

Reconstructing Justice: Race, Generational Divides, and the Fight Over “Defund the Police”

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Key Takeaways

- ▶ The fate of defund measures in Minneapolis, Atlanta, and New York City document the ways in which the fight over “defund the police” is as much a conflict between young and old and left and center as it is between Black and white.
- ▶ The expansion of the carceral state was a bipartisan affair. Interpretations that put all the weight on white political interests unduly minimize the impact of violence on Black communities. The younger generation, however, bore the brunt of aggressive, discriminatory policing.
- ▶ National polls demonstrate that there is a great deal of confusion around the word “defund,” and most African Americans see it as something other than completely ridding cities of cops.
- ▶ Most Americans, especially Blacks, see room for community groups and non-law enforcement professionals, such as social workers and doctors, in a broader public safety strategy. The evidence recommends the same.

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Introduction

For seven minutes and 46 seconds,¹ a Minneapolis police officer put his knee on George Floyd's neck, stealing his last breaths. Floyd's callous murder on May 15, 2020, sparked a conflagration across American cities that consumed national attention. "Defund the police," announced former Bernie Sanders presidential campaign speechwriter David Sirota, "has become a nationwide mantra."² While pundits wrestled with what that slogan should mean, Mariame Kaba, a prison abolitionist, set the record straight in the *New York Times*: "Yes, We Mean Literally Abolish the Police." George Floyd's murder by a Minneapolis police officer was the rule for her, not the exception: "When a police officer brutalizes a black person he is doing what he sees as his job." Put simply, "We can't reform the police."³ Similarly, Michelle Alexander, author of *The New Jim Crow*, was not surprised that "growing numbers of people are working to defund the police and reimagine justice," declaring, "The system is not broken; it is functioning according to its design."⁴

Many traditional Black leaders have pushed back against the calls from activists to "defund the police." James Clyburn, U.S. representative from South Carolina and chair of the Democratic Caucus, was as unequivocal as Kaba: "Nobody is going to defund the police." He explained, "re-imagine policing..., [t]hat is what we are going to do."⁵ Al Sharpton noted: "I don't think anyone other than the far extremes is saying we don't want any kind of policing at all."⁶ He later described abolition as an idea "a latte liberal may go for as they sit around the Hamptons discussing this as some academic problem."⁷ According to Newark Mayor Ras Baraka, a Black progressive with deep Black nationalist roots, defunding the police is a "bourgeois liberal" solution. Although he seeks "significant reforms," he questions the wisdom of abolition: "Who would respond to calls for service for violence and domestic abuse?"⁸ By early July, the African American Mayors Association had drafted a policy blueprint that focused on greater transparency; revising policing-related contracts; changing federal policy; engaging the community;

¹ "Prosecutors say officer had knee on George Floyd's neck for 7:46 rather than 8:46," *Los Angeles Times*, June 18, 2020.

² David Sirota, "There's No Way Around It: Spending on Police in the U.S. Is out of Control," *Jacobin*, June 8, 2020.

³ Mariame Kaba, "Yes, We Mean Literally Abolish the Police," *New York Times*, June 12, 2020.

⁴ Michelle Alexander, "America, This is Your Chance," *New York Times*, June 8, 2020.

⁵ Chandelis Duster, "Clyburn says he does not support defunding the police," *CNN*, June 14, 2020.

⁶ "Rev. Al Discusses Possible Changes to Minneapolis Police Department," *Morning Joe*, MSNBC, June 8, 2020.

⁷ *Morning Joe*, MSNBC, September 12, 2020.

⁸ Sam Sutton, "Newark Mayor: Dismantling Police a 'Bourgeois Liberal' Solution for a Much Deeper Problem," *Politico*, June 11, 2020.

and making budgets “reflect community values.”⁹ Though it was vague on specifics, McKinley Price, the association’s president and mayor of Newport News, Va., made one thing very clear: “We do not call for abolishing or defunding police departments.”¹⁰

“...the fight over ‘defund the police’ is as much a conflict between young and old and left and center as it is between Black and white.”

How do we break this impasse? Where do we go from here? We can begin to look for a path forward by reflecting on how the politics of punishment have evolved from the 1980s to today, reviewing polling data and key policy moments. While many accounts of attitudes about policing highlight “racial divides,”¹¹ my analysis seeks to understand African American opinion on its own terms as well as in relation to other racial groups and seeks to capture its political significance historically and in the current moment. Instead of assuming a coherent “Black perspective” on policing and punishment, it centers the complex, and sometimes contradictory, internal politics of public safety within African American communities.¹² While most Blacks have been less punitive than most whites, most Blacks have also been extremely punitive in their own right.

First, African American attitudes grew increasingly punitive towards crime, policing, and punishment in response to rising violence in Black communities from the 1960s to the early 1990s. The passage of the Violent Crime Control

⁹ African American Mayors Association, Inc., Black Mayors Release Pact on Police Reform (Press Release), June 30, 2020.

¹⁰ Tom Jackman, “African American mayors lay out plan for police reform without ‘defunding,’” Washington Post, July 27, 2020.

¹¹ Nazgol Ghandnoosh, *Race and Punishment: Racial Perceptions of Crime and Support for Punitive Policies* (Washington, D.C.: Sentencing Project, 2014). Mark Peffley and Jon Hurwitz. *Justice in America: The Separate Realities of Blacks and Whites* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

¹² This analytical perspective draws inspiration from the following: Jennifer L. Hochschild, *Facing up to the American Dream: Race, Class, and the Soul of the Nation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); Adolph L. Reed, *Stirrings in the Jug: Black Politics in the Post-Segregation Era* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999); Cathy J. Cohen, *The Boundaries of Blackness: AIDS and the Breakdown of Black Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Lester K. Spence, *Knocking the Hustle: Against the Neoliberal Turn in Black Politics* (Brooklyn: Punctum Books, 2015).

and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 (aka “the crime bill”) provides a key example. Anti-crime sentiments made African Americans a crucial member of the “get tough” coalition that defined American politics and policy in that era. Second, crime’s stunning denouement led Black opinion to moderate, as revealed by attitudes and events in New York City as reported violent crimes dropped sharply from their peak in the early 1990s, in part reflecting new policing strategies. Despite living in safer communities and continuing to see police brutality, most African Americans remained committed to effective policing as a public safety strategy. The Black Lives Matter movement emerged, in part, however, as a response to these same policing strategies and signals a major generational division in African American politics.

Third, manifestations of these generational splits were visible in the 2020 Democratic presidential primary campaign and the subsequent protests seeking to “defund the police.” Recent surveys show that most African Americans side with Clyburn more than Alexander. Most Americans, including Blacks, endorse meaningful police reforms, but they also oppose abolition, although that is favored by a plurality of Black and white millennials. The fate of defund measures in Minneapolis, Atlanta, and New York City document the ways in which the fight over “defund the police” is as much a conflict between young and old and left and center as it is between Black and white.

My analysis then returns to the central question: Where do we go from here? Some have cheered the ethical and practical benefits of abolition.¹³ Others have championed the merits of certain reforms.¹⁴ Without rehashing or adjudicating between these perspectives, one can still see a policy space that heeds the constraints of contemporary attitudes and attends both to the deep and legitimate fear of crime that continues to weigh heavily on many African Americans and to the terror that police violence foments among all Blacks.¹⁵ Living with overpolicing and underprotection,¹⁶ most African Americans seek the reconstruction of public safety strategies, urban communities, and the relationship between those strategies and those communities. We need to end police brutality without ending policing.

¹³ Alex S. Vitale, *The End of Policing* (Verso Books, 2017).

¹⁴ Robert Muggah and Thomas Abt, “Calls for Police Reform Are Getting Louder—Here Is How to Do It,” *Foreign Policy*, June 22, 2020.

¹⁵ Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: New Press, 2012).

¹⁶ Jill Leovy, *Ghettoside: A true story of murder in America* (New York City: Spiegel & Grau, 2015).

Part I: Violence, punishment, and Black public opinion

We cannot decipher the politics of “defund the police” today without capturing the role that African American leaders played in the punitive turn in American politics during the 1980s and 1990s. Until very recently, histories of policing and punishment treated African Americans mostly as victims, casualties of an intractable racial hierarchy, though some narratives spotlight how Black activists and community members used voice and agency to resist police brutality.¹⁷ Scholars give short shrift, however, to African American anti-crime activism, depicting Blacks’ “get tough” beliefs as false consciousness. Yet we must revise this history because a rich new literature has discovered intentionality, purpose, and consequence in African American struggles for greater public safety.¹⁸ The punitive turn in Black politics and its repercussions are evident in survey data and the development of the 1994 crime bill.

The post-civil rights era definitely saw a great prison boom. Activists and scholars alike have laid bare the tragic consequences of this massive shift in American public policy.¹⁹ That era also saw a stunning, and quite sudden, crime wave. In 1950, the homicide rate in the United States stood at 4.6 (per 100,000) (see Figure 1). It remained in that range until it began a precipitous rise in 1966, more than doubling the 1964 rate by 1971. It hit an all-time high of 10.2 in 1980 and remained between 7.9 and 9.8 for more than a decade, peaking again in 1991. (Trends in other violent crimes followed a similar path.) This wave of criminal violence hit African Americans particularly hard. Blacks were found disproportionately both among the perpetrators and victims of homicide. The homicide rate for Blacks (34.4 per 100,000) was

¹⁷ Donna Murch, *Living for the City: Migration, Education and the Rise of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

¹⁸ Amund R. Tallaksen, "Junkies and Jim Crow: The Boggs Act of 1951 and the Racial Transformation of New Orleans' Heroin Market." *Journal of Urban History* 45, no. 2 (2019): 230-246. James Forman, Jr., "Racial Critiques of Mass Incarceration: Beyond the New Jim Crow," *NYU Law Review*, 87, no. 21(2012): 21-69. James Forman, *Locking up Our Own: Crime and Punishment in Black America* (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2017).

¹⁹ John F. Pfaff, *Locked In: The True Causes of Mass Incarceration -- and How to Achieve Real Reform* (New York: Basic Books, 2017). Marie Gottschalk, *Caught: The Prison State and the Lockdown of American Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016).

almost 8 times the rate for whites (4.5 per 100,000), and the victimization rate for Blacks (27.8) was about 6 times the rate for whites (4.5).²⁰

Figure 1: Homicide Rate in the United States, 1950-2010



Note: Data are based on annual estimates of homicide from previously published versions of the FBI's "Crime in the United States." Data for 1989 to 2008 reflect updated homicide estimates from "Crime in the United States, 2008." Data for 2009 and 2010 reflect updated homicide estimates from "Crime in the United States, 2010." Source: FBI, Uniform Crime Reports, 1950-2010.

This violence transformed American politics. Many have rightly called attention to how "law and order" politicians used the dog whistle of urban crime to monger fear.²¹ Building on these observations, some have cast the "war on drugs" as a racist political project designed specifically for the electoral benefit of white conservative politicians.²² Certainly, as the infamous case of the Republican ad attacking 1988 Democratic presidential nominee Michael Dukakis for the furlough of William R. Horton attests, that strategy could work.²³ But more was involved, because the expansion of the carceral state was a bipartisan affair.²⁴ Interpretations that put all the weight

²⁰ Alexia Cooper and Erica L. Smith, "Homicide Trends in the United States, 1980-2008." (Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S. Dept of Justice, 2011).

²¹ Rick Perlstein, *Nixonland: the rise of a president and the fracturing of America* (New York: Scribner, 2009). Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*.

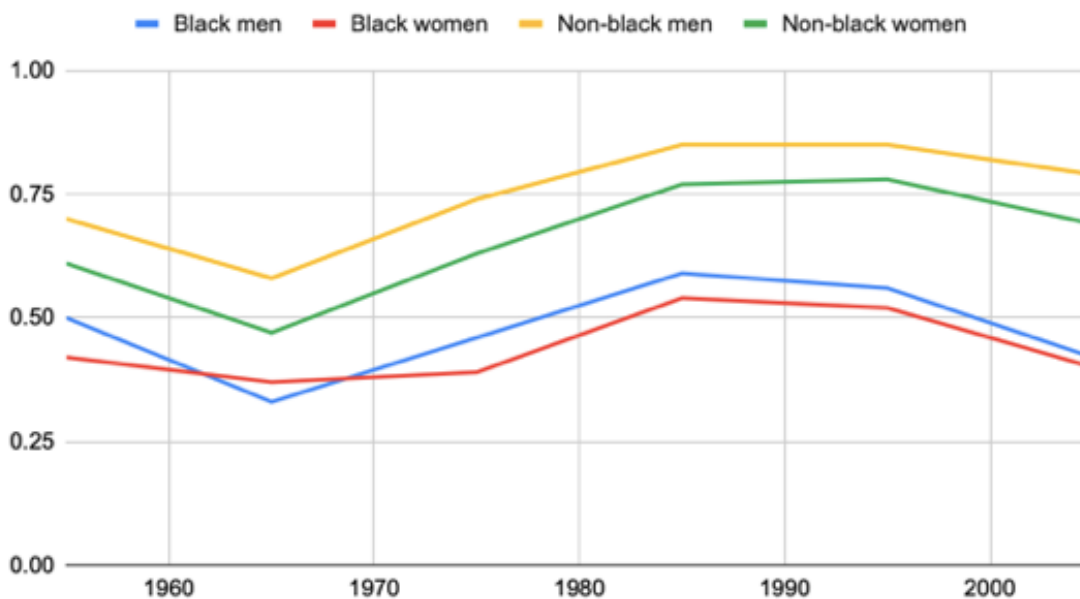
²² Katherine Beckett, *Making Crime Pay: Law and Order in Contemporary American Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

²³ Tali Mendelberg, *The Race Card: Campaign Strategy, Implicit Messages, and the Norm of Equality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

²⁴ Naomi Murakawa, *The First Civil Right: How Liberals Built Prison America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

on white political interests unduly minimize the impact of violence on Black communities. While some scholars dispute that mass incarceration was connected to rising violent crime rates,²⁵ Peter K. Enns establishes the link. His nuanced, rigorous analysis of survey data shows how the public's punitiveness shifted in line with trends in crime rates. Rising crime quickened the public's disciplinary impulses. Media mattered, but Enns finds that "shifts in news coverage of crime and shifts in the public's punitiveness track the actual crime rate."²⁶ Elites, he found, followed rather than led public opinion. As Lisa L. Miller's pathbreaking research shows, "serious violence *rose more dramatically, was sustained for far longer, and affected more populations than the literature typically assumes*" (emphasis in original). This violence refracted through the fragmented American polity (i.e., dispersed authority and veto points) to thwart nonpunitive solutions and incentivize "short-term, almost entirely punitive political responses to rising rates of serious violence."²⁷

Figure 2: Black and Non-Black Support for the Death Penalty, 1955-2005



Source: Kenneth E. Shirley and Andrew Gelman, "Hierarchical models for estimating state and demographic trends in US death penalty public opinion," *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society. Series A (Statistics in Society)* (2015): 1-28.

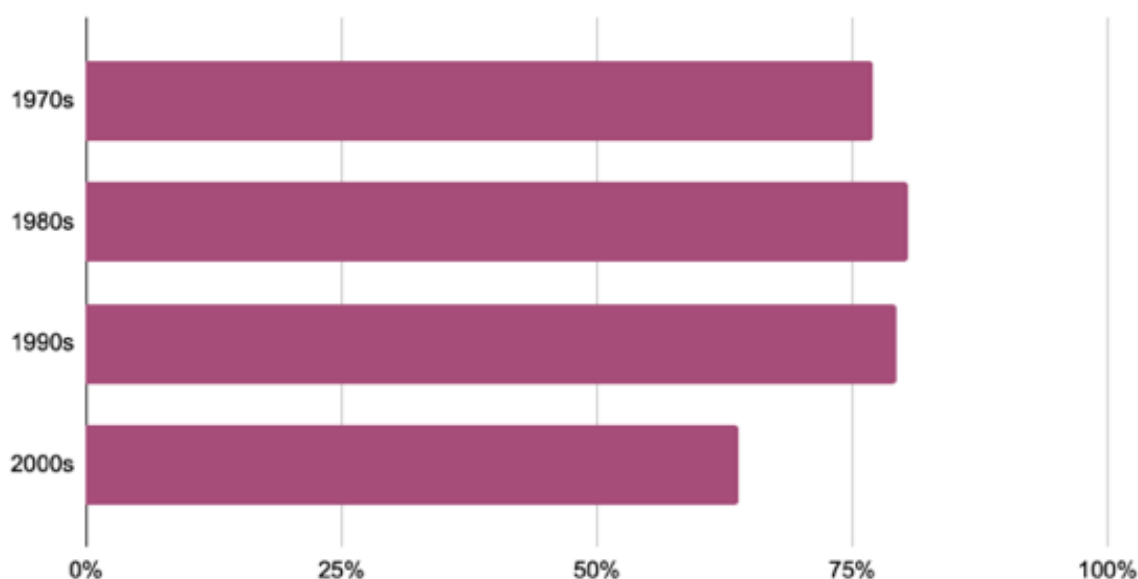
²⁵ Heather Ann Thompson, "Why Mass Incarceration matters: Rethinking Crisis, Decline, and Transformation in Postwar American History," *Journal of American History* 97, no. 3 (2010): 703-734.

