

COPS DON'T STOP VIOLENCE

**COMBATING
NARRATIVES USED TO
DEFEND POLICE INSTEAD
OF DEFUNDING THEM**

CO-PRODUCED BY



IC INTERRUPTING
CRIMINALIZATION

SUPPORTED BY



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KEY POINTS

- Fearmongering about “crime” and “violence” is an age-old tactic whenever police legitimacy, power, or resources are challenged.
- Politicians and pundits are conflating homicide, violence & crime — homicides have gone up, other forms of violence have gone down.
- Experts suggest homicides are increasing due to pandemic and economic stress, increased gun sales, and closure of community institutions.
- Spending pandemic recovery funds on policing runs contrary to addressing root causes of violence.
- The increase in homicides we are seeing is not unprecedented — homicide rates have been going up since 2014, and are equivalent to other periods in history where police budgets were consistently increasing.
- The increase in homicides happened before any police department’s funding was cut, and was seen in cities that both increased and decreased funds to police.
- Cuts to police funding in 2020 represented less than 1% of total annual expenditures on policing nationwide. Policymakers only invested a fraction of those funds into community-based safety strategies
- Research does not conclusively show that cops decrease homicides, violence, or crime — and any relationship between increased policing and decreased crime is smaller than previously indicated and not sustainable over time.
- Research does show cops increase violence.

→ CRIME STATS:

- Only reflect what is defined as a “crime” — which is a political decision. Who is policed and punished for crime is both a political and police decision. Not all crime is violence, not all violence is crime.
- Are collected and reported by cops.
- Can be manipulated for public relations purposes.
- Don’t account for other social and economic factors that affect violence.
- Most violence is not reported — so stats and studies that show a decrease in “crime” due to policing are not accurately measuring effect on all violence.
- Compare apples and oranges by generalizing results from unique conditions and communities.
- Only compare options involving more or less cops — don’t compare cops to other options.
- Research does show that increasing community-based organizations reduces homicides without increasing violence through police.



INTRODUCTION

“SKYROCKETING MURDER RATES.”

— THE NATIONAL FRATERNAL ORDER OF POLICE

“An explosion of violent crime.”

— SENATE MINORITY LEADER MITCH MCCONNELL

“Democrat-run cities across the country who cut funding for police have seen increases in crime.”

— U.S. REP. PATRICK MCHENRY, R-N.C.

Police are facing one of the greatest crises of legitimacy in a generation. In the wake of the largest uprisings in U.S. history, sparked by police violence, bloated police budgets, and the deadly impacts of a failure to invest in community health and safety laid bare by the pandemic, pro-police forces are on the defensive.

So they are reaching for one of their most reliable weapons — fear.

This is nothing new — cops and policymakers have always used fearmongering to push “law and order” agendas and pour more and more money into police departments. Now, with police budgets under scrutiny by campaigns to defund the police and refund our communities all across the country, lawmakers and the media are once again recycling old talking points about increasing violence and crime, claiming that campaigns to defund police are responsible .

Police fraternal associations, police chiefs, and policymakers are using an uptick in homicides to whip up a frenzy of fear that a “crime wave” is sweeping the country — for which they blame campaigns to defund police — to justify continued increases in police spending.

The facts simply don’t bear this out.



THE FACTS

President Biden cited a study showing a 30% increase in homicides, a 6% increase in aggravated assaults and 8% increase in gun assaults in 2020 over the previous year in 34 U.S. cities to justify paving the way for much needed pandemic relief funds to be poured into police coffers instead of into the pockets of people struggling to survive.¹ He recommended that communities use **\$350 billion in funds from the \$1.9 trillion coronavirus relief package to hire more cops.**² The White House has also proposed an **additional \$300 million in the 2022 federal budget for COPS Hiring Program grants to local police departments.**

First, spending pandemic relief funds on cops instead of care is likely to fuel more violence, including police violence, rather than more safety. It also runs contrary to the findings of the very report cited by the President, which concluded:

[T]he pandemic has placed individuals and institutions under tremendous strain, ultimately pushing homicide rates higher. In addition, the pandemic has impeded outreach to at-risk individuals — a key component of most evidence-informed anti-violence strategies.³

According to the John Jay Research Advisory Group on Preventing and Reducing Community Violence, “Community violence is more prevalent in neighborhoods where residents face severe and chronic financial stress.”⁴ As outlined in the recommendations of the COVID19 Policing Project’s latest report, investment of funds in direct support and community-based safety strategies, toward a just recovery, instead of doubling down on policing, is more likely to produce lasting public safety.⁵

Second, neither the President nor the pundits citing an increase in homicides to justify more police funding mention that **the same study found that homicide rates remain well below historic rates.** It also found that **robbery rates fell by 9%, and property and drug crime rates, with the exception of motor vehicle theft, fell significantly during 2020.** Additionally, **in 2020 residential burglaries decreased by 24%, nonresidential burglaries by 7%, larceny by 16%, and drug offenses by 30%.**⁶ According to previously released FBI data, **crime was down overall in 2020 by about 6 percent, one of the largest decreases in decades.**⁷

This illustrates the **third key point**, which is that **politicians and pundits are playing fast**

1 Fact Sheet: Biden-Harris Administration Announces Comprehensive Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gun Crime and Ensure Public Safety, June 23, 2021, available at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/06/23/fact-sheet-biden-harris-administration-announces-comprehensive-strategy-to-prevent-and-respond-to-gun-crime-and-ensure-public-safety/>. For further analysis and demands that American Rescue Plan funds not be spent on law enforcement, see Community Resource Hub, *Ensuring that Federal Stimulus Funds Support Care Not Cops*, available at: https://communityresourcehub.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/0407_CARES_ARPA_B.pdf and *Divesting from Pandemic Policing and Investing in a Just Recovery*, May 2021, available at: https://communityresourcehub.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Unmasked_Update.pdf

2 Michael D. Shear and Zolan Kanno-Youngs, “Walking a fine line, Biden balances confronting crime and supporting police reform,” *New York Times*, July 12, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/live/2021/07/12/us/joe-biden-news/biden-gun-violence>

3 Rosenfeld, Richard, Thomas Abt and Ernesto Lopez. *Pandemic, Social Unrest, and Crime in U.S. Cities: 2020 Year-End Update*. Washington, D.C.: Council on Criminal Justice, January 2021, p. 22.

4 John Jay College Research Advisory Group on Preventing and Reducing Community Violence (2020). *Reducing Violence Without Police: A Review of Research Evidence*. New York, NY: Research and Evaluation Center, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, City University of New York.

5 Michael D. Shear and Zolan Kanno-Youngs, “Walking a fine line, Biden balances confronting crime and supporting police reform,” *New York Times*, July 12, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/live/2021/07/12/us/joe-biden-news/biden-gun-violence>; Community Resource Hub COVID19 Policing Project, *Divesting from Pandemic Policing and Investing in a Just Recovery*, May 2021, available at: https://communityresourcehub.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Unmasked_Update.pdf

6 Rosenfeld, Richard, Thomas Abt and Ernesto Lopez. *Pandemic, Social Unrest, and Crime in U.S. Cities: 2020 Year-End Update*. Washington, D.C.: Council on Criminal Justice, January 2021.

7 Annie Linskey, Tyler Pager and Cleve R. Wootson Jr., “Biden launches an effort to head off violent crime — and political peril for his party,” *Washington Post*, June 21, 2021.

and loose with language, conflating homicides, “violent crime,” and crime — which are not the same things. As discussed in greater detail in the next section, homicides represent the number of people killed by another person — and do not include deaths resulting from poverty, corporate neglect or climate catastrophes, for instance. “Violent crime” is a subjective term that can include acts of violence against people or *property*. Additionally, statistics on rates of “violent crime” often don’t include police violence, or the significant amount of violence that is never reported to police. And, what is deemed a “crime” is a product of social, political and police decisions, and doesn’t necessarily involve violence of any kind.

A fourth key point is that the people who decide what and whose actions will be punished as a “crime,” and who collect and publish crime statistics, are the same people most likely to benefit from using the data to their advantage — police.

Finally, while the increase in the number of homicides over the past year is significant, it is not unprecedented: “In 1998, there were 6.3 murders per 100,000 people; 2020’s rate will likely be around 6.5 murders per 100,000. The rate likely peaked in 1980 at 10.2 and 1991 at 9.8.” In other words, **homicide rates have been this high in the past, including during periods when police budgets were on the rise, and no one was talking about defunding police.**

WHAT IS CAUSING THE INCREASED VIOLENCE?

It’s hard to pinpoint the exact causes of increased violence — there are many factors that can have an impact either way. Experts have noted that the increase in gun violence in 2020 is more likely due to the pandemic and a year of disruptions: devastating loss and grief, an unprecedented economic crisis, a looming eviction, foreclosure, and homelessness crisis, an ongoing climate crisis, the closure of community strengthening spaces and services, and to a significant increase in availability and purchase of guns.⁸

FBI data suggests nearly 40 million guns were sold last year, a 40 percent increase from 2019. New data from Northeastern University and the Harvard Injury Control Research Center found roughly 20 percent of those who bought guns last year were first-time gun owners. The research also found 39 percent of American households now own guns, up from 32 percent five years earlier.⁹

Decoupling from Defund

Pro-police media and policymakers are working overtime to turn an increase in homicides into a “crime surge,” and blame campaigns to defund police for making cities less safe. Again, the facts simply don’t bear this out.

