NATIONAL ISSUES FORUMS

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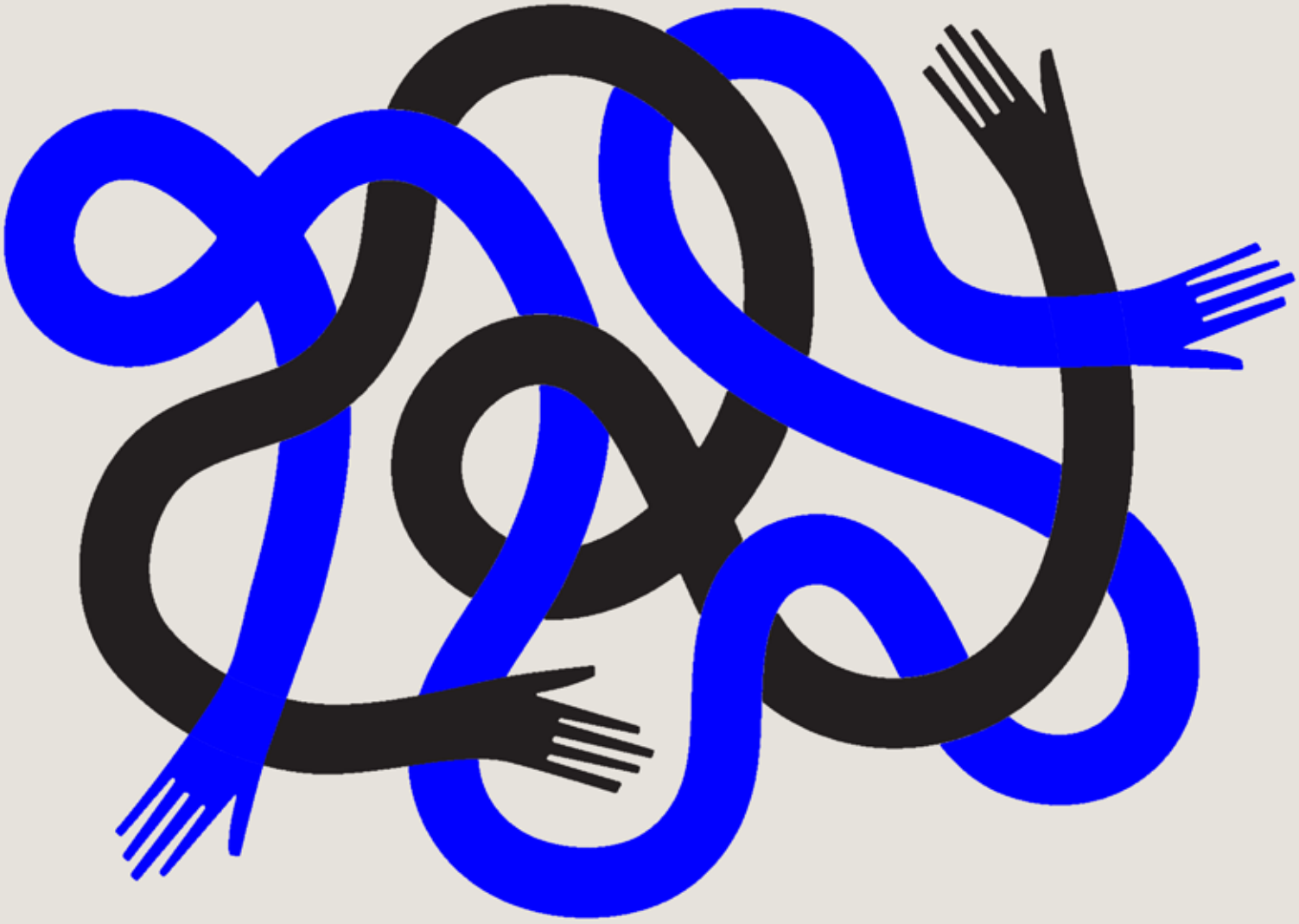
Safety and Justice

How Should Communities Reduce Violence?



About This Issue Guide

The purpose of this issue guide is to help us talk productively about a difficult issue that concerns all of us.

Deliberation

It's not a debate. It's not a contest. It's not even about reaching agreement or seeing eye-to-eye. It's about looking for a shared direction guided by what we most value.

It's about examining the costs and consequences of possible solutions to daunting problems and finding out what we, as a society, would or would not accept as a solution.

A Framework

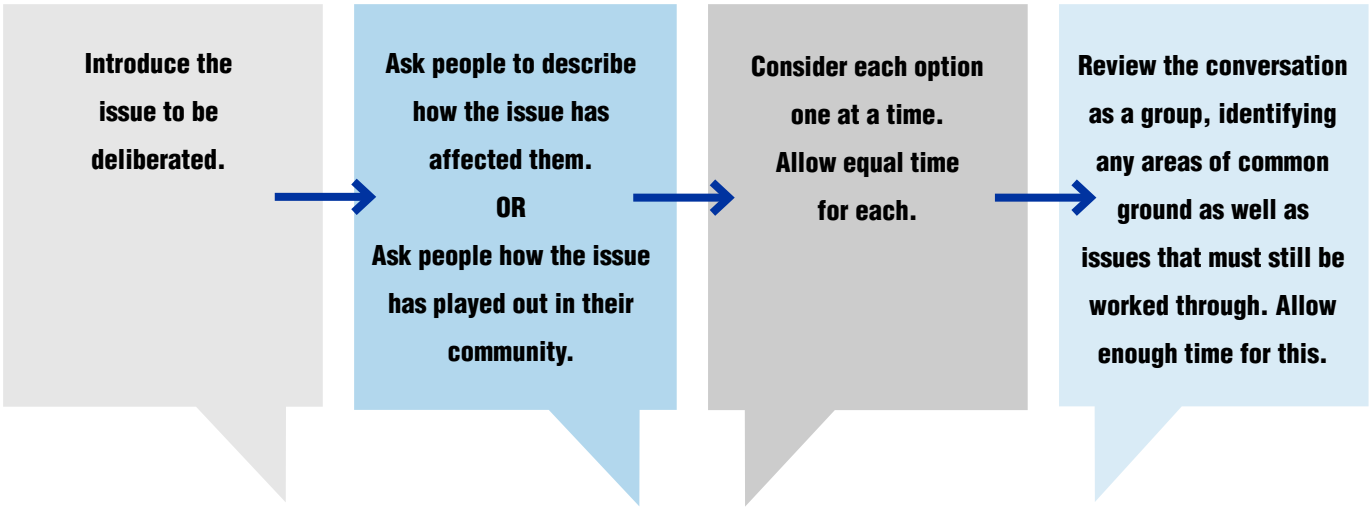
This guide outlines several alternative ways of looking at the issue, each rooted in a shared concern. It provides strategic facts associated with each approach and suggests the benefits and drawbacks of possible solutions. We engage in deliberation by:

- getting beyond the initial positions we hold to our deeper motivations—that is, the things we most care about, such as safety, freedom, or fairness.
- carefully weighing the views of others and recognizing the impact various options would have on what others consider valuable.
- working through the conflicting emotions that arise when various options pull and tug on what we—and others—consider valuable.

It is important to remember that, as a group, we are dealing with broader underlying concerns that are not defined by party affiliation and that your work here is to dig down to the things that define us as human beings and Americans rather than as liberals and conservatives.

The research involved in developing the guide included interviews and conversations with Americans from all walks of life, as well as surveys of nonpartisan public opinion research, subject matter scans, and reviews of initial drafts by people involved with organizations ranging from law enforcement groups to groups focused on community-level safety, and racial equity.

One Effective Way to Hold a Deliberative Forum*



*This is not the only way to hold a forum. Some communities hold multiple forums.