²⁶ Peter K. Enns, *Incarceration Nation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 96.

²⁷ Lisa L. Miller, *The Myth of Mob Rule: Violent Crime and Democratic Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 24, 100.

Likewise, violence reshaped African American politics. Kenneth E. Shirley and Andrew Gelman combined dozens of national polls taken over 50 years to estimate support for the death penalty from different groups (see Figure 2). They find that support for the death penalty among Black men began to rise in the mid-1960s, hit a high of 59 percent in 1985, and fell to 42 percent in 2005. Among Black women, support rose from an all-time low of 37 percent in 1965 to a high of 54 percent in 1985. It fell to 40 percent in 2005. Given the extremity of the death penalty, it may not fully capture the desire to punish offenders with incarceration. The General Social Survey (GSS) supplies a better measure. One question asked, “Do you think the courts in this area deal too harshly or not harshly enough with criminals”? The number of African Americans responding “Not harshly enough” rose slightly after 1970 and remained high (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: African American View of the Treatment of Criminal Defendants (% saying “Not Harshly Enough”)

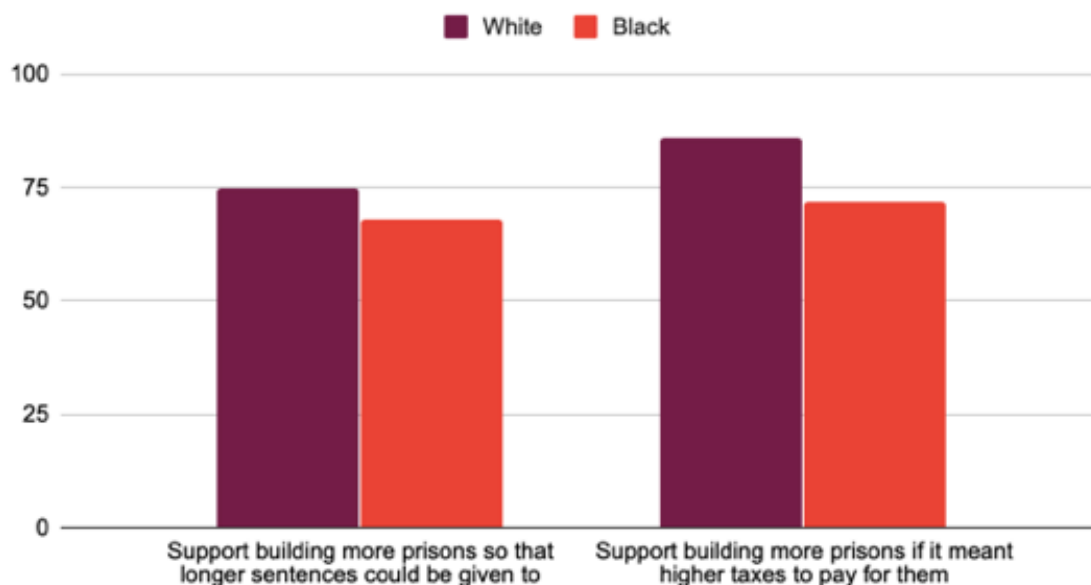


Source: James D. Wright, Jana L. Jasinski, and Drew N. Lanier, “Crime, Punishment, and Social Disorder: Crime Rates and Trends in Public Opinion over More than Three Decades,” In *Social Trends in American Life: Findings from the General Social Survey since 1972*, ed. Peter V. Marsden (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 158.

Scholarly and journalistic accounts of the punitive turn during this period discount public opinion and neglect African American attitudes altogether. Yet survey evidence exposes broad support for punitive approaches among Blacks and whites. The plurality of respondents (31 percent) to a February 1994

Washington Post/ABC news poll called crime the most serious problem facing the country, trailed by health care (9 percent) and drugs (9 percent).²⁸ In a January 1994 *Wall Street Journal*/NBC News poll, 93 percent of respondents agreed that crime should be an “absolute priority” for the Clinton administration and Congress.²⁹ Seventy-six percent believed that “three strikes” measures that imposed life sentences without parole for anyone convicted of three violent felonies would make a “major difference” in reducing violent crime, and 52 percent believed putting 100,000 more cops on the street would as well.³⁰

Figure 4: American Attitudes toward Prison Growth



Source: ABC News/Washington Post Poll, February 24-27, 1994, national sample of 1,829 adults, Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Dept. of Justice, 1994), Table 2.48.

While most Americans understood that crime trends reflected underlying inequalities in American life, they still endorsed harsh measures. In a January 1994 *Los Angeles Times* national poll, 56 percent of African Americans and Hispanics expressed support for spending more money and effort on social and economic problems, including better education and job training programs, than on police, prisons, and judges. But so did 50 percent of

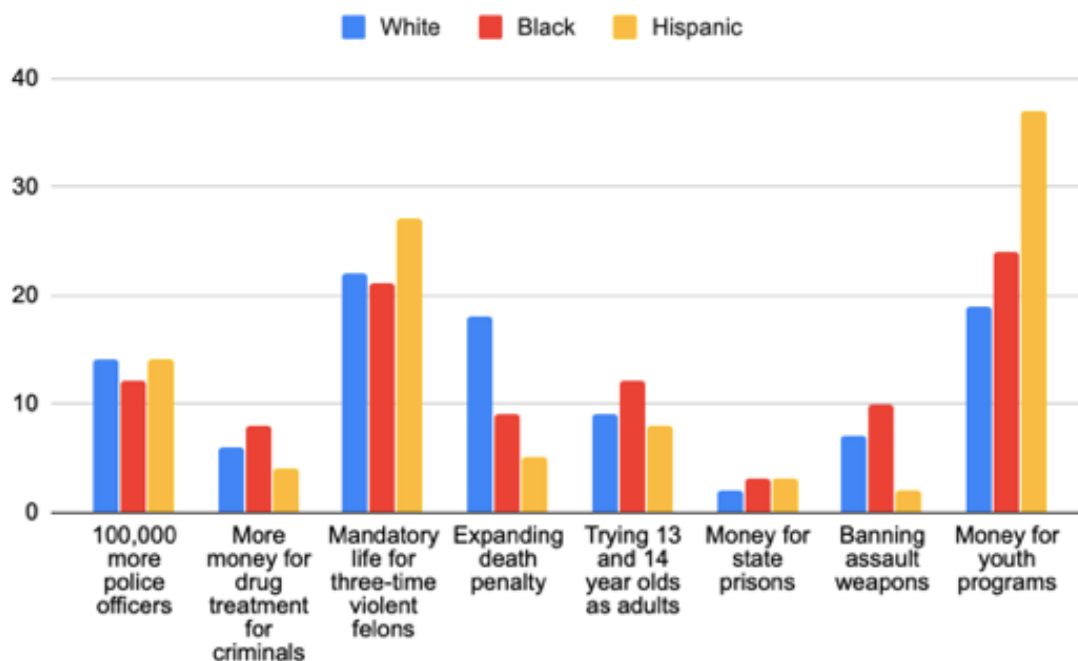
²⁸ Dan Balz, “Democrats Ride High into '94 Primaries,” *Washington Post*, March 3, 1994.

²⁹ Rich Jaroslosky, “Washington Wire: A Special Weekly Report from the Wall Street Journal's Capital Bureau,” *Wall Street Journal*, January 21, 1994. Gerald F. Seib, “Capital Journal,” *Wall Street Journal*, March 16, 1994.

³⁰ Ibid.

whites.³¹ This poll also showed that 67 percent of African Americans supported “three strikes” and another 71 percent believed that juveniles who commit crimes should be treated as adults.³²

Figure 5a: What are the most effective crime reducing proposals? Percent saying...



Source: Los Angeles Times Poll, April 16-19, 1994, national sample of 1,682 adults, Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Dept. of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1994), Table 2.36.

Though less punitive than whites and aware of the racist elements of the criminal justice system, many African Americans nevertheless supported “get tough” strategies. A 1993 *USA TODAY*/CNN/Gallup poll found that an overwhelming number of Blacks believed that the criminal justice system treated Blacks more harshly than whites and more than half believed that politicians who emphasized “law and order” were racist. At the same time, 61 percent felt that Black leaders were “too quick to use racism in society as an excuse for crimes committed by Blacks.”³³ While 68 percent of whites favored limiting parole for violent offenders, so did over 50 percent of Blacks. A 1994

³¹ *Los Angeles Times Poll*, January 15-19, 1994, national sample of 1,516 adults age 18 and older. Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Dept. of Justice, 1994), Table 2.38.

³² Ronald Brownstein, “Clinton’s New Democrat Agenda Reopens Racial Divisions,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 9, 1994.

³³ Sam V. Meddis and Dennis Cauchon, “Black-on-Black Violence,” *USA TODAY*, January 6, 1994, 01A.

Yankelovich/Time Magazine/CNN national poll of 503 Black adults showed that, although most opposed stop-and-frisk, 64.5 percent endorsed “three strikes.”³⁴ Similarly, a February 1994 ABC News/Washington Post poll showed that 88 percent of whites and 68 percent of Blacks supported “three strikes.”³⁵ That poll also asked, “Would you approve or disapprove of building more prisons so that longer sentences could be given to criminals?” Seventy-five percent of whites approved, but so did 68 percent of African Americans (see Figure 4). When respondents were asked in this same poll whether they would support higher taxes for more prisons, support actually rose: 86 percent of whites and 72 percent of African Americans said they would.³⁶

In 1994, partisan differences were just as meaningful as racial divisions with regard to public opinion on these issues. An April 1994 Los Angeles Times national poll asked which measures would be “the most effective in reducing crime in this country?” The top responses for whites were “mandatory life for three-time violent felons” (22 percent), “money for youth programs” (19 percent) “Expanding death penalty” (18 percent), and “adding 100,000 more police officers” (14 percent) (see Figure 5a). Racial minorities were only slightly less punitive. The top responses for African Americans were funding for youth programs (24 percent), “three strikes” (21 percent), adding more police officers (12 percent), and “trying 13- and 14-year-olds as adults” (12 percent). More African Americans and Hispanics than whites favored funding for youth programs, but they also liked “three strikes.”

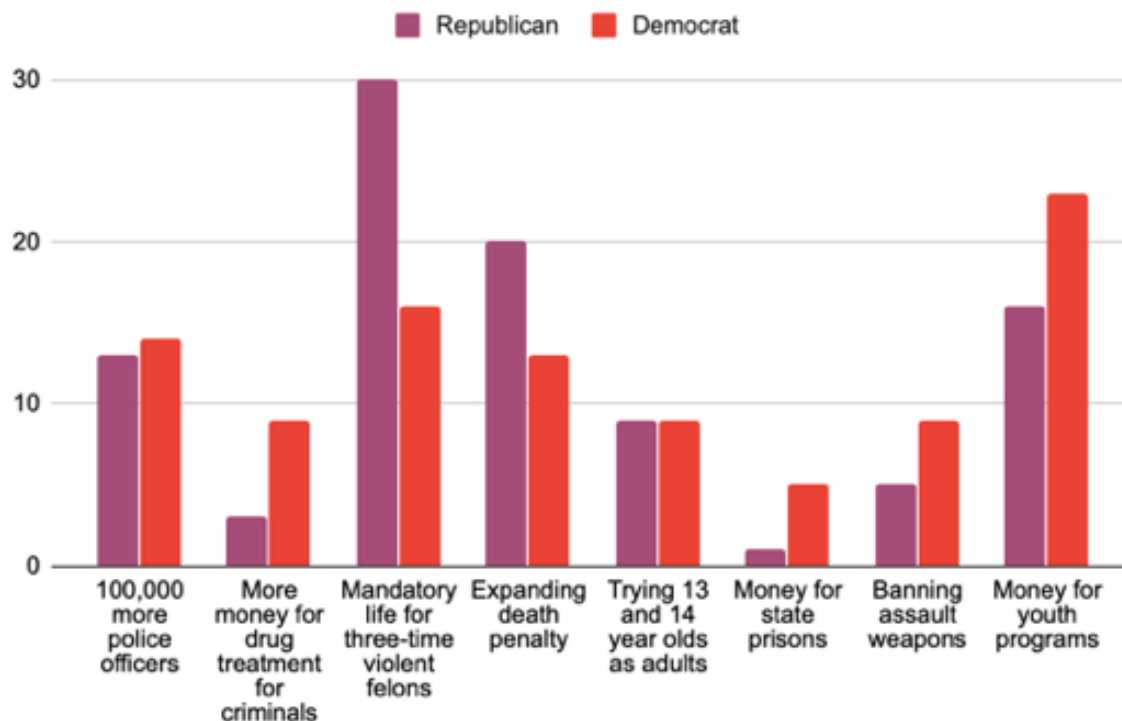
Partisan differences were starker (see Figure 5b). Republicans clearly favored “three strikes” and “expanding the death penalty.” Democratic preferences were more diffuse, with “money for youth programs” (19 percent) being the top choice, followed by “three strikes” (16 percent), increasing the number of police officers (14 percent); and “expanding death penalty” (13 percent). Not surprisingly, more than anything else, the death penalty provisions of the crime bill nearly split the “get tough” coalition that had been coalescing around a legislative package.

³⁴ Time Magazine/Cable News Network (CNN), Yankelovich/Time Magazine/CNN Poll: Black Leadership and Group Relations, Yankelovich Partners, Inc., (Cornell University, Ithaca, NY: Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, 1994).

³⁵ ABC News/Washington Post Poll, February 24–27, 1994, national sample of 1,829 adults, Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Dept. of Justice, 1994), Table 2.44.

³⁶ ABC News/Washington Post Poll, February 24–27, 1994, national sample of 1,829 adults, Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Dept. of Justice, 1994), Table 2.49.

Figure 5b: What are the most effective crime reducing proposals? Percent saying...



Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Dept. of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1994), Table 2.36.

Many Black leaders championed the controversial legislation. Forty influential African American ministers from across the country signed a letter defending it. Although they did not “agree with every provision,” they “emphatically” supported “the bill’s goal to save our communities, and most importantly, our children.” They hailed provisions on prevention, rehabilitation, and assault weapons and commended the law for “putting 100,000 well-trained police officers on the streets of our most violence-plagued communities and urban areas.”³⁷ At a conference on crime sponsored by Jesse Jackson’s Rainbow Coalition, Baltimore’s first Black mayor, Kurt Schmoke, told attendees, “I believe the crime bill ... is part of the answer, and the crime bill should be supported by us.” He explained, “We do need to send a signal throughout our communities that certain types of activities will not be tolerated, that people will be held accountable and that if there is evil manifested by actions taken by individuals who choose to prey upon our

³⁷ “Local Clergy Give Support to Crime Bill,” (Cleveland) *Call & Post*, August 25, 1994.

residents that that evil will be responded to quickly and correctly."³⁸ When a contingent of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) vowed to derail the legislation to protest the removal, because of Republican opposition, of a provision that would have allowed death penalty defendants to use statistics to show racial bias, ten big-city Black mayors insisted that this dispute should not "bring down the entire bill." They pleaded with the CBC: "We cannot afford to lose the opportunities this bill provides to the people of our cities."³⁹ In the end, most CBC members voted for the bill.

While scholars have illuminated the myriad ways that the punitive turn has victimized people of color,⁴⁰ African Americans were not bystanders to its adoption. Recent case studies of New York City,⁴¹ Washington, D.C.,⁴² and Atlanta⁴³ show how violence and disorder degraded neighborhoods and demoralized Black residents. They chronicle the war on crime that Black leaders prosecuted in response. Survey evidence reveals that these incidents were part of a broader transformation of American politics. Despite a general commitment to structural solutions, most whites and Blacks wanted more police, more punishment, and more prisons. Roiled by soaring murder rates and the deafening pleas of their constituencies, many Black pastors, civil rights leaders, and U.S. representatives joined a center-right "get tough" alliance to pass the crime bill. In the end, African American investments in policing and punishment during the 1980s and early 1990s would pay dividends for many and cost some dearly. Understanding this history is critical to unpacking the politics of "defund the police" today, as it reveals the degree to which African Americans embraced policing and punishment as public safety strategies — views that will later constrain the political possibilities of abolition.

³⁸ Lynne Duke, "Black Leaders Press Action on Crime, Youth," *Washington Post*, January 9, 1994.

³⁹ Ronald Brownstein, "Crime Bill Likely to Omit 'Racial Justice' Measure," *Los Angeles Times*, July 14, 1994.

⁴⁰ Mary Pattillo, David F. Weiman, Bruce Western, *Imprisoning America: The Social Effects of Mass Incarceration* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2004); Devah Pager, *Marked: Race, Crime, and Finding Work in an Era of Mass Incarceration* (University of Chicago Press, 2007); Megan Comfort, *Doing Time Together: Love and Family in the Shadow of the Prison* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008); Khalilah L. Brown-Dean, "Crime, Punishment, and Urban Governance in Contemporary American Politics," in *Urban Citizenship and American democracy*, eds. Amy Bridges and Michael Javen Fortner, eds (Albany: SUNY Press, 2016).

