GIFFORDS
LAW CENTER
TO PREVENT GUN VIOLENCE

IN PURSUIT OF PEACE

Building Police-Community Trust to Break the Cycle of Violence

JANUARY 2020

Welcome

In Pursuit of Peace: Building Police-Community Trust to Break the Cycle of Violence focuses on the importance of community trust in just and effective policing—and the deleterious and self-perpetuating cycles of violence that result when communities are both over-policed and under-protected.

As *In Pursuit of Peace* makes clear, to address the scourge of community gun violence that kills thousands of Americans and wounds tens of thousands more in our cities each year, we must implement reforms focused on building up this trust. While this report does not and could not cover all aspects of criminal justice or policing reform, we hope that advocates, legislators, and the larger gun violence prevention movement find this to be a helpful overview of the important role of community trust in saving lives from gun violence.

We know progress is possible: cities like Camden, New Jersey, and Stockton, California, are forging a hopeful path forward. I hope you'll join us in lifting up the findings of this report and elevating the critical work of the many organizations—including the groups highlighted on the following page—who have been working for years to make our justice system more just and effective at protecting the life and dignity of all Americans. I also want to offer a special thank you to the Giffords Law Center staff who so dilligently researched and drafted this report: Ari Freilich, Ariel Lowrey, and Brittany Nieto.

Together, we can make our cities safer places to live, work, and play, and assure all Americans receive the equal protection they deserve.

GIFFORDS LAW CENTER
TO PREVENT GUN VIOLENCE

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POLICING AND COMMUNITY TRUST

The Corrosive Cycle of Distrust and Violence

The lack of trust between communities and law enforcement is a major driver of gun violence in America's cities. When communities experience disparate treatment at the hands of the criminal justice system—which often takes the form of over-enforcement of minor infractions and under-protection from shootings and murder—they are less likely to report shootings, cooperate with the police, and serve as witnesses. To reduce gun violence and save lives, we must focus on reforms proven to build earned trust and more justly and effectively protect impacted communities from violence.

Chantal Pinzi/EyeEm via Getty Images

CYCLE OF DISTRUST & VIOLENCE

Over-enforcement of minor infractions and police brutality erode trust in law enforcement

Lack of community trust makes it harder for law enforcement to do its job

A small percentage of community members drives up homicide rates

Law enforcement fails to protect residents from shootings and homicides

Young men seek protection in groups and are more likely to pursue retributive justice

Five Facts about Murder in America

1 Most homicides occur in geographically concentrated areas within our cities.
In 2015, half of the nation's gun homicides occurred in just 127 cities and towns. More than a quarter of gun homicides that year occurred in city neighborhoods containing just 1.5% of the US population. Together, these neighborhoods would cover an area smaller in size than Green Bay, Wisconsin.

2 Most homicides are perpetrated by a very small percentage of the population.
Data from nearly two dozen cities reveals that around half of homicides and nonfatal shootings involve people—as victims and/or perpetrators—known by law enforcement to be affiliated with "street groups" involved in violence. These groups constitute, on average, less than 0.6% of a city's population, with an even smaller percentage actually perpetrating violent crime.

3 African Americans make up more than half of all homicide victims in America.
Black men comprise less than 7% of the US population, but 51% of gun homicide victims. Violence is the leading cause of death among young black men and boys aged 15–24. In 2016, homicide was responsible for more deaths in this age group than every other cause of death combined.

4 More than half of homicides of black Americans don't lead to an arrest.
A recent in-depth investigation by the *Washington Post* found that across 52 of the nation's largest cities over the past decade, 53% of all murders of African Americans never led to an arrest, let alone a conviction. Nearly three-quarters of all unsolved murders in these cities involved a victim who was black. Gun homicides and nonfatal shootings are even less likely to lead to an arrest.

5 In communities across the country, many violent crimes are never reported.
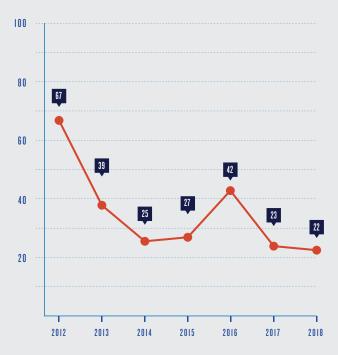Researchers have found that high-profile cases of police brutality or misconduct lead to substantial declines in citizen crime reporting and spikes in community violence. Neighborhoods where law enforcement is seen as illegitimate have higher rates of violence. Nationwide, 29% of Americans who were seriously injured in violent crimes involving weapons did not report that crime to the police.

Pathways to Progress

To save lives from gun violence and make all American communities safer, we must disrupt self-reinforcing cycles of distrust and community violence. Police departments and community leaders across the country have demonstrated that community-oriented, relational policing is key to earning public trust, gaining the information and active cooperation necessary to effectively protect the public, and preventing vigilante shootings.

Camden, New Jersey, has experienced remarkable progress in a relatively short amount of time. In 2012, Camden had the fifth highest homicide rate in the nation. Under the direction of Police Chief J. Scott Thomson, Camden's police department undertook a concerted effort to infuse community policing and trust-building efforts throughout all of its officers' work. While these efforts are still very much underway, the city has already seen pronounced results: **In 2012, Camden experienced 67 homicides. In 2018, there were 22.**

Cities seeking to implement reforms similar to those undertaken by Camden should follow the recommendations laid out in the final report of the President's 2015 Task Force on 21st Century Policing, and intentionally refocus law enforcement resources around proven violence prevention efforts like the group violence intervention strategy. Progress is within reach—but we must make a societal-level commitment to taking the steps necessary to achieve it.

Annual Homicides, City of Camden

Source: New Jersey Department of Health

NurPhoto via Getty Images

Introduction

The vital nonfiction work *Ghettoside* opens with a detective returning a pair of shoes. The detective steps into a small living room crowded from wall to wall with photos, trophies, awards, and stuffed animals—mementos to a murdered boy named Dovon.

The boy's mother greets the detective wearing a loose t-shirt with Dovon's face printed on the front, and gets choked up at the sight of her son's shoes. They were held in an evidence locker for nearly a year after 15-year-old Dovon was shot in the head by another boy at a bus stop.

The mother has diabetes and her doctor has been urging her to get out and walk more. But Dovon was shot to death just a few blocks away, and she has been too frightened to leave her home. Instead, she spends many days lying in the dark, unable to will herself to move or speak.

When the detective hands the mother her son's shoes, she takes them into her arms and leans back against the wall. She slowly lifts one shoe to her face and presses the open top against her mouth and nose, desperate for a trace of her son. She inhales the shoe's scent with a long, deep breath, closes her eyes, and sobs. Her knees give out; she slides down the wall and collapses to the floor, her face still pressed into the shoe of her dead son.

A year before, she dragged the detective to Dovon's bedside at the hospital, determined to make him see her son as more than an anonymous statistic. "I want you to meet him," she told the detective. "I want you to see his face." And he did.

The Washington Post via Getty Images

The hard truth, though, is that we—our nation, our politicians, our media, our justice system, and our national movement against gun violence—overlook and fail families like Dovon's with catastrophic frequency and consequence. Murder commonly leads the local evening news, and our TV dramas, podcasts, and books are filled with stories about mass violence, cold cases, and celebrity homicides. Yet too often, our society turns a blind eye to the ways murder typically impacts American families and life. It too easily ignores the raw agony that shootings impose on the thousands of Americans every year who are left, ravaged by grief, to collect their loved ones' shoes.

It is not possible to talk meaningfully about gun violence's devastating impact on our country without talking very specifically about racial inequality, because a majority of those empty shoes belonged to young men and boys of color.

IN 2016, THE MOTHER OF A BLACK TEENAGER WAS AS LIKELY TO LOSE HER SON TO VIOLENCE AS EVERY OTHER CAUSE OF DEATH COMBINED. [1]

That year, violence was responsible for 4% of deaths among young white men and boys aged 15 to 24,[2] a number that would be unheard of in nearly every other high-income country on earth.[3] But violence was responsible for 20% of deaths among Hispanic men and boys and 50% of deaths among black men and boys in this same age group.[4] Nearly all of these young lives were taken with guns. For many communities of color, shootings are not just a leading threat; they are the threat that dwarfs all others.

Over the past decade, over 125,000 Americans were intentionally shot to death by another person. It's estimated that at least five times that number were hospitalized or treated in emergency rooms after surviving serious, often life-altering gunshot injuries.[5] And in many communities, young people growing up with chronic exposure to violence exhibit shocking rates of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and toxic stress.

This catastrophic loss of life and quality of life is undoubtedly the result of policy failures. Reckless and profit-motivated gun laws have flooded our communities with increasingly lethal modern weaponry, easily accessible to people with histories of violence and hate. Federal law has effectively hindered law enforcement's ability to investigate the gun industry and traffickers profiting from murder epidemics. Many states have prevented their cities from regulating the carrying of weapons in public streets and spaces. At the same time, our leaders have largely failed to invest in community-based violence intervention initiatives.

But it's also time for the gun violence prevention movement to recognize that our country's failure to protect so many Americans from murder is a failure not just of policy but also of public safety. To understand the devastating toll that gun violence takes on our poorest and most segregated communities, we must address the justice system and policing—the priorities, strategies, and effectiveness of those public agencies tasked with protecting and serving all of us.

Because the status quo is failing so many. And the stark choices presented by TV talking heads and in much of popular culture—between policing and de-policing or policing that is just and policing that is effective—are false choices. The evidence is clear: Community-oriented policing that builds community trust and participation is effective at protecting people and preventing cycles of violence.

THIS REPORT TOUCHES UPON BROAD, INTERWOVEN TOPICS—INEQUALITY, RACE, POVERTY, POLICING, AND GUNS—BUT ITS PREMISE IS SIMPLE: POLICE-COMMUNITY TRUST IS A GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION ISSUE.

To ensure public safety and protect people from shootings and murder, law enforcement agencies need active cooperation from the communities they are meant to serve. The research, and the recent experience of many of our nation's cities, show that when police departments lose this trust, a dangerous, downward spiral of disengagement ultimately leads to spikes in violence and vigilantism that threaten the safety of residents and officers alike.

This downward spiral occurs when community members' distrust of law enforcement deepens, witness cooperation and engagement with officers diminish, policing becomes less informed and less effective, more shootings and murders go unsolved and unpunished, and more people seek vigilante justice in the streets. Fear and gun carrying spread like a contagion and make everyone in the community, including the police, toxically stressed and quicker to pull the trigger. And both the community and law enforcement become more cynical about the other's motives and worth.

All of this creates a continually destabilizing feedback loop of distrust, disengagement, and fear that can leave whole communities scarred by the violence of a desperate few.[6]

And so, to meaningfully address our gun violence crisis, we must understand how cycles of distrust and cycles of violence work. We must understand that a deep, generational lack of faith in law enforcement has kept many Americans from actively engaging with their police force—or even calling 911. We must understand that

one of the most dangerous things a police force can do, for both its officers and citizens, is to lose the trust and partnership of the community it serves. And we must understand that building earned and durable trust between communities and law enforcement is critical to stopping shootings and saving lives.

Our aim in this report is to explain why, as a gun violence prevention organization, we believe we must be engaged as allies in efforts to build community trust and refocus law enforcement efforts around just, effective, and proactive responses to community violence. While a comprehensive plan for criminal justice and police reform is beyond this report's scope, Giffords will continue to publish research and analysis about topics related to the intersection of gun violence, policing, and the administration of justice, as well as expand our efforts to support partners and allies who have been doing important work in this space for years, including Cities United, the Community Justice Reform Coalition, Faith in Action, the National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform, the National Network for Safe Communities, the National Police Foundation, the Sentencing Project, the Urban Institute, and the Urban Peace Institute.

This report condenses the leading recent research in the field to explain how cycles of distrust and disengagement fuel cycles of violence—to show how police officers' brutalization of one man in Milwaukee led to increased shootings and homicides across his city for over a year, and show how similar patterns of distrust and violence play out in cities around the country with disturbing frequency. The evidence is clear that in many places, and especially in communities of color, the status quo is failing to prioritize and protect human life and well-being.

This report also offers the hopeful truth that progress is possible. In 2015, the national blue ribbon Task Force on 21st Century Policing prepared a comprehensive report containing recommendations for law enforcement agencies and policymakers to build trust and better protect our communities. By implementing such reforms and refocusing law enforcement efforts, a number of police departments and community leaders across the country have contributed to meaningful, lifesaving reductions in gun violence in a short period of time.

In places like Camden, New Jersey; Stockton, California; and Seattle, Washington; cities have implemented real reforms, built trust between communities and police, reversed cycles of violence, and saved lives. Camden Police Chief J. Scott Thomson spearheaded an overhaul of his city's police force that focused on earning community trust, and helped the city achieve a 67% reduction in homicides between 2012 and 2018.[7] These and other models described in Chapter 5 are examples of progress underway—of lifesaving efforts that are working but unfinished. It is critical that we hold them up as examples of what could be in cities across the country.

Timothy A. Clary/Staff via Getty Images

It's especially important that the gun violence prevention movement speak out now. On October 28, 2019, President Donald Trump signed an executive order to establish a national Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice. The president tasked the commission with undertaking "a review of relevant research and expertise and mak[ing] recommendations [to the attorney general] regarding important current issues facing law enforcement and the criminal justice system" in the United States.[8] The Trump administration has frequently hampered fledgling efforts to build trust and reform harmful policing practices, yet this commission could present a critical opportunity to highlight evidence-based best practices, debunk dangerous myths, acknowledge past and present harms, and press for change.

Now more than ever, the gun violence prevention movement must be informed and engaged to support evidence-based reform that builds earned community trust and makes all Americans safer and freer from violence.

CHAPTER ONE

COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT MURDER IN AMERICA

Common Misconceptions about Murder in America

In communities where violence is rare, people may imagine that murder and the justice system follow a familiar Hollywood script. A murder occurs; witnesses come forward to share what they know; a detective follows a lead; a perpetrator is identified, arrested, and convicted; a devastated family and community begin to heal. In this script, law enforcement officers are envisioned as combat-ready SWAT team warriors or modern-day versions of Sherlock Holmes with high-tech CSI tools. One study found that across 730 episodes of *Law and Order*, over three-quarters of murder victims were white while only 10% were black, and nearly every murder led to an arrest and conviction.[9]

But this Hollywood script is not the story of most murder in America.

In the real world, more than three-quarters of American homicide victims are people of color, and nearly 60% are black. Large numbers of shootings are never reported to the police,[10] not because victims and witnesses don't feel terrified or outraged but because they often do not view their police force as capable of or interested in keeping them safe. Nationwide, a majority of black victims' killers are never even arrested, let alone convicted.[11]

For families grieving a murdered or injured loved one in cities across the country, the jarring truth is that the justice system usually fails to deliver justice. It fails to remove people who have taken or threatened human life from their victims' communities. This reality helps explain why a desperate few decide to take justice into their own hands, meeting violence with violence and fueling cycles of retaliatory shootings that can last for generations.

To be sure, not every perpetrator is also a victim, and not all violence is retaliatory. But for far too long, our country has viewed the overwhelming concentration of shootings and trauma in our poorest and most segregated minority enclaves as an intractable mystery—or worse, as evidence that whole communities or races are tolerant of "thuggishness" or a "culture of violence." We have often structured our criminal justice and policing priorities around uninformed or racist diagnoses that see entire communities as filled with problems and perpetrators, instead of partners and survivors desperate for both justice and safety.

Traditional policing practices often fail to reflect the reality that most violence is perpetrated by an incredibly small segment of any given community. Recent research

has confirmed that even in the neighborhoods with the most gun violence in America, a majority of shootings are perpetrated by people within a small, high-risk population involved with street groups, and that these group members constitute a fraction of 1% of the population. (This research is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2.)

WELL OVER 99% OF THE PEOPLE LIVING IN OUR NATION'S CAST-OFF "MURDER CAPITALS" ARE SURVIVORS AND VICTIMS OF THE VIOLENCE AROUND THEM—NOT PERPETRATORS.

They are key witnesses to the cycle of shootings occurring outside their doorsteps and key partners in efforts to stop it. But they have to be seen, treated, and protected accordingly.

Our country's most effective police departments know better than anyone that to be successful in interrupting cycles of community violence, law enforcement officers "must have active public cooperation, not simply political support and approval."[12] They need witnesses to trust them, come forward with information, and testify. They need to be able to work closely with community organizations and service providers to intervene and prevent violence before it occurs. They need grieving victims to trust that the justice system will deliver justice and keep them safe, so a desperate few don't resort to vigilante forms of justice.

Many cities' shootings are public events; they are perpetrated on populated streets to send a retributive message.[13] For law enforcement, the task of solving these cases is therefore usually "not a job for Sherlock Holmes"[14] or SWAT teams—it is something much more challenging. Homicide detectives frequently struggle to draw out what many people in a neighborhood already know but cannot or will not say to them or in an open court—to work on a very personal level to solicit tips and testimony from terrified and distrustful witnesses who have often felt over-policed and under-protected for years. When law enforcement fails to solicit that witness participation, vigilante justice and shootings become much more common.[15]

The challenge of soliciting cooperation is made much more difficult by the state of our justice system—by the fact that many law enforcement agencies prove brutally zealous in enforcement of minor infractions in communities of color, and at the same time seem powerless to accomplish their most vital public safety task: keeping people safe and alive. Nationwide, our police forces arrest more people for possessing personal quantities of marijuana than for all violent crimes combined.[16] **This over-enforcement and under-protection are two sides of the same coin.**[17] Both devalue the lives and priorities of communities of color, and both reinforce a destabilizing lack of trust that undermines public safety.

