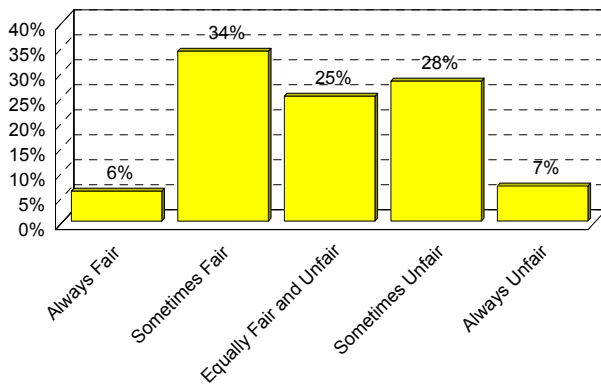




Affirmative Action: Fair or Unfair?

DO YOU THINK AFFIRMATIVE ACTION PROGRAMS DESIGNED TO INCREASE THE NUMBER OF BLACK AND MINORITY EMPLOYEES IN COMPANIES ARE...



In the wake of two recent Supreme Court decisions on the subject of affirmative action, a just released poll of 400 community and business leaders in the Valley shows a wide distribution of opinion on the subject. The *Valley Influentials Poll*, a survey of members of Valley Leadership, Greater Phoenix Leadership, the East Valley Partnership and Westmarc, asked “All in all, do you think affirmative action programs designed to increase the number of black and minority employees in companies are always fair, sometimes fair, equally fair and unfair, sometimes unfair, or always unfair?” A total of 40% indicate that such programs are more often fair than not, which slightly surpasses the 35% that feel that such programs are more often unfair than not.

Support Is Nuanced

According to the director of the poll, Dr. Michael O’Neil, “What impressed me most about these findings is not the relative proportions that feel that these programs are more often fair than unfair (though these numbers are approximately equally equal) but the relatively small number who place themselves in any extreme category. Looking at these numbers another way, fully 83% of respondents seem to recognize some subtlety regarding the fairness of the application of such programs. Only 13% feel that such programs are either always fair or always unfair. More significant than the fact that this 13% is almost equally divided, is the fact that the vast majority of respondents recognize that such programs have impacts that are neither always fair nor always unfair. In a sense, such findings may be seen as generally in accord with the recent Supreme Court decisions regarding the use of race as a factor in college admission policies. The rulings threaded the needle on the issue finding that such programs are acceptable unless they are administered too rigidly.”

About the Poll. The *O’Neil Associates Valley Influentials Poll* is a web-based survey that was sent to all members of Greater Phoenix Leadership, Valley Leadership, East Valley Partnership, and Westmarc. As such, this survey does not purport to be a random or representative sampling of the general population of the Phoenix metropolitan area. It would be difficult, however, to conceive of a more comprehensive representation from which to draw inferences about the opinions and sensibilities of *business and community leaders* than the combined membership of these organizations, although, inevitably, any definition of influentials is somewhat subjective. The persons surveyed are likely to exert disproportionate influence on and be an early indicator of community opinion by virtue of their position, community involvement, and political participation. The *O’Neil Associates Valley Influentials Poll was not sponsored or paid for by any outside organization.* Four hundred participants completed the survey between June 23 and July 2, 2003, yielding a margin of error of $\pm 4.9\%$. O’Neil Associates, Inc. is a Tempe-based public opinion research firm specializing in client-focused attitude and awareness studies for a wide variety of industries and organizations.

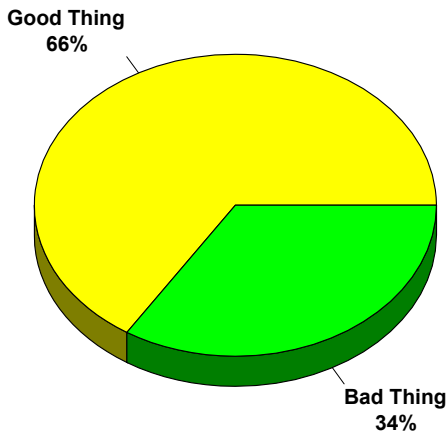
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These results may be reported freely provided that they are identified as the “O’Neil Associates Valley Influentials Poll” including identification on any graphic material.

