JOINT CENTER
FOR POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC STUDIES

# RACIAL DIFFERENCES ON THE FUTURE OF WORK: A SURVEY OF THE AMERICAN WORKFORCE

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# Executive Summary

This report summarizes findings from the Joint Center's 2018 survey of Black, Hispanic, Asian American, and White workers on the future of work.

Key Findings

- **While 38% of American workers reported "increased use of technology" on their job, only 12% noticed "more automation."** More White and Asian American respondents saw technological change than did Hispanic and African American respondents.

- **A quarter of Hispanic workers reported moving from salaried to hourly work** over the course of their current employment, which is over twice as high as other racial groups.

- **Americans of all racial backgrounds are more likely to believe that technology provides more opportunity rather than less opportunity and/or worker displacement. Racial disparities exist, however**. While 41% of Asian American workers see technology as creating greater opportunities, for example, only 24% of Black workers agree that technology has produced more opportunities. African American and Hispanic workers are significantly less likely than White and Asian American workers to see technology as creating greater workplace efficiencies.

- **American workers value job security above other benefits, including over pathways to new opportunities and paid training.** Black and Asian American workers, however, see job security as particularly important. About 40% of African American and 38% of Asian American workers ranked job security as the most important benefit offered by their employer. A relatively low number of African American and White workers—7% of each—prioritized pathways to new opportunities. Hispanic workers, more than workers of other racial groups, value retirement benefits and pathways to new opportunities. White workers were more likely than others to value healthcare benefits.

- **Workers are interested in employer-provided training.** Respondents from all racial backgrounds were very interested or somewhat interested in participating in employer-provided training (85% of Asian American workers and approximately 70% of White, Black, and Hispanic workers).

- **A majority of Americans from all racial backgrounds are willing to invest some of their own money to obtain additional job training that could potentially advance their careers,** but the interest seems concentrated in spending between $1-$2000 and declines significantly for higher amounts. A larger percentage of African Americans (24%) and Whites (19%)

expressed an unwillingness to invest any of their own money in training than Hispanics (15%) and Asian Americans (14%). Significant racial disparities in interest for spending one's own money for training appear in spending over $500.

- Regardless of race, financial constraints were the most-cited barrier to obtaining additional job training. Roughly 50 percent of the respondents from each racial group reported that financial constraints stood in the way of them obtaining additional job training. Feeling personally incapable of acquiring new skills was the least cited barrier.

- Americans across racial groups generally see the federal government, individuals/families, and employers as bearing greater responsibility than schools and state governments in preparing the workforce for a changing economy. African Americans, however, were more likely to believe the federal government has the greatest responsibility, and were less likely to believe individuals/families bear the greatest responsibility. Whites and Asian Americans were more likely than African Americans and Hispanics to believe employers bear the greatest responsibility.

- People of color have a significant interest in education and training. Asian Americans, African Americans, and Hispanics were all more likely to be interested than Whites in obtaining education or training from all the options we provided—including a college degree program, online college, community college, online training, a trade union, and a GED.

- With regard to the most impactful steps schools can take to prepare children for the future economy, African Americans, Hispanics, and Asian Americans were much more likely than Whites to prioritize teaching computer programming. Hispanic and White Americans were more likely than African Americans and Asian Americans to prioritize vocational training. African Americans and Whites were more likely than Asian Americans and Latinos to prioritize core educational subjects such as math, science, and language arts.

# Introduction

Technological innovations are rapidly changing the American workplace. As robots and computers streamline the production process, many American workers are discovering new ways to be more productive and are also finding that technological innovations are creating many new opportunities for advancement within the workplace. Despite increasing productivity and workplace opportunities, in some industries technological efficiencies have displaced American workers or have required workers to develop new skills.

At the same time, between 2040 and 2050, people of color are estimated to become a majority of the population in the United States. The perspectives of people of color today about technology, job-readiness, employability, the acquisition of skills, benefits, and education for children are critical to understanding the future of work.

These perceptions are important in developing solutions to ensure that Americans from all backgrounds are prepared to participate in the economy in the future, and that the U.S. economy remains competitive. If the children of color are currently becoming the majority of children in the U.S., for example, policymakers should pay attention to data that shows significant populations of Asian Americans, Hispanics, and African Americans believe schools should teach computer programming. Current workforce trends—such as a large number of Hispanics who report shifting from salaried to hourly work or having an interest in a GED or community college—can affect Hispanic workers, their children, and all of us who may depend on the productivity and tax dollars of those workers and their children over the next 50-75 years.

Racial perceptions about the future of work are also essential in addressing longstanding challenges that have plagued America since its founding, and ensuring that well-intentioned proposals do not exacerbate existing disparities over the next 50-75 years. Policymakers and employers designing tuition-assistance programs should know, for example, that once they require employees to spend more than $500 of their own money on training, significant racial disparities may emerge among which employees take advantage of the tuition-assistance program.

In this report, the Joint Center seeks to better understand how different racial groups perceive the changing nature of work. We commissioned and analyzed a nationally representative survey of 1115 Whites and nationally representative oversamples of 667 Blacks, 619 Latinos, and 611 Asian Americans. The sample was re-weighted to a 2,000-person sample with 500 interviewees from each racial group. The survey, which was conducted by Nielsen/Scarborough, seeks to understand differences and similarities across these different communities in perceptions regarding changes in the workplace, the effect of technology on work, job security and other workplace benefits, training to acquire new skills, and preparing children for a changing economy.

# Workers Notice Increased Technology Use

Many American businesses are investing in technological innovations to increase efficiencies and productivity. Many of these changes are gradual and may at times coincide with other workplace changes, such as changes to benefits or work hours.

In our survey, we assess respondents' perceptions of how their jobs have changed since they have been at their current place of employment to assess their understanding of shifting workplace priorities. We offered a number of choices ranging from increased use of technology and automation to changes in hours, salary, and benefits. We also gave respondents the option to say that they did not notice any of the listed changes in their workplaces.

As shown in Figure 1, the introduction of new technologies was the most dramatic change that most Americans noticed within their workplaces. Thirty-eight percent of the American workers we surveyed noted that they had seen an increase in the use of technology in their workplaces. Although significant portions of Black and Hispanic workers noted technological changes in their workplaces, White and Asian American workers reported the highest rates of technological change in their places of employment.

*The introduction of new technologies was the most dramatic change most Americans noticed in their workplaces.*

While new technology was the most dramatic change, perceptions of increased automation of workplace activities were relatively uncommon for all racial groups. This highlights a trend we discuss in detail below—while American workers see growth in technological innovation in the workplace, they do not necessarily see it as a threat to their employment.

Perhaps the most striking racial difference presented in Figure 1 is in the high rate of reported change from salary to hourly pay among Hispanic workers. Twenty-five percent of Hispanic workers in our sample reported moved from salaried to hourly work over the course of their current employment, which is over twice as high as the shift from salaried to hourly work reported by workers in the other racial groups.

Figure 1 also illustrates that more than other workers, White workers noticed changes in their healthcare benefits and the number of hours worked per week.

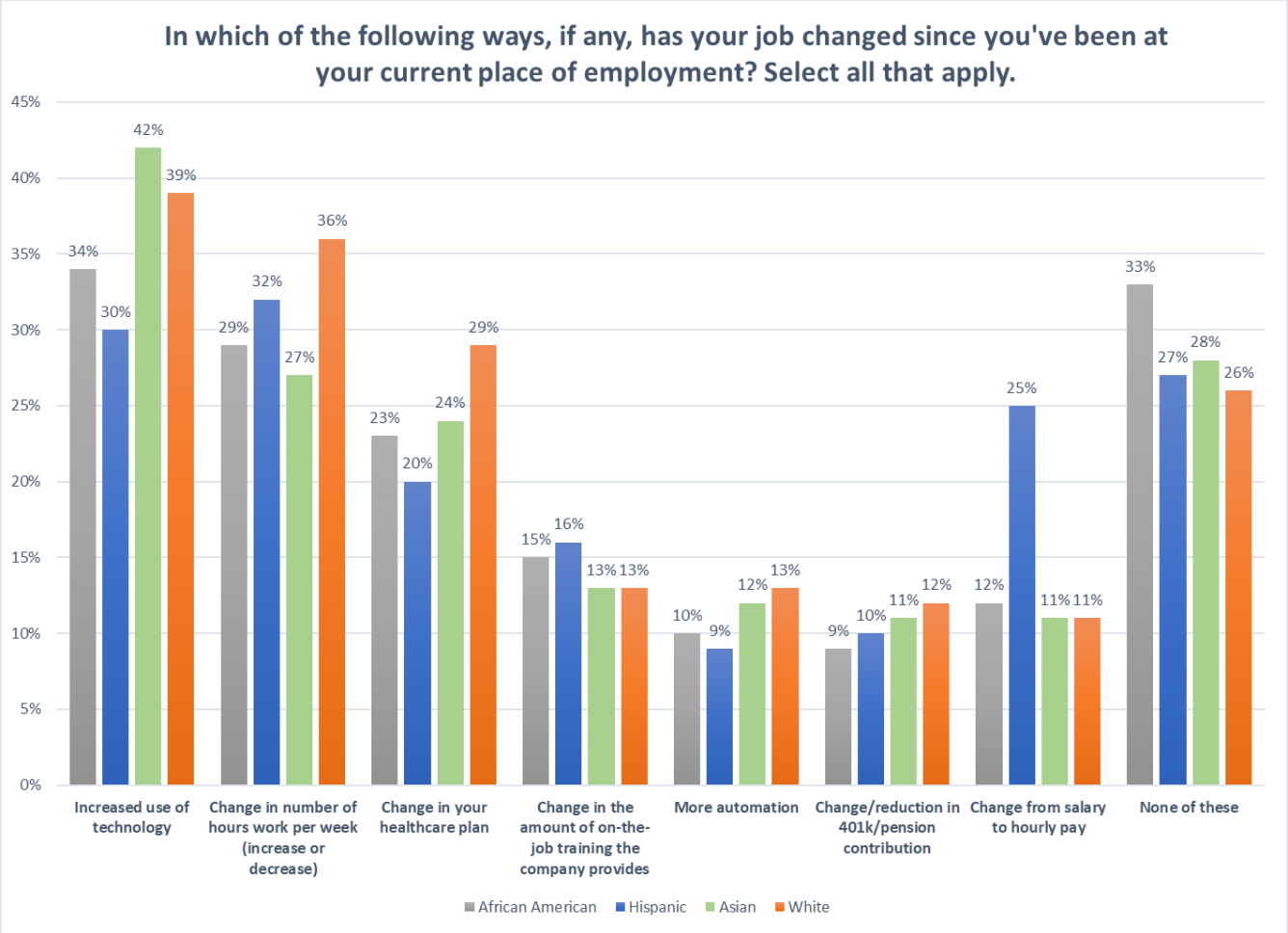
In which of the following ways, if any, has your job changed since you've been at your current place of employment? Select all that apply.
45%
40%
35%
30%
25%
20%
15%
10%
5%
0%
34%
30%
42%
39%
29%
32%
27%
36%
23%
20%
24%
29%
15%
16%
13%
13%
10%
9%
12%
13%
9%
10%
11%
12%
12%
25%
11%
11%
33%
27%
28%
26%
Increased use of technology
Change in number of hours work per week (increase or decrease)
Change in your healthcare plan
Change in the amount of on-the-job training the company provides
More automation
Change/reduction in 401k/pension contribution
Change from salary to hourly pay
None of these
African American
Hispanic
Asian
White

