PERSPECTIVES ON COMMUNITY SAFETY FROM BLACK AMERICA

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M4BL

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report aims to showcase the breadth of perspectives of Black people on the issues of policing and public safety in the United States across geographic regions, ages, gender, and political affiliation. The Movement for Black Lives (M4BL) and GenForward[1] collaborated to develop a comprehensive survey measuring Black people's experiences with policing and incarceration, and their feelings about alternatives to these systems. NORC at the University of Chicago administered this survey to a nationally representative sample of Black people across the United States.

The results highlight an alarming reality: Police are often feared by Black communities in crisis and emergency situations, and a large majority of respondents report that they or someone they know have had negative interactions with the police. The data underscore that these fears are not unfounded, as more than three-quarters of the respondents perceive police killings of Black people as a broader systemic issue. Nevertheless, a majority of Black Americans also say they would turn to the police for help, perhaps because of a lack of concrete alternatives. Throughout our findings, Black people in the U.S. consistently expressed a lack of trust and confidence in police. Black Americans also support comprehensive reforms and new initiatives meant to enhance public safety.

Our study found that support for transforming policing and incarceration is strongest when alternatives are specified. We found low support overall when asking about defunding or abolishing the police, with young adults expressing more support and older adults expressing less support. However, when we explicitly asked about alternative, non-policing solutions to public safety, we found consistently large majorities of Black people in support—even when we paired such alternatives with divestment from policing.

Close to 55% of Black people in the U.S. support (**25%** "strongly", **30%** "somewhat") divesting from police departments and putting their *entire* budget toward investments in other areas, such as health care, education, and housing. **Two-thirds of Black people express support** (**31%** "strongly", **36%** "somewhat") for reallocating part of police budgets toward such investments.

Our data suggest there is broad backing for alternatives to traditional policing, and the way these alternatives are presented can significantly influence the level of support they receive. For example, we found that **86% of Black people** support creating a new agency of

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first responders who specialize in de-escalating violence and providing mental-health support and other social services that would take over these responsibilities from police. Similarly, **78%** support a process whereby city officials promote public safety by investing in solutions that do not rely on incarceration.

When we asked about significant reforms in policing and mass incarceration, and investments in community-based social infrastructure, we found supermajority support for divesting from police departments and investing in social services. For example, **88%** of respondents support hiring mental-health professionals as first responders to de-escalate mental-health crises.

Moreover, **82%** of respondents support increased federal funding for states to develop crisis-response systems that do not rely on incarceration. In addition, **80%** support the closing of jails, prisons, or detention facilities that are notorious for human-rights violations. Notably, we found more consistent and larger differences in views about policing reforms across age groups rather than across political parties.

Overall, the data support the urgent need for a radical shift away from our existing carceral systems—policing, jails, and prisons—with a strong call for investments in police alternatives that emphasize preventive measures and mental-health resources. This is not just about reducing harm but proactively building safer and healthier communities.

INTRODUCTION

Systemic racism is still prevalent throughout the United States, so understanding the perspectives of Black Americans on matters of community safety and policing is crucial. This recognition guided the Movement for Black Lives (M4BL) and GenForward in conducting a comprehensive survey of Black individuals focusing specifically on their experiences around public safety and law enforcement.

The data gathered in this survey provide invaluable insights, highlighting the need for a visionary approach to public safety that transcends conventional political divides. Our findings indicate that Black people in the U.S. support alternatives to policing, and that the articulation of alternatives to conventional policing methods is paramount. The data also underline the importance of acknowledging the impact of political affiliation, location, gender, and generational variations in the discourse surrounding public safety.

Assessing and incorporating the perspectives of Black communities into their work ensures that movement organizers and policymakers thoroughly comprehend the issues— and that this understanding will foster the development of more effective and inclusive strategies and solutions.

The data offer not just a snapshot of the current state of affairs, but a roadmap. They tell us not only where we are, but also where we need to go—allowing us to more effectively advocate for policies that truly reflect the needs, aspirations, and experiences of Black communities.

Section 1.1: The Invest/Divest Approach to Public Safety

In the wake of the 2014 Ferguson Uprising, a response to the tragic murder of unarmed Black teenager Michael Brown, M4BL[2] emerged as a visionary force centering social justice and Black liberation. This uprising served as a profound call to action to address deeply ingrained systemic racism and police brutality. M4BL created a national platform and coalition for Black organizations to engage in vital discussions on current political matters and collective impact.

In August 2016, M4BL established the Vision for Black Lives, a comprehensive policy blueprint that aims to guide the post-Ferguson Black liberation movement on a path of accomplishing purposeful action. More than 50 Black-led organizations that are part of the M4BL network, as well as countless allies, have rallied behind the blueprint. Vision for Black Lives encompasses six pillars: End the War on Black People, Political Power, Community Control, Reparations,

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2 *ABOUT US.* (n.d.). M4BL. Retrieved September 30, 2023, from https://m4bl.org/about-us/

Economic Justice, and Invest/Divest. These pillars serve as a call to action and an invitation to Black people everywhere to move toward liberation in all facets of life.

This report centers the Invest/Divest pillar, which was developed to direct demands around reimagining public safety. Invest/Divest demands investments in education, health, and safety for Black people. It also calls for divestment from exploitative forces, including prisons, fossil fuels, police, surveillance, and corporations.

The Invest/Divest framework includes six demands:

1 **A reallocation of funds at the federal, state, and local levels from policing and incarceration to long-term safety strategies,** such as education, local restorative-justice services, and employment programs.

2 **The retroactive decriminalization, immediate release, and record expungement of all drug-related offenses and prostitution, and reparations for the devastating impact of the "war on drugs" and criminalization of prostitution.** This should include a reinvestment of the resulting savings and revenue into restorative services, mental-health services, job programs, and other programs supporting those impacted by the sex and drug trade.

3 **Real, meaningful, and equitable universal health care** that guarantees: proximity to nearby comprehensive health centers; culturally competent services for all people; specific services for queer, gender-nonconforming, and trans people; full bodily autonomy;, full reproductive services; mental health services; paid parental leave; and comprehensive quality child and elder care.

4 **A constitutional right at the state and federal levels to a fully funded education** that includes a clear articulation of the right to: a free education for all,; special protections for queer, gender-nonconforming, and trans students; wraparound services; social workers; free health services (including reproductive bodily autonomy); a curriculum that acknowledges and addresses students' material and cultural needs; physical activity and recreation; high-quality food; free daycare; and freedom from unwarranted search, seizure, or arrest.

5 **A divestment from industrial multinational use of fossil fuels and investment in community-based sustainable-energy solutions.**

6 **A cut in military expenditures and a reallocation of those funds to invest in domestic infrastructure and community well-being.**

The impacts of this organizing have been profound and multifaceted. M4BL has and continues to ignite visionary conversations about the role of policing in society, encouraging people and policymakers alike to imagine community-centric alternatives to public safety.

The BREATHE Act,[3] introduced by M4BL in 2020, offered a policy blueprint for a future in which policing and incarceration are replaced with transformative and evidence-informed community safety strategies. The mayors of major cities vowed to cut police department budgets and some to offer form of defunding or divestment of police budget funds.[4] In 2021, Minneapolis voters were asked whether or not they supported replacing the Minneapolis Police Department with a Department of Public Safety. Of those voting, **44**% voted in favor, illustrating that significant numbers (62,813 voters) of people understand and support alternatives to police.

Since the creation of BREATHE, there have been a number of BREATHE-inspired and aligned federal bills calling for community alternatives to policing, such as the People's Response Act, the Mental Health Justice Act, and the Break the Cycle of Violence Act. These bills demand that Congress respond to community calls for change. At the local level, wins like Treatment Not Trauma in Chicago have shown what's possible. These developments indicate a growing shift in the public and policymakers' openness to alternative approaches to public safety.

Section 1.2: The Invest/Divest Approach—Safety Beyond Policing

The concept of safety beyond policing challenges the traditional frameworks of public safety. It posits that genuine safety is not achieved through punitive measures, but through a community-oriented approach that addresses the root causes of social issues. This framework advocates for investing in resources that nurture community well-being, such as quality education, affordable housing, mental-health services, and job opportunities. By shifting the focus from punitive measures to prevention and rehabilitation, safety beyond policing paves the way for a society in which the well-being of all citizens is prioritized. This paradigm shift celebrates the power of community resilience and the relentless pursuit of a more equitable and just society.

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3 The Breathe Act.Retrieved July 26, 2023, from https://breatheact.org/

4 Balsamo, M. (2020, June 8). "George Floyd protests: What does 'defund the police' mean?" The Sydney Morning Herald. Retrieved July 27, 2023, from https://www.smh.com.au/world/north-america/black-lives-matter-s-big-ask-what-does-defund-the-police-mean-20200608-p550dr.html

AT ITS CORE, THESE INVEST/DIVEST CAMPAIGNS REDEFINE THE CONCEPT OF PUBLIC SAFETY IN THE UNITED STATES.

The framework of safety beyond policing is intrinsically linked to ongoing, decentralized "Defund the Police" campaigns that have been spearheaded by grassroots organizations and collectives nationwide. Defund campaigns align with the Invest/Divest pillar in M4BL's Vision for Black Lives platform. At its core, these campaigns redefine the concept of public safety in the U.S. They envisage a system in which mental-health emergencies are addressed not by police, but by social workers, counselors, and individuals trained in de-escalation tactics. This emphasis on public safety extends to other resources we should all have access to: such as education, housing, health care, and job opportunities.[5-6]

Organizers nationwide have made substantial progress with Invest/Divest approaches. Milwaukee organizers won investments of more than $43 million for housing, more than $30 million for lead remediation using APRA funding, and cuts to the Milwaukee Police Department budget for 25 positions in 2021.[7] Oakland organizers won the reallocation of $18 million to violence-prevention programs and mental-health services from the Oakland Police Department. There are several other victories, all of which are a testament to the power of collective action and of the Invest/Divest framework.

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5 Ray, R. (2020, June 19). "What does 'defund the police' mean and does it have merit?" Brookings Institution. Retrieved June 22, 2023, from https://www.brookings.edu/articles/what-does-defund-the-police-mean-and-does-it-have-merit/

6 Defund the Police: Community Resource Hub. (n.d.). Retrieved July 2, 2023, from https://defundpolice.org/

7 #DefundPolice #FundthePeople #DefendBlackLives The Struggle Continues. (n.d.). Interrupting Criminalization. Retrieved September 30, 2023, from https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5ee39ec764dbd7179cf1243c/t/63e5b524667b1b4ee837907d/1675998505258/The+Struggle+Continues.pdf

Section 1.3: The Radical Tradition of Invest/Divest

The works of Black feminists such as Angela Davis, Mariame Kaba, and others have offered countless frameworks for ending carceral violence and reimagining alternatives to penal systems.[8-9] Across this work is a common question: Can you imagine a world where policing is obsolete and everyone has what they need to thrive?

Through direct actions, grassroots organizing, protests, and social-media campaigns, this movement has raised awareness around the systemic issues plaguing our communities. It has highlighted the need for transformative change, through fostering safer communities that allow Black people to live without constant fear of police violence and discrimination.

Divestment has proven to be a powerful tactic for social and political change. During the 1970s and 1980s, student organizations all across the U.S. started a movement to protest American company investments in the South African apartheid government.[10] Institutions and individuals around the globe divested from companies doing business with South Africa, exerting economic pressure that contributed to the end of apartheid.

Similarly, other campaigns have targeted private prisons, advocating for divestment to highlight the profitable exploitation of incarcerated people. These campaigns aim to challenge the economic underpinnings of mass incarceration, exposing the profiteering that drives the prison industrial complex. Fights against inhumane prison conditions, exemplified by actions to shut down Attica Prison in 1971, created widespread discussions about prison conditions, incarceration, and divestment from punitive incarceration toward social services that still resonate today. These campaigns all underscore the potential power of strategic budget allocation as a tool for achieving political and social change, particularly in the pursuit of Black liberation.

