

**Policing, Violence, and Criminal Justice Reform
Fact Sheet
March 2022**

Key facts:

1. **Encounters with law enforcement and involvement in the criminal justice system have harmful effects** for people who are arrested or incarcerated, and also those who have low-level, frequent interactions with officers. These encounters with law enforcement are often disproportionately experienced by communities of color.¹ People endure physical injury, mental anguish, and lose lives in police encounters. Encounters also have less visible negative effects on peoples' and communities' mental health.²
2. **Preventing and reducing violence requires addressing the root causes of violence** – such as economic inequality, lack of job prospects, housing insecurity, and more recently, stressors brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic.³ **Community-based solutions to prevent violence and reduce law enforcement involvement are essential** to creating safer communities and improving people's lives.⁴
3. **Reforms aimed at reducing the punitive and discriminatory nature of the criminal justice system – namely bail reform and progressive prosecutors – have not resulted in an increase in crime.** The recent increases in homicide correlate with markers of social and economic instability⁵ that cannot be resolved through increased policing. While increases in incarceration or law enforcement funding are not generally associated with decreases in crime,⁶ increased law enforcement presence may increase harms communities experience from over-policing⁷ and make it more difficult to fund the economic and community interventions that can decrease crime.

Law enforcement are often the only tool local governments use to promote public safety but policing and involvement in the criminal justice system can be counterproductive to the safety and wellness of communities:

- **Police encounters can cause mental trauma.** A study examining the often unseen injuries of law enforcement-involved killings and excessive use of force, showed that Black participants worried about the experience of police use of force, over five times that of white participants.⁸ Latinx participants worry about law enforcement brutality more than four times that of white participants.⁹
- **More frequent contact with police leads to greater trauma and anxiety.** In a 2014 survey of 1,200 young men in New York City, participants who reported more contact with law enforcement, also reported more symptoms of trauma and anxiety.¹⁰ Further, the severity of these symptoms were tied to the amount of stops they reported, the intrusiveness of the encounters, and their perceptions of fairness in policing.¹¹ Such adverse impacts on mental health are not limited to individuals who are actually sanctioned by law enforcement, but can result from lower-level (in frequency and intrusiveness) contacts with police, which many people of color and individuals in urban areas experience on a regular basis.¹²

- **Police encounters pose a substantial risk of physical harm to young Black men.** In direct terms, law enforcement kill over 1,000 people per year, which is equivalent to 5% of all homicides.¹³ It is estimated that of the people fatally shot by law enforcement, Black Americans are killed at a rate twice as high as white Americans,¹⁴ and a 2019 report found that 1 in every 1,000 Black men between ages 20-35 can expect to be killed by law enforcement.¹⁵
- **Negative experiences with law enforcement have the potential to decrease trust in institutions more broadly and fray community ties.** As a result, community members may become less likely to engage with the healthcare system and other social services institutions, which can lead to untreated mental health issues and other conditions that can contribute to violence.¹⁶

To reduce violence, strategies must address the root causes of violence. And community-based solutions effectively decrease violence without causing the long-term harms associated with policing and criminal justice involvement.

- **While increased police presence has limited or short-term impact on decreasing crime, “fixing the underlying condition” of crime “often has a substantial impact” on decreasing crime.**¹⁷ Underlying conditions of violence generally include housing instability, lack of employment opportunities, and other threats to economic and social cohesion – things that by and large, law enforcement officers and agencies cannot fix.¹⁸
- **Higher pre-pandemic eviction rates are associated with increased violent crime occurring the COVID-19 pandemic.** For instance, cities with the highest average eviction rate preceding the pandemic had the highest increases in homicide during the pandemic. Likewise, cities with the lowest average eviction rate before the pandemic also had the lowest increases in homicides during the pandemic.¹⁹
- **Income inequality is another reliable predictor of crime.**²⁰ For example, cities with the highest income inequality in 2019 had the highest increase in homicides during the pandemic.²¹ Similarly, decreasing inequality by increasing government spending by \$10K per poor person is associated with a 16% decrease in the homicide rate.²²
- **COVID-19 exacerbated pre-existing stressors in many communities – such as income inequality and employment insecurity** – and newly created ones in the form of illness, loss of life, loss of community, and decreased person-to-person interactions. These stressors are reflected in homicide rates. For example, cities in counties with the highest year-to-date death rate from COVID-19 are also experiencing the highest increases in homicide during the pandemic.²³ Importantly, in Black and Latinx communities, which have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, the death rates were highest among working age populations. The death of these individuals not only causes emotional grief, but often leaves families more financially and socially unstable from the loss of a worker and primary caretaker, all of which can contribute to increased crime.²⁴
- **Violence interruption programs constitute one of the most successful approaches to preventing violence.** Across many cities, studies have consistently found that these programs