This lack of trust means the tangible loss of the information and relationships that actual, non-Hollywood police work is built on—the witness tips, testimony, and partnerships that allow law enforcement to do its job, remove shooters from their victims' communities, protect those at risk, and replace street justice with formal justice. As discussed further in Chapter 3, in cities across the country, a lack of trust in law enforcement has made these partnerships difficult, and both law enforcement and communities bear the consequences.

Gangs versus Groups

When law enforcement is not trusted to protect and serve a community's interests fairly and effectively, cycles of community violence and retaliation take root. These entrenched cycles of violence claim an enormous number of lives and impose both physical and invisible wounds on much larger numbers of people.

Young people in impacted neighborhoods often suffer devastating and traumatic effects from growing up in a climate where life is precarious and chronic exposure to shootings, bloody injuries, and death is the norm. Living every day in fear takes a terrible toll.[18] More than half of young people exposed to violence suffer some form of PTSD,[19] and experts at the National Institute of Justice have noted that "youth living in inner cities show a higher prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder than soldiers" in our wartime military.[20] Young people who are exposed to violence can become hypervigilant about their surroundings and perceived threats, and many exhibit severe PTSD symptoms such as disturbed sleep, chronic illness, fatalistic thinking, hopelessness, anger, impulsivity, and feelings of powerlessness.[21]

Despite these adverse traumatic experiences, the vast majority of these young people positively adapt and resiliently persevere, especially with the support of their families or communities.[22] As discussed below, the vast majority do not respond to this trauma by perpetrating violence themselves.

Some battle the sense that they are defenseless by taking on roles typically reserved for adult health and safety professionals: In Chicago, teens formed an anti-violence group called GoodKids MadCity, which, among other things, trains other teens on how to tend gunshot victims' wounds before an ambulance arrives.[23] A July 2019 NBC News story about the group featured a 14-year-old boy whose brother, an anti-violence activist in his community, was fatally shot at 19; the boy mentioned that a bystander with emergency training could have saved his brother's life, and talked about learning how to apply a shoelace tourniquet to his own wounds in case he is shot too.[24]

Others attempt to battle feelings of defenselessness or powerlessness by carrying weapons, often illegally.[25] When the Urban Institute surveyed young people between the ages of 18 and 26 in Chicago neighborhoods with the most violence, they found that young men were 300% more likely to have carried a gun if they had been shot or shot at in the past year.[26]

Finally, a relatively small number of people choose to battle feelings of defenselessness or powerlessness by joining informal cliques of other young men. These groups offer the perception of safety in numbers and sometimes, the pursuit of vigilante justice on group members' behalf.[27] People who have been victims of or witnesses to violence are particularly likely to join these groups.[28] Researchers have also found that being shot, shot at, or witnessing a shooting doubles the probability that a young person will commit a violent act themselves within two years.[29]

In the popular imagination, there is a persistent myth that most "inner city" shootings are perpetrated by large, highly organized, even transnational criminal gangs involved in vicious turf wars around illegal drug markets.[30] Some groups do fit that definition and have captured the attention of the public and especially of President Trump. But in reality, "most gangs in the United States are small, informal groups that have limited capacity for highly organized crime."[31]

There is no common definition for the term "gang"—different jurisdictions use different, often subjective terms. **In practice, many of the small, informal groups commonly labeled as "gangs" in public discourse are little more than neighborhood cliques of young men of color.**[32] In a safe suburb, a similar set of young white males whose members hang out together, occasionally get into trouble together, and wear the same clothing or varsity jackets as a symbol of group identity might simply be called a "clique," "crew," or "fraternity."

But when group identity reinforces an impulse to escalate confrontations to public violence, these groups can inflict massive harms. Researchers for the National Network for Safe Communities have found that a majority of shootings in American cities are perpetrated by a small number of young men affiliated with such groups. These groups typically operate without any common hierarchy or criminal goals, but their members may identify as a loosely cohesive, self-protective clique, claim control over certain city blocks, and at least occasionally perpetrate violence, often in retaliation for an attack or threat against a fellow group member.[33]

It is a common misconception that people affiliate with these groups because they glorify criminality or violence, leading many policing strategies to prioritize efforts to combat gang identity as a means of addressing violent crime. But in communities that suffer from rampant exposure to violence, some desperate young people join groups because they are seeking protection from violence, not running toward it.[34] In communities where most shootings go unreported and unpunished, these groups

offer the perception of safety and accountability; a research review published by the US Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention notes that "youth most commonly join gangs for the safety they believe the gang provides."[35] These groups are in many ways perceived to be a substitute for the public safety that is lacking.[36]

Yet "the grim reality is that youths who join gangs in pursuit of safety only place themselves in greater jeopardy" as they become targets for retributive violence. As one group member described, "You joined up for self-defense, but then you become the dudes you hated." Once a young man becomes publicly associated with a group and implicated in cycles of retaliation, he "can never be alone—you always have to be with your people" for safety in numbers,[37] even though affiliation with those same people often makes these young men targets for violence.

AS A RESULT, VIOLENCE AND FEAR OF VIOLENCE OFTEN ENGENDER MORE OF THE SAME. MUCH OF WHAT NEWS REPORTS CASUALLY DISMISS AS "INNER-CITY GANG VIOLENCE" IS ACTUALLY THE HORRIFIC—YET PREDICTABLE—APPLICATION OF VIGILANTE JUSTICE BY CLIQUES OF DESPERATE, OFTEN VIOLENTLY VICTIMIZED, AND SCARED YOUNG MEN.

Law enforcement efforts to reduce violence by targeting gang identity therefore often have it backwards: Neighborhood boys and men can become much more cohesively linked as a potentially violent "group" when they are united by a real fear of violence. By successfully reducing the threat of violence, rather than trying to directly attack gang membership itself, we can remove the primary impetus for many people to affiliate with these groups in the first place.[38] Finally, while a majority of shootings are inflicted by or against group members, it's important to note that group-related violence also has massive collateral consequences for many people who have no group affiliation whatsoever. Rival groups might treat everyone on a block as a member of the group who claims it, making everyone in the area, especially young men, targets for unfocused acts of retaliation.

And bullets fired at group members also frequently unintentionally kill or maim neighbors who are entirely unaffiliated with groups. In July 2019, a shootout between group members erupted at a block party in a public park in Brooklyn, leaving one person dead and 11 injured.[39] In these ways, violence perpetrated by a tiny portion of the population clusters in certain areas, harms an astonishing number of people, and kills about as many young black men in this country as every other cause of death combined.

Though the harms of community violence are pervasive and devastating to the physical and mental health of many, only a tiny number of people within the community respond to this trauma and violence by perpetrating violence themselves.[40] In communities suffering most from shootings and murders, the vast majority of residents are law-abiding citizens desperate for peace in their streets.

The "Culture of Violence" Myth

Unfortunately, the myth that shootings erupt in neighborhoods where residents tolerate criminality and violence is pervasive.[41] In this "classic subcultural perspective, lower-class communities [are seen to] generate a distinctive moral universe that glorifies and legitimates aggressive behavior, particularly among male juveniles."[42]

This narrative is so prevalent that it is sometimes casually reported as fact. In a 2019 report ranking US cities with the highest murder rates, *Forbes Magazine* suggested, without any further explanation, that Memphis' high murder rate was related to the city's "stubborn criminal culture."[43]

It is critical to emphasize then that researchers have found that neighborhood rates of "homicide [are] unrelated to resident attitudes toward deviance and violence,"[44] and that "residents of disadvantaged neighborhoods are no more likely to tolerate violence than are residents of advantaged neighborhoods." **In other words, communities with devastatingly high rates of shootings and murders are no more tolerant of violence than safer neighborhoods, and communities with devastatingly high rates of poverty are no more tolerant of violence than wealthier ones.**

This research is bolstered by researchers' findings (described in more detail in Chapter 2) that a majority of shootings in our nation's most impacted cities are perpetrated by a small subset of group members, and that less than 0.6% of the average city's population is involved with groups.[46] It's hard to credibly claim that a dominant culture of violence exists in communities where the population expresses at least as much opposition to violence as other communities and where well over 99% of residents are not involved in groups and do not perpetrate violence.

Even so, this "culture of violence" narrative persists, and is often racialized. Because community violence is disproportionately concentrated within segregated communities of color, a number of public figures have claimed that essential cultural or racial differences are to blame.

In 2016, for instance, a noted criminologist asserted in a book about the history of crime in America that "the [post-World War] black migration to cities, especially the big cities of the north, brought a culture of violence to the urban landscape."[47] He described this as a "black culture of violence."[48] After former president Barack Obama spoke about the shooting of an unarmed young black man in Ferguson, Missouri, former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani told CNN that the president "should have spent 15 minutes on training the [black] community to stop killing each other."[49] Former Chicago mayor Rahm Emanuel told MSNBC that gun violence is "an urban problem … that gets put in a different value system." He went on to say that "a piece of this is the culture … part of this is having an honest conversation, given the lion's share of the victims and the perpetrators are young African-American men."[50]

This narrative often crops up in our media too. Fox News host Bill O'Reilly asserted on-air that "there is a violent subculture in the African American community that should be exposed and confronted."[51] An African American *Wall Street Journal* columnist wrote of community violence, "This is about black behavior. It needs to be addressed head-on. It's about attitudes toward the criminal justice system in these neighborhoods, where young black men have no sense of … what it means to be black."[52] A former Minnesota congressman told radio show listeners that "African-Americans had an entitlement mentality, leading to violence in the community" and that it is "a cultural problem in the African-American community that is leading to this."[53]

This narrative has also permeated gun lobby talking points. In response to an article about the disparate impact of shootings on communities of color, the director of the Firearms Coalition wrote about the need to address "the elephant in the room": a "criminal culture [that] has been allowed to grow and fester in inner-city communities and has become particularly prevalent and destructive within black and Hispanic sectors of those communities."[54] Various NRATV hosts have urged audiences to "blame minorities for killing each other,"[55] suggested that "if [police] really were out to kill black people, [they] would just stay home for a couple of weeks,"[56] and asserted "there is plenty of proof that black culture is inherently more violent than other cultures."[57]

It is critical that we address these narratives head-on because they are pervasive, destructive, and demonstrably false.

First, we should acknowledge that this "culture" framing is almost exclusively reserved for racial minorities: White Americans are significantly overrepresented as perpetrators of school shootings,[58] various financial crimes,[59] drunk driving offenses,[60] and abuse of heroin and other opioids,[61] but those racial disparities are rarely discussed in the language of cultural deficiency or racial blame.

Researchers have also found no support for the notion that there is "a subculture of violence" tied to race.[62] Nationally representative survey data actually indicate that "white [men] are significantly more likely than black [men] to express their support for the use of violence in defensive situations,"[63] and otherwise found "no significant difference between white and black males in beliefs in violence in offensive situations."[64]

Research has demonstrated that residents of high-crime neighborhoods are more likely to express support for the need to obey the law than residents of safer communities, and that "contrary to received wisdom, African Americans and Latinos are *less* tolerant of deviance—including violence—than whites."[65] Similar research findings were published in 1974, 1978, 1980, 1994, and 1997.[66]

The trope that minority Americans have not been persistently outraged by or have not mobilized against community violence is also demonstrably untrue.[67] Racial minorities in America—particularly black Americans—consistently express the highest levels of concern about crime, murder, and gun violence.[68]

A slightly different culture claim—that community violence disproportionately impacts black families due to the relative prevalence of single-parent households—is also unsupported by the evidence.[69] Rates of gun violence have substantially fallen in recent decades (notwithstanding increases since 2014) as rates of single-parent households have significantly increased.[70] Young black men are both safer today than they were three decades ago and more likely to have grown up in a single-parent household.[71] Additionally, contrary to persistent stereotypes, health reports from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention about American fathers' involvement with their children found that "black fathers were the most involved with their children daily, on a number of measures, of any other group of fathers."[72]

Finally, the culture-blaming narrative also ignores the fact that the communities most impacted by violence have consistently mobilized against that violence. On a per capita basis, the number of community-based organizations "focused on confronting violent crime and building stronger communities" nearly quadrupled between 1990 and 2013,[73] as did the number of groups focused specifically on "crime prevention."[74] Research published in 2017 concluded that "the proliferation of [these] community nonprofits" was "among the most important shifts to occur in urban communities over this period," and estimated that in the average city, the formation of 10 community-based organizations per 100,000 residents led to a 9% reduction in the city's murder rate.[75]

The residents of impacted communities have also mobilized, organized, and marched to call attention to the enormous rates of violence in their communities over and over again.[76] Over just a two-month period from June to July 2019, nearly every major city across the United States held locally driven peace marches against community violence.

LOCAL PEACE MARCHES JUNE–JULY 2019

ALBANY, NEW YORK; ALLENTOWN, PENNSYLVANIA; ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND; ATLANTA, GEORGIA; ATLANTIC CITY, NEW JERSEY; BAKERSFIELD, CALIFORNIA; BALTIMORE, MARYLAND; BATON ROUGE, LOUISIANA; BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA; BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS; BROOKLYN, NEW YORK; BRUNDIDGE, ALABAMA; CAMDEN, NEW JERSEY; CAPE GIRARDEAU, MISSOURI CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA; CHICAGO, ILLINOIS; CINCINNATI, OHIO; CLARKSVILLE, TENNESSEE; DANVILLE, VIRGINIA; DAVENPORT, IOWA; DETROIT, MICHIGAN; DUBLIN, GEORGIA; EAST ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI; FLINT, MICHIGAN; FORT WALTON BEACH, FLORIDA; FORT WORTH, TEXAS; FRANKLIN, LOUISIANA; GREENVILLE, SOUTH CAROLINA; GREENWOOD, SOUTH CAROLINA; HARLEM, NEW YORK; HARRISBURG, PENNSYLVANIA; HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT; HIGH POINT, NORTH CAROLINA; INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA; JACKSON, MISSISSIPPI; JACKSON, TENNESSEE; JACKSONVILLE, FLORIDA; JERSEY CITY, NEW JERSEY; KANSAS CITY, KANSAS; KENOSHA, WISCONSIN; LAFAYETTE, LOUISIANA; LEXINGTON, KENTUCKY; LORAIN, OHIO; LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA; LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY; MACON, GEORGIA; MADISON, WISCONSIN; MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE; MOBILE, ALABAMA; MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA; NEWARK, NEW JERSEY; NORFOLK, VIRGINIA; NORTH CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA; OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA; OMAHA, NEBRASKA; PENSACOLA, FLORIDA; PEORIA, ILLINOIS; PHENIX CITY, ALABAMA; PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA; PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA; PONTIAC, MICHIGAN; RACINE, WISCONSIN; RICHMOND, VIRGINIA; ROANOKE, VIRGINIA; ROCHELLE, GEORGIA; ROCHESTER, NEW YORK; RUSTON, LOUISIANA; SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA; SAGINAW, MICHIGAN; SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS; SHREVEPORT, LOUISIANA; SIKESTON, MISSOURI; SOUTH BEND, INDIANA; ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI; ST. PETERSBURG, FLORIDA; STOCKTON, CALIFORNIA; SYRACUSE, NEW YORK; THE BRONX, NEW YORK; THOMASVILLE, GEORGIA; WASHINGTON DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA; WAXAHACHIE, TEXAS; WEST PALM BEACH, FLORIDA; AND WINSTON-SALEM, NORTH CAROLINA.

People suggesting that these communities are not engaged in combating violence in their neighborhoods simply aren't paying attention. By refusing to accept the status quo and demanding change, these communities have driven reform and improvements for public safety. In Oakland, California, persistent and sustained activism on the part of community groups led the city to implement a series of reforms and invest in a comprehensive violence intervention strategy that led to a nearly 50% reduction in homicides between 2012 and 2018 alone. And as shootings and homicides dropped in Oakland, law enforcement became more effective: Homicide solve rates rose from 29% in 2011 to over 70% six years later, suggesting that community trust and partnership were improving too.[77]

In order to replicate the lifesaving progress seen in Oakland and in other cities explored later in this report, our leaders and law enforcement need to evaluate and correct policing practices that are built around stubborn myths and misconceptions instead of evidence. Effective policing strategies reflect the fact that, while gun violence harms every community, shootings in America are overwhelmingly clustered within small areas of our cities, particularly among small numbers of desperate and terrified young men involved in cycles of group violence and retaliation.

Pacific Press/Contributor via Getty Images

A CASE STUDY IN HOPE

In April 2019, Giffords Law Center, Faith in Action, and the National Black & Brown Gun Violence Prevention Consortium published an in-depth report on the transformation underway in the city of Oakland, California, after the city implemented a concerted group violence intervention initiative. That initiative helped bring about a nearly 50% drop in shootings and homicides in the span of six years. To make this initiative effective, Oakland's community leaders had to compel the police department to make substantive policy changes to build trust, establish a dedicated Ceasefire unit responsible for responding to and preventing serious violence, implement implicit bias and procedural justice training for officers, and partner with community leaders and service providers to engage, heal, and protect individuals involved in cycles of violence.

UNDERSTANDING CONCENTRATIONS OF VIOLENCE & MURDER INEQUALITY

2 Understanding Concentrations of Violence and Murder Inequality

To craft more just and effective policing strategies, we must be clear about how gun violence affects us and who its victims are. Some of the most effective violence reduction initiatives in the nation, like the group violence intervention strategy,[78] are built in part on data-driven and community-oriented policing. This strategy focuses on protecting the relatively small number of people and places at highest risk and working with community partners to prevent violence among groups engaged in cycles of retaliatory shootings.

