THE TEXTURE OF INTERGROUP RELATIONS, 1993: A NATIONAL SURVEY

The American Jewish Committee, in seeking to obtain a better grasp of the texture of intergroup relations in the United States today, commissioned a special public-opinion survey dealing with the subject. Among other things, the survey examines perceptions of race, ethnic, and religious relations, personal exposure to racial, ethnic, or religious slurs, and the importance attached to promoting intergroup understanding and tolerance.

The survey was conducted for the American Jewish Committee by The Gallup Organization. One thousand and five respondents, constituting a representative national sample of American adults age 18 and older, were interviewed by telephone during September 13-19, 1993. The findings can be reported for the sample as a whole, as well as by (among others) sex, race, age, education, income, region, and political identification. The estimated sampling error for the total sample is plus or minus three percentage points.

Key Findings

The survey makes it clear that Americans see intergroup relations in the United States as a troubled arena. Race relations are viewed in the most negative light, followed closely by ethnic relations; fewer Americans— but still a majority—see relations between religious groups as problematic. In addition, one in ten Americans report that they themselves have been the target of a racial, ethnic, or religious slur. At the same time, a large majority of Americans express a strong commitment to intergroup harmony and equal rights.

The Data in Review

A majority of Americans characterize "relations between the different racial groups in the United States today" as "only fair" (53 percent) or "poor" (30 percent), while a minority see them as "good" (14 percent) or "excellent" (1 percent); 2 percent "don't know."

Similarly, a majority of Americans characterize "relations between the different ethnic groups in the United States today" as "only fair" (53 percent) or "poor" (24 percent), while a minority see them as "good" (20 percent) or "excellent" (1 percent); 3 percent "don't know."

A smaller majority of Americans characterize "relations between the different religious groups in the United States today" as "only fair" (39 percent) or "poor" (14 percent), while a substantial minority see them as "good" (41 percent) or "excellent" (4 percent); 2 percent "don't know."

A majority of Americans (57 percent) maintain that "relations between the different racial groups in the United States" are "about the same now as they were one year ago," while one-quarter (26 percent) indicate "worse now," 15 percent "better now," and 1 percent "don't know."

A majority of Americans (71 percent) maintain that "relations between the different ethnic groups in the United States" are "about the same now as they were one year ago," while 15 percent indicate "worse now," 11 percent "better now," and 3 percent "don't know."

A majority of Americans (74 percent) maintain that "relations between the different religious groups in the United States" are "about the same now as they were one year ago," while 16 percent indicate "better now," 8 percent "worse now," and 3 percent "don't know."

Asked "In the last year or so in the United States, has someone of a different race, ethnic group, or religion called you by an insulting racial, ethnic, or religious term to your face, or not?" 12 percent of Americans say "yes," while 88 percent say "no." Of those who say "yes," 70 percent say that it was a racial term, 16 percent an ethnic term, and 14 percent a religious term.

When asked "Looking ahead several years, do you think relations between the different racial groups in the United States will be better, worse, or about the same as they are now?" a plurality of Americans (41 percent) say "better," 32 percent "about the same," 25 percent "worse," and 2 percent "don't know." A plurality of Americans (45 percent) predict that relations between different ethnic groups will be "about the same" in several years, 38 percent "better," and 15 percent "worse"; 3 percent "don't know."

A majority of respondents (51 percent) say that relations between different religious groups will be "about the same" in several years, 36 percent "better," and 10 percent "worse"; 3 percent "don't know."

A large majority of Americans believe it "essential" (46 percent) or "very important" (38 percent) to "promote racial, ethnic, and religious understanding and tolerance in the United States," while 13 percent deem it "somewhat important" and 3 percent "not important"; 1 percent "don't know."

When presented with a list and asked "which one or two . . . should take the lead in dealing with racial, ethnic, and religious tensions in the United States," Americans most frequently answer "schools" (36 percent) and "community leaders" (36 percent), followed by "religious institutions" (24 percent), "the federal government" (23 percent), "the media" (17 percent), "the state government" (12 percent), "the city government" (8 percent), and "none" (5 percent); 4 percent "don't know."

