

Defend or Defund? One-in-four support cutting local police budgets; most back social welfare over hiring more cops

Two-in-five Toronto residents their local police budget should be cut, highest number in the country

October 26, 2020 – As RCMP [are criticized](#) in Nova Scotia for failing to protect Mi'kmaq fishermen in Nova Scotia in a violent dispute over the lobster fishery, and as protestors have taken to Parliament over [the acquittal](#) of an Ottawa police officer charged with the death of a Black man, questions of whether systemic racism exists within the ranks of Canadian policing are never far from the spotlight.

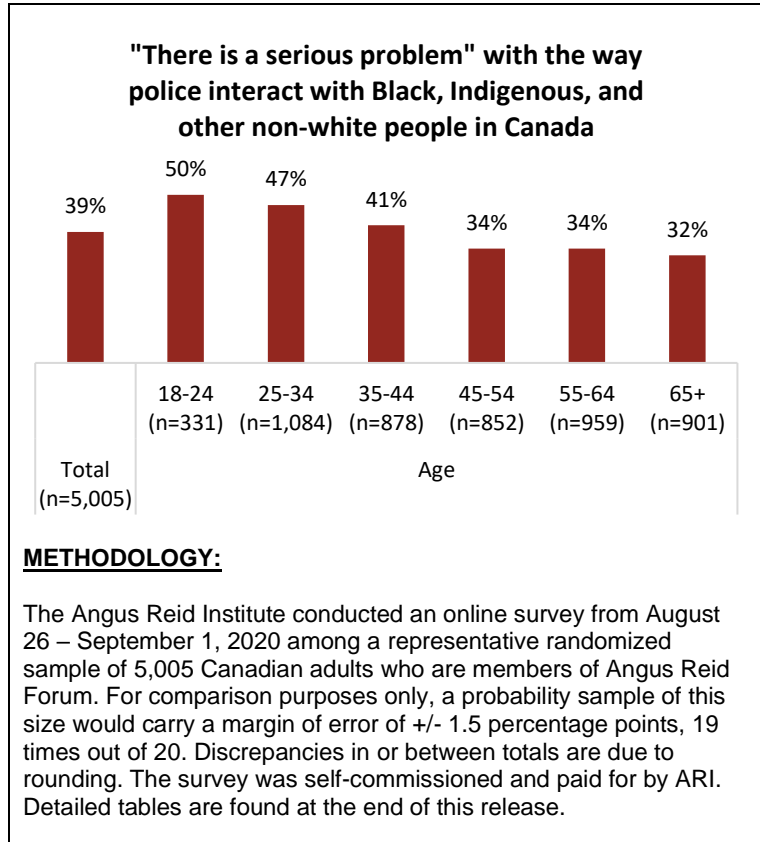
Now, the latest data from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute find nearly two-in-five Canadians say there is a “serious problem” with the way police interact with Black, Indigenous and other non-white people across the country, while more than one-quarter (27%) say it is a serious problem in their own community.

Further, nearly two-thirds (63%) agree that systemic racism is a serious problem for the RCMP, and three-quarters (73%) say police in Canada interact inappropriately with non-white people at least some of the time.

While these perspectives vary by racial background, generational and political differences are even more stark. When it comes to policy, calls to simply reduce police department budgets are not widely supported, though structural change is desired by many. One-quarter say that police funding should be reduced where they live. This proportion rises to 38 per cent in Greater Toronto, and 36 per cent in Winnipeg. Further, a firm majority (63%) of Canadians across the country would rather see investment in social welfare strategies rather than increasing police presence in high crime areas.

More Key Findings:

- Residents of urban areas are twice as likely to say there is a serious problem with police treatment of non-white people in their own community (29%) as residents of rural areas (14%).
- Six-in-ten (59%) think the Canadian justice system should prioritize crime prevention and the rehabilitation of criminals over longer sentences to punish them. This view is majority-supported in all regions of Canada.



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- Four-in-ten (41%) of those who live in Toronto say that police interactions with non-white people are a serious problem in their own community, the most of any of the major Canadian cities.

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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Notes on Methodology

Introduction:

This is the second of a two-part series exploring opinions and attitudes towards policing in Canada. [The first part](#) examined how positively Canadians view police officers, their experiences with officers in the past, and whether seeing the police makes them feel more or less secure.

This second report will focus on the issues of racism in law enforcement, levels of funding for police departments, and other policy considerations.

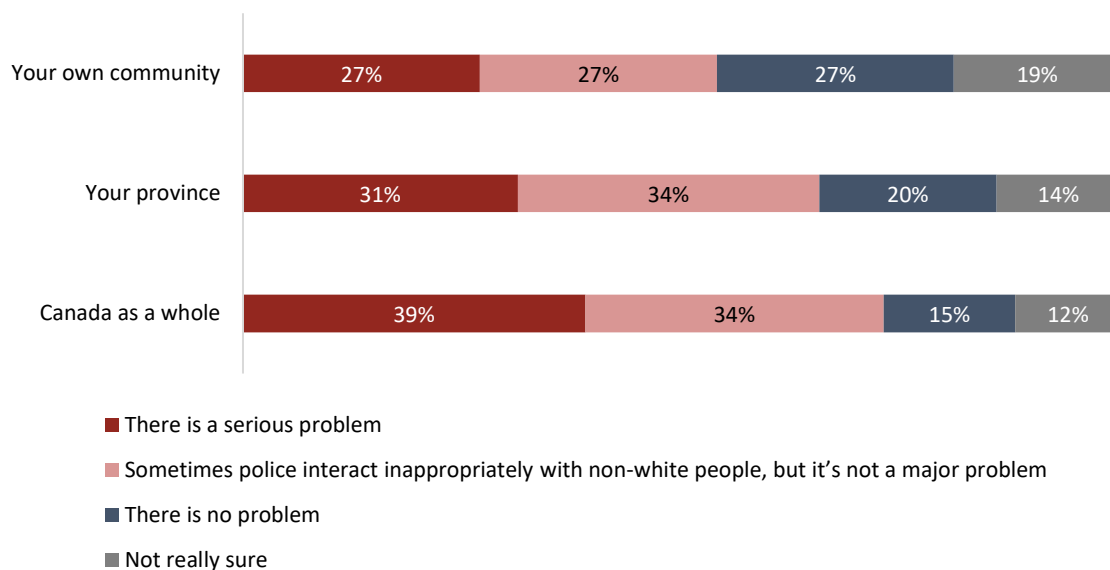
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Part One: Majority see a problem with treatment of Indigenous Peoples and Black Canadians

Canadians are less likely to believe there is a local problem with how police treat minorities than a national one. While three-quarters believe there is a larger problem with the way that police interact with non-white people in this country, a lower proportion, two-thirds, say the same about their province. When asked about their own community, fewer still identified an issue, with just over half (54%) saying that inappropriate treatment of non-white people either happens sometimes or is a serious problem:

**Which of the following best reflects your feeling about the way police interact with Black, Indigenous, and other non-white people in ...
(All respondents, n=5,005)**