*Figure 1*

# Technology Viewed Positively

As American workers see their workplaces becoming increasingly reliant on technology, how do they understand the benefits and costs? Do they see technology as a threat to their employment or as a tool that makes their work lives easier?

We asked our survey respondents to tell us the ways in which they think technology changed their work environments. We offered respondents an array of choices from greater workplace efficiencies and opportunities to disrupting productivity and displacing workers.

Overall, as presented in Figure 2, we found that American workers seem to embrace a positive view of technology at work. More than one-third of all respondents believe that technology creates greater efficiencies in the workplace, and about 25 percent believe it creates more opportunities. Only a little more than 15 percent of respondents believe that technology represents a threat to their employment.

*While 24% of Black workers believe technology has increased workplace opportunities, 9% believe it has decreased opportunities.*

Despite the overall positive view of technology in the workplace, some American workers are more likely than others to see the benefits in technological advancements. While 44 percent of White workers and 47 percent of Asian American workers believe that technology has created greater efficiency in their workplaces, for example, only 33 percent Black workers and 35 percent of Hispanic workers think that technology increases efficiency at their workplace. While 41 percent of Asian American workers see technology as creating greater opportunities, only 24 percent of Black workers agree that technology has produced more opportunities.

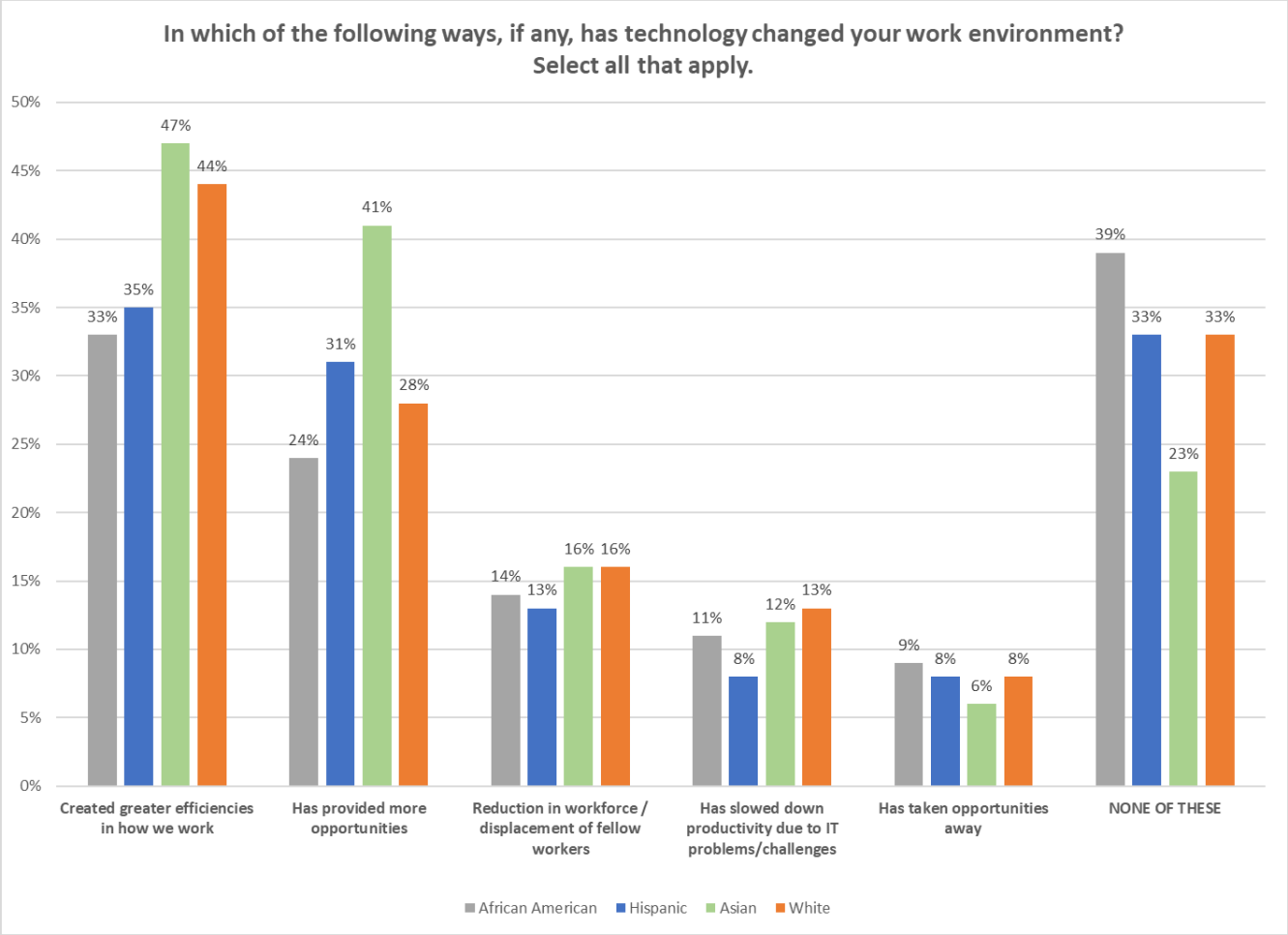


*Figure 2*

Many of these results also vary significantly by age, with younger workers of all racial groups being more likely to see technology as positively affecting their work environments. For example, as shown in Figure 11 below, younger people are much more likely than older workers to see technology as bringing more opportunities. Younger workers are also more likely to see the efficiencies of technological innovations. Older workers—particularly older African American workers—are somewhat more likely to see the negative effects of technology, particularly its effect on reducing the workforce.

# Job Security Valued Over Other Benefits

Whether workers realize it or not, many American jobs have already been affected by automation. For example, app-based ride sharing companies such as Uber and Lyft have dramatically changed the taxi industry, significantly decreasing hourly wages among salaried taxi drivers and increasing the number of self-employed hourly drivers.[1] As technological advancements such as platform-based employment and telecommuting have made it easier for people to work on their own schedules, they have also fueled the growth of short-term contract work. While contract work offers workers greater flexibility, many of these jobs tend to lack traditional workplace benefits that come with salaried full-time employment such as healthcare and retirement plans.

Given the potential disruption of technological innovations on workplace benefits, we examine the extent to which different racial groups value certain workplace benefits over others. Here we assess the degree to which the benefits that come from the new tech-based workplace—such as pathways to new opportunities and employer-paid training—are valued relative to the benefits offered through traditional employment such as healthcare, retirement benefits, predictable hours, and paid leave.

*40% of Black workers ranked job security as the most important benefit, while only 7% ranked pathways to new opportunities as most important.*

We observed interesting racial differences. While most workers value job security above all else, Black and Asian American workers see job security as particularly important. About 40 percent of African Americans and 38 percent of Asian Americans ranked job security as the most important benefit offered by their employer. Interestingly, only about 25 percent of Hispanic workers listed job security as the most important employer benefit. Hispanic workers, more than workers of other racial groups, value retirement benefits and pathways to new opportunities. Consistent with what we saw in our discussion of workplace changes, White workers were more likely than any of the other racial groups to value healthcare benefits.



[1] Thor Berger, Chinchih Chen, Carl Benedikt Frey 2018. "Drivers of disruption? Estimating the Uber effect, *European Economic Review,* Volume 110, 2018, Pages 197-210.

