

WE DESERVE TO BE SAFE

A study to explore how New Yorkers
living in heavily policed neighborhoods
understand and experience safety

**COMMUNITIES
UNITED FOR
POLICE REFORM**





In Memory of Carl Stubbs

This report is dedicated to the memory of Carl Stubbs, VOCAL-NY leader and a dedicated member of the Communities United for Police Reform (CPR) coalition for over ten years. Carl’s leadership supported CPR’s work to pass the Community Safety Act, win the Floyd stop-and-frisk litigation, pass the Right to Know Act, and the Safer NY Act. Carl stood side-by-side with families of New Yorkers killed by the NYPD calling for accountability and he was part of our work to reduce the size, scope, and power of the NYPD. In truth, it’s hard to recall a time when Carl wasn’t with CPR. Through it all, Carl showed up with kindness and wisdom, was joyful and made us laugh. He was dedicated to building power, to fight for what is right and not give up. He remained ever hopeful that we can and will win. One of the last CPR projects that Carl participated in was this research project and we dedicate this report to him and his vision for a safe and just future for all.

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This project came to life because of the brilliance and determination of over one hundred people and organizations. The leadership team designed the project from start to finish and coordinated all aspects of the data collection and analysis and many other CPR members and partners hosted survey sites, town halls, advised on key aspects of the project and helped design and write this amazing report. We wanted to thank each and every person who made this project possible.

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FIERCE
Girls for Gender Equity
Justice Committee
Make the Road New York
Public Science Project
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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, Red Hook Initiative, Street Vendors Project

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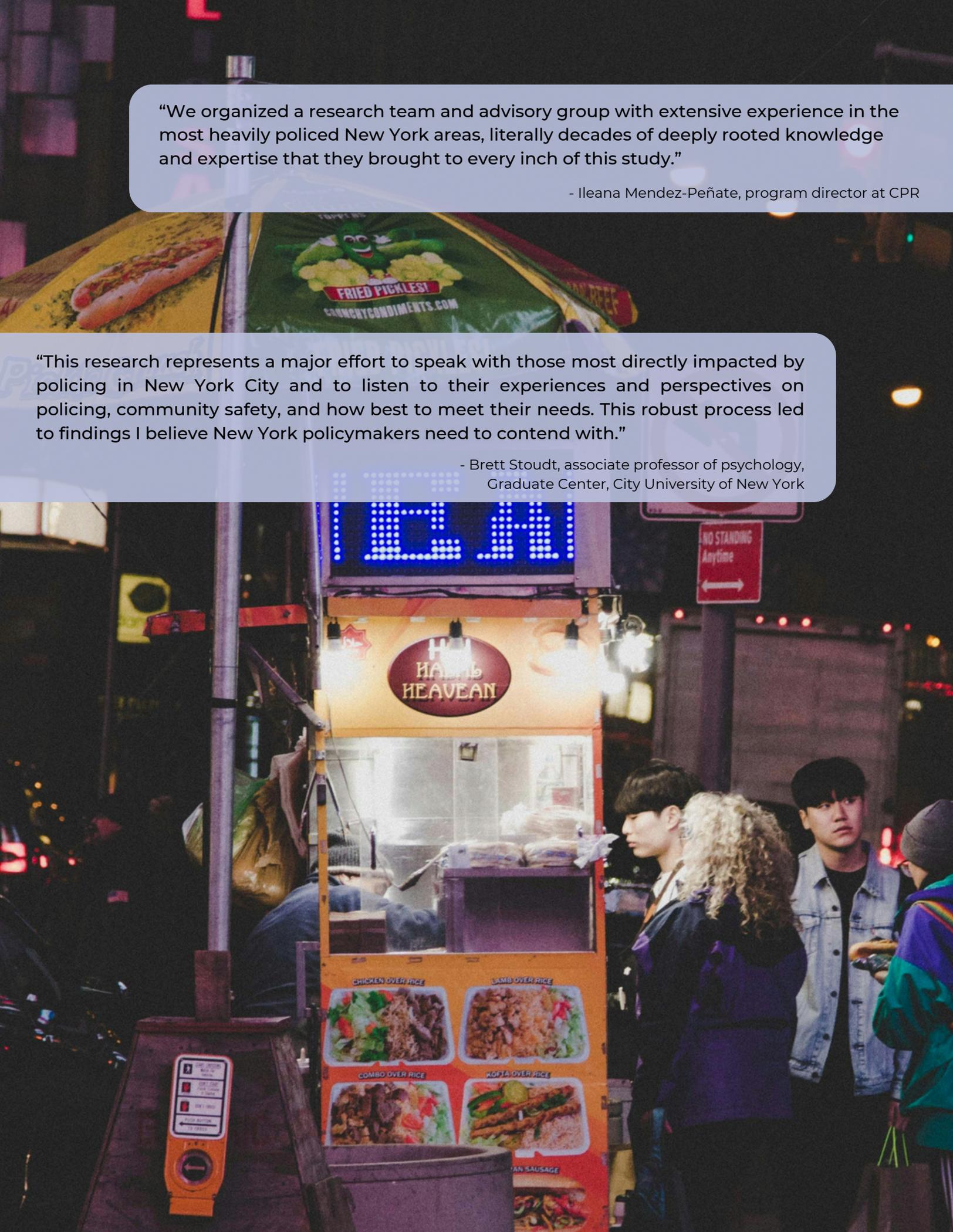
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“We organized a research team and advisory group with extensive experience in the most heavily policed New York City areas, literally decades of deeply rooted knowledge and expertise that they brought to every inch of this study.”

- Ileana Mendez-Peñate, program director at CPR

“This research represents a major effort to speak with those most directly impacted by policing in New York City and to listen to their experiences and perspectives on policing, community safety, and how best to meet their needs. This robust process led to findings I believe New York City policymakers need to contend with.”

- Brett Stouder, associate professor of psychology, Graduate Center, City University of New York



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is about the **Community Safety Project**, a study designed to center the knowledge, experiences and desires of those who live in heavily policed neighborhoods. Reaching over 3,300 people across all five boroughs through community-based surveys and town halls, the results of this research communicates the experiences and perspectives of New Yorkers who are often excluded from political decision-making yet are fundamentally necessary to crafting public safety solutions that offer both safety *and* justice. **What we learned is that many people living in highly policed neighborhoods want New York to reconsider what constitutes safety, how it is produced and who helps produce it. They are asking for a fundamental transformation in how safety is achieved in neighborhoods.**

The city continues to favor policing as a means to address public safety concerns, despite the community's demands to end the pervasive, abusive and discriminatory practices within law enforcement agencies. Many policymakers continue to suggest that safety can only be achieved through widespread and forceful police intervention. This stance justifies the city's persistent underinvestment in the critical life-supporting resources, services and institutions our communities urgently require. It is essential to challenge this flawed perspective to bring about the changes necessary to support all New Yorkers' welfare and safety.

Our findings are clear that people in highly policed neighborhoods suffer from harmful experiences with the NYPD, they frequently do not understand safety as synonymous with policing, and they desire non-police responses to crises. Furthermore, when given the option, most participants chose investments in public programs and infrastructure over investments in policing as a way to make communities safer. True safety, they believe, comes from deep and sustained investments in essential services rather than prioritizing funding for the NYPD as the primary public safety agency.

This executive summary will review the study's three key findings and then outline our central policy recommendations.

Key Finding #1:

Those living in highly policed neighborhoods frequently experience policing as pervasive, harmful, violent and frightening.

The Community Safety Project offers unique insight and support to the large body of empirical evidence that police saturation is often experienced as a collective punishment of whole communities, especially communities of color, with ongoing and far-reaching consequences. In sum, we found that while community members want to be and feel safe, the experiences they or their community members have had with the NYPD often run counter to that.

New Yorkers, especially Black and Latinx residents, living in highly policed neighborhoods report feeling that the police are an omnipresent force that subjects communities to near-constant surveillance. Study respondents describe high levels of police contact involving direct experiences of physical, verbal, and sexual/gender-based abuse. Many also have witnessed these abuses or know friends, family, or neighbors who have experienced them. Frequently, the cumulative impact fosters an individual and collective sense of insecurity and fear. The findings from this study signal serious concerns about a public safety approach that prioritizes NYPD enforcement without addressing the perceived and experienced harms caused by police.

Many people in highly policed neighborhoods see the NYPD as an unsafe presence involving a constant threat of police surveillance and contact.

73% understood the NYPD as a constant or frequent presence somewhere in their community life, **56%** felt at times unsafe with the NYPD's presence, and **39%** felt specifically targeted by the NYPD.

73% had direct contact with the NYPD in their lives and **54%** reported experiencing unwanted police contact in their lives.

Many people in highly policed neighborhoods are worried or fearful about their own safety or the safety of loved ones during police interactions.

51% worried most days or everyday about their own safety with police and/or the safety of their friends/family. **70%** worried to some degree.

70% feared calling or approaching the NYPD for help because it would make the situation worse or lead to unnecessary violence.

Many people in highly policed neighborhoods experience or witness harm and violence at the hands of the NYPD.

71% experienced varying degrees and forms of harm by the NYPD in their life. For example, **32%** had a physically violent encounter with the NYPD that involved being hit, slapped, choked or punched, **19%** reported that the NYPD used bigoted, sexist or racist language toward them and **9%** experienced sexual violence by the NYPD such as sexual assault or being touched in a way that felt sexually inappropriate or uncomfortable.

37% witnessed varying types of NYPD violence in their neighborhood. For example, **24%** witnessed police threaten to kill someone, **13%** actually saw the NYPD shoot at someone, **34%** observed physical violence at the hands of the NYPD and **24%** heard the NYPD use language that was bigoted or prejudiced.

Key Finding #2:

Those living in heavily policed neighborhoods frequently describe a vision of community safety rooted in restoration and investment rather than enforcement and punishment.

Our study has major implications for how to ask New Yorkers about community safety to accurately understand what resources and services they desire, as well as their impact on future safety initiatives and budget allocations. The ongoing public debate regarding policing and safety has consistently failed to adequately take up the question of what constitutes safety and how to produce it. Instead, public safety discourse has largely been framed for communities as either policing or violence; a simplistic binary that centers policing as the key driver of safety. The Community Safety Project sought to interrogate community members' thoughts, feelings and ideas about all the ways to make neighborhoods safer. We offered participants a wide range of options outside of the narrow "only-police" logic to more accurately illuminate hopes and desires for community safety. By implementing our nuanced survey strategies, we were able to gather data that disrupts overly simplistic narratives about New Yorkers' perspectives on safety, the NYPD, and effective public safety investments.

Our study found that many community members do not want greater resourcing of police as the solution to community safety. Likewise, it is clear that talking about a reduction in policing, whether in regards to budget, scope or size, is not enough. People also seek investment in services and infrastructure that enhance their own and their community's ability to lead safe, healthy and thriving lives. Rather than simply decrease funding to the NYPD without other viable options, community members expressed a desire to divest resources from policing and invest them in a range of health, human and social services, programs and resources to best meet community safety and health needs. Four years after the 2020 mass mobilizations, our research findings reveal a sustained demand for an alternative vision of public safety in New York, centered on enhancing people's quality of life and their ability to live and interact freely and fully with their community. Heavily policed communities are calling for approaches to public safety that invest in a broad set of supports, services and institutions to more fundamentally address the root causes of violence.

When asked about making their neighborhoods safer, many people in highly policed communities prioritize non-police community safety solutions over policing.

When asked to write in a blank space the things they believe are needed to produce safe, healthy and thriving communities, **62%** of the responses did not include police, prisons or the legal system. Meanwhile, **50%** of the responses did include nonpolicing community investments such as economic security, schools, housing and health care.

When asked to create a city budget across 16 items that communicated their specific priorities for producing safe, healthy and thriving communities, **62%** did not include the police, and **69%** did not include the justice system in their top 5 priorities. In fact, **45%** gave the police and **51%** gave the justice system \$0, suggesting no priority at all.

56% mostly or completely agreed with the "defund" or "divest/invest" movements that argue the police are too large in size, scope and power and **75%** agreed to some extent.

Many people in highly policed communities believe that budgets should prioritize non-police services and resources that make their neighborhoods safer.

55% mostly or completely agreed with the "defund" or "divest/invest" movements that argue for the need to change government budget priorities to fund nonpolicing services and resources that can help create safety and prevent violence by addressing the root causes of poverty and inequality (and **75%** agreed to some extent).

52% believed it would generally make them safer if the NYPD budget was reduced and that money was moved to community-based institutions, services and programs. In total across multiple questions, **77%** endorsed a divest/invest framing of safety at least once in the survey.

Across multiple survey items, the **ten investments** most prioritized in order to produce safe, healthy and thriving neighborhoods were: housing (and shelters); health care, jobs (economic security); public schools; hunger prevention services (affordable, healthy foods); programs for youth/teens (youth activities, services, resources, programs); community-based organizations; mental health care; infrastructure; community-led safety strategies.

Almost all people in highly policed neighborhoods believe that holding NYPD officers who commit violence accountable is key to community safety.

94% believed that officers who commit violence should be held accountable through some disciplinary action. For example, **33%** endorsed suspension, and **47%** endorsed termination for officers found guilty of excessive force.

Key Finding #3:

Many residents of heavily policed neighborhoods have experienced or fear experiencing negative interactions with the NYPD when seeking assistance, and often favor non-police responses to crises.

Many who participated in the Community Safety Project reported they sought the police for help during emergencies, only to find them unresponsive. When the police did respond, the encounters too frequently resulted in negative interactions. Reflecting a broader desire for alternative solutions, a considerable number reported instances where they opted to handle serious situations without involving the police, concerned about the potential violence or legal escalation they might cause. This preference for non-police options was further emphasized in response to mental health crises. The majority of respondents believed that the NYPD should not be first responders in mental health calls, citing that their presence generally exacerbates the situation. Instead, respondents desired assistance from other individuals or agencies considered more qualified to provide support.

Counter to dominant narratives, our research found that policing is not necessarily central to peoples' understanding of safety and that many participants understand safety in relation to a broadened notion of harm occurring to them and their communities. There is a strong demand from the community for investment in alternative emergency response resources, including community-based, non-police violence prevention professionals and local crisis response individuals and teams. This reflects a widespread desire for dependable emergency support options other than the NYPD, underscoring an urgent need for innovative and empathetic public safety approaches that prioritize community wellbeing and trust.

People in highly policed communities experienced negative interactions with the NYPD when seeking help.

62% had a negative experience when seeking the NYPD for help. For example, **52%** of those who sought the police for help said the NYPD didn't always show up, **38%** said they showed up half the time or less and **37%** said they felt disrespected, unsafe or harmed when the NYPD did show up.

35% were in a serious situation where they could have contacted the NYPD but decided to handle it without involving the police. They described a range of successful strategies and community members who assisted in resolving these issues. When asked why they chose not to call the police, **68%** explained they were worried about the NYPD harming them in some way.

Many people in highly policed communities want places or people to rely on in emergencies other than the NYPD.

55% indicated a strong desire for another place to turn in times of need other than the NYPD (**85%** to some degree).

Of those who were previously in danger or had an emergency where 911 was called, **50%** wished in their moment of crisis that there were people other than the police who responded.

61% indicated that community-based, nonpolice gun violence prevention programs like "Cure Violence" or "Advanced Peace Model" should be a high priority for their neighborhood.

Many people in highly policed communities want places other than the NYPD to turn to in instances of mental health crises

56% agreed with the statement that "the NYPD should be removed from mental health calls because they generally make the situation worse."

77% reported they would not want the NYPD as first responders at all if they or someone they loved was having a serious mental health issue that required 911.

Of those who experienced a mental health crisis where 911 was called on their behalf, **57%** desired options other than involving the NYPD in their particular mental health situation(s).

Key Recommendations:

1. Expand oversight, transparency & accountability of the NYPD

- Hold the NYPD accountable for failing to fire abusive officers
- End NYPD misinformation and propaganda
- Demand that the NYPD comply with city and state oversight laws
- Demand transparency on costs of NYPD settlements

2. Reduce the size, scope and budget of the NYPD

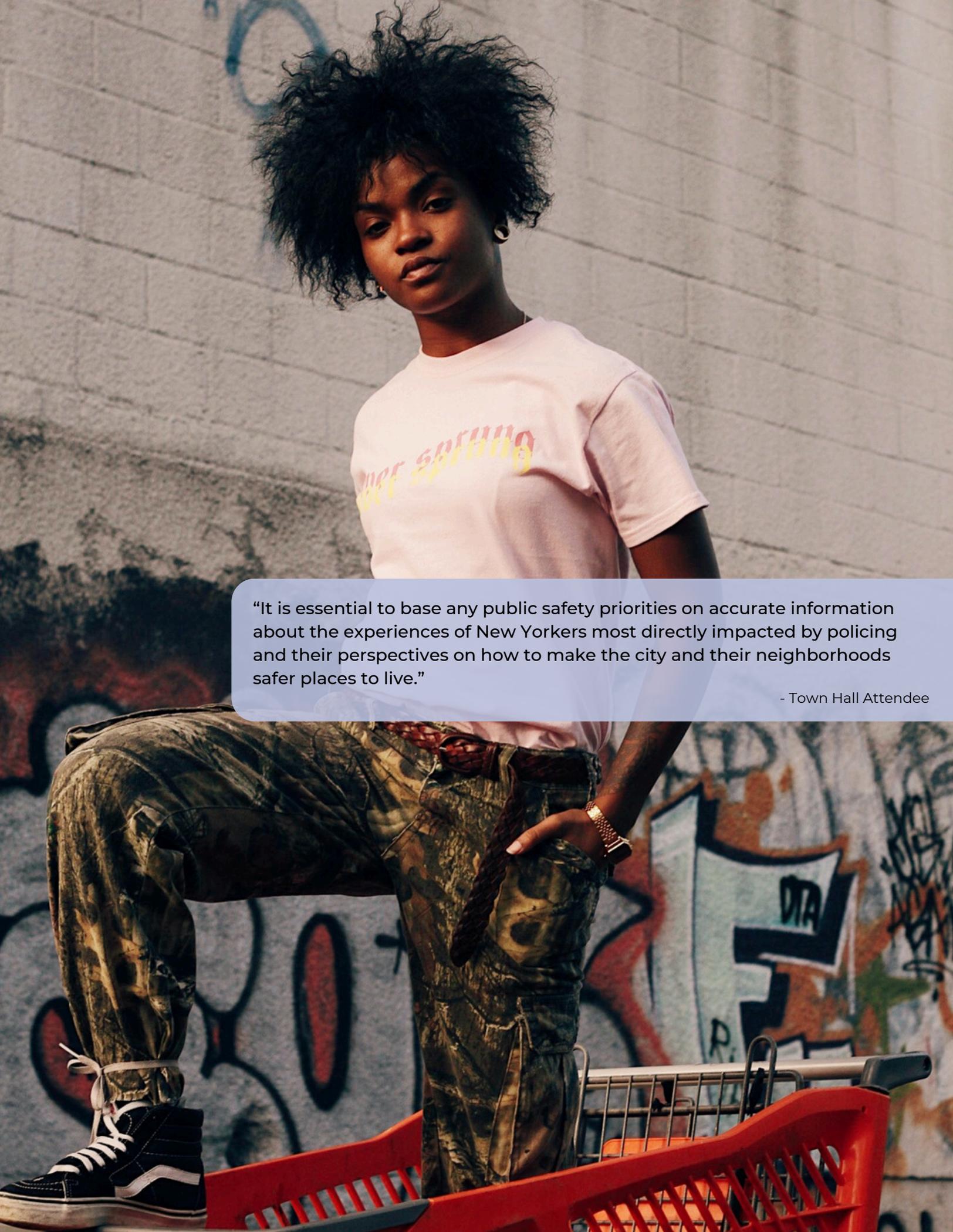
- Disarm and demilitarize police surveillance
- Disband historically abusive NYPD units
- Remove the NYPD from social service roles
- Reduce the growing number of police officers in non-police agencies
- Reduce the size of the NYPD
- Reduce the NYPD's budget

3. Invest in the fundamental needs of New Yorkers

- Housing
- Education
- Health care
- Mental health care
- Employment
- Youth programs and services
- Quality city infrastructure
- Community based organizations
- Food security
- Community-led safety strategies

4. Invest in violence prevention and crisis intervention programs

- Crisis Management Systems (CMS)
- Hate violence and bystander intervention programs
- Restorative justice programs in schools
- Non-police crisis response systems



“It is essential to base any public safety priorities on accurate information about the experiences of New Yorkers most directly impacted by policing and their perspectives on how to make the city and their neighborhoods safer places to live.”

- Town Hall Attendee

1.0

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.

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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.

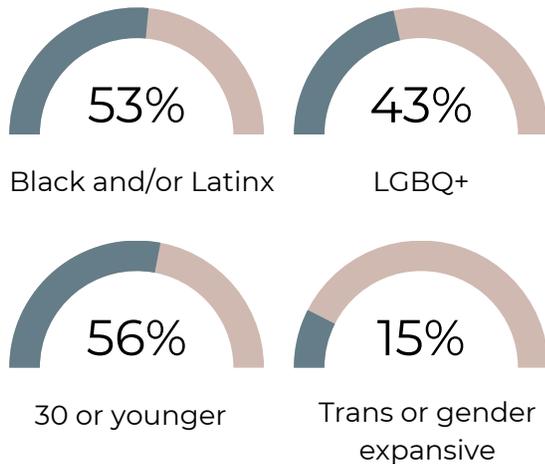
“I wanted to make my voice heard regarding public safety in New York’s most marginalized neighborhoods. I was stoked to be granted an opportunity to relay my story to folks that wanted to hear from me on a personal level.”

- 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

Fordham Heights
FIERCE
2427 Morris Ave, Bronx, NY 10468
11.08.21 - 11.12.21

Lower East Side
Henry Street Settlement's Boys and
Girls Republic
888 E. 6th St., NY, NY 10009
11.29.21 - 12.03.21

Red Hook
Red Hook Initiative
767 Hicks St., Brooklyn, NY 11231
12.13.21 - 12.17.21

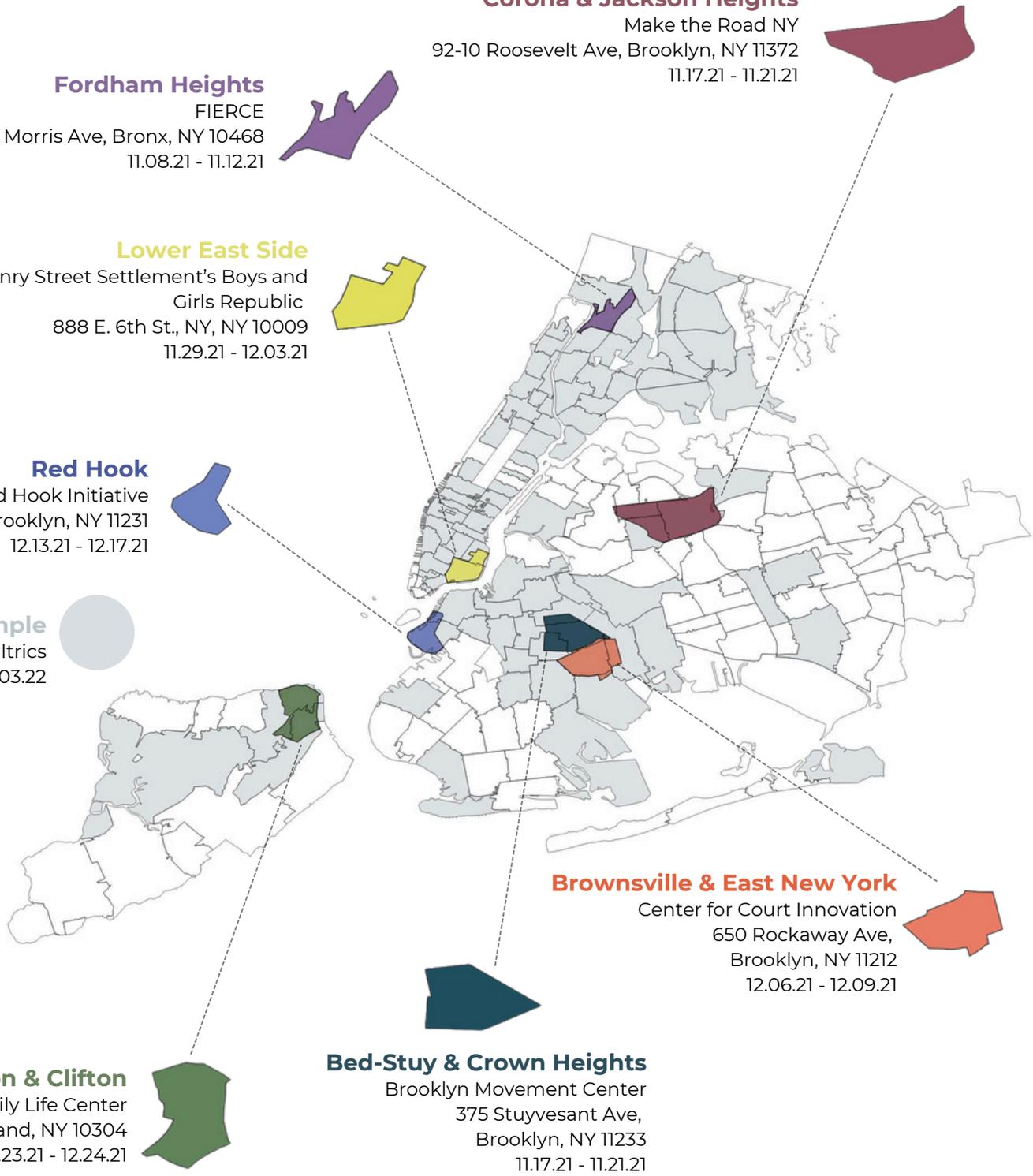
Online Panel Sample
Qualtrics
12.29.21 - 02.03.22

Stapleton & Clifton
Central Family Life Center
59 Wright St., Staten Island, NY 10304
12.23.21 - 12.24.21

Bed-Stuy & Crown Heights
Brooklyn Movement Center
375 Stuyvesant Ave,
Brooklyn, NY 11233
11.17.21 - 11.21.21

Corona & Jackson Heights
Make the Road NY
92-10 Roosevelt Ave, Brooklyn, NY 11372
11.17.21 - 11.21.21

Brownsville & East New York
Center for Court Innovation
650 Rockaway Ave,
Brooklyn, NY 11212
12.06.21 - 12.09.21



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.

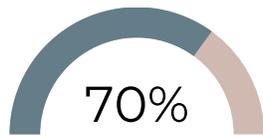
While taking this survey, I thought about my community and the projects I was born and raised in.”