Such efforts effectively focus public safety and preventative resources on the relatively small number of places and people at highest risk, and reflect these critical but often misunderstood facts about shootings in America:

First, shootings are overwhelmingly concentrated in small geographic areas within our cities.

Second, victims of community violence shootings are overwhelmingly young people of color and especially young black men, for whom violence is by far the leading cause of death.

Third, most shootings are perpetrated by a tiny high-risk subset of the population involved with groups, which constitutes far less than 1% of the population, even in neighborhoods with the highest rates of violence.

Neighborhood Concentration

Americans are 25 times more likely to be shot to death than the residents of other high-income countries.[79] Our population's ability to easily and immediately acquire deadly weapons means that Americans of every age, race, and gender, in every state, suffer vastly higher rates of gun death and injury than people in other peer nations. Through community violence, domestic violence, mass shootings, suicides, hate crimes, and unintentional shootings, gun tragedies cause enormous loss and suffering in every American community.

But most interpersonal gun violence in the United States is concentrated in our cities: In 2015, half of the nation's gun homicides occurred in just 127 cities and towns.[80]

Within those cities, shootings concentrate much, much more in neighborhoods marked by severe poverty, disadvantage, and stark racial segregation.[81] In 2015, more than a quarter of the nation's gun homicides occurred in city neighborhoods containing just 1.5% of the US population.[82] Together, those neighborhoods would cover an area smaller in size than Green Bay, Wisconsin.[83]

According to an analysis by *The Guardian*, 4.5 million Americans live in urban census tracts that experienced at least two fatal shootings in 2015.[84] (A "census tract" is a geographic area designated by the US Census Bureau that is "roughly equivalent to a neighborhood" and typically encompasses between 2,500 to 8,000 residents.)[85] People who lived in these areas were about 400 times more likely to be shot to death than the average person in other high-income countries.[86]

Many Americans don't realize just how geographically concentrated fatal violence is. In recent years, political commentators have often highlighted the city of Chicago as "the poster child of [the recent] big-city homicide rise,"[87] and President Trump has repeatedly compared the city to war-torn Afghanistan.[88] But when it comes to gun violence, there are essentially two Chicagos.

According to Giffords Law Center's analysis, nearly 70% of Chicago's population lived in census tracts with zero gun homicides in 2015, while 87% lived in areas that saw no more than one.[89] The remaining neighborhoods—containing just 13% of the city's population—suffered nearly two-thirds of all gun murders in Chicago that year.[90] More than half of Chicago's fatal shootings occurred in areas with 9% of the population, and more than one-fifth occurred in areas with just 2.3% of the population.

Mapping gun violence in nearly every other American city reveals similar stark divides, with large swathes of the city reporting few or no gun homicides, and isolated pockets suffering devastating numbers of killings.

In a few cities with the highest rates of violence, such as Baltimore, New Orleans, and Memphis, gun violence is more widely distributed throughout the city. In Baltimore, for instance, an astonishing 61% of residents lived in census tracts that saw at least one fatal shooting in 2015.

The same was true for 53% of people living in Memphis, and 48% of people in New Orleans. But even in these cities, most gun violence was still heavily clustered in relatively small areas. Over half of Baltimore's gun murders occurred in areas with less than 14% of the population, half of Memphis's gun murders occurred in areas with less than 15% of the population, and more than half of New Orleans' gun murders occurred in areas with less than 12% of the population.

While some cities are much safer than others as a whole, this data shows that there are typically much larger disparities in violence within a city than between different cities. This is true even in places like Chicago and Baltimore that are commonly portrayed as America's undifferentiated "Murder Capitals."[91]

Geographic Concentrations of Violence

Within cities across the United States, violence is often highly concentrated, with half of many cities' gun homicides occurring in census tracts with between 3% and 10% of the population.

DENVER
Half of the city's gun murders occurred in areas with 5% of the population. 77% of the population lived in census tracts with no fatal shootings.

LOS ANGELES
Half of the city's gun murders occurred in areas with 3% of the population. More than 90% of the population lived in census tracts with no fatal shootings.

PHOENIX
Half of the city's gun murders occurred in areas with 6.5% of the population. 82% of the population lived in census tracts with no fatal shootings.

HOUSTON
More than half of the city's gun murders occurred in areas with 10% of the population. 63% of residents lived in census tracts with no fatal shootings.

NEW YORK
More than half of the city's gun murders occurred in areas with 5% of the population. Over 88% of the city's population lived in census tracts with no fatal shootings.

CINCINNATI
More than half of the city's gun murders occurred in areas with 10% of the population. and one-quarter occurred in areas with just 4% of the population.

CHARLOTTE
More than half of the city's gun murders occurred in areas with less than 6% of the population. 80% of the population lived in census tracts with no fatal shootings.

JACKSONVILLE
Half of the city's gun murders occurred in areas with 9% of the population. 64% of residents lived in census tracts with no fatal shootings.

5% 3% 6.5% 10% 5% 10% 6% 9%

giffordslawcenter.org/policing

These most heavily impacted communities typically share a similar history. These neighborhoods are nearly all highly segregated, low-income communities forged by past and present racial discrimination—public policies and private actions that have deliberately marginalized non-white and especially black Americans; isolated them into redlined ghettos of concentrated disadvantage; and still today often exclude them from the social, civic, and economic heart of the American city.[92]

Minority Americans who live in these segregated communities have often been prevented from building generational wealth. Within living memory, black Americans have been blocked from moving to majority white neighborhoods, obtaining home mortgages and educational loans, joining trade unions or obtaining skilled work, attending colleges or equally funded schools, and obtaining Social Security benefits.[93] These neighborhood disadvantages were compounded by "white flight" to the suburbs, economic disinvestment, the disappearance of manufacturing jobs, environmental hazards like chronic lead exposure, and mass incarceration fueled by a "War on Drugs" that has been applied most broadly and severely against young black men, a population that does not use or sell illegal drugs at a higher rate than their white peers.[94] These disadvantages have persisted in the same neighborhoods for generations.[95]

Handicapped by the lack of a family safety net, even higher-income minority Americans may still struggle to afford to move to wealthier and more integrated neighborhoods.[96] Research shows that black families making $100,000 per year typically live in the kinds of neighborhoods inhabited by white families making $30,000.[97] This helps to explain why black men with postsecondary degrees are 30 times more likely to be killed by firearms than white men with similar levels of education.[98]

Disparate Racial Impact

In America, the toll of gun violence falls overwhelmingly on people of color, especially young black men and boys and their loved ones. In 2016, violence was responsible for 20% of deaths among young Hispanic men and boys ages 15 to 24.[99] And, incredibly, violence was responsible for more than half of all deaths among young black men and boys the same age.[100]

In other words, the mother of a black teenager was as likely to lose her son to violence as every other cause combined—every medical condition, cancer, virus, and infection, every act of nature, suicide, and car crash, every drug, toxin, and opioid, every fall, fire, drowning, choking, and accident. Combined. And that statistic is a national average: In poorer, segregated city neighborhoods where violence is most heavily concentrated, violence is responsible for an even larger majority of deaths. This violence is almost

exclusively gun violence. Nearly all homicides killing young black men and boys—95%—are committed with guns.[101]

This violence doesn't spare young children caught in the crossfire: Violence is the second leading cause of death for black boys between ages 10 and 14, and is responsible for 12% of deaths among all black children ages one to nine.[102]

Law enforcement officers have dangerous and often trauma-inducing jobs.[103] But statistically, being a young black man in America is even more dangerous: Black men and boys ages 15 to 24 are more than 11 times more likely to be shot to death than officers are to be shot and killed in the line of duty.[104]
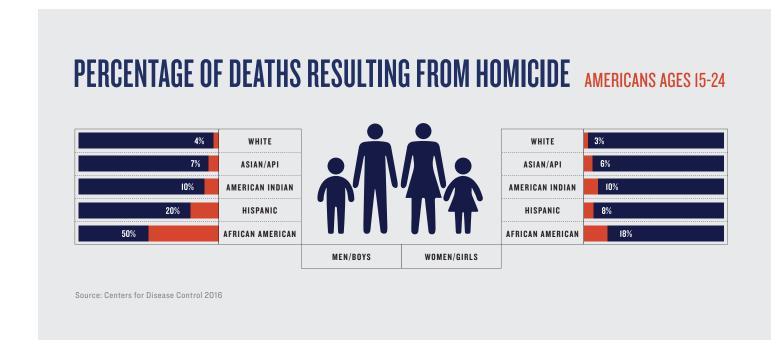
Extreme murder inequality is a national phenomenon. Black men comprise less than 7% of the US population but 43% of the nation's murder victims and 51% of those murdered with a gun.[105] Gun safety laws have a protective effect for all Americans, but black Americans are still murdered in some of the nation's safest states at a higher rate than white Americans in the most dangerous states in the country.[106] **There are at least 22 states where black men are over 10 times more likely to be murdered with a gun than white men.**[107] And some states have even more extreme firearm homicide disparities: From 2010–2017, black men were 51 times more likely to be shot to death in New Jersey than white men the same age, 49 times more likely in Illinois, 40 times more likely in Wisconsin, and 31 times more likely in Michigan.[108]

These enormous racial disparities are even starker at the city level. As discussed earlier, violence within each city is geographically concentrated in certain neighborhoods and blocks. Those impacted neighborhoods are usually overwhelmingly segregated communities where the vast majority of residents—including, logically, the neighborhoods' victims, survivors, and perpetrators of violence—are people of color.

Baltimore, for instance, saw gun homicides spike in 2015 up to what was, at that point, an all-time high.[109] But in the heavily segregated city,[110] predominantly white neighborhoods were "almost completely exempt from the rising violence."[111] Black men comprised 92% of the city's gun murder victims that year.[112] Similar racial disparities were evident in cities across the United States. In Chicago, a majority of the city's murder victims in 2016 were young black men between the ages of 15 and 34, even though that group comprised just 4% of the city's population.[113] While these racial disparities in murder rates exist nationwide, researchers have found that they are significantly larger in more racially segregated areas, even after other markers of racial inequality are accounted for, including unemployment, poverty, income, wealth, and single-parent families.[114]

It should be noted that this staggering level of violence and murder inequality exists after a generation of improvements. Murder rates across all demographic groups used to be even higher. From 1993 to 2014, murder rates among black Americans fell by more than half. They also fell by 18% among Native Americans, 37% among white Americans, and a remarkable 70% and 72% among Hispanic and Asian/Pacific Islander Americans, respectively.[115] Though murder rates have begun to rise again since 2014, Americans, and especially Americans of color, are overall safer today than they were a generation ago.

Despite these decades of progress, many white Americans may take for granted a degree of safety that has not been afforded to many predominantly minority communities. As leading sociologist and researcher Andrew Papachristos wrote in a *Washington Post* op-ed, "America's haves and have-nots are divided not just by how much people earn, where they went to school or what car they drive, but more fundamentally by whether they feel safe when they tuck their kids in at night."[116] This safety gap is one of the starkest examples of racial inequity in America today.

PERCENTAGE OF DEATHS RESULTING FROM HOMICIDE AMERICANS AGES 15-24

MEN/BOYS		WOMEN/GIRLS	
4%	WHITE	WHITE	3%
7%	ASIAN/API	ASIAN/API	6%
10%	AMERICAN INDIAN	AMERICAN INDIAN	10%
20%	HISPANIC	HISPANIC	8%
50%	AFRICAN AMERICAN	AFRICAN AMERICAN	18%

Source: Centers for Disease Control 2016

Concentration within Groups

Because shootings are so disproportionately concentrated in isolated neighborhoods, these communities are often described in broad strokes as violent themselves. People living in the same city may see whole neighborhoods as no-go zones and hear about them only in the context of crime and disorder.

The data tells a very different story. The communities most impacted by violence are not "lost zones" filled with hardened, organized killers. The most dangerous streets in America, the places abandoned and written off as "bad neighborhoods" by so many, are nearly entirely populated by law-abiding people who are survivors and victims of the violence around them, not participants.

In the most comprehensive analysis of this subject to date—a forthcoming study from the National Network for Safe Communities titled *The Less Than 1%: Groups and the Extreme Concentration of Urban Violence*—researchers demonstrate that a majority of homicides and shootings in our cities occur among a tiny fraction of the population, even in cities with the nation's highest rates of violence.[117]

Researchers looked at data from nearly two dozen cities and found that on average, at least 50% of homicides and at least 55% of nonfatal shootings involve people—as victims and/or perpetrators—known by law enforcement to be affiliated with "street groups" involved in violence.[118] Researchers found that members of those groups constitute less than 0.6% of a city's population on average.[119]

Within that small high-risk population, the number of people who actually perpetrate violence is much smaller still. Violence intervention experts have estimated that in an average-sized "group" involved in violence—typically involving 25 to 30 members— "generally only two or three members will reliably pick up a firearm and use it when there is a conflict."[120] Others within the group may rely on that small number of people to settle scores or defend them, but the actual number of active or would-be shooters in the average city is "far lower" than the 0.6% of the population affiliated with street groups.[121]
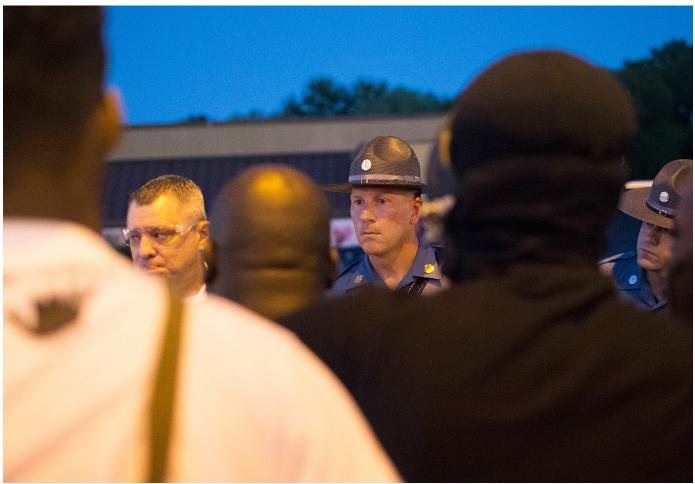
In some cities, an even tinier portion of the population are in these high-risk groups: researchers estimated that in Minneapolis, just 0.15% of city residents were involved in groups, and a small number of perpetrators within that population were connected to at least 54% of the city's shootings.[122]

Some cities evaluated did have meaningfully higher rates of group involvement, especially within "city segments" (or neighborhood areas) that were most impacted by violence. The Eastern District of Baltimore, for instance, suffers some of the nation's highest rates of violence and also had some of the highest rates of estimated street group involvement of any area evaluated by the National Network's researchers. But even there, just 0.75% of the population was determined to be involved in street groups; individuals within that high-risk population were linked to at least 58% of homicides and at least 55% of nonfatal shootings[123] in an area that has been repeatedly branded among "the most dangerous neighborhoods in America."[124]
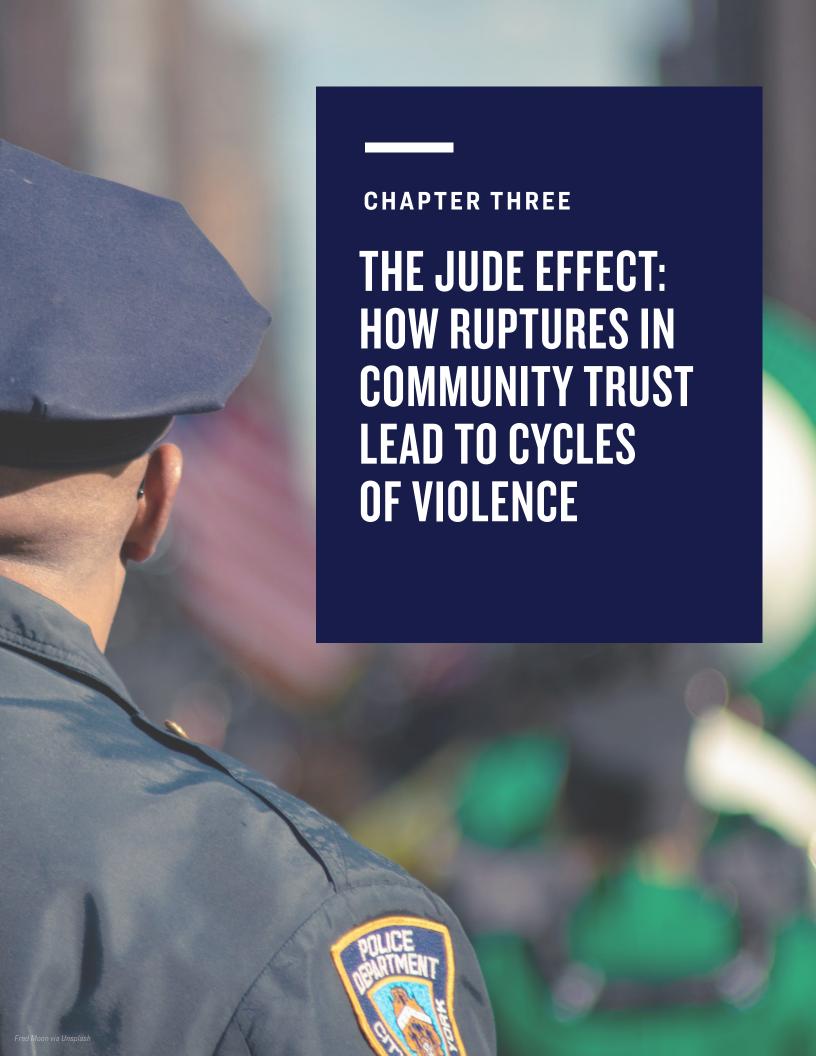
Every other study estimating the portion of the population involved with street groups has similarly found that less than 1% of the population, and less than 5% of people in younger, high-risk age brackets, are involved in street groups.[125]

While it's true that violence is often geographically clustered around certain blocks, it's critical to remember that "the blocks themselves are not committing the violence,"[126] and neither are the vast majority of people living there. A majority of violence in our most impacted communities is perpetrated by a fraction of 1% of the population.

