**Violence Media Mentions**

### *Intimate partner violence (IPV) and family dispute resolution: A randomized controlled trial comparing shuttle mediation, videoconferencing mediation, and litigation. (Jennifer Shack).*

In a randomized controlled trial of family cases involving parents reporting high levels of intimate partner violence (IPV), parents felt safer in and were more satisfied with shuttle and videoconference mediation than litigation. Importantly, they also indicated a preference of shuttle mediation over videoconference mediation. The study, conducted in Washington, DC, by Amy Holtzworth-Munroe, et al., is discussed in their article “Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) and Family Dispute Resolution: A Randomized Controlled Trial Comparing Shuttle Mediation, Videoconferencing Mediation, and Litigation” (Psychology, Public Policy, and Law, February 2021).

For the study, the researchers compared traditional litigation (n = 67 cases), the process used for all cases prior to the study, to shuttle mediation (n = 64 cases) and videoconference mediation (n= 65 cases), two approaches designed to protect parent safety. All parents referred to mediation by the court were first screened for IPV by specially trained Dispute Resolution Specialists (DRSs). Based on the screening, the DRSs identified cases as being potentially eligible for the study if the IPV reported by either or both parents was at a level that the case was considered inappropriate for joint mediation. Cases were considered ineligible if: the case involved an open child abuse case or required other emergency interventions due to immediate danger; a parent lived too far away to participate in mediation in person, was deemed incompetent for mediation (e.g., acutely psychotic), was incarcerated or had a pending criminal case that would interfere; or the parents were in a same-sex relationship (pilot work revealed that there were too few same-sex cases for study purposes). Eligible parents were then randomly assigned to one of the three groups.

Mediators were trained in both shuttle mediation and video mediation and were assigned to both types of mediation. In both shuttle and videoconferencing mediation, parents were in different rooms in the same building but not near one another. In shuttle mediation, the mediator met in person with each parent separately and shuttled back and forth between rooms. The parents never saw or spoke directly to each other; all communications were through the mediator. Mediators assigned to shuttle mediation had no discretion to change the process format.

In videoconferencing mediation, the mediator was in a third room. Both parents and the mediator had access to a web camera and a computer screen and could see and hear each other on the screen. The mediators took regular breaks to check to see if each parent was comfortable with continuing with the three-way videoconference or if they wanted to move to either only audio (with other parent and mediator) or to communicate individually by video with the mediator. Mediators could make such changes if concerned about parent safety or emotional wellbeing, and parents could turn off the video equipment in their rooms at any point.

Mediator Assessment of the Approaches

In 41.3% of videoconferencing cases, mediators said they had private, in-person meetings with one or both parents. Mediators were most likely to hold such meetings to get forms (e.g., agreement to mediate) signed by the parents. In 71.7% of videoconferencing cases, mediators reported holding private, individual video meetings with one or both. Mediators reported that these meetings took place to help the mediation process (e.g., when a parent was behaving inappropriately) or to help parents process what was happening.

Immediately after mediation, the mediators were asked to complete a survey. They were asked their perceptions of the mediation in terms of their own and each party’s safety, their own and each party’s comfort, about their feelings of safety and comfort as well as their perception of each parent’s safety and comfort and their perception of the appropriateness of the process used for that case. Mediators felt equally safe in both mediation approaches and perceived both as being similarly safe for mothers and fathers. They had similar perceptions about comfort in mediation, although they indicated feeling more comfortable and satisfied in shuttle mediation as compared to videoconferencing.

In 90% of cases, mediators believed shuttle mediation was appropriate for the case. This was significantly lower for videoconference mediation, which they said was appropriate in 78% of cases. Mediators also were significantly more likely to say that cases in videoconference mediations should have been handled with a different approach than that cases in shuttle mediation should have been handled differently (58% vs. 35%). Unsurprisingly, the mediators believed mediation had a greater effect on the parents’ ability to reach agreement when they conducted shuttle mediation than when they conducted videoconference mediation.

Parent Assessment of the Approaches

Parents were asked to assess the process in which they participated immediately after conclusion, including traditional litigation. Parents felt safer and less fearful in mediation than in traditional litigation, with no difference between the two mediation approaches. Parents in mediation were also more satisfied with the process than parents in traditional litigation, again with no difference between the two mediation approaches. Asked whether they believed the process used for their case was appropriate for their case, parents in mediation were significantly more likely to agree than were parents who participated in traditional litigation (87% vs. 76%). As with safety and satisfaction, parent perception of appropriateness of videoconferencing and shuttle mediation did not differ significantly. A similar pattern was found in their response to nine questions that assessd the positive effects of the process, such as feeling heard, able to express feelings efficiency, fairness, parents being held accountable.

Interestingly, there were no differences in parents’ satisfaction with the outcome or whether the process was helpful in resolving the issues among the three approaches. However, among those who reached a final resolution, parents who mediated using either approach were more likely to believe that the parents would follow the resolution terms than those who went through the traditional court process. There was no difference in parents’ responses between the two mediated approaches.

Outcomes and Time

Videoconferenced cases were half as likely to reach agreement as cases in shuttle mediation (43% vs. 22%). Through coding the content of the document that resolved case issues (i.e., the mediated agreement or the court order), the researchers found no statistically significant group differences in legal custody, physical custody, or parenting time arrangements and few differences in the likelihood of the document specifying a variety of arrangements (e.g., how to handle missed parenting time) or including safety provisions (e.g., supervised child exchanges).

However, there were statistically significant differences across groups for some specifications in the resolution document that might help decrease risk of violence. These differences indicate that mediation might result in more details regarding issues related to possible safety. Specifically, final documents for cases that had mediation were more likely than final documents for cases in traditional litigation to: address interparental communication at all (56 vs. 31%); agree to limit interparental disputes in the children’s presence (44% for mediation vs. 14%); include aspirational language about interparental communication (e.g., parents will try to have civil discussions; 38% vs. 8%); and agree to limit parents’ passing of messages to one another through the child (35% vs. 10%).

The researchers found that mediated cases also fared well in terms of the time needed to resolve a case. Cases that went through the traditional process took 3 times as long to reach final resolution as mediation cases.

Conclusion

The researchers conclude that “in cases with parents reporting concerning levels of IPV, when both parents are independently willing to mediate, mediation designed with strong safety protocols and carried out in a protected environment by well-trained staff may be an appropriate alternative to court.” (Taken from the article abstract.) They state that their findings do not definitively favor either shuttle or videoconference mediation. However, they note there are suggestions in the data that shuttle mediation might be preferable, as it was more likely to lead to agreement and mediators seemed to prefer it. They suggest that as COVID has put restrictions on in-person processes, future researchers could examine shuttle mediation via video technology. In the meantime, “longer term outcomes and additional research are needed to more clearly understand if videoconferencing mediation, as structured in this study, is as safe and appropriate as shuttle mediation for cases reporting high levels of IPV.”

### *Threat assessment as a school violence prevention strategy, Cornell, Dewey G*

What to Do About School Threats. (https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/checkpoints/202112/what-do-about-school-threats)

KEY POINTS

* Threats of violence at schools require serious attention.
* Mental health care for youth has been seriously neglected.
* A one-size-fits-all harsh legal response to all threats may cause more harm than good.

Following the horrific 2018 Marjory Stoneman Douglas shooting in Parkland, Florida, schools, police, and policymakers were desperate to prevent similar events from happening in the future. Prevention focused on the issue of school threats and the need to take them seriously. But we must balance taking threats seriously without imposing draconian penalties on youth or young adults who have mental health issues or who make a mistake.

Balancing Legal Response to Threats

In Florida, it is a second-degree felony for someone to send or make a threat, whether written or on social media, anonymous or otherwise. A recent spate of school threats made by minors in Florida raises serious concerns. On one hand, these threats absolutely need to be taken seriously and to be investigated by school officials and police officers. On the other hand, the harsh legal penalties currently imposed for such behaviors are likely to destroy the lives of some minors who were never serious threats or would have benefited from mental health care. Attendant news coverage, particularly if an offender’s name is released (though they are often withheld for juveniles) can result in public shaming that may be impossible to recover from.

Kids make threats for a variety of reasons. Obviously, the most worrying are those who seriously intend to carry out the threat. Individuals who commit serious incidents of school violence may have chronic mental health problems, come from difficult homes, have a history of anger problems, and see themselves as victimized by others. These are just general findings—not a definitive “profile.” Just as many people who fit this pattern never commit acts of violence, it’s important not to dismiss a threat because someone doesn’t fit this profile.

Other kids may have no intention of carrying out a threat. Some kids may think it’s a “prank,” may be motivated by resentment toward their school, or may have poor impulse control. Still others may make a threat in the heat of an argument; the proverbial “I’m gonna kill you” said on schoolyards across the world for generations is only now locked into social media as undeniable evidence.

Dismissing threats as “kids being kids” is definitely a bad idea, as this obviously risks missing a serious incident. But bringing the hammer of a felony charge down on kids regardless of intent or circumstance is likely to cause great harm as well. The United States already has a widespread problem with mass incarceration and draconian punishments. Adding to this isn’t going to help. In many cases, identifying the source of a youth’s motivation, focusing on mental health rather than incarceration, providing resources for a struggling youth and family, and supportive monitoring while keeping a child in school can deflect potential violence. An initiative of Miami-Dade’s Threat Management Section appears promising in this regard. The unit removes firearms from the possession of individuals making threats but also fosters relationships with them, helping them gain access to social and mental health services, often without making arrests.

Underinvestment in Mental Health

A large part of our problem is our underinvestment in mental health. In the case of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas shooting, the perpetrator was well-known to have mental health problems. The schools and mental health professionals struggled to know how best to serve him while keeping the community safe. It may be time to reconsider the need for state-funded, humane, long-term inpatient care with clear due process procedures so that we don’t return to the abusive asylums of the past. This will require funding and a lot of human rights oversight but may nonetheless be more fruitful in helping truly ill individuals than employing the criminal justice system as a crude instrument.

I applaud efforts by the state to take school threats seriously. Yet there is a difference between taking each school threat seriously and treating each school threat as serious. With a renewed focus on mental health care and social services for all but the most dangerous offenders, we can avert tragedies without shattering salvageable lives.

A Florida School Received a Threat. Did a Red Flag Law Prevent a Shooting?, Sheryl Gay Stolberg. (<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/16/us/politics/red-flag-laws-mass-shootings.html>)

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. — Seagull Alternative High School sits behind locked gates and a chain-link fence, a complex of low-slung buildings that provides an academic home for pregnant teenagers and students at risk of dropping out. On a Tuesday in early October, it was a target of the kind of threat that every school official dreads.

“I just might come to yo school and kill everybody,” a 17-year-old who had previously attended the school wrote in an Instagram message to a student, according to police records. He singled out the principal and a behavioral specialist and sent a chilling photograph: a handgun and an assault rifle, splayed out on a bed, with Seagull Alternative High School written across the top of the image.

Informed of the threat, law enforcement officials in Fort Lauderdale moved quickly. Making use of Florida’s so-called red flag law, the police obtained an order from a judge allowing them to remove any guns in the young man’s possession.

Gun safety activists and public health experts say that such orders — often known as extreme risk protection orders, or ERPOs — are a way to prevent mass shootings in a country that has been plagued by them. Nineteen states and the District of Columbia now have red flag laws, up from just two states a decade ago.

Advocates are pressing for more states — including Michigan and Minnesota, where Democrats recently took control of state legislatures — to pass them this year. Only two states controlled by Republicans, Florida and Indiana, have such laws.

A brick-red metal awning runs the length of the flat-roofed single-story building housing the club. A line of mountains marks the horizon under a hazy blue sky. A large tree, bare of leaves, stands in the foreground with a length of yellow police-line tape tied to its trunk.

The massacre at a Buffalo supermarket raised questions about why the suspect had not been subject to a red flag order. Such orders are most widely used in New York in Suffolk County.

Gun rights groups argue that the laws violate due process — the right to have one’s case heard in court. Erich Pratt, the senior vice president of Gun Owners of America, said the laws “don’t work,” citing back-to-back mass shootings in November in Colorado, which adopted a red flag law in 2019, and Virginia, which did so in 2020.

But a growing body of public health research suggests that the laws may prevent gun violence at least some of the time. A recent six-state study of more than 6,700 ERPO cases found that nearly 10 percent involved threats to kill at least three people.

Indeed, backers say the laws are not being used aggressively enough because law enforcement agencies lack the training or bandwidth to pursue court orders, and many people do not know the laws exist. Congress, recognizing these problems, passed bipartisan legislation last year that provides $750 million for state crisis intervention programs, including red flag laws.

“People are quick to say, ‘You have this tool, you didn’t use it, what went wrong here?’” said Lisa Geller, a researcher at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health who studies policies to reduce gun violence. “Yes, these incidents still happen. But states are using their ERPO laws in ways that you wouldn’t know about because the shooting never happened.”

There was no shooting at Seagull Alternative High School. The threat and the resulting risk protection order against the former student offer a case study in how such orders work — and why some judges and law enforcement officers are uneasy about them, especially when they involve juveniles.

A Tip From a Student

The investigation in Fort Lauderdale began when a female student alerted a school police officer, who called Detective Cody Campbell, a member of the Fort Lauderdale Police Department’s six-person threat response unit.

Within hours, Detective Campbell said in an interview, he, the former student and the former student’s mother were meeting in a shopping mall parking lot. The detective wanted the young man’s phone and the mother’s help so he could confirm whether her son had weapons. The mother refused, he said: “There wasn’t a lot of cooperation.”

Florida enacted its red flag law in response to the 2018 mass shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, a suburb of Fort Lauderdale.Credit...Saul Martinez for The New York Times

In a brief telephone interview, a woman who identified herself as the teenager’s mother declined to comment.

It was a long night for Detective Campbell. “We burned the midnight oil,” he said, drafting paperwork asking a court to issue a risk protection order, as well as warrants for Instagram and the young man’s wireless phone provider and to search his home.

The requests were granted. But the results of the search were not what the detective expected.

Memories of Parkland

Nationally, more than 20,000 petitions for extreme risk protection orders were filed from 1999 to 2021, according to data collected by Everytown for Gun Safety, an advocacy group. A vast majority of those petitions — more than 18,600 — were filed after the 2018 massacre at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, a Fort Lauderdale suburb.

Florida — a state controlled by Republicans, who have traditionally been loath to impose restrictions on gun ownership — enacted its red flag law in response to that shooting. Its courts handled more than 8,100 petitions for risk protection orders from 2018 to 2021, according to Everytown.

In Fort Lauderdale, the memory of Parkland is strong.

Detective Chris Carita, who has a master’s degree in public health from Johns Hopkins, trains fellow officers in how to use the state’s red flag law. On a recent Wednesday, he could be found in a bare-bones classroom with seven new officers.

“Law enforcement is a gun culture; the thought of taking someone’s firearms away may not sit well with us, right?” he told them. “That really is a problem for some of us, and so it’s important to understand the legal framework for these laws so that you can be comfortable and understand why it’s being used and how it’s being used.”

There are roughly 17,500 state and local law enforcement agencies in the United States; about 85 percent of them have fewer than 50 full-time officers. Many are unable to provide the kind of training available in Fort Lauderdale, said Chuck Wexler, the executive director of the Police Executive Research Forum, a nonprofit in Washington.

Even in bigger police departments, getting officers accustomed to using the orders can be a challenge. In Fairfax County, Va., Chief Kevin Davis has assigned a single officer to manage all emergency substantial risk orders, as they are called in that state. His department obtained 11 orders in 2020 and 26 in 2021. Last year, the number jumped to 80.

Red flag laws are not only used to thwart criminal activity; often, they are directed at someone who is in a mental health crisis or contemplating suicide. Some states allow family members to seek the orders. Two state lawmakers are pressing legislation to permit that in Florida as well.

In two oft-cited papers that helped make the case for the laws, Jeffrey W. Swanson, a professor in psychiatry and behavioral sciences at Duke University, studied their effects on suicides in the first two states to adopt them: Connecticut and Indiana. He calculated that for every 10 to 20 people who had guns taken away, one life was saved.

The six-state study found that of the extreme risk protection order cases related to threats to shoot three or more people, about half involved the kinds of “public mass shootings that we all fear,” said the lead researcher, April M. Zeoli of the University of Michigan’s Institute for Firearm Injury Prevention. K-12 schools and businesses were the most common targets for those large-scale threats.

“The big conclusion is that these really are being used in cases of multiple-victim mass shooting threats,” Dr. Zeoli said. “And these threats are largely determined to be credible by judges.”

Experts say it is extremely difficult to predict who will carry out a school shooting. But if there is a profile, the teenager in Fort Lauderdale seemed to fit it; past school shootings have often been committed by young men, including teenagers, who have signaled their intentions.

A Search for Guns

It took less than a day for the Fort Lauderdale police, working with the department’s legal adviser, to build a case for a risk protection order in response to the threat against Seagull Alternative High School.

In an affidavit supporting their petition to the court, Detective Campbell wrote that the young man had told the female student over Instagram that he would “kill the principal y he walking to his car.”

A background check, the detective wrote, revealed that the former student was facing 13 felony and two misdemeanor charges, including robbery, carjacking and battery, stemming from previous episodes. He had also received a diagnosis of schizoaffective disorder, a condition in which patients experience psychotic symptoms, including hallucinations and delusions.

Experts say that only a small percentage of people with mental illness are violent. But the young man had been involuntarily detained eight times for psychiatric evaluation since 2020. In one previous interaction with the police, he said he was “tired of the world and wants to kill everyone,” the detective wrote.

Extreme risk protection orders are civil and carry no criminal penalties; as a result, the young man was not entitled to a public defender. That troubles Chief Judge Jack Tuter of Florida’s 17th Judicial Circuit, which includes Fort Lauderdale. While he said he supported the state’s red flag law, Judge Tuter, who was not involved in the young man’s case, said he was concerned about people under 18 who lack legal representation.

“There is a due process aspect to juveniles — there always has been,” he said.

With the risk protection order and a search warrant in hand, the entire threat response team, along with a backup crew, parked themselves near the former student’s home. Hoping to avoid a confrontation at the front door, the officers watched him leave the house and served him the warrant during a traffic stop.

What they found when they searched the home surprised them. There were no guns. Detectives Carita and Campbell said they believed, but could not be certain, that the young man — aware that he was being watched — stashed the weapons that had appeared in the Instagram picture elsewhere.

That, however, is not the end of the story.

At the end of November, Detective Campbell was called to the teenager’s home to respond to an episode in which the young man “was alleged to have discharged a firearm multiple times, with one round ultimately striking his sister in the hand,” according to a police report.

After being informed of his right to remain silent, the report said, the teenager admitted to owning and firing the gun that police recovered at the time of the shooting. He was arrested, charged with violating his risk protection order and transported to a juvenile assessment center. The police said that a criminal investigation was active, and they would not comment on how or when the young man obtained the gun.

To Judge Tuter, that turn of events raises questions.

“What good did the risk protection order do,” he said, “if at the end of the day, he ended up getting a gun, which he was prohibited from doing; he ended up getting ammunition, which he was prohibited from doing; and he ended up using the gun?”

The police, however, are convinced that they prevented a mass tragedy that would have been perpetrated by an unstable young man who had a violent past, made a specific threat to kill school officials and students, and apparently had the means to carry it out.

“Based on his history, his posts and subsequent events, it’s very obvious that he is capable of violence,” Detective Campbell said. “When a person like that makes those kinds of statements, you have to take it very seriously.”

### *Assessing Implementation and Effects Associated with a Comprehensive Framework Designed to Reduce School Violence: A Randomized Controlled Trial Dymnicki, Allison B.*

With school shootings at record high, new grant aims to STOP violence in 40 Colorado schools, Lisa Marshall. (https://www.colorado.edu/today/2022/11/07/school-shootings-record-high-new-grant-aims-curb-violence-colorado-schools)

School shootings have already reached a record single-year high in 2022, with 40 in the United States as of Oct. 30, killing 34 people and injuring 88.

Meanwhile, other types of violence, including bullying and youth gun violence, are also on the rise, as lingering post-pandemic mental health issues stress already under-resourced school systems.

With a new $2 million grant from the Bureau of Justice Assistance, the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence (CSPV) at CU Boulder aims to help 40 Colorado schools get a handle on the crisis, by tackling the social and cultural roots of violence, long before anyone gets hurt.

The new grant is the latest of $100 million in anti-violence grants the research center has received in its history. It celebrates its 30-year anniversary this month.

“We’re hearing from many different schools and seasoned school safety practitioners that this is one of the hardest years they have ever experienced,” said CSPV Director Beverly Kingston. “These kids have missed a lot of school at really critical developmental times, and the mental health needs are unprecedented. Yet a lot of schools are having a hard time finding staff, much less worrying about school safety.”

The 3-year STOP School Violence Grant will allow the center to help 40 schools implement its Safe Communities Safe Schools (SCSS) program, a research-based initiative launched shortly after the 1999 Columbine High School shooting.

While discussions after a school shooting tragedy often center around gun policy or law enforcement response, the program takes a quieter approach, focusing on upstream solutions to prevent and avert violence.

Among other things, it helps K-12 schools to assess and improve their mental health climate, be sure they have a system in place for students and teachers to report when someone is struggling and establish systems to assure those reports are acted upon.

“We’re basically taking all that we know from decades of research to be effective and providing it to schools to help them be safer,” said Kingston.

Student and staff surveys are used to determine things like: how prevalent bullying is; how common depression and anxiety are; whether the school has mental health resources in place and students know how to access them; and whether the school has or publicizes a bystander reporting system.

Then program administrators help the school put together an action plan to emphasize their strong points and strengthen weak ones. They also provide training and some technical assistance.

“We would never approach a school and say, ‘this is what you need to do’,” said Amanda Matthews, implementation manager for the program. “This is a collaborative effort where schools are in the driver’s seat.”

Using previous grants, SCSS has already helped hundreds of schools, documenting what they learned from 46 of them in a recent research paper.

At one school, Matthews recalls, student surveys revealed the school had a serious bullying problem. SCSS connected them with a bullying prevention program which, according to follow-up data, made a huge difference in the school climate.

In another instance, the school realized that staff didn’t know what to do if they noticed that a youth was in crisis.

“Staff would stop the counselor in the hallway or send an email or text asking them to check on a student. There was no consistency once they referred a student so there was a lack of confidence in the system,” said Matthews.

Using the SCSS model, the team was able to establish a system and processes for managing mental health referrals.

At schools that lack staffing or resources to address school safety, the program helps them identify steps they can take with the resources they have, or secure funding to do more.

“Schools have so many competing priorities and so little time,” said Matthews. “What we can do is come in and provide time and space and training so they can have these intentional conversations.”

In recent months the center has also received a $6 million grant from the Centers for Disease Control to address youth community violence and a $1.2 million grant to boost education and awareness around violence on the CU Boulder campus.

“Violence may be increasing but we have solutions,” said Kingston. “These projects are about us coming together to implement a comprehensive public health approach and to stand bigger than violence.”

### *THINKING, FAST AND SLOW? SOME FIELD EXPERIMENTS TO REDUCE CRIME AND DROPOUT IN CHICAGO, Heller, Sara B.*

Study after study shows ex-prisoners would be better off without intense supervision. Jennifer L. Doleac. (<https://www.brookings.edu/articles/study-after-study-shows-ex-prisoners-would-be-better-off-without-intense-supervision/>)

Two-thirds of those released from prison are re-arrested within three years. This incarceration cycle hurts families and communities—and also costs a lot of money. Governments and nonprofits have tried many programs to reduce recidivism, but most are not successful. In a recent review of the literature on prisoner reentry, I summarized the best evidence on how to improve the lives of the formerly incarcerated. One of the most striking findings was that reducing the intensity of community supervision for those on probation or parole is a highly cost-effective strategy. Several studies of excellent quality and using a variety of interventions and methods all found that we could maintain public safety and possibly even improve it with less supervision—that is, fewer rules about how individuals must spend their time and less enforcement of those rules. Less supervision is less expensive, so we could achieve the same or better outcomes for less money.

For instance, Hennigan, et al. (2010), measured the effects of intensive supervision using a randomized controlled trial (RCT) in Los Angeles. Juveniles sentenced to probation were randomly assigned to intensive supervision—in the form of a community-based after-school program—or standard probation. Five years later, there were no significant differences in outcomes between the treatment and control groups, with one exception: Low-risk boys (ages 15 or younger) who were randomized to intensive supervision were worse off. Intensive supervision for that group led to more incarceration and a higher likelihood of continued criminal justice involvement in the years ahead. That is, intensive supervision increased criminal activity by this group, without reducing criminal activity by other groups.

Barnes, et al. (2012) used an RCT to study supervision levels in Philadelphia. Low-risk probationers were randomized to probation as usual or low-intensity supervision by parole officers with high caseloads (which forced them to pay less attention to each individual case). Less supervision means probationers may be less likely to get caught for technical violations, such as using drugs or breaking curfew. But these requirements of probation are a means to an end: what really matters for public safety is the number of new offenses committed. Eighteen months after randomization, there were no significant differences between the treatment and control groups in the likelihood of being charged for a new offense. In other words, low-intensity supervision did not result in more recidivism.

Boyle, et al. (2013) evaluated the effects of Day Reporting Centers (DRC) using an RCT in New Jersey. High-risk parolees were randomly assigned to either a DRC or parole supervision as usual. Those assigned to a DRC were required to attend programming at the DRC every weekday and submit to regular drug testing. The hope was that reporting to the DRC until they had something else to do during the day (work or school) would keep parolees out of trouble. The DRC provided a variety of services designed to facilitate successful reentry. Nonetheless, those assigned to a DRC instead of regular parole were actually more likely to be convicted for a new offense in the 6 months after their release. After 18 months there was no significant difference in recidivism between the treatment and control groups. Those at the DRC did not do better than those on standard parole, despite the many services available. The authors hypothesize that being required to spend weekdays with other recently-released offenders may impose negative peer effects that are actively counterproductive.

Georgiou (2014) used a natural experiment to measure the effects of supervision levels for parolees in Washington state. Before release, inmates are assigned risk scores, and those risk scores correspond to risk categories that determine the level of supervision they receive: for instance, scores of 1-5 might be “low risk” while 6-10 is “moderate risk” and 11-15 is “high risk.” Two individuals with similar risk scores might receive very different levels of supervision if their scores are on either side of a risk category cutoff —in this example, 5 vs. 6 or 10 vs. 11. Georgiou confirmed that in this dataset, when an offender has a risk score just over a cutoff, this caused a big increase in the hours of supervision they received. If intensity of supervision matters, then this big difference in supervision levels should affect recidivism. However, those big increases in supervision did not have any effect on the likelihood of a new conviction during the three years after release, at any of the risk thresholds examined.

Finally, Hyatt and Barnes (2017) examined the effectiveness of intensive supervision using a particularly impressive RCT in Philadelphia. High-risk probationers were randomly assigned “moderate risk” or “high risk” labels that determined the actual level of supervision they received. That is, their label did not correspond at all to their actual risk level. Neither the probation officers or the offenders knew about this experiment; they interpreted the labels as valid. One year after assignment, there was no significant difference between the two groups in new charges or days incarcerated. Those assigned to intensive supervision did have more technical violations, evidence that that they were caught breaking rules that were supposed to keep them out of trouble. But those rules, and the intensive supervision to enforce them, produced no public safety benefit to community members.

These studies show that current efforts to reduce recidivism through intensive supervision are not working. Why is intensive supervision so ineffective? Requiring lots of meetings, drug tests, and so on can complicate a client’s life, making it more difficult to get to work or school or care for family members (meetings are often scheduled at inconvenient times and may be far away). A heavy tether to the criminal justice system can also make it difficult for individuals to move on, psychologically. Knowing that society still considers you a criminal may make it harder to move past that phase of your life. These difficulties may negate the valuable support that probation and parole officers can provide by connecting clients to services and stepping in to help at the first sign of trouble.

It is unclear what the optimal level of supervision is for those on parole or probation, but these studies demonstrate that current supervision levels are too high. We could reduce the requirements of community supervision—for low-risk and high-risk offenders alike—and spend those taxpayer dollars on more valuable services, such as substance abuse treatment or cognitive behavioral therapy. This would be a good first step toward breaking the vicious incarceration cycle.

Gun Regulation Is Costly—and Not the Only Option, Jennifer Doleac. (<https://www.theregreview.org/2018/11/09/gun-regulation-costly-not-only-option/>)

Policymakers should deploy strategies beyond regulation to reduce gun-related harm.

Every mass shooting in the United States generates fresh calls to restrict access to guns, under the theory that fewer guns mean fewer shootings. But if the goal is to reduce gun fatalities, gun regulations are not the only option. In fact, the fight over gun control is distracting policymakers from opportunities to save more lives by other means.

Calls for stronger gun regulations are based on the belief that gun ownership leads to more deaths, through a combination of escalating violent conflicts—for example, what was just a bar fight is now a shooting—accidental shootings, and suicides. (A striking 62 percent of gun deaths in the United States are due to suicide.) Proponents of meaningful gun control say that these deaths outweigh any deterrent effect that gun possession may have.

There is solid evidence supporting this claim. For instance, the school shooting at Sandy Hook resulted in a spike in gun purchases, perhaps because people feared being the victim of a violent crime themselves. That spike in purchases led to spikes in homicides and accidental deaths. The death toll due to the subsequent spike in gun purchases was larger than the initial toll of the Sandy Hook shooting itself.

It would seem, then, that government regulations could engineer a drop in gun ownership, which would lead to a drop in homicides and accidental deaths. But this is easier said than done.

Government regulations are not always successful at changing behavior. It may be that those who want guns—particularly those who want guns for nefarious purposes—will find a way to obtain them, even if doing so means skirting the law. In other words, it is unclear how much gun possession falls in response to stricter gun regulations. It is even less clear whether any changes in gun possession result in a change in public safety.

There is a long, contentious academic literature on this topic. Many smart people have spent decades debating methods and data sources to consider the effects of a wide variety of regulations.

Some regulations do seem promising: For instance, mandatory waiting periods for handgun purchases reduce suicide rates by 5 percent, and surveys suggest that child access prevention laws improve school safety by holding gun owners accountable if a minor is found in possession of their guns. A recent study found that right-to-carry laws increase homicides by 4 to 6 percent, suggesting that repealing such laws might reverse this effect.

But, in general, the effect of gun regulations on public safety is less clear than many advocates on either side think, in part because gun law changes are typically heavily tethered to public opinion.

