

2018 NATIONAL POLICE EXECUTIVE SURVEY

Summary of Results



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Acknowledgments

We would like to thank each of the anonymous respondents who took time from their busy schedules to participate in our survey. Participation in surveys such as this one is critical to helping us to better understand law enforcement executives' attitudes and beliefs regarding a wide variety of topics.

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Introduction

In recent years, law enforcement in the United States has faced immense scrutiny. Amidst this climate, it is imperative to understand how this scrutiny has affected officers and what might be done to improve police/community relationships. In an effort to shed light on law enforcement attitudes and feelings regarding a variety of contemporary issues, we administered a survey to law enforcement executives throughout the United States. This report provides a summary of our methodology and results.

Methodology

Municipal police executives from across the country were invited to participate in this survey. In total, 2,496 police chiefs were randomly selected from the National Directory of Law Enforcement Administrators. These individuals received our survey in the mail and were also given the option to complete it online. We received 673 completed surveys – a response rate of 27%. Of these, 479 were the chief executive of their agency. All results presented herein pertain strictly to these 479 chief executives (full sample results for any question are available upon request).

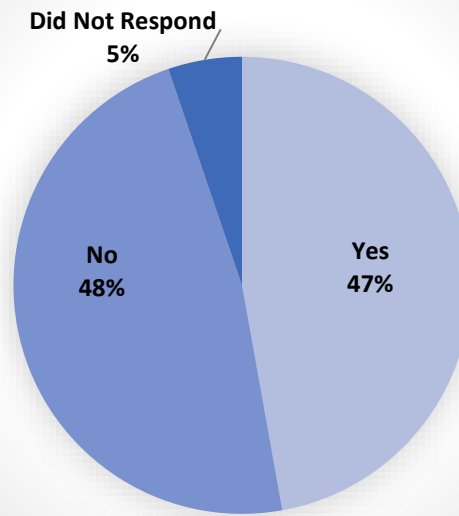
Results

Sample Characteristics

Approximately 21% of our sample represented the Northeast, 35% were from the Midwest, 26% were from the South, and 17% represented the West.¹ We asked respondents a series of demographic questions to ensure our sample represented a diverse cross-section of the law enforcement executives across the country. Approximately 90% self-identified as male, 4% as female, and 6% chose not to disclose their gender. Eighty-five percent were white, while 8% were nonwhite, and 7% elected not to answer. Respondents ranged from 30 to 78 in age, with an average age of 54. In terms of years of experience, the chiefs ranged from three to 50 years, with an average of 30 years. Three percent of the sample had a high school degree, 10% had some college, 9% had a technical or associate degree, 29% had a four-year college degree, and 38% had a master's, law, or other graduate degree (e.g., Ph.D.). Twelve percent of the sample did not disclose their highest level of education. Forty-five percent responded that their department currently has a body worn camera program, 46% responded that they do not, and 5% did not provide a response (see Figure 1).

¹ We defined regions in the same way as the FBI's Uniform Crime Report: *Northeast*- Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania; *Midwest*- Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, Wisconsin, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota; *South*- Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia, Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi, Tennessee, Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Texas; and *West*- Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, Wyoming, Alaska, California, Hawaii, Oregon, and Washington.

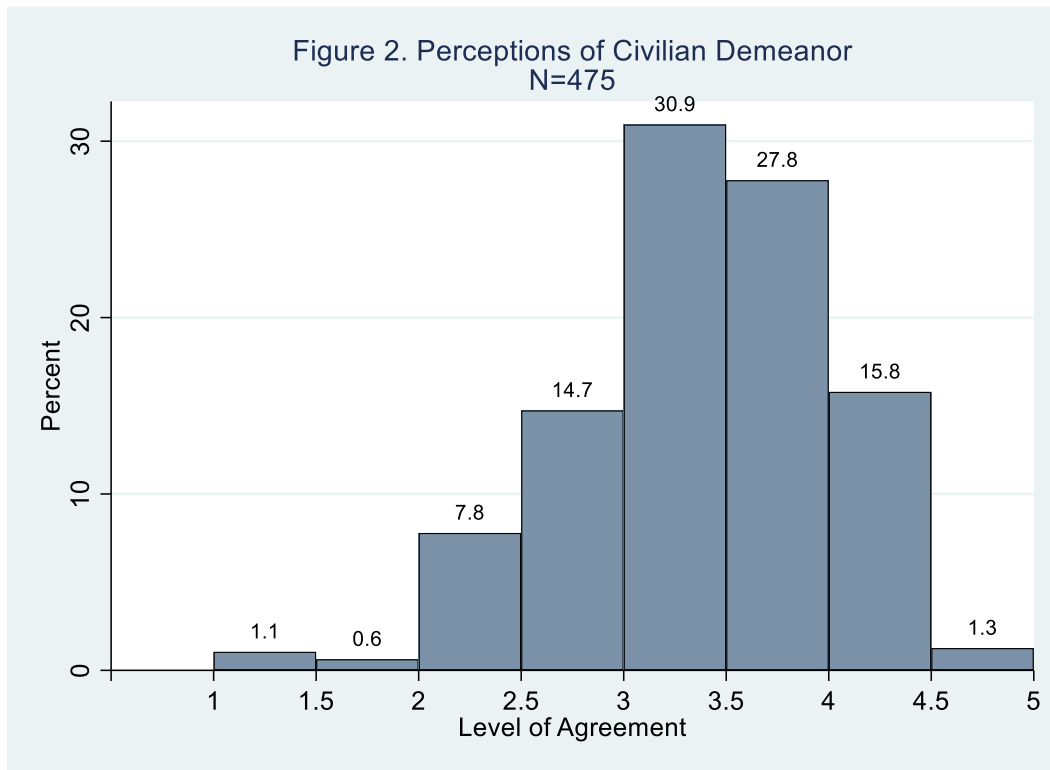
Figure 1. Body Worn Camera Use



Perceptions of Civilian Demeanor

The first section of the survey asked respondents questions regarding civilian demeanor toward the police. Respondents were asked about the level of politeness and respect civilians display toward the police, whether they allow officers to explain a situation before jumping to conclusions, and whether they treat police officers fairly (Pickett & Bontrager-Ryon, 2017). See Appendix for a complete list of survey questions. They were asked to report their level of agreement (*1=strongly agree, 2=agree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4=disagree, or 5=strongly disagree*) with each statement. We created an index – which we refer to as “procedurally just cooperation by civilians” – by averaging respondents’ level of agreement across each of these statements. Prior to averaging, each statement was coded so that higher scores reflected greater agreement that civilians tend to be fair and cooperative with police officers. Figure 2 provides the results of this index. The distribution of scores in the index are