And yet, all too often, our leaders have implemented policing and anti-violence efforts—including both punitive and preventative strategies—that treat the more than 99% of people who are not involved in groups or perpetrators of violence as if they are active participants in violence, instead of its survivors, victims, and witnesses.

Scott Olson/Staff via Getty Images

THE JUDE EFFECT: HOW RUPTURES IN COMMUNITY TRUST LEAD TO CYCLES OF VIOLENCE

3 The Jude Effect: How Ruptures in Community Trust Lead to Cycles of Violence

Research is clear that community trust and engagement with law enforcement are essential for public safety. To meaningfully address cycles of violence and retaliation, law enforcement needs active witness participation and testimony, and communities need trusted guardians who can effectively prevent violence and justly hold people accountable for taking or threatening human life.

The "Jude Effect" is what happens when a police force loses the trust and cooperation it needs to protect and serve effectively. When significant portions of a community give up on law enforcement as their protectors, some of the most desperate, traumatized, or alienated members of that community start taking justice into their own hands, often with impunity. The loss of trust in and lack of engagement with law enforcement fuels vigilante violence, which causes more fear, gun carrying, and retaliatory violence in turn. For too many, this is the story of gun violence in the American city.

The Story of Frank Jude

Frank Jude nearly lost his life outside a housewarming party in Milwaukee in October 2004.[127]

No shots were fired. Jude's injuries wouldn't appear in any analysis of gun violence incidents. But the events that transpired one October night—the particularly horrific brutalization of one young man by members of the Milwaukee police force—exacerbated a dangerous, downward spiral of distrust and disengagement that would ultimately leave many more people shot and dead across the city.[128]

On October 23, 2004, 26-year-old Frank Jude and his friend, Lovell Harris, accepted an invitation from two female college students to attend a housewarming party.[129] The party was hosted by a member of the Milwaukee police force and many of the 25–30 partygoers in attendance were off-duty officers. The party went late into the night and, according to neighbors, involved heavy drinking.[130]

By the time the men and their dates arrived at the party, it was after 2:30 a.m. They were greeted by unfriendly stares, and assumed it was because of the color of their skin. All of the other partygoers, as well as Harris and Jude's dates, were white. Harris and Jude were not. (Harris described himself as black and Jude described himself as biracial.) One of the female students with them described this as a "very

uncomfortable situation,"[131] so after five tense minutes at the party, the four decided to leave and returned to the truck they had arrived in.

Before they could drive away, a group of at least 10 men came out of the house and surrounded their truck. The off-duty officer who was hosting the party said his officer's badge had gone missing from his bedroom and accused the four of stealing it. The men surrounding the truck demanded that the four get out and return the missing badge.

When the four refused to get out of the truck, the group of men threatened them and a man in the crowd broke one of the truck's headlights. Alarmed, Harris called out to try to wake the neighbors. A man in the crowd responded: "N*gger, shut up, it's our world." All four were eventually dragged out of the vehicle. One of the students called 911 and said a "mob" claiming to be police officers was going through their things and trying to grab her phone.[132]

The group's search did not turn up the missing badge. But instead of concluding that the host had been mistaken, court documents later noted, "the [group of] men became enraged and violent." Events escalated quickly and brutally. One man drew a knife and cut Harris' face before he managed to run away. Jude wasn't able to escape. Several off-duty officers grabbed him and held his arms behind his back while others kicked and punched him. One of the students called 911 again and told the operator "they're beating the shit out of him." When the men in the crowd saw her on the phone, they grabbed the phone from her and flung her against the truck hard enough to dent the truck's metal.

Twelve minutes later, two on-duty officers arrived at the scene to respond to the student's 911 call. But instead of stopping the beating, one of the arriving officers joined in. When he was told that Jude had stolen an officer's badge, the arriving officer handcuffed Jude and stomped on his face.[133] Another off-duty officer kicked Jude in the groin. Another jammed a pen in his ears. Someone broke two of Jude's fingers, bending them back until they snapped. The party's host pointed a gun at Jude's head. An officer used a knife to cut off Jude's jacket and pants. Court documents later noted that Jude "never fought back" and had been too severely concussed to defend himself.

When additional on-duty officers arrived at the scene, they found Jude half-naked in a pool of blood. They arrested him and took him to the emergency room in the back of a police car. The admitting physician decided to take photographs of Jude's injuries because they were too extensive to document in writing.[134] The missing police badge was never found. A judge later surmised, "perhaps [the party's host] had put down the badge in the house and was too soused to remember where."

Elsewhere in Milwaukee that night, there were other officers performing just and effective policing work to protect and serve the city's residents. Their work often put them in harm's

way: A young Milwaukee officer was shot to death that same week during an armed robbery outside a gas station.[135] But those officers' work—and community safety across Milwaukee—was undermined in profound ways by the officers who brutalized Frank Jude, and by an ensuing response that was widely perceived to be unconcerned with the dignity and safety of people of color.

A picture of Frank Jude's bloodied, misshapen face hit the papers a few months later, in February 2005, when the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* broke the news about the beating.[136] The paper published a disturbing photo that an emergency room physician had taken of Jude's injuries, along with detailed descriptions of his wounds. The news report also documented prosecutors' failure, up to that point, to charge any officers suspected in the beating.[137]

More than 100 people protested in front of the district attorney's office four days later, many of them carrying signs alleging a cover-up by the police department.[138] Three months after the beating, investigating prosecutors still had not spoken with Jude's friend, Lovell Harris, a key witness to the events of that night.[139] And multiple officers were refusing to answer questions about the events they had witnessed or participated in.[140]

A month later, the city's police department dismissed nine officers and disciplined four others in connection with the beating.[141] But an all-white jury subsequently acquitted the party's host and two other officers of all criminal charges in state court.[142]

After thousands of people joined protests outside the courthouse, federal prosecutors brought civil rights and obstruction charges against eight of the officers and won convictions against seven.[143] Two of those officers tearfully apologized to Jude in court. One, who admitted to stomping on Jude's head while in uniform, cried as he told Jude, "I should have done more to protect you that night."[144]

A Cycle of Distrust and Violence

This was an exceptionally horrific instance of brutality against one man. But Frank Jude's injuries were not his alone; they had devastating ripple effects across much of his city.

In 2016, a team of researchers from Harvard, Yale, and Oxford published a groundbreaking study documenting the impact that Jude's beating had on public safety in Milwaukee.[145] The researchers found that news of the event intensified a longstanding gulf in trust between Milwaukee's residents and their police force, and triggered a dramatic and dangerous decline in citizen crime reporting.

> "When Frank Jude's face hit the papers in Milwaukee, the cops' phones stopped ringing."[146]

Researchers found that after news of Jude's beating broke in February 2005, there was a nearly 20% drop in 911 calls reporting crimes to the Milwaukee police, driven by a much steeper decline in calls reporting violent crimes from the city's black community.

The heavily segregated city[147] saw a small decline in 911 calls from predominantly white neighborhoods for a few weeks after the story broke, but this effect "dissipated rapidly." By contrast, the declines in crime reporting from predominantly black neighborhoods were "large and durable," lasting more than one year.

In total, researchers estimated that Milwaukee's residents placed at least 22,000 fewer 911 calls reporting crimes to the police in the year after they learned about the beating of Frank Jude. A majority of these 22,000 "missing" 911 calls were from neighborhoods where at least 65% of the population was black.

The researchers also concluded that this number likely substantially underestimated the true number of missing 911 calls because this estimate was based on the number of calls the Milwaukee police force would expect to receive in a normal year, based on previous crime trends.
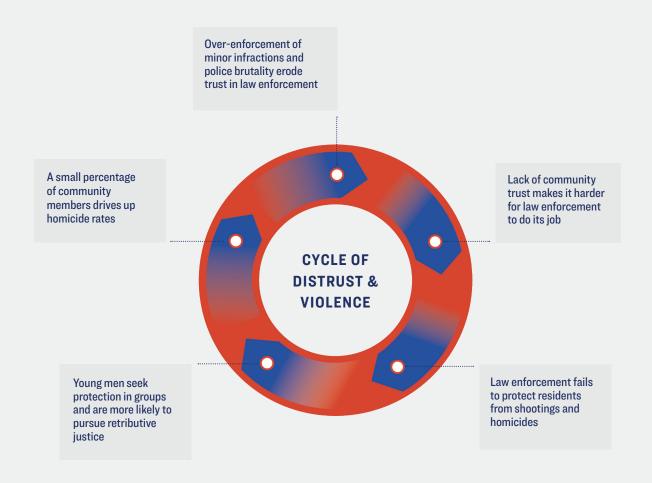
But the year following the Frank Jude beating was not a normal year for crime in Milwaukee. The city's large reduction in 911 calls occurred alongside a significant spike in violence. Homicides in Milwaukee jumped by one-third in the summer of 2005. The city would not experience a deadlier year for murders for another decade, until 2015,[148] following reports that a Milwaukee police officer shot and killed an unarmed black man during a mental health welfare check amid a disturbing spate of other highly publicized police brutality cases nationwide.

Researchers called this observable decline in proactive citizen cooperation with law enforcement "the Jude Effect." The study's authors concluded that **"publicized cases of police violence not only threaten the legitimacy and reputation of law enforcement; they also—by driving down 911 calls— thwart the suppression of law breaking, obstruct the application of justice, and ultimately make cities as a whole, and the black community in particular, less safe."**

While often overlooked by the public and policymakers, the primary implication of the Jude Effect study—that there is a strong link between community trust and firearm violence—has been documented by many other researchers, and for a long time.

In 2011, research supported by the National Institute of Justice sought to examine why high murder rates had persisted and even spiked in certain Chicago neighborhoods that were experiencing declines in poverty, even as rates of violence were falling across most other neighborhoods in the city.[149] The researchers found strong evidence that **"neighborhoods where the law and the police are seen as illegitimate and unresponsive have significantly higher homicide rates,"** even after accounting for differences in race, age, poverty, and other structural factors.[150] These effects were not driven by a complete neighborhood consensus; most communities hold a spectrum of views about law enforcement, with young people, men, and racial minorities tending to report more distrust, and older adults, women, and white Americans less distrust.[151] But neighborhoods that have the most significant levels of distrust of law enforcement on average were found to have much higher and more persistent rates of violence, even after controlling for other factors.[152]

Decades ago, leading sociologists demonstrated that the retributive "code of the street," involving cycles of violent vigilante justice, is actually an "adaptation to a profound lack of faith in the police and the judicial system—and in others who would champion one's personal security."[153] They observed that this code "emerges where the influence of the police ends and personal responsibility for one's safety is felt to begin,"[154] and that "when the law is perceived to be unavailable—for example, when

Over-enforcement of minor infractions and police brutality erode trust in law enforcement

A small percentage of community members drives up homicide rates

Lack of community trust makes it harder for law enforcement to do its job

CYCLE OF DISTRUST & VIOLENCE

Young men seek protection in groups and are more likely to pursue retributive justice

Law enforcement fails to protect residents from shootings and homicides

calling the police is not a viable option to remedy one's problems—individuals may instead resolve their grievances by their own means, which may include violence."[155]

When people don't view calling law enforcement as a reliable tool for resolving disputes or holding others accountable for wrongdoing, they can fall into a "paradox," where some individuals who believe in the substance of the law and oppose violence are nonetheless propelled toward violence as a form of self-reliance or vigilante justice.[156]

Victims of violence are especially likely to fall into this paradox: Researchers evaluating variations in homicide trends across different Chicago neighborhoods found that violent victimization had a "dramatic" negative effect on people's views about law enforcement and its role in the community.[157] People who have been shot are especially unlikely to trust the police to keep them safe, particularly since, as discussed below, police departments usually fail to arrest the people who pulled the trigger. Victims of violence are then much more likely to be involved in cycles of retaliatory violence as both shooters and repeat victims.

This is why so many urban hospitals and trauma centers see a "revolving door" of gunshot injury: Studies have long shown that in many of these hospitals, over 40% of patients treated for violent injuries such as gunshot wounds return to the emergency department with new violent injuries within five years,[158] and as many as 20% are killed within that short time frame.[159]

In other communities, these victims and their loved ones may be more likely to press law enforcement agencies to arrest their assailant, file a civil lawsuit, or move away from distressing circumstances. **But when the formal justice system is seen as absent, abusive, or ineffective, a small number of individuals are compelled toward violent vigilantism instead.**

PeopleImages via Getty Images

Over-Policing and Under-Protection in America's Cities

In March 2019, *The New York Times Magazine* published an in-depth report on "The Tragedy of Baltimore," exploring the city's nearly unprecedented spike in murders.[160] The report ended with a scene from a community meeting in a school auditorium where Baltimore's new police chief introduced himself to residents of a neighborhood especially hard hit by the surge in violence.

An hour into the meeting, a woman stepped up to the microphone to describe how "bewildering" it had been to accompany a friend to a safe and tourist-friendly neighborhood downtown:

> "The lighting was so bright. People had scooters. They had bikes. They had babies in strollers. And I said: 'What city is this?' … Because if you go up to Martin Luther King Boulevard … we're all bolted in our homes, we're locked down … All any of us want is equal protection."

As the *New York Times* piece concluded, "The residents streaming into these sessions … were not describing a trade-off between justice and order. They saw them as two parts of a whole and were daring to ask for both."[161]

But for many communities of color, law enforcement and the justice system impose enormously unequal harms while also failing to provide equal protection from and accountability for violence.

The recent public discussion around criminal justice reform has highlighted the many ways in which minority communities have been inequitably policed and incarcerated on a mass scale for generations. As The Sentencing Project describes, "Like an avalanche, racial disparity grows cumulatively as people traverse the criminal justice system … Once arrested, people of color are also likely to be charged more harshly than whites; once charged, they are more likely to be convicted; and once convicted, they are more likely to face stiff sentences – all after accounting for relevant legal differences such as crime severity and criminal history."[162]

Multiple studies have found that police are more likely to search black and Hispanic people than their white peers, even though searches of black and Hispanic drivers are less likely to turn up contraband.[163] According to one estimate, 80% of black

16- and 17-year-olds were stopped by the New York City Police Department in 2006, compared with 38% of Hispanic and 10% of white teens the same age.[164] And though black and white Americans use and sell drugs at similar rates, black Americans are nearly three times as likely to be arrested for drug offenses, and at the state level, 6.5 times as likely to be incarcerated for such crimes.[165] The collateral impacts on families and communities are hard to overstate. Data published in 2009 indicated that a black man without a high school diploma had a nearly 70% chance of being incarcerated at some point by his mid-thirties,[166] perpetuating a generational poverty trap for millions.[167] And though people of color are disproportionately represented among crime victims, they are also often underserved by publicly funded crime victim assistance programs.[168]

Regardless of the motivations or values systems of individual actors within law enforcement or the criminal justice system, the cumulative effects of these disparities are enormous, and create a system of justice that is frequently experienced as untrustworthy, racist, or illegitimate in communities of color.

At the same time, amid this vast, sometimes brutal police presence in segregated city neighborhoods, the most serious crimes imaginable—murders and attempted murders—are pervasive, and typically go unpunished. A recent in-depth investigation by *The Washington Post* found that across 52 of the nation's largest cities over the past decade, 53% of all murders of black Americans never led to an arrest, let alone a conviction.[169] Nearly three-quarters of all unsolved murders in these cities involved a victim who was black.[170]

Other investigative reporting has indicated that our justice system and law enforcement are even less likely to provide accountability for murders and attempted murders involving a gun:

RESEARCHERS FOR THE TRACE FOUND THAT ACROSS 22 CITIES, 65% OF FATAL SHOOTINGS INVOLVING AN AFRICAN -AMERICAN OR HISPANIC VICTIM NEVER LED TO AN ARREST.[171]

Police also failed to make an arrest in nearly 80% of nonfatal shooting incidents involving black victims.[172] These are citywide averages; in the poorest and most disadvantaged communities within those cities, accountability for shootings and murder is even rarer still.

This lack of accountability is no secret in communities most impacted by violence. When the Urban Institute surveyed young people from Chicago neighborhoods with the highest rates of homicide, only 14% said they thought a person was likely to "get caught" for shooting at someone in their neighborhood, and that number was even lower among young people who said they had carried a gun before.[173] Unsurprisingly, just 13% said police in their neighborhood were effective at reducing crime.[174]

This "near-total impunity for homicides and shootings in distressed communities" is a major driver of community distrust and community violence, as it "signals that the state can't or won't actually protect people from the most significant harm. Where that's true, people feel the need to protect themselves and settle disputes through other means, including private violence."[175]

It should be noted that arrest rates are surprisingly low for murders and shootings of white victims too, although arrest rates are substantially higher for white victims than they are for black victims in nearly every city.[176] When the criminal justice systems fails white victims, though, their families are on average more likely to have the resources they need to move away and put distance between themselves and circumstances that might otherwise make conflict and retribution more likely.[177]

People with lower levels of wealth, job security, and privilege are more likely to be trapped in the same invisible walls of poverty, segregation, and circumstance as the people who wronged them or their loved ones. As a result, vigilante justice breaks out more often within those invisible walls, particularly when victims know they are unlikely to see their loved ones' killers arrested and are unlikely to be arrested themselves for committing retributive violence.

