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INTRODUCTION

When public safety concerns arise in New York City the default response has been to increase policing.¹ With the largest police force in the country, flooding the streets with officers has become routine.² However, this approach overlooks the significant human and resource costs of policing, as well as the frequent harm, insecurity, and violence that can result from increased police interactions. Furthermore, relying primarily on police presence has led to the NYPD taking larger roles in addressing a wide array of social issues, including mental health and homelessness, thus broadening their influence over public life.³

Decades of policy decisions have significantly expanded the presence and authority of the NYPD, resulting in New Yorkers, particularly in low-income communities of color, experiencing some of the highest levels of policing in the country.⁴ Residents encounter police officers multiple times daily on the streets, in public transportation, schools, hospitals, parks, and housing.⁵ This heightened police presence often leads to disproportionate levels of police contact in these communities, along with higher incidences of police abuse, misconduct,⁶ and violence.

The perspectives of residents in heavily policed areas are often overlooked, misrepresented, and simplified in discussions about public safety.

Shortly after becoming Mayor, Eric Adams—a former NYPD officer—made comments that highlight this issue. He stated: “When I go to my communities of color, and I’ve never heard them, never heard them [say] Eric, we want less police ... my voice cannot supersede the voice of people on the ground.”⁷ Comments from policymakers like these dismiss the diverse opinions and experiences of New Yorkers living in highly policed neighborhoods and vastly oversimplify the task of public safety, framing it as a binary choice between more or less police. They also ignore a long history of organized protests against the NYPD by communities of color, including those following the deaths of Amadou Diallo in 1999,⁸ Sean Bell in 2006,⁹ Ramarley Graham,¹⁰ Shantel Davis,¹¹ and Mohamed Bah¹² in 2012, Eric Garner in

2014,¹³ Delrawn Small in 2016,¹⁴ Kawaski Trawick and Allan Feliz in 2019,¹⁵ and the unprecedented uprisings after the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor.¹⁶ These protests were not just marked with outrage but also offered serious solutions.

Seldom are individuals most affected by policing directly consulted about what safety should look like in their communities and what it takes to produce a safe neighborhood.¹⁷ To address the significant absence and repression of voices directly impacted by policing in public discourse, policy, and research, we conducted the Community Safety Project. This large community-based study in New York was pursued by, with, and for those most directly affected by policing. Our study was designed to answer these questions by intentionally centering the knowledge, experiences, and desires of those who live with disproportionately high levels of police activity.

We aimed to understand what it truly means to keep communities safe and what public investments are needed to ensure it.

Sections:

- 1.1 A brief summary of policing in New York**
- 1.2 Redefining safety?**
- 1.3 A study about safety and policing**
- 1.4 Looking forward**

1.1 A brief summary of policing in New York

The NYPD is the largest and most expensive police force in the world.¹⁸ With a uniform force of 35,000 and a workforce of close to 50,000, one in five city employees in 2025 will be employed by the NYPD.¹⁹ Spending on policing has steadily increased, reaching over \$12 billion dollars in 2024, despite historically low crime rates and the population in New York remaining largely consistent.²⁰

In conjunction with the overall rise in NYPD funding, controversial policing practices and strategies like stop-and-frisk and quality of life policing, also known as “order maintenance” or “broken windows policing”, have regained momentum under Mayor Adams.²¹

While stop-and-frisk was initially aimed at removing firearms and drugs, it resulted in a disproportionate targeting of Black and Latinx individuals, sparking widespread criticism and leading to a federal court ruling in 2013 that found the NYPD liable for widespread unconstitutional stops and racial profiling.²² Stop-and-frisk did not make New Yorkers safer,²³ and although it had reportedly decreased significantly in recent years, under Adams stops have increased by 90% in 2023 (as compared to 2021), the highest it’s been since 2015.²⁴

Related, quality of life policing is also on the rise again under Adams: “It’s about going down and dealing with the quality-of-life issues we’re seeing, what’s happening in drugstores where people are taking things and walking out, what’s happening with the gun violence that we’re seeing, and what’s happening with the everyday quality of life in this city, and that’s the plan we’re putting in place to address it,” Adams said in an interview with Today in New York.²⁵