lead to decreases in homicides, shootings, and other forms of violence.²⁵ They have also been credited with changing community norms, so that young people consider it less acceptable to use violence to resolve conflicts.²⁶ Further, there is evidence that they can be more effective than policing at reducing violence: in a 2015 evaluation of Safe Streets in Baltimore, researchers found that the program had a “stronger effect on shootings than law enforcement approaches.”²⁷

- **Another approach that reduces violence is increasing the presence of community-based non-profits.** Specifically, a study of 263 of the country’s 300 largest cities found that 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.²⁸ Additionally, adding an additional 10 non-profits is likely to be more effective at reducing violence, at a lower cost, and without the risk of violence that the presence of law enforcement can bring.²⁹
- **Public policy strategies that respect people’s dignity and humanity, and provide support for basic necessities, are effective and improve outcomes.** For example, in King County, Washington, when unhoused people were given private hotel rooms to slow the spread of COVID-19, 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; and exit rates to permanent housing increased.³⁰

Increased funding for law enforcement does not lead to lower crime rates or total homicides. Recent criminal justice reforms to the cash bail system, or by progressive prosecutors, are not the cause of increases in crime.

- **There is little evidence that increased incarceration leads to decreased crime.** Overall, data shows that the raw numbers of police have declined over the past five years, and the rate of police officers per 1,000 residents has been dropping for two decades. At the same time, the violent crime rate has also dropped.³¹
- Many cities, including those that increased their law enforcement agency budgets saw increased homicides in recent years. For example, among 12 cities cited as hitting all-time records for homicides in 2021,³² Albuquerque, Baton Rouge, Indianapolis, Louisville, Toledo, and Tucson all increased their spending on police over the past few years.³³
 - **The ten cities with the highest growth in homicides in 2021** (Las Vegas, Richmond, Winston-Salem, Louisville, Virginia Beach, Houston, Little Rock, Indianapolis, Aurora, and Lexington) **have traditional prosecutors, no bail reform, and spend an average of \$2.1 million annually in policing.** Yet, their average number of homicides increased by 35% increase in 2020 and an additional 21% in 2021.³⁴
 - According to the National Police Funding Database, Little Rock, AK had more than twice the number of law enforcement per 1,000 people as other similarly sized cities and Richmond had almost three times.³⁵ Despite such an overrepresentation of police, Richmond’s 2021 homicides were 60% above the five-year pre-pandemic average and Little Rock’s homicide increase was 73% above the five-year pre-pandemic average.³⁶

- **Additionally, recent reforms to the bail system have not resulted in meaningfully different crime rates.** When comparing 2021 homicide rates to 5-year pre-pandemic averages, cities with bail reform have fared slightly better (47% increase versus 51% increase).³⁷ More broadly, studies that compare crime rates before and after implementing bail reform have shown no impact on crime rates or public safety as a result of bail reform.³⁸
- **Similarly, changes in prosecuting approaches due to “progressive prosecutors” have also not resulted in meaningful differences compared to cities with more traditional prosecutors still at the helm.**³⁹ Specifically, from 2020 to 2021, the difference in homicide increases between cities with or without a progressive prosecutor was only 2% (9% and 7%, respectively). When comparing 2021 to a 5-year pre-pandemic average, the difference was only 1% (50% and 49%, respectively).⁴⁰ On the whole, progressive prosecutors exist in similar numbers in cities with above average, average, and below average increases in homicide rates.⁴¹

