

**Palm Beach County**

**Residents' Perceptions**

**of Police Body-Worn Cameras**

**November 2016**

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of Police Body-Worn Cameras**

John Ortiz Smykla, Ph.D.  
Vaughn J. Crichlow, Ph.D.  
Florida Atlantic University

Matthew S. Crow, Ph.D.  
Jamie A. Snyder, Ph.D.  
University of West Florida

**Presented to**

**Chief Bryan Kummerlen  
West Palm Beach Police Department  
West Palm Beach, Florida**

## **Acknowledgement**

In 2015 and again in 2016, the West Palm Beach Police Department contracted with the Hass Center at the University of West Florida to conduct telephone surveys of residents of Palm Beach County about their perceptions of police community interactions, their attitudes about police officers wearing body-worn cameras, their overall attitudes about police effectiveness, and their crime concerns.

At the same time, the Department allowed the researchers to administer paper surveys to sworn officers to assess their perceptions on the use of body-worn cameras in general, and the impact of body-worn cameras in their department.

The researchers gratefully acknowledge the full and complete cooperation of the West Palm Beach Police Department in both endeavors, especially Chief Bryan Kummerlen. This report addresses the results of telephone surveys of Palm Beach County residents. A report addressing the results of two waves of police surveys will follow.

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## INTRODUCTION

One month after the grand jury decided not to indict Ferguson, Missouri police officer Darren Wilson in the killing of teenager Michael Brown, the White House released the Interim Report of the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing (President's Task Force on 21<sup>st</sup> Century Policing, 2015). The report recommended greater use of police officer body-worn cameras (BWCs), improved collection of officer involved shooting data, sanctions on police departments using unnecessary military tactics and equipment, and about \$75 million to fund the purchase of BWCs. In spite of the fact that such funding would only be enough to outfit a small fraction of the nation's 18,000 separate law enforcement agencies with BWCs, it signaled a major vote of confidence from the federal government about a new method of police surveillance and high expectations for the new technology.

The task force report created six pillars and 62 recommendations to create new police knowledge and practice to benefit society in the areas of building trust and legitimacy, policy and oversight, technology and social media, community policing and crime reduction, training and education, and officer wellness and society. However, the report calls the first pillar—building trust and legitimacy with the community—the “foundational principle underlying this inquiry into the nature of relations between law enforcement and the communities they serve” (President's Task Force on 21<sup>st</sup> Century Policing, 2015, p. 9). As Papachristos, Meares, and Fagan (2012) and others have observed, compliance with the law is best secured when people believe that those who are enforcing the law have the legitimate authority to tell them what to do. Gallup polls, however, show the public's confidence in police work has not seen any significant improvement over the past three decades, and among some populations of color, confidence has declined (McCarthy, 2014). Although largely touted in the media and among advocates for

reform as a panacea for poor policing and strained police community relations, many questions remain about BWCs. Anecdotal evidence and limited research suggest that the public supports BWCs, but the factors driving public support remain unknown. Shortly after the task force issued its report, President Obama cautioned against expecting easy answers to the myriad questions surrounding BWCs. Today, George Mason University's Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy has launched a four-part research project into what is known and what needs to be known about BWCs (Lum, et al., 2015). The Center's researchers conducted a systematic review of existing and ongoing research relevant to BWCs as a first step in developing an evidence-based research agenda and to ensure that research is responsive to the needs of police and citizens. The researchers discovered 12 existing empirical studies of BWCs and 30 ongoing research projects. They mapped all 42 studies by the research questions addressed and found that the most common research that has been or is being addressed relates to the impact of BWCs on the quality of officer-citizen interaction as measured by complaints and officer use of force. Fewer studies have addressed the relationship between BWCs and citizen satisfaction with police encounters or the relationship between BWCs and community attitudes and perceptions of police and their legitimacy. To help fill the gap, the current study aims to contribute to this underdeveloped area of research by reporting on community members' views of BWCs and the perceived impact of BWCs on procedural fairness, concern about crime, police performance, and privacy in Palm Beach County, Florida.

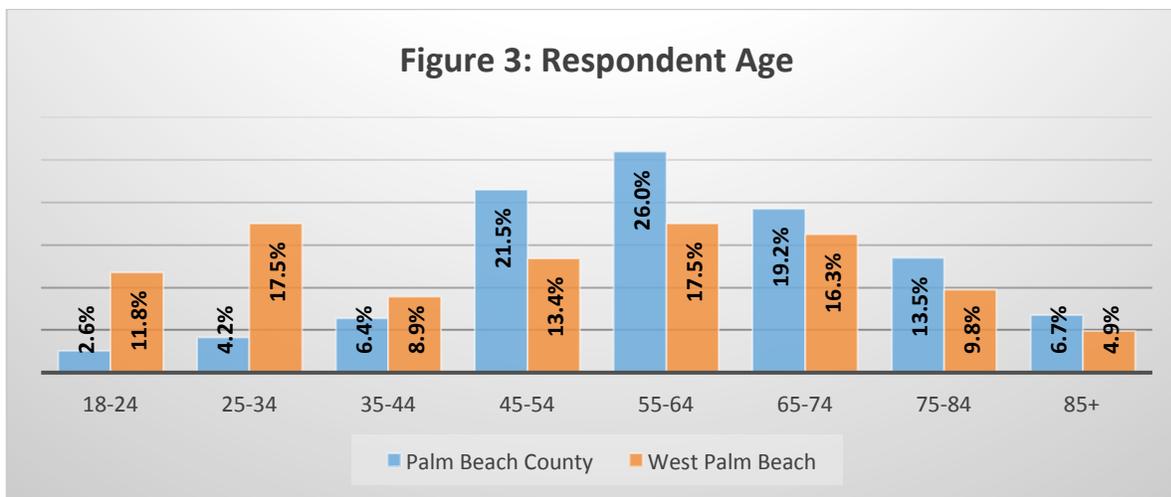
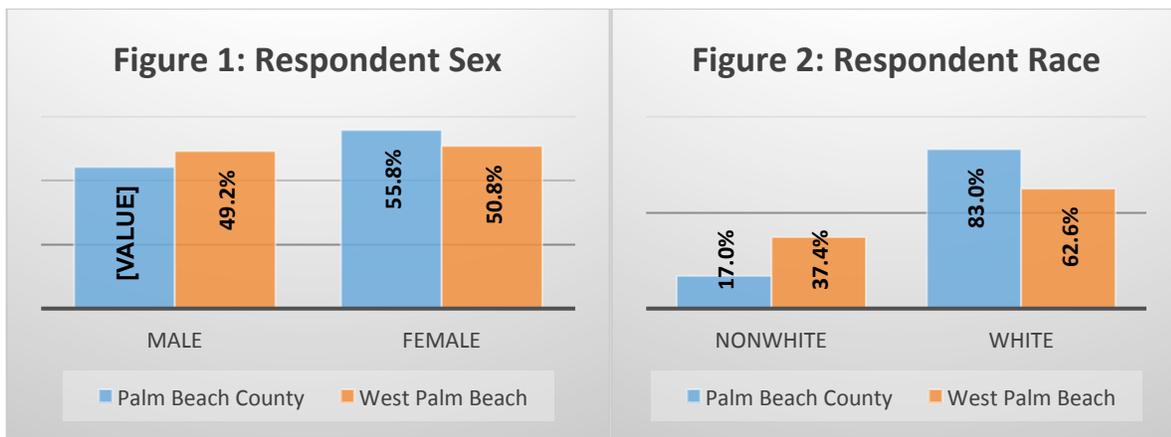
## **SURVEY AND ADMINISTRATION**

The West Palm Beach Police Department (WPB PD) issued its first BWC on March 23, 2015, but suspended deployment three days later pending discussions with the police union. In that interval 78 BWCs were issued. Full deployment of BWCs began July 30, 2015. By December 29, 2015, WPB PD deployed 217 BWCs.

