

WATCHDOG ((ARENA))

Chicago police chief fired as American attitudes towards police unveiled

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Amid a gathering of think tank, academia, and law enforcement figures at the libertarian Cato Institute to discuss the rise of police scrutiny in the U.S. came Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel's unexpected announcement following the recent video release of a black 17-year-old being shot 16 times by a white officer.

"I formally asked for Superintendent [Garry] McCarthy's resignation," Emanuel said in a Tuesday afternoon news conference about the police chief he appointed in 2011. According to the Chicago Sun Times, McCarthy and the mayor had met at City Hall Monday night and McCarthy was not fired.

POLICING THE POLICE: A new survey on American attitudes toward police is unveiled as Chicago's police chief is fired following the video release of Laquan McDonald's death.

Laquan McDonald, the black teen holding a 4-inch knife, was shot by Officer Jason Van Dyke on Oct. 20, 2014. The video was finally released when Cook County Judge Franklin Valderrama ruled Nov. 19 that the mayor and his administration, who had fought the release of the police dashboard camera video, had violated the state's open records law. While Emanuel maintains he didn't release the recording to avoid interference with the investigation, Valderrama ruled the claim as baseless.

Van Dyke has since been charged with first-degree murder, and Emanuel has tapped several individuals for his new Task Force on Police Accountability to improve police accountability, identify effective ways to track and evaluate officers with repetitive complaints, and recommend how to handle the release of videos with police-involved incidents.

The highly publicized killings of Tamir Rice, Walter Scott, Freddie Gray, and now Laquan McDonald precipitated the Cato Institute's Tuesday conference, "Policing in America." During

the conference, Cato unveiled its findings from their new survey, “American Attitudes Towards the Police.”

Emily Elkins, a research fellow at the institute, surveyed 2,000 Americans 18 years of age and over from a national sample of white Americans, African Americans, and Hispanics about their competency and perceptions of law enforcement.

When asked whether Americans think crime is on the decline, which it has been since the 1990s, the survey found most Americans are, in fact, aware of this. However, while crime concerns are less salient, 65 percent think there is a “war on police,” 63 percent think, in recent years, too many people have shown too little respect for police officers, and 72 percent think police officers have very dangerous job, overall.

The survey did reveal wide gaps between the three races’ perceptions and bias towards police.

According to the survey, 68 percent of African Americans feel police are not held accountable, compared to 52 percent of Hispanics and 39 percent of Caucasians. 81 percent of African Americans say the criminal justice system favors white Americans, compared to 56 percent of Hispanics and, 37 percent of Caucasians.

When rating personal satisfaction with interactions with police, white Americans surveyed gave their local police 4 out of 5 stars, while African Americans gave a little over 3 stars and Hispanics a little over 3-and-a-half stars. African Americans were found to be twice as likely to report police using profanity in their interactions than white Americans, and both African Americans and Hispanics say police use deadly force too quickly.

Elkins emphasized police have to realize, like a business in a free market, they are responsible for earning a positive perception and trust from the public.

Despite the varying gaps in racial perceptions, there is common ground among all groups on specific policy proposals:

63 percent support more training for police officers on how to handle confrontations.

92 percent support body cameras, and 55 percent said they would be willing to pay higher taxes to outfit local departments.

58 percent support police officers using drones, while 54 percent think drones would invade privacy.

81 percent support having an outside agency to investigate police misconduct.

The following policies were also found to be unpopular among the entire surveyed group:

86 percent oppose civil forfeiture.

63 percent oppose racial profiling, while 63 percent think the practice is commonly used.

54 percent oppose police using military grade weapons.

Elkins said the full survey will be released in a few weeks.

Americans for Tax Reform President Grover Norquist also addressed the public opinion concern in his remarks to conference attendees. “They’ve turned police in a lot of cities into tax collectors,” Norquist explained.

“Internal emails in Ferguson[, Missouri] show the department of finance sending letters to the police chief explaining how to police to maximize revenue. They’re not saying there are more crimes on this street. They’re saying there is more cash to be made.”

Norquist said in 2013 alone, the court ordered 9,000 warrants in a city of 21,000 people to go after people who hadn’t paid parking tickets or infractions. In some cases, one stop would yield 14 infractions. Out of an \$11 million budget, 1.4 million came from tickets.

“When you’ve turned police into tax collectors, you shouldn’t be surprised that they’ve become unpopular,” said Norquist.

“As a country that started as a tax revolt, you’d think they’d be more sensitive.”