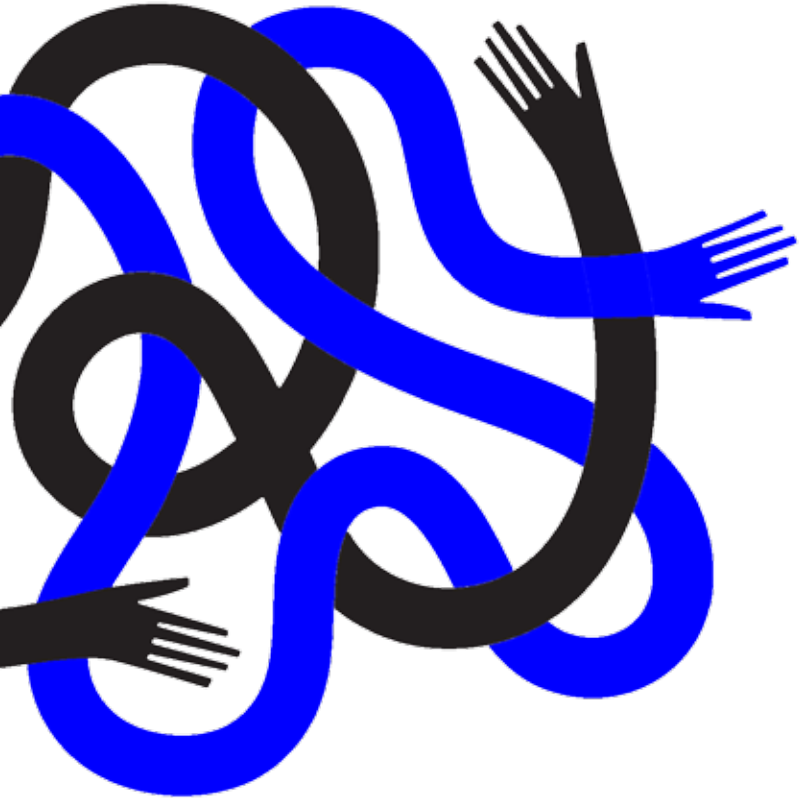
Ground Rules for a Forum

Before the deliberation begins, it is important for participants to review guidelines for their discussion.

- **Focus on the options.**
- **All options should be considered fairly.**
- **No one or two individuals should dominate.**
- **Maintain an open and respectful atmosphere.**
- **Everyone is encouraged to participate.**
- **Listen to each other.**

Safety and Justice

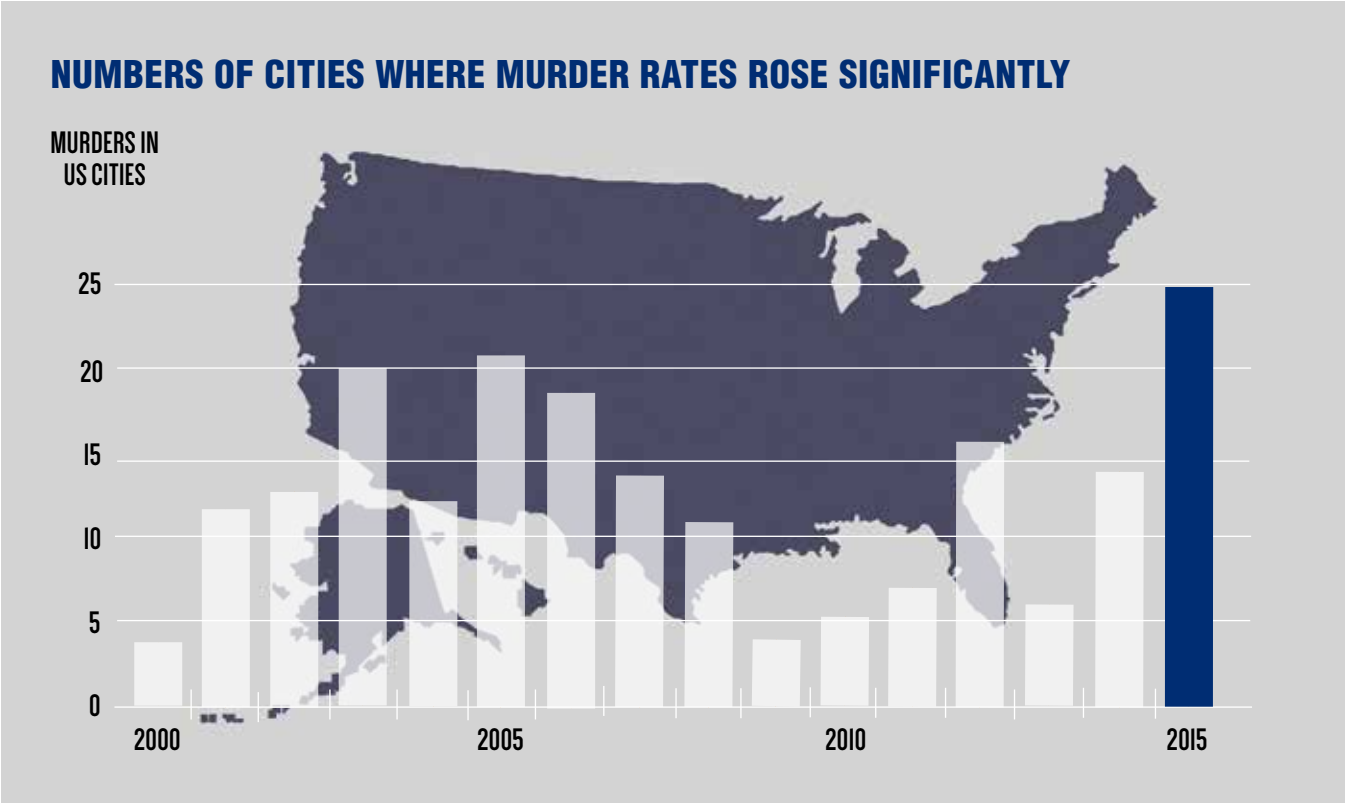
How Should Communities Reduce Violence?



AFTER FALLING STEADILY FOR DECADES, the rate of violent crime in the US rose again in 2015 and 2016. Interactions between citizens and police too often end in violence. People are increasingly worried about safety in their communities.

Many Americans are concerned that something is going on with violence in communities, law enforcement, and race that is undermining the national ideals of safety and justice for all.

It is unclear what is driving the recent rise in violence, but bias and distrust on all sides appear to be making the problem worse. Citizens and police need goodwill and cooperation in order to ensure safety and justice. For many people of color, the sense that they are being treated unfairly by law enforcement—and even being targeted by police—is palpable. Others say police departments are being blamed for the actions of a few individuals and that the dangers, stress, and violence law en-



Source: *The New York Times*, from FBI and local police data

forcement officers face in their work is underestimated. Still others hold that if we cannot find ways to defuse potentially violent interactions between citizens and police, we will never be able to create safe communities where all people can thrive and feel welcomed and comfortable.

How should we ensure that Americans of every race and background are treated with respect and fairness? What should we do to ensure that the police have the support they need to fairly enforce the law? To what degree do racial and other forms of bias distort the justice system? What should we do as citizens to help reduce violence of all kinds in our communities and the nation as a whole?

How should communities increase safety while at the same time ensuring justice? This issue guide is a framework for citizens to work through these important questions together. It offers three different options for deliberation, each rooted in different, widely shared concerns and different ways of looking at the problem. The resulting conversation may be difficult, as it will necessarily involve tensions between things people hold deeply valuable such

