



Finding 4

Public Safety & Law Enforcement

Active-duty family respondents of color report experiencing harassment and police profiling across all U.S. regions, both on and off installation, and reports are most prevalent among Black respondents.

As discussed at length in Finding 13, a series of racially/ethnically-charged events coalesced in 2020, leading to nationwide increases in racial/ethnic tension and racially/ethnically-motivated threats and harassment.¹ Results from this study suggest that experiences of these national trends are only slightly less prevalent within military communities than civilian communities. While active-duty family respondents* generally report better outcomes with regard to their military community, an alarming percentage report feeling unsafe in their *military* community and lack trust in *military* law enforcement. Moreover, reported experiences of racial/ethnic discrimination and police profiling since January 2020 are high in all regions of the United States and among all racial/ethnic minority groups analyzed.



One former neighbor, a dual officer household, had a giant Confederate flag hanging on the wall of their garage. Another neighbor, an officer household, had a QAnon flag all through 2020 until the ban on flags was enacted. Further, a majority of residents on base come from non-diverse, ideologically conservative places and are closed off to others who look or think differently from them.

- Asian Military Spouse

*Unless otherwise noted, respondents indicated having at least one racial/ethnic identity other than white.

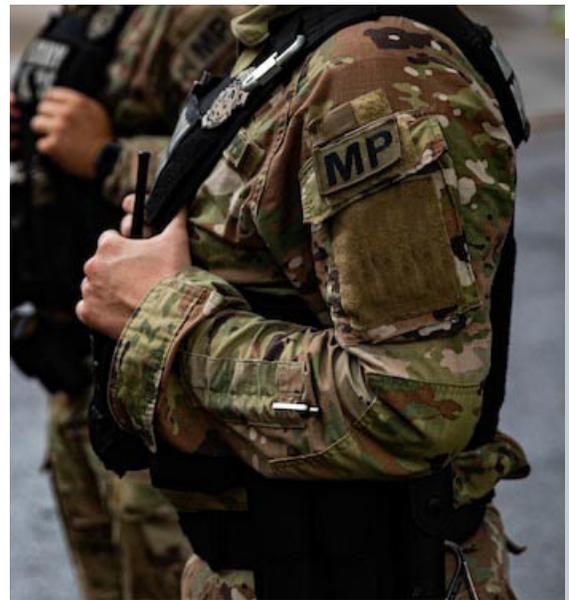
Fewer active-duty family respondents* report feeling unsafe in their military community than their civilian community; however, four in 10 report fearing for their personal safety in their military community at least once since January 2020 due to their race/ethnicity.

About one in three active-duty family respondents* report experiencing at least one incident of being threatened or harassed in their local civilian (33%)² or military (29%)³ community due to their race/ethnicity since January 2020, echoing reports from focus group participants. In addition, fewer active-duty family respondents report fearing for their personal safety at least once in their military community due to their race/ethnicity since January 2020, compared to their civilian community (41%⁴ vs. 54%⁵). However, the fact that four in 10 active-duty family respondents report this to be the case with regard to their *military* community is alarming. When asked to describe what these incidents looked like in an open-ended format, respondents describe general feelings of racism and discrimination, sometimes accompanied by overt symbolic displays (e.g., the Confederate flag) and discussion of politics in ways they viewed to be coded racism.



In communities that are not diverse, some locals are very verbal about their support of political figures that have been polarizing in issues concerning race. We opted to not get as connected to the community after being warned by others on base that African Americans are only 'tolerated' in certain areas of town, so we should be careful. As a result, we lived on base and enjoyed the diversity of the active-duty community.

- Black Military Spouse



*Unless otherwise noted, respondents indicated having at least one racial/ethnic identity other than white. The appearance of U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) visual information does not imply or constitute DoD endorsement.