- Town hall attendee

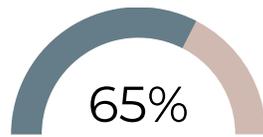
The research collective organized all survey data and analyzed it using SPSS, a statistical analysis program. We then cleaned (see endnote⁵⁰ for cleaning details) and analyzed the surveys, using multiple workshops with CPR and PSP members to collaboratively make sense of the findings and discuss their 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

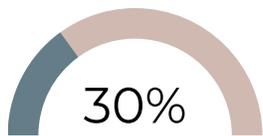
In an effort to gather insights from those most affected by policing, surveys were carried out in New York neighborhoods with high levels of NYPD activity using sampling strategies designed to invite groups most vulnerable to policing, as illustrated in these select demographics (see endnote⁵¹ for a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



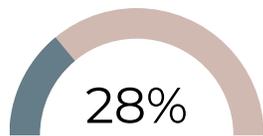
Black and/or Latinx



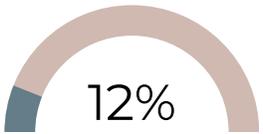
Below poverty line



Homeless



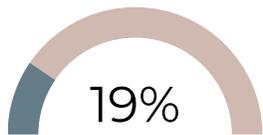
Unemployed



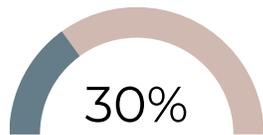
Disability



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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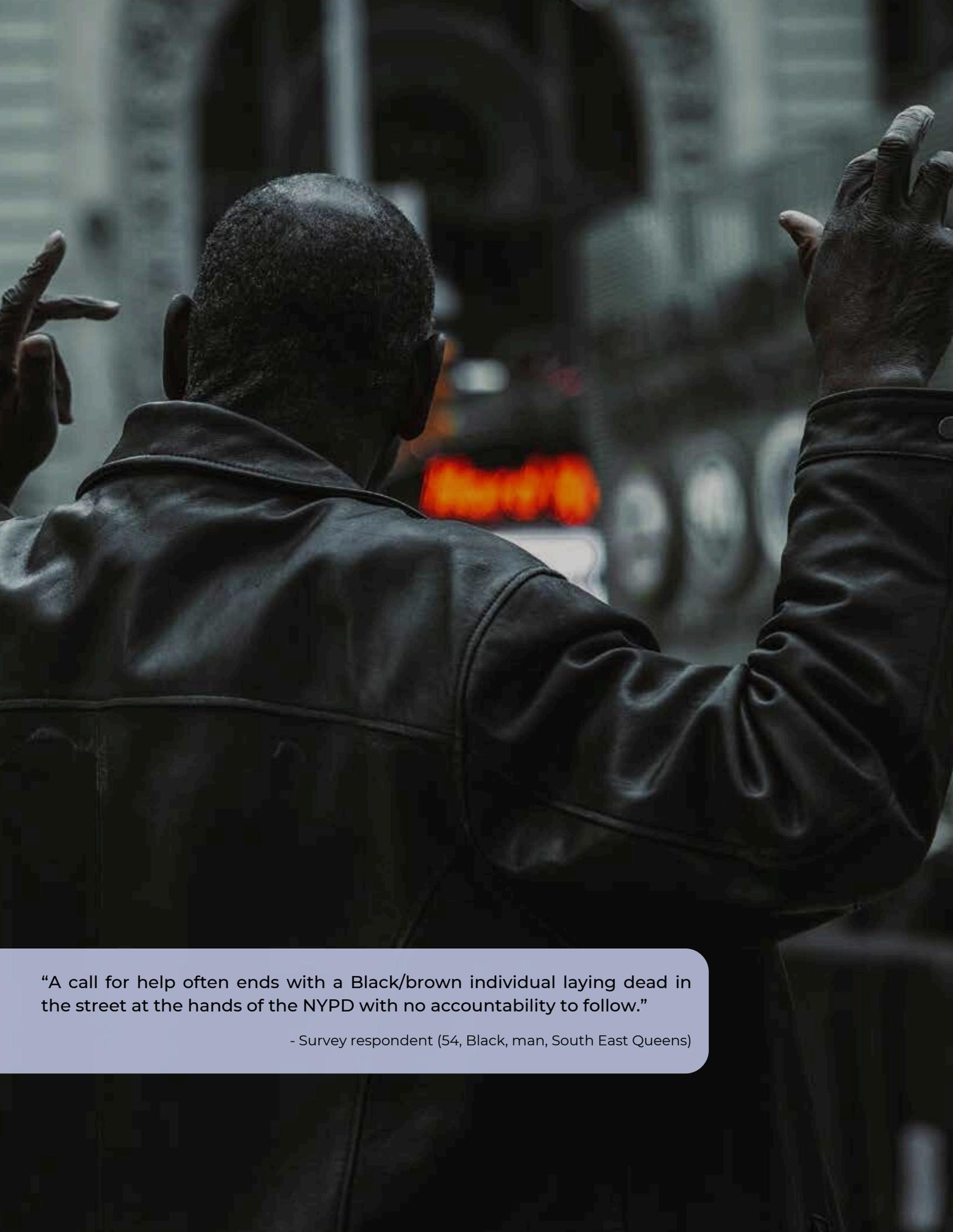
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- ⁴⁴ **Age:** 22% 10-20, 34% 21-30, 21% 31-40, 10% 41-50, 6% 51-60, 5% 61-70, 3% 71+; **Race/Ethnicity:** 25% Black, African American, Afro-Caribbean, 17% Latina/o, Latinx or Hispanic, 8% Asian, 30% White, 1% Arab or Persian, 13% Multiracial, 3% Other, 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.
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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.



“A call for help often ends with a Black/brown individual laying dead in the street at the hands of the NYPD with no accountability to follow.”

- Survey respondent (54, Black, man, South East Queens)

2.0

EXPERIENCES WITH THE NYPD

Communities United for Police Reform (CPR) is committed to building a New York where everyone lives in a community that is safe, healthy and thriving. As summarized in Chapter 1, a large amount of academic and community-based literature has documented in great detail the substantial harms that law enforcement has caused, especially to communities of color. Yet, we understand that there are wide-ranging perceptions of the police and its ability to make the city a safer place. The Community Safety Project emerged from the shared desire of CPR's member organizations to delve into the nuances of policing and safety. The NYPD is arguably the most visible and powerful arm of the government for most New Yorkers. We believe it is crucial to establish public safety priorities and policies based on accurate information about the experiences of those most directly impacted by policing as well as their perspectives on creating safer neighborhoods in the city.

In this second chapter, we use the data collected in the Community Safety Project to illustrate how participants described living in neighborhoods with high levels of police activity. We explore their interactions with the NYPD, what they witnessed, and what impact it has had on their lives. We also ask about their family, friends, and neighbors' experiences and observations of the NYPD. Our study focuses on recent policing during the pandemic as well as policing over time. We acknowledge the complexities of participants' responses, shedding light on how for many, the police represent an omnipresent violent threat while also recognizing the deep desire for safety and, at times, faith in the police as a means to promote safety.

Sections:

- 2.1 The NYPD is an omnipresent threat
- 2.2 Police response to calls for service
- 2.3 Being reported to the NYPD
- 2.4 NYPD harm and violence
- 2.5 Summary

2.1 The NYPD is an omnipresent threat

The NYPD is present and proactive in Black, Latinx and other neighborhoods of color through foot patrols, police dogs, command-center trucks, police with militarized equipment and uniforms, gang databases, social media searches, surveillance cameras, watch towers, flood lights and helicopters, to name just a few.¹ Both Adams and de Blasio have used the term “omnipresence” to describe the police saturation of certain neighborhoods or transit as a crime-prevention strategy.² Therefore, it was important for us to understand how New Yorkers experience this kind of police presence and the impact it has on their lives. **What we learned, via the town hall discussions and survey responses, was that community members describe policing in New York as an “omnipresent threat” rooted more in fear than in support, more in harm than service and more in aggression than in effectiveness.**

Police Presence

73% perceived the NYPD to be a constant or frequent presence somewhere in their community life.

More specifically:

48% Reported NYPD officers were constantly or frequently in the neighborhood

42% Reported NYPD surveillance technology were constantly or frequently in the neighborhood

42% Reported NYPD officers were constantly or frequently on public transportation

36% Reported NYPD officers were constantly or frequently in public parks or other greenspaces

31% Reported NYPD officers were constantly or frequently patrolling housing

To the people we surveyed, police activity is very visible. Most (73%) understood the NYPD as a constant or frequent presence somewhere in their community life. Indeed, surveillance is inescapable for people living in heavily policed neighborhoods, as one school-aged youth explained: “Young people where I go to school in East New York are constantly under surveillance, which is uncomfortable.”³ Over half (56%) of the survey participants felt at times unsafe with the NYPD’s presence. One person suggested, “I feel safe when there’s a community around me more than police or security. When there’s police officers around I feel scared and afraid that something bad will happen.”⁴ The police are bound to neighborhood security in contradictory ways. When police officers are present, they can inspire fear for some and calm in others; they can offer momentary safety while simultaneously being a threat to it. Yet, one reality that remains unchanging is that in heavily policed communities, everyday activities can become suspicious and potentially criminalizing.

Neighborhoods with omnipresent policing means that whole communities, not just certain individuals, have a major strike against them because of where they live. Highly monitored daily practices and behaviors can be racialized symbols of potential criminality (e.g., hoodies, low-riding jeans, hanging out on the street or standing on the corner in a group); cultural stereotypes can seem evasive, suspicious or disordered. “You can just be putting up a peace sign or doing something that police don’t understand in a photo, and they presume the worst of black and brown youth,” explained a young person about the NYPD’s surveillance of youth on social media. “And they can use these photos against you. Police can be out of touch culturally and not understand young people and criminalize them for things that they’re

doing in their photos that they THINK are criminal or are associated with criminal behaviors.”⁵ Over one-third (39%) of the survey respondents felt specifically targeted by the NYPD for at least one reason such as their race or neighborhood, and of them, most (83%) felt targeted for multiple reasons.

The NYPD’s close and constant watch heightens the risk of increased contact, violence, and potential punitive outcomes through the criminal legal system. This vulnerability is magnified by the assumptions linking criminality with race (or other marginalized identities) that studies have found are frequently baked into the officers’ discretionary decision-making.⁶ To some, whether it’s walking to school, playing in a playground, riding on the subway, sitting in the park, hanging out on a stoop or going to the corner store, this near-constant state of police surveillance feels like living in a police-occupied territory, as this Queens resident explained:

“Constant police presence means you live in fear of losing your life to law enforcement 24 hours a day, seven days a week. You are afraid to venture too far from home after sunset. When you hear a siren, you freeze. If you see them following you in a car, you slow down and pray they drive past you.”

- Survey respondent
(54, Black, man, Queens)

The NYPD’s potential harms are not just found in those moments of direct contact but also in the omnipresent threat of direct contact communicated by heavy surveillance and its authority to potentially act and even kill.

The state gives police discretionary permission — within a set of legal limitations — to interfere, disrupt or restrict community life in the name of public safety.⁷ Police officers are not trained to be social workers, medics, educators or community organizers; they are instead violence workers.⁸ The tools police officers are equipped with and largely trained for involve control, surveillance and force.⁹ Therefore, all police encounters — whether imposed or sought — are significant acts of government intrusion. This makes the NYPD an ongoing omnipresent threat of violence or legal escalation to those living in neighborhoods with heavy police presence, as this young person described:

“The police tried to pin me as someone in the neighborhood, a predator who was attacking women, that wasn’t me. They showed a picture of that person and tried to make me that person so that they would have somebody to arrest. I thought it was so ridiculous that I could be stopped just because I looked a certain way. My mom had to prove to them that it was not me by proving that I’m queer and not into women. It was like wow, I can’t even leave my house.”

- Town hall attendee

Many who attended the town halls and who took the survey understood the police as not only failing them but actively hurting them. They pointed to the ways that police profile and criminalize community members and aggressively interfere with daily life. They described living in a context where they are perceived as the disordered problem that needs ordering, where the police assume everyone to be potential criminals or potential threats to the safety of “others.”

“I’ve gone to the police for help and have instead been ticketed and threatened with arrest. I’ve been robbed, and the police have done nothing to help me. My daughter has been robbed, and they’ve done nothing to help her. They’ve even refused to help us file a report. Police officers don’t keep me safe. My friends and family keep me safe.”

- Town hall attendee

Police Contact

73% experienced direct contact with the NYPD in their lifetimes.

More specifically:

54% Had unwanted NYPD contact

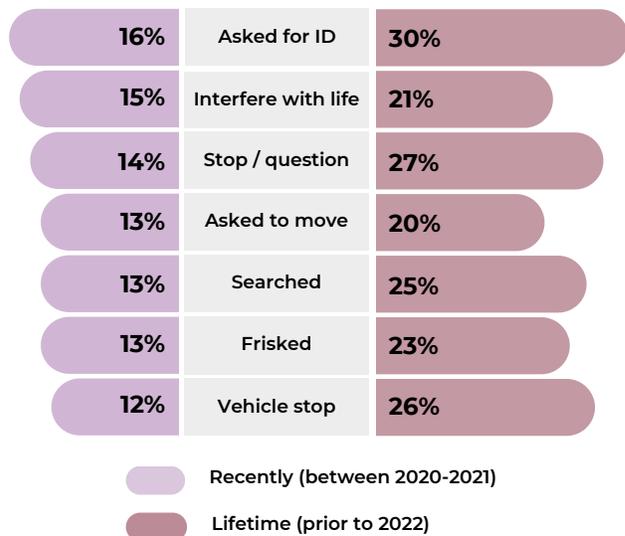
50% Sought the NYPD for help

Every time a person comes in contact with the police, they are confronting someone with a gun; they are exposed to the increased possibility of entering the criminal legal system; and they are vulnerable to state-sanctioned violence and even death. Nearly three-fourths (73%) of the survey respondents reported direct NYPD contact of some kind in their lives. Half (50%) also reported seeking the NYPD for help at some point in their lives, though, as we will describe in the next section and Chapter 4, this was frequently not without hesitation and was often met with inadequate, dismissive or even accusatory responses, as this Bronx resident explained:

Unwanted NYPD Contact

54% experienced unwanted NYPD contact in their lifetimes and **35%** experienced it since the pandemic.

More specifically:



The police contact reported in our survey was substantial and frequently unsolicited. More than half (54%) of all respondents reported experiencing unwanted police

contact in their lives, with over one-third (35%) experiencing unwanted contact during the pandemic. These are all major moments where police officers are limiting their freedom, even for something as seemingly innocuous as being asked to move. “There are usually cop cars outside of school and [the officers] just yell instructions at students like ‘go home, don’t wander the streets!’ It is scary because you know the power they have over you.”¹⁰ Unwanted police contact involves, for example, disrupting lives by asking people to move or show their ID. It involves times when the NYPD made it difficult or impossible for individuals to use important services like receiving drug treatment or health care, or interrupting them while attending places like work, school or child care. It also involves vehicle stops and street stops that can escalate into officers laying their hands on individuals through frisks and searches like this Brooklyn resident described:

“It’s terrifying to always run into officers. It’s aggressive and horrific. Especially when I was a kid. They said they would embarrass me every time they saw me and they did. They threw me against cars and searched me for nothing. I thought this was normal.”

- Survey respondent
(Black and Latinx, man, Brooklyn)

Encounters like these have long-term cumulative impacts,¹¹ whether it occurred two or 20 years ago. Therefore, it is significant that 84% of those who reported unwanted police contact, experienced it two or more times and nearly one-third (31%) experienced it 10 or more times. Overall, 72% of survey respondents who reported recent unwanted police contact also experienced it at other points in their past.

The ways in which policing occupies and accumulates among communities of color represents decades and generations of failed public safety strategies:

“The experience of being constantly monitored is why so many minority classes of folks feel a burning rage on an ongoing basis. No amount or degree of carceral intervention will prove successful in that regard. When folks who are struggling have acceptable employment tools, health care (mental and body well-being) access, a lifeline to quality education (schools, libraries), appropriate recreational facilities (parks, playgrounds, after-school centers) and secure housing, there is absolutely no need to spend \$11 billion on carceral policies that have proven ineffective for decades.”

- Survey respondent
(54, Black, woman, Bronx)

2.2. Police response to calls for service

In our culture, the police are widely understood as a public good who are there to serve and protect the community. The results from our study call this into question. Still, many seek the police for help in moments of crisis, and in this section, we detail what respondents told us about their experiences during calls for service. It is important to acknowledge that some people in our study indicated that the NYPD “were always there to diffuse the situation”¹² or “always helpful in my experiences”¹³ or “were able to take me away from an unsafe situation.”¹⁴ We indeed heard positive stories about assistance and security.

One individual said, “People were vandalizing my house, and no one on the block came to help as they started to assault my family until the cops came and handled it.”¹⁵ Another explained, “When I was working in a homeless program, there were times I had to call for NYPD, and they were very helpful in the situations.”¹⁶ Overall, 46% of the participants reported the NYPD is good or very good at responding to violence in their neighborhood.

Negative experiences when calling the NYPD for help

62% had at least one negative experience when seeking the NYPD for help.

Of those:

52% Reported the NYPD didn't always show up

38% Reported the NYPD showed up half the time or less

37% Reported feeling disrespected, unsafe, or harmed

However, we also learned that for many, calling the police for help is very precarious. Half of the survey respondents reported seeking the NYPD for help. When asked to reflect upon their call(s), respondents reported the NYPD showed up most of the time, and many had their issues resolved. Yet, 52% of those who called the NYPD said the NYPD didn't always show up when asked, and 38% said the NYPD showed up half the time or less. And when the police did show up, over one-third (37%) reported feeling disrespected, unsafe or harmed at least once. Combined — between not showing up, being ignored or troubling interactions — a full 62% of those who sought the NYPD reported at least one negative experience in their lifetime.

“If I feel like it’s life or death, then most likely yeah I will call 911 because of systemic default. I would still feel a bit hesitant though because calling 911 could either really help out or not. It’s just really a 50/50 coin toss with the situation.”

- Survey respondent
(26, Black, woman, Brooklyn)

Fifteen percent of the survey respondents said they would never call or approach the NYPD under any circumstances, while most (65%) reported they would only call if it’s an emergency. In other words, the majority suggested they either will not call the police at all or only if it is the last resort without other options. “The only time I would call police would be over a violent crime emergency and only because I don’t know who else I could call.”¹⁷ People are left then to calculate the potential benefit of seeking help with the potential cost of getting the police involved.

70% of respondents reported that they currently fear calling or approaching the NYPD for help because it will make the situation worse or lead to unnecessary violence.

We also learned that of those participants who had previously called the police for help, 45% reported there were times it was a difficult decision. When asked why, 66% of their open-ended responses explained their hesitancy as fear for what the NYPD would (or wouldn’t) do. Respondents reported assuming the NYPD would generally be unhelpful, unreliable or even hostile toward them. One person reported to police officers standing on the corner she was robbed, and “they told me to call in my complaint — really? I was just freaking robbed.”¹⁸

Another felt that “police act aggressively before knowing the situation.”¹⁹ Others worried about being falsely accused: “Found someone overdosed and felt like I was being blamed for what had happened.”²⁰

“A call for help often ends with a Black/brown individual laying dead in the street at the hands of the NYPD with no accountability to follow.”

- Survey respondent
(54, Black, man, South East Queens)

Calling the NYPD is “risky,” as another person noted, “you could get hurt or arrested although you yourself called police.”²¹ It was understood as especially risky for Black people, “Because being Black teaches you that you can get murdered by them for free.”²² One respondent explained, “They don’t respect Black people,” and another said, “My partner (Black man) was posing a threat to my safety. I hung up out of fear that they may harm him once they arrived.”²³ A mother bluntly explained why she avoided calling the police: “I didn’t want my Black son shot.”²⁴ Indeed, from 2013-2023, almost 2,927 Black people in the U.S. were killed by the police, and they are almost three times as likely to be killed by police than white people.²⁵

In addition to violence and even death, respondents worried that calling police would lead to legal escalation. They worried about being criminalized, arrested and imprisoned. Some respondents felt “[the NYPD] treat victims like criminals”²⁶ or “Just can’t trust police [because] they tend to make things worse or lock the innocent ones up.”²⁷ Some experienced this firsthand in their past: “My friend was shot and instead of helping they yelled and interrogated us.”²⁸

Yet, despite genuine concerns about calling police, many respondents understood the NYPD as the only viable choice in their circumstances. One said, “I was not sure if they were the correct people to call, but I didn’t have anyone else to call.”²⁹ It is not surprising people call the police when in need; support services are frequently scarce, and the NYPD is often the quickest and most readily or only available public resource in times of emergency or violence. “I felt like calling 911 and having them decide to send the police was the only option,”³⁰ a respondent said. The NYPD is the general default. It is significant, however, that people living in heavily policed neighborhoods, especially people of color, must live with this life-threatening decision. “They are the only one we can call; however, we are in fear for our lives,”³¹ stated a respondent.

“Calling the police would be my last resort. If I, or my loved ones, were hurt, my only option is to call 911, and that means the cops. Non-police response is especially necessary with mental health crises. Instead, people who need services are met with guns. And even when there are situations involving guns or violence, we can bring in violence interrupters who have influence in a particular neighborhood. I’ve seen this happen. Trusted community members have better results than cops ... The proof is in the pudding: The safest communities are the ones with the most resources, not the most police. If we had the resources we needed, we wouldn’t need the police.”

- Survey respondent
(Black and Latinx, man, Brooklyn)

2.3 Being reported to the NYPD

Research on calls for police service reveals that seeking police support is not an uncommon occurrence, particularly in communities of color.³² This trend is partly driven by the lack of resources, leaving the police as one of the few accessible and well-funded options for addressing various issues, such as disputes and family matters.³³

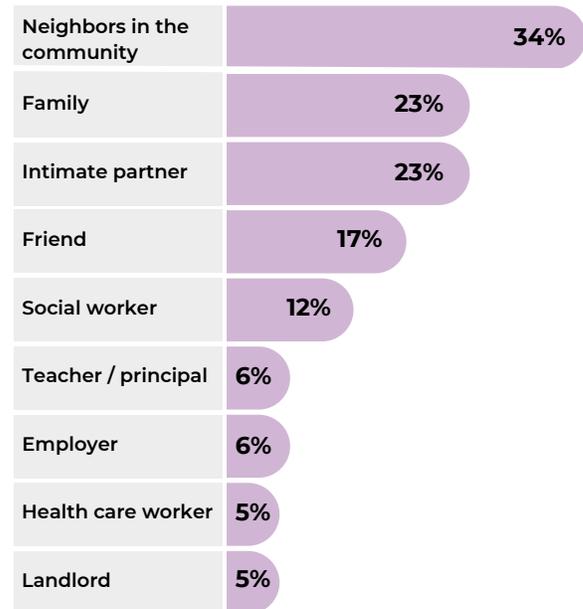
Our research underscores the significance of the police's role in under-resourced communities, given the limited alternatives available.

Survey data revealed that calls to the police often occur within intimate or proximal relationships, which led us to delve deeper into the implications of the other side of calls for service, the experiences of those whom the police were called on.

Eighteen percent of the survey respondents told us there was at least one time in their life where someone complained about or reported them to the NYPD. Over half (51%) were calls from people close, like family or friends, which are often complicated and layered situations. “My biological mother is mentally disturbed and abused me; when I learned to defend myself, I would. Calling the cop was her way of winning as the big bad wolf,”³⁴ one respondent said. Another person explained, “My ex partner was a very jealous man. I couldn’t have friends or go places with my girlfriends because he always felt like I was cheating. On that day, he just wanted to show me that he [had] control over my life and still thinks he does.”³⁵

Who contacted the NYPD to complain or report you?

18% of the calls to the NYPD were from service professionals like teachers/principals, social workers and healthcare workers.



Of course, calls to complain or report also came from outside family or friend networks. Over one-third (34%) said neighbors in the community called. Some referenced the idea of weaponized calls: “My mom and my aunt was undocumented during those calls. And I have people threatened to call 911 for that because of their dislike of them. The number has been weaponized towards me and my family.”³⁶ Others explained that they were wrongly perceived as suspicious: “I was just homeless and sleeping; no need to call police”³⁷ or “Someone confused a music device as a weapon. If that was the actual reason, then I think the call was justified. However, I suspect race was a factor.”³⁸

Importantly, 18% said service professionals called — people like social workers, health care workers or teachers/principals — who are there to offer support, not to criminalize and extend the carceral network. “I’ve just seen so many things that happen inside of a school,” explained a young person, “where School Safety Agents [SSA] should have been there to ‘protect and defend’ someone from getting their stuff stolen, from getting beat up, from getting whatever, bullied, whatever the case may be, and SSAs are nowhere to be found; but the minute a teacher calls the SSA and says, ‘Can you remove this child from my classroom,’ that’s not protecting — that’s policing.”³⁹

These findings reveal the extension of the police’s reach. **The act of involving the police in a situation effectively transforms teachers/principals, health care workers and social workers who are supposed to be sources of support and care into de facto enforcers of the carceral punishment system.** This blurs the roles of human service workers and underscores the entanglement of essential community figures with law enforcement practices. The evolution from seeking police assistance to involving an entire network of professionals who rely on the police has far-reaching implications, further reinforcing the presence and influence of the carceral state in daily life.

Of the people who had the police called on them, some felt the police calls were justified because they “broke the law”⁴⁰ or “they called the police for me stealing.”⁴¹ However, most (57%) felt in their situation that more suitable options or strategies were available or should be available other than involving the NYPD, even in serious situations (as is discussed more in Chapter 4).

Many of the calls were perceived to be for trivial incidents: “It was a minor argument, which could be easily resolved”⁴² or “The police were called by a stranger on me, because my friend was teaching me to drive in a park, the stranger did not like that we were practicing in the parking lot.”⁴³ Respondents felt these moments could have been better handled through direct communication: “It was a noise complaint when I was having a party; they could’ve asked us to be more quiet”⁴⁴ or “We were trespassing, but there were no signs or any indication that we weren’t allowed there. If we had been told calmly, we would have left. Instead, we were chased by police.”⁴⁵

Of the people who had police called on them, **57%** of the participants felt in their situation there were (or should be) more suitable options or strategies available other than involving the NYPD.

Whenever the police are involved, there is the threat of violence, arrest or death. However, it is important to note that those who chose to call the police - for example, to support someone who was injured or to prevent/end violence - may not have felt safe confronting people in moments of crisis or tension and felt that calling was, in fact, a way of providing safety to their community. Again, the NYPD is often understood as the only realistic choice for help under the circumstance. **Some respondents who had the NYPD called on them acknowledged the need for intervention in their situation but suggested that alternative strategies would have been more effective.** For example, one person said, “A social worker would have been a better option than three broken ribs

and a warning.”⁴⁶In fact, rather than NYPD intervention, many respondents explained it was services they most needed, such as “Safe Horizons,”⁴⁷ “Social worker from ACS,”⁴⁸ “counseling,”⁴⁹ “Mental health doctor,”⁵⁰ “Mediation,”⁵¹ “call my therapist,”⁵² “Housing program,”⁵³ “Health care workers for mental health,”⁵⁴ “Call rehab not jail”⁵⁵ or “Call my drug counselor.”⁵⁶ We will address these kinds of investments in the coming chapters.

2.4 NYPD harm and violence

Our findings illuminate that people in highly policed New York neighborhoods often hold deeply complex beliefs, attitudes and proposals for community safety, supporting this report’s approach of presenting data about the multiple truths that communities hold. Notably, our findings suggest that while police officers have provided moments of successful intervention and important services for New Yorkers, for many respondents the police are also a constant threat to safety.

71% of participants reported they were harmed by or experienced violence from the NYPD at least once in their life.

We recognize the desires many participants hold for police intervention while also acknowledging that the police frequently fall short in meeting individuals’ needs and can pose risks to community members in terms of violence and abuse. It is therefore of critical importance to keep in mind how, on the whole, policing as a public institution — along with the criminal legal system — have historically served to uphold social, racial and economic inequalities through the disproportionate criminalization, surveillance, discipline, control and containment of poor communities,

communities of color and others who are marginalized.⁵⁷

It is unsurprising then, though no less concerning, that whether within the context of unwanted police contact or calls for police service, almost three-quarters (71%) of survey respondents reported the NYPD harmed them at least once in their life. Many reported aggressive physical encounters with police. “So [the NYPD] telling us that we fit a description of two Spanish, Latinx guys that’s been seen dealing drugs,” explained a Bronx resident about an experience he and his recently immigrated brother had with police. They were not carrying or dealing drugs, but the contact still became violent:

“He dragged me by my balls — by my balls, not by my arm, my neck, not even my back ... So, because my brother pulling me inside while the police trying to pull me outside, from the driver’s side, the cop on the driver’s side opened the door and, he start[s] punching my brother and punching him and punching him and telling him to let go of me, so the officer could drag. And long story short, they take us out, they beat us up. ... we’re bloody and everything.”

- Survey respondent
(36, Latinx, man, Bronx)

The NYPD physically touched slightly over one-third (36%) of survey respondents. The NYPD handcuffed one-quarter, and of those, 75% indicated that they were let go.

Almost one-fifth (17%) of the participants reported the NYPD used or directed a weapon toward them, and just under one-third (32%) had at least one physically violent encounter with the NYPD in their lives that involved being hit, slapped, choked or punched.

Some of NYPD Harm and Violence Reported by Respondents

Physical harm to self or property	*Recently	**Lifetime
Experienced physical violence by the NYPD.	17%	32%
NYPD used or directed a weapon toward them.	9%	17%
NYPD damaged or took their property.	7%	16%
Verbal harm		
Disrespected by the NYPD.	19%	36%
NYPD threatened violence or legal escalation toward them.	15%	27%
Harassed by the NYPD.	11%	20%
NYPD made bigoted comments toward them.	11%	19%
Sexual and gender-based harm		
Received sexual attention from the NYPD.	7%	11%
Received gender-based neglect or voyeurism by the NYPD.	6%	11%
Experienced sexual violence by the NYPD.	5%	9%
NYPD asked for sexual favors in exchange for something or with threat of harm.	4%	5%

*Recently (between 2020-2021)
 **Lifetime (prior to 2022)

“When the cop showed up, they said, ‘aren’t you supposed to be the man? You’re supposed to check them.’ He [NYPD] believed that I was supposed to be the man and that I was supposed to enforce my will against her because I was masculine” was how a trans-identified person described a domestic incident with their partner. “[The NYPD] said it in such a mocking way too,”⁵⁸

this person reflected. “Police treated us like we were worthless”⁵⁹ was how another participant described her experience with stop and frisk. The NYPD does not collect information about disrespectful, threatening or prejudiced police encounters, but they can also be significant moments of harm. Over one-third (36%) of the survey respondents reported that the NYPD disrespected them; the NYPD threatened over one-quarter (27%) with violence or legal escalation; and the NYPD harassed one-fifth at least once in their lives.