Quality of life policing aggressively enforces minor offenses - through issuing summonses and making misdemeanor arrests - under the assumption that a focus on the less serious incidents will reduce or prevent occurrences of more serious incidents. In the context of New York, drinking in public, selling loose cigarettes, jaywalking, riding a bike on the sidewalk, showing small amounts of marijuana in public view, or being in the park after-hours have all currently or at one time been examples of quality of life offenses to the NYPD.²⁶ During the Adams administration’s first year, there was a notable 19% increase in misdemeanor arrests and 62% increase in criminal summonses — the first increase in nearly 10 years. Also, civil summonses were issued nearly four times more in 2022 than 2021.²⁷

Not all New Yorkers endure NYPD enforcement practices equally. Low-income neighborhoods of color are more likely to endure police surveillance, contact and

\$12 billion

As of 2024 the **NYPD’s budget** surpassed \$12 billion which is more than the budgets of the Los Angeles and Chicago police forces combined.

violence than other neighborhoods.²⁸ It is also well-documented that Black, Latinx and other people of color²⁹ as well as people who identify as LGBTQIA+,³⁰ young people,³¹ people who are houseless or precariously housed,³² people with disabilities,³³ Muslims,³⁴ and immigrants³⁵ are disparately impacted by policing.

Empirical evidence, including a recent report by the Office of Inspector General for the NYPD, has demonstrated that proactive policing in New York, such as quality of life policing, does not meaningfully reduce crime.³⁶ Additionally, studies have consistently demonstrated that both direct and indirect police contact can have significant repercussions on physical and mental health.³⁷ And these so called minor offenses can have serious impact on peoples' lives when they escalate into violence (even death, like when Eric Garner was killed from being restrained by the NYPD for selling loose cigarettes) or result in high fines they cannot afford, missing work or school because of an arrest and then again for court time, challenges with child care and housing as well many other ongoing cumulative and potentially traumatic issues caused by policing.³⁸

Does flooding the streets with police officers, increasing stop-and-frisk and quality of life policing make the city safer? What does it mean to keep communities safe, and what public investments are needed to ensure it?

1.2 Redefining safety?

At the national level, police violence and its racial disparities have come under greater scrutiny in recent years. From 2013-2024, the police killed almost 13,208 people in the United States. They are particularly deadly

for Black people whose risk of death at the hands of police are nearly three times higher than white people.³⁹ In fact, unarmed Black people have a higher probability of being shot to death by the police than armed white people.⁴⁰ Following the police murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, the summer of 2020 erupted in a groundswell of public outrage against anti-Black police violence that constituted one of the largest and most sustained civil rights protests in American history.⁴¹ A staggering 15 million to 26 million people in the U.S. participated in Black Lives Matter protests over the course of just a single week.⁴²

In New York, 2020 marked the most recent chapter of advocacy that spans across decades of mobilizing for police accountability, racial justice and non-policing alternatives to safety. These powerful movements have been led by community-based collectives such as the Coalition Against Police Brutality, Peoples Justice 2000 and presently, Communities United for Police Reform.

What does safety mean and how is it achieved? Do the police contribute to our safety? Is it feasible for the police to keep us safe? What public investments are necessary to create communities that are truly safe, healthy, and thriving?

The 2020 protests spotlighted these critical questions that have long been voiced by communities of color but rarely posed to them. It's precisely their expertise and leadership that are crucial in shaping and envisioning a way forward. New Yorkers living in areas most associated with violence and heavy police presence are rarely consulted about their desires for their communities; what they believe makes them safe or unsafe; what resources and support survivors of violence, including

police violence, need; and what reforms or alternatives to policing they favor.

When we engage with these seemingly straightforward questions, we confront entrenched assumptions about public safety in New York and across the United States.

The Community Safety Project, a collaborative research initiative between Communities United for Police Reform (CPR) and the Public Science Project (PSP), makes a significant empirical contribution to this essential public discourse on policing and safety.

Communities United for Police Reform (CPR) is an unprecedented campaign to end discriminatory and abusive policing practices in New York, and to build a lasting movement that promotes public safety and reduces reliance on policing. CPR runs coalitions of over 200 local, statewide and national organizations, bringing together a movement of community members, lawyers, researchers and activists to work for change. The partners in this campaign come from all 5 boroughs, from all walks of life and represent many of those most unfairly targeted by the NYPD (changethenypd.org).