Subgroup Differences

Blacks view intergroup relations more negatively than whites on some items, but more positively on others. Thus, 33 percent of blacks and 23 percent of whites consider ethnic relations "poor" (although nearly identical percentages of blacks and whites consider them either "only fair" or "poor"), and 69 percent of blacks as against 51 percent of whites consider interreligious relations either "only fair" or "poor" (blacks: only fair, 35 percent; poor, 34 percent; whites: only fair, 40 percent; poor, 11 percent). At the same time, 21 percent of blacks as against 9 percent of whites feel that ethnic relations are better than they were a year ago, and 28 percent of blacks are better than they were a year ago. When asked about racial relations, the views of blacks and whites do not differ significantly.

In terms of personal experience, nearly twice as many blacks (19 percent) as whites (10 percent) say that someone of a different race, ethnic group, or religion has called them by an insulting term in the last year or so. Strong differences among Americans do not emerge on the basis of education for all of the items in the survey, but for a number of items, better-educated respondents express at least somewhat less concern about intergroup relations than the less well educated. Thus, 54 percent of both college graduates and those with some college education, as against 38 percent of those with a high-school education or less, think that relations between religious groups in the United States are "excellent" or "good"; 25 percent of college graduates, as against 18 percent of those with a highschool education or less, think that relations between ethnic groups are "excellent" or "good"; 47 percent of college graduates, as against 33 percent of those with a high-school education or less, think that ethnic relations will be "better" in a few years; and 46 percent of college graduates, as against 38 percent of those with a high-school education or less, think that racial relations will be "better" in a few years.

While strong and consistent differences among Americans do not emerge on the basis of age, noteworthy differences exist for a number of items. For example, the youngest respondents (age 18-29) are more likely than the oldest (age 55 and older) to think that racial relations in the United States will be "worse" in several years (30 percent versus 19 percent), to say that someone of a different race, ethnic group, or religion has called them by an insulting term in the last year or so (19 percent versus 6 percent), and to consider it "essential" or "very important" to "promote racial, ethnic, and religious understanding and tolerance in the United States" (88 percent versus 80 percent). The youngest are also more likely than the oldest to consider racial relations "excellent" or "good" (24 percent versus 12 percent).

Similarly, while strong and consistent differences do not emerge on the basis of income, one noteworthy difference does exist: 67 percent of respondents those in the lowest category (those earning under \$20,000), as against 43 percent of respondents in the highest (those earning \$40,000 or more), think that relations between religious groups are "only fair" or "poor."

Again, strong and consistent differences do not emerge on the basis of region. Thus, 81-87 percent of those living in the East, Midwest, South, and West feel that racial relations in the United States are "only fair" or "poor"; 9-14 percent of those living in the different regions say that someone of a different race, ethnic group, or religion has called them by an insulting term in the last year or so; and 82-87 percent of those living in the different regions consider it "essential" or "very important" to "promote racial, ethnic, and religious understanding and tolerance in the United States."

In addition, while strong and consistent differences among Americans do not emerge on the basis of political preference, differ- ences do exist on some items. Thus, 89 percent of Democrats and 85 percent of independents, as against 77 percent of Republicans, consider it "essential" or "very important" to "promote racial, ethnic, and religious understanding and tolerance in the United States"; 50 percent of Democrats, as against 36 percent of Republicans and 35 percent of independents, think that racial relations will be "better" in several years; and 45 percent of Democrats, as against 33 percent of Republicans and 35 percent of independents, think that ethnic relations will be "better" in several years.

Comparisons with American Youth in 1992

In October 1992, an American Jewish Committee-sponsored Roper survey examined race, ethnic, and religious relations in the United States from the perspective of high-school students.¹ The 506 face-to-face interviews formed a representative national sample of American students in the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grades. Several items were worded similarly in that survey and the present one; when comparisons are made between the surveys, differences in the wording of items will be noted.

