



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

Dr. Ismail White
Harin Contractor

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	2
Introduction	4
Workers Notice Increased Technology Use.....	5
Technology Viewed Positively	7
Job Security Valued Over Other Benefits	9
High Interest in Employer-Provided Training	11
Workers Will Invest Limited Funds in Training	13
Finances as a Major Barrier to Training.....	16
Government, Individuals & Employers are Responsible for Preparing Workforce	18
High Interest in Free Education to Address Displacement	20
High Interest in College & Training Programs	23
Preparing Children for a Changing Economy.....	26
Appendix.....	28
About the Authors	32
Acknowledgments	33
Methodology	34

Executive Summary

This report summarizes findings from the Joint Center’s 2018 survey of 2,000 Black, Latino, Asian American, and White workers on the future of work.

Key Findings

- **While 38 percent of American workers reported “increased use of technology” on their job, only 12 percent noticed “more automation.”** More White and Asian American respondents saw technological change than did Latino and African American respondents.
- **A quarter of Latino workers reported moving from salaried to hourly work** over the course of their current employment—more than twice the percentage of 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. For example, 41 percent of Asian American workers see technology as creating greater opportunities, compared with only 24 percent of Black workers. African American and Latino 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 pathways to new opportunities and paid training.** However, Black and Asian American workers see job security as particularly important. About 40 percent of African American and 38 percent 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 percent of each—prioritized pathways to new opportunities. Latino 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 percent of Asian American workers and approximately 70 percent of White, Black, and Latino workers).
- **A majority of respondents from all racial backgrounds are willing to invest some of their own money to obtain additional job training that could potentially advance their careers.** However, the interest seems concentrated in spending \$1–\$2000 and declines significantly for higher amounts. A larger percentage of African Americans (24 percent) and Whites (19 percent) expressed an unwillingness to invest any of their own money in training than

Latinos (15 percent) and Asian Americans (14 percent). Significant racial disparities in interest for spending one's own money for training begin to appear at amounts 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 obtaining additional job training. The least cited barrier was feeling personally incapable of acquiring new skills.
- **Americans across racial groups generally see the federal government, individuals/families, and employers as bearing greater responsibility than schools and state governments for preparing the workforce for a changing economy.** However, African Americans were more likely to believe that the federal government has the greatest responsibility, and they were less likely to believe that individuals/families bear the greatest responsibility. Whites and Asian Americans were more likely than African Americans and Latinos to believe that employers bear the greatest responsibility.
- **A significant majority of Americans support free college or training as a response to job displacement.** African Americans (85 percent) expressed the highest support of this policy, followed by Asian Americans (78 percent), Latinos (75 percent), and Whites (70 percent). In addition, people of color favored a federal jobs guarantee and universal basic income as policy solutions to job displacement.
- **People of color have a significant interest in education and training.** Asian Americans, African Americans, and Latinos were all more likely than Whites to be interested in obtaining education or training from all the provided options, 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, Latinos, and Asian Americans were much more likely than Whites to prioritize teaching computer programming. Latino 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. They are also finding that technological innovations are creating new opportunities for advancement within the workplace. However, despite increasing productivity and workplace opportunities, technological efficiencies have displaced American workers or have required American workers to develop new skills.

In addition to those changes in the workplace, people of color are estimated to become the majority of the United States population by sometime between 2040 and 2050. Therefore, the perspectives of people of color today about technology, job-readiness, employability, the acquisition of skills, benefits, and education for children are even more critical to understanding the future of work.

These perceptions by people of color 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. For example, if children of color are currently becoming the majority of children in the United States, policymakers should pay attention to data that shows significant populations of African Americans, Asian Americans, and Latinos believe schools should teach computer programming. Current workforce trends—such as a large number of Latinos who report shifting from salaried to hourly work or having an interest in a GED or community college—can affect Latino 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 to 75 years.

Considering racial perceptions about the future of work is also essential in addressing long-standing challenges that have plagued America since its founding and ensuring that well-intentioned proposals do not exacerbate existing disparities over the next 50 to 75 years. For example, policymakers and employers designing tuition-assistance programs should know that significant racial disparities may emerge among employees who take advantage of those programs once employees are required to spend more than \$500 of their own money on training.

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 2000-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 review 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 listed several possible workplace changes, 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 increased use of technology 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 Latino 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 increased use of technology 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 salaried to hourly pay among Latino workers. Twenty-five percent of Latino workers in our sample reported they had moved from salaried to hourly work over the course of their current employment, a percentage over twice as high as for other racial groups.

Figure 1 also illustrates that more than other workers, White workers (29 percent) noticed changes in their healthcare benefits and the number of hours worked per week.

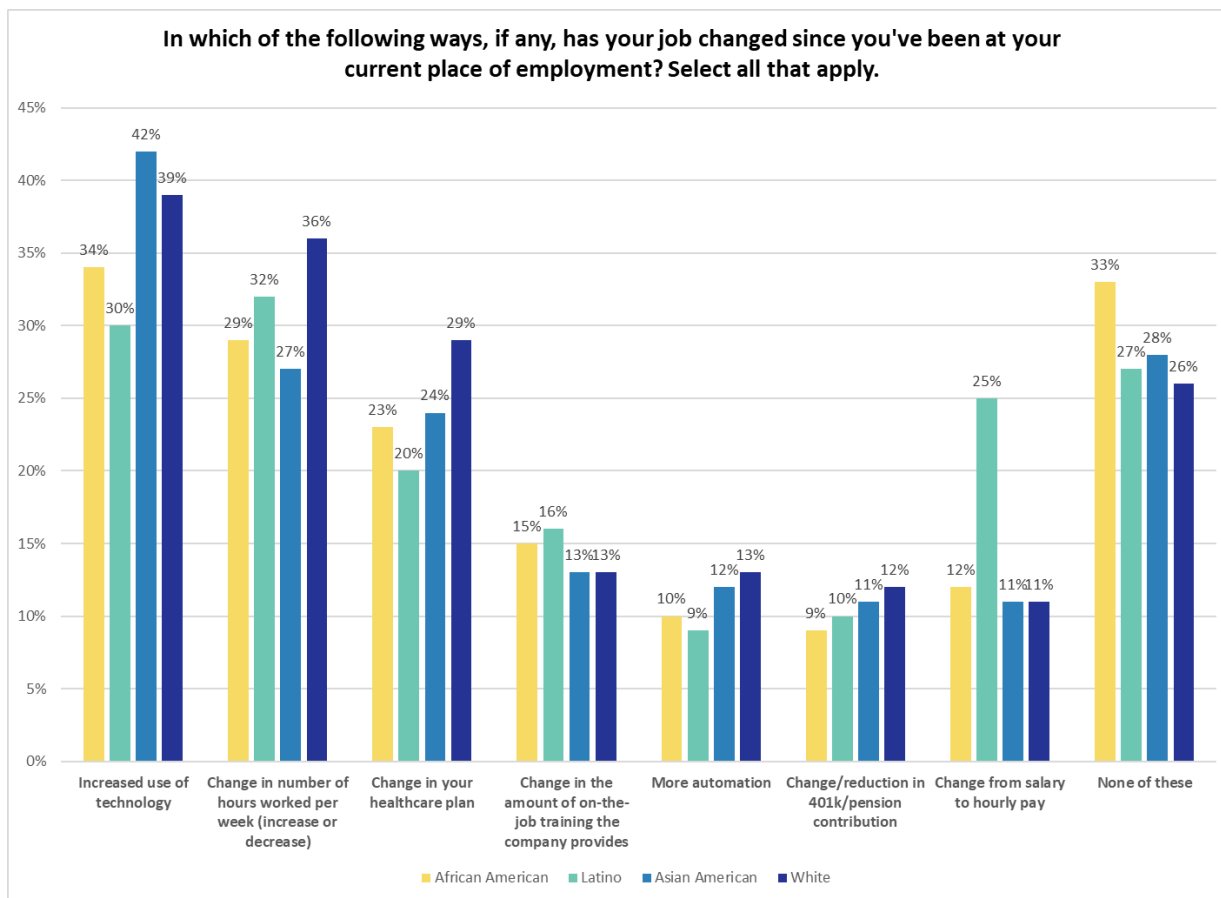


Figure 1

Technology Viewed Positively

As American workers see their workplaces becoming increasingly reliant on technology, how do they view 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. The respondents had the ability to select multiple options.

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. About 28 percent of respondents believe technology has provided more opportunities, whereas 8 percent believe technology has reduced opportunities and 16 percent of respondents believe that technology has resulted in a reduction of the workforce or displacement of fellow workers.

While 24 percent of Black workers believe technology has increased workplace opportunities, 9 percent believe it has taken opportunities away.

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. For example, while 44 percent of White workers and 47 percent of Asian American workers believe that technology has created greater efficiency in their workplaces, that belief is shared by only 33 percent of Black workers and 35 percent of Latino workers. While 41 percent of Asian American workers see technology as creating greater opportunities, only 24 percent of Black workers share that perception.

