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Deep Racial Divide in Perceptions of Police and Reported Experiences, No Group Is Anti-Cop

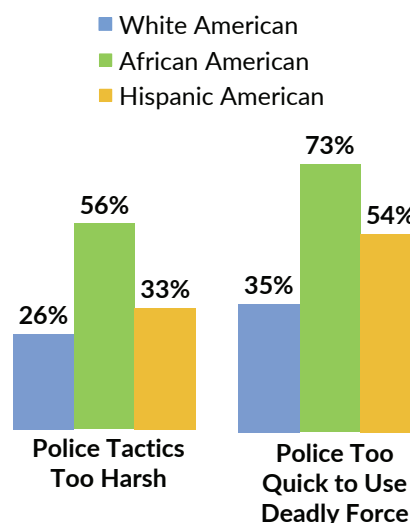
BY EMILY EKINS

A new Cato Institute/YouGov survey of public attitudes toward the police finds a 38-point gap between white and black Americans' perception that police are too quick to resort to deadly force.¹

Nearly three-fourths (73%) of African Americans and 54% of Hispanics believe the police are “too quick to use deadly force,” compared to 35% of white Americans. Instead, 65% of white Americans believe police resort to lethal force “only when necessary” (see Figure 1).

When it comes to police tactics overall, black Americans (56%) are more likely to think they are “too harsh” compared to white (26%) and Hispanic (33%) Americans. Majorities of whites (67%) and Hispanics (58%) believe police generally use the right amount of force for each situation.

Figure 1. African Americans Most Likely to Believe Police Use Excessive Force



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IS THE JUSTICE SYSTEM IMPARTIAL?

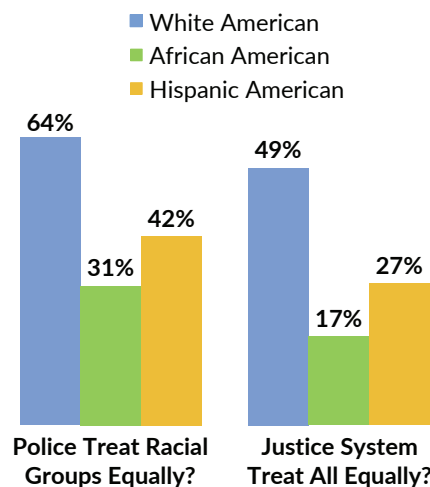
Only 17% of African Americans believe the criminal justice system treats all Americans equally, and only 31% are highly confident their local police department treats all racial groups impartially. Whites are 32 points more likely than blacks to believe the justice system treats everyone equally (49%), and a solid majority (64%) are confident that their local police are impartial. Hispanics fall in between with 27% who think the justice system is impartial, and 42% who believe their local police treat everyone the same. Among all Americans, only 42% think all are treated equally by the justice system, but 56% are highly confident their local police department treats everyone equally (see Figure 2).

ARE POLICE TRUSTWORTHY AND HELD ACCOUNTABLE?

Strikingly high numbers of whites (46%), blacks (61%), and Hispanics (61%) think that “most” police officers “think they are above the law.” Overall, nearly half (49%) of all Americans worry that police think the law doesn’t entirely apply to them.

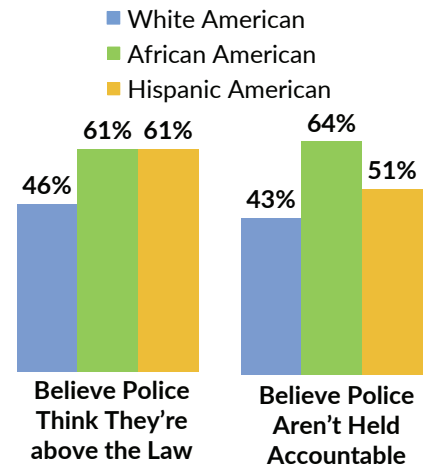
Nearly two thirds (64%) of black Americans and a majority (51%) of Hispanic Americans

Figure 2. Does the Criminal Justice System Treat Racial and Ethnic Groups Equally?



