

Policing in Canada: Major study reveals four mindsets driving current opinions and future policy preferences

Canadian perceptions of police vary significantly by age and ethnicity

October 9, 2020 – Canadians have watched protests south of the border calling for an end to police violence against Black and other Americans of colour, and [participated](#) in protests in this country calling for greater accountability and acknowledgement of what they say is systemic racism in Canadian policing as well.

Now, a comprehensive review of perspectives on policing in this country, from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute, finds a country at once critical and supportive of the police in their communities.

This first installment of a two-part series on policing in Canada finds three-quarters view the police in their community favourably, despite concerns about how officers may treat some demographics. For a similar number, 72 per cent, local police are a source of pride. This includes two-thirds of Indigenous and visible minority respondents.

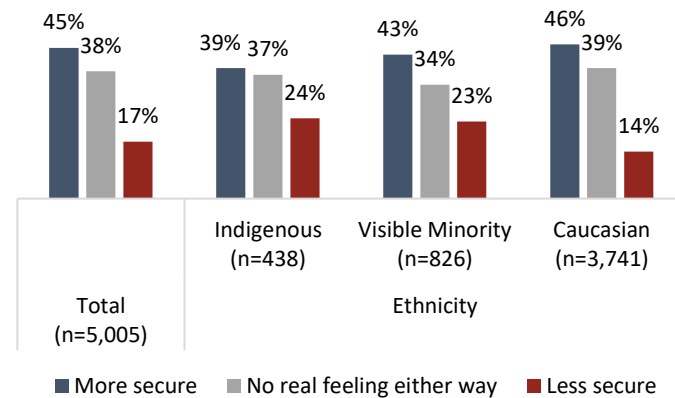
However, younger Canadians are less likely than their older peers to view the police positively. Those aged 18-24, on average, feel less secure when they see a police officer (38%) than more secure (32%), whereas this tendency is reversed in all older age groups. Similarly, more than one-in-three 18-24-year-olds (37%) view police in their own community unfavourably, compared to just one-in-ten (11%) among those 65 and up.

The landscape of perspectives in Canada includes considerable nuance, such that Angus Reid Institute researchers created the Policing Perspectives Index, which categorizes Canadians based on their attitudes toward police. This report explores the views of the True Blue, Silent Supporters, Ambivalent Observers, and Defunders in great detail.

More Key Findings:

- Looking at provincial differences, residents of Alberta and Saskatchewan lean the most towards warm perceptions of police, while Ontario has the highest proportion of those with a more negative view.

When you personally see a police officer, does it usually make you feel more or less secure?



METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from August 26 – September 1, 2020 among a representative randomized sample of 5,005 Canadian adults who are members of Angus Reid Forum. For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of this size would carry a margin of error of +/- 1.5 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding. The survey was self-commissioned and paid for by ARI. Detailed tables are found at the end of this release.

CONTACT:

Shachi Kurl, President: 604.908.1693 shachi.kurl@angusreid.org @shachikurl
Dave Korzinski, Research Director: 250.899.0821 dave.korzinski@angusreid.org

- Indigenous people and those who identify as visible minorities are more likely to feel less secure around and less favourable toward police compared to Caucasians, though the proportion who feel the opposite is still higher in each case.
- Two-thirds of Canadians have had at least one direct interaction with an officer over the past five years. For most, this was a comfortable experience. Negative experiences vary by age, gender, and ethnicity.

About ARI

*The **Angus Reid Institute (ARI)** was founded in October 2014 by pollster and sociologist, Dr. Angus Reid. ARI is a national, not-for-profit, non-partisan public opinion research foundation established to advance education by commissioning, conducting and disseminating to the public accessible and impartial statistical data, research and policy analysis on economics, political science, philanthropy, public administration, domestic and international affairs and other socio-economic issues of importance to Canada and its world.*

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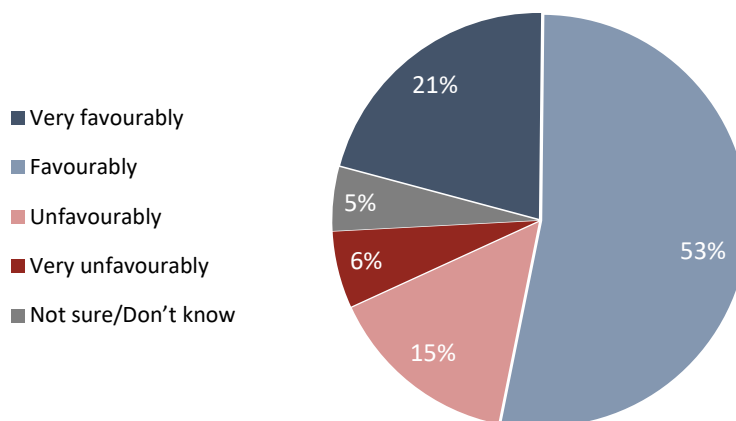
Shachi Kurl, President: 604.908.1693 shachi.kurl@angusreid.org @shachikurl
Dave Korzinski, Research Director: 250.899.0821 dave.korzinski@angusreid.org

Part One: Views of police in Canada

Policing in Canada is oftentimes complex, with municipal, provincial, and federal forces comprising a mosaic of services offered across the country. The relationship Canadians have with their police mirrors this complexity.