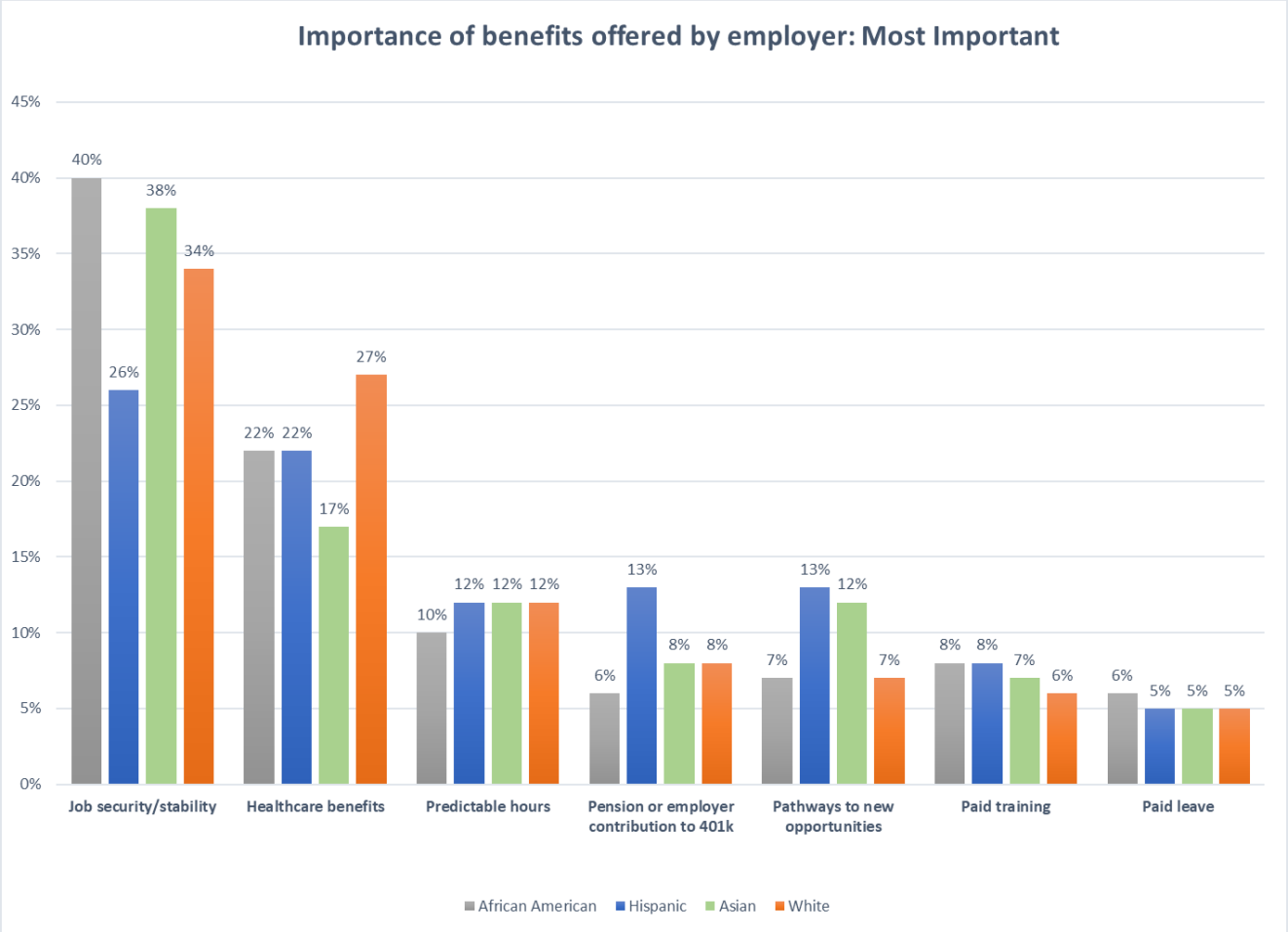


*Figure 3*

# High Interest in Employer-Provided Training

As "disruptions" to the way work is done in the American workplace continue, we are interested in whether American workers are willing and/or able to adjust to these new workplace demands by picking up new skills. We examine both the extent to which American workers are willing to take advantage of additional job training and/or educational opportunities when offered by their employers, and whether they are willing and/or able to invest their own time and resources in obtaining additional job training when it is not offered by their employers.

Our survey asked respondents about their interest in participating in different job training opportunities potentially offered by their employers: on the job training, online job training, employer provide tuition subsidies, and paid job training. We found that while the vast majority of American workers are open to some form of additional job training, Asian American workers were significantly more willing to participate in these programs than members of other racial groups. While around 70 percent of White, Black, and Hispanic workers stated that they would be either very interested or somewhat interested in participating in an employer-based, on-the-job training program, 85 percent of Asian American workers expressed an interest in on-the-job training. The numbers are similar for employee-based subsidized tuition programs, paid job training, and on the online training programs. Asian Americans are generally more open than any of the other racial groups to employer-offered job training opportunities.

*While most workers from all racial backgrounds expressed significant interest in employer-provided training, Asian American interest was consistently higher than others.*

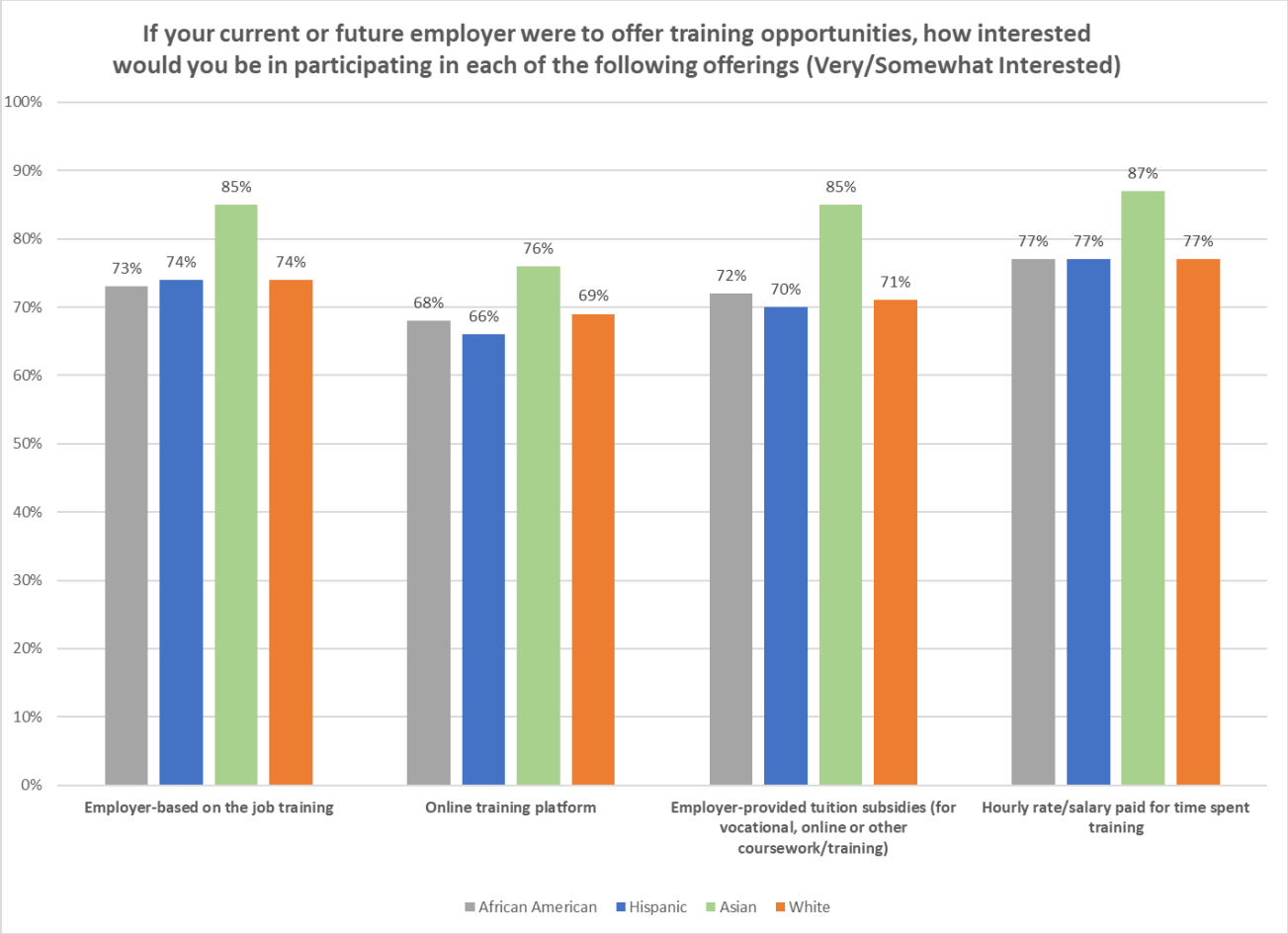


*Figure 4*

# Workers Will Invest Limited Funds in Training

A majority of Americans from all racial backgrounds are willing to invest some of their own money to obtain additional job training. The interest in doing so, however, seems concentrated in spending between $1-$2000, and declines significantly for personal job training spending over $5000.

Those who expressed an unwillingness to invest any of their own money toward additional training included 14 percent of Hispanics, 15 percent of Asian Americans, 19 percent of Whites, and 24 percent of African Americans. Interest in spending between $1-500 seemed roughly similar for all racial groups, but relatively consistent racial disparities emerged for spending above $500.

Asian American workers were more willing than workers from other groups to invest their own money toward additional job training costing between $501-$20,000, and Hispanic workers were more willing than Black and White workers to invest their own money toward additional training costing between $5001-$20,000. African Americans were the least willing group to pay between $501-$10,000 for training, and only about 1 percent of both Whites and African Americans were willing to pay above $10,000 for training.


