



E PLURIBUS UNUM

Survey of the South: In-Depth Interviews

February 2024

METHODOLOGY

PHASE 1

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Survey of n=2616 registered voters fielded via dynamic Online sampling. The modeled margin of error +/- 2.8%.

PHASE 2

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Conducted a series of 25 30-minute in-depth interviews (IDIs) from December 11-22, 2023.

SAMPLE OVERVIEW



7 Women
17 Men
1 Other



8 White
8 Black
9 Hispanic



20 Democrat
3 Republican
2 Independent



8 18-34
7 35-49
7 50-64
3 65+



2 Arkansas
4 Florida
2 Georgia

5 Louisiana
1 North Carolina
1 South Carolina

3 Tennessee
3 Texas
4 Virginia

KEY FINDINGS

01

Respondents often define community as a broad network of support. At the same time, most respondents describe their communities in much smaller and less supportive terms.

02

For most respondents, individual and institutional factors hold equal weight in determining individual opportunity.

03

Nearly all respondents report both interacting with those of different views and backgrounds regularly, as well as discussing issues of race regularly.

04

Respondents express overwhelming support of teaching comprehensive American history; however, some express concern with how that history is being taught.

REGIONAL
CONTEXT



Voters generally express pessimism toward the direction of their state, though key issues vary

"With the crime rating and the bringing up of the properties around making everything too high to afford in low-income areas [...], our tax dollars don't go to our area out in our communities." - Edward M, Black, male, 35-49, Independent, LA

"The legislature in the state has become horrifically conservative, and they are really impeding freedom of education. They are enacting policy that is detrimental to the people of the state." James D, White, male, 50-64, Democrat, NC

"I think accomplished people are leaving because they don't feel as as safe or or well represented in the state. And I think we rank pretty much bottom 5 in in most categories that matter to me, like education for example" - Adam G, Hispanic, male, 18-34, Democrat, LA

What influences community?

Geography:

“Really tiny but very close knit, you know it's it's very friendly here. I've I have several friends from the northeast and from the west and they all tell me how easy it is to make friendships. The downside, of course, with such a small community is that we have to be each other's friends. This is it”. - Henry M, Hispanic, male, 50-64, Democrat, AR

Shared Spaces:

You'll see those moments where if a mom has something to do, she can drop her kids off at the Barber shop, she can drop them off in the laundromat or the salon, whatever the case may be, and they'll be safe there.” - Royce B, Black, male, 18-34, Democrat GA

Key Identity Markers:

It's like your support network. It's like your second family. You know, being a member of the LGBT community, you come to realize that family doesn't necessarily have to be blood, you know? So we have to help each other, because if we don't, nobody else is going to.” - Dani B, White, female, 65+, Democrat, VA

Respondents overwhelmingly define community as a broad network of support...

“**It's folks coming together to help each other** in times of need. It's people coming together to make the correct decisions for their city or town.” - Jordan V, Hispanic, male, 18-34, Democrat, TX

“[Community means] **people working together** to share their interests or to solve problems.” - Mark W, White, male, 50-64, Democrat, LA

“Community means to me that **everybody try to come together** to the good of the people in the community. Reaching out, volunteering, giving back.” - Calla S, Black, female, 50-64, Democrat, FL

...But the realities of community tend to be small, insular circles

“It's like cliqued community. So like if I'm in my space, the the people down the street from me, we will be cool. But anybody outside of that block radius, if you were to come in, they may ostracize you, ignore you, whatever the case may be. You may have a bad experience” - Royce B, Black, male, 18-34, Democrat, GA

“The sense of community, Oh, it's horrifically fractured. I mean, there's a massive divide between urban places and rural places.” - James D, White, male, 50-64, Democrat, NC

“Coming from Southeast Ohio where my school graduating class was only 200 students, I think that overall, the majority of the times where I've interacted around in Virginia has been – people get turned off really quick. They there's no sense of, ‘Oh, hi, how's it going?’ There's there's not a lot of people interacting with other people.” - Michael M, Hispanic, male, 18-34, Republican, VA