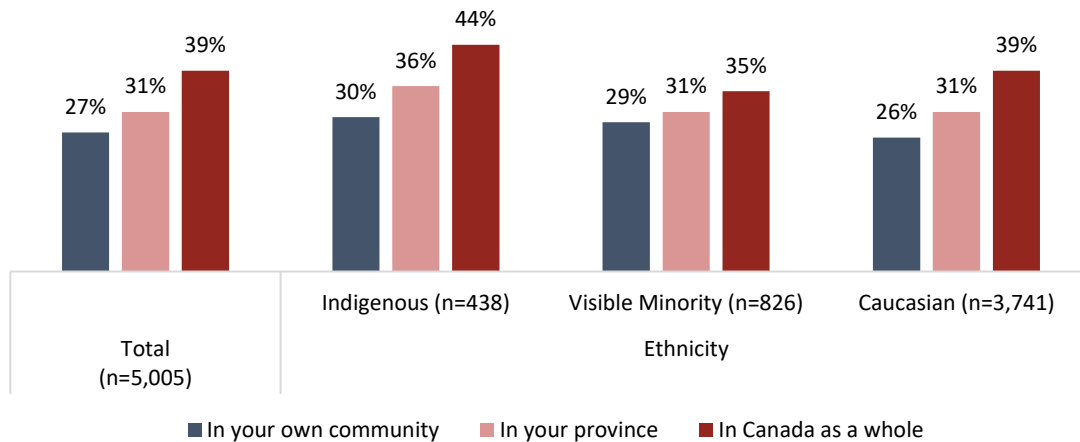
Indigenous and visible minority perspectives

Indigenous respondents are most likely to say that there is a serious problem at all levels of policing when it comes to the way they and Black people are treated; 44 per cent say this is a major issue, compared to 39 per cent of Caucasian respondents. Notably, those who identify as visible minorities (this includes people who are Black, and other people of colour) are less likely than Caucasians to see a problem:

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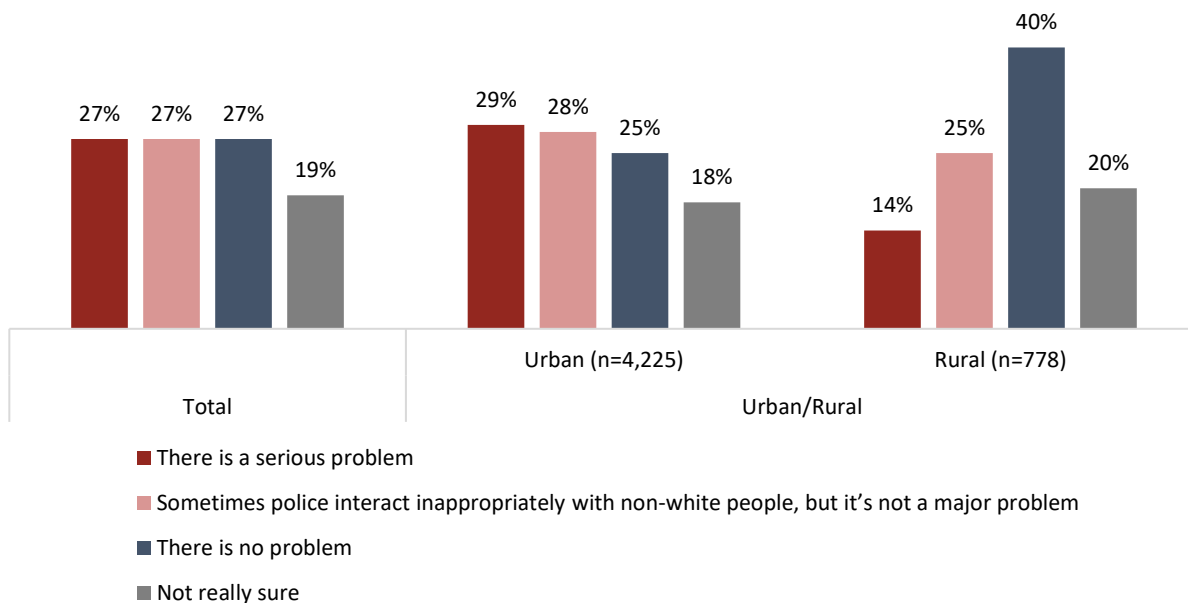
**Which of the following best reflects your feeling about the way police interact with Black, Indigenous, and other non-white people ...
(Percentage that say "There is a serious problem")**



Problem perceived as more serious in urban areas

There is a clear divide in perspectives on this issue based on where someone lives. Those who live in rural areas are half as likely to say that there is a serious problem with how police interact with Canadians of colour in their own communities, though they are equally likely to say that incidents do happen at times:

Which of the following best reflects your feeling about the way police interact with Black, Indigenous, and other non-white people in your own community?



The perception of the problem at the community level grows when looking at data from Canada's urban centres. At least one-in-three residents in Winnipeg, Toronto, Montreal, and Halifax say the problem is serious where they live:

Which of the following best reflects your feeling about the way police interact with Black, Indigenous, and other non-white people in your own community?											
	Total (5,005)	Major City									
		VAN (318)	CGY (160)	EDM (240)	REG (124)	SSK (123)	WPG (304)	GTA (474)	MTL (293)	QC (96*)	HFX (128)
There is a serious problem	27%	29%	23%	24%	23%	31%	36%	41%	35%	21%	39%
Sometimes a problem but not major	27%	29%	37%	28%	32%	29%	29%	26%	32%	20%	31%
There is no problem	27%	20%	29%	27%	32%	32%	20%	17%	18%	38%	18%
Not really sure	19%	22%	11%	21%	13%	8%	15%	17%	15%	21%	12%

**indicates small sample size, interpret with caution*

At the provincial level, Ontarians report higher levels of concern about the treatment of Black, Indigenous, and non-white residents. Two-in-five Ontarians (39%) say this is a serious problem within their province:

Which of the following best reflects your feeling about the way police interact with Black, Indigenous, and other non-white people in your own province?											
	Total (5,005)	Region									
		BC (628)	AB (599)	SK (500)	MB (485)	ON (1026)	QC (868)	NB (235)	NS (312)	NL (254)	
There is a serious problem	31%	32%	24%	24%	31%	39%	27%	23%	36%	6%	
Sometimes inappropriate, but it's not a major problem	34%	35%	33%	33%	31%	32%	38%	32%	35%	30%	
There is no problem	20%	16%	28%	32%	21%	16%	21%	29%	14%	34%	
Not really sure	14%	18%	15%	11%	17%	13%	13%	16%	15%	30%	