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Figure 3. Police Integrity and Accountability



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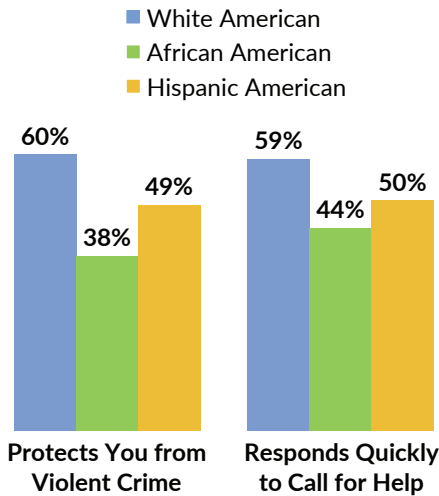
believe police are “generally” not held accountable for misconduct when it occurs. This is 21 points higher than the 43% of white Americans who also share this view. Instead, a majority (57%) of whites think police are generally brought to account (see Figure 3).

ARE POLICE EFFECTIVE?

African Americans (41%) and Hispanics (41%) are twice as likely as white Americans (29%) to say they are “extremely” or “very” worried about crime. Furthermore black Americans (41%) are more than twice as likely as whites (17%) or Hispanics (15%) to say they know someone who was murdered.

Despite more salient fears over safety, only 44% of African Americans are highly confident their local police department responds quickly to a call for help. White Americans are 15 points more confident (59%) than African Americans that their local police would come quickly if needed. In a similar pattern, white Americans are about 20 points more likely than black Americans to give their local police high marks for protecting them from crime (60% vs. 38%) and enforcing the law (64% vs. 44%). Hispanics fall in between with about half who give their police high marks for enforcing the law, protecting them from crime, and responding promptly (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Are Your Local Police Competent?



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DO THE POLICE CARE ABOUT YOU?

Only 37% of African Americans are highly confident their local police department cares about the people they serve. White Americans (59%) are far more confident that their local police care. A little less than half of Hispanic Americans (47%) agree (see Figure 5).

ARE THE POLICE COURTEOUS?

White Americans (62%) are 19 points more likely than African Americans (43%) and 13 points more likely than Hispanic Americans (49%) to rate their local police departments highly for being courteous.

WHITE, HISPANIC, AND BLACK AMERICANS REPORT DIFFERENT EXPERIENCES WITH POLICE

Most Americans have personally had positive experiences with the police. However, those who have experienced verbal and physical misconduct are disproportionately black and Hispanic.

African Americans are nearly twice as likely as whites to say a police officer swore at them. About a quarter of African Americans (26%) and Hispanics (22%) report a police officer personally using abusive language or profanity with

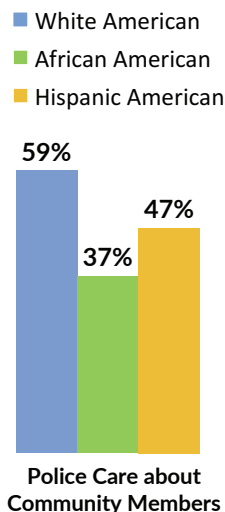
them compared to 15% of white Americans² (see Figure 6). The survey also found some evidence suggesting that whites who are highly deferential toward the police are less likely to report experiences with police profanity, whereas blacks and Latinos who are highly deferential do not report similarly improved treatment.³

African Americans are about twice as likely as white Americans to know someone who has been physically abused by police. Thirty-nine percent of African Americans know someone who has been physically mistreated by the police, as do 18% of whites and 27% of Hispanics.

Higher-income African Americans report being stopped at about 1.5 times the rate of higher-income white Americans. In contrast, lower-income African Americans report being stopped only slightly more frequently than lower-income white Americans. Overall, higher-income African Americans report being stopped more often than higher-income whites, lower-income blacks, and lower-income whites (see Figure 7 and Figure 8).

African Americans (50%) are also about 30 points less likely than whites (70%) and Latinos (66%) to report being satisfied with their personal police encounters over the past 5 years (see Figure 9).

Figure 5. Do Police Care about You?



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FAVORABILITY GAP TOWARD POLICE HAS CHANGED LITTLE OVER PAST 50 YEARS

Taking these results together, it comes as little surprise that there is a wide racial gap in favorability toward the police. Only 40% of black Americans have a favorable view compared to 68% of white Americans. Hispanic Americans fall in between, with 59% who share a positive view of the police (see Figure 10).