These are not laws that slip through the legislature unnoticed. These laws therefore do not offer good natural experiments to estimate their effects. It is difficult to disentangle the effects of gun laws from the effects of a community’s feelings about guns, from a community’s motivation to reduce gun violence, or from an increase in gun purchases that often comes before the laws take effect.

But let us assume for the sake of discussion that gun regulations would meaningfully reduce mortality. Pursuing regulations has opportunity costs: The significant time and money required to pass gun regulations—not to mention the time and money needed to enforce such laws through policing and incarceration—could be spent advocating for and implementing other programs. Are there other life-saving programs more deserving of these resources?

Several programs are at least worthy of consideration. Summer jobs programs for teens reduce mortality by 18 to 20 percent among participants. This effect is driven by a reduction in young men killed by homicide or suicide. Cognitive behavioral therapy for at-risk young men lowers violent crime arrests by 45 to 50 percent for participants. Access to Medicaid in early childhood decreases suicide by 10 to 15 percent later in life. Mandating that health insurance cover mental health benefits at parity reduces the suicide rate by 5 percent. Access to antidepressants also reduces suicide rates: An increase in antidepressant sales equivalent to one pill per capita reduced suicide by 5 percent.

In addition, repealing duty-to-warn laws for mental health providers—which require that they report a patient’s violent threats, perhaps causing patients to be less honest—could reduce teen suicides by 8 percent and decrease homicides by 5 percent. Repealing juvenile curfews could lower urban gunfire by two-thirds. And if the goal is to reduce mortality in general—not just gun deaths—then there are many more options policymakers should consider.

Some people will argue that policymakers can and should pursue all of these policy options—that pursuing gun control does not mean advocates cannot also lobby for summer jobs and mental health care—which may be true.

But the fact is that there is, right now, a tremendous amount of lobbying money and energy being expended both for and against gun regulation, and almost none on summer jobs programs or cognitive behavioral therapy. In the war over gun deaths, vast armies have gathered to contest gun regulations, a territory of uncertain value. Meanwhile, other zones of clear value are available and virtually unguarded.

Why are policymakers not seizing them?

Learning to cooperate and a culture of honor, Karla Hoff. ([https://www.brookings.edu/articles/learning-to-cooperate-and-a-culture-of-honor](https://www.brookings.edu/articles/learning-to-cooperate-and-a-culture-of-honor/))

Traditional economics assumes that culture does not affect economic behavior. Even behavioral economists generally assume that the biases in judgment and decisionmaking identified in experiments with U.S. subjects are universal among homo sapiens. But in the last three decades, first psychologists and then economists have found systematic differences across cultures in the way otherwise similar individuals respond to the same situation. “People think and feel and act in culture-specific ways,” the sociologist Paul DiMaggio and the psychologist Hazel Markus argue. One new research program seeks to discover cases in which features of human behavior that were thought to be universal are culturally specific.

A prior finding in economics is that pairs of individuals who interact repeatedly will almost surely coordinate on an efficient and cooperative equilibrium. However, all the participants in the experiments were U.S. university students.

In 10 villages in Uttar Pradesh, India, we conducted a similar experiment with 122 high- and low-caste men to shed light on how culture affects the ability of people to form efficient conventions. Our findings, supplemented by ethnographic evidence, suggest that there are cultural differences in whether a coordination game loss that is caused by another’s action is perceived as an insult to which one should retaliate.

What happens when high- and low-caste men play a coordination game of common interest?

Our team described the coordination game (the Stag Hunt) to participants in this way: You can choose to make either a larger or a smaller investment in a joint project. Making the larger investment yields a high return if the other player also makes the larger investment, but you will lose money (half of your endowment for the period) if the other player makes the smaller investment. Making the smaller investment yields a low return to the investor no matter what the other player does.

The game presents a very simple problem of learning how to cooperate: The players have common interests. Both will want to make the larger investment as long as they believe that their partner will also make the larger investment. Will they come to believe that?

Uttar Pradesh is a good place to study the effects of culture on convention formation because people from two broad cultures—high and low castes—live in the same villages; and the villages, which are dominated by the high castes, have remarkably inefficient conventions. Jean Dreze and colleagues describe the situation as political and social inertia. Villagers do not coordinate on tasks of common interest, such as sanitation, timing planting to maximize output, and draining household wastewater to keep dirt paths dry and safely passable.

But the disadvantage of using high and low castes to study the impact of culture is that the two groups differ in many ways besides culture—in particular, in wealth, education, and political power. We control for wealth and as many other differences as we can. In India, there are high-caste households that are poor and low-caste households that are well-off.

From each of 10 villages, we recruited representative samples of men from high (General) and low (Scheduled) castes. Each subject played five rounds of the Stag Hunt with an anonymous player of the same caste status, and another five rounds with a player of different caste status. We randomized the order.

What did we see?

Only in the low castes did most pairs of men quickly form a cooperative convention—see Panel A of the figure. In the fifth period, two-thirds of low-caste pairs (LL) were cooperating, and in the tenth period, 80 percent were.

In contrast, most high-caste pairs (HH) did not form a cooperative convention and there was no trend in outcomes of fixed pairs either over periods 1-5 or periods 6-10. In period 5, fewer than one-fifth of HH pairs were cooperating. In period 10, under one-half were cooperating. The remaining pairs were either in coordination failure or were making the smaller investment. The non-cooperative convention appears to have emerged in one-third of the HH pairs by period 10 (see Panel B).

Recall that the observations in panels A and B are for distinct groups of players: participants in the HH or LL pairs in period 1-5 were not in such pairs in period 6-10.

What is interesting to note is that high- and low-caste players behaved in very similar ways in all periods except (1) the first period (when the proportion who made the larger investment was 68 percent for low-caste, compared to 53 percent for high-caste participants) and (2) the period after a player incurred a loss from a coordination failure. Why the difference in response to a loss? The high- and low-caste players appear to interpret the loss differently or, if they interpret it in the same way, to differ in their preference for retaliation. Since the loss would have been avoided if the other player had cooperated, it could be categorized as an insult, for which the culturally appropriate response for a high-caste man is retaliation.

Is retaliating a luxury, so that only the better off do it? Can one explain why the high-caste retaliate more by their having greater average wealth? The answer is no. When we restrict the sample to the poorest players—those who live in thatched mud huts—the gap between high and low castes is larger. Among players who live in mud huts, the probability of continuing in the next period to make the larger investment after incurring a loss is 72 percentage points lower in HH than LL pairs. But among players who do not live in mud huts, the probability is only 38 percentage points lower in HH than LL pairs. Viewing retaliation as a luxury, or as an expression of feelings of entitlement of the rich, cannot explain why high-caste participants disproportionately retaliate.

To study cultural norms for retaliation, we implemented a vignette-based survey in 22 hamlets. We presented individuals with hypothetical scenarios in which one person harms another. We asked each person in the sample how he would respond to the harm. In cases in which the motivation behind the harm was ambiguous, a much larger proportion of high-caste than low-caste respondents said they would retaliate aggressively. Typical comments were, “I would do tit for tat, otherwise people will think I am weak” and “it is wrong to cause a loss.”

In a culture of honor, “honor” is synonymous with a reputation for responding aggressively to perceived offenses. This reputation, it is believed, deters others from challenging one’s authority or position.

What you see depends on what ideas are most accessible

Construal—the way a person understands the world or a particular situation—is an underutilized concept in explaining economic behavior. Individuals don’t respond to objective situations; they respond to situations as they perceive and interpret them.

A famous example that illustrates how the accessibility of different concepts affects perception is the next figure. What do you see in the figure?

Rabbit bunny illusionWhen asked in October, most of the subjects (recruited as they entered a zoo in Zurich) said it was a bird, but when asked on Easter Sunday, most said it was a bunny. Expectations have a biasing effect on perception. The bunny is very accessible to Westerners at Easter, but not in the fall. Thus, at Easter most see in the figure a bunny, and in the fall most see a bird (the type of bird most often named was a duck).

High-caste boys in villages are often taught from an early age to take revenge against slights. This makes honor a very accessible concept to high-caste males. A culture of honor has been described as a “mediative concept” through which individuals interpret reality. This culture is stronger among high castes than low castes in rural North India. It is strong in many groups around the world, for example, men in the U.S. South and young males in U.S. ghettos; a wonderful novel of an ancient culture of honor is Kadare’s “Broken April.”

The evidence suggests that many high-caste men construe their losses from coordination failures as insults, instead of innocent mistakes. They have been taught to retaliate against insults. Retaliating in the coordination game (by making the smaller investment in the joint project) makes it more difficult for players to converge on expectations that they will both make the larger investment.

Policy implications of economic mobility

Economic development increases mobility, and mobility increases the number of people at risk of falling in status. The poor, high-caste subjects in our experiment—people whose ancestors were presumably high in the distribution of income—were the least able to learn to cooperate. This suggests that economic development may exacerbate problems of poor coordination among villagers in North India.

But policies can change how people construe situations and how they respond to them. There have been successes in interventions to change construals that reduce violence among young males with a culture of honor in Chicago ghettos and among claimants to land in post-civil war Liberia. That high-caste men often retaliate against innocent losses from a coordination failure suggests the value of similar kinds of interventions in villages in North India.

Gun policy suggestions from Jennifer Doleac, Tyler Cowen. (<https://marginalrevolution.com/marginalrevolution/2019/08/gun-policy-suggestions-from-jennifer-doleac.html>)

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Here is more. I don’t read her as endorsing all of those uncategorically, simply as noting that many available options are on the table.

Six policies to boost employment for Black men. Harry J. Holzer (<https://www.brookings.edu/articles/six-policies-to-boost-employment-for-black-men/>)

Black men face a range of challenges in the labor market which hinder their employment opportunities, as discussed in my accompanying paper “Why are employment rates so low among Black men?“.

What can be done? Effective policies, operating at the federal, state and/or local level, to address some of these challenges include the following:

Reduce racial segregation of neighborhoods and schools

Residential segregation between white and Black households, and the segregation of K-12 schools that it generates, damages the educational and employment outcomes of Black boys and men, as shown in studies here and here). Reducing segregation would improve job prospects for Black men, through policies such as federal and state incentives to limit local zoning (which eliminates lower-cost housing from affluent suburbs), expanding affordable housing in racially diverse neighborhoods, and providing more federal support for highly-integrated “magnet schools”.

Boost early work experience for young Black men

Getting work experience early helps with long run employment outcomes. Programs should start in high school. One approach is to expand Summer Youth Employment Programs, which have a range of positive effects on employment in the short term, and on education and crime prevention in the longer term. Access to both skills and jobs can also be enhanced by expanding Career Academies and other forms of high-quality career and technical education in high school, as well as work-based learning through internships and apprenticeships.

The program Year Up, for example, provides training and six-month internships for low-income students, especially those of color, and shows very impressive positive impacts on subsequent earnings and employment of participants. New initiatives like P-Tech, which begins in grade 9 and creates a pathway into community college vocational programs, seem promising. More career education, beginning in middle school, would help too.

More–and better–college credentials

Lifting rates of higher education attainment among Black men would help a great deal. Gaining a bachelor’s degree has the biggest impact on employment outcomes. But there are many other options for acquiring valuable postsecondary credentials, including certificates and associate degrees at community colleges. The key is ensuring that these credentials have real labor market value. In other work, I have outlined a series of policy reforms–including more funding for high-quality occupational programs–that would benefit low-income youth and adults, particularly those of color, and not least for Black men.

Reduce crime and incarceration rates

Reducing crime rates and incarceration of Black men is a vital step towards boosting employment rates. There are a number of ways to achieve this. First, states and localities should expand the use of community policing and other approaches that successfully reduce crime without subjecting Black men to excessive use of force. Second, mental health professionals should be consistently deployed along with police, to defuse situations where mental illness leads to violence and deaths. Third, greater investment in programs that reduce crime and violence among young Black men–including summer employment and others, like Becoming a Man, that teach young participants how to avoid violence in confrontational situations. Fourth, expanded drug courts and treatments for those suffering from substance addiction. Fifth, seek out and eliminate the sources of racial bias in law enforcement at all levels.

More help for returning citizens into work

For those many Black men who have been incarcerated, more needs to be done to help them transition into paid work. Bruce Western shows how many former inmates still suffer from drug addiction or other mental health challenges upon release from prison. Assistance for these men, especially designed to reduce recidivism, is critical. One approach is to fund transitional jobs, which raises employment for these men in the short term – and can also reduce their recidivism rates over time.

Subsidized jobs

A large fraction of non-employed Black men suffer from disabilities and other barriers to work. Creating more subsidized jobs in either the public or private sector for these individuals could help them into the labor market. The broadly positive experience with emergency subsidized job creation at scale during the Great Recession illustrates the potential for such programs even when the labor market is stronger.

Invest now in Black men’s employment

The policy interventions described above, implemented properly, will not be cheap. In some cases, the evidence for effectiveness at scale is not yet that strong–which means that experimentation and careful evaluation will be necessary. But now is the time to invest in a full range of policies and programs to improve employment rates of Black men. As a nation, we simply cannot afford to waste so much personal and economic potential.

When cities add cops, Black residents could have the most to gain — and the most to lose. AARON CHALFIN , BENJAMIN HANSEN , EMILY WEISBURST , MORGAN C. WILLIAMS JR. (<https://www.niskanencenter.org/when-cities-add-cops-black-residents-could-have-the-most-to-gain-and-the-most-to-lose/>)

As police shootings remain in the public eye and the Black Lives Matter movement demands change, vocal debate about “defunding” the police can obscure a critical point: Most Americans, Black and white, are clear that what they want is not the end of police, but better police. What people want is police who treat civilians with respect and reduce serious crime. While most white Americans are generally satisfied with the police service they receive, among Black Americans there is considerably greater concern that the costs of policing are too high and that the benefits are not as large as they ought to be.

Do more police mean safer streets?

Are police effective in reducing crime? Some observers have suggested that since police spend so much of their time responding to calls for service, they don’t engage in a whole lot of crime prevention. But there is now a great deal of evidence that the presence of police officers promotes public safety. For example, research shows that concentrating police at crime hot spots reduces serious crime in those areas and that crime levels change when police officers are reallocated in response to a terrorist attack or when they are called away from their assigned beats to deal with a serious traffic accident.

Given the Defund movement’s focus on the size of a city’s police force, it is also important to consider the effects of investments in police personnel: the number of sworn officers employed by a police department.

What effects do changes in police force levels have on public safety and police enforcement? And to what extent does a larger police force create racially disparate impacts for Black versus white Americans? Surprisingly, the latter question has, until now, remained unanswered. In a new paper, we look to the historical record for insights. Using national data on police employment for a sample of 242 large U.S. cities over a 38-year period, we study the effects of changes in police force size on racial differences in homicide victimization and enforcement activity in the United States. Our analysis specifically accounts for changes in total municipal expenditures over time and as such reflects the historical opportunity costs of investing those funds in an additional police officer rather than in some other item in a city’s budget.

We find that expanding police personnel leads to reductions in serious crime. With respect to homicide, we find that every 10-17 officers hired abate one new homicide per year. In per capita terms the effects are approximately twice as large for Black victims. In short, larger police forces save lives and the lives saved are disproportionately Black lives.

Do more police “widen the net” of the criminal justice system?

We also consider how investments in police personnel have historically affected arrest patterns for white and Black civilians. The big concern, of course, is that a larger police presence expands all manner of civilian interactions with the criminal justice system and unnecessarily fuels racial disparities in the use of incarceration. Here, the evidence suggests the impacts of investments in policing are more nuanced than they might appear.

When cities hire more police officers, there is a decline in “index” crimes — serious offenses like robberies, aggravated assaults and burglaries that have high social costs and sometimes lead to a prison spell. Critically, arrests for these types of crimes decline too. Why would a larger police force reduce serious crime while also making fewer arrests for that type of crime? The answer lies in the ability of a larger police force to deter offending from happening in the first place. For example, police force expansion leads to an especially large decline in arrests for street crimes like robbery and vehicle thefts — crimes for which more cops on the street might be a particularly effective deterrent. Because fewer crimes are committed, there are fewer people to arrest. Interestingly, the decline in index crime arrests is four to six times larger for Black civilians than whites, which suggests that investments in policing are unlikely to have contributed to the massive and racially disparate growth in the scale of incarceration in the United States during the last four decades.

Of course, prison sentences are not the only way in which investments in police may widen the net of the criminal justice system. The majority of arrests that police officers make are not for serious index crimes. Instead, most arrests are for lower-level “quality-of-life” offenses, crimes that often do not have an identified victim but that lead to a criminal record and sometimes a jail sentence, each of which can substantially disrupt people’s lives. In some cases, these arrests, which typically involve a great deal of officer discretion, are thought to be a source of broken trust between police officers and citizens, particularly in communities that are predominantly low-income and Black. Do larger police forces lead to a proliferation of arrests for “quality-of-life” offenses and is there a racial gradient to the effects? Our research suggests that the answer to both questions is yes, with each additional police officer hired making between seven and 22 additional arrests for such crimes. With respect to arrests for liquor law violations and drug possession, two leading arrest charges for which police usually have tremendous discretion, our research finds particularly large and racially disparate impacts, with arrests three times larger among Black civilians.

Underpoliced or overpoliced?

Since the 1982 publication of “Broken Windows” by the political scientist James Q. Wilson and the criminologist George Kelling and the subsequent expansion of proactive, order-maintenance policing tactics in many U.S. cities, there has been considerable debate about the public safety value of making large numbers of arrests for low-level “quality of life” crimes. While the majority of early research suggested that today’s misdemeanor arrests prevent tomorrow’s felony crimes, a litany of more recent scholarship calls that conclusion into question. There continues to be an active debate about the public safety benefits of low-level arrests. But given that police have benefits as well as costs, a natural question to ask is whether U.S. cities are underpoliced or overpoliced.

Our research suggests that this question cannot be answered without appealing to strong normative beliefs about how to weigh the costs and the benefits of policing. But it is also fair to wonder whether we should be asking a different question. Instead of asking whether we are hiring the right number of police, we can also ask whether policing can become better and more precise — preserving the critical public safety benefits that policing can deliver to disadvantaged communities while minimizing the costs. In other words, can we invest in the most productive elements of policing, which improve public safety, without unnecessarily exposing larger numbers of people to the harmful effects of the criminal justice system?

The upshot is that we have not fully explored strategies that combine a relatively heavy police presence with a relatively hands-off approach to enforcing minor offenses. Skeptics might argue that such strategies are impossible, but we disagree. In fact, a number of reforms could address racial disparities in the burdens of police enforcement while also maintaining critical improvements in public safety. Consistent with our finding that the racially disparate effects of investments in police personnel are particularly large for drug possession arrests, the decriminalization of the possession of small amounts of drugs may be a particularly promising avenue for reducing racial disparities. Similarly, prior research suggests that racial disparities might be reduced by efforts to recruit a larger number of Black or female police officers as well as by the application of “precision policing,” a suite of strategies in which police effort is reallocated more intensively towards the small number of individuals in a community who are driving the most socially costly types of offending, in particular, gun violence.

Policing isn’t the only answer — but tread carefully

Of course, reducing funding for police could allow increased funding for alternatives. Indeed, an array of high-quality research suggests that crime can be reduced through methods other than policing or its byproduct, incarceration. Among the many alternatives to police for which there is promising evidence are place-based crime control strategies such as increasing the availability of trees and green space, restoring vacant lots, public-private partnerships in the form of business improvement districts, street lighting, and reducing physical disorder. There is also evidence that social service-based strategies such as summer jobs for disadvantaged youth, cognitive behavioral therapy, mental health treatment, and local nonprofit formation focused on building strong communities more generally can have important crime-reducing effects.

While an increasing number of promising studies show that there are ways to reduce crime outside of the traditional deterrence channels like police and prisons, it bears mentioning that social service interventions are often difficult to scale and may take time to pay dividends.

Ultimately, what will happen if a city decides to substantially reallocate resources away from police and towards social services? No one knows the answer to this question since it has never been done before. To this end, we note that all of the studies evaluating the effectiveness of social service interventions implicitly hold police funding and behavior fixed, just as studies of investments in policing hold funding for social service-based strategies fixed.

Our research provides novel insight into a fundamental policy lever generally used to address homicide victimization and other serious crime — police employment. We show that police force expansion can lead to significant improvements in racial disparities related to public safety, at a time in which the role of law enforcement is under intense public scrutiny. At the same time, our research also documents the consequences of policing practices that disproportionately expose disadvantaged communities to the criminal justice system.

Young Men Need More Medicaid. SHAWN FREMSTAD, CLARA WILSON, ANAÏS GOUBERT. (<https://cepr.net/young-men-need-more-medicaid/>)

Recent research establishes a link between losing Medicaid at age 19 and incarceration among young men. Using a research design that linked Medicaid records and criminal justice records for young low-income men in South Carolina, economist Elisa Jácome found that among the young men in her sample who were incarcerated before age 21, about 80 percent had a prior mental health diagnosis during adolescence, and that young men who lost Medicaid eligibility at age 19 were more likely to be incarcerated over the next two years than those in a matched comparison group. Her work builds on earlier research finding that access to mental health and substance abuse services reduces arrests and local crime rates, as well as a growing body of research on the importance of health insurance for young adults.

In this brief, we provide additional context for Jácome’s findings by documenting how common it is for young men to lose Medicaid eligibility and become uninsured during the transition to adulthood. We also discuss how to increase young men’s coverage during this crucial period. Most immediately, Congress can help young men, while narrowing class, racial, and ethnic disparities in coverage, by establishing a federal Medicaid program for adults living in states that have yet to expand to Medicaid. The House’s Build Back Better Act, legislation that is currently moving through Congress under budget reconciliation rules, would create such a program. Looking beyond this year, older boys and young men would benefit most from the kind of universal coverage that is common in most other wealthy nations.

Source of Health Insurance Coverage for Young Adults

About 95 percent of US children have health insurance coverage. Among insured children in 2020, about 37 percent had coverage through Medicaid. Most of the rest are covered as dependents through a parent’s employer-based coverage.

In nearly all states, children living in families with income below 200 percent of poverty (or even higher income levels in many states) are eligible for Medicaid until their 19th birthday. In South Carolina, for example, children are eligible for Medicaid (via the closely related Children’s Health Insurance Program) through age 18 as long as they live in a family with income below 208 percent of the federal poverty line, or just under $47,000 for a family of three.

Once a child turns 19, their Medicaid eligibility varies by their income and whether they live in one of the 39 states and the District of Columbia that have expanded Medicaid as allowed under the Affordable Care Act, or one of the 12 states that have not. In expansion states, non-elderly adults, including 19 to 25-year-olds, are generally eligible for Medicaid, but only if they have incomes below 138 percent of poverty, or $12,880 for an individual in 2021.

By contrast, the Affordable Care Act (ACA) requires private health plans and issuers that offer dependent child coverage to make such coverage available until a child reaches the age of 26. Thus, children covered as dependents under a parent’s employer-based or individual market coverage can typically stay on that coverage until their 26th birthday regardless of their income.

After the ACA’s dependent provision went into effect in 2010, the uninsurance rate among adults ages 19–25 fell from 36 percent to 27 percent. Research suggests that the provision resulted in increases in mental health treatment, reductions in out-of-pocket spending on health care, reductions in disease-related mortality, and various other health and financial improvements.

There is also evidence that “males experienced larger improvements in health-related outcomes from the ACA dependent coverage provision than females,” in part because gains in coverage and responses to obtaining coverage were larger among young men than young women.

At the same time, the ACA’s dependent coverage provision did not help close gaps in coverage by race and ethnicity. In fact, O’Hara and Brault found that “[n]et gains in coverage for non-Hispanic whites exceeded net gains in coverage for non-Hispanic blacks.” Similarly, Barbaresco and others found that “college graduates experienced greater improvements in health-related outcomes [after implementation of the dependent coverage care provision] than non-college graduates ….” By contrast, the ACA’s Medicaid expansion provision has contributed to increases in coverage among low-income young adults in expansion states, particularly low-income young adults who are Black, Hispanic, or do not have a college degree. Yet, as we document below, uninsurance rates continue to increase starting at age 18 because the loss of Medicaid coverage is not fully offset by increases in other coverage.

Medicaid and Other Health Insurance Coverage During Young Men’s Transition to Adulthood

Table 1 uses data from the 2019 American Community Survey (ACS) to estimate health insurance status (covered by Medicaid, covered by private or other public health insurance, and not covered) by age for young men ages 16–24. As the table shows, about 32 percent of 16 and 17-year-old men are covered by Medicaid. The Medicaid coverage rate starts declining at age 18 and through age 22. Only between 12–13 percent of men in their early 20s have Medicaid coverage. While men in their early 20s are more likely to have other forms of coverage, these gains offset only about half the decline in Medicaid coverage, so young men’s uninsurance rate more than doubles by age 20.

Table 1: Uninsurance rate increases during transition to adulthood

Percentage of 16 to 25-year-old men with health insurance in 2019, by age

Age No Health Insurance Coverage Medicaid Other Health Insurance

16 7% 32% 61%

17 8% 32% 60%

18 10% 26% 63%

19 15% 18% 68%

20 17% 15% 68%

21 18% 13% 69%

22 18% 12% 70%

23 17% 13% 70%

24 17% 12% 71%

25 18% 12% 71%

Source: Authors’ analysis of American Communities Survey using IPUMS-USA.

Figures 1 and 2 break out these health insurance coverage estimates by race and ethnicity. For these estimates, we use five years of data from the ACS to obtain reliable estimates by age for each group.

As Figure 1 shows, only about 4 percent of white boys are uninsured at age 16. Both Black and Asian/Pacific Islander boys have slightly higher uninsurance rates (about 6 percent), while both Hispanic and American Indian/Alaskan Native boys have much higher uninsurance rates, roughly 12 and 18 percent, respectively, at age 16.

Figure 1 also shows how uninsurance increases during the transition to adulthood for men in all of these racial and ethnic groups. At age 22, about 25 percent of Black men, 30 percent of Hispanic men, and 33 percent of American Indian/Alaskan Native men are uninsured.

As Figure 2 shows, Medicaid plays a crucial role in reducing uninsurance among 16 to 18-year-old boys in all groups, but it is especially important for Black, Hispanic, and American Indian/Alaskan Native boys. About half of Black 16-year-olds are covered by Medicaid, as are just under half of Hispanics, compared to about one-in-five whites. However, Medicaid coverage drops sharply at age 18 for all groups.

Uninsurance rates for young men are particularly high in states that have not expanded Medicaid. In the 31 states, including the District of Columbia, that had adopted Medicaid expansion by January 1, 2016, we found that about 13 percent of 19 to 25-year-olds were uninsured compared to just over 23 percent of 19 to 25-year-olds in the states that had not adopted Medicaid expansion by then. Recent research suggests that the American Community Survey may undercount Medicaid enrollment in states that have expanded Medicaid, so the actual uninsured rate in the 31 states that had adopted Medicaid expansion by 2016 may be lower than 13 percent.

Figure 3 shows uninsurance rates in the 10 most populous US states. The first four states in the figure have not expanded Medicaid; the remaining six states have expanded it. As with the overall state data, young men’s likelihood of being uninsured more than doubles in all states during the transition to adulthood, but uninsurance is particularly high for young men in the four non-expansion states.

Figure 3

Although the focus of this piece is on boys and men, loss of Medicaid and other forms of coverage is also a major problem for girls and women. As CEPR has previously documented (see Figure 4, below), white boys, Black boys, Black girls, and white girls all have roughly the same relatively low rate of uninsurance during childhood. However, their uninsurance rates spike and diverge considerably starting in young adulthood.

Figure 4

Policy Implications

The absence of universal health coverage, and other broadly inclusive social protections, has done considerable harm to boys and men in the United States. As CEPR has previously argued, the lack of such protections is likely due in part to policymaking based on stereotypical assumptions about men, particularly Black men.

Much more needs to be done to ensure that all adolescents, regardless of gender, have stable, continuous health insurance during and after the transition to adulthood. Most immediately, Congress should pass legislation that would create a federal Medicaid program for adults living in states that have yet to expand Medicaid. This legislation is currently included in the Build Back Better Act moving through Congress under the budget reconciliation process.

Looking forward, young people would benefit most from the kind of universal coverage that is common in most other wealthy nations. In addition to ensuring coverage for all, this would reduce the considerable administrative burdens that make it difficult for many otherwise eligible people to obtain and maintain coverage that is means-tested or based on falling into a particular category.

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How a focused approach to policing made New York safer. AARON CHALFIN <https://www.niskanencenter.org/how-a-focused-approach-to-policing-made-new-york-safer/>

Hundreds of New York City police officers massed outside two neighboring public-housing complexes in Harlem early one morning in June 2014 with a mission: Arrest dozens of feuding gang members, all at once.

Then-Commissioner William Bratton was on the scene to supervise as heavily armed officers burst into the complexes. On Twitter, the NYPD urged: “Residents in Manhattanville and Grant Houses don’t be alarmed!”

Those residents could be forgiven for feeling some alarm as they were woken by shouts and banging on doors. The operation — known as a “gang takedown” — would have hardly felt surgical to them. But this kind of intervention, now a cornerstone of NYPD strategy, casts a much smaller net than the notorious “stop, question, and frisk” approach that came before. What’s more, the strategy works: In new research with my colleagues Michael LaForest and Jacob Kaplan, I found that gang takedowns drive significant reductions in lethal violence.

Amid raging public debate about the pros and cons of policing, it’s important to reiterate that a great deal of evidence shows investing in law enforcement is a scalable and effective way to maintain public safety. When cities put more police officers on the street, crime and violence decline. One recent estimate suggests that for every 10 additional officers hired, cities abate one murder annually. Because homicides are disproportionately concentrated among young Black men, the lives saved by police are disproportionately Black, too. But putting more cops on the street also comes with major costs, which we should work to minimize. The gang takedown may be one way to get more of the benefits of policing and fewer of the costs.

New York’s two great crime declines

At the peak of the “crack epidemic” in 1990, New York experienced over 2,220 homicides. By 2011, the number had shrunk to 515. This meant that the city was safer than it had been in 1962, when the New York Mets played their first game at the Polo Grounds and when the oldest of the Baby Boomers were still in their teenage years. NYC’s now famous homicide decline of the 1990s had tapered off since 2000, but in 2011, NYC was among the safest large cities in the United States, with a homicide rate that was just one-third that of Chicago’s and compared favorably to that of Cheyenne, Wyoming.