Adults are much more likely than high-school students to express concern about the present state of racial and ethnic relations. (Adults were asked to characterize intergroup relations in the United States, and highschool students were asked to describe such relations in their own communities.) Thus, 83 percent of American adults feel that "relations between the different racial groups in the United States today" are "only fair" (53 percent) or "poor" (30 percent), while 15 percent consider them "excellent" (1 percent) or "good" (14 percent); and 77 percent of American adults feel that ethnic relations in the United States are "only fair" (53 percent)

¹ Reported in Renae Cohen and Jennifer Golub, *Intergroup Relations Today: A National Youth Survey* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1993).

or "poor" (24 percent), while 21 percent consider them "excellent" (1 percent) or "good" (20 percent). In contrast, 56 percent of respondents in the youth survey feel that "relations between the different racial and ethnic groups in [their] community today" are "only fair" (41 percent) or "poor" (15 percent), while 43 percent consider them "excellent" (6 percent) or "good" (37 percent).

At the same time, a slightly smaller proportion of adults than of highschool students report that they have been insulted in the past year. (Again, adults were asked about their experience in the United States, while highschool students were asked about their own communities.) When adults are asked "In the last year or so in the United States, has someone of a different race, ethnic group, or religion called you by an insulting racial, ethnic, or religious term to your face or not?" 12 percent say "yes" and 88 percent say "no." However, among those age 18-29 in the adult survey—the cohort that is closest in age to the respondents in the high-school sample—19 percent say "yes" and 81 percent say "no." And when high-school students are asked "In the last year or so in your community, has someone of a different race, ethnic group, or religion called you by an insulting racial, ethnic, or religious term to your face, or not?" the figures are virtually identical to those for the 18-29 subgroup: 19 percent say that they have been insulted, and 79 percent say that they have not.

Adults are slightly more likely than high-school students to consider it important to promote intergroup understanding. When adults are asked "How important do you think it is to promote racial, ethnic, and religious understanding and tolerance in the United States?" 84 percent say that it is either "essential" (46 percent) or "very important" (38 percent), while 16 percent say that it is either "somewhat important" (13 percent), while 16 percent say that it is either "somewhat important" (13 percent) or "not important" (3 percent). When asked "How important do you think it is to promote racial, ethnic and religious understanding and tolerance?" 78 percent of young people say that it is either "essential" (35 percent) or "very important" (43 percent), while 20 percent say that it is either "somewhat important" (18 percent) or "not important" (2 percent).

Conclusion

The American Jewish Committee's intergroup-relations survey highlights the tensions that exist in this domain. A majority of Americans characterize racial, ethnic, and religious relations in the United States as only fair or poor, with race relations viewed as the most troubled area. In addition, more than one in ten Americans report that they themselves have been the target of a racial, ethnic, or religious insult. At the same time, a large majority of Americans express strong support for intergroup harmony. Americans look especially to the schools and to community leaders to take the initiative in this area.

"Do you think relations between the different racial groups in the
United States today are excellent, good, only fair, or poor?" (in
percents)

Subgroup	Excel- icnt	Good	Only fair	Poor	DK/ NA (vol.)
		0000		1001	(101.)
Total	1	14	53	30	2
Sex					
Male	2	12	52	33	1
Female	1	16	54	27	2
Race					
White	1	14	54	29	2
Black	4	12	47	37	1
Age					
18-29	4	20	43	34	0
30-39	1	15	56	28	0
40-54	1	13	57	27	2
55+	1	11	55	30	3
Education					
High-school					
grad. or less	2	13	51	33	2
Some college	1	17	51	30	2
College grad.	0	16	61	22	1
Income					
<\$20,000	4	12	48	33	3
\$20,000-39,999	1	15	50	33	1
\$40,000+	0	14	64	21	0
Region					
East	1	14	54	30	3
Midwest	2	17	54	28	0
South	1	14	51	30	3
West	2	11	55	32	0
Political identification					
Democrat	1	14	53	31	2
Republican	2	11	59	29	0
Independent	1	17	50	30	2

"Do you think relations between the different ethnic groups in the United States today are excellent, good, only fair, or poor?" (in percents)