For one, the spike in homicides and assaults policymakers and media are pointing to

occurred before the Summer 2020 uprising, and subsided in the second half of the year, before any cuts to police budgets went into effect.¹⁰

In other words, **the majority of the cuts to police budgets won last year — which still amount to less than 1% of the over \$100 billion the U.S. spends annually on law enforcement — had not yet been implemented by the time the spike in homicides occurred.** What’s more, the vast majority of **preliminary cuts affected vacant**

8 Rachel Cohen, “Fentanyl, Guns, and Murder: Get Ready for a Bloody Summer,” *Daily Beast*, June 9, 2021.

9 Rachel Cohen, “Fentanyl, Guns, and Murder: Get Ready for a Bloody Summer,” *Daily Beast*, June 9, 2021.

10 Rosenfeld, Richard, Thomas Abt and Ernesto Lopez. *Pandemic, Social Unrest, and Crime in U.S. Cities: 2020 Year-End Update*. Washington, D.C.: Council on Criminal Justice, January 2021, p. 6.

positions — meaning that in the vast majority of jurisdictions there hasn't yet been a substantial budgetary cut to the overall number of cops.

Secondly, as Fordham Law Professor John Pfaff points out, **“the rise in homicides has occurred more or less equally in places that adopted reforms and those that rejected them.”** In other words, the spike in homicides largely took place “on the *status quo*'s watch,” meaning that policymakers arguing for more money for police **“are thus arguing for more of what has mostly failed us this past year.”**¹¹

In fact as shown by the graphs below, **spending on police overall, including in cities experiencing the highest increases in violence, has steadily increased or remained the same, while investments in meeting community needs and violence prevention have declined.**¹² For example, last year cities like Houston, Nashville, Tulsa, and Fresno experienced a spike in homicides

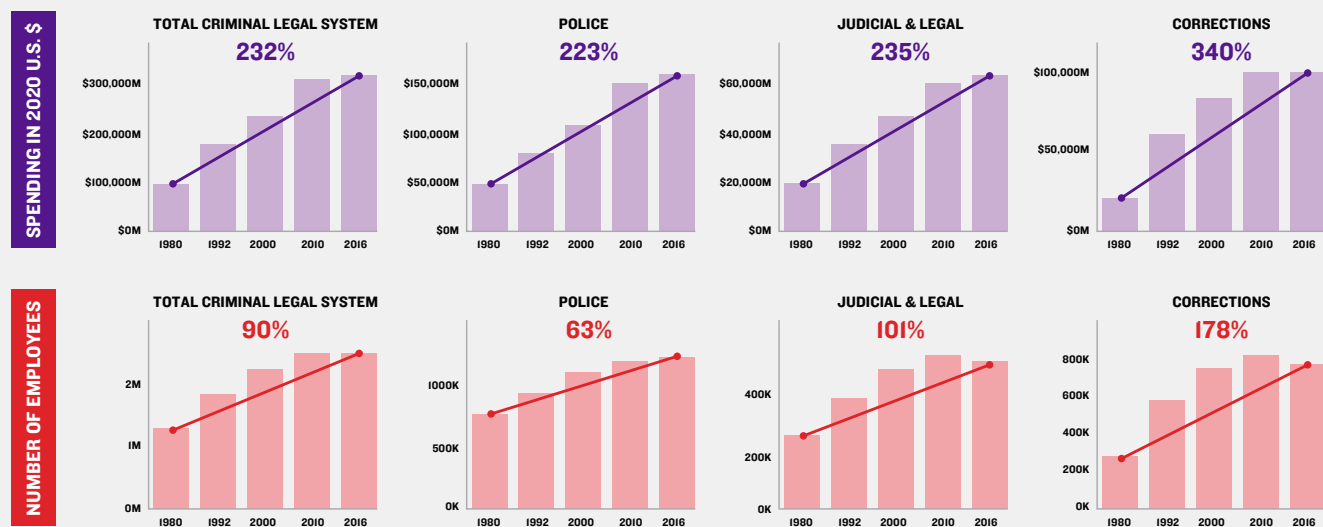
even as their police budgets increased.¹³ In Memphis, \$9.8 million in COPS funding was added on top of the city-funded Memphis Police Department (MPD) budget to support the hiring of 50 additional police officers. FBI reports for January through March 2021 compared with the same period in 2020 show that the overall rate of violent crime rose by 26 percent and the murder rate rose by 33 percent. Meanwhile, programs proven to reduce, prevent, intervene in, ameliorate and heal from violence are starved of funds, resources and legitimacy, and in some cases, actively undermined by cops protecting their own monopoly on violence.

“If the crime rate is up, we say, ‘Well, we need more cops because crime is going up.’ If the crime rate goes down, we say, ‘Well, we need more cops because what we’re doing is working.’ It’s ludicrous.”

— JOHN ROMAN, SENIOR FELLOW AT THE NATIONAL OPINION RESEARCH CENTER AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO¹⁴

FEDERAL, STATE, AND LOCAL SPENDING ON THE U.S. CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM & NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES, 1980–2016

Over the past few decades, spending on the criminal legal system has increased 232% from \$95,578,442,667 in 1980 to \$317,187,464,592 in 2016. Both figures are controlled for inflation using the 2020 U.S. Dollar. At the same time, the number of criminal legal employees has increased 90% from 1,270,342 positions in 1980 to 2,415,227 in 2016.



From [Defunddata.org](https://defunddata.org), a project of the Social Justice Movement Lab, also available at [defundpolice.org: https://defundpolice.org/budgeting-tools/spending-and-personnel-over-time/](https://defundpolice.org/budgeting-tools/spending-and-personnel-over-time/). Based on Fiscally Standardized Cities (FISC) data from the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy.

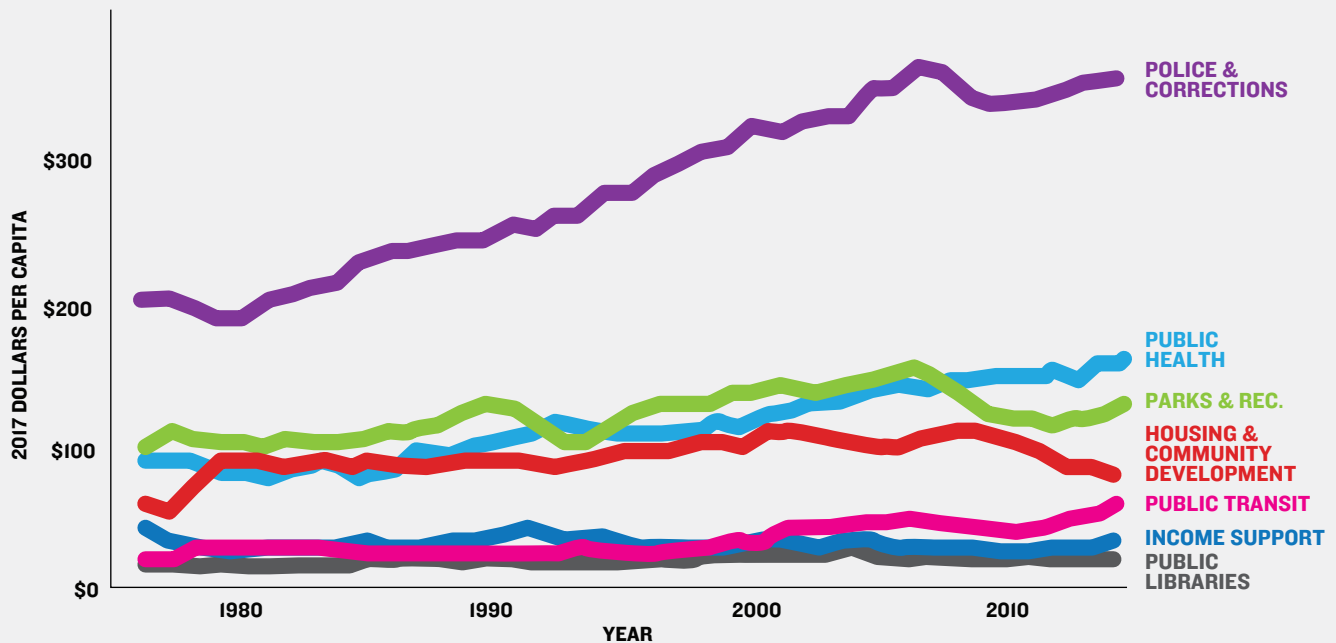
11 John Pfaff, “Can Criminal Justice Reform Survive a Wave of Violent Crime?,” *The New Republic*, June 21, 2021.

12 Rachel Cohen, “Fentanyl, Guns, and Murder: Get Ready for a Bloody Summer,” *Daily Beast*, June 9, 2021.

13 David Klepper and Gary Fields, “Homicides are up, but GOP misleads with claims about blame,” *AP News*, June 10, 2021.

14 Sidney Fussell, “What Disbanding the Police Really Meant in Camden, New Jersey,” *Wired*, July 1, 2020, available at: <https://www.wired.com/story/disbanding-police-really-meant-camden/>

CHANGE IN PER CAPITA LOCAL GOVERNMENT SPENDING BY SERVICE TYPE



All data from the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy's Fiscally Standardized Cities. Spending by city governments only.