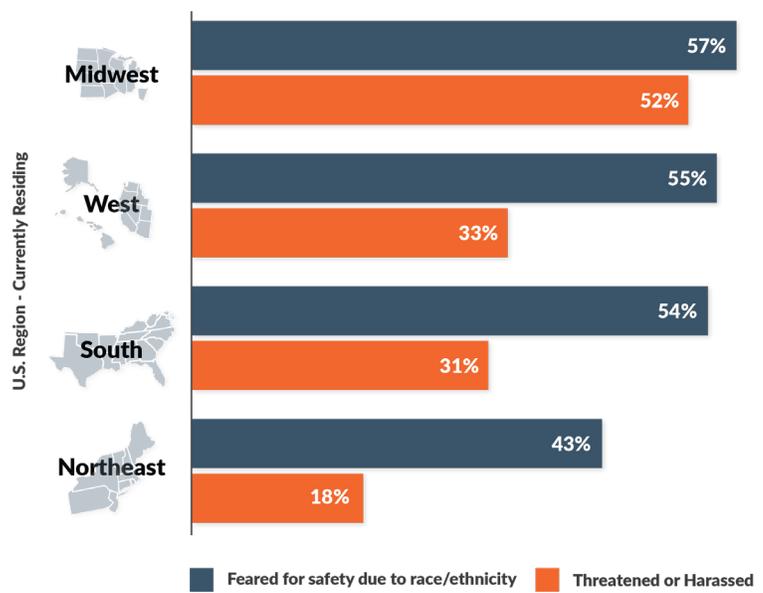
Racially/ethnically-motivated fear and experiences of threats and harassment since January 2020 are common for active-duty family respondents* residing in all regions of the United States.

Finding 1 highlights that, when considering their racial/ethnic identity, active-duty family respondents* report feeling substantially more comfortable being stationed in the Northeast and Hawaii than other regions of the United States. This finding prompted further exploration of the data within the sample regarding experiences of discrimination and harassment since January 2020.

While subsample sizes are small (especially in the Midwest and Northeast), responses suggest that many active-duty family respondents* have experienced “fear for [their] personal safety due to [their] race/ethnicity” and actual incidents of threats or harassment in their local civilian communities in all regions of the U.S.⁶ (Figure 1). More than half of active-duty family respondents residing in the Midwest, West, and South report fearing for their safety due to their race or ethnicity in their civilian community at least once since January 2020, and more than four in 10 (43%) living in the Northeast say the same.

Figure 1: Experiences in Current Civilian Community Since January 2020⁶

% active-duty respondents* reporting at least one incident



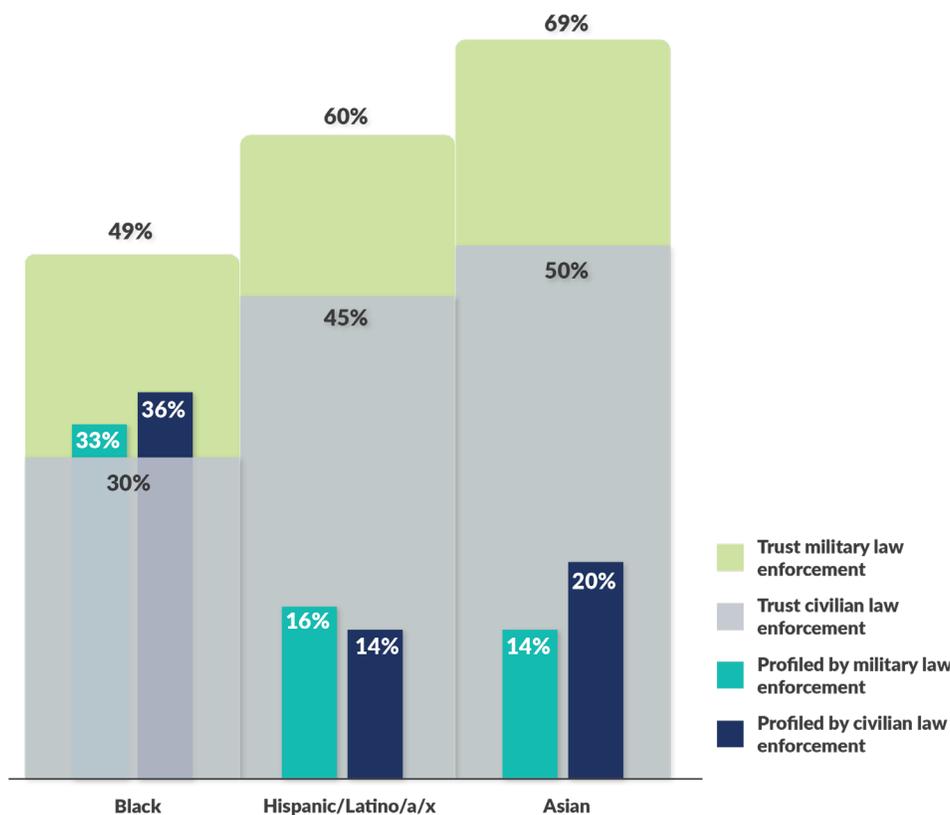
Although respondents report similar rates of police profiling on and off installation, they report higher levels of trust in *military* law enforcement than civilian law enforcement.