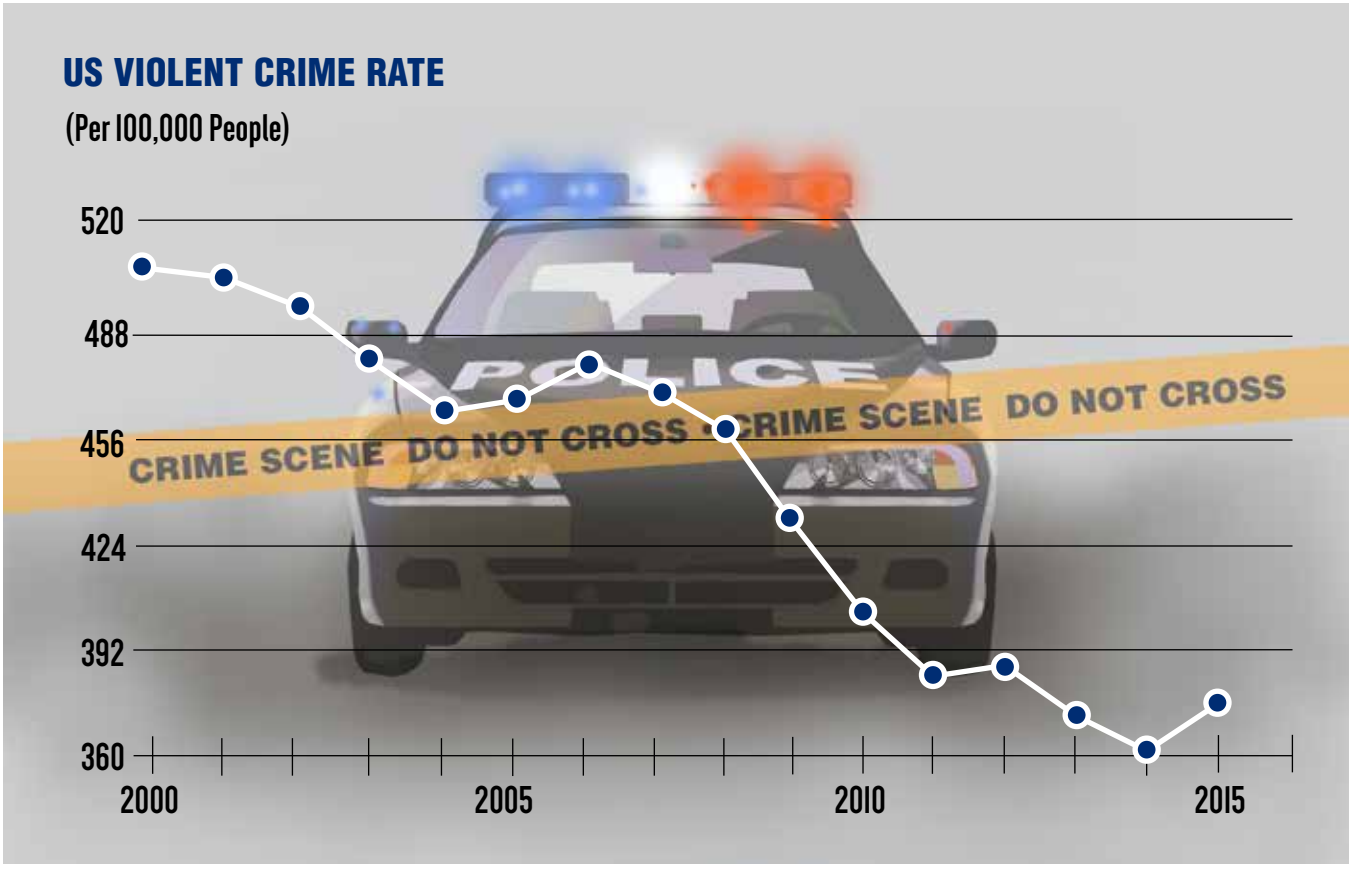
It is unclear what is driving the recent rise in violence, but bias and distrust on all sides appear to be making the problem worse. Citizens and police need goodwill and cooperation in order to ensure safety and justice.

as a collective sense of security, fair treatment for everyone, and personal freedom. No one option is the "correct" one; each includes drawbacks and trade-offs that we will have to face if we are to make progress on this issue. They are not the only options available. They are presented as a starting point for deliberation.

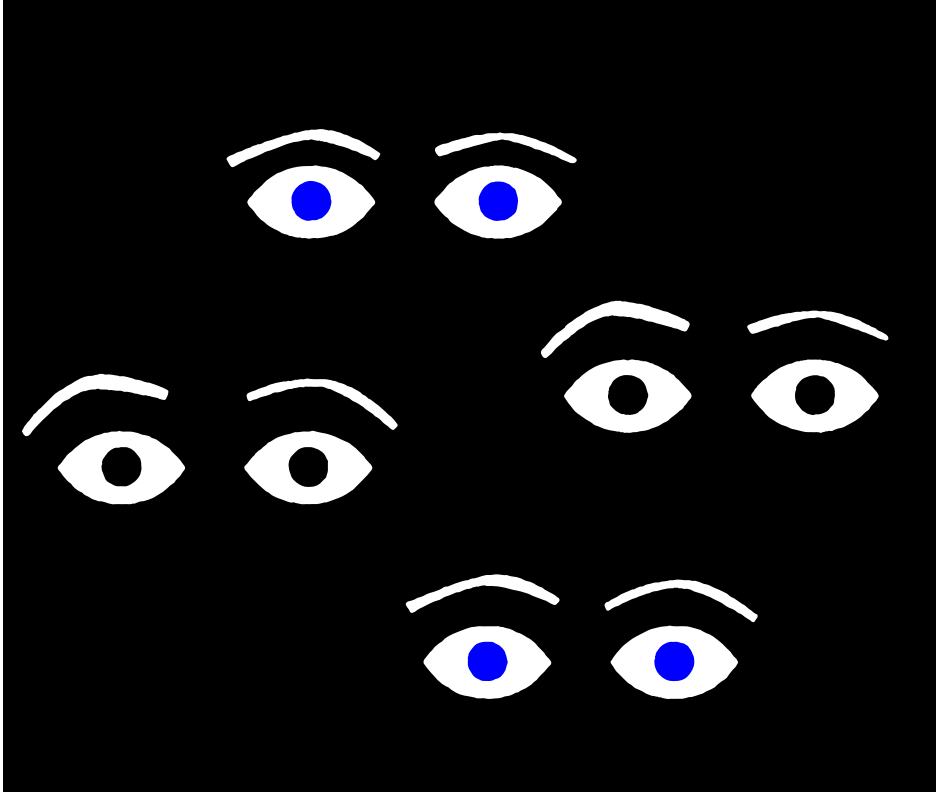
THE FIRST OPTION says that our top priority should be finding ways for communities and police to work together to stop violence of all kinds. Most Americans want safer streets and communities. Through neighborhood watch programs and community policing, citizens and police should identify sources of violence and work together to stop it.

THE SECOND OPTION says that only by addressing basic injustices and implicit bias in law enforcement and the courts can safety for all be achieved. Currently, the law is not enforced or applied fairly. From dealing with the ways people of color are treated on the streets to unequal sentencing in the courts, widespread reforms are needed in order to restore trust and reduce violence.

THE THIRD OPTION says that law enforcement officers are asked to handle a range of problems that go well beyond what they should be responsible for and what they were trained for. The police are often the first responders to mental health, domestic and drug abuse crises that escalate into violence. We should provide more mental illness and substance abuse treatment so there are fewer such episodes. We should commit to the de-escalation of violence, by police and in the larger society.



Source: FBI



Option 1:

Enforce the Law Together

Expand policing while strengthening community-police partnerships.

ACCORDING TO THIS OPTION, residents and police officers in every community should focus on working together in ways that ensure that everyone feels safe. Americans should be able to expect that they can go about their daily lives, taking reasonable precautions, without becoming the victims of violence.

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Communities should maintain law and order by improving the partnership between residents and the police. This means that police should do their part in protecting all citizens, and all community members should take some responsibility for reducing crime and violence as well.

This option sees citizens working in tandem with the police in a range of ways. This could include: supporting the enlargement of police departments; expanding and strengthening neighborhood watch programs; training people to carry firearms responsibly; and creating community organizations that tap into local knowledge about the strategies that will work best there. It also means that community members may need to support greater enforcement, with less tolerance for small infractions of the law.

In Yakima Valley, a region of southern Washington State, residents and businessmen concerned about gang violence, crime, and opportunities for young people took up the challenge by forming Safe Yakima Valley in 2006.

"We were talking about the crime rate in Yakima, and we were just complaining about it, about how bad things were," said Bill Dolsen, a local businessman. "And my wife just said, 'Are we going to sit here and complain or are we going to do something about it?' And the light went on in our heads." Today, Safe Yakima Valley runs multiple programs to break up gangs, place local teens in jobs, and improve relations between police and neighborhoods.

Nationally, police as well as community members are on edge. Some individuals have intentionally targeted and killed police officers in Dallas, Baton Rouge, Des Moines, and elsewhere. In Houston, Deputy Constable Steve Faulkner said ambushes of police officers in some cities have put him and his fellow officers, as well as their families, on high alert. His wife calls more often to check on him, and he looks for potential assailants from the moment he leaves the station. "It changes the way you do patrolling," he said in *The New York Times*. "Your head's on a swivel now."

This option says that more police officers are needed so they can work in pairs and be more visible and accessible. They need time to work with their communities to remove threats. There are already clear laws in place, of course, and the overwhelming majority of Americans observe them. Focusing on reporting those who do not observe the law will result in safer communities. This collective effort will deter criminals from engaging in illegal activity in our neighborhoods, as they know police and residents alike will stop them.

Communities of all kinds know best how they can achieve safety and security. Each can develop its own strategy for combating violence without waiting for guidance from the government.