As a spokesman for the Baltimore Police Department acknowledged, "Today's victim is yesterday's suspect, and today's suspect can be tomorrow's victim."[178] And as *The Baltimore Sun* observed, "Cases that aren't cleared by police are too often cleared by the streets, leading to the type of reciprocal killings that plague [the city]."[179]

In this regard, the perceived harshness of the American justice system and its inability to protect people from violence are both taken as evidence that law enforcement and society at large are untrustworthy and, at best, indifferent to the wellbeing of minority residents—especially young black men. Crime reporter Jill Leovy summarizes this dynamic: "Our criminal justice system harasses people on small pretexts but is exposed as a coward before murder. It hauls masses of black men through its machinery but fails to protect them from bodily injury and death. It is at once oppressive and inadequate."[180] Leovy suggests to readers:

> "Imagine that you're a student at a school. There are bullies at the school, and the bullies beat you up every day on the playground. But the only time the playground supervisor comes around, he or she says, 'Don't chew gum on the playground,' and walks away, and ignores the bruises and the fighting. You would be cynical. You would cease to believe in the system. In fact, you'd probably cease to believe that it's just the bullies picking on you, but rather that the system is a bully in and of itself."[181]

The real-world facts bear out this analogy tragically often. An investigatory report by The Trace found that since 2001, the Chicago Police Department has made more than 600,000 arrests for possessing or purchasing drugs, including marijuana, while also "fail[ing] to make an arrest in 85 percent of the violent crimes committed with firearms."[182] A Chicago mother grieving the loss of two sons to gun violence explained the dynamic to reporters as such: "They'll get a person for marijuana before they'll get a person for murder."[183]

NATIONALLY, VIOLENCE KILLS MORE YOUNG BLACK MEN THAN ALMOST EVERY OTHER CAUSE COMBINED, BUT OUR NATION'S LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES ARREST MORE PEOPLE FOR POSSESSING SMALL PERSONAL QUANTITIES OF MARIJUANA THAN FOR ALL VIOLENT CRIMES COMBINED.[184]

People of color are stopped and searched more, arrested more, charged more, and sentenced for longer[185] and yet are substantially less likely to see justice done when a loved one has been shot or killed.[186] The same justice system that fails to arrest the killers of a majority of black murder victims still hauls millions behind bars for non-violent offenses and often fails to hold law enforcement officers accountable when they perpetrate crimes or violence themselves.

These dynamics are further exacerbated by the fact that in cities across the country, people of color are commonly policed by officers who do not live in their community and do not reflect their community's racial or ethnic makeup. Across the 75 cities with the largest police forces in the United States, on average, 60% of officers (and 65% of white officers) reside outside the limits of the city they serve.[187] And according to Giffords Law Center's analysis of data from 269 of the nation's largest police departments, in 57% of departments, racial minorities were represented on the police force at less than half their share of the city's population.[188]

Researchers have also found that police departments are much more likely to rely on revenue-driven policing in predominantly minority communities. **In cities with larger minority populations, police departments are more likely to ticket and fine community members to fund their own operations, and in doing so, can criminalize poverty when they arrest those same residents for failure to pay.**[189]

Law enforcement agencies are also more likely to utilize civil asset forfeiture— whereby law enforcement agencies may confiscate and sell property they believe to be connected to a crime even in cases where the owner is not charged with any offense—when local unemployment rates increase, suggesting that policing for profit increases when economic distress in the community makes budgets tight.[190] People of color often bear the brunt of these seizures.[191]

Unsurprisingly, researchers have also found that in cities that collect a greater share of their revenue from these fines and fees, police departments solve violent crimes at significantly lower rates.[192] And cities that solve fewer homicides have much higher rates of homicide on average.[193] In 2013, the US Justice Department's Bureau of Justice Assistance partnered with the International Association of Chiefs of Police to identify best practices for improving law enforcement agencies' capacity to solve homicide cases in order to address the concern that in many communities, "offenders were literally getting away with murder."[194] Their best-practices report included a host of practical recommendations but ultimately concluded that all of them "rely on a community who trust and support the police and are therefore willing to talk with investigators and/or voluntarily provide information to the police."[195]

The report therefore identified the goal of building a foundation of community trust as the essential ingredient for detectives' work to hold people accountable for violence: "While many factors contributed to successful homicide investigations … there was one overarching factor: all of the agencies [that were identified as successful models] had laid a strong foundation of trust with the community."[196]

The report noted that a key best practice is to comprehensively canvass the neighborhood where a homicide has taken place in order to solicit tips and information. The report observed that both successful and unsuccessful agencies often employ this tactic, but:

> "In the successful agencies, these canvasses were not simple 'knock-and-talk' exercises but discussions with citizens that often included a community-based patrol officer whom citizens knew and trusted. In virtually every case, the neighborhood canvass yielded some type of information … that contributed to the successful investigation and case development.

> In the unsuccessful agencies, the ersatz neighborhood canvasses were not always performed, and when they were, the process was superficial … The successful agencies had laid a strategic foundation in community relationships that was simply absent from unsuccessful agencies. With this foundation, the neighborhood canvass tactic was effective."[197]

But many communities do not have that foundation of trust. After two cities installed acoustic sensor technology called ShotSpotter to detect and record the sound of gunfire, researchers found that just 12% of recorded gunfire incidents in the city led to 911 calls reporting gunshots.[198]

Many victims decline to report shootings to the police even when they have been seriously injured. **The US Justice Department's National Crime Victimization Survey indicated that nationwide, from 2006 to 2010, 29% of Americans who were seriously injured in violent crimes involving weapons did not report that crime to the police.**[199]

Without more context and understanding, many people—including local police officers—might interpret community members' reluctance to call 911 or actively cooperate with police investigations as a sign of apathy, a "no snitching" culture, or even tolerance of violence. But researchers have consistently shown that this disengagement from law enforcement is largely borne out of distrust, cynicism, and fear, which can become self-reinforcing as law enforcement agencies estranged from their own communities become even less effective at protecting them from shootings.

As the Police Executive Research Forum has made clear, "Lack of witness cooperation [is] one of the primary reasons for uncleared homicides" in many cities.[200] People "are less likely to cooperate with police when they feel unprotected by the law, and police are less able to protect people without cooperation."[201]

IN THIS WAY, COMMUNITY DISTRUST IS BOTH A CAUSE AND AN EFFECT OF LOW VIOLENT CRIME REPORTING AND WITNESS COOPERATION, LOW ARREST RATES FOR SHOOTINGS AND HOMICIDES, AND HIGH LEVELS OF COMMUNITY VIOLENCE OVERALL.

This dangerous spiral is made even worse when increasingly lethal guns proliferate in communities where there is typically limited accountability for shootings or violence.

Researchers have found that "negative perceptions of police in marginalized communities are linked to higher rates of protective firearm ownership."[202] In other words, more people arm themselves when they don't trust law enforcement to protect them. This proliferation of guns can lead to a contagious arms race. When some people start carrying firearms, others "feel less safe, which increases the likelihood that they will in turn carry guns" for protection[203] and/or affiliate with violent street groups to feel like they have safety in numbers.

Law enforcement officers may respond by militarizing their weaponry and tactics and sometimes by acting more nervously or violently. These responses are shaped both by racialized fears and genuine threats posed by a heavily armed civilian population. In areas with higher rates of gun ownership and weaker gun safety laws, police officers are much more likely to be killed and much more likely to kill civilians.[204]

Police officers are over three times more likely to be killed in states with high gun ownership, compared with states with low gun ownership.[205] **After accounting for race and other variables, researchers have also found that police are significantly more likely to fatally shoot civilians in communities with more guns**, **which often leads to ruptures in police-community trust.**[206] Officers policing heavily armed communities may "find it ever more reasonable to respond to seemingly benign situations with lethal force."[207] When they do, community disengagement deepens further, violence spikes, and gun carrying proliferates more.

Researchers have also found that police are more likely to use physical force in the most structurally disadvantaged neighborhoods[208] and that they are especially likely to use force, including deadly force, against minority civilians and black Americans in particular. Although officers employ force in less than 2% of all police-civilian interactions, they are 3.6 times more likely to use force against black civilians than white civilians,[209] even though data from at least some cities indicates that white individuals are more likely to resist arrest.[210] Researchers have estimated that on average, Americans are at least as likely to be shot by police if they are black and unarmed as if they are white and armed.[211]

Fear of this violence is, predictably, a major factor in communities' distrust of law enforcement. In 2017, the Urban Institute conducted large surveys in six cities' most distressed neighborhoods—"street segments" that were in the bottom 10% for indicators of both crime and poverty.[212] Just 38% of the respondents in these neighborhoods said they felt safe around the police.[213]

As discussed in Chapter 4, high-profile instances of police violence have exacerbated longstanding patterns of over-policing and under-protection in many cities, fueling recent declines in community trust and spikes in gun violence.

A combination of frequent interactions with civilians, conscious and unconscious racial bias, and genuine fears of a heavily armed civilian population make American law enforcement much more likely to shoot and kill civilians than police officers in other high-income nations. According to an analysis by *The Guardian*, police in the United States fatally shot more people in the first 24 days of 2015 than police did in England and Wales combined over the past 24 years.[214] Among men ages 25 to 29, police violence is the sixth-most-common cause of death in the United States.[215] And about 1 in every 1,000 black men die in police killings.[216]

Police shootings are often the most stark and visible examples of ruptures in police and community trust. They are part of the devastating impact of gun violence in America, and can significantly fuel communities' distrust of and disengagement from law enforcement.

In 2015, *The Washington Post* launched a real-time database to track lethal police shooting incidents, because, remarkably, the US government did not (and today, still does not) maintain or collect comprehensive data about the use of lethal force by public officers.[217] Then FBI director James Comey called this lack of government data about police shootings "embarrassing and ridiculous."[218] Republican Senator Tim Scott of South Carolina, one of just three African-American members of the US Senate, introduced federal legislation in 2015 and 2017 to establish the first federal database of lethal law enforcement incidents and incentivize states to share this information with the FBI, but his bill has never been brought up for a vote.[219]

The Washington Post database showed that law enforcement officers shoot and kill nearly 1,000 civilians per year nationwide.[220] In 2015, half of civilians fatally shot by police were white, and in nearly three-quarters of the incidents, *The Washington Post* indicated that officers used force because they believed some degree of "attack" was in progress. Over 80% of people shot by police were armed with some type of weapon (though some had never drawn their weapons). Many of those shot were severely mentally ill and likely acting erratically, but non-violently.

Some of the incidents were particularly frightening: The database documents instances of men lunging at officers with axes, shooting at officers, or approaching officers' squad cars brandishing firearms. Multiple incidents occurred when officers responded to domestic violence calls and were attacked by the abusers.

But this database also documents clear racial disparities. Law enforcement officers fatally shot nearly 1,000 black Americans between 2015 and 2018, including at least 96 who were completely unarmed. A similar number of unarmed white Americans were fatally shot by police. But because there are five times as many white Americans as black Americans nationwide, the database showed significant racial disparities in rates of use of deadly force. This is especially true for young black men and boys, who are 21 times more likely to be shot in their interactions with law enforcement officers than their white peers.[221]
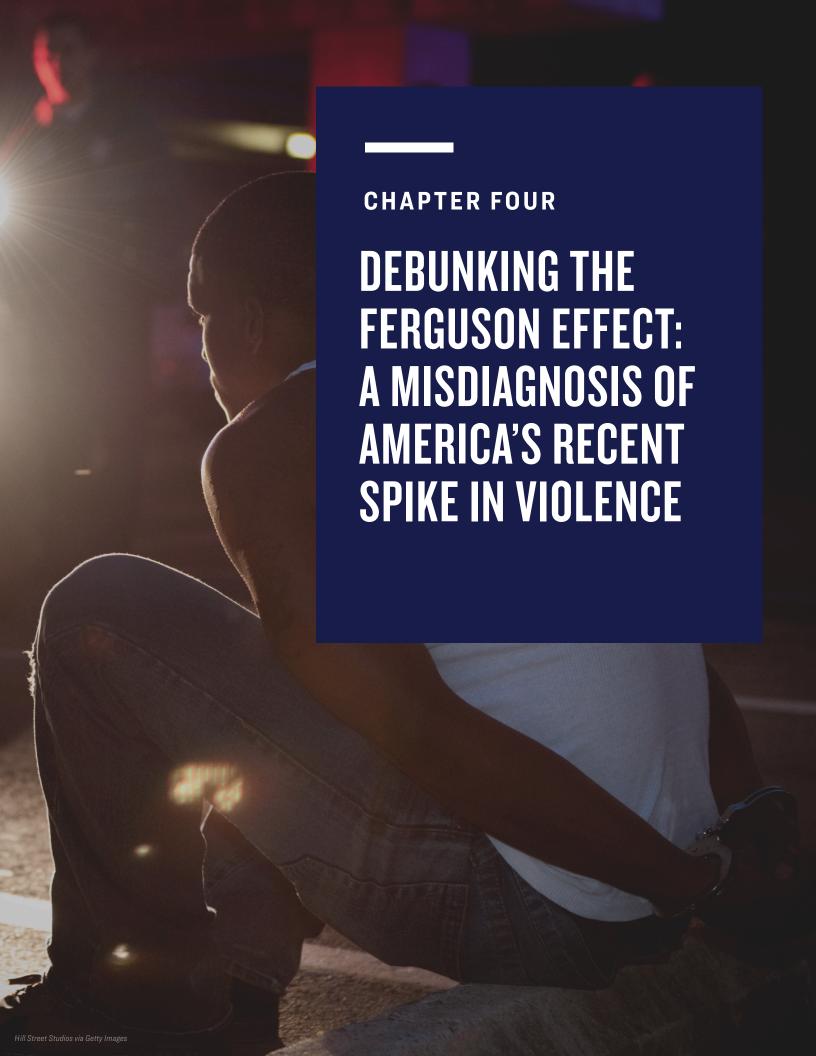
Researchers have estimated that on average, across all US counties, an individual is at least as likely to be shot by police if they are black and unarmed as if they are white and armed.[222] Unarmed black Americans are 3.5 times as likely to be fatally shot by police as unarmed white Americans.[223] Researchers have also found that police shoot unarmed white Americans at particularly low rates, indicating that they are, in practice, "more discerning of armed/unarmed status before shooting a white suspect than shooting a black or Hispanic suspect."[224] A 2012 study found similar evidence of this implicit bias: During a video-game simulation, officers "were quicker to shoot an armed black person, and slower to refrain from shooting an unarmed black person, than they were with members of any other racial group."[225]

While these killings constitute a relatively small share of the overall number of Americans killed by guns each year,[226] they have inflicted enormous pain on many families and communities, and are a leading driver of lack of trust in American law enforcement.

A DEVASTATING SHOOTING IN FORT WORTH

In October 2019, a Fort Worth police officer shot and killed a 28-year-old black woman in her home after being called to the house on a welfare check. As made clear earlier in this report, police shootings of unarmed civilians can jeopardize tenuous progress and disrupt fragile police-community trust for months and years to come. An AP News headline about the tragedy, "Fort Worth Police Shooting Shatters Community Trust," highlights the devastating stakes of such an event. Interim Fort Worth Police Chief Ed Kraus told reporters that the shooting "has been a blow to relations between police and the community in Fort Worth" and said of the loss of trust, "I likened it to a bunch of ants building an ant hill, and somebody comes with a hose and washes it away."

Sources: AP News and NBC News

DEBUNKING THE FERGUSON EFFECT: A MISDIAGNOSIS OF AMERICA'S RECENT SPIKE IN VIOLENCE

4 Debunking the Ferguson Effect: A Misdiagnosis of America's Recent Spike in Violence

In July 2013, a labor organizer named Alicia Garza wrote a Facebook post reacting to the news that George Zimmerman had been acquitted by a jury after fatally shooting Trayvon Martin, an unarmed black teenager who had been walking home alone from a convenience store. "Stop saying we are not surprised," she wrote. "I continue to be surprised at how little Black lives matter. And I will continue that. Stop giving up on black life ... black people, I love you. I love us. Our lives matter."[227] Garza's friend, Patrisse Cullors, soon condensed her post into a three-word Twitter hashtag: #BlackLivesMatter.[228]

That three-word phrase became a popular rallying cry one year later, when a police officer in the St. Louis suburb of Ferguson, Missouri, fatally shot 18-year-old Michael Brown[229] and left his body in the middle of a residential street in public view for hours.[230] Michael Brown's death prompted a wave of popular protests and tense encounters between demonstrators and Ferguson police.[231]

And over the two years following Michael Brown's death, homicides in Ferguson quadrupled.[232]

In the months and years that followed, more than 1,500 Black Lives Matter protests occurred in cities around the country as a steady stream of cell phone and body camera videos documented devastating police killings of unarmed black Americans— far from a new phenomenon, but one that technology made much more visible.[233]

In the wake of these highly publicized police killings, homicide arrest rates dropped in more than two-thirds of the nation's 50 largest cities between 2014 and 2017— consistent with a Jude Effect of decreasing community trust and engagement with police.[234]

Why Gun Homicides Have Spiked since 2014

While fewer murders were being solved, many more people were being killed. Nationwide, rates of fatal shootings increased by nearly one-third between 2014 and 2016 alone, and they continued to rise at least through 2017.[235] (At the time of writing, 2017 is the most recent year for which national fatal shootings data has been made available by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.) Over this same period, non-gun homicide rates held almost perfectly flat, actually decreasing by 0.004% between 2014 and 2017.[236] More Americans were being murdered—and that increase was due to fatal shootings.

The victims of this increased gun violence were predominantly people of color. If US gun homicide rates had remained steady at the already horrific 2014 levels, the

nation would have lost about 33,000 gun homicide victims between 2015 and 2017.