⁴¹ Michael Javen Fortner, *Black Silent Majority: The Rockefeller Drug Laws and the Politics of Punishment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015); Michael Javen Fortner, "'Must Jesus Bear the Cross Alone?': Reverend Oberia Dempsey and His Citizens War on Drugs," *Journal of Policy History* 27, no. 1 (2015): 118–156.

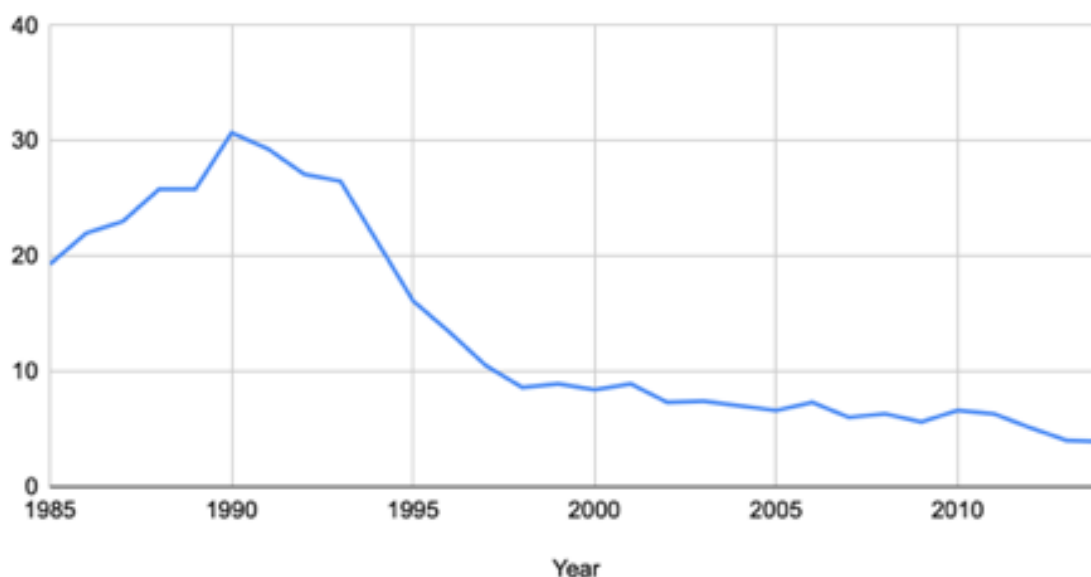
⁴² Mark Peffley and Jon Hurwitz, *Justice in America: The Separate Realities of Blacks and Whites* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

⁴³ Danielle Wiggins, "'Order as well as Decency': The Development of Order Maintenance Policing in Black Atlanta," *Journal of Urban History* Vol. 46, no. 4 (2020): 711–727.

Part II: Black Lives Matter and the evolution of crime politics

A new century brought relief from sky-high levels of violent crime. This section explores how African Americans reacted to this new reality. Because New York City experienced such startling declines in crime rates, it is an important case for exploring whether African Americans responded to these new conditions by rejecting the “get tough” regime many had hailed in the prior two decades and how the arrival of Black Lives Matter (BLM) affected their thinking. The findings here presage the post-George Floyd politics of “defund the police.” They show a Black majority increasingly committed to policing and a Black minority increasingly committed to its end.

Figure 6: Murder and Non-negligent Manslaughter Rate (per 100,000) in New York City, 1985 to 2014



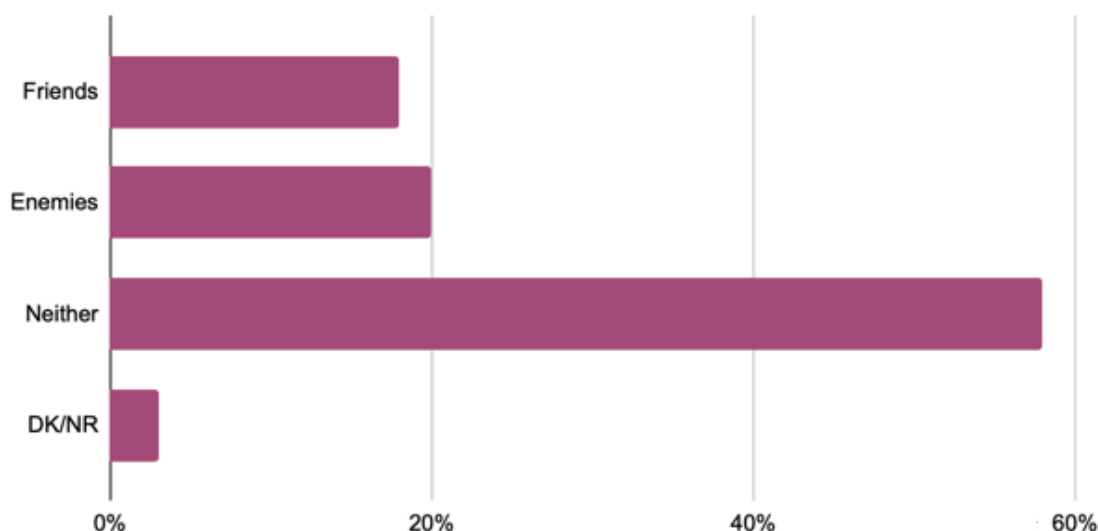
Source: FBI, Uniform Crime Reports, prepared by the National Archive of Criminal Justice Data.

The violent crime wave in New York City and the nation crested in 1991. By 2001, the national homicide rate had fallen to 5.6 (per 100,000), a level it had not seen since 1965. In 2010, the rate stood at 4.8, matching 1961. These tremendous drops conceal even steeper slides in many American cities. In New York City, for example, the homicide and negligent manslaughter rate rose from an already-high 19.5 (per 100,000) in 1985 to an all-time high of 30.7 in 1990 (see Figure 6). It then began a sharp fall, reaching levels it had

not experienced since the 1960s. Once tagged “fear city,”⁴⁴ New York became known as “the safest big city in America.”⁴⁵

Public attitudes followed these shifts. The number of Americans calling crime or violence the most important issue hit an all-time high in 1994 before falling rapidly, leaving crime only a minor issue in the 2000s. Simultaneously, most Americans became less punitive. Black attitudes towards the death penalty subsided to 1960s levels. White support for capital punishment declined from the highs of the 1980s and the early 1990s. Although most African Americans continued to believe that courts had treated criminals “not harshly enough” into the 2000s, the average for that decade was lower than for the previous three decades. The same was true for whites, including conservatives. David Dagan and Steven Teles find that the decline in “public anxiety” over crime allowed many white conservatives to eschew the old politics of “law and order” and endorse a new era of criminal justice reform.⁴⁶

Figure 7: “Do you generally think of the police more as friends, more as enemies, or don't you think of them in either of these ways?” Percent African Americans saying “Friends,” “Enemies,” or “Neither.”



Source: Quinnipiac University Poll, April 30 - May 5, 2008, 1,790 New York City registered voters, margin of error of +/- 2.3 percentage points.

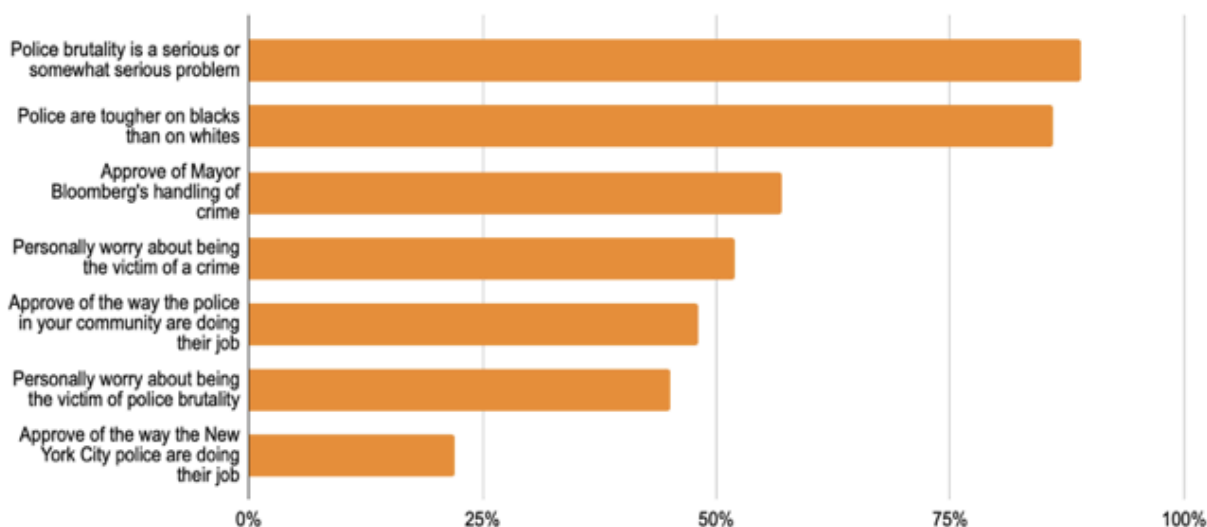
⁴⁴ Kim Phillips-Fein, *Fear City: New York's Fiscal Crisis and the Rise of Austerity Politics* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2017).

⁴⁵ Michael Bloomberg, “Stop and frisk’ keeps New York safe,” *Washington Post*, August 18, 2013.

⁴⁶ David Dagan and Steven Michael Teles, *Prison Break: Why Conservatives Turned Against Mass Incarceration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

As violent crime eased, however, discriminatory law enforcement persisted. Again, New York City is a case in point. Based on their analysis of about 175,000 police pedestrian stops from January 1998 through March 1999, Andrew Gelman, Jeffrey Fagan, and Alex Kiss found that Blacks and Hispanics represented 51 percent and 33 percent of the stops while representing only 26 percent and 24 percent of the city's population.⁴⁷ Fagan's analysis of stop-and-frisk data from 2004 to 2009 confirms earlier findings and shows that Blacks and Hispanics were more likely to be subject to use of force than whites.⁴⁸ In November 2006, undercover police officers killed Sean Bell, an unarmed Black man, after he left a night club in Queens, New York. After a jury acquitted the police officers, who had shot over 50 rounds into Bell's car, protesters briefly shut down traffic at the Queensboro Bridge, Triborough Bridge, Brooklyn Bridge, Manhattan Bridge, Holland Tunnel, and Queens-Midtown Tunnel. Al Sharpton, who led the demonstrations, said that they "dispelled the myth that people are not outraged." "The Sean Bell movement has been born," he shouted.⁴⁹

Figure 8: African American Attitudes towards Crime and Police in New York City in 2008



Source: Quinnipiac University Poll, April 30 - May 5, 2008, 1,790 New York City registered voters, margin of error of +/- 2.3 percentage points.

⁴⁷ Andrew Gelman, Jeffrey Fagan & Alex Kiss, "An Analysis of the New York City Police Department's 'Stop-and-Frisk' Policy in the Context of Claims of Racial Bias," *Journal of the American Statistical Association*, 102:479, 813-823.

⁴⁸ Jeffrey Fagan, Expert Report, *Floyd v. City of New York*, 08 Civ 01034 (SAS), filed October 15, 2010.

⁴⁹ Nicole Bode, Kerry Burke, and Corky Siemaszko, "Hundreds protest Sean Bell verdict," *Daily News*, May 8, 2008. It's important to note that in 2014 the number of individuals shot and injured by police officers in New York City had hit a 30-year low. *Annual Firearms Discharge Report 2010* (New York City Police Department, Office of Management Analysis and Planning, Special Projects, 2011).

Polling after this tragedy underscores the complexity of African American attitudes. Most Black voters in New York City did not consider police either friends or enemies (see Figure 7). They overwhelmingly viewed police brutality as a serious problem and felt that police were harsher towards Blacks than whites (see Figure 8). Nevertheless, they worried more about being a victim of crime (52 percent) than about being a victim of police brutality (42 percent). Although just 22 percent approved of the New York City Police Department (NYPD) overall, they were split on the job police were doing *in their community*: 44 percent approved, 44 percent disapproved. Mayor Michael Bloomberg, however, scored higher marks. Fifty-seven percent approved of his handling of crime.

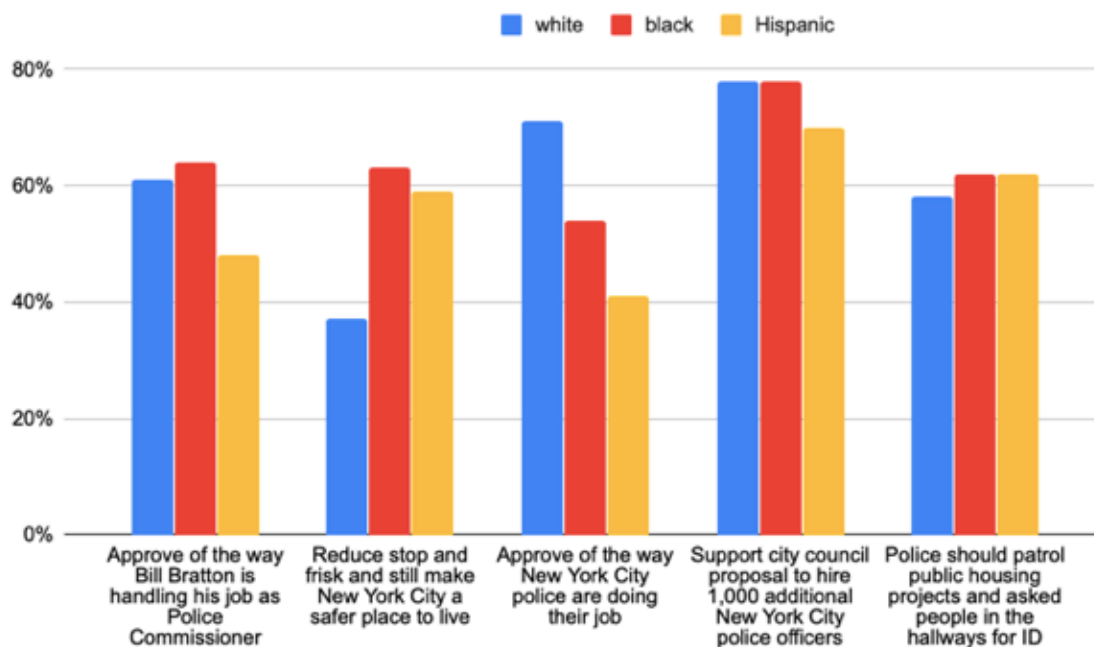
As violence remained at record lows, opposition to state violence rose. Founded in the aftermath of Trayvon Martin's senseless murder, BLM, though devoted to a broader anti-racist program and social justice strategy, sought "to intervene when violence was inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes."⁵⁰ The founders of BLM operated independently of the Black political establishment and forswore the patriarchal politics of respectability that marked an earlier era of civil rights leadership.⁵¹ As historian Russell Rickford states, the movement's leaders were "waging an unpretentious, democratic, militant crusade, determined to remain autonomous both from the American political establishment and from old guard leaders, such as Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton."⁵²

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ *Black Lives Matter*, "What We Believe," <https://blacklivesmatter.com/what-we-believe/>.

⁵² Russell Rickford, "Black Lives Matter: Toward a Modern Practice of Mass Struggle," *New Labor Forum*, vol. 25, no. 1, pp. 34-42.

Figure 9: Attitudes toward Policing in New York City in 2014

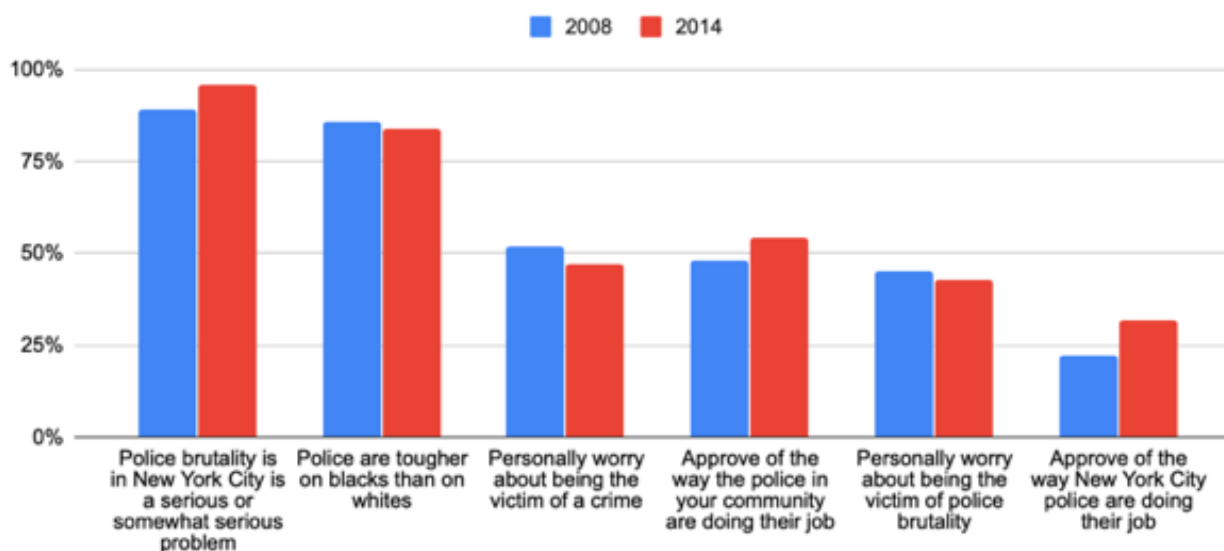


Source: Quinnipiac University Poll, June 5 - 9, 2014, 1,033 New York City voters, margin of error of +/- 3.1 percentage points.