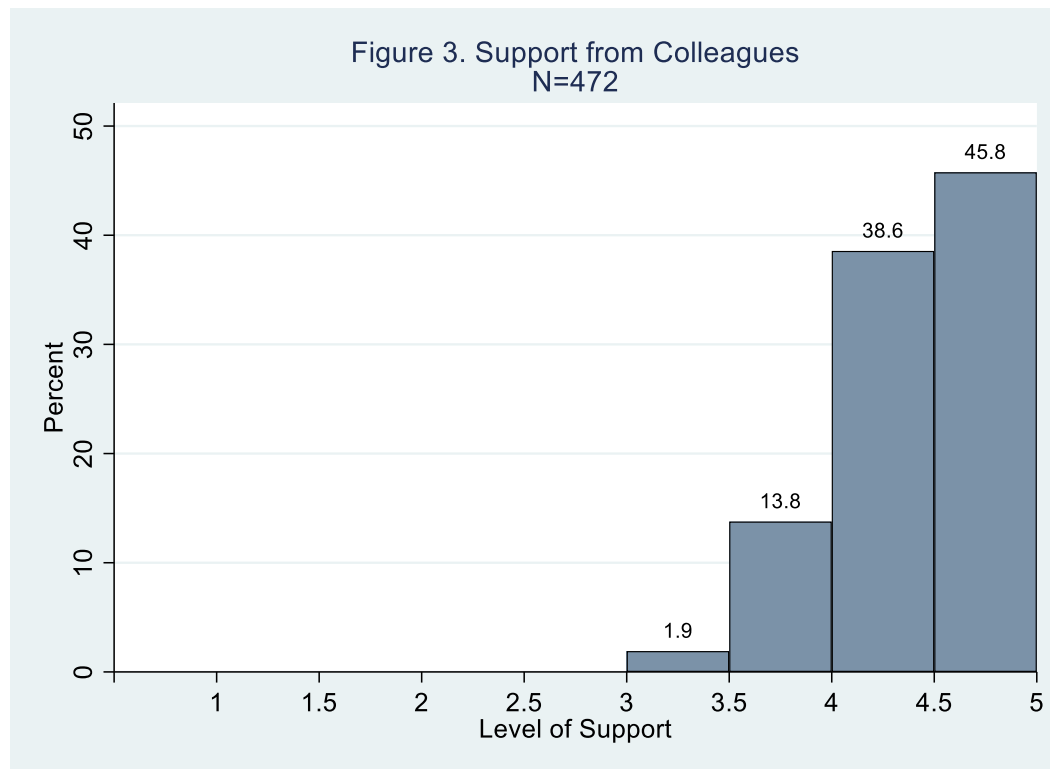
clustered near the middle of Figure 1 with a mean of 3.35. This indicates that respondents tend to believe that civilians are generally respectful and cooperative when dealing with the police.



Support from Colleagues

For the next part of the survey, we asked respondents about their relationship with other officers in their department. Respondents were asked about their perceptions of the level of trust and respect that other officers display toward them, and whether their views align with other officers' in the department. We asked respondents to report their level of agreement (*1=strongly agree, 2=agree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4=disagree, or 5=strongly disagree*) with each. We created an index, which we call "perceived support from colleagues" by averaging the officers' responses to these questions. The mean of the index is 4.34, and it ranges from 3 to 5.

This demonstrates that respondents largely feel supported by their colleagues and they tend to agree that they have a good working relationship and level of trust with the officers under their command.



Support from Community Representatives

Next we asked respondents questions regarding how often they feel that they have the support of various community representatives, including the mayor, city council, the courts, and local prosecutors. Respondents were asked to indicate how often they receive support (*1=never*, *2=rarely*, *3=sometimes*, *4=often*, or *5=always*) from each member or group listed in Table 1. In each case, well over half of respondents feel that they often or always receive support from their community representatives. However, the sample indicated feeling supported less often by the courts and local prosecutors.

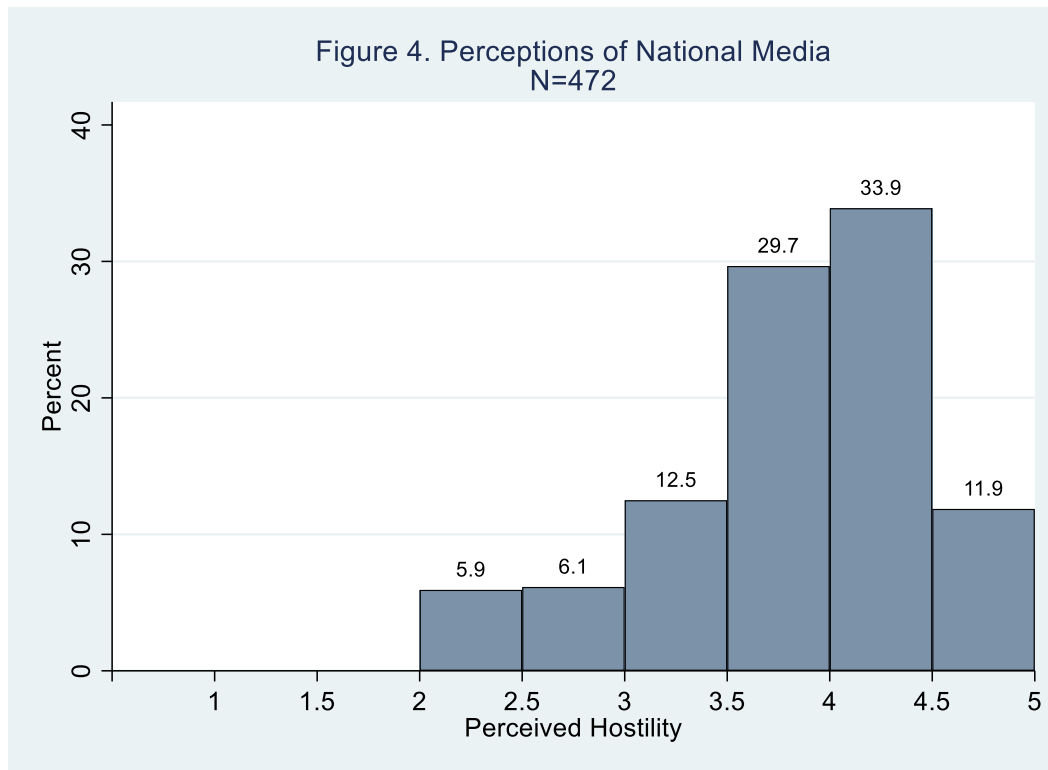
Table 1. Perceived Level of Support from Community Representatives.

Community Representative	N	R	S	O	A	DNR	Total
The Mayor	.42%	2.09%	5.01%	36.95%	47.81%	7.72%	100.0%
City Council	.42%	1.46%	8.56%	52.82%	34.86%	1.88%	100.0%
The Courts	.00%	5.22%	26.30%	50.94%	15.66%	1.88%	100.0%
Local Prosecutors	.00%	3.76%	15.24%	54.49%	24.84%	1.86%	100.0%

NOTES: N = Never, R = Rarely, S = Sometimes, O = Often, A = Always, DNR = Did Not Respond. Rows may not sum to exactly 100% due to rounding.