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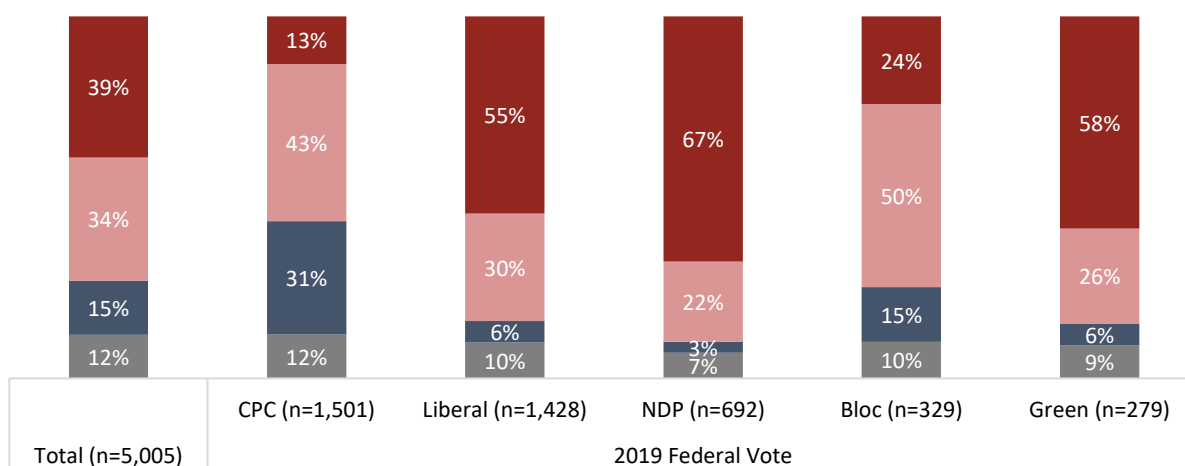
Generational and political factors

Perceptions of anti-Black and Indigenous bias among police officers drops with advancing age. Younger Canadians are more likely to perceive a problem:

Which of the following best reflects your feeling about the way police interact with Black, Indigenous, and other non-white people in each of the following areas: (Percentage that say "There is a serious problem")							
	Total (n=5,005)	Age					
		18-24 (n=331)	25-34 (n=1,084)	35-44 (n=878)	45-54 (n=852)	55-64 (n=959)	65+ (n=901)
In your own community	27%	34%	33%	27%	24%	24%	22%
In your province	31%	42%	41%	34%	27%	26%	23%
In Canada as a whole	39%	50%	47%	41%	34%	34%	32%

Some of the starkest divides on this issue are correlated with political partisanship. Just 13 per cent of past federal Conservative voters perceive Indigenous and visible minority treatment as a serious problem, compared to 55 per cent of past Liberal voters and two-thirds (67%) of past New Democrat voters.

Which of the following best reflects your feeling about the way police interact with Black, Indigenous, and other non-white people in Canada as a whole?



- There is a serious problem
- Sometimes police interact inappropriately with non-white people, but it's not a major problem
- There is no problem
- Not really sure

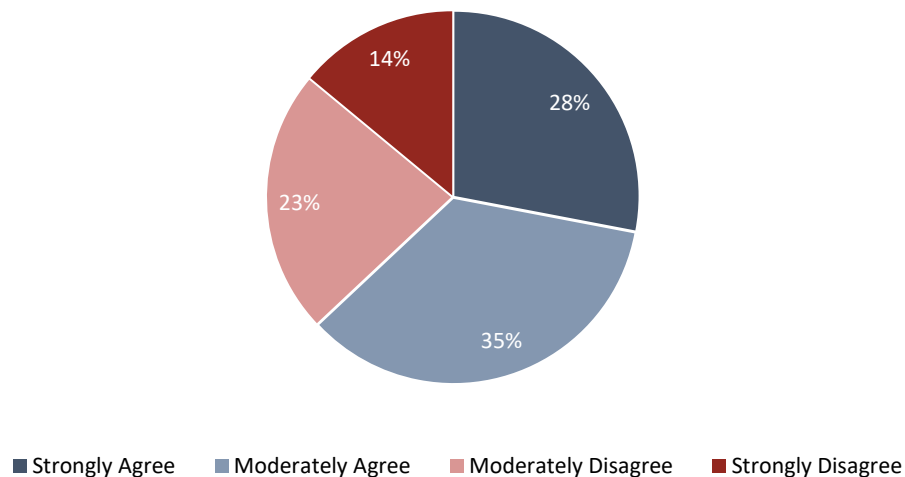
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Systemic racism perceived as a problem

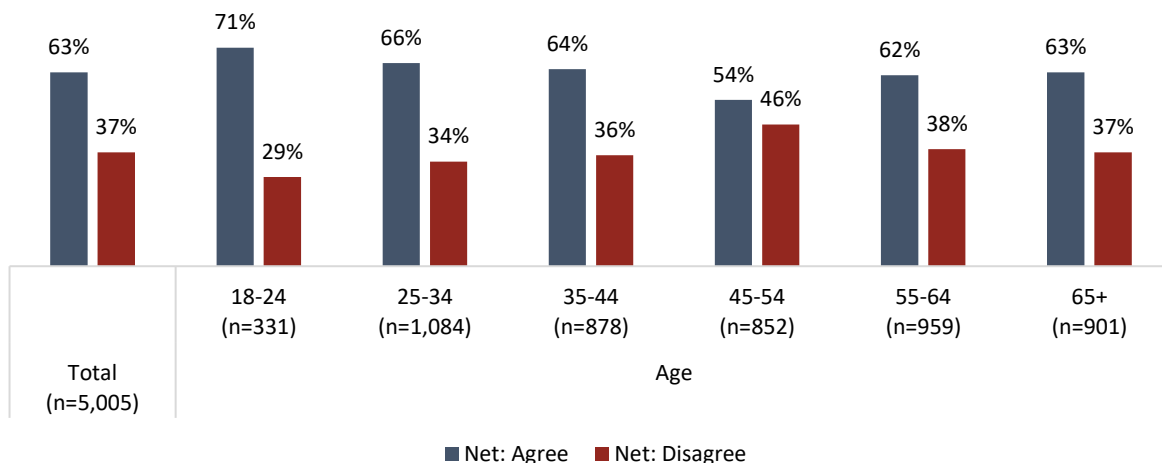
The perceived issue of systemic racism in the RCMP also generates strong opinions. RCMP Commissioner Brenda Lucki herself [stated in June](#): “I do know that systemic racism is part of every institution, the RCMP included”. Most Canadians agree with this statement (63%) and the population is twice as likely to strongly agree (28%) as to strongly disagree (14%):

**Agree vs Disagree:
"There is a serious problem with systemic racism in the RCMP"**



A majority of Canadians across the age spectrum agree that there is a systemic problem with racism in the RCMP, though younger people are most likely to hold this view:

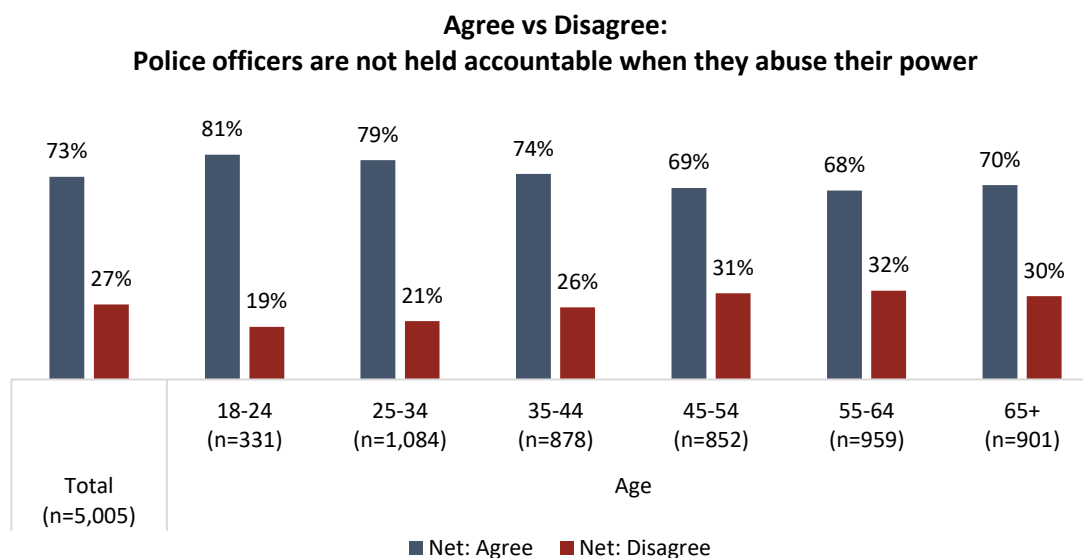
**Agree vs Disagree:
"There is a serious problem with systemic racism in the RCMP"**



Most say there is little accountability for abuse

Some observers in Canada have [criticized](#) the structure of policing accountability in Canada and suggested that reforms are necessary. Critics say that the current system which often relies on “police investigating police” is insufficient to introduce true accountability. Indeed, among the seven provincial investigation units that currently operate in Canada, 111 of the 168 are former officers, which some say [leads to implicit bias](#).

This is evidently something that Canadians agree with. Three-quarters (73%) say that they do not feel police officers are held accountable when they abuse power:



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

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- Equally Liberal (37%) and Conservative (35%)

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 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*)	HFX (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%

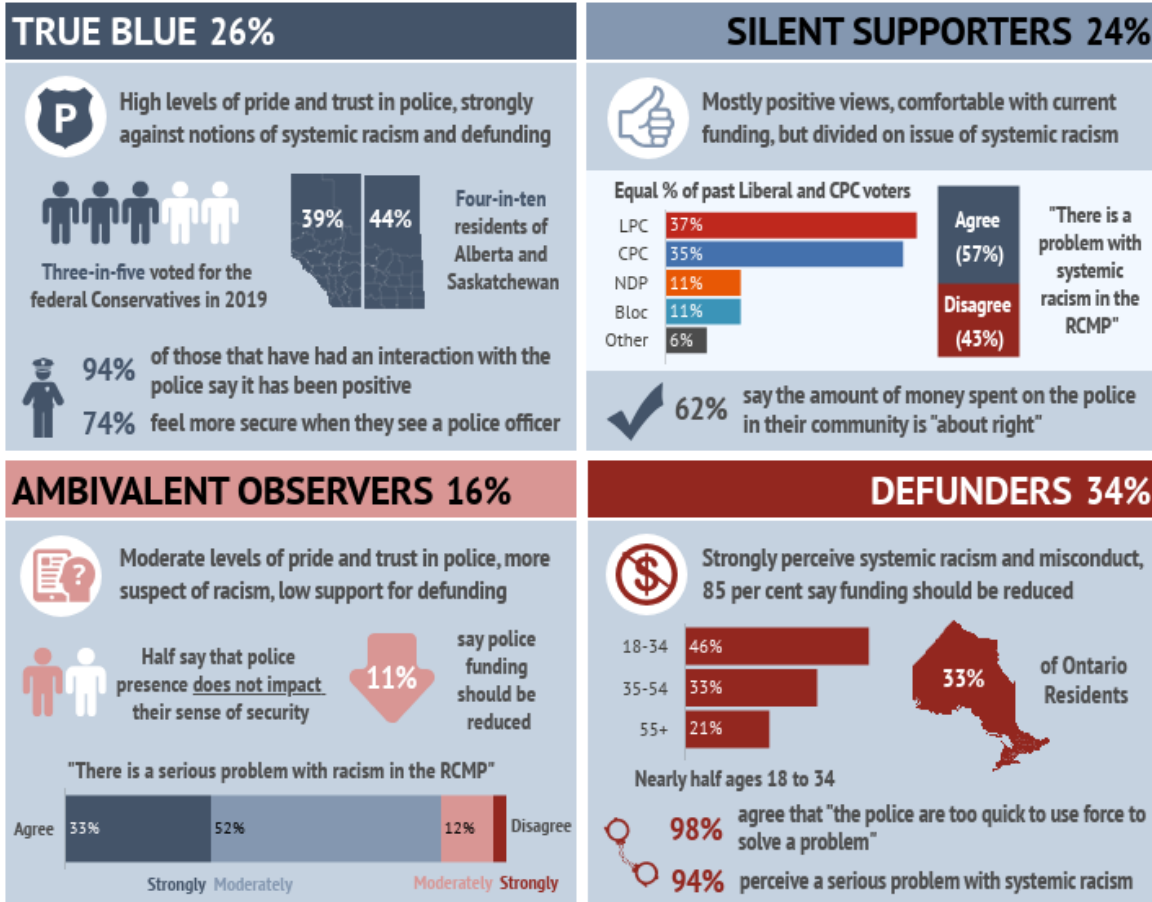
**indicates small sample size, interpret with caution*

Below is a visual summary of some of the key demographic characteristics of these groups.

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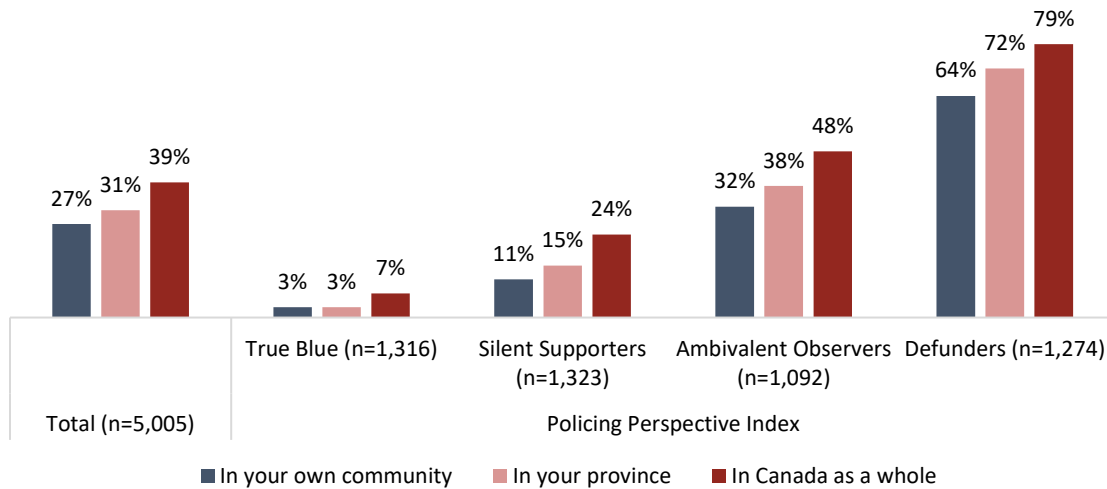
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ANGUS REID INSTITUTE
POLICING PERSPECTIVE INDEX



The four groups have very different ideas about whether police treatment of non-white people constitutes a major issue, ranging from just 7 per cent of True Blue respondents who think it is a serious problem in Canada as a whole, compared to eight-in-ten (79%) of Defunders.

