



# FORCE SCIENCE<sup>®</sup> NEWS

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## In This Edition:

How typical are your opinions and actions on the job compared to other American LEOs?

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## Are you a typical US cop? Measure against 8,000 of your peers

- Do you believe that protests over officers shooting blacks are motivated primarily by anti-police bias?
- In light of recent high-profile incidents, are you more reluctant to use appropriate force or to stop and question people who seem suspicious?
- Do you agree that in certain areas of your community "it is more useful for officers to be aggressive than to be courteous?"
- Does your work often make you feel angry or frustrated?
- Have you had at least four hours of scenario-based firearms training or instruction in nonlethal control methods in the last year?
- Are you confident in your department's disciplinary process, and do you find its force guidelines useful in real confrontations?
- Do residents of the areas you patrol generally share your personal values?
- Does the public really understand the risks and challenges of policing the streets?



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These are but a few of the topics explored in a new groundbreaking survey of law enforcement personnel conducted for the Pew Research Center, a nonprofit, nonpartisan “fact tank” in Washington, DC, that collects and disperses information on social issues, public opinion, and demographic trends.

In a project called “Behind the Badge,” launched by Pew some nine months ago, the experiences and opinions of a nationwide, representative sampling of nearly 8,000 officers were sought on critical issues in the post-Ferguson world of policing.

The Center offers its findings without judgment or recommendations. Its goal, according to Pew spokesmen, was simply to discover prevailing attitudes regarding recent events, key factors, and professional concerns, as revealed in “the most wide-ranging survey of police officers ever attempted.”

The actual polling was administered by the National Police Research Platform, a consortium of academics and police professionals who “seek to advance the science and practice” of US law enforcement. Through anonymous online questionnaires, the group sampled 7,917 officers from a cross-section of 43 municipal agencies and 11 sheriff’s departments with at least 100 full-time sworn LEOs.

[Click here](#) to access the full, 96-page report of findings free of charge.

Here are some of the highlights. How closely do they jibe with your views and experiences?

**PULLING BACK.** Whether working in “a quiet suburb or bustling metropolis,” more than eight in 10 officers queried say their job is harder now “as a consequence of recent high-profile fatal incidents involving blacks and police,” Pew reports. And they’re pulling back on their efforts as a result.

Over half (54%) of officers in departments with fewer than 300 sworn and 86% of those in agencies of 2,600 or more say fellow officers “have become less willing to stop and question people who seem suspicious.”

In larger departments, 85% of officers say their peers are “more reluctant to use force to control a suspect even when it is appropriate,” with six in 10 on smaller departments agreeing that’s the case.

The majority of officers (87% in the largest departments, 61% in smaller ones) say that “police interactions with blacks have become more tense.” Roughly nine out of 10 in departments of all sizes “have become more concerned about their safety,” with more than 40% feeling “serious” concern for danger “often” or “nearly always.”

**PROTESTS.** Most officers are “deeply skeptical of the motives of demonstrators” who protest police shootings, Pew reports. Over 90% believe that “long-standing bias against police” is at least “some” or “a great deal” of the motivation behind demonstrations.

The minority of officers who think protests are “sincere efforts to force police accountability” are more likely to be black, female, older, or in administrative assignments.

Over two-thirds of officers “characterize the fatal encounters that prompted the demonstrations as isolated incidents and not signs of broader problems between police and the black community,” the survey finds. “This stands in sharp contrast with the assessment of the general public.” A separate poll shows that 60% of US adults believe “these incidents are symptoms of a deeper problem.”

As to racial matters in general, “virtually all white officers (92%) but only 29% of their black colleagues say that the country has made the changes needed to assure equal rights for blacks.” More than half the white adult population as a whole agrees with the majority of black officers that “more changes are needed.”

**COMMUNITY COMPATIBILITY.** “[R]ather than viewing the neighborhoods where they work as hostile territories, about seven in 10 officers say that some or most of the residents there share their personal values and beliefs,” the Pew canvas finds. However, that leaves some 30% who don’t feel that world-view cohesion, a disconnect especially noticeable in larger departments.

A significant majority of officers (about 80%) say “they have been thanked for their service” by a civilian in the last month, but about two-thirds say they have been abused verbally in that same period. Those who’ve experienced abuse are more likely to be white, Hispanic, and/or male. Some 75% of younger officers report verbal abuse, compared to about 60% of colleagues over 44 years old.

“[P]olice and the public often see the world in very different ways,” Pew notes. “When both groups are asked whether the public

understands the risks and challenges of police work,” 83% of the public (in a separate survey) say they do, while “86% of police say they don’t—the single largest disparity measured in these surveys.”

Also the public is significantly more likely than police to favor a ban on assault-style weapons (64% vs. 32%), to want more relaxed marijuana laws (84% vs. 68%), and to support the use of body cameras (93% vs. 66%).

**USE OF FORCE.** In the month before taking the survey, a third of all officers say they “physically struggled or fought with a suspect who was resisting arrest.” White officers were significantly more likely to have had such an encounter than black officers (36% vs. 20%), as were males (35%) compared to their female counterparts (22%).

More than half the officers (56%) “agree” or “strongly agree” that in “certain areas” of their community “it is more useful for an officer to be aggressive than to be courteous.” And a substantial portion (44%) believe “some people can only be brought to reason the hard, physical way.”