Residents of Palm Beach County were surveyed via phone to gather overall perceptions of police in the community and potential benefits and privacy concerns about police officers wearing BWCs. The surveys were administered during two different time periods. The first wave of surveys was administered from March 17 through May 5 2015, prior to full deployment of BWCs by the WPB PD. The second wave of surveys was administered from January 19 through March 9, 2016. Telephone surveys were administered by the Haas Center at the University of West Florida (<http://www.haas.uwf.edu>) utilizing trained callers. The telephone numbers for Palm Beach County were selected randomly through the use of ASDE (Agile Software Development Ecosystems) software. Landlines were publicly listed numbers, while cell phone numbers were taken from local cell phone exchanges. For the first wave of surveys, 8,541 numbers were taken from local cell phone exchanges. Of the 2,699 eligible residents who answered the phone, 320 agreed to take the survey (11.9% response rate). For the second wave of surveys, 9,052 numbers were taken from local cell phone exchanges. Of the 3,914 eligible residents who answered the phone, 329 agreed to take the survey (8.4% response rate). While the response rate is low and is certainly a limitation, it is not uncommon amongst telephone surveys and is reflective of declining response rates for such surveys (Curtin, Presser, & Singer, 2005; Greenberg & Weiner, 2014). The survey took an average of approximately 8 minutes to complete and because of

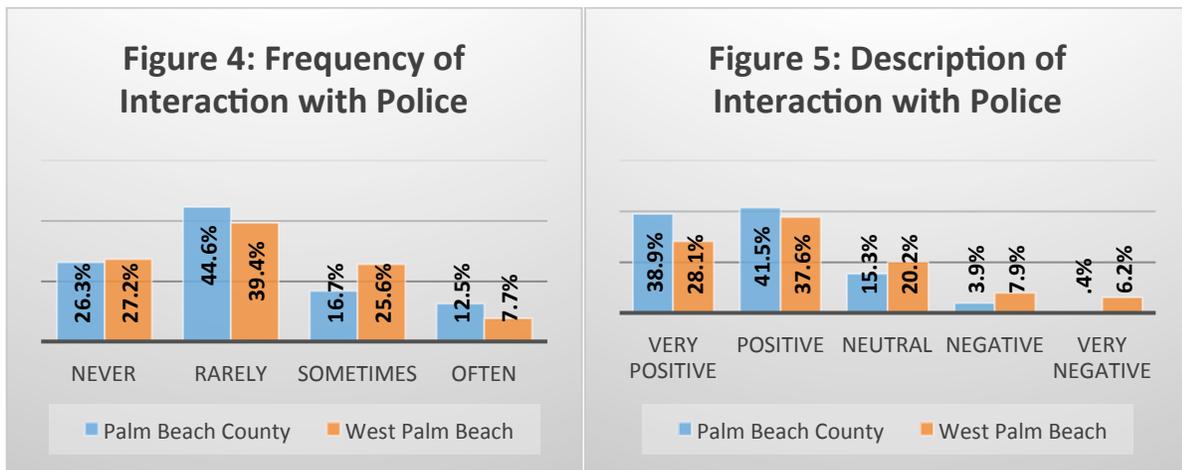
resource limitations, only English-speaking participants were included. A copy of the survey can be found in Appendix A.

The sample demographics for survey respondents were not representative of the residents of the county’s population. Respondents were more likely to be White, older, and female compared to the general population. The demographic characteristics of those self-identifying as residents of West Palm Beach also differed from those self-identifying as non-city residents of Palm Beach County. For example, West Palm Beach city residents were more likely than non-city residents to be male, Nonwhite, and younger (see Figures 1-3).



The survey contained 27 questions and the results are presented in four parts. Part 1 reports respondents’ perceptions regarding police/community interactions. Part 2 reports on

respondents' attitudes about police officers wearing BWCs. Part 3 discusses respondents' overall attitudes about police effectiveness. Finally, Part 4 focuses on respondents' crime concerns. Participants were also asked two questions about their interaction with police. The first question asked how often the respondent interacted with the police, while the second asked whether their interactions were positive or negative (see Figures 4-5). Overall, the majority of respondents reported rarely or never interacting with police. Of those who interacted with the police, most reported their interactions to be positive or very positive, although West Palm Beach residents were more likely than non-city residents to report their interactions with the police as negative or very negative.



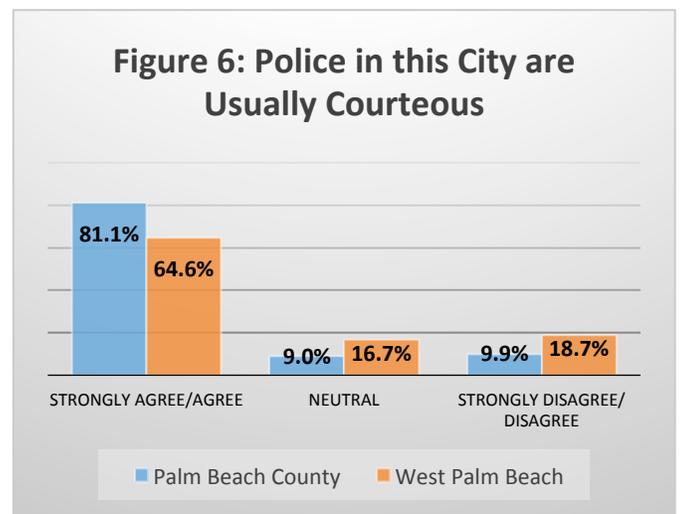
## RESULTS

Across all four parts we present the attitudes of individuals who self-identified as West Palm Beach (WPB) city residents compared with those who indicated they were not (or were unsure) if they were WPB city residents. We refer to these groups as WPB city residents and Non-WPB city residents for ease of interpretation. Despite the noted differences in participants' perceptions, questions about perceptions toward police did not name a specific police department. Rather, they were worded in a general fashion (e.g., local police or simply police), and should not be interpreted as specific perceptions of the WPB Police Department.

### Police-Community Interactions

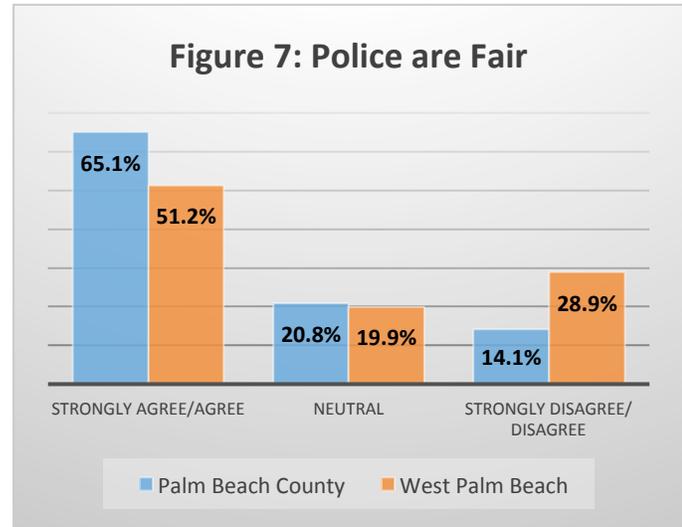
Part 1 of the survey contained nine questions that measure perceptions of police and community interactions. Response categories vary depending on the question asked. For purposes of presentation, we collapse 'Strongly Agree/Agree,' 'Strongly Disagree/Disagree,' 'Very Well/Well,' 'Very Poorly/Poorly,' and 'Very Good/Good.' We list the questions below with corresponding response percentages for WPB city residents and Non-WPB city residents.

