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# The Racial Confidence Gap in Police Performance

*Blacks, whites also have dramatically different views on causes of fatal encounters between blacks and police*

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## The Racial Confidence Gap in Police Performance

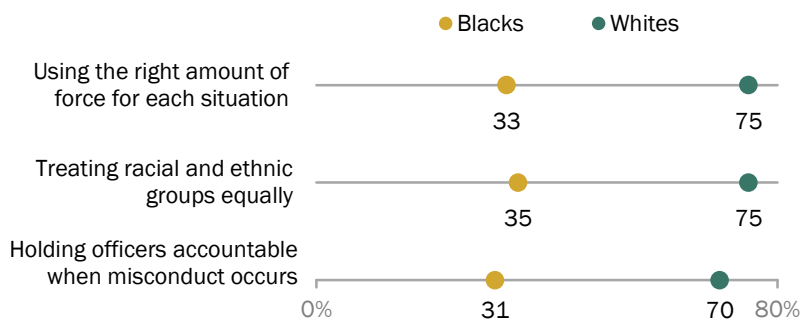
*Blacks, whites also have dramatically different views on causes of fatal encounters between blacks and police*

The deep [racial tensions seen in many areas](#) of American life<sup>1</sup> underlie how blacks and whites view police in their communities, as well as their reactions to the deadly encounters in recent years between blacks and law enforcement officers, according to a new survey by Pew Research Center.

Only about a third of blacks but roughly three-quarters of whites say police in their communities do an excellent or good job in using the appropriate force on suspects, treating all racial and ethnic minorities equally and holding officers accountable when misconduct occurs. Roughly half of all blacks say local police do an excellent or good job combatting crime – a view held by about eight-in-ten whites.

### Blacks are about half as likely as whites to have a positive view of the job their local police are doing

*% saying the police in their community do an excellent or good job when it comes to ...*



Note: Whites and blacks include only non-Hispanics.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Aug. 16-Sept. 12, 2016.

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Blacks and whites also differ over the root causes of the fatal incidents between police and blacks in recent years. Even before the recent lethal encounters between police and black men in Tulsa and Charlotte, the survey found that blacks are 25 percentage points more likely than whites to say the deaths of blacks during encounters with police in recent years are signs of a broader societal problem and not merely isolated incidents.

At the same time, whites and blacks both see the complexity of the situation. Majorities of each race say that both anti-police bias *and* a genuine desire to hold officers accountable for their actions play a part in fueling the protests that have often followed these fatal incidents, though

<sup>1</sup> For a recent analysis of racial attitudes, see the June 27, 2016 Pew Research Center report, "[On Views of Race and Inequality, Blacks and Whites Are Worlds Apart](#)"

whites are more skeptical than blacks about the demonstrators' motives. There is less agreement on which is the more important motivator: For whites, it is anti-police bias (85% vs. 63% who see a sincere desire to promote accountability); for blacks it's reversed (79% of blacks cite accountability, 56% opposition to the police).

The survey, conducted Aug. 16-Sept. 12 online and by mail among 4,538 U.S. adults, also found that about eight-in-ten blacks and a larger share of whites favor the use of body cameras by police to record encounters with citizens. Majorities of both races also believe that the use of so-called body cams would prompt officers to act more appropriately when dealing with the public.

The survey was completed before a recent deadly encounter in Tulsa, Oklahoma, that left a black man dead and the white officer who shot him charged with manslaughter, as well as a fatal shooting of a black man in Charlotte, North Carolina, that sparked two nights of unrest in that city.

## Blacks are less confident than whites in their local police

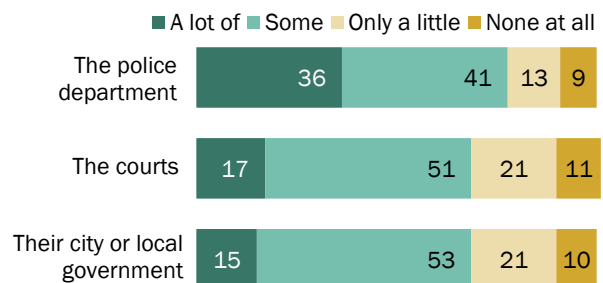
Only about one-third (36%) of the public says they have a lot of confidence in their police department. An additional 41% of Americans say they have some confidence in their community's police department.