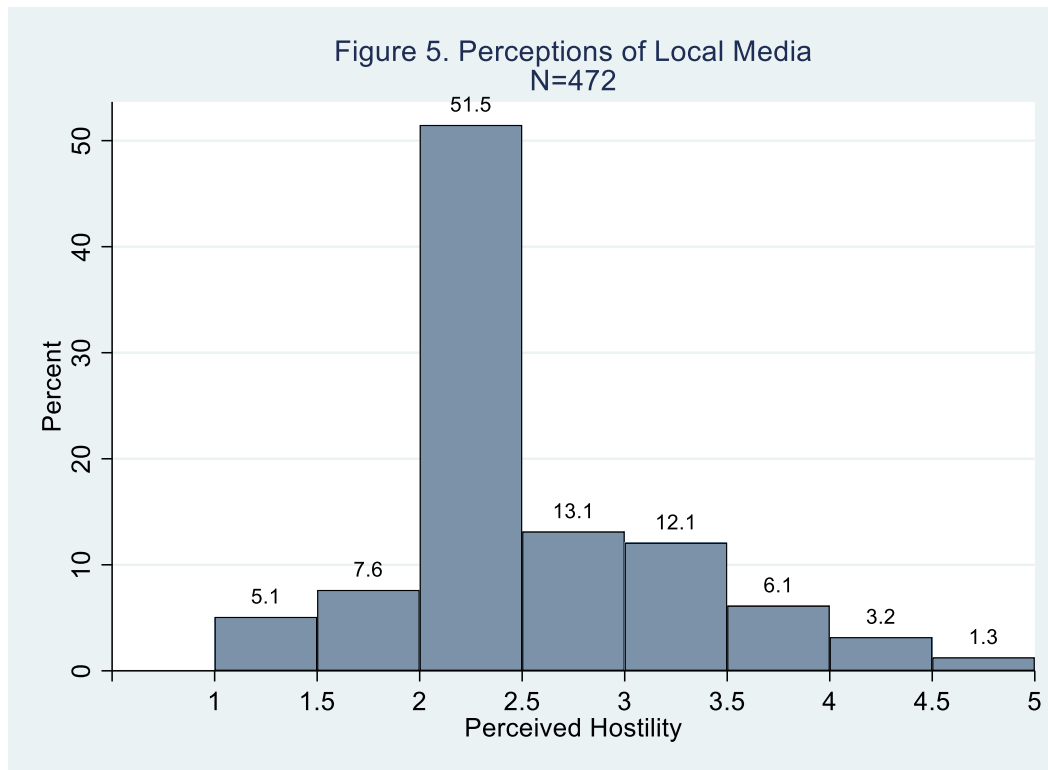
Perceptions of the National Media

Research suggests that news coverage of law enforcement can have an effect on officers' attitudes towards civilians (Nix & Pickett, 2017) and the confidence they have in their authority (Nix & Wolfe, 2017.) We asked law enforcement executives to provide their feelings regarding national media coverage. Respondents were asked how positive, fair, reliable, and truthful they perceived national media coverage of law enforcement. We averaged respondents' level of agreement with these statements and created an index – which we refer to as “perceived portrayal of law enforcement by the national media.” Figure 4 provides a breakdown of the index. Higher scores represent greater perceived hostility. The mean is 3.69 and the range is 2 to 5. In general, respondents feel that the national media casts an unfavorable light on law enforcement.



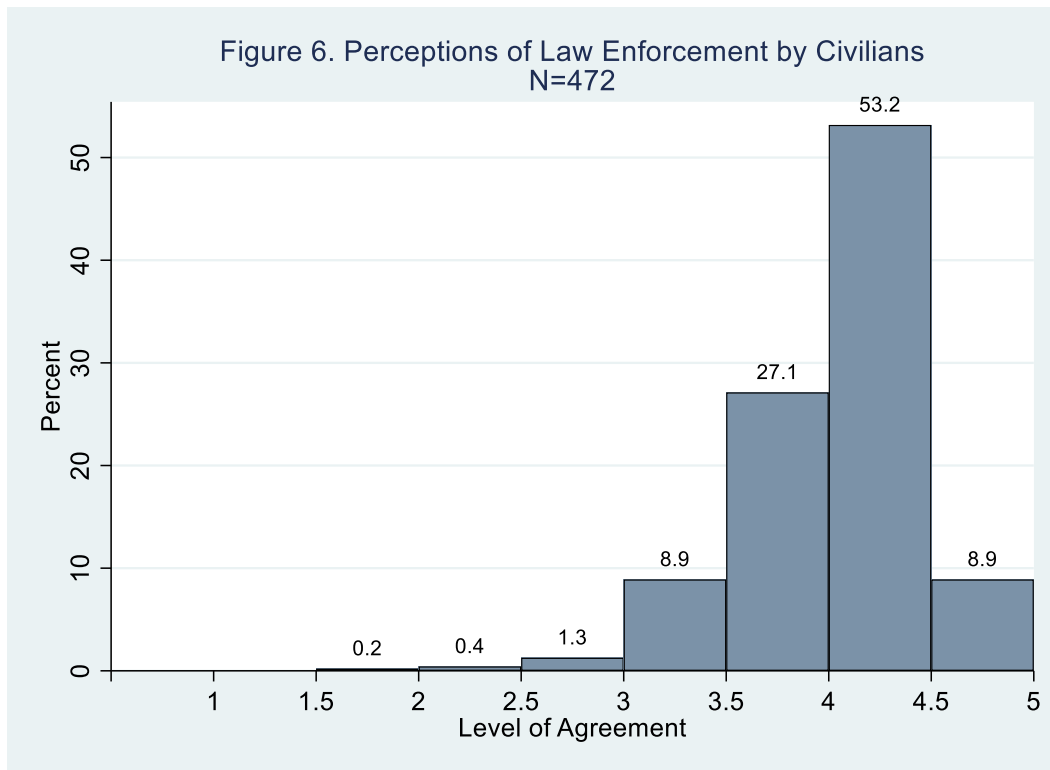
Perceptions of Local Media

Using the same outcomes as perceptions of the national media, we asked respondents about their perceptions of *local* media. We expected local media coverage to be more consequential to officers than national media, given their focus on stories closer to home, and because agencies tend to have stronger relationships with local outlets (Chermak & Weiss, 2005; Surrrette, 2001). Generally, respondents believed that US law enforcement is treated with more hostility by the national media than by local media. We repeated the steps followed in the national media analysis and created an index called “perceived portrayal of law enforcement by local media.” For this index, the mean was 2.36. The distribution of responses is provided in Figure 5.



Perceptions of Law Enforcement by Civilians

This section dealt with the way in which respondents believe law enforcement is perceived by civilians. Studies have shown that when civilians believe the police are a legitimate authority, they are more likely to cooperate with officers (Tyler, 2006; Tyler & Huo, 2002). In addition to questions about alignment with values, we asked respondents the extent that civilians believe that law enforcement is fair, corrupt, respectful, and biased (Tankebe, 2013). We averaged respondents' answers across these questions to create an index – which we refer to as “perceptions of law enforcement by civilians” – whereby higher scores reflect positive perception by civilians. Figure 6 shows the distribution of scores on the index. The distribution of scores, with a mean of 3.96, indicates that police chiefs feel most citizens tend to have a favorable view of their departments.