For example, politicians **invested only \$160 million of funds cut from police budgets in community-based safety strategies**, falling far short of what is needed to relieve economic and social pressures on communities that drive both violence and increases in criminalized activities.¹⁵ Addressing rising rates of violence requires deep investments in meeting our communities' economic and social needs and in community-based violence prevention and interruption programs — NOT more policing.

The bottom line is that police don't stop violence, no matter how high their budgets are. It's time to stop falling for cops' fearmongering and throwing good money after bad in pursuit of safety cops are not set up to deliver.

We know that prisons and police don't keep us safe or deter violence — and that they

contribute tremendous amounts of violence to our communities. We know that research shows — and even some cops agree — that the best way to reduce violence and increase safety is to increase access to housing, healthcare, including mental health care, education, accessible, sustainable and living wage jobs, and community care, connection, and programs. It is this knowledge that is informing and driving campaigns to defund police and invest in community safety — because we know that is the only path forward toward safer, more just communities.

15 Interrupting Criminalization, *The Demand is Still Defund the Police, Fund the People, Defend Black Lives*, January 2021, available at bit.ly/DefundPoliceUpdate; BYP100, Center for Popular Democracy, Law for Black Lives, *Freedom to Thrive: Reimagining Safety & Security in Our Communities*, available at: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5500a55ae4b05a69b3350e23/t/595cf69b1b631b031e0542a5/1499264677929/Freedom+to+Thrive+Web.pdf>



WHAT IS CRIME?

In an attempt to whip up and wield fear to divert attention from both police budgets and police violence, coverage and conversations focusing on the potential impacts of reducing police budgets tend to blur crime, violence, homicides and shootings, which are very different things.

Media coverage claiming an uptick in violence in 2020 is generally referring to homicides, robberies (theft by force), or domestic violence. While those trained in analyzing “crime” stats may know the different technical and legal measurements involved, critics of defunding the police intentionally blur the lines to spark fear of violence and an appetite for more policing among the general public.

Some Key Points

→ Often, the term “crime” is used to conjure images of violence, and claims that reducing police budgets or numbers will contribute to rising rates of violence often conflate violence and “crime.” Yet “crime” is not in itself a measure of harm or safety. “Crime” is a term used to describe any activity that violates a criminal law. The vast majority of what is defined as crime involves no violence. Crime is not the same as homicides, or violence.

→ **Not all violence is a “crime,” and not all “crimes” involve violence.** For instance, police and military regularly commit violence without being criminalized, and many acts defined as “crime” do not involve violence - including drug possession offenses, public order offenses like eating, sleeping, or drinking in public, and regulatory offenses like operating a hair salon without a license.

“The narrow and traditional definition of violence used in most evaluation research is interpersonal harms reported by the police or to the police. This view is wholly insufficient if the goal is to prevent and reduce community violence. For one, most violent acts are not measurable with police data because they are never reported to police. Not only do conventional definitions of violence fail to capture half of all violent acts between neighborhood residents, but they also omit any violent harm resulting from organizational behaviors, social structures, and systematic racial and class oppression. If the goal of violence reduction is to enhance the peace and security of neighborhood residents, efforts to reduce violence should attend to all forms of violence.”

— JOHN JAY RESEARCH ADVISORY GROUP
ON PREVENTING AND REDUCING COMMUNITY
VIOLENCE, *REDUCING VIOLENCE WITHOUT
POLICE: A REVIEW OF RESEARCH EVIDENCE*¹⁶

→ **Even within what is defined as crime, cops focus on certain types of “crimes” while ignoring other criminalized activity — such as tax evasion, financial fraud, and drug use and distribution by wealthy people and white college students.**

→ Crime rates usually only reflect violations of the law that:

- people have reported to police;
- that police choose to report; and
- that resulted in an arrest.

So the vast majority of violence is not counted as crime — because most people who experience violence don’t report it,

¹⁶ Andrea J. Ritchie and Beth E. Richie, *The Crisis of Criminalization: A Call for a Comprehensive Philanthropic Response*, available at: <http://bcrw.barnard.edu/wp-content/nfs/reports/NFS9-Challenging-Criminalization-Funding-Perspectives.pdf>

because cops don't act on or report it, and because a great deal of violence, including police violence, is not criminalized.

- According to the Vera Institute, **less than 5% of the 10 million arrests made annually are for what are described as “violent crime.”**¹⁷
- **Cops don't just report crime, they create it.** Police enjoy vast discretion with respect to who and what to pay attention to, and how. Ultimately, they decide what they will treat as a crime and what they won't. Cops aren't just enforcing laws, they are making the law every time they decide who and what is out of order, and what actions need to be taken to restore what they understand to be the right order of things. In other words, crime rates are reflections of cops' perceptions, not of harms people are actually experiencing.
- In cases where harm or violence do occur, crime data can still distort. For example, **homicide statistics include shootings but also deaths by other means, such as someone killed in a car accident by a reckless driver.** Yet when we hear that homicides are going up, we think only of intentional killings by a stranger. And, **homicide statistics don't include other preventable deaths** caused by things like lack of access to medical treatment, pollution, evictions and foreclosures.
- **Reports of increased violence also almost never include the violence perpetrated by the police** and military, who regularly commit violence without being criminalized and are often shielded from accountability. For instance, in New York City, 10% of homicides committed by strangers are committed by cops.

In the end, crime is a constructed category — states can and do decide what to label and

punish actions as crimes, civil violations, or no violation of law at all. As Beth Richie and Andrea Ritchie describe in *The Crisis of Criminalization*,¹⁸ what is deemed a crime is largely the product of political decisions made in service of maintaining existing relations of power. The state can choose to make shoplifting a crime, but not wage theft, or throwing dice in the street a crime, but not in a corporate casino. One state might criminalize marijuana possession, another might not.

Crime also means different things to different people. For some it means everything that is technically against the law. For others it means harm or violence. And for people calling the police, “crime” can simply be something or someone they consider a nuisance or bothersome, like the presence of a “suspicious person,” or someone barbecuing in a park or selling lemonade on the street, which may not technically be illegal.

Ultimately, what is deemed a crime is more about criminalizing specific populations of people rather than specific acts — so even when something is criminalized, it is not universally enforced. So while jaywalking is technically a crime, it tends to be used as a pretext to stop, harass, ticket and arrest people of color the cops are already criminalizing. Same goes for riding a bike on the sidewalk, celebrating a sports victory, getting into a fight at school, or using cocaine. Same goes for killing someone in self-defense — some people are arrested and criminalized for it, others, including cops who consistently claim self-defense regardless of the circumstances, are celebrated for it.¹⁹

17 Vera Institute, Arrest Trends, 2018, available at: <https://arresttrends.vera.org/arrests>.

18 John Jay College Research Advisory Group on Preventing and Reducing Community Violence (2020). *Reducing Violence Without Police: A Review of Research Evidence*. New York, NY: Research and Evaluation Center, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, City University of New York.

19 <https://survivedandpunished.org/>



PROBLEMS WITH CRIME STATISTICS & STUDIES

Problems with the crime stats and studies pundits and policymakers are pointing to in support of their arguments that we need to give more money to police to reduce violence or crime include:

- 1 they conflate “crime,” “violence,” and homicides;
- 2 they ignore evidence that cops don’t actually reduce or interrupt violence, but they do perpetrate and perpetuate it;
- 3 they don’t take into account the limits of the research in terms of the methods used, whether researchers took into account other factors that can affect rates of violence, how violence is conceptualized and measured, or the pro-police bias of researchers.
- 4 they presume there are only two options — more cops, or less cops — without considering the potential impacts of increased investment in the things we need to produce safety: housing, jobs, education, health care, community programs.

“What people are getting wrong inside of that is that this is an on-and-off spigot of what currently exists. The way that that sometimes gets articulated is, if there’s no cops then there’s chaos, like there’s some kind of one-to-one correlation. There’s only one option.”

— RACHEL HERZING, CO-FOUNDER,
CRITICAL RESISTANCE²⁰

Evidence that police stop people from killing each other is weaker than many people previously thought — while the evidence of police killing people is strong. While a few previous studies found that “police levels were inversely associated with homicide, robbery, assault, and burglary” in cities of 100,000 or more based on data from over 5000 cities from 1990 to 2001,²¹ subsequent **studies of higher quality found the impact of police on both homicide and violent crime is significantly lower than previously believed.**²² Meanwhile, **cops kill over 1,000 people a year**, a number equivalent to roughly 5% of all homicides.²³

→ A 2017 study concluded that, after adjusting for other factors, “we can be fairly sure that the effects of police staffing on violent crimes, murder in particular, are considerably less than estimated in previous studies.” By employing a better statistical strategy to isolate the effect of policing from socio-economic factors and community-specific effects, researchers showed a dramatically reduced impact of increased police presence on homicide and other violent crimes. **Measured in terms of police activity rather than numbers, a 2019 study found no relationship between arrest rates and homicide rates.**²⁴

→ Similarly, a 2007 study found that “additional officers granted through the [Department of Justice] COPS program produce statistically significant drops in burglaries, auto thefts, robberies, and aggravated assaults,” but was **not able to find an effect statistically**

20 Fabiola Cineas, “What the public is getting right — and wrong — about police abolition,” Vox.com, October 30, 2020 <https://www.vox.com/21529335/abolish-the-police-movement>

21 Worrall, J. L., & Kovandzic, T. V. (2010). Police levels and crime rates: An instrumental variables approach. *Social Science Research*, 39(3), 506-516.