What is particularly surprising, however, is that these numbers haven't changed much since 1970 when 67% of white Americans and 43% of African Americans had a favorable view of the police—nearly identical to today's numbers⁴ (see Figure 11).

PERCEPTIONS OF POLICE USE OF FORCE AND RACIAL BIAS ARE LIKELY KEY

Overall, African Americans and Latinos are less confident than whites that the police use appropriate force, are impartial, are competent, have integrity, are professional, care about them, and are held accountable (see Appendix A).

While each of these perceptions matter, statistical tests reveal two perceptions are likely key drivers of African Americans' lack of confidence in the police: 1) perceptions of excessive use of force and 2) perceptions of racial bias (see Appendix B).

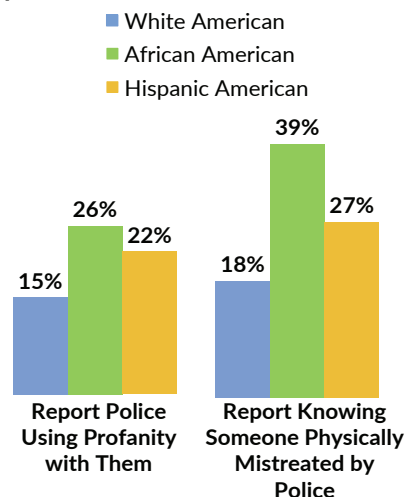
These tests indicate that after controlling for the effects of these perceptions, African Americans are *no less likely* than whites or Hispanics to have favorable views of the police. In other words, results suggest if we were able to equalize or reduce the belief that the police use excessive force or are racially biased, the race gap in attitudes toward the police could very well disappear.

Certainly, we also want to improve perceptions of police effectiveness, accountability, integrity, and empathy. However, finding ways to minimize the amount of physical force police need to use and improving perceptions of police impartiality may prove most efficacious in restoring public confidence.

AMERICANS ARE NOT “ANTI-COP”

It's important to point out: although some groups have less positive views of the police, no group is “anti-cop.”⁵ You might expect a

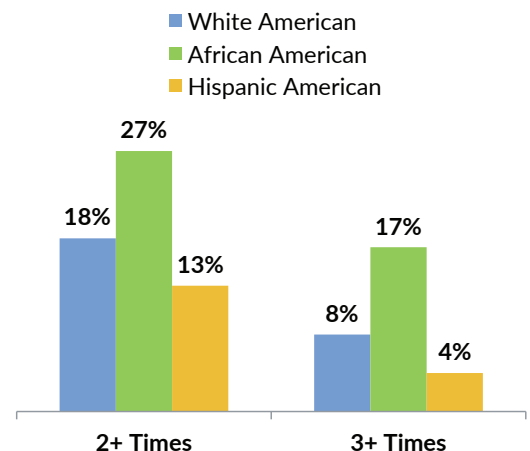
Figure 6. African Americans and Hispanics More Likely to Report Experiences with Police Misconduct



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Figure 7. African Americans Report Higher Number of Police Stops

Over the past five years, about how many times would you say you were stopped by the police?



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Figure 8: Predicted Number of Police Stops by Race and Income