*Figure 5*

These racial differences might be a function of the relative availability of resources across each of these racial groups. For example, we might expect that those individuals with more disposable income would be more capable of investing in extra job training. The median household income for African Americans and Hispanics in our sample is between $35,000 to $45,000, while the median household income for White Americans is between $45,000 and $50,000, and the median household income for Asian Americans is between $50,000 and $75,000.

To attempt to account for income differences across the racial groups, we examined willingness to invest in additional job training only for high earning individuals who make $75,000 or more. These results (Figure 6), show that even when we adjust for income, a higher proportion of African Americans than other groups remain unwilling to use any of their own resources to obtain additional job training. In fact, while a lower proportion of higher-earning Whites, Hispanics and

Asian American workers are unwilling to invest any of their own money toward job training, a slightly higher proportion of high income African Americans are unwilling to invest any money in job training than African Americans overall. We recognize that income alone is an incomplete picture of access to resources, and that other factors—such as racial differences in net worth—may affect the willingness to invest in job training.

Among high income respondents, we also see that the investment gap between Asian Americans, Whites, and Hispanics disappears, suggesting that income differences between the groups were at least partly responsible for the gap between Asian Americans, Whites, and Hispanics that we saw in Figure 5.

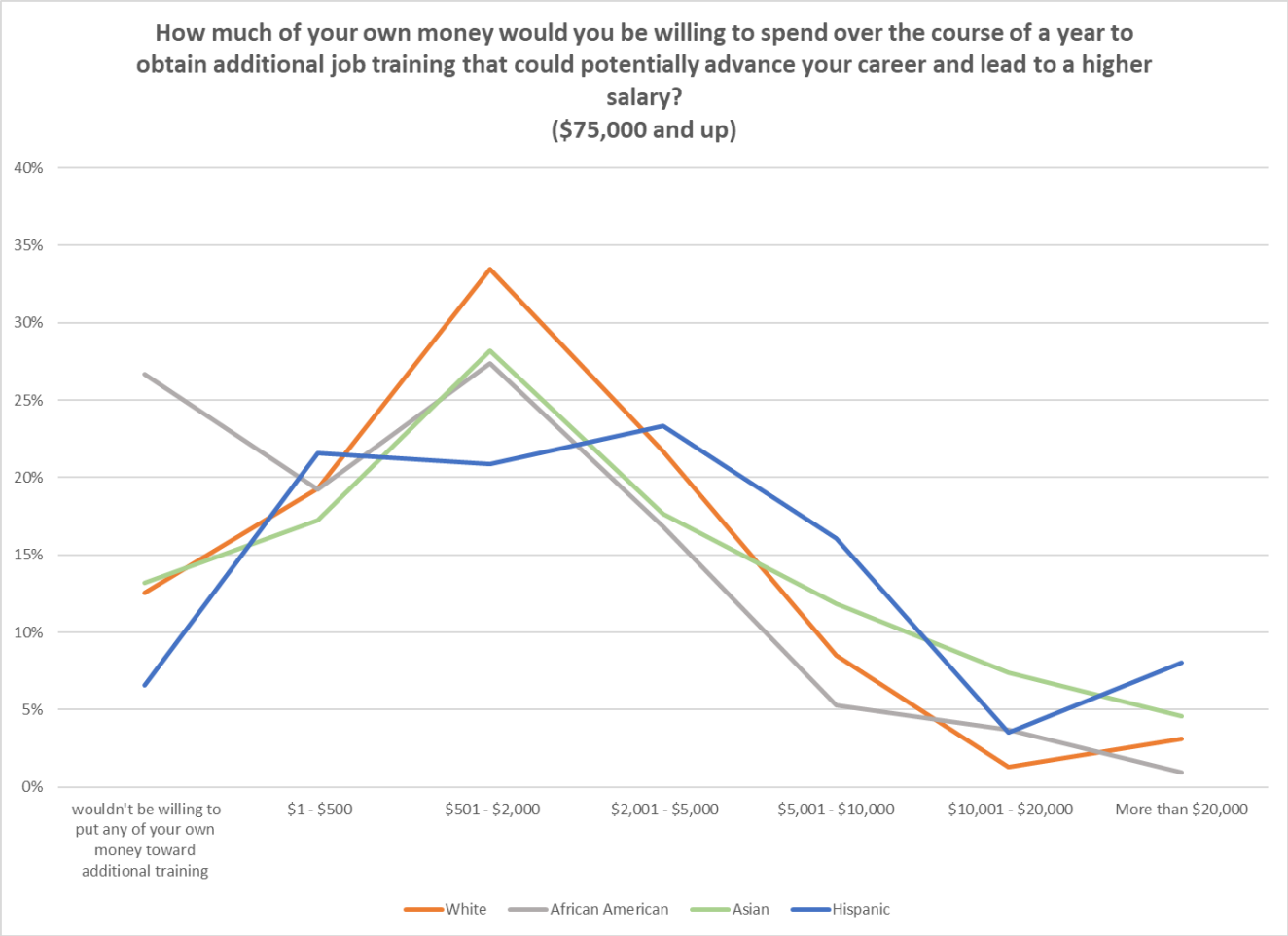


*Figure 6*

# Finances Major Barrier to Training

We asked respondents to describe the barriers that stand in the way of them obtaining additional job training, and financial constraints were by far the most cited barrier. Roughly 50 percent of the respondents from each racial group reported that financial constraints stood in the way of them obtaining additional job training.

Two notable racial differences emerged in responses to this question. First, Asian Americans are significantly more likely than any other racial group to cite their inability to get time off work as a barrier to additional training. Over 40 percent of Asian Americans indicated that getting time off work stood in the way of them getting additional job training, compared to only between 22-28 percent of other racial groups. Second, Asian and Hispanic Americans were more likely than Black or White Americans to cite child care responsibilities as a barrier to job training.

Feeling personally incapable of acquiring new skills was the least cited barrier to getting additional training, particularly among African Americans (only six percent) and Asian Americans (only four percent).

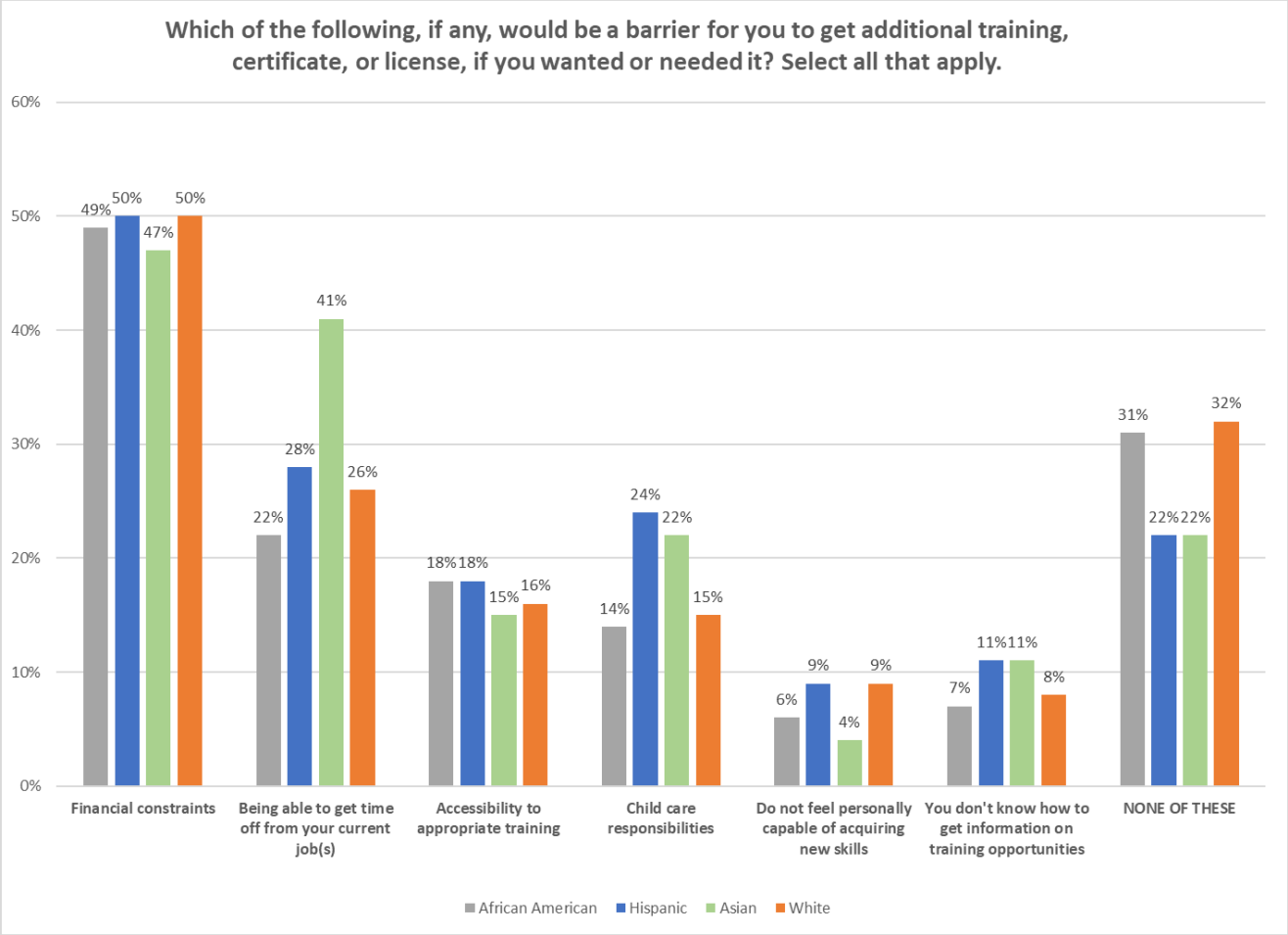


*Figure 7*

# Government, Individuals & Employers are Responsible for Preparing Workforce

With potentially dramatic changes to the American workplace on the horizon, who do American workers see as responsible for helping them prepare for the transition to the new economy? To answer this question, we asked our respondents who in their estimation bears the greatest responsibility for helping workers prepare for the new high-tech economy.