¹ See *Floyd, et al. v. City of New York, et al.*, 959 F. Supp. 2d 540, 589 (S.D.N.Y. 2013) (“... blacks are likely targeted for stops based on a lesser degree of objectively founded suspicion than whites”); *Davis v. City of New York*, 959 F. Supp. 2d 324, 361 (S.D.N.Y. 2013) (Plaintiffs’ expert “found that the racial composition of NYCHA buildings is a better predictor of trespass enforcement disparities than any racially neutral policy-rationalizing variables, including crime, policing activity, vertical patrols, or socioeconomic conditions.”); LDF Letter to UN High Commissioner for Human Rights re Implementation of Human Rights Council Resolution 43/1 (December 4, 2020) at 4-6 (where data is available, it demonstrates officers stop and search black people more frequently, and with less justification, than other groups), accessible at https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Racism/RES_43_1/NGOsAndOthers/naacp-legal-defense-and-educational-fund-inc.pdf; see also Stanford Open Policing Project Data Findings (Examining traffic stop rates, researchers found “[t]he data show that officers generally stop black drivers at higher rates than white drivers.”), <https://openpolicing.stanford.edu/findings/>.

² Amanda Graham et al., *Race and Worrying About Police Brutality: The Hidden Injuries of Minority Status in America, Victims & Offenders*, 15:5, 549-573 (2020)

³ See, e.g., Charles C. Branas et al., *Citywide cluster randomized trial to restore blighted vacant land and its effects on violence, crime, and fear* 2946 Jan. 26, 2018), (“Blighted and vacant urban land affects people’s perceptions of safety, and their actual, physical safety. Restoration of this land can be an effective and scalable infrastructure intervention for gun violence, crime, and fear in urban neighborhoods”, <https://www.pnas.org/doi/epdf/10.1073/pnas.1718503115>); Urban Institute, *An Evaluation of THRIVE East of the River, Findings from a Guaranteed Income Pilot during the COVID-19 Pandemic* (Feb. 24, 2022) (“Direct income supports (such as cash transfers) can stabilize households during crises and recoveries.”), <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/evaluation-thrive-east-river>; Center for American Progress, *NeighborhoodStat: Strengthening Public Safety Through Community Empowerment* (“Research shows that communities are safer when residents have access to stable jobs, high-quality schools and social services, and clean and vibrant public spaces.”), <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/neighborhoodstat-strengthening-public-safety-community-empowerment/>; Daniel C. Semenza et al., *Eviction and Crime: A Neighborhood Analysis in Philadelphia*, *Crime & Delinquency* 1–26 (2021) (finding rate of eviction associated with homicide, robbery, and burglary in fully controlled models), https://www.researchgate.net/publication/354020149_Eviction_and_Crime_A_Neighborhood_Analysis_in_Philadelphia; Sara Heller, *Summer jobs reduce violence among disadvantaged youth*, *Science* (Dec. 5, 2014), (“assignment to a summer jobs program decreases violence by 43% over 16 months ...”), <https://www.phila.gov/bestpractices/PDF/Science-2014-Heller-1219-23.pdf>.

⁴ See, e.g., Patrick Sharkey et al., *Community and the Crime Decline: The Causal Effect of Local Nonprofits on Violent Crime*, 82 American Sociological Rev. 1214, 1215 (Oct. 25, 2017), accessible at [cy.org/scans/Community-and-the-Crime-Decline-The-Causal-Effect-of-Local-Nonprofits-on-Violent-Crime.pdf](https://www.cy.org/scans/Community-and-the-Crime-Decline-The-Causal-Effect-of-Local-Nonprofits-on-Violent-Crime.pdf) (“[E]very 10 additional nonprofits per 100,000 residents leads to a 9 percent decline in the murder rate, a 6 percent decline in the violent crime rate, and a 4 percent decline in the property crime rate.”)