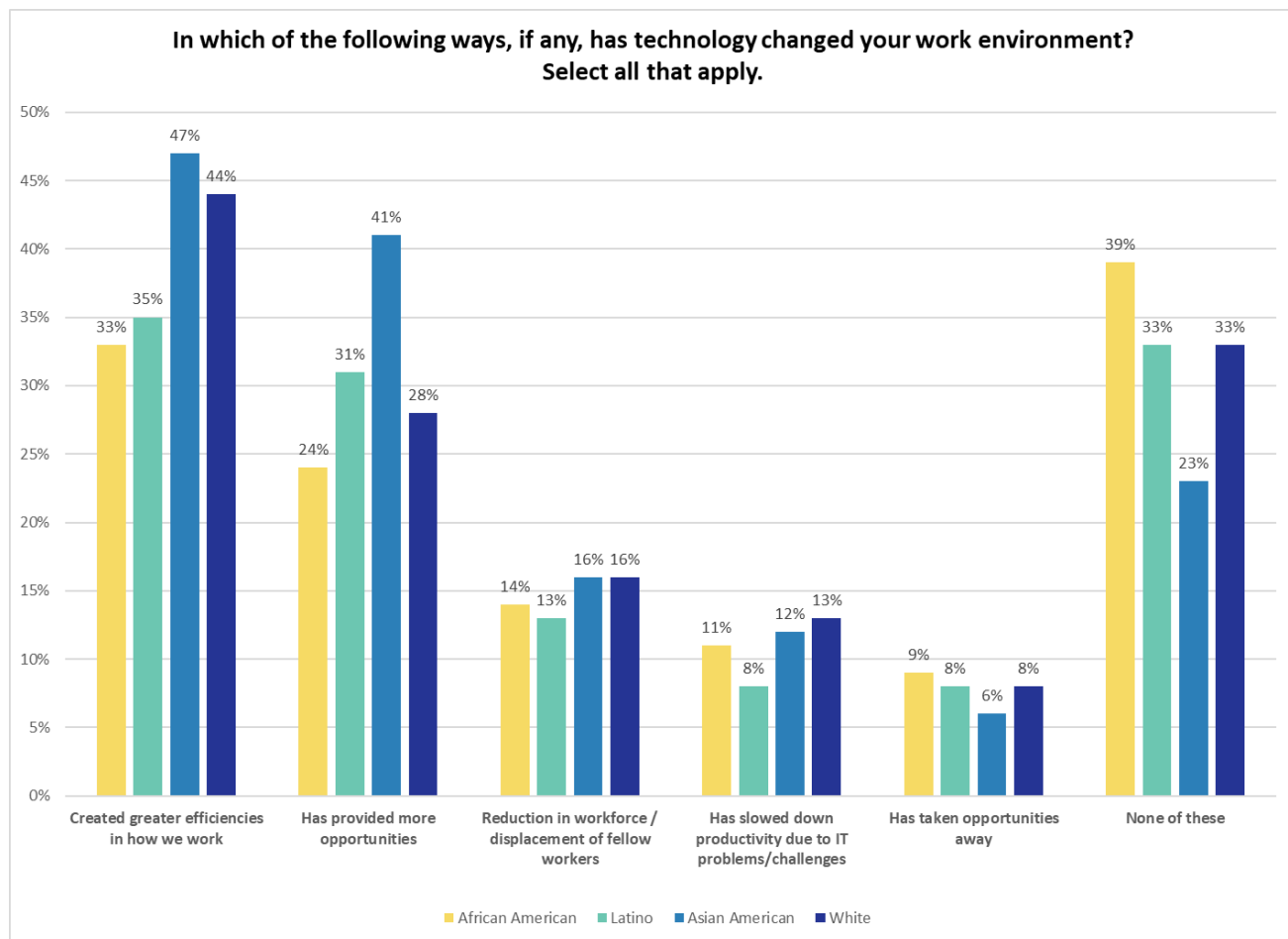


Figure 2

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 14 in the appendix 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 Latino and African American workers—are more likely to see the negative effects of technology on the work environment, particularly in taking opportunities away and reducing the workforce (see Figures 15 and 16).

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 have dramatically changed the taxi industry by significantly decreasing compensation for taxi drivers and increasing the number of self-employed drivers (e.g., Uber and Lyft drivers).¹ As technological advancements such as platform-based employment and telecommuting have made it easier for people to work on their own schedules, those advancements have also fueled the growth of short-term contract work. Although 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 how 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. The respondents were asked to rank their preferences.

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

While most workers value job security above all else, Black and Asian American workers see job security as particularly important. As seen in Figure 3, 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 26 percent of Latino workers listed job security as the most important employer benefit. Latino 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 (27 percent) were more likely than any of the other racial groups to value healthcare benefits.

¹ Thor Berger, Chinchih Chen, and Carl Benedikt Frey, "[Drivers of Disruption? Estimating the Uber Effect](#)," *European Economic Review* 110 (2018): 197-210.

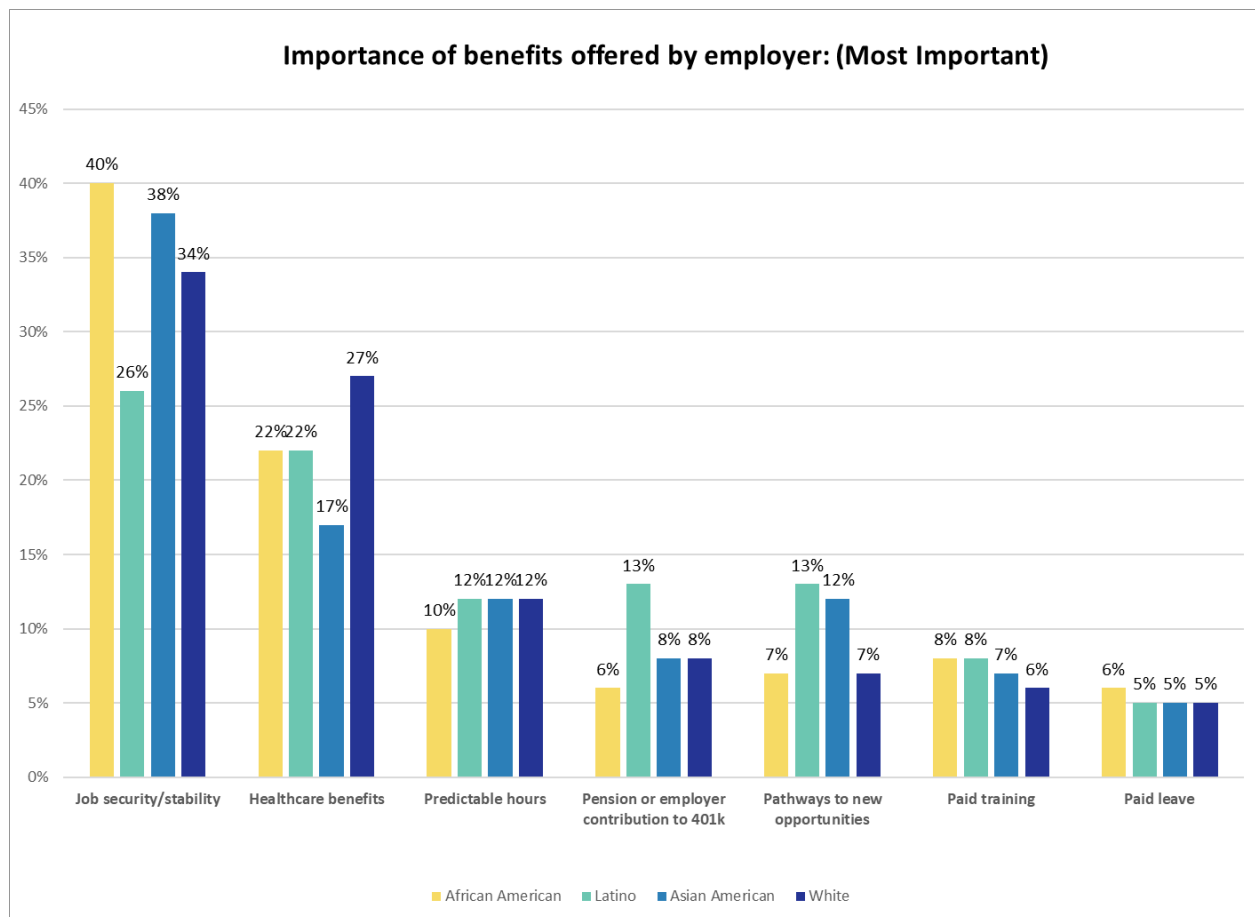


Figure 3

High Interest in Employer-Provided Training

As “disruptions” to the way work is done in the American workplace continue, we are interested in whether workers are willing or able to adjust to these new workplace demands by picking up new skills. We examine both the extent to which workers are willing to take advantage of additional job training or educational opportunities when offered by their employers and whether workers are willing 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 level (“very interested” to “not at all interested”) in participating in different job-training opportunities potentially offered by their employers: on-the-job training, online job training, employer-provided tuition subsidies, and paid job training. We found that while the 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 over 70 percent of White, Black, and Latino 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 employer-provided tuition subsidies, paid job training, and an online training platform.