As we reflect upon the past decade of Invest/Divest and the "Defund the Police" campaigns, we must recognize and appreciate the groundwork and foundation laid in the years leading up to this significant era. Considering the activism and efforts that have shaped the past decade, it

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8 #DefundPolice #FundThePeople #DefendBlackLives. (n.d.). Filter. Retrieved July 4, 2023, from https://filtermag.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Defund-Toolkit.pdf

9 Kaba, M. (2020, June 12). "Opinion | Yes, We Mean Literally Abolish the Police." The New York Times. Retrieved June 30, 2023, from https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/12/opinion/sunday/floyd-abolish-defund-police.html

10 Apartheid Divestment Campaigns – Tufts University Prison Divestment. Retrieved July 4, 2023, from https://sites.tufts.edu/prisondivestment/apartheid-divestment-campaigns/

is important to understand the perspectives of Black people in the U.S. It is all too common for these viewpoints to be overlooked—or, when acknowledged, to be painted with a broad and uniform brush. Yet, our activism and scholarship illuminate the fact that the experiences and opinions of Black people are beautifully diverse, varied, and far from monolithic.

Section 1.4: Methodology

This report showcases the breadth of perspectives and voices of Black people in the U.S. across geographic regions, ages, gender, and political affiliation. M4BL and GenForward[11] collaborated to develop a comprehensive survey measuring Black people's experiences with policing and incarceration, and their feelings about alternatives to these systems. NORC (National Opinion Resource Center) at the University of Chicago administered this survey to a nationally representative sample of Black people across the U.S.[12] Data analysis was conducted by GenForward. For additional information about the methodology, see Appendix A.

The sample, or those who took the survey, comprises 3,430 Black Americans.[13] Respondents were drawn from across the U.S. and completed the survey online. The sample is nationally representative, with regional and young-adult oversamples to ensure a detailed, nuanced understanding of Black people's views across regions and generations.[14] In this report, the results are broken down by age: 18–26 (Gen Z), 27–40 (Millennial), 41–64 (Gen X) and 65+ (Baby Boomer);[15] political affiliation (Democrat, Independent, and Republican); gender (Female, Male);[16] and region (Northeast, Midwest, South, and West).[17] The results highlight the rich and diverse experiences, plurality of opinions, and stressors Black Americans face today, as well as the overall impacts of discrimination and racism, no matter the region, age, political affiliation, or gender.

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11 Led by Dr. Cathy J. Cohen at the University of Chicago

12 NORC recruited the sample of respondents and administered the survey questionnaire.

13 A total of 3,430 interviews were conducted March 17 to April 3, 2023, with adults ages 18+ representing the 50 states and the District of Columbia, including completed interviews with 3,430 African American adults, 0 Asian American/Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander adults, 0 Latinx adults, 0 white adults, and 0 adults with other racial and ethnic backgrounds.

14 When reporting results, we use weighting to reflect the overall population. Our oversamples allow us to be more precise when reporting results within regional or age subgroups.

15 Media and survey firms may identify Gen Z as 18–26, Millennials as 27–42, Gen X as 43–58, Baby Boomers as 59–74, and Silent Generation as 75+.

16 Our sample of transgender and nonbinary respondents was too small for us to reliably report results for these groups separately.

17 We use the Census Bureau's definition of these four regions. For a list of states in each region, see "Geographic Levels." Census.gov, October 8, 2021. Retrieved October 9, 2023, from https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/economic-census/guidance-geographies/levels.html#par_textimage_34

BLACK PEOPLE IN AMERICA: NATIONWIDE CONCERNS AND EXPERIENCES WITH POLICE

Section 2.1: Interactions with Law Enforcement

The intersection of race and policing is deeply ingrained in the fabric of America. The history of policing is filled with unsettling patterns of explicit racism, racial profiling, excessive force, and countless lives lost. Police killed more people in 2022 than in any other year for the past decade—and to date, 95% of America's major city police departments kill Black people at a higher rate than white people.[18] Given that law enforcement disproportionately targets Black people in the U.S., it is not surprising that distrust of the police exists in many communities nationwide.[19]

As part of this study, we collected viewpoints about typical interactions with the police, such as calling the police for help or being pulled over. **Half of the respondents (50%)** expressed that they always or sometimes fear contacting the police in crisis or emergency situations; **39%** said they never fear calling the police (Figure 1).

However, **55%** of respondents said they would "always" or "almost always" call the police if they needed help (Figure 2). These statistics suggest the contradiction that many Black communities live with: namely, a fear of contacting police, who are meant to serve and protect without bias, alongside an understanding that there are few alternatives to turn to when in need.

FEAR OF CALLING POLICE IN EMERGENCY OR CRISIS SITUATIONS
Breakdown by Age Group

Legend: No, Never | Yes, Rarely | Yes, Sometimes | Yes, Always

Age Group	No, Never	Yes, Rarely	Yes, Sometimes	Yes, Always
18-26	23%	15%	42%	19%
27-40	27%	13%	41%	18%
41-64	41%	9%	34%	15%
65+	65%	6%	20%	8%
Overall	39%	11%	35%	15%

Source: 2023 GenForward/M4BL Survey

Figure 1

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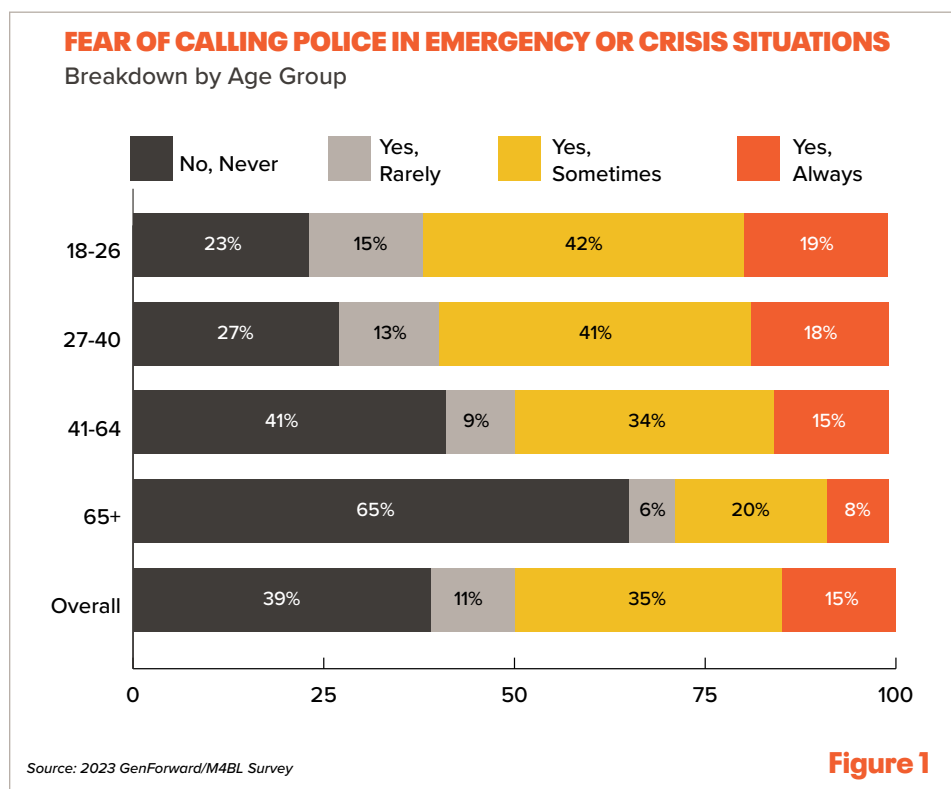
18 2022 Police Violence Report. (n.d.). Retrieved July 4, 2023, from https://policeviolencereport.org/

19 Mapping racial disparities in deaths by police | News. (2020, June 24). Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. Retrieved July 5, 2023, from https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/news/hsph-in-the-news/blacks-whites-police-deaths-disparity/

When we asked respondents whether they would call a mental-health crisis center instead of the police if one was available in their community, they expressed broad openness to this alternative: **92%** said they would use the alternative, with **33%** saying "yes, always" and **59%** saying "yes, depending on the situation."

In addition to covering Black Americans' experiences with calling the police, the survey also covered instances

WOULD YOU CALL THE POLICE FOR HELP?
Breakdown by Age Group

	No, Never	Yes, Rarely	Sometimes	Almost Always	Always
18-26	8	17	34	23	18%
27-40	5%	16%	32%	21%	21%
41-64		12%	30%	20%	36%
65+		5%	14%	28%	51%
Overall	4%	13%	28%	22%	33%

Source: 2023 GenForward/M4BL Survey

Figure 2

when calling the police was weaponized against them.. Viral videos[20] cross social media show instances where police were unjustly called on Black people. Our data indicate that **78%** of respondents (**44%** "often" and **34%** "sometimes") feel that police are used unfairly against Black people, compared to the 5% who said the police are never used unfairly. The virality[21] of these occurrences allows the world to see how Black people are often inappropriately accused of wrongdoing by simply existing. The commonality of Black individuals being unfairly accused of wrongdoing, is a stark reality that has been repeatedly highlighted in deadly incidents, from Emmett Till[22] to George Floyd.[23]

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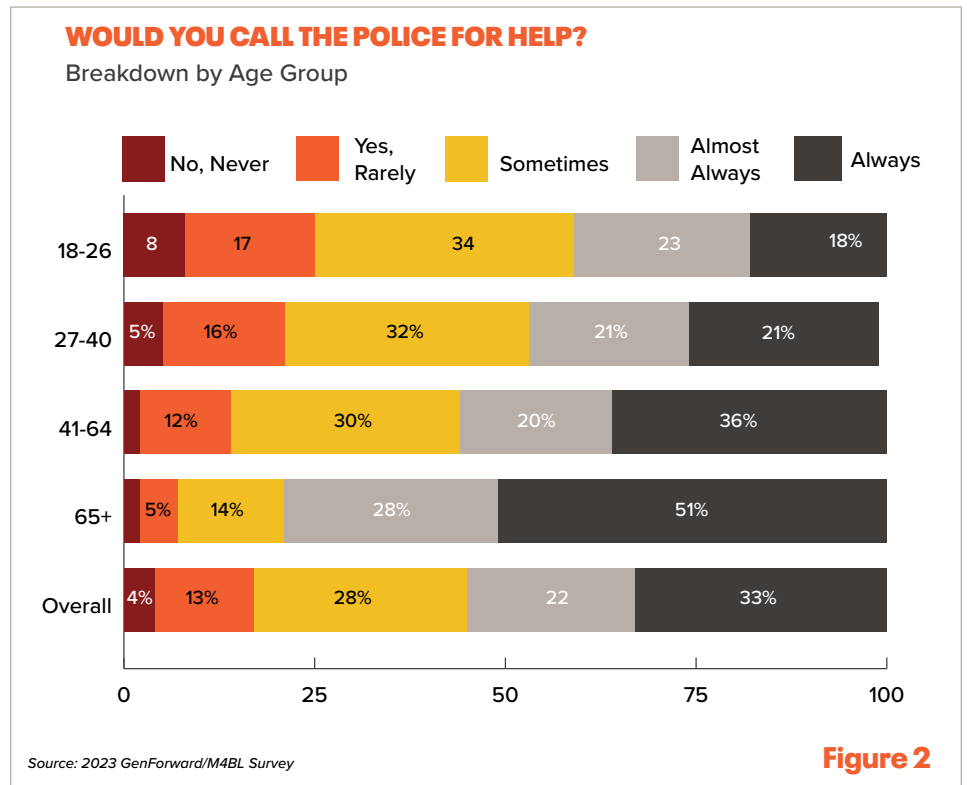
20 Siese, A. (2020, May 27). "White woman fired from her job after she called the cops on a black man in Central Park." CBS News. Retrieved July 4, 2023, from https://www.cbsnews.com/news/central-park-karen-amy-cooper-white-woman-calls-cops-black-man-fired-franklin-templeton/