While many African Americans applauded the movement for Black lives, most did not embrace its policy prescriptions. African Americans and Hispanics in the city, especially young men of color, continued to endure discriminatory treatment. In its study of 92,383 police pedestrian stops reported between 2014 and 2017, the New York Civil Liberties Union found that, although Black and Hispanic males between the ages of 14 and 24 made up 5 percent of New York City's population, they represented 38 percent of reported stops.⁵³ Nonetheless, a month before a police officer killed Eric Garner with a chokehold in July 2014, a Quinnipiac poll of New York City voters offered little evidence of simmering Black animosity towards the police (see Figure 9). African American voters welcomed the end of “stop and frisk” and doubted that the policy's demise would increase crime. Most also approved of Bill Bratton's handling of his job as police commissioner, and 54 percent approved of the NYPD. Nearly 80 percent supported hiring 1,000 more police officers and 62 percent wanted to reinstate a program in which police patrolled public housing projects and asked people in the hallways for ID.

⁵³ New York Civil Liberties Union, “Stop-and-frisk in the de Blasio era,” (New York Civil Liberties Union, 2019).

Figure 10: African American Attitudes toward Policing in New York City, 2008 and 2014



Source: Quinnipiac University poll, August 20 - 25, 2014 1,021 New York City voters, margin of error of +/- 3.1 percentage points.

Garner's death and ensuing protests organized by BLM did not fundamentally alter these attitudes. Most African American voters still did not consider police either enemies or friends. The number who considered police brutality a very or somewhat serious problem in New York increased from 84 percent in 2008 to 96 percent in August of 2014 (see Figure 10). The number who believed police were harsher on Blacks remained extremely high and the number of those who personally worried about police brutality remained about the same. Support for the NYPD declined from June 2014, with only 33 percent of Black voters approving of the way they handled their jobs. A clear majority still supported police in their communities.

Figure 11: African American Attitudes towards Quality of Life Policing in New York City, August 2014

Do you support or oppose having police issue summonses or make arrests for so-called quality of life offenses, low-level offenses such as drinking in public, selling small amounts of marijuana or making loud noise late at night?

Support	56 percent
Oppose	37
<i>Do you want police to actively issue summonses or make arrests for so-called quality of life offenses in your neighborhood or not?</i>	
Yes	60
No	36
<i>What comes closer to your point of view: Police issuing summonses or making arrests for low-level offenses improves the quality of life in a neighborhood, or Police issuing summonses or making arrests for low-level offenses adds to tension in a neighborhood?</i>	
Improves quality of life	49
Adds tension	41
<i>If someone were selling loose cigarettes illegally on a street corner in your neighborhood, would you want police to ignore that behavior or try to make that person stop, even if it means arresting that person?</i>	
Ignore	40
Try to stop	47
<i>If a person tells police he or she is not going to allow police to arrest him or her, should police walk away or use whatever amount of force is necessary to arrest the person</i>	
Walk away	23
Use Necessary Force	45

Source: Quinnipiac University poll, 1,021 New York City voters, August 20 - 25, 2014, margin of error of +/- 3.1 percentage points.

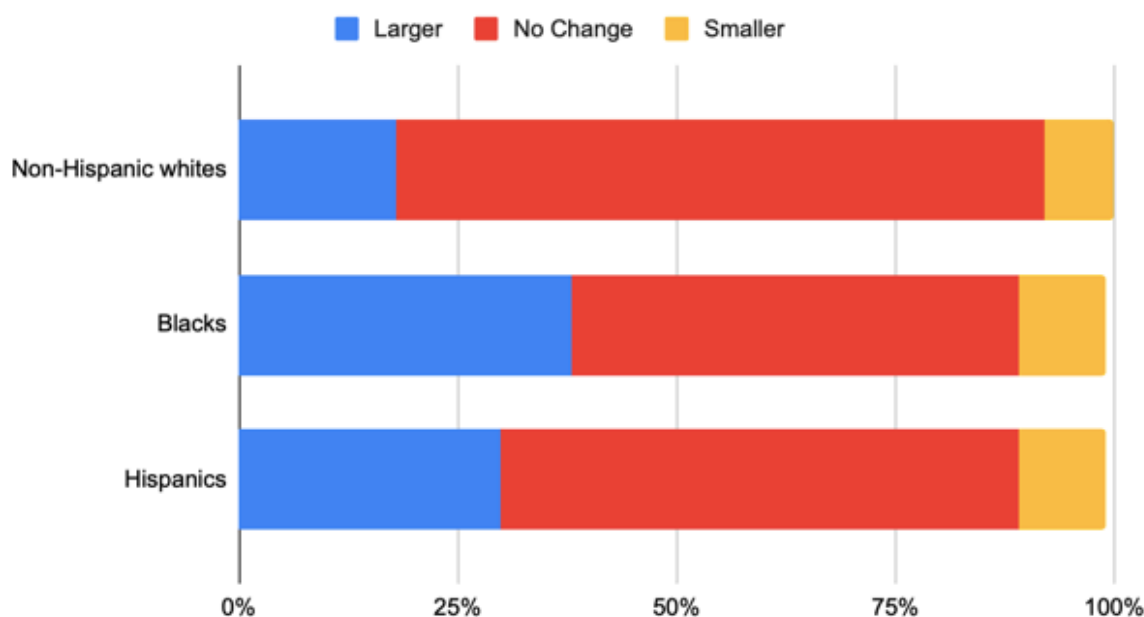
Furthermore, many endorsed assertive policing of low-level offenses. Over 50 percent of Black voters supported issuing summonses or making arrests for minor crimes (see Figure 11). Sixty percent wanted these summonses and arrests to take place in their neighborhood. Nearly 50 percent believed these tactics improved quality of life while 41 percent believed they increased tensions. Although a crackdown on loose cigarettes led to Garner's fateful encounter with police, 47 percent of African Americans felt that police should "try to stop" the illegal sale of cigarettes instead of ignoring this activity. Only 23 percent said police should "walk away" rather than "use necessary force" when a person resists arrest.

New York City was not unique. In this early period in the movement for Black lives, national polls told a similar story of ambivalence: African Americans did not see police either as friends or enemies. They believed law enforcement treated Blacks unfairly yet also valued policing. In a 2015 Gallup survey, only 10 percent of African Americans preferred a smaller police presence in their local area, while 38 percent wanted a larger presence (see Figure 12). Most preferred no change at all. Interestingly, among those who felt police treated African Americans unfairly, 44 percent wanted a larger police presence and only 12 percent preferred a smaller presence. In a 2016 Pew survey, 55 percent of African Americans expressed a lot or some confidence in the police department in their community. Only 24 percent expressed no confidence at all. While giving them low grades for treating minorities fairly and excessive use of force, 48 percent said that police in their community do an "excellent" or "good" job at "protecting people from crime."⁵⁴ In a 2019 Vox poll, 58 percent of African Americans expressed favorable opinions of their local police and 60 percent supported "increasing the budget for the police force and hiring more police officers in high crime areas."⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Pew Research Center, "The racial confidence gap in police performance," 2019.

⁵⁵ Matthew Yglesias, "The case for hiring more police officers," Vox, February 13, 2019.

Figure 12: Preferred Size of Police Presence, July 2015



Source: Gallup Poll, June 15-July 10, 2015, 2,296 adults, aged 18 and older, living in all 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia, margin of error is ± 5 percentage points.

African American attitudes towards policing remained stable into the new century despite record-low crime rates, glaring instances of overpolicing and brutality, and the advent of a bold, new social movement seeking to put opposition to state violence at the top of the political agenda. National trends and those in New York City suggest the increasing returns of policing: Although African Americans became less punitive on other dimensions, safer environments may have deepened the majority's investment in this public safety strategy.⁵⁶ At the same time, surveys from New York City also suggest that police practices angered a significant minority of African Americans. BLM spoke to these anxieties. Most African Americans viewed policing as an indispensable public good that enhanced their quality of life and saved Black lives,⁵⁷ while a new generation of Black activists considered it a persistent source of Black death. The absence of abolition from the agenda at this point allowed both segments of the community to work in solidarity towards

⁵⁶ For a discussion of increasing returns and path dependency, see Paul Pierson, "Increasing returns, path dependence, and the study of politics," *American Political Science Review*, 94, no. 2 (2000): 251-267.

⁵⁷ Michael Javen Fortner, "Hearing What Black Voices Really Say About Police," *City Journal*, July 5, 2020.

policing reform. George Floyd's murder and the resulting movement to "defund the police" exposed these tensions.⁵⁸

Part III: Race, generational divides, and the politics of "defunding" the police

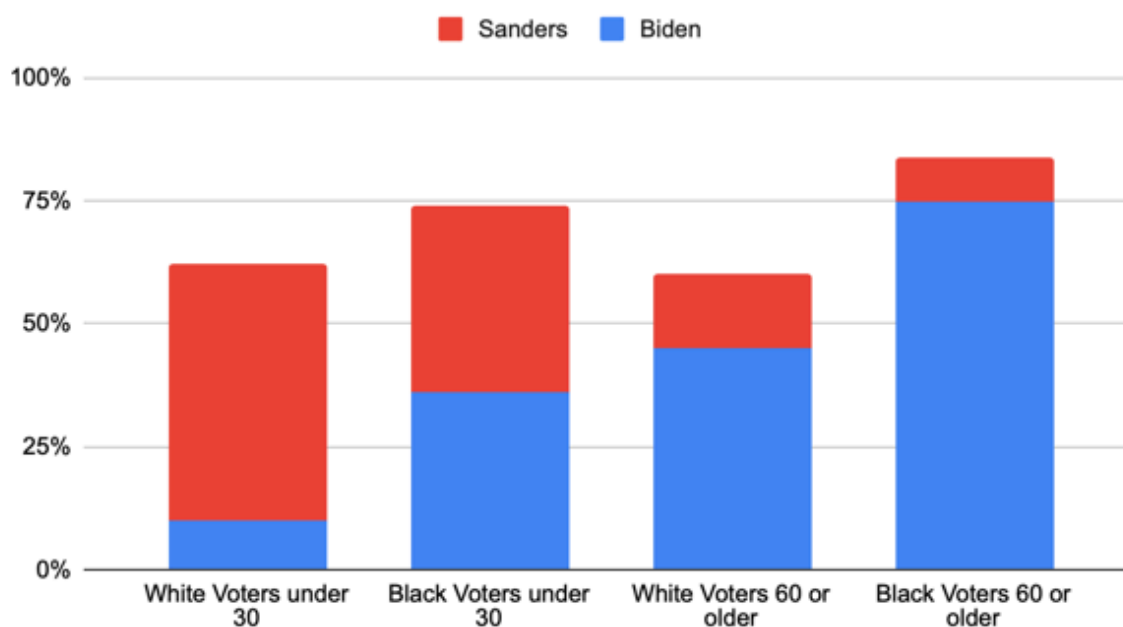
This year marks a significant shift in the politics of punishment. Recent polling documents the emergence of a cross-racial, center-left coalition for police reform. It also casts light on the fault lines in the "defund the police" debate. Despite some inconsistencies, the polling evidence indicates that only a minority of African Americans seeks to abolish the police while a clear majority prefers to keep and reform them. This is not necessarily surprising. The first section charted how personally experiencing the rise of crime led to "get tough" politics in African American communities. The second section showed that Black support for police remained durable even after crime rates fell and the movement for Black lives arose. What is different today is that a youthful minority among young Blacks and whites is increasingly independent and assertive and allied with a rising network of left-of-center organizations and movements. The 2020 Democratic primary previewed these new battle lines.

Biden overwhelmingly won the Black vote during the Democratic primaries, but not all African Americans embraced Barack Obama's vice president. In South Carolina, Biden won 45 percent of white voters 60 or older and 75 percent of Black voters 60 or older (see Figure 13). The former vice president basically tied Bernie Sanders among Black voters under 30 and lost young white voters, 10 percent to 52 percent. In Texas, Biden captured 62 percent of Black voters 60 or older and 48 percent of white voters 60 or older (see Figure 14). Twenty-six percent of Black voters 60 and older voted for Michael Bloomberg, whose stop-and-frisk policy unfairly targeted young men of color, while 17 percent of white voters 60 and older supported the former New York City mayor. Sanders soundly defeated Biden among Black voters under 30, winning 10 points more than Biden's 31 percent. It wasn't even close among white voters under 30. Ultimately, these primaries exposed a generational divide in African American politics and helped cement a cross-

⁵⁸ In 2016, its policy platform demanded the "defunding and dismantling of the systems and institutions that criminalize, control, and cage us." Movement for Black Lives, *A Vision for Black Lives: Policy Demands for Black Power, Freedom, & Justice* (2017).

racial, progressive movement of millennials — twin forces shaping the politics of “defund the police.”

Figure 13: 2020 South Carolina Democratic Primary Exit Poll



Source: 2020 South Carolina Democratic Primary Exit Poll, CNN, <https://www.cnn.com/election/2020/entrance-and-exit-polls/south-carolina/democratic>.

Despite the generational tensions surfaced by the Democratic primaries, the slayings of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and Floyd reunited young and old African Americans. In a Washington Post-Ipsos poll of African Americans taken almost a month after the Floyd killing, 91 percent of Blacks between the ages of 18 and 34 and 92 percent of African Americans 65 and over indicated that “police treatment of Black Americans” will be very important or one of the most important issues in their vote for president.⁵⁹ They weren’t alone. Fifty-six percent of whites and 74 percent of Hispanics shared the same sentiments.⁶⁰ In a June 2020 Yahoo News survey, 52 percent of whites, 67 percent of African Americans and 65 percent of Hispanics said they had grown “concerned about racial injustice in America since the protests began.”⁶¹ Similarly, 74 percent of respondents in the Kaiser Family Foundation *Health Tracking Poll* called “police violence” a “big problem” or “somewhat of a

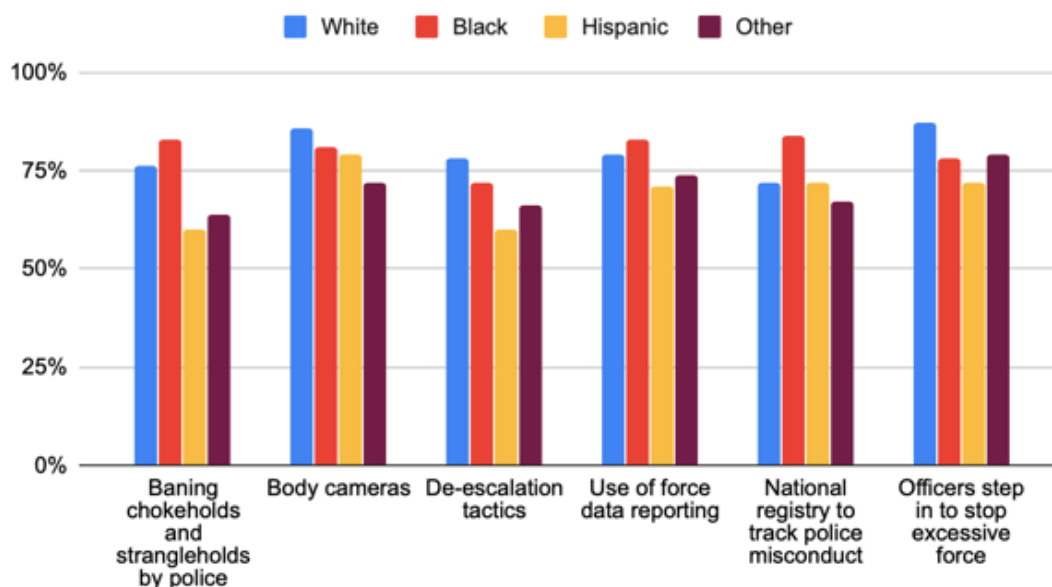
⁵⁹ Washington Post-Ipsos poll, June 9–14, 2020, 1,153 black adults, margin of error is +/- 4 percentage points.

⁶⁰ Washington Post-Ipsos poll, June 9–14, 2020, 1,051 U.S. adults, margin of error is +/- 3.5 percentage points.

