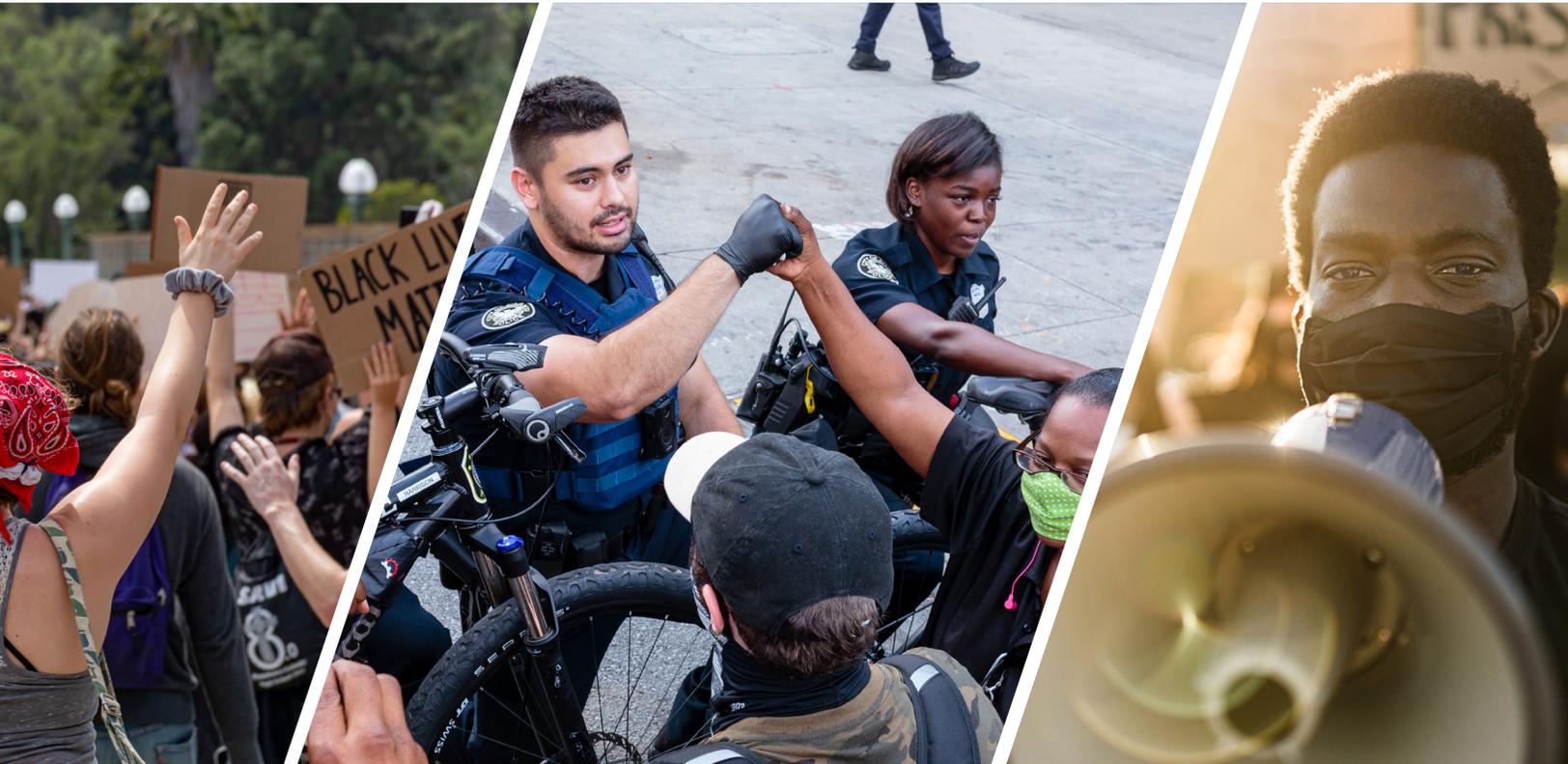


2020 MENINO SURVEY OF MAYORS



POLICING AND PROTESTS

SUPPORTED BY





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1. INTRODUCTION

Racial harassment, violence, and injustice have long marred policing in the United States (US). In 2015, the Obama White House created the Task Force on 21st Century Policing to engage mayors, police chiefs, community leaders, and academics in identifying meaningful reforms. Five years later, on May 25, 2020, the death of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin shone a national spotlight on enduring racial violence perpetrated by police. Black people are three times more likely to be killed by the police than white people. There is still little accountability for police-related homicides. Since 2013, 98 percent of killings by police have not resulted in any criminal charges.¹ In response to the death of George Floyd, protests erupted in cities and towns in every state, and a growing coalition of activists demanded substantial changes to police departments.

As part of the 2020 Menino Survey of Mayors, we asked a nationally representative sample of 130 mayors about policing, racism, and protests in their communities. In this report, we outline a) mayors' recognition of racial inequality, b) their roles during protests in their community, and c) how they hope to reform their police departments.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Mayors see stark racial disparities in local policing practices, but are mixed as to whether this inequality translates into mistrust of the police. An overwhelming majority of mayors believe that Black people are treated worse by the police compared with white people. However, they are considerably more mixed when asked whether Black people mistrust the police. A plurality of mayors believe their city's Black residents mistrust the police, while a sizable minority disagree.