21 Victor, D. (2018, May 11). "When White People Call the Police on Black People." The New York Times. Retrieved June 23, 2023, from https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/11/us/black-white-police.html

22 The Murder of Emmett Till | Articles and Essays | Civil Rights History Project | Digital Collections. (n.d.). Library of Congress. Retrieved July 4, 2023, from https://www.loc.gov/collections/civil-rights-history-project/articles-and-essays/murder-of-emmett-till/

23 Stein, R. (2020, May 31). "How George Floyd Was Killed in Police Custody." The New York Times. Retrieved July 4, 2023, from https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/31/us/george-floyd-investigation.html

It is also important to note the mass criminalization of people who are neurodivergent, and of people experiencing mental-health crises. Disabled/neurodivergent people comprise just **26%** of the U.S. population but represent up to half of the people killed by police; more than **50%** of the incarcerated adult prison population; up to **85%** of the incarcerated youth population; and a significant number of those incarcerated in medicalized carceral spaces, such as nursing facilities.[24]

Research shows that the potential for police encounters creates a state of apprehension and constant alertness, leading to mental exhaustion that perpetuates a cycle of stress and trauma. This heightened state of awareness and its mental-health impacts have far-reaching consequences, affecting educational attainment, employment opportunities, and overall life quality.[24-26]

The intersection of mental health and police violence demands urgent attention. There are many examples of police violence against individuals in mental distress, such as the murder of Quintonio LeGrier and neighbor Bettie Jones. One study found that LGBTQ+ communities are disproportionately affected by police encounters, and that violent police exposure (e.g., physical violence with a weapon, sexual violence, etc.) is associated with greater odds of current psychological distress and concurrent mental-health issues. Other research has shown that there are often higher rates of mental-health symptoms in neighborhoods or cities where police abuse and killings of unarmed people are more common.[26-28]

The omnipresence of direct and indirect exposure to police violence in the lived experiences of Black Americans influences family structures, mental health, and socioeconomic opportunities. This reality underscores the pressing need for reimagining our approach

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24 Lewis, T. (2020, October 6). "Disability Justice Is an Essential Part of Abolishing Police and Prisons." Medium. Retrieved July 4, 2023, from https://level.medium.com/disability-justice-is-an-essential-part-of-abolishing-police-and-prisons-2b4a019b5730

25 Mental health at work. (2022, September 28). World Health Organization (WHO). Retrieved July 5, 2023, from https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-at-work

26 DeVylder JE, Jun H, Fedina L, et al. "Association of Exposure to Police Violence With Prevalence of Mental Health Symptoms Among Urban Residents in the United States." JAMA Netw Open. 2018;1(7):e184945.

27 DeVylder J, Fedina L, Link B. "Impact of Police Violence on Mental Health: A Theoretical Framework." Am J Public Health. 2020 Nov;110(11):1704–1710.

28 Turner, N. (2022, April 6). We Need to Think Beyond Police in Mental Health Crises. Vera Institute of Justice. Retrieved July 5, 2023, from https://www.vera.org/news/we-need-to-think-beyond-police-in-mental-health-crises

29 Warren PY, Farrell A. "The Environmental Context of Racial Profiling." The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 2009;623:52–63.

to public safety to confront these deeply entrenched injustices. The Invest/Divest pillar emphasizes the crucial need for more mental-health resources and supports. The criminalization of mental illness often results in police being the first responders in situations where they lack the necessary training, tools, and skill sets to handle a mental-health crisis, which often ends up escalating these situations. Redirecting funds toward mental healthcare humanizes individuals with mental illnesses and eliminates unnecessary police intervention, ultimately fostering a safer environment.[27]

Section 2.2: Harassment, Violence, Mistreatment, or Abuse by Police

In our survey, nearly **2 in 5 (39%)** Black men indicate that they have experienced harassment or violence perpetrated by police officers (Figure 3). **1 in 7 (15%)** Black women report similar encounters. The significance of these numbers should be understood exponentially. Black people experience police abuse communally, meaning one doesn't have to be the person directly impacted to be harmed. Among our respondents, **41%** said they knew someone who had experienced harassment or violence at the hands of police. Among Gen Z (18–26), **51%** said they knew someone who had been harassed by or faced violence from the police (Figure 4).

More than half (53%) of Black men in the U.S. have encountered racial profiling—the act of suspecting or targeting a person of a certain race on the basis of the assumed behavior of a racial group, rather than on individual suspicion[28]—by the police. In addition, **69%** of Black people have been stopped by the police (**82% of Black men** and **58% of Black women**). The likelihood of this happening is alarmingly high for Black Americans, who know they run a higher risk of being pulled over, compared to their white counterparts. Stanford Open Policing Project data corroborate this, demonstrating that Black drivers are **20%** more likely to be stopped by police than white drivers.[30]

Regrettably, the lack of transparency in police data nationwide only fuels the mistrust between Black people and law enforcement.[31] The aforementioned statistics underscore the disturbing reality of systemic racism fostered by law-enforcement agencies. It's vital for us to reassess our approach to public safety in light of these findings.

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30 The Stanford Open Policing Project. (n.d.). Retrieved July 4, 2023, from https://openpolicing.stanford.edu/

31 Police Data Transparency Index. (n.d.). Vera Institute. Retrieved July 4, 2023, from https://www.vera.org/research/police-transparency-index

DIRECT EXPERIENCE WITH POLICING & INCARCERATION

Proportion saying they've had each experience | Breakdown by Gender

MALE

Experience	%
Experienced harassment or violence form police	39%
racially profiled by police	53%
stopped by police	82%
arrested by police	45%
convicted of a crime	24%
charged fine or fee for non-criminal offense	33%
Been on parole or probation	21%
been in jail or prison	26%
sexually harassed by police	(4%)

FEMALE

Experience	%
Experienced harassment or violence form police	15%
racially profiled by police	23%
stopped by police	58%
arrested by police	19%
convicted of a crime	8%
charged fine or fee for non-criminal offense	19%
Been on parole or probation	8%
been in jail or prison	11%
sexually harassed by police	3%

Source: 2023 GenForward/M4BL Survey

Figure 3

INDIRECT OR DIRECT EXPERIENCE WITH POLICING & INCARCERATION

Proportion saying they or someone they know have had each experience
Breakdown by Gender

MALE

Experience	%
Experienced harassment or violence form police	67%
racially profiled by police	75%
stopped by police	93%
arrested by police	84%
convicted of a crime	73%
charged fine or fee for non-criminal offense	67%
Been on parole or probation	73%
been in jail or prison	87%
sexually harassed by police	17%

FEMALE

Experience	%
Experienced harassment or violence form police	50%
racially profiled by police	64%
stopped by police	87%
arrested by police	78%
convicted of a crime	65%
charged fine or fee for non-criminal offense	56%
Been on parole or probation	69%
been in jail or prison	81%
sexually harassed by police	13%

Source: 2023 GenForward/M4BL Survey

Figure 4

Section 2.3: Black Families

Among many Black Americans, the pervasive nature of police violence is a threat to the creation of a healthy, thriving family; this violence is often a source of major trauma passed from one generation to the next. Research has shown that Black people face systemic disadvantages in the U.S. throughout their lifespan.[32] The cycle starts at birth; Black women in the U.S. are three to four times more likely to die from pregnancy-related causes than white women. The cycle continues, as Black people often have less education and wealth, and poorer physical and mental-health outcomes—all of which impact longevity. With few laws and policies to radically address and change these disparities, Black Americans have wide gaps in their quality of life, from birth to death.

Policing has profoundly impacted Black families, with effects permeating and dictating many aspects of life, ultimately shaping the trajectory of entire generations. Central to these impacts is the disproportionate targeting of Black people and increased likelihood of police encounters, leading to a vicious cycle of criminalization that continues to reinforce systemic disparities.

PARENTS/CAREGIVERS AFFECTED BY THE CRIMINAL LEGAL SYSTEM
Breakdown by age group

	No	Yes
18-26	62%	36%
27-40	64%	36%
41-64	79%	21%
65+	90%	9%
Overall	74%	26%

Source: 2023 GenForward/M4BL Survey

Figure 5

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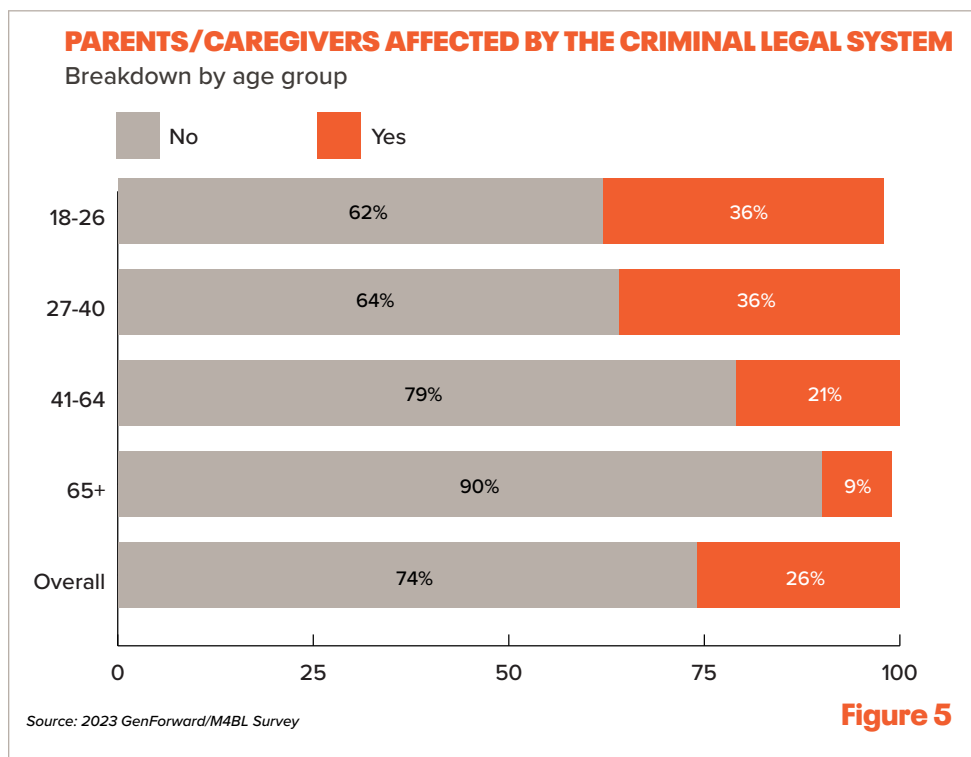
32 The Race Gap: How U.S. systemic racism plays out in Black lives. (n.d.). Reuters. Retrieved July 1, 2023, from https://www.reuters.com/graphics/GLOBAL-RACE/USA/nmopajawjva/#0

AGREEMENT WITH STATEMENTS ON POLICING, INCARCERATION, AND BLACK FAMILIES

Legend: Strongly agree | Somewhat Agree | Neither Agree nor disagree | Somewhat disagree | Strongly disagree

Statement	Strongly agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
The killing of Black people is a threat to building healthy and thriving Black families	55%	22%	15%	4%	
The criminal-legal system unnecessarily intervenes in the lives of Black families	38%	29%	22%	7%	
It feels safe to raise Black children today	10%	13%	23%	24%	29%