Generally American workers of all racial groups see all elements of society as broadly responsible for the preparing American workers for this transition. Between 15 percent and 23 percent of American workers saw government, businesses, and individuals as responsible for preparing workers for the changing economy. While African Americans see responsibility for businesses and individuals, they are more likely to see the federal government as bearing greater responsibility in preparing American workers for the changing nature of work.

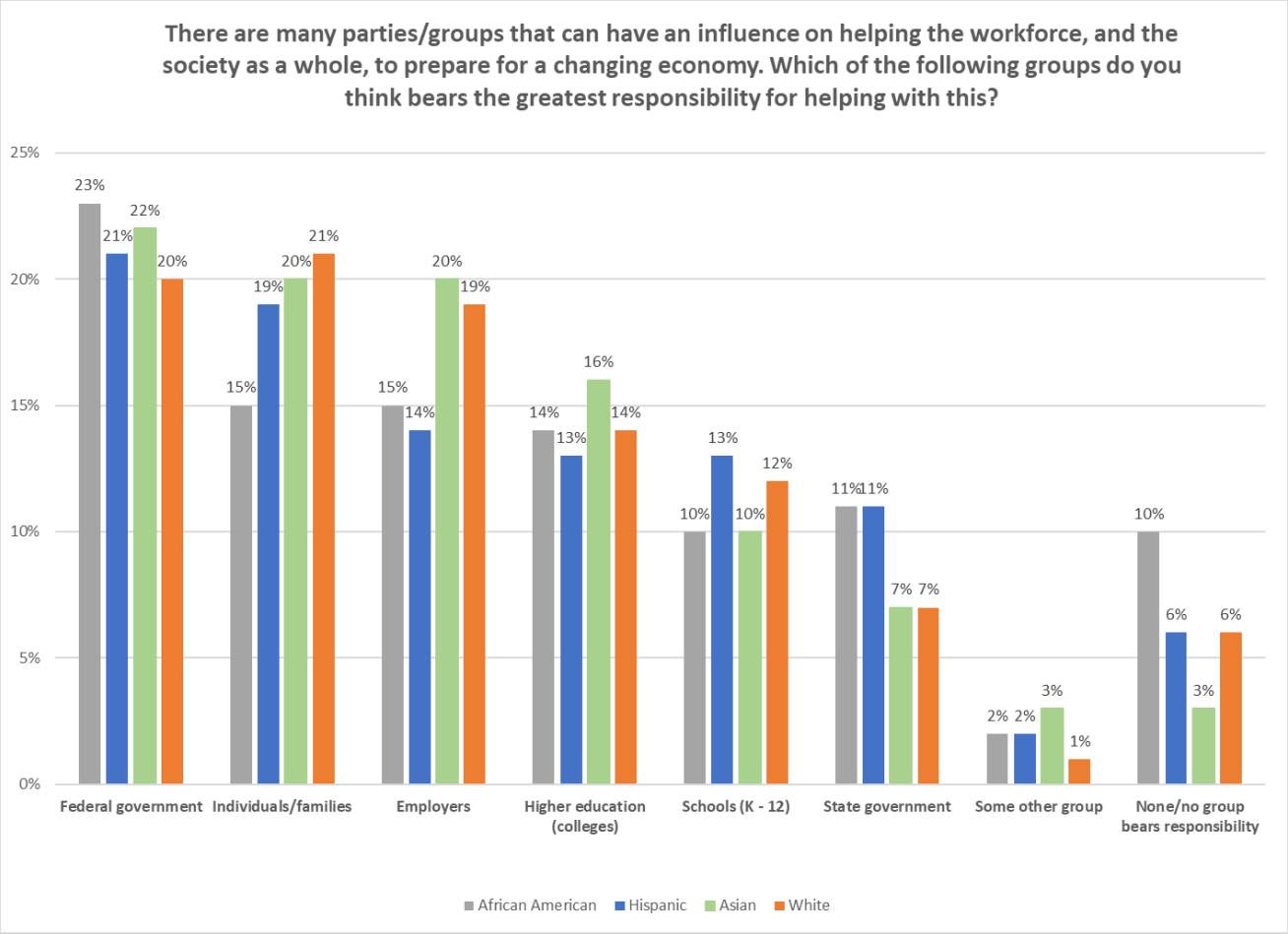
There are many parties/groups that can have an influence on helping the workforce, and the society as a whole, to prepare for a changing economy. Which of the following groups do you think bears the greatest responsibility for helping with this?
25%
20%
15%
10%
5%
0%
23%
21%
22%
20%
15%
19%
20%
21%
15%
14%
20%
19%
14%
13%
16%
14%
10%
13%
10%
12%
11%
11%
7%
7%
2%
2%
3%
1%
10%
6%
3%
6%
Federal government
Individuals/families
Employers
Higher education (colleges)
Schools (K - 12)
State government
Some other group
None/no group bears responsibility
African American
Hispanic
Asian
White

*Figure 8*

# High Interest in College & Training Programs

Racial differences also exist in how White, Black, Asian American, and Hispanic workers might obtain additional job training. We asked respondents where they would likely seek additional job training opportunities outside of their workplace. We offered several options, including the trade unions, online schooling, community college, trade schooling, an in person higher education degree (e.g., BA, Masters, or other degree), and the Department of Labor's "CareerOneStop" website for career exploration and job training.

On the whole, people of color seemed more interested in all of these options, and White Americans were slightly less interested in pursuing additional educational opportunities. With every educational option—from obtaining a General Equivalency Degree to online education to more college—White Americans were less likely to see education as a means of obtaining additional job training.

Hispanic workers appeared especially interested in seeking General Equivalency Diplomas. African American and Hispanic workers exhibited a higher interest in the Department of Labor's "CareerOneStop" website, community college, an in-person certification program, and online college.

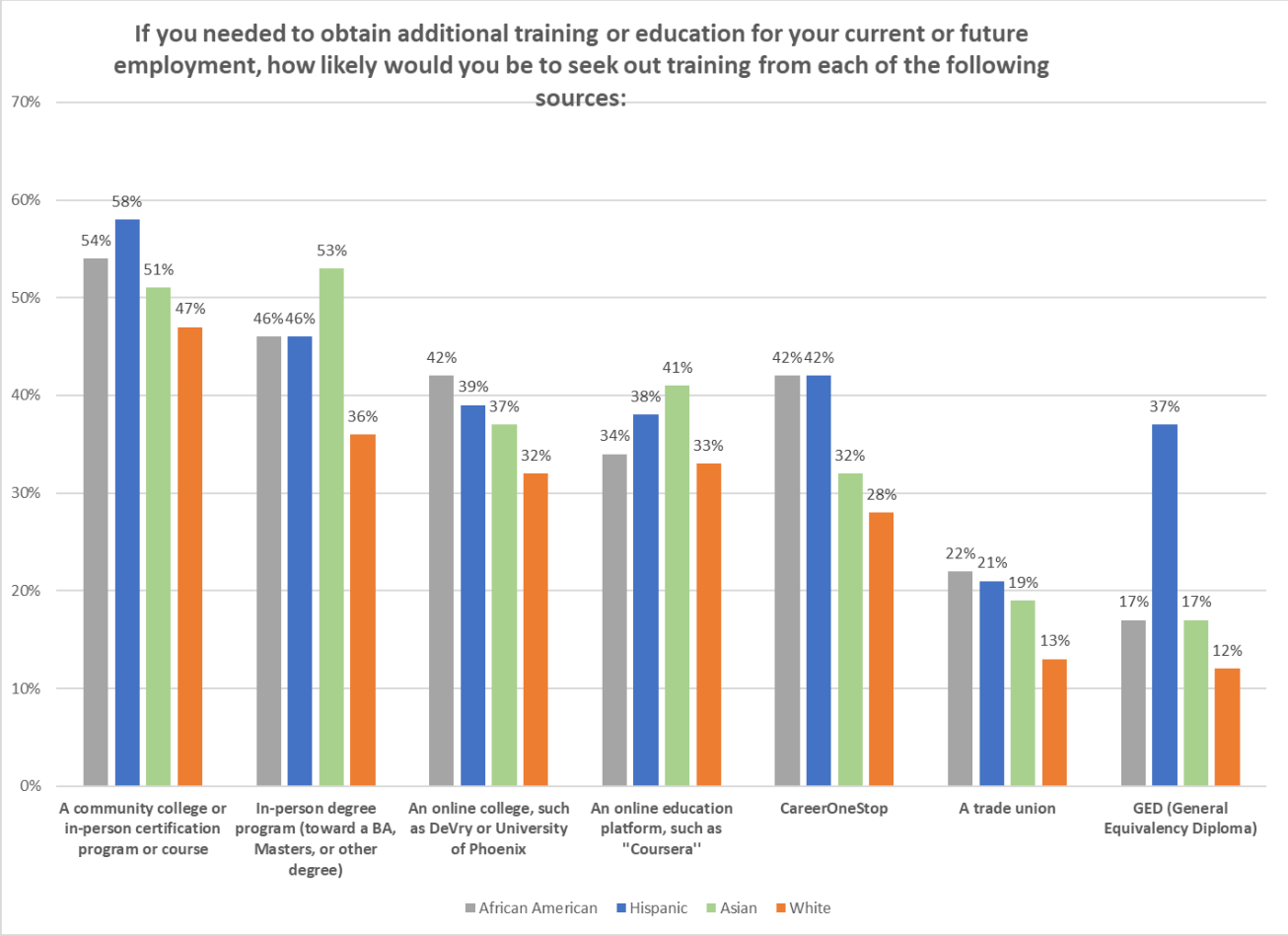
If you needed to obtain additional training or education for your current or future employment, how likely would you be to seek out training from each of the following sources:
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%
54%
58%
51%
47%
46%
46%
53%
36%
42%
39%
37%
32%
34%
38%
41%
33%
42%
42%
32%
28%
22%
21%
19%
13%
17%
37%
17%
12%
A community college or in-person certification program or course
In-person degree program (toward a BA, Masters, or other degree)
An online college, such as DeVry or University of Phoenix
An online education platform, such as "Coursera"
CareerOneStop
A trade union
GED (General Equivalency Diploma)
African American
Hispanic
Asian
White