A majority of mayors believe that protests against police violence during Summer 2020 were forces of positive change in their cities. There were sizable partisan differences, with Republican mayors over 30 percentage points more likely than Democratic mayors to perceive protests negatively. One-third of mayors said they participated in the protests, while another fifth described their roles as communicating with and listening to protesters and the police.

Almost 40 percent of mayors surveyed do not believe that police violence is a problem in their community. Republican mayors were 13 percentage points more likely to say that police violence was not an issue in their cities; still, 29 percent of Democratic mayors felt similarly. Among all mayors surveyed, just over half believe that both lack of racial diversity of officers and racism contribute to police violence at least a little.

An overwhelming majority of mayors believe that their police departments do a good job of attracting individuals well-suited to being police officers. Despite mayoral recognition of racial inequality in the police ranks and recognition of disparate treatment of constituents based on race, 80 percent of mayors believe their police departments' do a good job of attracting candidates well-suited to the job.

Very few mayors support shrinking their police budgets. Only 12 percent of mayors described their police budgets as too large. An overwhelming majority believe their budgets are just right, with eight percent describing their budgets as too small.

1 Sinyangwe, S., D. McKesson, and J. Elzie. "Police Violence Map." Mapping Police Violence (Oct. 6 2020): <https://mappingpoliceviolence.org>



Mayors support a wide variety of smaller reforms to their police departments; few endorse broader restructuring of their police department. Only one-third of mayors endorse reallocating at least some resources and responsibilities from their police departments to other city services. Similarly, when asked an open-ended question about desired reforms, just 16 percent of mayors support bigger structural changes. They back a variety of other reforms, including increasing diversity on their police forces and civilian review boards.

3. METHODOLOGY

The 2020 Menino Survey of Mayors uses a combination of open- and closed-ended questions to explore a myriad of salient local issues and policy priorities. This year, 130 mayors discussed everything from COVID-19 recovery and implications, to policing and protests, to parks and greenspace, to the 2020 Census. [For related and forthcoming reports on the 2020 Menino Survey findings, please visit surveyofmayors.com.]

To generate a systematic sample, we invited all mayors of cities with 75,000 or more residents to participate. Each mayor received an email invitation from the Boston University Menino Survey of Mayors team at their official email account, and follow-up phone calls. The vast majority of interviews were conducted over the phone. Mayors' responses and participation remain anonymous, in order to ensure they are able to speak freely about a wide range of issues. This systematic sampling and recruitment effort yielded a representative sample of mayors of American cities with populations over 75,000. Table 1 compares the demographics of participating cities to all cities with over 75,000 residents.

Table 1. Demographic Comparison of Sample Cities to All U.S. Cities with Populations >75,000

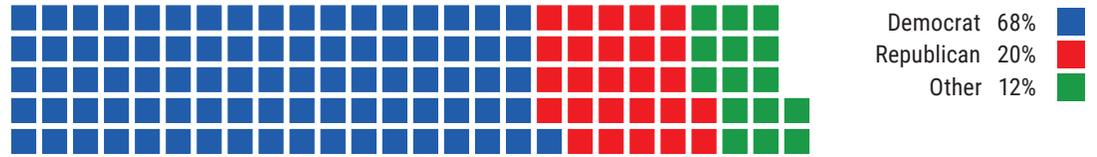
	Surveyed Cities	All Cities
Number of Cities	130	489
Average Population	215,619	223,815
Average Percent White	51%	49%
Average Percent Black	16%	14%
Average Percent Hispanic	22%	25%
Average Median Housing Price	\$273,673	\$295,960
Region	% of Sample	% of Cities
Midwest	20%	16%
Northeast	15%	9%
South	32%	34%
West	33%	40%

Source: 2018 American Community Survey (ACS), published by the US Census Bureau.