When it comes to the overall perspective with which Canadians regard the police in their own community, opinion is favourable but not without fractures. Three-quarters (75%) view them favourably. For one-in-five (21%), however, the view is unfavourable:

**And thinking about the police in your own community where you live, do you generally view them favourably or unfavourably?
(All respondents, n=5,005)**



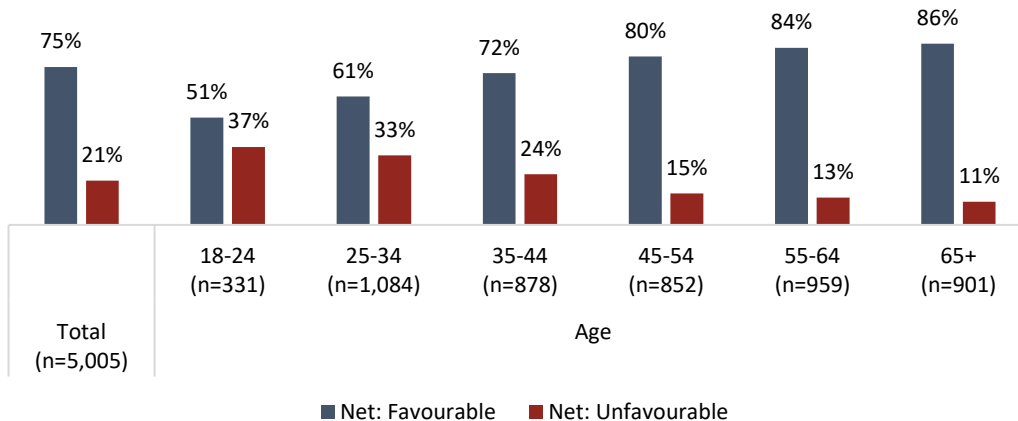
Generational gap

The divergence appears to be in part generational. While Canadians 45 years of age and older are relatively uncritical about the police serving their community, favourability among 18 to 34-year-olds is considerably lower:

CONTACT:

Shachi Kurl, President: 604.908.1693 shachi.kurl@angusreid.org @shachikurl
 Dave Korzinski, Research Director: 250.899.0821 dave.korzinski@angusreid.org

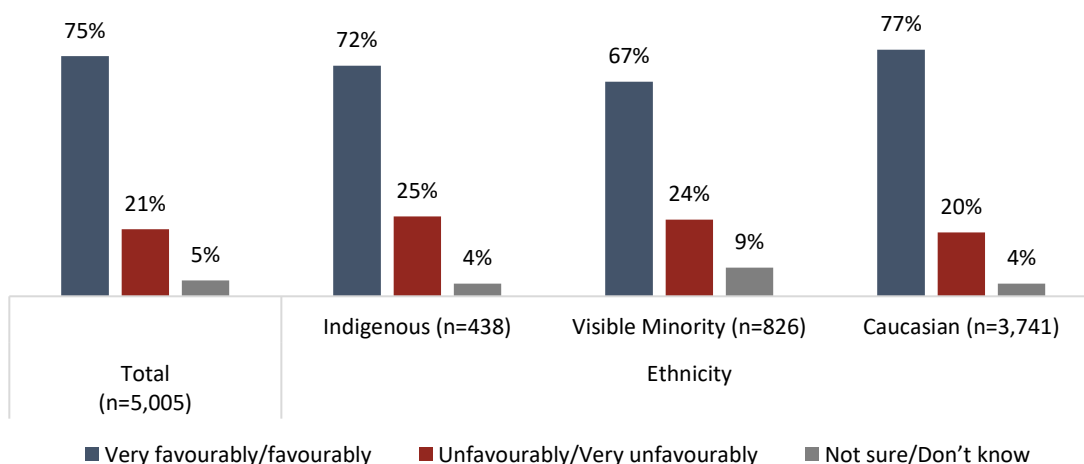
And thinking about the police in your own community where you live, do you generally view them favourably or unfavourably?



Indigenous and Visible Minority views

Notably, Indigenous respondents and those who identify as a visible minority are slightly more likely than Caucasians to hold an unfavourable view of their community police. That said, the vast majority in all groups say they view the police favourably. This does not, however, mean that these same respondents do not think that there is a systemic issue with how police interact with members of minority groups, as will be seen in the second part of this series:

And thinking about the police in your own community where you live, do you generally view them favourably or unfavourably?



The gap in opinion surfaces again when looking at these three groups across generations. In each of them, younger respondents are far more likely to view the police unfavourably. Indigenous respondents ages 35 to 54 are also more likely than others their age to feel this way:

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Shachi Kurl, President: 604.908.1693 shachi.kurl@angusreid.org @shachikurl
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And thinking about the police in your own community where you live, do you generally view them favourably or unfavourably?										
	Total n=5,005	Indigenous n=438			Visible Minority n=828			Caucasian n=3,741		
		18-34	35-54	55+	18-34	35-54	55+	18-34	35-54	55+
Favourable	75%	62%	68%	90%	53%	73%	79%	61%	78%	85%
Unfavourable	21%	34%	27%	9%	34%	19%	16%	33%	18%	12%