Hopes for the future focus contrast with limited channels for involvement

“I think the future is going to be tough for a while because we have such low voter registration first of all and then from among those who are registered we see low turnout. And until we can get people to re-engage and get rid of their apathy, I fear that the people who are engaged, which tend to be the more narrow minded conservative folks, I feel that they're going to maintain their grip on our politics, on our government, and on the way that our society operates.” Terry B, Hispanic, female, 50-64, Democrat, AR

“My hope is for the community to become better educated, and obviously improving certain small uncertain spots, not ostracizing those that they deem to be outsiders. And I just hope to add to that by being a part of that education in some sense.” Royce B, Black, male, 18-34, Democrat, GA

“Yeah, I'd like to see a more serious grasp on climate impacts on our community. [...] I think an investment in education is something that that I'd love to see over the course of the next 10 to 15 years. [...] I do think crime is of importance and worth attention in the state as a whole if done and focused correctly on different target groups. And I think my part is being an educated voter.” Mark W, White, male, 50-64, Democrat, LA

Nearly all respondents believe that they interact with people of different viewpoints and backgrounds regularly

Either among strangers...

“Every day. I mean, whether it's customers that come in the store, whether it's **people that I run into** in retail locations, whether it's people that I interact with that you know, maybe there are repairs that I'm having done to our home or or things like that.” - Timothy G, White, male, 65+, Democrat, VA

...or among friends

“I value diversity and so therefore **my friend group is extremely diverse** and I am constantly attempting to deconstruct my white male privilege and to see things from perspectives of minority communities and to do whatever I can to be a better ally.” - James B, White, male, 50-64, Democrat, NC

Conceptions of local culture and tradition vary significantly by race/ethnicity

White Respondents:

“I would have to say that it’s pretty traditional, [...] Judeo Christian, [...] it’s pretty normal. It’s the pretty standard holidays. I mean where where we live at, I haven’t seen things like gay pride parades or Black protests or any of that type of thing.” - Timothy G, White, male, 65+, Democrat, VA

Black Respondents:

“I could not even respond without mentioning my church, you know, which we have a vast and enormous outreach. I mean my church is a cathedral that seeks about 7000 people. [...] It plays a very important role in my sense of identity.” - Victor M, Black, male, 50-64, Democrat GA

Hispanic Respondents:

“Generally pretty little [impact on my identity] outside of some Hispanic traditions that we have in my household. I’m more embracing American culture than Cuban American.” - Manuel D, Hispanic, male, 18-34, Democrat, FL

Unique Challenges faced by Southerners of Color

Hispanic Respondents:

- Varied availability of bilingual support:
 - Respondents in states like Texas and Florida report that their communities provide substantial support and offer bilingual services in businesses and schools
 - Respondents who live in communities with smaller Hispanic populations, report that local governments and communities do not do enough to support Spanish speakers.

Black Respondents:

- Many interviewees express frustration at the local and state governments for the lack of support and policy solutions for issues such as:
 - Lack of quality education
 - Healthcare access
- At the same time, there are a few respondents who highlight local charities and nonprofits that show up for the community. However, there is a sense that these organizations can only do so much in the face of systemic issues.

ECONOMIC
PERSPECTIVES



Most respondents say they feel the same as or better than others economically...

“I feel better off. **We have a pretty high poverty rate** compared to San Francisco or Denver or New York. Our our rents are low, but compared to our incomes, our rents are pretty high. There's not a lot of affordable housing. We have no tenant protection rights for instance.” - Terry B, Hispanic, female, 50-64, Democrat, AR

...but identify intense economic struggle and stagnation around them

“I feel like that are a lot of people worse off than I am that are struggling – I honestly don't have to look much farther than my own kids to see how hard they're working to try and maintain their lifestyle. I think I'm in a position where I'm doing OK. **I'm not wealthy by any stretch, but I'm not worried about where the next meal's coming from.**” - Timothy G, White, male, 65+, Democrat, VA

Those who are considered most ahead:

White people:

“It's white, male Christians. [...] They're very self-centered, ego driven, cruel and use the Bible to justify their cruelty. So they're the ones who have most privilege.” - James D, White, male, 50-64, Democrat, NC

Recipients of generational wealth:

“The groups of people who are most ahead, I mean rich, white people with generational wealth. [...] They've had a hand up from the time they were born and the silver spoon in their mouth.” - Jordan V, Hispanic, male, 18-34, Democrat, TX

Business and political leaders:

“Business owners and politicians [...] because of the power that they get. And personally, I think a large majority of politicians are in politics to gain power and influence.” - Robert C, White, male, 65+, Republican, SC

Those who are considered most behind:

People of color:

“[The most behind] would of course clearly be people of color. Because it's a power issue.” - Victor M, Black, male, 50-64, Democrat, GA

Those in lower-wage professions:

“The middle class for the most part is right there on the edge. That if they are making money and if they are able to have jobs, they're able to barely make it to not qualify for like social programs.” - Michael M, Hispanic, male, 18-34, Republican, VA

In identifying those who are most ahead and behind, respondents most often identify systemic factors as the reason for an individual's economic position

There is a general consensus that individual and institutional factors have equally important impacts on individual opportunities

“I think [individual factors are] a large part of it. But to be fair, you have to be exposed to that as a model. You have to model that behavior. You have to know somebody who has done that and realize that that that extra effort is worth it. **If you don't have those resources available to you [...], you never see that as an opportunity even.**” - Mark W, White, male, 50-64, Democrat, LA

“I don't think one over the other. **I think it's a combination** because you can grow up rich like the Kennedys – it didn't matter that they had the biggest influence in the world – some of them still turn out to be drug addicts. If you don't have that personal drive to do it, it's not going to happen.” - Ariana L, Black, female, 18-34, Democrat, LA

“**It's 50/50.** I mean, I know the other races are discriminated against but I also know that there are a lot of those guys who get scholarships, they try to do things to improve their lives.” - Henry M, Hispanic, male, 50-64, Democrat, AR

Partisan divide in expanding opportunities

Democratic Respondents:

“I feel like some things are zero-sum but other things are not. I don't think it would be harmful to white people if we had police reform that allowed Black and Brown people to not get racially profiled.” - Theodore C, Hispanic, male, 35-49, Democrat, LA

“[Opportunity] is not cake and just because I get a piece of cake doesn't mean that you're not going to have a piece of cake.” - James D, White, male, 50-64, Democrat, NC

Republican/Independent Respondents:

“It depends on the program. If it's something where you're putting quotas or you're forcing certain dynamics, I think it obviously going to hurt groups.” - Luke G, White, male, 35-49, Republican, VA

“I've been in positions where we were forced to hire people that we knew were not competent, but because of the federal law, we had to hire them.” - Robert C, White, male, 65+, Republican, SC

It is also important to note that some respondents of color interpret “creating opportunities for one group occurring at the expense of other groups” to be the current status quo, referencing systemic and institutional factors that propagate marginalization and racism.

Unique economic barriers faced by Southerners of Color

Hispanic Respondents:

- Hispanic respondents often see the language barrier as a unique obstacle for their communities when it comes to economic mobility.
- In communities with a strong immigrant presence, Hispanic respondents report that their neighbors are afraid to access community resources for fear of deportation, family separation, or other consequences.
- Some respondents also note lower levels of civic engagement and fear of speaking up being passed down generationally.

Black Respondents:

- Many Black respondents discuss the concrete impacts of systemic racism such as:
 - Educational attainment
 - Hiring practices
- Some respondents believe that Black community solidarity can help foster unique networking opportunities and systems of support where there are traditionally systemic barriers.

POLITICAL

REPRESENTATION



Many voters of color express frustration with representation on the local and state level

“There's some representation. But the way I look at representation is not in terms of like, well, yes, you're seeing more people, especially nowadays who look like us. The people who look like us, they don't support us all the time because they don't represent us in terms of the mindset.” - Breona P, Black, female, 18-34, Democrat, FL

“Thanks to the gerrymandering and everything local and state like it's not good [...]. There's like one minority district when there should be probably two or three at the minimum.” - Muhammad A, Hispanic, male, 35-49, Democrat, TX

CONVERSATIONS ABOUT

RACE



Conversations about race happen frequently, but are often paired with discomfort

White respondents:

“I probably don't go into it with just random people that much just because you just don't know how people will take things. So and people it is a more sensitive topic for some people.” - Luke G, White, male, 35-49, Republican, VA