- “The police in this city are usually courteous.”
  - This difference is statistically significant indicating. Non-WPB residents perceived police as more courteous than WPB city residents.



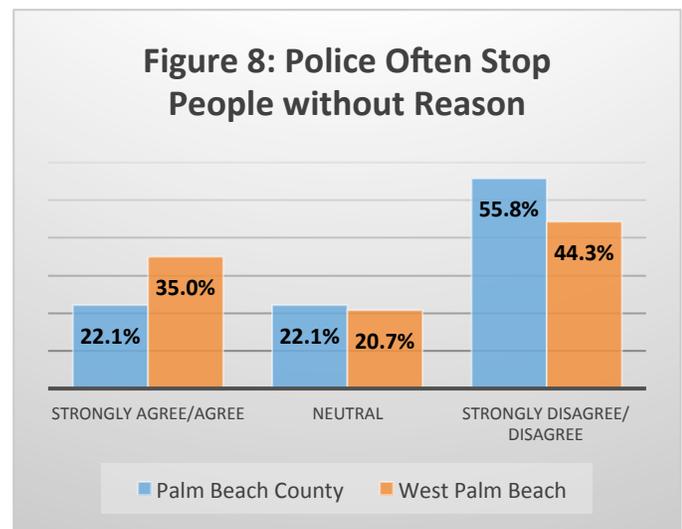
- “The police are fair when dealing with people.”
  - This difference is statistically significant.

Non-WPB city residents thought the police were fairer than WPB city residents when dealing with people.



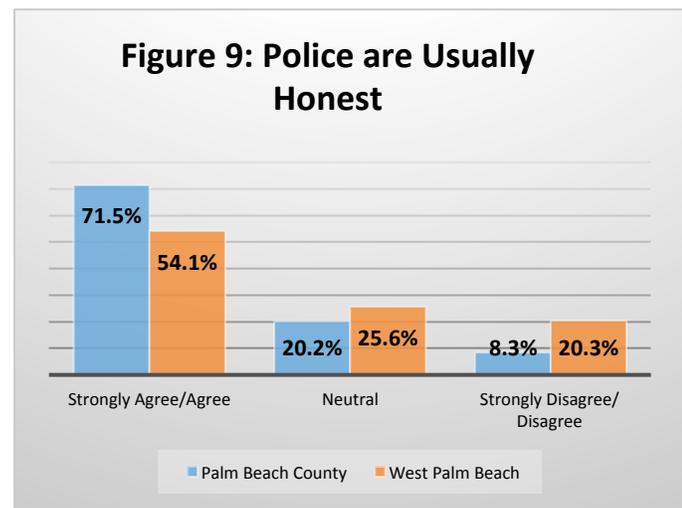
- “The police often stop people on the street without sufficient reason.”
  - This difference is statistically significant.

WPB city residents thought the police often stop people on the street without sufficient reason more often than Non-WPB city residents.



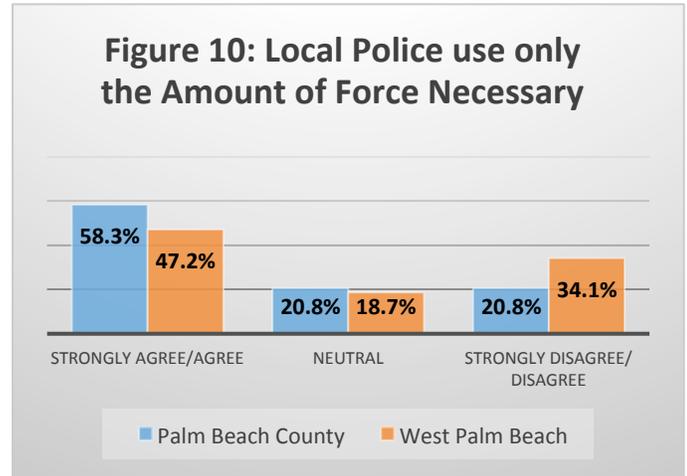
- “Police officers are usually honest.”
  - This difference is statistically significant.

Non-WPB residents were more likely to believe that police were more honest.



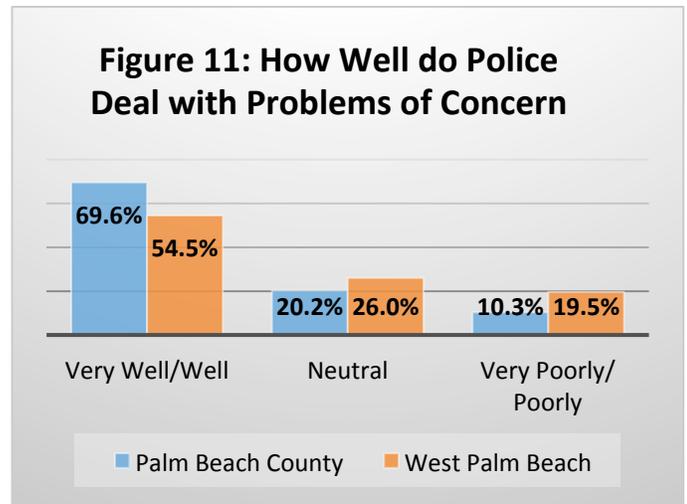
- “Local police officers use only the amount of force necessary to accomplish their tasks.”
  - This difference is statistically significant.

More Non-WPB city residents believed police officers use only the amount of force necessary to accomplish their tasks.



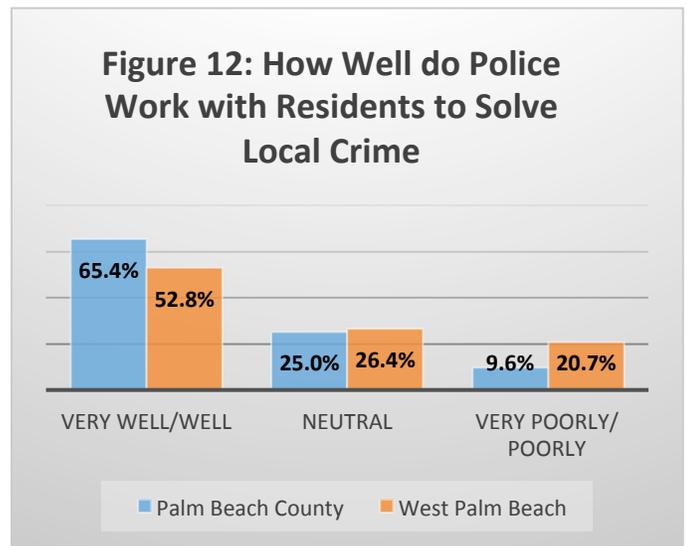
- “How well do police deal with the problems that really concern people in your neighborhood?”
  - This difference is statistically significant.

More Non-WPB city residents thought the police deal better with problems in their neighborhood.