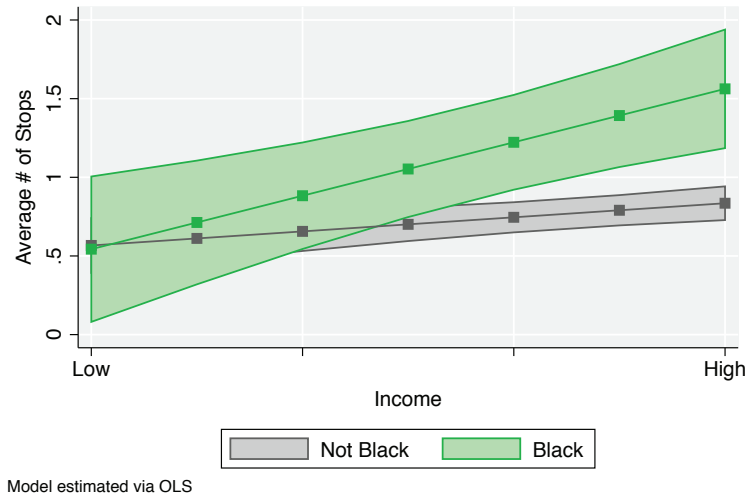


Figure 9. Satisfaction with Personal Police Encounters

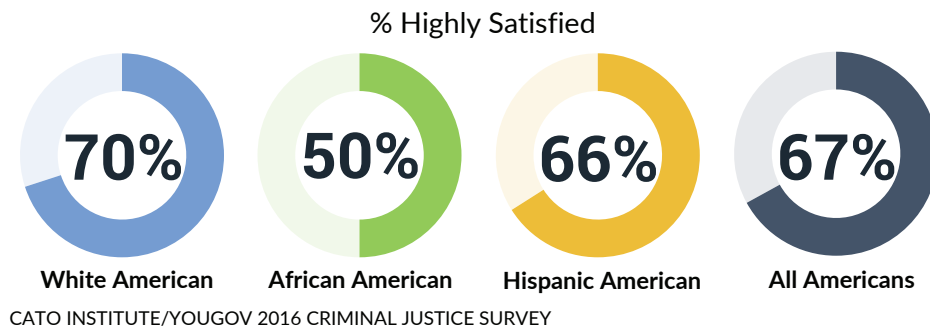


Figure 10. Racial Divide in Favorability toward the Police

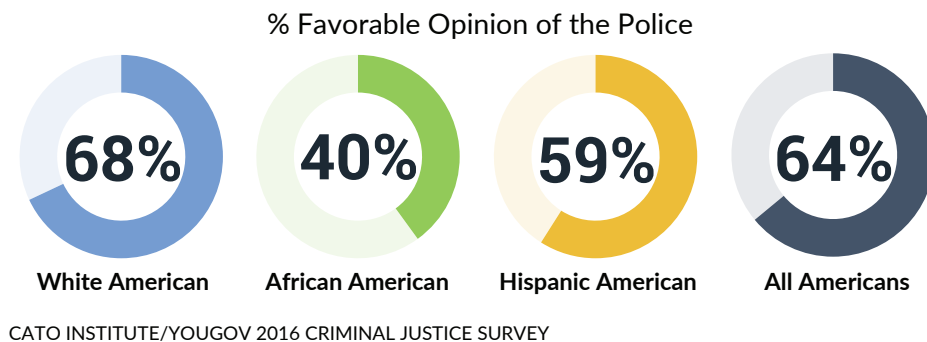
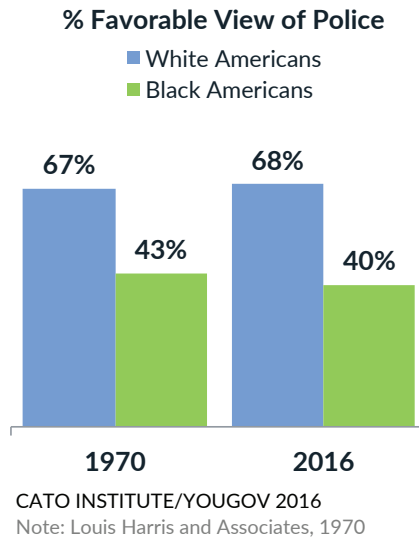


Figure 11. Little Change in White and Black Americans' Attitudes toward the Police, 1970-2016



person who is “anti-cop” to want fewer police in their community.⁶ But 9 in 10 Americans, regardless of race or ethnicity, oppose reducing the number of police officers in their communities. Instead, about half of blacks, whites, and Hispanics favor maintaining present levels and more than a third say their community needs more officers. Activists who call for “abolishing” or “defunding” the police may get media attention but are rare, and do not represent the views of very many people.⁷

Furthermore, 6 in 10 black, white, and Hispanic Americans all believe police have “very dangerous jobs.”