⁶¹ Yahoo News survey, June 9–10, 2020, 1,570 U.S. adult residents, margin of error is +/- 3.4 percentage points.

problem.”⁶² By July, according to a Gallup survey, 88 percent of African Americans, 82 percent of Asian Americans, 63 percent of Hispanics, and 51 percent of whites believed that policing was in need of “major changes.”⁶³

Figure 15: Support for Police Reforms by Race (Yahoo News survey)



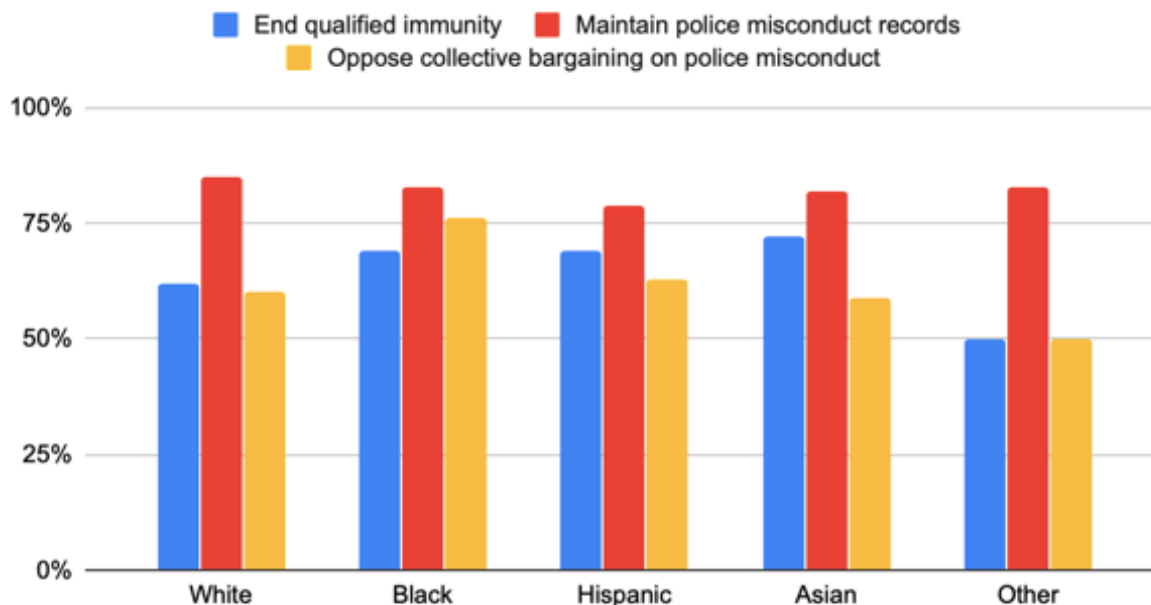
Source: Yahoo News survey, June 9-10, 2020, 1,570 U.S. adult residents, margin of error +/- 3.4 percentage points

A consensus has been emerging around some reform ideas, though not others. The Kaiser Family Foundation poll found that 52 percent of whites, 61 percent of African Americans, and 47 percent of Hispanics supported banning no-knock warrants allowing police to enter a person's residence unannounced. In the Yahoo News survey, overwhelming numbers of whites, Blacks, and Hispanics supported banning chokeholds and strangleholds, encouraging de-escalation strategies, and maintaining use-of-force data and a national registry of police misconduct (see Figure 15). The *Cato Institute Summer Survey* showed overwhelming support among whites, Blacks, Hispanics, and Asians for ending qualified immunity and prohibiting collective bargaining agreements from covering police misconduct (see Figure 16). In the Gallup poll, substantial numbers of whites, Blacks, and Hispanics endorsed several systemic reforms including ending stop-and-frisk, eliminating police unions, and curtailing the policing of nonviolent crimes (see Figure 17).

⁶² KFF Health Tracking Poll, June 8-14, 2020, 1,296 adults ages 18 and older, living in the United States, margin of error is +/- 3 percentage points.

⁶³ Gallup Panel, June 23-July 6, 2020, 36,463 U.S. adults, aged 18 and older, margin of error is +/- 1.4 percentage points.

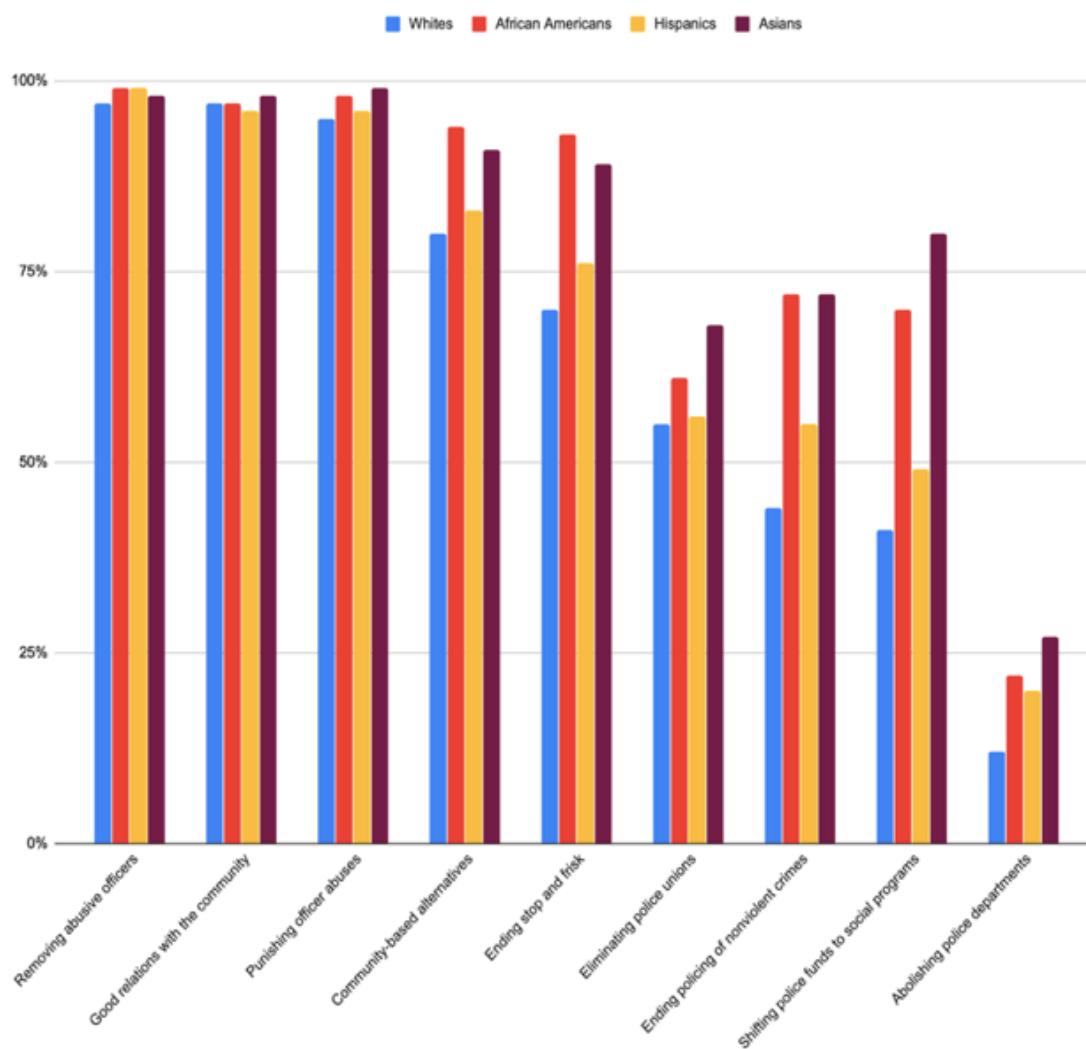
Figure 16: Support for Police Reforms by Race (Cato Institute Summer 2020 National Survey)



Source: Cato Institute Summer 2020 National Survey, July 1–6, 2020, 2,000 Americans 18 years of age and older, margin of error +/- 2.36 percentage points.

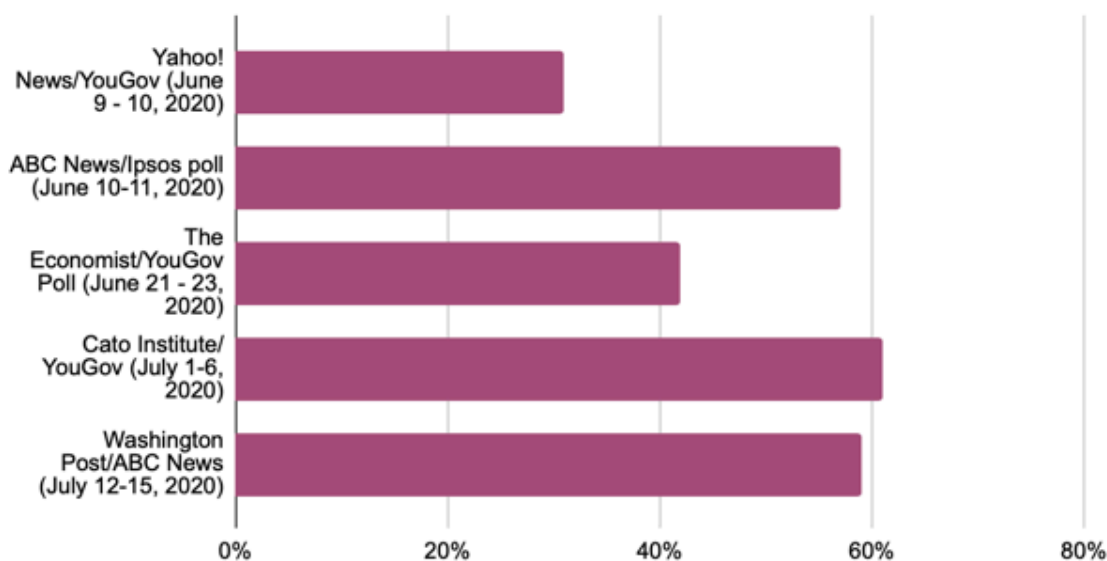
Polls also show broad support for reconstructing policing. In the Gallup survey, over 80 percent of whites and Hispanics and over 90 percent of African Americans and Asians supported community-based alternatives to policing, such as violence intervention. In the Data for Progress survey, 71 percent of white voters and 55 percent of Black voters “strongly” or “somewhat” supported “creating a new agency of first-responders ... to deal with issues related to addiction or mental illness that need to be remedied but do not need police.” Seventy-two percent of white voters and 58 percent of Black voters expressed support for “community-based programs to provide training in de-escalating potentially violent situations.” Whites, however, were less enthusiastic about diverting resources from police departments to social services or community programs. Moreover, abolition has been unpopular across all racial groups. In the Gallup survey, only 12 percent of whites, 22 percent of African Americans, 27 percent of Asians, and 20 percent of Hispanics endorsed abolishing police departments.

Figure 17: Support for Police Reforms by Race (Gallup)



Source: Gallup Panel, June 23-July 6, 2020, 36,463 U.S. adults, aged 18 and older, margin of error is ± 1.4 percentage points.

Figure 18: African American Support for "Defunding" Police Departments

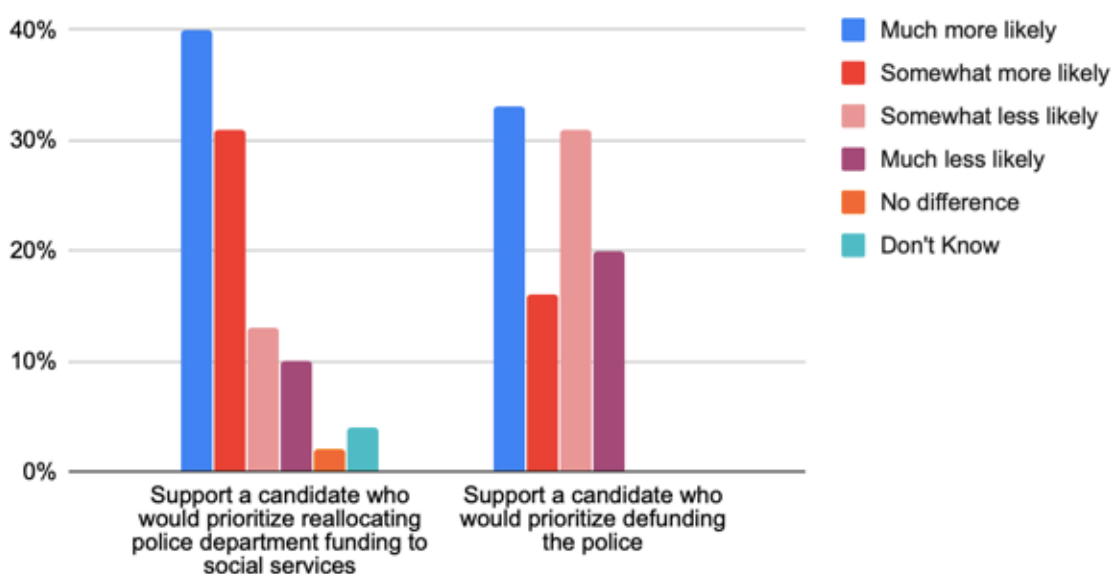


Source: The Economist/YouGov Poll, June 21 - 23, 2020, 1,500 U.S. adult citizens, margin of error ± 3.4 percent; ABC News/Ipsos Poll, June 10- 11, 2020, 686 adults, ± 4.2 ; The Yahoo News survey, June 9-10, 2020, 1,570 U.S. adult residents, ± 3.4 percent; Cato Institute Summer 2020 National Survey, July 1-6, 2,000 American adults, ± 2.36 ; Washington Post-ABC News poll, July 12-15, 2020, 1,006 adults, ± 3.5 percentage points.

Disapproval of abolition notwithstanding, some polls have shown significant African American support for “defunding the police.” An ABC News/Ipsos poll conducted in June found that 57 percent of African Americans expressed support for the “movement to defund the police” and 64 percent supported “reducing the budget of the police department in your community, even if that means fewer police officers” (see Figure 18). A mid-June Economist poll reported 42 percent of African Americans favored defunding police, 30 percent opposed it, and 28 percent were not sure. The Cato Institute poll also showed significant Black support for “defunding.” Sixty-three percent of African Americans favored defunding the police department in their community, including 31 percent who “strongly” favored it and 33 percent who “somewhat” favored it. Considerable swaths of all groups favored defunding in this poll, including nearly 40 percent of whites and over 50 percent of Hispanics and Asians, making this poll an outlier. In a Siena College poll of registered voters in New York state, 61 percent of African Americans

supported “reducing funding to police departments” and 31 percent opposed it.⁶⁴

Figure 19: African American Attitudes Towards Policing Reform in Battleground States



Source: Cornell Belcher, *Discrimination on the ballot in 2020 Collective PAC & Run for Something Battleground Poll on Policing Reform Frames*. July 2020, https://runforsomething.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/PoliceReform_deck-d8.pdf. PowerPoint Presentation.

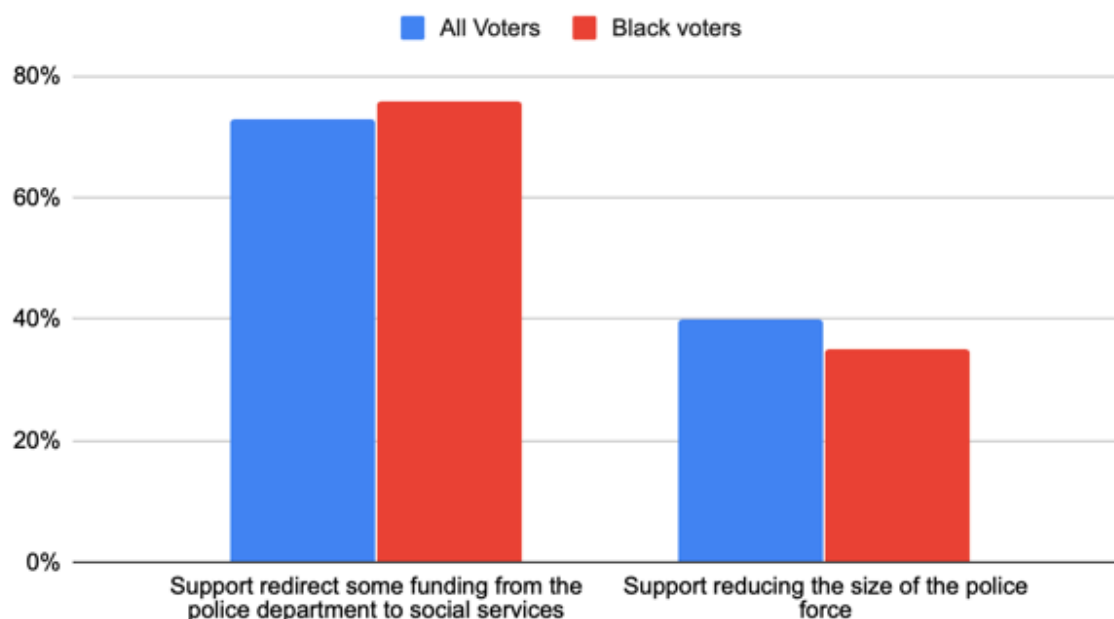
Other polls have featured slightly different results. Like some, a Quinnipiac poll conducted between June 11 and June 15 found that 62 percent of African Americans supported diverting some police funds to social services. At the same time, 60 percent opposed “eliminating the current police department in their community and replacing it with a new one.”⁶⁵ In an early July survey of likely voters in battleground states (Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Michigan, Minnesota, North Carolina, Nevada, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin) conducted by Democratic pollster Cornell Belcher, 71 percent of African Americans said they would be “much more likely” or “somewhat more likely” to support a candidate who would prioritize reallocating police department funding to social services once in office (see Figure 19). On the other hand, 51

⁶⁴ Siena College Research Institute, June 23–25, 2020, 806 New York state registered voters, margin of error is +/- 3.9 percentage points.