*Figure 9*

# Preparing Children for a Changing Economy

We also measured American workers' views on the role of American schools in helping prepare young people for the changing economy. To do so, we asked respondents the following question: "There are several ways schools can help children prepare for a changing economy. Please rank the items below from most impactful to least impactful." We then presented respondents with five choices, including: 1) ensuring proficiency in core subjects such as math, science and language arts; 2) requiring schools to teach more "soft skills," such as time management and interpersonal interactions; 3) increasing vocational training; 4) obligating schools to teach computer programming; and 5) offering year-round school. Figure 10 presents the proportion of respondents from each racial group that ranked a given choice as their top preference.

The results suggest interesting racial differences in beliefs about how schools should prepare children for the changing economy.

The starkest difference is the extent to which Hispanic and White Americans value vocational training. Thirty-two percent of Hispanics and 28 percent of White Americans felt that encouraging schools to provide more vocational training options was the most important strategy to prepare young people for the changing economy. Only 21 percent of Black Americans and Asian Americans felt the same.

*People of color are more likely than Whites to believe schools should focus more on computer programming to prepare young people for the future.*

Another racial difference was that people of color were more likely to value computer programming than Whites. While between 23 percent and 25 percent of African Americans, Hispanics, and Asian Americans think that focusing more on computer programming is the most important thing schools could do to prepare young people for the changing labor market, only 16 percent of White Americans share this view.

Black and White Americans were somewhat more likely than Hispanic and Asian Americans to prioritize core educational subjects such as math, science, and language arts.

