AP | NORC at the UNIVERSITY of CHICAGO

The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research

LAW ENFORCEMENT AND VIOLENCE: THE DIVIDE BETWEEN BLACK AND WHITE AMERICANS

The difficult relationship between the police and blacks in the United States is evident in the deep-rooted racial divisions in the public's view of law enforcement and the criminal justice system.

But the latest Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research poll also finds agreement across racial groups on many of the causes of police violence and further consensus that a number of changes in policies and procedures could be effective in reducing tensions between minorities and police and limiting violence against civilians.

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Some of the poll's key findings are:

- Violence against civilians by police officers is an extremely or very serious problem according to nearly three-quarters of blacks and less than 20 percent of whites.
- Many Americans, both blacks and whites, say that violence against police is also an extremely or very serious problem in the United States. And half of all Americans, regardless of race, say fear caused by the physical danger that police officers face is a major contributor to aggression against civilians.
- An overwhelming majority of blacks say that, generally, the police are too quick to use deadly force and that they are more likely to use it against a black person. Most whites say police officers typically use deadly force only when necessary and that race is not a factor in decisions to use force.

Three Things You Should Know

From The AP-NORC Center's poll on Attitudes toward Police

Among all American Adults

1) Black Americans are nearly four times as likely as whites to describe violence against civilians by police officers as an extremely or very serious problem.
2) More than 80 percent of blacks say police are too quick to use deadly force and they are more likely to use it against a black person. Two-thirds of whites label police use of deadly force as necessary and 58 percent say race is not a factor in decisions to use force.
3) There is support among both blacks and whites for many changes in policies and procedures that could be effective in reducing tensions between law enforcement and minorities and limiting police violence against civilians. For example, 71 percent say body cameras on police would be an effective deterrent to violence against civilians and 52 percent think community policing programs would help reduce tensions in minority communities.

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- Blacks and whites are sharply divided on whether police officers who injure or kill civilians are treated too leniently by prosecutors and on how much that contributes to the use of force against members of the public.
- Half of black Americans report being treated unfairly by police because of their race, and their views of law enforcement are shaped by this experience.
- Minorities are more concerned about crime and more skeptical about law enforcement's efforts to control it.
- Blacks and whites agree that changes in policies and procedures could be effective in reducing tensions between minorities and police and in limiting violence against civilians.
- There is widespread agreement that race relations in the United States are in a sorry state, but racial division exists on whether this contributes to police violence.

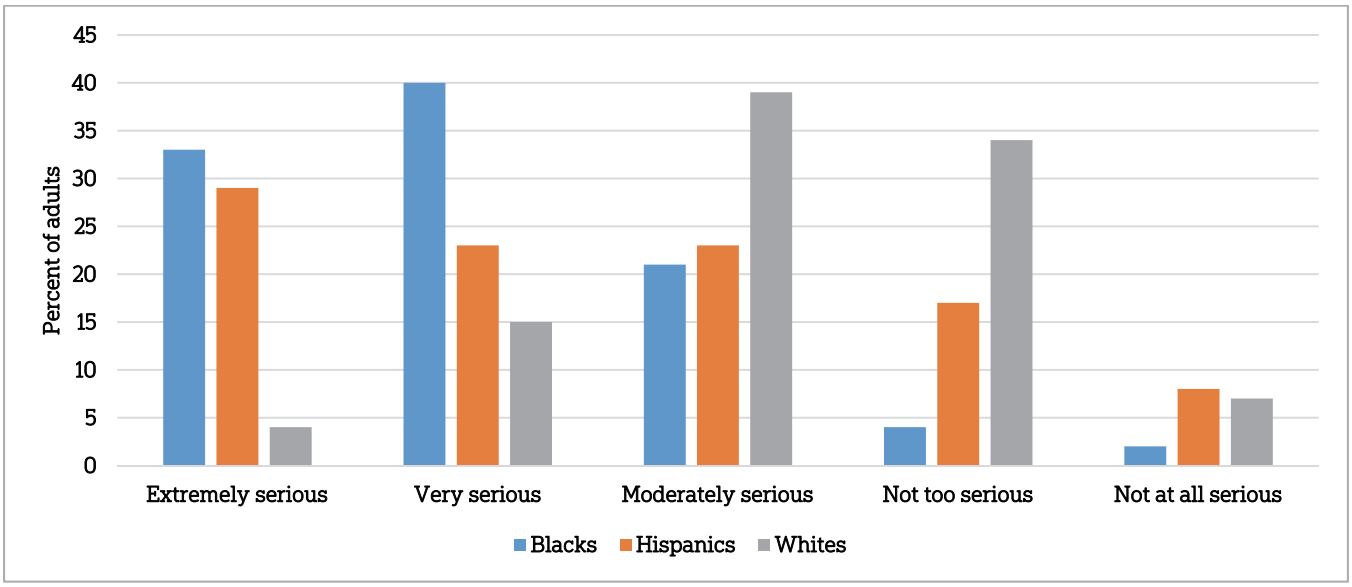
THE PUBLIC IS SPLIT ON VIEWS ABOUT POLICE AND VIOLENCE

Americans are divided when it comes to their opinions about police and violence, with significant differences in attitudes based on race and ethnicity.

Thirty-two percent of adults say police violence against the public in the United States is an extremely or very serious problem, 35 percent report it is moderately serious, and 33 percent say it is not at all or not too serious a problem.

Blacks are more likely to say police violence against the public in the United States is a very or extremely serious problem (73 percent) than are whites (20 percent). Just about half, 51 percent, of Hispanics describe police violence as a very or extremely serious problem.

Differences in views of severity of police violence against the public



Question: How serious a problem do you think police violence against the PUBLIC is in the United States?

DISTINCT RACIAL RIFTS ON POLICE USE OF FORCE

Fifty-five percent of Americans say police use deadly force only when necessary, while 45 percent say police are too quick to use deadly force.

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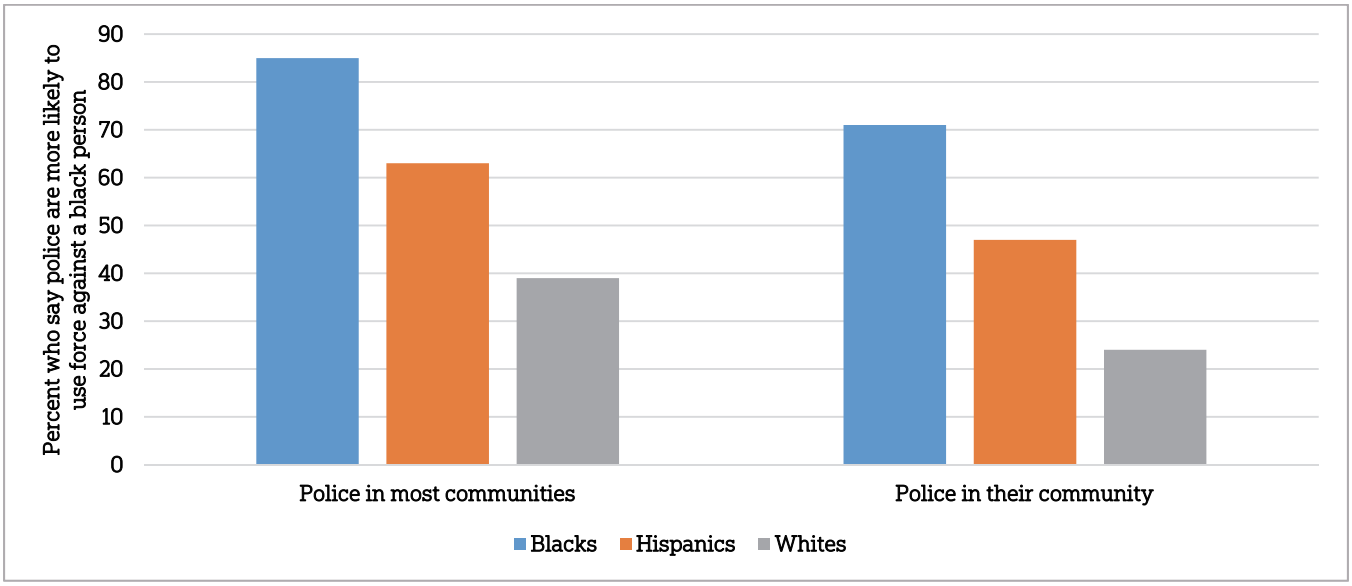
When asked about most communities, 49 percent say police are more likely to use deadly force against a black person, 48 percent say race is not a factor, and 1 percent say police are more likely to use force against a white person.