⁶⁵ Quinnipiac University Poll, June 11 – 15, 2020, 1,332 self-identified registered voters nationwide, margin of error of +/- 2.7 percentage points.

percent of African Americans said they would be “somewhat less likely” or “much less likely” to support a candidate who would prioritize defunding the police. Finally, in Minneapolis, 76 percent of Black voters supported redirecting funds from the police budget to social programs, but only 35 percent supported reducing the size of the police force (see Figure 20).

Figure 20: Reform Preferences of Minneapolis Voters



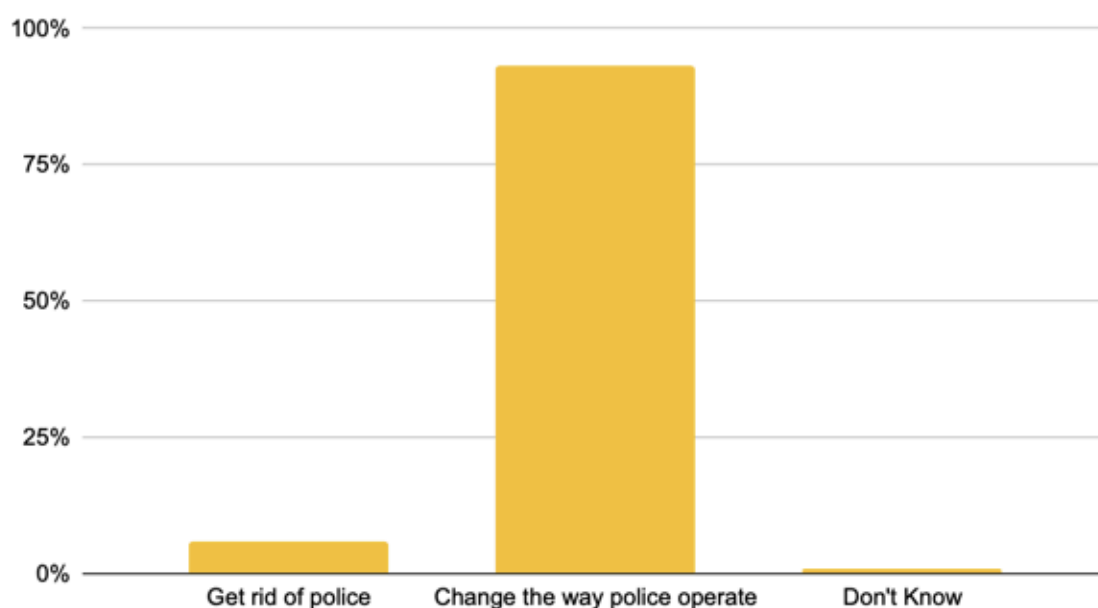
Source: Star Tribune/MPR/KARE Poll, August 10-12, 2020: 800 Minneapolis registered voters, margin of error +/- 3.5 percentage points; August 6-12, 2020: 500 Black Minneapolis registered voters, margin of error +/-4.5 percentage points.

While these seemingly inconsistent responses might reflect survey mechanics (i.e., sample size and sampling procedure), they might also reflect the interpretive challenges of the questions themselves. The wording does not always test the relative popularity of “defunding” and “reform” as abolitionists like Mariame Kaba and Black officials like James Clyburn have framed their positions. For example, should we read support for “reducing the budget of the police department in your community, even if that means fewer police officers” as an endorsement of abolition or a preference for reform? Additionally, the significant number of nonresponses in at least two surveys suggests Americans are wrestling with the meaning of “defund.”⁶⁶ In an

⁶⁶ It is quite plausible that nonresponses are a result of lack of information, clear preferences, or question wording. It is also possible that nonresponses reflect apprehension at expressing views challenging perceived norms. The subsequent discussion will explore these issues in greater detail. On nonresponses in public opinion, see Jon A. Krosnick, “The causes of no-opinion

early-June PerryUndem survey, 37 percent answered that “defund the police” meant “getting rid of funding that police need,” and 47 percent understood it to mean “using some police funding for other ways to make communities safer.”⁶⁷ Sixteen percent weren’t sure. By the end of June, a particular conception of “defund the police” began to solidify. For 18 percent of respondents in a Monmouth poll, “defund the police” meant “get rid of police.” Seventy-seven percent answered, “change the way police operate,” and 5 percent didn’t know. The numbers for African Americans are striking: 93 percent responded “change the way police operate” (see Figure 21). Only 6 percent believed it meant “get rid of police.”

Figure 21: African American Definitions of "Defund"

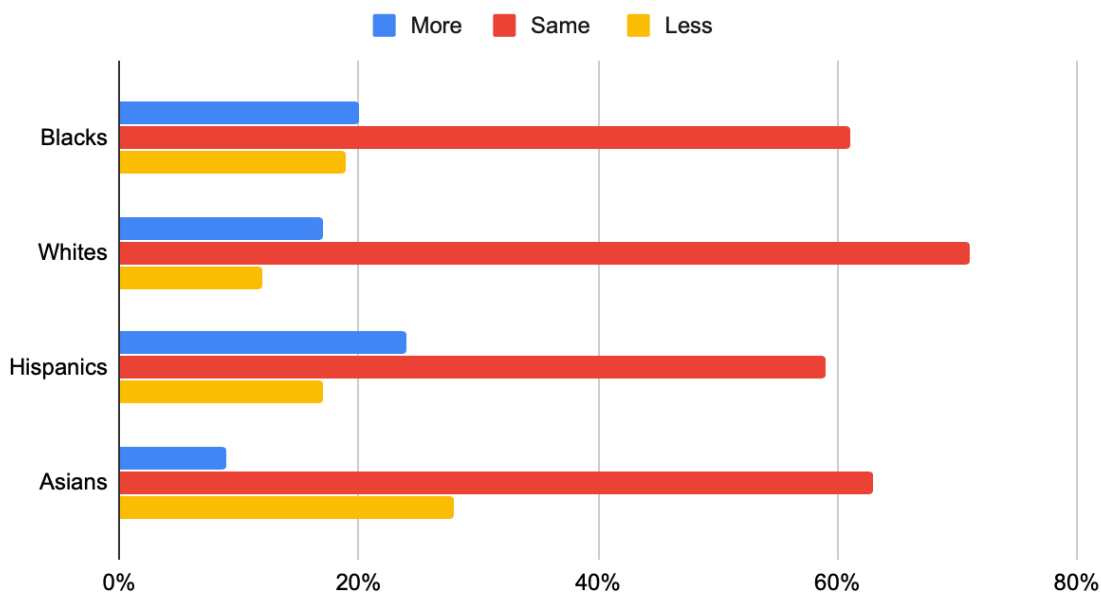


Source: Monmouth University Poll, June 26-30, 2020, 867 adults in the United States, margin of error is +/- 3.3 percentage points.

responses to attitude measures in surveys: They are rarely what they appear to be." in *Survey Nonresponse*, eds. Robert M. Groves, et al. (New York: Wiley, 2002). Adam J. Berinsky, *Silent Voices: Public Opinion and Political Participation in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

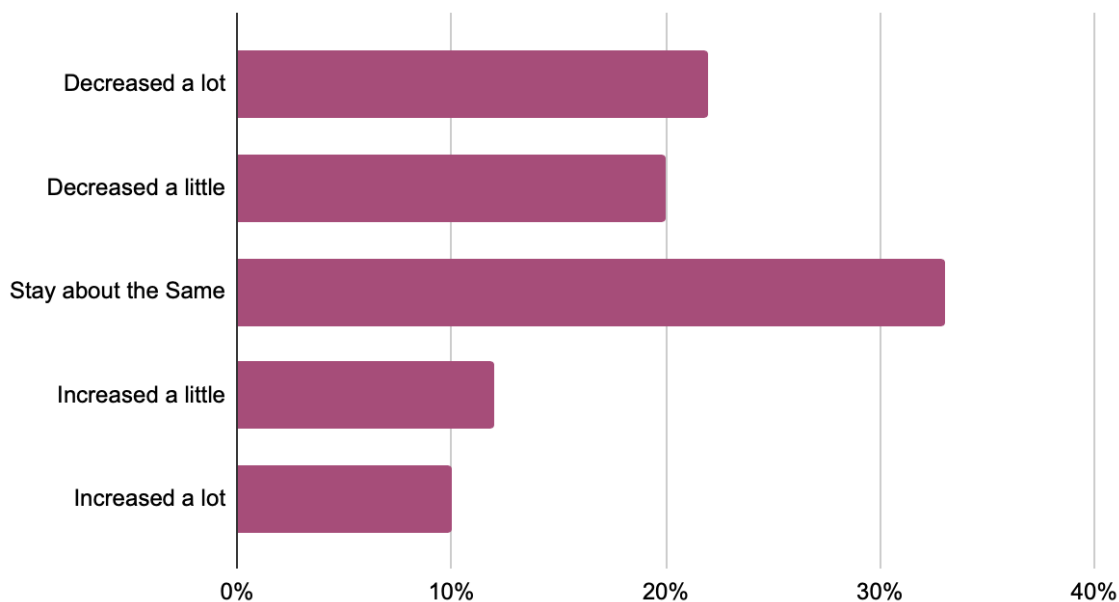
⁶⁷ PerryUndem, PerryUndem National Survey on Public Safety and Racism, June 15-17, Adults 18 and older, margin of error is ± 1.4 percentage points.

Figure 22: Preference for the Amount of Time Police Spend in Your Area



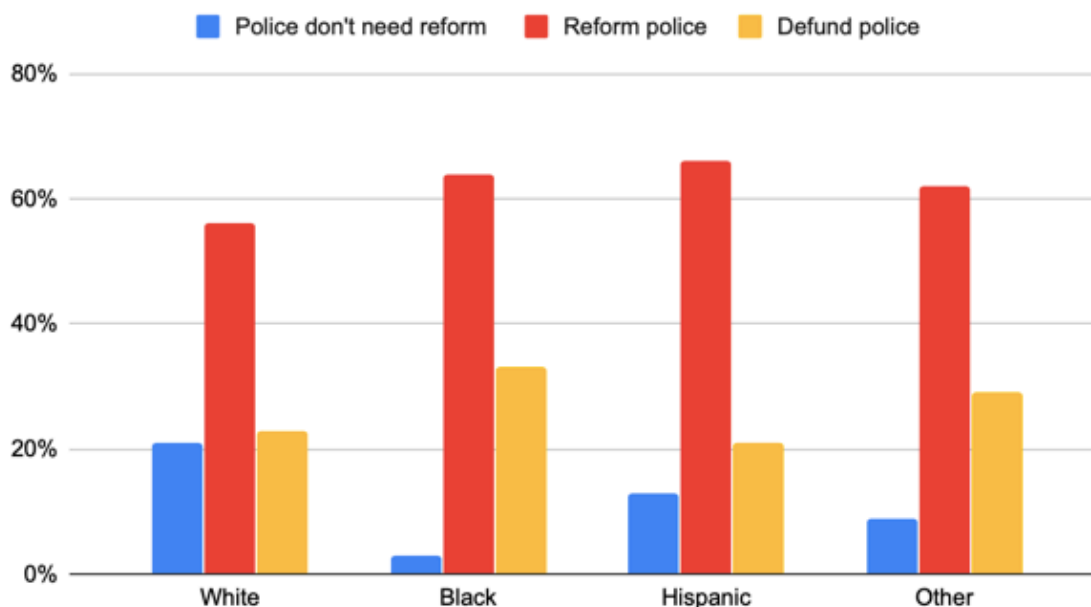
Source: Gallup Panel, June 23-July 6, 2020, 36,463 U.S. adults, aged 18 and older, margin of error is ± 1.4 percentage points.

Figure 23: African American Preferences for Police Spending



Source: American Trends Panel (ATP), June 16 to June 22, 2020, 4,708 U. S. adults, margin of error is ± 1.4 -1.8 percentage points.

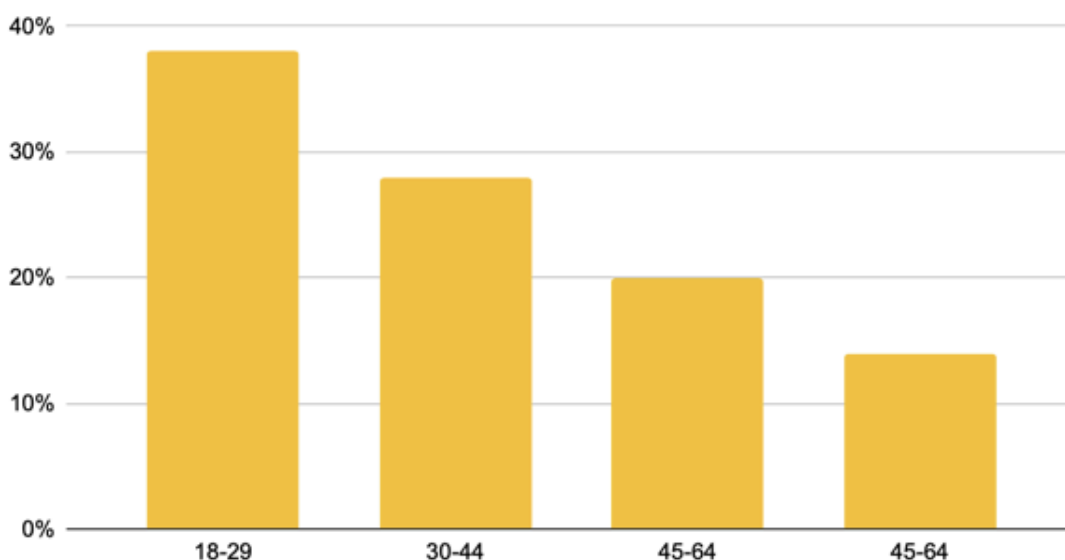
Figure 24: Reform Versus Defund the Police



Source: Yahoo News survey, June 9-10, 2020, 1,570 U.S. adult residents, margin of error is +/- 3.4 percentage points.

Fortunately, some surveys use carefully worded questions with easily interpretable response options to clarify these inconsistencies. Gallup asked, “Would you rather the police spend more time, the same amount of time or less time as they currently spend in your area?” Most African Americans, along with most whites, Hispanics, and Asians, preferred that police spend the same amount of time (see Figure 22). Moreover, “less time” was no more popular than “more time” among African Americans. Pew asked a similarly structured question about “police funding” (see Figure 23). A plurality of African Americans preferred that spending remain the same. Just 22 percent preferred that spending be decreased by a lot. Finally, the Yahoo News survey structured one question the way abolitionists and many Black leaders have framed the debate (see Figure 24). It asked respondents whether one of the following positions best captures their own beliefs: “Police departments don’t need to be reformed;” “Police departments have a problem with race, but the problem can be fixed by reforming the existing system;” “Police reform hasn’t worked...[so] we need to defund police and reinvent our approach to public safety.” Clearly, most African Americans (64 percent), along with most Whites (56 percent) and Hispanics (66 percent), clamor for reform instead of abolition.

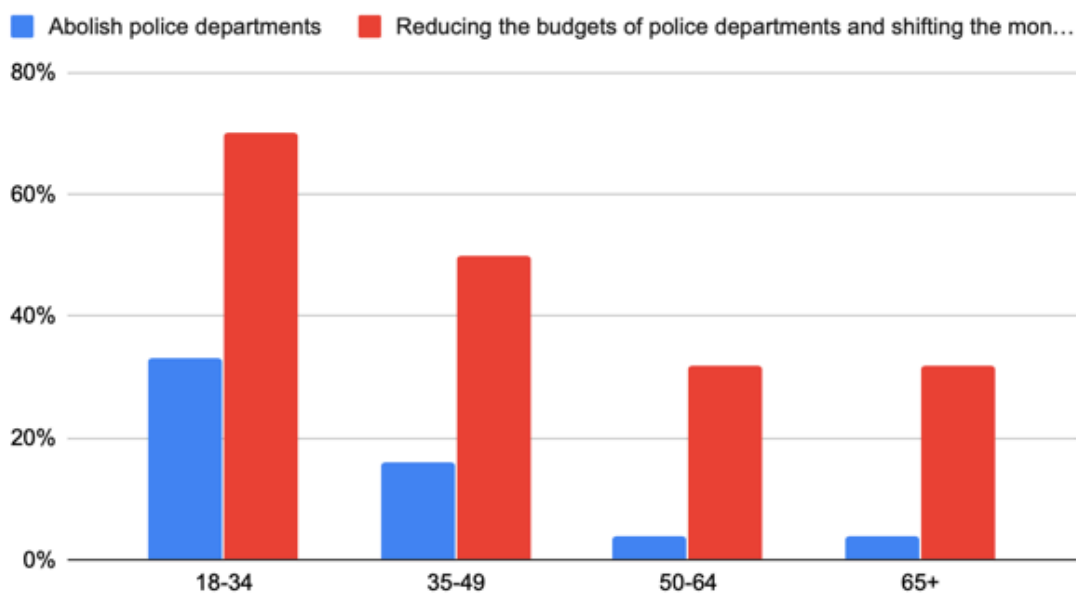
Figure 25: "Police reform hasn't worked...[so] we need to defund police and reinvent our approach to public safety"



Source: *Yahoo News* survey, June 9-10, 2020, 1,570 U.S. adult residents, margin of error is +/- 3.4 percentage points.