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

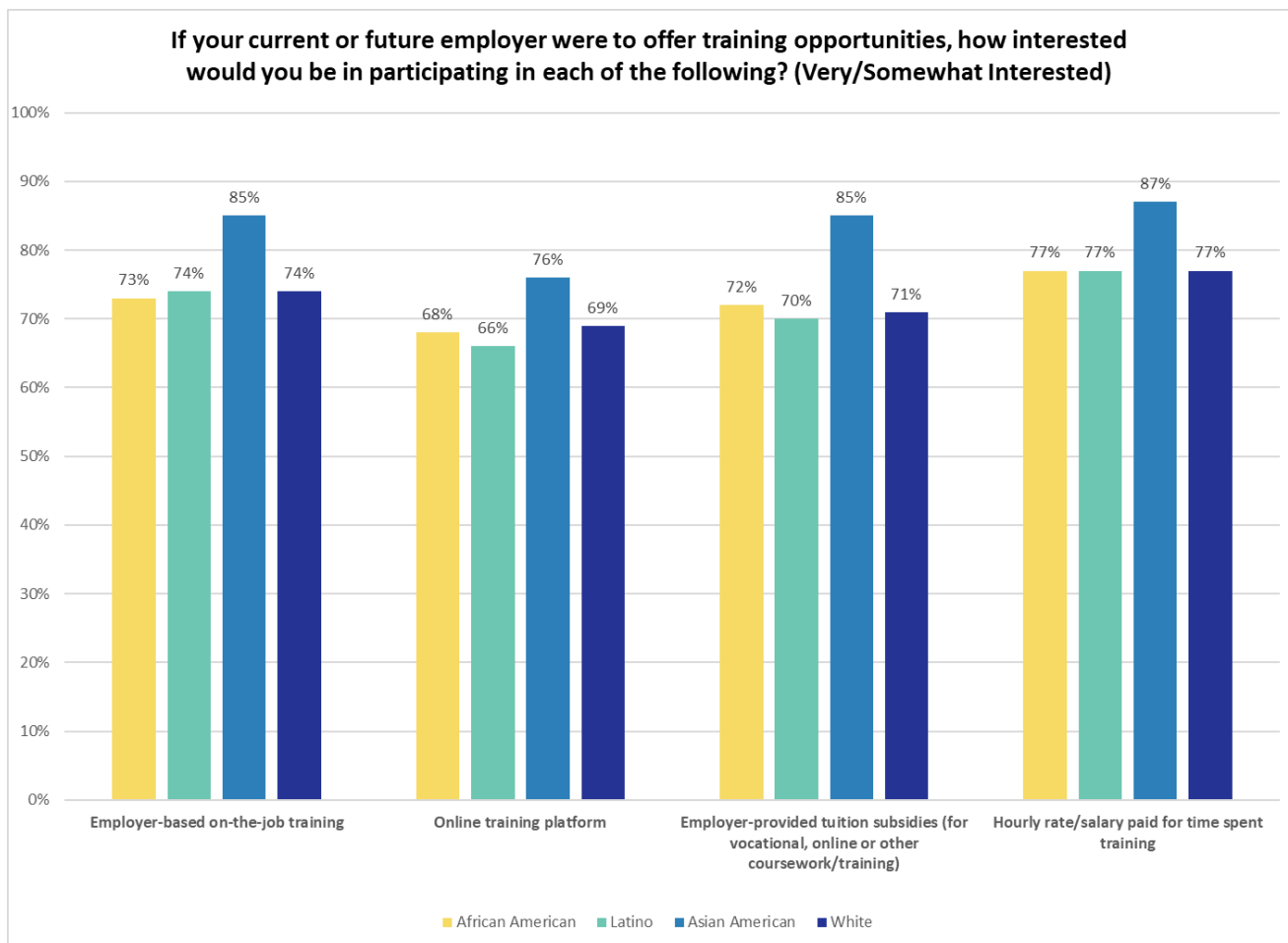


Figure 4

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. Of those who indicated a willingness to invest some of their own money to obtain additional job training, most were willing to spend either \$1–\$500 or \$501–\$2000. Relatively few were willing to spend over \$5000.

As seen in Figure 5, those who expressed an unwillingness to invest any of their own money toward additional training included 14 percent of Latinos, 15 percent of Asian Americans, 19 percent of Whites, and 24 percent of African Americans. Interest in spending \$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 \$501–\$20,000, and Latino workers were more willing than Black and White workers to invest their own money toward additional training costing \$5001–\$20,000. African Americans were the least willing group to pay \$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.

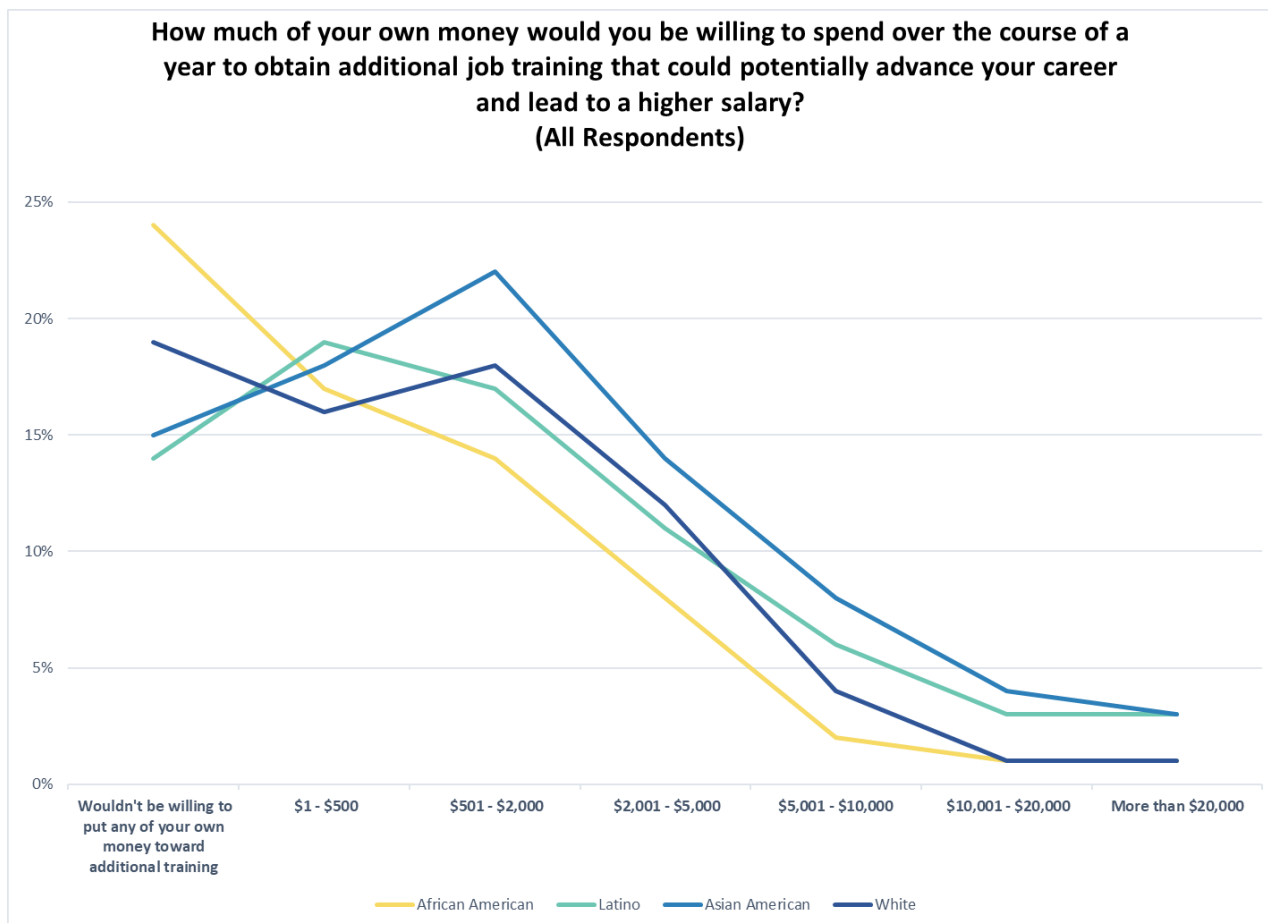


Figure 5

(Note: The numbers in Figure 5 do not add up to 100 percent because 29 percent of White Americans, 32 percent of African Americans, 16 percent of Asian Americans, and 27 percent of Latinos indicated “not sure,” and these groups are not reflected on the chart.)

These racial differences might be a function of the relative availability of resources across each of the 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 Latinos in our sample is between \$35,000 and \$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, as seen in 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 White, Latino,

and Asian American workers are unwilling to invest any of their own money toward job training, a slightly higher proportion of African Americans with high income are unwilling to invest any money in job training than are 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 gaps between Asian Americans, Whites, and Latinos disappear, suggesting that income differences between the groups were at least partly responsible for the gaps between Asian Americans, Whites, and Latinos that we saw in Figure 5.