What We Could Do

Improve Working Relationships to Build Trust Between Police and the Community

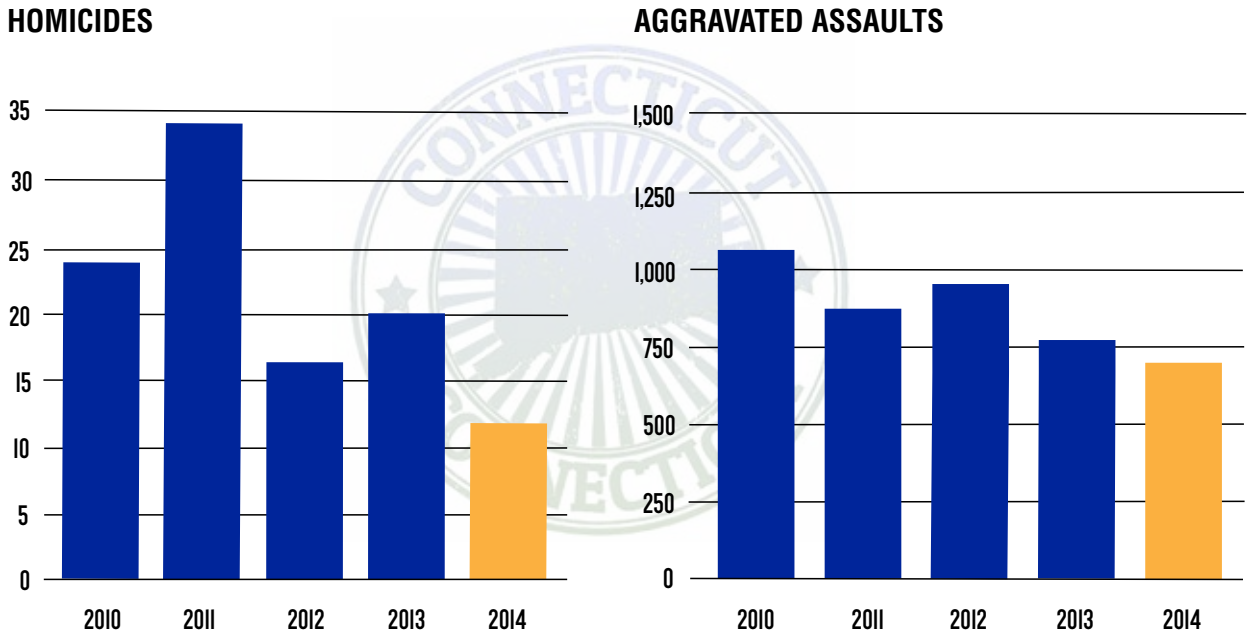
According to this option, if we are to see public safety as a shared responsibility between community members and police officers, working relationships will need to be improved. One way to do this is by making police officers more visibly accessible to community members.

Richmond, CA, a city of about 100,000 near San Francisco, recorded 38 murders in 2006, the year that Chris Magnus became police chief, and 47 the next year. Gang violence was rampant in the community and its citizens did not trust the police department.

Chief Magnus began a comprehensive shake-up of the department, hiring and promoting more female and Latino officers, assigning officers to specific neighborhoods so they became known to community members, and making the cellphone number for every officer public so that residents could reach them directly.

Magnus also changed the way Richmond recruits officers, emphasizing the ability to build relationships. "My goal is to look for people who want to work in my community, not because it's a place where they think they're going to be dealing with a lot of violence and hot chases and armed individuals and excitement and an episode of *Cops*

THE NUMBER OF HOMICIDES AND AGGRAVATED ASSULTS IN NEW HAVEN, CT, IS DOWN SINCE INCREASING FOOT PATROLS IN 2011



Source: New Haven Police Department

or something," Magnus said in an interview with the online magazine *Vox*. "I want them to be here because they're interested in building a partnership with the community."

Equally important, citizens began to feel they were partners with the police. Richard Boyd, a Richmond resident who works for an interfaith organization, said in the *Los Angeles Times*, "We were able … to call the beat officers directly and say, 'There are eight guys out front gambling.' And those officers would respond because they could feel our pain."

Homicides in Richmond dropped to 18 in 2015.

Hire More Police Officers

This option also holds that, in order to improve community safety, more police officers—and greater enforcement—will be required. Simply improving trust is important, but not enough.

"Increasing numbers of police officers can reduce crime," *The Atlantic* magazine reported in 2015, citing the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University. "Increased police in the 1990s brought down crime by about 5 percent. . . . Simply having more officers on the streets, even if they are not arresting or stopping anyone, can be a crime deterrent."

But during the recent recession, many cities experiencing serious budget shortfalls began cutting police positions or allowing forces to shrink. It is estimated that 12,000 officers were laid off in 2008 alone, and some cities are still not back at full employment.

Enlarging a department makes it possible to increase the number of officers walking a beat and easier to expand community-policing efforts. New Haven, CT, has recently increased its force by more than 10 percent and put many more officers on walking beats. As a result, *The Wall Street Journal* reported in 2015, the rate of violent crime and serious property crime in New Haven dropped by a third.

"You have somebody walking around, you can talk to them," said William Walker, 44, who works at a local hospital and stopped an officer in New Haven to tell him about a suspicious car.

Expand Neighborhood Watch Programs

A critical element in this option is the cooperation and involvement of every citizen in addressing crime. Author Jane Jacobs first observed in the 1960s that people sitting on their front porches and paying attention to the neighborhood was perhaps the most effective way of keeping the peace. Neighborhood watch programs have been striving to make that work in the decades since. But the National Sheriffs' Association estimates that just 40 percent of Americans live in a neighborhood watch area, and too many of those are neighborhoods where there is not much crime to begin with.

Such community efforts are not just feel-good exercises. Several studies, by the National Crime Prevention Council and other organizations, have found that neighborhood watch programs do tend to work. In northwest Las Vegas, burglaries and other property thefts dropped more than 30 percent where neighborhood watch programs were most active, the *Las Vegas Sun* reported; conversely more than 90 percent of auto thefts took place where there was no neighborhood watch program.

According to this option, the knowledge that community members have about their neighborhoods is an important and under-utilized asset. As police departments build trust through community policing, they should leverage that trust into better-organized neighborhood watches that can work closely with officers to prevent and report crime.

"We reduce crime by citizens helping us," said Las Vegas Police Captain John McGrath. "We need the eyes and ears of the community."

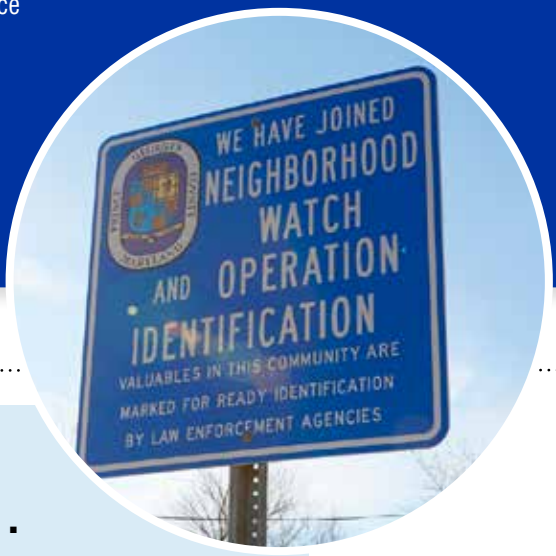
Trade-Offs and Downsides

■ Neighborhood watch programs could worsen racial bias, increase the likelihood of vigilante justice, or lead to police calls for innocuous behavior. Sometimes people are biased and suspicious of those unlike themselves.

■ More police officers visible in the community may create the sense that people are living in a police state. In some communities, a greater police presence may make residents feel less safe—that more of them will be arrested or have to endure needless encounters with police.

■ People will be hesitant to report neighbors or friends to the police if they fear retribution.

■ Nearly every city is under budget pressure. Spending more money on policing means less money for preventive programs.



