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Eight-Four Percent of Americans Oppose Civil Asset Forfeiture-But Only Once They're Told What It Is

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In a boost to American public opinion's beleaguered reputation, a new Cato Institute/YouGov survey indicates that 84 percent of us are against civil asset forfeiture—the process through which police departments can confiscate property, goods or cash merely *suspected* to have been involved in a drug crime, without a conviction being obtained—once it's explained to us.

Because, how would you even *think* that that's ok?

It actually gets worse: You don't even need to be *charged* with a crime for police to seize your property, and in most US jurisdictions, the police departments that do the seizing get to keep the proceeds, creating an obvious conflict of interests.

Seventy-six percent of survey respondents said that if assets *are* forfeited, they should not profit the local police department that seized them, but go instead to state-level law enforcement or general funds.

"No single policy undermines justice and distorts the mission of law enforcement more egregiously than civil asset forfeiture," wrote Lieutenant Commander Diane Goldstein (Ret.), a 20-year veteran of California law enforcement, in an article on the subject for *The Influence* earlier this year.

Her piece noted numerous examples of blatant policing for profit: "One notorious case involved the seizure in December 2011 of an office building worth $1.5 million by the City of Anaheim and the DEA—over a $37 medical marijuana transaction." And these examples are not isolated. By 2014, as the *Washington Post* has noted, more property was taken from Americans via civil asset forfeiture than by burglars.

It's little wonder that upwards of 75 percent of the Americans surveyed in each major demographic and party-political group are opposed to this practice. However, as the Cato Institute notes, most Americans remain unaware of what exactly civil asset forfeiture entails, so ending it will require spreading the word.