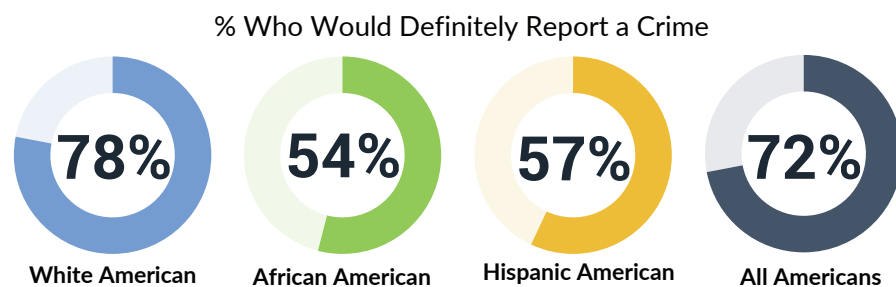
WHY WE SHOULD CARE ABOUT THE CONFIDENCE GAP IN POLICE PERFORMANCE

Confidence gaps in police come with consequences. Individuals with less favorable views of the police are less likely to report a crime they witness. For instance, African Americans and Hispanics are more than 20 points less likely than white Americans to say they’d definitely report a crime. Among African American men making less than \$30,000 a year, fewer than half are as confident they would do so (see Figure 12).

Effective policing depends on police and communities working together in a symbiotic relationship based on mutual respect and trust. The police are best able to safely and effectively serve and protect their communities when the residents freely cooperate with the police. And citizens are more willing to cooperate and help the police when they have confidence in them.⁸ Moreover, public confidence in the police bolsters their legitimacy and by extension compliance with the law.⁹

Thus, regardless of one’s own experiences and views of police, these perception gaps

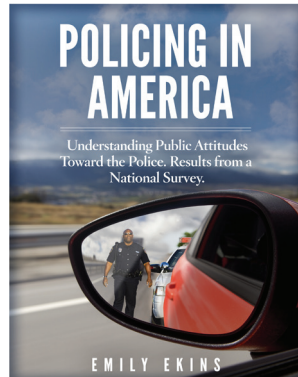
Figure 12. How Willing Are Americans to Report a Crime?



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alone merit our attention. It is important to improve relationships between police and communities they serve, or risk further eroding the legitimacy of the police and by extension the rule of law more generally.

A new Cato Institute public opinion report, *Policing in America: Understanding Public Attitudes toward the Police*, helps in this endeavor by carefully examining Americans' perceptions of and experiences with law enforcement to help uncover



why Americans think differently about the police. It also investigates and finds broad support for reforms that many believe can help improve police-community relations. You can find the full report at <https://www.cato.org/project-public-opinion>.

For more public opinion analysis, sign up at <https://www.cato.org/project-public-opinion> to receive Cato's upcoming public opinion surveys, reports, and opinion briefs.

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

The Cato Institute/YouGov national survey of 2000 adults was conducted June 6–22, 2016, using a sample drawn from YouGov's online panel, which is designed to be representative of the U.S. population. YouGov uses a method called sample matching, and restrictions are put in place to ensure that only the people selected and contacted by YouGov are allowed to participate. The margin of sampling error for all respondents is ± 3.19 percentage points. The full report, topline results, and methodological details can be found at <https://www.cato.org/project-public-opinion>.

Some data in this brief, which are identified, combine the June 2016 survey data with another survey conducted November 19 to 24, 2015, which asked many of the same questions. Only survey questions with identical question wording were combined. This offers greater precision and smaller margins of error for subgroups, particularly when examining attitudes across racial and partisan groups simultaneously. The November 2015 survey interviewed 2,113 respondents who were then matched down to a sample of 2,000. The survey included oversamples of African Americans (392) and Hispanics (370). Results were weighted to be representative of the national adult sample. The margin of error for the November 2015 survey, which adjusts for the impact of weighting is ± 3.26 percentage points. The margin of error for African Americans is ± 7.38 , for Hispanics it is ± 7.6 , and for whites it is ± 4.31 . The margin of error for the surveys combined, which adjusts for the impact of weighting is ± 2.28 percentage points, African Americans (± 4.99), Hispanics (± 5.1), and whites (± 2.58).