The public typically sees things in a more positive light closer to home, and so Americans are less likely to say race affects the use of deadly force in their own communities. Sixty-three percent say race is not a consideration in their community, while 34 percent say police are more likely to use deadly force against a black person, and 1 percent say police are more likely to use force against a white person.

Minorities in the United States see things much differently. A large majority, 81 percent, of blacks say police use deadly force too quickly compared with 61 percent of Hispanics and 33 percent of whites.

Similarly, 85 percent of blacks think police are more likely to use force against a black person in most communities, compared with 63 percent of Hispanics and 39 percent of whites. Nearly as many, 71 percent, of blacks say police in their own community are more likely to use force against a black person compared with 47 percent of Hispanics and 24 percent of whites.

Most blacks say police are more likely to use force against a black person



Questions: In general, do you think police in most communities are more likely to use deadly force against a black person, or more likely to use it against a white person, or don't you think race effects use of deadly force? What about your community? In general, do you think police in your community are more likely to use deadly force against a black person, or more likely to use it against a white person, or don't you think race effects use of deadly force?

CRIME AND HOW THE POLICE ARE DEALING WITH IT

Americans as a whole show low levels of concern about violent crime. Nationwide, 13 percent of Americans say they are extremely or very worried about being a victim of a violent crime. Twenty-seven percent say they are moderately worried, and 58 percent are only a little worried or not worried at all.

However, worries about violent crime vary considerably by race and ethnicity. Just 8 percent of whites say they are extremely or very worried about violent crime, but that rate jumps to 20 percent for Hispanics and 27 percent for blacks.

Along the same lines, racial differences in how well local police control crime emerge. While overall 36 percent of Americans say their local police are doing a very good or excellent job at controlling violent crime, just 16 percent of blacks agree, much less than the 42 percent of whites and 32 percent of Hispanics. A majority of

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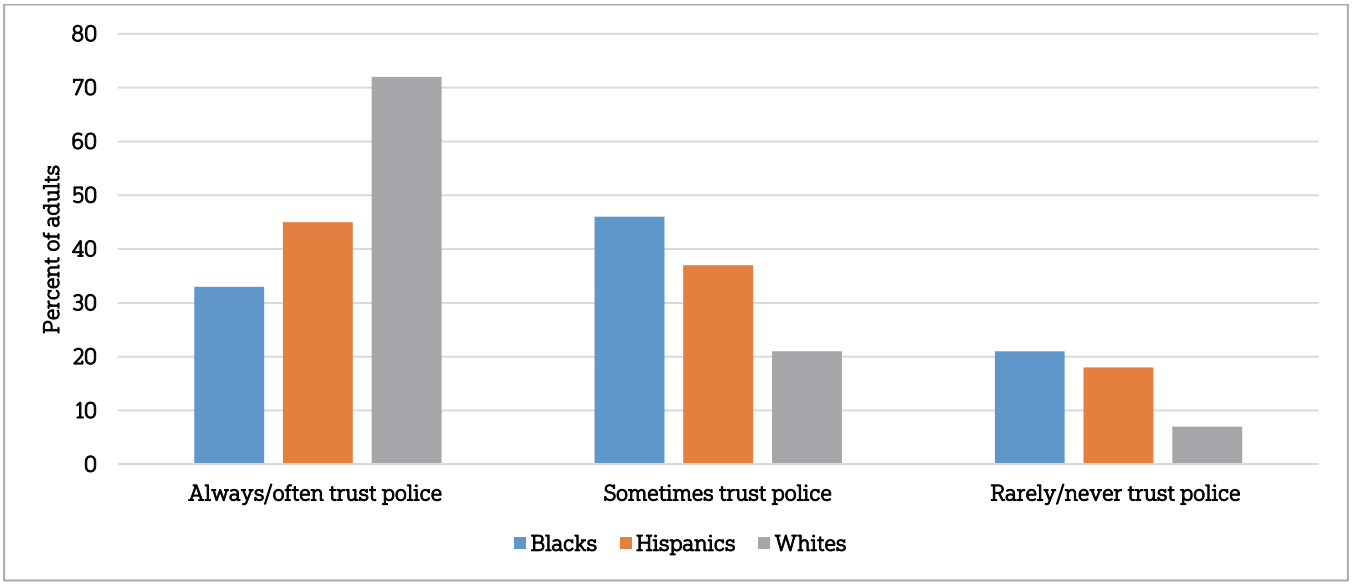
blacks (55 percent) think their local police are doing a poor or fair job, compared with just a quarter of whites (24 percent).

These differences are also evident in public trust of local police forces. Among all Americans, 60 percent say they can trust their local police to do what is right for them and their community often or always, 28 percent say sometimes, and 11 percent say rarely or never.

Whites, though, trust that the police work toward the best interests of the community far more frequently than Hispanics or blacks, with 72 percent saying police do the right thing often or always versus just 45 percent of Hispanics and 33 percent of blacks. Twenty-one percent of blacks say they trust their police to do what is best rarely or never. Just 7 percent of whites say the same.

Whites are most likely to trust police to do what is right for them and their community



Question: How much of the time do you think you can trust the police to do what is right for you and your community?

Americans as a whole are divided over how they think police in their local communities treat racial and ethnic minorities. Forty-five percent say police treat all races and ethnic groups the same, but a majority (54 percent) say they sometimes treat minority groups more roughly. Blacks (81 percent) are especially likely to say police sometimes treat minority groups more roughly compared to Hispanics (63 percent) and whites (47 percent). A majority of whites (52 percent) think police treat all races and ethnic groups equally.