The Public Science Project (PSP) is a collective of City University of New York (CUNY) professors and students who believe grassroots social science — collaborative, systematic, public-facing inquiry — can play a significant role in the struggle for justice. PSP members partner with community organizations and public institutions to conduct research with the goal of supporting movements aimed at interrupting oppressive structures (publicscienceproject.org).

The Community Safety Project goes beyond merely sparking dialogue—it actively contributes to efforts that make communities in New York safer by utilizing insights directly from those most affected by current safety policies.

This report builds on ongoing discussions about what truly produces safety by offering concrete data and firsthand accounts from New Yorkers impacted by structural conditions that increase their vulnerability to NYPD interventions. We gathered perspectives and experiences from 3,303 New Yorkers who are most directly impacted by the everyday realities of violence and policing. The sample primarily consists of Black and Latinx New Yorkers, but it also concentrates on other groups disproportionately vulnerable to the NYPD, such as those who are homeless, unemployed, young, disabled as well as those who identify as LGBTQ+ or transgender/gender expansive.

1.3 A study about safety and policing

Communities United for Police Reform (CPR) in partnership with the Public Science Project (PSP) spent four years conducting the Community Safety Project.

This large study across all five boroughs used 10 in-depth virtual town halls (N=550) and an extensive citywide survey (N=2,753) to understand the perspectives and experiences on safety and policing of 3,303 New Yorkers.

Representatives from CPR membership organizations conducted all aspects of the Community Safety Project — developing the methods, collecting information, analyzing data and communicating results

— through a deeply collaborative process that drew upon the group’s substantial expertise as organizers, educators and advocates. CPR staff and PSP members facilitated the study but it was primarily led by a research team of eight community-based organizations that received additional support from an advisory group consisting of nine organizations. All CPR organizations leading or involved with this study have worked extensively in, with, and on behalf of New Yorkers and New York communities most impacted by policing.

Leadership Team

Brooklyn Movement Center
Desis Rising Up & Moving (DRUM)
FIERCE
Girls for Gender Equity
Justice Committee
Make the Road New York
Public Science Project
VOCAL-NY

Advisory Board

1199 SEIU, Bronx Defenders, Common Justice, Interrupting Criminalization, Jews for Racial & Economic Justice, Malcolm X Grassroots Movement, New York Civil Liberties Union, New York Immigration Coalition, Street Vendor Project

The study began in September 2020 and involved two primary methods: Community safety town halls and community safety surveys.

Community Safety Town Halls: In February 2021, the research collective worked with other CPR organizations to host 10 virtual town halls, representing all five boroughs, on a range of topics related to safety and intended for people living in communities

directly impacted by heavy policing (See www.changethenypd.org/redefining-community-safety for more details). Town halls used a standardized format that included large- and small-group discussions and a brief online survey (See endnote⁴³ for the standardized town hall agenda).

Each event had American Sign Language interpretation as well as closed captioning. They were also recorded, and extensive notes were taken to systematically analyze the themes discussed. In total, over 550 New Yorkers attended these open forums to voice their needs, desires and recommendations for safe, healthy, equitable and thriving communities.

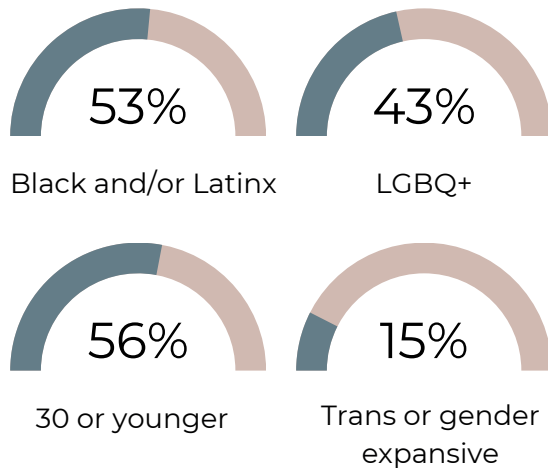
“I wanted to make my voice heard regarding public safety in New York’s most marginalized neighborhoods. I was stoked to be granted an opportunity to relay my story to folks that wanted to hear from me on a personal level.”