Views from provinces, major cities

This ratio of favourable to unfavourable views holds relatively constant across the country. No fewer than 73 per cent of respondents in every region and province view their police favourably, though people in Newfoundland and Labrador, served by both the provincial force, the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary, and the federal RCMP, are most favourable towards about their police (86%)

Discontent is more evident when focusing on major cities. In many of Canada's big cities: Metro Vancouver, Winnipeg, Greater Toronto, Montreal, and Halifax, favourability is lower and unfavourable views rise to one-quarter or higher:

And thinking about the police in your own community where you live, do you generally view them favourably or unfavourably?											
	Total (5,005)	Major City									
		VAN (n318)	CGY (n160)	EDM (n240)	REG (n124)	SSK (n123)	WPG (n304)	GTA (n474)	MTL (n293)	QC (n96*)	HFX (n128)
Net: Favourable	75%	69%	79%	79%	84%	75%	70%	69%	67%	74%	72%
Net: Unfavourable	21%	27%	16%	19%	16%	19%	26%	24%	29%	22%	25%
Not sure /Don't know	5%	4%	5%	2%	1%	5%	4%	7%	4%	4%	3%

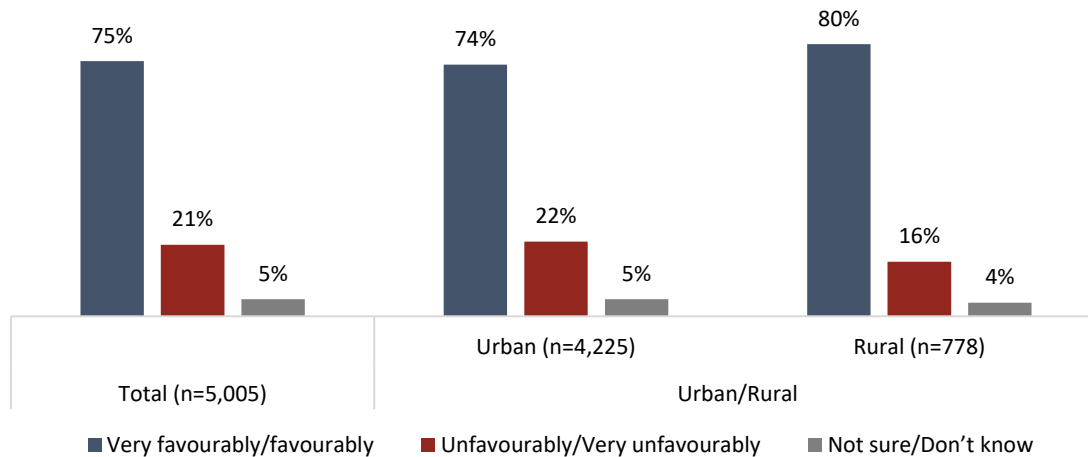
**indicates small sample size, interpret with caution*

This trend toward lower favourability in urban centres is clearer when comparing directly to those Canadians who live in sparsely populated areas. Urban Canadians are about 40 per cent more likely to view police unfavourably than those in rural areas:

CONTACT:

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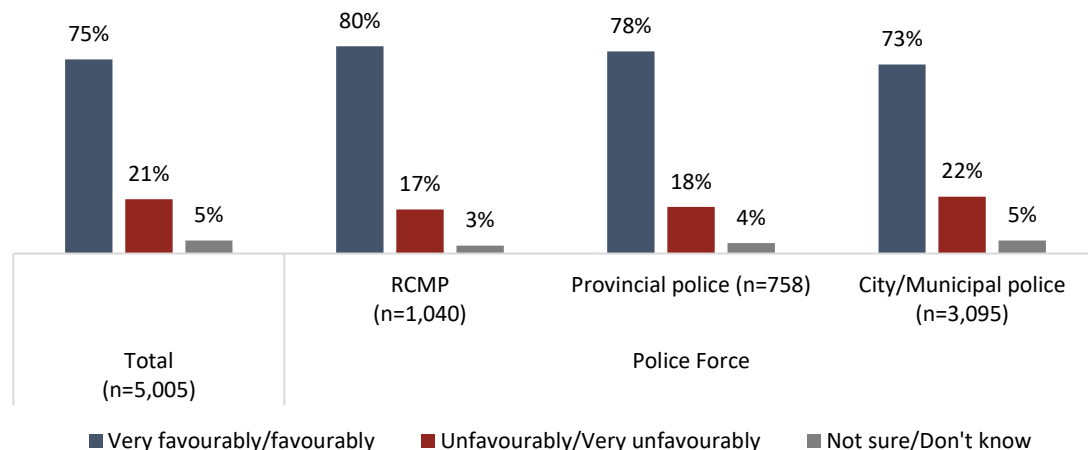
And thinking about the police in your own community where you live, do you generally view them favourably or unfavourably?



Type of police department has little impact on opinion

The type of police force that serve Canadians in their community does not appear to play a major role in favourability. Those who have a municipal police force are slightly less likely to say that they hold favourable views than those who rely on a provincial or RCMP force as their primary community service. Municipal police in Canada make up the largest cohort of individual officers; in 2017, 56 per cent of all police in Canada were employed by a stand-alone municipal department.

And thinking about the police in your own community where you live, do you generally view them favourably or unfavourably?



