

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

March 20, 2008

### Most Countries See Progress in Racial Equality; Some Do Not

[Full report \(PDF\)](#)

[Questionnaire/methodology\(PDF\)](#)

[Read an analysis of this poll by Peter Singer](#)



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.

*Roma children in Kosovo (Photo: OHCHR)*

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.

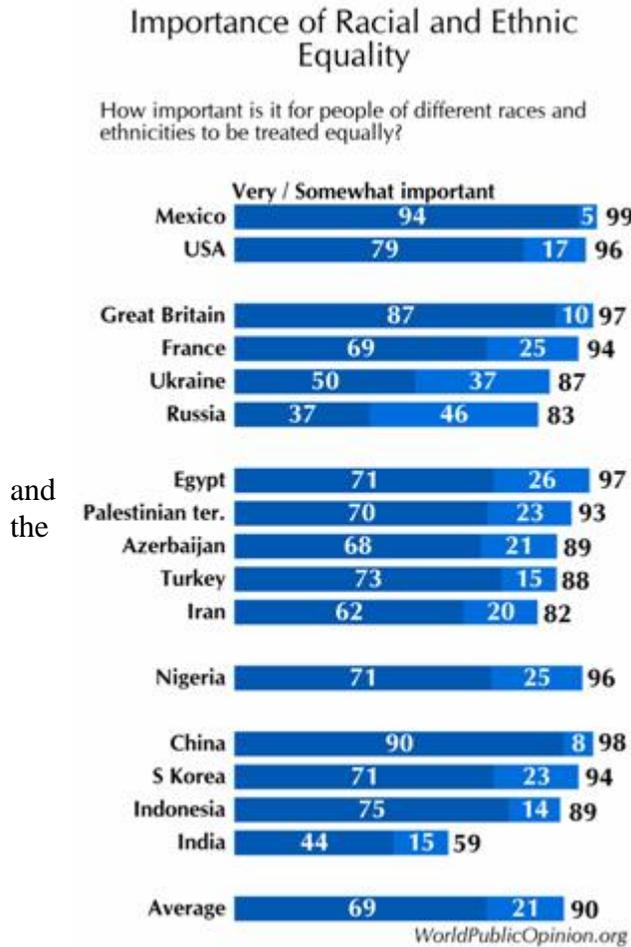
These are some of the findings from a poll of 14,896 people in the Americas, Europe, Asia, the Middle East and Africa conducted by WorldPublicOpinion.org, a collaborative research project involving research centers from around the world and managed by the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) at the University of Maryland. The primary funder of the study was the Oak Foundation.

Interviews were conducted in 16 countries between January 10 and February 29, 2008: Azerbaijan, China, Egypt, France, Great Britain, India, Indonesia, Iran, Mexico, Nigeria, the Palestinian territories, Russia, South Korea, Turkey, Ukraine, and the US. These nations represent 58 percent of the world population. Margins of error range from +/-3 to 4 percent.

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



and the

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%), Britain (87%), along with large majorities in 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."

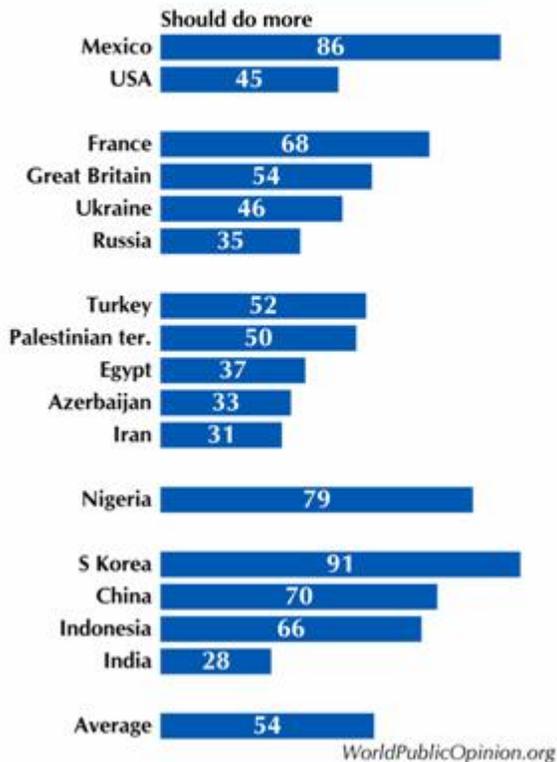
Americans hold divided views: 55 percent say the government is already doing enough (38%) or should not be involved (17%) but a robust 45 percent say the government should do more. Results are similar in Russia, where 39 percent say the government is doing enough (24%), too much (4%) or should not be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

## Should Government Do More?

Do you think the government is doing enough to prevent discrimination based on a person's race or ethnicity, or do you think it should do more?



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

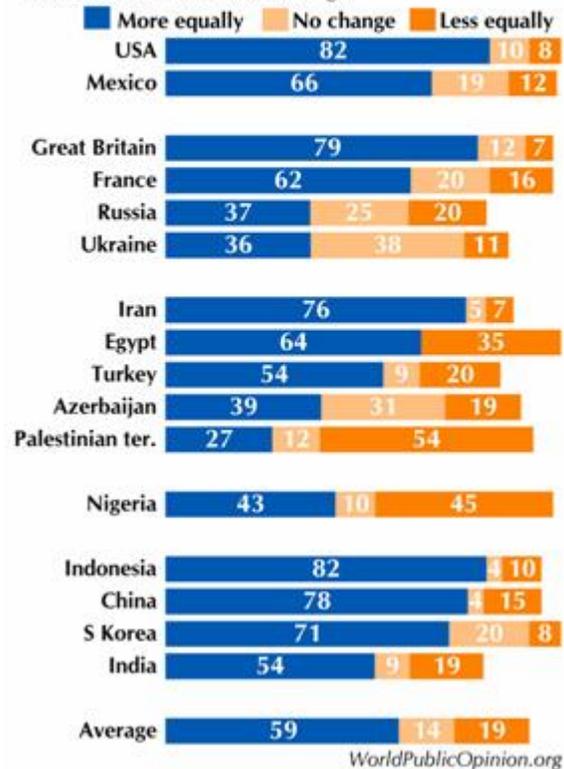
Majorities in 15 out of 16 nations agree that employers do not have the right to discriminate. Asked whether employers should be allowed to "refuse to hire a qualified person because of the person's race or ethnicity," on average three out of four (75%) say employers should not be able to base hiring 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).

### Perceived Increase in Racial Equality

Thinking about the course of your lifetime, would you say, compared to the past, people of different races and ethnicities are now treated much more equally, a little more equally, a little less equally, much less equally, or that there has been no real change?



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.

To read more about opinion in the individual countries surveyed, click [here](#) to view the full report (PDF).