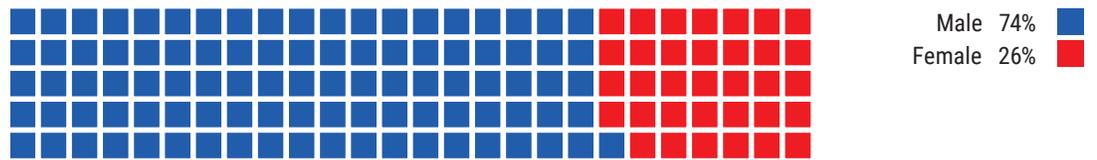


Figure 1. Demographics of Surveyed Mayors

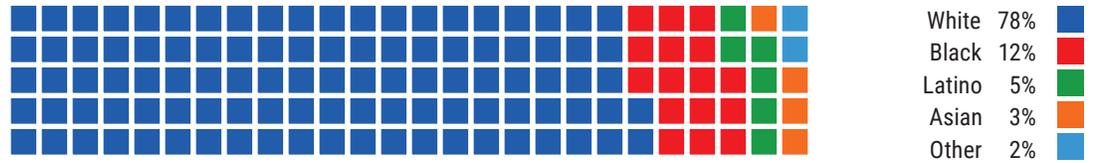
Party



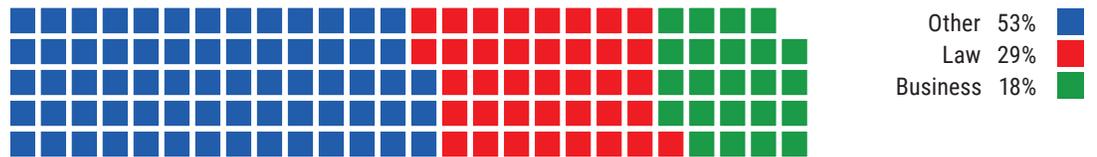
Gender



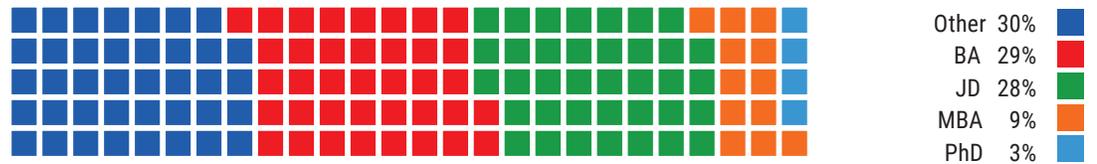
Race



Professional Background



Highest Degree

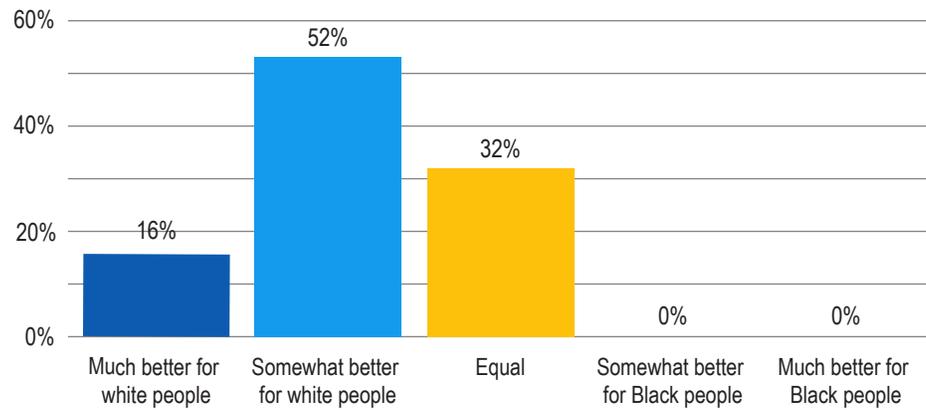




4. RACIAL DISPARITIES IN POLICING

Figure 2. Treatment by Police

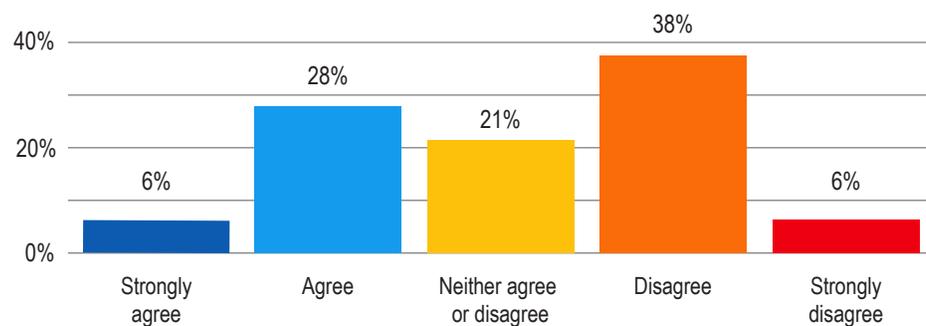
How equitable is treatment by police for white people compared with Black people in your city?



Mayors largely recognize racial inequality in how the police treat Black people, with a strong majority (68 percent) agreeing that the police treat white people better than Black people. This seeming agreement belies a stark partisan gap: 73 percent of Republican mayors believe that the police treat white and Black people equally, compared with a mere 14 percent of Democrats. Mayors in both parties agree, though, that Black people are not treated better by the police in any city. Interestingly, these perceptions do not vary in cities with more non-white police officers.

Figure 3. Trust in Police

Please rate how strongly you agree/disagree: Black residents in my city trust the police.



Mayors largely believe that police treatment is worse for Black people; they do not, however, believe that this unequal treatment affects community trust in the police. Only 44 percent of mayors believe that Black residents distrust the police — a number that persists across party lines. Some mayors believed that they could not characterize Black views monolithically. One northern mayor, for example, highlighted the importance of age differences: *“There’s a generational divide: older African Americans are more likely to trust the police. The younger generation does not trust the police.”* These numbers differ starkly from national public opinion polls during summer 2020 showing widespread Black distrust of the police. Indeed, only 36 percent of Black people trust the police, compared with 77 percent of white people.²