Part Two: Interactions with Police

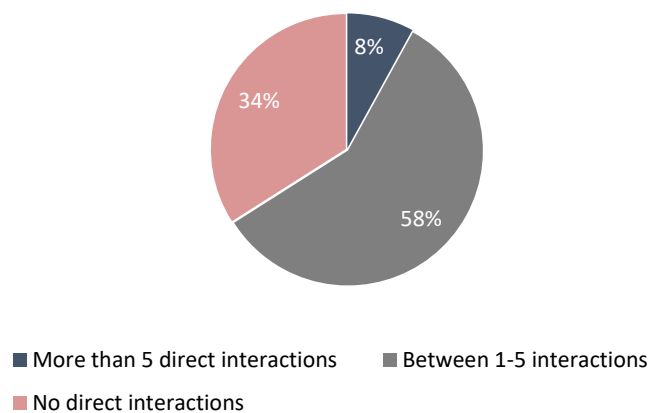
In order to separate broader perceptions from personal experiences, respondents were asked how many times they have had an experience with an officer and whether that experience was positive or problematic.

Two-thirds have interacted with an officer

The majority of Canadian adults had at least one “direct interaction” with a police officer in the last five years, described as “anything from a traffic stop, to speeding ticket, to reporting a break in or disturbance, or an arrest”. Due to confidentiality, respondents were not asked specific details about their encounter.

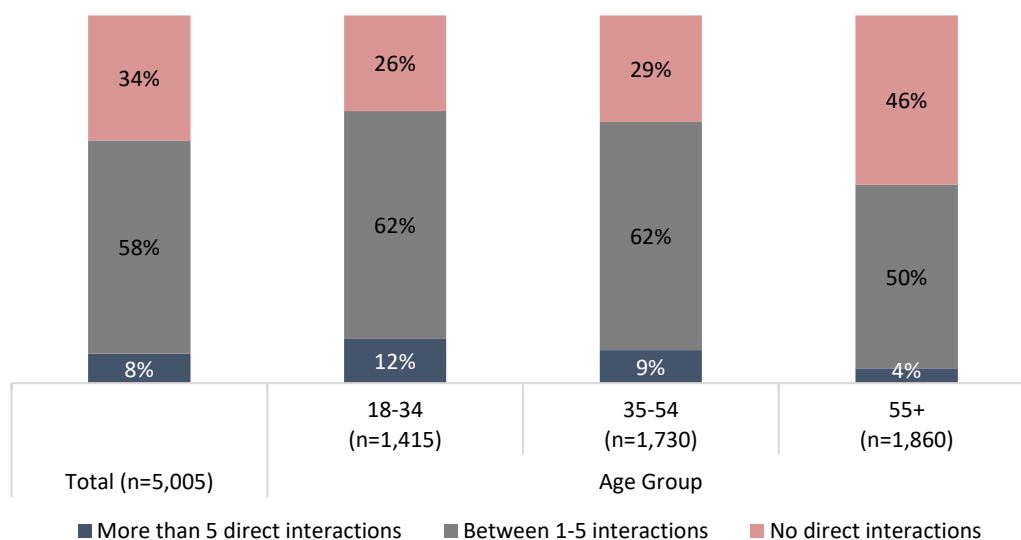
Three-in-five (58%) say that they have had between one and five direct interactions, while eight per cent say that they have had more than five.

Thinking about your own personal direct interactions with the police in the last five years, did you have...



Canadians older than 54 years are far less likely to have had direct experience with officers over the past five years. Meanwhile, three-quarters of 18 to 34-year-olds have had interactions:

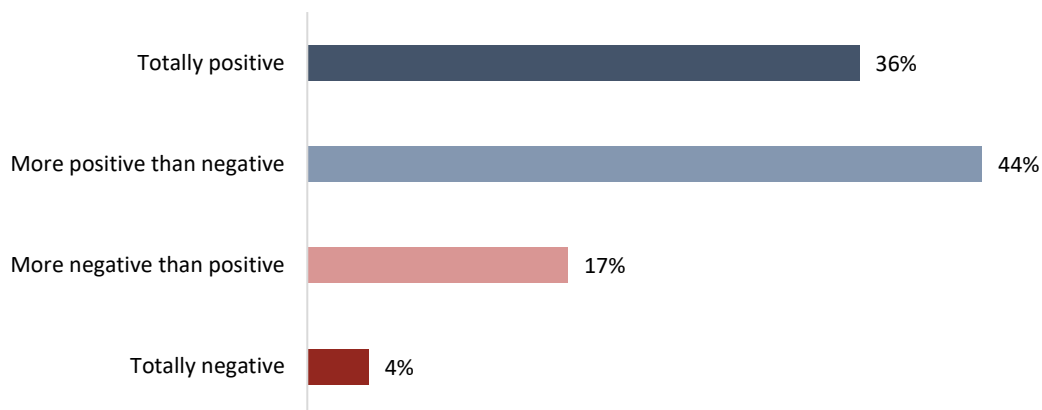
Direct interactions with police in last five years - by age group



Indigenous peoples more likely to have negative experience

Among those who have had direct interactions with police, one-in-three (36%) say this was an entirely positive experience. Just over two-in-five (44%) say it was more positive than negative, while one-in-five (21%) say that the experience was more negative or totally negative.