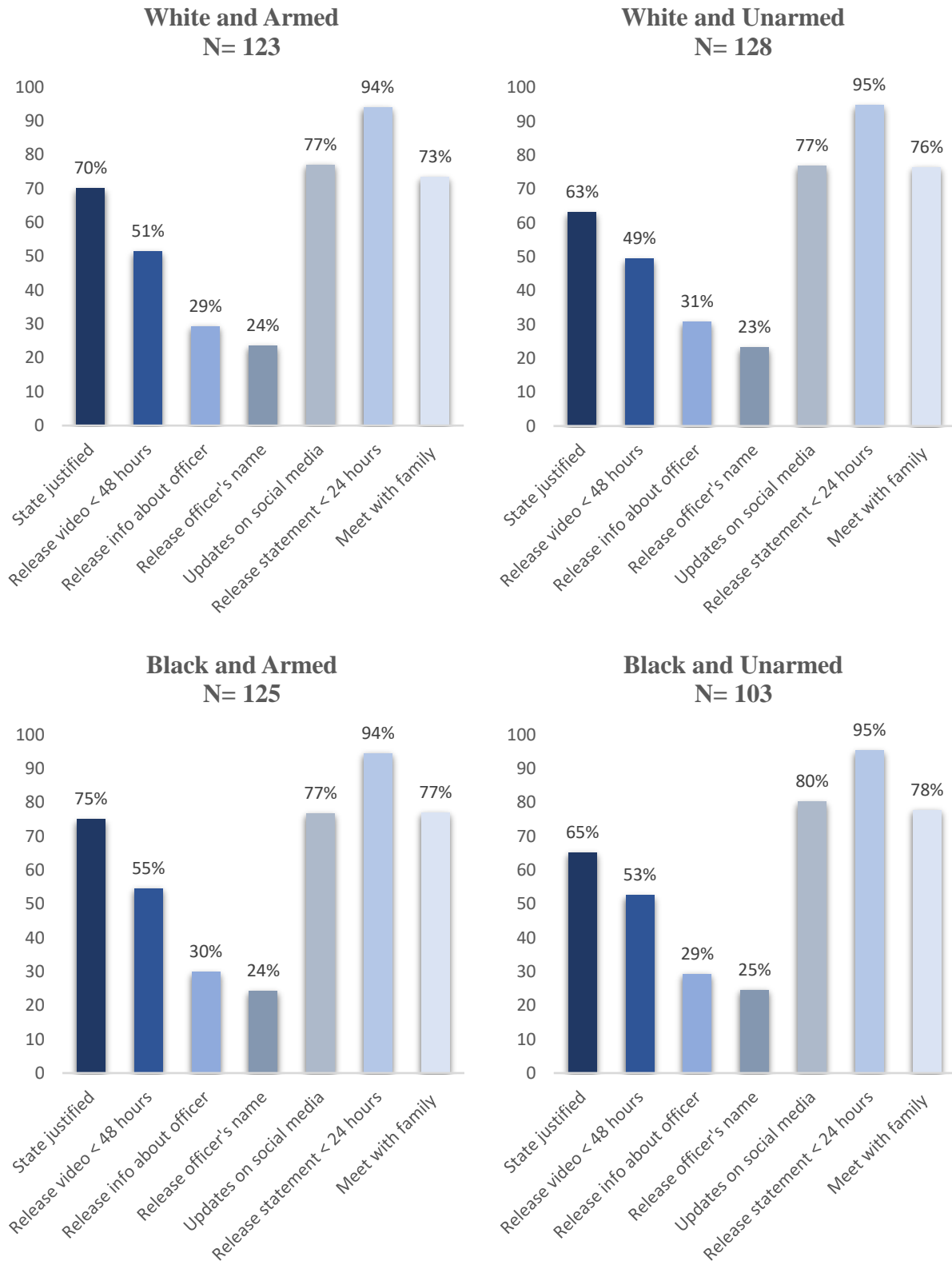
Hypothetical Officer-Involved Shooting

We next presented respondents with a hypothetical scenario in which an officer under their command arrived on scene of a home invasion in progress. During the incident, the officer shot a suspect as he placed his hands into his pocket and removed an object. Respondents were randomly assigned to one of four groups whereby the suspect in the scenario was: white and removing a gun, white and removing a cellphone, black and removing a gun, or black and removing a cellphone. All respondents (regardless of which group they were in) were informed that the officer was wearing a body-worn camera that captured full audio and video of the shooting.

Respondents were then presented with the seven statements in Figure 7 and asked how important each of several actions in the aftermath of the shooting would be. Each bar in the

figure displays the percentage of the sample who responded an action would be either “important” or “very important.” Notably, there was not a great deal of variation in responses across the randomly assigned groups. In other words, neither the suspect’s race nor the object he ultimately reached for (i.e., gun or cellphone) influenced the importance chiefs placed on each course of action. Sixty to 70% said it would be important to state that the shooting was justified. Roughly half of the sample felt it would be important to release the video footage to the public within 48 hours. Only about 3 in 10 respondents said it would be important to release the officer’s name or demographic information. Finally, the overwhelming majority of the sample felt it would be important to use social media to update the community about the shooting as details became available, to release a public statement within 24 hours, and to meet with the family of the deceased.

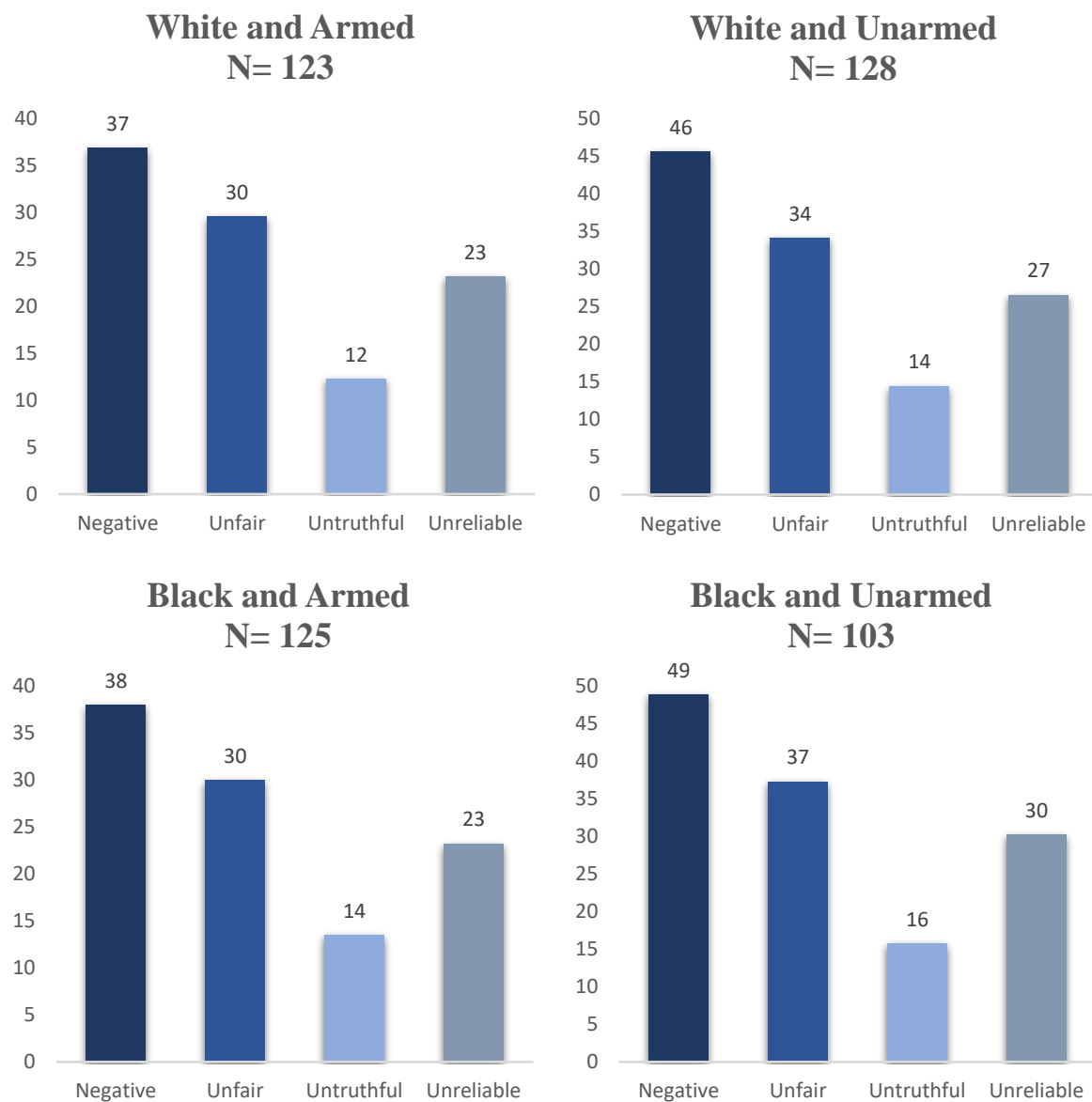
Figure 7. Hypothetical Officer-Involved Shooting