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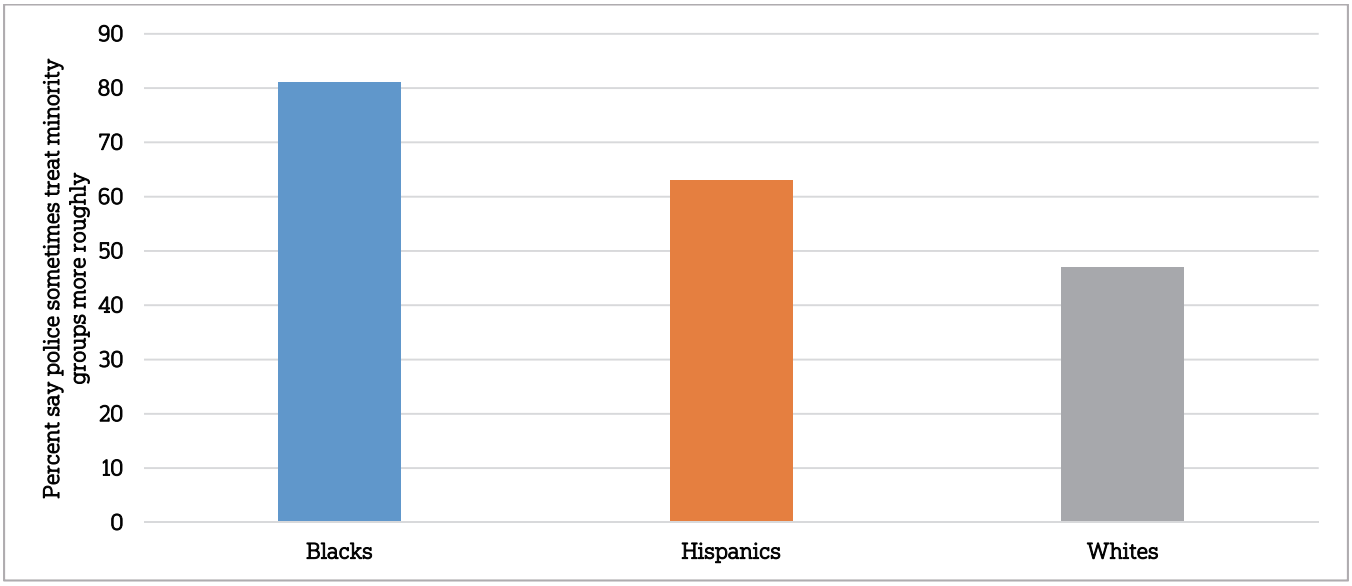
Race and ethnicity colors views of police treatment of minorities



Question: In dealing with crime, do you think the police in your community treat people of all races and ethnic groups equally, or do you think they sometimes deal more roughly with members of minority groups?

ATTITUDES TOWARD POLICE VIOLENCE VARY WITH RACIAL DIVERSITY

Both black and white Americans have different opinions about police violence depending on the racial diversity of where they live.[1]

Whites who live in more racially diverse communities, where at least a quarter of residents are non-white, have more negative views of the police than whites living in less diverse communities, where more than three-quarters of residents are white.[2] For example, 42 percent of whites living in more diverse communities say police are too quick to use deadly force compared with 29 percent of whites living in less diverse communities.

Thirty-three percent of whites living in more diverse areas say police in their community are more likely to use deadly force against a black person compared with 21 percent of whites living in less diverse areas. Likewise, they are more likely to say police in their community sometimes treat members of minority groups more roughly (58 percent vs. 42 percent).

Black attitudes toward police in their community also vary depending on the racial diversity of their community.[3] Blacks who live in majority black communities hold a more negative view of police behavior in their community than do blacks who live where less than half of residents are black.

Blacks living in majority black communities are more likely to say their local police treat minority members of the community more roughly when dealing with crime (88 percent vs. 74 percent). Likewise, 82 percent of

[1] The measure of racial diversity for communities is based on 2010 Census tract data.
[2] The report highlights only differences in which the percent of non-whites in the respondent's census tract is a significant predictor of white attitudes in a multivariate model. The report notes differences between whites in communities above and below 25 percent non-white for simplicity. Among our sample of white adults, 84 percent live in tracts at least 5 percent non-white, 51 percent live in tracts at least 15 percent non-white, 31 percent live in tracts at least 25 percent non-white, 21 percent live in tracts at least 33 percent non-white, and 9 percent live in tracts at least 50 percent non-white. These models do not control for other community characteristics that might be correlated with racial composition at the tract level, such as median household income or average education levels.
[3] The report highlights only differences in which the percent of blacks in the respondent's census tract is a significant predictor of black attitudes in a multivariate model. The report notes differences between blacks in communities above and below 50 percent black for simplicity. Among our sample of black adults, 93 percent live in tracts at least 5 percent black, 76 percent live in tracts at least 15 percent black, 60 percent live in tracts at least 25 percent black, 48 percent live in tracts at least 33 percent black, and 40 percent live in tracts at least 50 percent black. These models do not control for other community characteristics that might be correlated with racial composition at the tract level, such as median household income or average education levels.

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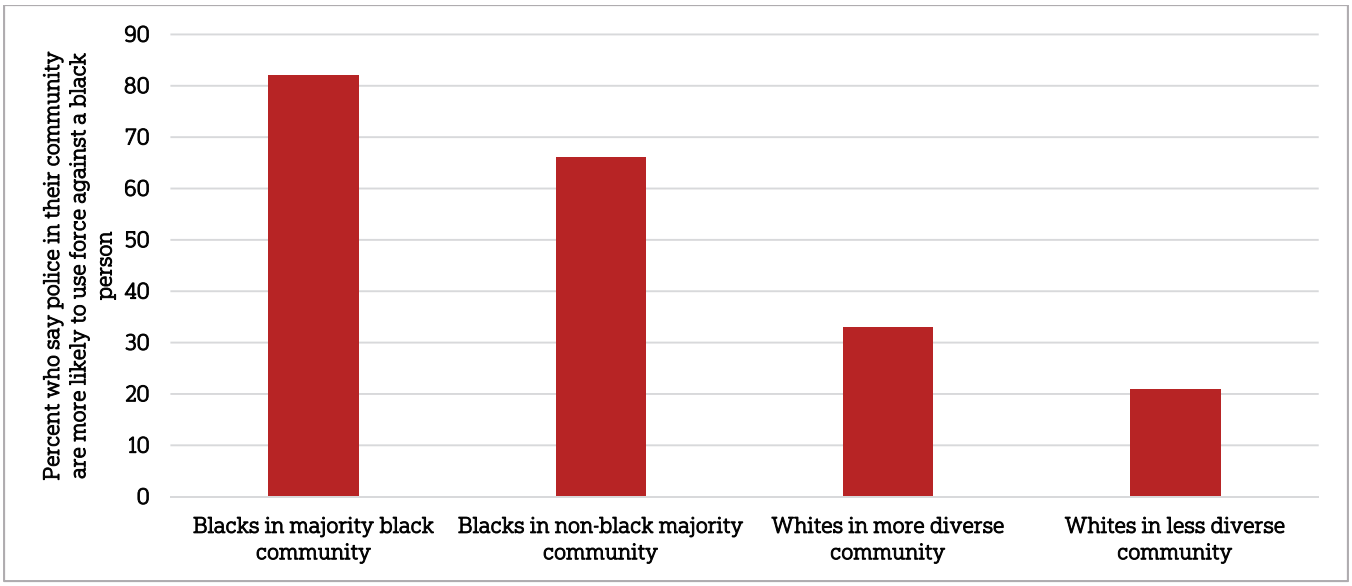
blacks say police in their community are more likely to use deadly force against a black person compared with 66 percent of those living in non-black majority areas.

Blacks living in majority black communities are also more inclined to describe their local police as doing only a fair or poor job of controlling crime in their community (71 percent vs. 48 percent). And 33 percent say they rarely or never trust the police to do what is right for them or their community compared with 9 percent of blacks living in non-black majority communities.

People's beliefs about police being more likely to use force against a black person in their community vary depending on the racial diversity of their community



Question: In general, do you think police in your community are more likely to use deadly force against a black person, or more likely to use it against a white person, or don't you think race effects use of deadly force?

SHARP RACIAL DIVIDES EXIST OVER POLICE TREATMENT BY THE JUSTICE SYSTEM

Over the past year, there have been a number of highly publicized incidents of police officers causing death to unarmed black men. In many cases, there has been significant attention given to these officers' treatment by the criminal justice system.

Overall, Americans are divided as to how fairly police officers who cause injury or death in the course of their job are generally treated by the criminal justice system. Forty-one percent say they are treated too leniently, 40 percent say they are treated fairly, and an additional 17 percent feel they are treated too harshly. A steep divide exists between the perceptions of whites and blacks on this issue, with whites more supportive of how the criminal justice system handles these cases compared to blacks.

