

Blog item for 7 a.m. Saturday 12/27

In police/community controversies, vast majorities back special prosecutors, body cams

By Gary Langer

Large majorities across racial and political groups agree on two proposals to address police-community relations in the United States: The use of an outside prosecutor when police kill an unarmed civilian, and requiring all patrol officers to wear body cameras when on duty.

Eighty-seven percent of Americans in an ABC News/Washington Post poll support calling in an outside prosecutor to investigate such cases, and 86 percent back the mandatory use of so-called body cams. That includes 85 percent or more of blacks, whites and Hispanics alike, and seven in 10 or more across ideological, political and generational lines.

The issue has been a highly charged one recently. This survey was conducted during the second week of December, before the murder of two police officers in New York City by a gunman said to have been angered by a pair of controversial police killings of unarmed civilians last summer.

Whatever the influence of recent events, concerns about racial fairness are not new. Fifty-four percent in this survey expressed doubt that blacks and other minorities receive equal treatment as whites in the criminal justice system – 44 percent of whites, rising to 60 percent of Hispanics and 89 percent of blacks. It's been as high in some previous ABC/Post polls back to the early 1990s.

Other results of this survey, produced for ABC by [Langer Research Associates](#), also show a gulf of differing perspectives. Fifty-two percent overall were very or somewhat confident that the police in this country treat whites and blacks equally; 63 percent of whites said so, dropping to four in 10 Hispanics and just 21 percent of African-Americans.

Similarly narrow majorities overall – 54 and 52 percent, respectively – said they feel confident that the police are adequately trained to avoid using excessive force and are held accountable for any misconduct. More, 66 percent, said the police “try hard enough to maintain good relations with different groups in the community” – a view held by three-quarters of whites and nearly six in 10 Hispanics, declining to just 35 percent of blacks.

There were similar differences on whether the fatalities that ignited the controversy – in Ferguson, Missouri and Staten Island, New York – reflected isolated incidents or broader problems in the treatment of African-Americans by the police. Three-quarters of blacks and half of Hispanics called it a broader problem, compared with only 35 percent of whites.

Differences on these issues are not solely racial or ethnic, but also political, ideological and generational. For example, just among whites, the view that the Ferguson and Staten Island cases reflect a broader problem in police treatment of blacks ranged from 62 percent of Democrats to 30 percent of independents and 17 percent of Republicans. And 70 percent of white Democrats said minorities don't receive equal treatment in the criminal justice system overall; 41 percent of white independents and 29 percent of white Republicans agreed.

There's also an age effect, with concerns about racial inequities generally higher among young adults and lowest among seniors.

Individual circumstances also make a difference. Overall just 31 percent in this poll approved of the grand jury's decision not to charge the police officer in the Staten Island case, while 57 percent disapproved. There was a much closer 48-45 percent division last month on the lack of an indictment in Ferguson.

METHODOLOGY – This ABC News/Washington Post poll was conducted by telephone Dec. 11-15, 2014, in English and Spanish, among a random national sample of 1,012 adults, including landline and cell-phone-only respondents. Results have a margin of [sampling error](#) of 3.5 points, including design effect.

The survey was produced for ABC News by [Langer Research Associates](#) of New York, N.Y., with sampling, data collection and tabulation by Abt-SRBI of New York, N.Y.

Analysis by Gary Langer.

ABC News polls can be found at ABCNEWS.com at <http://abcnews.com/pollingunit>.

Media contact: [Julie Townsend](#), (212) 456-4934.

Full results follow.

* in data columns = less than 0.5 percent

1-19, 29-30 previously released; 20-22, 31 held for release.

23. On another subject, do you think blacks and other minorities receive equal treatment as whites in the criminal justice system or not?