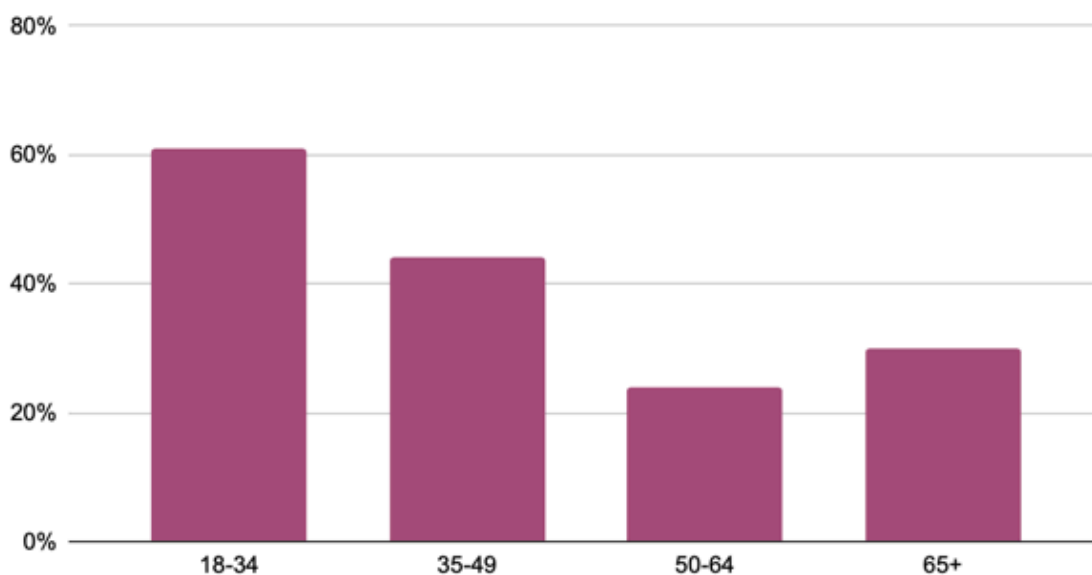
In general, young people were more likely to embrace abolition than older people. In the *Yahoo News* survey, only a bare majority selected “reform” over “defund.” Nearly 40 percent hoped to “defund police and reinvent public safety” (see Figure 25). In contrast, more individuals 65 and over (28 percent) believed “Police departments don’t need to be reformed” than supported defunding. Gallup confirms these findings (see Figure 26). About a third of individuals between the ages of 18 and 34 supported abolition, compared to a mere 4 percent of individuals 65 and over. Seventy percent of individuals between the ages of 18 and 34 and 50 percent of individuals between 35 and 49 favored reducing police budgets and directing those funds to community programs, compared to 32 percent of individuals between 50 and 64 and 32 percent of individuals 65 and older. In Minneapolis, 61 percent of voters between the ages of 18 and 34 and 44 percent of voters between 25 and 49 supported reducing the size of the police force (see Figure 27). Only 24 percent of voters between the ages of 50 and 64 and 30 percent of voters 65 and over approved.

Figure 26: Support for "Defund" by Age



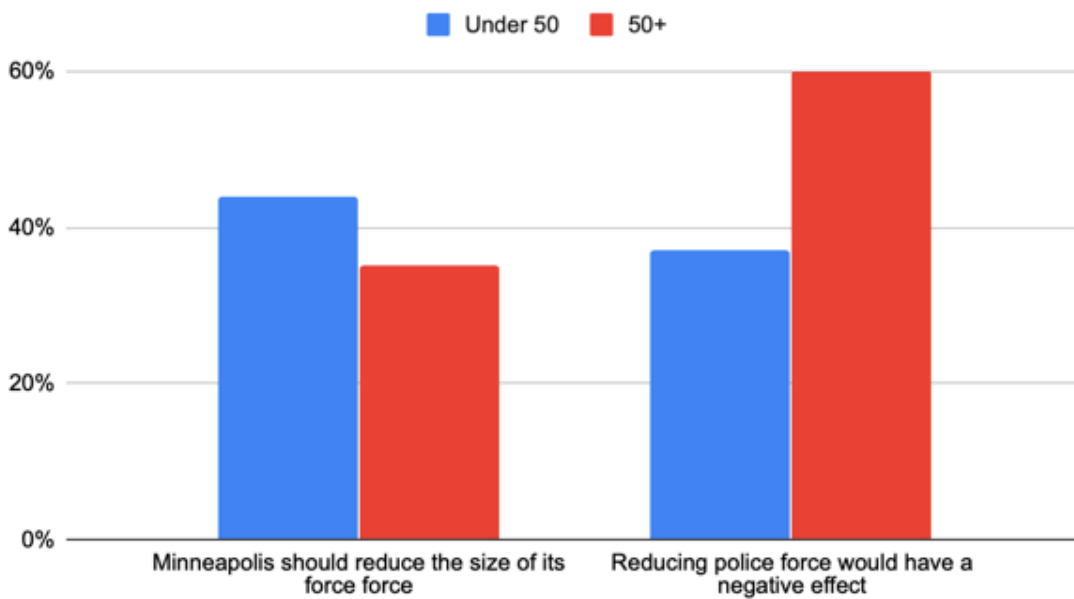
Source: Gallup Panel web study, June 23-July 6, 2020, 36,463 U.S. adults, aged 18 and older, margin of error ± 1.4 percentage points.

Figure 27: Support for Reducing Size of Police Force Among Minneapolis Voters



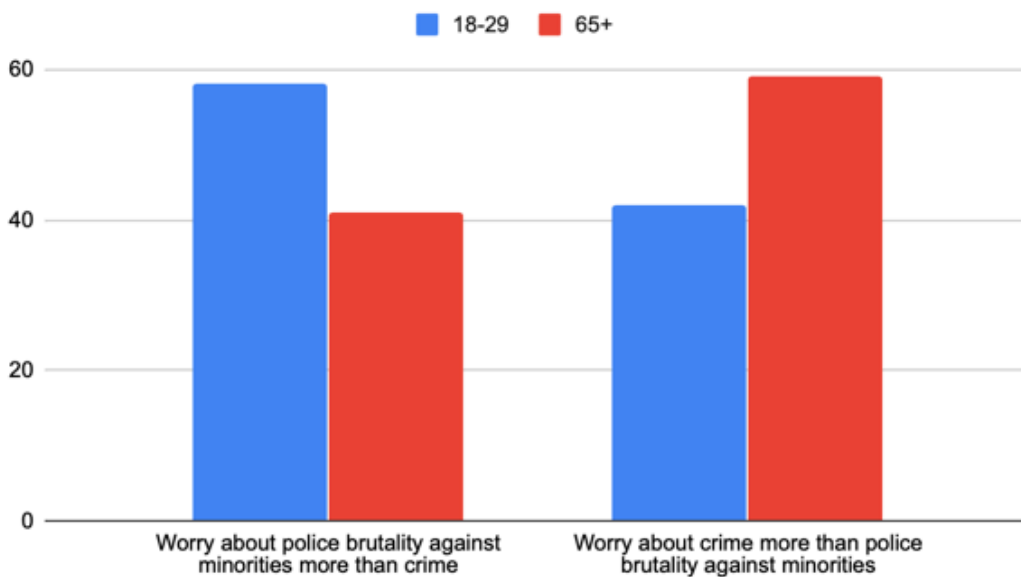
Source: Star Tribune/MPR/KARE Poll

Figure 28: African American Attitudes Towards Police Reform in Minneapolis



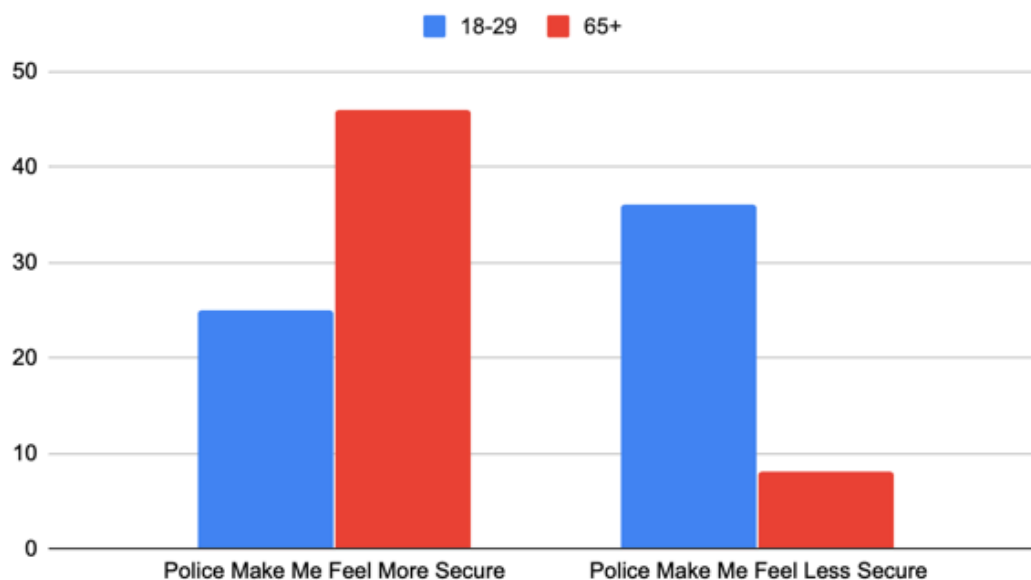
Source: Star Tribune/MPR/KARE Poll

Figure 29: Attitudes Towards Crime and Police Brutality by Age



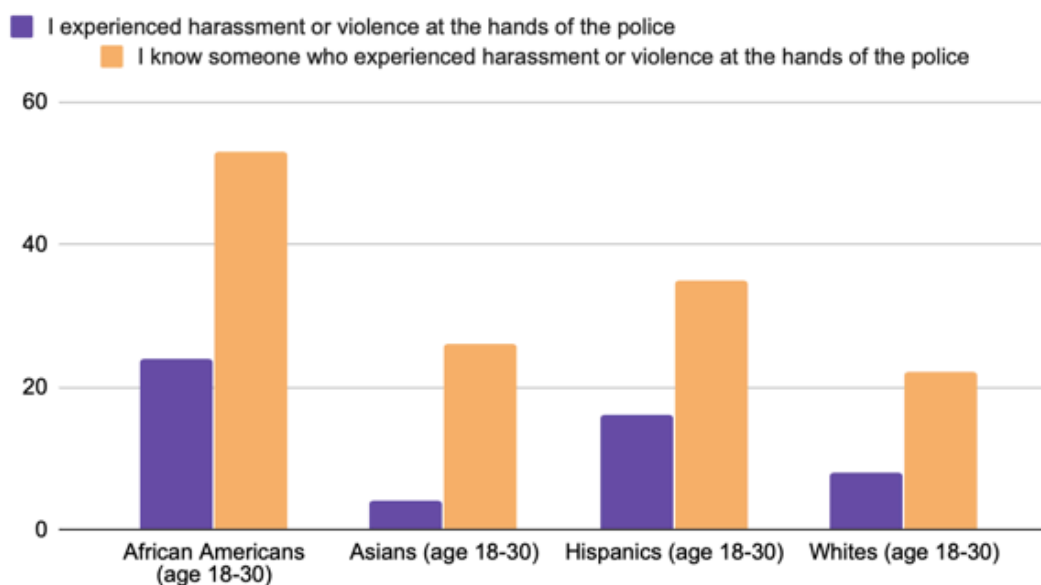
Source: Yahoo News survey, June 9-10, 2020.

Figure 30: Do Police Make You Feel Secure?



Source: Yahoo News survey, June 9-10, 2020.

Figure 31: Exposure to Police Brutality



Source: GenForward: A Survey of the Black Youth Project with the AP-NORC, Center for Public Affairs Research, 2016.

Black and white millennials have both been more partial to defunding the police than the populations at large. In a Pew survey, 32 percent of Blacks between the ages of 18 and 49 and 30 percent of whites between 18 and 49 preferred to decrease funding for police departments by a lot. Only 13 percent of Blacks 50 and over and 9 percent of whites 50 and older felt the same. A plurality of African Americans over 50 (37 percent) hoped that funding would stay the same, and more (19 percent) favored raising funding by a lot than favored cutting it by a lot (13 percent).⁶⁸ In Minneapolis, 44 percent of Black voters age 49 and below supported reducing the size of the police force. Only 26 percent of Black voters age 50 and over shared this belief. Sixty-five percent answered that the size “should not” be reduced. Almost 30 percent of Black voters under 50 expected that reducing the size of the police force would have a “positive effect,” and another 26 percent predicted that it would not have a “significant effect” (see Figure 28). In contrast, 60 percent of Black voters over 50 predicted it would have a “negative effect.”

Unfortunately, these polls do not allow us to isolate the causes of this generational divide, but they reveal that young and old view crime and policing very differently. About 60 percent of individuals between the ages of 18 and 29 worried more about police brutality against minorities than crime (see Figure 29). Nearly 60 percent of individuals 65 and over worried more about crime than police brutality. Just a quarter of all young people between 18 and 29 reported that police make them feel more secure (see Figure 30). That’s noticeably less than the 36 percent who reported that police make them feel less secure. The patterns are reversed for older individuals: 46 percent said police make them feel more secure and only 8 percent said less secure. Incidents of police brutality also increase the salience of racism among young people. Around 70 percent of individuals between 18 and 29 said that they have become more concerned about “racial injustice” since the protests, while 29 percent reported no impact. Older individuals were split: 46 percent grew more concerned and 54 percent did not.

To be clear, these attitudes are rooted in material realities for African Americans (or at least their perceptions of them), not just distant events or media coverage. In a 2016 GenForward Survey of 1,750 young adults, ages 18 to 30, few members of any racial group reported being a victim of police

⁶⁸ In the 2019 Black Census survey, a non-probabilistic survey, 39 percent of respondents said that police–community relations would be improved if parents took more responsibility for the behavior of their children. That number rose to 53 percent for African Americans age 60 and over. Black Futures Lab, *More Black than Blue: Politics and Power in the 2019 Black Census* (Oakland: Black Futures Lab, 2019).

harassment or violence, but African Americans were much more likely to report this experience (see Figure 31). At the same time, 53 percent of African Americans said they knew someone who had been a victim of police harassment or violence, while just 26 percent of Asians, 35 percent of Hispanics, and 22 percent of whites knew someone with this experience. Not surprisingly, Black respondents listed police brutality (42 percent) as the most important issue facing America, followed by racism (40 percent), and education (36 percent). Though older African Americans are concerned about racism, criminal justice issues do not rank as highly for them.⁶⁹ Hard-nosed law enforcement and the decline of disorder cemented a constituency for policing within the Black community.⁷⁰ Because of these dual dynamics, another generation bore the brunt of aggressive policing, and now they agonize over state violence more than crime.

We are beginning to witness the constraints facing advocates of abolition and “defund the police.” Activists in Minneapolis scored an early victory when they secured a pledge from the city council to dismantle the police. Not everyone agreed, however. Several Black residents, pastors, and leaders of traditional Black civil rights organizations were dubious. “I know on one side of the city, it looks beautiful for defunding to happen,” Keion Franklin, a resident who recently survived a shooting, remarked. Echoing sentiments in the survey responses, he, referring to his predominately Black neighborhood added, “But here on this side of the city, I’m scared if you defund the police ... Is it going to turn into World War III over here?” Another resident was a bit more succinct, “It’s good to have good police ... [i]t’s bad to have bad police.”⁷¹ Steven Belton, president and CEO of the Urban League Twin Cities, stressed that “we are overpoliced, we are subjected to excessive police use of force” and that “we are also disproportionately victims of crime and witnesses of crime.”⁷² He worried that some have “used that sound bite — ‘defund the

⁶⁹ In a 2019 Pew survey, the top “very big problems” African Americans listed included racism (75 percent), drug addiction (74 percent), health care (73 percent), affordable college (66 percent) and economic inequality (66 percent). In a national survey of African Americans conducted that same year by the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, the top policy priorities included: housing (68 percent), health care (67 percent), racism (67 percent), higher-paying jobs (66 percent), affordable college (66 percent), and clean water and air (66 percent). Fifty-seven percent mentioned criminal justice reform, but it ranked 13 on the list. Pew Research Center, *In a Politically Polarized Era, Sharp Divides in Both Partisan Coalitions*, December 2019. Third Way/Joint Center, National Survey, November 14–19, 2019, 1,200 African Americans.

⁷⁰ Patrick Sharkey, “Cops prevent violence. But they aren’t the only ones who can do it,” *Washington Post*, June 12, 2020. See also Patrick Sharkey, *Uneasy Peace: The Great Crime Decline, the Renewal of City Life, and the Next War on Violence* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2019).

⁷¹ John Eligon, “Distrust of the Minneapolis Police, and Also the Effort to Defund Them,” *New York Times*, August 4, 2020.

⁷² Maya Rao, “Some Minneapolis Black leaders speak out against City Council’s moves to defund police,” *Star Tribune*, July 2, 2020.

police’ — as an indication that there is no consequence, that there is no policing, and [concluded] that they are free to do whatever they want to do.”