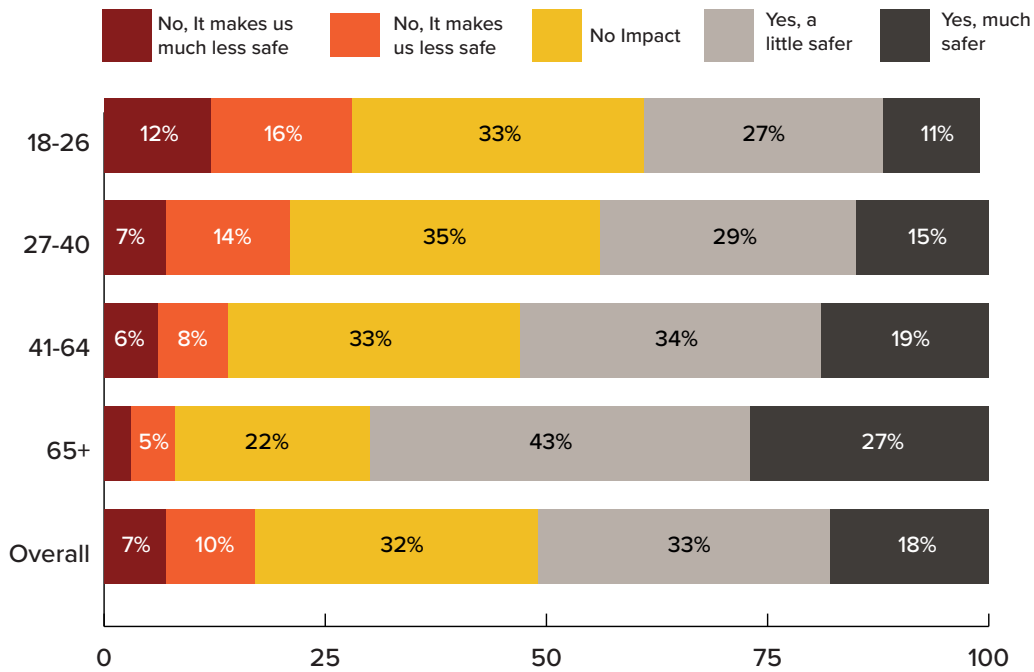*Source: 2023 GenForward/M4BL Survey*

Figure 6

1 in 4 (25%) of survey respondents said they have had a parent or caregiver directly affected by the criminal-legal system. We found that **31%** of Black men have had a parent or caregiver directly affected by the criminal-legal system, compared to **20%** of Black women. When we looked across generations, we found that younger generations were more likely to report having a parent or caregiver directly affected by the criminal-legal system—**36%** of Gen Z and Millennials compared to **9%** of Baby Boomers (Figure 5). Other research has shown that Black families are disproportionately impacted by incarceration.[33] Incarceration disrupts family structures, causing both emotional distress and economic hardship. It is no surprise that these experiences of over-criminalization and police brutality drive racial disparities across all areas of life in the U.S. and negatively impact Black people and their families.

In our study, **77%** (**55%** "strongly" and **22%** "somewhat agree") of respondents believe that the killing of Black people by the police is a threat to building a healthy and thriving family; and **67%** (**38%** "strongly'" and **29%** "somewhat") agree that the criminal-legal system unnecessarily intervenes in the lives of Black people (Figure 6). Thus, it may be no surprise that a majority **(53%)** of Black Americans (**29%** "strongly" and **24%** "somewhat") disagree that it is safe to raise Black children today. This sentiment cuts across generational lines, from Gen Z through Baby Boomers, with broad agreement on the issue of Black deaths being a national and social dilemma.

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33 Black families are disproportionately impacted by… (n.d.). Prison Policy Initiative. Retrieved July 1, 2023, from https://www.prisonpolicy.org/graphs/familyincarcerationbyrace.html

DO YOU BELIEVE THAT HAVING POLICE MAKES US SAFER?
Breakdown by Age Group

Legend:
- No, It makes us much less safe
- No, It makes us less safe
- No Impact
- Yes, a little safer
- Yes, much safer

Age Group	No, much less safe	No, less safe	No Impact	Yes, a little safer	Yes, much safer
18-26	12%	16%	33%	27%	11%
27-40	7%	14%	35%	29%	15%
41-64	6%	8%	33%	34%	19%
65+		5%	22%	43%	27%
Overall	7%	10%	32%	33%	18%

Source: 2023 GenForward/M4BL Survey

Figure 7

TRUST IN POLICE TO DO WHAT'S RIGHT
Breakdown by Age Group

Legend:
- Always
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never
- Don't Know

TRUST IN THE POLICE

Age Group	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
18-26	14%	40%	22%	9%
27-40	15%	49%	22%	8%
41-64	23%	53%	14%	
65+	36%	52%	8%	
Overall	22%	50%	17%	

TRUST IN POLICE IN YOUR LOCAL COMMUNITY

Age Group	Often	Sometimes	Rarely
18-26	18%	37%	26%
27-40	18%	40%	22%
41-64	22%	47%	14%
65+	34%	46%	
Overall	23%	43%	16%
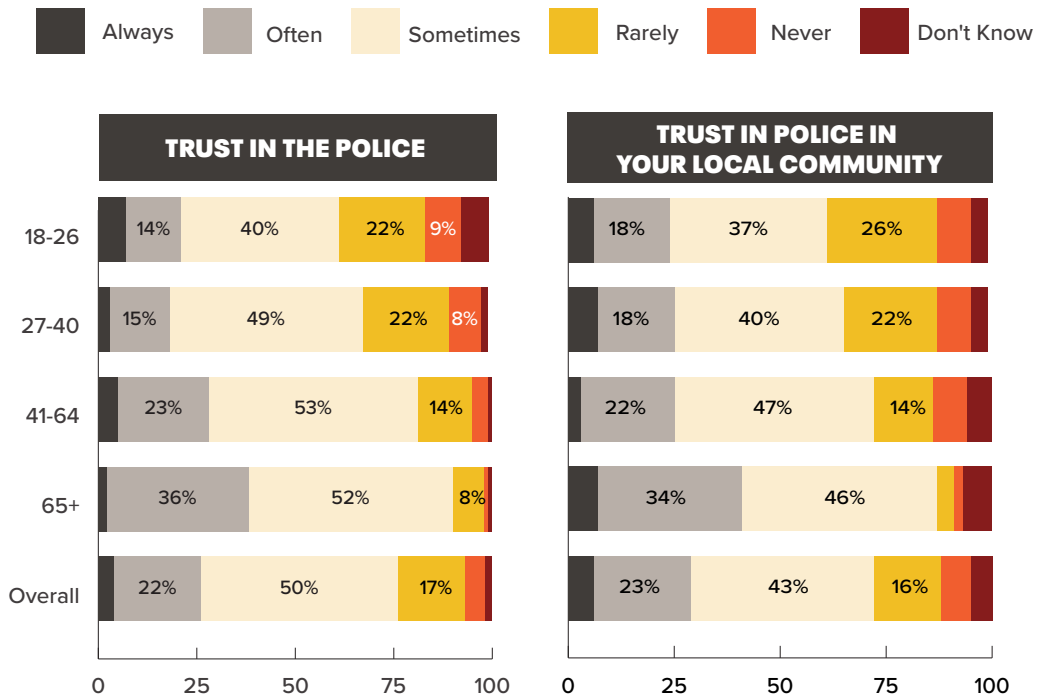
Source: 2023 GenForward/M4BL Survey

Figure 8

Section 2.4: Views on Present-Day Policing

A mere **9%** of Black Americans perceive the police as "very effective" in crime prevention, with **44%** perceiving the police as "somewhat effective" and **just under half (47%)** deeming the police "somewhat" or "very" ineffective. We asked respondents if having more police makes us safer: **18%** said that more police makes us "much safer," and **33%** said "a little safer"; **32%** of respondents see no impact on safety with an increase in the number of police; and **17%** say having more police makes us less safe (**7%** say "much less safe," and **10%** "less safe") (Figure 7).
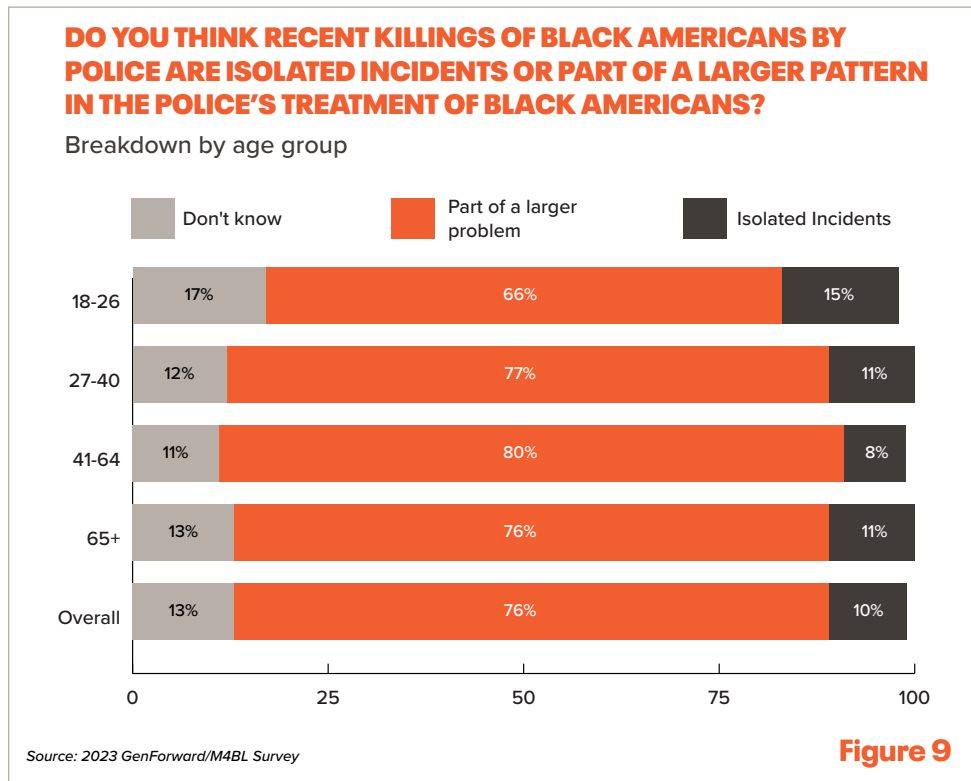
Similarly, the majority of Black people express ambivalence when asked if police can be trusted to do what is right (Figure 8). Just over **a quarter (26%)** said they can trust the police always or often, while **50%** said they sometimes trust the police to do the right thing, and **22%** said they rarely or never trust the police. We also asked a variation of this question that inquired about trust in police in your local community. We found slightly more polarized views, with **29%** saying they always or often trust their local police in your local community., and **23%** saying they rarely or never do. However, the largest proportion (**43%**) still expressed the ambivalent response that they sometimes trust their local police to do what is right.

When we asked respondents about their "level of confidence in the police to provide safety for your community," we continued to find ambivalence and skepticism among Black people. Only **12%** say they are very confident, with **52%** saying they are somewhat confident and **36%** saying they are not confident (**27%** "not very confident" and **9%** "not at all confident"). Gallup polls since the 1990s have found that Black Americans have been much less likely than white Americans to say they have "a great deal" of confidence in the police, with the gap ranging from 24 to 37 percentage points over time.[34-35] These statistics clearly highlight a significant trust deficit between Black people and law enforcement, signaling a need for change.

The state has built a system in which the main instrument for producing safety and safe communities is through policing. Thus, if Black people in the U.S. want safety for their families and communities, they are often forced to rely on police, hoping they can have confidence in them. Our findings underscore the unfortunate reality that these hopes and needs are frequently met with ineffectiveness, harassment, and violence.

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34 Jones J. (2021, July 14). "In U.S., Black Confidence in Police Recovers from 2020 Low [Internet]." Gallup. Retrieved July 1, 2023, from https://news.gallup.com/poll/352304/black-confidence-police-recovers-2020-low.aspx

35 Vitro C, Clark DA, Sherman C, Heitzeg MM, Hicks BM. "Attitudes about police and race in the United States 2020–2021: Mean-level trends and associations with political attitudes, psychiatric problems, and COVID-19 outcomes." PLoS One. 2022 Jul 27;17(7):e0271954. doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0271954. PMID: 35895630; PMCID: PMC9328541.

DO YOU THINK RECENT KILLINGS OF BLACK AMERICANS BY POLICE ARE ISOLATED INCIDENTS OR PART OF A LARGER PATTERN IN THE POLICE'S TREATMENT OF BLACK AMERICANS?

