
**The Arguments Used**

**Affirmative Action (Pro):**

*Some whites claim to be victims of affirmative action programs. Nonsense! White Americans have long benefited from a society biased toward white interests, so any current preferences for minorities are only fair. There are no innocent victims of affirmative action. Therefore, we should all support affirmative action programs.*

The largest group of Americans to benefit from affirmative action thus far are women. Before 1964, women were excluded from many higher paying occupations and professions based on stereotype, custom and law. There were virtually no women police officers, lawyers, or doctors, for example. Progress has been made, but women still need affirmative action programs.

*Nothing in the Constitution prohibits affirmative action. In fact, the Supreme Court upheld affirmative action programs in education in a landmark case. In this case, the Court explicitly stated that "affirmative action is consistent with the Constitution."

When a company with a history of past discrimination passes over a white man and hires a qualified minority or woman instead, that isn't "reverse discrimination." When black professional athletes were first hired, breaking the "color barrier" in sports, some white ballplayers lost job opportunities. But that was not "reverse discrimination," it was a first step toward ending discrimination.

In the historic words of one African-American leader, "America has given the Negro people a bad check marked insufficient funds." It is about time that America makes good on its promise of opportunity for all. Affirmative action programs are a necessary first step toward racial equality in America.

In 1990, the average black male worker earned just $731 for every $1,000 earned by a white male worker in a comparable position. Moreover, though white males make up only 43% of the workforce, they occupy 97% of America's top executive positions. After decades of discrimination, only tough affirmative action programs can level the playing field.

Affirmative action programs are very effective. A study from the Clinton administration shows that the percentage of blacks entering the fields of law and medicine has increased from less than 2% to over 10% in the past 20 years. Affirmative action is working.

Who says racism is dead in America? Far from it. Surveys show that a majority of white Americans still believe that African- and Latino Americans are less intelligent, less hard working and less patriotic than whites. Affirmative action programs are an important step toward changing these racist attitudes.

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1 An asterisk indicates the argument was used for the thoughts listing task in study 2.
Affirmative Action (Con):

*Affirmative action plans treat people based on race, not past or present circumstances. Middle class blacks are given preferences while lower class whites are not! This is unfair reverse discrimination and is itself a form of racism. Affirmative action programs must stop.

Many of the victims of affirmative action are Asian-Americans who have been excluded from top schools due to racial quotas. But they had no role at all in the country's history of discrimination against blacks and they are truly innocent victims! Affirmative action programs are doing more harm than good.

According to a prominent African-American economist, under affirmative action, blacks often get admitted into schools and programs even though they have worse credentials than most white applicants. As a result, their dropout rate is higher. Affirmative action plans harm both blacks and whites and should be stopped.

*The Constitution absolutely prohibits racial discrimination, including affirmative action. As one landmark case declared, "our Constitution is color-blind, and neither knows nor tolerates classes among citizens." Therefore, affirmative action plans are unconstitutional.

The preeminent African-American leader of all time put it best: "Men should be judged by the content of their character, not the color of their skin." Clearly this statement recognizes the injustice of any form of racial preferences. In other words, even the most famous black leader in American history opposed affirmative action!

Merit has always been the most important factor determining success in this country. People of all races and classes can get ahead if they are willing to work. Unfortunately, some Americans expect to be handed a free lunch. Opportunities exist for all, but you have to be willing to pull your weight. Affirmative action violates the merit principle and should be ended.

In a recent national poll, 50% of Americans said they oppose affirmative action. It seems that most of our laws these days favor minorities, and Americans are getting fed up. If a majority of American citizens believe that affirmative action programs are unfair, then why have these laws not been repealed? End affirmative action now!

Affirmative action programs at American universities "stigmatize" African Americans and other minority students who are assumed to be incompetent because they were admitted based on color, not on merit. Individuals, whether black or white, are far more likely to be successful if they prove their abilities in equal competition rather than receiving unfair and unearned advantages. Affirmative action works to the disadvantage of minorities.
Gun Control (Pro):
*A study in a prominent medical journal found that you or a member of your family are 43 times more likely to be killed by your own gun than by an intruder's. Guns aren't the protection many people think they are. We need stricter gun control.