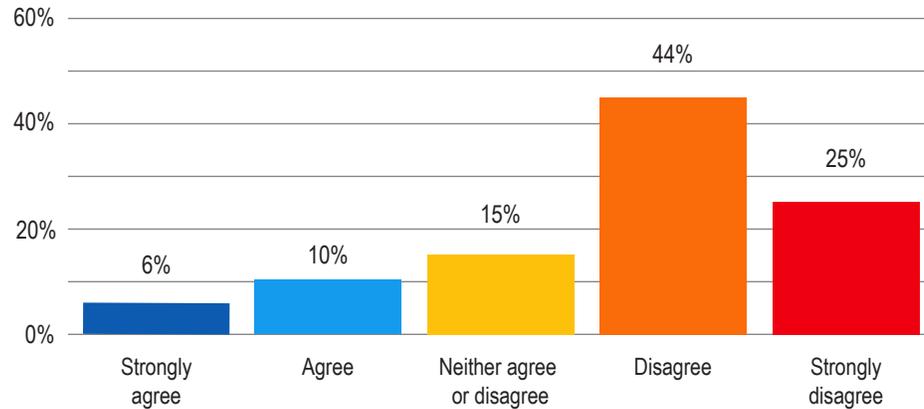
² Jackson, C. and M. Newall. “Despite COVID-19 spike, few individual behaviors are changing.” *Ipsos* (Oct. 27, 2020): <https://www.ipsos.com/en-us/news-polls/axios-ipsos-coronavirus-index>



5. URBAN PROTESTS

Figure 4. Protests Against Police Violence

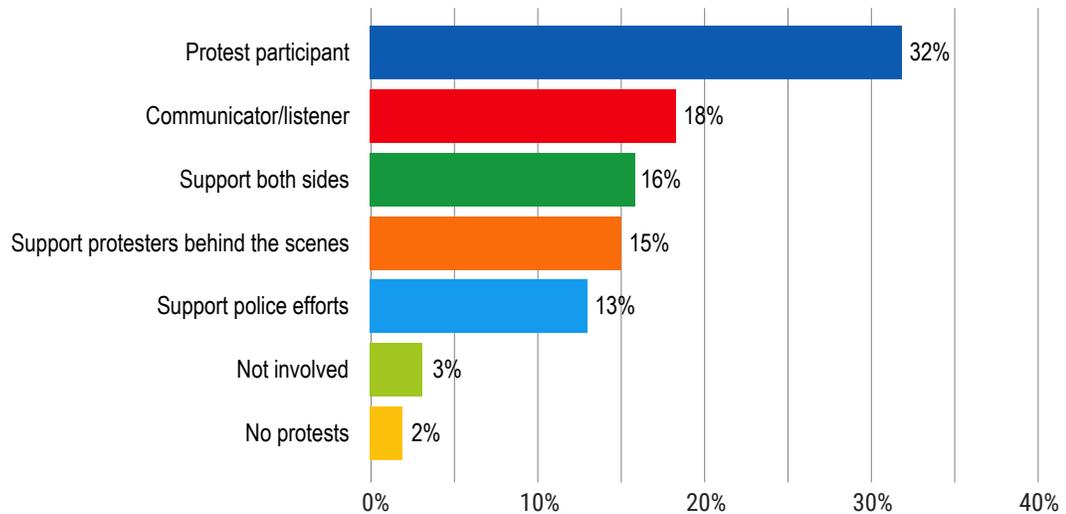
Please rate how strongly you agree/disagree with the following statement: Street protests against police violence in 2020 did more harm than good in my city.



This growing recognition and frustration with incidents of police violence and racism spurred widespread protests across American cities in summer 2020. Mayors largely (69 percent) saw these as positive forces of change in their communities.³ In line with national partisan views on protesting, Republican mayors were 31 percentage points more likely to see protests as harmful in their communities.

Figure 5. Role During Protests

If there were recent protests in your city, how would you characterize your role during that time?



When asked an open-ended question about their role during the protests, a plurality of mayors (32 percent) classified themselves as protest participants. Indeed, some were strong supporters of the Black Lives Matter

³ Five percent of mayors indicated that there were no street protests in their cities.



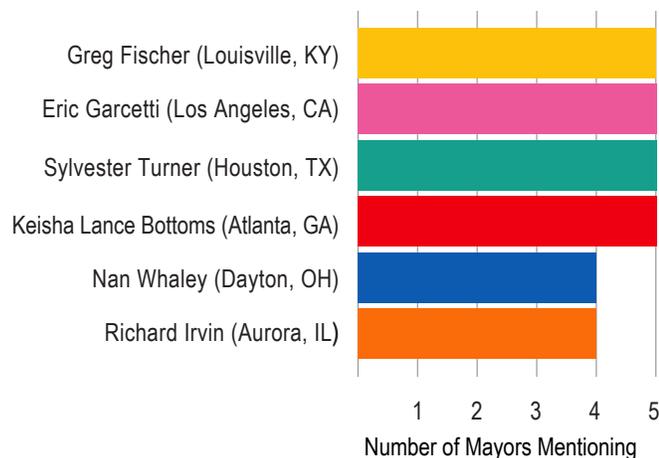
movement. One Midwestern mayor highlighted his public and financial contributions: *“I attended the mass rally....I’ve also donated financially to the cause.”* A southern mayor described himself as *“Very active. Attended and met with protesters. The whole nine yards.”* Some participating mayors highlighted the importance of being visible, while others emphasized their role as participants not leaders. As one western mayor put it, *“I attended several of them, almost all, and sometimes I would be called out and put on the spot to speak/say something. Sometimes it went well and sometimes it didn’t. Others didn’t like it. I did not lead, organize or facilitate any event, but attended as a participant.”*