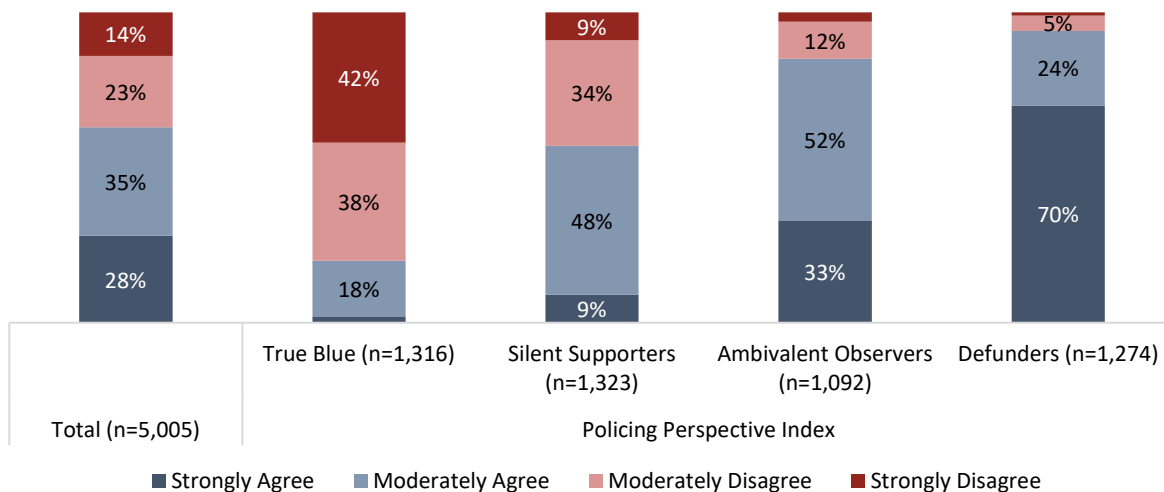
Which of the following best reflects your feeling about the way police interact with Black, Indigenous, and other non-white people ... (Percentage that say "There is a serious problem")



Views on systemic racism

Most prominently, two-in-five among the True Blue (42%) vehemently disagree that there is systemic racism within Canada’s national police force. The Silent Supporters more divided, while Ambivalent Observers and Defunders are much more certain that this is a major problem for the RCMP.

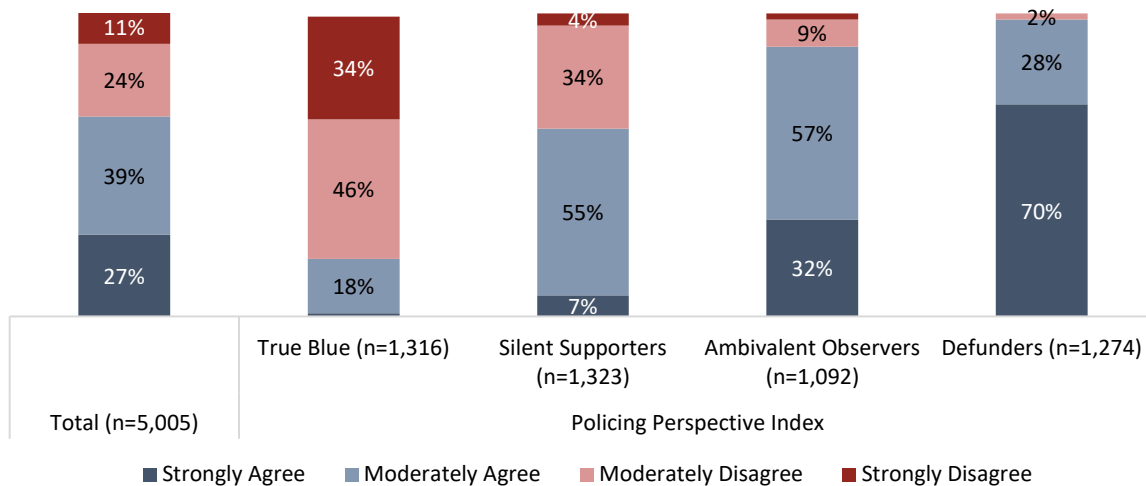
Agree vs Disagree: "There is a serious problem with systemic racism in the RCMP"



Views on use of force

Canadians also offer wide perspectives on how the police approach the use of force. The most ardent supporters don't agree that police move too quickly to use of force to solve a problem. A majority of all other groups agree that this *is* a problem, to varying intensities:

Agree vs Disagree: "The police are too quick to use force to solve a problem"



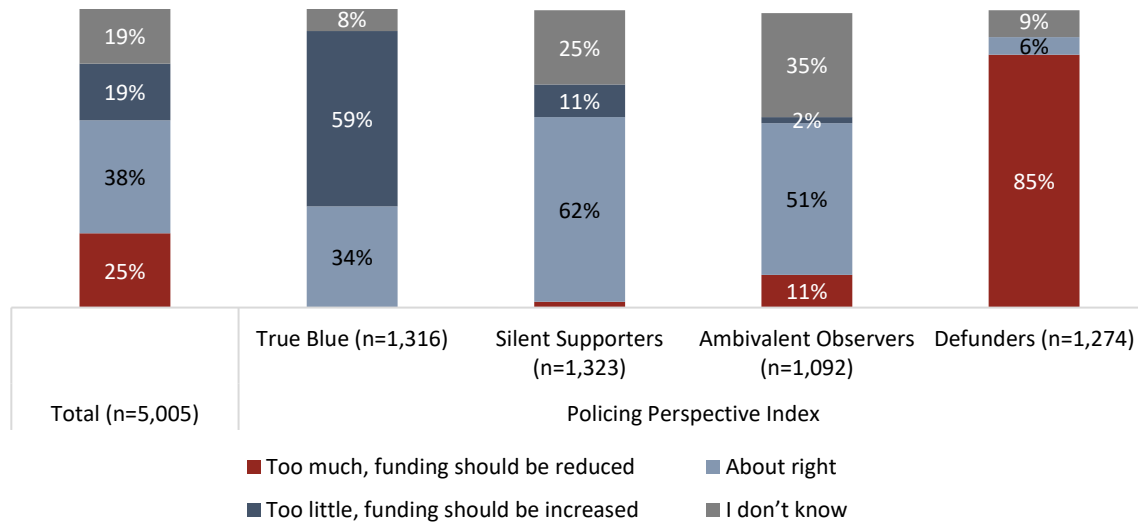
Views on police funding

On the question from which they draw their name, the Defunders are unique. Within this group, 85 per cent say that the police in their community should have its funding reduced and none feel that it should be increased. On this measure, the Silent Supporters are largely comfortable with the status quo, and would not like to see funding reduced or increased, while the True Blue would like to see more investment in police:

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When you think about the amount of money that is spent on the police in your community, would you say it is...