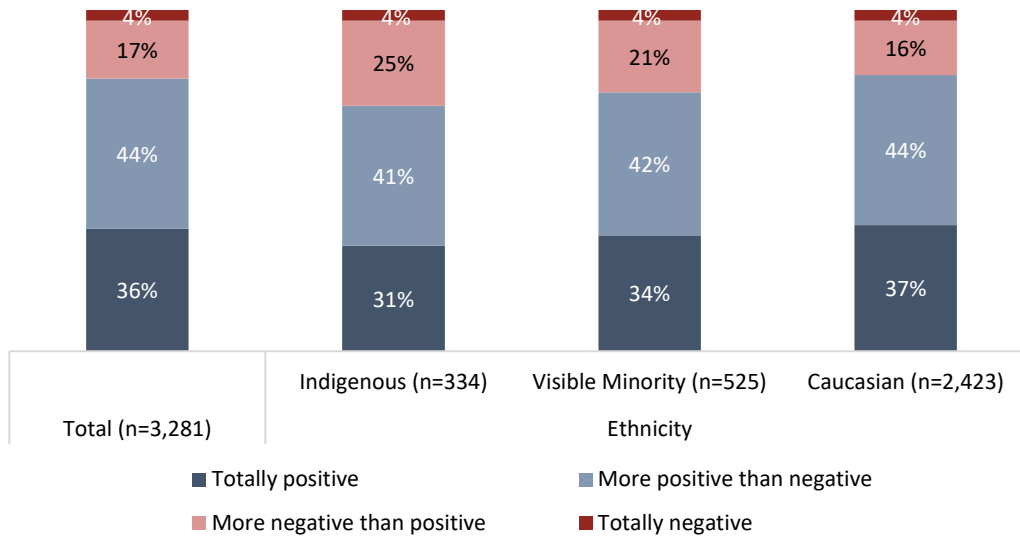
**Thinking about the demeanour of the police officer(s) and the way you were treated - were your overall experiences...
(Among those who've had personal interactions, n=3,281)**



The type of police force with which a person has interacted is not a huge factor in experience, but it is worth noting that experiences with the RCMP are overall, more positive than interactions with municipal police ([see detailed tables](#)).

Indigenous respondents are most likely to say that their experiences have been negative. Three-in-ten (29%) say this, compared to one-quarter of visible minorities (25%) and one-in-five Caucasians (20%):

Experience dealing with police officer:

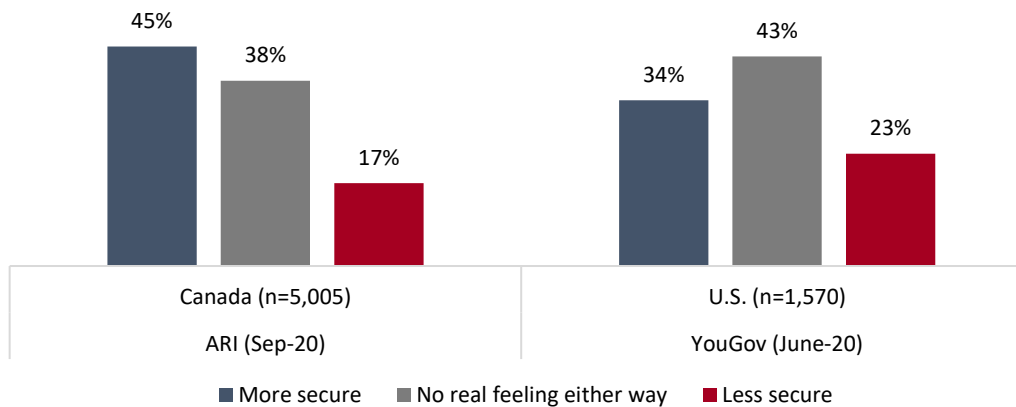


Part Three: Do police make Canadians feel more or less secure?

Canada compared to United States

Another valuable measure of Canadian public opinion is how secure Canadians feel around police. Overall, fewer than half of the population says they feel *more* secure when they see a police officer. For one-in-five (17%) seeing an officer in public generates unease. Canadian responses are considerably more positive than those given by Americans:

**When you personally see a police officer, does it usually make you feel more or less secure?
(Sources: ARI, YouGov)**

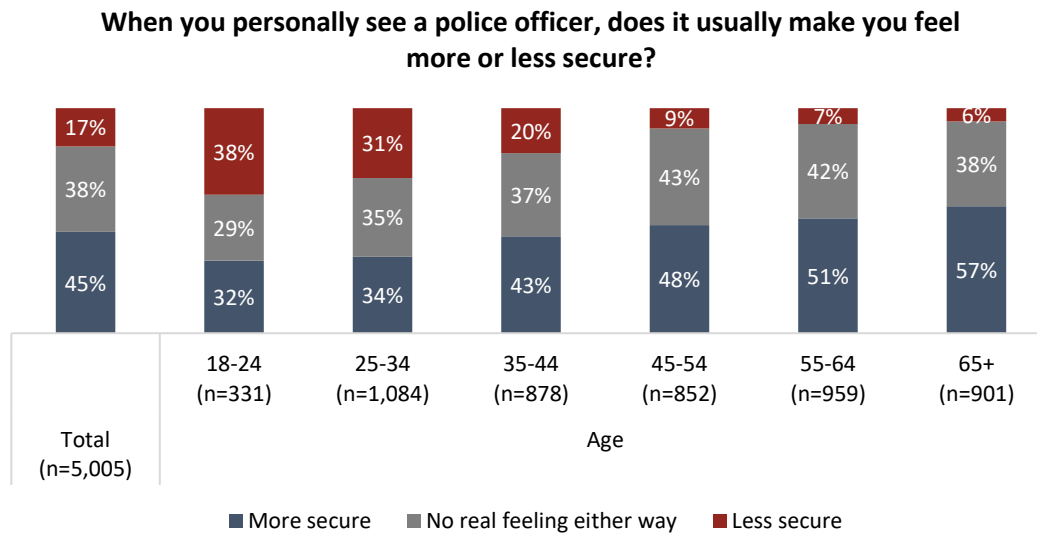


CONTACT:

Shachi Kurl, President: 604.908.1693 shachi.kurl@angusreid.org @shachikurl
 Dave Korzinski, Research Director: 250.899.0821 dave.korzinski@angusreid.org

Wide differences by age and ethnic background

The generational story again highlights divisions. Younger Canadians feel much more threatened by police presence than their older ones:



Also notable are the responses from Indigenous respondents and visible minorities. Both groups are more likely to say that they feel less secure when police are around than Caucasian respondents.

Younger Indigenous respondents are equally likely to say that they more secure (35%) and less secure (35%) in the presence of police. Meanwhile, younger visible minorities are most likely to voice feeling less safe – two-in-five do so (39%).

And thinking about the police in your own community where you live, do you generally view them favourably or unfavourably?

	Total n=5,005	Indigenous n=438			Visible Minority n=828			Caucasian n=3,741		
		18-34	35-54	55+	18-34	35-54	55+	18-34	35-54	55+
More secure	45%	35%	39%	47%	35%	47%	52%	33%	46%	54%
Less secure	17%	35%	25%	8%	39%	16%	8%	30%	13%	6%
No change	38%	30%	37%	45%	26%	37%	40%	37%	41%	39%

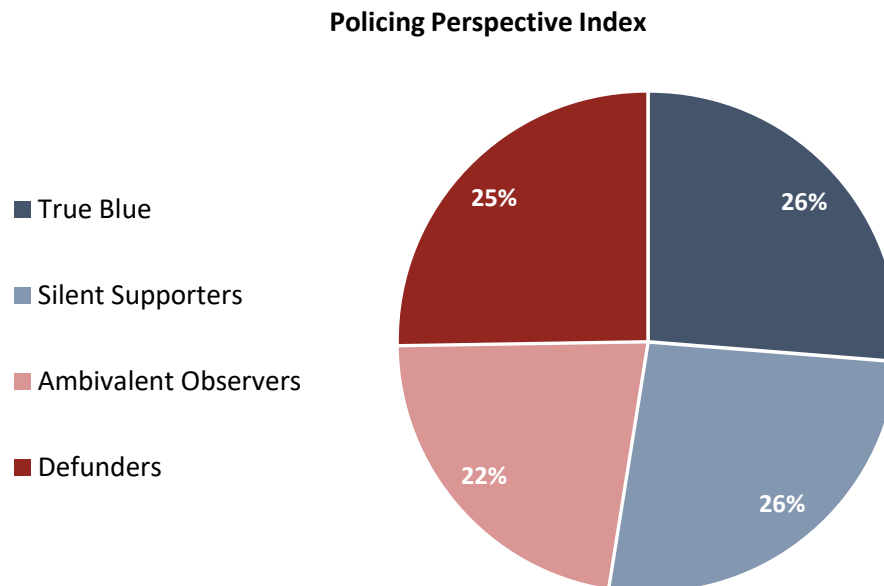
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Part Four: Policing Perspective Index

To distill the numerous viewpoints in Canada about policing, researchers at the Angus Reid Institute created an index based on responses to seven different questions about police and their place in the community. Further methodology may be found at the end of this report.

The Policing Perspective Index places Canadians into four groups. The True Blue, Silently Supportive, the Ambivalent Observers and the Defunders:



Four Perspectives in Canada

Before exploring their attitudes and opinions when it comes to policing in Canada, it is worth considering the demographic makeup of each group in the Index. Below are a number of the broad demographic characteristics from each:

True Blue: 26% of population

- Wealthier: 39 per cent have an annual household income of over \$100K
- Equally likely to be male (52%) or female (48%)
- Highest proportions found in Alberta and Saskatchewan
- Lowest proportion of university educated
- More Conservative: 61 per cent of True Blue voted CPC in the last federal election

Silent Supporters: 26% of population

- Household income distribution consistent with national average
- Highest proportion of women (56%) to men (44%) of the four groups
- Highest proportions found in Newfoundland and Labrador and Quebec
- Equally Liberal (37%) and Conservative (35%)

CONTACT:

Shachi Kurl, President: 604.908.1693 shachi.kurl@angusreid.org @shachikurl
 Dave Korzinski, Research Director: 250.899.0821 dave.korzinski@angusreid.org

Ambivalent Observers: 22% of population

- Consistent household income and age distributions, nearly identical to national average for both
- Slightly more female (53%) than male (47%)
- Highest proportions found in British Columbia and Quebec
- Significant segments voted for Liberals (37%), CPC (28%) and NDP (18%) in 2019