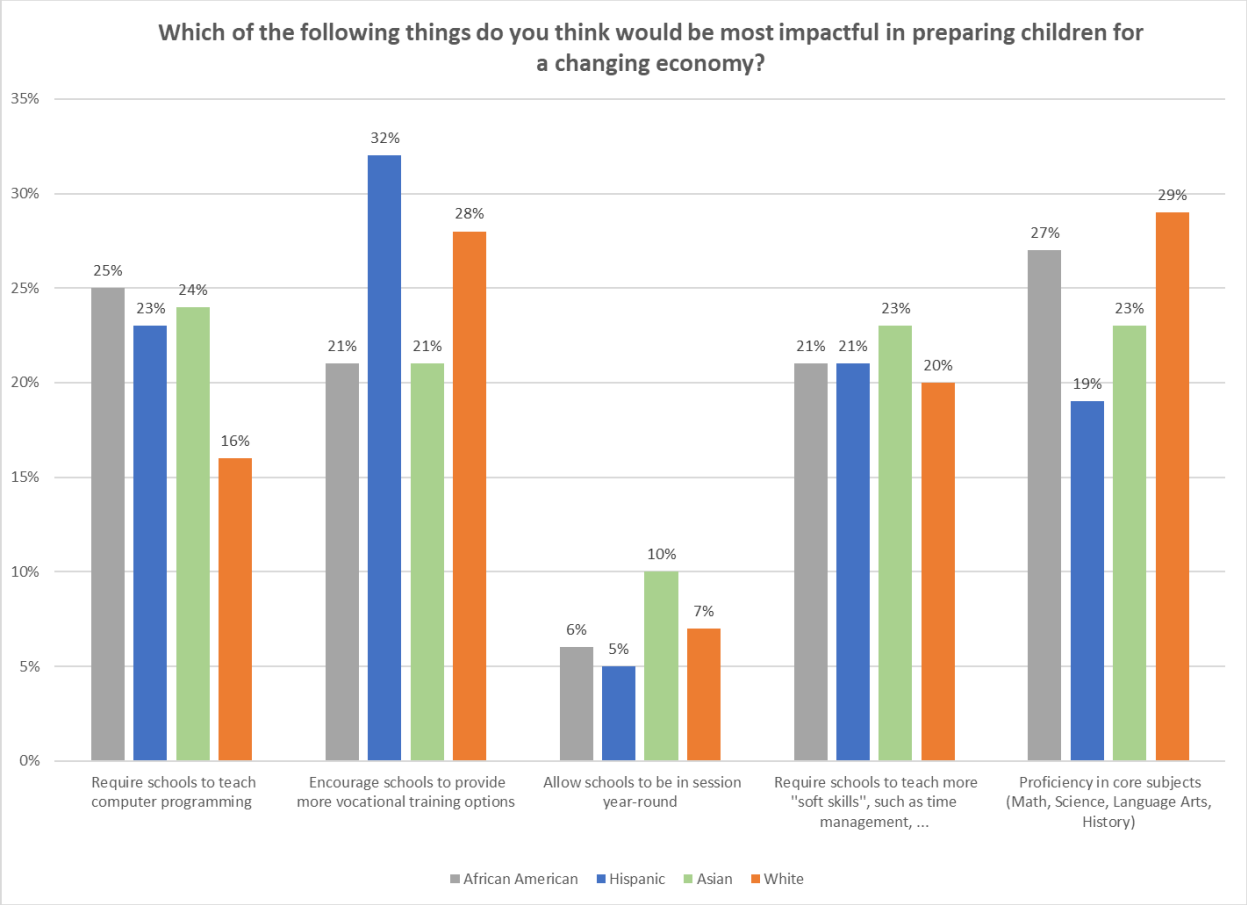


*Figure 10*

# Appendix

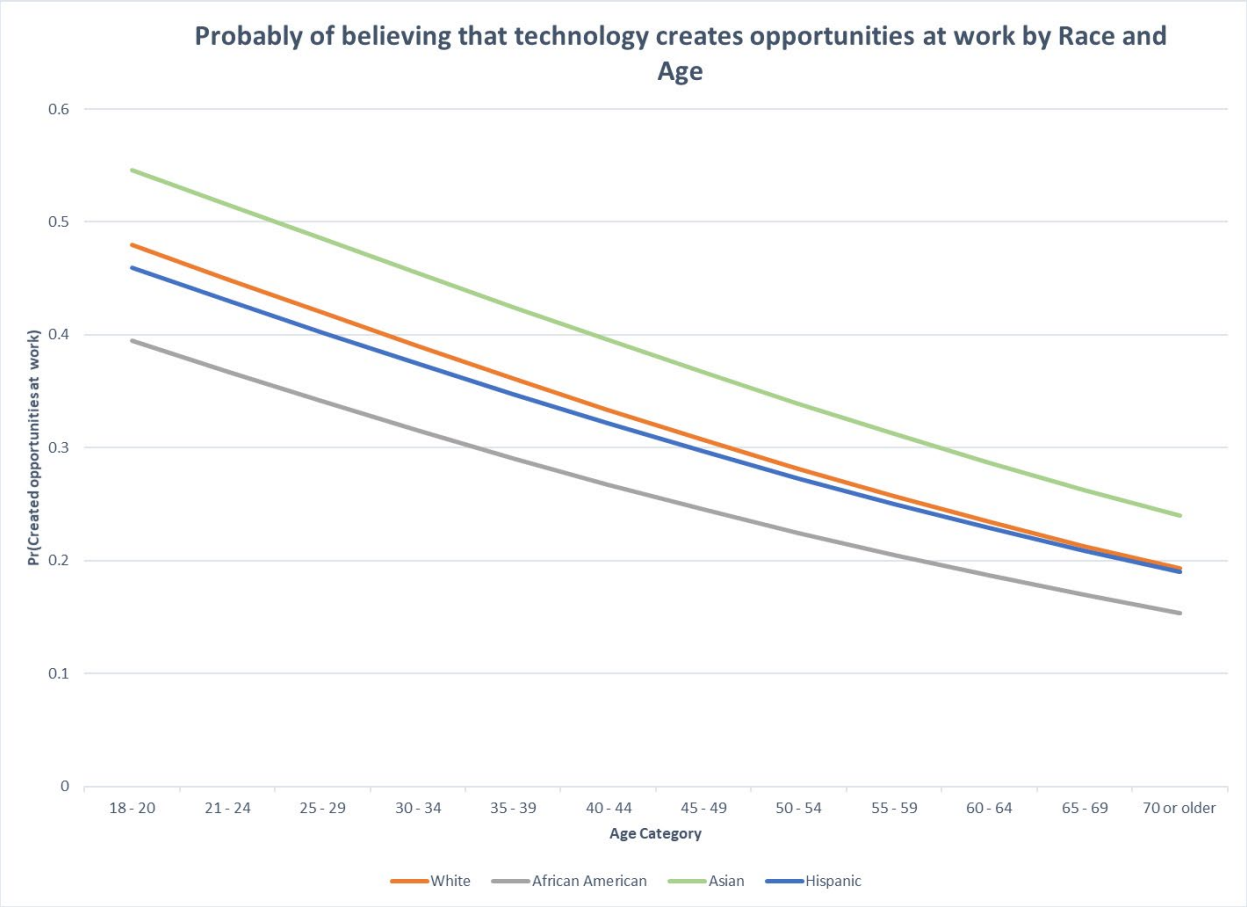


*Figure 11*

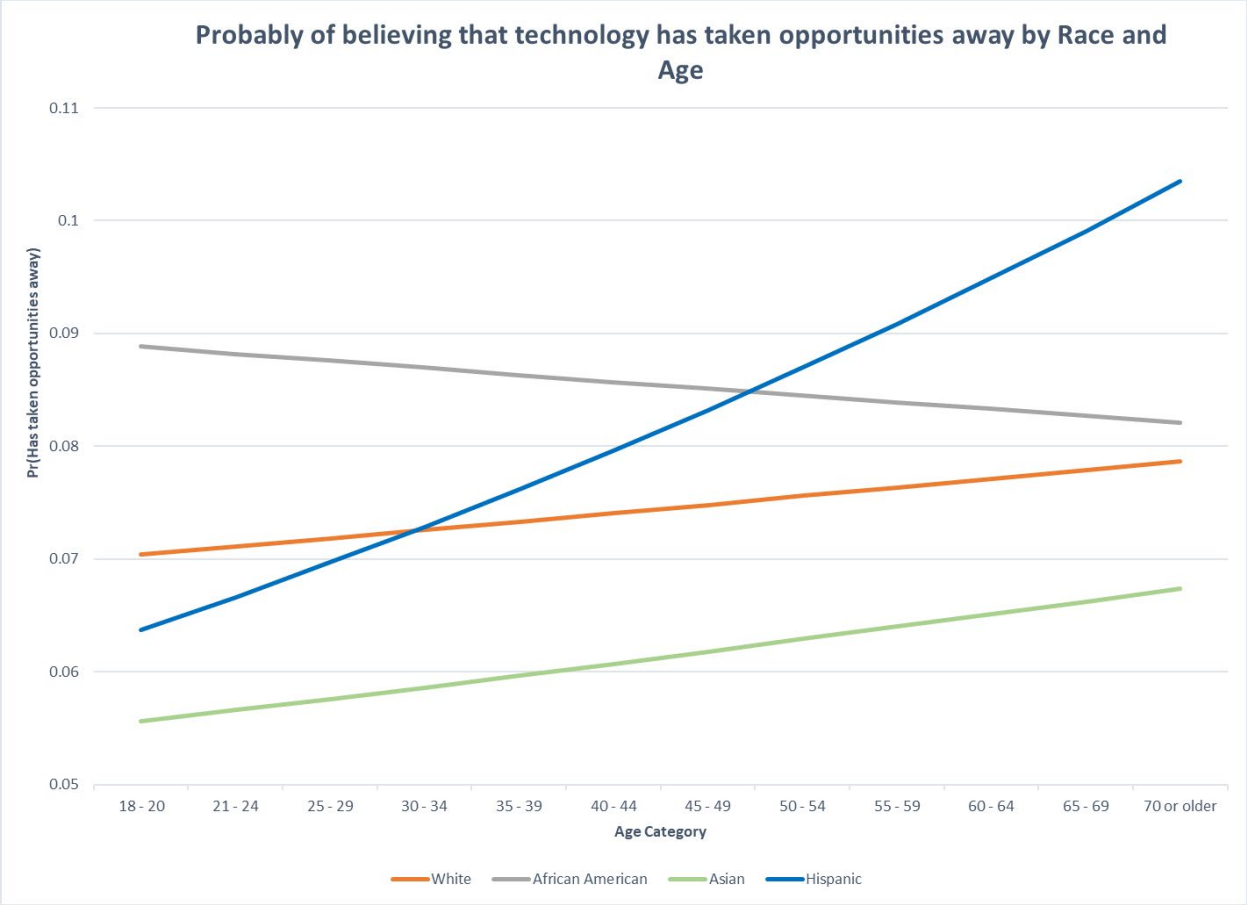


*Figure 12*

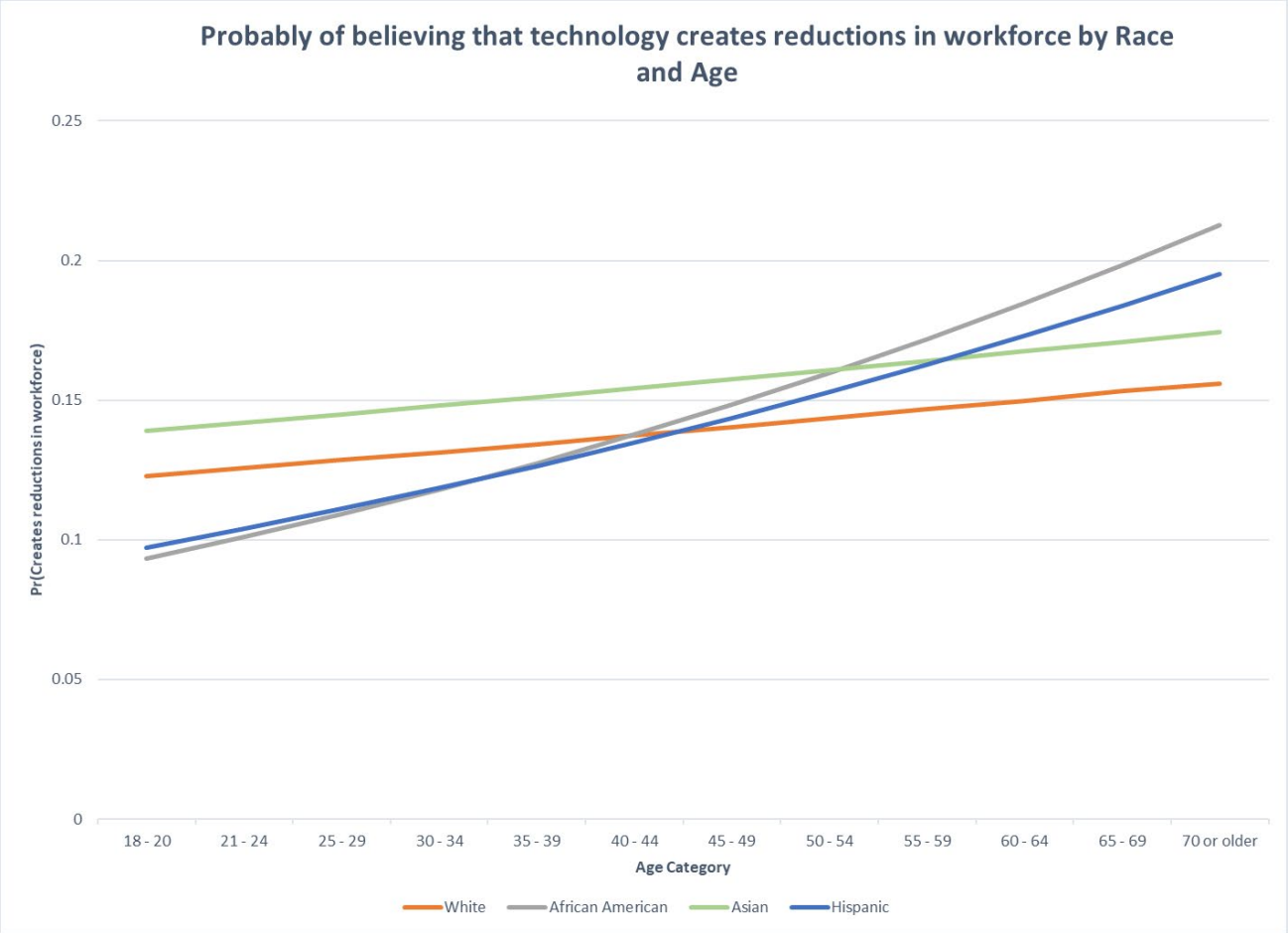
Probably of believing that technology creates reductions in workforce by Race and Age
0.25
0.2
0.15
0.1
0.05
0
Pr(Creates reductions in workforce)
18 - 20
21 - 24
25 - 29
30 - 34
35 - 39
40 - 44
45 - 49
50 - 54
55 - 59
60 - 64
65 - 69
70 or older
Age Category
White
African American
Asian
Hispanic