Part Three: Policy discussion

One-quarter say police expenditures too high in their community

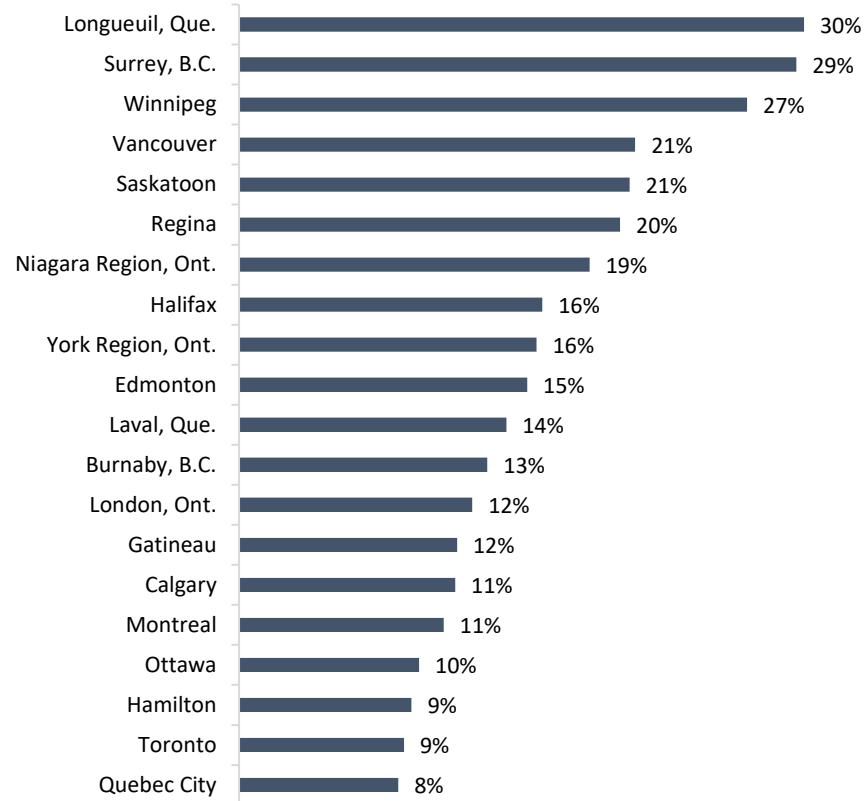
How much budget is too much budget when it comes to policing? Do departments require more funding and officers to fight crime? Or are those resources better spent on social and mental health programs?

There are differing views on just how much community funding should be invested in policing services. The percentage of city budgets allocated to police varies widely by jurisdiction. A recent analysis by the [Globe and Mail](#) found budgets across the country ranging from less than one-tenth of the city budget to nearly one-third. Longueuil (QC), Surrey (QC) and Winnipeg (MB) all approach the 30 per cent mark in share of budget spent on policing.

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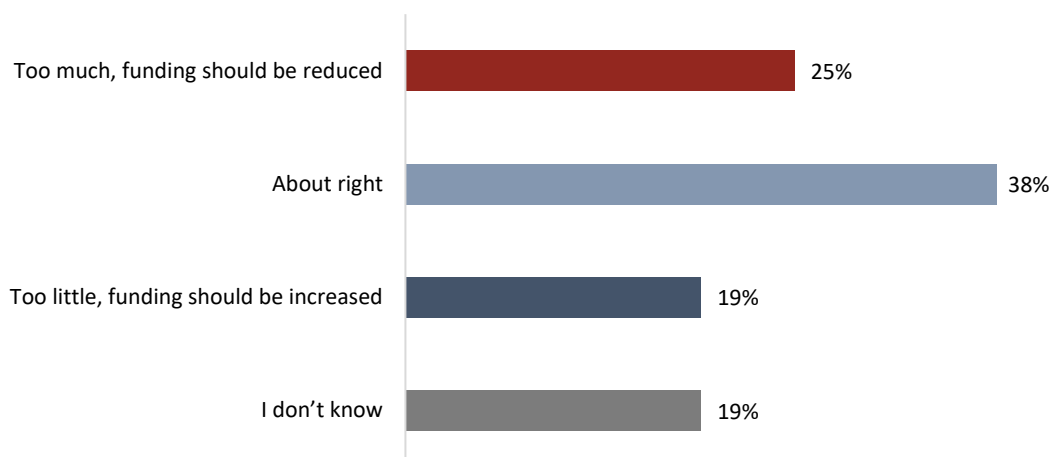
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**Percentage of 2019 budget allocated for police services
Source: Municipal Budgets, collected by Globe and Mail**



Overall, the desire to cut funding surpasses the desire to increase it among Canadians. That said, respondents (38%) are most likely to say current spending is about right. Importantly, one-in-five Canadians (19%) do not know.

**When you think about the amount of money that is spent on the police in your community, would you say it is...
(All respondents, n=5,005)**



Ontario, GTA residents most likely to support reduced funding

This summer, as protests about police treatment of Indigenous and visible minorities were sweeping North America, Ontario Premier Doug Ford [dismissed calls](#) to reduce the Ontario Provincial Police budget. It is notable that in Ontario, the highest number of residents (32%) say that funding should be reduced in their communities. Manitoba residents are close behind, with 29 per cent holding this view. At least one-in-three residents in each region say their community's police funding hits the right mark, while one-in-three in Alberta, Saskatchewan, and New Brunswick say more funding is needed:

When you think about the amount of money that is spent on the police in your community, would you say it is...										
	Total (5,005)	Region								
		BC (628)	AB (599)	SK (500)	MB (485)	ON (1,026)	QC (868)	NB (235)	NS (312)	NL (254)
Too much, funding should be reduced	25%	21%	20%	18%	29%	32%	20%	16%	21%	9%
About right	38%	32%	33%	38%	32%	37%	47%	33%	34%	41%
Too little, funding should be increased	19%	24%	31%	32%	23%	14%	13%	32%	20%	26%
I don't know	19%	23%	16%	11%	16%	17%	21%	19%	25%	24%

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Support for reducing the community police budget is highest in the Greater Toronto Area, where 38 per cent of residents say funding is too high. Toronto city council rejected a motion to cut the 2021 police budget by at least 10 per cent [in June](#).

Meanwhile, the Vancouver Police Board rejected a motion put forth by city council to cut funding [by one per cent](#), something one-quarter of residents (27%) appear to support. In Winnipeg, which boasts one of the highest proportions of budget spent on policing in the country, the largest group of residents would cut the budget (36%).