APPENDIX

Table A.1
Evaluations of Police Performance Summary Table

	White American (%)	Black American (%)	Hispanic American (%)	Difference between Blacks and Whites	Difference between Hispanics and Whites
Favorable View of the Police	68	40	59	-28	-9
Satisfaction with Personal Police Contact	70	50	66	-20	-4
Believe Police Are Too Quick to Use Lethal Force	35	73	54	38	19
Think Criminal Justice System Gives Preference to White Americans	40	72	51	32	11
Believe Police Tactics Are Too Harsh	26	56	33	30	7
Know Someone Physically Abused by Police	20	41	29	21	9
Extremely/Very Concerned about Crime	20	41	41	21	21
Believe Most Police Officers Think They Are above the Law	46	61	61	15	15
Know Someone Stopped and Searched by Police	47	60	40	13	-7
Police Ever Used Profanity/Abusive Language with You	15	24	25	9	10
Rate Police 4 or 5 out of 5: Responding Quickly to a Call for Help	59	44	50	-15	-9
Rate Police 4 or 5 out of 5: Being Courteous	62	43	49	-19	-13
Believe Police Are Held Accountable for Misconduct	57	36	49	-21	-8
Rate Police 4 or 5 out of 5: Protect People Like You from Crime	60	38	49	-22	-11
Rate Police 4 or 5 out of 5: Being Honest and Trustworthy	62	36	51	-26	-11
Think Criminal Justice System Treats All Americans Equally	49	18	27	-31	-22
Believe Police Only Use Lethal Force When Necessary	65	27	46	-38	-19

Table A.2
Predicting Favorability toward Police

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)
Satisfied Personal Contact[^]	2.54***										1.51***
([^] If had contact <5 years)	(0.21)										(0.22)
Perception of Police											
Caring		2.41***								1.38***	0.91***
		(0.17)								(0.20)	(0.27)
Racial Bias			-2.25***							-1.14***	-1.37***
			(0.20)							(0.27)	(0.32)
Untrustworthy				-2.22***						-0.51	-0.58*
				(0.26)						(0.28)	(0.25)
Competency					2.08***					0.99***	0.96***
					(0.17)					(0.17)	(0.20)
Use Harsh Tactics						-2.02***				-0.13	0.34
						(0.19)				(0.24)	(0.27)
Lack Accountability							-1.42***			-0.75***	-0.75**
							(0.19)			(0.16)	(0.23)
Experienced Mistreatment								-1.50***		-0.73*	-0.34
								(0.33)		(0.31)	(0.30)
Respect for Authority									0.81***	0.40*	-0.01
									(0.16)	(0.18)	(0.18)
DEMOGRAPHIC/POLITICAL											
African American	-0.15	-0.50*	-0.19	-0.61**	-0.66**	-0.45	-0.64**	-0.79***	-0.91***	-0.02	0.35
	(0.37)	(0.25)	(0.19)	(0.20)	(0.24)	(0.24)	(0.21)	(0.20)	(0.19)	(0.25)	(0.34)
Hispanic	0.09	0.03	-0.03	-0.10	-0.02	-0.05	-0.13	-0.17	-0.10	0.10	0.15
	(0.27)	(0.25)	(0.26)	(0.25)	(0.25)	(0.21)	(0.23)	(0.23)	(0.24)	(0.31)	(0.31)
Male	-0.00	-0.05	-0.00	-0.10	-0.22	-0.04	-0.01	-0.01	-0.09	0.18	0.20
	(0.20)	(0.15)	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.16)	(0.16)	(0.15)	(0.16)	(0.15)	(0.17)	(0.21)
Age	0.01*	0.01	0.01*	0.01	0.01	0.01*	0.01*	0.01*	0.01	0.01	0.01
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)

continued

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)
Education	0.20 [*] (0.10)	0.25 ^{***} (0.07)	0.28 ^{***} (0.08)	0.27 ^{**} (0.08)	0.26 ^{***} (0.08)	0.26 ^{**} (0.08)	0.23 ^{***} (0.07)	0.19 [*] (0.08)	0.23 ^{**} (0.08)	0.34 ^{***} (0.08)	0.26 ^{**} (0.10)
Income above 40K	0.45 (0.28)	0.25 (0.20)	0.33 (0.21)	0.33 (0.19)	0.34 (0.20)	0.39 [*] (0.19)	0.32 (0.18)	0.34 (0.18)	0.43 [*] (0.18)	0.09 (0.25)	0.14 (0.32)
City	-0.05 (0.18)	0.07 (0.13)	0.01 (0.14)	-0.03 (0.14)	-0.02 (0.15)	0.11 (0.14)	-0.04 (0.15)	-0.06 (0.14)	-0.05 (0.14)	0.14 (0.17)	0.08 (0.21)
Liberal	0.02 (0.24)	0.21 (0.24)	0.37 (0.21)	0.22 (0.22)	0.22 (0.21)	0.32 (0.21)	0.39 [*] (0.20)	0.22 (0.21)	0.17 (0.20)	0.62 [*] (0.28)	0.40 (0.31)
Conservative	1.13 ^{***} (0.21)	0.97 ^{***} (0.17)	1.05 ^{***} (0.17)	1.11 ^{***} (0.16)	1.22 ^{***} (0.18)	1.15 ^{***} (0.16)	0.93 ^{***} (0.16)	1.08 ^{***} (0.16)	1.07 ^{***} (0.16)	0.84 ^{***} (0.20)	0.94 ^{***} (0.24)
Constant	-2.45 ^{***} (0.49)	-1.95 ^{***} (0.46)	-0.72 (0.43)	-0.54 (0.41)	-1.79 ^{***} (0.45)	-0.76 (0.43)	-0.09 (0.46)	-0.56 (0.40)	-1.11 [*] (0.44)	-1.64 ^{**} (0.51)	-2.24 ^{***} (0.50)
Observations	1552	1994	1994	1992	1991	1994	1996	1998	1998	1983	1541 [^]
Pseudo R-squared	0.308	0.285	0.187	0.185	0.246	0.164	0.166	0.130	0.122	0.374	0.437