It was widely assumed that pushing the homicide rate any lower than this would be difficult to achieve. After all, while murders were down, the city had not come close to resolving any of the root causes of violence. In 2011, NYC remained highly segregated, with deep pockets of social isolation and poverty. And, unlike cities in other wealthy countries, NYC remained awash in illegal handguns, often trafficked up the I-95 corridor from Virginia and North Carolina. Still, the NYPD continued to make a concerted effort to combat violent crimes, relying increasingly on sustained and sometimes intrusive surveillance of community members by police, a policy best known for brief, often pretextual detainments called “stop-question-frisk.” In 2002, NYPD officers recorded 97,000 such street stops – investigative activities that are supposed to be based on the legal standard of “reasonable suspicion.” By 2011, the number of recorded street stops had risen to 680,000 – a 600 percent increase in less than a decade.

Large increases in street stops and low-level arrests followed from a popular interpretation of the theory of broken windows policing – the idea that it is necessary for police to be proactive against smaller crimes to prevent bigger ones. While the theory as advanced by its authors, the political scientist James Q. Wilson and the criminologist George Kelling, did not actually evangelize large numbers of street stops and arrests, police leadership, amid a new wave of violence in the 1980s and early 1990s, incentivized officers to engage in ever more intensive surveillance of high-crime communities. In NYC, that strategy culminated in the development of Operation Impact, which sent large numbers of rookie police officers to several dozen “impact zones” with orders to demonstrate proactivity by making a large number of stops and arrests, often for public order violations rather than acts of violence. While Operation Impact appears to have modestly reduced street crimes, the approach was implemented well after the peak of violence and is unlikely to explain most of the city’s decline in serious crimes during the period in which it was in effect.

In August 2011, the city’s mass enforcement regime came to an end when Judge Shira A. Scheindlin sent a powerful signal to the city’s political leadership that the approach was racially discriminatory and likely illegal. Judge Scheindlin declined to dismiss a lawsuit filed by David Floyd and several other plaintiffs that alleged that the NYPD’s enforcement activity constituted a pattern of racially discriminatory policing. While the case would not conclude for another two years, the city got the message. Recorded street stops declined almost immediately, and within five years, they fell by more than 90 percent.

The Floyd ruling was roundly criticized by Police Commissioner Raymond Kelly and then-Mayor Michael Bloomberg, who called it “dangerous.” Police brass worried that without the persistent threat of a street stop, the deterrent power of officers would be deflated. Offenders would begin carrying guns again and police would lose a critical tool in winning control of the city’s streets. These fears were bolstered by then-current academic research, which suggested that public order-maintenance policing (of which stop-question-frisk stops are one tool) had been effective in curtailing violent crime and might have played an important role in the city’s 1990s crime decline.

What happened after 2011 was therefore surprising to many. From that year until the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, while national homicide rates remained roughly flat, New York City experienced a second great homicide decline, with shootings and killings falling by more than 50 percent. By 2019, NYC’s homicide rate – 3.8 per 100,000 residents – was closer to that of Western European capitals like London and Paris than even other relatively safe U.S. cities like Los Angeles (6.4 per 100K residents) and Boston (6.0 per 100K residents), let alone the nation’s most challenged cities, like St. Louis (65 per 100K residents) and Baltimore (51 per 100K residents). National Review, one of the leading conservative periodicals of the last half-century, published an op-ed entitled, “We Were Wrong About Stop-and-Frisk.”

How did NYC, which had already benefited from a large homicide decline in the 1990s, experience a second plunge in murders on the heels of such a dramatic disruption to its law enforcement strategy? As large cities like New York are exceptionally complex ecosystems, offering a complete explanation for NYC’s decline in gun violence during the last decade is an impossible task. However, there are some tantalizing clues.

First, NYC’s great homicide decline was really mostly that — a decline in homicides and shootings. Other crimes, like less serious assaults, robberies, and thefts, followed national trends or declined only a little faster.

Second, the decline in homicides appears to have been highly concentrated among gang homicides, rather than homicides with other circumstances, like domestic violence.

Finally, while much attention has been paid to the rapid gentrification of certain neighborhoods in Brooklyn by artists, hipsters, and shopkeepers selling rainbow bagels, the homicide decline was, in fact, fairly uniform throughout the city, with some of the largest improvements in public safety accruing in communities that had yet to experience gentrification. Whatever caused the decrease in violence appears to have been specific to gun violence and concentrated among gang members in some of the highest-crime communities.

It is therefore noteworthy that just as the NYPD began to wind down its policy of mass street stops, it began to invest in a very different approach. Recognizing that violence, and in particular gun violence, is concentrated, to an incredible degree, among a small number of people and places, the NYPD sought to focus intensively on the small number of people who are engaged in retaliatory violence – so-called “ping pong murders.” The signature policy of the new regime was the “gang takedown,” the practice of targeting entire criminal gangs for arrest and prosecution by charging key players with major crimes and building conspiracy cases against others alleged to have acted in furtherance of a criminal conspiracy. By late 2013, the popular media had taken notice of the NYPD’s shift in strategy. The New York Times ran a headline entitled, “Frisking Tactic Yields to a Focus on Youth Gangs.”

Rise of the gang takedown

“Gang takedowns” is not a technical or legal term — instead this is a colloquial expression used in media reports and among members of the law enforcement community to describe highly-coordinated and targeted raids on alleged gang members, often centered around the city’s public housing communities. While there is no publicly available description of how gangs are selected for a takedown, former Police Commissioner Raymond Kelly — on whose watch the strategy emerged — made it clear that this new operation was intended to target not only established criminal enterprises (e.g., national and international gangs) but also crews — “loosely affiliated groups of teens” who often identify themselves by the blocks where they live and are responsible for much of the violence in public housing. And public commentary by senior NYPD officials indicates that gangs are targeted on the basis of their perceived participation in violence.

The two largest gang takedowns to date (the June 2014 raid in Manhattan and one in the Bronx in April 2016) led to arrests of 103 and 120 individuals, respectively. However, hundreds of smaller takedowns have also occurred over the last decade. The nature of the takedowns varies and the strategies employed depend on the activities of the gang. For gangs that are involved in the drug trade, takedowns are often centered around narcotics prosecutions. In September 2021, for instance, 48 individuals were indicted as part of a gang takedown in Manhattan’s West Harlem neighborhood. The group, known as “Main Event,” had been known to run the drug trade along several major thoroughfares through the neighborhood. Some individuals implicated in the takedown were indicted on drug charges while others were charged with committing or conspiring to commit specific acts of violence, including shootings. While the takedown occurred in 2021, the investigation began nearly three years before, in 2018. Police collected evidence methodically through wiretaps, monitoring of social media activity, and covert cameras, which were supplemented by a series of undercover drug buys.

For other gangs, investigations focus more intensively on specific acts of violence. In July 2021, police arrested 14 alleged associates of the Babiiez street gang, which operates in the Flatbush section of Brooklyn. Police charged individuals with planning and carrying out a series of homicides targeting rival gang members. Because each raid is tailored to the activities of a specific group, the “gang takedown” is best thought of as an overall approach to building major cases rather than a specific intervention like hot spots policing, in which police surge manpower to blocks they identify as surging crime locations, or civil gang injunctions, a once-popular method of dealing with gangs in Los Angeles.

After takedowns, public housing gets safer

Were gang takedowns responsible for new lows in gun violence? In a recent academic journal article, Jacob Kaplan, Michael LaForest and I examine the public safety impact of gang takedowns connected to the city’s public housing complexes. These are among the NYC communities that have continued to experience an outsize share of crime and violence; many have a strong nexus to gangs and crews, which are often strongly tethered geographically to the boundaries of a particular housing development.

Using data on gang takedowns in and around the 73 public housing communities that experienced at least one takedown during the study period, we looked at what happens to crime in these communities in the weeks and months after a major gang takedown. Prior to police action, communities that are about to experience a takedown look a lot like other large public housing communities with respect to their recent crime trends. But in the aftermath of a takedown, we found that lethal and near-lethal violence – shootings and homicides – in these communities declined by approximately one-third. Our findings suggest that impacts are felt for at least 18 months after the takedown occurred before petering out. Interestingly, while the gang takedowns lead to a large reduction in gun violence, we do not observe reductions in other types of crimes, such as robberies and thefts. This finding is not unexpected, given that gangs contribute considerably more to gun violence than to other types of crimes, which are more common and are committed by a larger number of people.

Critically, the takedowns were not followed by an increase in police enforcement. If anything, there is evidence that arrests for low-level crimes like drug possession decline in the aftermath of a takedown. This is a point worth dwelling on: The NYPD was able to meaningfully reduce gun violence in some of the city’s most disadvantaged areas without exposing an ever-increasing number of people to the criminal justice system through more arrests. The importance of these dual findings – a large decline in gun violence and a modest decline in enforcement activity — cannot be understated. Persistent exposure to violence leaves a great deal of trauma in its wake, and its effects cascade into all areas of community life. Research has found that recent exposure to a homicide substantially reduces children’s academic performance in school and leads to problems with attention and impulse control. There is also evidence that dialing up a community’s exposure to persistent street stops by police can have negative impacts on high school graduation and college enrollment, particularly for Black students.

How many shootings and homicides are abated by the takedowns? Our estimates suggest that the gang takedowns explain approximately one-quarter of the cumulative decline in shootings in and around public housing in NYC during the 2011-2018 period and more than 10 percent of the decline in shootings citywide. Since these takedowns are only one part of a broader policy shift and because positive spillovers to other communities are difficult to fully capture, this is likely to be a conservative estimate of the overall impact of the NYPD’s change in tactics.

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These findings suggest that more focused policing tactics are a promising avenue through which law enforcement can abate the most socially costly crimes while limiting the mass enforcement that widens the net of the criminal justice system for communities of color. If other cities can replicate this success, we may have discovered a pathway to address the dual plagues of over-policing and under-protection that stalk minority communities.

Gang enforcement is, of course, no panacea, and critics of the new approach have raised a number of challenges.

First, while the beneficial impacts persist for up to 18 months after an initial gang takedown, the violence reductions we observe do not continue in perpetuity. The data thus suggest that gang takedowns offer a means of temporarily relieving the symptoms of the disease of gun violence rather than offering a cure. As Pat Sharkey has noted in his most recent book, while focusing police resources on high-violence communities can improve public safety, until we address the root causes of endemic violence, the resulting peace will inevitably be uneasy.

Second, the long-term impacts of a gang takedown for the arrestees themselves remain a mystery. While the takedowns in NYC provided communities with some temporary relief from the traumatic effects of persistent violence, research suggests that prisons can further entrench individuals in gang life, creating challenges for reintegrating these individuals into the community upon their return from incarceration.

Third, advocates and legal scholars have raised a number of due process and fairness concerns about gang takedowns and have suggested that the takedowns create unacceptably high collateral damage for affected communities. As the raids are intended to net entire criminal gangs, the particular concern has been that sometimes people whose gang ties are only very tenuous — or who have no gang ties at all — are roped in too. In other words, while gang enforcement is a more precise policing strategy than the prior regime, gang sweeps, by their very nature, do not lend themselves easily to precision prosecution.

Ultimately gang takedowns are one element in a menu of often complementary strategies that can be employed to reduce violence in disadvantaged communities. Research shows that investments in social programs like expanding summer jobs for at-risk youth, cognitive behavioral therapy, and social services more generally can also be highly effective in reducing serious violence, particularly among youth. The best crime reduction portfolio is one that pulls all available levers and is therefore balanced between enforcement and community investment.

Despite the costs – and there are always costs – there are reasons to be optimistic that more targeted gang enforcement can make the policing portion of the portfolio better. When resources are focused on building major cases against the perpetrators of violence, the payoffs can be large. Critically, meaningful reductions in violence can be achieved without addressing root causes (which is a generational challenge) or churning large numbers of people through the criminal justice system on low-level charges (a strategy which exacerbates inequality and may backfire with respect to public safety).

Next year, we will mark the 20th anniversary of The Wire, David Simon’s widely-acclaimed television show about the role that crime and policing plays in the lives of a wide array of fictional characters in Baltimore. One of the persistent themes of The Wire is that policing matters, especially for the urban poor. Good policing that is sensitive to the needs of the community and focuses on developing the patience and skill to build major cases against the purveyors of violence can save scores of innocent lives. Bad policing – exemplified by an excessive focus on “quick rip” drug raids, low-quality arrests, and “juking the stats” – can do more harm than good. As it turns out, this social commentary set in fiction is backed up by growing empirical evidence that good policing does matter. By investing more resources in good policing – more effective gang enforcement, building major cases, and conducting better gun violence investigations – policymakers can double down on the benefits of policing while reducing its costs.

As NYC mourns two officers, it must resolve to fight endemic violence. RICHARD HAHN. (<https://www.niskanencenter.org/as-nyc-mourns-two-officers-it-must-resolve-to-fight-endemic-violence/>)

Last month, NYPD officers Wilbert Mora and Jason Rivera were fatally shot while responding to a domestic disturbance in the 32nd Precinct, a square-mile stretch of northern Harlem. High-profile killings tend to rouse politicians, and this tragedy was no different. Soon after the murders, President Biden visited New York to discuss gun violence with Mayor Eric Adams. For many Democrats, this was an opportunity to reject “Defund the Police” and publicly confirm their commitment to combating crime. For his part, Mayor Adams, who made public safety a central focus of his campaign, has promised a return to some of the city’s tougher and more controversial approaches to crime control.

The battle of “our city against the killers” is long overdue. Violence has been consistent and frustratingly commonplace in the 32nd Precinct for decades–a reminder that the benefits of “the Great Crime Decline” have been unevenly distributed. Indeed, the 32nd Precinct is representative of similar neighborhoods all over the country that have never enjoyed the safety most Americans take for granted, even as the national violent crime rate dropped by more than 50 percent since its peak in the early 1990s. So far, the city’s response, driven by emotion and politics, has framed violent crime as a recent problem. But ignoring neighborhoods until expediency demands a response and offering incomplete solutions is not a recipe for lasting peace.

A comprehensive strategy includes enforcement and meaningful investment. Enforcement should minimize indiscriminate street stops and focus resources on the worst and most violent actors. At the same time, the city should continue to invest in strengthening neighborhoods while avoiding the pitfalls of previous efforts. Perhaps most importantly, New York should pay close attention to its past in crafting policy for the future.

Ignored and left behind

Officers of the 32nd Precinct have watched over the neighborhood since long before the Great Migration made it a center of art and intellectualism. Yet even at its cultural zenith, Harlem was often, as novelist Chester Himes put it, “A city of the meek and the violent.” When many people describe violence in New York City – or America for that matter – they talk about ebbs and surges, but in the 32nd Precinct, the tide has never really gone out.

Like the 32nd Precinct, many New York neighborhoods that continue to suffer from high rates of violence have long seemed inherently violent to city officials, places to either crack down on or ignore. By the 1950s, New York City had all but given up on Harlem. Two decades of rising crime and white flight punctuated by riots convinced city officials that policing the 32nd Precinct was hopelessly dangerous. The NYPD signaled its indifference by sending in newly hired Black officers, then widely considered expendable. Though the murder rate in the 32nd was consistently higher than the city average, police interest in curbing the violence seemed minimal. The eminent police executive and theorist Joseph D. McNamara, who cut his teeth walking a beat near Lenox Avenue in 1957, recalled a supervisor telling him, “This is Harlem, young man. Unless a cop is killed … homicide dicks could care less about this Precinct.”

The city’s attitude toward Harlem didn’t budge much over the next 25 years, as suburbanization, purposeful deprivation often rooted in racial animus, economic blight, and disease transformed the community into a “deurbanized area with a hyper-concentration of poor people with serious health problems,” with a lower life expectancy than that of Bangladesh. The crack epidemic hit north Harlem particularly hard: The neighborhood encompassed five of the top 10 zip codes in the country by substance abuse-related hospital admissions. Meanwhile, growing frustration with crime led a “silent majority” of residents and community leaders to embrace harsh drug laws and aggressive policing.

Eventually, the violence spilled over into other communities, and the public took note. In the 1980s, lucrative drug markets spread crime across New York, subjecting once-safe residential neighborhoods like Kensington in Brooklyn and Far Rockaway in Queens to tastes of the same violence that had long plagued northern Harlem. The 32nd Precinct was the deadliest in the city in 1979; by 1990, its homicide rate barely cracked the top 10. Much like today, the rising tide of assaults and murders across the city made observers think violence was a new and unexpected horror. In the 32nd Precinct, it wasn’t.

Unequal relief

In a dramatic shift in tone and tactics, city leadership doubled down on street enforcement. NYPD increased its workforce by about 9,000 uniformed officers during the late ‘80s and early ‘90s, instituted the statistical management system COMPSTAT and focused resources on guns and open-air drug markets. Policies such as stop-question-frisk and Tactical Narcotics Teams were particularly salient in north Harlem. The 32nd was among the precincts with the largest increases in misdemeanor arrests and the highest drug arrest rates throughout the 1990s. Meanwhile, crime rates across the nation had begun to descend.

Some combination of law enforcement investment and changes in the character of the city and nation appears to have contributed to a significant and lasting crime decline, but police tactics, including aggressive street stops and “zero tolerance” policing, probably had only a moderate impact on violent crimes. Still, murders fell by two-thirds between 1991 and 2001, and about 65 percent of the lives saved were people of color, sparing vulnerable neighborhoods thousands of tragedies.

Street enforcement was so ingrained that police now thought of it as a permanent necessity rather than a temporary exigency. Intensive stops continued into the next decade and beyond, despite their doubtful contribution to the crime decline. The 32nd reported the most stop-question-frisks among NYPD precincts between 2006 and 2016. By 2018, the 32nd also had the highest per capita rate of incarceration in the city. This time, however, the returns were less impressive. The Precinct posted a lackluster reduction in homicides after 2000, scoring worse than all but ten other commands. From 2011 until the COVID-19 pandemic’s onset, the citywide murder rate fell by 30 percent. Still, killings in the 32nd haven’t changed much in 20 years.

From 2011-2015, when violence fell considerably citywide, the drop in the 32nd’s homicide rates was among the smallest. From 2015-2020, the 32nd reported the second-largest increase in murders among Manhattan precincts and the sixth-largest citywide. While the rest of the city benefited from such an unrelenting drop in crime that even conservative commentators admitted that heavy street enforcement was no longer necessary, violence simmered in the many places where it had never gone away.

Murders doubled in the Precinct in the three years leading up to the pandemic, but while advocates and city leaders leveraged 20 years of relative safety to call for big reforms to the justice system, no one seemed to be watching the trend in the 32nd. When the COVID-19 pandemic arrived in 2020, murders in the 32nd shot up by 78 percent. Two years on, the recent outrage and renewed attention to violence in the wake of the deaths of Officers Mora and Rivera in Harlem and heinous shooting injuries to three other officers and an 11-month-old baby earlier in January are justifiable and welcome. But their timing suggests many in the city care only about sensational violence and still think of the lower-profile, day-to-day killings that drive crime statistics in places like the 32nd, now as they did in 1957. That is, unless a cop or some other worthy innocent gets shot, they “could care less.”

The narrative that we are amid a sudden spike in violent crime rests on the incorrect premise that there was once a safe idyll from which unforeseeable forces have recently wrenched cities. This narrative ignores the undercurrent of quotidian violence that lurked just below the headlines, violence that somehow seemed safe to ignore. The truth is, even before the pandemic, in all types of precincts, New York’s homicide rate was back where it was in 2011, just before the second great crime decline. The same neighborhoods that led the city in reducing murders from 2011 to 2015 saw the gains of those years obliterated during the balance of the decade. The homicide curve looks low and flat if you squint at it from far enough away to see 40 years of statistics. But such a perspective offers no comfort to the families of people who continue to die needlessly in places like the 32nd Precinct.

Toward lasting peace

The ability to protect residents from violent victimization is arguably the most basic measure of state success. By that metric, New York has failed the 32nd Precinct. The city overcame a massive epidemic of violence that stretched between the 1960s and the 1990s, but since then it hasn’t progressed in places where violence had already been a feature of daily life. The inability of the city to protect residents of the 32nd Precinct from sustained violence over a long period could be considered an example of what Rutgers University political scientist Lisa Miller has called “racialized state failure.”

Violent crime, including murder, is lower than it was at its peak in the early 1990s, even in the 32nd. But it’s still intolerably high, and sustainably lowering the murder rate should be a top priority of the Adams administration. Critically, that goal should not be achieved by clustering violence into certain neighborhoods. Instead, the city must commit to the idea that no neighborhood is naturally or inevitably dangerous. Murder should be considered a key measure of racial and economic equity, and even overall reductions in crime are unsatisfactory if entire communities are left behind.

To their credit, New York’s leaders have made violence reduction a central focus, and two plans have emerged as leading contenders in the effort to fight crime. Mayor Adams’s approach includes a throwback to some previously controversial measures, including a resurrection of “neighborhood safety teams” made up of plainclothes officers trained to seize weapons and intervene when violence arises. Additionally, Mayor Adams has called on the city’s five prosecutors to commit to harsher prosecution of young people caught with a gun. Following the same logic, he has asked legislators to amend the state’s “Raise the Age” law to allow prosecutors to file adult charges against juveniles caught carrying or using guns, which would subject them to lengthy mandatory minimum sentences. He has asked that judges at bail hearings be allowed to consider the “potential dangerousness” defendants pose to public safety, an idea long resisted by progressives as subjective and unfair. Finally, he has asked the federal government to help interdict illegal guns.

The second plan, outlined by Public Advocate Jumaane Williams, takes an approach based less on enforcement and more on attacking root causes of violence. Williams wants residency requirements to make sure the police are representative of the neighborhoods they patrol. He also wants investments in non-police responses to violence, such as hospital-based interventions, in which medical staff, not cops, interview shooting victims. And he wants to couple long-term investment in mental health services with improvements to public spaces. Like Adams, he’s asking the state and federal governments to step up to help NYC track guns and stop them from entering the city.

There’s some merit to both proposals. Mayor Adams’s tactical approach can help stanch the bleeding in the short-term, a prerequisite for long-term healing. Mr. Williams’s root causes approach is also worthwhile if any respite is to last. The rebound in murders in places like the 32nd Precinct proves that enforcement alone will not deliver meaningful and lasting peace in the streets. However, both plans also fall short of the mark.

For example, while prosecuting young people for gun possession more harshly might deliver some short-term benefits, over the long term it could backfire if communities begin to perceive the effort as being more about locking people up than keeping them safe. NYC juries have long been reluctant to convict young people charged with carrying guns, reflecting the difficulty of proving such charges and general distrust between police and the people they serve. And while Mayor Adams is undoubtedly right that we need to get guns off the street before they are used, vacuuming young men in poor neighborhoods into the criminal justice system is an unnecessary collateral cost. What’s more, it is too often borne by the very people such laws are intended to protect.

Instead of relying only on harsh mandatory sentences to deter gun offenders (a dubious proposition), a better response would include non-carceral interventions that have shown promise. For example, the success of Brooklyn’s Project Redirect program, which diverts young adults accused of gun possession into intensive services and supervision, shows that some alternatives to incarceration can protect public safety without incurring attendant social costs.

Even within the restricted realm of enforcement, instead of an indiscriminate full-court press against gun-carrying that yields few benefits, city leaders should consider a more focused approach that has caused significant reductions in violence by targeting the most dangerous offenders. It’s also important to realize that the more lenient bail and prosecution policies introduced in the past few years, which overwhelmingly affected people charged with nonviolent and misdemeanor crimes rather than violent criminals, did not cause the crime spike, and in fact went into effect after violence was already rising in NYC’s most dangerous neighborhoods. Reversing these policies won’t reverse the trend in violence.

On the other hand, while there is evidence that crime rates respond to community investments like summer jobs for at-risk youth, cognitive behavioral therapy and social services more generally, such programs are difficult to successfully scale up and often benefit from operator effects, such as charismatic leadership, that are hard to replicate. Other reforms, such as residency requirements, have little basis in evidence.

Further, the public was lukewarm about moving money from police budgets to social service providers even at the height of the “Defund the Police” movement’s popularity. The community-based organizations that receive the bulk of city, state, and federal social investments in New York have long been tied to client politics that fosters a muddle of influence-trading. This perversely keeps money out of the hands of the people it is meant to help and waters down the benefits accrued. Rather than indiscriminately pumping more money into these organizations, the state and city should construct safeguards to ensure that effectiveness rather than expediency prevails.

Finally, both plans punt too much responsibility to outside regulators who are in no position to help. Relying on state and federal governments to stop the flow of illegal guns into the city is inadequate. Most of the guns used by the shooters driving up the murder rate have circulated in the illicit market for years. Many are shared and kept in public places, and they are often stolen or untraceable. Removing these guns through mass arrests is only one of many strategies. Gun surrender and buy-back programs have had mixed results. Consent-to-search programs, in which parents allow police to search their property for guns in exchange for immunity for their children, might be a more direct option. Still better, police might adopt the practice of regularly asking domestic violence complainants, like the mother of Officers Mora and Rivera’s killer, if they can search the premises for illegal weapons.

All neighborhoods matter

Enforcement and social services are not collectively exhaustive options. Absent from both crime control strategies is one plausible explanation for why crime continued to decline in places where mass street tactics were rolled back but not in places where they weren’t: The neighborhoods that became safe received lasting economic investments. In contrast, places like the 32nd received only piecemeal relief.

Two changes in New York during the 1980s and early 1990s fundamentally improved public safety: The city initiated a long-term development plan that put billions of public and private money into rebuilding housing stock and refurbishing commercial districts. Federal and state aid for social services increased by almost 50 percent. Of the two, the long-term development plan has delivered more lasting benefits. Times Square, a recipient of massive public-private investments, had some of the highest crime rates in the city between the 1960s and 1980s and is now one of New York’s safest places. Meanwhile, 100 blocks uptown, northern Harlem relied on government outlays that became scarce as the decade wore on. Federal and state social spending shriveled by 35 percent between 1995 and 2014, and even as crime rose after 2015, state grants for services fell by more than 20 percent. Places like Times Square were rebuilt; northern Harlem was patched over.

Neighborhoods where residents and businesses have informal social controls that are inadequate to deter crime must rely on enforcement. But for the same reason, law enforcement officials have more difficulty making arrests and solving crimes in such neighborhoods, which leads to diminishing gains from enforcement. Unsurprisingly, marginal increases in public and private investment in neighborhoods with low levels of social control have higher returns for public safety than similar investments in more affluent neighborhoods.

Policymakers can help these neighborhoods with solutions that sidestep the usual pitfalls of direct social spending, such as client politics and fickle budgets. The 32nd Precinct may never be Times Square (something that should cheer residents), but it can be just as safe with a similar strategy applied on a different scale. Neighborhood Improvement Districts, for instance, are nonprofit organizations to which property owners agree to contribute in exchange for supplemental public services over which they have some degree of control, an arrangement not unlike the Times Square Alliance. Such districts are associated with substantial reductions in serious crimes and significantly fewer arrests over time. Neighborhood Matching Funds, which match community investments of cash or volunteer hours with city grants and allow local control, have also shown promising results.

Direct investments in infrastructure are even more promising. For example, evidence suggests improved street lighting reduces crime. One estimate found that introducing temporary lighting towers reduced nighttime index crimes by 35 percent and overall index crimes by 4 percent – an effect akin to a 10 percent increase in police manpower. Improvements in street lighting may also contribute to residents’ healthier, more active lifestyles and a general feeling of well-being and neighborhood efficacy. These effects are likely generalizable to geographically and culturally diverse neighborhoods. Improving vacant lots is also correlated with reduced crime. One study found treating vacant lots in neighborhoods below the poverty line resulted in significant reductions in gun violence, burglary, nuisances, and other crimes. The general finding that improving vacant and blighted land can reduce crime is supported by substantial research.

New York’s recent history of mostly low crime rates and generally safe streets lulled the city into complacency about the crime that remained. Scholars have spent the better part of two decades puzzling over why violence went away in most neighborhoods, using the crime decline as proof for their theories of achieving public safety but rarely reaching consensus. Meanwhile, with some notable exceptions, they have ignored shootings and killings in places like the 32nd Precinct because such events are inconvenient to the narrative of “the city that became safe.”

Mayor Adams and his state and federal partners need to look no further than the 32nd Precinct to understand what Officers Mora and Rivera had learned growing up in nearby neighborhoods: Revenge is no substitute for safety, and enforcement alone is an incomplete answer. But neither will feckless social spending and empty gestures make a difference.

Eventually, violent crime will settle back to levels people on the Upper East Side can stomach. But until policymakers make a long-run commitment to a comprehensive, evidence-based strategy to tackle violence where it remains all too common, people who live in the 32nd Precinct will continue to die, even if most of them never make the front page.

MacDonald: 'Criminal justice reform should by guided by evidence'. Matthew T. Mangino. (<http://www.mattmangino.com/2023/04/macdonald-criminal-justice-reform.html>)

MacDonald: 'Criminal justice reform should by guided by evidence'

Criminal justice reform should be guided by evidence, not ideology, anecdote or magical thinking, writes Professor John MacDonald of the University of Pennsylvania in Vital City

There is a growing body of evidence that politically popular justice reform efforts, such as raising the maximum age under which someone can be handled in the juvenile justice system, are proving to make no difference or even increase the risk of recidivism. Policies and programs for criminal justice reform should be guided by scientific evidence, not wishful thinking about what may work in a Utopian world. As Thomas Sowell notes, “When you want to help people, you tell them the truth. When you want to help yourself, you tell them what they want to hear” The field of experimental criminology should continue to embrace evidence-based policy and push back against “replacing what worked with what sounded good.”

The field of experimental criminology has become influential in designing, testing and evaluating criminal justice reforms and reporting their results, even when results are contrary to popularly held beliefs. After all, science advances by trial and error and generating findings sometimes that are at odds with prevailing beliefs. Science is about generating objective evidence. The only faith required is the belief in the scientific method. Findings should be objective as possible, recognizing that choices of statistical analyses and program evaluation designs can change findings. Hence the need for replication of results in other settings and reproductions of results when new methods develop.

In the context of criminal justice reform, social programs that do not show evidence of being effective at reducing crime or that increase crime should be redesigned or abandoned, regardless of political popularity. The esteemed economists John Maynard Keynes and Milton Friedman rarely agreed, but there are two quotes that offer useful guides for criminal justice reform efforts. John Maynard Keynes is attributed as stating “When the facts change, I change my mind — what do you do, sir?” Similarly, Milton Friedman stated,, “One of the great mistakes is to judge policies and programs by their intentions rather than their results.”

