the government has the responsibility to prevent this.

- A very large majority (89%) of Azerbaijanis consider equal treatment of different races and ethnicities very (68%) or somewhat (21%) important.
- 70% feel the government should take measures to stop discrimination but only 33% say it needs to do more, 34% say it is already doing enough, and 16% say it is doing too much.
- Just 39% of Azerbaijanis believe racial and ethnic equality has improved over their lifetime, while half say there has either been “no real change” (31%) or that there is now less equality (19%).
- More than four in five (82%) say employers should not be able to make hiring decisions based on race or ethnicity, and 72%—one of the largest majorities among the publics polled—agree that the government has the responsibility to prevent this.

EGYPT

Attitude Market Research

Among Muslim publics, Egyptians have the largest number expressing support for the importance of racial and ethnic equality. Egyptians widely oppose employers having the right to discriminate based on race or ethnicity in their hiring practices, and believe the government has the responsibility to prevent this from happening. But while a large majority agrees that the government should prevent discrimination, Egyptians are divided on whether further action is necessary, and they have the most respondents saying the government should not be involved at all.

- 97% of Egyptians see equal treatment of people of different races and ethnicities as very (71%) or somewhat important (26%).
- 73% believe the government should try to prevent discrimination, although only 37% say it should do more, while 36% say it already does enough. 27% (the largest of any country) say the government should not be involved.
- Three in four (75%) believe employers do not have the right to discriminate on the basis of race or ethnicity. A majority (56%) says the government has the responsibility to prevent such discrimination while just 19% say it does not.

- A majority (64%) says that people of different races and ethnicities are now treated more equally than in the past, although just 17% believe they are treated “much more equally.” More than a third (35%) feels they are treated less equally.

IRAN

WorldPublicOpinion.org

A large majority of Iranians believes that racial and ethnic equality is important, although they have the lowest number calling this “very important” out of all Muslim publics polled. Although Iranians mostly favor the government preventing discrimination, more feel that it already does enough than say it should do more.

- More than four in five (82%) Iranians say that treating people of different races and ethnicities equally is important, including 62% who call this “very important.”
- Three-quarters (76%) feel their government should try to prevent racial and ethnic discrimination, although half say it already does enough (40%) or should not be involved (10%). Only a third (31%) think it needs to do more.
- 72% of Iranians think employers should not be allowed to discriminate based on race or ethnicity. A majority (61%) says the government has the responsibility to prevent such workplace discrimination. Only 5% say it does not.
- Three-quarters (76%) feel that people of different races and ethnicities are treated better than in the recent past, including (32%) who say they are much better treated. Very few say minorities are treated less equally (7%) or that there has been no real change (5%).

PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES

[Palestinian Center for Public Opinion](http://PalestinianCenterforPublicOpinion.org)

A large majority of Palestinians believe that equal treatment for people of different races and ethnicities is important. The Palestinians are the only nation where a majority says that people of different races and ethnicities have less equality of treatment than in the past. Two-thirds of Palestinians are supportive of the government making efforts to prevent racial and ethnic discrimination.

- Palestinians say overwhelmingly (93%) that it is important for people of different races and ethnicities to be treated equally, including 70% who say this is “very important.”
- 64% feel the government should try to prevent racial or ethnic discrimination, while only 32% believe that it should not be involved (15%) or that it already does too much (17%).
- Only 27% say their generation has seen improvements in the treatment of minorities. A majority (54%) say they are treated “a little less equally” (36%) or “much less equally” (18%). Twelve percent say they are treated the same.
- Nearly three-quarters (74%) of Palestinians say that employers should not be allowed to turn down qualified people because of their race or ethnicity. A majority (53%) say the government has a responsibility to try to prevent this.

TURKEY

[ARI Foundation](#) / [Infakto Research Workshop](#)

A large majority of Turks say that it is important for people of different races and ethnicities to be treated equally. A majority believes that the government should make an effort to prevent discrimination. However, when it comes to discrimination in employment, Turkey is the one country where a majority says that the government does not have the responsibility to prevent discrimination, or that employers should be allowed to refuse to hire someone based on their race or ethnicity.

- An overwhelming 88% believe it is important for people of different races and ethnicities to be treated equally, including 73% who say it is “very important.”
- 79% say the government should try to prevent discrimination. Fifty-two percent say it “should do more,” although 38% say it is already “doing enough” (25%), “doing too much” (5%), or “should not be involved” (8%).
- A large majority (72%) thinks employers should not be able to refuse to hire someone qualified because of their race or ethnicity. But large numbers (43%) say the government is not responsible for preventing such discrimination while only 23% say that it is.
- 54% say treatment of minorities has become more equal in their lifetime, including 16% who say that they have gained “much more” equality. Only 20% say they are treated less equally and 9% say about the same.

AFRICA:

NIGERIA

Market Trends Research International

Nigerians widely believe that the government should make an effort to prevent racial and ethnic discrimination and has the third-largest majority saying that the government should do more to prevent this type of discrimination. However, a significant number of Nigerians feel that an employer should have the right to refuse to hire someone based on their race or ethnicity. Nigeria is one of the few countries where a majority does not perceive that racial equality has improved.