Forty-six percent of whites but just 20 percent of blacks think these police officers are treated fairly. On the other hand, just 32 percent of whites but 70 percent of blacks think that these police officers are treated too leniently. Twenty-one percent of whites but just 8 percent of blacks think they are treated too harshly.

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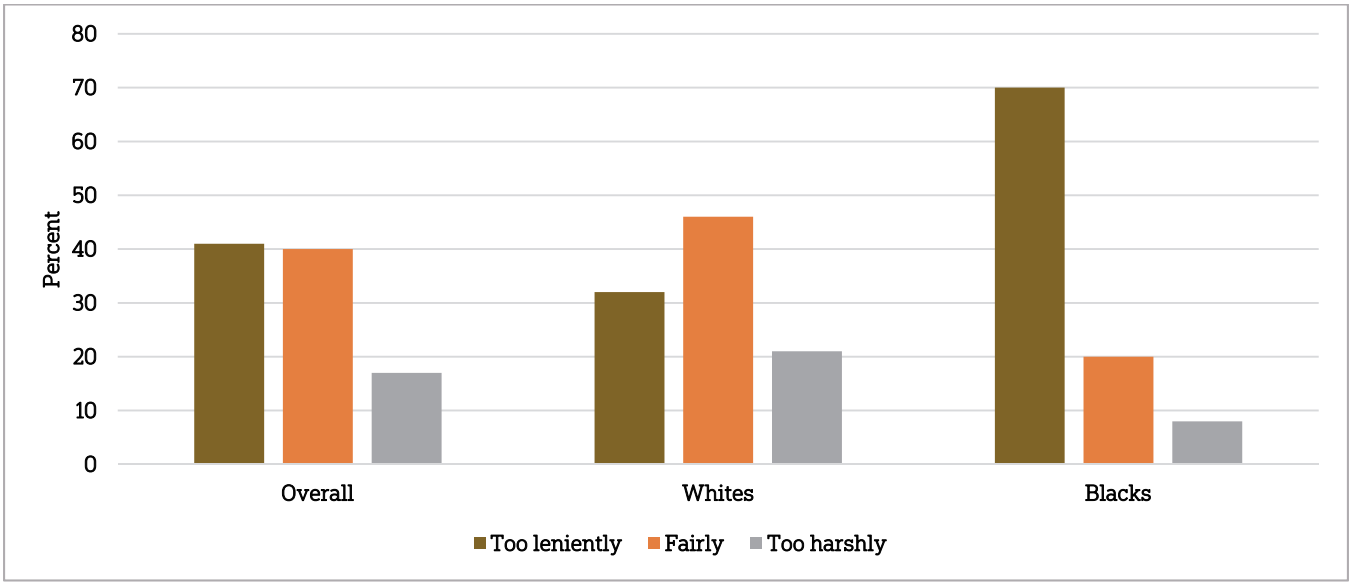
Differences in views on how police are handled by the justice system

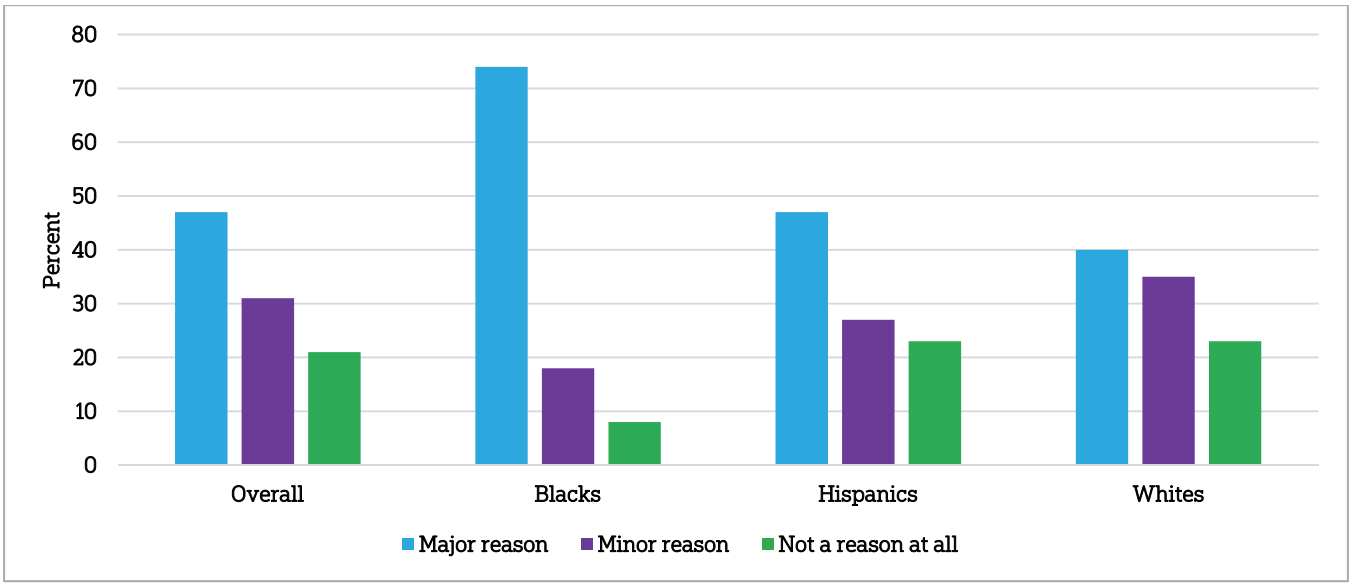


Question: How do you think police officers who cause injury or death in the course of their job are treated by the criminal justice system?

RACIAL DIFFERENCES EMERGE OVER THE ROLE OF COURTS' HANDLING OF POLICE VIOLENCE IN THE USE OF EXCESSIVE FORCE AGAINST CIVILIANS

A large majority of blacks see leniency by the courts as a foremost contributor to the incidence of violence against the public. Three-quarters of blacks say minimal consequences and lack of prosecution for excessive use of force is a major reason for violence against civilians. Just 40 percent of whites and 47 percent of Hispanics agree. Overall, 47 percent of Americans say this is a major reason for police violence against civilians, 31 percent say it is a minor reason, and 21 percent say it is not a reason at all.

Views of the effect of minimal consequences for police violence



Question: Here are some reasons that have been given for police violence against civilians. For each one, please tell me whether you think it is a major reason, a minor reason, or not a reason at all. Consequences for police misconduct are minimal and few police officers are prosecuted for excessive use of force.

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The indemnity given to police officers in cases of harm to civilians has often been attributed in part to the close working relationship between prosecutors and police departments. One solution advocated has been the appointment of a special prosecutor whenever a civilian is injured or killed by police. Overall, a majority (51 percent) of Americans say investigations by special prosecutors would be extremely or very effective in helping prevent police violence against civilians.

THE THREAT OF VIOLENCE AGAINST POLICE AND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO POLICE AGGRESSION

During encounters between police and civilians, both sides can find themselves at risk of violence. The threat faced by civilians from police is clearly a concern among Americans, but violence against police by the public is also viewed as a problem by Americans across racial and ethnic groups.

Four in 10 Americans say that violence against police is an extremely or very serious problem in the United States, and an additional 4 in 10 say it is a moderate problem. Unlike other issues discussed here, this one does not divide along racial lines. Forty-one percent of whites say violence against police is an extremely or very serious problem; 34 percent of blacks agree.