22 Spelman, W. (2017). The murder mystery: Police effectiveness and homicide. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, 33(4), 859-886.

23 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, FastStats: Homicide, available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/homicide.htm>.

24 Rosenfeld, R, Wallman, J. Did de-policing cause the increase in homicide rates? *Criminology & Public Policy*. 2019; 18: 51– 75. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1745-9133.12414>

distinguishable from zero for the effect of police on homicides.

In other words, when researchers account for the impacts of socio-economic and other factors, the reality that police don't protect us from violence — because their purpose is to use violence to maintain “order” premised on existing relations of power — becomes more clear.

Meanwhile, a study of 263 of the country's 300 largest cities discussed in greater detail in the last section of this report found adding an additional 10 non-profits is likely to have a greater impact on reducing violence at lower cost, and without the additional violence, including police killings and violence, that the presence of police brings.

Researchers also find that ups and downs in homicide rates are much more random than other violent crime rates, and are therefore not a reliable predictor of the risk of homicide. The authors of the 2017 study concluded, **“We can attribute over 60 % of the variability in...murder rates to random variation,”**²⁵ not to the numbers or budgets of police departments. Ultimately crime rates rise and fall in periodic bursts, but have overall have been steadily decreasing over the long term as economic conditions improve, while increasing when they worsen. It is difficult to separate out effects of police staffing from social conditions known to affect rates of violent crime such as unemployment, divestment from social services, community destabilization and residential segregation.

Additionally, the research on the relationship between police department size and homicide rates is plagued by multiple limitations including:

→ The fact that we rely solely on police departments to collect and report homicide statistics;

- Variability in the availability and quality of data on police force size and homicide statistics in national data sets;
- Difficulty generalizing the results of a single study to the conditions of any specific city;
- The fact that studies don't compare the cost of police relative to other strategies for reducing homicide such as violence interruption, jobs programs, stable housing, etc.;
- Failure to measure or take into account the negative impacts of increased police presence on communities, including increased police killings, violence, sexual harassment and assault, trauma and psychological distress, and criminalization, which may contribute to increased violence.²⁶ For instance, gang and drug war policing tactics have been shown to increase the violence of the drug trade;²⁷
- Failure to address the demands and needs of communities most impacted by homicide rates.

Studies that do not engage with these questions are an incomplete and insufficient basis for deciding how best to meet the challenge of preventing homicides and other forms of violence and harm. These issues, along with specific flaws with studies traditionally cited in support of increased policing discussed in the appendix, cast serious doubts on claims that increased police funding and department size will reduce homicides and violence.

Cops Cause Violence

Ultimately, police are violence workers. Their response to violence is more violence or the threat of violence. This means more police, police contact, and police resources automatically

25 Rosenfeld, R, Wallman, J. Did de-policing cause the increase in homicide rates? *Criminology & Public Policy*. 2019; 18: 51–75. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1745-9133.12414>

26 Alec Karakastanis, “Why ‘Crime’ Isn’t The Question and Police Aren’t the Answer,” *Current Affairs*, August 10, 2020, available at: <https://www.currentaffairs.org/2020/08/why-crime-isnt-the-question-and-police-arent-the-answer>.

27 Ryan Lugalía Hollon and Daniel Cooper, *The War on Neighborhoods: Policing, Prisons, and Punishment in a Divided City*, Beacon Press (2018).

means more violence because cops add their own violence to what's already in the mix. So, as Tamara Nopper says, instead of being violence preventers, cops are violence promoters.

There is no good national accounting of the full extent of violent acts committed by sworn law enforcement agents in the United States.

There is no national or state level record-keeping or reporting requirement to document and tally all acts of violence by law enforcement officers, and killings and assaults by cops are generally excluded from crime statistics except in the unlikely event of arrest of a police officer. So, for instance, the violent home invasion that led to Breonna Taylor's death would not be included in reported crime statistics, nor would her killing be reported in homicide statistics. Nor would the experiences of the two women previously sexually assaulted by the officer who killed her, Brett Hankison, be included in sexual assault data gathered through current victim surveys.

Through the tireless effort of hundreds of volunteers, we do have information on police killings through the Fatal Encounters database, which includes both police killings and accidental deaths related to police activity. There are also databases kept by media outlets like *The Guardian*, *The Washington Post*, *The Buffalo News*, and at mappingpoliceviolence.com. All indicate that cops have killed over 1,000 people a year on average since 2014, and the *Buffalo News* database estimates that a law enforcement officer is caught in an act of sexual misconduct every 5 days on average. Police killings are the easiest form of police violence to document, but are the tip of the iceberg on persistent and pervasive violence — there is no complete and reliable tally of how many people cops have beaten, choked, Tased, raped, sexually assaulted, or otherwise violated.

Beyond the gaps and problematic foundations of data around the effects of increased policing on homicide rates, **there is a deeper crack in the logic of claims that more violence requires more cops: we have options beyond simply increasing or decreasing the number of cops or how much money we spend on them.**

The real choice is between policing and a wide array of alternatives.

People advocating for more police funding are not pointing to a single study that proves that increasing numbers or resources to cops is

a more effective way to prevent, intervene in or heal from violence than other approaches, including meeting people's material needs, community-based crisis responders, or more teachers. **It is not enough to show that police have a marginal effect on "crime" or "violence" — the question is what is the best way to achieve safety? If the alternatives are more effective — and far less destructive — then studies claiming to show that police have an impact on "crime" aren't answering the right question.**



COPS AND SAFETY

OK, so maybe the evidence that cops affect homicide rates is flawed, but maybe they control other kinds of crime? The answer is, not really, and certainly not violent crime.

“First, repeated analysis has consistently failed to find any connection between the number of police officers and crime rates. Second, the primary strategies adopted by modern police have been shown to have little or no effect on crime.”²⁸

“Few if any studies reporting net positive effects from policing actually show it is specifically the police that reduce crime. Instead, results indicate that having someone present reduces crime and that police can be that someone, but not that police must be that someone.”²⁹

Effect of Increased Police Presence

A seminal year-long study of “preventive patrol” or increasing police presence beyond responding to calls for assistance in Kansas City neighborhoods found that **increased police patrols did not affect crime rates, including violent crime, nor did they make people feel more safe**. Of course, police preservationists argue that these results — which they say are still valid today — counsel in favor of *more* police and more targeted police interventions.³⁰ But, the study results could just as easily be interpreted as support for the argument that

increased police presence does little to deter violence — and increases the likelihood that cops will add their own violence to what is already happening.

A similar study in Newark, New Jersey, often cited as the basis for the theory of “broken windows” policing,³¹ similarly found that **“neither adding nor removing footpatrol affected crime in any way.”³²** What increased police presence did is give the *impression* that someone was handling the fall-out of economic policies in the form of “derelicts, petty thieves, disorderly persons, vagrants, panhandlers, noisy juveniles and street people, who, although they are not committing serious crimes, cause concern and fear among many citizens.”³³ There is another path to addressing those concerns by meeting the needs of communities rather than fomenting fear, scapegoating and criminalization.

An often-cited 2005 study used daily police reports of crime from the Metropolitan Police Department of the District of Columbia between March 2002 through July 2003, during which the terror alert level rose and fell four times. During periods of high alert, the DC MPD increased the number of patrols and length of shifts. On an average day, the police reported 17.1 crimes on the National Mall. During periods of high alert, crime on the National Mall decreased by an average of 2.62 crimes per day. The thing is, **while nonviolent crime on the Mall decreased, violent crime did not**, and decreases in crime in other parts of the DC police department’s

28 David Bayley, *Police for the Future* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 3.

29 John Jay College Research Advisory Group on Preventing and Reducing Community Violence (2020). *Reducing Violence Without Police: A Review of Research Evidence*. New York, NY: Research and Evaluation Center, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, City University of New York.

30 Kenneth Novak, Brad Smith, Gary Cordner and Roy Roberg, *Police & Society*, 7th ed. (Oxford University Press 2017), 98.

31 For more information on “broken windows” policing, see Andrea J. Ritchie, “Black Lives Over Broken Windows,” *Public Eye* (2016), available at: <https://www.politicalresearch.org/2016/07/06/black-lives-over-broken-windows-challenging-the-policing-paradigm-rooted-in-right-wing-folk-wisdom>

32 Kenneth Novak, Brad Smith, Gary Cordner and Roy Roberg, *Police & Society*, 7th ed. (Oxford University Press 2017), 105.

33 Kenneth Novak, Brad Smith, Gary Cordner and Roy Roberg, *Police & Society*, 7th ed. (Oxford University Press 2017), 105; see also Andrea J. Ritchie, “Black Lives Over Broken Windows,” *Public Eye* (2016), available at: <https://www.politicalresearch.org/2016/07/06/black-lives-over-broken-windows-challenging-the-policing-paradigm-rooted-in-right-wing-folk-wisdom>

jurisdiction were not significant. Not only is the National Mall in Washington, D.C. such a unique environment that it makes no sense to extrapolate from these results to conclude that more cops leads to less crime in other contexts, but at best the study establishes that police presence decreased some criminalized activity, but had no impact on violent crime.