⁵ See Keshia Moore, Ryan Tom, and Jackie O’Neil, *Descriptive Analysis of Homicide Trends in 61 Major U.S. Cities, 2015-2021*, NAACP LEGAL DEFENSE AND EDUCATIONAL FUND, INC., 9 (2022) (citing data from Princeton’s Eviction Lab which shows cities with the highest increases in homicides during the pandemic also have the highest average eviction rate preceding the pandemic) [“TMI Research”]; see also Heather L. Sipsma et al., *Spending on Social and Public Health Services and Its Association with Homicide in the USA: An Ecological Study*, 7 BMJ Open 1 (Oct. 12, 2017), <https://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/bmjopen/7/10/e016379.full.pdf>.

⁶ TMI Research, *supra* note 5 at 7; Dr. Oliver Roeder, et al., *What Caused the Crime Decline*, Brennan Center for Justice 79 (2015) (“This report demonstrates that when other variables are controlled for, increasing incarceration had a minimal effect on reducing property crime in the 1990s and no effect on violent crime. In the 2000s, increased incarceration had no effect on violent crime and accounted for less than one-hundredth of the decade’s property crime drop.”).

⁷ See e.g. Police Violence: Physical and Mental Health Impacts on Black Americans, Medical News Today, <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/police-violence-physical-and-mental-health-impacts-on-black-americans#Consequences-for-mental-health> (last visited February 28, 2022).

⁸ Amanda Graham et al., *Race and Worrying About Police Brutality: The Hidden Injuries of Minority Status in America*, 15 Victims & Offenders 549, 549 (May 26, 2020), accessible at <https://doi.org/10.1080/15564886.2020.1767252>

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ *Police Violence: Physical and Mental Health Impacts on Black Americans*, Medical News Today, <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/police-violence-physical-and-mental-health-impacts-on-black-americans#Consequences-for-mental-health> (last visited February 28, 2022).

¹¹ Amanda Geller et al., *Aggressive Policing and the Mental Health of Young Urban Men*.104:12, American Journal of Public Health, 2321- 2327(2014). accessible at:<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4232139/pdf/AJPH.2014.302046.pdf>.

¹² *Id.*

¹³ *FastStats: Assault or Homicide*, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Jan. 5, 2022), <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/homicide.htm>.

¹⁴ *Fatal Force*, The Washington Post (Feb. 27, 2022), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/investigations/police-shootings-database/>.

¹⁵ Frank Edwards, Hedwig Lee, and Michael Esposito, *Risk of Being Killed by Police Use of Force in the United States by Age, Race-Ethnicity, and Sex*, 116:34, Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America, 16793 -16798 (2019).

¹⁶ Reginald Young-Drake et al., *A Growing Dilemma: How Police Brutality Affects Mental Health in Black Communities*, The Movement Lawyering Clinic, Howard University School of Law (2021), <https://thurgoodmarshallcenter.howard.edu/sites/tmrc.howard.edu/files/2021-05/A%20Growing%20Dilemma%20-%20How%20Police%20Brutality%20Affects%20Mental%20Health%20in%20the%20Black%20Communities.pdf>.

¹⁷ See *supra* n.3.

¹⁸ *Id.*

¹⁹ TMI Research, *supra* note 5 at 9; see also Humera Lodhi, Hurubie Meko, *In Kansas City, a wave of evictions could push gun violence to new extremes this year* (Sept. 21, 2021) (Evaluating gun violence and eviction rates, finding “of the 10 Jackson County census tracts with the highest numbers of shootings, all but one also had higher than average eviction rates, according to an analysis by The Star of data from the nonprofit Gun Violence Archive and Princeton University’s Eviction Lab.”), <https://www.kansascity.com/news/state/missouri/gun-violence-missouri/article250974854.html#storylink=cpy>.

²⁰ TMI Research, *supra* note 5 at 10.