“See physically, I’ve been beaten from them; I have marks still today on my shoulders where they, um, threw me down to the ground, you know, um, and stepped on my shoulders where the marks are now still there to this day. I have pain in the shoulders.”

- Survey respondent
 (50, Black, woman, Bronx)

Most significant, some participants described triggering racist interactions. “I’m coming home from having to work one time in my own neighborhood. And then a couple of them [NYPD] were around, and they were asking where I was going, and I was actually heading home. They was like, ‘Where you going boy?’” a Black Brooklyn resident recounted. He explained,

“I’m a tall male actually. I’m 6’5 ... The word ‘boy’ is just set in racial issues and set in slave issues. Like it’s really setting that kind of field where you say to somebody that you [are] trying to condescend, that you clearly look down upon, or they try to make you feel less like a human ... If you’re a this officer come to my home unexpectedly and then throw out, ...

... you know, very nasty derogatory things to me ... it was a time when I went to tell him that we can no longer continue with this behavior...‘boy,’ I understand that. You gotta call them a boy obviously, a child maybe so ...but like when you’re a man and you know that for a fact and then you could say that kind of stuff, especially to Black men. Um, it’s like, that’s like something that you know; it’s like being done purposely.”

- Survey respondent
(29, Black, man, Brooklyn)

This is not a story of subtle misunderstandings or differing vocabulary interpretations. This is the NYPD using language with racial overtones to intimate, disempower and dehumanize. It is a form of racialized violence. **Nearly one-fifth (19%) reported that the NYPD used bigoted, sexist or racist language toward them in their life, with over one-tenth (11%) experiencing this during the pandemic (between 2020 and 2021).**

Sexual and gender-based police encounters are another form of harm faced by community members living with omnipresent policing but seldom part of the public discourse, despite more recent work that has brought these issues in the spotlight. Over one-tenth (11%) reported experiencing sexual attention like receiving catcalls or getting asked for their number, and just under one-tenth (9%) reported experiencing searches that felt sexualized, such as when, as this woman recalls, “I was searched by a male officer, and even when I demanded a female officer, he continued to touch and violate me.”⁶⁰ Or this search, where a respondent said, “I’m not a suspect, but yet you [NYPD] have your hands all over my crotch and, you know, my buttock.”

This led to a sexualized slur. “I’m explaining to him I’m very uncomfortable and instead of being professional, that’s when it comes out, ‘It’s not my fault you’re a fag. It’s not my fault you’re uncomfortable because you’re a fag.’”⁶¹

As part of the Community Safety Project, in addition to the survey, we conducted 38 in-depth interviews and held a virtual town hall with people who had a range of sexual and/or gender-based police experiences (see a forthcoming report by Priscilla Bustamante and CPR organizations). These interviews, such as from this person who had previously been involved with sex work, helped illuminate the violent distortion of power, consent and safety that occurs in these abhorrent encounters.

“Oh yes, it went as far as doing the whole act. But I went through with it because he would, he would tell me things like, ‘well, you know, if you ever get arrested again, I can help you’ ... And being a young mother, you know, and struggling and going through, you know, life’s obstacles, the ups and downs, I figured, well, let me go ahead and do it, you know? But it was like I was being pressured because he would pop up to my house unexpectedly. And this is a heavy man. There was plenty of phone calls and threats. So, I went along with it for about a good four months until I said to myself, I have to move, I have to change my address, and then maybe I can get around this situation that I’m in because it was very scary to have because I’m a woman of God and I knew that I was trying to change my life and I knew that it was wrong. I knew he had a wife. And then he forced himself on me. Just like,...

... 'No, you're gonna give me this because you've been giving it to me, so you just gonna accept it and shut up.'

- Survey respondent
(50, Black, woman, Bronx)

Under no circumstances should law enforcement use its position to coerce or force sex. This is a public betrayal of the highest order, and yet, in just our survey alone, 86 people reported that the NYPD sexually assaulted them, and 79 reported the NYPD asked for sex in return for something.

The NYPD has outsized power, influence and discretion in poor communities of color. The opportunities to observe and experience police contact as well as the harm resulting from police contact are much greater in neighborhoods flooded with the NYPD. The police are a more active and potentially disruptive presence in community life. They more proactively and aggressively enforce minor offenses; they are also more often sought for assistance and intervention given the lack of other resources available. In those ways, the harms and risks of police violence and the potential carceral consequences such as arrest and incarceration that come with omnipresence are not just experienced individually but shared with friends, family, close acquaintances and neighbors. "I just came home with my sister and my little brother so they're in the house by themselves, looking out the window at me get humiliated," remembers a Brooklyn resident. He was stopped outside his home, having just picked up his sister and little brother at school while his mom was at work. "I ended up arrested. Charges were dismissed and everything. My mother rushed home from work."⁶² 45% of survey respondents reported that people close to them experienced NYPD violence, arrest

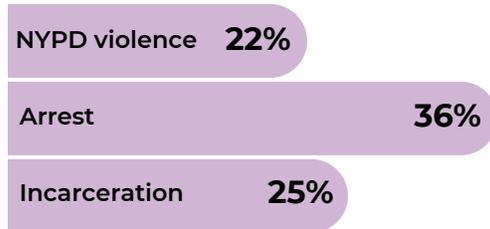
and/or incarceration. The NYPD's criminalizing presence can impact and harm loved ones in far-reaching ways from general fears of death to financial burdens, lack of child care, lack of housing support and prison visits (to name just a few).

NYPD experiences by people close to respondents

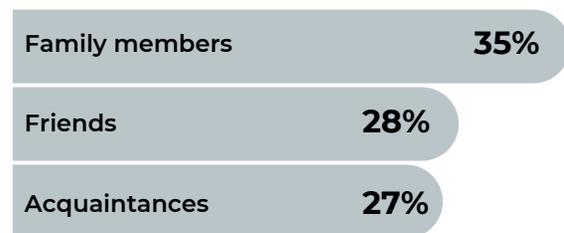
45% reported that people close to them experienced NYPD violence, arrest and/or incarceration.

More specifically:

The nature of system contact for people close to respondents:



People close to respondents who experienced system contact:



System contact of people close to respondents:

	Experienced NYPD violence	Arrested	Incarcerated
Family members	15%	28%	20%
Friends	14%	22%	15%
Acquaintances	14%	18%	12%

The NYPD can disrupt community relationships, create insecurity in peoples' lives and produce a hostile neighborhood environment.

Officers can limit residents' movements and engagement in public spaces, with some New Yorkers reporting that they simply stay home to avoid the police.⁶³ These trends are particularly concerning because policing may undermine social connection and increase community fragmentation,⁶⁴ which can diminish physical and mental health.⁶⁵ Over half (54%) of survey respondents who reported recent unwanted police contact indicated that at least several days in the previous two weeks they had little interest or pleasure in doing things as compared to those who had not experienced recent unwanted police contact (38%). Study participants noted a heightened sense of vulnerability where their everyday relationships with friends and family become scrutinized through police surveillance. For instance, one respondent commented on the NYPD's gang database, "I feel like it's unjust. You don't know that person's history. I can have a not-great history, but it's not right to just decide that I'm guilty and treat me like I'm guilty indefinitely because of my association with a gang or believed association."⁶⁶

Community members can find themselves negotiating where they go and who they see, such as this person who is describing the need to stay away from a certain neighborhood because of the police threat: "[It] keeps family away from family... I'm not going to hang over there anymore. I'm not about to get in trouble. It keeps you away from places that are in your own home, places you used to hang at."⁶⁷ It also forces people to stay away in fear they will cause trouble for their friends and family. Another respondent explained, "They end up saying, 'I can't go to that neighborhood because I

don't want to bring my baggage, the issue attached to me — to my family and friends.' They try to see their families, but they don't do it in certain places."⁶⁸

Living in neighborhoods with high police activity substantially impacts people's lives and the lives of their loved ones, family members, friends and neighbors.⁶⁹ **This research demonstrates how the NYPD's omnipresence is a community experience, and the implication is that the police can be a collective and continuously harmful presence even without direct contact, including simply observing severe police activity.** Significant numbers of respondents reported witnessing violence by NYPD officers in their community such as this Manhattan resident described:

"Maybe [the NYPD are] just doing that to show off, like to show others around that they're in power and I can do this to you too. And then people like me just feel like we can't do anything about it. Because we're scared that if we do, they'll probably come and shoot us, man, or kill us, man. And it's going to be their word against our word. They're the law enforcement, and we're just regular citizens."

- Survey respondent
(34, Latinx, man, Manhattan)

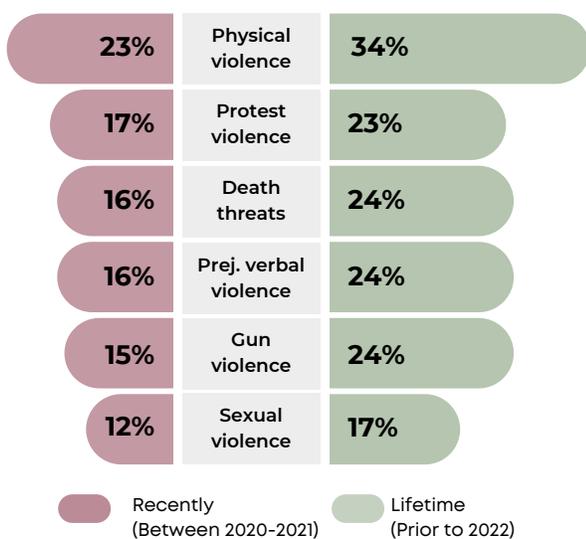
Such an experience can create collective feelings of trauma, threat and helplessness that impact individuals even though they were not directly targeted. Over one-third (37%) of survey respondents reported witnessing NYPD violence in their neighborhood, including nearly one-quarter (24%) who witnessed police threaten to kill someone as well as 13% who actually saw the NYPD shoot at someone. This also

includes over one-third (34%) who observed physical violence at the hands of the NYPD and nearly one-quarter (24%) who heard the NYPD use language that was bigoted or prejudiced.

Witnessed NYPD violence in their Community

37% witnessed some form of NYPD violence in their lifetimes and **26%** witnessed violence during the pandemic.

Specific forms of violence included:



Studies have consistently demonstrated that both direct and indirect police contact can have serious repercussions on mental and physical health, leading to increased rates of chronic diseases, stress and anxiety.⁷⁰ Contact with the police, including being stopped by the police or experiencing police abuse, is associated with poor physical health, while living in a neighborhood with high rates of police frisks is associated with increased odds of being diagnosed with diabetes, high blood pressure and past-year asthma episodes. Contact with the police⁷¹ is also associated with poor mental health, including trauma, post-traumatic stress disorder, physiological distress, depression, anxiety, suicide attempts and suicidal ideation.

⁷³

For young Black men in particular, research has shown that police violence, whether directly experienced or feared, can act as a chronic traumatic stressor and negatively impact their mental and physical well-being.⁷⁴

Our study found that Fifty-six percent of those survey respondents who experienced recent unwanted police contact said they felt down, depressed or hopeless several days or more in the previous two weeks as compared to those who had not reported unwanted police contact (40%). And over half (51%) of the survey respondents expressed being worried about their own safety with police and/or the safety of their friends/family most days or everyday (and 70% worried to some degree). This included having friends/family members or oneself killed, injured, wrongly arrested, disrespected, stopped or sexually assaulted by police. The threat of police violence, arrest, incarceration and potential death is very real to the participants in our study (One said, “Police killed my brother in [year], so ever since then I don’t trust them”). Police stops are frightening, explained a Brooklyn man: “It made me very scared to the point that it would be, sometimes, sometimes cops would have to be like, ‘Are you okay? You alright? Like, you [are] shaking.’”⁷⁵ Just the police’s mere presence can be frightening, even to children. “Like there’s an incident where the drug dealers was out there arguing and fighting,” one respondent described. “When the cops came, my kids ran so fast, they ran into the building. They wasn’t scared of the guys with the guns and the drug dealers that’s on my block; they were more afraid of the cops.”⁷⁶ **In heavily policed New York neighborhoods — from children to elderly — our study found that few are ultimately left untouched by the NYPD and the harms they enact.**

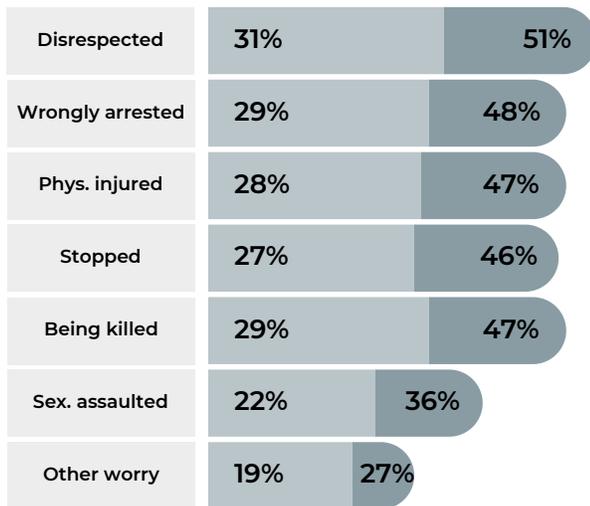
Feeling Worried About NYPD Contact

51% expressed being worried about their own safety with police and/or the safety of their friends/family most days or everyday, and **70%** worried to some degree.

More specifically:

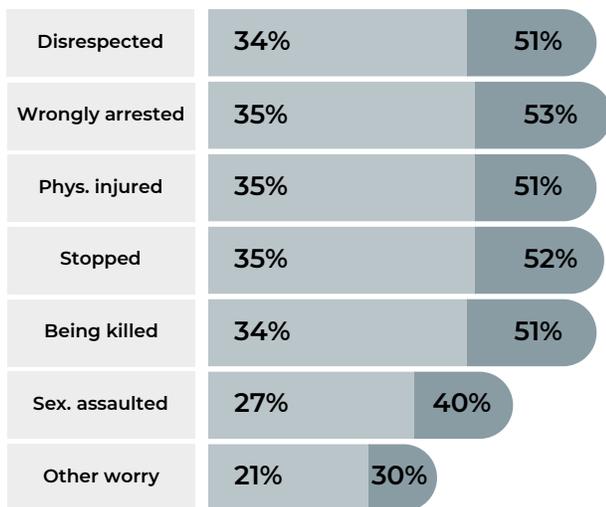
Worried for self

43% worried for one's own safety most/everyday (**61%** to some degree)



Worried for friends / family

43% worried about the safety of their friends or family most/everyday (**60%** to some degree)



Worry most or every day
 Worry to some degree

2.5 Summary

The findings throughout this section offer evidence that those living in highly policed neighborhoods frequently experience policing as pervasive, harmful, violent and fearful. Our study offers unique insight and support to the body of evidence that police saturation is often experienced as a punishment on whole communities, especially communities of color, with ongoing and far-reaching consequences. In sum, what we found is that while community members want to be and feel safe, the experiences they or their community members have had with the NYPD often run counter to that. People, especially Black and Latinx New Yorkers, living in highly policed neighborhoods report feeling that the police are an omnipresent force and that they are under near-constant surveillance. They report high levels of police contact in which they have directly experienced a range of physical, verbal, and sexual/gender-based violence and abuse. They also have witnessed this or know of their friends, family or neighbors experiencing this. For many, the cumulative effect of these experiences creates an individual and collective sense of insecurity and fear. These findings raise alarm bells for a public safety approach that prioritizes NYPD enforcement and fails to account for the perceived and experienced harms.

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- 13 Survey respondent - 38, white, man, Queens
- 14 Survey respondent - 27, Latinx, woman, Queens
- 15 Survey respondent - Age unknown, race unknown, gender unknown, Staten Island
- 16 Survey respondent - 47, Black, woman, Brooklyn
- 17 Survey respondent - 27, white, woman, Queens
- 18 Survey respondent - 56, Black, woman, Brooklyn
- 19 Survey respondent - 64, Latinx, woman, Manhattan
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- 36 Survey respondent - 20, Black, trans/questioning, Brooklyn
- 37 Survey respondent - 23, white, trans/questioning, Brooklyn
- 38 Survey respondent - 41, Black, man, Brooklyn
- 39 Town hall attendee - demographics unknown
- 40 Town hall attendee - demographics unknown

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- 41 Survey respondent - demographics unknown
- 42 Survey respondent - 36, white, man, Manhattan
- 43 Survey respondent - 19, white, woman, Brooklyn
- 44 Survey respondent - 37, white, woman, Brooklyn
- 45 Survey respondent - 19, Latinx, woman, Bronx
- 46 Survey respondent - 44, race unknown, trans/questioning, Staten Island
- 47 Survey respondent - 41, Black and Latinx, trans/questioning, Brooklyn
- 48 Survey respondent - 18, Black and Latinx, woman, Bronx
- 49 Survey respondent - demographics unknown
- 50 Survey respondent - 55, Black, woman, Staten Island
- 51 Survey respondent - 56, other person of color, man, Bronx
- 52 Survey respondent - 46, Black, woman, Manhattan
- 53 Survey respondent - 32, Latinx, trans/questioning, Staten Island
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“Community safety [is] ... knowing I can walk down the street without encountering profound human suffering and need on every block.”

- Town hall attendee

3.0

INVESTING IN COMMUNITY SAFETY

During the summer 2020, we bore witness to an unparalleled global outcry resonating against anti-Black police violence in the United States. This movement has been largely led by Black, Latinx and other people of color¹ who are — to varying degrees — at the center of numerous overlapping crises including criminalization, economic precarity, the climate crisis, and crumbling housing and school infrastructure.² The movement exposed on a global scale how historical patterns of racialized violence against communities of color continue to shape the daily lives of people in the U.S.

Within this context, CPR recognized the urgent call for new visions of safety and in response developed the Community Safety Project, which offers people in highly policed neighborhoods a platform to define for themselves what is necessary to create safe, healthy, and thriving communities.

In this chapter, we will explore what safety looks and feels like for people in highly policed neighborhoods and how they understand the relationship between policing and other community investments.

Sections:

- 3.1 When policing is the only option, it's the only answer
- 3.2 Designing research to understand community safety
- 3.3 Community safety means investment and care
- 3.4 Divest from police, invest in community
- 3.5 Generational differences in how people view policing and safety
- 3.6 Police accountability is part of community safety
- 3.7 Summary

3.1 When policing is the only option, it's the only answer

New Yorkers in highly policed neighborhoods often need access to a wide range of resources to help meet their basic needs, but the most present, proactive and available taxpayer-funded resource always comes with weapons and the potential for violence and criminalization. Residents of these neighborhoods have been told — through our media, politicians and other sources of conventional authority — that the police are the only rational and effective option for producing safety and that the price they must pay for safety is being exposed to omnipresent policing, constant surveillance and police stops. The warped yet mainstream rationale for imposing what essentially amounts to a permanent occupying force in low-income communities and communities of color³ is the false narrative that if New Yorkers don't support the NYPD, their only other option is lawlessness and violence. But is what New Yorkers have today safety? Can the police effectively keep them safe? Politicians give the police credit for lowering crime but do not blame the police for rising crime. In fact, rising crime rates offer cause for politicians to call for more police and more policing investments. Yet, very little police work actually focuses on serious violent crimes, the odds of police solving crimes is very low,⁴ and almost all of the people whom police stop are let go and not arrested.⁵ Why should people have to withstand the threat of police violence to be “safe” from other forms of violence?

In essence, people in highly policed neighborhoods are made to endure police violence and harm for the unsubstantiated possibility of community safety.

The results of our survey reflected this reality and revealed that for many residents, experiences with the police are not straightforward. For example, 64% who called the NYPD for help also experienced unwanted police contact, and 73% of those who felt the NYPD helped them also reported the NYPD harmed them. Or, when asked a series of questions about various forms of law enforcement presence, 60% of those who believed certain types of presence made them safer also indicated that other types of presence made them less safe. And 53% who indicated that the size of the NYPD presence in certain areas should not be reduced also indicated that the NYPD presence in other areas should be decreased. In other words, it was common for participants' experiences and views to reflect the tensions that omnipresent policing imposes on community life.

In the Community Safety Project, we were able to see many respondents deeply grappling with tensions related to the police as the only available safety option while experiencing and witnessing firsthand the risk of harm that the police bring. When speaking to researchers, one Brooklyn resident reflected on a police encounter he had experienced, explaining, “[A friend and I were] coming from the store on my way home and a [NYPD] car pulled up. I guess they suspected us of having guns because they asked us, ‘Where are the guns?’ So, they searched us, and they found nothing.” He went on to say, “They kind of were like jokers; they joked around a lot, so we joked kind of back in a sarcastic way. So, after the search, we just sort of went on with our day.”⁶ This might have been categorized in a survey as a positive or respectful police encounter. In this instance, we had the opportunity to ask whether he understood that encounter as respectful, and he responded, “What does being respectful mean? So, the fact that you didn't call me a ‘n@#*%’ or you didn't like curse at me,

does that make you respectful?” This participant, like many of the residents living in highly policed neighborhoods whom we spoke to held important insights about these tensions: “Why are you here in the first place? The physical presence of police in our neighborhoods is a sign of disrespect to our community because in and of itself it criminalizes our community and criminalizes the culture and thus the people in our community.” He went on to say, “But still, we have never seen safety come from anywhere else but the police department. So, we don’t know what accountability, what protection and what safety looks like outside of these governmental official institutions.” In these quotes, we see how, for this individual, the police put his community at risk, while at the same time, it is hard to understand what safety looks like without the police because the city does not ever provide other options.

Another Brooklyn resident described what it means to lack other options for help, stating, “When something does happen, it’s like we don’t have anybody else to go to, to feel some sense of safety, but the police.” Limited options force him to contend with the difficult choice of relying on the police, when harm can come from the community as well as the police: “Like I know the police are fucked up and the police don’t really care about Black or brown people, but still in my hood, if something was to happen, either I’m going to jump in front of a bullet for someone or I’m going to have to call someone; there’s nothing else to do.”⁷

This participant’s responses, like the responses above, are not simplistic calls for more police or police at all but a realistic assessment of current conditions. Yet, it is easy to see how a certain line of survey questioning that centers policing as the only option might lead to simplistically misleading answers and, if one is not careful, could be misinterpreted as “pro-police.”

For example, if a survey asked this participant if he desired more police presence, he might have said yes, but that would have missed the nuance of his response that in times of crisis there are no other options, and therefore he must choose the police. In other words, surveys can easily reproduce the false narrative of policing or violence unless participants are offered other ways of responding that are outside of the police-only logic.

This oversimplified line of questioning resembles the rhetoric of many politicians. What they ask, what they hear and what they propose are typically filtered through a false narrative that people have to either choose between omnipresent policing or lawlessness. As we highlighted in Chapter 1, Mayor Adams has recently stated: “When I go to my communities of color, and I’ve never heard them, never heard them [say] Eric, we want less police.”⁸ Yet, we know from our study that seemingly pro-police responses are frequently much more complicated. For example, of the survey respondents who indicated a desire for increased policing, 83% also expressed worry or fear of the NYPD; 84% indicated a desire for nonpolice safety options; and 55% reported the NYPD did little to reduce violence or handle most of the harm their communities experienced. While more than half (57%) of those who indicated they thought the NYPD’s budget should increase also said that, when given other options, reducing the NYPD budget and moving that money to community-based institutions, services and programs would make them safer.

These are not inconsistent findings. The desire for safety is a desire for safety from police violence as well as community violence. This chapter offers insights not only about how residents living in heavily policed neighborhoods understand community safety but also how to learn

about community safety. What participants communicate through a narrow line of police-centered questioning becomes more complicated across the breadth and depth of the Community Safety Project, where we intentionally designed questions to resist this narrow lens. For example, 63% of those who told us they generally believed the NYPD is good at reducing violence also thought that at least one of the eight listed nonpolicing alternatives actually does more to reduce violence in their neighborhood than the NYPD. In our study, we developed spaces that gave participants an opportunity to describe in more detail their full sense of safety. By reframing the false dichotomy of either police or violence, we learned that the wide-ranging services and resources participants prioritize for safety are not what the city budget ever gives them.

Concerns of safety and violence that endorse policing are too often portrayed by mainstream media and political pundits as backlash to or rejection of the “defund” demands that were elevated in the summer of 2020. **Our findings suggest that those living in heavily policed neighborhoods are communicating a vision for both safety and justice.** Rather than being mutually exclusive, they want to feel and be safe from violence and victimization whether from a police officer, a person on the street, someone in their home or someone with whom they’re in a relationship. To feel safe, their basic needs must be addressed, and at the same time, the fear of abusive, unlawful or violent policing also needs to be addressed. In other words, when given an opportunity, the community’s understanding of who creates safety and how to produce it is much more expansive than a narrowly defined version that simply centers the police. In the next section, we will describe the methodologies we used to gain a more nuanced understanding of community safety.

3.2 Designing research to understand community safety

We designed the Community Safety Project around the research question, “How do New Yorkers in the most heavily policed neighborhoods understand community safety?” What we found is a fairly straightforward but, perhaps to many, unexpected set of findings. In short, many participants described meeting people’s basic needs as the primary driver of safety and that the police were a common cause of harm but the only well-funded public option for help. This is a difficult position for people living in heavily policed neighborhoods to navigate because they want to be safe, but they are rarely given options for creating safety in their neighborhoods outside of policing. While policymakers, the media and even primetime television frequently center policing as the default public safety strategy, participants instead prioritized nonpolicing, noncriminalizing community investments such as housing, schools and jobs.

We came to this understanding of community safety by using a set of methodological approaches that drew upon CPR member organizations’ highly localized work and decades of experience partnering with communities with high police presence. Their deep expertise pushed the Community Safety Project to build spaces that resisted the dominant policing narratives so ingrained in our public discourse and that are even baked into the questions that social scientists typically ask about public safety.

Methodological Strategy #1: Offer unfiltered spaces for New Yorkers to communicate their grounded knowledge about safety and think big about their desires for what could and should be.

Each town hall followed a basic template. The first part of the town hall started with a space for personal reflection facilitated by a short online survey. The survey offered audience members an open-ended opportunity to reflect on how they defined community safety. This helped people generate memories and organize thoughts that they could share in later discussions. The survey also asked audience members to make choices about budget investments. The town halls then transitioned to 90-120 minute facilitated conversations, both in large and small groups, that addressed three themes: imagining community safety and thriving; reflecting on police practices and experiences; and building a better future. In total, these guided discussions gave participants ample space to offer what they believe is needed to build a safer New York, and we then used the rich themes discussed in the town halls to inform the development of the Community Safety Project survey.

Methodological Strategy #2: Offer opportunities for participants to explore their visions of safety within the context of open-ended survey questions.

We wanted to replicate the open-ended space that the town halls afforded within the context of the survey. The first question in our survey was the open-ended prompt: “What are the things you believe are needed to produce safe, healthy and thriving communities?”

With this question, we wanted to offer participants the opportunity, prior to seeing any of our other survey questions, to define for themselves what is needed to produce safe, healthy and thriving communities. We intentionally worded the question so that we were not assuming what participants might prioritize. In this chapter, we will discuss how participants had a wide range of responses to this question, illuminating how for many community members, policing is either not relevant at all for producing safety or is part of a wider strategy for producing safety.

Methodological Strategy #3: Ask questions that are conceptually related in multiple ways so that participants’ responses provide insight into the nuances of how they perceive safety and the NYPD.

We asked about safety and policing in multiple ways throughout the survey, which opened doors for participants to express their nuanced beliefs and enabled us, as researchers, to gain a more complicated understanding of safety across the questions. For example, we asked a general question: “How good is the NYPD at reducing violence in your neighborhood?” Then, to understand this more specifically, we asked, “Which does more to reduce violence?” For that latter question, we always offered the police as an option but also offered alternatives including social services, jobs, schools, affordable housing and mental health services. Knowing whether participants believe the NYPD is effective at reducing violence is important but incomplete and potentially misleading. Knowing whether respondents might simultaneously believe other options are more or equally effective offers a fuller understanding of possible future safety investments.

A similar example involves the police budget. We asked participants whether they believe “the size of the NYPD budget should increase, decrease or stay the same?” In the next question, we asked whether participants believe it would generally make them more or less safe “if the NYPD budget was reduced and that money was moved to community-based institutions, services and programs?” Here we asked about budget reduction in different ways, but like the example above, we offered a viable nonpolicing alternative in the second question. It is valuable to understand the possibility that participants might want the NYPD budget to stay the same or increase now as well as understand a specific divest-invest alternative as a potential safer future solution. As we discussed in the previous section, while this may seem contradictory, it is in fact, a more realistic and nuanced expression of community safety that our research is making visible.