Source: Data from Cato Institute/YouGov November 2015 National Survey.

Note: Models estimated via logit regression; robust standard errors in parentheses * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001.

NOTES

1. Please see the following for the full report: Emily Ekins, "Policing in America: Understanding Public Attitudes toward the Police," Cato Institute, December 7, 2016, <https://www.cato.org/publications/working-paper/policing-america-understanding-public-attitudes-toward-police-results>.
2. Data in this section come from the combined June 2016 and November 2015 national surveys (N=4000), which offer greater precision and smaller margins of error for subgroups.
3. See Emily Ekins, pp. 30–31.
4. Louis Harris and Associates Study no. 2043, 1970, cited in Michael J. Hindelang, "Public Opinion Regarding Crime, Criminal Justice, and Related Topics," *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* 11 (1974): 101–116.
5. Some have claimed that individuals critical of policing practices, or those who have negative feelings toward the police, are also anti-cop; see Matt Wilstein, "Daily Show's Trevor Noah on Police Shootings: 'You Can Be Pro-Cop and Pro-Black,'" *Daily Beast*, July 8, 2016, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2016/07/08/daily-show-s-trevor-noah-on-police-shootings-you-can-be-pro-cop-and-pro-black.html>.
6. To be sure, advocates of shrinking police departments are not necessarily "anti-cop" either; however, it's difficult to argue a person is if they do not want to cut the police force.
7. Peter Hasson, "Black Lives Matter Attorney: Dismantle and Abolish the Police," *The Daily Caller*, July 11, 2016, <http://dailycaller.com/2016/07/11/black-lives-matter-attorney-dismantle-and-abolish-the-police/>; Peter Johnson, "Black Lives Matter Leader: 'Defund Police,'" *The Federalist*, July 19, 2016, <http://thefederalist.com/2016/07/19/black-lives-matter-leader-defund-police-departments/>.
8. See Linqiun Cao, James Frank, and Francis T. Cullen, "Race, Community Context and Confidence in the Police," *American Journal of Police* 15 (1996): 3–22. Tom Tyler, and Jeffrey Fagan, "Legitimacy and Cooperation: Why Do People Help the Police Fight Crime in Their Communities?" *Ohio State Journal of Criminal Law* 6 (2008): 231–275; Andrew V. Papachristos, Tracey L. Meares, and Jeffrey Fagan, "Why Do Criminals Obey the Law? The Influence of Legitimacy and Social Networks on Active Gun Offenders," *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* 102, no. 2 (2009): 397–440; Tom R. Tyler, "The Role of Perceived Injustice in Defendants' Evaluations of Their Courtroom Experience," *Law & Society Review* 18 (1984): 51–74; Tom Tyler, *Why People Obey the Law* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); Jonathan Blanks, "How Pretextual Stops Undermine Police Legitimacy," *Case Western Law Review* 66 (2016): 931–946.
9. Andrew V. Papachristos, Tracey L. Meares, and Jeffrey Fagan, "Why Do Criminals Obey the Law? The Influence of Legitimacy and Social Networks on Active Gun Offenders," *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* 102, no. 2 (2009): 397–440.