Subgroup	Excel- lent	Good	Only fair	Poor	DK/ NA (vol.)
Total	1	20	53	24	3
Sex					
Male	1	18	53	26	2
Female	1	21	53	22	3
Race					
White	1	21	54	23	3
Black	4	15	45	33	4
Age					
18-29	2	22	49	26	1
30-39	1	19	55	23	1
40-54	1	21	55	20	3
55+	0	18	52	26	5
Education					
High-school					
grad. or less	1	17	52	26	4
Some college	1	22	51	25	2
College grad.	1	24	57	17	2
Income					
<\$20,000	2	16	46	31	6
\$20,000-39,999	1	18	57	23	1
\$40,000+	1	25	56	19	1
Region					
East	1	23	52	21	3
Midwest	1	22	57	18	2
South	1	18	50	27	5
West	1	15	53	30	1
Political identification					
Democrat	0	20	49	28	3
Republican	2	18	61	18	1
Independent	1	21	50	25	4

Subgroup	Excel- lent	Good	Only fair	Poor	DK/ NA (vol.)
Total	4	41	39	14	2
Sex					
Male	3	43	38	14	3
Female	4	39	41	14	2
Race					
White	4	43	40	11	3
Black	2	28	35	34	2
Age					
18-29	4	40	38	15	3
30-39	2	43	41	13	2
40-54	3	44	37	15	2
55+	5	37	42	13	3
Education					
High-school					
grad. or less	3	35	42	18	3
Some college	5	49	33	11	3
College grad.	5	49	37	8	2
Income				•	
<\$20,000	4	27	45	22	3
\$20,000-39,999	4	41	40	13	1
\$40,000+	4	53	35	8	1
Region					
East	3	42	39	14	2
Midwest	3	48	40	9	1
South	5	36	39	17	3
West	3	38	40	16	4
Political identification					
Democrat	3	38	44	13	2
Republican	6	45	38	10	0
Independent	3	40	36	17	4

"Do you think relations between the different religious groups in the United States today are excellent, good, only fair, or poor?" (in percents)

Subgroup	Better	Worse	Same	DK/ NA (vol.)
Total	15	26	57	1
Sex				
Male	13	24	62	1
Female	17	28	53	2
Race				
White	14	26	58	1
Black	18	25	55	2
Age				
18-29	19	26	54	1
30-39	12	26	62	1
40-54	14	26	59	1
55+	17	27	55	2
Education				
High-school				
grad. or less	16	26	56	2
Some college	13	28	58	0
College grad.	14	24	61	1
Income				
<\$20,000	19	26	54	2
\$20,000-39,999	17	28	54	1
\$40,000+	13	25	62	0
Region				
East	13	25	60	1
Midwest	17	22	61	1
South	16	28	54	2
West	14	30	55	1
Political identification				
Democrat	16	26	57	1
Republican	14	28	58	0
Independent	16	25	57	2

"Are relations between the different racial groups in the United States better now, worse now, or about the same now as they were one year ago?" (in percents)

Subgroup	Better	Worse	Same	DK/ NA (vol.)
Total	11	15	71	3
Sex				
Male	11	12	74	3
Female	11	17	69	3
Race				
White	9	15	72	4
Black	21	10	66	3
Age				
18-29	14	17	67	2
30-39	9	15	74	3
40-54	9	13	77	2
55+	13	14	67	7
Education				
High-school				
grad. or less	11	15	69	5
Some college	11	15	73	2
College grad.	11	12	76	2
Income				
<\$20,000	9	16	69	7
\$20,000-39,999	13	16	71	1
\$40,000+	10	12	76	2
Region				
East	11	12	76	2
Midwest	11	11	74	4
South	13	15	67	6
West	7	23	68	2
Political identification				
Democrat	11	16	68	4
Republican	9	14	76	2
Independent	12	14	70	4

"Are relations between the different ethnic groups in the United States better now, worse now, or about the same now as they were one year ago?" (in percents)

"Are relations between the different religious groups in the United States better now, worse now or about the same now as they were one year ago?" (in percents)