⁷³

Some accused the council of ignoring the wishes of African American residents. Raeisha Williams, a community activist who lost her brother to violent crime, complained, “They’ve made this choice for us as Black people.” She mused, “When my house is broken into, I want to be able to call the police. When my security alarm goes off, I want to know they’re going to arrive and protect my family.”⁷⁴ Nekima Levy Armstrong, former president of the Minneapolis chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), said, “They have shown a complete disregard for the voices and perspectives of many members of the African American community.”⁷⁵

Others felt differently. Jeremiah Ellison, the son of Minnesota Attorney General Keith Ellison who also voted to disband the police, stated, “The Black community is not a monolith, and just because there’s someone that might have a high profile doesn’t mean that they necessarily speak on behalf of the Black community of Minneapolis.”⁷⁶ Phillipe Cunningham, a Black, queer, transgender member of the city council,⁷⁷ took umbrage at the accusation: “To say that Black North Siders have not had a voice erases the existence of two Black North Side council members.”⁷⁸ Recently, reacting to a noticeable uptick in violent crime, the Council pressed the police chief for more action. To which Cunningham responded, “What I am sort of flabbergasted by is ... colleagues who a very short time ago who were calling for abolition, who are now suggesting that we should be putting more funding and resources into MPD.”⁷⁹ The fate of policing in Minneapolis remains unclear.

In contrast with Minneapolis, “defund the police” quickly faltered in Atlanta. The City Council narrowly voted down a “defund” measure that would have withheld \$73 million of the Atlanta Police Department’s budget until the

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Eligon, “Distrust of the Minneapolis Police.”

⁷⁵ Rao, “Some Minneapolis Black leaders speak out.”

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Emma Nelson and Eric Roper, “More new members win Minneapolis City Council seats, council president defeated,” *Star Tribune*, November 8, 2017.

⁷⁸ Eligon, “Distrust of the Minneapolis Police.”

⁷⁹ Libor Jany and Liz Navratil, “Minneapolis City Council members press police chief for response to rising crime,” *Star Tribune*, September 16, 2020.

mayor drafted a plan to reinvent policing in the southern city. Seven council members voted for the ordinance, including three African Americans, and eight members opposed it, including six African Americans. Explaining his vote against the measure, Michael Julian Bond, son of civil rights legend Julian Bond and a former deputy director and chief programs officer for the Atlanta branch of the NAACP, said, “If we were to defund the [Atlanta Police Department] as has been expressed, it is my belief that disastrous consequences would be the result.”⁸⁰ Council member Marci Collier Overstreet, another Black opponent of the ordinance, said, “I have not spoken to one district constituent who would like to have less police officers.” According to her, “they want a better relationship with our police officers.”⁸¹

During recent negotiations over New York City’s budget, the debate over defunding the police grew contentious. The battle lines were unusual. The New York Times reported that “White progressives, allied with some Latino council members from gentrifying and racially mixed neighborhoods and two Black council members,” sought “aggressive reductions and reforms.”⁸² On the other side, African American and Hispanic members from poor and middle-class neighborhoods advocated for a “measured approach to cutting the police budget.” According to Vanessa Gibson, a Black council member from the Bronx, her constituents “don’t want to see excessive force” or “cops putting their knees in our necks,” but they “want to be safe.”⁸³ They also “equate public safety with more policing.” She said, “If I go to them and tell them there would be less police, they would not be happy.”

Like African American opponents of “defund the police” in Minneapolis, New York City council members in the second camp have accused well-heeled, white liberals of imposing abolition on unsuspecting, disadvantaged communities of color. Laurie Cumbo, a Black councilwoman from Brooklyn, likened the push to defund to “colonization.” “Political gentrification” is what Robert Cornegy Jr., another African American councilman from Brooklyn, labeled it.⁸⁴ Adrienne Adams, a Black member from Queens, complained, “When those with privilege put down their torches and return

⁸⁰ Atlanta City Council, “Atlanta City Council Member Michael Julian Bond Releases Statement Regarding Fiscal Year 2021 Budget Amendment and Police Reform Policies” (Press Release), June 30, 2020.

⁸¹ Stephen Deere, “Atlanta City Council votes down withholding police funding,” *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, June 21, 2020.

⁸² Jeffery C. Mays, “Who Opposes Defunding the N.Y.P.D.? These Black Lawmakers,” *New York Times*, August 10, 2010.

⁸³ Bobby Cuza, “Black City Council Members Allege Outside Agitators are Driving Rhetoric on Defunding Police,” *NY1*, July 1, 2020.

⁸⁴ Mays, “Who Opposes Defunding the N.Y.P.D.?”

home, our Black, Latino and Asian communities will remain.”⁸⁵ In the end, the council, after devising budgetary gimmicks and shifting some responsibilities from the police department to other agencies, passed a “cosmetic” \$1 billion cut that did nothing abolish or defund policing in the city. In response, Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, complained, “Defunding police means defunding police.” “It does not mean budget tricks or funny math.”⁸⁶

African American politicians and activists need not automatically reflect the preferences of their communities. These individuals carry their own interests, ideas, and ideologies, and popular attitudes represent one of several constraints they face. The concerns of their constituencies matter; so do the interests, ideas, and ideologies of their patrons.⁸⁷ Thus, elite sentiments may shape Black opinion rather than reflect it. Even so, on this issue, Black politicians and activists across the country claim to speak on behalf of the race. Both sides are somewhat right, but the racial generalizations obscure internal divisions and the ways in which those fissures have been shaped by distinct experiences and have been impacted by broader political formations.

As the former president of the Minneapolis NAACP chapter, Nekima Levy Armstrong, New York City Council member Laurie Cumbo, and Atlanta City Council member Marci Collier Overstreet advise, most African Americans do not support massive cuts to law enforcement budgets. Only a minority of Black voters in Minneapolis backed dismantling the police department. When African Americans express support for “defund the police,” they want something other than ridding cities of cops. Unquestionably frustrated and outraged, they seek root-and-branch reforms of the existing system.

As these Black women correctly note, some of the push for abolition has originated outside African American communities. A substantial number of white millennials have taken to “defund the police.” Leftist publications such as *Jacobin*⁸⁸ and *Boston Review*⁸⁹ have given considerable space to police

⁸⁵ Cuza, “Outside Agitators.”

⁸⁶ Dana Rubinstein and Jeffery C. Mays, “Nearly \$1 Billion Is Shifted From Police in Budget That Pleases No One,” *New York Times*, June 30, 2020.

⁸⁷ Charles V. Hamilton, “The patron-recipient relationship and minority politics in New York City,” *Political Science Quarterly* 94, no. 2 (1979): 211-227. Jack L. Walker, *Mobilizing Interest Groups in America: Patrons, Professions, and Social Movements* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991).

⁸⁸ Alex S. Vitale, “We Must Defund the Police Now,” *Jacobin*, June 6, 2020. Joshua Page, Heather Schoenfeld, Michael Campbell, “To Defund the Police, We Have to Dethrone the Law Enforcement Lobby,” *Jacobin*, July 4, 2020.

⁸⁹ Derecka Purnell, “What Does Police Abolition Mean?” *Boston Review*, August 23, 2017; Lydia Pelot-Hobbs, “Accept Nothing Less Than Police Abolition,” *Boston Review*, June 24, 2020; Garrett Felber, “The Struggle to Abolish the Police Is Not New,” *Boston Review*, June 09, 2020.

abolitionists, and influential liberal media organizations, such as Vox,⁹⁰ the New Republic,⁹¹ and The Atlantic, have given currency to “defund the police.”⁹² According to celebrated Harvard historian and New Yorker staff writer Jill Lepore,⁹³ our current crisis in policing is rooted in slavery, and that’s all you need to know. Rarely, if ever, do elite liberal publications give voice to African Americans such as Minneapolis activist Raeisha Williams, Atlanta City Council member Michael Julian Bond, or Bronx Council member Vanessa Gibson.⁹⁴

Black Minneapolis council members Phillipe Cunningham and Jeremiah Ellison are also right in wanting deep structural reforms. They are not alone. A substantial number of African Americans favor sizable cuts in police spending and would like to see those resources diverted to other social programs, though these sentiments are concentrated among Black millennials. In years past, these voices might have been overshadowed by elected Black officials such as James Clyburn or prominent civil rights leaders such as Al Sharpton. But not today. New social movements — Occupy Wall Street, Black Lives Matter, and even the Sanders campaign — have constructed a vibrant counterpublic in which young African American activists can formulate their own agenda and from which they can critique and mobilize against white supremacy, economic inequality, and, recently, traditional Black leaders.⁹⁵ Young African Americans and their white peers are marching side-by-side, valiantly fighting for their definitions of justice. The vigor of their step and the virtue of their cause notwithstanding, it remains to be seen what this coalition can accomplish.

Conclusion

⁹⁰ Ranjani Chakraborty, “It’s not as radical as it sounds,” *Vox*, June 26, 2020.

⁹¹ David Roth, “Twilight of the Cop Consensus,” *New Republic*, June 11, 2020.

⁹² Derecka Purnell, “How I Became a Police Abolitionist,” *The Atlantic*, July 6, 2020.

⁹³ Jill Lepore, “The Long Blue Line: Inventing the Police,” *New Yorker*, July 13, 2020.

⁹⁴ Fortner, “Hearing What Black Voices Really Say About Police.” For an excellent piece of reporting that includes multiple black voices and reflects the complexity this debate within the African American community, see Peter Hermann and Clarence Williams, “On a D.C. street beset by gun violence, calls to fix policing, not defund it,” *Washington Post*, July 10, 2020.

⁹⁵ Ruth Milkman, “A new political generation: Millennials and the post-2008 wave of protest,” *American Sociological Review* 82, no. 1 (2017): 1–31; Ally Mutnick, Heather Caygle, and Sarah Ferris, “Black Caucus Seeks to Squash Liberal Insurgents,” *Politico*, April 28, 2020. For a discussion of discursive divisions within the African American counterpublic, see Lester K. Spence, *Stare in the Darkness: The Limits of Hip-Hop and Black Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

The wisdom of a public policy is not contingent upon its support in public opinion. The morality of the abolition position does not rest upon the consent of African Americans. One need not subscribe to critical race theory or critiques of neoliberalism to question the fundamental logic of policing in the United States or fret over its devastating effects. The persistence of police brutality might suggest that coercive organizations cannot execute their mission fairly amid vast inequality. In this context, departments may be irretrievably broken, officers may be incorrigible. Thus, it is not unreasonable to seek alternative strategies to achieve public safety that do not rely on the state's monopoly on violence, especially when the death of civilians at the hands of law enforcement continually calls into question the legitimacy of its use.

Popularity does have its compensations, though. This is not 1994. The era of “get tough” politics has abated. We are now in an age of reform. But there are limits to it. As the polling suggests, neither “abolition” nor severe cuts to police budgets appear to have the requisite public support to be enacted. Most Americans prefer that law enforcement funding and the police presence in their communities remain the same. While African Americans no longer have an appetite for harsh sentences and aggressive policing, they also don't hunger for less policing. Most don't consider cops their friends, but most don't see them as enemies either. Black neighborhoods across the country think policing is vital even if it is flawed, dangerous, and, all too often, racist. Abolition isn't faring so well in Minneapolis, the city where the uprising began. In New York, Atlanta, and elsewhere, “defund the police” has ignited a backlash from the very community it was meant to save. Most African Americans are still guided by a simple motto: “It's good to have good police; it's bad to have bad police.”

Most Americans reject the false choice between “defund” and violent, racist policing. A great racial awakening has happened in the wake of George Floyd's horrible death and the passionate protests it spurred. Most Americans, including most whites, consider police violence a problem and yearn for major changes to policing. Americans want to end chokeholds, strangleholds, and no-knock warrants. Americans also endorse the implementation of de-escalation techniques.⁹⁶ Imposing restrictions on the use of force will also

⁹⁶ Campaign Zero, “Limit Use of Force,” <https://www.joincampaignzero.org/force>.

decrease state violence and Black death.⁹⁷ A few studies suggest that increasing the number of women on police forces would decrease use of force and increase the quality of civilian-police interactions.⁹⁸ These reforms can make a real difference. There is no reason why we should not act on them and save Black lives.

Transparency is popular. Overwhelming numbers support maintaining public records of use of force and police misconduct and abuse. Many Americans have grown suspicious of police unions and want to curb their influence, especially their ability to limit punishment for misconduct or abuse. Acting on this support would improve law enforcement. The officer who murdered George Floyd had drawn 17 complaints.⁹⁹ The officer who killed Laquan McDonald in Chicago in 2014 had drawn 20 civilian complaints, including several regarding excessive use of force. In police departments across the country, dangerous individuals remain on the job and frequently escape any punishment as they are shielded by collective bargaining agreements.¹⁰⁰ We need not wait for the end of policing to end the careers of these bad actors.

But that's not all. Americans also seek a radical reconstruction of our dominant public safety paradigm. Attitudes suggest that policymakers should layer robust social interventions on top of targeted policing strategies.¹⁰¹ African Americans, in particular, don't wish to live in communities besieged with crime, especially homicides and property crime. Thomas Abt explains that "violent crime clusters in and around" "hot spots" and in the most dangerous areas of the most dangerous cities "murder concentrates on just a few corners and blocks." Focusing policing on these areas generates significant declines in violence.¹⁰² Thus, instead of stripping sizeable resources from police budgets, which most Americans oppose, cities should redirect them to targeted strategies. There is no reason why entire neighborhoods should feel the force of policing organizations when most crime is generated by a few people in a few locations.

⁹⁷ Police Executive Research Forum, "Guiding principles on use of force" (Washington, D.C.: Police Executive Research Forum, 2016).

⁹⁸ Rosa Brooks, "One reason for police violence? Too many men with badges," *Washington Post*, June 18, 2020.

⁹⁹ Shaila Dewan and Serge F. Kovalski, "Thousands of Complaints Do Little to Change Police Ways," *New York Times*, May 30, 2020.

¹⁰⁰ Daniel DiSalvo, "Tired of bad cops? First, look at their labor unions," *Washington Post*, June 3, 2020.

¹⁰¹ For discussions of institutional layering, see: Kathleen Thelen, *How Institutions Evolve: The Political Economy of Skills in Germany, Britain, the United States, and Japan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Eric Schickler, *Disjointed Pluralism: Institutional Innovation and the Development of the U.S. Congress* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

¹⁰² Thomas Abt, *Bleeding Out: The Devastating Consequences of Urban Violence — and a Bold New Plan for Peace in the Streets* (New York: Basic Books, 2019), 116–124.

“It is clear that ending the overpolicing and underprotection of African Americans requires rebuilding the civic infrastructure and social safety net in urban black communities.”

Most Americans, especially Blacks, see room for community groups and non-law enforcement professionals, such as social workers and doctors, in a broader public safety strategy. The evidence recommends the same. Patrick Sharkey, Gerard Torrats-Espinosa, and Delaram Takyar show that nonprofit organizations focused on violence reduction and community-building can decrease both violent crime and property crime.¹⁰³ Eugene, Oregon’s Crisis Assistance Helping Out On The Streets (CAHOOTS) shows that police need not handle all emergency calls. As Bloomberg City Lab reports, “Dispatchers are now taught to divert calls for assistance that involve behavioral health or substance abuse to [a clinic], which sends one medic and one crisis worker out in a van to assess each incident,” and these workers “can link people up with other social services and transport them to the hospital, if necessary.”¹⁰⁴ Of course, more research on these strategies is necessary. Even so, it is clear that ending the overpolicing and underprotection of African Americans requires rebuilding the civic infrastructure and social safety net in urban black communities.¹⁰⁵

Reconstructing public safety will not be easy. “Kludgeocracy” — the crazy quilt of agencies and policy venues that defines the American state — is certainly a challenge for strategies that require coordinated, layered policymaking.¹⁰⁶ In practice, achieving these goals will require agile leadership, effective management, and renegotiating collective bargaining agreements with police unions. The window of opportunity may be closing. The great racial awakening is waning. Among whites and Blacks, disapproval

¹⁰³ Patrick Sharkey, Gerard Torrats-Espinosa, and Delaram Takyar. “Community and the crime decline: The causal effect of local nonprofits on violent crime.” *American Sociological Review* 82, no. 6 (2017): 1214–1240.

¹⁰⁴ Sarah Holder and Kara Harris, “Where Calling the Police Isn’t the Only Option,” *Bloomberg City Lab*, September 3, 2020.

¹⁰⁵ Robert J. Sampson, *Great American City: Chicago and the Enduring Neighborhood Effect* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

¹⁰⁶ Steven Teles, “Kludgeocracy in America,” *National Affairs*, Fall 2013.

of the police has begun to fall towards its pre-George Floyd levels.¹⁰⁷ Images of violence, disorder, and devastation might alienate moderates.¹⁰⁸ If recent upticks in murder rates become a long-term trend, we might see the return of “get tough” politics. Nevertheless, for now, there is a viable center-left coalition for police reform and some structural remedies. We should seize this moment while it lasts.

About the Author

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¹⁰⁷ Michael Tesler, “Support For Black Lives Matter Surged During Protests, But Is Waning Among White Americans,” *FiveThirtyEight*, August 19, 2020.

¹⁰⁸ Omar Wasow, “Agenda Seeding: How 1960s Black Protests Moved Elites, Public Opinion and Voting,” *American Political Science Review* 114, no. 3 (2020): 1–22.