Methodological Strategy #4: Provide response options to questions that include the possibility for participants to endorse policing and/or the legal system while not centering them or framing them as necessary.

We included numerous questions in which the police and the criminal legal system were just two of several possibilities available to participants. For example, in one question we told participants: “Imagine that you are in charge of the city budget and responsible for producing a safe, healthy and thriving community. Distribute \$100 across the 16 items below. More money = greater priority to you.” Participants had the opportunity to distribute money to a range of options (as well as add in their own options), including the police, the justice system, housing, health care, jobs, mental

health care and transportation. This enabled us to see the extent to which people prioritized certain public investments in community safety as compared to others, without assuming that participants desire investments in the police and/or the justice system at all.

Our study has major implications for how to ask New Yorkers about community safety to accurately understand what they desire and its impact on future safety initiatives and budget allocations.

The ongoing public debate regarding policing and safety has consistently failed to adequately take up the question of what constitutes safety and how to produce it. Instead, public discourse has remained largely stuck in the overly simplistic duality of either decreased policing and lawlessness or increased policing and safety. Above all, the public narrative has failed to adequately consider community members’ thoughts, feelings and ideas about all the ways we can make neighborhoods safer. Through the implementation of the survey strategies outlined in this section, we were able to gather data that unsurprisingly disrupts overly simplistic narratives about New Yorkers’ perspectives on safety, the NYPD and effective public investments in safety.

3.3 Community safety means investment and care

Safety for many, as we will describe in more detail throughout this chapter, involves well-resourced neighborhoods where basic needs are adequately met and where people have access to the comprehensive resources necessary to lead flourishing lives;

to not only survive but to thrive with dignity; and to have “opportunities and resources available for everyone — education, jobs, mental health resources, health care.” This kind of safety involves feelings of mutual accountability to others in the community so that individual well-being depends on collective well-being. Respondents described the importance of both having enough resources to support themselves and their families and also knowing their neighbors have enough as well, such as this person who explained, “[Safety is] knowing the folks around me have adequate (abundant!) housing and health care, public space to convene, celebrate and care for each other.”⁹

At the same time, a genuine discussion about safety must first acknowledge the fears of violence that many New Yorkers hold. Freedom from harm to body and soul are central parts of community safety. In other words, as this person aptly put it, “I don’t want to worry if I’ll see tomorrow.” Many define safety as a feeling of security and comfort, a feeling that comes from not fearing that they, their loved ones or others in the community might be harmed. One person described their safety as “Being able to walk around without having to take extra precautions, such as worrying about being jumped/attacked or harassed in any ways.”¹⁰ Another explained, “I believe community safety is when people living in a neighborhood feel comfortable simply living their lives without the fear something bad will happen to them.”¹¹ While the indeterminate fear of violence is not equivalent to an increased likelihood of actually experiencing violence,¹² fear is a very real part of how people understand safety, and frequently it is the force behind calls for public safety initiatives that center police.¹³

The very first questions in the survey involved a three-part sequence that offered

people living in heavily policed neighborhoods different ways of describing their top needs, investments and priorities for safety.

The first survey question was a blank space that allowed participants to write whatever they desired. The prompt asked them to write the things they believe are needed to produce safe, healthy and thriving communities. **The majority (62%) of New Yorkers in highly policed communities wrote responses that did not mention police, prisons or the legal system at all.**

The specific content of the open-ended responses varied and often included multiple themes in a single statement. While more than one-third (38%) provided responses that were, in part, associated with “more police” or “having law and order,” most offered responses that included other factors. Some offered statements about good governance and leadership (4%) such as “trustworthy leaders,” “politicians that actually care,” “community leaders” or “leaders who have policies that help people.” Others provided general value statements or desires (19%) such as “the peoples voices need to be heard,” “equality,” “diversity,” or “accountability and justice.” While one-fifth (21%), as we will discuss in more detail below, described the need for community care: “unity, communication and compassion”; “sense of community”; “love, care and oneness”; and “a strong association among neighbors.”

However, half (50%) of all the open-ended responses involved at least one of eighteen different nonpolicing community investments. The typical responses often resembled lists of essential needs. For example, one person wrote, “1. Economic, racial and social equity. 2. Little to no police presence. 3. Efficient and frequent participation for resources for the

community such as super markets, youth programs, library, community centers, care for seniors, strong schools, parent support, day care, hospitals, proper healthcare services 4. strong and progressive government presence/programs with diverse/liberal/honest leadership and much community representation and participation.” Another wrote, “access to a quality education, safe and healthy homes, adequate employment, transportation, physical activity, and nutrition.” The top half of investments (9 of 18) most frequently cited involved economic security, schools, health care, food security, social/community services, child/youth services, housing, infrastructure and community centers/organizations.¹⁴

The second survey item in the sequence directed respondents to “imagine you are in charge of the city budget” and distribute \$100 across 16 items, including the police and justice system, as a way to communicate their specific priorities for producing safe, healthy and thriving communities. This question limited people’s ability to give money indiscriminately. In other words, it attempted to simulate the zero-sum decision-making against competing investments that more closely reflects the real city budget. Respondents were told that giving an item more money indicated greater importance, but they were free to distribute the funds any way they would like until it was gone.

The top half of highest priorities (8 of 16) on average looked similar to those provided in the open-ended question along with the addition of adult education and mental health care. It is important to note that 62% of respondents did not include police, and 69% did not include the justice system in their top five priorities. In fact, 45% gave the police and 51% gave the justice system \$0, suggesting no priority at all.¹⁵

A similar pattern continued with the final question of the three-part survey sequence. The third question listed a set of specific policy proposals and asked respondents which should be the highest priority for their neighborhood to produce a safe, healthy and thriving community. **The most frequently endorsed high priorities for the third question looked similar to the first two questions in the survey sequence but also included affordable child and elder care and nonpolice gun violence programs. Once again, policing did not emerge among the most frequently endorsed top priorities. In fact, a “larger police presence in the community, on public transportation and around the city” was the 4th least frequently chosen “high priority” of 17 policy items.**¹⁶

In addition to the three-part survey sequence above, we also distributed a short survey to town hall attendees. In this survey, we asked participants to respond to the following prompt: “What do you think should be valued in NYC’s budget?” We then provided a list of 20 potential funding areas and asked participants to “indicate how you feel each area should be prioritized in the city budget during the coming fiscal year” by selecting which should receive the maximum additional investment, some additional investment, no additional investment, or the budget should be reduced (take money away).

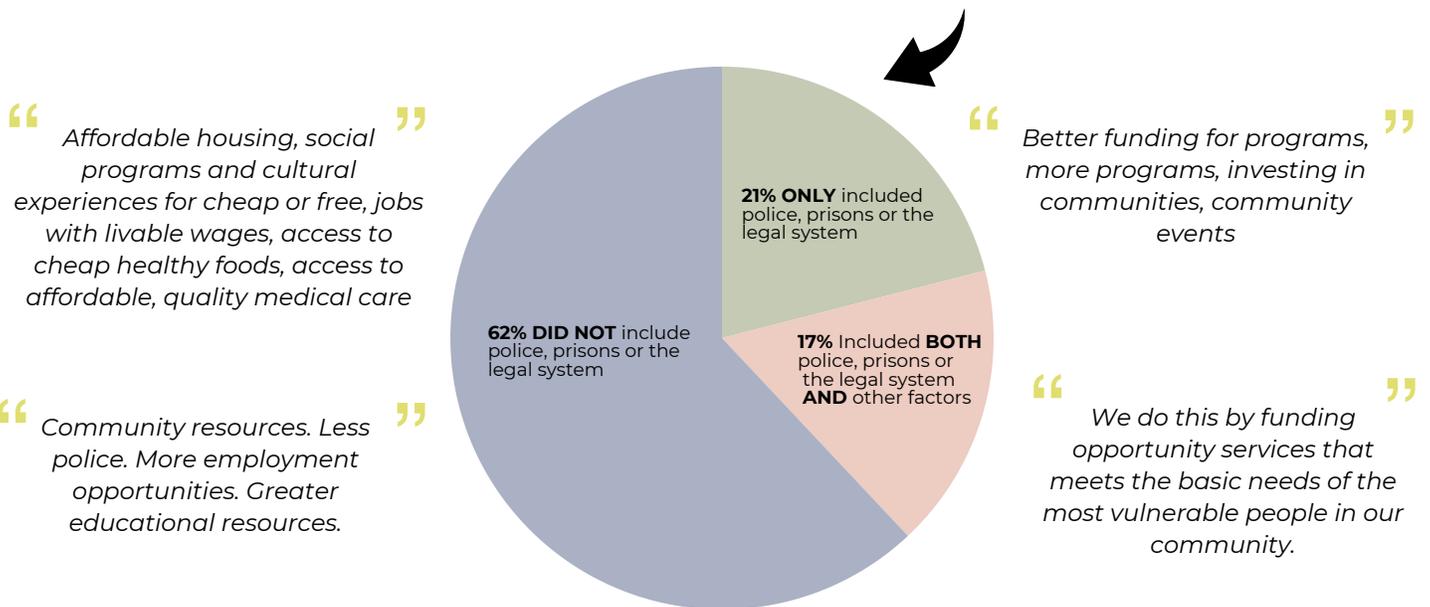
The top half (10 of 20) maximum investments of town hall participants overlapped with those described in the three survey questions, with the addition of environmental justice. Similar to the data presented above, the police and legal system did not emerge in the top half. In fact, 59% of the participants indicated the criminal legal system and 87% thought law enforcement should get money taken away in the coming fiscal year.¹⁷

#1 of the three-part sequence

Open ended: What is needed to produce safe, healthy, and thriving communities?

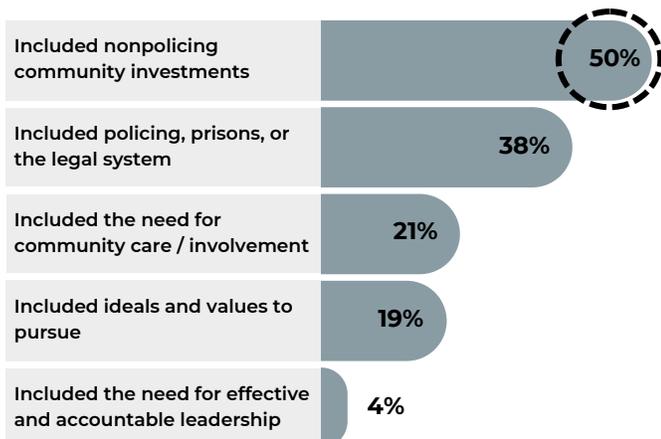
The first survey question was a **blank space that allowed participants to write** whatever they desired. The prompt asked them to write the things they believe are needed to produce safe, healthy and thriving communities.

Most responses (62%) did not mention police, prisons or the legal system **at all**.

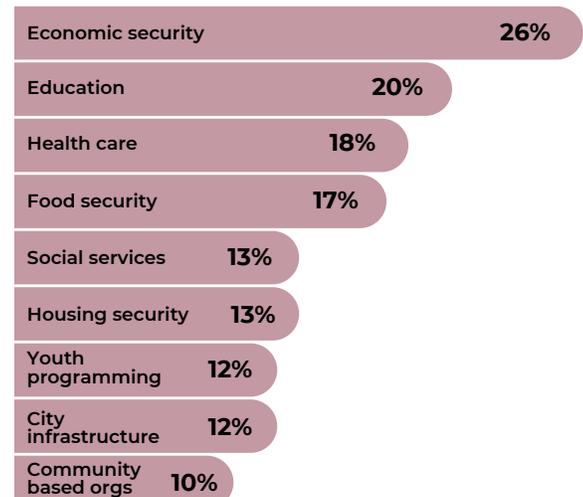


The specific content of the open-ended responses varied and often **included multiple themes** in a single statement.

However, **50%** of the responses included nonpolicing community investments



The **top half** (9 of 18) most frequently mentioned non-policing community investments were:



Survey participants wrote responses that fell into more than one theme. Therefore, the percentages do not equal 100%.

For the bottom nine non-policing investments see endnote 14.

#2 of the three-part sequence (\$100 Budget): Imagine you are in charge of the city budget

Participants were asked to **distribute \$100 across 16 items** where more money meant a greater priority to producing a safe, healthy and thriving community.

The top half (8 of 16) investments were all non policing:

\$10.94	Housing
\$9.36	Healthcare
\$8.53	Jobs
\$7.59	Adult Education
\$7.00	Mental Health Care
\$6.86	Public Schools
\$6.53	Hunger Prevention
\$5.73	Community Based Organizations

The \$ represent the average money respondents gave to these items. For the bottom eight investments see endnote 15.

#3 of the three-part sequence (Policy Priority): What is needed to produce safe, healthy, and thriving communities?

Participants were presented with **17 specific policy proposals** and asked to indicate the priority level of each proposal in terms of producing a safe, healthy and thriving community.

The top half (9 of 17) most frequently endorsed were:

74%	Public schools with enough school counselors, psychologists and behavior specialists to fully support all students
73%	Jobs for all levels of education with enough pay and benefits to support a family
73%	Affordable housing, not shelters, for families and individuals who become homeless
68%	Food and nutritional assistance programs to address hunger
64%	Community-based health and wellness clinics (e.g., mobile clinics, school health clinics, walk-in centers)
62%	Affordable child care and elder care that accommodate different work schedules
62%	Summer jobs made available for every young person who is 16 years or older and wants to work
62%	Improving community infrastructure (e.g., fixing or adding streetlights, redeveloping or expanding recreation space)
61%	Community-based, nonpolice gun violence prevention programs (e.g., "Cure Violence" or "Advance Peace Model")

For the bottom eight proposals see endnote 17.

Town Hall Survey: What do you think should be valued in NYC's budget?

Participants were presented with **20 potential budget areas** and asked them to indicate how each should be prioritized in the city budget during the coming fiscal year.

The top half (10 of 20) most frequently chosen for maximum investments were:

For the bottom eight proposals see endnote 16.

Health care	79%
Public education	75%
Housing security	72%
Food security	69%
Mental health and wellness	68%
Community-based organizations / programs	64%
Economic security	63%
Child/youth services and programs	62%
Community-led safety strategies	59%
Environmental justice	58%

Across all four survey items: The top needs, investments and priorities to produce safe, healthy and thriving neighborhoods

Investment	Q 1: Open Ended	Q 2: \$100 Budget	Q 3: Policy Priority	Q 4: Town Hall Survey
Housing (and shelters)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Health care	✓	✓	✓	✓
Jobs (economic security)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Public schools/education	✓	✓	✓	✓
Hunger prevention services (affordable, healthy foods)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Programs for youth/teens (youth activities, services, resources, programs)	✓		✓	✓
Community-based organizations	✓	✓		✓
Mental health care		✓		✓
Infrastructure	✓		✓	
Community-led safety strategies			✓	✓

Across four questions that asked participants to identify their top priorities, we found 100% agreement in the need for **housing, health care, jobs, public schools** and **food**.

We also found consistent agreement (agreement across 2 or 3 questions) in the need for **youth programs, community-based organizations, mental healthcare, better infrastructure** and **community-led safety strategies**.

At no time across the four questions did **policing** and the **legal system** emerge as a top half priority for producing safe, healthy and thriving neighborhoods.

Note: Items were included in this table if they emerged as top half priorities in two or more of the questions.

Through the four survey questions outlined in this section, participants explained the necessary and comprehensive resources they need and believe should be prioritized to not only survive in New York but lead healthy, flourishing, safe lives with dignity. The most frequent answers across the three-part sequence and the town hall survey showed remarkable consistency. What that tells us is that people prioritize pro-social investments in their communities over investments in policing. Our results suggest that most want to support youth and teens by investing in public schools with enough school counselors, psychologists and behavior specialists or summer jobs made available for every young person or community-based

rehabilitation programs and services for young people. There is a desire that all basic needs are met for everyone, such as affordable housing for families and individuals who become homeless and food and nutritional assistance programs to address hunger. People want jobs for all levels of education with enough pay and benefits to support a family as well as affordable child care and elder care. Most want health needs addressed through community-based health and wellness clinics as well as healing support programs that help people and communities recover from trauma or substance use treatment centers focused on harm reduction and long-term support. And they want their community infrastructure improved as well

as community centers that have comprehensive programming. This includes community-led safety strategies, such as violence and conflict mediation, transformative and healing justice, and anti-harassment methods.

“I believe that safety could only be felt when all of an individual’s needs are accounted for. These needs include but are not limited to financial security, housing security, food security, mental health support, access to education, etc. Unless all these needs are met, a community will never truly be safe because they’ll be vulnerable to many issues without any means of support.”

- Town hall attendee

The facilitated town hall conversations supported the survey findings by also illustrating the importance of community investments and helped elaborate these findings by providing us a deeper understanding of community care. Here a participant described community safety as rooted in relationships with and within the community, “Safety is knowing my neighbors, not even personally but understanding every day I pass this person that hangs out at this store, this person plays music on Saturdays ... basically knowing the rhythm of the community, familiarity.”¹⁸ These are the familiar relationships and ordinary connections that happen throughout the day but help sustain life in healthy, supportive and accountable ways; the familiar strangers on the corner and at the bodega; feeling comfort with the neighborhood’s rhythms and activities; having meaningful bonds with friends and family, teachers and organizers, young people and elders.

In this way, “community safety” is a verb, as something one does and makes.

For example this person explains, “Community safety looks like community fridges that pop up to make sure everyone in the neighborhood has food to eat.”¹⁹ Community safety is about relying on neighbors and being relied upon in return; it is about showing concern, providing mutual aid, watching out for others, as well as demonstrating respect, empathy and acceptance for differences. In other words, safety, as described by this participant, is understood to be produced and reproduced in neighborhoods every day through their mutual support and collective actions: “Mutual aid makes me feel safe, neighbors caring for each other makes me feel safe. Everyone having food on their table and a roof over their head makes me feel safe.”²⁰ But it is also centered on resourcing ways to build people’s ability to develop and sustain a vibrant community life.

“Community safety [is] ... knowing I can walk down the street without encountering profound human suffering and need on every block.”

- Town hall attendee

These neighborhood-level bonds of trust, relationships and support can be strengthened through support of, as one respondent stated, “spaces where people can gather, in my opinion a hub is vital. A hub that is actually active and has resources and organizations for the community.” Local community organizations and centers,²¹ locally owned businesses, and public spaces and facilities such as parks or playgrounds are spaces that facilitate trusting and constructive connections with others where the unfamiliar can become familiar, camaraderie turns to solidarity and neighbors are accountable to each other.

Taken together, our research has offered us significant insight into how New Yorkers most directly impacted by policing understand and define community safety. Indeed, our findings suggest that residents of heavily policed neighborhoods want more resources for safer and healthier communities, resources that they are sorely lacking at the moment.²² And this is at the heart of what “community safety” means. **Community safety is about greater life supporting public investments and services — investments in education, health care, jobs, local infrastructure and more; investments that strengthen community relationships and quality of life.** It is a positive articulation of safety, rooted in what safety and security are fundamentally composed of. It’s well-resourced neighborhoods where basic needs are adequately met and where people are offered the necessary and comprehensive resources to lead flourishing lives where they not only survive but thrive with dignity. Community safety involves feeling mutually implicated and accountable to others in the community, with the understanding that individual well-being depends on collective well-being and addressing a wide array of inequalities, harms and forms of violence.

3.4 Divest from police, invest in community

Since it was established in 1845, the NYPD has had consistently tense relationships with Black, Latinx and other communities of color; poor communities; immigrant communities; LGBTQ+ communities; Indigenous communities; as well as protestors and activists of all kinds. This is an old and ongoing story. Documented complaints about NYPD abuse emerged just a year after it was founded.²³ One hundred seventy-four years later, the summer of 2020 was marked by sustained

and massive uprisings and demonstrations against anti-Black police violence not just in New York, but across America. This mobilization and outpouring also set forth demands that have been years in the making from communities suffering under police violence; demands for a fundamental transformation in how policing takes place in neighborhoods and, perhaps more profoundly, in how to understand, value and invest in public safety. In response to the failures and harm caused by America’s reliance on punishment and policing to address social issues, communities called on everyone to reconsider what constitutes safety, how it can be produced and who can help produce it. They used slogans like “Defund the NYPD” or “Divest from Police.” What they were calling for was a transformative change of an entrenched condition by decentering police in favor of more fundamental solutions. In other words, divesting from police and investing in alternatives.

These calls and this movement were not new, but the widespread and mainstream momentum was. Still, it remained unclear how widespread²⁴ and mainstream these views were in New York. In our survey, we wanted to understand how fully people agreed or disagreed with the reasoning beneath the protest slogans that used words like “defund” or “divest/invest.”

“Community safety means the community keeping itself safe with support, training and funding from the city — not the city making the community feel unsafe with aggressive cops.”

- Town hall attendee

We began by asking respondents to read a paragraph, shown here in the right column, that summarizes why divestment from police is understood as necessary to those in this movement. Over half (56%) of the respondents living in heavily policed New York neighborhoods indicated that they mostly or completely agreed with the statement, and 75% agreed to some extent.

“Food and housing security for all, excellent public schools, free and accessible mental and physical health services, free and accessible child care, accessible and efficient public transit — I believe that if all of these things existed, policing would not need to exist (or it would barely need to).”

- Town hall attendee

For the neighborhoods involved in our study, the NYPD represents one of the largest city investments and yet to many, the police are all too capable of causing violence and are inadequate at addressing violence. Only 37% of survey participants thought the NYPD was generally good at reducing violence in their neighborhood. As a methodological strategy to more deeply understand this we then asked participants to compare the NYPD to a list of nonpolice options, and decide which they believed do more to reduce violence in their neighborhood. Of most significance, 71% thought at least one, and 60% thought more than one of the nonpolice options did a better job at reducing violence than the NYPD. The second most common response was that the nonpolice options were at least equivalent to police at addressing violence. In fact, only 6% thought the NYPD was always better at reducing violence, and 45% never thought the NYPD did a comparatively better job.

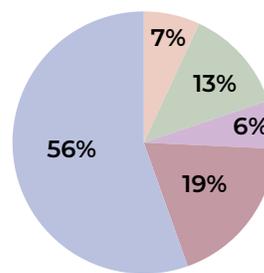
Levels of Agreement with Divesting From Police

Participants were asked how much they agreed or disagreed with the following statement:

“The ‘defund’ or ‘divest’ movements argue that the police are too large in size, scope and power. More NYPD officers on the streets, more weapons, and more surveillance technologies overly criminalize communities of color in New York City. The NYPD do little to reduce violence and are generally incapable of handling most of the harm communities experience. In fact, attending to violence or solving crime are only a small part of police work. Many of the roles the NYPD are asked to take on, like intervening in homelessness, drug use and mental health issues, are better addressed by other professionals. And the presence of NYPD can often instigate and escalate violence, leading to arrest or even death.”

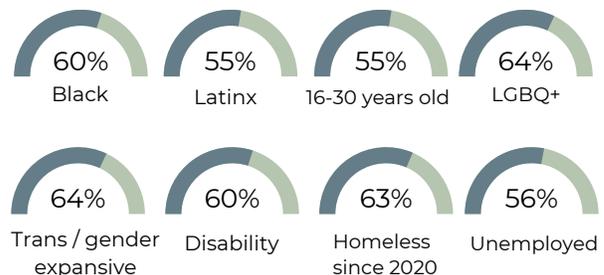
56% mostly or completely agreed with the above statement, and **75%** agreed to some extent. Only **13%** mostly or completely disagreed with the statement.

More specifically:



56% Completely or Mostly agree
19% Slightly agree
6% Slightly disagree
13% Completely or Mostly disagree
7% Unsure

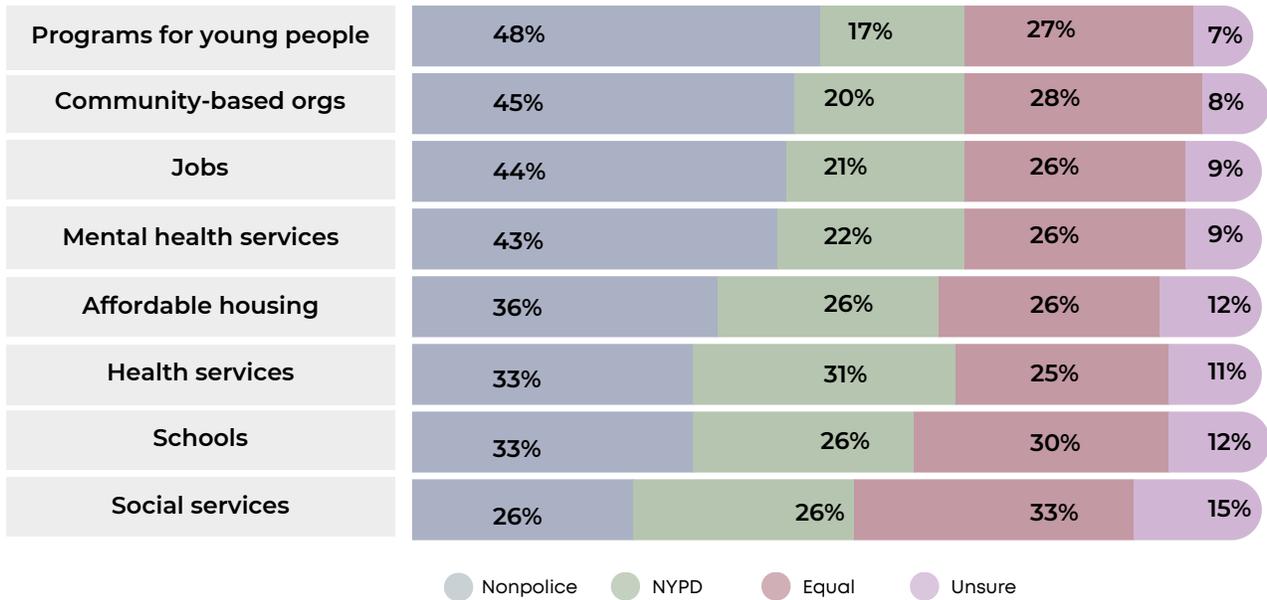
The **demographics** for those who responded “completely” or “mostly agree” are:



Which does more to reduce violence?

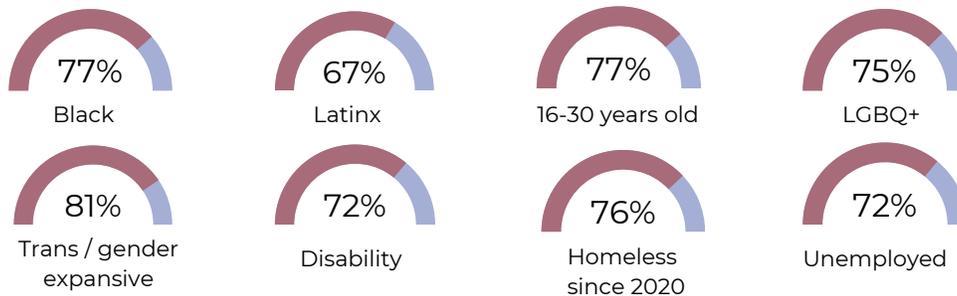
Participants were asked how various initiatives, including programs for young people, community-based organizations, jobs, mental health services, affordable housing, health services, schools, and social services, compared to the NYPD in terms of reducing violence. Only **6%** thought the NYPD was always better at reducing violence, while **45%** never thought the NYPD did a better job.

More specifically:



Most (**71%**) participants thought at least one of the non-police options did a better job than the NYPD at reducing violence, this sentiment was often more pronounced for those with marginalized identities:

More specifically:



The results outlined thus far in this chapter should make politicians pause and question their own assumptions about the supposed singular and necessary role of law enforcement in the most heavily policed communities. Their own constituents likely do not share such blind faith in this

institution. The majority of those in our study — when given the opportunity — do not understand policing as the most central or effective part of producing community safety. They do not hold views of safety that are solely limited to the experience of violence or crime victimization, which is the

typical focus of public safety as reported through policing statistics. This is an important fact that must be recognized and finally confronted when the city considers its public safety policies and budgets. Our study makes clear that for many New Yorkers who most directly experience the reality of policing in the city and also face significant safety needs, police are not synonymous with safety.

We also asked an additional four questions in the survey to explicitly examine the extent to which participants agreed with the combined divest and invest argument. We asked participants to read another paragraph (shown here in the right column), this time summarizing both the divest and invest point of view held by the movement.

When presented with the argument more holistically than the fragmented or decontextualized phrases commonly heard, over half (55%) of the respondents living in heavily policed New York neighborhoods said they mostly or completely agreed with the above statement, and 75% agreed to some extent.