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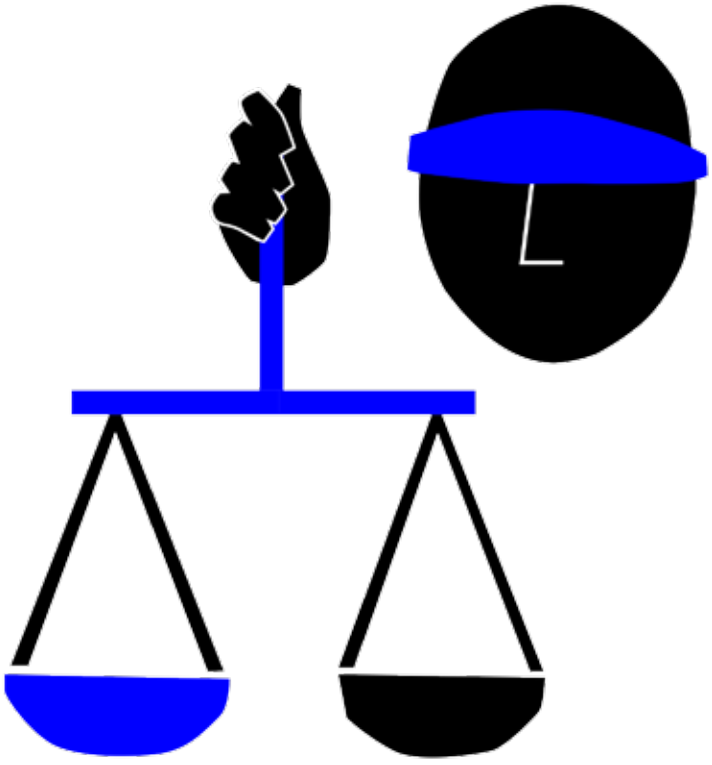
Questions for deliberation . . .

1. Would better working relations between the police and the community address the crime and justice issues that concern you most?
2. How can we ensure that these crime prevention tactics do not violate the American standard that all people are innocent until proven guilty?
3. If this happened and nothing else changed, would you be satisfied?
4. If we focus on punishing crime, do we ignore the underlying problems that cause people to commit crimes?

Option 2:

Apply the Law Fairly

Remove injustices, reform inequities, and improve accountability.



THIS OPTION SAYS that all Americans should be treated equitably, but that too often, some people are treated unfairly due to systemic bias throughout the criminal justice system and, in many cases, the way police go about their work.

Research shows that law enforcement and the courts are harsher on people of color and on people in poverty. According to this option, these and similar inequities arise from racism that must be addressed before everyone will be able to feel they live in a safe and just society.

When Darren Wilson, a white police officer in Ferguson, MO, fatally shot Michael Brown, an unarmed African-American teenager,

in August 2014, the resulting protests and investigation focused national attention on the many negative ways that police and the criminal justice system engage with people of color.

The US Justice Department found that Ferguson's courts and police officers had lost sight of the community's needs and their obligation to uphold the safety of all its residents. Eighty-five percent of the police department's traffic stops targeted African-American drivers. Law-abiding African-Americans, often doing nothing suspicious, were routinely stopped, frisked, and asked for identification. Exorbitant fines and fees were disproportionately charged to people of color. The report found officers "are inclined to interpret the exercise of free-speech rights as unlawful disobedience, innocent movements as physical threats, indications of mental or physical illness as belligerence."

These findings rang true with people of color across the US, many of whom had seen similar practices in their own communities. A 2014 *USA Today* study of all arrests in over 3,500 police departments across the country found that 95 percent of departments arrested African-Americans at a higher rate than other racial groups. "Blacks are more likely than others to be arrested in almost every city for almost every type of crime," according to the article.

More communities and their police departments have become aware that overt racism and implicit bias—in which unconscious prejudices and stereotypes affect decision-making and attitudes—contribute to the dangerous and sometimes fatal interactions people of color have with law enforcement and the justice system.

Many African-American parents today make a special effort to teach their children how to interact with the police so officers do not see them as criminal threats. It is referred to as "the talk." One mother told CNN that she talked to her 12-year-old son about the old prank of ringing someone's doorbell and running away. "I said you cannot play that game," April Finkley explained. "He said, 'Why?' Because when your friend plays the game and he's running away from a neighbor's house, he's going to go home. . . . When you play it, you may not come home to me, because you will be seen as a black male running from a stranger's home."

©A KATZ/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

Finally, many citizens in lower-income communities and some communities with more people of color, say that more of their neighbors are driven into crime by lack of other opportunities— failing schools, few job prospects, and other conditions that make these neighborhoods more vulnerable. This option holds that, unless some of these inequities are addressed, more people from these communities will continue to be drawn into criminal activity.

What We Could Do

Curtail Traffic Stops and "Stop-and-Frisk"

This option holds that a number of common police practices are connected to racial profiling or abuse, and should be ended or sharply reduced.

Traffic stops, for instance, result in far too many shootings and deaths. Multiple studies suggest that this routine police power is frequently abused, with African-American drivers getting stopped, and subsequently ticketed or arrested, disproportionately often. Given the risk to both officers and civilians, these practices should be sharply curtailed. Police could rely instead on cameras to catch speeders and drivers who run red lights and reserve the traffic stop for drivers posing a more urgent threat.

This option also holds that the police tactic of "stop-and-frisk" must end. This is a practice in which police officers can force any citizen to be searched and produce documentation. Studies suggest this tactic is overwhelmingly used on people of color, yet such individuals are not more likely to be carrying illegal items or otherwise breaking the law.

For instance, a 2016 report commissioned by the San Francisco district attorney investigated that city's police practices and found that "of all people searched without consent, Black and Hispanic people had the lowest 'hit rates' (i.e., the lowest rate of contraband recovered)" and that "the disparities in search hit rates suggest the SFPD performs non-consensual searches of Black and Hispanic people with lower levels of evidence than for other racial or ethnic groups."

Judges have ruled against the practice, and some cities like New York have cut back on its use. This option says the rest of the nation must also end the use of stop-and-frisk and other tactics that may involve racial profiling.

Require Implicit Bias Training

This option says that one area where progress must be made is in addressing implicit bias and racism. The concept of implicit bias holds that there are beliefs, assumptions, and stereotypes that exist in all of us, often unconsciously. These biases can create problems in interactions between and among authority figures and community members.

"If the stereotype is 'New Yorkers are rude,' prejudice is the feeling of like or dislike based on the stereotype, as in 'I value courtesy so I don't like New Yorkers,'" explained Morehouse College psychologist Bryant Marks in *The Washington Post*. "Discrimination is the action that often follows stereotypes and prejudices, which can result in a New Yorker not being hired for a customer service job or welcomed as a neighbor. Sometimes we're aware of the thoughts and feelings that lead us to discriminate. Sometimes we aren't."

In the fluid, ambiguous, and potentially volatile circumstances involved in police interactions, such assumptions can be deadly. Police may interpret innocent behavior, like playing with a toy gun, as suspicious or dangerous, and respond with force.

According to this option, it is particularly important to address the implicit biases of those in authority, such as police officers. This can be done through training. For example, in July 2016, the US Department of Justice established such training for its law enforcement employees. "[T]he effects of … bias can be countered by acknowledging its existence and utilizing response strategies," said Deputy Attorney General Sally Q. Yates.

Such training is not designed to criticize or blame police officers. On the contrary, it begins by acknowledging that everyone harbors bias, and shows people how to respond in difficult situations without letting bias drive the split-second

decisions that can mean the difference between violent conflict and peaceful resolution.

Another important reform would be creating more accountability mechanisms so that there is greater oversight of police practices. This could be done through citizen review boards and through mandatory, immediate release of dashboard and body-camera videos.

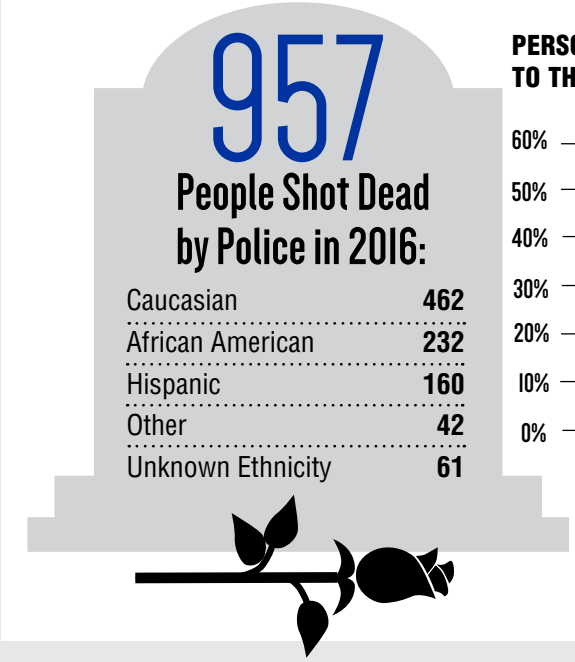
Make Enforcement and Sentencing More Equitable

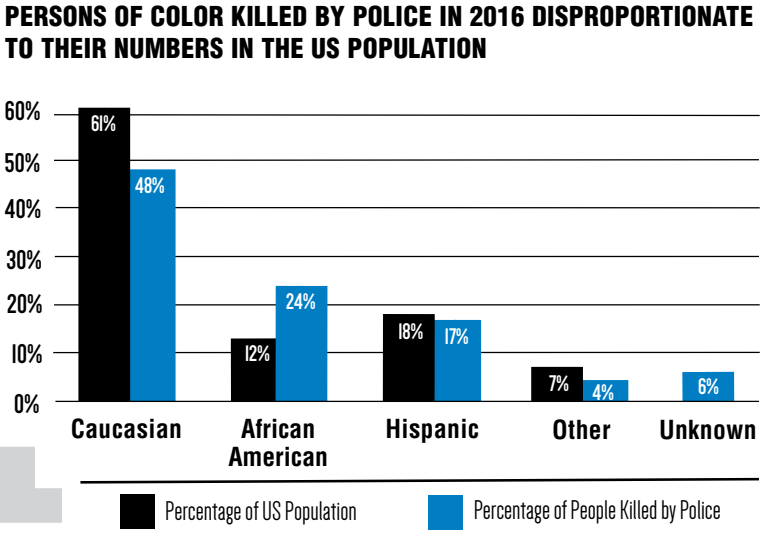
This option holds that the US prison population is both far too large and unfairly comprised of people of color.