- Town hall attendee

The town halls were co-sponsored by 22 diverse organizations representing communities and interests across the city, including NYC Anti-Violence Project, Audre Lorde Project, Bronx Defenders, Brooklyn Movement Center, Center for Anti-Violence Education, Center for Constitutional Rights, Color of Change, Desis Rising Up and Moving (DRUM), FIERCE, Gathering for Justice, Girls for Gender Equity, Justice Committee, Justice League NYC, Legal Aid Society, LIFE Camp, NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Make the Road New York, New York Civil Liberties Union, VOCAL-New York, Public Science Project, Rise of Staten Island and True 2 Life.

Town Hall Demographics

Town hall forums were designed to reach New York communities who were most vulnerable to policing, as demonstrated in these select demographics (for a full list of demographics, see endnote⁴⁴)



These percentages are estimates of the attendee demographics. They are derived from the 231 people who filled out the survey that was distributed at each town hall.

Community Safety Survey: The research collective used the town hall discussions along with eight additional CPR workshops between September 2020 and April 2021 to develop a large, 10-section survey asking questions about community safety and experiences with the NYPD (see endnote⁴⁵ to review the survey section themes). The survey draft went through many rounds of revisions as the research collective and other CPR members provided ongoing input.

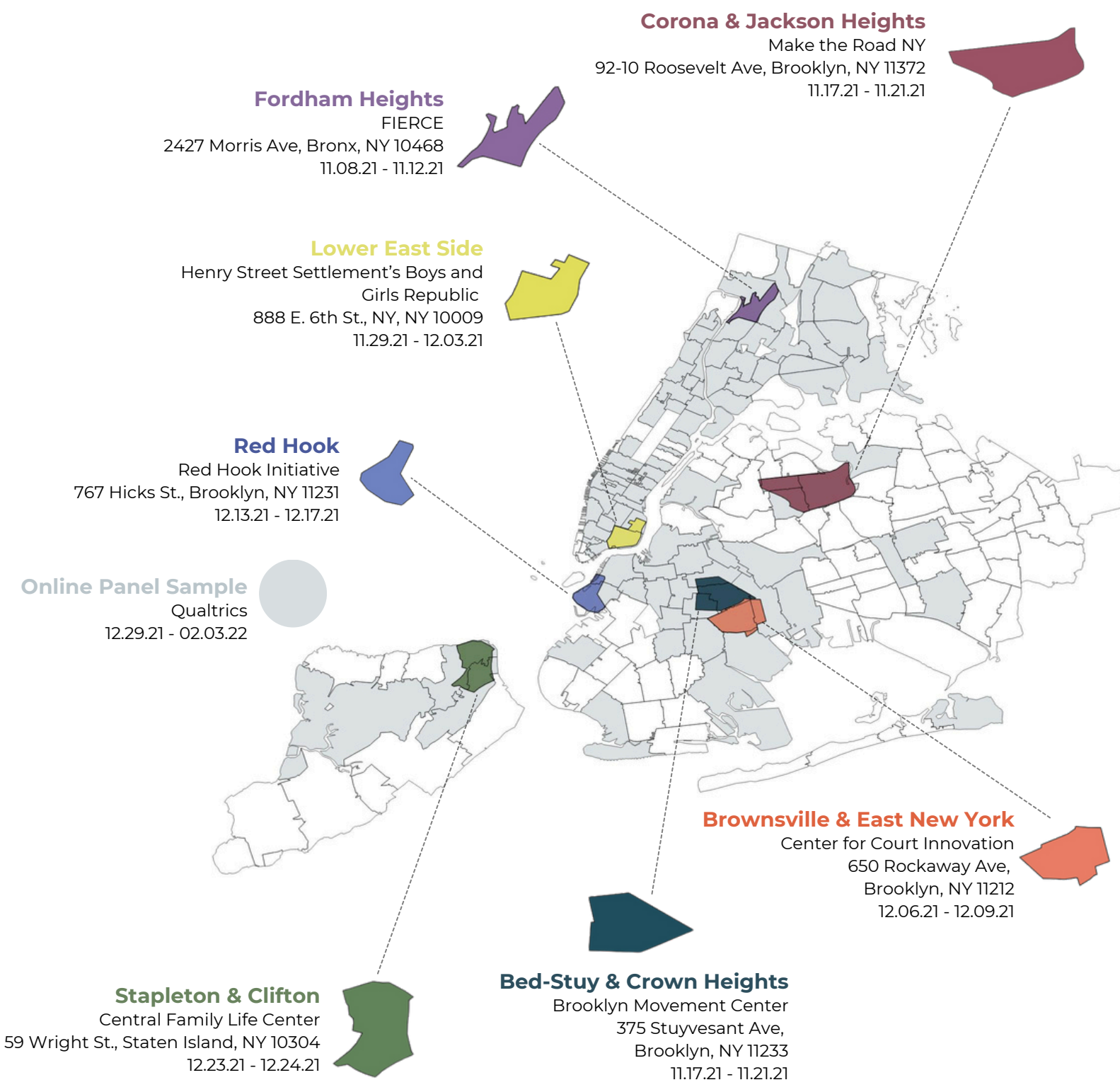
The survey was then piloted with eligible community members, which resulted in further revisions. In total, the survey went through more than 25 drafts, with edits from