Breakdown by age group

Don't know | Part of a larger problem | Isolated Incidents

Age group	Don't know	Part of a larger problem	Isolated Incidents
18-26	17%	66%	15%
27-40	12%	77%	11%
41-64	11%	80%	8%
65+	13%	76%	11%
Overall	13%	76%	10%

Source: 2023 GenForward/M4BL Survey

Figure 9

In our survey, Black people expressed grave concerns about the severity of police violence and brutality, and recognized it as a systemic problem. A supermajority (**74%**) said that police killings of Black people is a serious problem (**59%** "extremely serious" and **25%** "very serious"). A striking majority (**76%**) perceive killings of Black Americans by police as "part of a larger problem," compared to only **10%** who say they are isolated incidents. This view is relatively consistent across age groups, as Figure 9 shows.

More broadly, **73%** agree that among issues confronted by their community, police harassment and brutality is an extremely important (**43%**) or very important (**30%**) issue.

We also found widespread discontent with accountability for police killings. Among our respondents, **77%** said police charged with the killing of Black people too often get off, compared to only **13%** who said the justice system is fair in these cases and **9%** who said the police can't get a fair trial. These findings underscore that Black people recognize police killings and police brutality as serious and systemic problems in their communities—problems for which police are not held accountable.

Not surprisingly, we also found that awareness of specific incidents of police violence among Black Americans is high. When respondents were asked to match the description of a recent high-profile police killing with the victim's name, more than **70%** answered correctly in each

EVIDENCE SUGGESTS THAT AWARENESS OF POLICE BRUTALITY INCIDENTS LEAD TO DETERIORATING MENTAL HEALTH OUTCOMES FOR THE BLACK COMMUNITY IN THE STATE WHERE THE INCIDENT OCCURRED.

instance (Table 1). It seems that the cases of Michael Brown, George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Tyre Nichols, and Sandra Bland not only deeply affected Black communities nationwide, but there is also evidence to suggest that awareness of such incidents leads to deteriorating mental health outcomes for the Black community in the state where the incident occurred.[36-37]

The recurring media coverage and research findings emphasizing that Black people in the U.S. are more likely to be killed by police than their white counterparts[38] are constant reminders of the devaluation of Black lives by law enforcement and the criminal-legal system. These persistent reminders undoubtedly have a detrimental impact on the mental health and well-being of Black Americans. It's crucial to understand that for each high-profile case that garners media attention, there exist countless untold stories of similar fates.

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36 Bor, J, Venkataramani, AS, Williams, DR, & Tsai, AC (2018). "Police killings and their spillover effects on the mental health of black Americans: a population-based, quasi-experimental study." The Lancet, 392(10144), 302–310.

37 Pazzanese, C. (2021, May 13). "How unjust police killings damage the mental health of Black Americans." Harvard Gazette. Retrieved July 4, 2023, from https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2021/05/how-unjust-police-killings-damage-the-mental-health-of-black-americans/
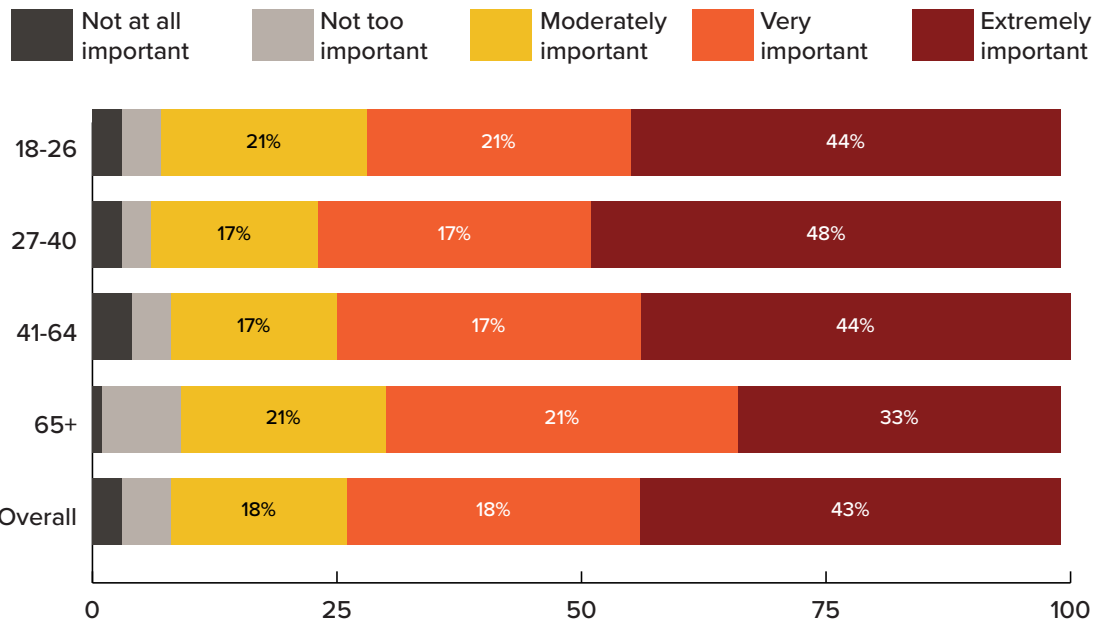
38 Mapping Police Violence Project. (n.d.). Campaign Zero. Retrieved July 4, 2023, from https://mappingpoliceviolence.org/?gclid=Cj0KCQjwnf-kBhCnARIsAFlg493MbMOpDU0qVTu7MIMz2ZEIa3AR8NB3hwFfQZzlkNPC2rUMqB4yjhUaAklaEALw_wcB

Table 1. Recognition of Cases of Police Violence

Police Case	Overall Correct Match
18-year-old unarmed Black man fatally shot by police officer Darren Wilson on August 9, 2014, in Ferguson, Missouri. – Michael Brown	70%
46-year-old unarmed Black man killed by police officer Derek Chauvin while having a knee pressed on his neck on May 25, 2020 in Minneapolis, Minnesota. – George Floyd	88%
26-year-old unarmed Black woman fatally shot by plainclothes police officers in her home on March 13, 2020, in Louisville, Kentucky, as police shot into her apartment using a no-knock warrant. – Breonna Taylor	83%
29-year-old unarmed Black man killed after being brutally beaten by multiple police officers during a traffic stop on January 7, 2023, in Memphis, Tennessee. – Tyre Nichols	72%
28-year-old Black woman found hanged in police custody after being arrested during a traffic stop in July 2015 in Waller County, Texas. – Sandra Bland	82%

WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT THE ISSUES CONFRONTED BY YOUR COMMUNITY, HOW IMPORTANT IS THE ISSUE OF POLICE HARASSMENT AND BRUTALITY?

Breakdown by age group

Legend: Not at all important · Not too important · Moderately important · Very important · Extremely important

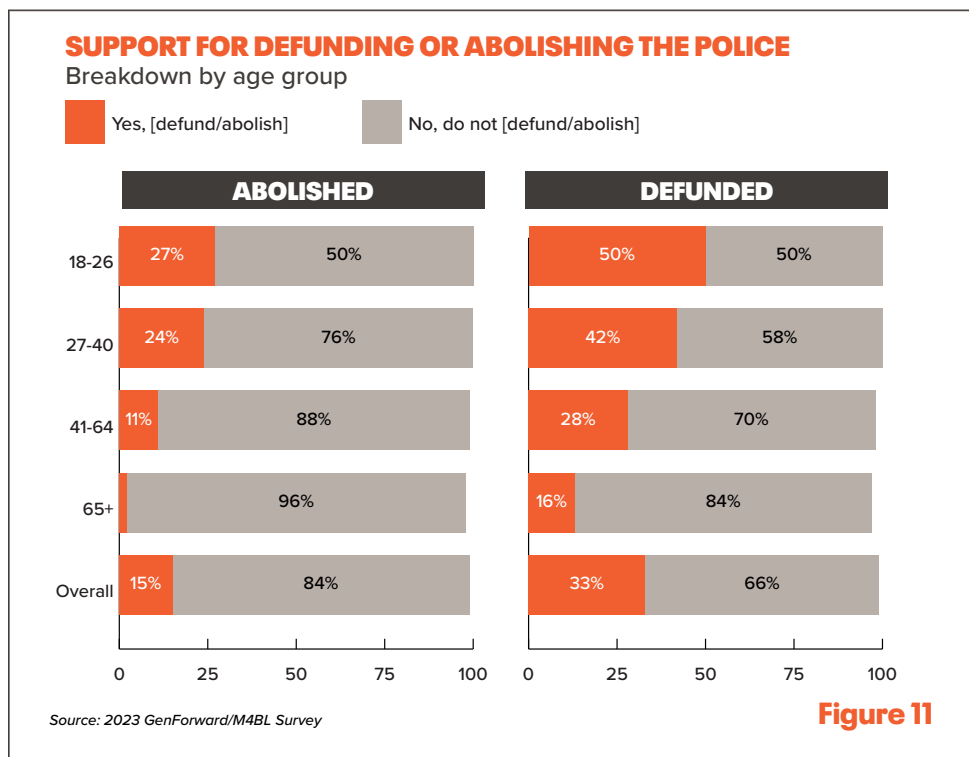| Age group	Moderately important	Very important	Extremely important
18-26	21%	21%	44%
27-40	17%	17%	48%
41-64	17%	17%	44%
65+	21%	21%	33%
Overall	18%	18%	43%

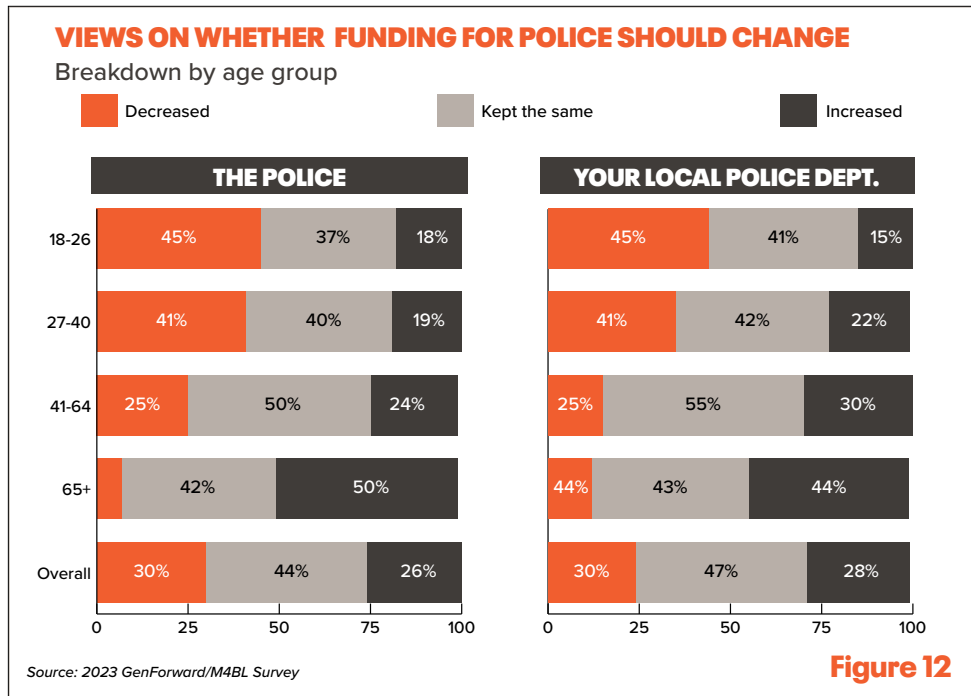*Source: 2023 GenForward/M4BL Survey*

Figure 10

VIEWS ON DEFUNDING THE POLICE, AND POLICE ALTERNATIVES

Section 3.1: Views on Defund

A closer look into Black people's views on defunding the police shine light on possible interventions that can be implemented across the study. In our survey, we found that **1 in 3 (33%)** Black people support defunding the police, and **1 in 6 (15%)** support abolishing the police (Figure 11).