When you think about the amount of money that is spent on the police in your community, would you say it is...											
	Total (5,005)	Major City									
		VAN (318)	CGY (160)	EDM (240)	REG (124)	SSK (123)	WPG (304)	GTA (474)	MTL (293)	QC (96*)	HFX (128)
Too much, funding should be reduced	25%	27%	22%	23%	27%	28%	36%	38%	25%	18%	25%
About right	38%	30%	33%	31%	35%	38%	30%	34%	43%	47%	37%
Too little, funding should be increased	19%	19%	28%	30%	29%	27%	20%	13%	13%	22%	19%
I don't know	19%	24%	17%	15%	9%	7%	14%	15%	19%	13%	19%

**indicates small sample size, interpret with caution*

Two-thirds say more social welfare programs, less police presence is key

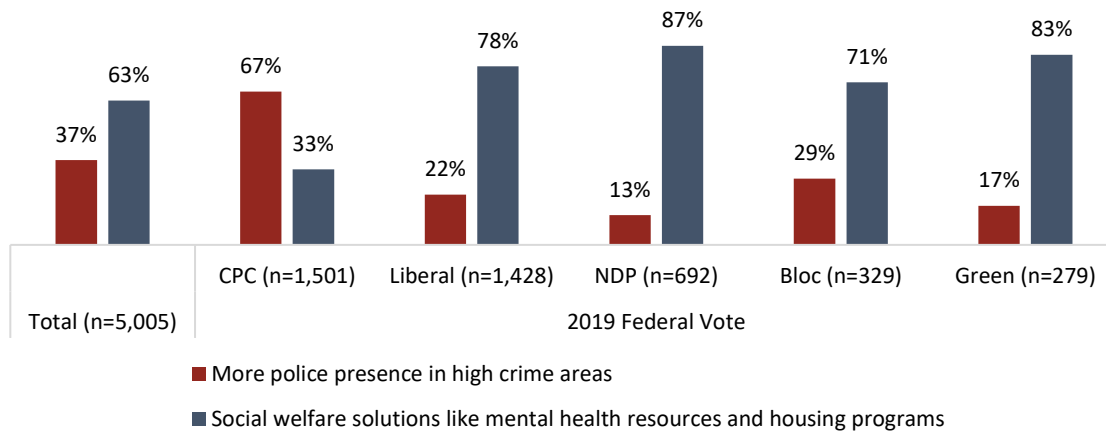
Some have said calls to “defund the police” are not necessarily to be [taken literally](#). In many cases, advocates wish to transfer money from traditional law enforcement techniques to social welfare focused solutions with an emphasis on understanding mental health and de-escalating conflict. For example, a [pilot program](#) in a high-crime region of Dallas, Texas involved assigning a paramedic and social worker to accompany police officers responding to mental health call. This led to a drop in arrests in the area.

[NDP leader Jagmeet Singh](#) has called for a shift of resources towards community services. His perspective aligns with that of his supporters, as 87 per cent of past NDP voters say they would prefer this versus more police presence in high crime areas. Indeed, all Canadians, except for those who supported the Conservative Party in last year’s federal election, tend to agree:

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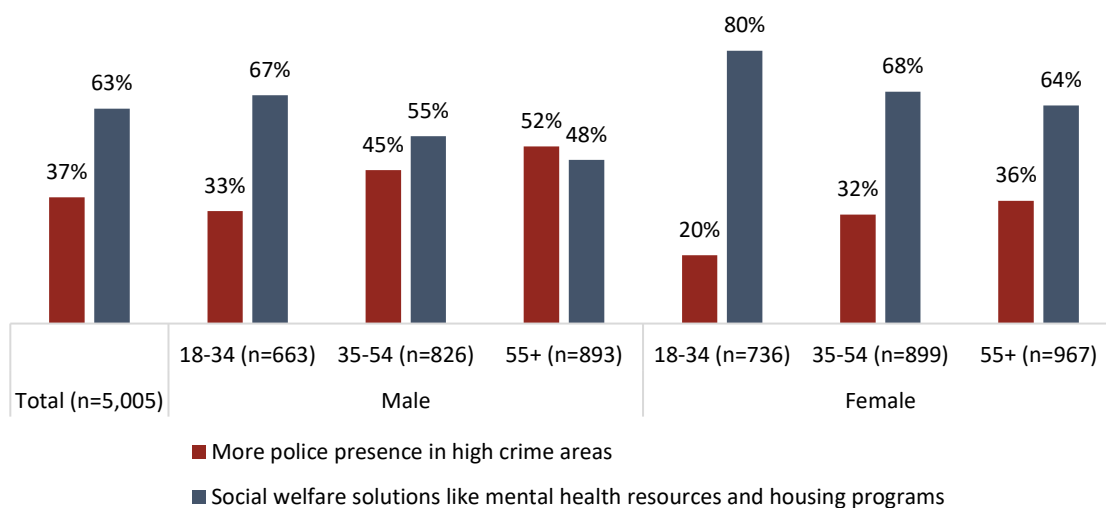
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And when you think about police resources, regardless of whether you would like to see them reduced or increased, would you say money should be allocated more towards...?



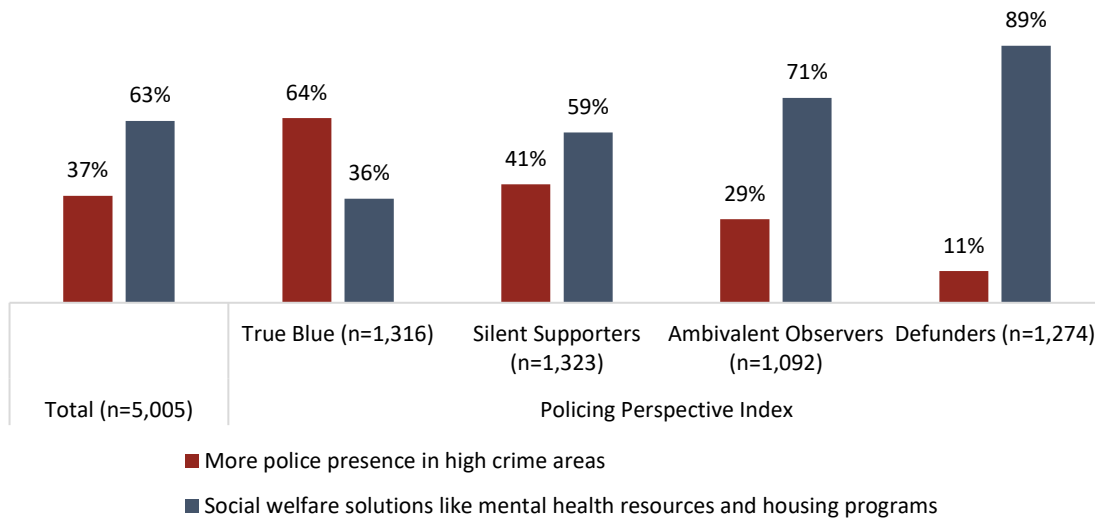
This question also exposes a significant gender divide. Men are much more likely to say that increasing police in high-crime areas is the preferred strategy than women:

And when you think about police resources, regardless of whether you would like to see them reduced or increased, would you say money should be allocated more towards...?