Subgroup	Better	Worse	Same	DK/ NA (vol.)
Total	16	8	74	3
Sex				
Male	12	6	80	2
Female	20	9	68	3
Race				
White	15	8	75	3
Black	28	10	59	3
Age				
18-29	14	9	74	3
30-39	11	8	79	2
40-54	15	8	75	2
55+	23	7	67	3
Education				
High-school				
grad. or less	17	10	70	3
Some college	17	1	79	3
College grad.	13	8	78	2
Income				
<\$20,000	23	11	61	4
\$20,000-39,999	16	6	76	2 2
\$40,000+	13	4	82	2
Region				
East	14	10	73	3
Midwest	20	3	75	2 2
South	16	11	71	2
West	14	5	77	5
Political identification				
Democrat	19	9	71	1
Republican	15	7	76	2
Independent	14	7	74	5

Subgroup	Yes	No	DK/ NA (vol.)
Total	12	88	0
Sex			
Male	14	85	0
Female	9	91	1
Race			
White	10	89	0
Black	19	79	2
Age			
18-29	19	81	0
30-39	12	87	1
40-54	11	89	0
55+	6	93	1
Education			
High-school			
grad. or less	10	89	1
Some college	14	86	0
College grad.	13	87	0
Income			
<\$20,000	8	90	2
\$20,000-39,999	15	85	0
\$40,000+	10	90	0
Region			
East	13	86	1
Midwest	9	91	0
South	14	86	0
West	9	91	0
Political identification			
Democrat	9	90	1
Republican	13	87	0
Independent	12	87	1

"In the last year or so in the United States, has someone of a different race, ethnic group, or religion called you by an insulting racial, ethnic, or religious term to your face or not?" (in percents)

"Was it an insulting racial, ethnic, or religious term?" (asked of and based on those respondents who answered "yes" to Question 7) (in percents)

Subgroup	Racial	Ethnic	Religious	DK/ NA (vol.)
Total	70	16	14	1
Sex				
Male	66	20	13	2
Female	75	10	15	0
Race				
White	67	15	17	1
Black	86	14	0	0
Age				
18-29	78	12	10	0
30-39	59	19	18	3
40-54	74	19	8	0
55+	63	14	23	0
Education				
High-school				
grad. or less	68	17	16	0
Some college	66	20	15	0
College grad.	77	11	9	3
Income				
<\$20,000	74	12	14	0
\$20,000-39,999	63	19	18	0
\$40,000+	79	16	2	3
Region				
East	66	32	2	0
Midwest	80	8	12	0
South	74	14	10	2
West	54	0	46	0
Political identification				
Democrat	60	26	14	0
Republican	78	10	12	0
Independent	69	13	16	2

"How important do you think it is to promote racial, ethnic, and religious understanding and tolerance in the United States? Is it essential, very important, somewhat important, or not important?" (in percents)

Subgroup	Essential	Very important	Somcwhat important	Not important	DK/ NA (vol.)
Total	46	38	13	3	1
Sex					
Male	46	37	13	3	1
Female	45	40	12	2	1
Race					
White	46	37	13	3	1
Black	41	50	7	2	0
Age					
18-29	48	40	12	0	0
30-39	50	36	10	4	1
40-54	49	36	11	3	2
55+	38	42	16	3	1
Education					
High-school					
grad. or less	39	43	15	2	1
Some college	51	36	10	2	1
College grad.	59	28	9	3	1
Income					
<\$20,000	36	45	17	1	2
\$20,000-39,999	47	38	12	2	0
\$40,000+	53	32	10	3	1
Region					
East	47	35	14	2	1
Midwest	46	36	14	4	0
South	44	42	12	2	1
West	47	40	10	2	1
Political identification					
Democrat	52	37	8	2	1
Republican	39	38	18	4	1
Independent	45	40	ה כוצואלית		1
		5,	ב דון אני ד ד ד ברית בירושל		17

Among the following, which one or two do you think should take the lead in dealing with racial, ethnic, and religious tensions in the United States?" (in percents)	g, which (the Unite	one or two d ed States?" (o you think in percents)	should take	the lead in	dealing with	n racial, eth	inic, and	-
Subgroup	Schools	Community leaders	Religious institutions	The federal government	The media	The state government	The city government	None (vol.)	DK/ NA (vol.)
Total	36	36	24	73	17	12	œ	Ś	4
Sex Male Female	31 41	32 39	25 23	24	17 17	13 11	∞ ∞	3 ¢	4 4
Race White Black	36 34	36 32	24 34	22 31	17 7	12 13	88 1-	so eo	4 1
Age 18-29 30-39 40-54	36 36 36	30 32 46	18 24 24	29 23 16	17 19 16	16 9 9	12 6	००७	0 n v
55+	30	34	29	23	15	13	7	4	S