	Receive equal treatment	Do not receive equal treatment	No opinion
Among all:			
12/15/14	43	54	4
7/21/13	45	50	6
4/8/12	37	55	7
2/4/97	55	38	6
5/7/96	36	55	9
10/6/95	44	50	6
10/3/95	47	44	8
9/27/95	47	46	6
4/30/92	39	50	11
7/2/88*	43	43	15

*Associated Press/Media General Poll

Among whites:			
12/15/14	52	44	4
7/21/13	54	41	6
4/8/12	44	49	7
2/4/97	61	32	7
5/7/96	41	49	10
10/6/95	52	42	6
10/3/95	52	40	8
9/27/95	54	39	7

4/30/92 46 43 12

Among blacks:

12/15/14 10 89 1
 7/21/13 8 86 6
 4/8/12 10 84 6
 2/4/97 19 78 3
 5/7/96 12 81 7
 10/6/95 9 88 2
 10/3/95 19 73 8
 9/27/95 12 87 2
 4/30/92 8 89 3

Among Hispanics:

12/15/14 35 60 5
 7/21/13* 36 60 4

*Sample sizes in other polls are too small to report.

24. How confident are you that the police in this country [ITEM] - very confident, somewhat confident, not so confident or not confident at all?

a. Treat (whites) and (blacks) equally

	----- Confident -----			----- Not confident -----			No opinion
	NET	Very	Somewhat	NET	Not so	Not at all	
12/15/14	52	21	32	46	22	24	2
Whites	63	26	37	36	19	17	1
Blacks	21	3	18	77	20	57	1
Hispanics	40	15	25	57	29	29	3

b. Try hard enough to maintain good relations with different groups in the community

	----- Confident -----			----- Not confident -----			No opinion
	NET	Very	Somewhat	NET	Not so	Not at all	
12/15/14	66	25	41	33	19	14	1
Whites	74	31	43	25	15	10	1
Blacks	35	4	32	64	38	26	1
Hispanics	58	21	37	39	18	21	3

c. Are adequately trained to avoid the use of excessive force

	----- Confident -----			----- Not confident -----			No opinion
	NET	Very	Somewhat	NET	Not so	Not at all	
12/15/14	54	20	34	44	23	21	2
Whites	62	23	39	36	20	16	2
Blacks	29	4	25	71	30	41	0
Hispanics	44	22	22	52	25	27	4

d. Are held accountable for any misconduct

12/15/14	52	19	33	46	22	24	2
Whites	60	23	37	38	21	17	2
Blacks	25	5	20	75	17	57	0
Hispanics	36	20	15	61	33	28	3

25. Would you support or oppose requiring patrol officers in your area to wear small video cameras whenever they're on duty?

	Support	Oppose	No opinion
12/15/14	86	13	2

Whites	85	13	2
Blacks	91	9	1
Hispanics	87	12	1

26. Would you support or oppose a policy saying that when police kill an unarmed civilian it should be investigated by an outside prosecutor who does not work with the police on a regular basis?

	Support	Oppose	No opinion
12/15/14	87	11	2
Whites	86	12	2
Blacks	92	8	0
Hispanics	86	12	2

27. As you may know, a grand jury has decided not to bring criminal charges against a white police officer in New York City over the choking death of an unarmed black man last summer. Do you approve or disapprove of the grand jury's decision not to charge the police officer? Do you approve/disapprove strongly or somewhat?

	----- Approve -----			----- Disapprove -----			No opinion
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	
12/15/14	31	18	13	57	15	42	12
Whites	38	23	15	49	16	33	14
Blacks	6	0	6	91	5	86	3
Hispanics	25	16	8	60	16	44	15

Compare to: As you may know, a grand jury has decided not to bring criminal charges against a white police officer in Ferguson, Missouri, over the shooting of an unarmed black teen-ager last summer. Do you approve or disapprove of the grand jury's decision not to charge the police officer? Do you feel that way strongly, or somewhat?

	----- Approve -----			----- Disapprove -----			No opinion
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	
11/30/14	48	33	15	45	14	31	7
Whites	58	42	17	35	13	22	7
Blacks	9	5	4	85	12	73	6
Hispanics	32	20	12	61	17	45	7

28. Do you think the recent killings of unarmed African American men by police in Ferguson, Missouri and New York City are (isolated incidents) or (a sign of broader problems in treatment of African Americans by police)?

	Isolated incidents	A sign of broader problem	No opinion
12/15/14	51	43	6
Whites	60	35	5
Blacks	18	74	8
Hispanics	45	51	4

*** END ***