Self-defense arguments for the need of guns are silly: guns only become necessary for self-defense because there are so many guns out there. Thus, guns should be outlawed outright -- then we won't need to worry about self-defense.

The United States has the highest murder rate of all industrialized nations. It is also the only industrialized country that has lenient gun laws. We therefore say: bring down the number of guns, bring down the murder rate.

*Several recent school tragedies highlight the fact that guns have become a menace to our children. It's very simple: our schoolyards should not be battlefields. We need to reduce access to guns; we need stricter gun control.

In one poll of imprisoned felons, only 27% report buying guns on the black market; the rest got their weapons through legal channels. Obviously, tougher gun controls are needed to keep these ‘legal’ guns out of criminal hands.

Recent trials against gun manufacturers have consistently found them guilty, and have forced the gun industry to pay out huge sums of money. If the courts can find good reason to rein in the gun industry, then it is high time for Congress to follow suit.

A study of 743 gunshot deaths reports that 398 occurred in a home where a gun was kept. Only 9 of the 743 were deemed to be justified by the police. It follows that gun owners are not as responsible as they claim to be.

A gun should only be fired if one's life is in danger and all other options have been exhausted. Most 'self-defense' shootings do not meet these criteria. Thus use of guns in self-defense only contributes to the crime rate.

Gun Control (Con):
*A main reason why our murder rate is so high is that most crime victims do not resist. These victims are twice as likely to be injured compared to those who defend themselves. Carrying a gun is thus one's ultimate protection against violent crime.

The liberal media distorts gun issues: they only talk about tragedies involving guns. Yet guns were used defensively 2.5 million times last year. The real tragedy would be to outlaw guns -- crime would spiral out of control.

*The Bill of Rights guarantees the right of all citizens to bear arms. Quite simply, gun control measures are unconstitutional infringements on a basic right of citizenship.
Most privately-owned guns in America are owned by sportsmen and are used for completely peaceful purposes. These guns pose no risk to society, but they are unfairly targeted by gun control legislation.

Stricter gun control laws have not passed Congress, reflecting serious misgivings the American people have about gun control. However, the courts have repeatedly ignored the will of the people, finding gun manufacturers in the wrong. We need to limit the power of the courts in gun control cases.

A national council reported in 1991 that handgun accidents killed less than 15 children under the age of 6. This number is minuscule when compared to the total number of accidental deaths of young children. It simply is not worth outlawing guns to save just a handful of lives.

Laws that require guns to be locked up defeat the purpose of gun ownership: how can I protect my family if I must first retrieve my gun from its locker? We thus need to repeal laws regulating guns in private homes.

Gun control legislation can only regulate guns sold through legal outlets. But these days, many criminals buy their guns illegally. Gun control legislation therefore cannot regulate the most dangerous guns in society.

General Instructions

In this experiment, we will be asking you about your opinions on a number of political issues. There will be several parts to the experiment and we will give you instructions for each part as you come to it. The most important thing is for you to relax and take your time. For most of the questions, there are no right or wrong answers, only opinions, and it is your personal opinions that we are interested in.

Instructions for the Information Board Task

Now that you have finished with the practice screen, we ask you to read several arguments on affirmative action. At the conclusion of the experiment, you will be asked to explain the affirmative action debate to a group of interested students. The arguments presented on the following screen will give you a chance to prepare to do this. We understand that you may already have an opinion about affirmative action, but we would like you to set your feelings aside and consider the arguments fairly. Please be as objective as possible. The arguments we have selected were sampled from the public statements of two interest groups and two political parties. These groups are listed below along with a brief summary of their general position on affirmative action. To read an argument from one of these groups, just click one of the boxes in the row for that group. The argument will appear on the screen. There is just one catch: you will only able to view 8 arguments in total. Once you have reached that number the information board will disappear and you will move on to the next part of the study. If you do not understand these instructions, please ask the experimenter to explain.
NAACP: The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People is the oldest and largest Civil Rights Organization in the United States. The NAACP supports affirmative action programs.