A majority of Americans think civilian behavior during confrontations is a significant reason for police violence. Fifty-seven percent of Americans say that civilians confronting police rather than cooperating when they are stopped is a major reason for police violence, and 35 percent say it is a minor reason. Just 8 percent say it is not a reason at all. Blacks and whites do not have significantly different opinions here either.

Slightly fewer Americans think that aggression toward police officers contributes to the levels of violence against civilians. Forty-five percent say that fear on the part of police officers is a major reason for police violence against civilians. An additional 41 percent consider this a minor reason. Just 13 percent say it is not a contributing factor. Whites and blacks see eye-to-eye on this issue: 46 percent of whites and 43 percent of blacks say this is a major reason.

Fewer Americans consider police officer training as a factor in police violence toward the public, and again blacks and whites agree. Just 31 percent say a major reason for police violence against civilians is inadequate training to deal with perceived threats. Forty-one percent say this is a minor reason, and 27 percent say it is not a reason at all.

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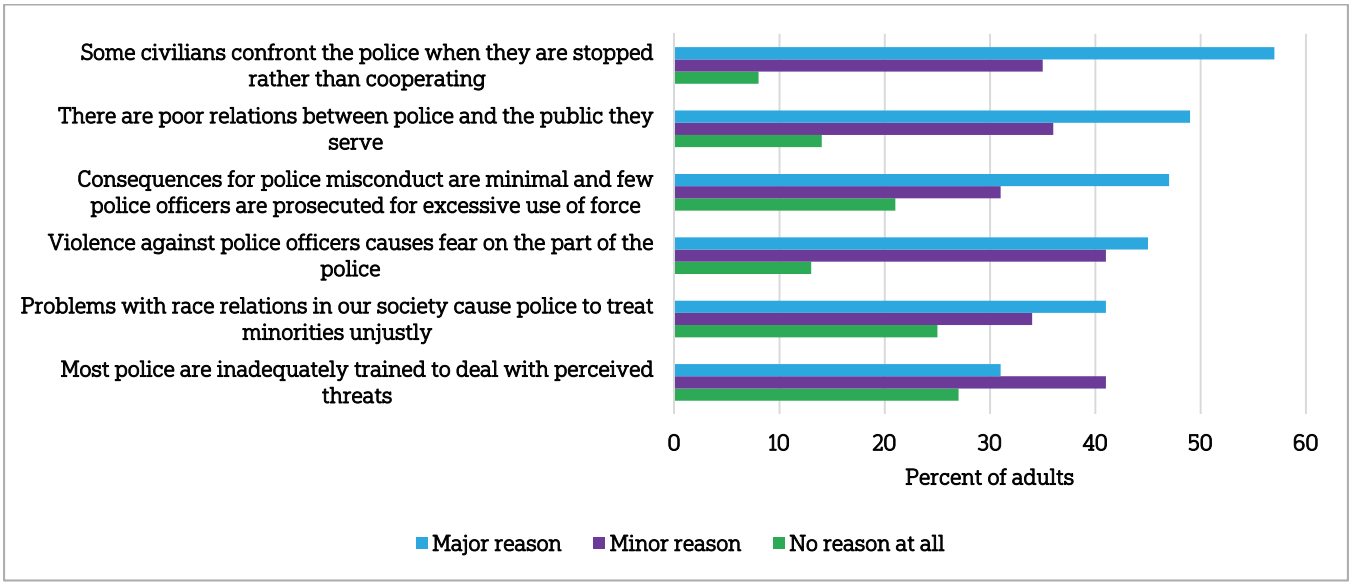
Americans report a number of reasons for police violence



Question: Here are some reasons that have been given for police violence against civilians. For each one, please tell me whether you think it is a major reason, a minor reason, or not a reason at all.

ATTITUDES TOWARD POLICY CHANGES AND TENSIONS BETWEEN POLICE AND MINORITY COMMUNITIES

Advocacy groups, policymakers, and pundits have suggested a number of policy reforms to reduce tensions between police and minority communities, and Americans, regardless of race or ethnicity, think each of the four policy changes asked about on the survey would reduce tensions, albeit with different levels of efficacy.

About half, 52 percent, say developing community policing programs in neighborhoods to help build relationships between the public and local police officers would be extremely or very effective in reducing tensions between police and minority communities.

There is less enthusiastic support for some other proposals. A third think it would be extremely or very effective to require all police officers to receive racial bias training or require departments to recruit additional qualified minority officers. And 40 percent say offering incentives to officers to live in the community where they work would be extremely or very effective.

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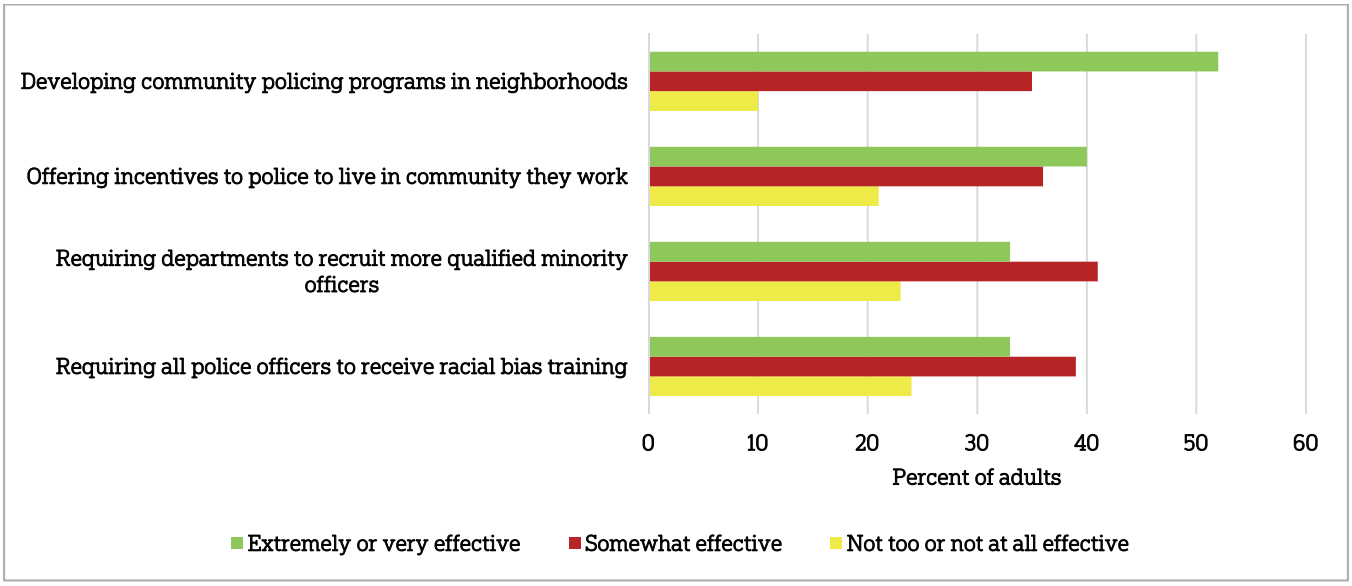
Effect of policy reform on tensions between police and minorities



Question: Here are some policy changes that have been suggested to reduce tension between minority communities and the police. For each one, please tell me whether you think it would be extremely effective, very effective, somewhat effective, not too effective, or not effective at all.

Majorities of blacks, whites, and Hispanics all say each of the changes would be at least somewhat effective in reducing tension between the police and minority communities. However, there are some differences based on partisanship and income.

VIEWS ON HOW POLICY CHANGES COULD HELP DETER POLICE VIOLENCE

The public agrees that several procedural modifications could help prevent police violence against civilians. When asked about five suggested changes, Americans, regardless of race, say each could be effective in preventing police violence.