“I think in order to fix the systemic issues with the police you need to completely dismantle it and create new solutions ... I believe it is no longer a matter of change from within. I think you need to clean house, reallocate funds to other areas that can do more to help the people.”

- Survey respondent
(22, Black and Latinx, woman, Queens)

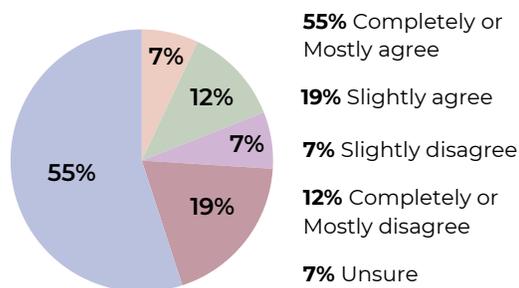
Levels of Agreement with Divest-Invest Strategy

Participants were asked how much they agreed or disagreed with the following statement:

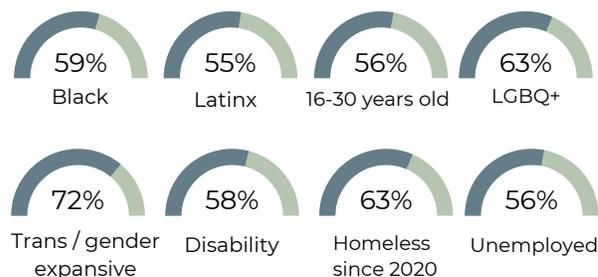
“The ‘defund’ or ‘divest’ movements want to change government budget priorities to make sure there is more funding for the kinds of services and resources that actually help create safety and prevent violence by addressing the root causes of poverty and inequality. In other words, making safe, healthy and thriving neighborhoods by shrinking the NYPD’s size, scope, and power and investing that money in things like better jobs, affordable housing, healthcare, mental health services, public education, to name a few.”

55% mostly or completely agreed with the statement above, and **75%** agreed to some extent. Only **12%** mostly or completely disagreed with the statement.

More specifically:



The **demographics** for those who responded “completely” or “mostly agree” are:



77% of survey participants indicated a belief in a divest/invest framing of safety at least once in the survey.

In addition, the three other divest/invest questions in the survey found that over half (52%) of participants reported that they believed reducing the NYPD budget and moving that money to community-based institutions, services and programs would generally make them safer; 44% of participants said they most agreed with the idea of dismantling or reducing the role of the NYPD and investing in nonpolicing safety solutions; and 37% said that when it comes to their neighborhood, they feel it is important to cut the NYPD budget and put the money into community organizations and services. In total, 77% of survey participants indicated a belief in a divest/invest framing of safety at least once in the survey.

In other words, most New Yorkers who participated in our study generally agreed with the sentiment that the NYPD is unable to adequately reduce violence, repair harm and produce safety in their neighborhood. Instead, they more often expressed agreement with the desire to invest in alternative community-based safety solutions involving more resources, not more police.

In the last four years, in response to the failures and harm caused by our reliance on violence, punishment and policing to address social issues, an overdue conversation blossomed as to how best to ensure community safety and how best to allocate toward it in public budgets.

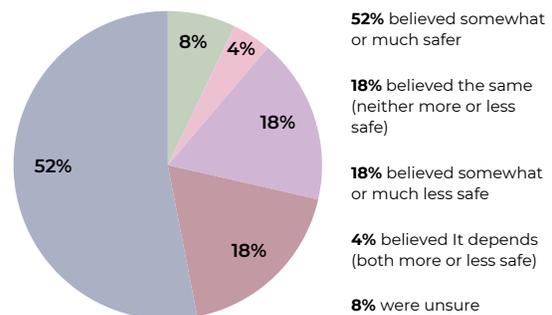
Divest/invest arguments get to a central question of how to best utilize relatively limited public funds to best produce

community safety. Rather than reflecting talking points around “defund the police,” our study suggests that participants understand and agree that reducing the police is not a question of abandoning safety but rather how to most effectively and efficiently utilize scarce public dollars to meet community members’ needs, and how to develop alternative strategies.

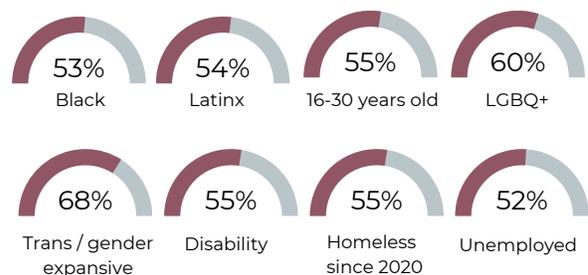
Perceived Safety Impact of Reducing NYPD Budget in Favor of Community Programs

52% reported that they believe reducing the NYPD budget and moving that money to community-based institutions, services and programs would generally make them safer.

More specifically:



The **demographics** for “somewhat or much safer” results are:



While other agencies and services have faced decades of austerity measures and budget reductions, the police department

has seen regular increases, especially when considering federal grant money and private money that flows into the police department. The vision and definition of community safety that the respondents who live in highly policed neighborhoods provided, as described above, and that we will discuss further in the next chapter, necessitate a greater investment in social, health, housing and other pro-social services in the community, and these funds can be found in existing police budgets.

3.5 Generational differences in how people view policing and safety

Across our survey, we found that young people not only have very different interactions with the police compared to older New Yorkers, but they also frequently hold divergent ideas about the NYPD's role and size.

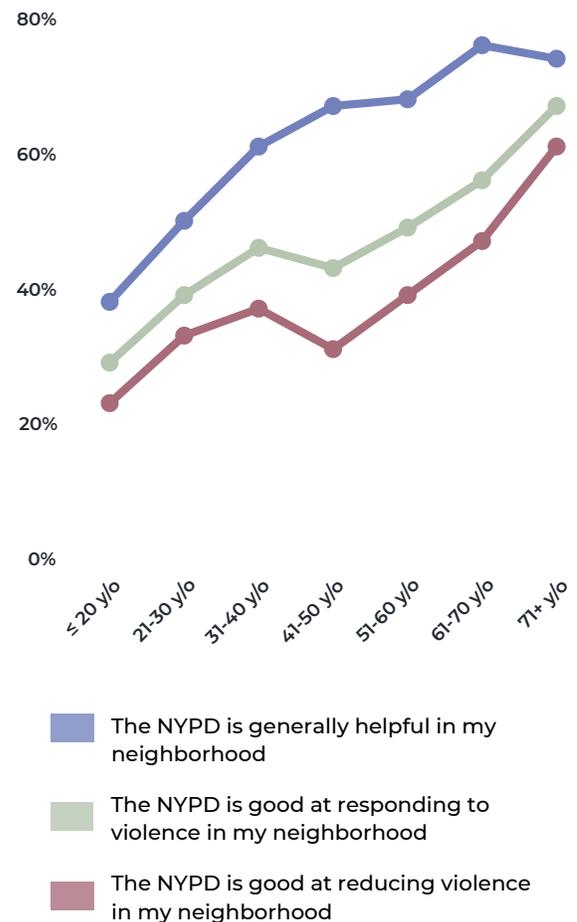
Indeed, we found a clear linear trend across age that helped explain how residents of heavily policed neighborhoods understood policing and safety. A greater percentage of participants from older generations interpreted the NYPD as effective at reducing violence, responding to violence and generally helping the neighborhood. They were also more likely to call the police and less likely to feel targeted or have a recently violent police experience.

On the other hand, a greater percentage of those survey participants within the younger generations felt targeted by police, were more likely to have a recent violent police encounter and were more likely to have the police called on them. And it was

the younger generations who, when asked questions about the role of policing, were more likely to endorse a vision for safety that reduces the NYPD's power, budget, size and use of weapons. In essence, a vision for safety that sits counter to the Mayor's Fiscal Year 2025 Executive Budget, which will, in fact, grow and strengthen the NYPD.

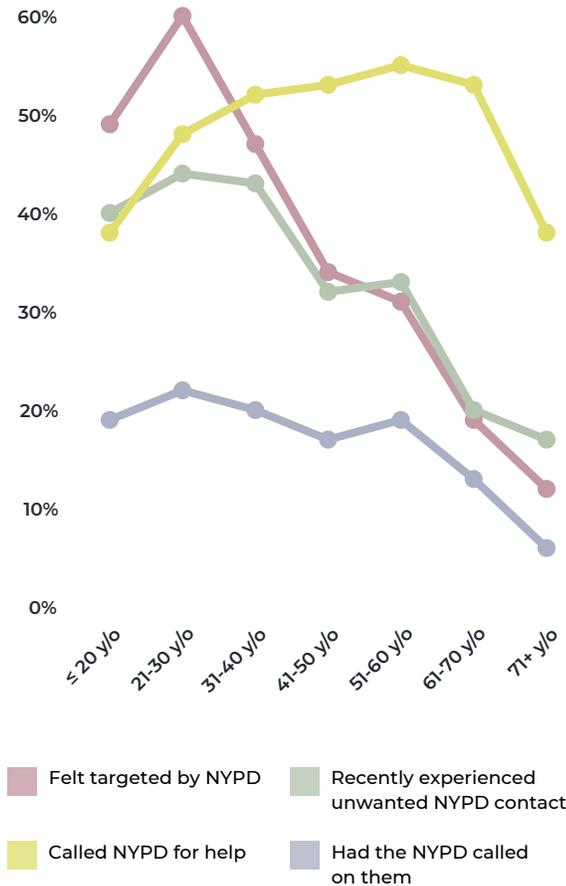
Respondents' reported beliefs about the NYPD in their neighborhood

A greater percentage of participants from older generations interpreted the NYPD as effective at reducing violence, responding to violence and generally helping the neighborhood.



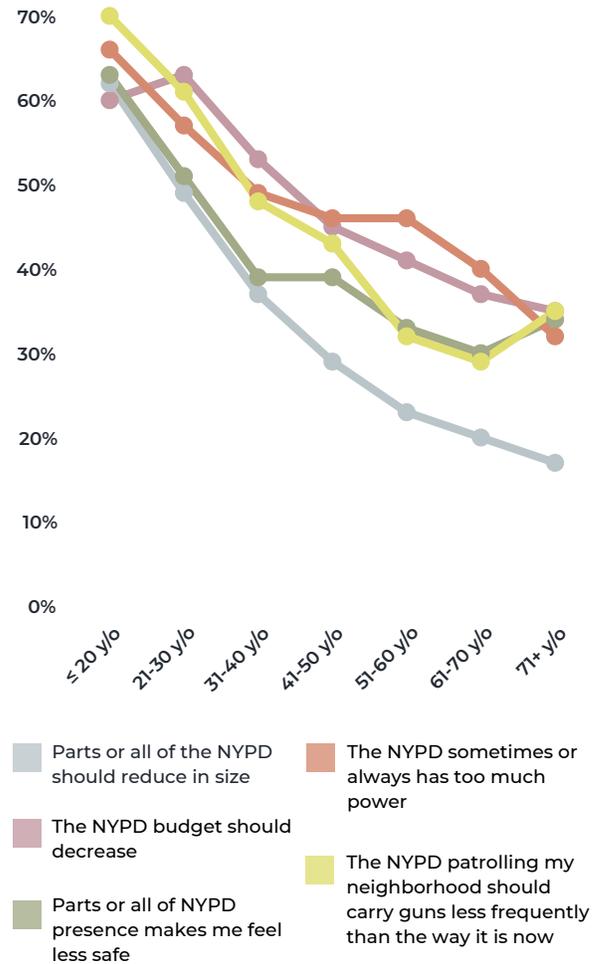
Respondents' experiences with the NYPD

A greater percentage of participants from older generations were more likely to call the police, and less likely to feel targeted, have the police called on them, or have a recently violent police experience.



Respondents' reported beliefs on NYPD funding, size, and power

The younger generations were more likely to endorse a vision for safety that reduces the NYPD's power, budget, size and use of weapons.

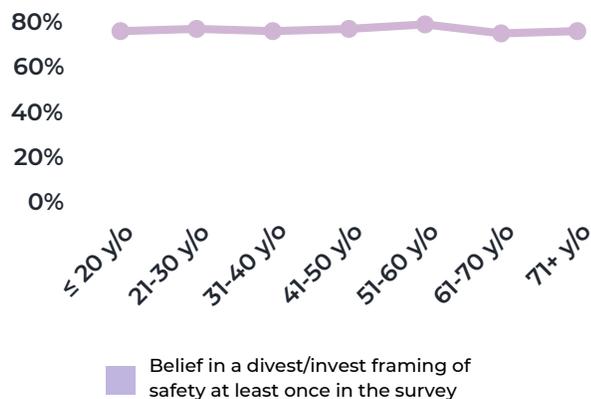


One might interpret these as developmental trends, meaning, as people get older, they are increasingly more likely to interpret the need for and effectiveness of policing. However, decades of on-the-ground experience have led the CPR members involved with this study to interpret the age trends as a generational shift, growing out of over 40 years of hyper-aggressive discriminatory policing practices that have led to skyrocketing incarceration and police violence with very little accountability.

Rising stop-and-frisks and aggressive practices like “quality of life” or “broken windows” policing have disrupted communities without making them safer.²⁵ Our data confirms what community organizers have noticed for quite some time: that young people and younger adults who have grown up under these conditions are more likely to believe that police should have either no role or a significantly reduced role in creating safe communities.

Respondents' indicated belief in a divest/invest framing of safety at least once in the survey

77% indicated a belief in a divest/invest framing of safety at least once in the survey across four questions. **This trend did not change with age.**



However, it is quite significant that older participants were just as likely to indicate somewhere in the survey an agreement with the divest/invest framework as compared to younger participants. When presented with multiple questions that suggested *both* reducing the NYPD budget *and* investing it in other community-based resources, participants tended to agree with that vision at least once in the survey, regardless of generation. Our evidence reveals that older adults are not monolithic and, in fact, that many also share an understanding of safety that prioritizes meeting people's basic needs. **Most participants in our study, regardless of age, believed in the need to invest in more resources and services as a pathway toward creating safety instead of or in addition to the NYPD.** This has important implications to policymakers now but especially moving forward. They will increasingly need to contend with growing political pressure to address safety by investing in alternatives to policing and

incarceration. At the same, it will likely involve a growing public pressure for tightened oversight, transparency and accountability of the police.

3.6 Police accountability is part of community safety

Another theme we heard clearly and nearly universally across all age groups was the need for police accountability. Regardless of age or view of police, participants stressed that there needs to be "accountability for folks who have caused harm to community members on all levels"²⁶ including the police. Or, stated another way, "Cops need to be held accountable for their actions just like we all do."²⁷ Participants described what this meant to them. For one person, this involved transparency: "Community safety to me means if there is transparency and accountability for any abuse or mistreatment from the organization that is supposed to protect us." For another, it involved community empowerment and oversight: "Safety is knowing that my community has influence over the agencies and institutions which operate within our community. Safety is knowing that there is a system of checks and balances instituted at every level of power within the community, and larger society."²⁸ And someone else said, "Firing all killer cops; accountability from those in power."²⁹

Nearly every one (94%) of the survey respondents believed that officers who commit violence should be held accountable through some disciplinary action. This trend was not dependent on age. However, true police accountability for police violence seldom exists. A town hall attendee explained that even when police

kill unarmed victims, they often are “not held accountable by the local criminal justice system.” She concluded: “that’s a major element of what allows the abusive violence to continue — there’s no accountability for officers who brutalize New Yorkers. They are held to a different standard of justice than everyone else.”³⁰ This person asks a pertinent question: “What does it mean for the police to do their job in a system of accountability?” In other words, what would policing look like if officers were held responsible for their actions in neighborhoods through strong, transparent oversight mechanisms? While police accountability rarely happens, one-third (33%) of the survey respondents endorsed suspension, and nearly half (47%) endorsed termination for officers found guilty of excessive force.

“Safety is knowing that my community has influence over the agencies and institutions which operate within our community. Safety is knowing that there is a system of checks and balances instituted at every level of power within the community, and larger society.”

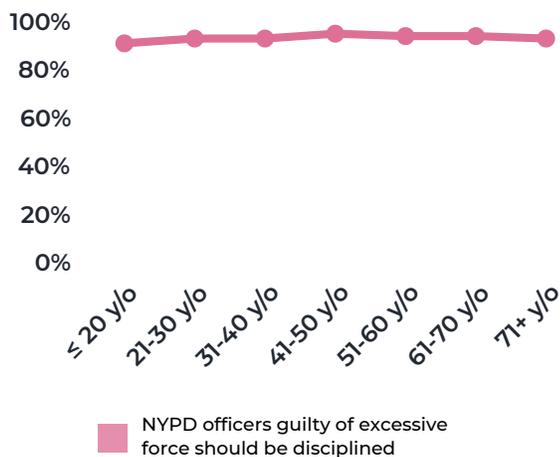
- Town hall attendee

“Community safety to me means if there is transparency and accountability for any abuse or mistreatment from the organization that is supposed to protect us.”

- Town hall attendee

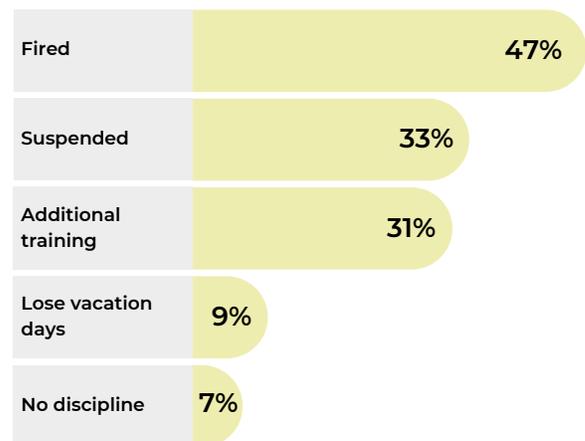
What should happen to NYPD officers who are guilty of excessive force?

94% believed that officers who commit violence should be held accountable through some disciplinary action. This trend did not change with age.



Respondents’ beliefs what should happen to NYPD officers guilty of excessive force

47% endorsed termination and 33% endorsed suspension for officers found guilty of excessive force.



*Respondents could select more than 1 option. The percentages do not add to 100%.

3.7 Summary

The responses and visions from community members in highly policed neighborhoods speak for themselves. They describe a vision of community safety rooted in restoration and investment rather than enforcement and punishment. Given their lived experiences, many community members do not want greater resourcing of police as the solution to community safety. Likewise, it is clear that talking about a reduction in policing, whether in regards to budget, scope or size, is not enough. People also want investment in services and programs that support their ability to live healthy and thriving lives. Rather than a simple “defund” message, community members expressed a desire to divest resources from policing and invest them in a range of health, human and social services, programs and resources to best meet community safety and health needs. Four years on from the 2020 summer mobilizations, the findings from our research clearly show a sustained demand for an alternative vision of public safety in New York that is grounded in improving people’s quality of life and their ability to live and interact freely and fully with their community.

This study suggests that thoughts about policing and safety are changing. We have lived under 40 years of broken windows policing; skyrocketing incarceration; and increasing police violence and abuse of Black, Latinx and other communities of color. There have been dozens of high-profile instances of people being killed by the police in the last decade that officers are almost never held accountable for as well as rising numbers of Black, Latinx and other people of color who have been killed by police every year, even whose names do not make it into the headlines. Younger generations who have lived under these conditions their entire lives are more likely to question the value and effectiveness of policing as a public safety strategy. They are more likely to endorse reducing the size, scope and power of law enforcement. They are more likely to see the institution of policing as largely unreformable and want real options for safety in their communities that don’t come with increased violence and incarceration. Instead, they desire a radically reformed vision for what safety is, how it is achieved and how to enact it.

Most importantly, highly policed communities across all generations want other options for creating safety in their neighborhoods and increased resources and support that we know will make communities safer.

New York City’s Gun Violence Prevention Task Force (GVPTF), established by Mayor Adams, recently released “A Blueprint for Community Safety,”³¹ which argues what community organizations have been saying for years: Long-term divestment from community resources that support thriving — including programs, services, housing, health care, mental health, public spaces and opportunities for young people — has led to increases in violence and trauma while negatively impacting residents’ physical and mental health. While Adams’ report acknowledges this and emphasizes an approach that prioritizes cross-collaboration and investment in community resources, his actions since he entered office directly contradict this approach, given that he has consistently elicited unwarranted fears in New Yorkers with messaging that the conditions in New York are dangerous, despite long-term evidence suggesting that homicide remains historically low.³² His rhetoric, along with outsized and often sensationalistic media coverage, has predictably contributed to the NYPD’s growth in size, budget and scope, which ultimately means a larger footprint in Black and brown neighborhoods.

All New Yorkers need access to enough food, housing, health care, good education, decent employment, strong relationships, fun recreational activities, space to explore creativity as well as protection from individuals and institutions intent to do them harm — that includes neighborhood violence³¹ and, for example, other forms of violence that get comparatively less attention like predatory lenders, white collar exploitation, and abusive and violent policing. These should be foundations every person in New York receives to create environments of opportunity and possibility and human dignity for their best to blossom. It is time to seriously consider why the city chooses to invest so much in policing and why it does not invest more in schools, community centers, affordable housing, living-wage jobs and a host of vital resources to facilitate nurturing and sustainable communities.

Chapter 3: Endnotes

- 1 Miranda Bryant, "‘It Was Time to Take Charge’: The Black Youth Leading the George Floyd Protests," *The Guardian*, June 15, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jun/15/black-youth-activism-george-floyd-protests>
- 2 Michelle Fine, María Elena Torre, David M. Frost, and Allison L. Cabana, "Queer Solidarities: New Activisms Erupting at the Intersection of Structural Precarity and Radical Misrecognition," *Journal of Social and Political Psychology* 6, no. 2 (2018): 608-630, <https://doi.org/10.5964/jspp.v6i2.905>.
Karenza Moore, Benjamin Hanckel, Caitlin Nunn, and Sophie Atherton, "Making Sense of Intersecting Crises: Promises, Challenges, and Possibilities of Intersectional Perspectives in Youth Research," *Journal of Applied Youth Studies* 4 (2021): 423-428, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s43151-021-00066-0>.
- 3 Anthony D. Romero, "Reimagining the Role of Police," ACLU, June 5, 2020, <https://www.aclu.org/news/criminal-law-reform/reimagining-the-role-of-police>
- 4 Isabelle Leyva and Simon McCormack, "Hero-worship of Police is Failing Us," New York Civil Liberties Union, ACLU of New York, August 1, 2022, <https://www.nyclu.org/en/news/hero-worship-police-failing-us#:~:text=Data%20Sources,percent%20in%20New%20York%20City.>
Serious violent crime is defined as homicide, assault, rape, torture, theft, and drug abuse.
- 5 Bahar Ostadan, "The NYPD Has Stopped Tens of Thousands of People Under Mayor Adams. Just 5% Were White," *Gothamist*, August 25, 2023, <https://gothamist.com/news/the-nypd-has-stopped-tens-of-thousands-of-people-under-mayor-adams-just-5-were-white>.
- 6 Town hall attendee - demographics unknown
- 7 Town hall attendee - demographics unknown
- 8 Jonathan Michalitsaianos, "Mayor Eric Adams Says Black New Yorkers Have 'Never' Said They Want Less Police on the Street, but MORE, as Murders and Shootings Spike 40% This Year Compared to 2021," *Daily Mail*, August 3, 2022, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-11077553/Mayor-Eric-Adams-says-New-Yorkers-want-cops-street-murders-shootings-spike-40.html>.
- 9 Town hall attendee - demographics unknown
- 10 Town hall attendee - demographics unknown
- 11 Town hall attendee - demographics unknown
- 12 Stephen D. Farrall, Jonathan Jackson, and Emily Gray, *Social Order and the Fear of Crime in Contemporary Times* (Oxford University Press, 2009).
- 13 Mariame Kaba and Andrea J. Ritchie, No More Police: A Case for Abolition (The New Press, 2022).
- 14 Public spaces and parks (6%), Mental healthcare (5%), Sustainable environment (5%), Fitness and recreation (5%), Local business (4%), Family support (3%), Public transportation (2%), Art and entertainment (1%), Fire department and EMS (1%).
- 15 Police department (\$5.64), Programs for youth/teens (\$5.18), Fire department (\$5.25), Services for elders (\$4.74), Transportation (\$4.50), Justice system (\$3.77), Parks and playgrounds (\$3.73), Libraries (\$3.27).
- 16 Healing support programs that help people and communities recover from trauma (58%), Community centers that have comprehensive programming (e.g., family programs, youth programs, health and mental health programs, arts and sports) (57%), Community-based rehabilitation programs and services for young people (55%), Substance use treatment centers focused on harm reduction and long-term support (55%), Large police presence in the community, on public transportation and around the city (53%), Public schools with no forms of policing (e.g., school safety agents (SSAs), metal detectors) (47%), More funding for arts and culture programming and institutions (e.g., murals, libraries, concerts, museums, plays, outdoor movies, music, dance, theater) (47%), Close all juvenile detention centers (28%).
- 17 Incarceration alternatives (52%), Public transportation (43%), Senior services and programs (42%), Cultural institutions and arts (33%), Non-police emergency response (33%), Public space (32%), Public maintenance (28%), Local business (22%), Criminal legal system (6%), Law enforcement (1%).
- 18 Town hall attendee - demographics unknown
- 19 Town hall attendee - demographics unknown
- 20 Town hall attendee - demographics unknown
- 21 Survey respondent - 24, Black, man, Brooklyn
- 22 Caitlin Cahill, Brett G. Stoudt, M.E. Torre, X. Darian, Amanda Matles, Kimberly Belmonte, Selma Djokovic, Jose Lopez, and Adilka Pimentel, "They Were Looking at Us Like We Were Bad People": Growing Up Policed in the Gentrifying, Still Disinvested City," *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies* 18, no. 5 (2019): 1128-1149.
- 23 Marilyn Johnson, *Street Justice: A History of Police Violence in New York City* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003). Johnson, for instance, details a range of complaints against the NYPD in their early years, including the use of physical violence to command respect and control among New Yorkers, preventing civilians from identifying officer badge numbers, and suppressing protests during moments of social and political unrest.

Chapter 3: Endnotes

- ²⁴ Mariame Kaba and Andrea J. Ritchie, *No More Police: A Case for Abolition* (The New Press, 2022).
- ²⁵ Bernard E. Harcourt, *Illusion of Order: The False Promise of Broken Windows Policing* (Harvard University Press, 2005).
- ²⁶ Town hall attendee - demographics unknown
- ²⁷ Town hall attendee - demographics unknown
- ²⁸ Town hall attendee - demographics unknown
- ²⁹ Town hall attendee - demographics unknown
- ³⁰ Town hall attendee - demographics unknown
- ³¹ New York City's Gun Violence Prevention Task Force, "A Blueprint for Community Safety," 2023, <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/home/downloads/pdf/press-releases/2023/Blueprint-Community-Safety.pdf>
- ³² Fola Akinnibi, Rebecca Wahid, and Angel Adegbesan, "Fear of rampant crime is derailing New York City's recovery," Bloomberg, July 29, 2022, <https://www.bloomberg.com/graphics/2022-is-nyc-safe-crime-stat-reality/>



“I feel safe when there's a community around me more than police or security. When there's police officers around, I feel scared and afraid that something bad will happen.”

- Town hall attendee

4.0

CRISIS RESPONSE

Counter to dominant narratives, our research found that policing is not necessarily central to peoples' understanding of safety. In chapter 2, we presented evidence that people in heavily policed neighborhoods frequently experience the NYPD as violent, harmful and ineffective. In Chapter 3, we shared that heavily policed communities are calling for approaches to public safety that invest in a broad set of supports, services and institutions to fundamentally address the root causes of violence. In other words, many participants understand safety in relation to a broadened notion of harm occurring to them and their communities that are both acute and structural.¹ At the same time people are policed on an everyday basis, rents are going up, families are displaced from their neighborhoods, young people continue to be subjected to school suspensions despite the risk it carries for future arrest, graduation rates remain too low, and not enough living-wage jobs exist (to name just a few of the issues).² Yet, when it comes to promoting safety, the police are the chief public agency that policymakers utilize, invest in and prioritize.