Effect of Police Response Times

A follow-up study to the Kansas City experiment examined police response times — which critics of defunding police departments claim without any basis will be slower if defund demands are met — and found that **efforts to increase rapid response times were not effective**, including where burglaries were concerned. Researchers found that crime victims **usually called someone else first** — a friend, relative, or insurance agent — **before calling the police**, and that **police virtually never made an arrest at the scene, no matter how quickly they responded**.

Again, police preservationists interpret these findings as grounds for prioritizing police responses, while simultaneously acknowledging that “the vast majority of calls to police departments are not critical.”³⁴ But these studies show that, contrary to the drumbeat of “who will answer your call when you are in trouble?” being marshaled in the face of demands to reduce police budgets, police aren’t responding to crisis calls the vast majority of the time, and when they do, they are not doing anything to stop or interrupt violence, instead primarily documenting it after the fact.

After the Fact

For the most part, police show up after harm has already been done. And even then, they do little

to offer healing, accountability or repair, and nothing to prevent it from happening again.

A third study found that

police investigative units were found to be rather ineffective and inefficient... (1) only 20% of serious crimes are ever solved (2) when serious crimes are solved, it is usually through information obtained from victims rather than through leads developed by detectives (3) in 75% of cases that are eventually solved, the suspect’s identity is known or easily determined at the time the crime is reported to police; (4) the majority of detective time is devoted to reviewing reports, documenting files, and attempting to locate and interview victims for cases with low probability of ever being solved; and (5) police collect a great deal of evidence, but most of it is never subjected to forensic analysis and does not contribute to crime solving.³⁵

These results also hold true today: **“police still solve only 20-25% of reported serious crimes, and most evidence still comes from witnesses, informants, and confessions. In addition, we have learned in recent years that the scientific validity of many long accepted forensic science techniques is questionable.”**³⁶ In fact, for some offenses, the solve rate has been decreasing even more dramatically, and is even lower: for example, only 11% of car thefts lead to recovery of a stolen vehicle.³⁷

The rate of unsolved homicides for Black people is even higher at 40% compared to 20% for white people.³⁸ The disparities are even greater when gender is factored in — the solve rate for cases in which Black men are killed with guns is 22%, for white women killed with guns in their homes, 77%.³⁹

34 Kenneth Novak, Brad Smith, Gary Cordner and Roy Roberg, *Police & Society*, 7th ed. (Oxford University Press 2017), 98-99.

35 Kenneth Novak, Brad Smith, Gary Cordner and Roy Roberg, *Police & Society*, 7th ed. (Oxford University Press 2017), 99.

36 Kenneth Novak, Brad Smith, Gary Cordner and Roy Roberg, *Police & Society*, 7th ed. (Oxford University Press 2017), 100.

37 *You’re Wrong About...Murder* Podcast, July 27 2020.

38 *The Murder Accountability Project* (2021). Accessed online 6/27/2021: <https://www.murderdata.org/p/victims.html>

39 *You’re Wrong About...Murder* Podcast, July 27 2020.

Police response to low solve rates? “Screen out cases with a very low probability of being solved” in an effort to improve the stats.⁴⁰

Using Crime Data to Drive Policing

In response to the data showing that increased police presence and faster response times don't have significant effects on crime rates, police departments have shifted to what they call “hot spot policing”: focusing their activities on specific neighborhoods framed as “hot spots” for crime based on the cops' own statistics and enforcement activities. “Hot spot” policing also includes targeting specific groups of people believed to be responsible for the majority of criminalized activity.

“Hot spot” policing is another example of how political decisions around what constitutes a crime and which crimes by who will be prioritized, as well as wide police discretion, both create and confirm crime statistics. Cops target an area they decide needs to be controlled and contained for intensive enforcement, generating arrests that are then turned into crime statistics used to justify further targeting. Arguably, Wall Street is a “hot spot” for white collar crime, but it is not flooded with cops who use statistics based on their own decisions of which laws to enforce where to justify their presence there. Similarly, fraternity houses could be framed as “hot spots” for sexual assault and drug-related offenses, but are not flooded with police on a nightly basis.

Research on “hot spot” policing in Minneapolis found that “increased police presence failed to reduce serious crime.”⁴¹ This is not surprising given that hot spot policing relies on increased police presence and shorter response times, in spite of evidence that neither deters nor interrupts violence.

Hot spot policing has been found to have “a modest effect on disorder,”⁴² which again, is not surprising given that cops wield wide discretion around what is perceived to be “order” and “disorder.” A heavily policed area will be perceived to be more “orderly,” resulting in fewer arrests — but the effects will be short lived because intense police presence and control of the population cannot be maintained over an extended period.

Similarly, research shows that the effects of “crackdowns” or “intensive, short term increase in officer presence and arrests for specific types of offenses or for all offenses in specific areas,” — such as those targeting drunk driving, public drug use and sale, the sex trade, and traffic offenses — are limited. They may have short term effects, but those disappear rather quickly, leading researchers to conclude that “because of high costs they are rarely sustainable and thus are not long term solutions.”⁴³ And, focused-deterrence initiatives, in which individuals deemed responsible for a significant amount of violence experienced in a community are targeted by prosecutors and for focused interventions, in spite of initially promising results, have proven to have short-lived impacts.⁴⁴

With respect to each of these strategies, one reason results can't be sustained is that crackdowns and intense scrutiny of particular individuals does not fundamentally change the conditions people are operating under. The goal of police here as always is simply to contain and control, not change or strike at the root causes of criminalized acts. Police preservationists, again interpret this data to mean that the goal should be to move toward *more* crackdowns and *more* investment in focused deterrence — in the hopes that they will become more cost-effective and their results will become more sustained

40 Kenneth Novak, Brad Smith, Gary Cordner and Roy Roberg, *Police & Society*, 7th ed. (Oxford University Press 2017), 101.

41 Kenneth Novak, Brad Smith, Gary Cordner and Roy Roberg, *Police & Society*, 7th ed. (Oxford University Press 2017), 102, 237.

42 Kenneth Novak, Brad Smith, Gary Cordner and Roy Roberg, *Police & Society*, 7th ed. (Oxford University Press 2017), 102, 237.

43 Kenneth Novak, Brad Smith, Gary Cordner and Roy Roberg, *Police & Society*, 7th ed. (Oxford University Press 2017), 239.

44 Kenneth Novak, Brad Smith, Gary Cordner and Roy Roberg, *Police & Society*, 7th ed. (Oxford University Press 2017), 242-43.

over time — rather than concluding that the strategy is ineffective, particularly compared to addressing underlying conditions.

Police scholars are increasingly acknowledging that what are deemed “hot spots” and “problem areas” suitable for “crackdowns” — generally low income Black and Brown neighborhoods experiencing what Ruth Wilson Gilmore calls “organized abandonment” — “often spring from some underlying condition.” **Therefore, “fixing the underlying condition often has a substantial impact,” and crime prevention lies “mainly outside the realm of policing and emphasizes education, housing, health care and employment; in other words, create a fair and prosperous society and eliminate the root causes of crime...[which] are generally far outside the jurisdiction of the police.”**⁴⁵

The Shift to “Community Policing”

In the face of decades-long evidence confirming that they are not particularly effective at preventing, interrupting or solving crime — because that has never been their true function — police departments have focused on “improving police-community relations” in an effort to boost their legitimacy. They have also worked to increase the status and legitimacy of tasks unrelated to preventing or intervening in or resolving violence — like “order maintenance, social service and general assistance duties” and “educational, recreational, and even counseling services.”⁴⁶

This explains why cops are reluctant to let go of functions such as responding to mental health crises, homeless “outreach,” and youth engagement programs — because they know that retaining control of these functions is key to keeping their jobs and their budgets.

It also explains why President Biden and other pro-police forces are doubling down on the need to boost legitimacy of policing through

“community policing.” While also not proven to stop violence more effectively than non-police community-based safety strategies, “community policing” expands and extends police power, deputizing “respectable” “citizens” in the work of policing. Through community policing, cops reinforce and bolster their own notions of order and safety, while doing nothing to build stronger, safer communities.

So if police don’t deter crime, interrupt crime, or solve crime, why are we investing up to half of city budgets on them?

45 Kenneth Novak, Brad Smith, Gary Cordner and Roy Roberg, *Police & Society*, 7th ed. (Oxford University Press 2017), 102.

46 Kenneth Novak, Brad Smith, Gary Cordner and Roy Roberg, *Police & Society*, 7th ed. (Oxford University Press 2017), 110, 111.



WE CAN REDUCE VIOLENCE WITHOUT COPS

“[A]re there ways to prevent violence without relying on the police? The obvious answer is “yes.” Policing has never been the primary explanation for obviously varying levels of community safety.”

— JOHN JAY RESEARCH ADVISORY GROUP ON PREVENTING AND REDUCING COMMUNITY VIOLENCE, REDUCING VIOLENCE WITHOUT POLICE: A REVIEW OF RESEARCH EVIDENCE⁴⁷

Often the conversation around violent crime posits police as the only possible response. In fact, there are a wide array of community-based responses that are proven to be effective at violence prevention.

One study looked at Uniform Crime Data, Census Data, and non-profit data from 1990 to 2013 in 264 of the 300 largest cities in the U.S. and found that:

- **Every 10 additional community nonprofits in a city with 100,000 residents leads to a 12% reduction in the homicide rate, a 10% reduction in violent crime, and a 7% reduction in the property crime rate.**⁴⁸
- In other words, adding 24 community nonprofits per 100,000 residents leads to a 29 percent decline in the murder rate, a 24 percent decline in the violent crime rate, and a 17 percent decline in the property crime rate.⁴⁹

Community nonprofits were defined as organizations focused on crime prevention,

neighborhood development, substance abuse prevention, job training and workforce development, and recreational and social activities for youth.