People of color are over-represented in prisons, while white people are underrepresented. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, about 38 percent of all male inmates are African-American, three times their share of the US population. Twenty-two percent are Hispanic, also well above their share of the population. Meanwhile, 32 percent are Caucasian, just half of their share of the US population.

This is largely due to much higher rates of arrest, conviction, and length of sentence for people of color on drug offenses, even though the rate of actual drug use is similar among white Americans. Another reason may be that police departments deploy more officers in poor communities of color. Studies also suggest that people of color receive harsher sentences for similar offenses than do white Americans.

According to this option, we need to reform sentencing and enforcement so it is applied more fairly across the board. One important reform would be to do away with so-called "three strikes" laws, resulting in fewer people who are imprisoned long-term, in many cases simply because they committed petty crimes.





Numbers do not equal 100% due to rounding and other factors.

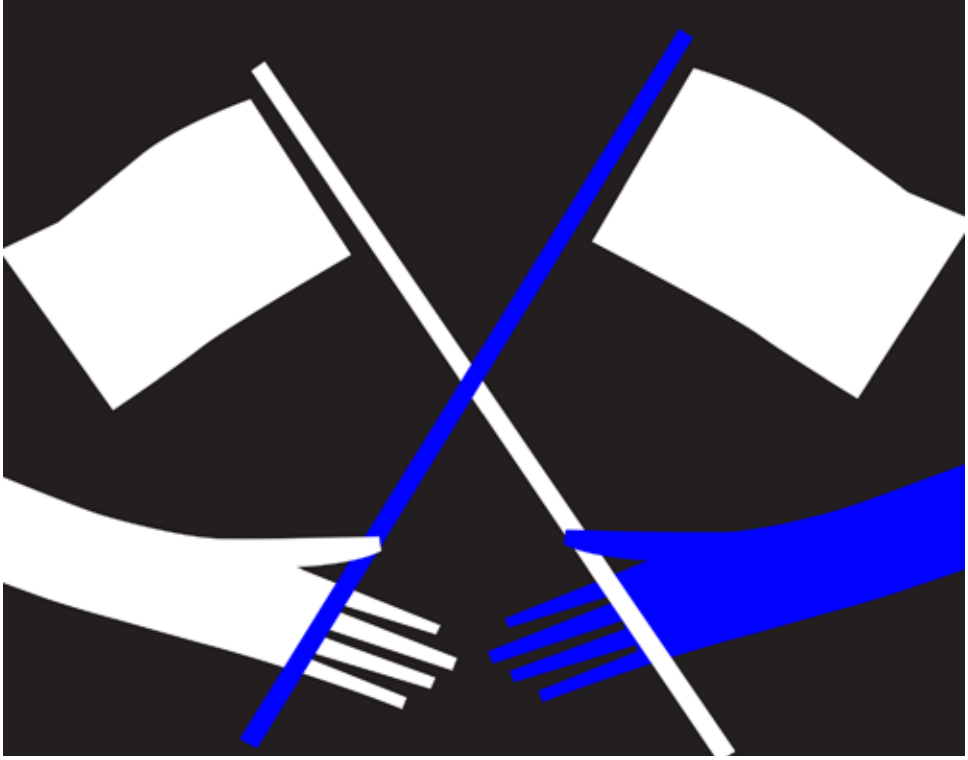
Source: *The Washington Post*, based on news reports, public records, Internet databases and original reporting.

Trade-Offs and Downsides

- Police departments already face difficulties in recruiting for a very tough job. If we single out police officers too quickly for what is acknowledged to be a problem of bias across society, we risk turning away more recruits.
- This may make it more difficult for officers to make split-second life and death decisions.
- Taking investigative tools such as "stop and frisk" away from police officers will mean that we reduce the ability of police to stop serious crimes before they start.
- Reducing penalties for drug or other offenses could lead to an increase in crime.

Questions for deliberation . . .

1. Bias training is useful, but can we realistically ask police officers to hold back and take risks when guns are so easily available and when violence is so prevalent in our society?
2. Some say long jail terms are an important deterrent to habitual criminals and that they protect communities. What would be the reaction in your neighborhood if small-time drug-dealers and petty thieves were released back into the community?
3. Do reasons for the large number of prison inmates of color begin with inequities in our social and economic systems?



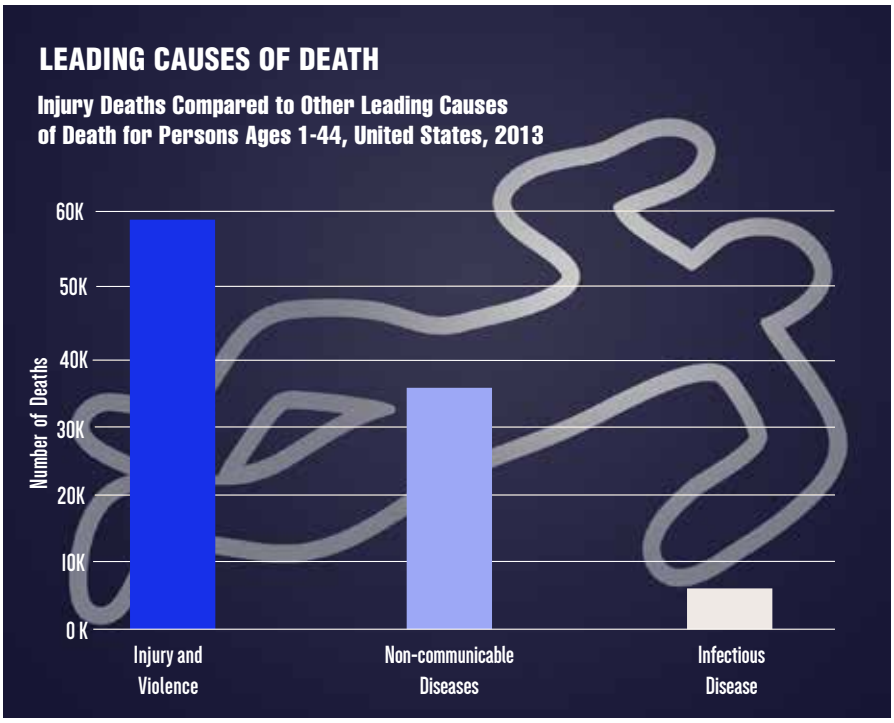
Option 3:

De-Escalate and Prevent Violence

Address the causes of violence and take direct actions to disrupt conflict.

BY ANY MEASURE, the US is far more violent than other large developed nations.

While violent crime has declined over the past decades, there is still far too much day-to-day violence, and the threat of it, in many communities. Many US cities have more murders than much larger *countries*.