Support for these proposals are strongest among younger generations: **50%** of Gen Z and **42%** of Millennials support defunding the police, and **27%** and **24%** support abolishing the police, respectively. While our survey data show that a subset of Black people in the U.S., primarily younger generations, support defunding and abolishing police, many do not. This may be due to a variety of reasons. Some could be concerned about the potential consequences of defunding, such as an increase in crime rates or slower response times. We can speculate that support may be low due to how normalized policing is for solving crimes and "keeping us safe," as we build concrete alternatives. Some may not know what the alternatives to traditional policing are, which contributes to skepticism.

SUPPORT FOR DEFUNDING OR ABOLISHING THE POLICE
Breakdown by age group

Yes, [defund/abolish]   No, do not [defund/abolish]

	ABOLISHED			DEFUNDED	
18-26	27%	50%		50%	50%
27-40	24%	76%		42%	58%
41-64	11%	88%		28%	70%
65+		96%		16%	84%
Overall	15%	84%		33%	66%

Source: 2023 GenForward/M4BL Survey

Figure 11

VIEWS ON WHETHER FUNDING FOR POLICE SHOULD CHANGE
Breakdown by age group

Decreased | Kept the same | Increased

THE POLICE

	Decreased	Kept the same	Increased
18-26	45%	37%	18%
27-40	41%	40%	19%
41-64	25%	50%	24%
65+		42%	50%
Overall	30%	44%	26%

YOUR LOCAL POLICE DEPT.

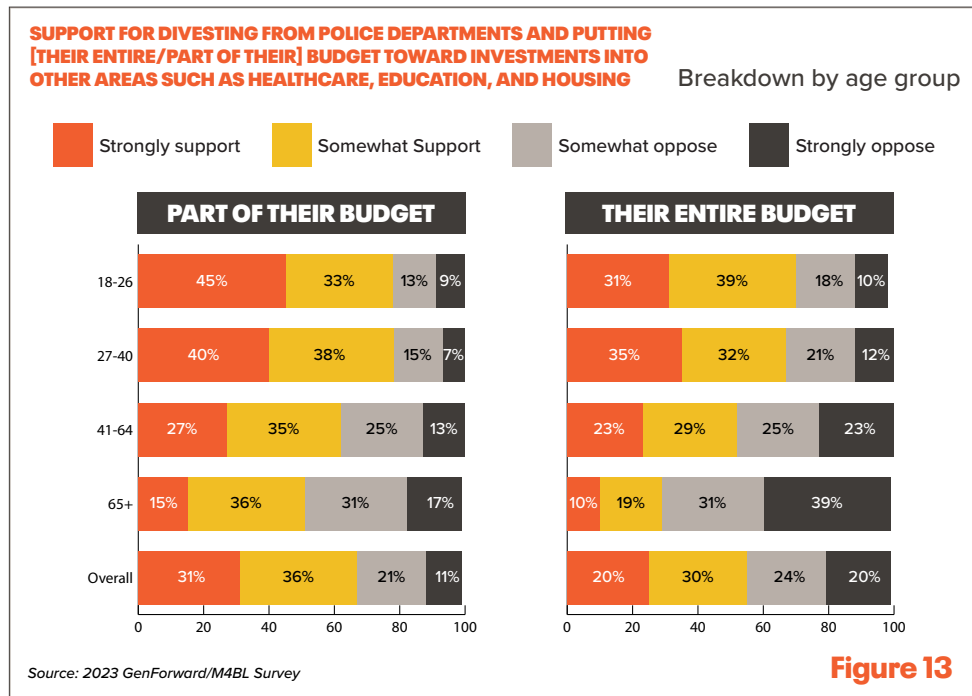|	Decreased	Kept the same	Increased
18-26	45%	41%	15%
27-40	41%	42%	22%
41-64	25%	55%	30%
65+	44%	43%	44%
Overall	30%	47%	28%

Source: 2023 GenForward/M4BL Survey

Figure 12

While proposals to "defund" and "abolish" the police do not elicit widespread support when posed in the abstract, asking more detailed questions about resource allocation yields more nuanced responses. For example, when asked specifically about local police budgets, **1 in 4** (**24%**) Black people say they should be decreased, and **nearly half** (**47%**) say they should be kept the same—while only **28%** advocate increasing local police budgets (Figure 12).

Again, generational differences are significant: just over **2 in 5** of Gen Z respondents believe that their local police budget and police budgets in general should be decreased (**44%** and **45%**, respectively). When we asked a question that specified how police funding would be reallocated, we saw a significant shift in responses. Figure 13 shows responses to a question about divesting from police departments and putting those funds toward other areas, such as health care, education, and housing.

Close to **55%** (**25%** "strongly" and **30%** "somewhat") of Black people support divesting from police departments and putting their entire budget toward investments in other areas, such as health care, education, and housing. **Two-thirds of Black people** (**31%** "strongly" and **36%** "somewhat") express support for reallocating part of police budgets toward such investments.

SUPPORT FOR DIVESTING FROM POLICE DEPARTMENTS AND PUTTING [THEIR ENTIRE/PART OF THEIR] BUDGET TOWARD INVESTMENTS INTO OTHER AREAS SUCH AS HEALTHCARE, EDUCATION, AND HOUSING Breakdown by age group

Strongly support   Somewhat Support   Somewhat oppose   Strongly oppose

PART OF THEIR BUDGET

Age	Strongly support	Somewhat Support	Somewhat oppose	Strongly oppose
18-26	45%	33%	13%	9%
27-40	40%	38%	15%	7%
41-64	27%	35%	25%	13%
65+	15%	36%	31%	17%
Overall	31%	36%	21%	11%

THEIR ENTIRE BUDGET

Age	Strongly support	Somewhat Support	Somewhat oppose	Strongly oppose
18-26	31%	39%	18%	10%
27-40	35%	32%	21%	12%
41-64	23%	29%	25%	23%
65+	10%	19%	31%	39%
Overall	20%	30%	24%	20%

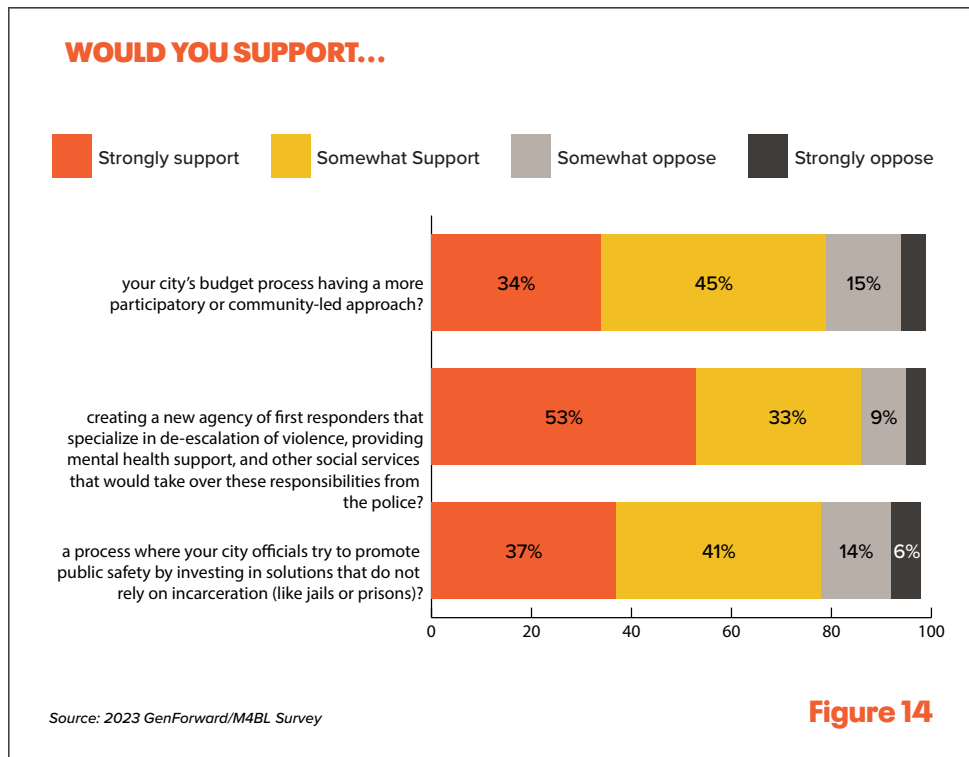*Source: 2023 GenForward/M4BL Survey*   **Figure 13**

Generational differences play a significant role in attitudes toward police budget allocation. Consistent with our other findings, Millennials and Gen Z are more likely to support both full police budget decrease and partial divestment, unlike Gen X and Baby Boomers.

Our data demonstrate that there is broad support for alternatives to policing and divest/ invest frames. The terminology used to discuss these options is of vital importance. When we articulate what the alternatives to traditional policing could be, we witness a significant surge in support. While support for defunding and abolition in the abstract are relatively low and concentrated among younger generations, there is broader and even majority support for a divest/invest framework that specifies the areas that would receive reallocated police funds.

Section 3.2: Views on Alternatives to Policing and Incarceration

In an attempt to see what other forms of alternative public-safety measures Black Americans would support, we asked our respondents about a number of new and currently existing initiatives. We found broad openness to alternative ways of addressing public safety and making city budgets (Figure 14). An overwhelming **86%** (**53%** "strongly" and **33%** "somewhat") of Black people support creating a new agency of first responders specializing in de-escalating violence, and providing mental-health support and other social services that would take over these responsibilities from the police. Moreover, **78%** (**37%** "strongly" and **41%** "somewhat")

WOULD YOU SUPPORT…

Legend: Strongly support | Somewhat Support | Somewhat oppose | Strongly oppose

Question	Strongly support	Somewhat Support	Somewhat oppose
your city's budget process having a more participatory or community-led approach?	34%	45%	15%
creating a new agency of first responders that specialize in de-escalation of violence, providing mental health support, and other social services that would take over these responsibilities from the police?	53%	33%	9%
a process where your city officials try to promote public safety by investing in solutions that do not rely on incarceration (like jails or prisons)?	37%	41%	14% / 6%

Source: 2023 GenForward/M4BL Survey

Figure 14

support city officials promoting public safety by investing in solutions that do not rely on incarceration. Similarly, **79%** (**34%** "strongly" and **45%** "somewhat") support their city's budget process having a more participatory or community-led approach. Participatory budgeting offers a promising model to empower local communities to define their priorities and allocate public funds accordingly.

Repeatedly, these statistics denote the importance of specifically naming what alternatives can look like.

VIEWS ON POLICING AND MASS-INCARCERATION REFORMS

Section 4.1: Policing Reforms; Support for Non-Police Alternatives

Next, we asked respondents about a series of reforms to contemporary practices of policing and incarceration, partially based on various ongoing campaigns across the country. In Table 2, we summarize levels of support, aggregating the proportion who said they would strongly or somewhat support each reform. The data throughout this section are specifically segmented by age, as we saw more generational variation across the data than variation based on gender, region, or political affiliation. Levels of support for reforms were high among all respondents. While we saw significant age differences when asking about support for defunding or abolishing the police, we found much smaller age differences for these proposed reforms, as shown in Table 2.

We found consistently high support for proposals to address public-safety problems outside of institutions of policing and incarceration. A large majority of respondents (**82%**) said they strongly or somewhat supported increasing federal funding for states to develop crisis-response systems that do not rely on incarceration. The vast majority also expressed support (**88%**) for hiring mental-health professionals as non-police first responders to de-escalate mental-health crises. There is substantial support (**88%**) for the initiation of violence interruption initiatives like Ceasefire programs, which aim to promote firearm safety and violence prevention by providing outreach and support services to gangs, groups, and individuals who are at high risk of shooting or being shot.