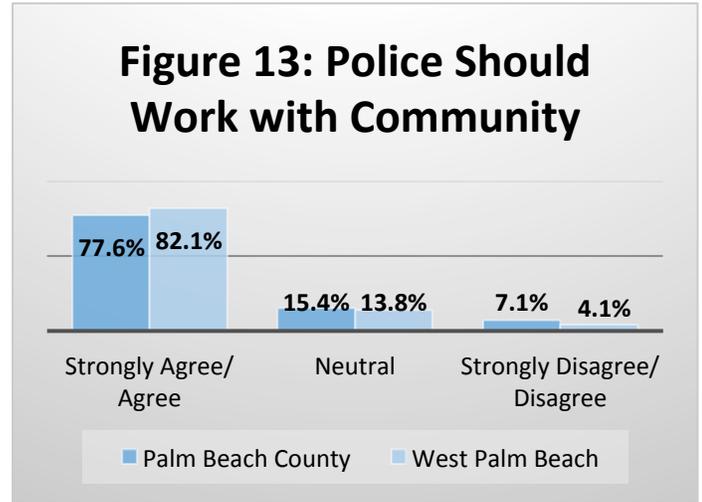


- “How well do police work with residents to address local crime problems?”
  - This difference is statistically significant.

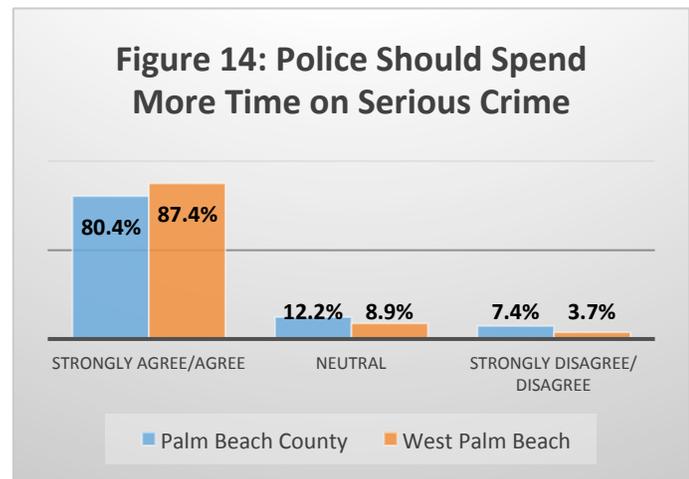
More Non-WPB city residents thought the police worked with residents to solve crime.



- “Police should spend more time working with community members and groups to solve problems.”
  - The difference is not statistically significant. The majority of both groups agreed that police should work more with community members and groups to solve problems.



- “Police should spend more time investigating serious crimes, serious criminals, and suspicious people.”
  - This difference is statistically significant. More WPB city residents believed that police should spend more time on serious crime.



## **Summary Police-Community Interactions**

Significantly more Non-West Palm Beach city residents compared to West Palm Beach city residents believed:

- Police are more courteous
- Police are fairer
- Police stop people on the street less often
- Police are usually honest
- Police use only the amount of force necessary to accomplish their tasks
- Police deal better with problems in the neighborhood
- Police work better with residents to solve local crime

Significantly more West Palm Beach city residents compared to Non-West Palm Beach city residents believed:

- Police should spend more time on serious crime

Both groups believed:

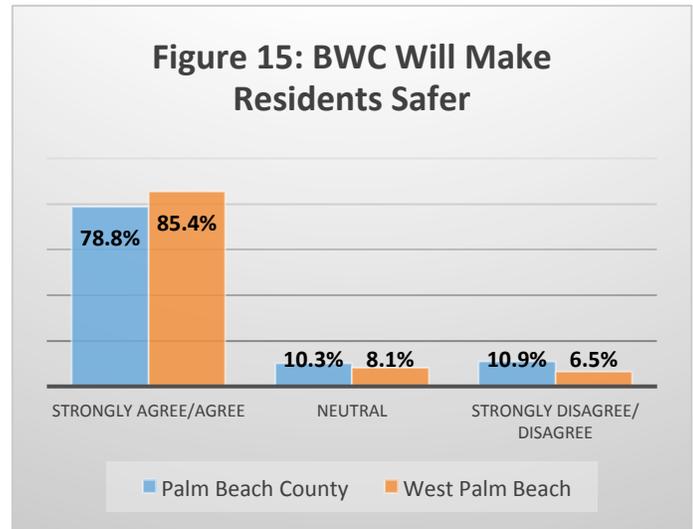
- Police should spend more time working with community members and groups

## Impact of BWCs

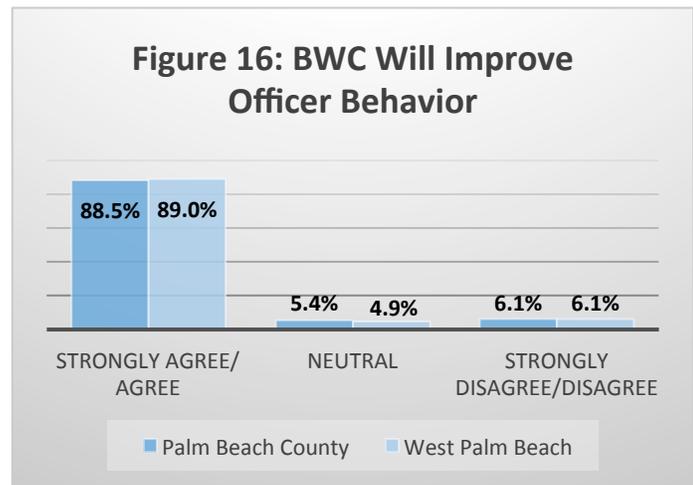
Part 2 of the survey contained ten questions that measure residents’ perceptions about the potential benefits and impact of BWCs. We report the data using the response categories noted earlier.

- “BWCs will make residents safer.”
  - This difference is statistically significant.

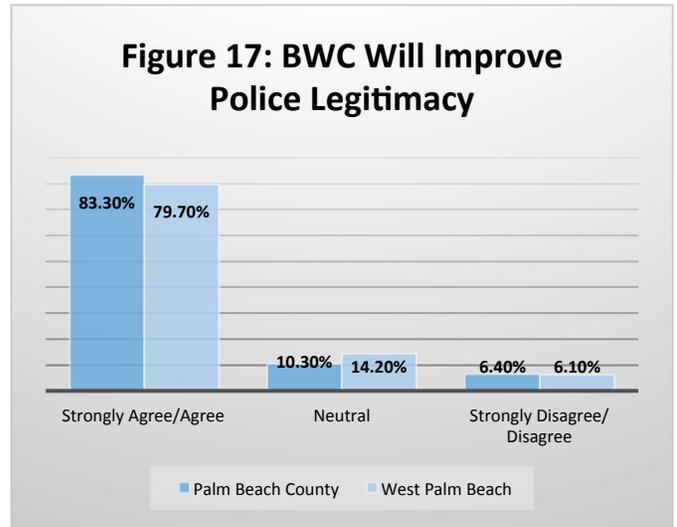
More WPB city residents agreed that BWCs will make residents safer. However, the majority of residents in both groups supported the statement regardless of where they lived.