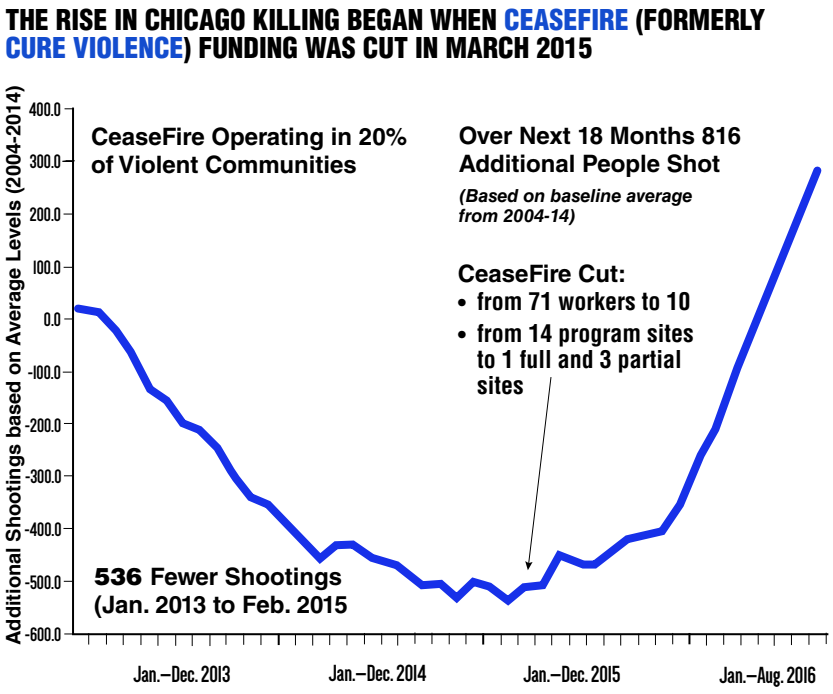
Source: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

"Only when violence becomes personal are Americans jarred, though briefly," wrote Jean Kim, a George Washington University professor, in the online journal *Aeon*. "With the advent of the internet, cellphones and YouTube, we have these unexpected moments where the lava pours out. People react with confusion, shock; their numbness doesn't work anymore. But the more it happens, the more detached we become."

According to this option, too many otherwise routine interactions between community members and police become violent, sometimes tragically so. In July 2014, a police officer in Staten Island trying to halt the sale of untaxed cigarettes on the sidewalk put Eric Garner, 43, into a chokehold, even as Garner repeatedly said, "I can't breathe!" Garner ultimately died. A grand jury did not indict the officer, which led to widespread protests in the US and around the world, but the city of New York agreed to pay Garner's family $5.9 million.

This option holds that violence itself, committed by citizens or by police officers, is the most urgent threat and should be directly addressed. If communities were to fully embrace methods of de-escalation, they would become safer.

De-escalation strategies can work anywhere—workplaces, playgrounds or in the home. Diplomats, nurses, even librarians have received training in ways to calm aggressive individuals and defuse potentially violent situations.



Source: Official Chicago Police Department data

What We Could Do

Directly Interrupt Violence

"Violence is a contagious disease," said Gary Slutkin, M.D., an epidemiologist at the University of Illinois at Chicago in 2014. "It meets the definitions of a disease and of being contagious—that is, violence is spread from one person to another."

When Slutkin founded Cure Violence (now operating as CeaseFire) in 2000, he turned to people in the community who could act much like the body's own anti-virus protection. Ameena Matthews, Cobe Williams, and Eddie Bocanegra, all with past links to violent gangs, are among those who have worked as violence "interrupters," identifying situations and individuals likely to cause violence, employing conflict-mediation methods to break the chain of violence, and teaching people in their Chicago neighborhoods how to change behaviors that lead to violence.

©AP PHOTO/RICHARD VOGEL

Los Angeles Police Chief Charlie Beck at a meeting with local gang leaders, organized by rappers The Game (left) and Snoop Dogg, to discuss ways to curb violence in the city

This option holds that this approach should be adopted in other cities. One of the keys to the program's success is that, as community members, the "interrupters" have credibility and contacts that outsiders would not have. Researchers found a clear correlation between CeaseFire's work and an accompanying fall in Chicago's violent crime rate. That correlation may have been strengthened by what happened next: CeaseFire's funding was slashed in spring 2015 and the number of interrupters cut from 71 to 10, and Chicago's spike in violence and homicides in 2015-2016 began shortly after that point.

Address Mental Illness and Similar Crises

This option recognizes that some incidents of violence are the result of mental illness, including drug addiction, and that police officers are often called upon to be the first responders to such situations. According to this option, such problems should be addressed earlier so they do not become criminal issues.

The Treatment Advocacy Center estimates that nearly 400,000 people with mental illness are in jails and prisons rather than in treatment. One of the main reasons is that states closed many psychiatric hospitals and moved toward de-institutionalization, starting in the 1960s. There are now far too few psychiatric hospital beds, a fact highlighted by Virginia State Sen. Creigh Deeds after his son, Gus, attacked him and then killed himself in 2013. Gus Deeds, despite a judge's order, could not be hospitalized because no bed was available.

"That makes absolutely no sense," Deeds said in *U.S. News & World Report*. "An emergency room cannot turn away a person in cardiac arrest because the ER is full, a police officer does not wait to arrest a murder suspect or a bank robber if no jail space is identified."

When police officers must deal with individuals exhibiting possible mental illness in public, the uncertainty and potential for violence in the situation is sometimes worsened by traditional police responses. In July 2016, a North Miami officer shot therapist Charles Kinsey while he lay flat on his back with his hands in the air as he attempted to bring a wandering patient back to the group home where he lived. Kinsey was not killed, but the episode seemed clearly to call for more restraint.

In many instances, community members can intervene in ways that are less likely to result in violence than if uniformed officers do. Some communities have begun forming mental health response teams that can take the place of police officers in dealing with people in crisis and thus reduce the chance of a violent encounter. According to this option, people in more communities ought to adopt this model.

Train Police Officers in De-Escalation and De-Militarize Police Departments

Police officers are often the first to deal with a wide range of issues, not just reported crimes—family and marital problems, disputes between neighbors, and mental health crises—and they are handling more than ever before. For example, dispatchers for the Albemarle County, VA, police department reported a 54 percent increase in mental health 911 calls between 2011 and 2016.

According to this option, police training is too focused on using force to deal with situations.

"Police training needs to go beyond emphasizing the severity of the risks that officers face by taking into account the likelihood of those risks materializing," wrote Seth Stoughton, a former police officer and now law professor at the University of South Carolina, in *The Atlantic*. "Policing has risks—serious ones—that we cannot casually dismiss. . . . But for all of its risks, policing is safer now than it has ever been. Violent attacks on officers, particularly those that involve a serious physical threat, are few and far between when you take into account the fact that police officers interact with civilians about 63 million times every year."

Stoughton and others argue that police training needs to spend many more classroom and real-world hours on communication and de-escalation.

Such tactics can be effective. In 2015, outside a restaurant in Camden, NJ, two officers trained in de-escalation were confronted by a man with a steak knife lunging forward. They could have shot him, but instead cleared all bystanders away and began talking to him. Eventually, he dropped the knife. It was the kind of outcome that needs to happen more often in the US.

According to this option, another factor that contributes to the current level of violence in law enforcement interactions is the way police are equipped and organized. The high crime rates of the 1990s and the terrorist attacks of 9/11 prompted many police departments to rely more often than before on heavily armed SWAT teams and lethal hardware.

More recently, many police departments have obtained and use military hardware such as armored troop carriers, flash-bang grenades, and bayonets through national programs that transfer military surplus items to local law enforcement agencies. In part due to the prevalence of so much deadly weaponry, potentially violent situations that once might have been defused are now more likely to produce an armed confrontation. The military equipment transfers have been sharply curtailed since 2015, but much of the equipment is still in use. This option holds that this equipment should be decommissioned.

Trade-Offs and Downsides

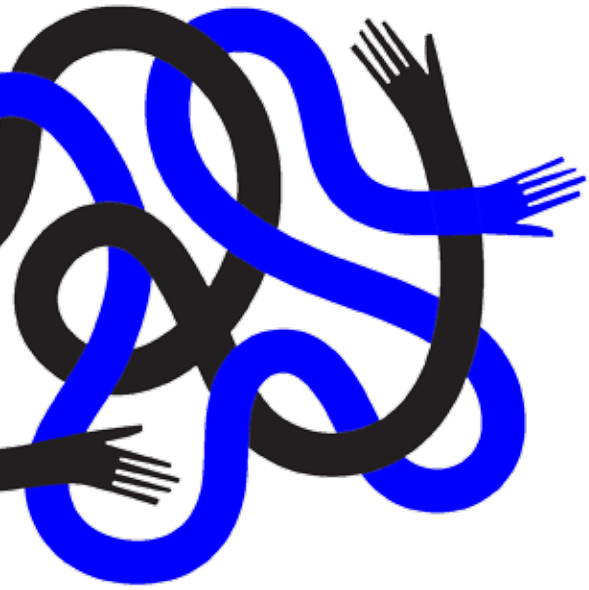
- Police officers' lives and those of bystanders could be endangered more often when de-escalation doesn't work.
- When citizens directly intervene in potentially violent situations they will be placed at risk.
- Taking military hardware away from the police could be the wrong strategy in an era of more frequent "lone wolf" terror attacks.