Confidence in local police is considerably lower among blacks. Just 14% of blacks say they have a lot of confidence in their local police, and 41% say they have some confidence. By comparison, about four-in-ten whites (42%) say they have a lot of confidence in their local police, and another 39% say they have some confidence. Among Hispanics, 31% say they have a lot of confidence, and another 48% say they have some confidence in their police.<sup>2</sup>

Limited confidence in community institutions is not limited to the police department. In fact, fewer Americans say they have a lot of confidence in the other local institutions asked about in the survey than say this about their police: Some 17% of the public says they have at a lot

### About a third of Americans say they have a lot of confidence in the police department in their community

*% saying they have \_\_\_ confidence in each of the following institutions in their community*



Note: No answer category not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Aug. 16-Sept. 12, 2016. "The Racial Confidence Gap in Police Performance"

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<sup>2</sup> Hispanics may be of any race. In the American Trends Panel, Hispanics are primarily English speaking and U.S. born.

of confidence in the courts in their community, and 15% say the same about their city or local government. Confidence in these institutions is also lower among blacks than whites. For example, 49% of blacks say they have at least some confidence in the courts in their community, compared with 70% of whites.

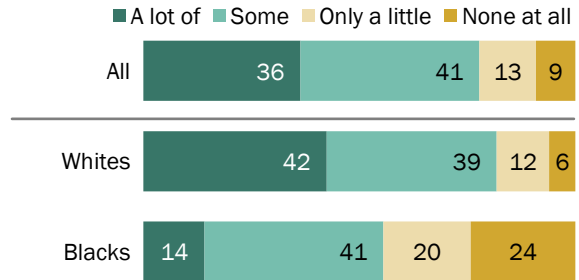
### Wide racial gaps in views of police performance

When it comes to some key aspects of their job, the police are rated more positively than negatively, but wide racial gaps persist. A majority of Americans say the police department in their community is doing an excellent or good job in protecting people from crime (72%), using the right amount of force for each situation (67%), treating racial and ethnic groups equally (65%) and holding officers accountable when misconduct occurs (63%).

But whites are about twice as likely as blacks to give their community's police department high marks in most of these areas. Across most of the areas, a majority of Hispanics say their local police are doing an excellent or good job.

### Blacks are less likely than whites to have confidence in the local police

% saying they have \_\_\_ confidence in the police department in their community

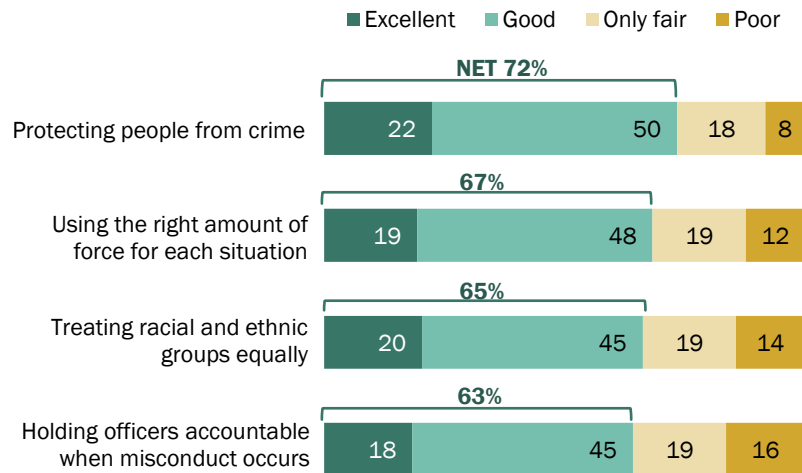


Note: No answer category not shown. Whites and blacks include only non-Hispanics. Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Aug. 16-Sept. 12, 2016. "The Racial Confidence Gap in Police Performance"

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### Most give high marks to police for treating all citizens equally and using the right amount of force

% saying the police in their community do a/an \_\_\_ job when it comes to ...



