

Ten Ways that Thoughtful, Good-hearted People Disagree about Policing and Law Enforcement

From Furious to Curious

A New Dialogue-Sparking Series from the Village Square¹



1. How serious of a problem is over-aggressive use of force by U.S. law enforcement currently?

- *Police brutality is a BIG problem.* Police brutality is a widespread and significant problem in the U.S. – as evidenced by increasing reports and documented cases of this happening all around the country. Ending police violence in America is one of the biggest needs facing our country.
- *Police brutality is a SMALL problem.* Police brutality is being sensationalized in the media by stories taken out of context – obscuring the reality that true police brutality remains an extremely rare event. The focus on ending the so-called epidemic of police violence in America distracts us from much bigger needs.

2. How common is it for police to hurt someone who wasn't threatening any harm?

- *Surprisingly common.* Many people are hurt or killed by police when they weren't even showing any signs of threat – reflected in accounts of people being shot in the back, when they possessed no firearm or when their hands were up in the air.
- *Remarkably uncommon.* The overwhelming majority of people killed by police were either shooting at police or attacking them with a weapon.

3. Are African-Americans being unfairly targeted by police?

- *Police are clearly racial profiling.* Police are clearly targeting racial minorities in a way that is intentional, disproportionate and harmful. Statistical evidence back that up.
- *There is little evidence that police are racial profiling in any systematic way.* The idea that police are targeting minorities is an overgeneralized perception based on random incidents and misinterpreted statistics. Higher rates of violence and crime in African-American communities require law enforcement to be more involved, more frequently.

4. Are police officers being unfairly targeted and blamed by communities?

- *Police are safe and well supported.* Police officers aren't the ones to feel bad for. With the growing amount of weapons and gear, police officers are the safest members of their communities. The fact that communities are holding them accountable should lead to welcome changes, not push-back and complaints.
- *Police are in danger and unsupported.* People have little idea of how difficult policing has become. The job of a police officer is increasingly dangerous and scary – with many officers feeling unsupported by their communities.

5. Are police increasingly out of control?

- *Clearly yes.* Many in today's police force are obviously out of control - as reflected in a seemingly never-ending stream of news reports and bolstered by YouTube videos and cellphone footage.

¹ The intention is to fairly "map out" both key questions and the associates responses - drawing upon the strongest arguments, in the simplest and most objective language possible. The attempt here is to represent fairly the most reasonable and nuanced perspectives on both sides - in a way that would be recognizable to each side - 'yes, that's it!')

- *That is perception, not reality.* This perception of police being out of control borders on hysteria and paranoia, based on the instantaneous dissemination of dramatic footage online without proper context. The reality is most police everywhere are doing their job carefully and as best they can.

6. How helpful and accurate are cell-phone footage and body-camera videos in improving transparency and accountability?

- *Super helpful.* Audiovisual recordings provide for a level of accountability and scrutiny unparalleled – and have already proven themselves both as a check on excessive force and as crucial evidence for bringing errant police officers to justice.
- *Not as great as people think.* Contrary to the perception that pictures never lie, all videos are necessarily limited to capturing a bounded view from only one perspective. Left out is the broader context, which can be crucial for understanding what really happened.

7. Is the current level of accountability for police actions sufficient and helpful?

- *Are not being held accountable enough.* Even with the improvements in accountability that have taken place, police officers are still not being held accountable enough for their actions. They are still given too much freedom to abuse.
- *Are being held excessively accountable.* These so-called 'improvements' have limited the ability of law enforcement to do its job. Our men and women in blue have been hamstrung by the excessive accountability measures demanded by watch-dog groups and implemented by compliant government officials fearful of mobocracy.

8. Are people justified in fearing mistreatment by the police?

- *Yes.* There is good reason to be fearful of the police – especially if you're black. There are significant, well-known problems with racial discrimination and profiling among America's police forces. What's more, most of the people drawn to a career in law enforcement have personalities marked by hyper-masculinity and aggressive tendencies.
- *Mostly no.* People who fear mistreatment from the police are largely paranoid – including those who are black. Concerns about racism are overblown by academics and media elites obsessed with finding racism everywhere they look. Apart from some bad apples, most police officers are good people doing a good job of protecting our communities.

9. Is community pressure on police departments a good thing overall?

- *Overall yes.* The amount of pressure being placed on law enforcement is a good thing overall and a healthy sign of progress in our communities. Overall, we are moving in a good direction – as evidenced by changes likely to lead our communities to more collective safety as law enforcement voluntarily restrains itself more often.
- *Overall no.* The pressure being placed on law enforcement right now is a bad thing overall, and it's a sign of deterioration in our communities. Overall, we are moving in a very bad direction – as evidenced by communities becoming less safe and soaring crime rates. Because of community pressure, the cop on the beat is pulling back from the direct engagement that can stop criminal activity.

10. **Another question we're missing?