Criminal justice reform efforts should be guided by a basic understanding of the facts of crime and criminal offenders, and by scientific findings from social programs that have been shown to prevent crime and minimize the use of the criminal justice system. Over 100 hundred years of research has revealed seven indisputable facts about crime and offenders:

First, crime is highly concentrated by place. As little as 3% of addresses and 5% of street blocks account for more than 50% of crimes reported by citizens to the police. The concentration of crime is even greater if one focuses on more serious crimes that are less subject to under-reporting, such as shootings and homicides.

Second, crime is also concentrated by times of day, days of the week and months. Summers, nights and weekends are peak times for violence. Burglaries happen during the middle of the day when homes are empty and people are away at work, school, or on errands.

Third, crime is highly concentrated among active offenders. Most of the criminal offending in the population is generated by a small fraction of chronic offenders, such that the incapacitation of one high-volume offender abates an estimated 9.4 felony offenses.

Fourth, just as crimes are highly concentrated among places and people, so are the social costs of crime. A subset of serious crimes generates the most harm. Social costs of crime derived from jury awards, the willingness to pay to avoid specific crimes, costs to victims, criminal justice system costs and from sentences imposed for a given offense all show that violent crimes are the costliest.

Fifth, among criminal offenders, the rate of offending peaks in early adulthood, consistent with the “age-crime curve.”

Sixth, offenders do not specialize in specific offense patterns. Rather, active offenders tend to engage in what could be called a “cafeteria style” of offending and select a lot of different offenses from a menu of options. While some offenders show repeat behaviors, even the most optimistic approaches to estimating offense specialization can only find some modest evidence of offending preferences.

Seventh, criminal offending occurs within social networks, and the most active offenders tend to be clustered within dense criminal networks.

One can debate about which theories explain these facts the best, but the facts are indisputable. They exist across time periods, demographic groups, countries and whether crime is measured by official records or self-reported offending and victimization.

The most convincing rigorous evidence that exists focuses on fostering informal and formal social control.

Evidence-based crime policy should be guided by programs that confront these basic facts. The best evidence to guide policy are programs or interventions that have been experimented with in the real world, are attuned to the distribution of crime and offenders, can be scaled up to the population, are sustainable and are constitutional. We are fortunate that criminology has generated an abundance of experimental and quasi-experimental evidence over the past 70 years for what works to prevent crime. This evidence, however, has been largely absent from the current policy debates on criminal justice reform. A truly progressive criminal justice reform should be guided by evidence, not ideology, anecdote, or magical thinking.

The most convincing rigorous evidence that exists focuses on fostering informal and formal social control. Social control focuses on the constrained view of human behavior, or that society must control places and people to have a lawful society. Informal social control typically refers to the spectrum of actions taken by family, friends, neighbors and schools to maintain norms and rules. Formal social control refers to the exercise of the state to use sanctions or the threat of sanctions to enforce norms to prevent crime and illegal conduct. In conventional terms, formal social control is expressed through the functions of police, prosecutors and judges, and includes the other mechanisms of the criminal justice system.

Informal and formal social control are clearly linked to each other. While community safety is primarily produced by informal social control, high-crime areas are in particular need of formal social control like the presence of effective police and prosecutors when neighbors are unable to regulate the conduct of public spaces. So why have progressive criminal justice reforms in the past several years forgotten about social control?

The current state of progressive criminal justice policy reforms seems to have missed the growth of evidence-based policy generated from several decades of experimental and quasi-experimental evaluations in criminology.

This is a rhetorical question, as I realize there is another view about the causes of crime that focus on crime as a social construct and criminal offending as solely a result of social inequality. Under this worldview, addressing crime requires redressing the social origins of crime. While the social origins of crime, such as concentrated disadvantage, can be viewed as “root causes,” we have few experimental or quasi-experimental evaluations of social programs that address root causes and show appreciable changes in the concentration of crime by place, among active offenders and within offending networks. There are programs and policies that can help reduce social inequalities and help mitigate crime, but they are longer-term investments and not the proximal causes of changes in the crime rate in each period.

Criminal justice reform needs to be tailored to the present facts on the ground. The facts of crime in the moment need to be responded to with efforts that prevent crime and not ignore those efforts in the hope for a more promising distant future. Moreover, there is no logical reason that policies cannot address both the current facts of crime in the population and longer-term efforts to reduce future cohorts from experiencing surges in crime and violence. A criminal justice reform effort that is effective at controlling crime with the minimum use of punishment necessary should be guided by evidence on what drives the crime rate and what can reduce inequalities in the criminal justice system.

A close review of experimental and quasi-experimental evaluations offers support for the following social programs that focus on those at greatest risk of serious criminal offending, the concentration of crime by place and the networked nature of offending:

Family: Functional Family Therapy, Multi-systemic Therapy and Nurse Family Partnership all are programs that have been demonstrated to work through at least one high-quality randomized controlled trial among at-risk youth. All these programs focus on teaching parenting skills and increasing pro-social thinking among youth.

Schools: School-based programs that have demonstrated efficacy similarly involve teaching thinking skills to constrain aggressive or criminal behavior. Such programs include Life Skills Training, Positive Action and Becoming a Man. These programs focus on social control, helping youth learn self-control and increasing bonds to school.

Places: Summer jobs for at-risk youth are delivered to youth in communities with the highest rates of crime and violence and thus fit within the general framework of establishing social control in places. These programs help keep kids off the streets in the summer with productive things to do. Also, having adults monitor youth in actual jobs is another form of informal social control. Business improvement districts (BIDs), for example, are a social program that involves local businesses organizing in a defined geography and hiring private security guards and CCTV cameras, cleaning crews and place promotion and marketing materials to make a commercial area look and feel safer. The key logic model of BIDs is the focus on reducing physical disorder in places and offering extra “eyes upon the street.” Other social programs that focus on the physical environment and offer evidence for reducing serious crime include vacant lot greening and vacant housing remediation, improving street lighting and nuisance abatement.

Criminal Justice Agencies: Social control from criminal justice agencies may be one of the least popular social programs among contemporary criminal justice reformers, but it is an area where we have arguably the best evidence. This includes support for deploying extra police to crime “hot spots” — when police stay vigilant about crime prevention in crime hot spots, they exert a significant impact on serious crime and violence. The theoretical logic of hot spot policing is also consistent with the offender-specific program of focused deterrence, a multi-stakeholder approach that involves providing direct deterrence messages to individuals with high rates of offending. Rigorous designs that compare cities with and without focused deterrence or groups of offenders that could have been eligible find that when the program is implemented with fidelity, it significantly reduces serious crime and violence. Research from several quasi-experimental studies also suggests that increasing prison time for active offenders also helps prevent crime.

The current state of progressive criminal justice policy reforms seems to have missed the growth of evidence-based policy generated from several decades of experimental and quasi-experimental program and policy evaluations in criminology. Ideally, criminal justice policy reforms should be logically consistent with facts of crime and criminal offenders, tested in the field and implemented gradually.

By contrast, closing down summer job programs, letting physical disorder and mismanagement of places spread in neighborhoods, having the police pull back from high-crime intersections and the criminal justice system failing to hold active offenders accountable are all examples of ways to foster epidemic rises in serious crime and violence. These results were witnessed during the 2020–2021 rise in violent crime in large U.S. cities, but also echo the patterns of other violent crime cycles in American history.

Understanding the basic facts of crime and offenders explains why social programs that foster informal and formal social control and are targeted to those individuals and places at the greatest risk for criminal offending generate sizable reductions in serious crime. We have good evidence for social programs that work to prevent crime and minimize the footprint of the criminal justice system. This evidence base offers good guidance for effective criminal justice reforms. I am hopeful that the evidence generated from experimental criminology on what works to prevent crime can have a greater impact in the future than it presently has received from the policy community.

To read more CLICK HERE

Stopping the revolving prison door. J-PAL North America. (<https://news.mit.edu/2017/stopping-revolving-prison-door-reducing-recidivism-mit-jpal-0510>)

J-PAL North America tests innovative strategies to reduce recidivism and help inmates transition back to society.

More than three out of every four individuals released from U.S. prisons are re-arrested within five years. Given the sharp negative effects that incarceration has on individuals and their communities, as well as the often staggering expense of jails and prisons to governments and taxpayers, addressing this “revolving door” has become a top priority for many policymakers.

Reentry interventions — programs designed to help people readjust to society following their release from jail and prison — are one promising strategy. Former inmates often face complex challenges after release and experience an increased risk of homelessness, unemployment, addiction, and trauma. Sixty to 75 percent of recently incarcerated individuals were unemployed one year after release, and when they do find employment, former inmates can expect to earn 40 percent less, on average, than they did before going to jail. Seventy to 90 percent of the 10 million people released from jail or prison each year are uninsured, yet this group experiences mental illness, substance use disorders, infectious disease, and chronic health conditions at a rate that is seven times higher than the general population. Difficulty accessing housing, jobs, and treatment services puts this population at a high risk of reoffending, creating a self-perpetuating cycle.

The research community has done an extensive amount of work documenting and exploring the challenges faced by formerly incarcerated individuals and the resulting effects on prison populations when those individuals reoffend. However, as policymakers face tough choices about which reentry programs to support with limited funding available, we don’t know enough about which approaches work, which work best, and why.

The Milwaukee Safe Streets Prisoner Release Initiative

J-PAL North America, based within MIT's Department of Economics, is supporting randomized evaluations to rigorously test prisoner reintegration policies and programs so policymakers can direct their efforts in the most effective way possible. Looking at some past examples of research is helping to guide our thinking on what still needs to be tested. In one study, researchers Anthony Braga (Harvard University), Philip Cook (Duke University), Songman Kang (Hanyang University), Jens Ludwig (University of Chicago), and Mallory O’Brien (Medical College of Wisconsin) evaluated the impact of the Milwaukee Safe Streets Prisoner Release Initiative (PRI) on improving employment prospects and reducing recidivism. The PRI provides intensive, comprehensive services — such as vocational and soft-skills training, remedial education, restorative justice circles, substance use treatment, and assistance finding housing, transportation, and employment — to inmates in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, both before and after release with the aim of improving their chance of finding a job and staying out of jail.

Within the first year of release, the PRI program increased the likelihood of former inmates finding employment from 55 to 80 percent. However, while the treatment group was more likely to earn an income, their wages were still very low — leaving many in poverty. The PRI program also decreased the likelihood that former inmates would be rearrested (63 versus 72 percent), though there was no discernible difference in recidivism rates.

A different approach to recidivism: Behavioral interventions

A cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) program used in the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center (JTDC) in Chicago, Illinois, offers a potentially more scalable model for policymakers to adopt. The therapy sessions, studied by Sara Heller (University of Pennsylvania), Anuj K. Shah (University of Chicago), Jonathan Guryan (Northwestern University), Jens Ludwig (University of Chicago), Sendhil Mullainathan (Harvard University), and Harold A. Pollack (University of Chicago), generated small but significant and sustained reductions in recidivism at a much lower cost than the PRI.

As part of the experiment, trained detention staff led group CBT sessions twice a day for members of the treatment group. The sessions were targeted at reducing impulsive and harmful behaviors that can lead to criminality, and the curriculum was created by surveying other CBT programs and adapting them to the JTDC context based on behavioral science research. This allowed for an extensive understanding of the key elements necessary for successful implementation of CBT in a juvenile detention center.

This CBT program helped high-risk youth avoid being readmitted to JTDC after their release. Juveniles who complied with the treatment were 13 percentage points less likely to be readmitted to JTDC than their control counterparts within two months after release, and 16 percentage points less likely after 18 months (an overall 21 percent reduction in readmission to JTDC).

While both the CBT program and the PRI intervention proved successful by some measures, the PRI intervention cost about $5,000 per participant, whereas the CBT program cost approximately $60 each. Intensive programs like the PRI may need to have a greater and more sustained impact on recidivism to justify the high cost. On the other hand, investing in cognitive behavioral therapy programs like the one used at JTDC can produce returns ranging from 5-to-1 to 30-to-1 in averted recidivism costs.

Moving forward

Governments, service providers, and researchers are continuing to develop innovative projects aimed at finding scalable, effective solutions to close our criminal justice system’s revolving door. With support from J-PAL North America made possible by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Jennifer Doleac (University of Virginia) and Benjamin Castleman (University of Virginia) are testing a tablet-based reentry module in two county jails that aims to strengthen inmates’ transition back into society. Through this module, inmates create a personalized transition plan prior to release, and after leaving jail receive support and reminders to encourage them to adhere to their plan. If effective, this highly-scalable, technology-based and behavioral-science informed strategy may be a promising tool for successful reentry reforms.

With a renewed wave of political attention and practitioner innovation in this space, there is much more to learn about how best to support formerly incarcerated individuals to make communities safer and reduce the burden of the criminal justice system. J-PAL North America invites prospective partners interested in expanding the evidence base on reentry policy to reach out to J-PAL North America’s crime sector manager, Ben Struhl, with ideas for evaluations.

Innovative strategies to reduce recidivism and help prison inmates transition back to society, Massachusetts Institute of Technology. (<https://phys.org/news/2017-05-strategies-recidivism-prison-inmates-transition.html>)

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Study after study shows ex-prisoners would be better off without intense supervision, Jennifer Doleac. (<https://www.brookings.edu/articles/study-after-study-shows-ex-prisoners-would-be-better-off-without-intense-supervision/?alm_mvr=0>)

Two-thirds of those released from prison are re-arrested within three years. This incarceration cycle hurts families and communities—and also costs a lot of money. Governments and nonprofits have tried many programs to reduce recidivism, but most are not successful. In a recent review of the literature on prisoner reentry, I summarized the best evidence on how to improve the lives of the formerly incarcerated. One of the most striking findings was that reducing the intensity of community supervision for those on probation or parole is a highly cost-effective strategy. Several studies of excellent quality and using a variety of interventions and methods all found that we could maintain public safety and possibly even improve it with less supervision—that is, fewer rules about how individuals must spend their time and less enforcement of those rules. Less supervision is less expensive, so we could achieve the same or better outcomes for less money.

For instance, Hennigan, et al. (2010), measured the effects of intensive supervision using a randomized controlled trial (RCT) in Los Angeles. Juveniles sentenced to probation were randomly assigned to intensive supervision—in the form of a community-based after-school program—or standard probation. Five years later, there were no significant differences in outcomes between the treatment and control groups, with one exception: Low-risk boys (ages 15 or younger) who were randomized to intensive supervision were worse off. Intensive supervision for that group led to more incarceration and a higher likelihood of continued criminal justice involvement in the years ahead. That is, intensive supervision increased criminal activity by this group, without reducing criminal activity by other groups.

Barnes, et al. (2012) used an RCT to study supervision levels in Philadelphia. Low-risk probationers were randomized to probation as usual or low-intensity supervision by parole officers with high caseloads (which forced them to pay less attention to each individual case). Less supervision means probationers may be less likely to get caught for technical violations, such as using drugs or breaking curfew. But these requirements of probation are a means to an end: what really matters for public safety is the number of new offenses committed. Eighteen months after randomization, there were no significant differences between the treatment and control groups in the likelihood of being charged for a new offense. In other words, low-intensity supervision did not result in more recidivism.

Boyle, et al. (2013) evaluated the effects of Day Reporting Centers (DRC) using an RCT in New Jersey. High-risk parolees were randomly assigned to either a DRC or parole supervision as usual. Those assigned to a DRC were required to attend programming at the DRC every weekday and submit to regular drug testing. The hope was that reporting to the DRC until they had something else to do during the day (work or school) would keep parolees out of trouble. The DRC provided a variety of services designed to facilitate successful reentry. Nonetheless, those assigned to a DRC instead of regular parole were actually more likely to be convicted for a new offense in the 6 months after their release. After 18 months there was no significant difference in recidivism between the treatment and control groups. Those at the DRC did not do better than those on standard parole, despite the many services available. The authors hypothesize that being required to spend weekdays with other recently-released offenders may impose negative peer effects that are actively counterproductive.

Georgiou (2014) used a natural experiment to measure the effects of supervision levels for parolees in Washington state. Before release, inmates are assigned risk scores, and those risk scores correspond to risk categories that determine the level of supervision they receive: for instance, scores of 1-5 might be “low risk” while 6-10 is “moderate risk” and 11-15 is “high risk.” Two individuals with similar risk scores might receive very different levels of supervision if their scores are on either side of a risk category cutoff —in this example, 5 vs. 6 or 10 vs. 11. Georgiou confirmed that in this dataset, when an offender has a risk score just over a cutoff, this caused a big increase in the hours of supervision they received. If intensity of supervision matters, then this big difference in supervision levels should affect recidivism. However, those big increases in supervision did not have any effect on the likelihood of a new conviction during the three years after release, at any of the risk thresholds examined.

Finally, Hyatt and Barnes (2017) examined the effectiveness of intensive supervision using a particularly impressive RCT in Philadelphia. High-risk probationers were randomly assigned “moderate risk” or “high risk” labels that determined the actual level of supervision they received. That is, their label did not correspond at all to their actual risk level. Neither the probation officers or the offenders knew about this experiment; they interpreted the labels as valid. One year after assignment, there was no significant difference between the two groups in new charges or days incarcerated. Those assigned to intensive supervision did have more technical violations, evidence that that they were caught breaking rules that were supposed to keep them out of trouble. But those rules, and the intensive supervision to enforce them, produced no public safety benefit to community members.

These studies show that current efforts to reduce recidivism through intensive supervision are not working. Why is intensive supervision so ineffective? Requiring lots of meetings, drug tests, and so on can complicate a client’s life, making it more difficult to get to work or school or care for family members (meetings are often scheduled at inconvenient times and may be far away). A heavy tether to the criminal justice system can also make it difficult for individuals to move on, psychologically. Knowing that society still considers you a criminal may make it harder to move past that phase of your life. These difficulties may negate the valuable support that probation and parole officers can provide by connecting clients to services and stepping in to help at the first sign of trouble.

It is unclear what the optimal level of supervision is for those on parole or probation, but these studies demonstrate that current supervision levels are too high. We could reduce the requirements of community supervision—for low-risk and high-risk offenders alike—and spend those taxpayer dollars on more valuable services, such as substance abuse treatment or cognitive behavioral therapy. This would be a good first step toward breaking the vicious incarceration cycle.

How to save lives when Congress refuses to pass gun control, Dylan Matthews. (<https://www.vox.com/future-perfect/2018/11/13/18088202/gun-control-gun-violence-jennifer-doleac>)

It’s been six days since Thousand Oaks, a year since Las Vegas, two years since Orlando, six years since Newtown and Aurora, nearly eight years since Tucson, and almost two decades since Columbine.

Yet while some states have taken action on guns, federal movement toward gun control in the United States has been practically nonexistent over that period. A limited bipartisan background checks bill got close to passing in the months after Newtown but ultimately failed, and the Trump administration has moved to ban “bump stocks” that let semiautomatic guns achieve near-automatic rates of fire. But that’s about it.

That’s frustrating both for advocates and for rank-and-file supporters of gun control. The evidence is persuasive that tougher gun laws can prevent homicides, and can certainly prevent suicides. The US has a lower overall crime rate than many peer countries, including the UK, Australia, Canada, and Sweden, but it has a vastly higher homicide rate; the most likely explanation is simply that we own many more guns, and disputes that wouldn’t turn lethal in Canada often turn lethal in the US.

So why isn’t the federal government doing anything about it?

It’s a fair question, and a fair battle to wage in the halls of Congress and the court of public opinion. But it’s also worth asking: If gun control of the scale we need isn’t happening, what non-gun control measures could help as well?

Jennifer Doleac, an economist at Texas A&M University and director of the Justice Tech Lab, has a sharp piece in the Regulatory Review outlining a few possible options:

Several programs are at least worthy of consideration. Summer jobs programs for teens reduce mortality by 18 to 20 percent among participants. This effect is driven by a reduction in young men killed by homicide or suicide. Cognitive behavioral therapy for at-risk young men lowers violent crime arrests by 45 to 50 percent for participants. Access to Medicaid in early childhood decreases suicide by 10 to 15 percent later in life. Mandating that health insurance cover mental health benefits at parity reduces the suicide rate by 5 percent. Access to antidepressants also reduces suicide rates: An increase in antidepressant sales equivalent to one pill per capita reduced suicide by 5 percent.

In addition, repealing duty-to-warn laws for mental health providers — which require that they report a patient’s violent threats, perhaps causing patients to be less honest —could reduce teen suicides by 8 percent and decrease homicides by 5 percent. Repealing juvenile curfews could lower urban gunfire by two-thirds [during the hours affected]. And if the goal is to reduce mortality in general—not just gun deaths—then there are many more options policymakers should consider.

In making the case for these non-gun control ideas, Doleac argues that the fixation on gun control might be distracting advocates from presumably more tractable alternatives. “The significant time and money required to pass gun regulations — not to mention the time and money needed to enforce such laws through policing and incarceration — could be spent advocating for and implementing other programs,” Doleac argues.

I’m not so sure that’s right. For one thing, many of the non-gun control programs that reduce crime and mortality are also politically controversial. Summer jobs programs, mental health care for “at-risk young men,” and Medicaid/antidepressant drug coverage all cost money, and funding for health programs is a topic of live political debate. The number one issue of the 2018 midterm elections, based on ad buys, was health care, not guns. It might not be as hard to get these initiatives passed as it would be to pass gun laws that saved the same number of lives, but my guess is that the two are close.

And some gun control groups have embraced non-gun control ideas for reducing gun violence. Everytown for Gun Safety, for instance, has supported cognitive behavioral therapy and summer jobs as ways to prevent violence.

“I don’t credit the view there is an ‘opportunity cost,’” the veteran writer on gun issues Ted Alcorn tweeted, responding to Doleac. “Declining to fight for stronger gun laws does not benefit other approaches to violence prevention.”

But whether you think of Doleac’s ideas as a both/and with gun control or an either/or, they’re a good reminder to keep our eyes on the actual goal. Gun control isn’t an end in itself; it’s a means to saving lives, and while it would probably do that, it’s not the only way. If there are other low-cost, less controversial ways to save lives, we should be trying them out.

Learning to cooperate and a culture of honor, Karla Hoff (<https://www.brookings.edu/articles/learning-to-cooperate-and-a-culture-of-honor/?alm_mvr=0>)

Traditional economics assumes that culture does not affect economic behavior. Even behavioral economists generally assume that the biases in judgment and decisionmaking identified in experiments with U.S. subjects are universal among homo sapiens. But in the last three decades, first psychologists and then economists have found systematic differences across cultures in the way otherwise similar individuals respond to the same situation. “People think and feel and act in culture-specific ways,” the sociologist Paul DiMaggio and the psychologist Hazel Markus argue. One new research program seeks to discover cases in which features of human behavior that were thought to be universal are culturally specific.

A prior finding in economics is that pairs of individuals who interact repeatedly will almost surely coordinate on an efficient and cooperative equilibrium. However, all the participants in the experiments were U.S. university students.

In 10 villages in Uttar Pradesh, India, we conducted a similar experiment with 122 high- and low-caste men to shed light on how culture affects the ability of people to form efficient conventions. Our findings, supplemented by ethnographic evidence, suggest that there are cultural differences in whether a coordination game loss that is caused by another’s action is perceived as an insult to which one should retaliate.

What happens when high- and low-caste men play a coordination game of common interest?

Our team described the coordination game (the Stag Hunt) to participants in this way: You can choose to make either a larger or a smaller investment in a joint project. Making the larger investment yields a high return if the other player also makes the larger investment, but you will lose money (half of your endowment for the period) if the other player makes the smaller investment. Making the smaller investment yields a low return to the investor no matter what the other player does.

The game presents a very simple problem of learning how to cooperate: The players have common interests. Both will want to make the larger investment as long as they believe that their partner will also make the larger investment. Will they come to believe that?

Uttar Pradesh is a good place to study the effects of culture on convention formation because people from two broad cultures—high and low castes—live in the same villages; and the villages, which are dominated by the high castes, have remarkably inefficient conventions. Jean Dreze and colleagues describe the situation as political and social inertia. Villagers do not coordinate on tasks of common interest, such as sanitation, timing planting to maximize output, and draining household wastewater to keep dirt paths dry and safely passable.

But the disadvantage of using high and low castes to study the impact of culture is that the two groups differ in many ways besides culture—in particular, in wealth, education, and political power. We control for wealth and as many other differences as we can. In India, there are high-caste households that are poor and low-caste households that are well-off.

From each of 10 villages, we recruited representative samples of men from high (General) and low (Scheduled) castes. Each subject played five rounds of the Stag Hunt with an anonymous player of the same caste status, and another five rounds with a player of different caste status. We randomized the order.

What did we see?

Only in the low castes did most pairs of men quickly form a cooperative convention—see Panel A of the figure. In the fifth period, two-thirds of low-caste pairs (LL) were cooperating, and in the tenth period, 80 percent were.

In contrast, most high-caste pairs (HH) did not form a cooperative convention and there was no trend in outcomes of fixed pairs either over periods 1-5 or periods 6-10. In period 5, fewer than one-fifth of HH pairs were cooperating. In period 10, under one-half were cooperating. The remaining pairs were either in coordination failure or were making the smaller investment. The non-cooperative convention appears to have emerged in one-third of the HH pairs by period 10 (see Panel B).

Recall that the observations in panels A and B are for distinct groups of players: participants in the HH or LL pairs in period 1-5 were not in such pairs in period 6-10.

Figure 1

What is interesting to note is that high- and low-caste players behaved in very similar ways in all periods except (1) the first period (when the proportion who made the larger investment was 68 percent for low-caste, compared to 53 percent for high-caste participants) and (2) the period after a player incurred a loss from a coordination failure. Why the difference in response to a loss? The high- and low-caste players appear to interpret the loss differently or, if they interpret it in the same way, to differ in their preference for retaliation. Since the loss would have been avoided if the other player had cooperated, it could be categorized as an insult, for which the culturally appropriate response for a high-caste man is retaliation.

Is retaliating a luxury, so that only the better off do it? Can one explain why the high-caste retaliate more by their having greater average wealth? The answer is no. When we restrict the sample to the poorest players—those who live in thatched mud huts—the gap between high and low castes is larger. Among players who live in mud huts, the probability of continuing in the next period to make the larger investment after incurring a loss is 72 percentage points lower in HH than LL pairs. But among players who do not live in mud huts, the probability is only 38 percentage points lower in HH than LL pairs. Viewing retaliation as a luxury, or as an expression of feelings of entitlement of the rich, cannot explain why high-caste participants disproportionately retaliate.

To study cultural norms for retaliation, we implemented a vignette-based survey in 22 hamlets. We presented individuals with hypothetical scenarios in which one person harms another. We asked each person in the sample how he would respond to the harm. In cases in which the motivation behind the harm was ambiguous, a much larger proportion of high-caste than low-caste respondents said they would retaliate aggressively. Typical comments were, “I would do tit for tat, otherwise people will think I am weak” and “it is wrong to cause a loss.”

In a culture of honor, “honor” is synonymous with a reputation for responding aggressively to perceived offenses. This reputation, it is believed, deters others from challenging one’s authority or position.

What you see depends on what ideas are most accessible

Construal—the way a person understands the world or a particular situation—is an underutilized concept in explaining economic behavior. Individuals don’t respond to objective situations; they respond to situations as they perceive and interpret them.

A famous example that illustrates how the accessibility of different concepts affects perception is the next figure. What do you see in the figure?

Rabbit bunny illusionWhen asked in October, most of the subjects (recruited as they entered a zoo in Zurich) said it was a bird, but when asked on Easter Sunday, most said it was a bunny. Expectations have a biasing effect on perception. The bunny is very accessible to Westerners at Easter, but not in the fall. Thus, at Easter most see in the figure a bunny, and in the fall most see a bird (the type of bird most often named was a duck).

High-caste boys in villages are often taught from an early age to take revenge against slights. This makes honor a very accessible concept to high-caste males. A culture of honor has been described as a “mediative concept” through which individuals interpret reality. This culture is stronger among high castes than low castes in rural North India. It is strong in many groups around the world, for example, men in the U.S. South and young males in U.S. ghettos; a wonderful novel of an ancient culture of honor is Kadare’s “Broken April.”

The evidence suggests that many high-caste men construe their losses from coordination failures as insults, instead of innocent mistakes. They have been taught to retaliate against insults. Retaliating in the coordination game (by making the smaller investment in the joint project) makes it more difficult for players to converge on expectations that they will both make the larger investment.

Policy implications of economic mobility

Economic development increases mobility, and mobility increases the number of people at risk of falling in status. The poor, high-caste subjects in our experiment—people whose ancestors were presumably high in the distribution of income—were the least able to learn to cooperate. This suggests that economic development may exacerbate problems of poor coordination among villagers in North India.

But policies can change how people construe situations and how they respond to them. There have been successes in interventions to change construals that reduce violence among young males with a culture of honor in Chicago ghettos and among claimants to land in post-civil war Liberia. That high-caste men often retaliate against innocent losses from a coordination failure suggests the value of similar kinds of interventions in villages in North India.

On The Knife's Edge: Using Therapy To Address Violence Among Teens, Shankar Vedantam, Jennifer Schmidt, Tara Boyle. (<https://www.npr.org/2020/01/06/794016613/on-the-knifes-edge-using-therapy-to-address-violence-among-teens>)

The fight was over a pair of gym shoes. One teenager faces years in prison. The other — the 15-year-old grandson of Congressman Danny Davis — is dead.

We often hear stories about murders sparked by trivial disputes. And we also hear the same solutions proposed year after year: harsher punishments, more gun control.

But what if science can help us find new solutions? Can understanding how we make decisions help us prevent these tragedies?

In moments of anger, it can be hard to heed the advice to take a deep breath or count to ten. But public health researcher Harold Pollack says that "regret comes almost as fast as anger," and that five minutes of reflection can make all the difference between a regular life and one behind bars.

This week, Harold Pollack and Jens Ludwig tell us about the research they've done at the University of Chicago's Crime Lab. They worked with a program called BAM (Becoming a Man) to look at what happens when teenagers participate in cognitive behavioral therapy, or CBT.

Sponsor Message

We hear from students in the program and examine the results of Pollack and Ludwig's research. They found that changing the way we think can change the way we behave — and changing the way we behave can change our lives. This week, we put that idea to the test.

Additional Resources:

"Preventing Youth Violence and Dropout: A Randomized Field Experiment," by Sara Heller, Harold A. Pollack, Roseanna Ander, and Jens Ludwig, National Bureau of Economic Research, 2013.

