

Building a Police-Free Future: Frequently Asked Questions

We believe in the power, possibility, and necessity of a police-free future. We also understand, however, that this is a new idea for many people. What follows are some frequently-asked questions, and our responses to them.

Won't abolishing the police create chaos and crime? How will we stay safe?

Police abolition work is not about snapping our fingers and instantly defunding every department in the world. Rather, we're talking about a gradual process of strategically reallocating resources, funding, and responsibility *away* from police and *toward* community-based models of safety, support, and prevention.

The people who respond to crises in our community should be the people who are best-equipped to deal with those crises. Rather than strangers armed with guns, who very likely do not live in the neighborhoods they're patrolling, we want to create space for more mental health service providers, social workers, victim/survivor advocates, religious leaders, neighbors and friends— all of the people who really make up the fabric of a community— to look out for one another.

But what about armed bank robbers, murderers, and supervillains?

Crime isn't random. Most of the time, it happens when someone has been unable to meet their basic needs through other means. So to really "fight crime," we don't need more cops; we need more jobs, more educational opportunities, more arts programs, more community centers, more mental health resources, and more of a say in how our own communities function.

Sure, in this long transition process, we may need a small, specialized class of public servants whose job it is to respond to violent crimes. But part of what we're talking about here is what role police play in our society. Right now, cops don't just respond to violent crimes; they make needless traffic stops, arrest petty drug users, harass Black and Brown people, and engage in a wide range of "broken windows policing" behaviors that only serve to keep more people under the thumb of the criminal justice system.

But why not fund the police and fund all these alternatives too? Why is it an either/or?

It's not just that police are ineffective: in many communities, they're actively harmful. The history of policing is a history of violence against the marginalized— American police departments were originally created to dominate and criminalize communities of color and poor white workers, a job they continue doing to this day. The list has grown even longer: LGBTQ folks, people with disabilities, activists— so many of us are attacked by cops on a daily basis.

And it's bigger than just police brutality; it's about how the prison industrial complex, the drug war, immigration law, and the web of policy, law, and culture that forms our criminal justice system has destroyed millions of lives, and torn apart families. Cops don't prevent crime; they cause it, through the ongoing, violent disruption of our communities.

It's also worth noting that most social service agencies and organizations that could serve as alternatives to the police are underfunded, scrambling for grant money to stay alive while being forced to interact with officers who often make their jobs even harder. In 2016, the Minneapolis Police Department received \$165 million in city funding alone. Imagine what that kind of money could do to keep our communities safe if it was reinvested.

Even people who support the police agree: we ask cops to solve too many of our problems. As former Dallas Police Chief David Brown said: "We're asking cops to do too much in this country... Every societal failure, we put it off on the cops to solve. Not enough mental health funding, let the cops handle it... Here in Dallas we got a loose dog problem; let's have the cops chase loose dogs. Schools fail, let's give it to the cops... That's too much to ask. Policing was never meant to solve all those problems."

What about body cameras? What about civilian review boards, implicit bias training, and community policing initiatives?

Video footage (whether from body cameras or other sources) wasn't enough to get justice for Philando Castile, Samuel DuBose, Walter Scott, Tamir Rice, and far too many other victims of police violence. A single implicit bias training session can't overcome decades of conditioning and department culture. Other reforms, while often noble in intention, simply do not do enough to get to the root of the issue.

History is a useful guide here: community groups in the 1960s also demanded civilian review boards, better training, and community policing initiatives. Some of these demands were even met. But universally, they were either ineffective, or dismantled by the police department over time. Recent reforms are already being co-opted and destroyed: just look at how many officers are wearing body cameras that are never turned on, or how quickly Jeff Sessions' Justice Department has moved to end consent decrees. We have half a century's worth of evidence that reforms can't work. It's time for something new.

This all sounds good in theory, but wouldn't it be impossible to do?

Throughout US history, everyday people have regularly accomplished "impossible" things, from the abolition of slavery, to voting rights, to the 40-hour workweek, and more. What's really impossible is the idea that the police departments can be reformed against their will to protect and serve communities whom they have always attacked. The police, as an institution around the world, have existed for less than 200 years— less time than chattel slavery existed in the Americas. Abolishing the police doesn't need to be difficult— we can do it in our own cities, one dollar at a time, through redirecting budgets to common-sense alternative programs. Let's get to work!

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