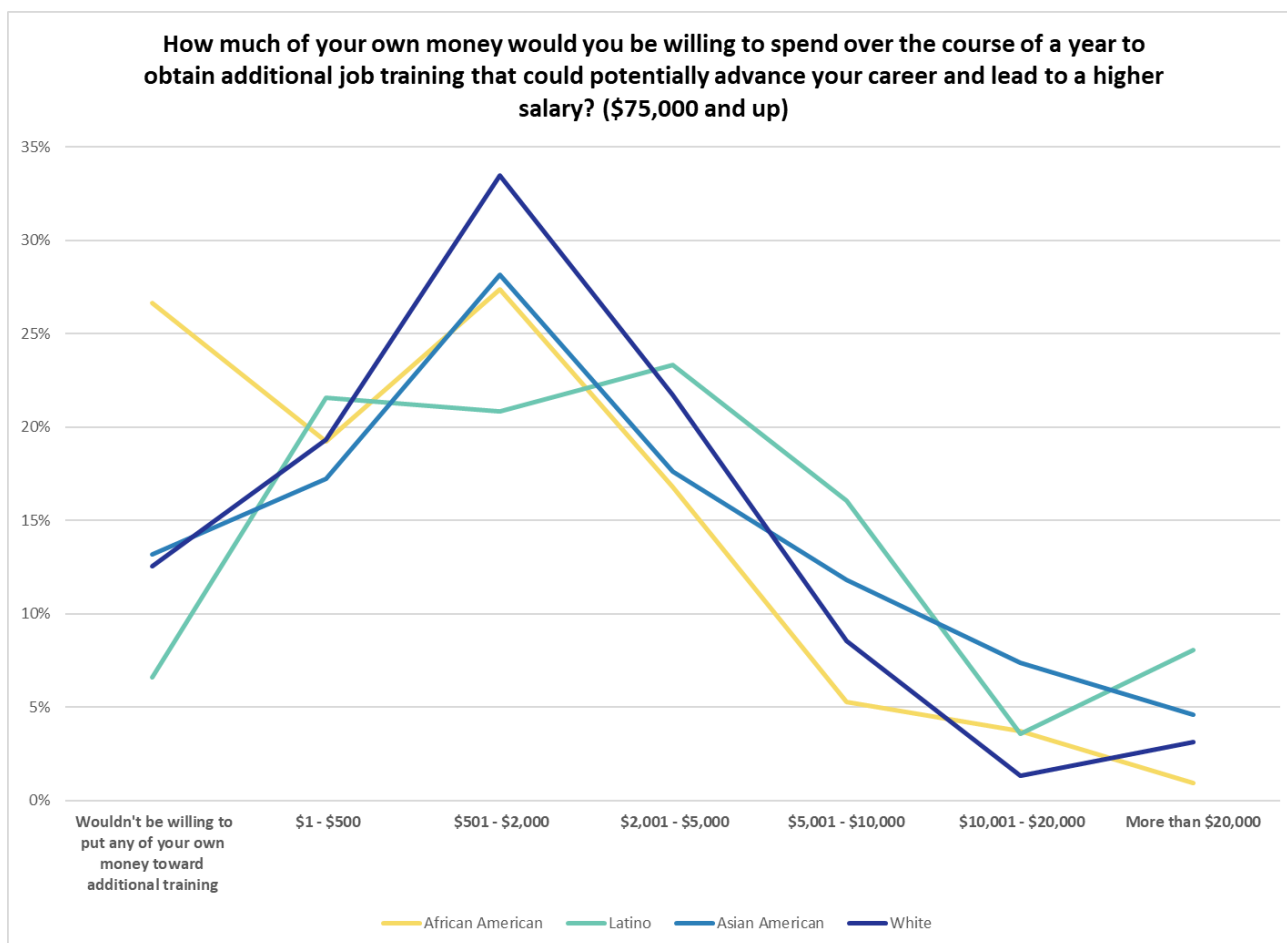


Figure 6

Finances as a Major Barrier to Training

We asked respondents to describe the barriers they have that stand in the way of obtaining additional job training, and financial constraints were by far the most cited barrier. Respondents were asked to select multiple options. As seen in Figure 7, roughly 50 percent of the respondents from each racial group reported that financial constraints stood in the way of obtaining additional job training.

Two notable racial differences emerged in the responses to this question. First, Asian Americans (41 percent) are significantly more likely than any other racial group to cite their inability to get time off from work as a barrier to additional training. In comparison, only 22 percent to 28 percent of other racial groups cited inability to get time off from work as a barrier. Second, Latino and Asian Americans (24 and 22 percent, respectively) were more likely than Black or White Americans (14 and 15 percent, respectively) 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 (6 percent) and Asian Americans (4 percent).

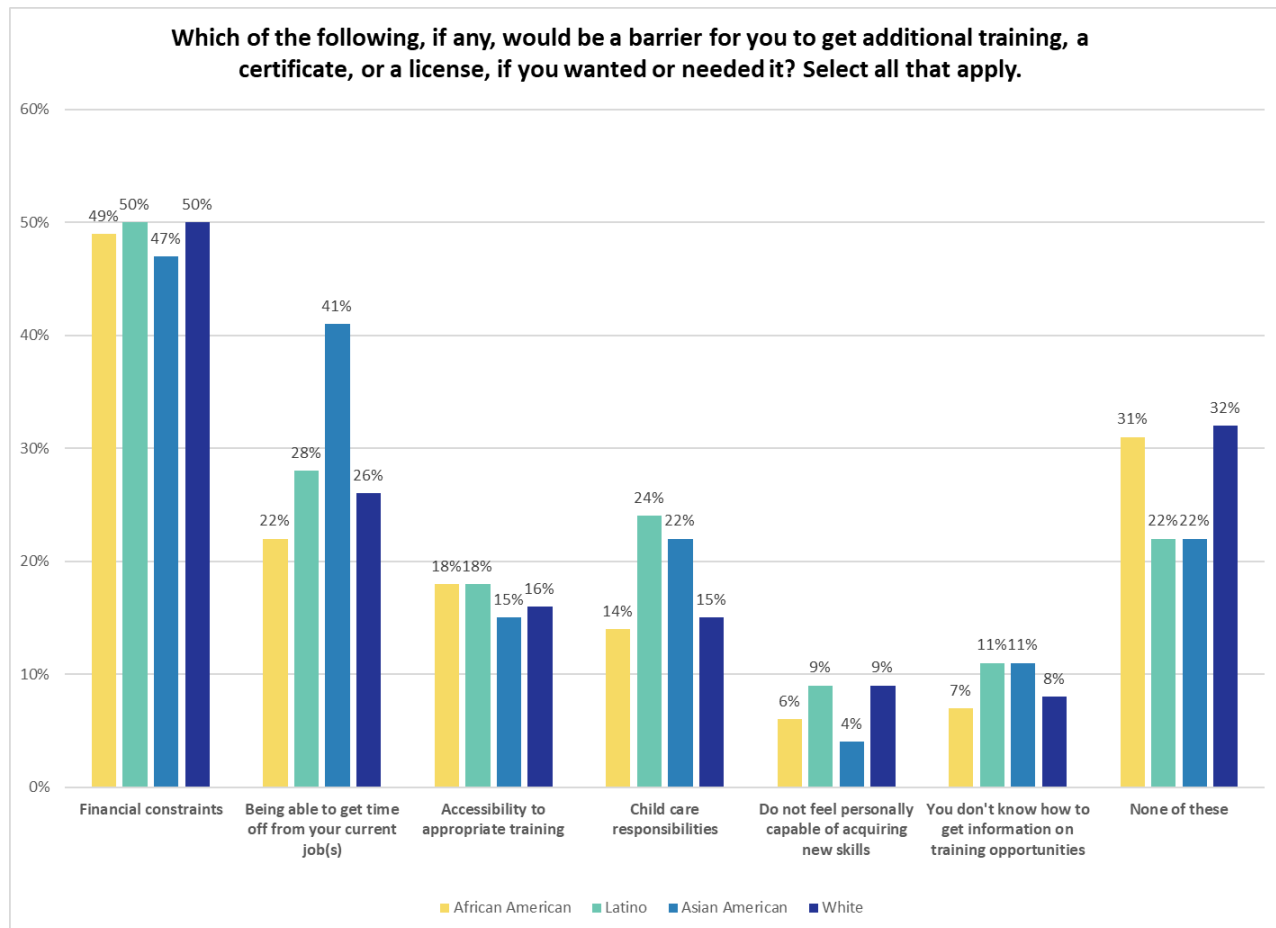


Figure 7

Government, Individuals & Employers are Responsible for Preparing Workforce

With potentially dramatic changes for the American workplace on the horizon, who do workers see as responsible for helping them prepare for the transition to the new economy? To answer this question, we asked respondents to rank the groups they believe bear the greatest responsibility for helping workers prepare for the changing economy.

Generally, American workers of all racial groups see all elements of society as broadly responsible for preparing American workers for this transition. Between 14 percent and 23 percent of the racial groups surveyed saw government, employers, and individuals/families as responsible for preparing workers for the changing economy. While 15 percent of African Americans see responsibility for employers and individuals, they are more likely (23 percent) to see the federal government as bearing greater responsibility in preparing American workers for the changing nature of work.