"Thinking, Fast and Slow? Some Field Experiments to Reduce Crime and Dropout in Chicago," by Sara B. Heller, Anuj K. Shah, Jonathan Guryan, Jens Ludwig, Sendhil Mullainathan, and Harold A. Pollack in The Quarterly Journal of Economics, 2017.

Why do we need the police?. Patrick Sharkey. (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2020/06/12/defund-police-violent-crime/>)

The calls to end policing as we know it contain a sort of trap. The best evidence we have makes clear that police are effective in reducing violence, and without designating some group to combat this problem, efforts to weaken them through budget cuts — “defund the police” — are likely to have unanticipated consequences and to destabilize communities. In many cities this is likely to lead to a rise in violence. And research shows that, when violence increases, Americans of all races become more punitive, supporting harsher policing and criminal justice policies. That’s how we got to this point.

Patrick Sharkey @patrick\_sharkey is a professor of sociology and public affairs at Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs. His most recent book is "Uneasy Peace: The Great Crime Decline, the Renewal of City Life, and the Next War on Violence."

Yet none of this means that the police, which have served as an institution of racialized control throughout our nation’s history, are the only group capable of reducing violence. Community leaders and residents have proved adept at overseeing their neighborhoods, caring for their populations and maintaining safe streets. Studies show that this work lowers crime, sometimes dramatically. What happens if we put those people in charge of containing violence, too?

Over the past 10 years, an expanding body of research has shown just how damaging violence is to community life, children’s academic trajectories and healthy child development. We have rigorous, causal evidence that every shooting in a neighborhood affects children’s sleep and their ability to focus and learn. When a neighborhood becomes violent, it begins to fall apart, as public spaces empty, businesses close, parks and playgrounds turn dangerous, and families try to move elsewhere. Violence is the fundamental challenge for cities: Nothing works if public space is unsafe.

Those who argue that the police have no role in maintaining safe streets are arguing against lots of strong evidence. One of the most robust, most uncomfortable findings in criminology is that putting more officers on the street leads to less violent crime. We know this from randomized experiments involving “hot spots policing” and natural experiments in which more officers were brought to the streets because of something other than crime — a shift in the terror alert level or the timing of a federal grant — and violent crime fell. After the unrest around the deaths of Freddie Gray in Baltimore and Michael Brown in Ferguson, Mo., police officers stepped back from their duty to protect and serve; arrests for all kinds of low-level offenses dropped, and violence rose. This shouldn’t be interpreted to mean that protests against violent policing lead to more violence; rather, it means that when police don’t do their jobs, violence often results.

Considered alongside the brutal response to protests over the past few weeks, this evidence forces us to hold two incongruent ideas: Police are effective at reducing violence, the most damaging feature of urban inequality. And yet one can argue that law enforcement is an authoritarian institution that historically has inflicted violence on black people and continues to do so today.

Police officers outside the Trump International Hotel in Washington, D.C., on June 8, after more than a week of protests following the killing of George Floyd by the police in Minneapolis. (Katherine Frey/The Washington Post)

To resolve these divergent ideas requires thinking about whether there are other groups or institutions that can uphold public safety without the damage done by law enforcement. Decades of criminological theory and growing evidence demonstrate that residents and local organizations can indeed “police” their own neighborhoods and control violence — in a way that builds stronger communities. This isn’t about citizen watch groups. When neighborhood organizations engage young people with well-run after-school activities and summer jobs programs, those young people are dramatically less likely to become involved in violent activities. When street outreach workers intervene, they can be extremely effective in interrupting conflicts before they escalate. When local organizations reclaim abandoned lots and turn them into green spaces, violence falls. When community nonprofits proliferate across a city, that city becomes safer.

[I’m a cop. I won’t fight a ‘war’ on crime the way I fought the war on terror.]

The idea that residents and local organizations can play a central role in creating safe and strong communities is not new, and it is not particularly controversial. And yet we have never made the same commitment to these groups that we make to law enforcement — we ask residents of low-income neighborhoods to do the crucial work of building safe spaces on the cheap, often without any resources or compensation.

What if these alternative actors received the same resources the police do? The Metropolitan Police Department in Washington, for example, operates with an annual budget of close to $580 million and a workforce of 4,400 full-time employees. Each of its 57 police service areas (which D.C.'s seven police districts are subdivided into) receives, on average, about $10 million per year to protect public safety, with a workforce of roughly 77 full-time employees to serve a population of just over 12,000. If we ask community organizations and leaders to take over primary responsibility for creating a safe community, they should be given equivalent resources. And we have every reason to believe that a coalition of organizations and leaders with the capacity to hire and train more than 70 professionals — conflict mediators, violence interrupters, youth outreach teams, case workers, mental health counselors, crisis response teams, maintenance and beautification crews, data analysts, liaisons to public agencies — can begin to transform a neighborhood. These would be well-paid, full-time jobs.

This notion, obviously, requires rigorous testing. We could begin with a demonstration project that is both more cautious and more radical than the call to defund the police, tailored for a bold mayor and a bold philanthropist. It consists of a half-dozen steps: Select a set of neighborhoods or precincts where residents are actively seeking an alternative to law enforcement. Bring local organizations, leaders and residents together around a single entity, sometimes called a “community quarterback,” to begin planning for a new model of public safety and well-being. Find an outside source of funding, from a philanthropist or a foundation, to make sure the coalition has the same resources the police department would receive to patrol that precinct. Do not fire any cops or touch the police budget, but reassign officers to different roles or different precincts, outside the neighborhoods selected for the project. Last, make a long-term commitment to the new coalition and give it a chance, with methodical planning and sustained resources over at least five to 10 years.

New York City police arrest protesters in Brooklyn after an 8 p.m. curfew on June 5. (Holly Pickett/For The Washington Post)

How would this new coalition take over the task of public safety? The answers will come from those who have been doing this work for years outside the boundaries of law enforcement and from the community itself. In neighborhoods with extreme gun violence, police officers should continue to play a role in responding to some violent crimes, working with the community to solve problems in locations where shootings are common, and focusing their attention on the tiny fraction of residents who account for a disproportionate share of serious violence. But it is not hard to envision a place where police officers are confined to these roles — and otherwise serve as backup to outreach workers, counselors, mediators, social service providers, unarmed traffic safety agents and EMTs, becoming involved only if the first responder requests assistance or an arrest.

[A ‘good’ protester is just a ‘bad’ protester in the misty rearview mirror]

It may seem naive to think that most crimes can be handled outside of law enforcement or the criminal justice system. But the reality is that this is already happening. Data from the National Crime Victimization Survey reveals that roughly half of sexual assaults, robberies and aggravated assaults are not reported to the police. Those who have survived violence say prosecution is not always the right response: When given multiple options, a large majority of survivors do not want the people who harmed them to go to prison, according to a 2016 study by the Alliance for Safety and Justice. Most want those who did them harm to understand the pain they caused, to acknowledge their accountability in person, and to make a commitment to transform their behavior.

Research on street outreach programs suggests that most conflicts and altercations can be defused by violence interrupters and professionals trained in mediation. Physical and mental health crises can be addressed by paramedics and medical professionals, and public-order violations can be handled by homeless-assistance providers, counselors and other social service workers.

There are neighborhoods all over the country where residents gave up on the police a long time ago, where local organizations and informal groups have developed their own methods to mediate and de-escalate conflict, to treat neighbors experiencing health problems, to support those suffering from poverty or addiction, to provide appropriate responses for people with mental illness, to seek healing and reckoning in the aftermath of victimization. Local groups, including organizations like Reclaim the Block and the Black Visions Collective in Minneapolis, were making the case for new institutions of public safety well before George Floyd was killed. We have models available, but we’ve made commitments only to the police and the prison system.

I know what it looks like when public spaces are overseen by a group of advocates, rather than a group of warriors. In March 2017, I traveled to Perth, in Western Australia, to walk alongside outreach workers from the Nyoongar Patrol. The organization was set up with government funding to be a buffer between the police and the Aboriginal community. The highly trained, professional staff walk the streets of Perth each night looking out for community members who need assistance, defusing conflict and greeting neighbors with smiles and hugs. I watched them break up a fight between two young people before the police were called. At the end of the night, I saw them make calls to find a safe place to sleep for a woman who was worried that she would be at risk if she went home.

I observed from the periphery, and I was still exhausted by the end of the shift. It is hard, stressful work to spend time in public spaces, making sure everyone feels safe. But it works better if those taking on this task are motivated by genuine concern for their neighbors.

**Note: This story appears two more times in different outlets**

How to transform policing. John Hollywood. (<https://thehill.com/opinion/criminal-justice/506438-how-to-transform-policing/>)

The killing of George Floyd along with other abuses of power against Black Americans have been horrifying, bringing about growing calls to alter how we conduct public safety and, more broadly, criminal justice in America, including calls to “defund the police.”

Police chiefs have also been questioning how to transform the systems of policing. In 2018, RAND Corporation hosted an expert panel of police chiefs for the National Institute of Justice. The chiefs discussed what police should do and what they should not do, noting, for example, concerns about having officers serve as primary responders for mental health, addiction, and homelessness services.

They asked how partners outside of traditional criminal justice agencies, such as counseling, treatment, employment, and housing providers could be involved in a more comprehensive version of public safety. More broadly, the panelists, who represented a range of types and sizes of law enforcement agencies, raised questions about how justice and safety are implemented currently in America and how it should be implemented.

Evidence shows there is substantial room for improvement. A review of past studies of promising policing strategies shows 30 percent to 40 percent reductions in violence and major crimes are possible. If successful nationwide, a transformation in policing and justice could mean reductions in over four thousand homicides of Americans per year, including over two thousand fewer deaths of Black Americans per year. Making similar progress on lethal uses of force would mean over 300 fewer officer-involved deaths (nearly a thousand such deaths typically occur per year), including over 100 fewer deaths of African Americans, annually.

Similar progress on officers killed in the line of duty would reduce the number of officers killed by over 50 per year (nearly 200 are killed in the line of duty per year). There are also substantial opportunities to increase the percentage of major crimes that are solved and improve the overall trust and legitimacy that public safety agencies have with their communities.

How do we get there? Four major types of strategies are most promising: problem-oriented (i.e., crime problem-solving) policing, especially working directly with community residents to identify and resolve safety concerns; intervening directly with persons at high risk of being involved in violence, again with community support; police legitimacy techniques centering on procedural justice to address racial and other tensions directly, build community relations, and to build trust; and strategies to solve homicides and other serious crimes by using strategies and tactics employed by jurisdictions that solve more than 80 percent of their homicides.

There is also evidence on what not to do: aggressive, order maintenance policing or zero tolerance strategies. These strategies include the widespread stopping, questioning, and frisking of pedestrians or drivers considered to be acting suspiciously and then arresting and charging them for typically low-level offenses such as possessing marijuana or resisting arrest. Evidence shows these strategies are ineffective at best and may lead to tragic and unnecessary consequences at worst.

In terms of the number of people involved in public safety, past studies have found that a one-percent increase, on average. in the size of public safety, the workforce is associated with about a half-percent decrease in crime. However, those in the public safety workforce can and should include expert personnel in addition to law enforcement. This means organizations providing mental health, physical health, substance abuse, and case management to help residents navigate social services (such as in the Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion Program) can play an important role in police efforts.

Similarly, nonprofits working to reduce violence and improve community life (one study showed each new nonprofit in a small city led to about a one percent drop in homicide), training and employment partners, and partners that advocate for improving outdoor environments, and conflict mediators (such as the Cure Violence initiative), can be effective parts of the public safety enterprise, as well.

The evidence on what works better in public safety is substantial, but much more is needed on how to implement the most promising strategies at scale effectively, including making cultural and strategic changes. Given the ongoing major recruiting, retention, pay, and morale problems in policing, there is also a need to work with personnel to create rewarding, well-compensated careers in public safety. The strategies and partnerships mentioned should be first steps in making public safety jobs better, helping to make them more effective, more welcomed, and less likely to include excessive duties for which officers are not adequately prepared.

Much more work is also needed to comprehensively examine the root causes of the major racial disparities in public safety (and criminal justice, more broadly) and to develop suitable measures to address them. Core to all of this is the requirement for police departments, partner service providers, communities, and policymakers to work together to plan and implement measures that are mutually agreeable to all partners.

In all, evidence suggests that a future in which major crime victimizations, lethal uses of force, and officers killed in the line of duty are reduced, biases are eliminated, and public safety personnel are consistently welcomed by communities, is possible. It is time to start working together towards that future now.

**Note: This story appears one more time on another media outlet.**

How cities can tackle violent crime without relying on police. Roge Karma. (<https://www.vox.com/21351442/patrick-sharkey-uneasy-peace-abolish-defund-the-police-violence-cities>)

One of the most robust findings in criminology is that putting more police officers on the streets leads to less violent crime. Yet, as recent police killings and violence against protesters have reminded us, policing also produces staggering costs that many communities are no longer willing to bear. These seemingly incongruous views represent a tension at the core of any efforts to reform, defund, or abolish policing.

Few scholars have wrestled with this tension as rigorously as Princeton University sociologist Patrick Sharkey. In his 2018 book, Uneasy Peace: The Great Crime Decline, the Renewal of City Life, and the Next War on Violence, Sharkey makes the case that the decline in violent crime in America over the past three decades is one of the most important social transformations of our time. At the same time, he argues the US’s chosen methods for responding to violence have become far too destructive, and offers an alternative vision for public safety that relies primarily on communities and residents, not law enforcement.

We are currently being forced to confront a question that has animated Sharkey’s work for years: How can we continue to reduce violence, but do so using a model that relies far less on police and prisons? That’s a much harder question than simply asking whether some of the jobs police currently perform can be replaced — and it demands an even more rigorous answer, especially considering the extent to which high levels of violence can devastate disadvantaged communities.

I recently spoke to Sharkey about what’s causing the uptick in gun violence in big US cities, whether there is an inevitable trade-off between reducing police presence and reducing violence, his vision for a community-driven approach to public safety (and the evidence base behind that vision), what he thinks the “defund the police” campaign gets right (and wrong), and more.

Our conversation, edited for length and clarity, follows.

Roge Karma

Can you describe the “uneasy peace” that we are currently living through?

Patrick Sharkey

Since the 1990s, violence has fallen by roughly half across the country. In a number of cities like New York, Los Angeles, Washington, DC, Dallas, San Diego, and San Francisco, violence has fallen by 70 or 80 percent. Even places we still think of as violent — Chicago, Philadelphia, Oakland — have seen violence fall by between a third and a half.

These changes have transformed city life as we know it. As violence falls, public life starts to return. Parents let their kids play outside, libraries fill up, shopping districts become more lively. Academic performance rises; young people are less likely to drop out. Families invest in neighborhoods as they become safe, and businesses return.

There’s causal evidence that children growing up in cities where violence is declining are more likely to rise up in the income distribution when they reach adulthood and move out of poverty. In short, when violence falls, cities start to return to life, and the greatest benefits are experienced by the most disadvantaged segments of the population.

But the paradox is that the methods we’ve relied on to deal with violence — primarily aggressive policing and mass incarceration — have had staggering costs. They have left millions of Americans enmeshed in the prison system with consequences that affect not only the people who are involved in the system but also their families and the next generation.

For several decades now, we’ve asked police departments to dominate public spaces through any means necessary. The police violence that has become so visible recently is a function of that task; the controversy, the attention, the unrest, the anger toward policing is a response to a strategy to reduce violence that has been intact for several decades now.

That’s what I mean when I’m talking about the peace being uneasy: Violence has fallen, but we need a new method to address it going forward.

A protestor demonstrates against police brutality in New York City on May 11 following the killing of Ahmaud Arbery. B.A. Van Sise/NurPhoto via Getty Images

Roge Karma

That’s a good segue into our current moment. Multiple cities are currently experiencing a sharp uptick in shootings and homicides — some of which is being blamed on efforts to delegitimize police authority and reduce police presence. So I’m wondering: Is that the trade-off we face? If we try to scale back policing, is rising violence the inevitable byproduct?

Patrick Sharkey

It’s not an inevitable trade-off.

To be clear, there is a pattern of violence rising in the aftermath of these kinds of high-profile protests against police brutality. This happened after Freddie Gray in Baltimore, after Michael Brown in Ferguson, and it’s clearly happening now. But that doesn’t mean that protests against police cause violence to rise. It also doesn’t mean police are the only institution capable of confronting violence. It means that when we rely primarily on police to respond to all forms of violence and then police stop playing that role, neighborhoods become destabilized.

That happens for a few different reasons. One is that police make a conscious decision to step back from their role in being the primary institution responsible for public safety. That might happen due to increased scrutiny on policing. It might happen due to shifts in policy, like the fact that NYPD dismantled their plainclothes anti-crime units that respond to many serious forms of violent crime. It also may happen because law enforcement is slowing down intentionally to make a statement.

A second piece is that residents may be less likely to work with the police, defer to the police, or cooperate with investigations. Young people may come to the conclusion that this city doesn’t care about me — I’m not playing by the rules anymore. People obey the law when they believe it’s legitimate; when the belief in the legitimacy of this institution is undermined, that can result in a rise of violence.

None of this implies people should stop protesting police brutality. It means that the methods we’ve historically used to reduce violence are unsustainable, and we need to start thinking of a strategy for confronting violence that relies a lot less on those methods.

Roge Karma

Let’s talk about that strategy. Can you paint me a picture of what an alternative model of public safety would look like that didn’t rely so heavily on police?

Patrick Sharkey

There’s a basic conclusion from the research on what creates safe neighborhoods: Police are effective at reducing violence, but they aren’t the only ones who are effective.

There’s lots of evidence telling us that other core institutions in a community — institutions that are driven by residents and local organizations — can play a central role in controlling violence. But we’ve never thought of these organizations and residents as the central actors responsible for creating safe streets, so we’ve never given them the same commitment and the same resources that we give to law enforcement and the criminal legal system. When we talk about how to respond to violence, the default response in the US is always to focus on the police and the prison.

The next model should be one driven primarily by residents and local organizations as the central actors. Police still certainly have a role to play, but responding to violent crime takes up only a tiny fraction of police officers’ time. So the idea here is that we can rely on residents and local organizations to take over most of the duties that [officers] currently handle and make sure neighborhoods are safe.

Roge Karma

The critique you’ll often hear on this is that the evidence base for some of these community-based methods for reducing violent crime is not nearly as robust as the evidence base behind policing as a way to reduce violent crime. How do you respond to that?

Patrick Sharkey

I agree that the research on the effectiveness of policing on crime is strong. But the motivation for developing a new model for how to deal with violence is the observation that while police may have been effective in controlling violence, that has come with significant costs, which aren’t accounted for in any of those studies. It’s come with the type of aggressive, and sometimes violent, policing that I think most of the country is no longer willing to tolerate. Policing as a method to confront violence is now seen as unacceptable by a large chunk of the population.

I would also dispute that the evidence base for the alternative approach focused on community actors and institutions is not as strong. We now have a pretty well-established base of evidence telling us that residents and local organizations are at least as effective as the police in controlling violence.

The programs run out of the Crime Lab at the University of Chicago, all of which are run as randomized controlled trials, are extraordinarily effective. The Becoming a Man and Choose to Change programs, which rely on a combination of mentoring and cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), reduce participants’ involvement in violence by about 50 percent. Summer jobs programs have led to over 40 percent decreases in violence.

The READI program, which provides adults most at risk of becoming a victim or perpetrator of gun violence with transitional employment and CBT, is currently under evaluation, but the early results have shown extraordinary potential. Community-based programs that redesigned randomized abandoned lots in Philadelphia to become public spaces reduced violence in and around those lots by around 30 percent.

The Cure Violence programs, which have been cited as if they always work, do have a more mixed evidence base. I think it is important to be very transparent about that — they don’t work every single time. Still, this can be a very effective model. Programs in New York, Baltimore, and elsewhere have been rigorously evaluated and shown to be extremely effective at reducing violence.

There’s also national data on this. I carried out a study on the role that the expansion of the nonprofit sector played in contributing to the crime drop. What we found was that in a given city with 100,000 people, every new organization formed to confront violence and build stronger neighborhoods led to about a 1 percent drop in violent crime and murder. So the expansion nonprofits focused on building stronger communities and working against violence played a big role in contributing to the crime drop.

The evidence base for a community response to violence is at least as strong as the evidence base for policing. That’s why I don’t really think it’s about the evidence base — I think it’s about a mindset. In America, policy discussions about violence focus so intently on the police and the prison as the default responses. We’ve been investing in these methods for so long, it’s all we know — it’s hard to even imagine a different response to violence.

A group of violence interrupters head into a neighborhood in Baltimore, Maryland, to greet residents and raise awareness about the city’s Safe Streets program to reduce gun violence. Andre Chung/Washington Post via Getty Images

Roge Karma

I want to talk about that mindset. In Uneasy Peace, you talk about our historic approach to issues like violence, poverty, and inequality as one of “punishment and abandonment” and warn that if we focus on only addressing the “punishment” side of things but ignore making investments in abandoned communities, then reform efforts will ultimately fail.

I think this framework applies to conversations around “defunding the police.” If the goal is to just reduce the injustices that come with policing, then slashing police budgets works great. But it strikes me that this strategy could also lead to an uptick in overall violence levels if it’s not paired with investments in alternative mechanisms for reducing violence.

Can you walk us through that broader framework and how it may apply today?

Patrick Sharkey

Calls to defund or dismantle the police are really about how we deal with an institution that is seen as racist and anti-democratic; what I’ve argued for is to shift the focus toward how we can most effectively create safe and strong communities. When we make that shift, it forces us to think about not just how to scale back police shootings but what active steps need to be taken to make sure that communities are safe and everyone is welcomed.

For the past 50 years, our model of responding to concentrated urban poverty has been abandonment and punishment. We’ve ignored the challenges of urban inequality and responded by scaling up the policing and prison systems. Over time, there has been a recognition of the injustice those systems, so we’ve moved toward a model that is trying to gradually scale them back. That means we have moved away from a focus on punishment and toward a focus on justice. But if we just focus solely on justice, then we’re going to end up with a situation where communities don’t have the basic investments that they need to be strong, stable, and safe.

That’s my motivation for a different approach: to focus not only on justice but also on the investments that are needed to create safe neighborhoods. I agree entirely that just scaling back the budgets of police departments is going to leave us with neighborhoods that are more vulnerable to a rise in violence. That’s why I make the case for investments in a different set of institutions driven by residents and local organizations that can play a central role in creating safe streets and strong communities.

That’s the step we haven’t taken. We started the conversation about scaling back the excesses of law enforcement and the criminal legal system. But we haven’t had the conversations about the investments that are needed to make sure neighborhoods are safe and no one falls through the cracks.

Roge Karma

Let’s have that conversation. You’ve called for “a demonstration project that is both more cautious and more radical than the call to defund the police.” Can you outline that for me?

Patrick Sharkey

Instead of calling for a rapid change where we dismantle police departments and immediately shift all police responses to other entities, the idea here is to try to maintain stability in communities at a time when violence is rising, but also start to plan for what an alternative model for dealing with violence might look like.

There are a few steps. Begin with a community within a city where the police are not seen as a legitimate institution — where residents are looking for an alternative to law enforcement. There has to be buy-in from the community where this is implemented and it has to be driven by members of that community. Second, establish a “community quarterback”: a single coalition of organizations that are brought together and see it as their responsibility to make sure all public spaces are safe in their community.

Third, provide funding to that organization equal to what law enforcement would be provided in that precinct. For instance, each of Washington, DC’s 50-plus police service areas receives, on average, about $10 million per year to fund a workforce of roughly 80 full-time employees for a population of around 12,000. That’s the kind of commitment I’m asking for: the same level of commitment that we give law enforcement. For far too long, we’ve asked community groups to mobilize to respond to violence on the cheap, often without any resources or compensation.

Then allow this new organization to decide how it wants to hire, train, and deploy its resources to deal with all of the incidents that that police departments currently deal with: mental health crises, young people dealing drugs, small-scale altercations that occur outside bars or other hot spots, drug addiction.

Lastly, make a long-term commitment to this new coalition; I’m calling for a 10-year commitment. Give it a chance to fail. Give it a chance to go through scandals and mishaps and bumps along the way, and know that it’s still going to be there in 10 years. There’s no easy way to respond to every challenge in a community. There’s gonna be problems along the way. So it’s really a mayor and a funder that have to be willing to go through these challenges and stick with an organization.

Now, communities may decide that there are places where armed responders are still necessary, like gun violence, and could choose what kind of relationship they want with the local police department accordingly. But in those places, we could imagine a model where even for situations where police are first to respond, they would need to respond with a member of this community coalition with them. Then, for all other 99 percent of incidents, the members of this coalition would be the first to respond to incidents in public space.

That’s the proposal: Give an alternative coalition of residents and organizations a chance to play a central role in creating a safe community and give them the resources that we devote to law enforcement. I just have to believe that, based on the evidence we have, that coalition would be at least as effective as law enforcement, and would come without the costs of law enforcement.

6 policies to boost employment for Black men. Harry J. Holzer. (<https://www.brookings.edu/articles/six-policies-to-boost-employment-for-black-men/?alm_mvr=0>)

Black men face a range of challenges in the labor market which hinder their employment opportunities, as discussed in my accompanying paper “Why are employment rates so low among Black men?“.

What can be done? Effective policies, operating at the federal, state and/or local level, to address some of these challenges include the following:

Reduce racial segregation of neighborhoods and schools

Residential segregation between white and Black households, and the segregation of K-12 schools that it generates, damages the educational and employment outcomes of Black boys and men, as shown in studies here and here). Reducing segregation would improve job prospects for Black men, through policies such as federal and state incentives to limit local zoning (which eliminates lower-cost housing from affluent suburbs), expanding affordable housing in racially diverse neighborhoods, and providing more federal support for highly-integrated “magnet schools”.

Boost early work experience for young Black men

Getting work experience early helps with long run employment outcomes. Programs should start in high school. One approach is to expand Summer Youth Employment Programs, which have a range of positive effects on employment in the short term, and on education and crime prevention in the longer term. Access to both skills and jobs can also be enhanced by expanding Career Academies and other forms of high-quality career and technical education in high school, as well as work-based learning through internships and apprenticeships.

The program Year Up, for example, provides training and six-month internships for low-income students, especially those of color, and shows very impressive positive impacts on subsequent earnings and employment of participants. New initiatives like P-Tech, which begins in grade 9 and creates a pathway into community college vocational programs, seem promising. More career education, beginning in middle school, would help too.

More–and better–college credentials

Lifting rates of higher education attainment among Black men would help a great deal. Gaining a bachelor’s degree has the biggest impact on employment outcomes. But there are many other options for acquiring valuable postsecondary credentials, including certificates and associate degrees at community colleges. The key is ensuring that these credentials have real labor market value. In other work, I have outlined a series of policy reforms–including more funding for high-quality occupational programs–that would benefit low-income youth and adults, particularly those of color, and not least for Black men.

Reduce crime and incarceration rates

Reducing crime rates and incarceration of Black men is a vital step towards boosting employment rates. There are a number of ways to achieve this. First, states and localities should expand the use of community policing and other approaches that successfully reduce crime without subjecting Black men to excessive use of force. Second, mental health professionals should be consistently deployed along with police, to defuse situations where mental illness leads to violence and deaths. Third, greater investment in programs that reduce crime and violence among young Black men–including summer employment and others, like Becoming a Man, that teach young participants how to avoid violence in confrontational situations. Fourth, expanded drug courts and treatments for those suffering from substance addiction. Fifth, seek out and eliminate the sources of racial bias in law enforcement at all levels.

More help for returning citizens into work

For those many Black men who have been incarcerated, more needs to be done to help them transition into paid work. Bruce Western shows how many former inmates still suffer from drug addiction or other mental health challenges upon release from prison. Assistance for these men, especially designed to reduce recidivism, is critical. One approach is to fund transitional jobs, which raises employment for these men in the short term – and can also reduce their recidivism rates over time.

Subsidized jobs

A large fraction of non-employed Black men suffer from disabilities and other barriers to work. Creating more subsidized jobs in either the public or private sector for these individuals could help them into the labor market. The broadly positive experience with emergency subsidized job creation at scale during the Great Recession illustrates the potential for such programs even when the labor market is stronger.

Invest now in Black men’s employment

The policy interventions described above, implemented properly, will not be cheap. In some cases, the evidence for effectiveness at scale is not yet that strong–which means that experimentation and careful evaluation will be necessary. But now is the time to invest in a full range of policies and programs to improve employment rates of Black men. As a nation, we simply cannot afford to waste so much personal and economic potential.

Twelve Things That Caught My Eye Today: The Suffering Uyghurs, Lebanon, When Harry Became Sally & More. KATHRYN JEAN LOPEZ (<https://www.nationalreview.com/corner/twelve-things-that-caught-my-eye-today-the-suffering-uyghurs-lebanon-when-harry-became-sally-more/>)

1. UK House of Commons: Uyghur forced labour in Xinjiang and UK value chains

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ARI BLAFF

Jack Smith Is a Fanatic

RICH LOWRY

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2. Lebanon: “The People Are Hungry, and the Worst is Yet to Come”

We only realize the extent of the catastrophe that has hit the Lebanese, if we compare the current collapsed currency rate of some 11,000 LBP to the US dollar and the rate in September 2019 when it amounted to some 1500 LBP to the dollar.

This means that the average monthly income, which stood at some 700,000 LBP or $470 at the time, today equals some $64. All this has made the Lebanese rush to buy subsidized products and sometimes store them. Recently, a video went viral on social media showing shocking scenes of people fighting over a box of powder milk that was still on the list of subsidized items by the government.

3. Ryan T. Anderson: Amazon Won’t Let You Read My Book

Three years ago the Post ran a hit piece titled “ Ryan Anderson’s book calling transgender people mentally ill is creating an uproar.” The second sentence read: “In the 264-page book, ‘When Harry Became Sally,’ Anderson makes an inflammatory claim — that transgender people are mentally ill.”

My book made no such claim. I contacted the Post asking them to quote a single sentence from the book supporting their contention that I had called transgender people mentally ill. They couldn’t, because it doesn’t exist. Within a day, the newspaper had entirely rewritten the story, removing the falsehoods and changing the headline.

Three years later, the world’s largest e-commerce platform — owned by the richest man on the planet — has canceled my book. In a letter last week to four U.S. Senators, Amazon justified its decision to delist “When Harry Became Sally” by claiming it frames “LGBTQ+ identity as a mental illness.” This recycled charge is as false now as when Mr. Bezos’ newspaper first made it.