Defunders: 25% of population

- Equally likely to be male (48%) and female (51%) but much younger than other groups
- Highest proportions found in Manitoba and Ontario
- Highest proportion of university educated
- Largest number of past Liberal (47%) and NDP (28%) voters among the four groups

Below is a detailed regional distribution of each group by province:

Policing Perspective Index by Province										
	Total (5,005)	Region								
		BC (628)	AB (599)	SK (500)	MB (485)	ON (1,026)	QC (868)	NB (235)	NS (312)	NL (254)
True Blue	26%	29%	39%	44%	33%	21%	22%	34%	28%	33%
Silent Supporters	26%	22%	22%	27%	21%	25%	33%	28%	27%	38%
Ambivalent Observers	22%	25%	18%	14%	19%	21%	25%	20%	21%	19%
Defunders	25%	24%	21%	15%	27%	33%	20%	19%	24%	11%

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Below is a detailed regional distribution of each group by major city:

Policing Perspective Index by Major City											
	Total (5,005)	Major City									
		VAN (n318)	CGY (n160)	EDM (n240)	REG (n124)	SSK (n123)	WPG (n304)	GTA (n474)	MTL (n293)	QC (n96*)	HFV (n128)
True Blue	26%	25%	35%	36%	37%	38%	26%	17%	18%	34%	27%
Silent Supporters	26%	20%	22%	19%	27%	26%	20%	23%	28%	23%	25%
Ambivalent Observers	22%	25%	21%	18%	15%	17%	20%	20%	26%	22%	20%
Defunders	25%	29%	22%	26%	22%	19%	33%	39%	28%	21%	28%

Part Five: Analysis by Policing Perspective Index

These four groups have widely varying attitudes towards the police. This is demonstrated by how much pride each group feels for their local department, their past experiences with officers, and whether seeing one gives them a sense of security or not. The differences between groups is often stark, reflecting the disparate views held in Canada.

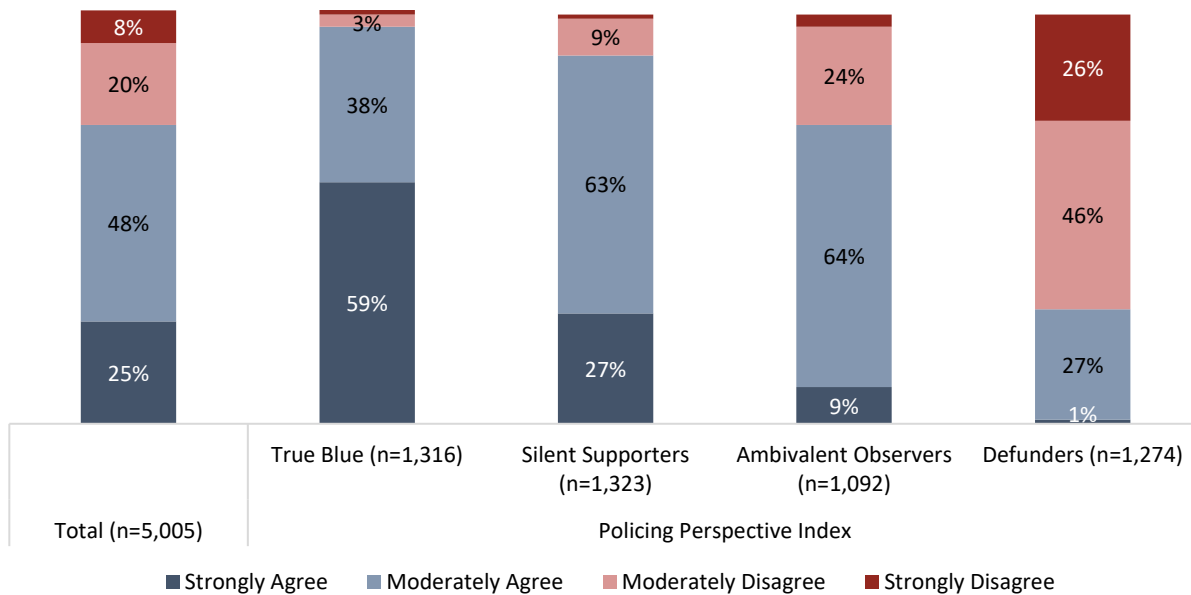
Pride in community police

First, consider the responses given across these groups on the question of pride in their community police. For the True Blue, the feeling or pride is strong, and it is unanimous. Silent Supporters feel a consistent but more muted pride, Ambivalent Observers are 'moderate' in their views, while Defunders tend to disagree with the notion:

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Shachi Kurl, President: 604.908.1693 shachi.kurl@angusreid.org @shachikurl
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Agree vs Disagree: "The police in my community make me proud"



