
The racial gap over trust in elections (and how to close it)

Research by Laura Uribe, Kailen Aldridge, Thad Kousser, Tye Rush (UC San Diego), and Kyshan Nichols-Smith (Morehouse College). Contact: Laura Uribe, UC San Diego (uribe@ucsd.edu)

Executive Summary:

Despite the focus on mistrust among white conservatives, voters from minority groups may also lack confidence in the integrity of the vote count. Analyzing surveys from 2012-2022, we find that Black and Native Americans are consistently less trusting of elections than white Americans, holding all else equal. Asian Americans have similar levels of trust to whites, and trust gaps for Latinos can be partially explained by demographic factors like education and income. State voting laws play a crucial role: in states with restrictive voting policies, the trust gap between Black and white Americans grows, whereas in states with inclusive laws, this gap disappears.

Methodology:

We conducted a nationwide post-election survey of eligible voters in the 2022 election of over 7,000 Americans. We also used data from the Survey of the Performance of American Elections from 2012–2022 to see over-time trends of racial disparities in trust in elections.

We examined the level of trust for white, Black, Latino, Native, and Asian American respondents. We include standard demographic controls of education, income, age, and gender, and partisanship. We also include state-level measures for historic voting restrictions and contemporary inclusivity in voting laws (such as pre-registration, allowing formerly convicted felons to vote, and expansive voting days).

Results:

Trust Gap by Ethnoracial Group, compared to white Americans, after demographic controls

Black Lower levels of trust	Native Lower levels of trust
Latino <i>No evidence of difference</i>	Asian American <i>No evidence of difference</i>

We find that Black, Latino, and Native Americans have lower levels of trust when compared to white Americans, but Asian Americans have similar trust levels. However, after controlling for demographic variables, the gap in trust between Latinos and white Americans disappears. When including all controls, including those for historic and contemporary voting policies, Black and Native respondents continue to have lower levels of trust, compared to white Americans.

How can election officials act on these findings?

Understanding how voter trust varies with historic and contemporary approaches to an inclusive democracy is crucial. Our statistical evidence shows that states with more inclusive voting laws have smaller gaps between racial/ethnic groups when it comes to trusting elections.

What we don't know yet:

How can election officials increase levels of trust in elections among all of their voters? We don't know exactly what is going on in minority voters' minds when they express levels of distrust in our electoral system. Is it that different groups have different reasons for distrust? And if this is the case, what kinds of messages or messengers are best to increase their trust? Further research is needed to evaluate whether there are approaches that elections officials can take to effectively and sustainably reduce this trust gap.

Learn more:

[Full research paper available online](#) and in the peer-reviewed article in the journal Political Research Quarterly, "[The Racial Gap in Trust in Elections \(and how to close it\).](#)" Support for this project was provided by the [UC San Diego Yankelovich Center](#) and by the [MIT Election Data and Science Lab](#). You can follow our team's research partnerships with election officials all across the country at elections.ucsd.edu.