When asked about requiring on-duty police officers to wear video cameras that would record their interactions with the public as they occur, 71 percent say it would be extremely or very effective in preventing police violence against citizens.

Other adjustments were not seen as quite as useful. About half say it would be extremely or very effective to require a special prosecutor to investigate when a civilian is seriously injured or killed by police (51 percent) and to set stricter criteria for the use of deadly force (47 percent).

In addition, 46 percent of adults say making it more difficult to put people in jail for minor violations would be extremely or very effective. Thirty-eight percent think setting limits on the acquisition and use of surplus military equipment would be extremely or very effective.

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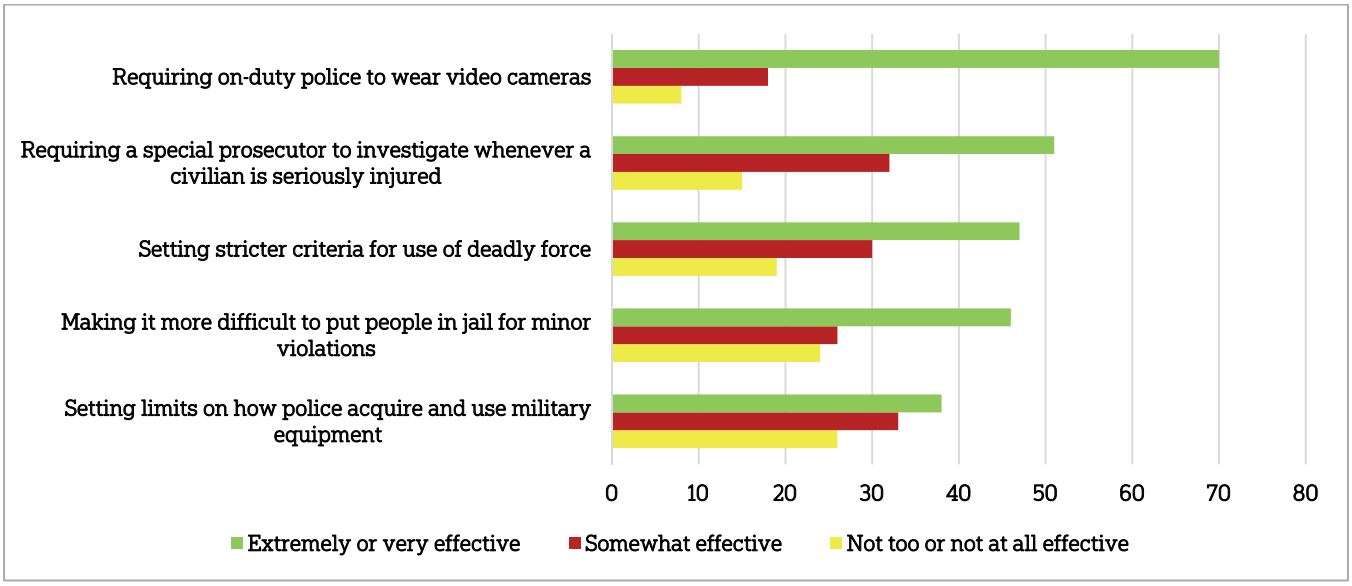
Effect of policy modification on police violence against civilians



Question: Here are some policy changes that have been suggested to help prevent police violence against civilians. For each one, please tell me whether you think it would be extremely effective, very effective, somewhat effective, not too effective, or not effective at all.

However, having a relationship with a police officer seems to make people more skeptical about the effectiveness of suggested changes.

About 1 in 3 Americans (36 percent) report either being a police officer or having a close friend or family member who is serving or has recently served as a police officer. They are less likely to say it would be very or extremely effective to make it more difficult to put people in jail for minor violations (41 percent vs. 50 percent).

Among whites, 39 percent report either being a police officer or having a close friend or family member who is serving or has recently served as a police officer. They are even more doubtful about the value of some of these suggested changes. They are less likely to say it would be very or extremely effective to require police officers to wear video cameras (58 percent vs. 76 percent), set stricter criteria for use of deadly force (34 percent vs. 47 percent), require a special prosecutor to investigate whenever a civilian is seriously injured (37 percent vs. 52 percent), and make it more difficult to put people in jail for minor violations (35 percent vs. 50 percent).

THE STATE OF RACE RELATIONS AND ITS EFFECT ON POLICE BEHAVIOR

Americans of all races are united in their view that race relations are in bad shape. Overall, just 17 percent of Americans say that race relations in the United States are somewhat or very good. Sixty-three percent say they are somewhat or very bad. Twenty percent say they are neither good nor bad. Majorities of blacks, whites, and Hispanics all say the country's race relations are either somewhat or very bad.

The public is more positive about race relations in their own community, but many still see problems. Four in 10 describe race relations in their community as good, compared to 3 in 10 who describe them as bad, and 3 in 10 who say they are neither good nor bad. While there are no significant differences based on race, those who say they have been mistreated by police are much more likely to describe race relations in their community as bad.

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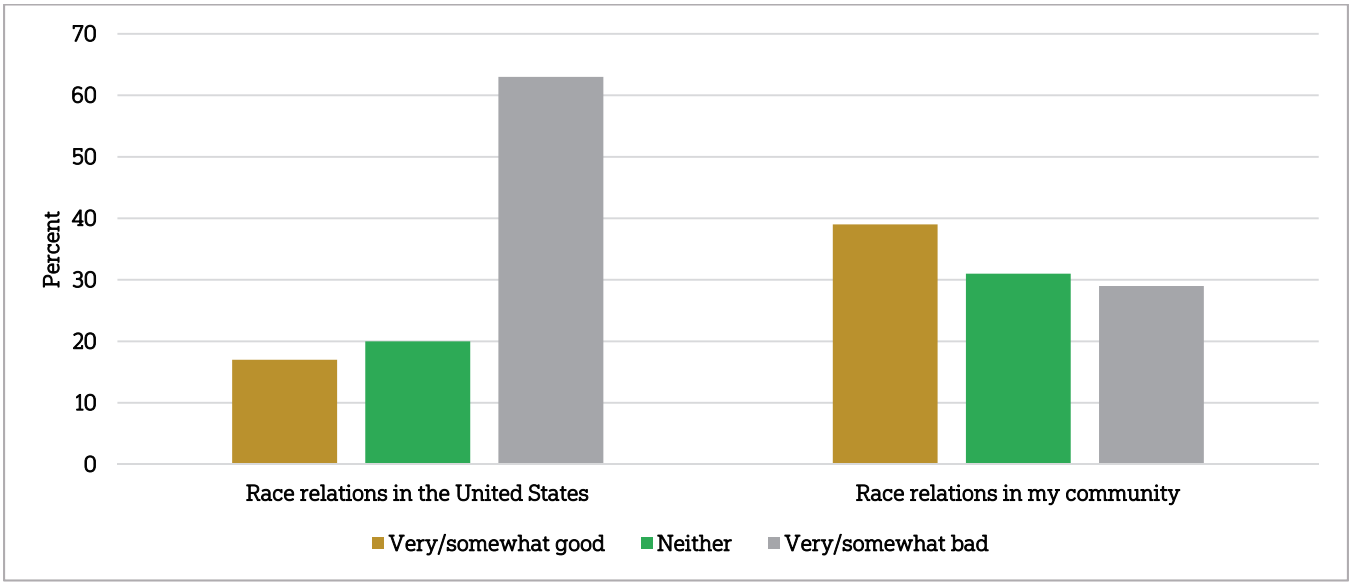
Race relations nationally versus the individual community



Questions: Do you think race relations in the United States are very good, somewhat good, neither good nor bad, somewhat bad, or very bad? Do you think race relations in your community are very good, somewhat good, neither good nor bad, somewhat bad, or very bad?

