Reduced faith in the police has been linked to a number of factors, including changes in policing behavior and diversity. In contrast to the weaker influence from diversity, the findings indicate that solving problems more effectively may do little to increase trust. For example, respondents were approximately 5% more likely to express confidence in police forces with below-average levels of trust and accountability, but this effect was only consistent when gender diversity was at its peak. Police forces that were 46% women were 2.2% more likely to be viewed as trustworthy and accountable among women. By contrast, gender diversity had neither a positive nor negative influence on police perceptions among men. The impact of police behavior and effectiveness was consistent and relatively large. Across all respondents, lower levels of use of force and citizen complaints, and higher levels of felony solve rates raised confidence and accountability perceptions, with the effect sizes generally larger than those witnessed for changes in diversity levels. For example, respondents were approximately 5% more likely to express confidence in police forces with below-average levels of lethal use of force.

The level of community police resources, police budget, and the type of population served had no impact on people’s views of the police.

**Findings**

In general, the impact of police diversity was limited. Racial diversity did significantly increase perceptions of trust and accountability, but this effect was only consistent when respondents read about a department containing the highest hypothetical level of racial diversity (54% non-White). Additionally, this impact was slightly stronger among Black respondents (increased the likelihood of viewing the police as trustworthy and accountable by 3.8% and 4.3%, respectively) as compared to changes among White respondents (increases of 2% and 2.6%, respectively). Similarly, greater gender diversity boosted both trust and accountability attitudes, but specifically among women, and only when this gender diversity was at its peak. Police forces that were 46% women were 2.2% more likely to be viewed as trustworthy and accountable among women. By contrast, gender diversity had neither a positive nor negative influence on police perceptions among men. The impact of police behavior and effectiveness was consistent and relatively large. Across all respondents, lower levels of use of force and citizen complaints, and higher levels of felony solve rates raised confidence and accountability perceptions, with the effect sizes generally larger than those witnessed for changes in diversity levels. For example, respondents were approximately 5% more likely to express confidence in police forces with below-average levels of lethal use of force.

The level of community police resources, police budget, and the type of population served had no impact on people’s views of the police.

**Implications**

These findings suggest that increasing the gender and racial diversity of law enforcement bodies have some utility to improve perceptions of the police, but this impact is generally small and limited to communities that are seeing changes in representation (e.g., women and Black people) and only occurs when these communities approach or surpass 50% of the force, a number that is significantly higher than current levels.

In contrast to the weaker influence from diversity, the findings indicate that solving serious crime while limiting citizen complaints and use of force can more consistently and effectively build perceptions of confidence and accountability, underscoring the value of investing in police training that builds capacity in these areas. Finally, this research was conducted through a survey experiment, it remains to be seen if these results would replicate in response to real-world changes in policing behavior and diversity.

**Article Citation**


**Research Question**

How does police diversity shape the public’s confidence in law enforcement and belief that the police can be held accountable?