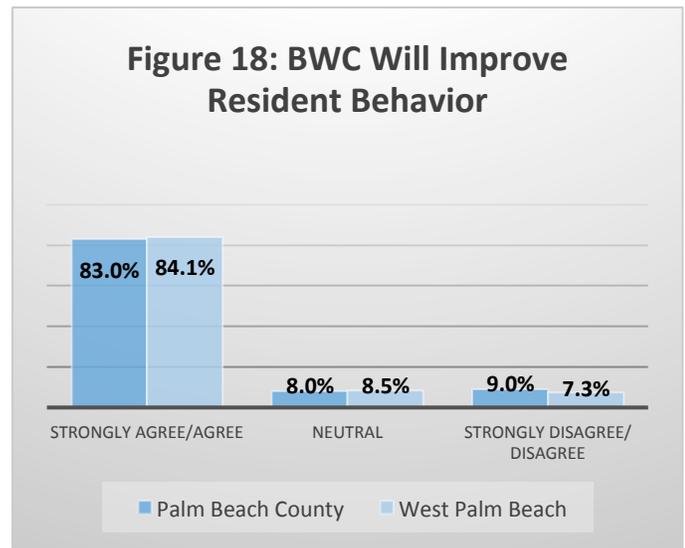
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- “BWCs will improve police officer behavior during interactions with residents.”
  - This difference is not statistically significant. The majority of both groups believed that BWCs will improve officer behavior regardless of where they lived.



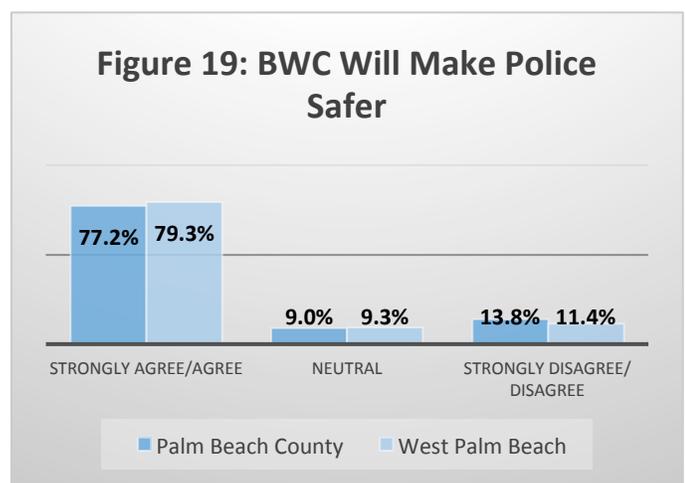
- “BWCs will improve residents’ views of police legitimacy.”
  - This difference is not statistically significant. The majority of both groups believed that BWCs will improve police legitimacy regardless of where they lived.



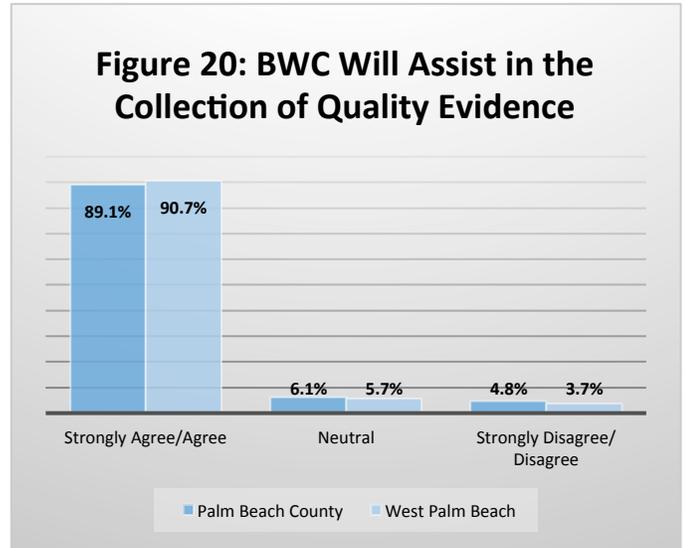
- “BWCs will improve resident behavior during interactions with the police.”
  - This difference is not statistically significant. The majority of both groups believed that BWCs will improve resident behavior regardless of where they lived.



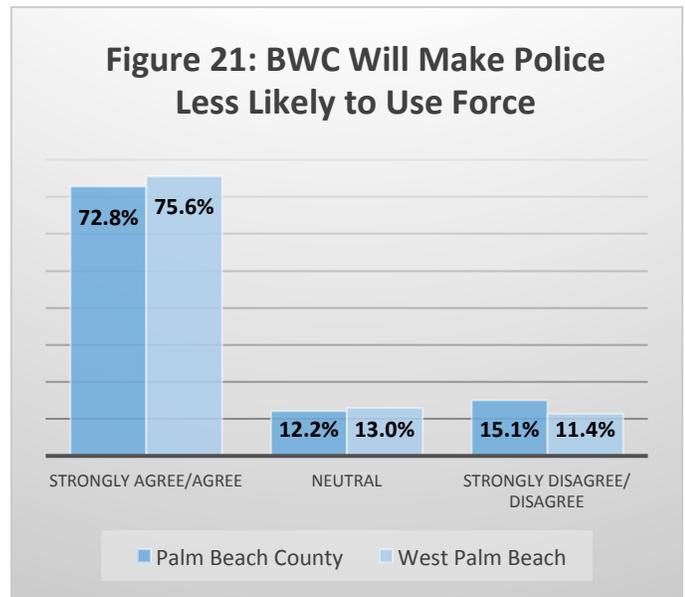
- 
- “BWCs will make police officers safer.”
  - This difference is not statistically significant. The majority of both groups believed that BWCs will make police safer regardless of where they lived.



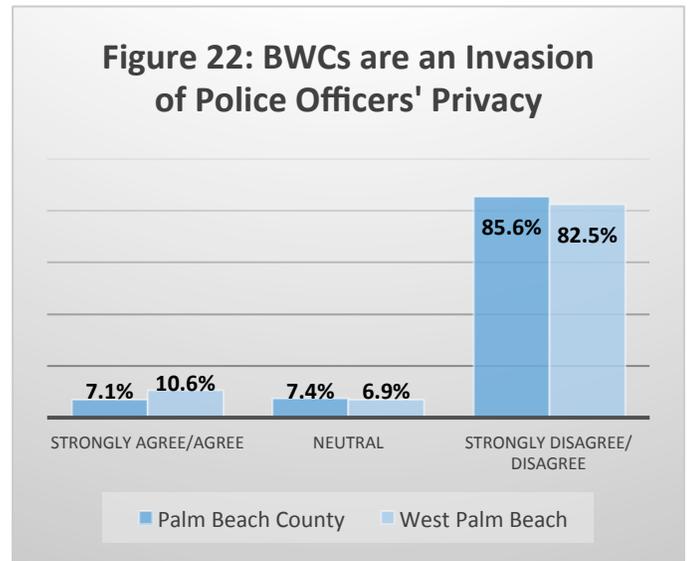
- “BWCs will assist the police in the collection of quality evidence.”
  - This difference is not statistically significant. The majority of both groups believed that BWCs will assist in the collection of quality evidence regardless of where they lived.