Majority support for non-police solutions to public safety persist when we frame proposals as involving divestment from police, albeit at lower levels. We found that **72%** of respondents support divesting from police and investing in strengthening social infrastructure, such as housing, education and health care. In the domain of education, **64%** said they supported replacing police in schools with social workers and counselors. Research has indicated that police officers in schools, often called School Resource Officers (SROs), contribute to criminalizing students of color through over-policing and extreme disciplinary action.[39] By removing SROs, we can create safer and less punitive learning environments for students.[40]

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39 Anderson, A.M. ".Removing SROs from Schools: A Step towardJustice and Safety for Students of Color." (n.d.). Retrieved July 3, 2023, from https://auontaianderson.medium.com/removing-sros-from-schools-a-step-towards-justice-and-safety-for-students-of-color-c8786952a024

40 How to Advocate for School Resource Officer Removal. (n.d.). ACLU of Washington. Retrieved July 4, 2023, from https://

More broadly, we found high support for investments to address poverty and trauma. For example, an overwhelming majority (**82%**) of respondents favor investing in housing security programs, such as community land trusts and permanent housing for individuals experiencing homelessness. Similarly, 89% expressed support for investing in community organizations that address local safety needs. When it comes to supports for youth and families, 90% support the establishment of resources like school counselors, trauma-informed practices,[41] youth employment, and extracurricular programs.

These findings underscore that proposals for non-police alternatives to provide public safety and investments to address the root causes of crime and violence are broadly popular among Black Americans.

Table 2: Support for policing reforms[42]					
Proposed Reform	**Overall**	**By Age**			
		18-26	**27-40**	**41-64**	**65+**
Hiring mental-health professionals as non-police first responders to de-escalate mental-health crises	**88%**	**83%**	**88%**	**91%**	**88%**
Divesting from police and investing in strengthening social infrastructure, such as housing, education, and health care	**72%**	**75%**	**78%**	**71%**	**63%**
Increasing federal funding for states to establish crisis response that does not rely on incarceration and putting people in jails and prisons	**82%**	**75%**	**83%**	**87%**	**79%**
Attempting to reduce high rates of gang and youth violence by initiating violence interruption programs, such as the Ceasefire program	**88%**	**76%**	**86%**	**92%**	**91%**

www.aclu-wa.org/pages/how-advocate-school-resource-officer-removal

41 SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma Informed Approach. (2014 July). SAMHSA's Trauma and Justice Strategic Initiative. Retrieved July 1, 2023, from https://ncsacw.acf.hhs.gov/userfiles/files/SAMHSA_Trauma.pdf

42 This table shows aggregate levels of support, combining the proportion of respondents who said they "strongly support" or "somewhat support" each reform.

Table 2: Support for policing reforms[42]					
Proposed Reform	Overall	By Age			
		18-26	27-40	41-64	65+
Investing in housing security programs, such as community land trusts and permanent housing for individuals experiencing homelessness	87%	75%	87%	91%	92%
Supports for youth and families, such as school-based counselors, trauma-informed practices, youth jobs, and out-of-school enrichment programs	90%	79%	90%	93%	93%
Replacing police in schools with social workers and counselors	64%	63%	70%	63%	55%
Investing in community organizations that address local safety needs	89%	76%	89%	93%	92%

Section 4.2: Mass-Incarceration Reform

Our survey also asked about radical reforms addressing mass incarceration. The U.S. has some of the highest rates of people incarcerated globally, with about two million Americans in prison.[43-44] According to the Vera Institute, the U.S. incarceration rate increased drastically between 1977 and 2000, which has disproportionately affected Black people, Native Americans, immigrants, and other racial and ethnic minorities. This year, 2023, marks the fiftieth year of the U.S. prison population surge—and today, more than five million people are under criminal-legal system supervision.[45-46]

In Table 3, we summarize levels of support, aggregating the proportion who said they would strongly or somewhat support each reform. We found majority support among Black Americans for proposals that would dramatically reduce the severity of incarceration. Notably, **63%** support releasing everyone serving time for nonviolent offenses. An even larger majority (**73%**) support enabling expanded use of parole and pardons to shorten or eliminate prison sentences.

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43 Highest to Lowest – Prison Population Total. (n.d.). World Prison Brief. Retrieved July 4, 2023, from https://www.prisonstudies.org/highest-to-lowest/prison-population-total?field_region_taxonomy_tid=All

44 Reducing Incarceration. (n.d.). Vera Institute. Retrieved July 4, 2023, from https://www.vera.org/ending-mass-incarceration/reducing-incarceration?ms=awar_comm_all_grant_BS22_ctr_M1&utm_source=grant&utm_medium=awar&utm_campaign=all_M1&gclid=Cj0KCQjwnf-kBhCnARIsAFlg492004

45 Kluckow, R. & Zeng, Z. (2022). Correctional populations of the United States. Bureau of Justice Statistics. Retrieved July 4, 2023, from https://bjs.ojp.gov/document/cpus21st.pdf

46 The Sentencing Project. Retrieved July 4, 2023, from https://www.sentencingproject.org/app/uploads/2023/01/Mass-Incarceration-Trends.pdf

The majority also support ending various policies that enable long or harsh prison sentences, including "truth in sentencing laws" (**66%**), "three strikes" policies (**60%**), "tough on crime" sentencing (**63%**), and the death penalty (**54%**).

We found supermajority support for proposals to redress the harms caused by the "war on drugs," which has been a major contributor to mass incarceration. Our data show that **77%** of Black Americans support ending laws that make drug possession a criminal act, and investing in community rehabilitation programs. A striking **82%** support removing criminal records for those with cannabis convictions, and **78%** support reparations for those subject to harsh prison terms as a result of the war on drugs.

There is also support among our respondents for reforms to redress the financial harms of incarceration. A slight majority (**53%**) support eliminating cash bonds. Just under **two-thirds** (**66%**) support ending practices such as forcing prisoners to fight fires or clean up debris for less than a dollar an hour.

We also asked questions about addressing the "collateral consequences" of incarceration, which affect the social, economic, and political lives of individuals after their imprisonment. Levels of support for these reforms are summarized in Table 4. We generally find large majorities in support of policies to eliminate these collateral consequences. For example, **69%** of Black people support "Ban the Box" reforms that prohibit questions about criminal records on applications, such as those for employment, housing, and college admissions. Even larger proportions of Black Americans support ending post-imprisonment limits on access to housing and jobs (**83%**), providing legal protections for the formerly incarcerated when they face discrimination in employment and housing (**85%**), and restoring voting rights to those with prior convictions (**87%**).

Table 3: Support for reforms of sentencing, fines, and other carceral practices[47]					
Proposed Reform	**Overall**	**By Age**			
		18-26	**27-40**	**41-64**	**65+**
Releasing everyone serving time for nonviolent offenses	**63%**	**65%**	**68%**	**60%**	**58%**
Making it easier to shorten or eliminate prison sentences through expanded use of parole and pardons	**73%**	**71%**	**76%**	**75%**	**66%**
Abolishing "truth in sentencing" laws that require incarcerated people to serve a substantial portion of their sentence before release	**66%**	**65%**	**67%**	**65%**	**67%**
Ending "three strikes" policies that require significantly harsher punishments for those with repeat offenses	**60%**	**58%**	**62%**	**60%**	**60%**
Abolishing "tough on crime" sentencing	**63%**	**65%**	**71%**	**62%**	**49%**
Abolishing the death penalty	**54%**	**59%**	**58%**	**50%**	**56%**
Ending laws that make drug possession a criminal act and investing in community rehabilitation programs	**77%**	**74%**	**81%**	**77%**	**73%**
Removing criminal records for those with cannabis convictions	**82%**	**75%**	**85%**	**83%**	**82%**
Reparations for those who have been harmed by the "war on drugs" through harsh prison terms[48]	**78%**	**77%**	**81%**	**79%**	**72%**
Eliminating cash bonds, or the fees and fines individuals must pay to be released from jail after being charged with a crime	**53%**	**59%**	**58%**	**49%**	**50%**
Ending practices such as forcing prisoners to fight fires or clean up debris for less than a dollar an hour, and similar forms of slavery in legal punishment	**66%**	**70%**	**73%**	**64%**	**57%**

47 This table shows aggregate levels of support, combining the proportion of respondents who said they "strongly support" or "somewhat support" each reform.

48 In this question, we provided a brief definition of reparations: "Reparations seek to end harmful practices and make amends through formal apologies and policies such as cash payments, educational benefits, or rehabilitation programs."

Table 4: Support for reforms addressing the collateral consequences of incarceration[49]					
Proposed Reform	**Overall**	**By Age**			
		18-26	**27-40**	**41-64**	**65+**
Eliminating the question asking if a person has a criminal record on applications like those for employment, housing, and college admissions ("Ban the Box")	**69%**	**70%**	**71%**	**70%**	**60%**
Ending restrictive policies that continue to penalize people long after they have served their sentence in prison, such as limiting their access to housing and jobs	**83%**	**75%**	**85%**	**86%**	**80%**
Providing legal protections for formerly incarcerated individuals when they face discrimination in employment and housing	**85%**	**77%**	**84%**	**88%**	**85%**
Restoring voting rights to those with prior convictions	**87%**	**77%**	**85%**	**91%**	**92%**

Section 4.3: Closing or Reducing the Number of Prisons

We further asked respondents about their support for initiatives to close carceral facilities. Our findings from these questions are summarized in Table 5. We found that 80% support the closing of jails, prisons, or detention facilities notorious for human-rights violations, and 72% support closing those facilities that are vacant. We further found that 61% support closing all private correctional facilities, and 57% support ending the construction of new jails or prisons altogether.

These findings collectively suggest a robust demand for comprehensive and humane interventions in the criminal-legal system. These results may be a reflection of the increasing public awareness and understanding of carceral systems. With support for measures such as closing jails, prisons, and detention facilities known for human-rights violations, it is evident that Black people recognize the need for dramatic changes to the system.

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49 This table shows aggregate levels of support, combining the proportion of respondents who said they "strongly support" or "somewhat support" each reform.

Table 5: Support for reforms to close carceral facilities[50]					
Proposed Reform	Overall	By Age			
		18-26	27-40	41-64	65+
Closing jails, prisons, or detention facilities that are mostly vacant	72%	64%	75%	74%	72%
Closing jails, prisons, or detention facilities with a history of human-rights abuse	80%	74%	81%	82%	79%
Ending the construction of new jails or prisons	57%	59%	66%	55%	46%
Closing all private jails, prisons, and detention facilities	61%	62%	68%	58%	54%

The data underscore a critical narrative: the urgent need to divest from our existing policing and incarceration systems and channel investments toward sustainable alternatives. Black people in the U.S. express overwhelming support for proposals for alternative policies and systems that emphasize community safety, preventive measures, restorative justice, mental-health resources, and an improved standard of living. The Bureau of Justice Statistics reports that the U.S. annually allocates $81 billion to mass incarceration, which is potentially underestimated (other approximations suggest $182 billion). Given this substantial investment in mass incarceration, one might assume that there's a parallel commitment toward supporting individuals post-release or initiatives to enhance public safety, as well as prevent and reduce crime, but this is not the reality.[51-52]

As we work to end mass incarceration and the caging of human beings, we must create pathways for people to reintegrate into society, including access to mental-health services, education, and job opportunities. Investing in such initiatives ensures that those released from

50 This table shows aggregate levels of support, combining the proportion of respondents who said they "strongly support" or "somewhat support" each reform.

51 Kuhn, C & Murrow, ER. (2021, April 7). "The U.S. spends billions to lock people up, but very little to help them once they're released." PBS. Retrieved July 4, 2023, from https://www.pbs.org/newshour/economy/the-u-s-spends-billions-to-lock-people-up-but-very-little-to-help-them-once-theyre-released

52 "Mass Incarceration Costs $182 Billion Every Year, Without Adding Much to Public Safety." (2017, June 2). Equal Justice Initiative. Retrieved July 4, 2023, from https://eji.org/news/mass-incarceration-costs-182-billion-annually/

incarceration can live productive lives rather than continue to be marginalized and criminalized. These data points demonstrate that Black people believe more prisons and police are not the answer to addressing public-safety needs, and that our current system is designed to fail.