Instead, our nation buried about 42,000 gun homicide victims over this three-year period, including nearly 2,000 more Hispanic and 5,000 more black men above 2014 levels.[237]

One particularly novel study compared these recent violent crime trends across dozens of large US cities with how frequently the residents of those cities searched on Google for news and information related to police violence and misconduct.[238] The study ultimately found that "violent crime was higher and rose more in cities where concern about police violence was greatest," as measured by Google search activity.[239] In other words, larger spikes in violence were likely concentrated, at least in part, in places where residents became significantly more distrustful of law enforcement.

In its 2017 review of the research about this gun homicide spike, the National Institute of Justice—the research and evaluation arm of the US Justice Department—similarly concluded that "growing community alienation and declining police legitimacy contributed to the [nation's] recent homicide rise."[240]

But despite the strong evidence underlying the importance of community policing and trust, a dominant counter-narrative about this spike in gun homicides, called "the Ferguson Effect," has emerged in some circles. Its proponents have asserted that "in the aftermath of controversial and heavily publicized incidents of police use of force against minorities, particularly black Americans, the police have pulled back from proactive enforcement strategies that can reduce crime, including making arrests and stopping and questioning suspicious people on the street."[241] Author Heather MacDonald, a commentator and writer with the Manhattan Institute, a conservative think tank, dubbed this police pull-back theory the "Ferguson Effect" after the mass protests against police violence that emerged there after Michael Brown was killed. This viewpoint aligns with long-held beliefs about policing from the Manhattan Institute, which advocated for aggressive "broken windows" policing in the 1990s, and in 1996 published a warning about a coming crime wave of "juvenile super predators" in the inner city.[242] MacDonald claimed that:

"Officers continue to rush to crime scenes after someone has already been victimized, sometimes getting shot at in the process. But in that large area of discretionary policing that aims to prevent crime before it occurs—getting out of a squad car at 1 a.m., for example, to question someone who appears to have a gun or may be casing a target—many officers are deciding to drive on by rather than risk a volatile, potentially career-ending confrontation that they are under no obligation to instigate."[243]

She and others have also more explicitly blamed the Black Lives Matter movement, the Obama Justice Department, and civil liberties organizations for placing officers under increased public or legal scrutiny and, allegedly, discouraging proactive policing.

After targeted mass shootings of police officers in Dallas and Baton Rouge, the theme of restoration of law and order—and support for the police—also became a central rhetorical focus for Donald Trump.[244] And since coming into power, the Trump administration has echoed these Ferguson Effect theory talking points in word and action. Other officials across the partisan spectrum have echoed them too—including former Democratic mayor of Chicago Rahm Emanuel, who claimed that amid public scrutiny, police officers "went fetal," made fewer stops and arrests, and emboldened people to commit shootings.[245]

In the cities where gun violence has spiked most, like Chicago, there is little mystery or disagreement about when recent homicide spikes began. An examination of Chicago crime data by FiveThirtyEight demonstrated clearly that the "severe spike in gun violence Chicago is experiencing can be dated to the release of the video in the Laquan McDonald case," showing a police officer shooting a 17-year-old armed with a knife 16 times as he was walking away from officers.[246] The same crime data analysis also showed that Chicago saw a drop in arrests for homicides and nonfatal shootings almost immediately after the video's release. From 2014 to 2016, the number of homicides in the city increased by 85% while the percentage of homicides cleared by the police department fell by nearly half (from 50% to 29%).[247]

The Ferguson Effect theory's proponents claim that this decrease in arrests occurred because Chicago police officers became demoralized or hesitant to initiate encounters after the video's release, allowing the city to descend unchecked into lawlessness.

But the evidence indicates that the recent drop in arrests for shootings and murders and the spikes in violence seen in Chicago and many other major cities occurred not because dedicated officers systematically "went fetal" and stopped leaving their cars but because of a Jude Effect. Important segments of the community likely stopped relying on police for help and participating as witnesses, which drove declines in law enforcement officers' effectiveness and encouraged some residents to resort to vigilante justice instead.

In its January 2017 investigatory report on the Chicago Police Department, the US Justice Department observed that the Laquan MacDonald shooting "was widely viewed as a tipping point—igniting longstanding concerns about [Chicago Police Department] officers' use of force, and the City's systems for detecting and correcting the unlawful use of force."[248] The report concluded that "trust had been broken" between the Police Department and the community and that this "breach in trust has in turn eroded [the Department's] ability to effectively prevent crime."[249]

Proponents of the Ferguson Effect theory ignore just how concentrated and unchecked most community violence typically is, and how important community trust and participation are to effectively deterring that violence. As the president of the Center for Policing Equity explained, "If you believe not having police doing proactive stops in neighborhoods leads to immediate upticks in violent crime, that suggests that the people who live in that neighborhood are just waiting to commit acts of violence until they're not being watched by the hall monitors that wear badges and guns."[250] As discussed earlier in the report, in reality, in most cities shootings are perpetrated by a tiny portion of the population, and the vast majority of those shootings typically go unpunished and undeterred, not because law enforcement officers are absent from the community but because they are not trusted.[251]

And as the Jude Effect study showed, when community trust diminishes further, witness tips and testimony can decline even more, homicide investigations suffer, and a desperate few turn toward vigilante justice, sparking cycles of violence and distrust.

As the Police Executive Research Forum observed in a comprehensive review of Chicago homicide investigations in 2019, "The absence of strong relationships of trust between the [Chicago Police Department] and residents in some communities makes it challenging for the [police] to obtain cooperation from the public in solving crimes, including homicides," and that failure to successfully investigate homicides and nonfatal shootings in particular leads to missed opportunities to prevent and deter retaliatory violence.[252] The US Justice Department's 2017 report similarly noted that Chicago's homicide clearance rate had precipitously declined after the Laquan MacDonald shooting, and found "broad consensus . . . that increasing community trust and confidence in [the Chicago Police Department] is necessary for [the Department] to be able to clear more homicides," while emphasizing that doing so would be "an important factor in preventing future homicides" and promoting safety.[253]

In short, it is the trust gap that has in large part driven recent spikes in gun violence in Chicago and many other cities since 2014. This was the conclusion made by the National Institute of Justice, the research and evaluation arm of the US Justice Department, which wrote in 2017 that evidence for the Ferguson Effect was "ambiguous at best."[254] A 2018 Congressional Research Service report similarly found "little evidence of a link between de-policing and increases in violent crime," in examining the Ferguson Effect theory.[255]

The Ferguson Effect theory's proponents looked at the right data, timing, and inflection points, and drew the wrong conclusions.

Trust, Violence, and Justice in Ferguson

Perhaps nothing illuminates why the Ferguson Effect theory is wrong better than Ferguson itself.

In 2015, the US Justice Department published the results of its investigation into the Ferguson Police Department. The report detailed a pattern of disturbing and illegal policing practices that had made the residents of Ferguson deeply distrustful of, and often disengaged from, their police force long before the killing of Michael Brown.[256]

The Justice Department found that Ferguson officials had repeatedly pressured the Ferguson Police Department to issue more arrests, tickets, and fines to city residents— not for any public safety purpose but to generate more revenue for the city. Police officers at all levels told investigators that "the pressure was unrelenting" to stop, cite, and arrest more people to raise cash.[257]

33,000 ARREST WARRANTS

21,000 RESIDENTS

IN 2013, COURTS AND LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS ISSUED 33,000 ARREST WARRANTS IN FERGUSON, A CITY OF JUST 21,000 PEOPLE.[258]

This was policing for profit.[259] Most of these arrest warrants were for traffic violations,[260] and nearly all were issued to people of color. Black Americans made up 11% of Ferguson's police force,[261] 67% of Ferguson's population, and 90% of people issued citations by the Ferguson police.[262]

This sort of pervasive and unconstitutional policing would be unfair, infuriating, and costly for any community. But for Ferguson's poorest residents, this sort of policing could turn minor offenses into devastating criminal matters.

In one case, a black woman illegally parked her car and received two citations, along with a fine for $151. The woman, who was poor and occasionally homeless, struggled to pay. Over the next seven years, she was charged seven times for failure to appear in court and to pay. She spent six days in jail, was arrested twice, and paid a total of $550—all because she parked illegally once.[263]

Court records show that she twice attempted to make partial payments of $25 and $50, but the court returned those payments, refusing to accept anything less than payment in full. Seven years later, she still owed $541 in late fees—despite initially owing only $151 and having already paid $550.[264]

The Justice Department also documented "many instances in which [Ferguson's Police Department] had imposed unnecessary negative consequences" on people who reached out to them for help,[265] including "many instances in which officers arrested individuals who sought to care for loved ones who had been hurt," as well as multiple instances in which officers ticketed domestic violence victims who called them for help.[266]

Meanwhile, Ferguson's police chief complained to investigators that his officers "couldn't get cooperating witnesses" from large portions of the community. Unsurprisingly, the Justice Department confirmed that many Ferguson residents were in fact "reluctant to report being victims of crime or to cooperate with police."[267] Public safety—and Ferguson police officers themselves—suffered as a result. The Justice Department concluded that "as a consequence of these practices, law enforcement [in Ferguson] is seen as illegitimate, and the partnerships necessary for public safety are, in some areas, entirely absent."[268]

After Michael Brown was killed, much of the ensuing public discussion about Ferguson focused on debates about the individual judgments, biases, and conduct of one officer and one civilian. **But Ferguson's leaders, like many others across the country, had long failed to appreciate the fundamental importance of community trust and procedural justice as foundational principles for policing.** And in failing to do so, they also failed to justly and effectively deliver public safety to thousands of Americans who deserve fair treatment and equal protection under the law.

Ferguson is no anomaly. Recent Justice Department investigations of a number of cities, including Cleveland (December 2014), Baltimore (April 2016), and Chicago (January 2017) uncovered pervasive patterns of unconstitutional policing practices that undermined community trust and safety.[269] These included widespread stops and searches of young people of color without reasonable suspicion; policies encouraging officers to make frequent arrests for minor offenses; aggressive tactics that unnecessarily escalated tensions and endangered residents; excessive use of force, especially on the mentally ill and in predominantly black neighborhoods; and lack of accountability when unlawful or inappropriate practices were brought to light.[270] Each of the Justice Department's investigatory reports about these cities emphasized the damage these practices have inflicted on community trust and engagement, and on law enforcement's ability to effectively prevent violence as a result.

The Justice Department's investigation into the Chicago Police Department (CPD), for instance, noted that "trust and effectiveness in combating violent crime are inextricably intertwined," and concluded that "it is imperative that the City rebuild trust between CPD and the people it serves, particularly in [neighborhoods "disproportionately ravaged" by gun violence]."[271] The Justice Department's report into the Cleveland Police Department similarly found that the police force "too often police[d] in a way that contributes to community distrust and a lack of respect for officers – even the many officers who are doing their jobs effectively."[272] The report concluded that "this level of distrust between the police and the community interferes with [the Department's] ability to work with the various communities it serves to effectively fight crime and ensure the safety of the people of Cleveland."[273]

These Justice Department investigations led to substantive policy changes in some places.

After the Justice Department's damning report on Ferguson, for instance, the State of Missouri initiated legislative policy changes to discourage agencies from relying on traffic stops as a means of generating municipal revenue. Researchers subsequently found that those policy changes made some difference: As a whole, Missouri law enforcement agencies started making fewer traffic stops, especially in cities with larger black populations, and their "hit rates" from those traffic stops increased, suggesting that officers were making fewer stops and ones that were more likely to uncover contraband in drivers' vehicles.[274] Importantly, researchers found that these "changes in police behavior were neither statistically nor substantively related to changes in crime rates," and that—contrary to Ferguson Effect theory talking points—any "pullback in police activity had not led to more crime."[275]
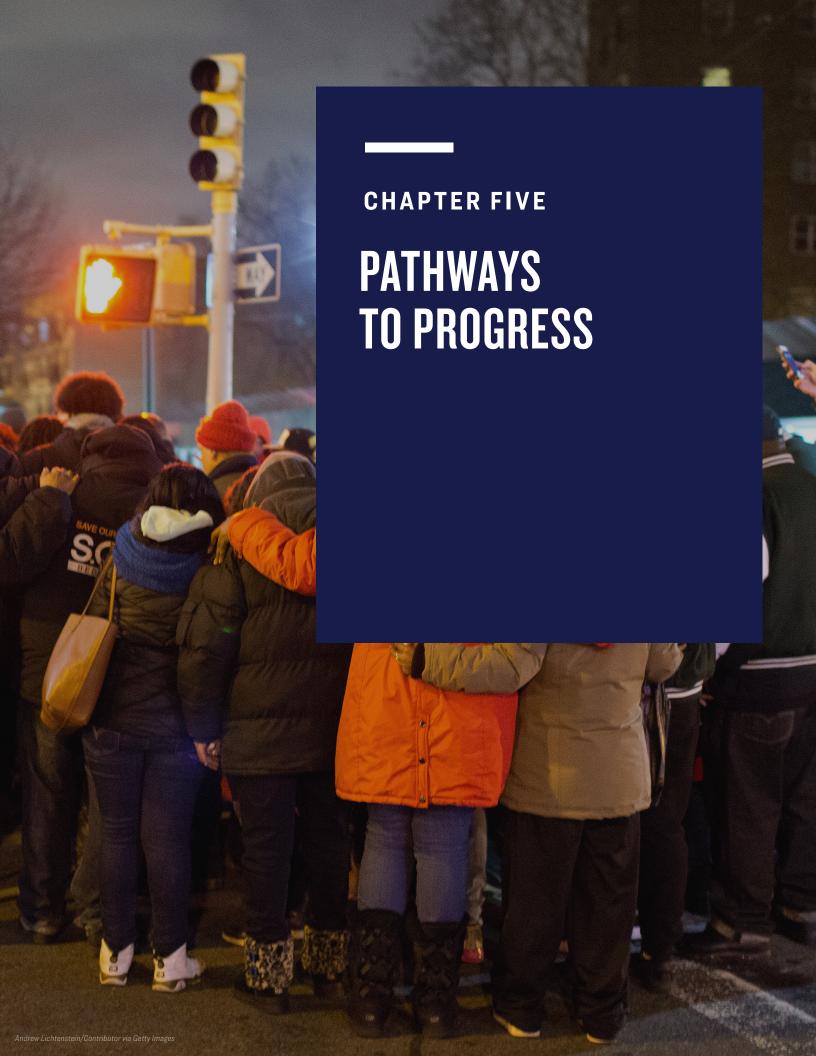
Other cities more significantly curtailed mass misdemeanor arrest or stop-and-frisk policing practices over this period. Some, including Chicago, began doing so before recent spikes in violence began,[276] others after. Some also bucked national trends and become notably safer: For instance, from 2011 to 2018, the New York City Police Department reduced its number of stop-and-frisk encounters by more than 98% and, from 2013 to 2018, reduced its number of misdemeanor arrests by 43%.[277] New York reinvested some of the funding it previously allocated to these mass suppression approaches in targeted community-based violence intervention efforts, focused gun crime units, and community policing efforts instead.[278] Contrary to many alarmist warnings about the consequences of this police "pull-back,"[279] felony and misdemeanor crime rates fell, and in 2018, New York City achieved a nearly 70-year record low homicide rate.[280]

While a variety of factors likely contributed to America's recent spike in gun violence, a broad national police pullback is not one of them. Instead, many communities struggling with long-simmering crises of confidence in law enforcement witnessed spikes in violence after high-profile police misconduct further weakened community trust. Communities like Ferguson that have long felt brutally over-policed and under-protected were particularly susceptible to this trend.

To build earned community trust and reverse these deadly cycles, our leaders and law enforcement must undertake concrete efforts, like those discussed in the following chapter, to intentionally build trust and refocus law enforcement practices around effectively protecting human life and deterring violence.

Anadolu Agency/Contributer via Getty Images

CHAPTER FIVE

PATHWAYS TO PROGRESS
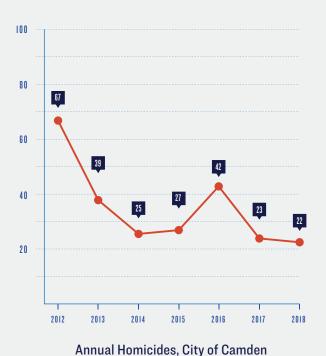
5 Pathways to Progress

Debates about policing often ask Americans to choose between policing that is just and accountable and policing that is proactive and effective. As the Urban Institute describes, proponents of this narrative "have set up an implicit trade-off: communities can demand police accountability, but only at the cost of increased crime and reduced safety."[281]

These choices are false and dangerously counterproductive, especially when it comes to stopping serious crimes. Police departments and community leaders across the country have instead demonstrated that community-oriented, relational policing—policing that is perceived as procedurally just, accountable, and responsive to community needs—is key to earning public trust, gaining information and active cooperation necessary to protect the public, and preventing cycles of retributive shootings. Law enforcement agencies that prioritize efforts to earn the public's trust and cooperation are more effective at protecting both the community they serve and the officers they employ.

Camden Offers an Alternative

The city of Camden, New Jersey, is showing how transformational progress can be made in a relatively short period of time.