4. Catholic News Agency: Poll: most Illinois voters want parental notification for abortion, but lawmakers seek repeal

5. Brookings Institute: 6 policies to boost employment for Black men

Reducing crime rates and incarceration of Black men is a vital step towards boosting employment rates. There are a number of ways to achieve this. First, states and localities should expand the use of community policing and other approaches that successfully reduce crime without subjecting Black men to excessive use of force. Second, mental health professionals should be consistently deployed along with police, to defuse situations where mental illness leads to violence and deaths. Third, greater investment in programs that reduce crime and violence among young Black men – including summer employment and others, like Becoming a Man, that teach young participants how to avoid violence in confrontational situations. Fourth, expanded drug courts and treatments for those suffering from substance addiction. Fifth, seek out and eliminate the sources of racial bias in law enforcement at all levels.

6. Kevin D. Williamson: Hillbilly Agonistes

Vance’s views are, in many cases, not mine. But he is not auditioning for the vacancy at Lou Dobbs’s old desk. We can have a useful argument with intelligent, informed, honest people with whom we disagree. I wish there were more opportunities for such disagreement, both within the Right’s factions and between the Right and the Left. Our politics have been tribalized and sacralized (which ultimately are the same thing) at just the wrong time in our cultural history: the moment when new manners and mores associated with social media and the mutation of celebrity culture into an airborne virus have led to a general lowering of intellectual standards and the nearly complete annihilation of the spirit of compromise and cooperation. Reversing that dismal tide will require a campaign for hearts and minds, and a very different kind of politics from the one we have endured so far in this wretched century.

7. Robby George and Rick Santorum warned us: The New Yorker: How Polyamorists And Polygamists Are Challenging Family norms

In the popular imagination, polygamists are presumed to be right-wing misogynists and polyamorists to be decadent left-wingers, but the two groups share goals and, often, ways of life. In the years I’ve spent talking to members of both communities, I have found that it is usually the polygamists who are more cognizant of common cause.

How feminists don’t care in a big way about this is beyond me.

8. Samuel Benson: The danger of trading religion for politics

The problem, some would say, is not just the rise of politics and fall of faith. Politics are not inherently bad, nor are all Americans theists. But as politics replace faith, fueled by hate, the irony (and danger) of it isn’t lost on religious politicians themselves. Utah Gov. Spencer Cox, a Latter-day Saint, decried this pandemic-era mentality and the shift from pews to PACs: “We may not have any real friends, and we may not know our neighbors, but at least we can hate the same people together on Facebook. And that’s bringing people together in this new type of religion.”

9. Gracy Olmstead: The Risk of Gentleness

As I sat — nine months pregnant — during Advent, surrounded by reminders of Jesus’ imminent birth, I found myself dwelling often on the sacred surprises we neither expect nor fully deserve. In 2020, like many others, I realized how often love calls us to take frightful, beautiful risks.

10.

11. National Catholic Register: Examen for Masculine Virtue

12. Dan Darling: Why It’s Okay to Enjoy Some Good News

Biden’s plan to spend billions on community policing is bad policy. (Michael Sierra-Arévalo).

(<https://thehill.com/opinion/white-house/563276-bidens-plan-to-spend-billions-on-community-policing-is-bad-policy/>)

This past Monday, President Biden encouraged a group of city leaders and police chiefs to tap into $350 billion of COVID-relief funds to address rising violence. In addition to “community-based prevention and intervention programs,” the president urged funds be used to hire more police and “encourage more community policing” that aims to enhance public safety through cooperative partnerships.

On its face, parallel investment in community programs and “community policing” appears to have little downside. History and decades of research show, however, that community policing is, at best, a bad bet to reduce violence. At worst, it’s a thinly-veiled political play for the president to have his cake and eat it, too, appeasing progressives with funds for community-based programs while using the gentler label of “community” policing to justify a deluge of federal dollars for U.S. police.

This is not the first time Biden has used such sleight of hand. As a senator, Biden was a prominent supporter of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994. This legislation, in addition to providing billions to expand state prisons, allocated nearly $11 billion to put “100,000 officers on the street in community policing programs” and reduce violent crime. The bill also created the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, which has distributed more than $14 billion to community policing efforts since 1994.

Decades and billions of dollars later, research shows that community policing is not the answer violence. Though it can improve attitudes toward police, it has only small and unreliable effects on violence. Its lack of effectiveness is at least partially explained by the utter lack of consistency in how departments implement community policing. Walking patrols, community meetings, neighborhood watch, and ice cream socials have all been labeled community policing. Many departments that claim to practice community policing relegate its implementation to individual officers or specialized units. And departments that report community policing is practiced department-wide actually end up “squeezing in” community policing between calls for service. Even worse, other departments do little more than relabel age-old enforcement as community policing, perpetuating the aggressive enforcement that harms disadvantaged communities and creates the deep distrust which community policing was supposed to address in the first place.

Pouring billions into police hiring with vague appeals to “community policing” is a recipe for either ineffective or inequitable policing. This does not mean, however, that police have no ability to address violence. As outlined by Thomas Abt, a senior fellow at the Council on Criminal Justice, “focused deterrence” interventions that use a combination of police, social service providers and community members have helped reduce gun violence in cities across the United States. By the same token, “hot spots” policing that focuses on the extremely small number of “micro places” and people actively involved in violence — a far cry from indiscriminate, “stop and frisk” policing — can reduce violence.

And then there are strategies that do not depend on police at all. For every 10 non-profits focused on reducing violence and building stronger communities that a city adds, violent crime drops by 6 percent; murder, specifically, drops by 9 percent. After-school initiatives that use cognitive behavioral therapy can reduce involvement in violent crime by between 45 and 50 percent, and summer job programs reduced youth violence by 43 percent. Just changing the physical environment can reduce violence, too. Better lighting and rehabilitating blighted areas by renovating the facades of abandoned buildings and clearing empty lots can make communities safer, too.

The Biden administration’s announcement of new funding to reduce violence does, of course, provide some reason for optimism. Potentially billions of dollars going to community-based prevention is a welcome development, especially as political pressure to stem the bloodshed pushes major cities to roll back last year’s efforts to transfer funding from police to communities and social services. Teachers, clergy, mental health care professionals and violence interrupters that have been on the frontlines of our gun violence epidemic for decades need and deserve more resources. But tethering this investment to billions of more dollars for community policing that has never been consistently implemented and which has little effect on violence is bad policy. In an effort to appease everyone, Biden’s funding proposal risks repeating very costly mistakes we’ve already made.

**Note: This story appears one more time on other media outlet.**

A study gave cash and therapy to men at risk of criminal behavior. 10 years later, the results are in. Sigal Samuel (<https://www.vox.com/future-perfect/23141405/violence-crime-cbt-therapy-cash-shootings>)

What if someone told you that you could dramatically reduce the crime rate without resorting to coercive policing or incarceration? In fact, what if they said you could avert a serious crime — a robbery, say, or maybe even a murder — just by shelling out $1.50?

That’s such an incredibly good deal that it sounds too good to be true. But it’s been borne out by the research of Chris Blattman, Margaret Sheridan, Julian Jamison, and Sebastian Chaskel. Their new study provides experimental evidence that offering at-risk men a few weeks of behavioral therapy plus a bit of cash reduces the future risk of crime and violence, even 10 years after the intervention.

Blattman, an economist at the University of Chicago, never intended to conduct this study. But in 2009, he was hanging out with an acquaintance in Liberia named Johnson Borh, who showed him around the capital city of Monrovia. Since Blattman studies crime and violence, Borh took him to visit the pickpockets, drug sellers, and others living on the margins of society.

Along the way, they kept running into guys who were sitting on street corners, eking out a meager living by shining shoes or selling clothes. When these men spotted Borh, they’d run to give him a hug. Blattman recalls that when he asked the men how they knew Borh, they’d say something like, “I used to be like them,” and point to the nearby pickpockets or drug sellers. “But then I went through Borh’s program.”

That’s how Blattman learned about the program Borh had been running for 15 years: Sustainable Transformation of Youth in Liberia. It offered men who were at high risk for violent crime eight weeks of cognitive behavioral therapy. CBT, as it’s called, is a popular, evidence-based method of dealing with issues like anxiety, but Borh adapted the therapeutic strategy to deal with issues like violence and crime.

Meeting with a counselor in groups of around 20, the men would practice specific behavioral changes, like managing anger and exerting self-control. They’d also rehearse trying on a new identity unconnected to their past behavior, by changing their clothes and haircuts and working to reintegrate themselves into mainstream society through community sports, banks, and more.

Blattman wanted to formally study just how effective this kind of program could be. He decided to run a big randomized controlled trial with 999 of the most dangerous men in Monrovia, recruited on the street. The results were so promising that they’ve already inspired a sister program in a very different city: Chicago.

In Chicago, the murder rate is troublingly high, and the police fail to solve 95 percent of all shootings. Finding a way to prevent shootings and other violent crimes is an urgent priority — not only in that city, but across the US, as the recent mass shootings in Buffalo, New York, and Uvalde, Texas, remind us. Given that direct interventions like removing guns are largely blocked by political polarization, and trying to crack down on crime after the fact carries with it risks of policy brutality, we desperately need new solutions to the problem of violence.

Therapy plus cash was a surprisingly successful combo

The 999 Liberian men were split into four groups. Some received CBT, while others got $200 in cash. Another group got the CBT plus the cash, and finally, there was a control group that got neither.

A month after the intervention, both the therapy group and the therapy-plus-cash group were showing positive results. A year after the intervention, the positive effects on those who got therapy alone had faded a bit, but those who got therapy plus cash were still showing huge impacts: crime and violence were down about 50 percent.

But Blattman didn’t dare to hope that this impact would persist. Experts he surveyed predicted that the effects would steeply diminish over the years, as they do in many interventions.

So it was a great surprise when, 10 years later, he tracked down the original men from the study and reevaluated them. Amazingly, crime and violence were still down by about 50 percent in the therapy-plus-cash group.

Ecuador legalized gangs. Murder rates plummeted.

Blattman estimates that there were 338 fewer crimes per participant over 10 years. Given that it had cost just $530 per participant to implement the program, that works out to $1.50 per crime avoided.

In short, it worked extremely well. But why did the combination of CBT and some cash work?

Practice makes perfect

The most plausible hypothesis, according to Blattman, is that the $200 in cash enabled the men to pursue a few months of legitimate business activity — say, shoe shining — after the therapy ended. That meant a few extra months of getting to cement their new non-criminal identity and behavioral changes. “Basically, it gave them time to practice,” Blattman told me.

A couple of caveats: The study relied largely on self-reported data about what behaviors participants were and weren’t engaging in, which could raise concerns of experimenter demand (where participants tell experimenters what they want to hear). Also, of the 999 men initially recruited into the study, 103 had died by the time of the 10-year follow-up.

That might make you wonder whether the more violent men, who could have been more resistant to the effects of the program, were just missing from the reevaluation, artificially making it look as if violent crime had dropped more than it really had.

But there are caveats to the caveats. For one thing, the study authors didn’t rely only on self-reported data; they also observed how participants acted in incentivized games where, for example, they’re given a choice between getting $1 now or $5 next week (a good example of self-control and future-oriented thinking). “Our treatment effects are strong and persistent in these outcomes,” the study notes.

By interviewing friends and relatives of each participant who died, the authors also determined the cause of death. They identified only 26 violent deaths. And even when they modeled what would happen to their results if they plugged in “good” outcomes for missing control group members and “bad” outcomes for missing treatment group members, the positive treatment effect for therapy-plus-cash largely remained.

Upending the mainstream approach to crime

Inspired by the program in Liberia, Chicago has been implementing a similar but more intensive program called READI. Over the course of 18 months, men in the city’s most violent districts participate in therapy sessions in the morning, followed by job training in the afternoon. The rationale for the latter is that in a place with a well-developed labor market like Chicago, the best way to improve earnings is probably to get people into the market, whereas in Liberia, the labor market is much less efficient, so it made more sense to offer people cash.

“We’ll have more results this summer,” said Blattman of the READI program, which he is helping to advise. So far, “it doesn’t look like a slam dunk.”

Still, Chicago is eager to try these therapy-based approaches, having already had some success with them. The city is also home to a program called Becoming a Man (BAM), where high schoolers do CBT-inspired group sessions. A randomized controlled trial showed that criminal arrests fell by about half during the BAM program. Even though effects dissipated over time, the program looks to be very cost-effective.

But this isn’t just a story about the growing recognition that therapy can play a useful role in preventing crime. That trend is part of a broader movement to adopt an approach to crime that is more carrot, less stick.

“It’s all about a progressive, rational policy for social control. Social inclusion is the most productive means of social control,” David Brotherton, a sociologist at the City University of New York, explained to me in 2019.

A bold new experiment out of Florida: Guaranteed income for the formerly incarcerated

Brotherton has long argued that mainstream US policy is counterproductively coercive and punitive. His research has shown that helping at-risk people reintegrate into mainstream society — including by offering them cash — is much more effective at reducing violence.

To give one striking example from Brotherton’s research: In 2007, the crime-riddled nation of Ecuador legalized the gangs that had been the source of much of the violence. The country allowed the gangs to remake themselves as cultural associations that could register with the government, which in turn allowed them to qualify for grants and benefit from social programming.

Can you guess what happened to the murder rate over the next few years?

That’s right. It plummeted.

Eight weeks of therapy, plus some cash, can change the lives of violent men. Christopher Blattman (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2022/06/03/cbt-violence-study-prevention/>)

I work with violent young men, from Africa to the Americas — guys so far into lives of crime that a natural reaction is hopelessness. If, 10 years ago, you told me that eight weeks of therapy plus a little cash could turn a significant proportion of them away from that life, I’d have scoffed. But it’s true — as three colleagues and I demonstrated in a new working paper. What we learned in Monrovia, Liberia, holds the potential to change the way America handles its own epidemics of crime and murder.

Cognitive behavioral therapy, or CBT, is a set of simple techniques for recognizing your problematic, “automatic” behaviors and training yourself to act differently. For instance, when an emotion like anger swells, CBT helps you recognize how it can distort your thinking. You can practice habits that put your rational brain back in charge, such as slow breathing, counting to 10 or walking away.

Research has shown that CBT can be effective in treating a range of disorders, including depression and anxiety, and CBT techniques have long been used to combat aggression and criminal behavior, too. Juvenile prisons use it routinely, for instance, although its long-term effectiveness remains a subject of study. In 2009, my colleagues and I, working with a program called Sustainable Transformation of Youth in Liberia, decided to explore, using a randomized trial, how much difference CBT could make for men deeply immersed in crime and daily violence. STYL recruited 1,000 men who fit that description. Half were offered therapy via lottery: For two months they were counseled in groups three times a week, four hours at a time, supplemented by individual sessions. Then, after the therapy ended, we held a second random draw to determine who got $200 cash. (We hypothesized that cash alone might make a difference in men’s lives.) This made four groups — therapy only, cash only, both therapy and cash, and a control group that received neither.

We looked at effects one month after the program, then one year later and, just recently, after 10 years. In an earlier paper, we showed that therapy plus cash had promising results after a year. Other research on CBT and violence prevention suggests that therapy’s effects fall off after that, and Liberia was no different — the effects of therapy alone began to fade with the first year.

We expected therapy plus cash to suffer the same fate over time (as did most of the experts we surveyed). But a decade later, after we tracked down and interviewed as many of men from the original study as we could find (some 830, 93 percent of those still alive), we learned that the large effects in the therapy-plus-cash group were sustained.

After 10 years, for example, 5 percent of the men who got both treatments (cash and therapy) reported selling drugs, compared with 10 percent for the control group. Also, each person who got therapy and money committed half as many thefts, on average, than control group men — results similar to those in our one-year study. We don’t have data for every intervening year, but the surveys we have suggest roughly 30 fewer robberies and muggings per person, per year, for a decade. Since together the cash and therapy cost $530 per person, the expense was less than $2 for every theft avoided (ignoring the declines in drug selling and interpersonal violence).

An unintended consequence of mindfulness

When it came to therapy alone, after a decade there were detectable signs of improvement, but they were substantially smaller than therapy plus cash, and not nearly as statistically precise. We think the difference is explained by the fact that even modest financial support gave the men enough stability in their lives to put into practice the behaviors they learned during therapy. The men who got money generally used the cash prudently, we found, starting small businesses like shoeshine stands. But these enterprises were fleeting, and within months, their goods were stolen or the businesses simply collapsed. So therapy plus cash didn’t mean they earned more money one year or 10 years later.

As with any study, there are weaknesses. Impoverished Liberia does not have crime statistics or arrest records, so our data on the men’s behavior was self-reported. (We asked the men about dozens of antisocial and illegal behaviors, including drug-dealing, theft, fighting, arrests, carrying weapons and domestic abuse.) We did what we could to validate this information, sending qualitative researchers to observe 100 of the men for four days; their impressions matched the survey data. We also measured outcomes such as patience with games played with real money, and still saw impacts there.

Addressing gun violence means considering solutions other than policing

This 10-year research odyssey grew out of my relationship with Johnson Borh. He still runs STYL, as he did when we first met in 2008, when he was a smiling, meaty man in his 30s who moved easily among members of Monrovia’s underclass. He introduced me to men clustered in the thatch huts that served as drug dens, or standing by with empty wheelbarrows, ready to haul goods for hire (but making most of their money from robbery).

Borh had been offering a version of STYL for a decade. I started sitting in on the meetings that he and his self-taught social workers led. We rested on plastic chairs in an abandoned building. The men rehearsed handling raw emotions and peacefully negotiating their way through threatening situations. Counselors also urged them to try on, for size, a new social identity — trading shorts and sandals for pants and dress shoes, for instance, and practicing going to banks and supermarkets.

Borh had patched together the program from online materials, but it was clear that this was a cognitive behavioral program in all but name (indeed, many of the handbooks he downloaded were based on CBT). To see if it worked, Borh and I teamed up with a behavioral economist, Julian Jamison; a clinical psychologist, Margaret Sheridan; and a master of randomized trials, Sebastian Chaskel.

Beyond the large and persistent impacts of therapy and economic assistance, our results offer other good news. Even among the control group, half returned to more mainstream, nonviolent lives within a year. This suggests that even the young Liberian men who seem most lost revert to the mean over time. We also found that STYL’s impacts on crime and violence were concentrated among the men who reported, at the outset, the most anti-social behavior. This suggests that cities can make meaningful progress on violence with targeted interventions for the small number of the most at-risk people.

This is just one of several studies that show CBT’s promise in combating violence. At the same time we were studying STYL, a group of economists and psychologists in Chicago evaluated two versions of Becoming a Man — a CBT-based program for troubled adolescents in the city’s most violence-plagued high schools. Their research found that CBT alone — no economic help, in this instance — led to 45 to 50 percent reductions in violent crime arrests over the next one to two years. And even though the effects of therapy alone faded somewhat over a longer time frame, the authors demonstrated that BAM’s benefits were large enough to more than justify the program’s cost. The researchers also studied a BAM-like program in juvenile detention, in the same paper, and drew similar conclusions.

American cities need solutions to the problems of gun violence, especially ones that don’t involve hassling and imprisoning members of minority groups. CBT, in concert with economic assistance, offers a promising alternative, one that averts community violence rather than punishing and jailing offenders after it happens. President Biden has advocated putting more money into “community violence interruption” programs like Becoming a Man.

Controlling anger is a habit we all need to practice, along with handling contentious relationships, recognizing biases and seeing arguments from another point of view. Decades of social science show us that peaceful societies saturate citizens’ lives with these lessons, fortifying them with laws and norms. They socialize their young to nonviolence, in what sociologist Norbert Elias called “the civilizing process.”

In America we start early, with “Sesame Street," “Mr. Rogers” and other television shows deliberately designed to impart these behaviors. And most schools teach the same socio-emotional skills that programs like STYL impart. But some young people don’t get these lessons in class, or at home — or they just need a little extra help to learn them. This includes disaffected young men in Chicago and street youth in Monrovia — but in principle the approach could work with anyone engaged in sustained and regular violence. We don’t yet know the full range of CBT’s benefits and limitations. But like Johnson Borh, we ought to try things, tinker and find out what works. He showed us something deeply hopeful: that we can make societies less violent not by using force, but by laying down a path to a different life.

948 school shootings since Sandy Hook prove swift policy changes and more guns don't work. Kaitlyn J. Selman and Justin Turner.

(<https://www.courier-journal.com/story/opinion/2022/06/07/were-criminologists-end-mass-shootings-fund-community-not-cops/7528989001/>)

As criminologists and parents of a 2 ½-year old, our morning starts with Elmo’s toothbrush rap and ends with dropping him off at daycare – or “school” as we call it—before we head off to schools of our own. These two identities often merge, our studies of youth justice and policing informing our dislike of forced hugs and time-outs. But as the horrors of Robb Elementary unfold, we feel powerless—that feeling fueled, in part, by the conflicting desires of our roles.

As criminologists, we know that calls for swift policy changes, like national legislation or school security practices, often follow massacres like this. Already, people in power proclaim they have the solution: more officers, armed teachers, single point of entry and bulletproofed backpacks. We know, too, however, that those policies often lack any empirical backing—evidenced by the 948 school shootings since Sandy Hook. But as parents, we find ourselves wishing they worked. We’ve watched videos of parents jumping over fences and bypassing cops to save their children and are reminded again that nothing we’ve done has worked. Uvalde, with its active shooter training, School Resource Officers, and a police department that absorbs 40% of the city’s budget, is further proof of this unfortunate failure…of our failure in protecting our children.

Data Map - K-12 School Shooting Database

Despite Texas Governor Abbott’s claim that if not for law enforcement, Uvalde “could have been worse” there is no evidence that police prevent school shootings. An analysis of school shootings from 1999-2018 found that the presence of a school resource officer did little to reduce shootings or their severity and actually, schools that had an armed guard experienced a death rate 2.83 times higher than those without.

Awash in Guns:‘It’s real easy to get a gun’ in Louisville. And it’s costing lives

A school resource officer at the Marion C. Moore Traditional School on Outer Loop, stands in the high school hallway between classes on Aug. 30, 2019.

More guns aren't the answer

Whether an armed guard or an armed teacher, a 2020 review of gun policy research found no evidence that the presence of more guns had any effect on gun violence. In fact, unarmed staff or the shooters themselves are more likely to end a school shooting than someone with a gun.

Metal detectors and surveillance cameras are similarly useless: cameras specifically fail to deter students capable of moving out of view. Rightfully frustrated, some parents have turned to bulletproofed products like backpacks, But, none of the backpacks on the market would have stopped a single round from the guns of the most recent school shooters.

Yet, the wheels keep turning. A newly approved Kentucky state law requires every school to have an armed School Resource Officer. Locally, under JCPS’s new two-pronged model, “safety” will be the responsibility of armed School Safety Officers and Safety Administrators. This plan, costing at least $6.5 million a year, represents all that we, as parents, can rely on to keep our kids safe. And considering the research, we are left unconvinced that this model will prevent violence, and instead, harm poor, Black, Brown, queer and disabled students. Just ask Angeli Gomez.

As criminologists and parents, we know that this will not keep our child safe. And yet, on June 23, Metro Council will vote on Mayor Fischer’s budget for 2022-2023. If passed, LMPD will have a budget of over $220 million—up $25 million from last year. This is a huge investment in an institution that hasn’t proven it can protect our community members and has inflicted unparalleled violence on our most marginalized. Much like the strategies we demand and deploy in schools after yet another mass shooting, we put our faith in a fantasy—the notion that safety can be achieved through policing and surveillance.

More:Fischer pushes public safety in final Louisville budget, with more cash for jail and LMPD

LMPD police chief Erika Shields raises her right hand as she is sworn into office by Louisville Mayor Greg Fischer. Tuesday, Jan. 19, 2020.

Fund community, not cops

The truth is that school shootings cannot be resolved by those strategies, or even by schools themselves, as schools are rarely the cause of violence. We must target the root causes, which can include systemic racism, poverty, housing instability, mental health struggles, abuse, underfunded schools, food apartheid, inaccessible health care, and so much more. It’s estimated that for every 10 non-profits focused on violence prevention and community support, the murder rate decreases by 9% and the violent crime rate overall by 6%. Quality early childhood programs and cognitive behavioral therapy for adolescents have been found to help prevent later criminal behavior. And when Philadelphia residents received home repair grants, the homicide rate on the block decreased by 21.9%.

Luckily, we already have programs in Louisville that do this kind of work…if we fund them. The Office for Safe and Healthy Neighborhoods develops and implements “strategies for violence prevention that are comprehensive, socially just, evidence-based and grounded in the public health approach.” But Mayor Fischer has budgeted only $9 million for OSHN. Or what about the six pages of “external agencies,” including departments like the Office of Youth Development and the Office of Resilience and Community Services? That fund will also receive under $9 million to do things like “transform systems that prevent young people from living equitable, healthy and happy lives” and “provide essential services for Louisville residents, especially for low-and-moderate income populations.”

This isn’t a political speech or even an academic argument. This is parent-to-parent. As parents, we are tired of feeling powerless and as criminologists, we are tired of reading the same research on the same policies that always fail and yet are somehow still heralded as our saviors. Instead of another Sandy Hook, it’ll be another Uvalde. So why not try something that can work?

**Note: This article appears two more times on other news outlets.**

Analysis: School Safety Is About More Than Keeping Guns Out of the Classroom. Roseanna Ander and Monica Bhatt. (<https://www.newsbreak.com/news/2717477455442-analysis-school-safety-is-about-more-than-keeping-guns-out-of-the-classroom>)

In June, after decades of inaction on gun violence, the federal government enacted the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act. While limited in its scope compared to the magnitude of America’s gun violence crisis, the law still presents an enormous opportunity to save lives — particularly the lives of children. But that’s not guaranteed. As gun violence experts with decades of combined research and policy experience, we believe the law’s impact will depend on one thing: whether, in spending the billions of dollars in new school safety resources now available through the act, states and cities will follow the evidence about what actually keeps kids safe.

This starts with understanding the nature of America’s gun violence crisis. The tragedy in our backyard in Highland Park, Illinois, over the Fourth of July weekend, not long after the devastation in Uvalde, Texas, was yet another harsh reminder of the impact gun violence has on children and young people in this country. It’s a crisis that’s not confined to Highland Park, Uvalde, Sandy Hook or Parkland, but one that affects cities and rural areas across the country. Every year, approximately 3 million children are exposed to gun violence. Thousands are shot. In our home city of Chicago, roughly 30% of children under the age of 5 live in a community that experiences more than 10 homicides per year.

The ripple effect of gun violence goes far beyond the direct victims and even their immediate families. Research from University of Chicago Crime Lab-affiliated researcher Pat Sharkey shows that exposure to a local homicide disrupts young people’s sleep, interferes with their ability to concentrate and worsens their educational outcomes. Take one stark example: Children who take standardized exams following a homicide on their street test as though they have missed two years of schooling.

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This is the “school safety” challenge we face. Yes, it is in part about preventing the 93 in-school shootings that occurred in the last school year alone. But it’s also about ensuring children can walk to class on safe streets without being shot or killed. It’s about keeping students engaged and enrolled in school, because that’s one of the best protective factors against involvement in crime and violence . And it’s about addressing the trauma students bring into the classroom after losing neighbors, friends and family members to this uniquely American epidemic.

The Bipartisan Safer Communities Act provides the opportunity to do all of that. In passing the law, Congress provided billions of dollars to help state, cities and districts reduce community violence and increase school safety. But how they spend this money will determine whether the law will have an impact. Traditionally, school safety funding has been used to harden buildings by purchasing things like metal detectors and employing armed security guards.

Truly keeping kids safe means making a different bet, one backed by data and evidence: advancing programs that help young people cope with trauma while developing tools to de-escalate arguments before they lead to violence. At our research organizations, the University of Chicago Crime Lab and University of Chicago Education Lab, we have conducted randomized controlled trials — the gold standard in scientific evidence — of several such programs that show enormous promise.

​​One of these programs, Choose to Change (C2C) , connects students at risk of gun violence with trauma-informed therapy and supports. The therapy aims to help youth manage their emotions and understand how past traumatic experiences, such as witnessing gun violence in their community, can impact their thinking and behavior. Through exercises and conversation, participants learn to build problem-solving and communication skills. Our researchers found that participants in C2C had 48% fewer violent crime arrests and 32% fewer school misconduct incidents than their control group peers, and these changes persist: Preliminary results suggest C2C reduces violent crime arrests for over 2½ years after the program ends.

Results from another program, Becoming A Man (BAM) , are equally encouraging. Like C2C, BAM uses role-playing and group exercises to help young people in grades 7 to 12 make more deliberate decisions and de-escalate arguments. One exercise practiced in the program, called the fist, is illustrative: Two teens are paired up; one is given a rubber ball, and the other has 30 seconds to get the ball out of his partner’s fist. Inevitably, the teens end up wrestling over the ball. After they switch roles and the same struggle occurs, the BAM counselor asks why they didn’t simply ask their partner for the ball. It’s a teachable moment: slowing down and thinking before reacting provides the opportunity to consider alternative ways to avoid confrontation. Our evaluation found that by utilizing exercises like this, BAM reduced the number of violent crime arrests among participants by approximately 50% and increased their high school graduation rate by almost 20%.In short, the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act can be used to keep children safer in school, if — and only if — funding is directed toward evidence-based solutions that are proven to reduce violence. We’ve done our homework on what works and what doesn’t. Now, it’s time for policymakers to take action.

**Note: This article appears two more times in other websites.**

Jennifer Doleac is helping us find nuanced, effective ways to fight crime. Miranda Dixon-Luinenburg. (<https://www.vox.com/future-perfect/23366558/future-perfect-50-jennifer-doleac-economist>)

In the midst of frantic calls for action after school shootings, like the one earlier this year in Uvalde, Texas, Jennifer Doleac’s measured response stands out: Policymakers don’t really know what would help, because — while every school shooting is a tragedy — these events are rare and thus hard to study.

Hasty reactions to a single, widely publicized event are rarely the best long-term solution. Sometimes, it can even make things worse. After the Sandy Hook school shooting, as Doleac points out in her 2018 article for The Regulatory Review, people worried about violent crime purchased more guns, which, inevitably, led to a matching spike in gun homicides and accidental deaths.

As an associate professor of economics at Texas A&M University, Doleac looks at criminal justice policy through the lens of causal factors on a society-wide level. She founded Doleac Initiatives, a policy research nonprofit, and runs a podcast about law, crime, and economics. Across her work, she uses careful, data-based analyses to unpack systemic factors like poverty that influence gun deaths, particularly gun homicides, and what social programs actually address them. She also digs through the crime literature, synthesizing and signal-boosting other researchers’ work that she believes calls for further study or investment via her Twitter, interviews, and articles.