There is a general recognition that the police can do little to address the deeper roots of community safety,³ but what about in moments of acute crisis? Where violence exists, people want and need support. That much is obvious. However, this fact does not necessarily translate into a desire for police if other options are presented, as we will discuss in more detail throughout this chapter. Many times when people call 911, they need immediate aid that does not require police response, but the NYPD is almost always the default response option, regardless of the situation.⁴

In the last several decades, the NYPD has taken over a wide range of roles that are thoroughly outside its stated mandate.⁵ It is highly present in places like schools, hospitals, community centers and government buildings where people access benefits, even public New York pools, where NYPD officers have to be present for the doors to open.⁶ The city is using police to act in the place of counselors, mediators, mental health professionals and social workers, and in doing so, increasing the likelihood that community members will end up in jail instead of getting their needs met.⁷ This is especially true in crisis situations where people

are often forced to turn to police for mental health, domestic violence or school-based crises instead of professionals who are better equipped to handle these urgent situations.⁸

The Community Safety Project asked respondents what they want and need when having an emergency or a situation that needs an urgent response, such as moments of violence, a mental health crisis, or other situations that people find unmanageable and in which they need immediate assistance.

Using similar methodological strategies as described in Chapter 3, it is clear from the research that many New Yorkers find themselves in situations where they want an urgent and immediate response from places other than the NYPD. Respondents described a range of situations in which their preferred options are well-trained and well-resourced crisis responders who are unconnected to the criminal legal system.

Sections:

4.1 Handling a crisis without the NYPD

4.2 The NYPD should not be the only option for New Yorkers in crises

4.3 Seeking help for intimate partner violence and sexual assault

4.4 Removing the NYPD from mental health crisis response

4.5 Summary

4.1 Handling a crisis without the NYPD

To begin a conversation about crisis response, it is necessary to acknowledge that communities respond to crises every day without the NYPD's help. This is not a radical notion or a future fantasy. It is happening now and needs to be centered when documenting how people understand community safety. Our research also found that many people avoid calling the NYPD in crisis situations because they fear that the NYPD will make the situation worse. Survey responses and town hall conversations indicated that people in crisis frequently want and need outside support but can feel like the right kind of support isn't available to them. In other words, our study found that the current crisis response system needs a serious overhaul to genuinely meet the needs of communities most heavily policed in New York.

Over one-third (35%) of the participants reported they were in a serious situation where they could have contacted the NYPD but decided to handle it differently without police. When asked what they did instead of calling the NYPD, respondents wrote about a range of successful strategies. Some wrote about de-escalation strategies, such as this person describing a fight where someone from the community was hit by a car: "The situation ended up getting resolved by the neighborhood. A few elders, and people walking by got involved and listened to both sides of the story, resolved the situation and both individuals went home. Problem was solved."⁹ Others described relying on community-based programs for support: "My sibling got jumped; we called GMACC [Gangstas Making Astronomical Community Changes] instead of the police."¹⁰

Who assisted in resolving issue(s) without the NYPD

35% reported they were in situations serious enough to contact the NYPD but decided to handle it differently without police.

When asked who assisted in resolving the issue(s) without the NYPD, respondents selected all of the following that applied to them:

42%	Themselves (respondent)
33%	It resolved itself
30%	Family
24%	Friends
23%	People from the neighborhood
16%	Elder
16%	Family of those involved
14%	Friends of those involved
13%	Leaders in the neighborhood
6%	Community advocate of organization
6%	Religious org or leader
5%	Service provider
5%	Peer mentor program
4%	Local crisis response team
4%	A trained de-escalator or mediator
4%	Teacher
3%	Elected official
3%	Violence interrupter program
3%	Restorative or transformative justice program

*Respondents could select all that applied

“Some kids fighting in front of my house damaged my car and property. I considered calling the police to break it up but decided to talk to them myself ... They don’t deserve to die for whatever kiddie conflict they were going through.”

- Survey respondent
(44, Latinx, man, Staten Island)

When faced with a choice to call the NYPD or not, these community members chose a nonpolice alternative that they thought would be a more effective solution. Those who assisted in resolving the crisis without the NYPD were people like elders, community members, bystanders and sometimes violence prevention organizations. Ultimately, the stories that participants conveyed are important illustrations of what is too frequently discounted — a neighborhood’s collective strength and power. However, the NYPD’s perceived inadequacy and the fear that it elicits leaves a significant civic gap that can force New Yorkers to make dangerous decisions in moments of crisis, such as putting themselves or others at great risk. For example, one person recalled:

“When my friend got shot, we went to his mom’s house instead so she can get the bullet out just because he was scared they [NYPD] was going to think he was the shooter and kill him.”

- Survey respondent
(22, Black, woman, Brooklyn)

Another respondent commented, “I was chased into a deli on the corner, but instead of calling the cops for help, I just stepped out and faced what was coming my way.”¹¹

These are life-and-death situations — situations that require medical attention — and yet people fear that calling the NYPD will make the situation worse or result in death. No New Yorker should ever feel that they have to risk their own life instead of calling emergency services. And yet, for many like this participant, these are worries based on direct experience: “I’m just afraid based on my past life experiences where I called them for help and I ended up getting assaulted with excessive force, lies and battery. But thank God for someone who had a video camera.”¹²

Over two-thirds (68%) of the survey respondents who chose not to call the police in a serious situation said the reason was because they worried about the NYPD harming them in some way, 47% said that the situation would be better handled by someone other than the NYPD, and 30% said that calling the NYPD was unnecessary because the situation would resolve itself.

When asked why they did not call the NYPD, many assumed, as this respondent put it, “The problem will come out better if I didn’t get the police involved.”¹³ Respondents spoke about their fears that the NYPD would escalate the situation, leading to increased harm and violence and causing both short- and long-term damage to the lives of the people involved. For example, this person calculated that getting the police involved not only would fail to repair the immediate harms but would likely exacerbate them: “Domestic dispute with an intoxicated couple; turns out the gentleman was suffering from a severe mental breakdown. Had I called the police, I could’ve broken up a family and sent a man to jail who had an awful day. He lost his job and got drunk, took out the stresses on his lover.” Instead, the respondent explained that this person “Moved out and found a therapist, was diagnosed and moved right back in after

taking time to heal. We had spoke and broke it up and suggested our medical facility that offered therapy at very discounted rates. It helped so much.”¹⁴ In this case, it was not the NYPD but the neighbors’ support, not only in the moment of crisis but also by connecting to the needed services, that turned the acute emergency into a sustainable solution. The reality is that being a person of color was frequently a factor in people’s decision-making about whether or not to call the NYPD. One respondent said, “I often feel that there’s a chance that when they see my height and skin, they will assume I’m the problem.”¹⁵

Why respondents chose NOT to call the NYPD in a serious situation

68% of those who chose not to call the police in a serious situation said it was because they worried about being harmed by the NYPD in some way.

More specifically:

40%	NYPD might make it worse
27%	Afraid for own safety
24%	Previous negative experiences with the NYPD
19%	Afraid the NYPD could hurt people involved
14%	Thought they would get in trouble
13%	Contacted the NYPD previously and they never responded
8%	Other

*Respondents could select all that applied so percentages do not add to 100%

“Gunshots are heard in my neighborhood regularly. I fear calling the police will lead to them shooting someone who they think may have a gun if they come here.”

- Survey respondent
(39, white, woman, Brooklyn)

We found that people in highly policed neighborhoods are frequently concerned about the NYPD’s crisis response and are forced to make choices that nobody should be forced to make. When calling for help, no one should be worried or afraid that the people coming to help them will also harm them. In the next several sections, we explore what kind of help people want and need when in crisis.

4.2. The NYPD should not be the only option for New Yorkers in crises

Fifteen percent of the survey respondents reported that there was at least one time that they were in danger or having an emergency that resulted in someone in the community calling 911 or approaching the NYPD. When asked to reflect on these experiences, 38% of them reported they were satisfied with the NYPD as first responders. However, half (50%) of them, in their moment of acute danger or emergency, wished there were places and people who responded other than the NYPD. Many respondents provided specific examples of what would have been a better response in their particular situation(s). Participants spoke of needing “Trained trauma specialist,”¹⁶ “a mediator,”¹⁷

“counseling,”¹⁸ “social worker,”¹⁹ “mental health counselor”²⁰ or “calling family or friends.”²¹ There was an acknowledgement that police are trained to “handle things with force,”²² but what people needed was support without the threat of harm or the legal system. Respondents wanted “Someone to talk to instead of facing intimidating officers,”²³ someone “trained in crisis situations,”²⁴ perhaps even “people in the community who know others in the community”²⁵ like a “local elder group who could be contacted free of charge and provide mediation and support.”²⁶

50% of those who had previously experienced danger or an emergency resulting in police presence, wished instead that there were places and people other than the NYPD who responded.

“As someone who tried so hard after experiencing harm for so long and then being harmed by the system, it’s like so often the police don’t provide the resources or space or support that people need and, then, even when you try to live outside of the control and violence of the state and the police because you know they can cause harm, they still become involved and can cause harm in that way.”
- Town hall attendee

And yet, on the other side of the call for help, the community frequently sees the NYPD as the only place to turn. Of those survey respondents who had previously sought the NYPD for help, 62% felt that in their situation(s), calling the police was the only viable possibility, at least that they were aware of. When asked to explain,

respondents largely felt siphoned into this single choice: “They were the only people I could call, so I had no choice, but I wasn’t sure if they were the ones to call or the ones that could do the job.”²⁷

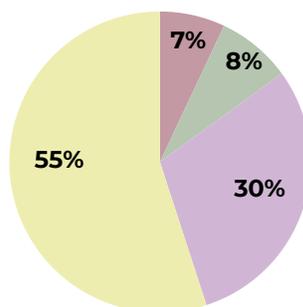
As previously described in Chapter 2, people most frequently see the NYPD as the very last resort, but in the severest moments, they are left with few if any other options. One respondent said, “I do try to exhaust every nonpolice option before I call them, but sometimes there are few other choices.”²⁸

Given all this accumulated evidence, it should come as no surprise then that respondents, as these two responses indicate, “wish there were other resources”²⁹ or “think maybe other unknown sources could have been of some help, if only we knew who to call.”³⁰ In fact, as already indicated in chapter 2, 85% of all the the survey participants wished to some degree there was another place to turn in a time of need other than the NYPD, and over half (55%) indicated a strong desire for a police alternative.

Do respondents wish there were places OTHER than the NYPD they could turn to?

55% strongly desired that there were places and people OTHER than the NYPD to call or approach for help in serious situations (**85%** to some degree and **8%** did not desire it at all)

More specifically:



55% of people said a great deal or a lot

30% of people said somewhat or a little

8% of people said not at all

7% were unsure

Also, as described in chapter 3, 61% of the respondents highly prioritized community-based, nonpolice, gun violence prevention programs like “Crisis Management Systems”³¹ or “Advanced Peace Model”³² for their neighborhoods. Indeed, people want and need publicly funded, nonpolicing support to help them effectively handle the serious challenges in their lives, including/especially moments of violence.

Evidence shows community-based violence prevention programs are equal to or more effective at preventing, deterring and responding to violence than the police.³³ Several programs like this exist in the city — programs that take a holistic approach to preventing, intervening and addressing violence and conflict among community members, primarily through the use of peers, violence interrupters, and extensive trauma healing and wraparound support. While the city has made some investments in these programs, it has failed to expand them so that they are readily available to all New Yorkers. The city has also failed to make sure they are robust enough to provide the kind of wraparound services that communities need. In 2022, the city reported that the city had 23 programs, each operating on small budgets approximately .00003% of the NYPD’s \$12 billion budget. Combined, the city spends only .01% of the NYPD’s total budget on these crisis management programs.³⁴

People in crisis want and deserve holistic, nonpolice options that are effective and reliable. To make communities safer, the city should focus efforts to increase funding and expand their reach so that many more New Yorkers can benefit from nonpolice crisis management programs.

4.3. Seeking help for intimate partner violence and sexual assault

In this section, we delve into the experiences of New Yorkers who reached out to the NYPD seeking assistance in cases of domestic or intimate partner violence (IPV) and sexual assault. Our findings suggested that many respondents faced a complex web of emotions, fears and doubts when considering the involvement of law enforcement in, what were often considered, deeply personal and sensitive matters.

We found in our survey that people who sought the police for help with IPV — often women of color — said they feared calling the police would make the situation worse or that they simply did not see calling the police as a viable option. For instance, “Fear of calling for domestic violence treatment goes according to the officer’s views of the situation. Some are empathetic, and others may make you feel like what did you do to deserve it.”³⁵ Despite the fear of violence at home, there were real concerns of the potential consequences that involving the NYPD could carry. Abuse victims’ lives are often intertwined with their abusers through children, financial support, love and many other factors. It is frequently not as simple as leaving the abuser, and for many reasons, putting the abuser in jail may exacerbate the issue.³⁶ For example, one respondent said, “Father was abusing my mom, but we were scared to call the cops because my dad worked for the city, and we were afraid he would lose his job.”³⁷

In our survey, 7% of the respondents reported the NYPD investigated an IPV case on their behalf. Of those, over half (58%) reported at least one troubling experience with the NYPD within the context of their IPV case. For example, over one-quarter (26%) said the NYPD blamed them for the violence (“I was in a domestic violence relationship for many years & the consequences I suffered & sometimes the police sided with him”³⁸ or “Being in a DV relationship made me second guess because they weren’t always on my side. Only when he beat me up badly.”³⁹). Over one-fifth (21%) said the NYPD ignored their case (“Report of harassment and break of my order of protection was ignored by the NYPD.”⁴⁰). And almost one-fifth (18%) indicated the NYPD arrested them instead (“Because I’ve called them for domestic violence on me, and they locked me up too, and I was the victim.”⁴¹).

“Police are called ... This happens a lot in my community. Nothing comes from it. There is not counseling. No help. The cycle just gets worse. And there are not resources for the people who are being abused, so they have to stay in the relationship. When community folks try to get involved, the cops get called, and they yell at community folks and tell them to back away or whatever.”

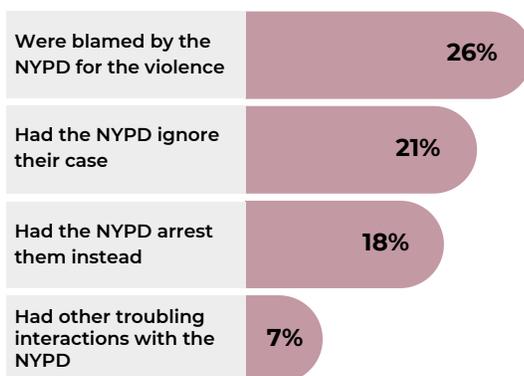
- Town hall attendee

In addition to IPV, our survey also asked about sexual assault. Similar to findings on IPV, 6% of the respondents reported that the NYPD investigated a sexual assault case on their behalf. Of them, 62% reported they had at least one troubling interaction with the NYPD within the context of their sexual assault case. For example, over one-third (35%) reported that the NYPD blamed them for their assault; over one-fifth (21%) told us the NYPD ignored their case; and 11% said the NYPD arrested them instead. Like IPV cases, we similarly heard from respondents a hesitancy to involve the NYPD because they likely would not help and could easily harm. One respondent noted, “I was sexually assaulted by someone I knew, and I didn’t call because I knew there was a really good chance [the NYPD] wouldn’t do anything and might blame me.”⁴²

Troubling experiences with NYPD in the context of IPV

Of those who sought the NYPD to investigate IPV, **58%** reported at least one troubling experience with the NYPD in the context of their IPV case.

More specifically:

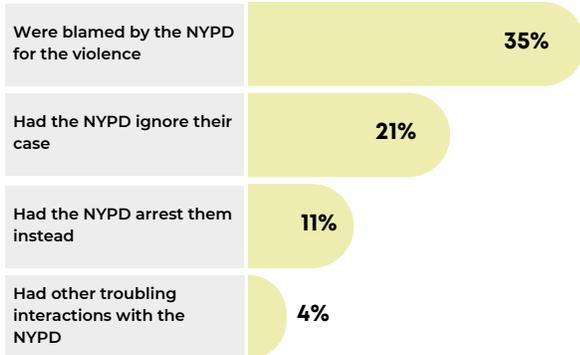


*Respondents could select all that applied

Troubling experiences with NYPD in the context of sexual assault

Of those who sought the NYPD to investigate sexual assault, **62%** reported they had at least one troubling interaction with the NYPD within the context of their sexual assault case.

More specifically:



*Respondents could select all that applied

Intimate partner violence and sexual assault are serious, complex issues that deserve to be handled with care and respect by trusted professionals. **Our survey found that too often police involvement in IPV and sexual assault decreased survivors' sense of safety and well-being and further criminalized survivors. There should be increased investments in nonpolice crisis intervention services that have trusted professionals who are capable of intervening in violence without further harming and criminalizing victims and survivors.**

4.4 Removing the NYPD from mental health crisis response

In 2018, the NYPD received nearly 180,000 emergency calls involving people

experiencing an emotional or mental health emergency or crisis.⁴³ The number of calls nearly doubled from 2009 to 2019. A disproportionate number of crisis calls take place in Black and Latinx working-class neighborhoods. The 10 precincts with the largest Black and Latinx populations had nearly 35,000 calls in 2018 compared to 19,000 with the largest white populations. Not all moments of crisis are related to mental or behavioral health, of course, but compared to NYPD funding, resourcing across New York communities for mental health support remains wholly insufficient.

The deployment of NYPD to crisis calls yields an increase in arrest and a higher risk for use of force, all while not effectively addressing the needs of the persons experiencing the crises. Between Jan. 2, 2015, and Aug. 28, 2023, police across America fatally shot 8,727 people, and at least 20% (1,783) of those were experiencing some form of emotional or mental health distress.⁴⁴ This rate has remained mostly constant nationally. Disturbingly, the rate in New York of fatal shootings by police of people experiencing a crisis is significantly higher than the national average. Thirty-six percent of the people whom the NYPD have killed since 2014 (27 of 76 people based on documented media coverage) were experiencing some form of emotional distress, substance use or mental health emergency.⁴⁵ All but five – or 82% – were Black or Latinx.

Most New Yorkers living in heavily policed neighborhoods do not want the NYPD to respond to mental health 911 calls. We learned this from the survey in various ways. Nearly one-tenth (8%) of respondents experienced a mental health crisis where someone in the community had called 911 on their behalf. Of them, some were unsure (15%), but the majority (57%) desired options other than involving the NYPD in their

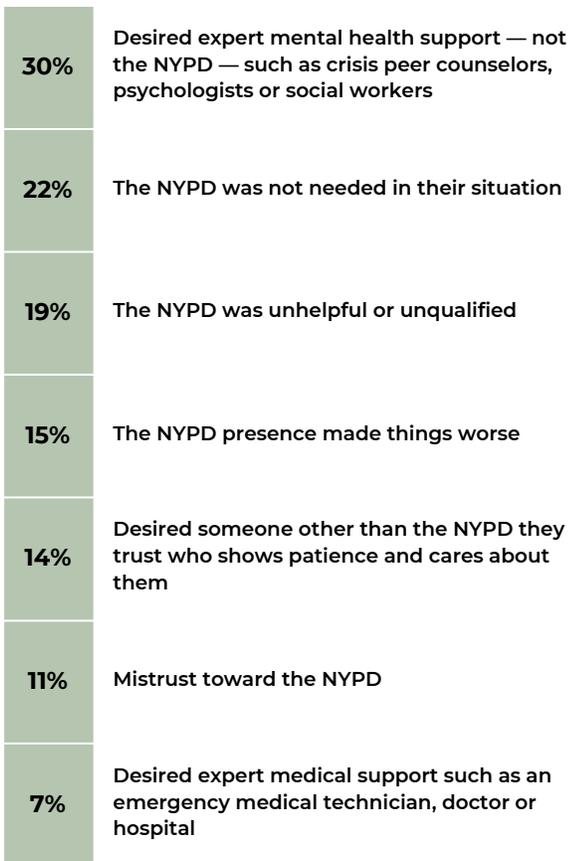
particular mental health situation(s). Sometimes it only appeared serious but was unnecessary (“I was only having a panic attack and had no need for 911 to be called”);⁴⁶ Others experienced the police as generally unhelpful (“Police didn’t understand what I was going through — a psychologist would have been better.”)⁴⁷ or unqualified (“I would have preferred someone who had more experience with dealing with someone who has mental health needs.”).⁴⁸

“My mother has severe mental health problems, but the police don’t help. So, I just don’t even bother, but sometimes other people call the police.”
 - Survey respondent (24, white, man, Brooklyn)

Respondents’ explanations for why they did not want the NYPD involved in their mental health situation

8% personally experienced a mental health crisis where someone in the community called 911. Of them, 57% desired options other than involving the NYPD.

Their specific reasons for this were:



*Respondents could select all that applied

In general, people understood that the “police can make it worse”⁴⁹ and make “a frightening experience more frightening.”⁵⁰ Respondents explained that “police involvement only escalates stress”⁵¹ in ways that can be hurtful, violent and criminalizing. What they needed were first responders that were not the police, people who were “more approachable and empathetic”⁵² and who showed patience, care and understanding like “dialogue with the family”⁵³ or community members. Respondents especially wanted people with mental health training such as peers, therapists or crisis counselors.

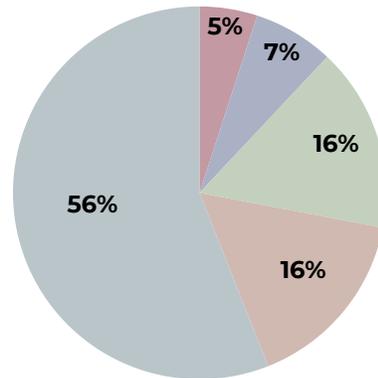
Even for those who have not personally experienced mental health calls that involved the police, most reported they desire first responders or services other than the NYPD to support moments of serious emotional crisis. Only 16% of the survey respondents disagreed with the statement that “the NYPD should be removed from mental health calls because they generally make the situation worse,” with over half (56%) agreeing and another 7% suggesting it depends. When asked whom they would most want as first responders if they or someone they loved was having a serious mental health issue that required 911, 77% of survey respondents reported they would not want the NYPD at all. The top two first responders they wanted, either alone or in combination, were medics and trained crisis counselors. Of those who desired trained crisis counselors, 75% wanted them to be from their neighborhood or community and/or to have experienced serious mental health issues themselves.

Removing the NYPD first responders from mental health 911 calls

Participants were asked how much they agreed or disagreed with the following statement:

Many are now proposing to remove the NYPD from mental health 911 calls because they think that police too often make the situation worse. Do you agree or disagree with this proposal?

56% agreed with the statement above while only **16%** disagreed.



56% completely or strongly agree

16% Completely or strongly disagree

16% Neither agree nor disagree (indifferent)

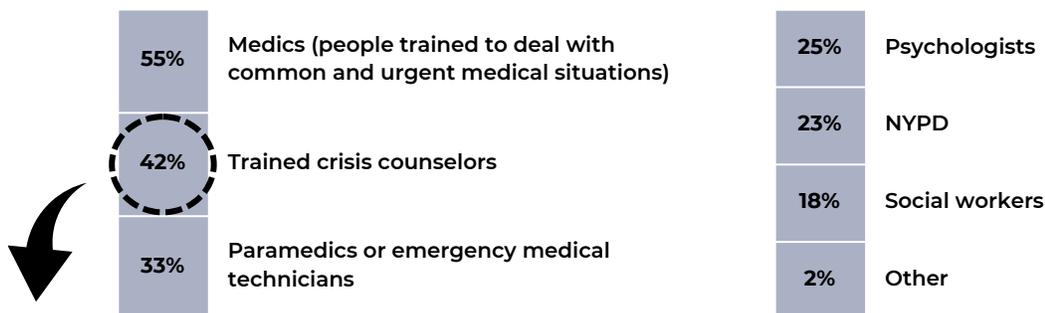
7% Both agree and disagree (it depends)

5% Unsure

Who would you most want as first responders if you or someone you loved was having a serious mental health issue that required 911?

77% reported they would not want the NYPD at all as first responders if they or someone they loved was having a serious mental health issue that required 911. **Medics (55%)** and **trained crisis counselors (42%)** were the top two choices.

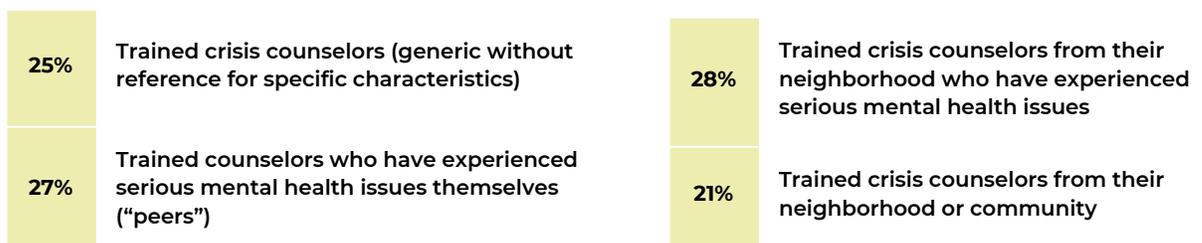
They specifically indicated:



Trained crisis counselors

Of those who desire trained crisis counselors, **75%** want them to be from their neighborhood or community and/or to have experienced serious mental health issues themselves.

They specifically indicated:



We need to invest in a mental health crisis response system that does not involve the NYPD and instead takes a public health approach to responding to people in mental health crises. When the NYPD responds to mental health crises, it often escalates a situation by aiming to control the person in crisis because the NYPD doesn't have the expertise to understand what the person is going through. A police response can contribute to the trauma a person is experiencing and result in serious harm or death. We have seen too many times in New York and across the country police kill people in mental health crises.⁵⁴

Other municipalities have removed police from being first responders in mental health crisis with much success,⁵⁵ and yet New York has struggled to invest in a truly nonpolice based mental health crisis response. Programs such as the Behavioral Health Emergency Assistance Response Division (B-HEARD) — a program designed to send teams of emergency medical technicians and social workers to instances where people are experiencing a mental health crisis — are touted as nonpolice response systems. Yet, the NYPD responds to over 80% of mental health calls in neighborhoods where B-HEARD is active,⁵⁶ and callers are not able to specifically request a response from a B-HEARD team.⁵⁷ Mayor Adams has continued to call for the expansion of B-HEARD⁵⁸ and has also doubled down on police involvement in mental health with the expansion of SCOUT teams on the subways, which are police officer led mental health teams. We need a truly nonpolice mental health crisis response. We also need to address the reason why an increasing number of New Yorkers are experiencing mental health issues, especially post-pandemic. And we need to address the lack of comprehensive mental health services that are affordable, culturally competent and center individuals' self-determination.

4.5 Summary

It is imperative that the perspectives of communities most impacted by policing are prioritized as New York continues to explore how to invest in nonpolice alternatives to crisis response. **Many people who participated in our study expressed fear and apprehension calling police in moments of crisis, emergency or serious need. Some shared their preference to resolve matters on their own, and most expressed a clear desire for alternative responders to crises.** We saw this trend across crises, including moments of danger, IPV, sexual assault and serious emotional distress. Rather than de-escalate and resolve matters, police response tends to escalate a crisis, and respondents expressed fear and anxiety that calling the police would deteriorate a situation and cause additional harm.

The Community Safety Project's findings mirror the growing calls and movement in support of building nonpolicing crisis care response options.⁵⁹ One recent nationwide poll found that 65% of likely voters in the U.S. endorse the redirection of funds from law enforcement to nonpolice first responder initiatives,⁶⁰ and several cities across the country are starting to build and expand nonpolice emergency response systems.⁶¹ Many New Yorkers want alternative crisis management systems,⁶² and yet New York has struggled to adequately develop and invest in alternatives that are not still heavily reliant on the NYPD as first responders. Established crisis response systems exist and offer effective alternatives to police engagement.⁶³ Investing in these models will improve all New Yorkers' safety.

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- 16 Survey respondent - 57, Black, man, Manhattan
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- 19 Survey respondent - 73, Latin, man, Manhattan
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- 22 Survey respondent - age unknown, race unknown, gender unknown, Staten Island
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“Mutual aid makes me feel safe, neighbors caring for each other makes me feel safe. Everyone having food on their table and a roof over their head makes me feel safe.”

- Town hall attendee



5.0

RECOMMENDATIONS & CONCLUSION

Over 3,300 New Yorkers from all five boroughs participated in this research project and shared with us what it means for them to feel safe in their city. **We learned that many participants want a fundamental transformation of how safety is produced in their neighborhoods.** They are asking policymakers to reconsider what constitutes safety, how it can be produced and who can help produce it.

How do New Yorkers want to make their city safer?

For many New Yorkers who live in highly policed neighborhoods, it is clear that their vision for safety moves away from law enforcement and other carceral forms of intervention to address systemic social issues. The reliance on punishment, surveillance, use of force, violence, and coercion in efforts to achieve safety has often heightened feelings of fear and fragmentation.¹ This is evident in participants' descriptions of individual and community-level experiences of harassment, violence, and harm. Rather than producing safety, policing tends to escalate conflict and disrupt communities.