Another 15 percent of mayors described themselves as supportive of protests, but in a more behind the scenes role. These mayors did not attend rallies, but supported protesters out of sight of the cameras and community. One western mayor explained his decision: *“[I] refused to make a public appearance [where you] can’t control the narrative.”*

Thirty-four percent of mayors saw their roles as supporting and communicating with their police and protesters, with 18 percent highlighting their jobs as communicators and listeners and 16 percent emphasizing their support for both sides. One southern mayor highlighted his dual role serving protesters and police officers, describing himself as *“Supporting rights of protesters to protest peacefully and supporting police arresting protesters that did illegal actions.”* Another southern mayor emphasized his responsibility to act as a *“Facilitator, representative of government, caring mayor, caring public servant.”* Thirteen percent of mayors saw themselves as protectors of their residents’ safety and defenders of the police. One eastern mayor described his job as to provide *“Visible and vocal support of our police department.”* Other mayors worried about public safety and property damage during protests.

Figure 6. Outreach to Other Mayors

In the days immediately following the killing of George Floyd, which other mayors, if any, did you reach out to, to talk about addressing protests and responses to them? Please name up to two that come to mind.



Some mayors quickly turned to their colleagues for advice on how to manage racial disparities in policing practices and protests in their cities. We asked mayors whom they reached out to in the aftermath of George Floyd’s killing. While some cities were mentioned more than others, no one mayor stood out. The most frequently mentioned mayors, Greg Fischer (Louisville), Eric Garcetti (Los Angeles), Sylvester Turner (Houston) and Keisha Lance Bottoms (Atlanta), were each mentioned only five times. Many mayors were mentioned at least once but we only show those mentioned relatively frequently. Some of the more commonly cited mayors were also frequently mentioned as valuable sources of information and advice about COVID-19, suggesting that some mayors are particularly respected policy advisors.⁴ A few of the most mentioned hold leadership positions in national associations (e.g. Fischer and Whaley — the Mayor of Dayton — are leaders within the US Conference of Mayors).

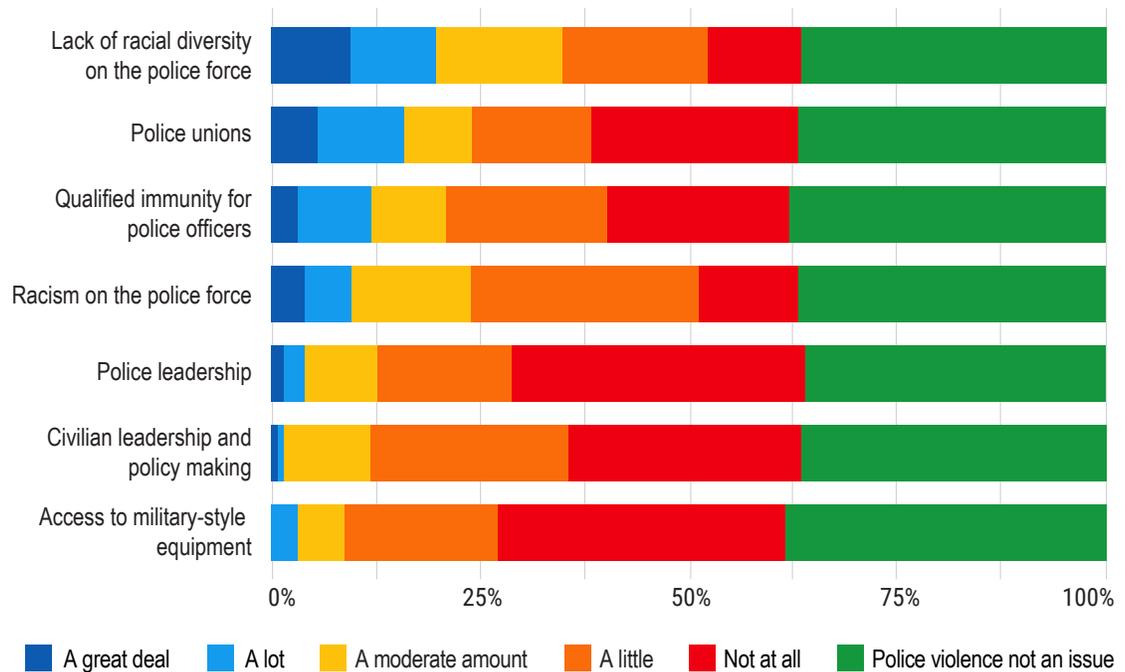
4 Glick, D., K.L. Einstein, M.B. Palmer, and S. Fox. 2020 Menino Survey of Mayors: COVID-19 Recovery and the Future of Cities. Boston University Initiative on Cities (Dec. 3, 2020): <https://www.surveyofmayors.com/reports/menino-survey-of-mayors-2020-covid-report.pdf>.



6. POLICE REFORM

Figure 7. Police Violence in City

If police violence has been a problem in your city, how much do each of the following contribute to it?