Across the Policing Perspective Index, only the True Blue lean toward police presence in reducing crime, while majorities of the other three groups prefer using social welfare solutions:

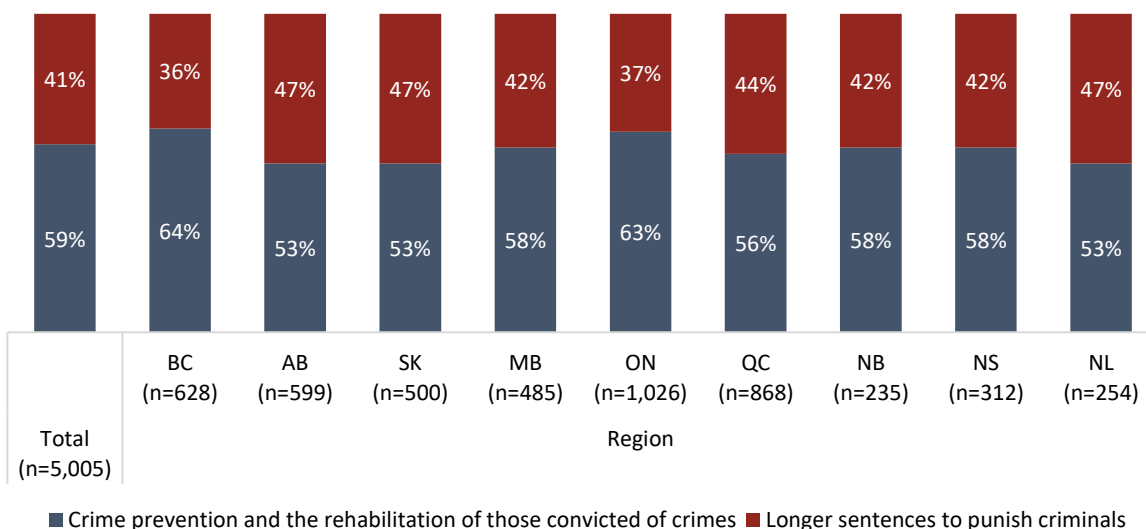
When you think about police resources, regardless of whether you would like to see them reduced or increased, would you say money should be allocated more towards...?



Canadians lean toward rehabilitation rather than longer sentencing

Looking beyond police resources and funding, Canadians have different perspectives on the incarceration system. Canadians were asked if they feel the Canadian justice system should broadly give priority to crime prevention and rehabilitation versus longer sentences to punish and deter criminals. While the majority say they prefer prevention and rehabilitation, both viewpoints are well-represented in each part of the country:

When it comes to the Canadian justice system, priority should be given to...



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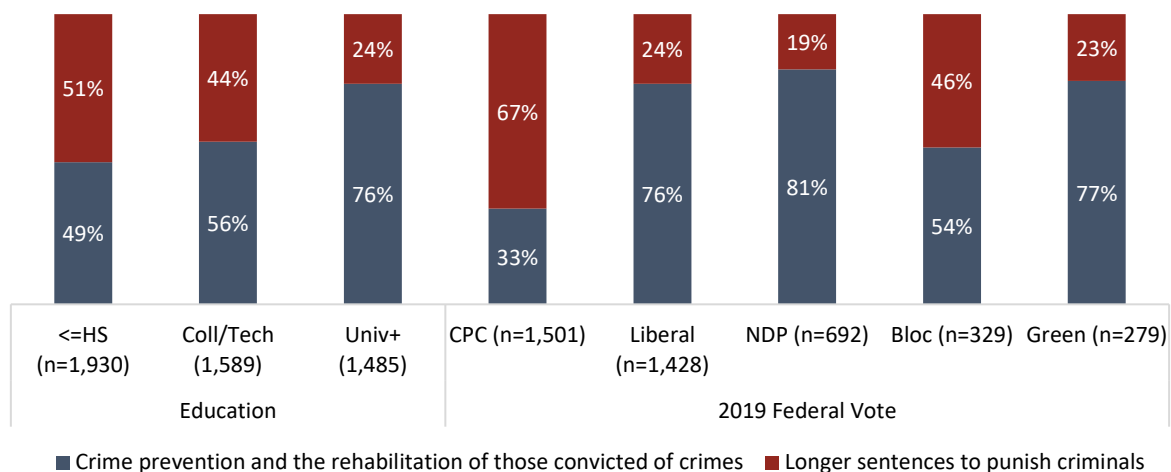
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[Public Safety Canada](#) reported in 2016-17, that the annual average cost of keeping an inmate incarcerated was \$116,473 per year. That same government department noted that “the cost associated with maintaining an offender in the community is 74% less than the costs of maintaining an offender in custody (\$30,639 per year versus \$116,473 per year).”

Rehabilitation as a primary focus has been tried in some countries. In [Finland](#), where many prisoners gain training to help them pursue a career after prison, the country has reported one of the lowest recidivism rates in the world at [35 per cent](#).

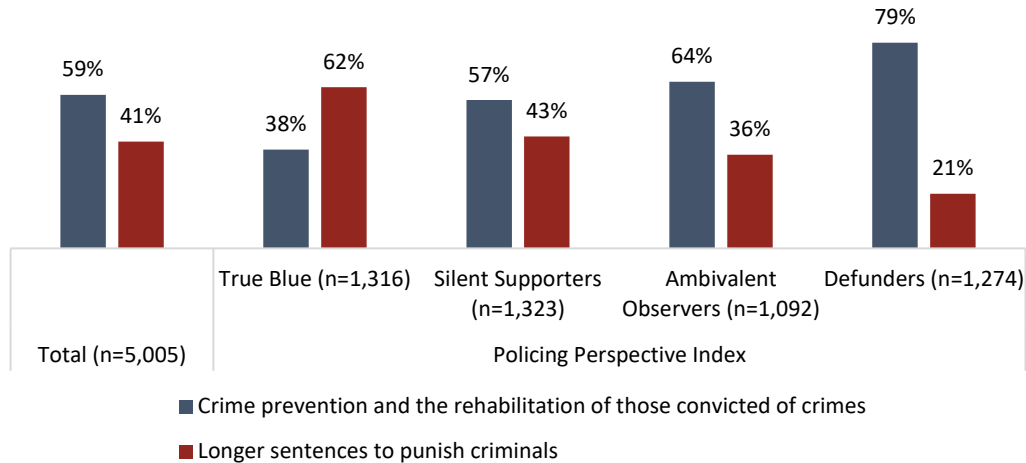
Nonetheless, this type of focus remains contentions across both education and political demographic:

When it comes to the Canadian justice system, priority should be given to...



The perspectives of each of the four groups in our index are notable on this question. The True Blue group lean toward prioritizing longer sentences, but two-in-five dissent. Silent Supporters are relatively split each way. Ambivalent Observers and Defunders lean more heavily toward a focus on rehabilitation and prevention:

When it comes to the Canadian justice system, priority should be given to...



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.](#)

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