

Younger Generations are Least Accurate About Police Shootings and Least Trusting of Police

Research Report: PADS-011 | March 23, 2024

Research Question

Amidst the George Floyd anti-police riots, the Skeptic Research Center showed that Americans' anti-police attitudes were influenced to a significant degree by their ignorance about the number of unarmed Black men shot by police (McCaffree & Saide, 2021; Saide, McCaffree & McCready, 2021). Probably due in part to mainstream media's constant portrayals of police as bloodthirsty racist killers (e.g., Balko, 2022; Thompson, 2021), we found that Americans identifying as "very liberal" were extremely misinformed, with nearly 54% believing 1,000 or more unarmed black men were shot by police in 2019, and with over 22% of "very liberals" believing the number was 10,000 or more (the actual number is around 10). Given Americans' continued fledgling trust in police—64% of Americans reported high levels of trust in police in 2004 compared to 43% in 2023 (Gallup Polling, 2023)—in this report we ask: how does Americans' accuracy about policing vary by generation, and how does being inaccurate about policing relate to trust of police?

Methodology

Data Source

- Political Accuracy and Divisions Study ("PADS," collected in August-October 2022; n = 3,014) using Qualtrics Panel Services and quota sampling. Sample is lowered to n = 2,938 when respondents from the silent generation are removed.

Data Quality Control

- All participants in this dataset passed attention, response time, fraud, duplication, and bot checks.

Participants

- 3014 adults in the United States (51.2% Female)
- Average Age = 44.39 years (SD = 17.41 years)
- 46.4% White; 32.2% Hispanic; 21.2% Black

Measures

- Trust in Police:** was measured by asking respondents to rate agreement with the statement, "I trust police to act in the best interests of citizens." Answers ranged from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7).
- Generation:** based on age at time of data collection. Gen Z (18 to 25 years), Millennial (26 to 41 years), Gen X (42 to 57 years), and Boomer (58 to 76 years).
- Knowledge About Race and Policing:** Respondents were asked, "If you had to guess, how many unarmed Black men were killed by police in 2021?" Option categories ranged from "about 10" to "more than 10,000."

Summary of Findings

- Nearly 27% of GenZ (21% of Millennials) estimated that 1,000 unarmed Black men were shot by police in 2021. Over 14% of GenZ (7% of Millennials) estimated that 10,000 or more unarmed Black men were shot by police (see Fig 1.)
 - In reality, available data (see chart notes below) indicate that 11 unarmed Black men were shot by police in 2021.
- Amongst generation groups, GenZ reported the lowest average level of trust in police. GenZ is the only generation group with below-midpoint levels of trust (see Fig. 2)
- Believing police shot 10,000 or more unarmed Black men in 2021 was associated with below-midpoint levels of trust in police (see Fig. 3).
 - People believing police shot zero unarmed Black men in 2021 had the highest levels of trust in police.
 - Again, according to available data (see chart notes below) the actual number of unarmed Black men shot by police in 2021 is 11.

Take-Home Messages

- GenZ is more ignorant about policing (specifically about unarmed Black men killed) than any other generation group.
- GenZ reported the lowest level of average trust in police of any generation group.
- Overestimations of police shootings are associated with lower levels of trust in police.
- Have an interpretation? Share it here: research@skeptic.com

SKEPTIC

This report was brought to you by the **Skeptic Research Center** and the Worldview Foundations Research Team.

Become Involved!

skeptic.com/research-center/become-involved

Researchers

Kevin McCaffree, PhD
Anondah Saide, PhD
research@skeptic.com

Suggested Citation

McCaffree, K., & Saide, A. (2024). Younger Generations are Least Accurate About Police Shootings and Least Trusting of Police. Skeptic Research Center, PADS-011.