While there is general agreement on the state of race relations in this country, blacks and whites perceive the effect of poor race relations on police violence considerably differently. Overall, 41 percent of Americans say a major reason for police violence against civilians is that problems with race relations in our society cause police to treat minorities unjustly. Seventy-one percent of blacks and 57 percent Hispanics say it is a major reason, but only 30 percent of whites agree. Whites are significantly more likely to say poor race relations are either a minor reason or not a reason at all for police violence against civilians. Very few blacks or Hispanics say problems with race relations do not contribute to police violence against civilians.

Similarly, 49 percent of Americans say a major reason for police violence against civilians is poor relations between police and the public they serve. Blacks are most likely to say this is a significant contributor to violence against civilians, with 73 percent saying it is a major reason compared to just 50 percent of Hispanics and 45 percent of whites. Whites and Hispanics are more likely to cite poor relations between police and the public as a minor reason for police violence against civilians (41 percent and 31 percent vs. 17 percent).

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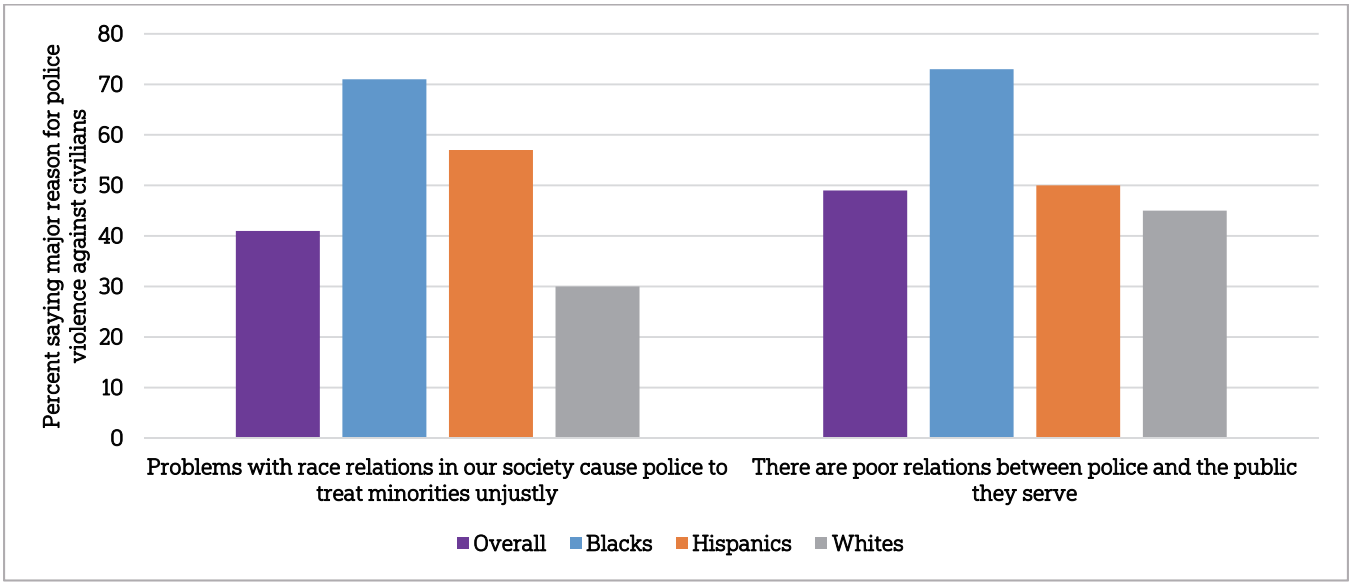
Differences in the effect of race and community relations on police violence



Question: Here are some reasons that have been given for police violence against civilians. For each one, please tell me whether you think it is a major reason, a minor reason, or not a reason at all.

VIEWS OF PROTESTS AGAINST POLICE VIOLENCE DIVIDE ALONG RACIAL AND PARTISAN LINES

Throughout the past year, there have been marches and rallies in many major American cities to protest the highly publicized killings of unarmed black men by police. The number of Americans who say they participated in these protests is small—only 3 percent nationally, including 8 percent of blacks.

Overall, half of Americans say that protests about police violence mainly bring attention to the issue in a negative way (50 percent) versus in a positive way (26 percent), or have no impact at all (23 percent).

Blacks and whites view these protests in very different lights, though. A majority of blacks (51 percent) say they bring attention to the issue in a positive way versus just 18 percent who say they have a negative effect. Whites, on the other hand, are much more likely to say the protests are negative (59 percent) than positive (21 percent). Hispanics view these protests much like whites do, with 40 percent viewing them as negative and just 25 percent viewing them as positive.

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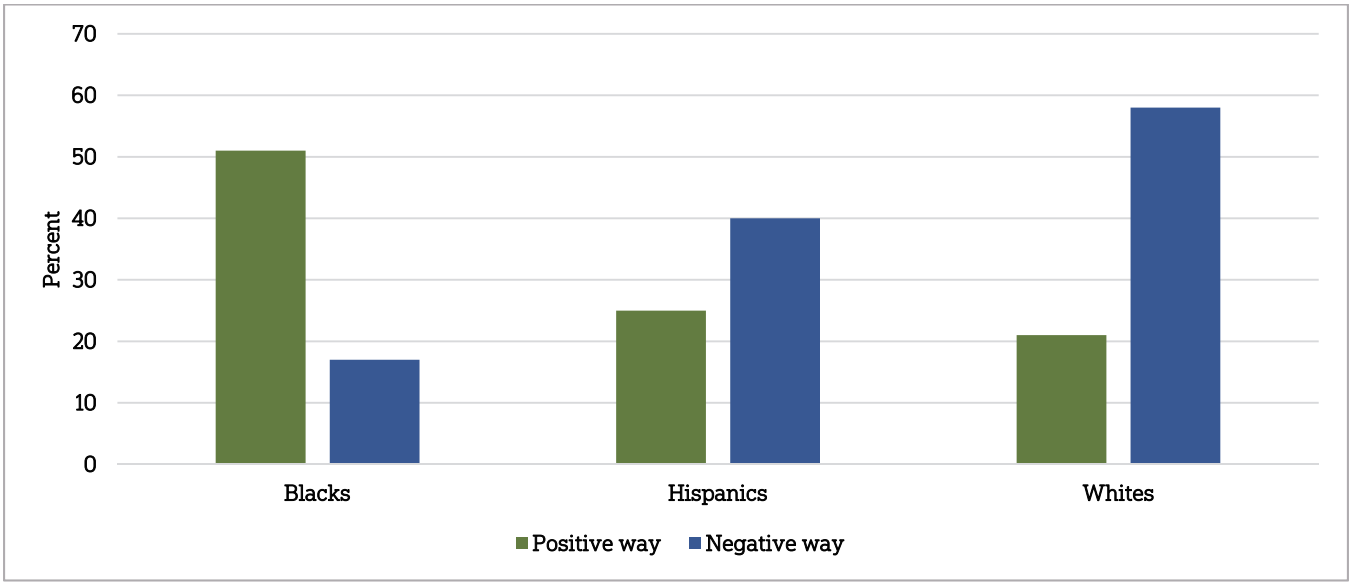
Views on the benefits of protests against police violence



Question: Do you think protests and demonstrations about police violence mostly bring attention to the issue in a positive way, in a negative way, or don't they really have any impact at all?

VIEWS OF POLICE ARE INFORMED BY PERSONAL EXPERIENCE WITH LAW ENFORCEMENT

Most Americans do not believe the police have treated them unfairly because of their race, but 2 in 3 blacks report that either they or a family member have been mistreated due to race.