Instead, those who live with heavy police presence commonly understand safety as something rooted in their relationships with and within the community that allows for themselves and the community as a whole to live and grow in healthy, supportive and accountable ways. It is rooted deeply in the daily interactions among neighbors, friends and family that promote trust, familiarity and shared aid and that de-escalate conflict and center healing justice. Community safety is a verb — it is something realized, something each of us does, makes and remakes through mutual support and collective actions. In this sense, it is rooted in collective care, in relying on neighbors and having them rely upon us in return.

While safety is fundamentally rooted in the collective everyday actions of communities and their members, its sustainability heavily relies on investments in public resources that enable communities to thrive. Neighborhood-level bonds of trust and relationships are strengthened through support for local

community organizations and centers, harm prevention and intervention initiatives, youth programs and resources, mental health and health services, and public spaces and facilities that promote trusting and constructive connections with others. Community safety is centered on resourcing ways to build people's ability to develop and sustain a vibrant community life, where the unfamiliar can become familiar, camaraderie turns to solidarity and neighbors are accountable to each other. This resourcing especially means ensuring that people's basic needs are met to provide the stability necessary to lead thriving lives with dignity. This includes accessible services such as education, jobs and income generation, child care and family support, mental health services, health care, stable housing, and food and nutrition. These kinds of investments have significant short- and long-term impact on people's lives, how safe they feel in their community, and how much safety and support they can offer their community.²

It is also clear that community safety means freedom from harm and violence, not only from other community members but also from the police. The NYPD too frequently exacerbates or, in fact, is the source of harm and violence, yet the police remain the starting point for any "serious" public safety proposal.³ It is true that many New Yorkers, as this report describes, also still have deep associations with the centrality of policing; however, when offered alternatives, they often prefer nonpolice or noncarceral options, citing them as or more effective than police interventions but involving less risk of harm and violence.

Sections:

5.1 How do we create a safer New York?

5.2 Specific priority demands for fiscal year 2025

5.3 Conclusion

5.1 How do we create a safer New York?

Safety is a public investment in well-resourced communities where people can thrive with dignity. To have any success enacting a transformative vision of public safety, the city must shift from criminalizing communities to supporting communities. The NYPD cannot remedy the deeply rooted structural conditions that produce widespread injustice and are often at the root of community violence and harm.⁴ The city needs to hold police accountable for harm and violence, while reallocating resources from law-enforcement into a range of community-based approaches rooted in life-affirming health, social and human services. The following are Communities United for Police Reform's (CPR) broad recommendations, directly supported by the evidence collected in the Community Safety Project, on how to create a safer New York.

1. Expand oversight, transparency & accountability of the NYPD

- Hold the NYPD accountable for failing to fire abusive officers
- End NYPD misinformation and propaganda
- Demand that the NYPD comply with city and state oversight laws
- Demand transparency on costs of NYPD settlements

2. Reduce the size, scope and budget of the NYPD

- Disarm and demilitarize police surveillance
- Disband historically abusive NYPD units
- Remove the NYPD from social service roles
- Reduce the growing number of police officers in non-police agencies
- Reduce the size of the NYPD
- Reduce the NYPD's budget

3. Invest in the fundamental needs of New Yorkers

- Housing
- Education
- Health care
- Mental health care
- Employment
- Youth programs and services
- Quality city infrastructure
- Community based organizations
- Food security
- Community-led safety strategies

4. Invest in violence prevention and crisis intervention programs

- Crisis Management Systems (CMS)
- Hate violence and bystander intervention programs
- Restorative justice programs in schools
- Non-police crisis response systems

1. Expand oversight, transparency & accountability of the NYPD

The city must do more to keep communities safe by increasing transparency and local oversight of the NYPD while also holding officers/departments accountable for the violence, harm and abuse they cause.

- **Hold the NYPD accountable for failing to fire abusive officers.** The failure to hold officers accountable for abuse and even the death of New Yorkers leads to ongoing, unchecked police violence in communities. The refusal to discipline these officers decreases community members' real and perceived sense of safety because they know that there is little consequence for police behavior. Policymakers need to strengthen the city's ability to hold NYPD officers accountable for harm and address patterns of misconduct that put New Yorkers at risk.⁵
- **End NYPD misinformation and propaganda.** The NYPD's 86-person public relations spin-team helps police avoid accountability for its actions. They repeatedly justify the harm police cause in communities and misconstrue how community members experience the harm. They distort the role of police in the everyday lives of New Yorkers while also misinforming the public about policies aimed at holding the NYPD accountable, such as the How Many Stops Act or bail reform policies. The city must end the propaganda and fear mongering produced by the NYPD public relations team because it makes us all less safe. The first step is to cut their budget in half.⁶
- **Demand that the NYPD comply with city and state oversight laws.** Attempts to hold the NYPD accountable through oversight laws must be complied with by

the NYPD. In 2020 organizers and advocates won the repeal of 50a, making police misconduct reports available to the public. However, it was recently reported that the NYPD's public database on officer misconduct is deeply flawed, with cases of officer misconduct disappearing for weeks on the database, making it virtually impossible to accurately assess the level and scope of officer misconduct. In addition, the NYPD is also out of compliance with statewide legislation requiring the agency to report on how many civilians it kills per year.⁷

- **Demand transparency on costs of NYPD settlements.** It was recently reported that over 1 billion dollars in police violence settlements were not reported by the Law Department over the last ten years. This obscures the true scope and scale of police violence. The city should ensure that going forward, the full-cost of NYPD settlements is accurately reported and available to the public.⁸

2. Reduce the size, scope and budget of the NYPD

The city must do much more to keep communities safe from police violence, harm and abuse by shrinking the NYPD's presence and power in neighborhoods.

- **Disarm and demilitarize police surveillance.** It is essential that we end the use of military-grade weapons and technologies, such as long-range acoustic devices (LRADs) and drones, and aggressive tactics and practices, such as no-knock warrants, aggressive protest policing and repression of constitutionally protected activity. Rather than advance community members' sense of safety and belonging, the use of military-grade weapons and technology such as

biometric surveillance technologies, predictive policing algorithms and so-called gang databases have further entrenched racist and bias-based policing, increased rights violations, and failed to make people and communities safer.⁹

- **Disband historically abusive NYPD units.** It is essential that we protect communities from police violence by disbanding notoriously abusive NYPD units that have a track record of consistently harming New Yorkers. Such units include the Strategic Response Group who was responsible for the death of Saheed Vassell and has a history of violence towards protestors exercising their first amendment rights, the VICE Enforcement Unit that has a history of being abusive towards trans women of color, the Neighborhood Safety Teams that are the re-created “Anti-Crime” teams who terrorized Black, Latinx and other communities of color in NYC, and the Youth Coordination Officers who have also notoriously targeted Black, Latinx, and other young people of color.¹⁰
- **Remove the NYPD from social service roles.** Police are increasingly being asked to play social service roles across the city in homelessness, in schools, in mental health response, and in hospitals. Police are wholly unsuited to help New Yorkers who are struggling on the streets, in our schools, and in their own homes, often escalating situations, abusing, and criminalizing people who need help and support. This is not the role of law-enforcement, and policymakers should remove police from these roles, including removing police from mental health response, from schools, and from homeless outreach.¹¹
- **Reduce the growing number of police officers in non-police agencies.** There are seventeen agencies outside of the

NYPD that have their own police forces or enforcement arms. The number of police officers in non-law-enforcement agencies such as the Department of Homelessness and Parks and Recreation has increased in the last several years. This is unnecessary and counterproductive to creating safer communities and should be stopped.¹²

- **Reduce the size of the NYPD.** The current size of the NYPD is larger than the Chicago and Los Angeles police forces combined with one out of every five municipal employees working for the police department. NYPD omnipresence in the lives of New Yorkers produces violence and fear. The threat of increased police contact puts individuals and whole communities at greater risk of harm, including trauma and even death. The city must reduce NYPD staffing to make communities safer.¹³
- **Reduce the NYPD’s budget.** The police are fundamentally unable to create safety in communities. They do very little to prevent crime or reduce violence and cannot remedy the deeply rooted structural conditions that produce widespread injustice and harm. Most of the tasks that police perform are better addressed using more effective and suitable alternatives. The unfortunate reality is that the NYPD’s outsized budget continues to substantially grow at the expense of other non policing investments that do in fact, offer sustainable public safety solutions. The city must reduce the NYPD’s budget and reinvest in other institutions, programs and services that meet the needs of New York’s’ most underserved communities including, Black, Latinx and other communities of color, LGBTQ+ New Yorkers, homeless New Yorkers, young New Yorkers, and New Yorkers with disabilities.¹⁴

3. Invest in the fundamental needs of New Yorkers

Ensuring that New Yorkers have their fundamental needs met will increase stability and safety for all. Our survey respondents were clear that ensuring these basic ten needs below should be the top priorities of lawmakers for making thriving, safe and healthy communities.

- **Housing.** Long-term, well-maintained, affordable housing for all New Yorkers is a cornerstone of a safe city. We cannot continue to use police-based approaches to address the homelessness crisis while failing to make the needed investments to ensure all New Yorkers have a home. It is paramount that the city increase low-income housing, invest in NYCHA, increase supportive housing, and protect tenants through rental assistance and legal services.¹⁵
- **Education.** Ensuring all New York children, youth and adults have access to high-quality education in fully-funded schools will dramatically increase safety in our city. Quality schools are bedrocks of communities, they can strengthen the social fabric of neighborhoods, increase economic security and contribute to the overall well-being of the families they serve. The city needs to invest in our public education system from early childhood education through graduate school as a primary path towards making communities safer.¹⁶
- **Health care.** New Yorkers deserve health care services that are culturally competent, comprehensive, affordable and easily available. This includes access to rehabilitation, disability and preventative health programs as well as well-funded public health organizations and hospitals. This is one of the most important elements in producing safe, healthy and thriving neighborhoods. Too many New Yorkers are still without quality affordable care.¹⁷
- **Mental health care.** Making locally accessible, affordable, comprehensive, culturally competent mental health care, including for behavioral health and drug use, available to all New Yorkers is crucial to creating a safe environment for all. We cannot continue to police and incarcerate New Yorkers using drugs or living with mental illness, while failing to close the serious gaps in services that leave so many New Yorkers without support. We need to increase overdose prevention centers and other harm-reduction based programs that keep people who use drugs safe. We specifically need an increase in mental health programs for under-served Black, Latinx, other communities of color as well as LGBTQ+ communities.¹⁸
- **Employment.** Investment in anti-poverty programs as well as increased access to secure and well-paying jobs for New Yorkers living in poor neighborhoods of color is essential to sustainable public safety. Unemployed or underemployed New Yorkers are some of the most highly policed, and the city is not doing nearly enough to create widely available opportunities for financial security.¹⁹
- **Youth programs and services.** The city needs to invest in young people as a public safety strategy instead of criminalizing them. Young New Yorkers deserve services that will help manage the multiple stressors of adolescence and help them transition into adulthood. This includes recreational programs for young people, programs that support young people to enter higher education as well as programs that secure

employment and housing. Programs for young people play a crucial role in public safety and have far reaching impacts on the lives of young people.²⁰

- **Quality city infrastructure.** A safe city also depends on city infrastructure that is robust, well-maintained and accessible to all its residents. This includes investments in parks and green spaces, playgrounds, pools and recreational facilities, quality and accessible public transportation, including protected bike lanes and safe pedestrian crossings. The city must prioritize these projects over continued funding for policing and criminalization infrastructure. Quality city infrastructure creates safe public spaces that can be claimed and enjoyed by all.²¹
- **Community based organizations.** Well funded and well staffed multi-issue community based organizations are critical to public safety. Community based organizations provide trusted and tailored local support across New York neighborhoods in deeply grounded and accountable ways, especially for Black, Latinx and other communities of color that are often under-served. Community organizations also support democracy by increasing the power of local communities and ensuring that city government is accountable to the needs of communities.²²
- **Food security.** The city needs to ensure that all New Yorkers have reliable access to nutritious and affordable food. This includes nearby, affordable, healthy grocery stores and farmers markets, food pantries, SNAP, meals on wheels, urban farming, and programs that end hunger in the city. Safety comes from stability, and when New Yorkers feel like they are unsure where their next meal is coming from, it has far-ranging impacts on individual and community safety.²³

- **Community-led safety strategies.** Violence and harm are best understood through a focused lens at the level of a small number of people within a few neighborhood blocks and social networks. Community-led safety strategies offer more individualized, trusted, and effective responses to neighborhood crises. These strategies include, for example, violence interrupter and gun violence-prevention programs like “Cure Violence”, peer mentor programs such as “Credible Messengers”, restorative and transformative justice programs through school coordinators and community healing circles, local crisis response teams for mental health crises and domestic violence and other non-police first responders as alternatives to calling police. See number 4 below.²⁴

4. Invest in violence prevention and crisis intervention programs

Police-led efforts to prevent or reduce conflicts and crises have proven limited and frequently escalate situations. Instead, alternative measures that rely upon non police, independent outreach workers and peers have demonstrated substantial success in defusing and mediating conflicts as well as preventing long-term violence in the streets, in schools and in community organizations and centers. The impact of these initiatives is most strengthened when integrated with individualized, wraparound services — such as health care, housing, employment and education — that can help stabilize conditions and improve New Yorker’s quality of life long term.

- **Crisis Management Systems (CMS).** CMS should be dramatically expanded across

the city, especially programs that take a holistic approach to addressing violence and harm and are led by members of the communities that they serve. Crisis Management Systems have a proven track record of intervening to prevent and significantly reduce gun violence. CMS deploy teams of trained violence interrupters and credible messengers who mediate conflicts on the street and connect high-risk individuals to services that can reduce the long-term risk of violence.²⁵

- **Hate violence and bystander intervention programs.** These programs are rooted in communities and strengthen public safety. They use a comprehensive community-driven approach to prevent bias incidents and hate crimes. They also have strong track records of addressing hate violence and helping bystanders intervene in violence when appropriate.²⁶
- **Restorative justice programs in schools.** Our students need culturally responsive and healing-centered programs that help address harms occurring at school by supporting students in generating solutions to conflict. Restorative justice programs in schools have a proven record of keeping students safe and out of the criminal legal system.²⁷
- **Non-police crisis response systems.** New Yorkers experiencing mental health or substance use-related crises should receive a public health-based response from peers and professionals who are best equipped to address the issues and coordinate with long-term (post-crisis), low-threshold wraparound services. This means policymakers must create an alternative crisis response system that is truly based on public health principles, with oversight from the city's public health agencies, not the NYPD.

Policymakers must also ensure that adequate investments are made in preventative and long-term mental health and substance-use care that helps people heal and thrive, especially Black, Latinx, and other communities of color that have been historically under-served in New York.²⁸

5.2 Specific priority demands for fiscal year 2025

The following are priority demands for Fiscal Year 2025 proposed by Communities United for Police Reform and supported by evidence gathered from the Community Safety Project. These demands specifically help expand oversight, transparency, and accountability of the NYPD as well as reduce the size, scope and budget of the NYPD.

Priority 1

Cut the NYPD's press/communications budget by at least 50%, including Deputy Commissioner of Public Information and other NYPD press/communications infrastructure and programs. Public resources should not be used to spread misinformation, and the millions of dollars being spent by the NYPD public relations spin team should be cut and re-invested to close critical gaps in services. When accounting for the full cost of staffing of DCPI, social media management and other contracts, we estimate that the full cost of NYPD press and communications is well over \$10 million dollars.²⁹

Priority 2

Remove NYPD from mental health response. New Yorkers need mental health care, not increased criminalization. NYPD Co-Response Teams should be eliminated, and this money should be moved into crisis response teams that do not include police officers and community-based mental health services and programs that can provide mental health crisis prevention, response and post-crisis services. We estimate that the NYPD Uniform costs of NYPD Mental Health Co-Response teams is approximately \$5.6 million dollars.³⁰

Priority 3

Freeze hiring of school police and cut funding for remaining vacant school positions. Mayor Eric Adams is proposing hiring 574 school police officers in FY25 to fill vacant positions³¹ as well as an additional 400 school police positions³² that are being introduced in the FY25 Adopted budget, meaning close to 1000 new school police officers in schools next year. The city should be taking the opposite approach, cutting school cop vacancies, freezing hiring, and moving at least \$98 million dollars³³ to close needed gaps in services and support for students. Students need restorative justice, mental health, other non-police schools' staff and practices that help students learn and thrive, not cops.

Priority 4

Disband the Strategic Response Group (SRG). Adams is proposing an increase in funding next year for this notoriously abusive unit.³⁴ The SRG should be disbanded, and their hyper-aggressive escalating tactics should be eliminated. Militarized forces that target protesters for exercising their first amendment rights do not belong in our communities or in our streets, we must disband the SRG and reinvest \$145 million³⁵ to serve, not harm New Yorkers.

Priority 5

Block attempts to add 1,200 additional officers in FY25,³⁶ and instead invest those monies to keep jobs in schools, mental health programs, libraries, composting, and non-police anti-violence programs. The NYPD should not be allowed to add an additional 1,200 new recruits in FY25 while staffing from other critical agencies and programs are being cut. These officers would add \$62 million dollars to the NYPD expense budget and at least an additional \$62 million in fringe and pension costs for FY25, for a total of \$124 million dollars that can be reinvested.³⁷

Priority 6

Stop the Creation of Cop City NYC! Reject Mayor Eric Adams plan to spend \$225 million on a mega-police training facility in Queens. This capital project will consolidate training for the NYPD and 17 other city agencies that have enforcement arms. Adams' Cop City project will increase the influence and power of the NYPD and mold the enforcement arms of other city agencies to more closely follow NYPD protocols and practices. This is a dangerous expansion of policing and enforcement and will result in increased criminalization of New Yorkers.³⁸

5.3 Conclusion

The actions, calls for change and growing movement that emerged across the country in 2020 were especially felt in New York City and throughout the state. What we saw was an undeniable, popular democratic expression for change that was simultaneously multiracial and broad-based. It was also led by people directly affected by police abuse and violence, especially Black communities and other communities of color.³⁹ In other words, the very communities holding the weight of policing in America made it clear that this cannot go on any longer. Policymakers, elected officials and even some police leadership were initially open to engage with these historic calls for transformative change. However, we quickly entered a period of reactionary backlash where police unions and political parties (among others) maneuvered to counteract the demands of the movement.⁴⁰

The popular media in New York has frequently described the election of Mayor Adams, a former NYPD officer, as a referendum on and rejection of the 2020 demands.⁴¹ Such portrayals commonly emphasize a desire for public safety through policing while downplaying the demands to end overly pervasive, abusive and discriminatory policing. In popular coverage and political talking points, this has been presented as a binary to the extreme — that the choice is either “defund” or “safety” where safety can only be delivered by the police through repressive enforcement practices. Predictably, aggressive police enforcement and greater investments in policing are presented as the leading solutions.

The reactionary turn in New York discounts a substantial amount of learning in the past

decade gained through public outrage, successful litigation, an ongoing federal monitorship of the NYPD and passed legislation (including two veto overrides, one by then-Mayor Mike Bloomberg with the Community Safety Act and another in 2024 by Mayor Adams, with the How Many Stops Act).⁴² This learning also involved convincing empirical evidence that aggressive, quality of life and order-maintenance policing practices — such as stop and frisk — and strategies such as broken windows policing increase harm to Black, Latinx and other New Yorkers of color and have questionable (if any) causal benefit to safety.⁴³ Yet, the NYPD continues to be deployed in response to violence even though it does little to prevent violence from occurring and fails to address the vast number of fundamental harms that marginalized communities experience.⁴⁴ In other words, despite all we learned about policing in the past decade, the NYPD continues to be the New York’s main safety strategy.

It is folly to respond to the historic demands for change that emerged over the 2020 summer with the same narrow set of tools and actors that caused ongoing pain and harm in the past. It is folly when a discussion on safety reform, or change of any kind, starts with the police. This is broken, self-reinforcing logic. If the problem which needs addressing is the police’s failure to keep all people safe — and indeed, that the police actually accentuate and enact harm against Black, Latinx and other communities of color — the solution cannot be the very problem. A fundamental reimagining must take place if we are to break free from the entrenched patterns and practices of abuse, violations of rights, fear and even death.

The desire for safety is universal. That is not in doubt. We have been tricked, however, to

think that there is only one way or one kind of actor who can help promote safety. We have been told that the only way to obtain safety is through punishment, repression, violence and authoritarian use of force. To build effective policy and budgetary agendas that promote dignity, safety and justice, we must move beyond political talking points or positions based solely on the priorities and analysis of the NYPD. Indeed, any public policy to address safety and policing must first directly hear what New Yorkers want, especially those who bear the brunt of the reality of policing in the city — namely Black, Latinx, New Yorkers of color, young New Yorkers, homeless New Yorkers, LGBTQIA+ New Yorkers, New Yorkers with disabilities and immigrant New Yorkers (among others). Such an effort should do so in a way that centers and acknowledges their lived experiences. It must also avoid presenting a set of false dichotomies and trade-offs that presume policing as a necessary part of the safety equation.

The Community Safety Project spoke to 3,303 New Yorkers living in highly policed neighborhoods across all five boroughs and heard how they understand safety, what their experiences with the NYPD have been, and what they desire from the city to meet the current moment and the challenges ahead. This project centered their thinking, vision, policy desires and the common issue that lay at the heart of the matter: community safety. After all, this is what the police are supposed to be doing: providing community safety. What we learned, from what amounts to many decades of lived experience and wisdom, is that the NYPD cannot consistently and adequately produce safety in neighborhoods.

We also learned that New Yorkers want investments that empower vibrant

community life, where those who are unfamiliar can become familiar, where camaraderie turns to solidarity and where neighbors become accountable to each other. It is not a radical notion that communities are a significant source of neighborhood safety. However, community support and care do not occur independent from significant state investments that prioritize support for local community organizations and centers; locally owned businesses; enough food, housing and employment for everyone; and public-oriented infrastructures like parks, playgrounds, performances and other spaces that facilitate trusting connections with others.

Meanwhile, Adams has proven to be a mayor who is continually cutting nearly every city agency while increasing the NYPD budget.⁴⁵ Adams has stated his promise to reform the NYPD but has instead consistently refused to hold NYPD officers accountable and has promoted people within the department with documented cases of misconduct.⁴⁶ Adams has reinvested in aggressive quality of life or order maintenance policing that doubles down on the premise that safety is carved through the kinds of carceral enforcement that have repeatedly resulted in discrimination and abuse.⁴⁷ Adams has failed to meet this moment with necessary and bold transformational policies. In the meantime, through our study, we have documented another vision — one rooted in and emanating from New York communities who have experienced heavy policing. Those communities told us we need a system that offers healing, not abuse. It is past time that we listen.

Chapter 5: Endnotes

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“How is it that we want to fix our harm? Repair the world. You don’t fix it by causing more harm. The idea that you get justice by causing more harm is terrible ... people can fuck up and be healed.”

- Town hall attendee



Appendix

BY THE NUMBERS

This report represents a major effort to go directly to people who bear the brunt of the NYPD and listen to their experiences and perspectives on policing, safety, and how best to meet their needs. We learned that to many, the NYPD is understood as an omnipresent threat who too frequently surveils and harasses but too infrequently provides the assistance they actually need. They told us an all-too-familiar story of fear, harm and violence instigated by the police. Unsurprisingly, many want places other than police to seek assistance during emergencies, such as during mental health crises. In fact, many desire a City budget that reduces NYPD funding in order to substantially strengthen police accountability and non-policing alternatives to safety, like housing, schools and jobs.

This report uncovered a deep desire for community safety through life-affirming investments, not in more policing. In this appendix we offer a “by the numbers” look at the key results for some of the most heavily policed demographics within the most heavily policed neighborhoods. While the numbers within and across these analyses vary, they follow and often accentuate the typical patterns we have shared throughout this report. Each section follows the same bulleted “by the numbers” format.

Sections:

- 6.1 Black New Yorkers living in heavily policed neighborhoods**
- 6.2 Latinx New Yorkers living in heavily policed neighborhoods**
- 6.3 New Yorkers with disability living in heavily policed neighborhoods**
- 6.4 Younger (ages 16-30) New Yorkers living in heavily policed neighborhoods**
- 6.5 Trans/Gender Expansive New Yorkers living in heavily policed neighborhoods**
- 6.6 LGBTQ+ New Yorkers living in heavily policed neighborhoods**
- 6.7 Homeless New Yorkers living in heavily policed neighborhoods**
- 6.8 New Yorkers living below the poverty line in heavily policed neighborhoods**

Appendix 6.1

Black New Yorkers living in heavily policed neighborhoods

Experiences with the NYPD

Many Black participants see the NYPD as an omnipresent threat

75% understood the NYPD as a constant or frequent presence somewhere in their community life, 62% felt at times unsafe with the NYPD's presence, and 47% felt specifically targeted by the NYPD.

77% had direct contact with the NYPD in their lives and 58% reported experiencing unwanted police contact in their lives.

Many Black participants fear the NYPD

57% worried most days or everyday about their own safety with police and/or the safety of their friends/family (74% worried to some degree).

75% feared calling or approaching the NYPD for help because it would make the situation worse or lead to unnecessary violence.

Many Black participants experienced NYPD harm and violence

76% experienced varying degrees and forms of harm by the NYPD in their life. For example, 38% had a physically violent encounter with the NYPD that involved being hit, slapped, choked or punched, 23% reported that the NYPD used bigoted, sexist or racist language toward them and 10% experienced sexual violence by the NYPD such as sexual assault or being touched in a way that felt sexually inappropriate or uncomfortable.

44% witnessed varying types of NYPD violence in their neighborhood. For example, 31% witnessed police threaten to kill someone, 17% actually saw the NYPD shoot at someone, 42% observed physical violence at the hands of the NYPD and 28% heard the NYPD use language that was bigoted or prejudiced.

Investing in community safety

Policing is to many Black participants not the most important investment in community safety

When asked to write in a blank space the things they believe are needed to produce safe, healthy and thriving communities, 64% of the responses did not include police, prisons or the legal system however, 53% of their responses did include nonpolicing community investments such as economic security, schools, housing and health care.

When asked to create a city budget across 16 items that communicated their specific priorities for producing safe, healthy and thriving communities, 69% did not include the police or the justice system in their top 5 priorities. In fact, 53% gave the police and the justice system \$0, suggesting no priority at all.

60% mostly or completely agreed with the “defund” or divest/invest” movements that argue the police are too large in size, scope and power (and 79% agreed to some extent).

Many Black participants want to divest from police and invest in nonpolicing alternatives to community safety

59% mostly or completely agreed with the “defund” or “divest/invest” movements that argue for the need to change government budget priorities to fund nonpolicing services and resources that can help create safety and prevent violence by addressing the root causes of poverty and inequality (and 79% agree to some extent).

53% believed it would generally make them safer if the NYPD budget was reduced and that money was moved to community-based institutions, services and programs.

In total across multiple questions, 81% endorsed a divest/invest framing of safety at least once in the survey.

Many Black participants see police accountability as part of community safety

94% believed that officers who commit violence should be held accountable through some disciplinary action. For example, 30% endorsed suspension, and 56% endorsed termination for officers found guilty of excessive force.

Crisis response

The NYPD often does not provide the assistance that many Black participants desire

63% had a negative experience when seeking the NYPD for help. For example, 53% of those who sought the police for help said the NYPD didn't always show up, 36% said they showed up half the time or less and 40% said they felt disrespected, unsafe or harmed when the NYPD did show up.

40% were in a serious situation where they could have contacted the NYPD but decided to handle it differently without police, describing a range of successful strategies and community members who assisted in resolving the issues. When asked why they chose not to call the police, 70% explained they were worried about the NYPD harming them in some way.

Many Black participants want places to go in emergencies other than the NYPD

55% indicated a strong desire for another place to turn in a time of need other than the NYPD.

Of those who were previously in danger or had an emergency where 911 was called, 51% wished in their moment of crisis that there were people other than the police who responded.

65% indicated that community-based, nonpolice gun violence prevention programs like "Cure Violence" or "Advanced Peace Model" should be a high priority for their neighborhood.

Many Black participants want places other than the NYPD to turn to in instances of mental health crises

60% agreed with the statement that "the NYPD should be removed from mental health calls because they generally make the situation worse."

80% reported they would not want the NYPD as first responders at all if they or someone they loved was having a serious mental health issue that required 911.

Of those who experienced a mental health crisis where 911 was called on their behalf, 58% desired options other than involving the NYPD in their particular mental health situation(s).

Appendix 6.2

Latinx New Yorkers living in heavily policed neighborhoods

Experiences with the NYPD

The NYPD is an omnipresent threat to many Latinx participants

68% understood the NYPD as a constant or frequent presence somewhere in their community life, 57% felt at times unsafe with the NYPD's presence, and 33% felt specifically targeted by the NYPD.