Figure 1

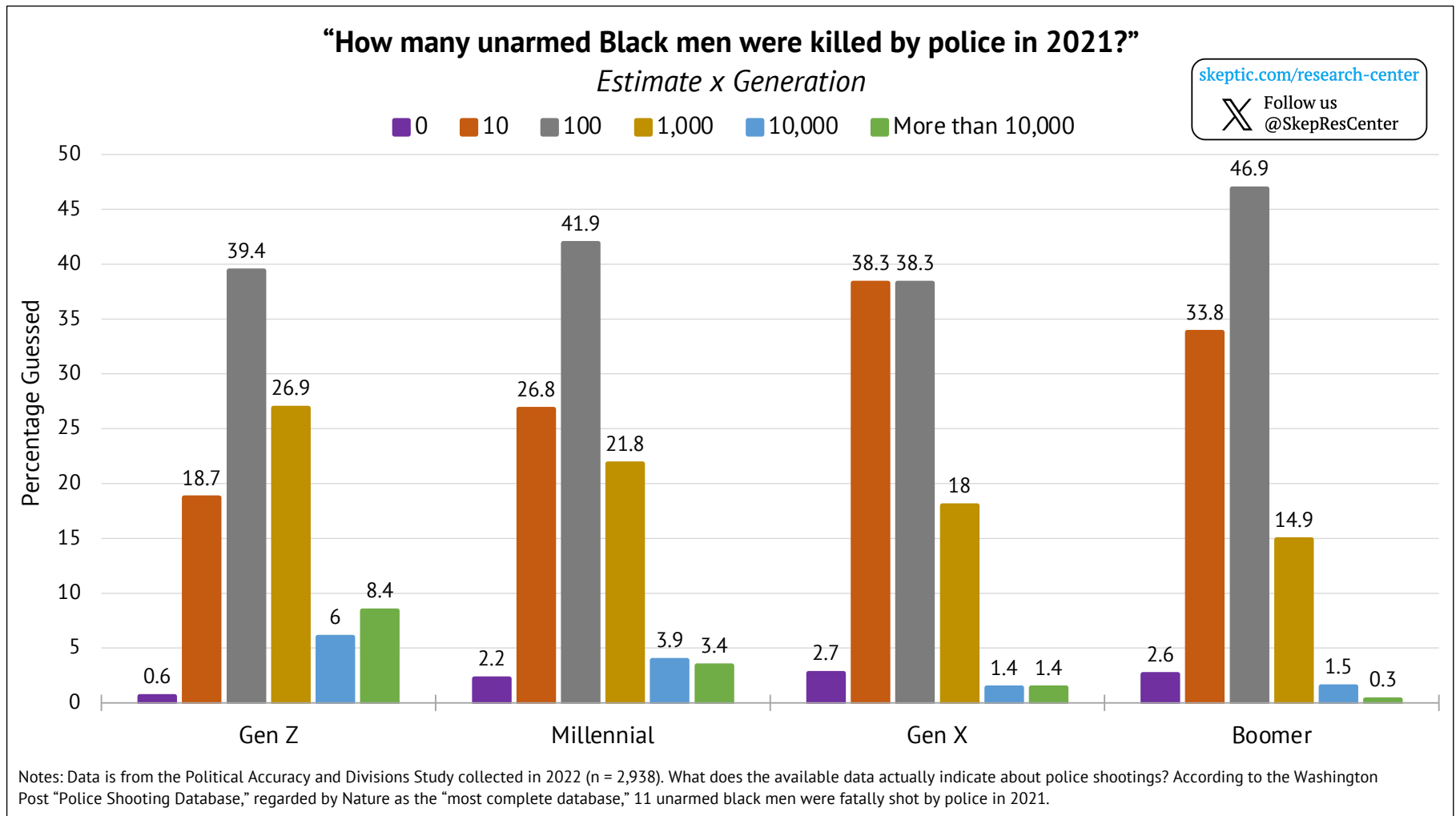


Figure 2

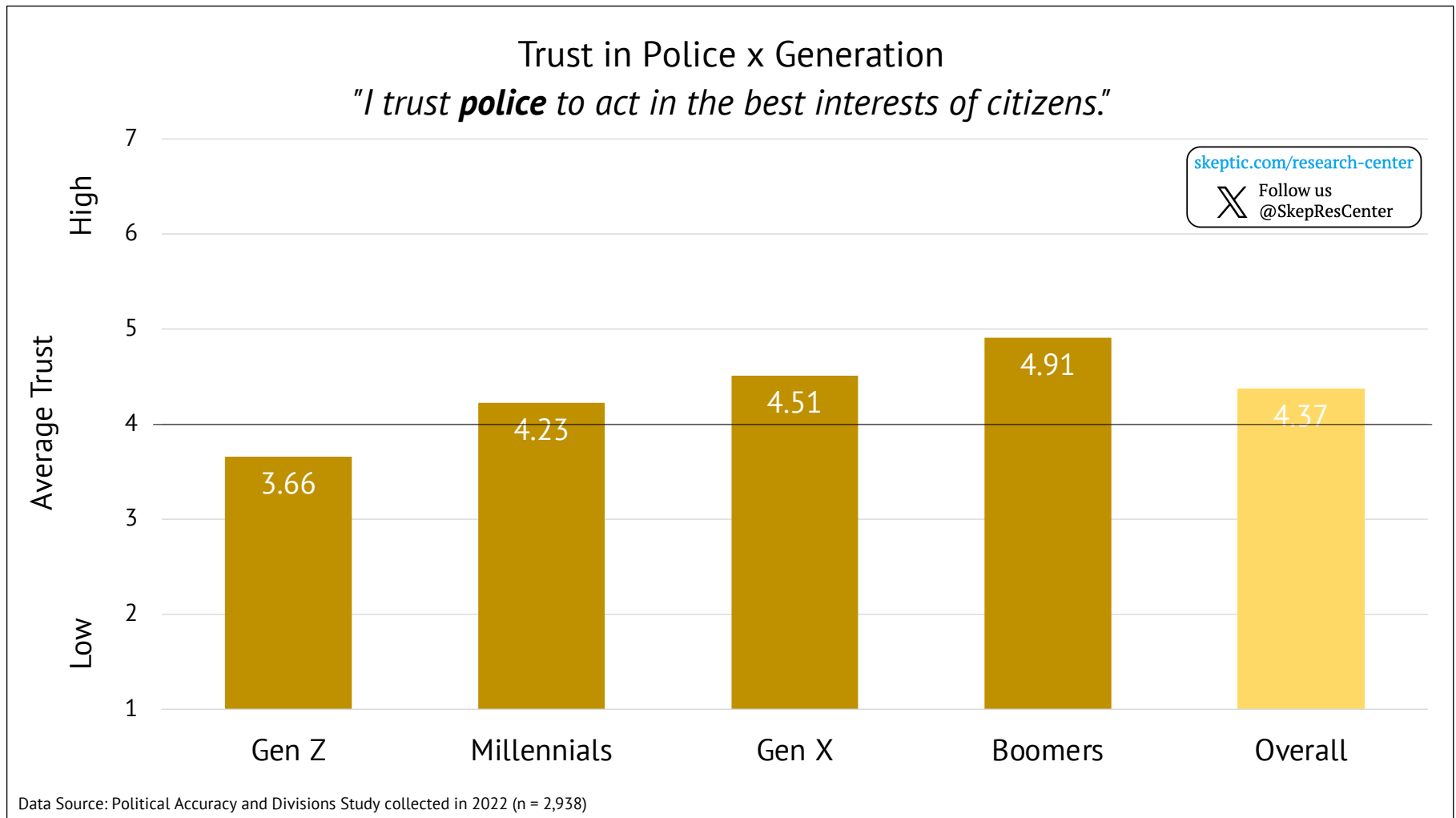
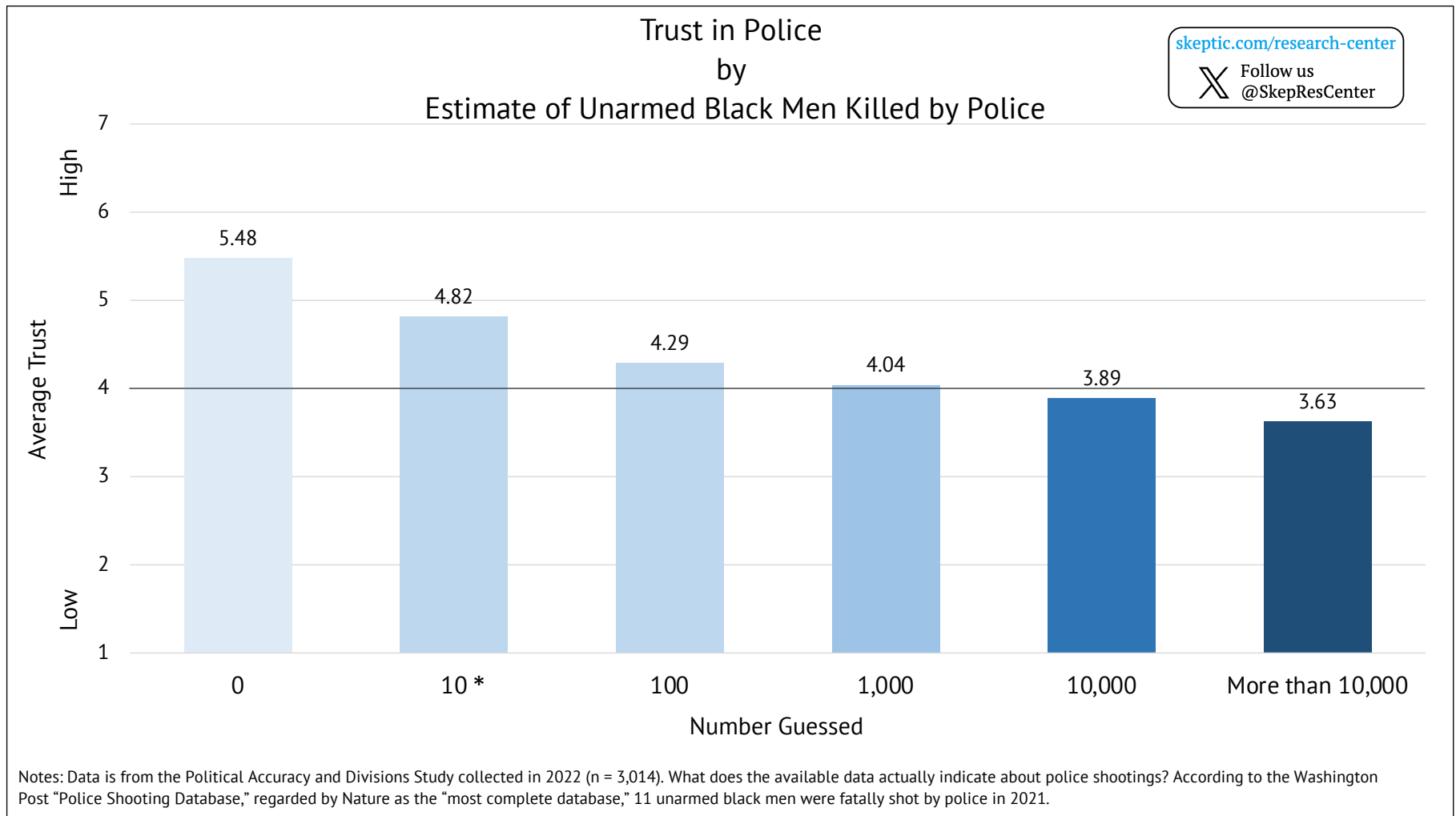


Figure 3



References

- McCaffree, K. & Saide, A. (2021). *How Informed are Americans about Race and Policing?* Skeptic Research Center, CUPES- 007. (URL: <https://www.skeptic.com/research-center/reports/Research-Report-CUPES-007.pdf>)
- Saide, A. R., McCaffree, K. J., & McCready, M. (2021). Pandemic politics: Americans' social and political attitudes in 2020. *Skeptic Magazine*, 26(3), 58-63. (URL: https://www.skeptic.com/reading_room/pandemic-politics-how-2020-impacted-americans-social-political-attitudes/)
- Thompson, C. 2021. *Fatal Police Shootings of Unarmed Black People Reveal Troubling Patterns*. National Public Radio (“NPR”). (URL: <https://www.npr.org/2021/01/25/956177021/fatal-police-shootings-of-unarmed-black-people-reveal-troubling-patterns>).
- Balko, R. 2022. What Black cops know about racism in policing. Washington Post. (URL: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2022/04/13/black-police-know-racism-law-enforcement/>).
- Gallup Polling. 2023. *Confidence in Institutions*. (URL: <https://news.gallup.com/poll/1597/confidence-institutions.aspx>).