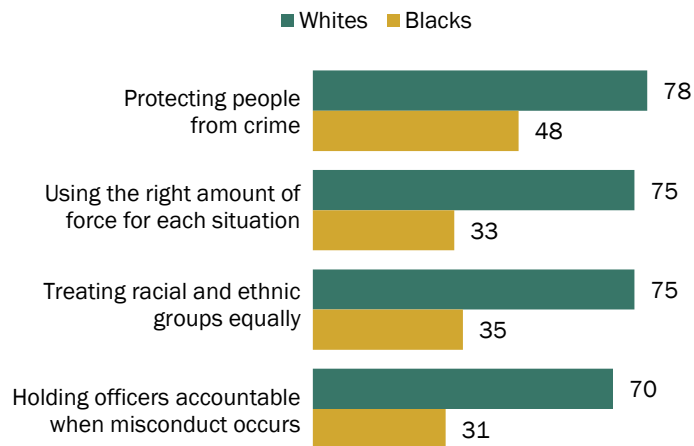
Note: No answer category not shown. NETs calculated prior to rounding. Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Aug. 16-Sept. 12, 2016. "The Racial Confidence Gap in Police Performance"

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Most whites (75%) say their local police do an excellent or good job when it comes to using the right amount of force for each situation. Only 33% of blacks share this view; 63% say the police do only a fair or poor job in this area. About six-in-ten Hispanics (62%) say their community's police are doing at least a good job in this area, while 35% say they are doing only a fair or poor job.

### Blacks are about half as likely as whites to have a positive view of police treatment of racial and ethnic groups or officers' use of force

*% saying the police in their community do an excellent or good job when it comes to ...*



Note: Whites and blacks include only non-Hispanics.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Aug. 16-Sept. 12, 2016.

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When it comes to treating racial or ethnic groups equally, 35% of blacks say the police department in their community does an excellent or good job, compared with 75% of whites. Conversely, about a quarter (23%) of blacks say their police department does only a fair job and about four-in-ten (38%) say they do a poor job. (Among whites, about a quarter – 24% – say their

department does only a fair job or a poor job in treating racial and ethnic groups equally.) Roughly six-in-ten Hispanics (58%) say their local police are doing an excellent or good job in this area, while 38% say they are doing only a fair or poor job.

Some 31% of blacks say the police in their community are doing an excellent or good job when it comes to holding officers accountable when misconduct occurs. By comparison, 70% of whites say the same. About three-in-ten (28%) blacks say their community's police department is doing only a fair job, and about four-in-ten (37%) say they are doing a poor job in holding officers accountable for misconduct. Some 62% of Hispanics say their local police are doing an excellent or good job in this area, and 35% say they are doing only a fair or poor job.

Blacks give their local police somewhat higher ratings for the job they are doing protecting people from crime, though support still falls short of a majority. About half (48%) of blacks say the police

are doing an excellent or good job in this area; by comparison, 78% of whites say their police do an excellent or good job in protecting people from crime. Two-thirds of Hispanics say the same.

When the survey asked about how police *around the country* are doing in these specific areas, Americans' views are less positive overall, but the wide racial gaps remain.<sup>3</sup> For example, 52% of whites say police around the country are doing a good or excellent job of using the right amount of force for each situation, compared with 21% of blacks.

## Large majority of blacks see recent fatal encounters with police as signs of a broader problem

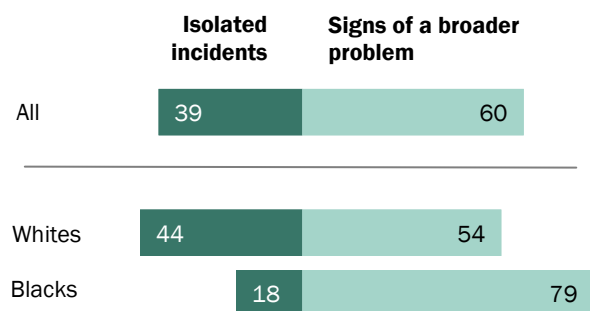
Six-in-ten Americans say the deaths of blacks during encounters with police in recent years are signs of a broader problem between blacks and the police, while 39% say they have been isolated incidents.

Blacks and whites differ dramatically in how they interpret these fatal incidents. For about eight-in-ten blacks (79%), these deaths signal a larger problem between police and the black community.

Whites are more divided: A narrow majority (54%) says these fatal encounters are symptoms of a broader problem. But more than four-in-ten (44%) say these tragic encounters are only isolated incidents. Hispanics fall between whites and blacks; two-thirds (66%) say the incidents suggest there is a deeper problem.