Half of blacks say police have treated them unfairly because of their race, and another 15 percent say a family member has been mistreated. In comparison, 28 percent of Hispanics and 3 percent of whites report being personally mistreated due to race, with an additional 5 percent of whites and 23 percent of Hispanics saying a family member has been treated unfairly.

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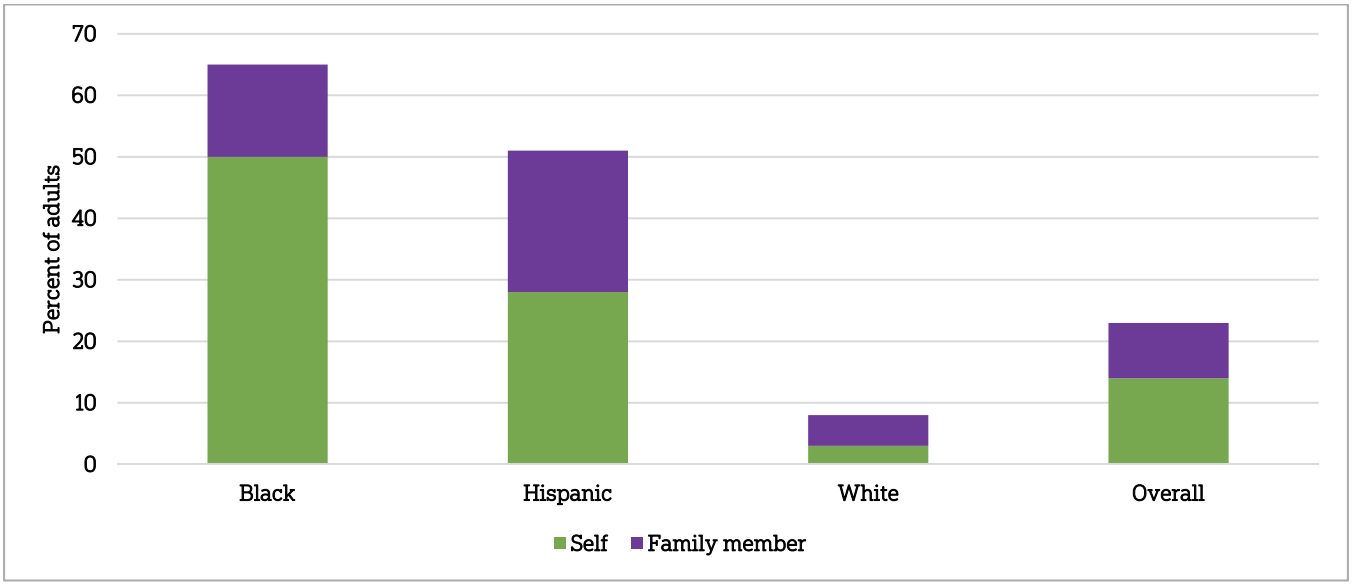
Racial and ethnic differences in racially motivated police mistreatment



Questions: Have you personally ever felt treated unfairly by a police officer specifically because of your race? As far as you know, has a member of your immediate family[4] ever felt treated unfairly by a police officer specifically because of his or her race?

Americans who feel police have mistreated them because of race are more likely to have a negative opinion of law enforcement than those who have not had racially shaded encounters with police.

- More than 8 in 10 say police are too quick to use deadly force, are more likely to use it against blacks and sometimes deal more roughly with members of minority groups in their community.
- About 70 percent say police violence against the public is a serious problem.
- Three-quarters say the criminal justice system treats police too leniently.
- Six in 10 say to say their local police are doing a poor or fair job controlling crime and a quarter are personally worried about violent crime.
- About 40 percent view protests and demonstrations against police violence as a positive way to bring attention to the problem.

IN ADDITION TO RACE, AMERICAN ATTITUDES TOWARD POLICE AND VIOLENCE DIVIDE ALONG PARTY LINES

Although a large majority of black Americans identify with the Democratic Party, there are partisan distinctions in attitudes concerning law enforcement and violence.

Republicans are more inclined to positively evaluate the police and less likely to regard police dealings with the public as having any racial component.

- Only a quarter of Republicans say police use deadly force too quickly, and less than 20 percent say they are more likely to use force against a black person in their community.
- Three-quarters of Republicans trust their local police to do what is right for them and the community.

[4] The race of the family member is unknown.

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- They are more likely to consider police officers' encounters with the justice system to be objective: only 20 percent say the courts are too lenient with police officers who cause harm to civilians.
- Only a quarter of Republicans think poor race relations contribute a lot to police violence.

On the other hand, Democrats tend to see race relations as a major element in police interactions with the public and are more disposed to mistrust law enforcement.

- Seventy percent of Democrats say police are more likely to use force against a black person in most communities, and 50 percent say the police are more inclined to use force against blacks in their own communities.
- Six in 10 Democrats say minimal consequences for excessive use of force contributes to police violence against civilians.
- More than half of Democrats say police officers are treated too leniently by the criminal justice system.
- Most Democrats say problems with race relations contribute in a major way to police violence against civilians, and 60 percent say poor relations between police and the public are a major reason for police violence.

ABOUT THE STUDY

Survey Methodology

This survey was conducted by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research and with funding from NORC at the University of Chicago. Data were collected using AmeriSpeak®, which is a probability-based panel designed to be representative of the U.S. household population. The survey was part of an omnibus that included questions about several other topics not included in this report, such as climate change. During the initial recruitment phase of the panel, randomly selected U.S. households are sampled with a known, non-zero probability of selection from the NORC National Sample Frame and are then contacted by U.S. mail, email, telephone, and field interviewers (face-to-face).

Interviews for this survey were conducted between July 17 and July 19, 2015, with adults age 18 and over from the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Panel members were randomly drawn from AmeriSpeak®, and 1,223 completed the survey—1,037 via the web and 186 via telephone. The final stage completion rate is 28.4 percent, and the weighted household panel response rate is 29 percent, and the weighted household panel retention rate is 99 percent, for a cumulative response rate of 8.2 percent. The overall margin of sampling error is +/- 4.2 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level, including the design effect. The margin of sampling error may be higher for subgroups. There was also an oversample of blacks with 311 completed interviews. The overall margin of error for the oversample is +/- 9.1 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level including the design effect.

Once the sample has been selected and fielded, and all the study data has been collected and made final, a poststratification process is used to adjust for any survey nonresponse as well as any non-coverage or under- and oversampling resulting from the study-specific sample design. Poststratification variables included age, gender, census division, race/ethnicity, and household phone status. The weighted data, which reflect the U.S. population of adults age 18 and over, were used for all analyses.

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All analyses were conducted using STATA (version 14), which allows for adjustment of standard errors for complex sample designs. All differences reported between subgroups of the U.S. population are at the 95 percent level of statistical significance, meaning that there is only a 5 percent (or lower) probability that the observed differences could be attributed to chance variation in sampling. A comprehensive listing of all study questions, complete with tabulations of top-level results for each question, is available on The AP-NORC Center website: www.apnorc.org.

CONTRIBUTING RESEARCHERS

From NORC at the University of Chicago

Marjorie Connelly
Dan Malato
David Sterrett
Jennifer Benz
Trevor Tompson
Nada Ganesh
Becky Reimer
Emily Alvarez
Ivana Cvarkovic
Elizabeth Kantor
Brian Kirchhoff
Jennifer Titus

From The Associated Press

Emily Swanson

ABOUT THE ASSOCIATED PRESS –NORC CENTER FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS RESEARCH

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