After overall confidence in law enforcement hit an all-time low in 2020 following the murder of George Floyd,⁷ the public disclosure of the assault on uniformed and unarmed Lt. Caron Nazario⁸—a biracial (Black and Hispanic) Army officer—caused an additional uproar within military and Veteran-connected communities.⁹ Focus group participants discussed the risks of “driving while black” in their civilian communities and described being pulled over by law enforcement for minor infractions (e.g., window tint, expired registration) they perceive their white, non-Hispanic counterparts would not be held accountable for.

*Unless otherwise noted, respondents indicated having at least one racial/ethnic identity other than white.

Notably, active-duty family respondents report remarkably higher levels of trust in military law enforcement than civilian law enforcement, despite similar levels of reported police profiling (Figure 2). Striking differences emerged by race/ethnicity, with Black active-duty family respondents reporting the highest levels of police profiling and lowest levels of trust (Figure 2), aligning with national polls.¹⁰ Nearly one in three Black active-duty family respondents report being profiled by military (33%¹¹) or civilian (36%)¹² law enforcement at least once since January 2020, and a greater proportion trust military law enforcement (49%)¹³ than civilian law enforcement (30%),¹⁴ though trust remains low in military law enforcement as well. Similar to the previous section (and with the same caveats regarding a small sample size), active-duty family respondents* residing in all regions of the U.S. report incidents of perceived profiling by civilian law enforcement, with incidents most commonly reported among those residing in the Midwest (33%)¹⁵ and West (32%)¹⁶ and least commonly among those in the Northeast (23%).¹⁷

Figure 2: Trust in military law enforcement higher than in civilian despite similar levels of perceived profiling since January 2020¹⁸
 % of active-duty family respondents*



*Unless otherwise noted, respondents indicated having at least one racial/ethnic identity other than white.

Finding 4 Endnotes

- ¹ Ruiz, Horowitz, & Tamir, 2020, July 1; Human Rights Watch, 2020, May 12; Addo, 2020.
- ² n=526 (excludes those reporting "I don't know").
- ³ n=510 (excludes those reporting "I don't know").
- ⁴ n=523 (excludes those reporting "I don't know").
- ⁵ n=530 (excludes those reporting "I don't know").
- ⁶ After excluding those reporting "I don't know," 425 respondents residing in the Midwest (n=46), West (n=141), South (n=188), and Northeast (n=50) provided an answer when asked: "Considering interactions in your local CIVILIAN community since January 2020, how often have you experienced the following? - 'I have been threatened or harassed.'" After excluding those reporting "I don't know," 427 respondents residing in the Midwest (n=44), West (n=140), South (n=190), and Northeast (n=53) provided an answer when asked "Considering interactions in your local CIVILIAN community since January 2020, how often have you experienced the following? - 'I feared for my personal safety because of my race/ethnicity.'" Both questions were asked using the following scaled answer choices: Never, 1-4 times, 5-10 times, More than 10 times; 'at least one incident' includes anyone who selected 1-4 times, 5-10 times, and more than 10 times. For the purposes of analysis, regions were defined using census aggregation: Midwest (Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, Wisconsin); West (Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, Wyoming); South (Alabama, Arkansas, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, West Virginia); and Northeast (Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont).
- ⁷ Jones, 2021.
- ⁸ Ives & Cramer, 2021.
- ⁹ Finley & Foreman, 2021, April 18; Pickrell, 2021, April 13.
- ¹⁰ Gilberstadt, H., 2020, June 5; Newall, Jackson, & Sawyer, 2021, March 5.
- ¹¹ n=243
- ¹² n=247
- ¹³ n=259
- ¹⁴ n=263
- ¹⁵ n=42
- ¹⁶ n=145
- ¹⁷ n=52
- ¹⁸ Profiled by military law enforcement - Black (33%, n=243), Asian (14%, n=100), and Hispanic (16%, n=160); profiled by civilian law enforcement - Black (36%, n=247), Asian (20%, n=100), Hispanic (14%, n=160). Trust of military law enforcement - Black (49%, n=259), Asian (69%, n=109), Hispanic (60%, n=177). Trust of civilian law enforcement - Black (30%, n=263), Asian (50%, n=109), Hispanic (45%, n=177).

Finding 4 References

Unless otherwise noted, images are sourced from Blue Star Families Stock Photos, DVIDSHub.net, Unsplash.com. The appearance of U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) visual information does not imply or constitute DoD endorsement.

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