### Blacks' fatal encounters with police have different meanings for whites and blacks

% saying fatal encounters between police and blacks are \_\_\_\_\_



Note: No answer category not shown. Whites and blacks include only non-Hispanics.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Aug. 16-Sept. 12, 2016. "The Racial Confidence Gap in Police Performance"

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<sup>3</sup> For questions rating police job performance, the sample was divided randomly into two halves. Half of the respondents were asked to evaluate the "police in their community." The other half-sample was asked to rate "police around the country."

## Dual motives behind the protests

Regardless of their race, many Americans say the public protests that have followed many fatal police-black encounters are motivated by long-standing anti-police bias as well as by a genuine desire to hold police accountable for their actions.

Roughly eight-in-ten survey respondents (79%) say a great deal (41%) or some (38%) of the motivation behind the demonstrations has been antipathy toward the police.

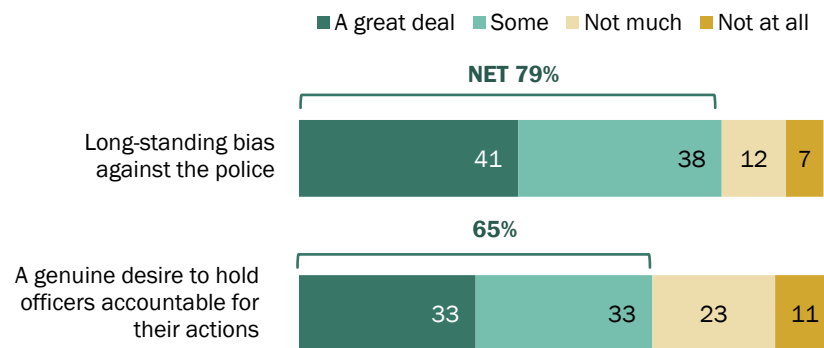
While many blacks and whites see anti-police prejudice as a significant reason for the protests, blacks are significantly less likely than whites to hold this view (56% of blacks vs. 85% of whites).

At the same time, a substantial but smaller majority of the public believes the protests are motivated by a genuine effort on the part of demonstrators to hold police accountable for their actions. Overall, about two-thirds of the public (65%) say a great deal (33%) or some (33%) of the protestors are driven by a genuine desire to hold officers accountable.

Blacks are significantly more likely than whites to say the desire for police accountability is at least some of the motivation behind the demonstrations, a view shared by 79% of

### Public says both anti-police bias and desire to hold police accountable motivate protests

% saying protests of fatal police-black encounters are motivated \_\_\_ by ...

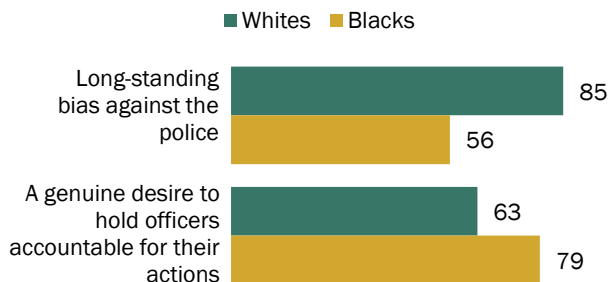


Note: No answer category not shown. NETs calculated prior to rounding.  
 Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Aug. 16-Sept. 12, 2016.  
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### Whites more likely to say anti-police bias motivating protests; more blacks say desire for accountability a reason

% of blacks and whites saying protests are motivated a great deal/some by ...



Note: Whites and blacks include only non-Hispanics.  
 Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Aug. 16-Sept. 12, 2016.  
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blacks but 63% of whites. Blacks also are about twice as likely as whites to attribute a great deal of the motivation for the demonstrations to the desire to hold officers accountable (55% vs. 27%).

### **Majority say body cameras will make police act more responsibly**

Overall, about nine-in-ten Americans (93%) favor the use of body cameras by police so officers can record their interactions with citizens, including 95% of whites, 93% of Hispanics and 85% of blacks.

A smaller but still substantial majority also believe that body cams would make officers act more appropriately (66%), while 27% say it would make no difference and 6% say the cameras would cause officers to act less responsibly. Majorities of whites (67%) and blacks (60%) say the cameras would prompt more appropriate behavior from officers, a view shared by about three-quarters (74%) of all Hispanics.

