

Political Beliefs and Views of Law Enforcement Expenditures

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Research Questions

- Do conservatives differ from other political stances in their attitudes towards law enforcement spending?
- Does the association vary by age?

Significance

- Current annual US law enforcement expenditures exceed \$180 million, without significant changes in crime rates (Gullapalli et al., 2019).
- Shifting some of these resources to other areas, such as education, could help lower overall crime rates.

Background

- Mixed past research findings.
- No significant crime deterrence due to increased law enforcement (Cloninger, 1975).
- Increased law enforcement leads to higher crime deterrence (McPheters & Stronge, 1974).
- Tough on crime and mass incarceration are questionable (Beckett et al., 2019)
- Conservatives are more likely than liberals to have a tough on crime stance (Chammah, 2016).

Hypothesis

- Conservatives are more likely than liberals to suggest that US spends too little on law enforcement.
- Older generations are more likely than younger ones to suggest that US law enforcement expenditures are too little, despite political stance.

Data and Sample

- General Social Survey
- Conducted by National Opinion Research Center at University of Chicago
- Nationally representative of US adults 18 or older
- 2014 (N = 2,538), 2016 (N = 2,689), 2018 (N = 2,348)

Dependent Variable

- Attitudes on law enforcement expenditures (N = 3,758)
 - Is the US spending on law enforcement:
 - Too little 52.2%
 - About right 36.0%
 - Too much 11.8%

Independent Variable

- Respondents' political views
 - Do you see yourself as:
 - Liberal 28.0%
 - Moderate 39.0%
 - Conservative 33.0%

Control Variable

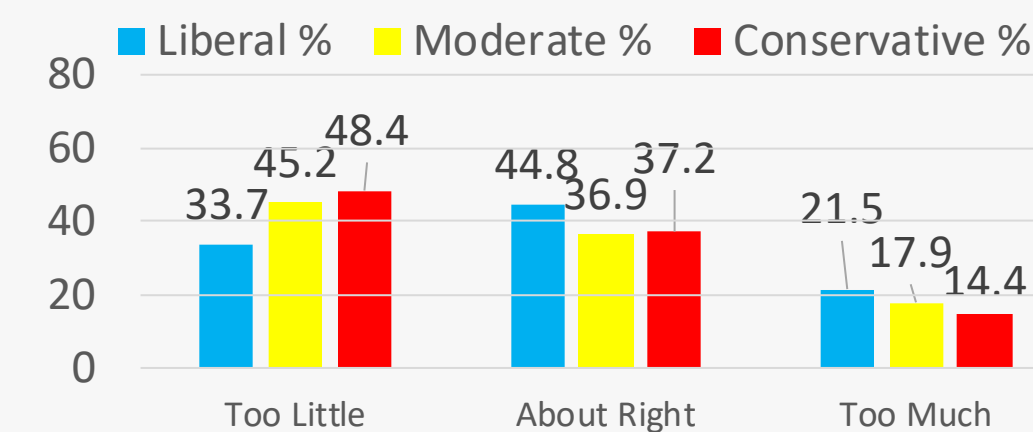
- Respondents' age
 - What is your age?
 - 18 – 34 26.0%
 - 35 – 49 25.0%
 - 50 – 64 27.0%
 - 65+ 22.0%