Perceptions of Media Coverage of the Shooting

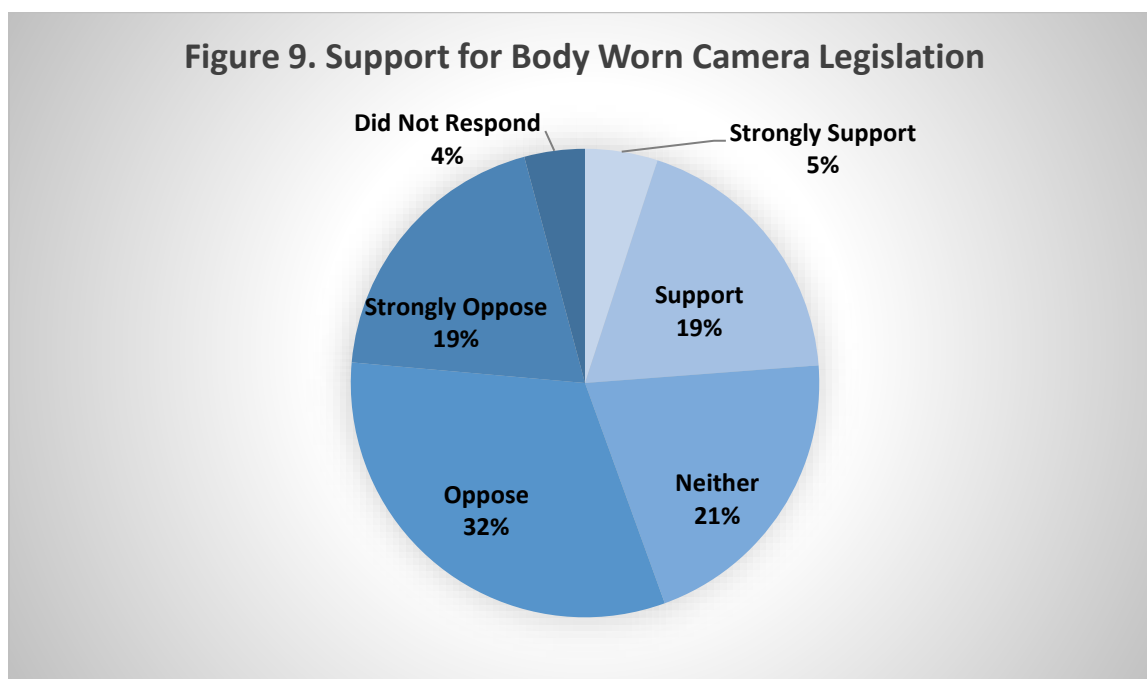
Following the hypothetical scenario, respondents were asked about how they believed the media would cover the shooting. Each of the metrics is included in Figure 8 along with a breakdown of responses. In each case, respondents believe that the media would exhibit harsher treatment towards shootings of unarmed citizens.

Figure 8. Perceptions of Media Coverage of the Shooting



Support for Body Worn Camera Legislation

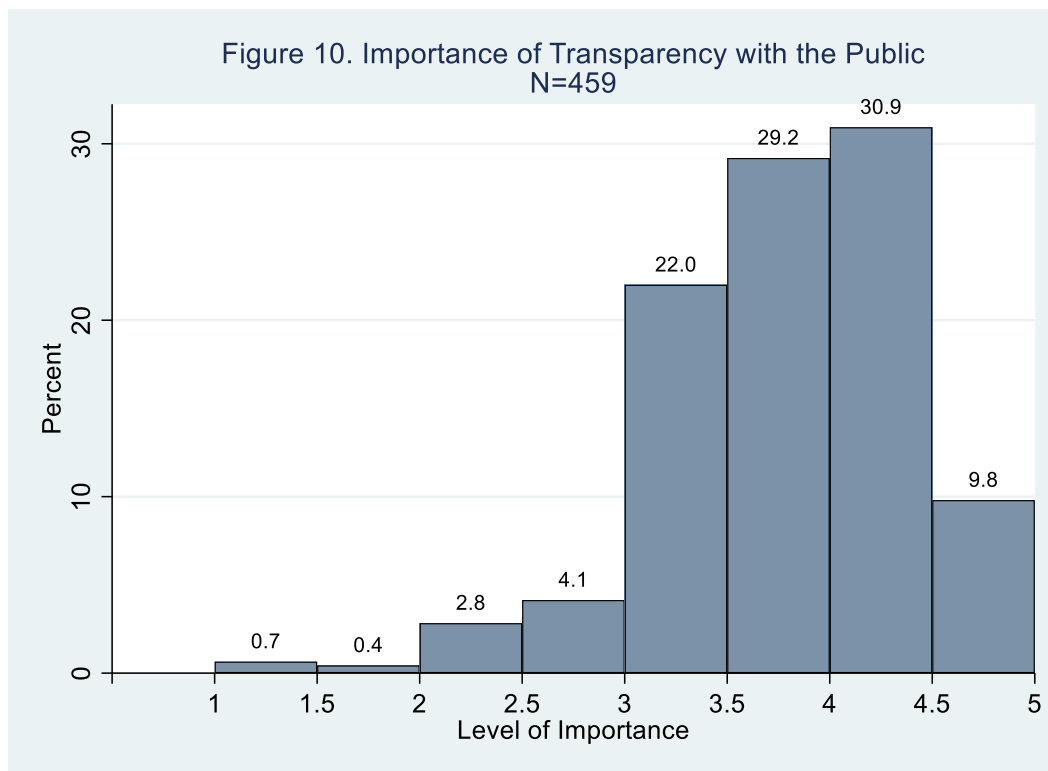
Respondents were asked about the extent to which they supported legislation requiring agencies to release body-worn camera footage upon request as public information. Choices included *1=strongly support*, *2=support*, *3=neither support nor oppose*, *4=oppose*, *5=strongly oppose*. Responses are provided in Figure 9. Almost half of respondents support or strongly support such legislation.