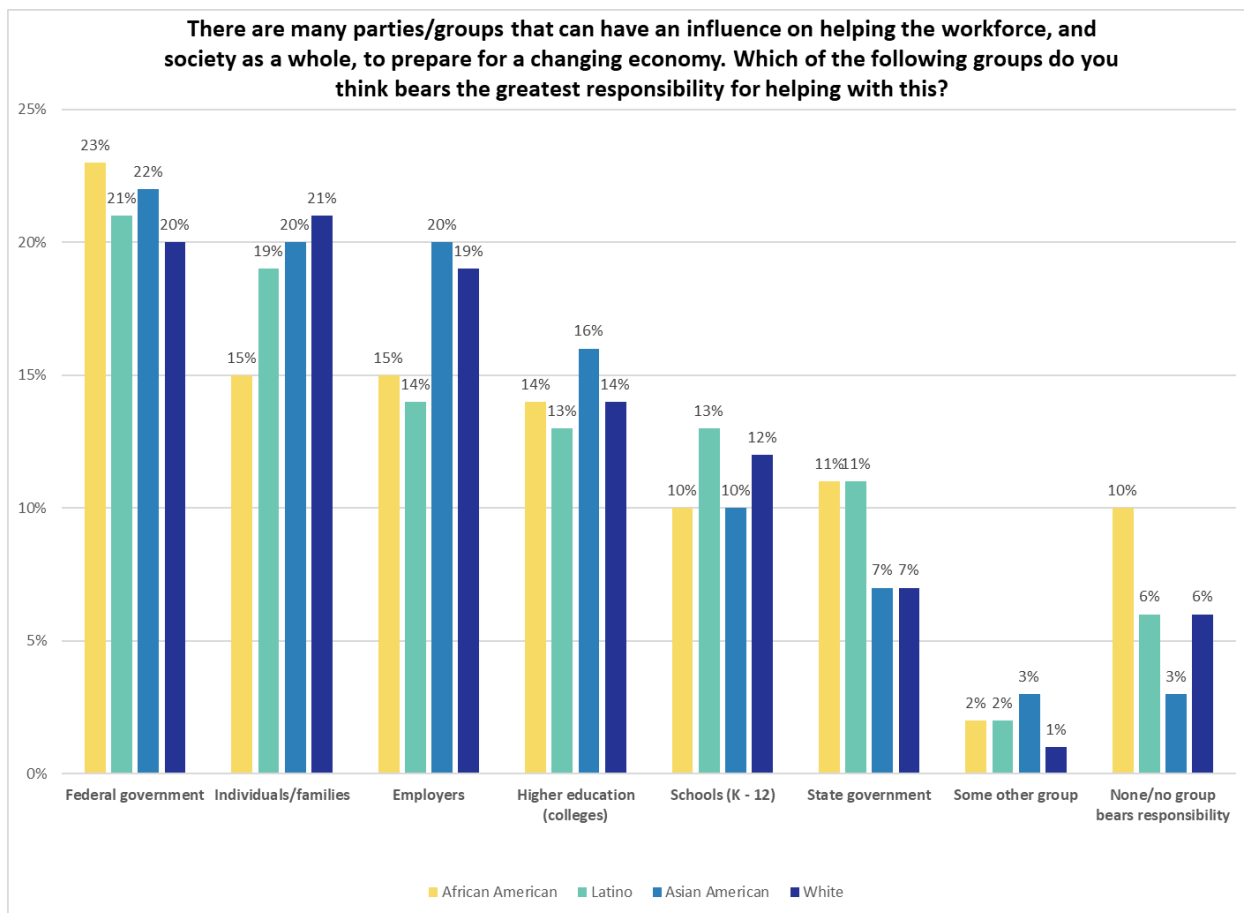


Figure 8

High Interest in Free Education to Address Displacement

We also asked respondents whether they favored, opposed, or neither favored nor opposed particular policies in the event a robot or a computer replaces a human in her or his job. We asked respondents their perceptions of the following policies: “tuition-free community college or vocational training,” “the government guarantees a job for every American adult who wants to work,” and “the government offers all Americans a guaranteed income to meet basic needs.”

People of color favored all of the proposed government policies. Whites were least likely to support these government policies, but they did indicate significant support for “tuition-free community college or vocational training.”

Between 85 percent (African Americans) and 70 percent (Whites) of racial groups surveyed favored “tuition-free community college or vocational training.” Among high-income respondents (\$75,000 or greater), between 85 percent (African Americans) and 67 percent (Whites) favored free college or training.

However, significant racial differences emerged when respondents were asked about a federal jobs guarantee and universal basic income. A federal jobs guarantee was supported by large majorities of African Americans (75 percent), Latinos (70 percent), and Asian Americans (68 percent), but only 52 percent of Whites. Similarly, while African Americans (71 percent), Latinos (64 percent), and Asian Americans (61 percent) favored universal basic income, only 46 percent of Whites favored the policy.

While favorability drops a bit among high-income earners, a majority of the high-income respondents of color favored a federal jobs guarantee (66 percent to 58 percent) and universal basic income (62 percent to 53 percent). Just over a third of high-income White respondents, however, supported a federal jobs guarantee and universal basic income.

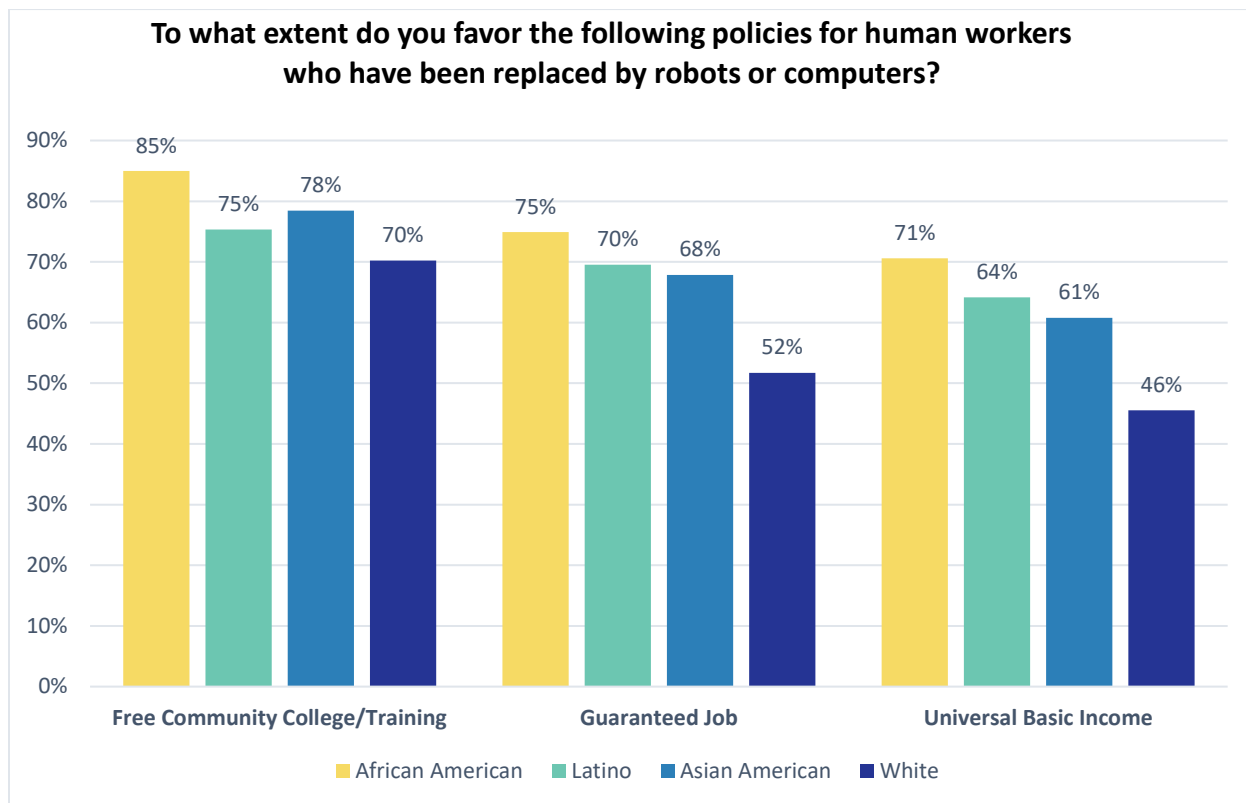


Figure 9

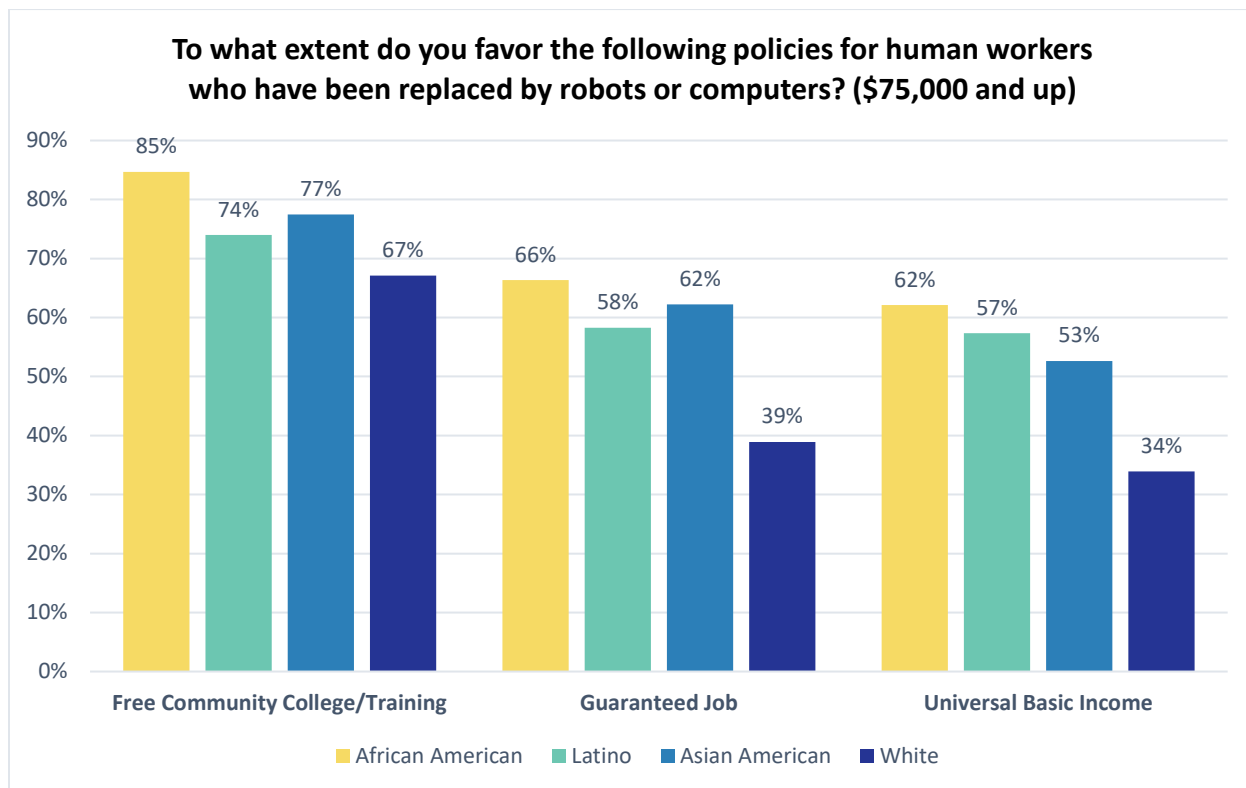


Figure 10

High Interest in College & Training Programs

Racial differences also exist in how White, Black, Asian American, and Latino 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 trade unions, online schooling, community college, trade schooling, an in-person higher education degree (e.g., Bachelor's, Master's, or other degrees), and the Department of Labor's "CareerOneStop" website for career exploration and job training. The likelihood for responses ranged from "very likely" to "very unlikely."