Some cities that experienced large declines in crime during this period include New York, which added 25 nonprofits per 100,000 residents during the decade studied; Los Angeles, which added 36 per 100,000 residents; Chicago, which added 47; and Boston, which added 56.

The authors of the study conclude that, **“we find strong evidence that establishment of community nonprofits had a substantively meaningful negative effect on murder, violent crime, and property crime.”** The study result was achieved based on very modest investments in community-based strategies to meet the needs of communities impacted by violence.

In other words, instead of increasing police budgets, we could theoretically neutralize the 30% increase in reported homicides in 2020 by investing in an additional 24 community-based organizations per 100,000 residents.

Using American Rescue Plan Act funds as they were intended — to support and strengthen communities and community-based organizations — would have a much more profound and lasting effect on reducing homicides than increasing police budgets.

47 John Jay College Research Advisory Group on Preventing and Reducing Community Violence (2020). *Reducing Violence Without Police: A Review of Research Evidence*. New York, NY: Research and Evaluation Center, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, City University of New York.

48 Sharkey, P., Torrats-Espinosa, G., & Takyar, D. (2017). Community and the crime decline: The causal effect of local nonprofits on violent crime. *American Sociological Review*, 82(6), 1214-1240, 1215. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122417736289>

49 Sharkey, P., Torrats-Espinosa, G., & Takyar, D. (2017). Community and the crime decline: The causal effect of local nonprofits on violent crime. *American Sociological Review*, 82(6), 1214-1240, 1229. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122417736289>

Who Stops Violence? Violence Interrupters

Violence interrupters are credible messengers and respected community members who conduct daily outreach to their communities, de-escalate, prevent and intervene in potentially violent situations, and respond after the fact to prevent escalation and retaliation.

- Evaluation studies in cities across the country showed promising results for the CURE Violence model, which combines violence interruption strategies rooted in public health and support to individuals.⁵⁰
- In Baltimore, the Safe Streets program recently celebrated a full year without a homicide in

one area they cover, and once marked 500 days without a homicide in the other. Credible messengers, many of whom have been criminalized in the past, engage in conflict resolution on the streets, respond to hospitals where gunshot victims are being treated, and connect people to services and resources. In one year, the program intervened in almost 1000 conflicts that had the potential to become dangerous, and since last June resolved over 400 conflicts, 70% of which involved someone carrying a gun or known to carry a gun.⁵¹

- “Establishing Offices of Neighborhood Safety (ONS) which have violence prevention programs in cities like Milwaukee and Oakland cost \$4 and \$26 per capita, compared to \$502 and \$727 per capita spending on their police departments respectively.”⁵²

RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

AMERICAN JOURNAL OF PUBLIC HEALTH

Matthay, Ellicott C., Kriszta Farkas, Kara E. Rudolph, Scott Zimmeran, Melissa Barragan, Dana E. Goin and Jennifer Ahern (2019). Firearm and nonfirearm violence after Operation Peacemaker Fellowship in Richmond, California, 1996–2016. *American Journal of Public Health*, 109(11), 1605–1611.

Participants in Operation Peacemaker Fellowship (OPF) in Richmond, California receive person-specific mentorship, cognitive behavioral therapy, internship opportunities, and stipends to to \$1,000 per month for achieving program goals. Researchers modeled the presence and absence of the program with a synthetic control method to predict pre- and post-intervention patterns in violence and found the program was associated with the 55 percent fewer homicides and 43 percent fewer assaults.

From John Jay College Research Advisory Group on Preventing and Reducing Community Violence (2020). *Reducing Violence Without Police: A Review of Research Evidence*. New York, NY: Research and Evaluation Center, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, City University of New York.

50 Butts JA, Roman CG, Bostwick L, Porter JR. Cure violence: a public health model to reduce gun violence. *Annu Rev Public Health*. 2015 Mar 18;36:39-53. doi: 10.1146/annurev-publhealth-031914-122509. Epub 2015 Jan 7. PMID: 25581151.

51 Jessica Anderson and Phillip Jackson, “Safe Streets celebrates a year with no homicides in a South Baltimore area they serve, with hope for rest of the city,” *Baltimore Sun*, June 26, 2021.

52 D’Angelo Cameron, “More Police is Not the Solution to Gun Violence,” *Common Justice*, May 26, 2021, available at: https://blog.commonjustice.org/blog/gun-violence-policing?fbclid=IwAR3R0X4sidEaN7FhM8Dzk-glx_oxL77vF4TIEL9dqHpmuOgrqxyF-C1Odio

Despite evidence that violence interrupters are successful in preventing and intervening in violence, and responsible for significant decreases in homicides, programs continue to be grossly underfunded, and are often undermined by police who see them as a threat to their monopoly on public safety dollars. This remains true in the current climate — **while the Biden administration has committed \$5.3 billion to violence interruption programs in recent legislative proposals, this continues to fall far short of the \$100 billion spent on police every year, or the \$300 billion in American**

Rescue Plan Act funds he is proposing that communities divert to cops.

“There are also significant challenges for program managers working to secure consistent financial and political support for program operations. The pay and benefits for outreach workers are typically low, despite the high stress and high-risk nature of their jobs.”

— JOHN JAY RESEARCH ADVISORY GROUP ON PREVENTING AND REDUCING COMMUNITY VIOLENCE, *REDUCING VIOLENCE WITHOUT POLICE: A REVIEW OF RESEARCH EVIDENCE*⁵³



ARPA FUNDS SHOULD BE USED FOR

States and municipalities should engage in public participatory budgeting processes to determine how ARPA funds should be spent.

When allocating ARPA funds, the following direct supports to people and communities devastated by the coronavirus and economic crisis should be prioritized:

- Housing assistance, rent and mortgage cancellation or deferment;
- Long-term eviction moratoriums to address the looming and potentially deadly and devastating eviction and foreclosure crisis;
- Permanent, quality, accessible housing for all unhoused people;
- Direct cash assistance and income support for unemployed and underemployed people, including undocumented people, disabled people and caretakers;
- Summer youth employment, educational, and recreational programs;
- Equitable, widespread vaccine distribution with a focus on disproportionately impacted communities;
- Health care, vaccination, and medical release for incarcerated people;
- Non-profit and mutual aid programs—note **that the ARPA specifically provides that the funds can be disbursed to provide assistance through non-profits;**
- Resources for teachers and students to ensure safe, enriching, and supportive educational experiences during the pandemic, including appropriate and consensual mental health services as students return to in-person learning;
- Evidence-based violence interruption programs that do NOT involve law enforcement;
- Violence prevention and interruption through quality, accessible, and universal housing, health care, youth programs, education, employment, cash assistance, and income support;
- Safe, accessible, and ecologically sound transportation infrastructure;
- Library expansion and creation and maintenance of public spaces;
- Arts sector relief funding;
- Free universal high-speed broadband for everyone.

⁵³ John Jay College Research Advisory Group on Preventing and Reducing Community Violence (2020). *Reducing Violence Without Police: A Review of Research Evidence*. New York, NY: Research and Evaluation Center, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, City University of New York.

FIVE EVIDENCE-BASED STRATEGIES TO STOP VIOLENCE

drawn from John Jay Research Advisory Group on Preventing and Reducing Community Violence, *Reducing Violence Without Police: A Review of Research Evidence*⁵⁴

1

IMPROVE THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Place-based interventions that are structural, scalable, and sustainable have been shown to reduce violence and many strategies are economically viable. Increasing the prevalence of green space in a neighborhood, improving the quality of neighborhood buildings and housing, and creating public spaces with ample lighting suitable for pedestrian traffic can be cost-effective ways of decreasing community violence.

2

STRENGTHEN ANTI-VIOLENCE NORMS AND PEER RELATIONSHIPS

Programs such as Cure Violence and Advance Peace view violence as a consequence of social norms spread by peer networks and social relationships. Outreach workers, a key part of these interventions, form supportive and confidential relationships with individuals at the highest risk of becoming perpetrators or victims of violence, connecting them with social resources and working to shift their behavior and attitudes toward non-violence. Evaluations suggest these programs may help reduce neighborhood violence.

3

ENGAGE AND SUPPORT YOUTH

Violence prevention and reduction strategies must include a priority on young people, focusing on protective factors as well as risk factors. Strategies that add structure and opportunities for youth have been shown to decrease their involvement in violent crime. Youth employment, job mentorship and training, educational supports, and behavioral interventions can improve youth outcomes and reduce violence. Some of these strategies require relatively costly individualized therapeutic interventions, but others focused on work and school have been associated with cost-efficient reductions in violence.

4

DECRIMINALIZATION AND TREATMENT

Numerous studies show that interventions to reduce harmful substance abuse are associated with lower rates of community violence, and not all strategies involve treatment. One study found that decriminalization reduced sexual assault, robbery, and burglary, another that a dollar spent on (civilian) drug treatment may cut crime by almost \$4, gains that far exceed those of policing without the attendant social costs, and with a host of other social benefits. Violence prevention must include a focus on drug decriminalization, and treatment.