Some of her most valuable work is in helping people think through what the data appears to show. Because gun laws in a region are already heavily tied to existing public opinion, Doleac warns that the data on gun restrictions that find reductions in gun ownership or gun-related deaths shouldn’t be taken at face value, since people in regions that pass gun control laws are more likely to have generally anti-gun sentiments.

Since most research on the ramifications of gun laws doesn’t allow for natural experiments, Doleac focuses on the interventions that do — for example, the varying times of the youth curfew in Washington, DC.

There are other effective ways to reduce gun deaths that aren’t mired by politics or by confounding factors, Doleac points out. For example, when I interviewed her in May, she highlighted the work done by researcher Sara Heller and her colleagues showing that cognitive behavioral therapy programs for vulnerable youth lowered violent crime arrest by up to 50 percent — a vastly stronger effect than the mandatory waiting periods.

These programs may be hard to implement widely, but Doleac believes that summer job programs, like the youth job lottery in New York City, are much easier to scale and can reduce mortality for the youth included by 18 to 20 percent, as Judd Kessler and colleagues at J-PAL found. “When policymakers and practitioners ask me what they can do, what’s a reliable way to reduce crime in general and violent crime in particular, summer jobs are always the first thing I bring up,” Doleac said.

Doleac has looked into a long list of similar interventions, including the effects of air pollution on gun crime, which she hopes will be less politicized and more feasible to implement. Setting policy in an area with so many competing and confounding factors, and often limited data on outcomes, is always going to be a challenge and an ongoing process, but — and this is what makes her essential — Doleac takes the long view.

Hard Cash and Soft Skills: Experimental Evidence on Combining Scholarships and Mentoring in Argentina. Ganimian, Alejandro; Barrera-Osorio, Felipe; Biehl, María Loreto; Cortelezzi, María. (<https://publications.iadb.org/en/hard-cash-and-soft-skills-experimental-evidence-combining-scholarships-and-mentoring-argentina>)

Many developing countries offer cash to low-income families to encourage children to attend school. These initiatives have increased educational attainment, but they have rarely improved student achievement. One potential reason may be that beneficiaries may need additional support to develop the requisite “soft” skills to succeed in school. We conducted a three-year randomized evaluation of a program that provides secondary school students with scholarships and non-academic mentoring in the Province of Buenos Aires, Argentina. The program improved students’ academic behaviors (e.g., starting to study early before an exam or catching up on schoolwork missed due to absences). Yet, we find little evidence that it improved their academic mindsets (e.g., self-beliefs about performance and efficacy), perseverance (e.g., grit), or learning strategies (e.g., metacognition). The program also improved some metrics of school performance (e.g., language grades, student absenteeism, grade failure, and the number of failed subjects) on its first year, but we cannot detect similar gains in subsequent years. This fadeout may be due to the fact that a large share of treatment students were expelled from the program for not meeting its requirements. We do not find any evidence that the program improved students’ achievement in math and reading or their personality traits.

Intergenerational Effects of Welfare Reform: Adolescent Delinquent and Risky Behaviors. Dhaval M. Dave, Hope Corman, Ariel Kalil, Ofira Schwartz-Soicher & Nancy Reichman. (<https://www.nber.org/papers/w25527>)

This study investigates effects of welfare reform in the U.S. on the next generation. Most previous studies of effects of welfare reform on adolescents focused on high-school dropout of girls or fertility; little is known about how welfare reform has affected teenage boys. We use a difference-in-difference-in-differences framework to identify gender-specific effects of welfare reform on salient adolescent behaviors (skipping school, fighting, damaging property, stealing, hurting others, smoking, alcohol, marijuana, other illicit drugs). Welfare reform led to increases in delinquent behaviors of boys as well as increases in substance use of boys and girls, with substantially larger effects for boys.

Can Simple Psychological Interventions Increase Preventive Health Investment?. Johannes Haushofer, Anett John & Kate Orkin. (<https://www.nber.org/papers/w25731>)

Behavioral constraints may explain part of low demand for preventive health products. We test the effects of two light-touch psychological interventions on water chlorination and related health and economic outcomes using a randomized controlled trial among 3750 women in rural Kenya. One intervention encourages participants to visualize alternative realizations of the future; one builds participants' ability to make concrete plans. Both interventions include information on health benefits of chlorination. After twelve weeks, both interventions increase the share of households who chlorinate drinking water and reduce child diarrhea episodes. Analysis of mechanisms suggests both interventions increase self-efficacy—beliefs about one's ability to achieve desired outcomes—as well as the salience of chlorination. They do not differentially affect beliefs and knowledge about chlorination (compared to a group who receive only information), nor affect lab measures of time preferences or planning ability. Results suggest simple psychological interventions can increase use of preventive health technologies.

Race and Economic Opportunity in the United States: An Intergenerational Perspective Raj Chetty, Nathaniel Hendren, Maggie R. Jones & Sonya R. Porter. (<https://www.nber.org/papers/w24441>)

We study the sources of racial disparities in income using anonymized longitudinal data covering nearly the entire U.S. population from 1989-2015. We document three results. First, black Americans and American Indians have much lower rates of upward mobility and higher rates of downward mobility than whites, leading to persistent disparities across generations. Conditional on parent income, the black-white income gap is driven by differences in wages and employment rates between black and white men; there are no such differences between black and white women. Hispanic Americans have rates of intergenerational mobility more similar to whites than blacks, leading the Hispanic-white income gap to shrink across generations. Second, differences in parental marital status, education, and wealth explain little of the black-white income gap conditional on parent income. Third, the black-white gap persists even among boys who grow up in the same neighborhood. Controlling for parental income, black boys have lower incomes in adulthood than white boys in 99% of Census tracts. The few areas with small black-white gaps tend to be low-poverty neighborhoods with low levels of racial bias among whites and high rates of father presence among blacks. Black males who move to such neighborhoods earlier in childhood have significantly better outcomes. However, fewer than 5% of black children grow up in such areas. Our findings suggest that reducing the black-white income gap will require efforts whose impacts cross neighborhood and class lines and increase upward mobility specifically for black men.

Rethinking the Benefits of Youth Employment Programs: The Heterogeneous Effects of Summer Jobs. Jonathan M.V. Davis & Sara B. Heller. (<https://www.nber.org/papers/w23443>)

This paper reports the results of two randomized field experiments, each offering different populations of youth a supported summer job in Chicago. In both experiments, the program dramatically reduces violent-crime arrests, even after the summer. It does so without improving employment, schooling, or other types of crime; if anything, property crime increases over 2-3 post-program years. To explore mechanisms, we implement a machine learning method that predicts treatment heterogeneity using observables. The method identifies a subgroup of youth with positive employment impacts, whose characteristics differ from the disconnected youth served in most employment programs. We find that employment benefiters commit more property crime than their control counterparts, and non-benefiters also show a decline in violent crime. These results do not seem consistent with typical theory about improved human capital and better labor market opportunities creating a higher opportunity cost of crime, or even with the idea that these programs just keep youth busy. We discuss several alternative mechanisms, concluding that brief youth employment programs can generate substantively important behavioral change, but for different outcomes, different youth, and different reasons than those most often considered in the literature.

Addressing High School Dropouts with a Scalable Intervention : The Case of PODER. Cuevas, Janina. (<https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/33054>).

Working with the Mexican Ministry of Education, this study piloted a scalable program to reduce high school dropout rates by focusing on socio-emotional skill development and mathematics tutoring. The intervention was evaluated through a randomized field experiment with more than 5,000 youths at 20 upper secondary schools in Mexico City. An intention-to-treat analysis finds some evidence that exposure to the Opportunities and Development to Avoid Risks Program increases socio-emotional skills, but no evidence that it improves math outcomes or future attendance. Likely explanations for these 0 results include low take-up and other process factors, which are document qualitatively, as well as heterogeneous treatment effects. In particular, an inverse-probability-weighted matching model is suggestive of an effect whereby some students participate actively in the program and drop out of school less often, while other students choose not to participate when given the option and actually drop out more as a result.

Publication: The COVID-19 Pandemic: Shocks to Education and Policy Responses. World Bank. (<https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/entities/publication/ebc53312-9629-55f9-9309-a5ec13532a15>)

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the world was living a learning crisis. Before the pandemic, 258 million children and youth of primary- and secondary-school age were out of school. And low schooling quality meant many who were in school learned too little. The Learning Poverty rate in low-and middle-income countries was 53 percent—meaning that over half of all 10-year-old children couldn't read and understand a simple age appropriate story. Even worse, the crisis was not equally distributed: the most disadvantaged children and youth had the worst access to schooling, highest dropout rates, and the largest learning deficits. All this means that the world was already far off track for meeting Sustainable Development Goal 4, which commits all nations to ensure that, among other ambitious targets, “all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education.” The COVID-19 pandemic now threatens to make education outcomes even worse. The pandemic has already had profound impacts on education by closing schools almost everywhere in the planet, in the largest simultaneous shock to all education systems in our lifetimes. The damage will become even more severe as the health emergency translates into a deep global recession. These costs of crisis are described below. But it is possible to counter those shocks, and to turn crisis into opportunity. The first step is to cope successfully with the school closures, by protecting health and safety and doing what they can to prevent students' learning loss using remote learning. At the same time, countries need to start planning for school reopening. That means preventing dropout, ensuring healthy school conditions, and using new techniques to promote rapid learning recovery in key areas once students are back in school. As the school system stabilizes, countries can use the focus and innovativeness of the recovery period to “build back better.” The key: don't replicate the failures of the pre-COVID systems, but instead build toward improved systems and accelerated learning for all students.

The Effect of Grade Retention on Adult Crime: Evidence from a Test-Based Promotion Policy. Ozkan Eren, Michael F. Lovenheim & Naci H. Mocan. (<https://www.nber.org/papers/w25384>)

This paper presents the first analysis in the literature of the effect of test-based grade retention on adult criminal convictions. We exploit math and English test cutoffs for promotion to ninth grade in Louisiana using administrative data on all public K-12 students combined with administrative data on all criminal convictions in the state. Our preferred models use the promotion discontinuity as an instrument for grade retention, and we find that being retained in eighth grade has large long-run effects on the likelihood of being convicted of a crime by age 25 and on the number of criminal convictions by age 25. Effects are largest for violent crimes: the likelihood of being convicted increases by 1.05 percentage points, or 58.44%, when students are retained in eighth grade. Our data allow an examination of mechanisms, and we show that the effects are likely driven by declines in high school peer quality, lowered non-cognitive skill acquisition, and a reduction in educational attainment. However, we find little effect on juvenile crime, which suggests the effects on adult criminal engagement are driven by worse job market prospects and non-cognitive skills that stem from lower educational investments by students. Using the method proposed by Angrist and Rokkanen (2015), we also estimate effects of grade retention away from the promotion cutoff and show that our results are generalizable to a larger group of low-performing students. Our estimates indicate that test- based promotion cutoffs lead to large private and social costs in terms of higher levels of long-run criminal convictions that are important to consider in the development and use of these policies.

Research Series Issue 54: Rural youth in the context of fragility and conflict. Ghassan Baliki, Tilman Brück, Neil T. N. Ferguson, Wolfgang Stojetz (<https://www.ifad.org/en/web/knowledge/-/publication/research-series-issue-54-rural-youth-in-the-context-of-fragility-and-conflict>)

While conflicts are often defined as “development in reverse”, there is a general lack of research focusing specifically on young people living in rural areas.

Yet, from wider literature, we know that conflict is a cause of adversities across a range of economic and non-economic indicators. Exposure to violence increases infant mortality, reduces birthweight, harms child health, damages human capital accumulation, restricts performance in education and interacts negatively with labour market opportunities.

Despite this accumulated knowledge, key knowledge gaps remain, especially when it comes to understanding possible mitigation programmes.

Administrative Data Linking and Statistical Power Problems in Randomized Experiments. Sarah Tahamont, Zubin Jelveh, Aaron Chalfin, Shi Yan & Benjamin Hansen. (<https://www.nber.org/papers/w25657>)

Objective:

The increasing availability of large administrative datasets has led to a particularly exciting innovation in criminal justice research, that of the “low-cost” randomized trial in which administrative data are used to measure outcomes in lieu of costly primary data collection. In this paper, we point out that randomized experiments that make use of administrative data have an unfortunate consequence: the destruction of statistical power. Linking data from an experimental intervention to administrative records that track outcomes of interest typically requires matching datasets without a common unique identifier. In order to minimize mistaken linkages, researchers will often use “exact matching” (retaining an individual only if all their demographic variables match exactly in two or more datasets) in order to ensure that speculative matches do not lead to errors in an analytic dataset.

Methods:

In this paper, we derive an analytic result for the consequences of linking errors on statistical power and show how the problem varies across different combinations of relevant inputs, including the matching error rate, the outcome density and the sample size.

Results:

We show that this seemingly conservative approach leads to underpowered experiments and potentially to the failure of entire experimental literatures. For marginally powered studies, which are common in empirical social science, exact matching is particularly problematic.

Conclusions:

We conclude on an optimistic note by showing that simple machine learning-based probabilistic matching algorithms allow criminal justice researchers to recover a considerable share of the statistical power that is lost to errors in data linking.

Frontiers in the Economics of Crime: Lessons for Latin America and the Caribbean. Laura Jaitman. (<https://publications.iadb.org/en/frontiers-economics-crime-lessons-latin-america-and-caribbean>)

This paper uses the crime economics framework to shed light on the main drivers of crime and proposes avenues for future research and action in the region to reduce crime and its social and economic costs.

Michael J. D. Vermeer, Dulani Woods, Brian A. Jackson. Would Law Enforcement Leaders Support Defunding the Police? (<https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PEA108-1.html>)

Recent nationwide protests against police use of force and perceptions of systemic racism in law enforcement in the United States have sparked renewed conversation about problems in the U.S. criminal justice system. Much of this conversation has been focused on the idea of "defunding the police." In this Perspective, the authors describe police leaders' and practitioners' views on defunding the police — that is, budgeting less money for police and more for other public safety strategies — and explain why revisiting the role of law enforcement in society could have broader appeal than some think. To do this, the authors draw on experience in workshops held over the past seven years by the Priority Criminal Justice Needs Initiative. In these workshops, police leaders and practitioners have voiced frustration with being the default party that is expected to respond to many complex social problems, such as homelessness, substance use, and mental health crises. Practitioners argue that nonenforcement strategies are often more effective than policing in solving many of these problems. Therefore, the authors suggest that there might be significant law enforcement support for some "defunding" strategies — as long as these efforts relieve some of the unrealistic expectations on police. The authors also describe current police functions that could be reassigned to other community partners, discuss factors that communities must consider if they choose to reallocate police functions, and note evidence of broader support for such reforms in the general population.

Exploring Approaches to Increase Economic Opportunity for Young Men of Color: A 10-Year Review. Natalie Spievack, Madeline Brown, Christin Durham, Pamela J. Loprest (<https://www.urban.org/research/publication/exploring-approaches-increase-economic-opportunity-young-men-color-10-year-review>)

The past decade has brought significant developments in efforts to close equity gaps for young men of color—but additional progress must be made. This report tracks 10 years of progress on increasing economic opportunity for young men of color. It highlights the voices of young men and lifts up seven new and promising approaches: changing narratives, intervening early, empowering young men of color to lead, promoting mental health and well-being, preparing for higher education and careers, building wealth, tailoring interventions to the local context. It also presents recent federal, state, and local policy reforms that show promise for increasing economic opportunity by dismantling structural barriers faced by young men of color. Written for practitioners, policymakers, philanthropy, and advocates, the report concludes with opportunities for action for all audiences.

Building Ladders of Opportunity for Young People in the Great Lakes States. Heather Hahn, Megan Gallagher, Jesse Jannetta, Michael Katz, Rolf Pendall, Shayne Spaulding. (<https://www.urban.org/research/publication/building-ladders-opportunity-young-people-great-lakes-states>)

The Great Lakes region is positioned to rewrite its Rust Belt narrative as a story of resurgence. Capturing that potential depends in large part on the presence, skills, and well-being of young people. This brief summarizes recommendations for five broad evidence-based policy and philanthropic strategies to build ladders of opportunity and economic mobility for young people, especially young people of color, and promote productivity, stability, and prosperity in the Great Lakes states. This brief is part of a series that includes a separate brief on each of the five strategies.

This brief is part of a series recommending policies that will build ladders of opportunity and economic mobility for young people in the six state Great Lakes region—Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin.

Publication: Long-Term and Intergenerational Effects of Education: Evidence from School Construction in Indonesia. (<https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/entities/publication/e21a4f8d-afe6-5082-8cda-93bf569dfc0e>)

Abstract

This paper studies the long-term and intergenerational effects of the 1970s Indonesian school construction program, which was one of the largest ever conducted. Exploiting variation across birth cohorts and districts in the number of schools built suggests that education benefits for men and women persist 43 years after the program. Exposed men are more likely to be formal workers, work outside agriculture, and migrate. Men and women who were exposed to the program have better marriage market outcomes with spouses that are more educated, and households with exposed women have improved living standards and pay more government taxes. Mother’s program exposure, rather than father’s, leads to education benefits that are transmitted to the next generation, with the largest effects in upper secondary and tertiary education. Cost-benefit analyses show that school construction leads to higher government tax revenues and improved living standards that offset construction costs within 30-50 years.

Publication: Long-Term and Intergenerational Effects of Education: Evidence from School Construction in Indonesia. Richard Akresh.

(<https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/entities/publication/e21a4f8d-afe6-5082-8cda-93bf569dfc0e>)

Abstract

This paper studies the long-term and intergenerational effects of the 1970s Indonesian school construction program, which was one of the largest ever conducted. Exploiting variation across birth cohorts and districts in the number of schools built suggests that education benefits for men and women persist 43 years after the program. Exposed men are more likely to be formal workers, work outside agriculture, and migrate. Men and women who were exposed to the program have better marriage market outcomes with spouses that are more educated, and households with exposed women have improved living standards and pay more government taxes. Mother’s program exposure, rather than father’s, leads to education benefits that are transmitted to the next generation, with the largest effects in upper secondary and tertiary education. Cost-benefit analyses show that school construction leads to higher government tax revenues and improved living standards that offset construction costs within 30-50 years.

Full Employment for the Young, Too. HAROLD A. POLLACK. (<https://www.cbpp.org/research/full-employment/full-employment-for-the-young-too>)

By various measures, the U.S. economy has significantly recovered from the Great Recession and the foreclosure crisis. But in important ways, the labor market is not meeting the needs of disadvantaged young people, particularly young people of color in cities and youth of every race and background in economically distressed rural communities.

Weak labor markets that fail to offer opportunities for young workers have an impact that goes beyond lost wages. Young people marginalized from legitimate employment are more likely to work in the underground economy and are much more likely to become victims and perpetrators of violence.

Although Americans across the political spectrum lament the lack of economic opportunities for young people and accompanying social problems, policymakers have failed to devote commensurate resources to address the challenges. Indeed, youth and young adult employment has not been a particular focus of national investment for decades. The $1.2 billion in employment and training provided under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 represented the first major allocation of dedicated summer employment funds since the Workforce Investment Act of more than 20 years before.[1]

Federal policymakers have largely deferred to cities and counties. Yet the local governments facing the greatest challenges of youth joblessness are also the ones most likely to lack the resources to address the true scale of the problem.

Evidence-based public investment in employment opportunities for youth and young adults could provide a powerful tool for boosting incomes, teaching the hard and soft skills that young workers need to become successful participants in the labor market, and helping to reduce the current rise in violent crime that cities such as Chicago and Baltimore have experienced since 2015.

This brief examines the extent to which disadvantaged youth are disconnected from the labor market and provides an overview of research on employment programs designed to reconnect youth and young adults to opportunities. Following this review is a set of proposals based on what we’ve learned about successful youth employment initiatives.

Youth Employment and Labor Force Participation

Although young adult unemployment rates have markedly declined since 2010, labor force participation among young adults fell precipitously after the Great Recession and has not fully recovered. (See Figure 1.) Some of this drop may reflect higher school enrollment and higher intensity of schooling among those enrolled. Yet labor force participation has dropped among both enrolled and un-enrolled young adults, suggesting that educational trends alone do not explain the pattern. Aaronson et al. note that rising economic returns to education may promote reduced labor force participation among the enrolled and un-enrolled alike.[2] Young adults who are enrolled in school may be pursuing more intensive forms of schooling, which has higher returns relative to time spent working additional hours of paid work. Meanwhile, young adults who are not enrolled in school may face declining demand for their services, which may promote both declining wages and declining hours worked.

FIGURE 1

Labor Force Participation Rate, 20- to 24-Year-Olds

The burden of economic dislocation has fallen particularly heavily on African Americans, for whom the unemployment rate for 16- to 24-year-olds (20.6 percent) is more than double that of non-Hispanic whites (9.9 percent) and Hispanic Latinos (11.3 percent) in the same age group.[3] As of March 2017, 17.5 percent of male high school dropouts age 20 to 24 were unemployed, as were 10 percent of those with only high school degrees.

Ross and Svailenka estimate that approximately 3 million Americans between the ages of 16 and 24, roughly 8 percent of this age group, are “disconnected” from the legitimate economy, meaning that they are not enrolled in school and are not participating in the formal labor market.[4]

Belfield, Levin, and Rosen, applying a slightly broader definition that encompasses part-time students and part-time workers, estimate that 6.7 million “opportunity youth” in the same age range are wholly or partially disconnected from the formal labor market.[5] They note that this labor market disconnection has fiscal consequences: for the average young person in this group, the lifetime present discounted value of additional required services and lost tax revenue exceeds $200,000.

While these negative trends have been evolving, funding for government programs to help address them has declined. Adjusting for inflation, Department of Labor spending for training and employment for individuals of all ages has dropped by roughly 59 percent since 1985, while spending on youth training and employment has dropped by 53 percent. Accounting for the 36 percent increase in the U.S. population over that same period, per-capita spending on these activities has fallen by roughly two-thirds. (See Figure 2.)

President Trump’s proposed 2018 budget includes a 21 percent cut to the Department of Labor, which would further reduce expenditures across the range of job training and employment initiatives over the life course.[6]

The lack of sustained federal investment partly reflects a view among researchers and policymakers that scalable employment investments accomplish little for youth and young adults.[7] Yet, as discussed below, evidence from recent randomized trials challenges that view, showing that economical, feasible, and scalable youth employment efforts can improve outcomes for young people, particularly by reducing youths’ risks of perpetrating or becoming victims of violent crimes.[8] This emerging body of work justifies a more ambitious effort, particularly in low-income communities, to address the lack of economic opportunities for teenagers and others.

FIGURE 2

Department of Labor Budget Authority for Training and Employment Programs, FY 1985-2016

Challenges Facing High-Risk and Low-Income Youth

American public policies have done a poor job of providing at-risk youth, particularly at-risk youth of color, with the effective home, school, community, and workplace supports required to set them on a path to success. Gaps in school quality and accompanying academic skills tied to socioeconomic status have widened among youth of all races.[9] As a result, many disadvantaged youth find themselves without the academic or job skills necessary to thrive in a competitive labor market. Many youth, particularly boys, face additional challenges in acquiring the socioemotional or non-cognitive skills needed to obtain and sustain entry-level employment.[10]

The hurdles nonwhite youth face from labor market discrimination place them at further disadvantage. Field experiments demonstrate the prevalence and impact of such discrimination in low-wage labor markets. In one widely cited New York City experiment, white, African American, and Latino job applicants were matched on demographic characteristics and interpersonal skills, given equivalent résumés, and sent to apply for entry-level jobs. African Americans were half as likely as equally qualified whites to receive a callback or job offer. African American and Latino applicants with no criminal records fared no better than whites who were identified as recently released from prison.[11]

As a result of these patterns, low-income youth, particularly youth of color, are often the last-hired, first-fired workers in a slack labor market. Declining real labor market wages for unskilled workers, including youth, aggravate all of these trends. These disadvantages are a particular challenge for youth who are expected to contribute to their household economies to meet basic needs.

Some Connections Between Lack of Opportunity and Youth Crime

Youth joblessness has a particularly complex and bidirectional relationship with crime. Many parents and policymakers fear that the underground economy offers an alluring financial alternative for youth, particularly in an era of declining real wages. In the 1970s and 1980s these fears had some justification: a substantial minority of youth engaged in drug sales, and the effective wages of criminal activities may have exceeded compensation in the formal labor market.[12] But the allure may be less strong today. In straight economic terms, by the late 1990s the compensation of most workers within the illicit drug market was surprisingly low;[13] wages in the bottom rung of drug selling organizations were only slightly higher than the minimum wage. Indeed ethnographer Sudhir Venkatesh found that middle managers in these organizations would prefer conventional employment such as unionized custodial jobs.[14]

Nevertheless, particularly in the absence of legitimate work, the structure of compensation in a criminal enterprise offers an attractive model for some youth, who see that successful leaders of drug-selling organizations can earn higher wages than they could otherwise obtain in the legitimate labor market. The stigma of a prior criminal conviction poses further obstacles to legitimate employment, ironically increasing the relative attractiveness of underground employment.

Joblessness creates other risks of criminal involvement. Unstructured time can increase the prospect that youth will engage in problem behaviors; summer delinquency can promote peer co-offending networks that persist and are associated with later crime; and idleness can reinforce a sense of hopelessness regarding the legitimate job market that may cast a longer shadow on attitudes and behavior, particularly in high-poverty urban areas.[15] Recent work by Case and Deaton underscores that similar dynamics may be at play in predominantly white rural areas that have experienced job loss, declining wages, and the opioid epidemic.[16]

Specific patterns in Chicago, which experienced a sharp homicide increase in 2016, underscore a general challenge facing many American cities. In that year, five out of 77 Chicago neighborhoods accounted for roughly one-third of city homicides,[17] and these five neighborhoods displayed teen joblessness rates exceeding 79 percent and young adult joblessness rates between 49 and 70 percent.[18] Ross and Svailenka report that 23 percent of Chicago’s African American population is not working or attending school, more than double the rates found among Latinos or non-Hispanic white Chicago residents in the same age group. Legitimate employment may help to address these specific risks, and thus be a particularly important public investment.[19]

Uggen suggests several reasons why employment may constitute a turning point in reducing criminal behavior.[20] A predictable paycheck provides a powerful alternative to the underground economy, and mundane realities of the workplace environment — behavioral norms of workplace behavior, the discipline and routine of predictable workplace scheduling, workers’ routine involvement with peers and supervisors who are not involved in crime — further encourage pro-social behavior. One might assume that at a minimum employment would curtail criminal activity during working hours, but in fact the crime-reduction effect appears to be more general. In the randomized trial of One Summer Plus, described below, Heller found that crimes averted through work would have occurred late at night or otherwise outside working hours.[21]

Once the risks of criminal activities are factored in, legitimate employment may be seen as more lucrative than the underground economy. Less tangibly, legitimate employment generates the opportunity for job references and positive relationships with adults. These aspects promote future opportunities, which appear to be particularly attractive from the perspective of participating youth.

The Effectiveness of Job Programs in Boosting Long-Term Economic Prospects and Reducing Crime

Despite plausible mechanisms that might link employment to beneficial outcomes, many criminologists and labor economists have been cynical about the ability of job programs — other than very costly and intensive ones — to appreciably reduce criminal behavior or improve subsequent labor market outcomes. The dearth of entries in the evidence-based “what works” clearinghouse linking youth employment to reduced violence exemplifies the conventional wisdom in this area.

Disappointing results from the National Supported Work Demonstration Project and the Transitional Aid Research Project, launched in the 1970s and targeting ex-offenders and very high-risk youth, are often extrapolated to the larger population of low-income youth. The Job Training Partnership Act yielded similarly disappointing findings among out-of-school youth.[22] Indeed, it has proven difficult to demonstrate long-term improvements in employment and wages associated with scalable and low-cost interventions.

However, a body of rigorous evaluation research is emerging to support a more optimistic view. Prevention science — the application of scientific methods to studying the effectiveness of interventions designed to influence public health risks and associated behaviors — has notably progressed over the past decade, with increased interest and funding from both government and private sources. Program assignment through enrollment lotteries allows more realistic and rigorous analysis.[23] The growing use of administrative data such as state police arrest records allows more rigorous investigation than is possible with conventional studies that rely upon participants’ self-reporting. This emerging body of work has demonstrated that well-implemented economical programs can change people’s lives.

Job Corps

The Department of Labor’s Job Corps program looks like a costly and intensive intervention when evaluated by the usual standards applied to social service interventions. It is an intensive educational and vocational intervention for youth and young adults age 16 to 24. Established in 1964 as one of President Johnson’s most successful Great Society initiatives, the program provides participants with room and board for up to two years as they complete their training and seek employment. Participants are paid a monthly allowance and receive other supports.

A 1986 report estimated per-person costs exceeding $10,000 annually, roughly $23,500 in 2017 dollars.[24] Yet even with these relatively high program costs, economic analysis suggests that the benefits to Job Corps participants and the broader society exceeded these costs. In one evaluation, the value of goods and services produced by participants during their training and afterwards exceeded the productivity of control-group peers by roughly $27,000 per participant.[25] The evaluation adopted a conservative approach to valuing the social costs of crime and thus likely understated the social benefits of crime reductions associated with Job Corps.

ChalleNGe

Research from another intensive program, the National Guard Youth ChalleNGe dropout recovery intervention, also found promising results.[26] ChalleNGe serves youth age 16 to 18 who are not in school, are unemployed, are drug free, have never been convicted of a felony, and are not currently involved with the criminal justice system. The program is less well-known than Job Corps, even though more than 100,000 youth have completed the program since the early 1990s. ChalleNGe has several components, including a five-month highly structured and disciplined residential phase, followed by a one-year post-residential program, in which participants seek to complete high school, pursue further education, find employment, join the military, or engage in volunteer work. ChalleNGe includes an extensive mentoring component, in which adults within participants’ own communities assist them in pursuing life plans.

A randomized trial examining the impact of ChalleNGe found that three years after entering the study, participants were 16 percentage points more likely than their control-group peers to obtain a GED certificate or high school diploma (71.8 percent vs. 55.5 percent), 7 percentage points more likely to be employed (57.8 percent vs. 50.7 percent) and 11 percentage points more likely to have both obtained a GED certificate/high school diploma and to be currently employed or engaged in further schooling (49.1 percent vs. 37.8 percent).