Formerly a prosperous manufacturing town across the Delaware River from Philadelphia, Camden had become one of the most distressed communities in America by the early

Annual Homicides, City of Camden

Source: New Jersey Department of Health

IN MAY 2015, PRESIDENT OBAMA VISITED CAMDEN TO CALL NATIONAL ATTENTION TO THE CITY'S PROGRESS. HE ACKNOWLEDGED THAT "JUST A FEW YEARS AGO, [CAMDEN] WAS WRITTEN OFF AS DANGEROUS BEYOND REDEMPTION—A CITY TRAPPED IN A DOWNWARD SPIRAL." [282]

21st century, buffeted by the loss of manufacturing jobs, white flight and segregation, endless public corruption scandals, police violence, community violence, and crime.[283] In 2012, Camden had the fourth-highest poverty rate of any city in America,[284] as well as the nation's fifth-highest homicide rate; someone was shot in the city of roughly 77,000 every 33 hours, on average.[285] In a 2012 news story, an NPR reporter reported that "memorials to shooting victims are the landscape of Camden — clumps of candles, stuffed animals, liquor bottles. They're displayed on front steps, at the side of houses, on empty lots."[286] The NPR report described how "many residents spend their days holed up in their homes" to stay safe, "often behind iron bars that extend from first-floor rooftops all the way to the ground."[287] An NBC News headline in 2013 asked simply: "What's the Matter With Camden?"[288]

After severe budget cuts required the city to lay off half its police officers in 2013, the city chose to disband and reconstitute its police department as a new county police force.[289] Under the direction of Police Chief J. Scott Thomson, the new Camden County Police Department undertook a concerted, "revolutionary" effort to infuse community policing and trust building efforts throughout all of its officers' work.[290] A neighboring city's police chief described Camden's changes as "a disaster waiting to happen."[291] But Chief Thomson viewed the 2013 overhaul as an opportunity for his agency to "hit the reset button" with the community.[292]

That reset helped spur real change. **By the time President Obama visited in May 2015, about two years later, violent crime in Camden had fallen by 24% and homicides had been cut nearly in half.**[293]

Camden's police department made multiple practical changes to its departmental policies, priorities, and organizational structures. But these changes were only possible and effective because Camden's police force recognized the need to make a fundamental shift in its approach with the community it served.

The leadership of the new Camden County Police Department embraced a view of law enforcement as guardians and partners protecting community well-being, instead of warriors fighting against law-breakers.[294] This shift required a recognition that the status quo had been failing Camden's families and police officers for years, and a willingness to do the hard work of building trust where there had been little to none before. Importantly, Camden also worked to implement this strategic shift across the entire force, rather than in siloed special units. As Chief Thomson said:

"Community policing cannot be a program, unit, strategy or tactic. It must be the core principle that lies at the foundation of a police department's culture. The only way to significantly reduce fear, crime, and disorder and then sustain these gains is to leverage the greatest force multiplier: the people of the community."[295]

Chief Thomson directed officers to seek out positive interactions with community members to proactively change the community's perceptions of the police force. For instance, he required officers to routinely patrol high-crime neighborhoods on foot and knock on doors to introduce themselves to build a foundation of familiarity and trust before there was any crime or crisis occurring.[296] Chief Thomson explained:

> "We may not be responsible for [historical examples of police brutality and abuse], but we are responsible to it—as an organization, as an institution. And those memories are still very fresh in people's minds. And that's what this uniform sometimes represents, and the only way we're going to be able to change that experience and that opinion is to offer new experiences, to shape new opinions, and that can only be done through human contact."[297]

Frontline officers were trained to prioritize these relationships as an essential part of effective police work and began to integrate community policing principles into their training.[298] And this training—especially of law enforcement, by law enforcement— helped officers understand the critical role that community-oriented policing plays in effective police work. One Camden police sergeant summarized this training by explaining: "We're only as good as our community allows us to be. Without them making the phone call, without them talking to the walking beat officer, we can't be an effective police department."[299]

To build trust with the community, the Camden County Police Department had to re-examine some of its longstanding priorities and redefine some of its metrics of success. *The New York Times* reported that Chief Thomson periodically asked for information about which of his officers had issued the highest number of tickets and arrests over the past few months—not, as in some other departments, as a measure of officers' productivity, but instead to determine whether those officers should have chosen to provide some individuals with a warning instead.[300] Chief Thomson noted that "handing a $250 ticket to someone who is making $13,000 a year"— around Camden's per capita income—"can be life altering."[301] *The New York Times* called this approach the "Hippocratic ethos of policing: Minimize harm, and try to save lives."[302]

Building trust also required the Camden Police Department to re-examine its policies and culture around use of force. Camden police received significant new training around de-escalating conflict,[303] and the department established a new use-of-force policy created by the Police Executive Research Forum, which directs officers to incorporate harm reduction strategies into their work so that force, and especially fatal force, is used as a last resort.[304]

(Notably, both the local American Civil Liberties Union and local police unions embraced this higher standard.)[305] The department tied this policy shift to broader departmental culture changes, and made materials available to the public in which it proclaimed that "the Camden County Police Department has established an Ethical Protector culture wherein the sanctity of life is our highest priority"[306] and declared that "our officers live and work by the credo: Service Before Self."[307]

The evidence suggests that these shifts in policing policy and culture led to real substantive changes in the ways in which officers actually performed their difficult, often dangerous jobs in practice. In the span of a few years, the number of civilian complaints filed against Camden police officers regarding use of force plummeted.[308]

In the years since President Obama visited Camden to hold the city up as a promising model for 21st-century policing, Camden has continued to make even more substantial progress. The number of homicides in Camden fell by two-thirds between 2012 and 2018, down to a three-decade low, even as many other cities across the country experienced significant spikes in violence.[309] Decades earlier, a Camden cathedral had begun a tradition of lighting one candle on New Year's Eve for each person the city lost to homicide that year.[310] In 2012, the cathedral was lit up with 67 candles.[311] By the end of 2018, there were 22 candles to light.[312]

This progress also occurred as nonfatal shootings and other violent crimes dropped,[313] and news reports documented other, less easily quantifiable signs of progress: Camden residents told reporters about letting their children play outside for the first time,[314] and the city's Little League ballooned in size[315] as residents began to reclaim public spaces and feel safer in their community.

Geoff Mulvihill via AP Images

"You can see it already with the younger kids in the city," said Rick Kunkel, the president of the union that represents Camden County police officers. "There isn't the us-against them mentality there used to be." When Kunkel started on the force in the mid-1990s, he said, "you'd never see kids dressed as cops, like on Halloween, but you see that all the time now." [316]

There is undeniably still much more work to be done. Chief Thomson himself has said he "would qualify [Camden's] statistics as progress and not success."[317] Even after its remarkable improvements, the city still suffers high rates of fatal shootings,[318] its police department still uses force at a higher rate than most other agencies in the state,[319] and community trust building efforts are a sometimes uneven work in progress.[320] It should also be noted that other factors contributed to Camden's progress (or at least helped made conditions for improvement possible), including New Jersey's strong gun safety laws, efforts to raze empty buildings that had become hot spots for illegal conduct, and the tireless work of community-based violence intervention groups like Cure4Camden to connect would-be shooters with violence interrupters, support, and pathways to peace.[321]

But Camden's progress is a vital testament to the fact that when there is a will to build community trust, progress is possible. In the past few years, many Camden residents have begun to gain a degree of peace and safety, and a freedom to enjoy public spaces, that has been unknown in their community for at least a generation.

While communities like Camden face enormous interwoven challenges, including racism, poverty, and disinvestment, proactive efforts to modernize and shift policing paradigms can create virtuous cycles, in which agencies begin to build some measure of community trust and reverse downward spirals of disengagement and violence quickly. While building this trust takes a concerted, department-wide effort, leaders dedicated to the task have clear blueprints for progress.

Promising Results from the National Initiative

In December 2014, President Obama signed an executive order to create a national blue-ribbon Task Force on 21st Century Policing. He called on the task force to study best practices from cities and police forces around the nation and to make concrete

recommendations for how police departments could "promote effective crime reduction while building public trust." After months of hearings and testimony from community members, crime experts, researchers, police chiefs, unions, frontline officers, mayors, and civil rights advocates, the task force released its comprehensive final report in May 2015.

The task force's final report started with the word "trust" and ended with "respect." In between were 156 specific recommendations and action items for achieving more transparent, just, and effective policing in America.[322] The task force identified "building trust and nurturing legitimacy on both sides of the police/citizen divide" as the first pillar and foundational principle underlying effective modern policing, and offered practical recommendations for agencies seeking to build mutual trust, many of them based on lessons learned from the promising transformation underway in Camden.

The International Association of Chiefs of Police called the report "one of the most significant documents for law enforcement in modern history,"[323] and other leading organizations followed suit in endorsing its principles and recommendations.[324]

To promote implementation of the report's recommendations, the US Justice Department launched and funded a pilot program in 2015 called the National Initiative for Building Community Trust and Justice. The National Initiative funded small programs in six cities—Birmingham, Alabama; Stockton, California; Gary, Indiana; Minneapolis, Minnesota; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; and Fort Worth, Texas—to work with police departments and community members to strengthen mutual trust and engagement. The National Initiative was led by the National Network for Safe Communities, in collaboration with the Center for Policing Equity, Yale Law School, and the Urban Institute.[325]

The National Initiative provided technical assistance and training to law enforcement on community policing strategies and implicit bias; made recommendations for departmental policy changes to promote procedural justice, accountability, and transparency; and launched new public-facing efforts to interact with and engage community residents, acknowledge harms, and reset patterns of distrust.[326]

In each of the six cities, law enforcement officers held listening sessions with residents as part of a structured trust-building and reconciliation process. These listening sessions gave residents an opportunity to share their experiences with law enforcement and yielded insights that guided policy changes in five out of the six participating cities' police departments. They also provided opportunities for law enforcement officers to share their own perceptions, acknowledge past and present harms, and communicate key themes from the listening sessions to the broader community.[327]

This dialogue, in addition to recommendations made by the National Initiative's partner organizations, facilitated real change in departmental policies, strategies, and attitudes. And as a result, researchers found that the National Initiative led to modest but critical improvements in community trust and perceptions of neighborhood safety in nearly every participating city.

To evaluate the National Initiative's progress, researchers surveyed the residents of "street segments" that had the highest rates of both poverty and crime in each of the six cities about their perceptions of law enforcement and public safety in their community. They conducted these large-scale surveys before the trust-building initiative launched and again after three years of implementation efforts.

Before the National Initiative, surveys found, residents "held largely negative views of their local police department and their neighborhood conditions."[328] These pre-implementation surveys found that an overwhelming majority of respondents indicated support for the law and a belief that laws should be strictly obeyed, but also found that residents had an overwhelming lack of faith in law enforcement officers to serve as fair and trustworthy representatives of the law. When asked whether they were likely to report suspicious activity near their home or call the police to report a crime, about one-third said they were unlikely or unsure.[329]

When researchers conducted the second wave of surveys three years later, they found that modest but critical improvements were already underway. This second wave of surveys revealed that while perceptions of local policing and neighborhood safety remained largely negative, on average "those views were markedly more positive" than they had been just three years earlier.[330] Before, only 43% of respondents saw their local police departments as "legitimate"; after three years of implementation, that number increased to a majority of 51%.[331]

Importantly, these improvements were especially large among African American respondents, whose perceptions of their police departments "became considerably more positive" after implementation.[332]

The second wave of surveys found other modest but critical gains, including:

- An 8% increase in respondents who said they felt comfortable around the police
- An 11% increase in respondents who said they felt relatively safe in their neighborhood
- A 10% decrease in respondents who said that shootings or shooting attempts were a weekly or daily occurrence in their neighborhood
- A 13% decrease in respondents who said they knew someone who had been the victim of a shooting or an attempted shooting in the previous year[333]

In all six cities, the residents of neighborhoods most impacted by poverty and crime reported at least some improvements in their neighborhood conditions during the three-year implementation period, and in four of the six cities, residents perceived improvements in their police department and in police-community relations.[334] All six cities recorded decreases in arrest rates for lower-level crimes, and at least two saw reductions in use of force (not all of the cities reported use-of-force data).

Minneapolis Police Department

The National Initiative conducted its first site visit to Minneapolis in the summer of 2015. By the end of the following year, all 874 sworn officers in the Minneapolis Police Department (MPD) had been trained in procedural justice and implicit bias.[335] In 2016, the department also deployed body cameras and hosted its first listening session with the community.

During the MPD's first full calendar year working with the National Initiative, the department amended its use-of-force policy "to prioritize sanctity of life for both officers and civilians," began requiring officers to intervene in incidents in which other officers used excessive force, added policy guiding interactions with transgender and gender nonconforming residents, and started collecting race- and gender-specific data on police stops.[336]

Over the next two years, the MPD conducted 18 more community listening sessions and adopted a wide array of policy changes, often based on input from community members. The department developed new policies around the use of body-worn cameras, made efforts to improve transparency, and created accountability mechanisms to ensure that allegations of misconduct are appropriately investigated.[337]

Ultimately, Minneapolis saw the most impressive results of the six National Initiative sites. In May of 2018, Chief Medaria Arradonodo of the MPD revealed that the citywide use-of-force rate in Minneapolis had dropped by 48%, attributing the decline to improved "de-escalation techniques and implicit bias training as well as greater mental health awareness."[338]

Survey results indicate that perceptions of police-community relations and neighborhood conditions also improved significantly. Residents expressed much more favorable views of procedural justice, police legitimacy, and the law; were significantly more likely to see officers as "relatable"; perceived the police as less biased; and showed more willingness to partner with police.[339] Respondents also expressed more positive views concerning safety in their neighborhoods, reported a decrease in the frequency of violence, and experienced fewer instances of victimization resulting from the death or injury of loved ones and neighbors.[340]

Stockton Police Department

In Stockton, work to improve police-community relations began before the National Initiative's first site visit in April 2015. The Stockton Police Department (SPD) was in the process of training officers in procedural justice, and with the guidance from the National Initiative, completed training in applied procedural justice techniques in June 2016.[341] Officers then completed training to recognize and curb implicit bias by the end of 2017.

While other cities completed these courses more quickly, according to the Urban Institute's evaluation, the City of Stockton "accomplished the largest and most robust array of trainings, listening sessions, and activities among the six pilot sites."[342]

The city convened listening sessions in communities with the highest rates of violence and with specific subpopulations that included members of immigrant and LGBTQIA+ communities. As in most National Initiative cities, conversations with community members helped guide policy and procedural changes in the department.

Over the evaluation period, the SPD implemented a number of other reforms: The department began evaluating officers based on their understanding of procedural justice practices, mandated that officers receive annual mental health training, and leveraged the police chief's Community Advisory Board to help translate listening sessions into actionable policy goals.[343] The SPD developed a policy on the release of body camera footage, added tenets of procedural justice to the canine and equestrian unit orders, and established a Neighborhood Impact Team tasked with reaching out to residents who had experienced tragedy.

Researchers observed some signs that the SPD's efforts toward improving its relationship with the community were effective. Between April 2015 and the end of 2017, despite relatively stable levels of violent crime and decreasing levels of property crime, evaluators observed a steady increase in calls for service, indicating that the SPD may have increased the community's willingness to seek law enforcement's help.[344] During this period, the National Initiative survey found significant improvements in residents' perceptions of procedural justice, police legitimacy, and police relatability, as well as an increased willingness to partner with police. Stockton residents' perceptions of neighborhood safety also improved, as their reports of neighborhood violence and victimization of loved ones and neighbors decreased.[345]

Birmingham Police Department

The Birmingham Police Department (BPD) began its work with the National Initiative in June of 2015, shortly after the department launched a new focused deterrence crime-fighting initiative. About a year later, the department finished training officers in conceptual and tactical procedural justice, and by early 2017, officers completed implicit bias training.[346] Shortly thereafter, the BPD launched community- and youth-facing implicit bias trainings in 2017 and 2018, respectively.[347]

The BPD conducted nine listening sessions during the evaluation period and 10 more in 2018. Sessions engaged members of the black and Latinx communities, the LGBTQIA+ community, youth, and survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault. Listening sessions in Birmingham led the department to hire an LGBTQIA+ liaison and established the BPD teen advisory council.[348]

Birmingham observed a decrease in the average number of monthly arrests in the city, a trend that began before the initiative was implemented, but became more pronounced after the BPD was exposed to the concept of reconciliation.[349] Furthermore, as BPD conducted implicit bias training, rates of arrests of white community members increased while rates of arrest of black community members decreased, suggesting that "implicit bias training may have had an impact on officers' decisions to make arrests" more equitably.[350]

Community survey results indicate that the BPD is making progress toward improving community-police relations. Birmingham residents reported a significantly more positive perception of the law and demonstrated an increased willingness to cooperate with police after the department implemented reforms. Residents were also less likely to perceive a high frequency of violence and saw fewer instances of victimization resulting from the death or injury of loved ones and neighbors.[351]

Boston Globe/Contributor via Getty Images

Of the six National Initiative pilot cities, Minneapolis, Minnesota, and Stockton, California, made the most significant gains in community trust and perceptions of law enforcement. Stockton made the largest improvements in residents' perceptions of neighborhood safety, the frequency of violence in their community, reports of knowing someone who had been the victim of violence within the previous year, and whether local police officers were "relatable." Stockton also saw substantial gains in residents' reported perceptions of police legitimacy, willingness to actively partner with their police, and views about officers' commitment to procedural justice.[352]

Stockton's police chief, Eric Jones, was appointed to lead the police department in 2012, the year Stockton became the largest city in US history to file for bankruptcy.[353] Stockton's violent crime and unemployment rates both ranked among the 10 worst in the country,[354] and *Forbes Magazine* and the PBS NewsHour ran stories profiling Stockton as America's "Most Miserable City."[355]

But over time, efforts led by Chief Jones to reset trust and engagement with his community helped the city make significant progress against violence. In 2016, Chief Jones appeared at a large gathering at a predominantly black church to acknowledge his and other departments' historic and current failures, and the disparate impact of arrests and shootings on communities of color. He told the audience, "We will never impact violent crime the way we need to if we're not gaining community trust in the work we're doing. It makes our job safer, we solve more crime, and we are legitimate and credible in the eyes of the community."[356]

Stockton established a community advisory board to inform policing policies, and Chief Jones and the city manager embarked on a sustained community listening tour, which now occurs about once a week and involves more officers. The Stockton Police Department began to change some of its policies and practices based on the community input it received in those sessions.[357]

Chief Jones explained that one small but important shift that his department made in response to these listening sessions was to direct officers to routinely follow up with homicide victims' families.[358] Before, victims' family members usually had to reach out to the police department if they had information. Now, officers routinely call victims' family members to check in and stay connected.[359] This builds human connection with grieving residents and creates more natural opportunities for witnesses to share information. The Stockton Police Department also started sending "neighborhood impact teams" of chaplains and officers into communities the day after a homicide or other traumatic event to knock on doors and talk to residents. A department spokesman told *The New York Times* that "in addition to improving relations, such outreach has led to tips from residents who didn't want to be seen coming up to an officer at a crime scene."[360]

Between April 2015 and the end of 2017, evaluators observed a steady increase in calls for service to the Stockton Police Department, indicating that the community was likelybecoming more willing to contact law enforcement.

giffordslawcenter.org/policing

Both the community and law enforcement have become safer as a result. Homicides and shootings have gone down; homicide clearance rates have improved.[361] In a 2019 interview with The Trace, Chief Jones explained how his own views about policing and public safety had evolved:

"I started working for the Stockton Police Department in the early 1990s as a beat cop and then I just worked my way up over time. I was one of those officers that was out there making as many arrests as I could. That's just what we're supposed to do, what our supervisors and commanders were directing us to do—it was a measurement of success in our department and police departments all over the place. I did often wonder, 'Does this really make the most sense?'