Analysis

- Cross tabulation and Chi-square tests using SPSS

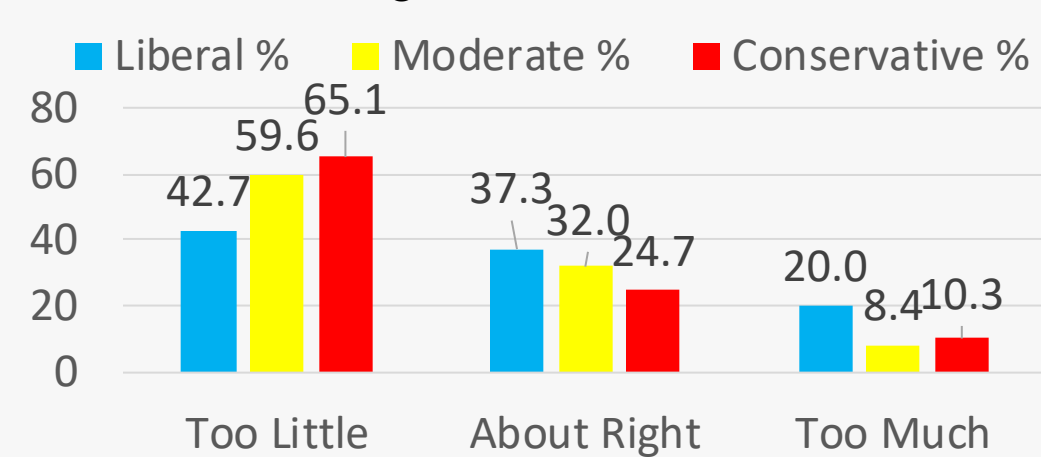
Results

Figure 1. % Views of Law Enforcement Spending by Political Stance: Ages 18-34



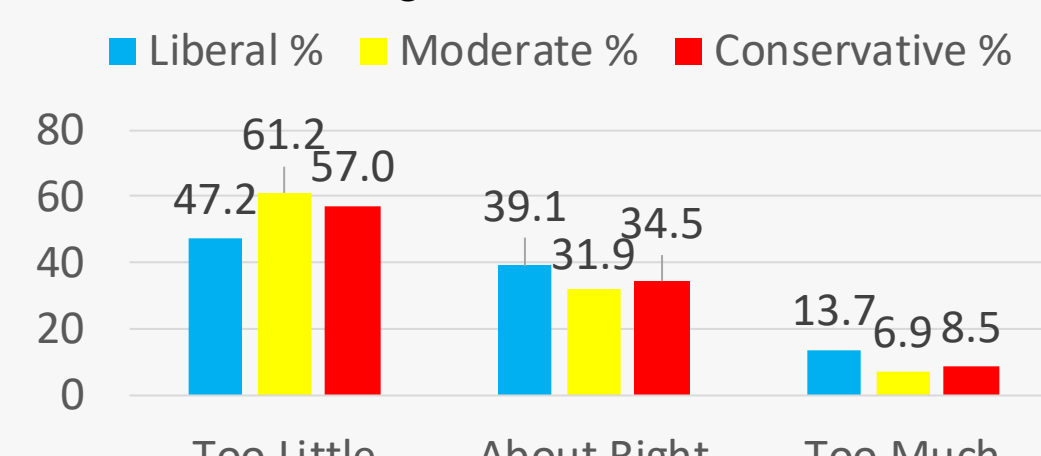
Note. Chi-square test ($\chi^2 = 13.581$, $df = 4$, $p < .01$)

Figure 2. % Views of Law Enforcement Spending by Political Stance: Ages 35-49



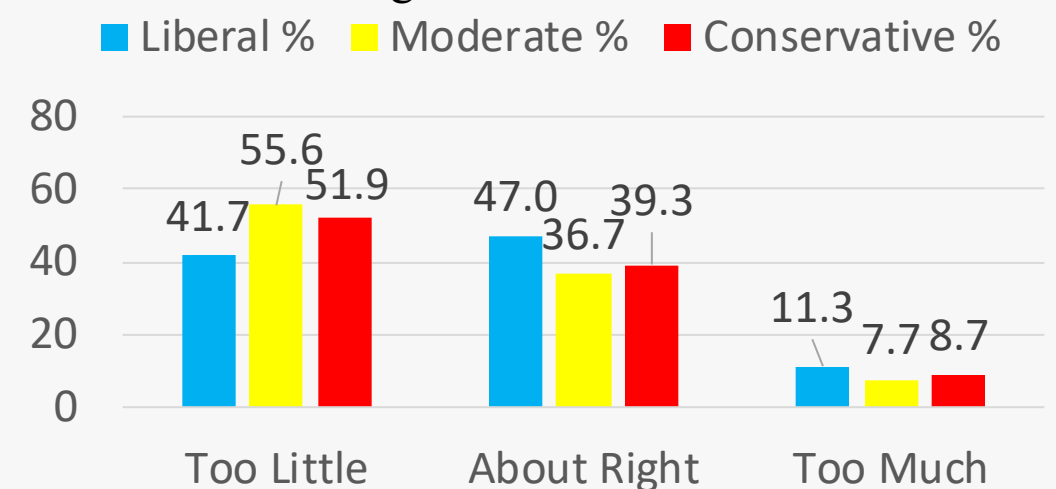
Note. Chi-square test ($\chi^2 = 38.722$, $df = 4$, $p < .001$)

Figure 3. % Views of Law Enforcement Spending by Political Stance: Ages 50-64



Note. Chi-square test ($\chi^2 = 18.346$, $df = 4$, $p = .001$)

Figure 4. % Views of Law Enforcement Spending by Political Stance: Ages 64+



Note. Chi-square test ($\chi^2 = 13.422$, $df = 4$, $p < .01$)

Summary of Findings

- 52% of American adults reported that law enforcement spending is too little.
- Among those under age 50, conservatives are more likely than moderates and liberals to say law enforcement spending is too little.
- Among those age 50 or older, moderates are most likely to say law enforcement spending is too little.
- Young adults are more likely than older ones to say spending is too much.

Implications

- Not just conservatives may support mass incarceration.
- Further research on law enforcement spending and crime deterrence is required.

References

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- Gullapalli, V., Soderberg, B., Morrison, A., & Iannelli, J. (2019, August 2). *Spending Billions on Policing, then Millions on Police Misconduct*. Retrieved February 19, 2020, from <https://theappeal.org/spending-billions-on-policing-then-millions-on-police-misconduct/>
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