68% had direct contact with the NYPD in their lives and 47% reported experiencing unwanted police contact in their lives.

Many Latinx participants fear the NYPD

52% expressed being worried most days or everyday about their own safety with police and the safety of their friends/family (69% worried to some degree).

68% fear calling or approaching the NYPD for help because it will make the situation worse or lead to unnecessary violence.

Many Latinx participants experienced NYPD harm and violence

63% experienced varying degrees and forms of harm by the NYPD in their life. For example, 28% had a physically violent encounter with the NYPD that involved being hit, slapped, choked or punched, 15% reported that the NYPD used bigoted, sexist or racist language toward them and 7% experienced sexual violence by the NYPD such as sexual assault or being touched in a way that felt sexually inappropriate or uncomfortable.

31% witnessed varying types of NYPD violence in their neighborhood. For example, 21% witnessed police threaten to kill someone, 12% actually saw the NYPD shoot at someone, 28% observed physical violence at the hands of the NYPD and 21% heard the NYPD use language that was bigoted or prejudiced.

Investing in community safety

Policing is not the most important investment in community safety for many Latinx participants

When asked to write in a blank space the things they believe are needed to produce safe, healthy and thriving communities, 56% of the responses did not include police, prisons or the legal system however, 45% of their responses did include nonpolicing community investments such as economic security, schools, housing and health care.

When asked to create a city budget across 16 items that communicated their specific priorities for producing safe, healthy and thriving communities, 62% did not include the police, and 74% did not include the justice system in their top 5 priorities. In fact, 46% gave the police and 56% gave the justice system \$0, suggesting no priority at all.

55% mostly or completely agree with the “defund” or divest/invest” movements that argue the police are too large in size, scope and power (and 74% agree to some extent).

Many Latinx participants want to divest from police and invest in nonpolicing alternatives to community safety

55% mostly or completely agree with the “defund” or “divest/invest” movements that argue for the need to change government budget priorities to fund nonpolicing services and resources that can help create safety and prevent violence by addressing the root causes of poverty and inequality (and 75% agree to some extent)

54% believe it would generally make them safer if the NYPD budget was reduced and that money was moved to community-based institutions, services and programs.

In total across multiple questions, 77% indicated a belief in a divest/invest framing of safety at least once in the survey.

Police accountability is part of community safety for many Latinx participants

95% believe that officers who commit violence should be held accountable through some disciplinary action. For example, 36% endorsed suspension, and 42% endorsed termination for officers found guilty of excessive force.

Crisis response

The NYPD often does not provide the assistance that many Latinx participants desire

62% had a negative experience when seeking the NYPD for help. For example, 56% of those who sought the police for help said the NYPD didn't always show up, 41% said they showed up half the time or less and 36% said they felt disrespected, unsafe or harmed when the NYPD did show up.

34% were in a serious situation where they could have contacted the NYPD but decided to handle it differently without police, describing a range of successful strategies and community members who assisted in resolving the issues. When asked why they chose not to call the police, 64% explained they were worried about the NYPD harming them in some way.

Many Latinx participants want places to go in emergencies other than the NYPD

58% indicated a strong desire for another place to turn in a time of need other than the NYPD.

Of those who were previously in danger or had an emergency where 911 was called, 46% wished in their moment of crisis that there were people other than the police who responded.

63% indicated that community-based, nonpolice gun violence prevention programs like "Cure Violence" or "Advanced Peace Model" should be a high priority for their neighborhood.

Many Latinx participants want places other than the NYPD to turn to in instances of mental health crises

55% agreed with the statement that "the NYPD should be removed from mental health calls because they generally make the situation worse."

77% reported they would not want the NYPD as first responders at all if they or someone they loved was having a serious mental health issue that required 911.

Of those who experienced a mental health crisis where 911 was called on their behalf, 52% desired options other than involving the NYPD in their particular mental health situation(s).

Appendix 6.3

New Yorkers with disability living in heavily policed neighborhoods

Experiences with the NYPD

The NYPD is an omnipresent threat to many participants with disabilities

75% understood the NYPD as a constant or frequent presence somewhere in their community life, 59% felt at times unsafe with the NYPD's presence, and 43% felt specifically targeted by the NYPD.

84% had direct contact with the NYPD in their lives and 61% reported experiencing unwanted police contact in their lives.

Many participants with disabilities fear the NYPD

53% expressed being worried most days or everyday about their own safety with police and the safety of their friends/family (74% worried to some degree).

69% fear calling or approaching the NYPD for help because it will make the situation worse or lead to unnecessary violence.

Many participants with disabilities experienced NYPD harm and violence

80% experienced varying degrees and forms of harm by the NYPD in their life. For example, 43% had a physically violent encounter with the NYPD that involved being hit, slapped, choked or punched, 24% reported that the NYPD used bigoted, sexist or racist language toward them and 10% experienced sexual violence by the NYPD such as sexual assault or being touched in a way that felt sexually inappropriate or uncomfortable.

47% witnessed varying types of NYPD violence in their neighborhood. For example, 30% witnessed police threaten to kill someone, 14% actually saw the NYPD shoot at someone, 44% observed physical violence at the hands of the NYPD and 29% heard the NYPD use language that was bigoted or prejudiced.

Investing in community safety

Policing is not the most important investment in community safety for participants with disabilities

When asked to write in a blank space the things they believe are needed to produce safe, healthy and thriving communities, 59% of the responses did not include police, prisons or the legal system however, 54% of their responses did include nonpolicing community investments such as economic security, schools, housing and health care.

When asked to create a city budget across 16 items that communicated their specific priorities for producing safe, healthy and thriving communities, 64% did not include the police, and 71% did not include the justice system in their top 5 priorities. In fact, 51% gave the police and 58% gave the justice system \$0, suggesting no priority at all.

60% mostly or completely agree with the “defund” or divest/invest” movements that argue the police are too large in size, scope and power (and 80% agree to some extent).

Many participants with disabilities want to divest from police and invest in nonpolicing alternatives to community safety

58% mostly or completely agree with the “defund” or “divest/invest” movements that argue for the need to change government budget priorities to fund nonpolicing services and resources that can help create safety and prevent violence by addressing the root causes of poverty and inequality (and 77% agree to some extent).

55% believe it would generally make them safer if the NYPD budget was reduced and that money was moved to community-based institutions, services and programs. In total across multiple questions, 83% indicated a belief in a divest/invest framing of safety at least once in the survey.

Police accountability is part of community safety for many participants with disabilities

94% believe that officers who commit violence should be held accountable through some disciplinary action. For example, 34% endorsed suspension, and 49% endorsed termination for officers found guilty of excessive force.

Crisis response

The NYPD often does not provide the assistance that many participants with disabilities desire

66% had a negative experience when seeking the NYPD for help. For example, 60% of those who sought the police for help said the NYPD didn't always show up, 45% said they showed up half the time or less and 41% said they felt disrespected, unsafe or harmed when the NYPD did show up.

46% were in a serious situation where they could have contacted the NYPD but decided to handle it differently without police, describing a range of successful strategies and community members who assisted in resolving the issues. When asked why they chose not to call the police, 69% explained they were worried about the NYPD harming them in some way.

Many participants with disabilities want places to go in emergencies other than the NYPD

62% indicated a strong desire for another place to turn in a time of need other than the NYPD.

Of those who were previously in danger or had an emergency where 911 was called, 58% wished in their moment of crisis that there were people other than the police who responded.

71% indicated that community-based, nonpolice gun violence prevention programs like "Cure Violence" or "Advanced Peace Model" should be a high priority for their neighborhood.

Many participants with disabilities want places other than the NYPD to turn to in instances of mental health crises

62% agreed with the statement that "the NYPD should be removed from mental health calls because they generally make the situation worse."

76% reported they would not want the NYPD as first responders at all if they or someone they loved was having a serious mental health issue that required 911.

Of those who experienced a mental health crisis where 911 was called on their behalf, 66% desired options other than involving the NYPD in their particular mental health situation(s).

Appendix 6.4

Younger (ages 16-30) New Yorkers living
in heavily policed neighborhoods

Experiences with the NYPD

The NYPD is an omnipresent threat to many younger participants

73% understood the NYPD as a constant or frequent presence somewhere in their community life, 61% felt at times unsafe with the NYPD's presence, and 56% felt specifically targeted by the NYPD.

73% had direct contact with the NYPD in their lives and 61% reported experiencing unwanted police contact in their lives.

Many younger participants fear the NYPD

62% expressed being worried most days or everyday about their own safety with police and the safety of their friends/family (80% worried to some degree).

84% fear calling or approaching the NYPD for help because it will make the situation worse or lead to unnecessary violence.

Many younger participants experienced NYPD harm and violence

73% experienced varying degrees and forms of harm by the NYPD in their life. For example, 36% had a physically violent encounter with the NYPD that involved being hit, slapped, choked or punched, 23% reported that the NYPD used bigoted, sexist or racist language toward them and 11% experienced sexual violence by the NYPD such as sexual assault or being touched in a way that felt sexually inappropriate or uncomfortable.

47% witnessed varying types of NYPD violence in their neighborhood. For example, 28% witnessed police threaten to kill someone, 15% actually saw the NYPD shoot at someone, 44% observed physical violence at the hands of the NYPD and 30% heard the NYPD use language that was bigoted or prejudiced.

Investing in community safety

Policing is not the most important investment in community safety for many younger participants

When asked to write in a blank space the things they believe are needed to produce safe, healthy and thriving communities, 72% of the responses did not include police, prisons or the legal system however, 56% of their responses did include nonpolicing community investments such as economic security, schools, housing and health care.

When asked to create a city budget across 16 items that communicated their specific priorities for producing safe, healthy and thriving communities, 67% did not include the police, and 63% did not include the justice system in their top 5 priorities. In fact, 41% gave the police and 39% gave the justice system \$0, suggesting no priority at all.

55% mostly or completely agree with the “defund” or divest/invest” movements that argue the police are too large in size, scope and power (and 77% agree to some extent).

Many younger participants want to divest from police and invest in nonpolicing alternatives to community safety

56% mostly or completely agree with the “defund” or “divest/invest” movements that argue for the need to change government budget priorities to fund nonpolicing services and resources that can help create safety and prevent violence by addressing the root causes of poverty and inequality (and 79% agree to some extent)

55% believe it would generally make them safer if the NYPD budget was reduced and that money was moved to community-based institutions, services and programs.

In total across multiple questions, 77% indicated a belief in a divest/invest framing of safety at least once in the survey.

Police accountability is part of community safety for many younger participants

93% believe that officers who commit violence should be held accountable through some disciplinary action. For example, 36% endorsed suspension, and 59% endorsed termination for officers found guilty of excessive force.

Crisis response

The NYPD often does not provide the assistance that many younger participants desire

67% had a negative experience when seeking the NYPD for help. For example, 58% of those who sought the police for help said the NYPD didn't always show up, 45% said they showed up half the time or less and 45% said they felt disrespected, unsafe or harmed when the NYPD did show up.

36% were in a serious situation where they could have contacted the NYPD but decided to handle it differently without police, describing a range of successful strategies and community members who assisted in resolving the issues. When asked why they chose not to call the police, 74% explained they were worried about the NYPD harming them in some way.

Many younger participants want places to go in emergencies other than the NYPD

58% indicated a strong desire for another place to turn in a time of need other than the NYPD.

Of those who were previously in danger or had an emergency where 911 was called, 51% wished in their moment of crisis that there were people other than the police who responded.

56% indicated that community-based, nonpolice gun violence prevention programs like "Cure Violence" or "Advanced Peace Model" should be a high priority for their neighborhood.

Many younger participants want places other than the NYPD to turn to in instances of mental health crises

55% agreed with the statement that "the NYPD should be removed from mental health calls because they generally make the situation worse."

79% reported they would not want the NYPD as first responders at all if they or someone they loved was having a serious mental health issue that required 911.

Of those who experienced a mental health crisis where 911 was called on their behalf, 68% desired options other than involving the NYPD in their particular mental health situation(s).

Appendix 6.5

Transgender / gender expansive New Yorkers living in heavily policed neighborhoods

Experiences with the NYPD

The NYPD is an omnipresent threat to many transgender/gender expansive participants

75% understood the NYPD as a constant or frequent presence somewhere in their community life, 84% felt at times unsafe with the NYPD's presence, and 60% felt specifically targeted by the NYPD.

77% had direct contact with the NYPD in their lives and 62% reported experiencing unwanted police contact in their lives.

Many transgender/gender expansive participants fear the NYPD

64% expressed being worried most days or everyday about their own safety with police and the safety of their friends/family (83% worried to some degree).

83% fear calling or approaching the NYPD for help because it will make the situation worse or lead to unnecessary violence.

Many transgender/gender expansive participants experienced NYPD harm and violence

70% experienced varying degrees and forms of harm by the NYPD in their life. For example, 44% had a physically violent encounter with the NYPD that involved being hit, slapped, choked or punched, 39% reported that the NYPD used bigoted, sexist or racist language toward them and 17% experienced sexual violence by the NYPD such as sexual assault or being touched in a way that felt sexually inappropriate or uncomfortable.

52% witnessed varying types of NYPD violence in their neighborhood. For example, 33% witnessed police threaten to kill someone, 11% actually saw the NYPD shoot at someone, 44% observed physical violence at the hands of the NYPD and 41% heard the NYPD use language that was bigoted or prejudiced.

Investing in community safety

Policing is not the most important investment in community safety for many transgender/gender expansive participants

When asked to write in a blank space the things they believe are needed to produce safe, healthy and thriving communities, 77% of the responses did not include police, prisons or the legal system however, 63% of their responses did include nonpolicing community investments such as economic security, schools, housing and health care.

When asked to create a city budget across 16 items that communicated their specific priorities for producing safe, healthy and thriving communities, 85% did not include the police, and 75% did not include the justice system in their top 5 priorities. In fact, 60% gave the police and 56% gave the justice system \$0, suggesting no priority at all.

64% mostly or completely agree with the “defund” or divest/invest” movements that argue the police are too large in size, scope and power (and 81% agree to some extent).

Many transgender/gender expansive participants want to divest from police and invest in nonpolicing alternatives to community safety

72% mostly or completely agree with the “defund” or “divest/invest” movements that argue for the need to change government budget priorities to fund nonpolicing services and resources that can help create safety and prevent violence by addressing the root causes of poverty and inequality (and 83% agree to some extent)

68% believe it would generally make them safer if the NYPD budget was reduced and that money was moved to community-based institutions, services and programs.

In total across multiple questions, 92% indicated a belief in a divest/invest framing of safety at least once in the survey.

Police accountability is part of community safety for many transgender/gender expansive participants

94% believe that officers who commit violence should be held accountable through some disciplinary action. For example, 28% endorsed suspension, and 60% endorsed termination for officers found guilty of excessive force.

Crisis response

The NYPD often does not provide the assistance that many transgender/gender expansive participants desire

86% had a negative experience when seeking the NYPD for help. For example, 80% of those who sought the police for help said the NYPD didn't always show up, 77% said they showed up half the time or less and 64% said they felt disrespected, unsafe or harmed when the NYPD did show up.

44% were in a serious situation where they could have contacted the NYPD but decided to handle it differently without police, describing a range of successful strategies and community members who assisted in resolving the issues. When asked why they chose not to call the police, 85% explained they were worried about the NYPD harming them in some way.

Many transgender/gender expansive participants want places to go in emergencies other than the NYPD

74% indicated a strong desire for another place to turn in a time of need other than the NYPD.

Of those who were previously in danger or had an emergency where 911 was called, 100% wished in their moment of crisis that there were people other than the police who responded.

68% indicated that community-based, nonpolice gun violence prevention programs like "Cure Violence" or "Advanced Peace Model" should be a high priority for their neighborhood.

Many transgender/gender expansive participants want places other than the NYPD to turn to in instances of mental health crises

60% agreed with the statement that "the NYPD should be removed from mental health calls because they generally make the situation worse."

89% reported they would not want the NYPD as first responders at all if they or someone they loved was having a serious mental health issue that required 911.

Of those who experienced a mental health crisis where 911 was called on their behalf, 82% desired options other than involving the NYPD in their particular mental health situation(s).

Appendix 6.6

LGBQ+ New Yorkers living in heavily policed neighborhoods

Experiences with the NYPD

The NYPD is an omnipresent threat to many LGBTQ+ participants

74% understood the NYPD as a constant or frequent presence somewhere in their community life, 64% felt at times unsafe with the NYPD's presence, and 45% felt specifically targeted by the NYPD.

72% had direct contact with the NYPD in their lives and 55% reported experiencing unwanted police contact in their lives.

Many LGBTQ+ participants fear the NYPD

56% expressed being worried most days or everyday about their own safety with police and the safety of their friends/family (71% worried to some degree).

78% fear calling or approaching the NYPD for help because it will make the situation worse or lead to unnecessary violence.

Many LGBTQ+ participants experienced NYPD harm and violence

70% experienced varying degrees and forms of harm by the NYPD in their life. For example, 34% had a physically violent encounter with the NYPD that involved being hit, slapped, choked or punched, 21% reported that the NYPD used bigoted, sexist or racist language toward them and 11% experienced sexual violence by the NYPD such as sexual assault or being touched in a way that felt sexually inappropriate or uncomfortable.

43% witnessed varying types of NYPD violence in their neighborhood. For example, 27% witnessed police threaten to kill someone, 14% actually saw the NYPD shoot at someone, 38% observed physical violence at the hands of the NYPD and 29% heard the NYPD use language that was bigoted or prejudiced.

Investing in community safety

Policing is not the most important investment in community safety for many LGBTQ+ participants

When asked to write in a blank space the things they believe are needed to produce safe, healthy and thriving communities, 64% of the responses did not include police, prisons or the legal system however, 54% of their responses did include nonpolicing community investments such as economic security, schools, housing and health care.

When asked to create a city budget across 16 items that communicated their specific priorities for producing safe, healthy and thriving communities, 70% did not include the police, and 72% did not include the justice system in their top 5 priorities. In fact, 50% gave the police and 53% gave the justice system \$0, suggesting no priority at all.

64% mostly or completely agree with the “defund” or divest/invest” movements that argue the police are too large in size, scope and power (and 80% agree to some extent).

Many LGBTQ+ participants want to divest from police and invest in nonpolicing alternatives to community safety

63% mostly or completely agree with the “defund” or “divest/invest” movements that argue for the need to change government budget priorities to fund nonpolicing services and resources that can help create safety and prevent violence by addressing the root causes of poverty and inequality (and 81% agree to some extent)

60% believe it would generally make them safer if the NYPD budget was reduced and that money was moved to community-based institutions, services and programs.

In total across multiple questions, 84% indicated a belief in a divest/invest framing of safety at least once in the survey.

Police accountability is part of community safety for many LGBTQ+ participants

93% believe that officers who commit violence should be held accountable through some disciplinary action. For example, 31% endorsed suspension, and 48% endorsed termination for officers found guilty of excessive force.

Crisis response

The NYPD often does not provide the assistance that many LGBTQ+ participants desire

66% had a negative experience when seeking the NYPD for help. For example, 57% of those who sought the police for help said the NYPD didn't always show up, 44% said they showed up half the time or less and 44% said they felt disrespected, unsafe or harmed when the NYPD did show up.

42% were in a serious situation where they could have contacted the NYPD but decided to handle it differently without police, describing a range of successful strategies and community members who assisted in resolving the issues. When asked why they chose not to call the police, 70% explained they were worried about the NYPD harming them in some way.

Many LGBTQ+ participants want places to go in emergencies other than the NYPD

61% indicated a strong desire for another place to turn in a time of need other than the NYPD.

Of those who were previously in danger or had an emergency where 911 was called, 58% wished in their moment of crisis that there were people other than the police who responded.

61% indicated that community-based, nonpolice gun violence prevention programs like "Cure Violence" or "Advanced Peace Model" should be a high priority for their neighborhood.

Many LGBTQ+ participants want places other than the NYPD to turn to in instances of mental health crises

61% agreed with the statement that "the NYPD should be removed from mental health calls because they generally make the situation worse."

81% reported they would not want the NYPD as first responders at all if they or someone they loved was having a serious mental health issue that required 911.

Of those who experienced a mental health crisis where 911 was called on their behalf, 66% desired options other than involving the NYPD in their particular mental health situation(s).

Appendix 6.7

Homeless (since 2020) New Yorkers living in heavily policed neighborhoods

Experiences with the NYPD

The NYPD is an omnipresent threat to many homeless (since 2020) participants

86% understood the NYPD as a constant or frequent presence somewhere in their community life, 65% felt at times unsafe with the NYPD's presence, and 53% felt specifically targeted by the NYPD.

85% had direct contact with the NYPD in their lives and 72% reported experiencing unwanted police contact in their lives.

Many homeless (since 2020) participants fear the NYPD

64% expressed being worried most days or everyday about their own safety with police and the safety of their friends/family (75% worried to some degree).

79% fear calling or approaching the NYPD for help because it will make the situation worse or lead to unnecessary violence.

Many homeless (since 2020) participants experienced NYPD harm and violence

80% experienced varying degrees and forms of harm by the NYPD in their life. For example, 60% had a physically violent encounter with the NYPD that involved being hit, slapped, choked or punched, 33% reported that the NYPD used bigoted, sexist or racist language toward them and 17% experienced sexual violence by the NYPD such as sexual assault or being touched in a way that felt sexually inappropriate or uncomfortable.

51% witnessed varying types of NYPD violence in their neighborhood. For example, 40% witnessed police threaten to kill someone, 24% actually saw the NYPD shoot at someone, 47% observed physical violence at the hands of the NYPD and 38% heard the NYPD use language that was bigoted or prejudiced.

Investing in community safety

Policing is not the most important investment in community safety for many homeless (since 2020) participants

When asked to write in a blank space the things they believe are needed to produce safe, healthy and thriving communities, 71% of the responses did not include police, prisons or the legal system however, 49% of their responses did include nonpolicing community investments such as economic security, schools, housing and health care.

When asked to create a city budget across 16 items that communicated their specific priorities for producing safe, healthy and thriving communities, 71% did not include the police, and 69% did not include the justice system in their top 5 priorities. In fact, 57% gave the police and 56% gave the justice system \$0, suggesting no priority at all.

63% mostly or completely agree with the “defund” or divest/invest” movements that argue the police are too large in size, scope and power (and 81% agree to some extent).

Many homeless (since 2020) participants want to divest from police and invest in nonpolicing alternatives to community safety

63% mostly or completely agree with the “defund” or “divest/invest” movements that argue for the need to change government budget priorities to fund nonpolicing services and resources that can help create safety and prevent violence by addressing the root causes of poverty and inequality (and 82% agree to some extent)

55% believe it would generally make them safer if the NYPD budget was reduced and that money was moved to community-based institutions, services and programs.

In total across multiple questions, 89% indicated a belief in a divest/invest framing of safety at least once in the survey.

Police accountability is part of community safety for many homeless (since 2020) participants

92% believe that officers who commit violence should be held accountable through some disciplinary action. For example, 24% endorsed suspension, and 50% endorsed termination for officers found guilty of excessive force.

Crisis response

The NYPD often does not provide the assistance that many homeless (since 2020) participants desire

74% had a negative experience when seeking the NYPD for help. For example, 62% of those who sought the police for help said the NYPD didn't always show up, 48% said they showed up half the time or less and 55% said they felt disrespected, unsafe or harmed when the NYPD did show up.

45% were in a serious situation where they could have contacted the NYPD but decided to handle it differently without police, describing a range of successful strategies and community members who assisted in resolving the issues. When asked why they chose not to call the police, 76% explained they were worried about the NYPD harming them in some way.

Many homeless (since 2020) participants want places to go in emergencies other than the NYPD

60% indicated a strong desire for another place to turn in a time of need other than the NYPD.

Of those who were previously in danger or had an emergency where 911 was called, 55% wished in their moment of crisis that there were people other than the police who responded.

57% indicated that community-based, nonpolice gun violence prevention programs like "Cure Violence" or "Advanced Peace Model" should be a high priority for their neighborhood.

Many homeless (since 2020) participants want places other than the NYPD to turn to in instances of mental health crises

63% agreed with the statement that "the NYPD should be removed from mental health calls because they generally make the situation worse."

81% reported they would not want the NYPD as first responders at all if they or someone they loved was having a serious mental health issue that required 911.

Of those who experienced a mental health crisis where 911 was called on their behalf, 57% desired options other than involving the NYPD in their particular mental health situation(s).

Appendix 6.8

New Yorkers below the poverty line in the most heavily policed neighborhoods

(based on their total yearly family income)

Experiences with the NYPD

The NYPD is an omnipresent threat to many participants living below the poverty line

75% understood the NYPD as a constant or frequent presence somewhere in their community life, 58% felt at times unsafe with the NYPD's presence, and 34% felt specifically targeted by the NYPD.

69% had direct contact with the NYPD in their lives and 49% reported experiencing unwanted police contact in their lives.

Many participants living below the poverty line fear the NYPD

50% expressed being worried most days or everyday about their own safety with police and the safety of their friends/family (66% worried to some degree).

69% fear calling or approaching the NYPD for help because it will make the situation worse or lead to unnecessary violence.

Many participants living below the poverty line experienced NYPD harm and violence

65% experienced varying degrees and forms of harm by the NYPD in their life. For example, 33% had a physically violent encounter with the NYPD that involved being hit, slapped, choked or punched, 18% reported that the NYPD used bigoted, sexist or racist language toward them and 8% experienced sexual violence by the NYPD such as sexual assault or being touched in a way that felt sexually inappropriate or uncomfortable.

33% witnessed varying types of NYPD violence in their neighborhood. For example, 24% witnessed police threaten to kill someone, 14% actually saw the NYPD shoot at someone, 31% observed physical violence at the hands of the NYPD and 23% heard the NYPD use language that was bigoted or prejudiced.

Investing in community safety

Policing is not the most important investment in community safety for many participants living below the poverty line

When asked to write in a blank space the things they believe are needed to produce safe, healthy and thriving communities, 59% of the responses did not include police, prisons or the legal system however, 46% of their responses did include nonpolicing community investments such as economic security, schools, housing and health care.

When asked to create a city budget across 16 items that communicated their specific priorities for producing safe, healthy and thriving communities, 66% did not include the police, and 74% did not include the justice system in their top 5 priorities. In fact, 52% gave the police and 60% gave the justice system \$0, suggesting no priority at all.

58% mostly or completely agree with the “defund” or divest/invest” movements that argue the police are too large in size, scope and power (and 77% agree to some extent).

Many participants living below the poverty line want to divest from police and invest in nonpolicing alternatives to community safety

56% mostly or completely agree with the “defund” or “divest/invest” movements that argue for the need to change government budget priorities to fund nonpolicing services and resources that can help create safety and prevent violence by addressing the root causes of poverty and inequality (and 75% agree to some extent)

52% believe it would generally make them safer if the NYPD budget was reduced and that money was moved to community-based institutions, services and programs.

In total across multiple questions, 81% indicated a belief in a divest/invest framing of safety at least once in the survey.

Police accountability is part of community safety for many participants living below the poverty line

93% believe that officers who commit violence should be held accountable through some disciplinary action. For example, 29% endorsed suspension, and 43% endorsed termination for officers found guilty of excessive force.

Crisis response

The NYPD often does not provide the assistance that many participants living below the poverty line desire

64% had a negative experience when seeking the NYPD for help. For example, 56% of those who sought the police for help said the NYPD didn't always show up, 41% said they showed up half the time or less and 38% said they felt disrespected, unsafe or harmed when the NYPD did show up.

36% were in a serious situation where they could have contacted the NYPD but decided to handle it differently without police, describing a range of successful strategies and community members who assisted in resolving the issues. When asked why they chose not to call the police, 66% explained they were worried about the NYPD harming them in some way.

Many participants living below the poverty line want places to go in emergencies other than the NYPD

57% indicated a strong desire for another place to turn in a time of need other than the NYPD.

Of those who were previously in danger or had an emergency where 911 was called, 51% wished in their moment of crisis that there were people other than the police who responded.

65% indicated that community-based, nonpolice gun violence prevention programs like "Cure Violence" or "Advanced Peace Model" should be a high priority for their neighborhood.

Many participants living below the poverty line want places other than the NYPD to turn to in instances of mental health crises

56% agreed with the statement that "the NYPD should be removed from mental health calls because they generally make the situation worse."

77% reported they would not want the NYPD as first responders at all if they or someone they loved was having a serious mental health issue that required 911.

Of those who experienced a mental health crisis where 911 was called on their behalf, 51% desired options other than involving the NYPD in their particular mental health situation(s).