Black respondents:

“If we have an actual like balanced conversation on race, it could end up very extreme. But in the event that it doesn't, you end up with people actually taking time to understand individual background as opposed to having people view everyone as a general monolith.”
- Royce B, Black, male, 18-34, Democrat, GA

Hispanic respondents:

“It's not like I'm doing it daily, like I'm not. I'm not trying to to get into it every every day, but I'll I'll have the conversation when it appears. I don't go searching for it” - Adam G, Hispanic, male, 18-34, Democrat, LA

EDUCATIONAL CONCERNS AND

CRT



The term “Critical Race Theory” is galvanizing and muddy to many respondents

“I feel like we just put a fancy word on things that have been happening in the past or should have been happening. So when it came about, I was like, what are we talking about? **Are we just talking about history that should have been taught?**” - Ariana L, Black, female, 18-34, Democrat, LA

“I hate it. I hate it. As I understand it, [...] it seems to be something that focuses on why one group of people have an advantage and through that advantage are limiting the opportunities of other groups of people [...]. **We are being judged today on things that happened in our history** hundreds of years ago.” - Robert C, White, male, 65+, Republican, SC

“It's a culture war issue. It's nothing. **It's not a real issue.** It's a graduate level legal course that has no bearing on what a teacher teaches” - Jordan V, Hispanic, male, 18-34, Democrat, TX

Respondents are unified in support for full American history

“I knew about Nat Turner and all kinds of things like that and it wasn't deemed as controversial. [...] But I think today 30-40 years later you couldn't teach that stuff because people are going to get up and arms. I'm like, 'Who are you people? **You were my classmates but now you're getting offended about stuff that was just basic education to me.**' It didn't go far enough, but now they can't even teach basic stuff.” -

Natasha M, Black, female, 35-49, Democrat, TN

“I think that [teaching full American history] is the way that we can start to defuse the the institutionalization of racism. I may sound trite, but I think that the children are our future. [...] And I think we need to take advantage of that and **provide our younger folks with a full spectrum of information, good, bad and ugly.**” - Terry B, Hispanic, female, 50-64, Democrat, AR

“One cannot talk about history without talking about the impact of people on each other. I mean that's what history I think is in some ways. [The legacy of slavery] is such a part of American history [...]. **One has to understand all of these systems to be able to move forward in a way that brings us together.**” -

Michael K, White, male, 35-49, Independent, TX

Respondents believe that language and culture differences require nuance when discussing race

White respondents:

“You can't just sit down and discuss something with one person and then sit down to another person and discuss it in the same way. You have to understand their background where how their culture developed too.” - Dani B, White, female, 65+, Democrat, VA

Black respondents:

“[Cultural differences] create a relative barrier, and then even to a certain degree, if you want to go as far as like language, it may create a hierarchy in a certain sense. We view those that are multi linguistic in any sense as somehow superior to those that lack such a skill and that can make conversations a little more difficult.” - Royce B, Black, male, 18-34, Democrat, GA

Hispanic respondents:

“We all speak different languages, we all have different jargon. Words mean different things to different people, to different families. You could say a phrase to someone and you have good intentions, but because their grand-uncle on their mother's side used that phrase in a malicious way, then that phrase means to them that that you're trying to hurt them.” - Vivien B, Hispanic, other, 18-34, Democrat, TN

Respondents of color see conversations on race as crucial for community building, but also express wariness and uncertainty

“Conversations about race can help people to understand that community has different layers and different levels and that it should be inclusive and not exclusive.” - Terry B, Hispanic, female, 50-64, Democrat, AR

“You can share the history with another group, you can tell them everything, but I don't necessarily know that they would comprehend the magnitude of it all. They'll empathize with you and understand, but it's only going to go so far.” - Ariana L, Black, female, 18-34, Democrat, LA

CONCLUSION

Due to factors of region, partisan identity, and race and ethnicity, clear disparities in opinion emerge when discussing issues of community building, economic equality, education, and the importance of discussing and acknowledging race.

While their experiences vary, these respondents align on the value of community as a foundation for social support, and the need for high-quality education that includes the full spectrum of American history.

THANK YOU

QUESTIONS?