*Figure 13*

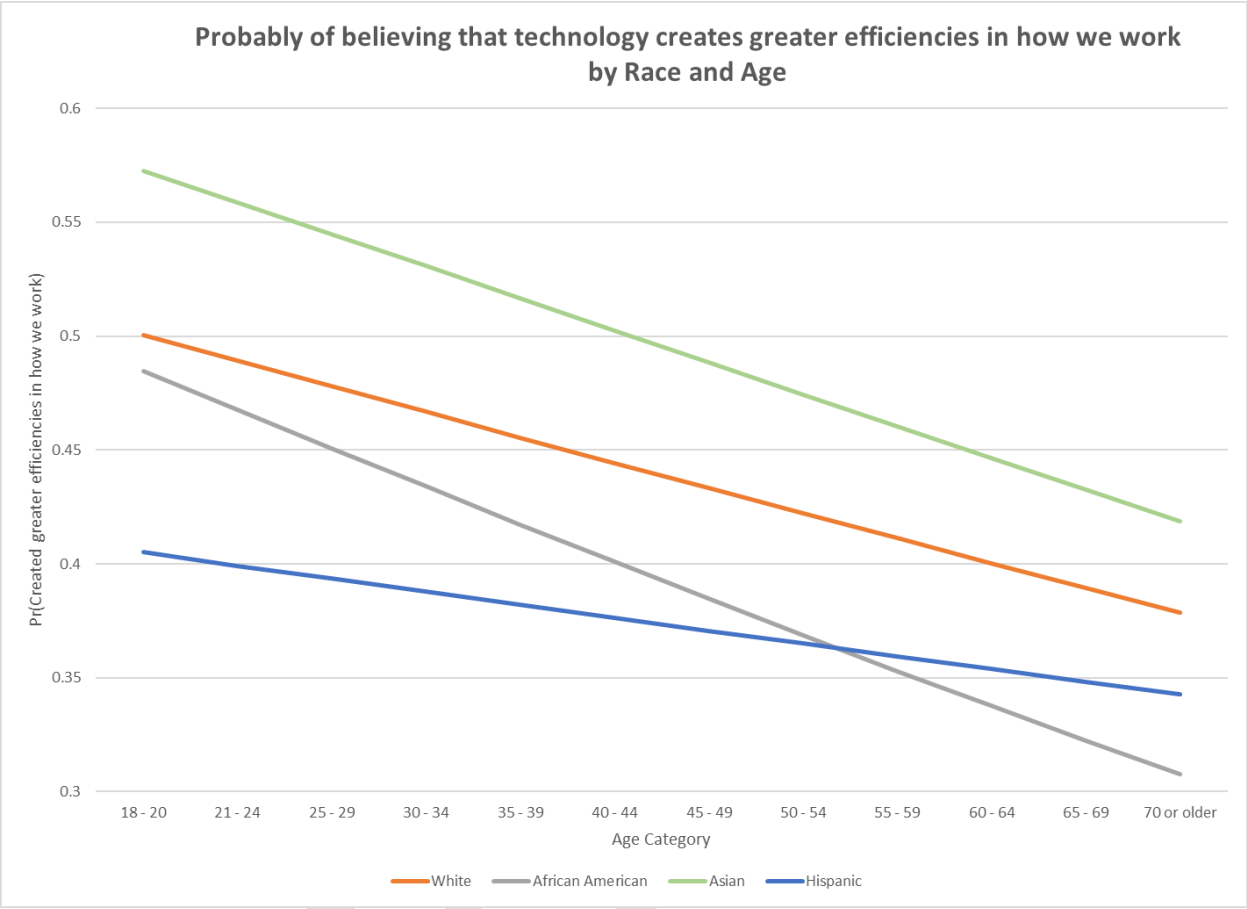


*Figure 14*

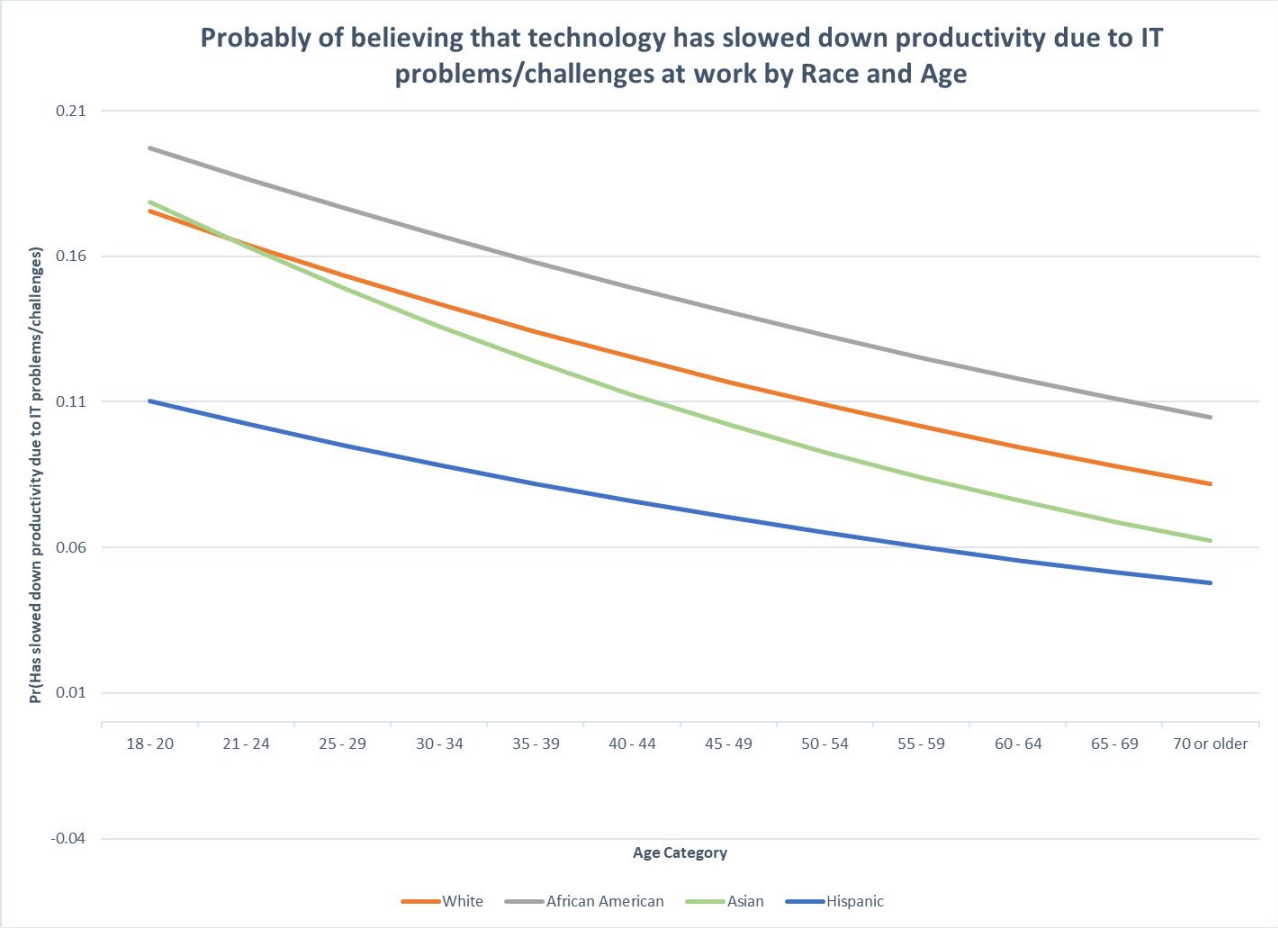


*Figure 15*

# About the Authors

Dr. Ismail White is an Associate Professor of political science at Duke University. He received his B.A. in political science from Southern University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana and his Ph.D. in political science from the University of Michigan. He previously held positions at George Washington University, the University of Texas at Austin, The Ohio State University, and Princeton University's Center for the Study of Democratic Politics. Dr. White studies American politics with a focus on African-American politics, public opinion, and political participation. His research in these areas has appeared in the American Political Science Review, Journal of Politics, Public Opinion Quarterly, Journal of Black Studies, Race and Social Problems, Virginia Journal of Social Policy and the Law, and a number of edited book volumes.

He is co-editor of the book *African-American Political Psychology: Identity, Opinion, and Action in the Post-Civil Rights Era*. He also works on the development of survey and experimental methods for better understanding political and social issues. He has published work in these areas in the American Journal of Political Science and Political Analysis and previously worked on surveys through the Detroit Area Study and as a fellow for the American National Election Study.

Harin Contractor is the Workforce Policy Director of the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. Harin worked at a tech start-up that used government data to empower communities. He also started the Data Analytics unit of the Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC), a government run non-profit that provides $10 billion of grants to facilitate broadband access across the United States. Harin worked in the Obama Administration at the U.S. Department of Labor as the Economic Policy Advisor to the Secretary. Harin is a graduate of the University of Georgia and the University of Chicago.

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# Methodology

The Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies commissioned and analyzed the results of this survey conducted in partnership with Nielsen Scarborough. This survey results from 1115 Whites and nationally representative oversamples of 667 Blacks, 619 Latinos, and 611 Asian Americans. The sample was re-weighted to a 2,000-person sample with 500 interviewees from each racial group. For questions related to one's job only those who were currently employed were surveyed.

Using survey questions developed by the Joint Center, Nielsen Scarborough collected this data through the Nielsen Scarborough panel between September 1 and September 28, 2018. The Nielsen Scarborough panel consists of 200,000+ U.S. adults drawn from a random probability selection process that includes random-digit-dialing (RDD) and address-based sample methods. The panel offers statistically reliable projections to the total U.S. adult population and is designed to ensure the representativeness of Hispanic and African American populations.

The margin of error for individual racial and ethnic groups is +/- 5 percentage points. In comparing differences within racial and ethnic subgroups, the margin of error grows larger. The Joint Center reminds readers to interpret group differences with caution. It is also important to note that margins of error are calculated on individual proportions and not on the difference. The margin of error also shrinks significantly as a number approaches zero, allowing us to be more confident in some results than others.


The Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, founded in 1970, is a think tank that produces data, analysis, and ideas to solve challenges that confront Black communities. The Joint Center collaborates with top experts, various organizations, and others that value racial inclusion to maximize our impact.

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