On both measures, Pew finds, “a larger share of younger, less senior officers and those with less than five years of experience favor [aggressive] techniques, while proportionally fewer older, more experienced officers, or department administrators endorse them.”

Questioned about “striking the right balance between acting decisively versus taking time to assess a situation,” a thin majority (56%) say they worry more about officers on their department spending “too much time

diagnosing a situation before acting” than they do about their peers not taking enough time before making decisive moves.

Administrators and black officers, however, tend to have the reverse view. About 60% of them fear that officers will act in situations too quickly, with too little analysis.

“[R]oughly half of officers (46%) say fatal encounters between blacks and police in recent years have prompted their department to modify use-of-force policies,” Pew notes. This is especially true in larger departments, which are three times more likely to have made changes than smaller agencies.

Although nearly three-fourths of officers say their department’s UOF policies now are “about right,” about one in four think the guidelines are “too restrictive” and a relative handful (1%) would like them to become even more restrictive.

In managing real-world confrontations, about half of officers say their department’s policies are “somewhat useful,” with a third rating them “very useful.” Only 14% say they are “not too useful or not at all useful.”

When department guidelines are not followed, “police overwhelmingly say fellow officers need to step up,” Pew reports. “Fully 84% say officers should be required to intervene when they believe another officer is about to use unnecessary force.”

**TRAINING.** Departments are “not exemplary” in “training and equipping officers to do their jobs,” according to survey results. Overall, only 30-40% of officers say their agency has done “very well” in training them adequately, in “clearly communicating the responsibilities of the job,” and in

equipping them to perform successfully. Smaller agencies (1,000 officers or less) tend to be most favorably rated.

In the last 12 months, according to the survey:

- Scarcely half (53%) of officers say they have had at least four hours of scenario-based firearms decision-making training;
- Only 50% have had at least four hours of training in nonlethal methods for controlling combative or threatening subjects;
- Just 46% have had at least four hours’ training in how to deal with individuals in mental crisis, although three out of four officers consider this task “an important role for police”;
- Only 39% have received at least four hours’ training in “bias and fairness,” and 37% in “how to deal with people so they feel they have been treated fairly and respectfully”;
- And despite the public attention focused on “de-escalation,” only 44% of officers say they’ve had at least four hours’ training “in how to de-escalate a situation so it is not necessary to use force.”

**JOB EMOTIONS.** In filling their roles as protectors and enforcers, officers “experience a range of emotions on the job—often conflicting ones,” the survey shows.

Most officers (58%) say their work “often” or “nearly always” makes them feel proud, although lesser numbers (42%) say they feel “fulfilled” to the same degree. About half further acknowledge that “often” or “nearly

always” they feel “frustrated by the job,” compared to only 29% of all employed adults.

About one in five officers say their work “often makes them feel angry,” and about half say it “sometimes” makes them feel this way.”

The report points out that officers prone to anger “seem to be less connected to the citizens they serve.” Some 45% say “none” or “very few” of the people in the neighborhoods they serve share their values. Among officers who “never” or “hardly ever” feel angry, only 20% feel that disconnect.

“White officers are significantly more likely than black officers to associate negative emotions with their job,” the survey notes. More than half of white officers (54%) say the job frequently or perpetually frustrates them—13 percentage points higher than their black peers.

“Exposure to the dark side of life, coupled with the stress that officers encounter working in high-pressure situations or with hostile individuals, means that many officers may pay an emotional price for their service,” the report states.

“For example, a 56% majority say they have become more callous toward people since taking their job,” with younger and white officers most likely to feel that change. Those who sense more personal insensitivity are “about twice as likely to say their job nearly always or often makes them feel angry or frustrated.” They are more likely to “endorse aggressive or physically harsh tactics with some people.” And they are more likely to have been in a recent physical or verbal

confrontation or to have fired their gun while on duty during their career.

**AGENCY ASSESSMENT.** The survey reveals that most officers (74%) are “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with their department as a place to work and 96% feel “strongly committed” to making their agency successful.

“Still, police do not offer universal praise of their departmental leadership,” Pew reports. Only about three in 10 say they are “extremely (7%) or very (23%) supportive of the direction that top management is taking their organization.” The rest are only “moderately” or “slightly” supportive or “not supportive at all.”

At the most basic level, “most police surveyed (86%) say their department does not have enough officers to adequately police the community.” In agencies of 1,000 or more, 95% of officers voice this complaint.

Departmental disciplinary processes draw “mixed ratings.” Less than half (45%) of officers surveyed believe the disciplinary process in their agency is fair, with one in five “strongly disagreeing” that there is fairness. More than 70% believe that officers who consistently do a poor job are not held accountable for their shortcomings.

About half of black officers (53%) “say that whites are treated better than minorities in their department when it comes to assignments and promotions.”

**MISCELLANY.** If you love statistics, the Pew report is a treasure trove. Browsing its pages, you can learn that male officers are about three times more likely than their female

peers to have fired their service weapon on duty...that only three in 10 officers have patrolled on foot continuously for 30 minutes or more in the last month...that 52% of officers think local police should take an active role in identifying illegal aliens... that 44% of officers don't believe that body cams will cause police to act more "appropriately," and so on.

In summary, as Pew puts it, this broad-ranging survey "provides a unique window

into how police officers see their role in the community, how they assess the dangers of the job, and what they encounter on a day-to-day basis. It also gives a glimpse into the psychology of policing and the way in which officers approach the moral and ethical challenges of the job."

Written by Force Science Institute  
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