numerous experts, and was responsive to grassroots, legal, policy and academic feedback. After more than one year since its construction began, the final survey was completed in November 2021, serving as a testament to the deeply collaborative process and commitment to being accountable to the communities most affected by policing.

After the survey was finalized, it was entered into an online survey software and translated into Spanish and simplified Chinese. All surveys were taken on tablets, smartphones or computers. All New Yorkers 16 years and older living, working, going to school or spending considerable time in the designated areas were eligible to take the survey. The surveys were distributed between November 2021 and February 2022 over two phases.

The first phase involved community sampling in seven locations across all five boroughs: Lower East Side, Manhattan; Fordham Heights, Bronx, Corona & Jackson Heights, Queens; Bedford-Stuyvesant & Crown Heights, Brooklyn; Brownsville & East New York, Brooklyn; Red Hook, Brooklyn; Stapleton & Clifton, Staten Island. The locations represented neighborhoods with high police presence and activity, as determined by an index the research collective constructed from publicly available policing data (see endnote⁴⁶ for the index details).

Survey Locations



Surveys were distributed within communities using Respondent Driven Sampling (RDS), an approach effective at collecting data from what are often considered hard-to-reach populations; minimizing selection bias; and improving sample representativeness.⁴⁷ Respondents were compensated for taking the survey and then offered additional compensation for referring up to three eligible people from their networks. In an exponentially snowballing fashion, RDS draws people to the study in an ever-widening community network (see endnote⁴⁸ for compensation details).

Surveys were available between two to five days at each community-based site and during hours that accommodated unemployed and employed respondents. Every location included indoor seats and tables with enough space to apply social distancing protocol and other COVID-19 health measures such as wearing masks. The survey took respondents approximately 20-60 minutes to take on a tablet or, in some cases, their phone. CPR members and organization volunteers were always present to assist people, helping to ensure that items were interpreted and answered accurately as well as making sure people were promptly paid for their time.

“As someone who was formerly incarcerated, I know the impact of policing and the importance of this survey.”

- Town hall attendee

As a supplement to surveys collected at community sites, we then pursued an online panel sample by contracting with Qualtrics, a digital survey platform that partners with over 20 online recruitment providers to cultivate representative pools

of people by ZIP code (see qualtrics.com for more details). Using the policing index as an indicator of ZIP codes with heavy police presence, the online panel sample was designed to reach a wider representative sample of New Yorkers who live in highly policed neighborhoods (see endnote⁴⁹ for additional sampling details). The original survey was too long for this type of sampling strategy and therefore was cut into two shorter surveys that were randomized for each respondent upon entering the platform. This reduced the completion time to between 15-30 minutes. Upon completion of the first half, respondents were offered the chance to take the second half of the survey at another time for additional compensation.

While taking this survey, I thought about my community and the projects I was born and raised in.”