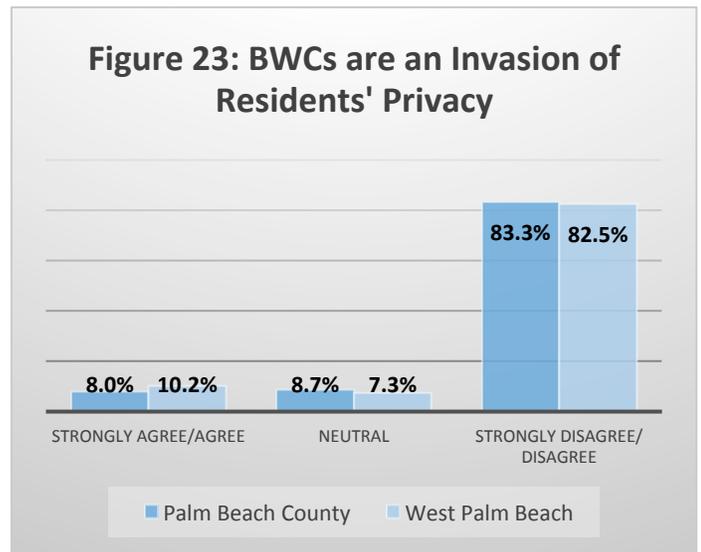
- “BWCS will make police officers less likely to use force in encounters with residents.”
  - This difference is not statistically significant. The majority of both groups believed that BWCs will make police less likely to use force regardless of where they lived.



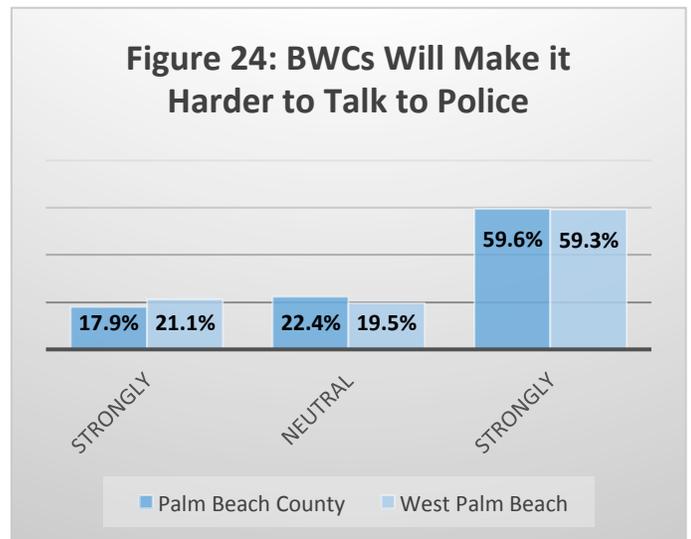
- “BWCs are an invasion of police officers’ privacy.”
  - This difference is not statistically significant. A small minority of respondents in both groups agreed that BWCs are an invasion of police officers’ privacy.



- “BWCs are an invasion of residents’ privacy.”
  - This difference is not statistically significant. A small minority of respondents in both groups agreed that BWCs are an invasion of residents’ privacy.



- “BWCs will make it harder to get residents to talk to the police.”
  - This difference is not statistically significant. Only one in five respondents in both groups agreed that BWCs will make it harder to talk to police.



## **Summary Impact BWCs**

Significantly more West Palm Beach city residents compared to Non-West Palm Beach city residents believed:

- BWCs will make residents safer

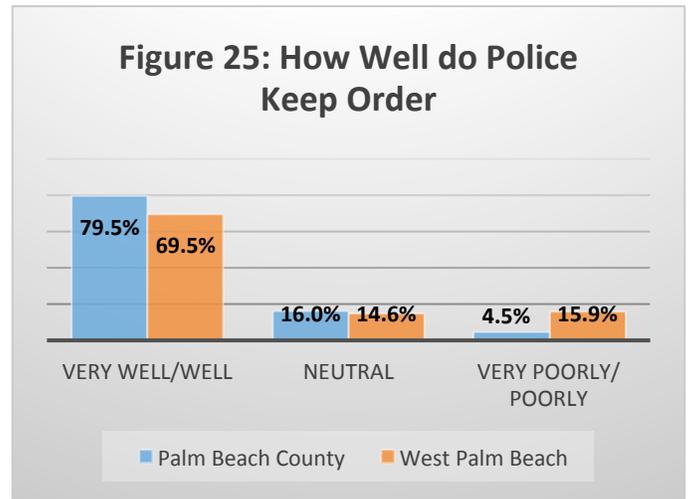
Both groups believed:

- BWCs will improve officer behavior
- BWCs will improve police legitimacy
- BWCs will improve resident behavior
- BWCs will make police safer
- BWCs will assist in the collection of quality evidence
- BWCs will make police less likely to use force
- BWCs are not an invasion of police officers' privacy
- BWCs are not an invasion of residents' privacy
- BWCs will not make it harder to talk to police

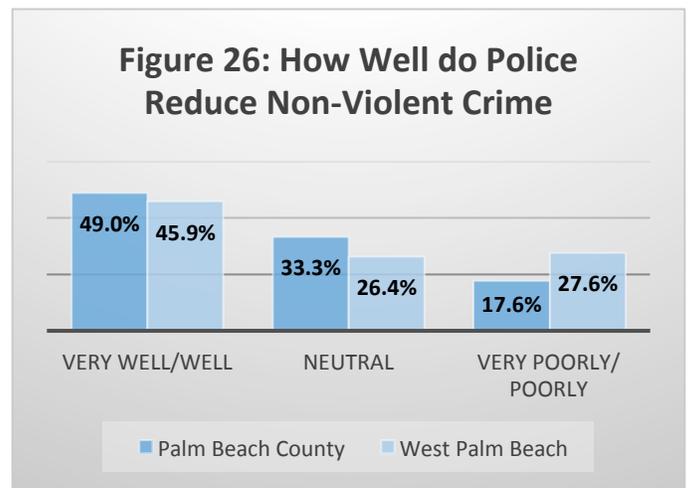
## Police Effectiveness

Part 3 of the survey contained six questions that measure residents' overall perceptions about police effectiveness. We report the data using the response categories noted earlier.

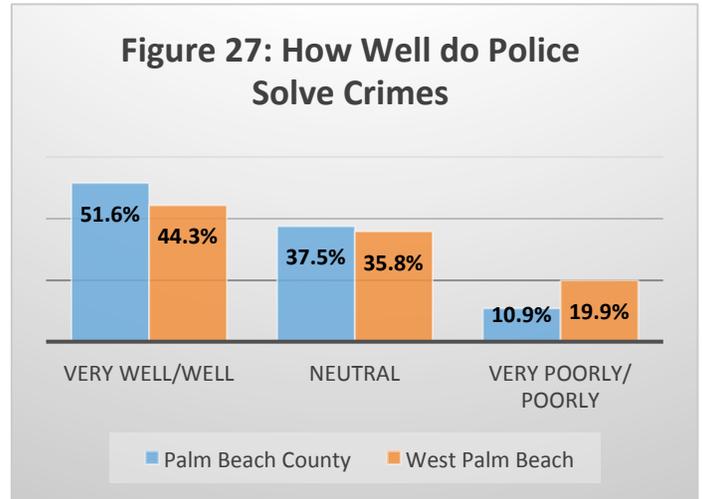
- “How well are the police keeping order on the streets and sidewalks?”
  - This difference is statistically significant. More Non-WPB city residents believed that police keep order on the streets and sidewalks better than WPB city residents.
  -



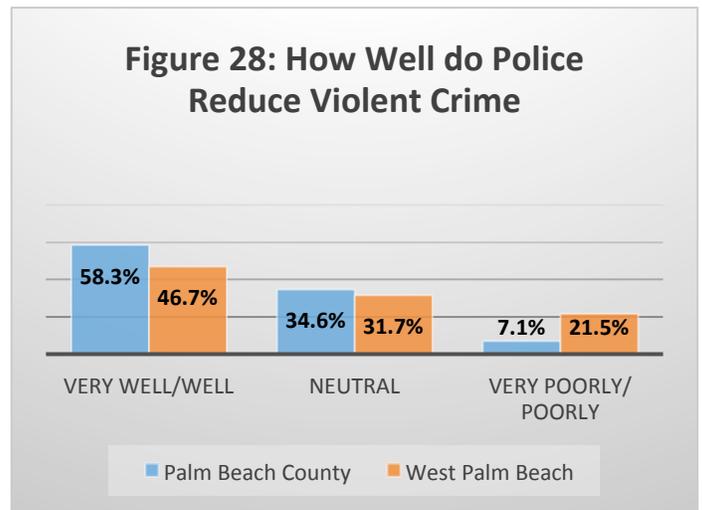
- “How well are the police reducing non-violent crimes such as burglary, auto theft, and theft from vehicles?”
  - This difference is not statistically significant. Almost one-half of the residents in both groups believed police do a good job in reducing non-violent crime.