Mayors largely acknowledge inequality in police treatment of Black people, and support protests against police violence in their cities, at least tacitly. Yet, a strikingly high percentage of mayors (38 percent) also do not believe that police violence is an issue in their communities.⁵ When asked about various drivers of police violence in their communities, the most popular answer from mayors was that police violence was not an issue in their cities. Again consistent with national partisan divides on policing, Republican mayors were 13 percentage points more likely to say that police violence was not an issue in their cities. Still, a sizable proportion of Democratic mayors — 29 percent — believe that police violence is not a problem in their cities. This contrasts sharply with data on the widespread nature of police violence: police in only one of the nation’s largest 100 cities did not kill anyone between 2013-2019.⁶ While there is certainly variation in the incidence of violence across police departments, virtually all police departments struggle with officer-involved shootings and other non-fatal forms of police brutality.⁷

Of 60 percent of mayors who do acknowledge police violence in their communities, most do not believe that many of the factors commonly cited in academic and policy research were important contributors to the problem. Racism in police departments is endemic; internal FBI documents have expressed concern about ties between white

⁵ We do not find significant differences in the views based on the race of the mayor. White and non-white mayors both reported that police violence was not an issue at similar rates. Forty-one percent of mayors of majority white cities and 35 percent of mayors of majority-minority cities reported that police violence was not an issue.

⁶ Sinyangwe, S., D. McKesson, and J. Elzie. “Police Accountability Tool.” Mapping Police Violence (Oct. 6, 2020): <https://mappingpoliceviolence.org/cities>

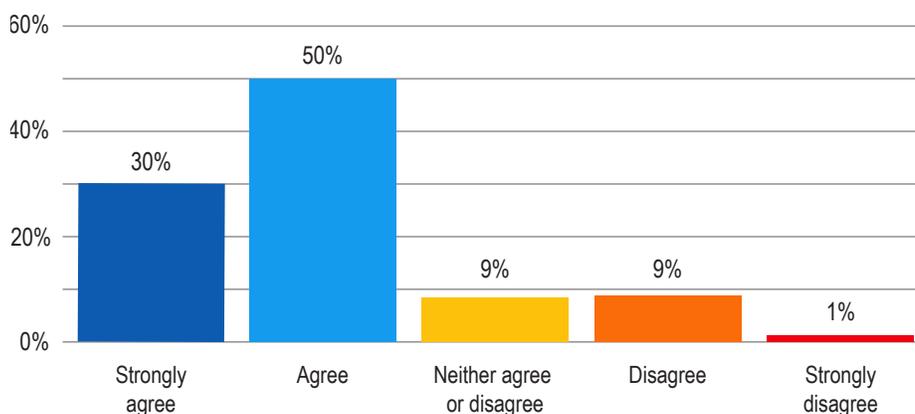
⁷ Sinyangwe, S., D. McKesson, and J. Elzie. “Police Accountability Tool.” Mapping Police Violence (Oct. 6, 2020): <https://mappingpoliceviolence.org/cities>



supremacist organizations and local law enforcement in some communities.⁸ Police violence is a more significant problem in unionized police forces,⁹ in large part because unions shield officers who commit such acts from disciplinary procedures.¹⁰ The increased availability of military-style weapons in police forces has led to an increase in police violence.¹¹ Police officers are often deeply unrepresentative of the communities they serve.¹² Yet, large majorities of mayors do not think police racism, police unions, civilian and police leadership, access to military-style equipment, or a lack of racial diversity drive police violence. The two factors that more than half of mayors believed contributed at least “a little” to police violence was lack of racial diversity on the police force and racism.

Figure 8. Police Recruitment in City

Please rate how strongly you agree/disagree with the following statement: The police department in my city does a good job of attracting individuals well-suited to being police officers.



While mayors acknowledge racial inequality in how their police treat Black people, they are loath to criticize their police officers more broadly. An overwhelming majority of mayors (80 percent) believe that their cities’ police force does a good job of attracting individuals well-suited to being police officers. Ninety-five percent of mayors who do not believe police violence is a problem in their cities agree with this statement. Even among those mayors who believe that a lack of police diversity is an important contributor to police violence, 61 percent of mayors believe that their own police force does a good job of attracting good police officers. Republican mayors are 13 percentage points more likely to support this view; still, 75 percent of Democratic mayors think police recruitment succeeds in drawing in the right types of applicants. Yet, multiple studies have shown a troubling mismatch between the selection and training procedures for police officers and the actual job of policing. While selection and training favors more militaristically-oriented individuals, the job itself often entails an emphasis (ideally) on community- and relationship-building.¹³ Few mayors seemed willing to acknowledge these types of structural staffing issues on their police forces.

