**ROLE**

In different forms, the “police” have been an entity interacting with citizens in North America for nearly 400 years. Some of the first organized police forces were “watchmen” created in urban areas in New England, and southern states had slave patrols. Roles of police changed over the decades in reaction to societal needs and perceived effectiveness. Diverging trends emerged in policing across states and cities, particularly with respect to non-core police functions.

Police today perform many functions that overlap with the social work. In a national survey of over 2,400 police officers, 84% said mental health–related calls have increased during their careers. Similarly, police often respond to homelessness. For example, some Kansas and Texas police departments have teams that work with unhoused people to provide case management services, support in finding shelter, and access to medical care. There are also overlaps between police work and social work in responding to domestic disputes and gender based violence. Research suggests involving untrained police in this work can be destructive to police themselves: prolonged exposure to domestic violence may make police officers more likely to commit domestic violence.

Police reformers advocate for alternatives to police. In Denver, Colorado, for example, mental health professionals respond to some emergency calls instead of the police. Opponents of such reform argue that social workers and mental health professionals are not equipped to respond if events take a violent turn.

What do you think? Do police have a role to play in responding to mental health crises, homelessness, and gender-based violence?

*I have no opinion or my opinion is conflicted: For the most part, police should not have any involvement in responding to these situations. However, I can envision certain circumstances where we would want police involved. One example I'm considering is a domestic violence call where one partner is threatening the other with a deadly weapon. In the violence situation, it may be appropriate to pre clear police to arrive alongside other working teams.*

*I agree: Specialists and social workers should be used in these situations, unless there is a threat that police can keep people safe from. However, the overall issue should be handled by an expert.*

*I disagree: ​​With proper training, police can be the best first contact.*

*All three of these situations can lead to public endangerment…. the police still have a duty to protect that person from themselves and others should the situation escalate.*

**MONEY**

Each year, the Bureau of Justice Assistance awards hundreds of millions of dollars in competitive grants to local, state, tribal, and territorial law enforcement agencies. Typically, these grants aid jurisdictions in hiring and training new officers, procuring cutting-edge technology, and implementing community outreach and educational programs. According to an April 2022 Gallup poll, 50% of Americans support “major changes” to policing, while another 39% support “minor changes.”

A majority of respondents also expressed support for police unions, which bargain collectively on behalf of member officers, often on issues involving police discipline.Police collective bargaining agreements the following clauses that shield officers from scrutiny, e.g. prohibiting internal investigations of anonymous civilian complaints and barring public access to police body-camera footage without a court order.

To opponents of police unions the present economic downturn gives Congress an opportunity to incentivize police reform. Specific conditions to the Bureau of Justice Assistance’s grant program could force departments to strike obstructive clauses from collective bargaining agreements. However, cutting police resources could provoke police union resistance, resulting in delayed response to 911 calls, decreased arrest numbers, and increased violent misconduct.

What do you think? Should the Bureau of Justice cut grants to police departments that have records of using excessive force and/or obstruct internal investigations into police misconduct?

*I have no opinion or my opinion is conflicted: On the one hand, it makes sense for the federal government to punish state and local departments for wrongdoing by withholding funding. On the other hand, loss of funding will ultimately impair the people's access to police services.*

*I agree: If police departments know that the state will cut funding, then they will preach not engaging in those activities.*

*I disagree: Grant amounts should be tied to measurables; if violence continues or increases, funding should be cut; if violence decreases, grants can be maintained or increased, especially to assist with continued training to reduce violence.*

**WEAPONS**

Every U.S. police officer carries a gun, with few exceptions. The organized use of lethal weapons in the U.S. police force traces its inception to the start of modern American policing — when the Berkeley police department appointed August Vollmer as its chief in 1909. Vollmer refashioned the police to resemble the American military, with the goal of “conducting a war against the enemies of society.” Militaristic rhetoric persisted whenCongress passed the Law Enforcement Assistance Act in 1965 in response to what President Johnson termed “the war on crime.” The Act mandated the federal government to supply police departments with military-grade weapons such as those that had been used in the Vietnam War.

As the beginning of the war on crime coincided with the Civil Rights Movement, policing reflected the bi-partisan split, and police brutality disproportionately impacted Black Americans, other peoples of color, and civil rights protesters.

The number of individuals killed by police each year has steadily risen: 958 in 2016; 1,019 in 2020; and 1,096 in 2022. A 2015 survey by Amnesty International found that all fifty states failed to comply with international law , which prohibits officers from using lethal force except as a last resort Nineteen countries in the world do not arm their officers..

Proponents of arming police observe that the U.S. faces different enforcement challenges than other countries. The Institute for Economics and Peace ranks the U.S. as the 35th most dangerous country in the world. Even if police do not need military grade equipment, perhaps they need lethal tools to protect themselves and others.

What do you think? Should police carry lethal weapons?

*I have no opinion or my opinion is conflicted: I think that for a majority of cases, police should not have access to lethal weapons. I can envision certain circumstances, however, where pre-clearing police to carry firearms would be appropriate. This model of firearms is a reasonable alternative to our current practices and are implemented in other countries.*

*I agree: The police should not be killing anyone, and lethal weapons make non-threatening situations more tense.*

*I disagree: Lethal weapons are a defense for police against those who could have lethal weapons themselves. I believe the more important consideration is that police should have a variety of non-lethal tools (taser, handcuffs, pepper spray, etc.) so that their pistol is only deployed when absolutely necessary.*

**SURVEY**

Add the numbers of your responses together. This will help us pair people up for discussion.

Prompt A: Police have no role to play in responding to mental health crises, homelessness, and gender-based violence.

1. I agree. 2. I have no opinion or my opinion is conflicted. 3. I disagree.

Prompt B: The Bureau of Justice should cut grants to police departments that have records of using excessive force and/or obstruct internal investigations into police misconduct.

1. I agree. 2. I have no opinion or my opinion is conflicted. 3. I disagree.

Prompt C: Police should not carry lethal weapons.

1. I agree. 2. I have no opinion or my opinion is conflicted. 3. I disagree.

**Total: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**