Figure 11, which displays the "somewhat" and "very likely" responses, shows that overall, people of color cited more interest 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 Diploma to online education to more college—White Americans were less likely to see education as a means of obtaining additional job training. When looking specifically at respondents who have less than a college degree, Whites are still less likely to pursue additional avenues of training (Figure 12). Latino workers appeared especially interested in seeking GEDs. African American and Latino workers exhibited a higher interest in community college or in-person certification program or course, online college, and the Department of Labor's "CareerOneStop" website.

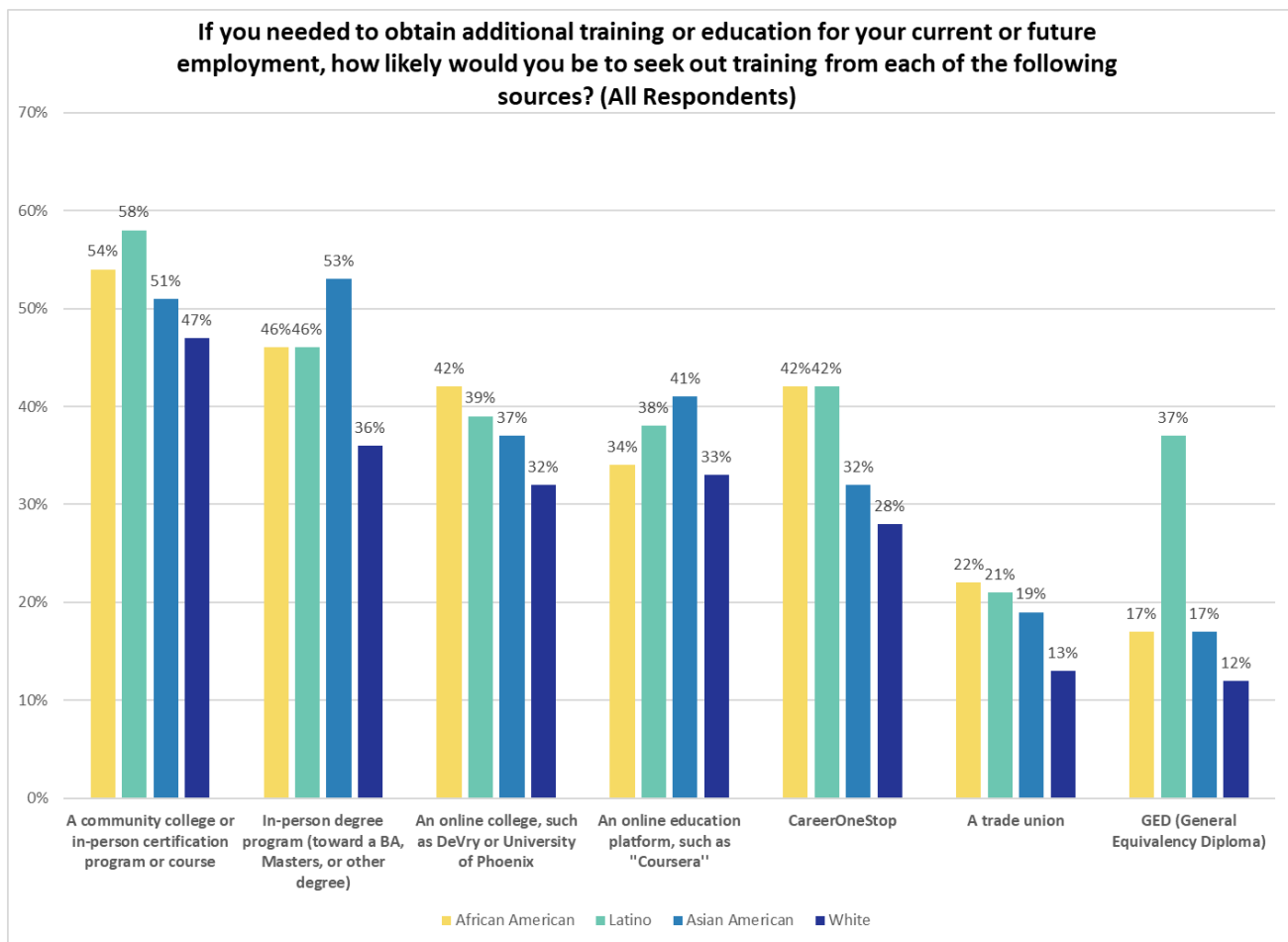


Figure 11

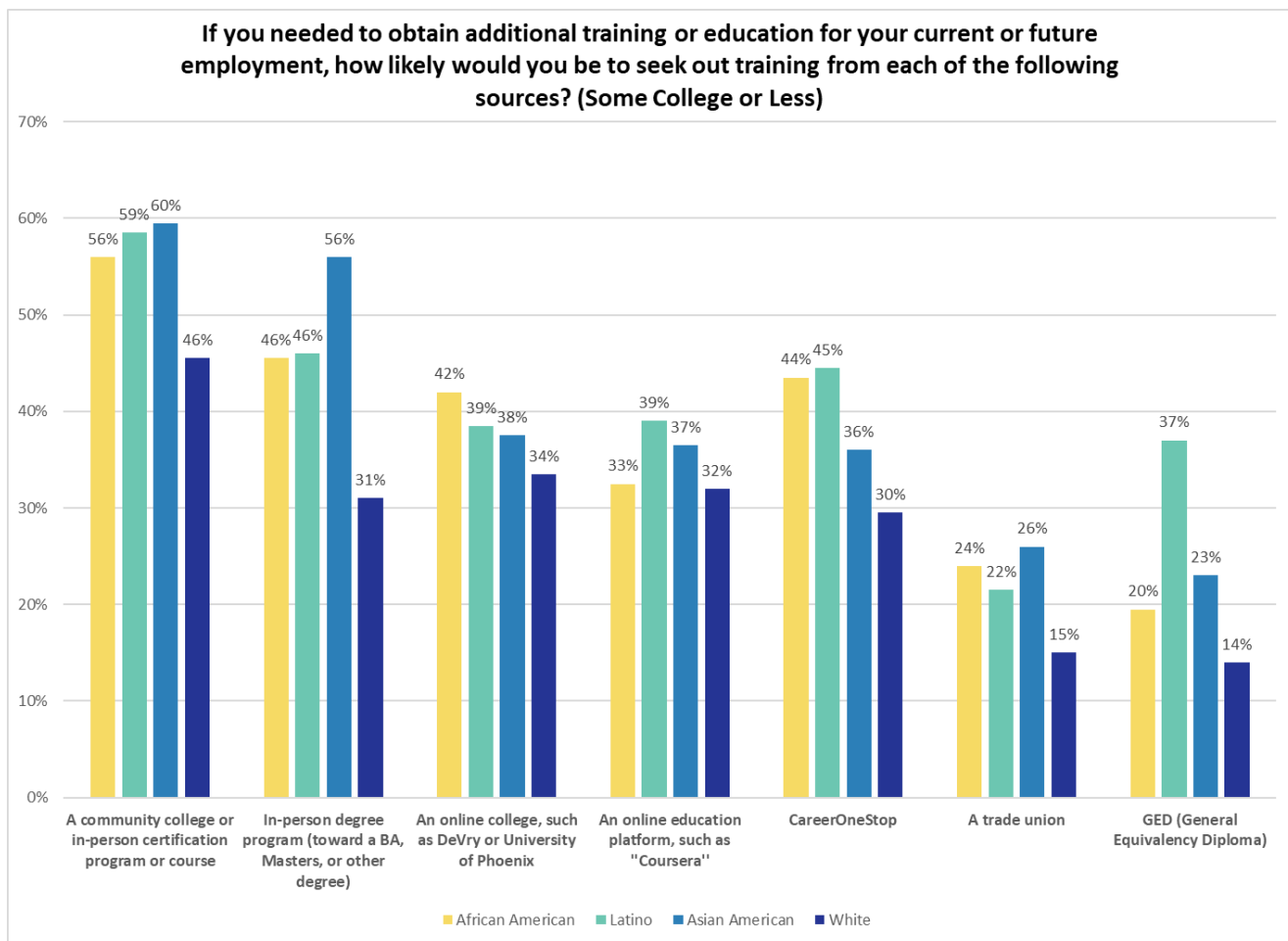


Figure 12

Preparing Children for a Changing Economy

We also measured 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) require schools to teach computer programming; (2) encourage schools to provide more vocational training options; (3) allow schools to be in session year-round; (4) require schools to teach more "soft skills" such as time management and interpersonal interactions; and (5) proficiency in core subjects (Math, Science, Language Arts, History). Figure 11 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 Latino and White Americans value vocational training. Thirty-two percent of Latinos 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 African Americans and Asian Americans felt the same.

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, Latinos, 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 (27 and 29 percent, respectively) were somewhat more likely than Latinos and Asian Americans (19 and 23 percent, respectively) to prioritize core educational subjects such as math, science, and language arts.