Section 4.4: Invest and Divest Messaging

To better examine how to build support for invest/divest campaigns, we tested four messages that argue for the necessity of such campaigns. As we discussed in Section 1.1, the invest/ divest framework emphasizes both investment in areas such as education, health, housing, and other community safety measures to improve the well-being of Black people, and divestment from carceral policies and programs that harm Black people. This type of carceral divestment and shrinkage will gradually reduce carceral and punitive entities like jails, prisons, biased surveillance,[53-54] and policing.

Each participant in our sample was randomly assigned to a group and shown one of four messages. We framed each message as coming from national organizations, and then told respondents that these national organizations "argue that we should divest from policing and invest in non-policing alternatives to address public-safety issues." We asked respondents about their level of agreement with this invest/divest position (Table 6), their level of support for an invest/divest campaign in their local community (Table 7), and whether they would sign a petition supporting such a campaign (Table 8). Below are the four messages:

Message 1: Ending traditional public-safety approaches: *To make our communities safer, our public-safety approach must move away from punishment, incarceration, and isolation, and toward repairing harm, ensuring rehabilitation, and improving conditions in poor and working-class communities.*

Message 2: Promoting alternatives to policing: *To make our communities safer, we should invest in unarmed and trauma-informed professionals instead of police, to engage in homelessness outreach, mental-health crisis response, violence de-escalation, and traffic-violation incidents.*

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53 Crockford, K. (2020, June 16). "How is Face Recognition Surveillance Technology Racist?" American Civil Liberties Union. Retrieved June 24, 2023, from https://www.aclu.org/news/privacy-technology/how-is-face-recognition-surveillance-technology-racist

54 Friedersdorf, C & Jeong, S. (2018, May 23). "Amazon's Surveillance Technology Is Just the Beginning." The Atlantic. Retrieved July 4, 2023, from https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2018/05/the-undemocratic-spread-of-big-brother/560999/

Message 3: Expanding social welfare: *Our communities would be safer if we invested more resources in people so they have good jobs, education, a living wage, and universal health care.*

Message 4: Naming harms of policing: *Policing does not make our communities safer, and instead harms Black and brown people through harassment and racial profiling, police killings, violence with impunity, and imprisonment.*

We first asked respondents if they agreed with the stated invest/divest position. In Table 6, we report the proportion of respondents who said that they "strongly" or "somewhat" agreed.[55] Respondents who saw Message 2 (alternatives to police) expressed the highest level of agreement, but differences in overall agreement were not large (or statistically significant) across the four messages. Across all four messages, Baby Boomers registered the lowest agreement compared to other generations (Table 6). Gen X respondents had the second-lowest level of agreement across messages, even though Gen X had lower confidence about the police's ability to prevent crime than Boomers or Gen Z.

Table 6. Message Testing for Invest/Divest: "These national organizations argue that we should divest from policing and invest in non-policing alternatives to address public-safety issues. Do you agree or disagree with this position?"

Response	Overall	By Age				By political affiliation		
		18-26	27-40	41-64	65+	Dem	Ind	Rep
Message 1: Change public-safety approach	53%	64%	75%	74%	72%	51%	37%	59%
Message 2: Alternatives to police	56%	74%	81%	82%	79%	60%	45%	47%
Message 3: Expand social welfare	50%	59%	66%	55%	46%	52%	41%	58%
Message 4: Harms of policing	51%	62%	68%	58%	54%	49%	64%	44%

55 However, we do not include those who said they "neither agree nor disagree," "somewhat disagree," or "strongly disagree."

While we found some differences across political affiliation, we note that these were less pronounced than differences by age. Among Black Democrats, support was highest for those seeing Message 2 (alternatives to policing). Among Black Independents, support was highest among those seeing Message 4 (harms of policing). Among Black Republicans, support was highest for those seeing Messages 1 (change public-safety approach) and 3 (expand social welfare). Notably, Republicans who saw these messages expressed higher agreement with the position than Democrats or Independents.

We then asked participants if they would support a national campaign to divest from policing and invest in non-policing alternatives in their local community. In Table 7, we report the proportion of respondents who said "yes, definitely" or "yes, probably."[56] As with the previous question, respondents who saw Message 2 (alternatives to police) reported the highest level of support, but the differences were not very large across messages. Once again, support was lowest among Baby Boomers and second-lowest among Gen X across all messages.

Table 7. "Would you support a campaign to divest from policing and invest in non-policing alternatives in your local community?"								
Response	**Overall**	**By Age**				**By political affiliation**		
		18-26	**27-40**	**41-64**	**65+**	**Dem**	**Ind**	**Rep**
Message 1: Change public-safety approach	38%	40%	55%	37%	12%	36%	46%	33%
Message 2: Alternatives to police	46%	46%	49%	45%	43%	53%	38%	13%
Message 3: Expand social welfare	40%	42%	55%	36%	31%	40%	42%	41%
Message 4: Harms of policing	44%	53%	50%	43%	23%	43%	44%	31%

Finally, we asked respondents if they would add their name to a petition supporting such a campaign. In Table 8, we report the proportion of respondents who said "yes." These findings shed light on the types of campaigns for which Black people are willing to extend resources, time, and energy. Among respondents, **54%** who had seen either Message 2 (alternatives

56 This excludes respondents who said "I am not sure," "No, probably not," or, "No, definitely not."

to police) or Message 3 (expand social welfare) expressed readiness to sign a petition for an invest/divest campaign.

Table 8. "Will you add your name to a petition supporting this campaign?"									
Response	Overall	By Age				By political affiliation		
		18-26	27-40	41-64	65+	Dem	Ind	Rep
Message 1: Change public-safety approach	47%	49%	50%	47%	42%	50%	37%	43%
Message 2: Alternatives to police	54%	60%	55%	51%	55%	59%	40%	45%
Message 3: Expand social welfare	54%	47%	53%	54%	61%	56%	50%	51%
Message 4: Harms of policing	50%	51%	55%	54%	33%	53%	43%	41%

We generally find that support for invest/divest campaigns varies more by age than by political affiliation. This suggests that the traditional boundaries between Democrats, Republicans, and Independents are more porous among Black Americans when it comes to issues of policing and incarceration. Black Republicans, we find, may be more open to rethinking policing and incarceration than their political affiliation alone may suggest. Given our findings about age differences being more pronounced, we suspect that messaging on invest/divest campaigns may be more effective if targeted to generational cohorts rather than framed in ideological or partisan terms. That is, messaging around invest/divest strategies may be more effective when employing values, cultural signifiers, and a voice that authentically speaks to the distinct experiences and worldviews of generational cohorts.

CONCLUSION

Our work reveals that there is undeniable support among Black people for alternatives to traditional policing methods. It's important to underline that the language used plays a significant role in the reception and understanding of this work. The concept of investing in community resources and adopting alternative solutions has resonated more deeply than the use of terms such as defund and abolish. This finding should shape our future narratives and advocacy efforts. Organizers advocating for police alternatives and reforms should take into account how these communication strategies have resonated with Black people in the U.S..

The data make one thing abundantly clear: Black people want alternatives to police for community safety. The call from the community to divest from this system and reinvest in sustainable alternatives is loud and clear. There is a strong desire for approaches that emphasize prevention, restorative justice, and support for those formerly incarcerated, rather than the continued construction of prisons and increased police presence. This system must include resources that acknowledge and address the underlying issues of poverty, racism, mental health, and education. Investing in prevention through community-based initiatives such as social programming, job training, mentorship programs for youth, housing security, and nutrition can go a long way toward addressing these issues.

Years of dedicated and impactful movement work manifest in the data, revealing intriguing trends in public support for police alternatives. Support for these changes spans geographic, generational, and even political lines, illustrating a collective desire for transformation and reimagining of public safety. The data capture a refreshing departure from the often-polarized political landscape. This alignment signifies a hopeful shift in societal attitudes, opening the door for meaningful policy reforms that could alter the landscape of the American criminal-legal system.

Furthermore, a critical aspect that surfaced in our analysis is the importance of elevating and respecting the voices of Black communities in these discussions. Their experiences and the work they are engaged in are crucial to the fabric of our movement. Listening to, respecting, and following their lead will not only enrich our perspective, but will also ensure that the solutions we advocate for are grounded in lived realities and experiences, and freedom dreaming.

In conclusion, as we started this report with the aim to explore alternatives, our findings confirm a broad consensus for such alternatives. These insights are significant, as we consider the evolution of the work toward a future with police alternatives, as well as the natural evolution of Black Americans' diverse perspectives. By being mindful of changes in public perception, organizers can target the most pertinent issues that surface while continuing the fight for Black liberation.

ENDNOTES

1 Rojas, R. & Keenan, S. (2023, June 6). "Atlanta City Council Approves 'Cop City' Funding Despite Protests." The New York Times. Retrieved July 16, 2023, from https://www.nytimes.com/2023/06/06/us/atlanta-cop-city-funding-vote.html?action=click &pgtype=Article&state=default&module=styln-policing&variant=show&region=MAIN_CONTENT_1&block=storyline_top_links_ recirc

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Methodology

The GenForward Survey is a project of Professor Cathy J. Cohen at the University of Chicago. Interviews were conducted with a representative

sample from GenForwardSM, a nationally representative survey panel of adults recruited and administered by National Opinion Resource Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago.

For the March 2023 GenForward/M4BL Survey, a total of 3,430 interviews were conducted March 17 to April 3, 2023, with Black or African American adults ages 18+ representing the 50 states and the District of Columbia. The survey was offered in English via an online platform. The GenForward survey was built from two sample sources:

◆ Forty-seven percent of the completed interviews are sourced from NORC's AmeriSpeak® Panel and from the Black Youth Project (BYP) panel of young adults recruited by NORC. Funded and operated by NORC at the University of Chicago, AmeriSpeak® is a probability-based panel designed to be representative of the U.S. household population. Randomly selected U.S. households are sampled with a known, non-zero probability of selection from the NORC National Frame and address-based sample, and then contacted by U.S. mail, telephone interviewers, overnight express mailers, and field interviewers (face to face). The BYP sample is from a probability-based household panel that uses an address-based sample from a registered voter database of the entire U.S. Households were selected using stratified random sampling to support oversampling of households with African Americans, Latinx Americans, and Asian Americans/Native Hawaiians/Pacific Islanders between the ages of 18 and 36. NORC contacted sampled households by U.S. mail and by telephone, inviting them to register and participate in public-opinion surveys twice a month.

◆ The AmeriSpeak® panel sample was supplemented with respondents from the Dynata and Prodege nonprobability online opt-in panel(s). Fifty-three percent of the completed interviews are sourced from the Dynata and Prodege panel(s). To help reduce potential bias in the nonprobability sample, Dynata and Prodege attempted to balance the nonprobability respondent sample by age, race and ethnicity, gender, and political affiliation. In order to incorporate the nonprobability sample, NORC used TrueNorth calibration services, an innovative hybrid calibration approach developed at NORC based on small-area estimation methods to account for potential bias associated with the nonprobability sample explicitly.

The purpose of TrueNorth calibration is to adjust the weights for the nonprobability sample so as to bring weighted distributions of the nonprobability sample in line with the population distribution for characteristics correlated with the survey variables. Such calibration adjustments help reduce potential bias, yielding more accurate population estimates.

The survey completion rate is 19.3%. The weighted AAPOR RR3 panel recruitment rate is 19.9%, and the weighted household panel retention rate is 80.1%, for a weighted AAPOR RR3 cumulative response rate of 3.1%. The overall margin of error is ±2.48 percentage points at the 95% confidence level, including the design effect.

Respondents were offered incentives for completing the survey that ranged from the cash equivalent of $5 to $10. The interviews from the two probability-based sample sources were combined for statistical weighting and analysis. The combined panel samples provide sample coverage of approximately 97% of the target population. The statistical weights incorporate the appropriate probability of selection for the BYP and AmeriSpeak samples, nonresponse adjustments, and raking ratio adjustments to population benchmarks.

A post-stratification process is used to adjust for any survey nonresponse and any non-coverage or under- and oversampling resulting from the study-specific sample design. The post-stratification process involved the following variables: age, gender, education, Census Region, and political affiliation. The weighted data were used for all analyses, unless otherwise noted.