Committee to End Preferences: A citizen group devoted to ending racial and gender preferences, quotas and set-asides. The Committee to End Preferences opposes affirmative action programs.

Democratic Party: We provide a sampling of statements made by Democratic politicians on the issue. Historically, the Democratic Party has supported affirmative action programs.

Republican Party: We provide a sampling of statements made by Republican politicians on the issue. Historically, the Republican Party has opposed affirmative action programs.

National Rifle Association: The largest organization of gun owners and advocates in the United States. The NRA opposes gun control.

Citizens Against Handguns: A Maryland-based group devoted to the elimination of handgun sales in the U.S. Citizens Against Handguns favors gun control.

Democratic Party: We provide a sampling of statements made by Democratic politicians on the issue. Historically, many Democrats have favored gun control.

Republican Party: We provide a sampling of statements made by Republican politicians on the issue. Historically, many Republicans have opposed gun control.

Instructions for Argument Strength Task

In this section, we will ask you to read a set of arguments on gun control and tell us how weak or strong you believe each argument is. At the conclusion of the experiment, you will be asked to explain the gun control debate to a group of interested students. The arguments presented will give you a chance to prepare to do this.

PLEASE NOTE: We want to know how weak or strong you believe the argument is, NOT WHETHER YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH THE ARGUMENT. Please try to leave your feelings about affirmative action aside and indicate how strong or weak you feel the argument is. Please be as objective as possible.

REMEMBER: whether you agree or disagree with the conclusion of an argument is not the same thing as whether you think the argument is weak or strong.

If you do not understand these instructions, please ask the experimenter to explain.

Attitude Measures

**Extremity/Position** (9 pt. Likert type agree-disagree response options)

Equal opportunity for African-Americans is very important but it's not really the government's job to guarantee it.

Generations of slavery and discrimination have created conditions that make it difficult for blacks to work their way out of the lower class.
It's really a matter of some people not trying hard enough; if blacks would only try harder they could be just as well off as whites.
Over the past few years blacks have gotten less than they deserve.
Affirmative action helps to level the playing field, giving blacks an equal chance.
Blacks do not help themselves by pushing in where they’re not wanted.

Curbing gun violence is very important, but limiting the right to bear arms is not really an effective way to do this.
Everyone's rights and freedoms are important, but sometimes, as with gun control, it is necessary to limit freedom for the greater public good.
Guns, like cars, should only be used by responsible citizens. Gun control laws just insure that responsible people are using guns in a responsible manner.
Over the past few years our right to bear arms has been eroding. This encroachment on our rights must be stopped.
There should be no limits on the number of guns someone can own.
It is not the government's job to pick and choose the types of weapons it finds acceptable for citizens to own.

**Attitude Strength (continuous sliding response scale)**

How much do you personally care about the issue of affirmative action?
Compared to how you feel about other public issues, how strong are your feelings regarding the issue of affirmative action?
Some people report that they are very certain of their feelings on the issue of affirmative action. Others say they are not certain at all. How certain are you of your feelings on the issue of affirmative action?
People have told us they have thought a lot about some issues and haven't thought at all about some other issues. How would you rate the amount of thinking you have done about the issue of affirmative action?

How much do you personally care about the issue of gun control?
Compared to how you feel about other public issues, how strong are your feelings regarding the issue of gun control?
Some people report that they are very certain of their feelings on the issue of gun control. Others say they are not certain at all. How certain are you of your feelings on the issue of gun control?
People have told us they have thought a lot about some issues and haven't thought at all about some other issues. How would you rate the amount of thinking you have done about the issue of gun control?

**Strength X position correlations**

.146 for aa study 1
.176 for gc study 1
.076 for aa study 2
.203 for gc study 2