- Town hall attendee

The research collective organized all survey data and analyzed it using SPSS, a statistical analysis program. We then cleaned (see endnote⁵⁰ for cleaning details) and analyzed the surveys, using multiple workshops with CPR and PSP members to collaboratively make sense of the findings and discuss their implications. Every survey question was examined using exploratory data analysis strategies. Where appropriate, we aggregated multiple survey items to create thematically relevant variables (e.g., police contact), and we iteratively examined the open-ended items on the survey using thematic coding and content analysis.

Survey Demographics

In an effort to gather insights from those most affected by policing, surveys were carried out in New York neighborhoods with high levels of NYPD activity using sampling strategies designed to invite groups most vulnerable to policing, as illustrated in these select demographics (see endnote⁵¹ for a more complete list of demographics).



Black and/or Latinx Below poverty line



Homeless Unemployed



Disability LGBTQ+



Immigrant 30 or younger

N = 2,753

1.4 Looking forward

What follows, in five additional chapters, is a detailed summary of our findings. We offer the reader an interpretation of the results that boldly reimagines how the city should enact community safety. Chapter 2 focuses on respondents' experiences with and perspectives on the NYPD. Chapter 3 presents respondents' answers as to what community safety means to them, how they believe it can and should be created, their priorities for the city's public safety policy and budget, and what role the NYPD should have. Chapter 4 features respondents' perspectives, experiences and desires related to crisis response, and those emergencies that the NYPD most typically handles as first responders. In chapter 5, the report concludes with a summary of the findings and their implications for advocacy, education and policy moving forward. Finally, Chapter 6 serves as an appendix, presenting key data points for notable demographic groups.

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- ⁴³ The standardized agenda, tailored for each event, included: 1. An opening to welcome guests including a description of the forum's purpose and why it's important. 2. Small-group breakout discussion groups to reflect on their community experiences with safety and policing with a large group debriefing to follow. 3. A two-question online survey. The first open-ended question asked "What makes you feel safe in your community? In your own words, what does community safety mean to you?" The second question asked attendees to go through 20 different areas and "Indicate how you feel each area should be prioritized in the city budget during the coming fiscal year." 4. Facilitate small- and large-group conversations imagining and prioritizing the areas they see as critical for safety and identifying actionable solutions and concrete reforms. 5. Closing and next steps.
- ⁴⁴ **Age:** 22% 10-20, 34% 21-30, 21% 31-40, 10% 41-50, 6% 51-60, 5% 61-70, 3% 71+; **Race/Ethnicity:** 25% Black, African American, Afro-Caribbean, 17% Latina/o, Latinx or Hispanic, 8% Asian, 30% White, 1% Arab or Persian, 13% Multiracial, 3% Other, 3% Prefer Not To Answer; **Gender:** 23% Boys/Men; 60% Girls/Women, 15% Non-Binary, Gender-Fluid, Questioning/Unsure, Multigender, 2% Prefer Not To Answer; **Sexual Identity:** 48% Straight, 43% Asexual, Bisexual, Gay, Lesbian, Pansexual, Queer, Multisexual and/or Questioning/Unsure, 9% Other or Prefer Not To Answer; **Borough:** 13% Bronx, 31% Brooklyn, 25% Manhattan, 17% Queens, 7% Staten Island, 7% Outside of NYC.
- ⁴⁵ The theme of the 10 survey sections were 1. Feeling and Producing Community Safety. 2. Policing and Community Safety. 3. Attitudes towards Police. 4. Observing and Feeling Police Surveillance. 5. Calling the Police. 6. Calling the Police on Them. 7. Police Contact and Violence. 8. Police Sexual Violence. 9. The Impact of Police on Self and Family. 10. Demographics.
- ⁴⁶ The research collective created an index of the most "heavily policed" neighborhoods (defined by ZIP code) in 2021 using the following publicly available indicators: misdemeanors arrests (January to June 2021); misdemeanor complaints (January to June 2021); felony arrests (January to June 2021); violation complaints (January to June 2021); criminal court summons (January to June 2021); B summons (January to June 2021); shootings (January to June 2021); calls for service (January to June 2021); stop, question and frisks (January 2019 to December 2020). The geocoded locations of the police activity were mapped using QGIS and then