- A large majority (96%) believes it is important for people of different races and ethnicities to be treated equally, although only 71% say it is “very important.”
- Nine out of 10 Nigerians (90%) say their government should make an effort to prevent discrimination based on race or ethnicity, including 79% who believe it “should do more.” Only 9% say it is “doing enough.”
- 64% say employers should not be allowed to turn away qualified jobseekers because of their race or ethnicity but a third (34%) say they should be free to hire whom they chose, more than in most other countries polled. A majority of Nigerians (56%) feel their government has the responsibility to prevent this form of discrimination.

- Only 43% say different races and ethnicities are treated more equally than they were a generation ago. A majority (55%) say they are either treated less equally (28%), much less equally (17%) or about the same (10%).

ASIA/PACIFIC:

CHINA

WorldPublicOpinion.org

The Chinese are among the publics with the greatest support for importance of equal treatment for different races and ethnicities, second only to Mexicans among the publics polled. China also has the second-largest majority rejecting employers having the right to discriminate based on race or ethnicity, and are among the largest majorities that favor their government making efforts to prevent racial and ethnic discrimination.

- Nearly all Chinese (98%) believe treating people of different races and ethnicities equally is very important, including 90% who say it is “very important.”
- An overwhelming 90% agree that the government should try to prevent racial and ethnic discrimination and 70% think it should be doing more.
- 88% of Chinese feel that employers should not be allowed to turn away jobseekers because of their race or ethnicity. More than three in four (77%) believe the government has a responsibility to prevent such practices.
- 78% say that people of different races and ethnicities are treated more equally now than a generation ago, with 34% saying “much more” and 44% saying “a little more.”

INDIA

[Team CVoter](http://TeamCVoter)

Indians stand out as the public with the weakest levels of support for racial equality. On most questions this is due to large numbers providing equivocal answers or not providing an answer. However, Indians have the largest number who do not support the government taking more action to protect people from ethnic or racial discrimination. They also have the second-lowest number saying that their government has the responsibility to prevent racially or ethnically discriminatory hiring practices, with only Turks showing more resistance. Modest majorities of Indians say that equal treatment of different races and ethnicities is important and that they have seen progress in this area during their lifetimes.

- 59% of Indians agree that racial and ethnic equality is important, including 44% who say it is “very important.” About a third (30%) volunteer that this depends.
- A plurality of 46% says the government should protect people from discrimination based on race or ethnicity, although 17% think the government should not be involved and 31% decline to offer an opinion. A majority of Indians (62%) do not want their government to take more action on the matter: 24% say the government is doing enough, 21% volunteer the government is doing too much, and 17% say it should not be involved.

- 43% believe that employers should not have the right to discriminate because of race or ethnicity, while an unusually high 30% think employers should have the right to hire whomever they choose. Just 27% say the government has the responsibility to prevent employers from discrimination.
- A majority (54%) thinks treatment of different races and ethnicities has grown more equal, including 27% who say “much more.”

Yashwant Desmukh, director of the WPO network’s Indian partner Team C Voter, comments that the relatively low levels for greater government action to prevent racial discrimination may be due in part to the already-existing robust affirmative action programs in favor of the lower castes implemented by the Indian government. He explains that the question of race or ethnicity is seen “as more relevant to the Indian caste system.”

INDONESIA

[Synovate](#)

Indonesians have the largest majority among all countries polled saying the government has the responsibility to prevent employers from discriminating on the basis of race or ethnicity. Indonesians also have the largest majority (along with Americans) to perceive improvement in the treatment of people of different race or ethnicity now, compared to the past.

- Nearly nine in 10 (89%) Indonesians say it is important for people of different races and ethnicities to be treated equally, including 75% who feel it is “very important.”
- 88% say that the government should take action to prevent racial and ethnic discrimination. Two-thirds (66%) say the government needs to do more and just 17% say it already does enough.
- A very large majority (84%) rejects allowing employers to discriminate based on race or ethnicity, and an overwhelming 80% say that the government has the responsibility to prevent this. No other public polled has such a large majority in favor of such action., Just 3% say the government does not have this responsibility.
- More than four in five (82%) say they have seen the treatment of different races and ethnicities improve over their lifetime. About a third (31%) say they are treated much more equally and half (51%) say they are treated a little more equally. Only the United States has an equally large majority with this view.

SOUTH KOREA

[East Asia Institute](#)

South Koreans demonstrate the most widespread support for the government making further efforts to prevent racial and ethnic discrimination. However, they also have the largest minority saying that employers should have the right to refuse to hire a candidate based on race or ethnicity.

- An overwhelming majority (94%) of South Koreans feels that equal treatment of people of different races and ethnicities is important, including 71% who say it is very important.

- Nearly all South Koreans polled (96%) support government action to prevent racial or ethnic discrimination and 91% say it should do more, the highest percentage among the publics polled. Just 5% feel that the government already does enough.
- A more modest majority of South Koreans (58%) thinks employers should not be able to turn away jobseekers because of their race or ethnicity. An exceptionally high 41% say employers should have the freedom to hire whomever they choose, the largest number among all countries polled. Only a modest majority (53%) says the government has the responsibility to prevent employers from discriminating.
- 71% say that equal treatment of people of different races and ethnicities has improved in their lifetimes, though just 4% say they are treated “much more equally” and 67% say “a little more equally.”