- “How well are police solving crimes once they have occurred?”
  - This difference is statistically significant. More Non-WPB city residents believed that police solve crimes better once they occurred.

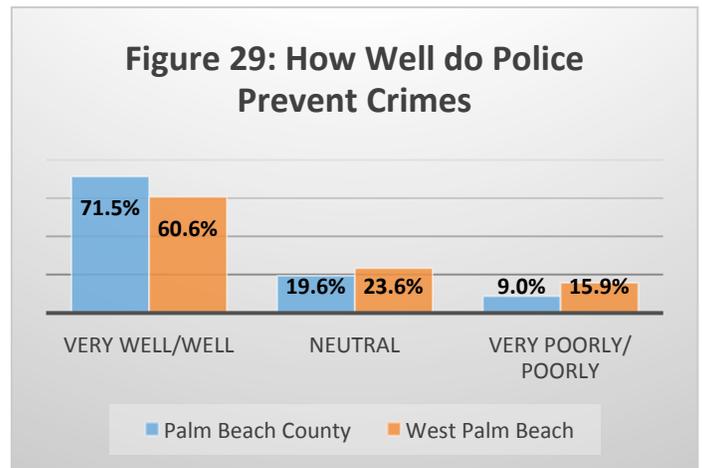


- “How well are the police reducing violent crimes such as assault, rape, robbery, and homicide?”
  - This difference is statistically significant. More Non-WPB city residents believed that police do a better job reducing violent crime.



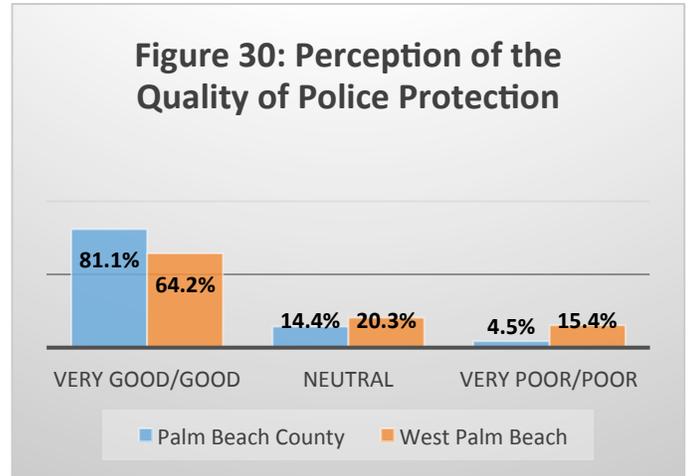
- “How well are police preventing crime in your neighborhood?”

This difference is statistically significant. More Non-WPB city residents believe that police prevent crime better in their neighborhood better.



- “How is the quality of police protection in your community?”
  - This difference is statistically significant.

More Non-WPB city residents believe that the quality of police protection in their community is better.



## **Summary Police Effectiveness**

Significantly more Non-West Palm Beach city residents compared to West Palm Beach city residents believed:

- Police keep order better on the streets and sidewalks
- Police solve crime better
- Police do a better job reducing violent crime
- Police prevent crime in their neighborhood better
- Quality of police protection is better

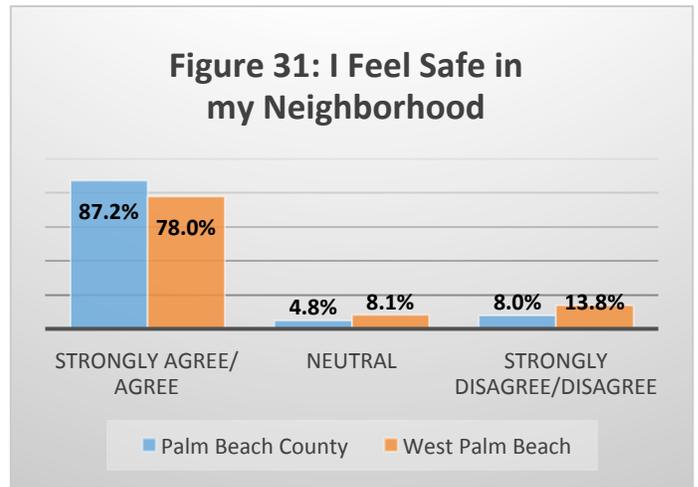
Both groups believed:

- Police do a good job in reducing non-violent crime

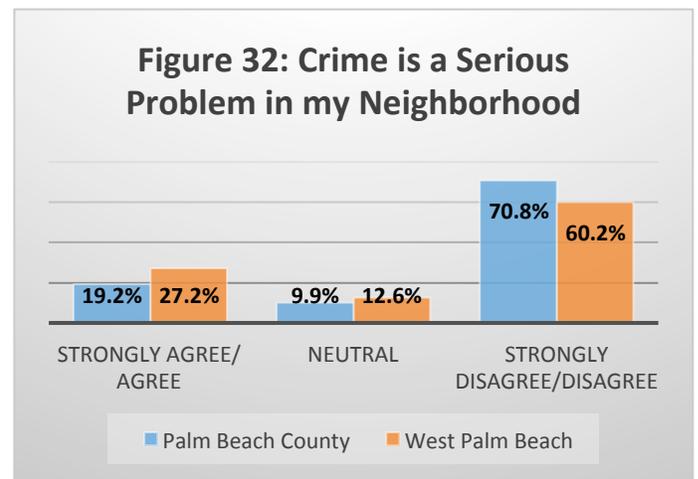
## Crime Concern

Part 4 of the survey contained two questions that asked participants their concern about crime. We report the data using the response categories noted above.

- “I feel safe in my neighborhood at night.”
  - This difference is statistically significant. More Non-WPB city residents said they feel safer in their neighborhood at night.



- “Crime is a serious problem in my neighborhood.”
  - This difference is statistically significant. More WPB city residents believe that crime is a serious problem in their neighborhood.



### **Summary Crime Concern**

Significantly more Non-West Palm Beach city residents compared to West Palm Beach city residents believed:

- They feel safer in their neighborhood at night

Significantly more West Palm Beach city residents compared to Non-West Palm Beach city residents believed:

- Crime is a serious problem in their neighborhood

## DISCUSSION

There were noteworthy findings across the four sections covered in the survey. In regard to BWCs and safety, there was a significant difference between WPB residents and Non-WPB residents' perceptions. WPB city residents were more likely to believe that BWCs would make residents safer, and this reflects an important theme regarding community safety concerns among residents in general. Notwithstanding this difference, the net findings were favorable regarding the police use of BWCs. The overwhelming majority of residents agreed that the use of BWCs would increase safety for officers and residents, improve officers' and residents' behavior, increase police legitimacy, and improve the quality of evidence collected. The majority of respondents also agreed that the use of BWCs would make it less likely for police officers to use force in encounters with citizens. These findings are encouraging as WPB police seek to increase efficiency and improve officers' interactions with the public with the use of BWCs.