ALL IN ALL, DO YOU THINK AFFIRMATIVE ACTION PROGRAMS ARE A GOOD THING OR A BAD THING?



Balancing Public Good and Fairness

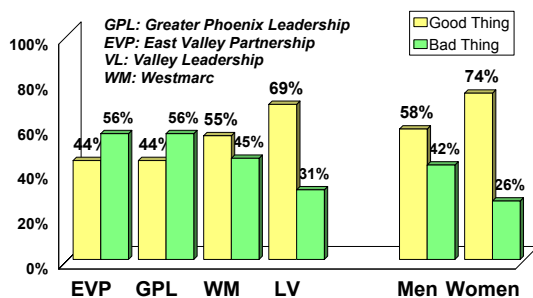
In a follow-up question, the poll asked, “All in all, do you think affirmative action programs are a good thing or a bad thing?” In this case, by a two-to-one margin (66% to 34%), community leaders indicate that they feel affirmative action programs are a good thing. In conjunction with the responses to the earlier question, this can be interpreted to mean that community leaders, for the most part, buy into the notion that there is a greater good produced by affirmative action programs. At the same time, the vast majority of respondents

(94%) recognize that at least some of the time, these programs are not entirely fair. For most respondents, this seems to indicate that occasional unfairness can be tolerated in the service of a greater good.

Dr. O’Neil further commented, “The juxtaposition of the responses to these questions suggests the subtlety in respondents’ opinions. It illustrates that it is seldom possible to capture the full nuance of public opinion with any single attitudinal question. If one only looked at the latter question, one would conclude that affirmative action is endorsed by two community leaders out of three. While this is not untrue, an examination of the responses given to the first question reveals substantial misgivings in the application of affirmative action programs and the recognition that such programs can often be unfair. Responses to neither question alone captures the full nuance of Valley opinion leaders’ perspectives. To understand people’s opinions, in this and other areas, one needs to look at responses to a range of questions on a topic. In this instance, only a very small minority of 6% believe that affirmative action programs are “always fair,” and a similar 7% who believe they are “always unfair” may be said to be absolute in their opinions. The vast majority of respondents see shades of gray in the application of these programs.”

ATTITUDES BY GROUP

“All in all, do you think affirmative action programs are a good thing or a bad thing?”



Responses from Greater Phoenix Leadership members are not reported independently due to sample size restrictions

Differences Between Leadership Groups

There are some moderate differences between leadership groups. Members of the East Valley Partnership, Greater Phoenix Leadership (each by a 56% to 44% margin) tend to describe affirmative action programs as a bad thing. Members of Westmarc, on the other hand, are more supportive of such programs (by 55% to 45%), while members of more diverse Valley Leadership (by 69% to 31%) are most inclined to think that affirmative action programs are a good thing. Women, who are more likely to be the beneficiaries of such programs, tend to view them as a good thing (by 74% to 26%). While males are in agreement, the margin is much smaller (58% to 42%). Liberals and moderates tend to view affirmative action as a good thing, while conservatives tend to be opposed. Similarly, Democrats and Independents express strong support for affirmative action programs while Republicans are evenly divided and lean slightly against such programs.

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*O'Neil Associates has tracked public opinion across the Valley, Arizona, and the Nation since 1981. To be healthy, public debate must be informed—this is why we commit our resources to measuring opinions on the political and social issues people care about and talk about. O'Neil Associates, however, is much more than that. While the **Valley Influentials Poll** and **Valley Monitor** may be our most publicly visible activities, we do most of our work for private businesses and organizations as well as state and other public agencies. As a full-service research firm, we assist our clients with a broad range of research efforts to measure customer satisfaction, improve customer service, fine-tune public images, focus marketing campaigns, engineer products, increase market shares, strengthen employee relations, and plan, refine, and assess business strategies.*

For more information including a just-released survey on Rick Romley's treatment of Bishop O'Brien, please visit

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