5

MITIGATE FINANCIAL STRESS

Violence is more prevalent where residents face severe and chronic financial stress. Timely and targeted financial assistance can help to reduce rates of violence. Financial stability and economic opportunities help to reduce crime. People experiencing negative income shocks are less inclined to behave violently when they receive timely financial assistance.

54 John Jay College Research Advisory Group on Preventing and Reducing Community Violence (2020). *Reducing Violence Without Police: A Review of Research Evidence*. New York, NY: Research and Evaluation Center, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, City University of New York. The authors of this document do not support the recommendations made in the John Jay report focused on increasing surveillance, involuntary demolition of public housing, partnerships between violence interrupters and law enforcement, mandated treatment or enforced sobriety, "workfare" (imposing work requirements as a condition of receiving social entitlements), or increasing "trust" and legitimacy of systems of policing and punishment.



CONCLUSION

Fear — of being killed, raped, hurt, of having our loved ones harmed or our belongings taken — are the most powerful weapons of pro-police forces. As police budgets and legitimacy are being challenged by movements to defund police and invest in community safety, cops and politicians are predictably pulling out their biggest guns: crime statistics that they create, control, and conflate with threats to our wellbeing.

Rather than focusing on the root causes of increased violence — an unprecedented global pandemic and economic crisis, skyrocketing gun sales, and increased pressure on communities already pushed to the brink of survival, the symptoms are being used to justify pouring more and more resources into policing instead of into community-based safety strategies and ensuring a just recovery.

Yet the stats and studies don't show that cops prevent, stop, or resolve violence. They also don't support the claim that community demands to divest from policing and invest in community safety through campaigns to defund the police are responsible for any increase in violence. They also conveniently fail to account for the violence cops contribute. They certainly don't prove that cops address violence more effectively than other less violent and expensive approaches.

It's time to recognize that decades of pouring more money, resources, and legitimacy into policing in an effort to increase safety have failed — because policing is functioning as it is intended to: to contain, control, and criminalize Black and Brown communities rather than to prevent and reduce violence. It's time to invest in meeting community needs and building non-police community safety strategies. It's time to invest in just recovery.



APPENDIX

A DEEPER DIVE INTO CHALLENGING THE RESEARCH ON POLICE AND CRIME

Research assessing the effect of changes in the *number* of police, or the *concentration/ deployment* of police, on *crime rates* (as opposed to rates of violence) suffer from three fundamental flaws:

→ **MEASUREMENT:** Studies on the effectiveness of police at reducing crime are limited by the fact that crime rates:

1. do not necessarily measure what we care about directly (violence or harm); and
2. are measured by police departments who can — and do — manipulate crime data to make themselves look better.

→ **I. GENERALIZATION:** Researchers don't take two comparable cities and compare rates of violence with two different levels of policing, controlling for all other variables. Studies are conducted in specific communities and locations - like the National Mall in D.C. - and then generalized as if they apply everywhere.

→ **2. FALSE COMPARISON:** The comparison is always less police or more police — not police compared to community-based safety strategies.

For more information on flaws in research on the links between rates of violence and policing, please see “Data Blinders,” in John Jay College Research Advisory Group on Preventing and Reducing Community Violence (2020). *Reducing Violence Without Police: A Review of Research Evidence*. New York, NY: Research and Evaluation Center, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, City University of New York.

Problem 1: Measurement

Using crime statistics to measure changes in violence is fundamentally flawed in three important ways.

1. Crime rates are an *inaccurate* representation of rates of violence because:
 - (a) as noted above, not all crime represents violence; and
 - (b) violence is highly under reported: **less than half of all violent victimizations are reported to police.**
2. Crime rates are *biased* because they are created and reported by police.
3. Crime data are *imprecise* due to measurement error (coding decisions, date and time crimes are recorded, etc.)
4. Crime rates are *volatile*, making differences in time harder to identify.

UNDERREPORTING

First, crime rates do not capture all violence — they only capture crimes that are reported to police. This makes measurement of the effects of policing on crime rates inaccurate — because even if there is an impact on reported crime, we can't say that there is an effect on the majority of violence, which is not reported.

Across most categories, and particularly violent crimes, the majority of crimes go unreported to police and thus are not counted in published and

publicized “crime rates.” Rates vary by crime, but for example:

- The National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) shows that people only formally report about 25% of all of the burglaries that occur.⁵⁵
- Overall less than half of violent victimizations are reported to police according to the BJS Criminal Victimization, 2019 report.⁵⁶
- Three quarters of sexual assault survivors don’t report their assault to police.⁵⁷

There are many reasons a person who experiences violence may not report it to police:

- They fear police violence, derision, or neglect
- They do not think the police can help them
- They fear retribution or social consequences
- They are busy and do not have time to deal with the police
- The crime cannot be solved
- They fear being the target of a criminal investigation themselves
- They know the person who harmed them and don’t want that person to be criminalized.

So if you add cops to a neighborhood and then the crime rate goes down, it is not possible to know whether it’s because violence has actually decreased, or simply because residents are reporting fewer crimes to police. In fact, heavy police presence in low-income communities, communities of color, and migrant communities

may reduce the rate of crimes reported because residents may be reluctant to interact with police due to aggressive and violent police presence.

POLICE CONTROL THE CRIME RATE

Crime rates do not represent objective data. Police departments have broad latitude in recording crime statistics and they have an incentive to show that their increased presence reduces violent crime. **Studies on police and crime are far from controlled scientific experiments — the police control the intervention and the scale used to measure it.** In other words, when cops claim that increased budgets or numbers of cops result in lower rates of crime or violence, they are controlling the measurement of the result they are claiming.

Put another way, police control the numbers and types of homicides and crimes they report to the FBI and the general public, and no one is checking their numbers. Therefore, evidence that when police numbers go up crime rates go down could equally be explained by police reporting higher crime rates to assert their necessity to the community, and reporting lower crime rates when they are being pressured around performance.

The notion that police have their thumb on the scale is not just hypothetical — we know police have and do manipulate crime statistics for political and public relations purposes. For instance, an NYPD report confirmed that the nation’s largest police department systematically underreported crimes.⁵⁸ One of the authors of the report, a retired NYPD officer, stated, **“the (crime) numbers are being gamed, plain and simple, and the numbers are being gamed because the (police district) commanders are under tremendous pressure to make the numbers look good. This is happening all over**

55 Andrew Karmen, *Crime Victims: An Introduction to Victimology*, 7th edition, 2009, Wadsworth Publishing Company, p. 113.

56 Bureau of Justice Statistics, Criminal Victimization, 2019 - Summary, NCJ 255113, available at: https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/cv19_sum.pdf

57 Rachel E. Morgan, Ph.D., and Barbara A. Oudekerk, Ph.D, Criminal Victimization, 2018, Bureau of Justice Statistics, September 2019, NCJ 253043, available at: <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/cv18.pdf>

58 Chris Francescani, “NYPD report confirms manipulation of crime stats,” Reuters, March 9, 2012, available at <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-crime-newyork-statistics-idUSBRE82818620120309>

the city.”⁵⁹ Similarly, an LAPD Captain blew the whistle on her department doing the same.⁶⁰

The most common way cops manipulate crime data is by reclassifying crimes or changing the date the crime is reported to make the statistics line up with a policy or public relations narrative of safer cities and lower crime — or of rising crime in the face of efforts to limit police power or resources.⁶¹ Individual cops and commanders can also affect crime rates by selecting whether to charge someone with a “violent” or non-violent offense, and the degree of severity of the offense.

Another way police departments can affect and reduce crime rates when it suits their interests is to deem criminal complaints “unfounded.” Cops are in sole control of what counts as a “credible” crime report and what does not. If you call the police and report a crime the police may, at their own discretion, deem your report “unfounded” and exclude it from the crime rate. You have no way of knowing if this has happened and no way to appeal if it does. A *ProPublica* investigation identified wide variation in the use of the “unfounded” designation in the case of rape reports across many different jurisdictions.⁶² Scholars refer to the ensuing crime stats as “dirty data” which bias the system and make them unreliable.⁶³

These are not just technical problems of interest to only researchers. These realities dramatically affect how we should interpret and evaluate the studies cited by police and pundits. **Whether they show crime rates going up or down, stats and studies are ultimately wielded as a public relations tool to argue in favor of more**

resources, power, funds and legitimacy for police.

HOMICIDE RATES AND VIOLENT CRIME RATES ARE HIGHLY VOLATILE

Over 60% of the year-to-year variation in homicide rates can be attributed to randomness compared to less than 10% for other more frequent crimes.⁶⁴

Why?

- Homicide is still very rare and the rate at which rare events occur are subject to volatility because they happen infrequently. For instance, if lightning strikes once a year on average, and strikes twice one year, suddenly there is a 100% increase in the rate of lightning strikes — which implies a dramatic increase in the *number* of lightning strikes, when really the number has increased by a relatively small amount.
- Whether an assault becomes a homicide depends on factors beyond the incident itself, including access to healthcare, emergency care, proximity to a hospital, and access to more lethal means of attack. These change over time and location. For instance, for decades there was no trauma center on the South Side of Chicago, making it more likely that shootings would become homicides than in other parts of the city, until local organizers fought to get one.⁶⁵
- The decision to rule a crime a homicide has immense bureaucratic consequences,

59 Chris Francescani, “NYPD report confirms manipulation of crime stats,” Reuters, March 9, 2012, available at <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-crime-newyork-statistics-idUSBRE82818620120309>

60 Matt Hamilton, “LAPD captain accuses department of twisting crime statistics to make city seem safer,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 6, 2017.