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overlaid with ZIP codes. Raw values within ZIP code were divided by square meters to standardize spatially. Z-scores were then created for the values of each indicator of police activity to standardize around the average. The Z-scores were added together, averaged and then ranked by ZIP code throughout New York. The rankings were divided into thirds to create high-, medium- and low-policed categories. Similarly, Z-score rankings leading to three categorizations (e.g., high, medium, low) were also created from the raw values (e.g., not standardized by square meters) of police activity. This research defined "high policed" as any ZIP code that is in the top one-third of police activity citywide from either the raw or spatial Z-scores. In addition to this index, public housing, socioeconomic factors, racial demographics and CPR organizational locations were closely considered as well.

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- 48 In each neighborhood, eligible people were first recruited to take the survey for \$25. When finished, survey participants were given three unique ID tickets to distribute to people they knew who qualified for the study and then paid \$10 for each one who ultimately showed up to complete the survey. The newly recruited respondents were also paid \$25 to take the survey and also given three tickets that could generate an additional \$30.
- 49 The online panel sample was designed at first to reach additional people living in high policed neighborhoods. However, it also offered an opportunity to collect a smaller representative sample of New Yorkers who live in medium- and low-policed ZIP codes with the goal to serve as a potentially illuminating comparison group. In total, this enabled us to collect surveys from over 4,000 New Yorkers. The data from the medium- and low-policed ZIP codes are not included in this report.
- 50 We systematically cleaned the data by reading closely through every survey to locate suspicious response behavior such as straightlining, zigzagging, exaggeration, irrelevance, incompleteness, outliers or duplication. We determined that 201 surveys (7%) out of the 2,954 were untrustworthy or of poor quality, and we removed them, resulting in 2,753 usable surveys.
- 51 **Age:** 9% 16-20, 22% 21-30, 20% 31-40, 16% 41-50, 18% 51-60, 11% 61-70, 4% 71-80, 0.4% 81+; **Race/Ethnicity:** 35% Black or African American, 28% Latinx, 7% Asian, 4% Other People of Color, 13% White, 1% Multiracial – Other, 6% Multiracial – Black/Latinx, 5% Prefer Not To Answer; **Gender:** 42% Boys/Men; 54% Girls/Women, 2% Transgender, Non-binary, Two-spirit, and/or Questioning, 2% Other, Did Not Answer or Prefer Not To Answer; **Sexual Identity:** 64% Straight, 23% Asexual, Bisexual, Gay, Lesbian, Pansexual, Queer, and/or Questioning, 14% Other, Did Not Answer or Prefer Not To Answer; **Immigration Status:** 75% Born In The U.S., 19% Born Outside The U.S., 1% Other, 5% Prefer Not To Answer; **Disability Status:** 77% Nondisabled; 12% Disabled, 11% Prefer Not To Answer; **Public School:** 59% Attended NYC Public School, 36% Did Not Attend NYC Public School; **Highest Level of Education:** 16% Less Than High School, 30% GED or High School Diploma, 17% Some College, 27% Associates, Bachelors, or Graduate Degree, 11% Other Or Prefer Not To Answer; **Employment Status:** 27% Employed Full Time (35+ hours), 11% Employed Part Time, 20% Unemployed and Looking For Work, 8% Unemployed and Not Looking For Work, 5% Self-Employed, 1% Off The Books or Under The Table, 10% Out Of The Workforce, 4% Other, 11% Prefer Not To Answer; **Borough:** 18% Bronx, 35% Brooklyn, 30% Manhattan, 12% Queens, 6% Staten Island; **Housing Status:** 80% Stably Housed, 13% Precariously Housed, 7% Other, Did Not Answer, Prefer Not To Answer; **Homelessness History:** 65% Never Homeless, 7% Homeless Since 2020, 16% Homeless Before 2020, 2% Homeless Before and Since 2020, 10% Prefer Not To Say; **Yearly Family Income:** 62% Less Than \$29,000 or No Source Of Income, 19% \$30,000-\$69,000, 8% \$70,000 - \$109,000, 7% \$110,000+, 5% Other, Did Not Answer, Prefer Not To Answer.