In addition, perceptions regarding general police effectiveness must be considered. Overall, it was clear that residents' views on policing and crime-related issues were mixed, however, there was an unfavorable slant in WPB city residents' perceptions regarding police-community encounters, police effectiveness, and issues of crime and safety. WPB city residents reported less favorable perceptions on the fairness, courteousness, and honesty of local police. WPB city residents were more likely to agree that police do not deal with important problems well (including city crime problems). WPB city residents were more likely to agree that police often stop people on the street without sufficient reason. Furthermore, WPB city residents were less likely to agree that local police only use the amount of force necessary to accomplish their tasks.

Despite the favorable perceptions towards the use of BWCs, more broadly, these findings may warrant further attention to police practice regarding strategies for improving public perceptions. For instance, it was clear that a large portion of residents did not perceive the local police to be effective in reducing crime. WPB city residents in particular held less favorable views in terms of the effectiveness of police in solving and preventing crimes, as well as in order maintenance and the overall protection of residents. Results pertaining to the questions over crime concerns showed a similar trend. WPB city residents were more likely to view crime as a serious problem in their neighborhoods and the concern for safety was clearly more pronounced among WPB city residents.

Notwithstanding the noticeable differences in perceptions, the findings must be interpreted cautiously. As stated earlier, respondents were asked about their perceptions towards “local police” or “police,” and due to the generic nature of these terms there is no way to determine whether WPB city residents’ perceptions were actually shaped by WPB police. Differences in the age and race of sampled residents could also play a role in the results. Nonetheless, these findings provide a much-needed overview on residents’ views on areas of priority that could be useful to local police. Programmatic responses based on these survey questions can be incorporated with existing self-evaluation exercises in order to enhance police-differences between WPB city residents and Non-WPB residents’ perceptions further. Uncovering the potential reasons for these differences could lead to more focused strategies for enhancing residents’ perceptions toward police, and more effective crime prevention efforts.

## REFERENCES

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## APPENDIX A

**Type:** 0 – landline, 3 – cellphone

**INT01:** 02- no answer, 04-answering machine, 08-invalid phone number, 09-someone is answering, 10-busy, 77-fax machine

Hi, my name is \$I and I'm calling from the Haas Center at the University of West Florida. We're conducting a survey on behalf of the University's Department of Criminal Justice to gather residents' opinions about police in West Palm Beach and Palm Beach County, and the use of body-worn cameras by police officers. The survey should take no more than 10 minutes to complete. Would you be willing to take part in this survey?

**INT02:** 05- yes, 18-no, not interested, 96-No, part-time resident, 97-Spanish Speaking individual (unable to conduct survey), CB-Call Back Later, P9-Never Call Again

All of your responses to this survey are held in strict confidence, and only comprehensive results will be reported. Are you 18 years or older??

**INT03:** 06-yes, 07-no

(Cell Phone Only) All of your responses to this survey are held in strict confidence, and only comprehensive results will be reported. Are you a current resident of Palm Beach County, FL and at least 18 years old?

**INT04:** 01-yes, 03-no

<b>The following statements focus on your overall perceptions of the police in your community. After hearing each statement, please respond with Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree or Unsure.</b>	Strongly Agree				Strongly Disagree	Unsure	Unwilling to Respond
1a. The police should spend more time working with community members and groups to solve problems	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1b. The police should spend more time investigating serious crimes, serious criminals,	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

and suspicious people							
1c. The police in this city are usually courteous	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1d. The police are fair when dealing with people	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1e. The police often stop people on the street without sufficient reason.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1f. Police officers are usually honest	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1g. Local police officers use only the amount of force necessary to accomplish their tasks.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1h. Crime is a serious problem in my neighborhood	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1i. I feel safe in my neighborhood at night	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Very Well	Well	Neutral	Poorly	Very Poorly	Unsure	Unwilling to respond
2a. How well do police work with residents to address local crime problems?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2b. How well do the police deal with the problems that really concern people in your neighborhood?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2c. How well are the police keeping order on the streets and sidewalks?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2d. How well are the police reducing violent crimes such as assault, rape, robbery and	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

homicide?							
2e. How well are the police reducing non-violent crimes such as burglary, auto theft and theft from vehicles?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2f. How well are police solving crimes once they have occurred?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2g. How well are police preventing crime in your neighborhood?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Very Good	Good	Neutral	Poor	Very Poor	Unsure	Unwilling to respond
3. How is the quality of police protection in your community?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<b>The following questions are specifically aimed at getting your attitudes about police officers wearing body cameras</b>	Strongly Agree				Strongly Disagree	Unsure	Unwilling to respond
4a. Body-worn cameras will improve resident behavior during interactions with the police.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4b. Body-worn cameras will improve police officer behavior during interactions with residents.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4c. Body-worn cameras will assist the police in the collection of quality evidence.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4d. Body-worn cameras will improve residents' views of police legitimacy.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4e. Body-worn cameras are an invasion of police officers' privacy.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4f. Body-worn cameras are an invasion of residents' privacy.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

4g. Body-worn cameras will make it harder to get residents to talk to the police.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4h. Body-worn cameras will make police officers safer.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4i. Body-worn cameras will make residents safer.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4j. Body-worn cameras will make police officers less likely to use force in encounters with residents.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

5. How frequently do you interact with the police in your area?

- 1- Never
- 2- Rarely
- 3- Sometimes
- 4- Often
- 5- Unwilling to Respond

6. How would you describe your interactions with the police in your area?

- 1- Very Positive
- 2- Positive
- 3- Neutral
- 4- Negative
- 5- Very Negative
- 6- Unwilling to Respond

7. Do you live within West Palm Beach city limits?

- 1-Yes
- 2- No
- 3- Unsure
- 4- Unwilling to Respond

8. What is your sex?

- 1-Male
- 2-Female

9. What is your current age?

- 1 18-24
- 2 25-34
- 2 35-44
- 3 45-54
- 4 55-64
- 5 65-74
- 6 75-84
- 7 85+
- 8 Unwilling to Respond

10. Which of the following best describes your race/ethnicity?

- 1 Asian
- 2 African American/Black
- 3 Latino/Hispanic
- 5 Caucasian/White
- 5 Native American
- 6 Multiple races/ethnicities
- 7 Other \_\_\_\_\_
- 8 Unwilling to Respond

11. What is your current employment status?

- 1 Employed Full-time
- 2 Employed Part-time
- 3 Unemployed
- 4 Retired
- 4 Disability
- 5 On leave, medical or otherwise
- 6 Other
- 7 Unwilling to Respond

12. What is your current marital status?

- 1 Married
- 2 Divorced
- 3 Widowed
- 4 Single
- 5 Unwilling to Answer

13. Do you have any children?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No
- 3 Unwilling to Respond

14. If yes, how many?

- 1 Number?
- 2 Unwilling to Respond

15. Have you interacted with a police officer in your area who was wearing a body-worn camera?<sup>1</sup>

- 1 Yes
- 2 No
- 3 Unsure
- 4 Unwilling to Respond

Thank you for your time. This survey was conducted by the University of West Florida and the Haas Center for research purposes. The conducting of this sponsored research project by the Haas Center does not reflect the views of the University or Haas Center concerning body-worn police cameras. Have a great day!

**INT99: CO Completed**