Defunders equally likely to say experience positive, negative

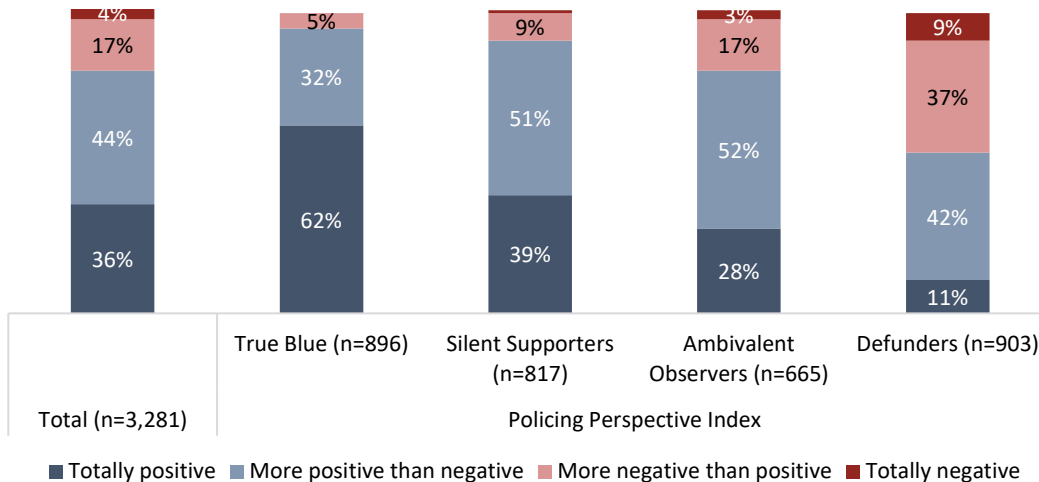
The Policing Perspective Index also offers an additional dimension by which to look at Canadians' personal experiences with police. First, consider the variance in overall experience among members of these groups that have had at least one direct encounter with a police officer in the last five years.

Those among the True Blue and Silent Supporters, tending to be older, wealthier, and more conservative, have had few poor experiences with a police officer. The Defunders, younger, urban, left-leaning Canadians, are far more divided.

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Shachi Kurl, President: 604.908.1693 shachi.kurl@angusreid.org @shachikurl
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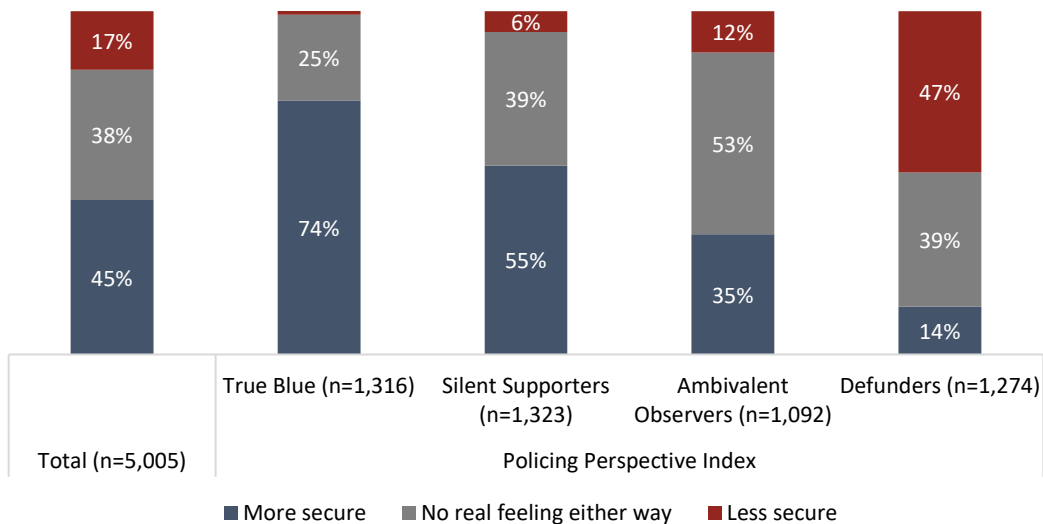
Thinking about the demeanour of the police officer(s) and the way you were treated - were your overall experiences...



Defunders feel less secure, True Blue safer

Perceptions of safety in the presence of police also vary among these four groups. Those who feel less secure are found primarily in the Defunders group; half (47%) of them feel this way. Meanwhile, half of Ambivalent Observers say that police presence makes no impact either way (53%) and majorities of the two other groups feel more secure.

When you personally see a police officer, does it usually make you feel more or less secure?



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Shachi Kurl, President: 604.908.1693 shachi.kurl@angusreid.org @shachikurl
 Dave Korzinski, Research Director: 250.899.0821 dave.korzinski@angusreid.org

Coming up next: Policy issues, defunding, and systemic racism

Canadian opinions towards issues such as police budgets, rehabilitation of criminals, and systemic racism in policing will be canvassed in the second part of this comprehensive study.

Notes on Methodology

The Policing Perspectives Index is based on responses to seven questions. Respondents were scored first on six attitudinal statements related to police conduct, based on whether they agreed or disagreed:

- The police are too quick to use force to solve a problem
- There is a serious problem with systemic racism in the RCMP
- Police officers are not held accountable when they abuse their power
- Police unions cover up for bad cops
- Complaints about police misconduct are taken seriously in my community

Additionally, respondents were scored on a separate question related to the amount of money that is spent on the police in their community.

For detailed results by age, gender, region, education, and other demographics, [click here](#).

For detailed results by Policing Perspective Index, ethnicity, and urban centres, [click here](#).

For detailed results by finer age groups, [click here](#).

For detailed results by age of ethnic group, [click here](#).

CONTACT:

Shachi Kurl, President: 604.908.1693 shachi.kurl@angusreid.org @shachikurl

Dave Korzinski, Research Director: 250.899.0821 dave.korzinski@angusreid.org