Importance of Transparency with the Public

In this section, respondents were asked how important they believe it is to provide information to the public about various situations. In 2015, the Presidential Task Force on 21st Century Policing made several recommendations about how agencies should enhance public transparency. Specifically, respondents were asked about ongoing investigations, changes in

tactics, non-deadly and deadly force incidents, and credible allegations of misconduct. Answer choices included the following: *1=very unimportant, 2=unimportant, 3=neutral, 4=important, 5= important*. Responses are reported in Figure 10. The distribution of scores, with a mean of 3.74, indicates that police chiefs in the sample have generally positive views toward being transparent with the public.

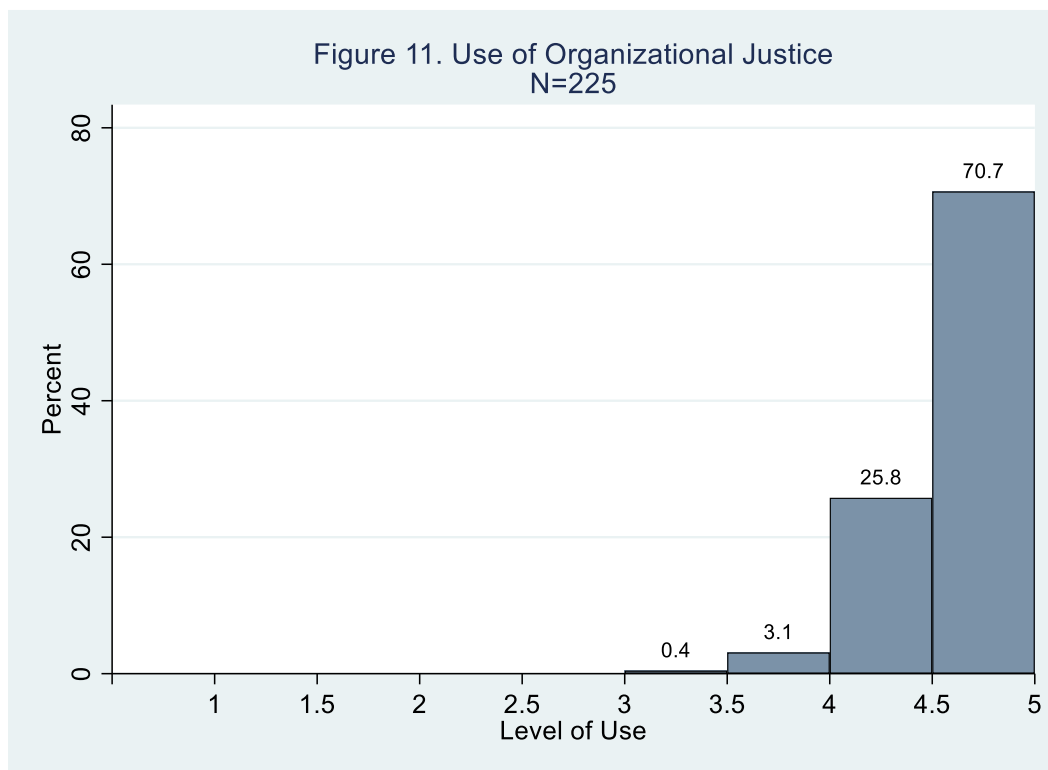


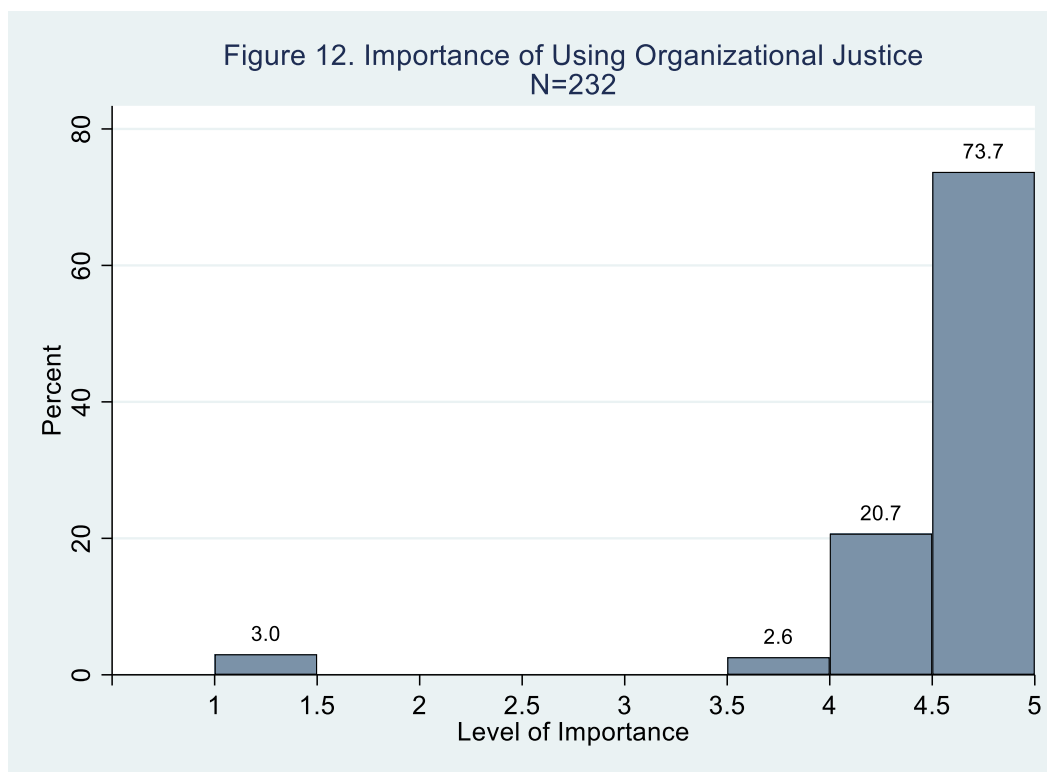
Views on Organizational Justice

Officers who feel they are treated fairly by their supervisors tend to have more confidence in their authority (Bradford & Quinton, 2014) and trust in their agency (Wolfe & Nix, 2017). Indeed, research shows that officers value having a voice in the decision-making process, and being given clear explanations why decisions are made (Trinkner, Tyler, & Goff, 2016).

When officers believe they are treated fairly by their agency, they are more likely to comply with

procedures (Tyler et al., 2007) and less likely to engage in misconduct (Wolfe & Piquero, 2011). Thus, it is essential for police chiefs to treat their employees fairly and with respect. For this section, respondents were randomly assigned into two evenly distributed groups. The first group was asked about *how often they used* organizational justice within their department. The second group was asked *how important they believe it is to use* organizational justice outcomes within their department. The first group were presented with the following choices: *1=never, 2=rarely, 3=sometimes, 4=often, 5=always*; while the latter group received: *1=very unimportant, 2=unimportant, 3=neutral, 4=important, 5= important*. Responses are reported in Figures 11 and 12. The mean of Figure 11 is 4.55 and the range is three to five. The mean of Figure 12 is 4.54. The takeaway is that chiefs in our sample feel it is important to exercise organizational justice, and believe they do so upon reflecting on their management style.

