

Whites believe they are victims of racism more often than blacks

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Whites believe that they are replacing blacks as the primary victims of racial discrimination in contemporary America, according to a new study from researchers at Tufts University's School of Arts and Sciences and Harvard Business School. The findings, say the authors, show that America has not achieved the "post-racial" society that some predicted in the wake of Barack Obama's election.

Both whites and blacks agree that anti-black [racism](#) has decreased over the last 60 years, according to the study. However, whites believe that anti-white racism has increased and is now a bigger problem than anti-black racism.

"It's a pretty surprising finding when you think of the wide range of [disparities](#) that still exist in society, most of which show black Americans with worse outcomes than whites in areas such as income, home ownership, health and employment," said Tufts Associate Professor of Psychology Samuel Sommers, Ph.D., co-author of "Whites See Racism as a Zero-sum Game that They Are Now Losing," which appears in the May 2011 issue of the journal [Perspectives on Psychological Science](#).

Sommers and co-author Michael I. Norton of Harvard asked a nation-wide sample of 208 blacks and 209 whites to indicate the extent to which they felt blacks and whites were the targets of discrimination in each decade from the 1950s to the 2000s. A scale of 1 to 10 was used, with 1 being "not at all" and 10 being "very much."

[White](#) and black estimates of [bias](#) in the 1950s were similar. Both groups acknowledged little racism against whites at that time but substantial racism against blacks. Respondents also generally agreed that racism against blacks has decreased over time, although whites believed it has declined faster than blacks do.

However, whites believed that racism against whites has increased significantly as racism against blacks has decreased. On average, whites rated anti-white bias as more prevalent in the 2000s than anti-black bias by more than a full point on the 10-point scale. Moreover, some 11 percent of whites gave anti-white bias the maximum rating of 10 compared to only 2 percent of whites who rated anti-black bias a 10. Blacks, however, reported only a modest increase in their perceptions of "reverse racism."

"These data are the first to demonstrate that not only do whites think more progress has been made toward equality than do blacks, but whites also now believe that this progress is linked to a new inequality - at their expense," note Norton and Sommers. Whites see racial equality as a zero sum game, in which gains for one group mean losses for the other.

The belief that anti-white bias is more prevalent than anti-black bias has clear implications for future public policy debates and behavioral science research, say the authors. They note that claims of so-called reverse racism, while not new, have been at the core of an increasing number of high-profile Supreme Court cases.

Provided by Tufts University

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