Community members say, if we're not comfortable coming to the police, street justice prevails. More than ever, I see trust in police connected to reducing violent crime. Last year we had a big reduction in both homicides and nonfatal shootings. Anonymous tips are up; more people are providing information to the police. We're solving more cases. Our homicide clearance rate went from around 40 percent in 2017 to 66 percent last year. And when trust goes up it's safer for the officers going into neighborhoods, because there's less animosity and confrontation."[362]

The Group Violence Intervention Strategy

In some cities, including Stockton, law enforcement agencies have been able to leverage and cement gains in community trust by implementing initiatives, like the "group violence intervention" strategy, which actively refocus law enforcement resources around the prevention of lethal violence and protection of people at highest risk. To be effective, this strategy relies on a threshold level of community trust and a robust partnership between law enforcement, community leaders, and service providers.

In multiple previous reports, Giffords Law Center and our partners have documented how the group violence intervention strategy has helped to achieve enormous reductions in shootings and homicides in multiple cities.[363] When violence intervention experts compared more than 1,400 individual studies of crime-reduction strategies in 2016, they identified group violence intervention as having "the strongest and most consistent anti-violence effects."[364] Based on multiple studies and evaluations, the US Justice Department has also awarded this strategy the highest possible effectiveness rating in its review of crime prevention strategies.[365] As one expert wrote, this strategy "does not work perfectly, it does not work every time, but it works better, on average, than anything else out there, decreasing homicides and assaults by as much as 30 to 50 percent."[366]

To implement this strategy effectively, police departments must partner closely with credible community leaders and service providers to jointly convene "call-ins" with a relatively small number of individuals identified as having the highest risk of becoming a victim and/or perpetrator of violence in the near future. These individuals are typically young men involved with street groups, who often have extensive histories of violent victimization, trauma, and criminal involvement. In other words, they are often fearful of violence and distrustful of the police, yet interested in opportunities to become safer.
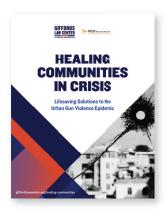
At the call-ins, people representing the community's moral voice communicate a strong demand for the shooting to stop and give an explanation about how violence has affected their families and community. Parents who lost their children to violence are often the most effective voices, along with former group members who lost friends to violence.

Social service providers then present plans to connect high-risk individuals with services, ranging from trauma counseling, mediation, and peer coaching to job training and relocation assistance to help people at risk of being shot find temporary housing away from a dangerous situation. These providers offer genuine support and interventions to promote pathways to peace and healing for the community's highest-risk, often desperate young men.

And finally, law enforcement officers often deliver a respectful notification regarding the legal risks individuals may face if the community's plea for peace is ignored. Because most shootings and murders do not lead to arrests in many communities, this notification or promise of accountability can have a new focused deterrent effect on people involved in cycles of violence.

By working to engage with the community around a targeted effort to prevent the most serious crime imaginable, law enforcement agencies can demonstrate that they are responsive to community concerns and begin to build more trust.

As criminologist Dr. Anthony Braga explains, "In the eyes of community members, there is an inherent fairness in offering targeted offenders a choice and providing resources to support their transition away from violent behavior." [367] By building police legitimacy and decreasing violence, these efforts can create a positive feedback loop of increased

HEALING COMMUNITIES IN CRISIS

Giffords Law Center's 2016 report *Healing Communities in Crisis: Lifesaving Solutions to the Urban Gun Violence Epidemic*, explores evidence-based approaches to community gun violence. Our report also lays out the policy reforms most likely to reduce the supply of crime guns in impacted communities, including universal background checks, permit-to-purchase laws, gun trafficking regulations, and prohibitions on large-capacity ammunition magazines.

community engagement, increased law enforcement effectiveness, decreased vigilante violence, and lives saved.

The most effective violence reduction initiatives have combined group violence intervention and trust-building efforts with concerted, sustained community outreach by peer counselors and violence interrupters who are trained to reach and heal individuals at high risk of violence, including those who may be too estranged or distrustful to be reached through call-ins with law enforcement.[368]

The gun violence prevention movement can play an important role in advocating for these reforms. Giffords has proudly partnered with broad coalitions of allies to draft, pass, and implement legislation in multiple states to expand and replicate successful group violence intervention efforts and to ensure that public health and safety dollars are spent more justly and effectively on community-based violence intervention initiatives that are laser-focused on protecting the people and places at highest risk of violence.[369] For example, Giffords helped lead a coalition of organizations and advocates that successfully advocated for the creation of the California Violence Intervention and Prevention (CalVIP) competitive grant program. Recently, Giffords and other advocate groups helped to codify strong requirements that funding be used on effective programs focused on highest-risk people and places and that do not contribute to mass incarceration, and advocated for a tripling of the state's investment in these efforts.

Building on these state-level efforts, Giffords also worked closely with a coalition of partners to develop the federal Break the Cycle of Violence Act, which would launch a national 10-year competitive grant program allocating $90 million per year to the most effective violence reduction initiatives in communities with the greatest need.[370] That legislation was introduced in Congress in October 2019 by Senator Cory Booker (D-NJ) and Representative Steven Horsford (D-NV) with the support of Giffords, the National Black and Brown Gun Violence Prevention Consortium, Faith in Action, the African American Mayors Association, Amnesty International, the American Public Health Association, the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence, Cure Violence, the Health Alliance for Violence Intervention, and the National Network for Safe Communities. In his new book, *Bleeding Out: The Devastating Consequences of Urban Violence— And a Bold New Plan for Peace in the Streets*, Harvard Senior Research Fellow Thomas Abt estimates that a similar level of investment in these violence reduction initiatives, combined with community trust-building efforts, could save over 12,000 lives in the next eight years alone.[371]

Federal Tools to Support Reform

Leaders that have dedicated time and effort to building trust between their communities and law enforcement have demonstrated that enormous, lifesaving progress can be made in a short period of time. This progress requires buy-in from numerous stakeholders and a sustained commitment to evidence-based policing, community engagement, and to fixing what isn't working.

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As this report has described, some law enforcement agencies have taken a proactive role in initiating change and intentionally resetting their relationship with the communities they serve. In others, community leaders have compelled local departments to shift their policies and priorities in order to build trust and reduce violence.

And in many, the US Justice Department has played an integral role in facilitating or compelling trust-building reforms.

Federal civil rights law can serve as a powerful tool for change. Since 1994, federal law has empowered the Justice Department to investigate and sue local police departments to eliminate any large-scale "pattern or practice" of unconstitutional conduct.[372] In cases when law enforcement agencies have been unresponsive to repeated allegations of civil rights abuses, such as excessive use of force, racially biased policing, revenue-driven policing, and other constitutional violations, the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division has the power to open an investigation; consult with officers, community members, and local officials; observe and document officer activities; make a determination as to whether there is in fact a systemic pattern of unconstitutional conduct; and release a report of its findings.

In cases where the Justice Department finds a pattern or practice of unconstitutional conduct, it may seek to reach agreements, either in or out of court, with the local agency about how they will implement changes necessary to correct patterns of unconstitutional behavior. Sometimes, the Justice Department and local agency will negotiate a binding settlement agreement called a "consent decree" that is enforced by a judge and details an agreed-upon timeline for reform.

While this process can sometimes be adversarial or lengthy, court-enforced federal oversight has helped to spur trust-building efforts in cities like Ferguson, where ineffective and abusive policing practices had become institutionalized in law enforcement for years.

These consent decrees can also help local agencies build trust with their community in a short period of time. In Seattle, the Justice Department documented a pattern and practice of unconstitutional use of force by the police department, and in 2012, entered a court-enforced consent decree to eliminate that practice. Seattle's consent decree required the city's police department to work with community representatives to revamp its use-of-force policies; retrain officers; establish new de-escalation tactics for interacting with mentally ill individuals; and modernize procedures for reporting, investigating, and reviewing incidents in which officers used force.[373]

Fewer than three years later, the independent monitor appointed by the court to oversee the Seattle consent decree concluded that Seattle had largely complied with its reform requirements, and found that "the results have been impressive," as "public trust in the Seattle Police Department has steadily increased."[374] After the police department implemented new training and reform requirements, the number of incidents in which officers used "moderate to severe force" against civilians dropped by 60%.[375]

Results from an anonymous survey found that 1% of black and Latinx residents in Seattle said they had been victims of excessive force in 2015, compared to 5% and 9%, respectively, just two years earlier.[376] Meanwhile, an independent polling company found notable gains in public approval for the police department among Seattle residents across every race and ethnicity; polling showed especially large increases in approval among black residents (rising from 49% approval in 2013 to 62% in 2016) and Latinx residents (rising from 54% to 74%).[377]

The court-appointed monitor also observed that this "expanded community confidence appears to be inspiring more cooperation with the police in solving crime and addressing neighborhood problems,"[378] even as many other cities were experiencing a significant spike in distrust and violence over the same period.

Under President Obama, the Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division obtained consent decrees with 14 out of the nation's 18,000 law enforcement agencies, including Ferguson, and finalized other oversight and reform agreements with 10 others.[379] (The department also concluded investigations of at least six other agencies without finding patterns or practices of unconstitutional policing.)[380]

To complement these efforts, in 2011 the Justice Department launched the Collaborative Reform Initiative, a voluntary alternative to the consent decree process in which "law enforcement agencies facing significant issues that may impact public trust undergo a comprehensive assessment, are provided with recommendations[381] on how to address those issues, and receive technical assistance to implement such recommendations." By the end of 2016, 16 police departments had voluntarily requested to participate in the Collaborative Reform Initiative,[382] and an early review of the initiative's impact concluded that it had "been shown to be a valuable tool for inspiring and accelerating change in many of the departments" and that evidence for "organizational transformation" in those police departments was "abundant."[383]

Despite the success of these initiatives and the need to address declining community trust and homicide clearance rates in many American cities, the Trump administration has sharply curtailed federal efforts to investigate, collaborate with, and reform troubled police departments to build community trust, forsaking these powerful tools to inspire and accelerate change.[384] As one headline in HuffPost observed, "5 Years After Ferguson, The Justice Department Has All But Ended Federal Police Reform."[385]

Within days of taking office, then-Attorney General Jeff Sessions signaled that the Trump administration would scale back federal oversight and support for civil rights investigations and reform efforts. He called police officers "frontline soldiers" in the fight against crime [386] and warned that consent decrees could "discourage the proactive policing that keeps our cities safe" and "cost more lives by handcuffing the police instead of criminals."[387]

In March 2017, Sessions directed the Justice Department to undertake a comprehensive review of all police reform activities, including any existing or contemplated consent decrees, in order to ensure that they were consistent with new guidelines that, among other things,

emphasized the need for "local control and local authority" for "effective local policing."[388] He dismissed the Justice Department's reports into unconstitutional practices in Ferguson and other cities as "anecdotal," while conceding that he had not read them.[389] By September 2017, the Justice Department had effectively ended the Collaborative Reform Initiative, and blocked release of reports assessing systemic practices contributing to community distrust in cities from North Charleston to Milwaukee.[390]

Attorney General Sessions' last formal act in office was to issue a memorandum that all but eliminated the Justice Department's use of settlement agreements and consent decrees to facilitate police accountability and reform.[391] Since President Trump took office, the US Justice Department has published just one pattern-or-practice investigation into law enforcement misconduct[392] and has initiated zero new agreements or consent decrees for policing reform.[393]

Despite this worrisome track record, the president signed into law a modest but important piece of criminal justice reform legislation, called the FIRST STEP Act, in 2018. In October 2019, he signed an executive order to establish a national Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice. The president tasked the commission with undertaking "a review of relevant research and expertise and mak[ing] recommendations [to the Attorney General] regarding important current issues facing law enforcement and the criminal justice system" in the United States.[394]

This executive order falls short of the recommendation made by the 2015 Task Force on 21st Century Policing to convene a new blue-ribbon National Crime and Justice Commission to review and evaluate all components of the criminal justice system and develop recommendations for comprehensive criminal justice reform that would build trust and refocus law enforcement resources on preventing violence and protecting human life.[395]

But the president's commission may still present an important moment for the nation's law enforcement, criminal justice, and violence prevention leaders to acknowledge past harms, press for change, and highlight best practices that could more justly and effectively protect our communities. Giffords will monitor this commission's work and stand as allies with experts and advocates calling for evidence-based reforms that build trust and prevent violence.

Now more than ever, the gun violence prevention movement must continue to make the case, loudly and persuasively, that community trust is a gun violence prevention issue, and that genuine trust-building reform efforts must grow and continue. In order to more justly and effectively protect and serve communities devastated by violence, trauma, and fear, our criminal justice agencies must engage community partners and transparently redress policies and practices that have failed too many American families for far too long.

Conclusion

Serious efforts to build community trust in cities around the country must start with a national commitment to implementing the recommendations of the Task Force on 21st Century Policing. This includes a truly comprehensive, evidence-based reassessment of our policing and criminal justice practices, policies, and priorities, and a commitment to leverage federal resources and leadership to address the crisis of over-policing and under-protection in many communities of color. Advocates should be engaged to press President Trump's Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice to recognize the need to reform and refocus criminal justice resources around building trust and protecting communities from violence.

The gun violence prevention movement must be engaged and informed in these efforts because cycles of distrust are a key driver of cycles of community violence. And our movement must craft effective gun safety policies that are appropriately targeted, driven by impacted communities' priorities, and do not contribute to over-policing and mass incarceration in communities of color.

Cities and police departments should also engage with experts, advocates, community members, and technical assistance providers to understand how longstanding practices in their own jurisdictions may be contributing to cycles of distrust, disengagement, and violence in their own communities.
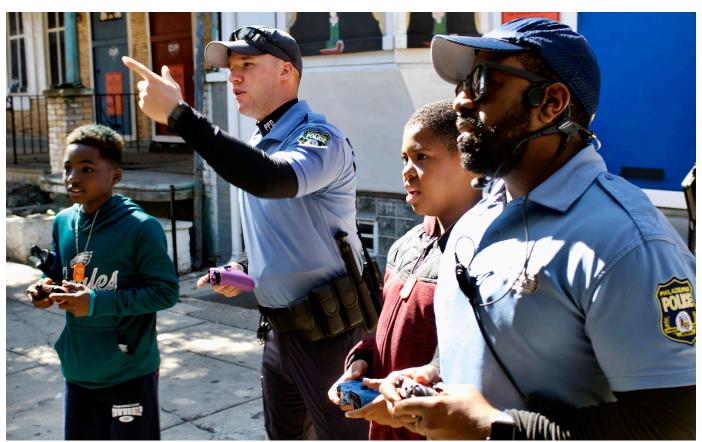
And leaders at every level must also work to expand targeted investments in community-based violence intervention and street outreach efforts, including the group violence intervention strategy, that work to build trust, interrupt cycles of violence, and protect those at greatest risk. To support and lead those efforts, Congress should pass the Break

the Cycle of Violence Act into law to fund a long overdue national initiative to interrupt violence, heal communities in crisis, and make our cities safer and freer for all who call them home.

Cities like Camden, Stockton, and Seattle show us that when police departments focus on building trust and concentrating their efforts around violence prevention, both law enforcement officers and community members become safer. Reform efforts in these cities, while undeniably works in progress, remind us that there is a clear path forward for communities long torn apart by distrust, gun violence, over-policing, and under-protection.

The public conversation around police-community relations has often been presented as a series of choices and competing sides. Between officer safety and civilian safety. Between policing and de-policing. Between the cop who garners community support and the cop who gets the job done.

But these are false choices. When it comes to making communities safe from violence, there can be no sides. When law enforcement and criminal justice agencies across the country incorporate efforts to build community trust and more justly and effectively protect people from violence, our country will be much closer to living up to its promise of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for all.

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ENDNOTES

Introduction

[1] As discussed further in Chapter 2, mortality data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) shows that in 2016, violence was responsible for over 50% of deaths among non-Hispanic black males ages 15 to 24 in the United States.

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Chapter One—Common Misconceptions about Murder in America

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