

**Contact:**

Tatishe Nteta, [nteta@polsci.umass.edu](mailto:nteta@polsci.umass.edu)

Jesse Rhodes, [jrhodes@polsci.umass.edu](mailto:jrhodes@polsci.umass.edu)

Ray La Raja, [laraja@polsci.umass.edu](mailto:laraja@polsci.umass.edu)

Alex Theodoridis, [atheodoridis@umass.edu](mailto:atheodoridis@umass.edu)

Jared Sharpe, [jsharpe@umass.edu](mailto:jsharpe@umass.edu)

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**Nearly 70% of Americans Find Chauvin Murder Verdict Justified and Plurality Calls for Maximum Sentencing, According to New UMass Amherst / WCVB Poll**

*Poll also finds majority support for many police reform measures and doubts among Trump voters over the fairness of Chauvin's trial and the justification of its outcome*

**Topline results and crosstabs for the poll can be found at [www.umass.edu/poll](http://www.umass.edu/poll)**

AMHERST, Mass. – Results of a new nationwide University of Massachusetts Amherst / WCVB poll released today show that a wide majority of Americans polled in the days immediately following the Derek Chauvin trial believe that the guilty verdict against the former Minneapolis police officer in the murder of George Floyd was justified and that he received a fair trial. A plurality of the poll's respondents also believes an appropriate sentence for Chauvin would be the maximum length he faces – 40 years in prison.

The national poll of 1,000 respondents, conducted April 21-23, found that nearly 70% believe his verdict was justified, with 55% saying that it was “definitely” justified. When asked if Chauvin received a fair trial, 60% replied that he had, while 22% said that he had not.

“In a nation rife with divisions over race, class, generation and gender, there is a surprising agreement on the issue of whether Chauvin's verdict was justified,” says [Tatishe Nteta](#), associate professor of political science at UMass Amherst and director of the poll.

“Race profoundly influenced perceptions of the trial and verdict, with African Americans, Latinx, and Asian Americans much more likely to perceive them as fair than whites,” says [Jesse Rhodes](#), professor of political science at UMass Amherst and associate director of the poll. “At the same time, it is notable that a solid majority of whites (56%) supported the verdict. In a nation with such a troubled racial history and present, it is extremely rare – and perhaps unprecedented – that a majority of whites support the conviction of a white police officer for the murder of a Black man.”

Asked about the total sentence Chauvin should receive, a plurality of 30% believes that he should face the maximum of 40 years, while 11% replied he should be imprisoned for 31-39 years and 17% each felt that he should receive 11-20 and 21-23 years, respectively.

Twenty percent of respondents said Chauvin should serve only 1-10 years in prison, and 4% said he should not face any prison time whatsoever.

“While the minimum sentence for second-degree murder conviction is 12.5 years in the state of Minnesota, a plurality of Americans want to see Chauvin receive the maximum sentence of 40 years in prison for the murder of George Floyd,” says Nteta.

Nearly half of Trump voters, however, believe Chauvin should receive little or no sentence after being found guilty on all three of the charges he faced in Floyd’s killing. Forty percent of Trump voters say Chauvin should receive just 1-10 years, while 9% say he should never have to enter prison. Nearly half of Trump voters – 48% – also believe Chauvin did not receive a fair trial, and 38% do not believe the guilty verdict was justified.

“There is some irony in both Democrats’ and Republicans’ attitudes toward how Chauvin should be sentenced,” Rhodes says. “While Democrats tend to be critical of mass incarceration and lengthy sentences, when it comes to sentencing Chauvin a strong majority prefers a sentence of 30 years or more. Republicans, typically proponents of harsher sentences for serious crimes such as murder, tend to prefer a lighter sentence in this case. It seems clear that, for both Democrats and Republicans, attitudes toward sentencing Chauvin have much more to do with the political and racial dimensions of the case than with more general principles related to criminal sentencing.”

## **Police Reform**

The poll also surveyed respondents’ views on various police reform measures that have been raised over recent years. Reducing funding for state and local police departments to instead spend money on social services – the basis for calls to “defund the police” – continues to face more opposition (45%) than support (38%), while 1-in-6 (17%) respondents are still unsure or non-committal on the issue.

“Defunding the police is not a winning issue for most Americans,” Nteta says, “but it does garner widespread support among members of the Democratic coalition as young people, progressives, the highly educated, and people of color all express support for this change in funding local and state police departments.”

Other measures surveyed all received strong support from the poll’s respondents, however. Majorities support restricting the ability of police officers from deactivating their body camera (71%), banning the use of chokeholds by police officers (62%) and allowing citizens to sue individual police officers that are accused of the excessive use of physical force or misconduct (59%), while a plurality supports banning the use of military grade equipment and weaponry by state and local police departments (48%).

“While there is meaningful variation across specific policy proposals and opinion differs among Americans from different parties and racial or ethnic groups, there appears to be substantial overall public appetite for reforming policing in this country,” says [Alexander](#)

[Theodoridis](#), associate professor of political science at UMass Amherst and associate director of the poll.

“Given the lack of body camera footage in a number of fatal incidents involving the police, it is no surprise that close to three-quarters of Americans support restricting officers from turning off their body cameras,” Nteta adds.

“Chauvin’s trial and conviction seem to be altering Americans’ attitudes toward police reform, with many Americans supporting major changes to policing,” says Rhodes. “While Americans don’t want to reduce funding for police, large majorities want to end practices such as chokeholds and the deactivation of body cameras. We also seem to be reaching a tipping point where many Americans are open to banning the use of military grade equipment and weapons by police. These findings suggest that major police reforms may be possible in many states, and possibly at the federal level as well.”

## **Methodology**

This [University of Massachusetts Amherst / WCVB Poll](#) of 1,000 respondents nationwide was conducted April 21-23 by YouGov. YouGov interviewed 1,151 respondents who were then matched down to a sample of 1,000 to produce the final dataset. The respondents were matched to a sampling frame on gender, age, race and education. The frame was constructed by stratified sampling from the full 2018 American Community Survey (ACS) one-year sample with selection within strata by weighted sampling with replacements, using the person weights on the public use file.

The matched cases were weighted to the sampling frame using propensity scores. The matched cases and the frame were combined and a logistic regression was estimated for inclusion in the frame. The propensity score function included age, gender, race/ethnicity, years of education, and region. The propensity scores were grouped into deciles of the estimated propensity score in the frame and post-stratified according to these deciles.

The weights were then post-stratified on 2016 Presidential vote choice, and a four-way stratification of gender, age (4-categories), race (4-categories) and education (4-categories) to produce the final weight.

The margin of error within this poll is 3.4%.

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