## Acknowledgments

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## Methodology

The American Trends Panel (ATP), created by the Pew Research Center, is a nationally representative panel of randomly selected U.S. adults living in households. Respondents who self-identify as internet users and who provided an email address participate in the panel via monthly self-administered web surveys, and those who do not use the internet or decline to provide an email address participate via the mail. The panel is being managed by Abt SRBI.

Data in this report are drawn from the August wave of the panel, conducted Aug. 16-Sept. 12, 2016 among 4,538 respondents (4,195 by web and 343 by mail). The margin of sampling error for the full sample of 4,538 respondents is plus or minus 2.4 percentage points.

Members of the American Trends Panel were recruited from two large, national landline and cellphone random-digit-dial (RDD) surveys conducted in English and Spanish. At the end of each survey, respondents were invited to join the panel. The first group of panelists was recruited from the 2014 Political Polarization and Typology Survey, conducted Jan. 23 to March 16, 2014. Of the 10,013 adults interviewed, 9,809 were invited to take part in the panel and a total of 5,338 agreed to participate.<sup>4</sup> The second group of panelists was recruited from the 2015 Survey on Government, conducted Aug. 27 to Oct. 4, 2015. Of the 6,004 adults interviewed, all were invited to join the panel, and 2,976 agreed to participate.<sup>5</sup>

Participating panelists provided either a mailing address or an email address to which a welcome packet, a monetary incentive and future survey invitations could be sent. Panelists also receive a small monetary incentive after participating in each wave of the survey.

The ATP data were weighted in a multi-step process that begins with a base weight incorporating the respondents' original survey selection probability and the fact that in 2014 some panelists were subsampled for invitation to the panel. Next, an adjustment was made for the fact that the propensity to join the panel and remain an active panelist varied across different groups in the sample. The final step in the weighting uses an iterative technique that matches gender, age, education, race, Hispanic origin and region to parameters from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2014 American Community Survey. Population density is weighted to match the 2010 U.S. decennial census. Telephone service is weighted to estimates of telephone coverage for 2016 that were

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<sup>4</sup> When data collection for the 2014 Political Polarization and Typology Survey began, non-internet users were subsampled at a rate of 25%, but a decision was made shortly thereafter to invite all non-internet users to join. In total, 83% of non-internet users were invited to join the panel.

<sup>5</sup> Respondents to the 2014 Political Polarization and Typology Survey who indicated that they are internet users but refused to provide an email address were initially permitted to participate in the American Trends Panel by mail, but were no longer permitted to join the panel after February 6, 2014. Internet users from the 2015 Survey on Government who refused to provide an email address were not permitted to join the panel.

projected from the July-December 2015 National Health Interview Survey. Volunteerism is weighted to match the 2013 Current Population Survey Volunteer Supplement. It also adjusts for party affiliation using an average of the three most recent Pew Research Center general public telephone surveys. Internet access is adjusted using a measure from the 2015 Survey on Government. Frequency of internet use is weighted to an estimate of daily internet use projected to 2016 from the 2013 Current Population Survey Computer and Internet Use Supplement. Sampling errors and statistical tests of significance take into account the effect of weighting. Interviews are conducted in both English and Spanish, but the Hispanic sample in the American Trends Panel is predominantly native born and English speaking.

The following table shows the unweighted sample sizes and the error attributable to sampling that would be expected at the 95% level of confidence for different groups in the survey:

<b>Group</b>	<b>Unweighted sample size</b>	<b>Plus or minus ...</b>
Total sample	4,538	2.4 percentage points
Whites	3,485	2.8
Blacks	383	7.4
Hispanics	350	7.4
Form 1	2,255	3.3
Form 2	2,283	3.4

Sample sizes and sampling errors for other subgroups are available upon request.

In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

The web component of the August wave had a response rate of 81% (4,195 responses among 5,150 web-based individuals in the panel); the mail component had a response rate of 76% (343 responses among 454 non-web individuals in the panel). Taking account of the combined, weighted response rate for the recruitment surveys (10.0%) and attrition from panel members who were removed at their request or for inactivity, the cumulative response rate for the August ATP wave is 2.9%<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> Approximately once per year, panelists who have not participated in multiple consecutive waves are removed from the panel. These cases are counted in the denominator of cumulative response rates.

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