8 German, M. “Hidden in Plain Sight: Racism, White Supremacy, and Far-Right Militancy in Law Enforcement.” Brennan Center for Justice (Aug. 27, 2020): <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/hidden-plain-sight-racism-white-supremacy-and-far-right-militancy-law>

9 Walker, S. “The Neglect of Police Unions: Exploring One of the Most Important Areas of American Policing.” *Police Practice and Research*, Vol. 9, Iss. 2, pgs. 95-112 (Jun. 24, 2008): <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/15614260802081253?journalCode=gppr20>

10 Bies, K. “Let the Sunshine In: Illuminating the Powerful Role Police Unions Play in Shielding Officer Misconduct.” *Stanford Law & Policy Review*, Vol. 28, Iss. 1 (May 2017): <https://law.stanford.edu/publications/let-the-sunshine-in-illuminating-the-powerful-role-police-unions-play-in-shielding-officer-misconduct/>

11 Delehanty, C., J. Mewhirter, R. Welch, and J. Wilks. “Militarization and Police Violence: The Case of the 1033 Program.” *Research & Politics*, Vol. 4, Iss. 2 (Jun. 14, 2017): <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/2053168017712885>

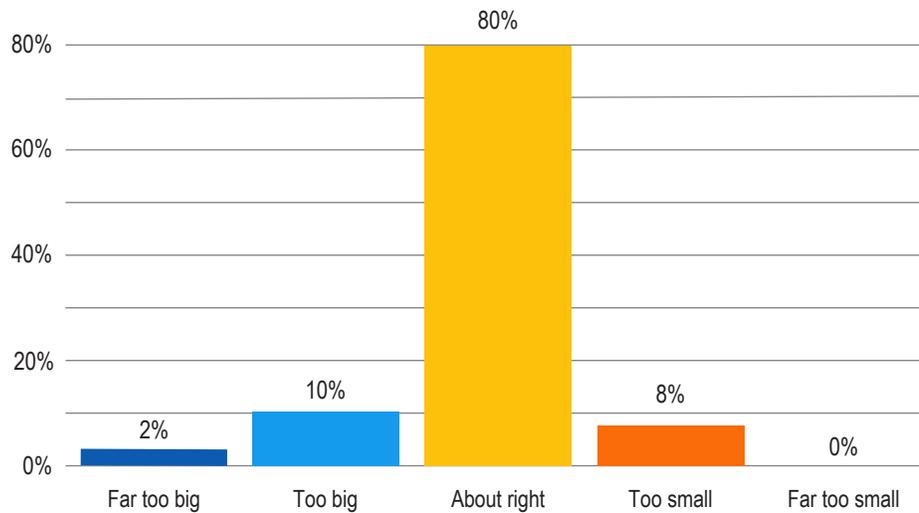
12 Hyland, S. and E. Davis. “Local Police Departments, 2016: Personnel.” U.S. Department of Justice: Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics (Oct. 2019): <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/lpd16p.pdf>

13 Friedman, B. “Disaggregating the Police Function.” New York University School of Law, Public Law Research Paper, No. 20-3 (Apr. 6, 2020): https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3564469



Figure 9. Police Department Budget

In my city, the police department's share of last year's budget was:



A small, but growing social movement endorses defunding the police; it asks local governments to instead redirect resources to other government agencies oriented towards social services, redistribution, and mental health.¹⁴ There does not appear to be a ground-swell of mayoral support for such a programmatic shift: an overwhelming, bipartisan majority of mayors believed that their police budget was “about right.” One mayor explained his decision: “[About right] because it is set by the voters. The people spoke and [the majority] agreed with the budget.” Another remarked that “[We] had already made cuts to police budget, so feel it is appropriate now.” Only a tiny minority (12 percent) believed that their budget was too big. In short, mayors do not appear to support sharp cuts to police budgets.

More generally, mayors appear unwilling to consider broader structural reforms to their police departments. When asked an open-ended question about short-term and long-term changes they would like to make to their police departments, only 16 percent of mayors proposed transformative structural changes. Those mayors emphasized the mismatch between their police departments’ tactics and community needs. Many suggested that some (or most) police functions should be transferred over to social workers. As one southern mayor put it, “Take the social service centric duties and tasks away from law enforcement.” Others emphasized a fundamental change in the nature and orientation of officers. One western mayor sought to “Deconstruct negative cultures that have been developed in police departments as far as a “warrior” mentality. Ninety-nine percent of what they do has nothing to do with that. [We] need to change them to a service mentality and a service-oriented organization that has self-awareness.”

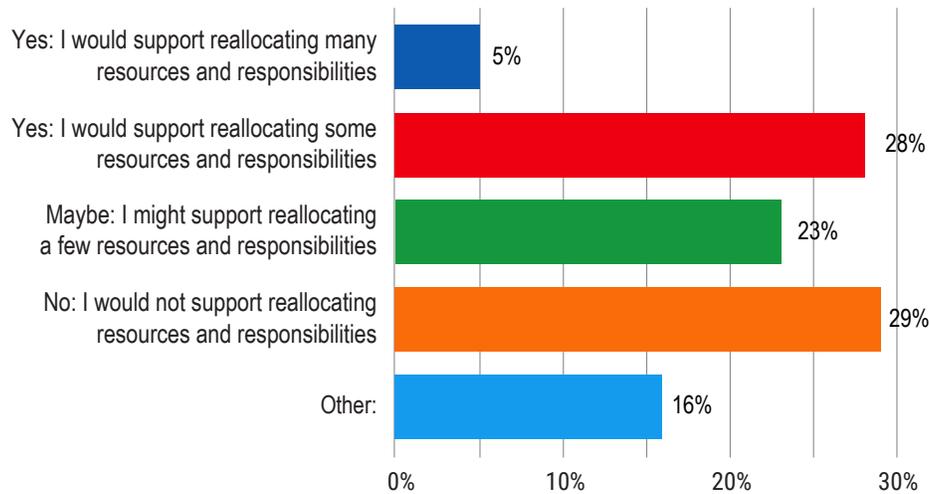
The overwhelming majority of mayors (84 percent), however, proposed more modest reforms working within the structures of their existing police departments, rather than radically transforming them. Twenty-nine percent hoped to increase the racial diversity of their police force. One eastern mayor’s proposed long-term reform aimed for “More cops who are residents. [We’re] trying to get more recruitment that focuses on diverse candidates that are from the city. It’s been a challenge.” Others emphasized transparency, with 16 percent hoping to create a civilian review board; one midwestern mayor sought to “Accomplish better oversight and transparency of police operations [and create a] more robust citizen review board.”