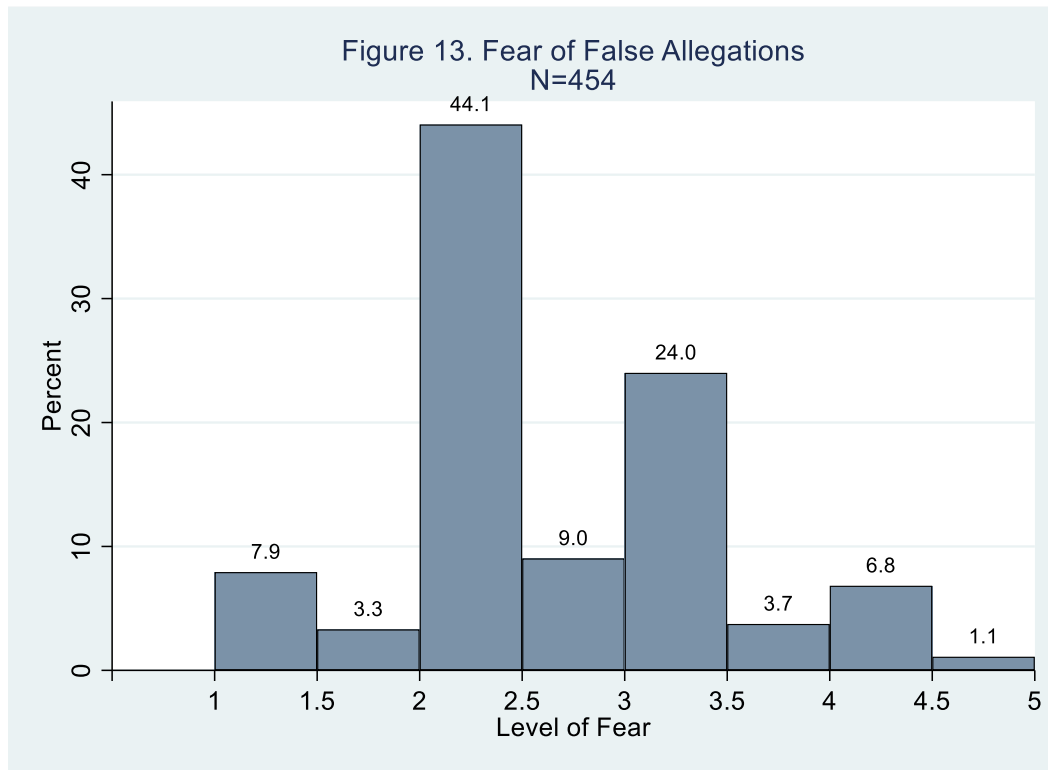




Fear of False Allegations

The “Ferguson Effect” suggests that law enforcement officers may have become more fearful of being accused of misconduct, which could cause them to avoid proactive policing (Nix & Pickett, 2017.) Similarly, police chiefs may fear the fallout of a false accusation against one of their officers. Respondents were asked several questions about their level of fear of false allegations. The false allegations included an officer being accused of misconduct, illegal searches and seizures, discrimination, and excessive force. One question also asked whether respondents feared a media entity negatively portraying their agency in a news story. For the most part, respondents indicated that they were not afraid of false allegations. However, respondents did appear to be afraid of negative media coverage. We averaged respondents’

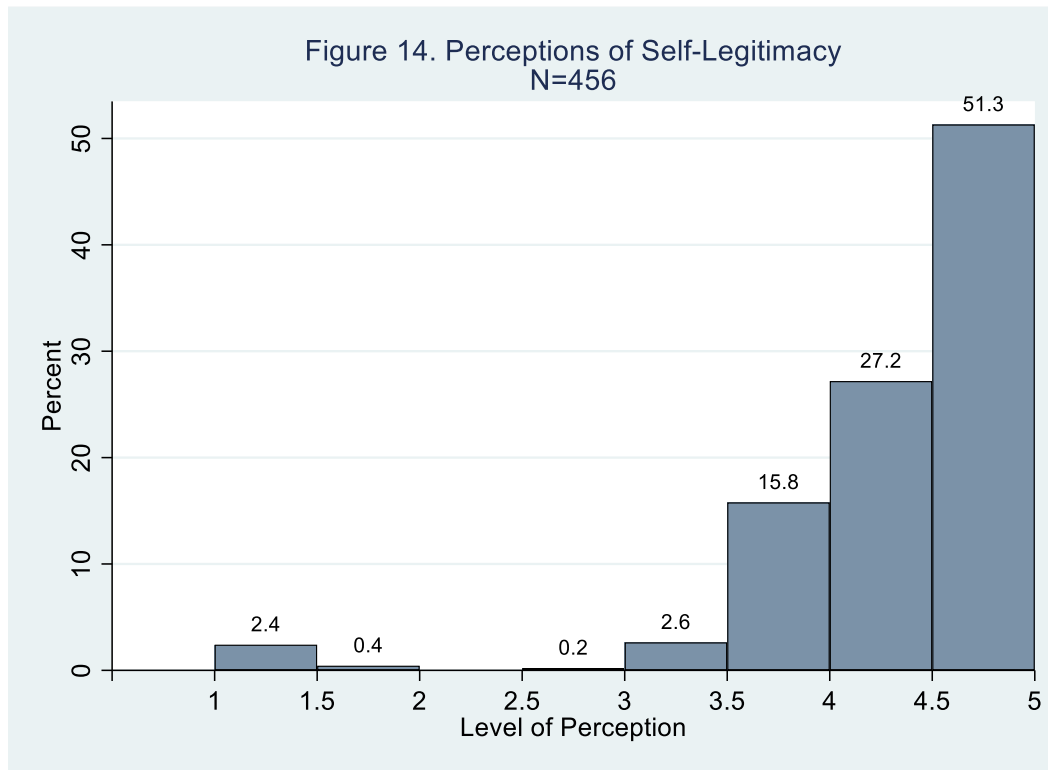
answers across each of these five questions to create an index – “fear of false allegations” – whereby higher scores reflect greater fear. The mean is 2.56.



Perceptions of Self-Legitimacy

This section posed questions regarding the ways in which respondents view their role as a law enforcement officer. Research demonstrates that a higher level of self-legitimacy is correlated with officers’ commitment to due process (Bradford & Quinton, 2014) and a willingness to collaborate with the community to solve problems (Wolfe & Nix, 2016). Respondents were asked to indicate whether they believe they represent community and department values, their level of confidence in their performance of their duties, and whether they felt that law enforcement could provide security for their community. Choices included *1=strongly agree, 2=agree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4=disagree, 5=strongly disagree*.

Figure 14 provides an index of responses and has a mean of 4.29. The vast majority of our sample, then, expressed high levels of self-legitimacy.



Perceptions of How People Generally Treat Each Other

A recent study suggests the extent citizens believe *most people* treat each other fairly predicts the extent they believe *police officers* treat people fairly (Pickett, Nix, & Roche, 2018). For our study, we were interested in the extent that police chiefs believe most people treat others fairly. Respondents were asked a series of questions about civilians' interactions with other civilians. Examples include whether most people: treat each other with respect and fairness, are polite, show concern for others, and how people will react when in conflict. Answer choices included 1=*strongly agree*, 2=*agree*, 3=*neither agree nor disagree*, 4=*disagree*, 5=*strongly*

disagree. We created an index, referred to as “relational justice” by averaging level of agreement with the above statements. Figure 15 provides a breakdown of the index and has a mean of 3.30.