Table 10 "Among the following, which one or two do you think should take the lead in dealing with racial, ethnic, and

Education High-school grad. or less Some college College grad.	33 41	32 39 42	25 26 22	24 22 18	14 20	15 10 8	∞ σ ∞	<i>N</i> 4 N	5 0 4
Income <\$20,000 \$20,000-39,999 \$40,000+	36 37 37	35 32 42	23 23 26	25 23 20	11 18 18	18 8 8	10 8	N Q N	946
Region East Midwest South West	36 35 39	38 38 33	23 28 21 21 21 23	23 23 25	19 11 22	11 8 14 14	6 10 10	\$\$ \$\$ \$\$ \$\$	r 4 a 0
Political identification Democrat Republican Independent	36 32 40	36 35 36	24 23	29 22 18	15 14 21	13 9	9 6 8	<i>6 5 7</i>	9 K K

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Subgroup	Better	Worse	Same	DK/ NA (vol.)
Total	41	25	32	2
Sex				
Male	38	26	34	3
Female	43	24	31	2
Race				
White	40	26	32	3
Black	44	20	35	1
Age				
18-29	36	30	34	1
30-39	41	25	33	1
40-54	33	28	37	2
55+	49	19	27	4
Education				
High-school				
grad. or less	38	27	32	2
Some college	40	22	36	2
College grad.	46	22	30	2
Income				
<\$20,000	40	23	34	4
\$20,000-39,999	42	24	33	1
\$40,000+	40	27	32	1
Region				
East	39	23	36	2
Midwest	39	22	38	1
South	42	25	29	4
West	42	29	27	2

"Looking ahead several years, do you think that relations between the different racial groups in the United States will be better, worse, or about the same as they are now?" (in percents)

Political identification Democrat

Republican

Independent

Subgroup	Better	Worse	Same	DK/ NA (vol.)
Total	38	15	45	3
Sex				
Male	33	15	49	3
Female	42	14	41	3
Race				
White	38	15	45	3
Black	36	15	45	4
Age				
18-29	34	19	46	2
30-39	39	18	43	1
40-54	34	14	47	5
55+	43	10	43	5
Education				
High-school				
grad. or less	33	16	47	4
Some college	42	14	43	1
College grad.	47	11	40	2
Income				
<\$20,000	31	15	49	5
\$20,000-39,999	41	14	44	1
\$40,000+	40	15	44	1
Region				
East	35	12	50	4
Midwest	40	14	45	1
South	39	15	41	5
West	38	17	43	3
Political identification				
Democrat	45	9	42	4
Republican	33	17	50	1
Independent	35	18	42	5

"Looking ahead several years, do you think that relations between the different ethnic groups in the United States will be better, worse, or about the same as they are now?" (in percents)

Subgroup	Better	Worse	Same	DK/ NA (vol.)
Total	36	10	51	3
Sex				
Male	32	11	55	2
Female	40	10	47	3
Race				
White	35	10	52	3
Black	44	14	41	1
Age				
18-29	36	15	47	2
30-39	32	10	56	2
40-54	35	11	51	3
55+	41	7	49	3
Education				
High-school				
grad. or less	36	12	49	3
Some college	39	10	49	2
College grad.	35	6	57	2
Income				
<\$20,000	36	11	49	3
\$20,000-39,999	41	12	47	1
\$40,000+	35	6	57	2
Region				
East	32	12	53	2
Midwest	41	6	52	1
South	39	12	46	3
West	32	11	53	4
Political identification				
Democrat	41	7	50	2
Republican	31	15	54	1
Independent	36	10	50	4

"Looking ahead several years, do you think that relations between the different religious groups in the United States will be better, worse, or about the same as they are now?" (in percents)