Questions for deliberation . . .

1. How much does this approach address your most serious concerns about safety and justice in America?
2. If we only pursued the ideas in this approach, would you be satisfied?
3. How much do you think individuals can do to help address mental health issues in their communities? Is it realistic to think that neighbors are equipped to handle situations of domestic abuse and child abuse when professionals struggle to address them?

Summary

AFTER FALLING STEADILY FOR DECADES, the rate of violent crime in the US rose again in 2015 and 2016. Interactions between citizens and police too often end in violence. People are increasingly worried about safety in their communities.



Many Americans are concerned something is going on with violence in communities, law enforcement, and race that is undermining the national ideals of safety and justice for all.

It is unclear what is driving this rise in violence, but bias and distrust on all sides appear to be making the problem worse. Citizens and police need goodwill and cooperation in order to ensure safety and justice. For many people of color, the sense that they are being treated unfairly by law enforcement—and even being targeted by police—is palpable. Others say police officers are being blamed for the actions of a few and that the dangers, stress, and violence law enforcement officers face in their work is underestimated. Still others hold that if ways to defuse potentially violent interactions between citizens and police are not found, we will never be able to create safe communities where all people can thrive and feel welcomed and comfortable.

How should communities increase safety while at the same time ensuring justice? This issue guide is a framework for citizens to work through these important questions together. It offers three different options for deliberation, each rooted in different, widely shared concerns and different ways of looking at the problem. The resulting conversation may be difficult, as it will necessarily involve tensions between things people hold deeply valuable such as a collective sense of security, fair treatment for all, and personal freedom. No one option is the "correct" one; each includes drawbacks and trade-offs that we will have to face if we are to make progress on this issue. They are not the only options available. They are presented as a starting point for deliberation.

Option 1:

Enforce the Law Together

Expand policing while strengthening community-police partnerships.

THIS OPTION SAYS THAT OUR TOP PRIORITY should be finding ways for communities and police to work together to stop violence of all kinds. Most Americans want safer streets and communities. Through neighborhood watch programs and community policing, citizens and police should identify sources of violence and work together to stop it.

But—more police officers visible in the community may create the sense that people are living in a police state. Some people may take the law into their own hands.

EXAMPLES OF WHAT MIGHT BE DONE	TRADE-OFFS TO CONSIDER
Communities can hire and deploy significantly more police officers of diverse races and train them in community policing.	This could create the oppressive feel of a police state.
Beef up and expand the use of neighborhood crime watch programs.	This might erode community trust and neighbors could end up targeting people based on racial, ethnic, or religious biases.
Require police officers to live in the communities they serve.	Some cities might find it harder to attract and hire new officers.
More citizens could fulfill their own obligations to the criminal justice system by reporting crimes and serving as witnesses and jurors.	Many people don't want to participate in a system that they see as biased and unfairly burdensome.
Train more people in the responsible use and carrying of firearms, and enact more "stand your ground" laws.	People may act as vigilantes.
What else?	What's the trade-off?

This option proposes that we put more trust in law enforcement and neighborhood watch efforts to ensure safety for all. How can we ensure that police officers will also observe the law? Are we confident that ordinary citizens can handle increased responsibility?

Option 2:

Apply the Law Fairly

Remove injustices, reform inequities, and improve accountability.

THIS OPTION SAYS THAT ONLY BY ADDRESSING injustice and bias in law enforcement and the courts can safety for all be achieved. Currently, the law is not enforced or applied fairly. From dealing with the way people of color are treated on the streets to unequal sentencing in the courts, widespread reforms are needed in order to restore trust and reduce violence.

But—this may make it harder for police officers and judges to do their jobs.

EXAMPLES OF WHAT MIGHT BE DONE	TRADE-OFFS TO CONSIDER
Limit the use of traffic stops and "stop and frisk" by police officers, and review other practices where racial profiling could come into play.	This would be taking away some of the tools police officers use to prevent crime before people are hurt.
Cities could invest more resources in schools in communities with higher poverty and crime rates.	This would mean that tax dollars would go to communities where there is greater need, rather than being distributed equally.
Require all law enforcement officers and court officials, including judges, to participate in implicit bias training.	This may make it more difficult for officers to make necessary split-second life and death decisions out on the street.
Using body cameras and smartphones, police and community members can document interactions, with videos made publicly available and independent prosecutors appointed to increase accountability.	This could put privacy and trust at risk and lead members of the community to continually second-guess the police based on partial evidence. Some police officers may feel themselves targeted by the legal system.
Reduce rates of arrest for minor drug and other non-violent crimes, especially in communities of color, and address disparities in sentencing for people of color.	Some criminals would receive less punishment than they currently do. Community members would have to be willing to accept more repeat, non-violent crimes being committed.
What else?	What's the trade-off?

This option argues that inequity and bias are at the root of much of the violence the nation is experiencing. Can becoming aware of these biases actually change behavior? Is police reform enough to adequately ensure all people feel safe in their communities?

Option 3:

De-Escalate and Prevent Violence

Reduce the culture of violence and take direct actions to disrupt conflict.

THIS OPTION SAYS THAT VIOLENCE itself is the most urgent threat and should be directly addressed. We should commit to the de-escalation of violence, by police and in the larger society. The police are often the first responders to mental health, domestic, and drug abuse crises that they are not always trained to handle. We should provide more mental illness and substance abuse treatment so there are fewer such episodes.

But—this might put police officers and citizens in danger more often.

EXAMPLES OF WHAT MIGHT BE DONE	TRADE-OFFS TO CONSIDER
Community members can disrupt gang activity and stop violence before it occurs.	Community members could put themselves and others at risk.
States and cities can invest in more mental health treatment programs and hospital beds to reduce violence both against and by those with mental illness.	This could result in more people being confined in mental hospitals for long periods.
Local governments could sponsor gun buy-back programs to reduce the number of guns in circulation.	Those likely to participate in these programs are probably not the ones using guns for illegal purposes.
Cities could stop allowing police to use military hardware, especially for crowd control.	Police officers might be under-equipped or outgunned in the worst situations, such as active shooter incidents.
Train all police officers in de-escalation techniques and enforce stricter use-of-force rules.	Police officers' lives—and the lives of bystanders—could be endangered in some situations
What else?	What's the trade-off?

This option says situations often unnecessarily escalate into violent confrontations. Do we expect too much of law enforcement? Is it reasonable to expect that citizen interventions can reduce violence?

The National Issues Forums

The National Issues Forums (NIF) is a network of organizations that bring together citizens around the nation to talk about pressing social and political issues of the day. Thousands of community organizations, including schools, libraries, churches, civic groups, and others, have sponsored forums designed to give people a public voice in the affairs of their communities and their nation.

Forum participants engage in deliberation, which is simply weighing options for action against things held commonly valuable. This calls upon them to listen respectfully to others, sort out their views in terms of what they most value, consider courses of action and their disadvantages, and seek to identify actionable areas of common ground.

Issue guides like this one are designed to frame and support these conversations. They present varying perspectives on the issue-at-hand, suggest actions to address identified problems, and note the trade-offs of taking those actions to remind participants that all solutions have costs as well as benefits.

In this way, forum participants move from holding individual opinions to making collective choices as members of a community—the kinds of choices from which public policy may be forged or public action may be taken, at community as well as national levels.

Feedback

If you participated in this forum, please fill out a questionnaire, which is included in this issue guide or can be accessed online at **www.nifi.org/questionnaires**. If you are filling out the enclosed questionnaire, please return the completed form to your moderator or to the National Issues Forums Institute, 100 Commons Road, Dayton, Ohio 45459.

If you moderated this forum, please fill out a Moderator Response sheet, which is online at **www.nifi.org/questionnaires**.

Your responses play a vital role in providing information that is used to communicate your views to others, including officeholders, the media, and other citizens.

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Recent topics in this series include economic security, energy, alcohol, jobs, and Social Security.

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Writer: Tony Wharton

Executive Editor: Brad Rourke

Managing Editor: Ilse Tebbetts

Art Consultant and Contributing Writer: Amy Lee

Illustrations: Odie & Partners

Design and Production: Long's Graphic Design, Inc.

Copy Editor: Lisa Boone-Berry

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