14 Ray, R. “What Does ‘Defund the Police’ Mean and Does it Have Merit?” Brookings (Jun. 19, 2020): <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/fixgov/2020/06/19/what-does-defund-the-police-mean-and-does-it-have-merit/>



Figure 10. Reallocation of Resources and Responsibilities

Going forward, would you support reallocating police department resources and responsibilities to other parts of city government such as social service agencies?



Still, most mayors did not endorse reallocating many, or even some, of the police department’s resources and responsibilities. Some mayors highlighted their lack of control over budgets; one midwestern mayor said, “It would be great to put money towards mental health, addiction recovery, etc. but we don’t run those programs.” Yet, in previous years in the Menino Survey, mayors were optimistic about their ability to make significant inroads on major international challenges like climate change¹⁵ — an arena over which mayors have less direct control than a local government service like the police.

Indeed, previous data from the Menino Survey suggest that, when mayors want to reform their police departments, they are able to effect important changes. In 2015, we asked mayors about their support for a variety of police reforms proposed by the Obama Administration’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing. The most widely supported, by far, were body cameras, which were endorsed by 93 percent of mayors. At the time the survey was conducted, only five of 87 responding cities had implemented body cameras. By September 2020, a striking 76 percent of cities had put this program in place. What’s more, the intensity of mayoral support for body cameras predicted whether or not the city implemented the reform. Eighty-six percent of cities in which the mayor *strongly* supported the reform saw the program implemented between 2015 and 2020, compared to 71 percent of cities where mayors were simply supportive. Only 17 percent of cities in which the mayor opposed body cameras ended up implementing the policy. Substantial political obstacles, rather than a lack of power, may prevent mayors from tackling more structural reforms to their police departments.

¹⁵ Einstein, Katherine, D. Glick, and M. Palmer. 2017 Menino Survey of Mayors. Boston University Initiative on Cities: https://www.surveyofmayors.com/reports/MeninoReport17_011218_web.pdf



7. CONCLUSION

Mayors face formidable challenges in reforming their police departments. Public sector unions are powerful — perhaps none more so than police unions.¹⁶ Moreover, mass public opinion on major structural police reform remains mixed at best. Even in the immediate aftermath of George Floyd’s killing, only 33 percent of Black people and 23 percent of white people favored broad structural reforms to the police and “reinvent[ing] our approach to public safety.” Support was considerably higher for reforming “within the existing system” — a proposition endorsed by 64 percent of Black people and 56 percent of white people.¹⁷ White support for the police overall remains quite high, and white enthusiasm for the Black Lives Matter movement is waning.¹⁸

In light of these constraints, it is perhaps unsurprising that mayors could both believe Black people are unfairly treated by their police and fail to endorse major structural reforms to their police departments. Taking a strong political stand against their own police department would require mayors to anger their own employees and staff as well as the broader public upon whom they rely for reelection. The results from this survey suggest that, while there is mayoral support for modest reforms, there is little political appetite for the broad structural reforms many believe are needed to address systemic violence and racism.

16 Anzia, S. and T. Moe. “Public Sector Unions and the Costs of Government.” *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 77, No. 1 (Jan. 2015): <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/abs/10.1086/678311?journalCode=jop&mobileUi=0>

17 YouGov. “Yahoo! News Race and Politics.” (Jun. 11, 2020): https://docs.cdn.yougov.com/86ijosd7cy/20200611_yahoo_race_police_covid_crosstabs.pdf

18 Thomas, D. and J. M. Horowitz. “Support for Black Lives Matter has Decreased Since June But Remains Strong Among Black Americans.” Pew Research Center (Sept. 16, 2020): <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/09/16/support-for-black-lives-matter-has-decreased-since-june-but-remains-strong-among-black-americans/>

To learn more about the Menino Survey of Mayors, visit surveyofmayors.com

Boston University Initiative on Cities

The Initiative on Cities at Boston University seeks to research, promote, and advance the adaptive urban leadership strategies and policies necessary to achieve more sustainable, just, and inclusive urban transformation. Founded by a proven urban leader, the late Boston Mayor Thomas M. Menino, and a highly regarded academic, Professor Graham Wilson, the Initiative serves as a bridge between world-class academic research and the real-life practice of city governance. bu.edu/ioc