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

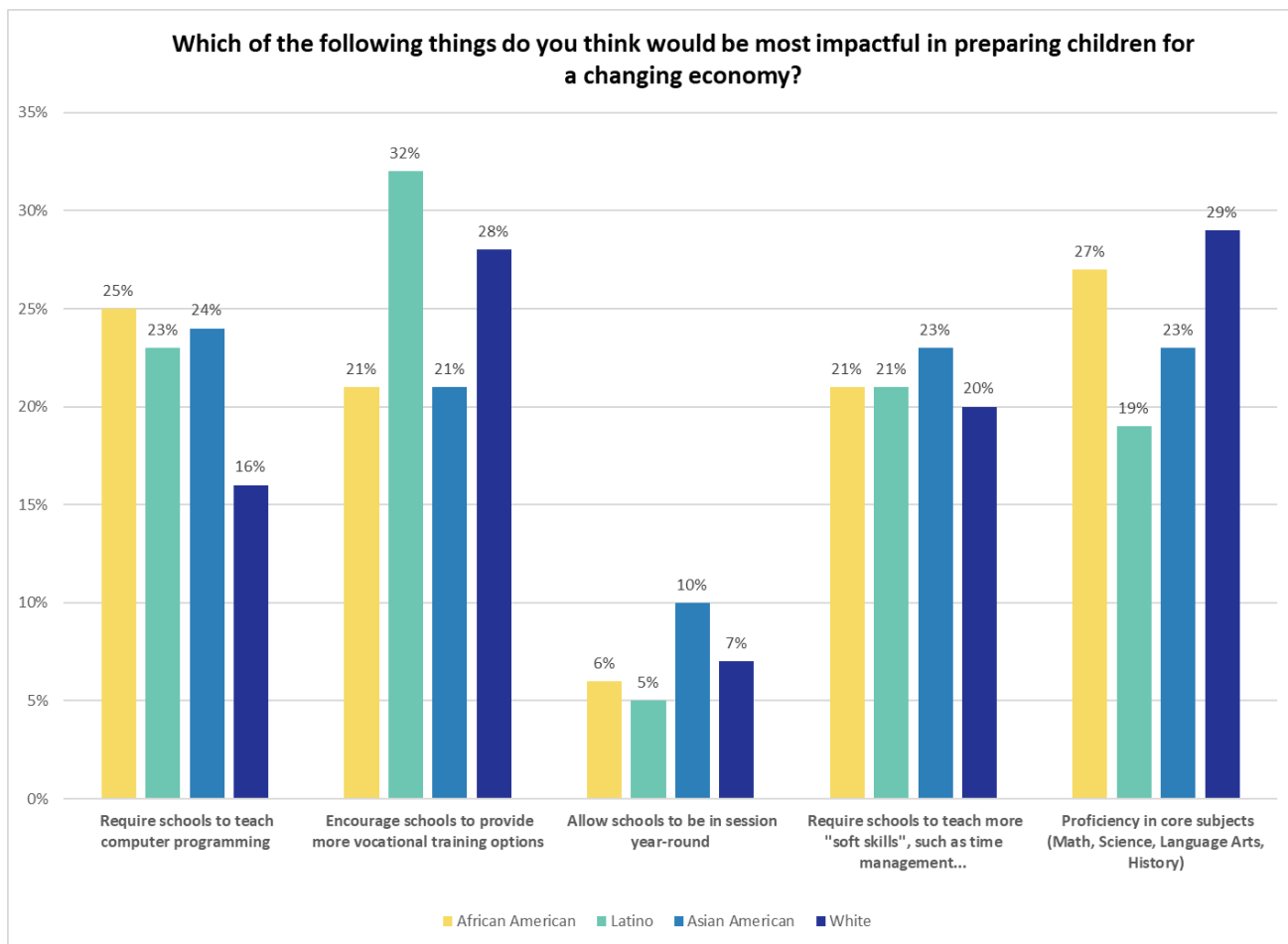


Figure 13

Appendix

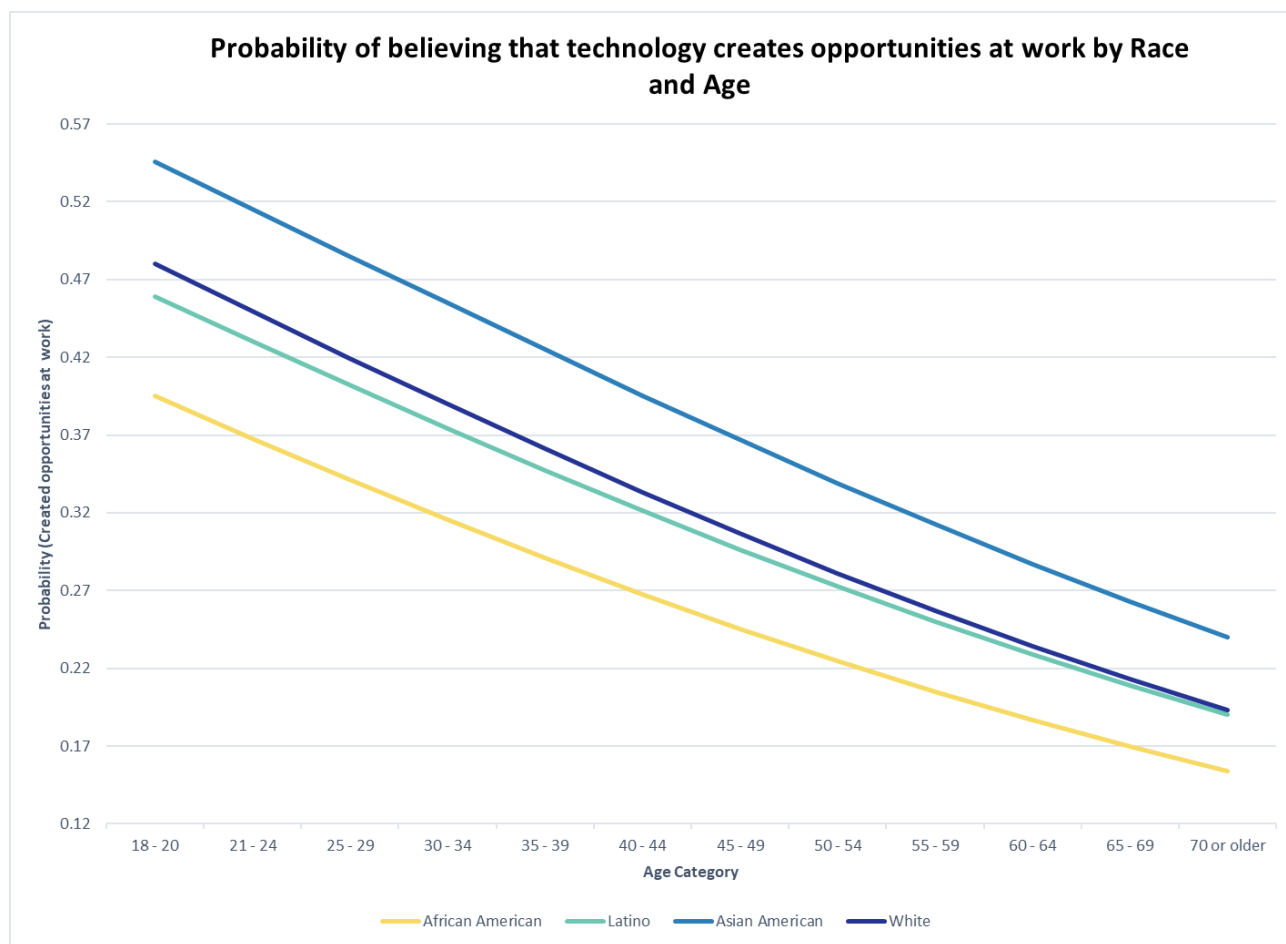


Figure 14

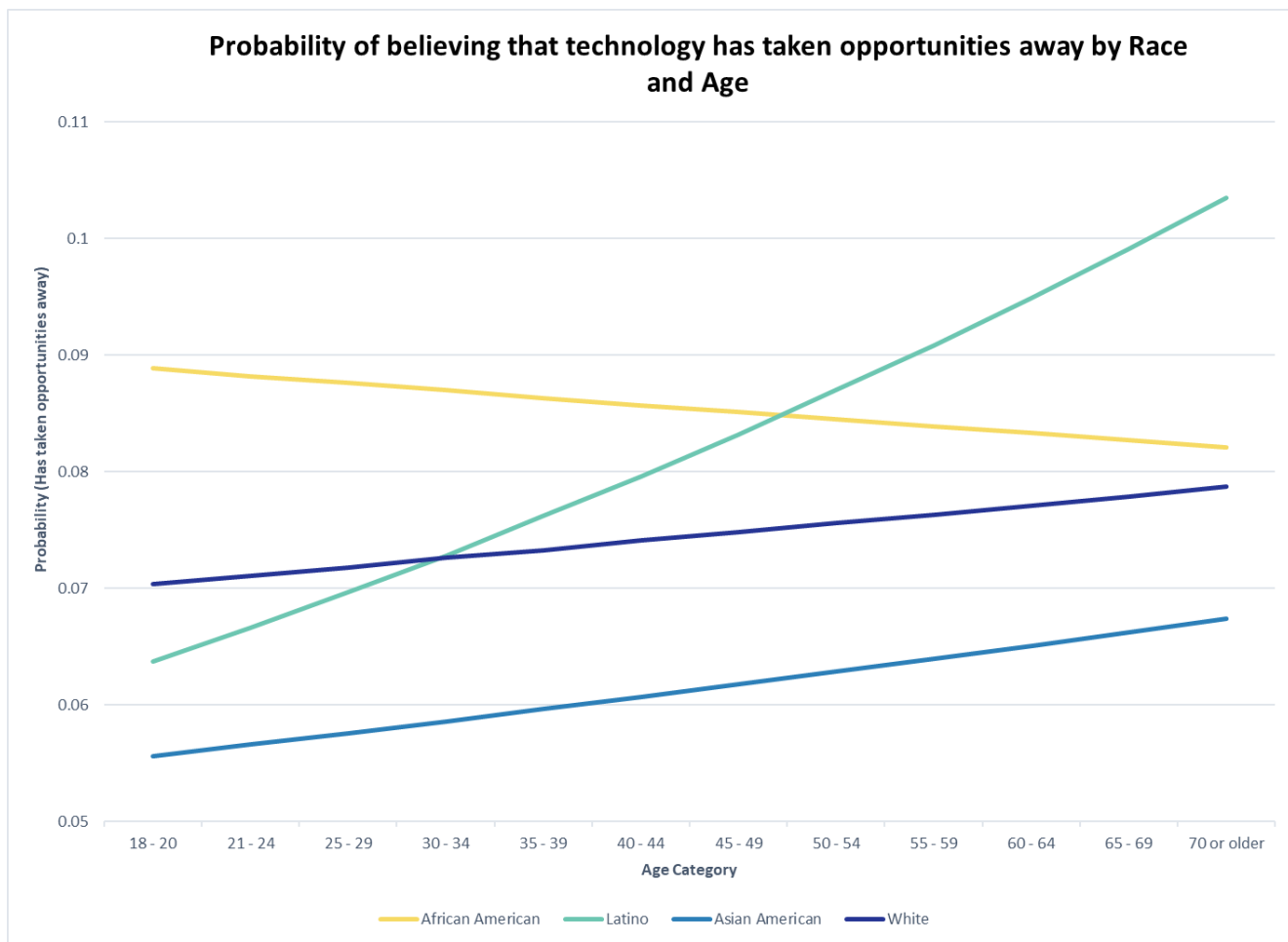


Figure 15

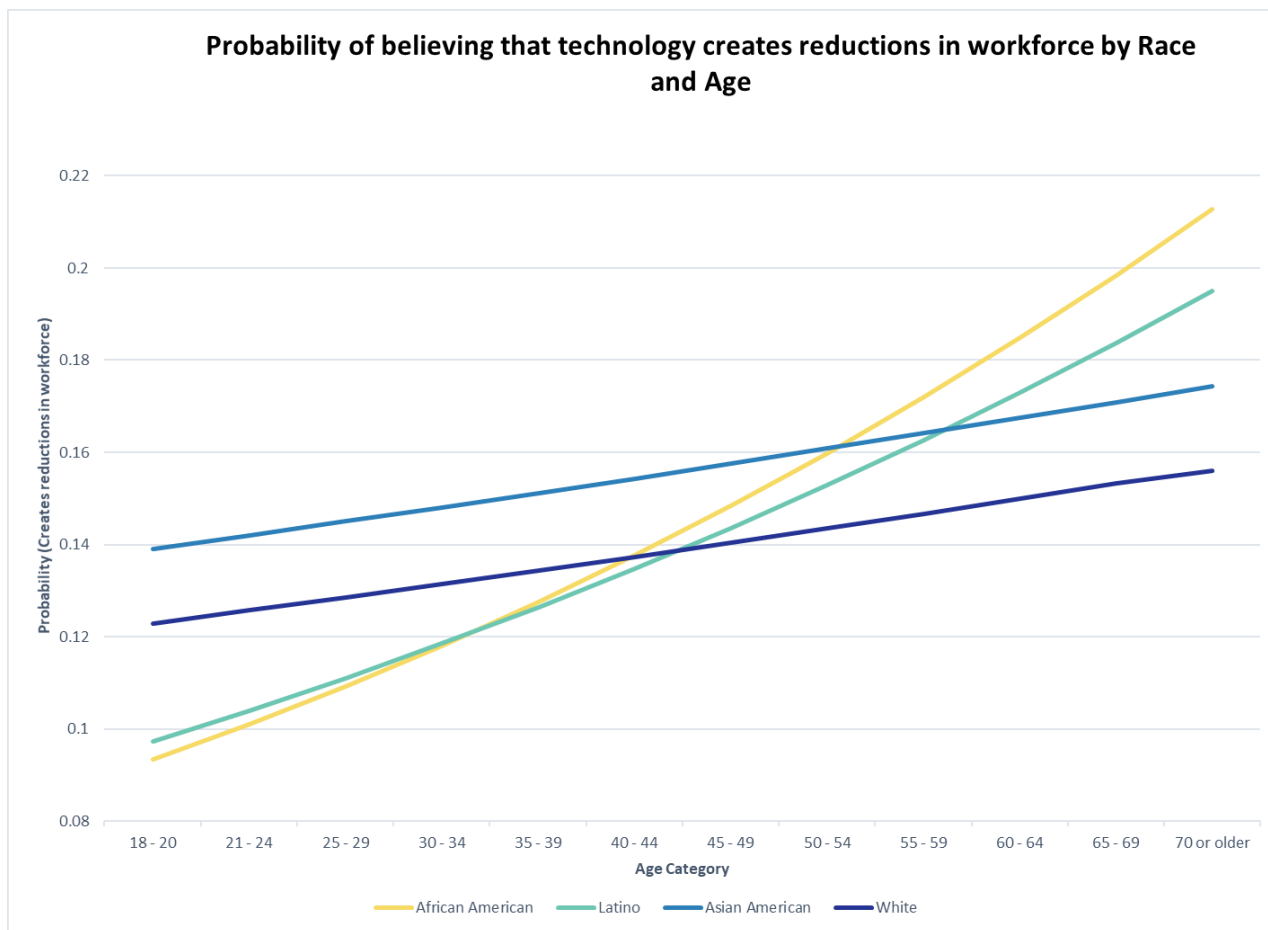


Figure 16

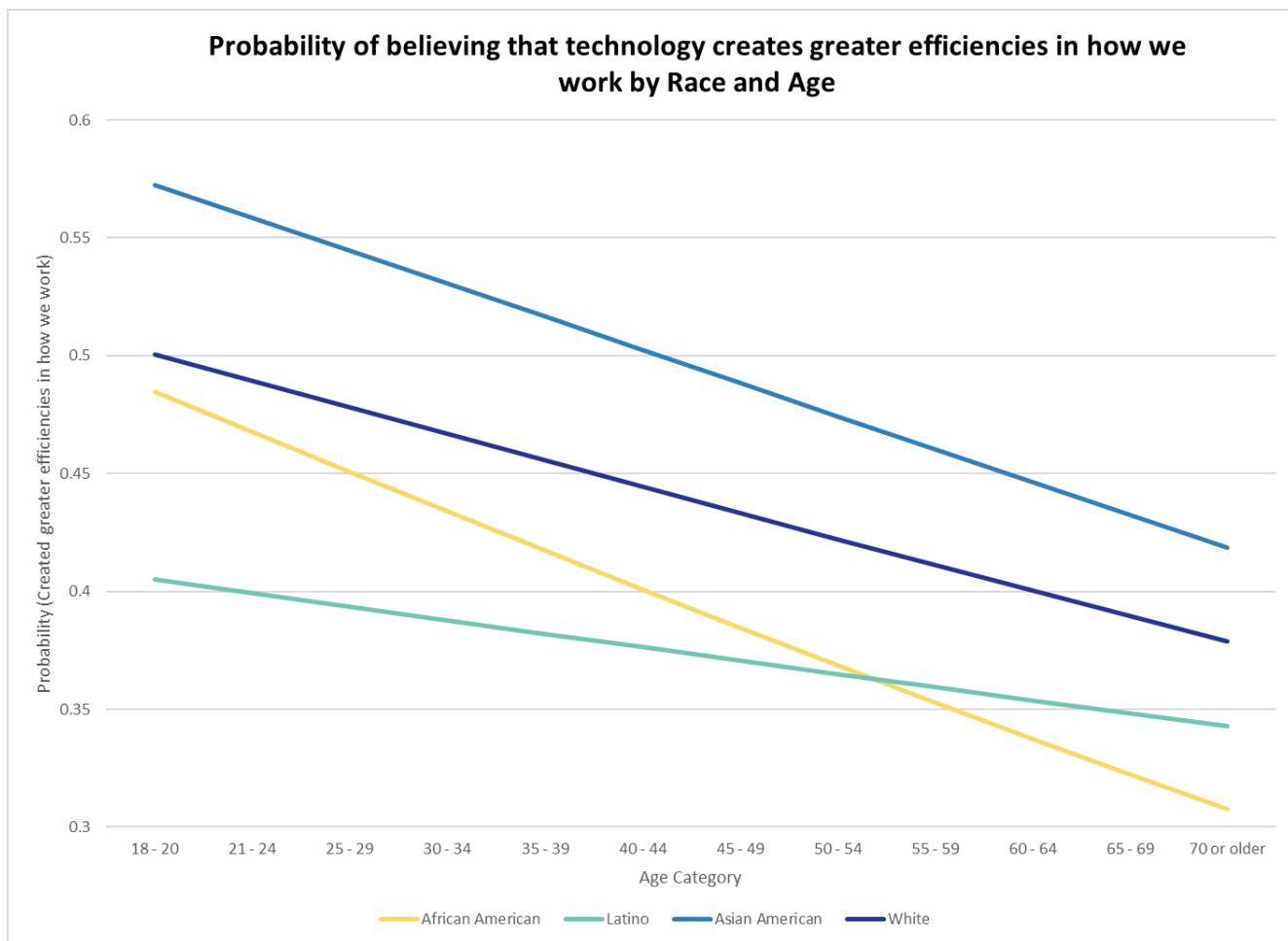


Figure 17

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 nonprofit 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 nationally representative samples of 1115 Whites and nationally representative oversamples of 667 Blacks, 619 Latinos, and 611 Asian Americans. The sample was re-weighted to a 2000-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 Latino, African American, and Asian 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.

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Media Contact

press@jointcenter.org | 202.789.3500 EXT 105

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Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies

633 Pennsylvania Ave., NW

Washington, DC 20004

info@jointcenter.org

www.jointcenter.org

@JointCenter