²¹ *Id.*

²² *Id.*

²³ *Id.*

²⁴ *Id.*

²⁵ See, e.g., Daniel Webster, et al., *Evaluation of Baltimore's Safe Street's Program: Effects on Attitudes, Participants' Experiences, and Gun Violence*, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Health (Jan. 11, 2012), https://www.jhsph.edu/research/centers-and-institutes/center-for-prevention-of-youth-violence/field_reports/2012_01_11.Executive%20SummaryofSafeStreetsEval.pdf; Nancy Ritter, *Ceasefire: A Public Health Approach to Reduce Shootings and Killings*, National Institute of Justice (Oct. 28, 2009) <https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/articles/ceasefire-public-health-approach-reduce-shootings-and-killings>; Wesley G. Skogan, et al., *Evaluation of CeaseFire-Chicago*, Northwestern University (March 19, 2009) http://www.skogan.org/files/Evaluation_of_CeaseFire-Chicago_Main_Report.03-2009.pdf; Cure Violence, *The Evidence of Effectiveness* (Aug. 2021) <https://cvg.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Cure-Violence-Evidence-Summary.pdf>.

²⁶ See Cure Violence, *The Evidence of Effectiveness* (Aug. 2021) <https://cvg.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Cure-Violence-Evidence-Summary.pdf>; Daniel Webster, et al., *Evaluation of Baltimore's Safe Street's Program: Effects on Attitudes, Participants' Experiences, and Gun Violence*, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Health (Jan. 11, 2012), https://www.jhsph.edu/research/centers-and-institutes/center-for-prevention-of-youth-violence/field_reports/2012_01_11.Executive%20SummaryofSafeStreetsEval.pdf.

²⁷ See Cure Violence, *The Evidence of Effectiveness* 20 (Aug. 2021) <https://cvg.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Cure-Violence-Evidence-Summary.pdf>.

²⁸ Sharkey, P., Torrats-Espinosa, G., & Takyar, D. *Community and the crime decline: The causal effect of local nonprofits on violent crime*. 82 *American Sociological Review* 6, 1214-1240 (2017), available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122417736289>.

²⁹ *Id.*

³⁰ 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>

³¹ Simone Weichselbaum and Wendi C. Thomas, *More cops. Is it the answer to fighting crime?* USA Today (Feb. 12, 2019) <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/investigations/2019/02/13/marshall-project-more-cops-dont-mean-less-crime-experts-say/2818056002/>.

³² Bill Hutchinson, *'It's Just Crazy': 12 Major Cities Hit All-Time Homicide Records: "It's Worse Than a War Zone Around Here Lately," Police Officials Said.* ABC News (December 8, 2021) <https://abcnews.go.com/US/12-major-us-cities-top-annual-homicide-records/story?id=81466453>.

³³ Daniel Funke, *Fact Check: No Evidence Defunding Police to Blame for Homicide Increases, Experts Say*, USA Today (January 28, 2022). <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/factcheck/2022/01/28/fact-check-police-funding-not-linked-homicide-spikes-experts-say/9054639002/>

³⁴ TMI Research, *supra* note 5 at 11-14.

³⁵ *Id.*

³⁶ *Id.*

³⁷ TMI Research, *supra* note 5 at 4; see also Tina Herring, *Releasing People Pretrial Doesn't Harm Safety: When These States, Cities, and Counties Began Releasing More People Pre-trial, There Were no Corresponding Waves of Crime*, Prison Policy Initiative (November 17, 2020), <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2020/11/17/pretrial-releases/>.

³⁸ TMI Research, *supra* note 5 at 4-5.

³⁹ For the purposes of research conducted by TMI, "progressive prosecutors" were defined based on support for the following various viewpoints: recognizing that the current criminal justice system is flawed and creates harms, particularly for people of color; recognizing that the office the prosecutor can create an outsized effect for criminal justice reform; a platform that suggests they do not support mass incarceration and that they recognize the need to decarcerate. Additionally, they hold a general belief in: diverting low-level offenses out of the criminal justice system; providing treatment and diversion programs in lieu of incarceration; refusal to prosecute a certain set of crimes as harm reduction (e.g. sex work); enhancing integrity units; and refusing to prosecute cases brought by officers with a history of dishonesty.

⁴⁰ TMI Research, *supra* note 5 at 5-6.

⁴¹ *Id.*