61 Ryan Jacobs, “Just like in ‘The Wire,’ real FBI crime stats are ‘joked,’” *Mother Jones*, June 19, 2012, <https://www.motherjones.com/crime-justice/2012/06/fbi-crime-stats-fudged-the-wire-nypd/>

62 Bernice Yeung, Mark Greenblatt, Mark Fahey, and Emily Harris, “Just because a case is cleared doesn’t mean it’s solved,” *ProPublica*, November 15, 2018, <https://www.propublica.org/article/when-it-comes-to-rape-just-because-a-case-is-cleared-does-not-mean-solved>

63 Rashida Richardson, Jason M. Schultz, and Kate Crawford, *Dirty Data, Bad Predictions: How Civil Rights Violations Impact Police Data, Predictive Policing Systems, and Justice*, NYU L. Rev. Online, 2019, 94(15). Available at: <https://www.nyulawreview.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/NYULawReview-94-Richardson-et-al-FIN.pdf>

64 Spelman, W. (2017). The murder mystery: Police effectiveness and homicide. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, 33(4), 859-886.

65 Claire Bushey, “How Chicago Activists Organized To Get An Adult Trauma Center,” April 15, 2016, available at: <https://popularresistance.org/how-chicago-activists-organized-to-get-an-adult-trauma-center/>

meaning these data are likely to be adjusted and reevaluated over time. Statistical forensics of UCR data, the most common source of homicide data, has shown that these data are revised and that the pattern of reporting is consistent with human error or approximation. In other words, the data around homicide are fallible.⁶⁶

Problem 2: Community Selection Bias

The measurement problem alone is enough for us to question the value of studies telling us there is a causal link between police and safety. But, setting those issues aside and assuming the data are pristine, do they justify decisions to spend more on policing or hire more cops?

The answer is a resounding no. The technical term is that these studies do not “generalize” well. The crime rate in each city is a function of social and economic pressures. **Thus, studies from a few cities showing a decrease in violence following an increase in the number of police do not translate to other cities, times or circumstances.** It’s like your friend telling you that they just sold their house in San Francisco for a tidy profit so you should consider selling your house in Topeka. We know that the home price market is highly variable across cities and even within cities, and we would never make such a decision with this type of evidence because it is not appropriate.

Studies demonstrate that most of the fluctuation in crime rates, particularly in violent crime rates, can be explained by a combination of national trends and local measures of resource deprivation.⁶⁷ The best studies that have dealt with this by estimating the relationship between police levels and crime by assessing the impacts of hiring grants have found, at best, mixed results for rates of some types of crimes in some types of cities.⁶⁸ And even these studies do not completely address the larger problem with the research, which is the strong and consistent relationship between residential segregation, income inequality and policing levels.⁶⁹ Cities that apply for or receive the hiring grants studied by researchers are very likely to be cities where income inequality and residential segregation affect both police levels and crime rates.

One study found substantial differences in the trajectories of crime rates across cities explained by community-specific factors.⁷⁰ This work combines decades of research establishing the socioeconomic determinants of crime rates with a procedure to cluster cities and then estimate the long-term trend in homicide rates for demographically and socioeconomically similar cities. This analysis built on the extensive research literature into the community determinants of crime, demonstrating the importance of measures of economic inequality,⁷¹ resource deprivation,⁷² and age of the population.⁷³ Once the researchers applied

66 Maltz, Michael D., and Joseph Targonski. “Making UCR data useful and accessible.” U.S. Department of Justice. NCJ 205171 (2004). Available at: <https://www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/making-ucr-data-useful-and-accessible>; Lynch, James P., and John P. Jarvis. “Missing data and imputation in the uniform crime reports and the effects on national estimates.” *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice* 24, no. 1 (2008): 69-85.; Maltz M (2007) Missing UCR data and divergence of the NCVS and UCR trends. In: Lynch J, Addington L (eds) *Understanding crime statistics: revisiting the divergence of the NCVS and UCR*. Cambridge University Press, UK, pp 269-296; McDowall D, Loftin C (2007) What is convergence, and what do we know about it? In: Lynch J, Addington L (eds) *Understanding crime statistics: revisiting the divergence of the NCVS and UCR*. Cambridge University Press, UK, pp 93-124

67 McCall, Patricia L., Kenneth C. Land, and Karen F. Parker. “Heterogeneity in the rise and decline of city-level homicide rates, 1976-2005: a latent trajectory analysis.” *Social Science Research* 40, no. 1 (2011): 363-378.

68 Worrall, John L., and Tomislav V. Kovandzic. “Police levels and crime rates: An instrumental variables approach.” *Social Science Research* 39, no. 3 (2010): 506-516.

69 Kent, Stephanie L., and Jason T. Carmichael. “Racial residential segregation and social control: A panel study of the variation in police strength across US cities, 1980-2010.” *American Journal of Criminal Justice* 39, no. 2 (2014): 228-249.

70 McCall, Patricia L., Kenneth C. Land, and Karen F. Parker. “Heterogeneity in the rise and decline of city-level homicide rates, 1976-2005: a latent trajectory analysis.” *Social Science Research* 40, no. 1 (2011): 363-378.

71 Blau, Judith R., and Blau, Peter M. “The cost of inequality: Metropolitan structure and violent crime.” *American Sociological Review* 47, no. 1 (1982): 114-129.

72 Land, Kenneth C., McCall, Patricia L., and Cohen, Lawrence E. “Structural covariates of homicide rates: Are there any invariances across time and social space?” *American Journal of Sociology* 95, no. 4 (1990): 922-963.; Land, Kenneth C., McCall, Patricia L., and Cohen, Lawrence E. “Characteristics of US cities with extreme (high or low) crime rates: Results of discriminant analyses of 1960, 1970, and 1980 data.” *Social Indicators Research* 24, no. 3 (1991): 209-231; Lee, Matthew R. “Concentrated poverty, race, and homicide.” *The Sociological Quarterly* 41, no. 2 (2000): 189-206.; Lee, Matthew R., and Tim Slack. “Labor market conditions and violent crime across the metro-nonmetro divide.” *Social Science Research* 37, no. 3 (2008): 753-768.

73 Cohen, Lawrence E., Marcus Felson, and Kenneth C. Land. “Property crime rates in the United States: A macrodynamic analysis, 1947-1977; with ex ante forecasts for the mid-1980s.” *American Journal of Sociology* 86, no. 1 (1980): 90-118.; Phillips, Julie A. “The relationship between age structure and homicide rates in the United States, 1970 to 1999.” *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* 43, no. 3 (2006): 230-260.

this approach, they found that previous research currently being cited in favor of increasing police numbers and budgets to reduce violence significantly overestimated the impact of increased numbers of police on homicide and violent crime rates.

Problem 3: The Wrong Questions

A third flaw of crime stats and studies cited in support of increasing police funding is that they are answering the wrong question. They are focused on the effect of hiring or firing a few police from the police force, or changing the level of police presence in a location.

Demands to defund police are accompanied by demands for deep investments in a multitude of approaches to creating safety in communities, and to replace police with a multitude of options. The studies being cited in support or arguments that we need to increase the number of cops to address crime have **not measured the effect on crime rates when police are replaced by investments in meeting material needs and in community-based non-police safety strategies.**

Studies ask a simple yes or no question: Is the increased presence of police associated with a decrease in violent crime (often over a short period of time like 1 year). This is not the right question a policymaker should ask themselves when faced with an epidemic of violent crime.

The right question should be what is the best way to reduce violence?

In other words, even a statistically precise estimate (which again, these studies are not) of the impact in one or a few cities of adding or subtracting a few police **does not answer the question of what would happen to crime and safety if a city transferred a significant amount of funding from police to safety promoting alternatives like housing, healthcare, and economic security.**

For instance, in King County Washington, when unhoused people were given private hotel rooms to slow the spread of COVID-19, the rate of transmission dramatically slowed, AND:⁷⁴

- Residents felt secure and safe;
- Health, wellness, hygiene, sleep, and mental health of unhoused people improved;
- Conflict within the community decreased dramatically, including 911 calls;
- Exit rates to permanent housing increased.

In other words — safety was greatly increased without increasing the number of police officers, and at a fraction of the cost.

Policy decisions are not about doing X or doing nothing — which is what people citing crime stats and studies are comparing. Policy is about explicit tradeoffs between doing X and doing Y. In the case of defunding the police, Y looks different in response to the specific needs of each community.

When bloated police budgets taking up almost half of cities' resources prevent a community from doing things like providing private and secure individual rooms to homeless people, the policy question is can spending money on policing produce more safety than spending an equivalent amount on the alternative of providing housing.

Once you start looking at the specific proposals of defund campaigns in specific cities, and the work they have done to document the social harms of policing and the needs of their communities that could be met with funds currently being siphoned to policing, you begin to see how important the point of comparison is to evaluating how defunding the police may impact public safety.

74 KOMO News Staff. "Moving homeless people to hotels slowed virus spread in King Co., study finds." *KOMO News*. October 7, 2020. Available at: <https://komonews.com/news/coronavirus/moving-homeless-people-to-hotels-slowed-virus-spread-in-king-co-study-finds>



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