Conclusion

We are encouraged by many of our findings. Despite perceptions of hostile treatment by the media after a deadly force incident, the chiefs in our sample appeared to value openness and transparency with the public following the incident. In addition, chiefs also feel that citizens display a good demeanor and that they have the support of officers under their command. Despite their fear of false allegations, they reported having high levels of self-legitimacy. Finally, chiefs in our survey felt that it was important to use organizational justice within their agencies.

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Appendix 1. Breakdown of Responses for the Dependent and Independent Variables

Variable	%SD	%D	%N	%A	%SA
<i>Perceptions of Civilian Demeanor</i>					
People often disrespect the police.	7.98	47.44	18.95	17.52	2.42
People are normally polite when dealing with the police	.43	4.42	13.68	68.66	6.84
People treat police officers with dignity	.71	7.12	26.21	55.70	4.56
People treat the police worse than they treat other government employees.	1.42	33.33	26.92	26.92	5.84
People treat police officers unfairly.	1.57	38.60	21.63	21.37	2.85
People normally listen to the police before jumping to conclusions in incidents.	5.41	31.48	23.50	33.48	.57
People will ignore or walk away from the police when officers try to explain a situation.	4.56	55.41	21.08	12.39	1.14

Note: SD = Strongly Disagree, D = Disagree, N= Neutral, A= Agree, SA = Strongly Agree.

<i>Support from Colleagues</i>	%SD	%D	%N	%A	%SA
I have a good working relationship with the officers in my department.	.00	.14	.85	48.29	44.87
I feel that officers in this department trust me.	.00	.28	2.99	52.14	38.75
I feel supported by the officers in my department.	.00	.28	4.84	52.99	36.04
Officers in this department treat me with respect.	.00	.14	1.00	45.16	47.58
My views about what is right and wrong in police work are similar to the views of other officers in the department.	.00	1.71	10.68	58.83	22.65
Other officers in the department come to me for advice.	.00	.57	7.12	58.55	27.78

Note: SD = Strongly Disagree, D = Disagree, N= Neutral, A= Agree, SA = Strongly Agree.

<i>Perceptions of Law Enforcement by Civilians</i>	%SD	%D	%N	%A	%SA
Most residents believe the police...					
...Are corrupt	38.32	50.43	2.71	2.42	.00
...Use rules and procedures that are fair to everyone.	1.28	7.41	15.53	63.96	5.56
...Clearly explain the reasons for their actions.	.28	4.99	23.79	.6154	3.13
...Treat people with respect.	.28	1.71	8.40	71.51	11.82
...Are biased against them.	13.39	60.83	13.25	5.70	.57
...Do a good job tackling crime in the community.	.28	1.99	9.12	67.09	15.38
...Represent their values.	.14	1.57	6.10	66.81	9.12

Note: SD = Strongly Disagree, D = Disagree, N= Neutral, A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree.

<i>Importance of Transparency with the Public</i>	%VU	%U	%N	%I	%VI
How important or unimportant do you think it is for police departments to provide information to the public about each of the following?					
Ongoing police investigations	3.70	10.11	22.22	48.15	7.55
Changes in policing style or tactics	3.99	12.39	24.79	40.17	10.54
Situations where officers use non-deadly force	2.99	15.38	25.36	38.46	9.40
Situations where officers use deadly force	1.14	.85	3.99	41.60	44.44
Credible allegations of misconduct against officers	.57	2.85	13.82	48.58	26.07

Note: VU = Very Unimportant, U = Unimportant, N= Neutral, I = Important, VI = Very Important.

<i>Views on Organizational Justice</i>	%N	%R	%S	%O	%A
How important or important is it that you:					
Consider your employees' viewpoints?	1.46	.00	2.92	52.61	38.41
Treat employees with kindness and consideration?	1.46	.00	.63	25.26	68.06
Clearly explain the reasons for your decisions?	1.46	.42	4.80	45.09	43.63
Clearly explain the reasons your agency makes policy changes?	1.46	.42	3.97	40.71	48.85
Treat employees with respect?	1.46	.00	.00	15.24	78.50
Make decisions that have the agency's best interest in mind?	1.46	.21	.42	41.61	78.29

Notes: N = Never, R = Rarely, S= Sometimes, Often = Often, A = Always.

This table represents the mean of all responses to these questions regardless of the version that the respondent received.

<i>Fear of False Allegations</i>	%VA	%A	%N	%U	%VU
How afraid or unafraid are you of each of the following happening?					
Someone falsely claiming an officer under your command committed misconduct	1.14	9.83	26.21	43.87	9.97
Someone falsely claiming that an officer under your command illegally stopped or searched them	.71	8.69	24.36	47.15	10.11
The media negatively portraying your agency in a news story	4.42	24.93	31.62	26.07	3.99
Someone falsely claiming that an officer under your command discriminated against them	1.71	12.25	24.93	43.73	8.26
Someone falsely claiming that an officer under your command used excessive force	1.99	10.54	27.49	43.45	7.41

Note: VA = Very Afraid, A = Afraid, N= Neutral, U = Unafraid, VU = Very Unafraid.

<i>Perceptions of Self-Legitimacy</i>	%SD	%D	%N	%A	%SA
I feel that I represent the values of my local community.	2.14	.14	1.99	37.18	49.86
The authority I have as an officer of my rank is morally right.	1.99	.57	10.83	37.04	40.17
I am sure I can give a good reason to members of the public as to why my authority is morally proper.	1.99	.57	11.11	41.74	35.19
I feel that I represent the values of my department.	2.28	.00	.00	32.62	56.55
As an officer of my rank, I believe I occupy a position of special importance in society.	3.70	6.13	14.67	31.91	34.90
I have confidence in the authority vested in me as an officer of my rank.	2.14	.14	2.56	34.62	51.42
I am confident I have enough authority to do my job well.	2.14	.71	3.42	36.47	48.43
I believe law enforcement is capable of providing security for all citizens in the community.	3.56	9.40	12.68	37.75	28.06

Note: SD = Strongly Disagree, D = Disagree, N= Neutral, A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree.

<i>Perceptions of How People Generally Treat Each Other</i>	%SD	%D	%N	%A	%SA
Most people treat other people with dignity and respect.	.57	12.25	14.96	59.40	3.42
Most people are polite when dealing with others.	.43	7.83	20.80	58.69	2.85
Most people show concern for other people's rights.	.85	14.10	19.80	53.56	2.28
Most people treat other people fairly.	.14	8.83	19.94	58.83	2.85
Most people treat other people equally, regardless of their race, gender, or sexuality.	2.42	15.38	21.51	48.29	2.71
In a dispute or argument, most people will give the other person the opportunity to express his or her views before making decisions.	4.99	34.76	30.34	18.95	1.42
In a dispute or argument, most people will listen to the other person.	4.13	35.61	31.62	17.66	1.42
In most cases, people will try to explain the reasons for their actions if they do something that upsets someone else.	1.71	17.52	21.94	47.44	1.85

Note: SD = Strongly Disagree, D = Disagree, N= Neutral, A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree.

N= 479

Note: Rows may not sum to exactly 100% due to rounding.



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