Not all results were positive. Participants were just as likely as the control group to self-report arrests or delinquency, and participants who entered the program younger than age 17 were more likely than their control group peers to pursue a GED certificate rather than a standard high school diploma. (A body of research suggests that workers holding GED certificates earn significantly less than otherwise comparable peers who hold conventional high school diplomas.) Such mixed findings underscore both the implementation challenges facing employment interventions and the likelihood that the same intervention will have different impacts for different beneficiary groups. A key function of rigorous trials is to identify subgroups most likely to derive the greatest benefit and to identify potentially unwanted or unintended impacts of real-world interventions.

Youth Summer Jobs

If jobs programs for youth and young adults must be complex, costly, and intensive to really work, what is the way forward to help hundreds of thousands of young people in a time of limited public budgets and managerial resources? Marquee interventions such as Job Corps and ChalleNGe must be complemented with less expensive, simpler, and lighter-touch interventions that can be scaled to much larger numbers of people.

Youth summer jobs are one such intervention. Yet until recently such interventions have not received the rigorous evaluation required to establish their effectiveness. In his review of job training and employment programs, Lalond noted that, despite serving hundreds of thousands of youth annually, summer youth programs funded by the Job Training Partnership Act “received relatively little attention from program evaluators,” and that virtually no strong experimental evidence existed to document the effectiveness of such interventions.[27]

Fortunately, two recent studies, with more underway, are now filling this gap, and underscore the promise of such interventions.

Chicago’s One Summer Plus

One Summer Plus (OSP) linked Chicago students in grades 8-12 with jobs at local government or nonprofit agencies and paid participants the state minimum wage of $8.25 per hour. To evaluate this intervention, a randomized trial was conducted involving 1,634 students residing in some of Chicago’s lowest-income neighborhoods.[28] Each youth selected for the intervention participated for five hours per day, 25 hours per week. Half of the treatment group spent all 25 hours at a job and the rest divided their week between work (15 hours) and participation in a social-emotional learning intervention (10 hours). This latter component was based on cognitive behavioral therapy, and was designed to assist youth with various self-regulation skills. All participants received supports to help them be successful in their jobs. An adult job mentor regularly visited the workplace to assist youth and their supervisors with interpersonal or other issues. Outcomes among all youth selected for this intervention were then compared with those of other youth who were not selected for the intervention.

At a cost of less than $2,000 per person in direct wages, OSP reduced overall arrests for violent offending by 43 percent over 16 months. Given the high social costs of violent offending, cost-benefit analyses indicate that OSP was extremely beneficial. Equally important, participating families benefited from the labor earnings associated with minimum wage summer jobs.

However, not all results matched researchers’ expectations. Perhaps most puzzling was that, though the intervention reduced violent crime, it had less of an impact on property crime and other offenses. (See Figure 3.) Unpacking the mechanisms of this effect would be important.

FIGURE 3

Average Number of Arrests per Youth Participating in Chicago's Summer Youth Program

The violence reduction benefits persisted well after the summer intervention ended. (See Figure 4.) The underlying causal mechanisms for this pattern are not fully clear. Perhaps youth developed positive relationships with adults during the summer months that provided lasting benefits, or perhaps the additional income from summer employment reduced immediate incentives for criminal activity. It is also possible that students who do not obtain paid summer employment co-offend with peers, and that these co-offending ties persist into the following school year.

One key question for future research concerns who benefits the most from such employment interventions, and how OSP, like the Becoming a Man program, was designed to serve fairly typical high school students in challenged sections of Chicago. About 20 percent of study participants had been arrested before the trial was conducted, and 20 percent had been victims of crimes. Students had about a 2.3 grade-point average and averaged about 18 percent absence. OSP was not designed to serve a higher-risk segment of youth who are no longer engaged in school or who have more serious and ongoing involvement with the criminal justice system.

Randomized trials are now underway to understand how best to serve the more intense needs of at-risk populations through interventions that offer more supports than OSP but that are less complex and costly than Job Corps and other intensive interventions.

FIGURE 4

Effect of Summer Jobs on Violent Arrests (Heller 2014)

New York Summer Youth Employment Program

Gelber, Isen, and Kessler evaluated the results of New York City’s Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP), the largest summer youth employment program in the United States, for the years 2005-2008.[29] In each of those years, SYEP provided summer employment to 34,000 youth ages 14-21 at an average cost of roughly $1,700 per participant. Young people earned the local minimum wage, working up to 25 hours per week at local employers. Participants also attended workshops on career development, financial literacy, and related subjects.

The intervention was associated with roughly a 10 percent reduction in criminal offenses and, even more striking, an 18 percent reduction in mortality due to external causes. This latter effect was especially surprising given New York’s low rate of homicides and accidents — two of the leading causes of adolescent mortality.

The authors found mixed results on subsequent earnings, with benefits to younger teens but potentially harmful effects for older youth. Many of these youth were placed in summer camps, day care centers, and other settings that did not appear to be conducive to higher subsequent wages. For other youth, participation in SYEP may have disrupted potentially fruitful links to prior employers.

Students with poor prior school attendance seemed to notably benefit, demonstrating a four- to-five-day statistically significant boost in high school attendance the following year. As a result of their increased participation, these students were more likely to attempt (and thus more likely to pass) English and math Regents Exams. The improved attendance appeared comparable to that found in other programs such as those offering cash incentives. Despite these gains, SYEP participation did not seem to have any impact on college attendance.

Program Design Challenges

Not surprisingly, a program’s design and the quality of its implementation are central to its success. Effective programs require careful selection of youth most likely to benefit, cooperation between program implementers and those who will be employing youth, and supports for youth to maximize their chances of success in a real-world workplace.

Mentoring and supports can be helpful to assist youth in complying with workplace requirements and norms. These same mentoring and supports may help to prevent violence, though this hypothesis remains unconfirmed in the literature. In the Chicago OSP trial, young people who received such mentoring were about as likely to be arrested as youth assigned to another treatment arm that received all the same mentoring plus some additional violence prevention counseling.[30]

Employers may require training and supports to address the challenges likely to arise in their relationships with low-income youth most in need of employment supports. In addition to providing such supports, effective programs involve employers in program design and the design of job roles. This involvement increases the likelihood that youth will be doing actual work valued by employers — and that employers with a sense of ownership over the intervention are more likely to remain supportive stakeholders in an ongoing program.

More granular logistical challenges may also require attention. For example, many youth have summer school obligations that must be integrated into the employment experience. Availability of part-time work or flexible work hours is important for youth who face specific academic or health challenges.

Basic employment with relatively light-touch supports may be well-targeted to the typical low-income young person. Experience with Chicago’s OSP and New York City’s SYEP suggests that meaningful benefits can be provided economically, for roughly $2,000 per participating youth, but individuals with more intensive needs may require more intensive programming. A mix of different interventions is likely required to meet the varying needs across the entire population of low-income youth.

The Need for Rigorous Evaluation

Program evaluation — particularly randomized trials — creates significant implementation challenges. The use of random lotteries and administrative data to examine individual outcomes such as school attendance, graduation rates, and arrests dramatically improves rigor while reducing the costs associated with conducting such research. Rigorous evaluation also increases buy-in among philanthropic and government funders, who are potentially receptive to greater investments but wish to see concrete results. Any expansion of youth employment supports is likely to be far more sustainable if it is designed from the start to facilitate such evaluation.

Dilemmas and Strategic Decisions

Ideal candidates for basic interventions appear to be youth and young adults who face economic and social risks but who are still engaged in school and remain reasonable candidates for competitive employment. Specific outcomes require specific intervention and recruitment strategies. For example, summer employment programs can reduce crime and help youth stay engaged in high school, but such interventions presently seem less effective in promoting college attendance or raising hourly wages.

Youth and young adults are often unsuccessful in their efforts to obtain paid employment, and an emerging body of evidence suggests that employment supports may bring long-term benefits to both the worker and wider society. However, the research does not precisely indicate which program designs are most effective, and for whom. The optimal program design likely depends on participants’ age, and interventions for younger individuals should place a greater weight on supporting high school completion.

Much remains unknown about the best focus and content of employment interventions. Do younger or older youth benefit most from employment? Which wrap-around program components are most cost-effective? Should positions be created in the public sector or provided by the private sector?

The range of employment possibilities might also require rethinking. Traditional activities such as park cleanup or camp counseling require minimal training and supervision, and offer immediate income and the benefits that come with a structured work environment. Yet these basic jobs do not appear to produce sustained gains in employment and earnings. A more ambitious and imaginative program could consider different job roles.

Proposal

Effective youth employment policies should include two complementary components to address the challenges and uncertainties regarding what works, for whom, and at what level of cost-effectiveness.

First, federal agencies should finance a range of field trials and demonstration projects to improve our scientific knowledge. Ross and Kazis have proposed the establishment of a fund of approximately $300 million annually to support randomized trials and other evaluation efforts,[31] with the goal of developing feasible program models suitable for scale-up.

Second, federal agencies should finance an ambitious youth employment effort that addresses current needs in light of what is known regarding program effectiveness. One intermediate goal would be to restore Department of Labor youth employment and job training to the per-capita funding levels of the early 1980s — that is, from the current $880 million to roughly $2.6 billion.

An even more ambitious step would be the establishment of a national budget for part-time summer employment on the order of $2,000 for every disconnected youth and young adult, a level of commitment on par with OSP and SYEP. This effort might be financed through an expansion of the $14 billion federal Title I program, which already provides pertinent infrastructure to target and manage such investments.

An expansion of this magnitude would cost roughly $6 billion annually, not an insignificant amount but small compared to other items in government budgets: it is about 1/200th what the federal government spends on health care, and less than one-tenth of state and local expenditures on corrections.[32]

Though rigorous evaluations show that summer job programs reduce youth violence, crime reduction is just one benefit of making meaningful employment available for youth and young adults. Investments to employ young people express the dignity of work, and these interventions put money in the pockets of disadvantaged individuals and families.

The United States willingly and routinely spends far greater sums on policy interventions that provide less value and are less cost-effective — the home mortgage interest deduction and subsidized employer-based health insurance come to mind. Far smaller amounts for evidence-informed interventions to address widespread youth joblessness would have a profound impact on individuals, families, and communities across the United States.

The Role of Justice in Development: The Data Revolution. Maqueda Ramos et al. (https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/entities/publication/cfc8755c-02a9-5585-94f8-ec2e4a594e93)

Abstract

This paper summarizes the empirical evidence on the role of justice in economic development, conflict, and trust in institutions. It finds that justice institutions play a significant role in economic development, particularly through their impact on credit markets and firm growth, the protection of vulnerable populations, their capacity to deter violence, and their influence over people’s trust in formal institutions. The paper then considers the promise of administrative data, machine learning, and randomized controlled trials to enhance the efficiency, access, and quality of justice. The paper concludes by discussing new avenues for research and the potential for data to improve the functioning of justice systems in the age of COVID-19.

Violence in London: what we know and how to respond. Handan Wieshmann, Dr Matthew Davies, Ollie Sugg, Sophie Davis (<https://www.bi.team/publications/violence-in-london-what-we-know-and-how-to-respond/>)

We have worked with the Mayor of London’s Violence Reduction Unit to carry out the first ever capital-wide assessment of violence. In our new report we bring together data analysis and new research from leading academics to complement the voices of London’s communities with evidence of large-scale patterns and trends to inform decision making. We also present the evidence on what works to prevent violence so policy makers can incorporate insights about what has previously been effective and why into new or existing programmes, and make commissioning decisions based on a good understanding of what we do and do not know.

Heat, Crime, and Punishment. Behrer, A. Patrick; Bolotnyy, Valentin. (<https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/36881>)

Abstract

Using administrative criminal records from Texas, this paper shows how heat affects criminal defendants, police officers, prosecutors, and judges. It finds that arrests increase by up to 15 percent on hot days, driven by increases in violent crime. There is no evidence that charging-day heat impacts prosecutorial decisions. However, working alone, judges dismiss fewer cases, issue longer prison sentences, and levy higher fines when ruling on hot days. Higher incomes, newer housing, more teamwork, and less accessible weapons may decrease these adverse effects of heat. Even with adaptation, the paper forecasts that climate change will increase crime and have substantial distributional consequences.

How to reboot education post-pandemic: Delivering on the promise of a better future for youth. Beatriz Abizanda et al.

(<https://publications.iadb.org/en/how-reboot-education-post-pandemic-delivering-promise-better-future-youth>)

During the COVID-19 pandemic, 165 million students in Latin America and the Caribbean were abruptly disconnected from education. By the end of 2021, schools had been closed for an average of 237 days, more than anywhere else in the world. Although the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the lives of many people around the world, it has not done so uniformly. Perhaps one of the most devastating legacies of the pandemic is its effect on young people. During one of life's most critical developmental periods, large numbers of young people have been deprived of education and exposed to increased levels of social, health, economic insecurity, domestic violence and abuse. Despite the efforts of the entire educational community to ensure that students maintain some level of learning, the evidence collected in this report shows that many schoolchildren did not participate in meaningful learning activities and that the slowdown in the accumulation of skills and human capital it will have immediate and long-term consequences for the well-being of countries. Why? It wasn't just the pandemic. It was the fact that the region and its educational systems were not well prepared to withstand a shock of this magnitude. The short and long-term effects of the health crisis cannot be understood if the story does not include the starting conditions. The purpose of this report is to provide those responsible for educational policy throughout the region with an idea of the magnitude of the damage, its consequences if immediate, substantial and effective measures are not taken, and the priorities of educational policy taking into account the starting point and the effects of the pandemic. More importantly, the report also provides a compass for the education sector to develop evidence-based responses to the immediate needs of young people, as well as the medium-term measures needed to rebuild our education systems so that be more resilient, equitable, and efficient in developing effective learners throughout life. If we do nothing, we will leave an entire generation behind. Governments have to use all the levers at their disposal to recover, and education is key in that process.

Helping Families Help Themselves? The (Un)intended Impacts of a Digital Parenting Program. Sofía Amaral, et al. (<https://publications.iadb.org/en/helping-families-help-themselves-unintended-impacts-digital-parenting-program>)

Las prácticas de crianza tienen un papel crucial en el desarrollo infantil. Este estudio evalúa el impacto de una intervención digital gratuita sobre gestión del estrés y crianza positiva dirigida a cuidadores y cuidadoras de niños y niñas diseñada para reducir la prevalencia del maltrato infantil en El Salvador. El estudio analiza los efectos de la entrega digital de material basado en el contenido de intervenciones presenciales de probada efectividad. Mediante un ensayo controlado aleatorio, se encuentra que la intervención aumentó el estrés y la ansiedad de los cuidadores de sexo masculino, y disminuyó sus interacciones con los niños y las niñas a su cargo. En tanto, no se detectan cambios en la salud mental de las cuidadoras de sexo femenino y se observa una disminución de la violencia física que ellas ejercen contra los niños y las niñas a su cargo. Estos resultados difieren de los generados por las intervenciones presenciales originales, pero se ajustan a las teorías que relacionan la privación económica y la estructura familiar con la sobrecarga cognitiva y la salud mental de los cuidadores y las cuidadoras.

**Note: Reddit media mentins are not included.**

### *Evaluation of California's Armed and Prohibited Persons System: study protocol for a cluster-randomised trial.* Wintemute, Garen J.

Gun laws that cost millions had little effect because they weren't enforced. Lois Beckett (<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/oct/13/gun-laws-that-cost-two-state-lawmakers-their-seats-had-little-effect-study-finds>)

In Colorado and Washington state, advocates spent millions of dollars, and two Colorado Democrats lost their seats, in the effort to pass laws requiring criminal background checks on every single gun sale.

More than three years later, researchers have concluded that the new laws had little measurable effect, probably because citizens simply decided not to comply and there was a lack of enforcement by authorities.

Veronica Hartfield, widow of Officer Charleston Hartfield, and family members attend a vigil at Police Memorial Park in Las Vegas.

'Monsters out there every day': NRA refuses to consider major gun control

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The results of the new study, conducted by some of America’s most well-respected gun violence researchers, is a setback for a growing gun control movement that has centered its national strategy on precisely the kind of state laws passed in Colorado and Washington. A third, smaller state, Delaware, passed a background check law around the same time and did see increases in the number of background checks conducted, the study found. But a similar background-check law in Nevada passed in 2016 has also run into political hurdles and has never been enforced.

“These aren’t the results I hoped to see. I hoped to see an effect. But it’s much more important to see what’s actually happened,” said Garen Wintemute, one of the study’s authors. Wintemute is a University of California Davis emergency room physician and has been conducting public health research on gun violence for decades, sometimes self-funding his research when federal funding dried up.

“We know background check laws work, and this latest research shows Delaware in particular has seen a dramatic impact,” said Sarah Tofte, research director at Everytown for Gun Safety. “This research also shows how critical implementation and enforcement are, and it suggests Colorado and Washington still have gaps in those areas that can and should be addressed.”

In most states, Americans are allowed to sell their guns to each other privately without conducting a background check. In contrast, licensed gun dealers are required to consult a national database that lists people who are disqualified from owning a gun because of a criminal record or other disqualifying record.

Congressional Republicans, joined by a handful of Democrats, have repeatedly refused to pass a national law to require background checks on gun sales, despite public survey results that show overwhelming public support for the policy. As a result, some states have chosen to close the loophole themselves, mandating that any gun sale now be preceded by a background check, an attempt to crack down on the flow of guns to the illegal market.

Opponents of the new laws in both Colorado and Washington had proudly advertised their noncompliance with the new regulations. In Washington, Wintemute and his co-authors noted, more than 1,000 gun rights supporters held an “I will not comply” demonstration at the state capitol where they reportedly flouted the newly passed law in public by transferring firearms to each other in full view of law enforcement. In Colorado, some sheriffs in more conservative rural areas reportedly said they would not enforce the new gun control law, and others that enforcement would simply be “a very low priority”.

The new research results are likely to be touted by opponents of gun control as evidence that new gun regulations are futile. The National Rifle Association did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Under American law, only a few categories of people, including convicted felons, are barred from gun ownership. America’s relatively permissive gun laws, together with the estimated 300m civilian-owned guns, make it more difficult to keep guns out of the hands of people who are not legally allowed to have them. Despite this challenge, some gun control laws, including laws aimed at disarming domestic abusers, have shown success in reducing gun murders.

“Passing these laws is just part of the battle, and making sure they work effectively once they’re passed is very, very important,” said Josh Horwitz, the executive director of the Coalition to Stop Gun Violence. He cautioned that looking at a law a few years after it’s passed is still very early in the process. “It really takes time for the system to coalesce around the new law, and that’s because people have done things one way for a long time.”

After advocates in Washington state worked together with law enforcement officials, prosecutors and judges to sit down together and figure out how to best enforce a new domestic violence gun law, compliance with the law increased, Horwitz said.

But the need to focus on enforcing new gun laws, as well as simply passing them, adds another layer of work for a gun violence prevention movement that is still relatively small, and that faces battles across the country to pass new gun control laws and to fight against efforts to erase existing gun restrictions.

“Our influence has grown exponentially over the past five years,” said Peter Ambler, the executive director of Americans for Responsible Solutions, a newer gun control group founded by the former US congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords, who survived a mass shooting in 2011. “But if you look at our funding compared to how we as a society otherwise address causes of mortality and injury that are similar in scope – or if you look at our opposition in the NRA – we still don’t have comprehensive resources for the problem at hand.”

The conclusion readers draw from the new study should not be that the background policy is “no good”, Wintemute said. “It’s evidence that these policies may need more assertive enforcement.”

“If I’m an advocate pushing for one of these laws, [I would ask]: ‘What can I do to maximize the opportunities for enforcement? Does that mean funding for law enforcement, for augmenting the activities of an enforcement unit?”

Another approach, Wintemute said, would be focusing on education, “to assertively remind private party sellers that background checks on their buyers is required, and that not having that background check done is a crime, and it potentially exposes them to a much more serious risk if a crime is committed with that gun”.

The fact that private gun sales have long been totally unregulated and undocumented – the very reason that the new laws were passed – does make enforcement difficult, he said.

The new research also raises the question of whether gun violence prevention advocates would save more lives if they chose to fight for a slightly tougher law, which requires background checks to be conducted by a law enforcement agency which then provides a permit to purchase a gun. Research evaluations of these “permit to purchase” laws in Missouri and Connecticut found much stronger results in preventing gun murders than the evaluation of universal background check laws alone found.

A vigil remembering those who died in Las Vegas.

'I seriously doubt the laws will change': Guardian readers' views on gun control

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The new study, published in Injury Prevention, a medical journal, did not attempt to analyze whether the new background check laws in Delaware, Colorado and Washington had any effect on gun violence or gun crime. Instead, it asked a simpler question: did a law requiring more background checks actually result in more background checks being conducted?

In Delaware, a small state on the liberal east coast, the answer was yes. Delaware saw a 25% increase in background checks for handguns and a 34% increase in background checks for long guns, the study found.

In Colorado and Washington, both western states that have large rural, more conservative areas, the answer was no. Both states showed modest increases in the number of background checks conducted on certain kinds of private gun sales, according to other data sets, showing that some people did appear to be complying with the new laws. But neither state saw an increase in the number of overall background checks compared with the number researchers would have expected to see without the law.

**Note: This article appears two more times in different media outlets.**

The Guardian: Background Check Laws Fail in CO, WA Because Citizens Will Not Comply. AWR Hawkins. (<https://www.breitbart.com/2nd-amendment/2017/10/13/guardian-millions-spent-background-checks-laws-co-wa-fail/>)

On October 13 the Guardian reported that background check laws in Colorado and Washington state have proven a failure because citizens simply will not comply with them.

This means that after millions upon millions spent, political offices lost, and promises of a Utopian world with less gun crime made, the checks have been a bust.

According to The Guardian, the failure of these background check laws was discovered via research by Injury Prevention and it “is a setback for a growing gun control movement that has centered its national strategy on precisely the kind of state laws passed in Colorado and Washington.”

Guns have been sold privately in American since 1791–the year the Second Amendment was ratified. The push to mandate citizens undergo a background check for private gun sales is a Johnny-come-lately in American history, inasmuch as it began in the 1990s (and has made very little progress since). The adoption of universal backgrounds in Colorado in 2013 and Washington state in 2014 was met with great fanfare from the left; progress had finally been achieved.

But not really.

The Guardian:

Opponents of the new laws in both Colorado and Washington had proudly advertised their noncompliance with the new regulations. In Washington, Wintemute and his co-authors noted, more than 1,000 gun rights supporters held an “I will not comply” demonstration at the state capitol where they reportedly flouted the newly passed law in public by transferring firearms to each other in full view of law enforcement. In Colorado, some sheriffs in more conservative rural areas reportedly said they would not enforce the new gun control law, and others that enforcement would simply be “a very low priority.”

Notice, the citizenry and law enforcement alike expressed little desire to comply with laws, which have now proven a waste of time.

The failure of these laws actually goes to the fact that universal background checks are unenforceable without a gun registry, and neither Colorado nor Washington state enacted such a registry. This is not lost on the researchers who studied the failure of gun control in Colorado and Washington state.

For example, Garen Wintemute, one of the Injury Prevention study’s authors, said the failures in Colorado and Washington state does not mean universal background checks are “no good.” Rather, it means “these policies may need more assertive enforcement.”

Why Most Gun Laws Aren’t Backed Up By Evidence. Maggie Koerth. (<https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/absence-of-evidence-gun-laws/>)

In the first month of 2023, 25 people lost their lives in four mass shootings in California over just eight days. It’s a grim statistic, made all the more distressing when you consider the fact that California has one of the lowest gun death rates in the entire country. This is what a safe state looks like.

California also has some of the strictest gun control laws in the country. And in the aftermath of those four mass shootings, new House Speaker Kevin McCarthy — who represents a district in southern California — took the opportunity to poke at the state’s firearms restrictions, saying in a press conference that federal gun control legislation would not be an automatic response to these tragedies because such laws “apparently … did not work in this situation.”

Will Tyre Nichols’s murder finally make Congress do something about police reform?

So, did California’s gun laws succeed at making it one of the safest states … or did they fail to stop a string of mass shootings? Questions about the efficacy of gun laws have gotten easier to answer in recent years as changes to federal policy have helped to bring money and people back to the field of gun violence research. But decades of neglect mean there are still lots of blank spaces — policies that don’t yet have good quality data backing them up. A recent report from the Rand Corporation that reviewed the evidence behind a variety of gun policies found just three that were supported by evidence that met the report’s quality standards.1

That fact, however, doesn’t mean other gun laws don’t work — just that the research proving it doesn’t yet exist. Scientists I spoke to saw it as an “absence of evidence” problem, stemming from long-standing, intentional roadblocks in the path of gun violence research. Even the authors of the Rand report say lawmakers should still be putting policies aimed at preventing gun violence into practice now — regardless of what the science does or doesn’t say.

“I think that the goal of the lawmaker is to pick laws that they have a reasonable hope will be better than the status quo,” said Andrew Morral, a senior behavioral scientist at the Rand Corporation. “And there’s lots of ways of persuading oneself that that may be true, that don’t have to do with appealing to strict scientific evidence.”

Recent Stories from FiveThirtyEight

California doesn’t just have some of the nation’s strictest gun laws and lowest gun death rates, it’s also maybe the best state to study gun laws in, said Dr. Garen Wintemute, director of the Violence Prevention Research Program at University of California, Davis Medical Center. That’s because of both the way the state makes data available to researchers and its willingness to work with researchers to further the science. Wintemute is currently part of a team that is working on a randomized controlled trial of one particular California gun law — an initiative that tracks legal gun owners over time and dispatches authorities to remove their weapons if those people later break a law or develop a condition that would make them ineligible to own guns in the state.

It’s hard to oversell what a big deal this is. Frequently referred to as the “gold standard” of evidence-based medicine, randomized controlled trials split participants randomly (natch) into groups of people who get the treatment and groups that don’t. Because of that, it’s easier for researchers to figure out if a medication is actually working — or if it just appears to be working because of some other factor the people in the study happen to share. These kinds of studies are crucial, but almost impossible to do with public policy because, after all, how often can you randomly apply a law?

Ohioans will vote Tuesday on whether amendments to the state constitution should require at least 60 percent of the vote to pass. Advocates and opponents both see the election as crucial to the fate of an abortion-rights amendment that will go before voters in November.

But California has been willing to try. It took cooperation from many different levels of state leadership, Wintemute said. The government was always going to slowly expand this particular program statewide, but in this case legislators were willing to work with scientists and randomize that expansion across more than 1,000 communities, so that some randomly became part of the program earlier and some later. When the study finally concludes, researchers will be able to compare these two groups and see how joining the program affected gun violence in those places with a high level of confidence.

Most of the time, however, the scientists who study gun laws aren’t working with the kind of research methodology like this that produces strong results. Morral, along with his Rand colleague, economist Rosanna Smart, have reviewed the vast majority of the research on gun control policies done between 1995 and 2020. Their research synthesis found that a lot of what is out there are cross-sectional studies — observational research that basically just compares gun violence statistics at one point in time in a state that has a specific law to those in a state that doesn’t. That type of study is prone to mixing up correlation and causation, Smart said. There could be lots of reasons why California has lower rates of gun violence than Alabama, but studies like this don’t try to tease apart what’s going on. They end up being interpreted by the public as proof a law works when all they’ve really done is identified differences between states.

The Rand analysis threw out these kinds of studies and only looks at research that is, at least, quasi-experimental — studies that tracked changes in outcomes over time between comparison groups. Even then, the analysis ranked some studies as lower quality than others, based on factors such as how broadly the results could be applied. For instance, a study that only looked at the effects of minimum age requirements for gun ownership in one state would be ranked lower than a study that looked at those effects in every state where a law like that existed.

The Hardest Part Of Red Flag Laws Isn't Getting Them Passed. Maggie Koerth. (<https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/absence-of-evidence-gun-laws/>)

In the first month of 2023, 25 people lost their lives in four mass shootings in California over just eight days. It’s a grim statistic, made all the more distressing when you consider the fact that California has one of the lowest gun death rates in the entire country. This is what a safe state looks like.

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### *Rethinking the Benefits of Youth Employment Programs: The Heterogeneous Effects of Summer Jobs*. Davis, Jonathan M. V.

Summer Jobs Programs Aim To Keep Teens Out Of Trouble. This Year, That Work Is Moving Online. Leigh Paterson. (<https://www.wunc.org/2020-06-19/summer-jobs-programs-aim-to-keep-teens-out-of-trouble-this-year-that-work-is-moving-online>)

In cities like Denver, Detroit and Chicago, summer jobs programs are a key strategy in youth gun violence prevention. But this summer, the pandemic is forcing many cities to scramble to move these programs online while dealing with budget restrictions.

Nevaeh Casanova, 18, has participated in Denver’s Summer Youth Employment program for the past four summers, a connection that began when she was arrested for shoplifting at age 13.

“Getting in trouble was one of the big highlights because it got me where I am now,” she said.

Nevaeh was put on Denver’s Juvenile Diversion Program, an alternative to traditional court proceedings. Through that process her shoplifting ticket was dismissed and taken off her record. As part of diversion, the city placed her in a job at the Boys & Girls Club, where she has staffed the front counter, helped out with lunch, and taught kids peer-mentoring skills.

Growing up, Nevaeh was extremely shy. She had trouble ordering her own food at restaurants; at school, she struggled to be around other kids. Working at the Boys & Girls Club, along with other components of the program, helped her overcome that shyness.

“I just feel like the summer job definitely helps me learn different experiences,” Nevaeh said. “Helps me learn how to deal with people better because there’s always going to be different people in everything you do. Not everybody is going to be the same.”

This employment also helped her stay out of trouble. Nevaeh says her extended family members are involved in gangs: She hears gunshots in her neighborhood “all the time,” and says a shooting happened in her parking lot when she was a kid. If Nevaeh didn’t have caring parents and the support of city programs, she thinks her life may have been different.

“I could definitely have gone the other way instead of going into the path I’m at now,” Nevaeh said.

Moving Summer Jobs Online

In a normal year, Denver’s Summer Youth Employment program places around 225 young people, ages 16-24, in summer jobs at libraries, city parks, nonprofits and other businesses.

Sauntice Washington was placed last year at Metropolitan State University as part of Denver’s summer youth employment program.

“From a youth violence standpoint, we do see it as an important strategy. It absolutely is,” said Pat Hedrick, director of Denver Public Safety Youth Programs, which partners with Denver Economic Development and Opportunity to support youth employment.

A small number of studies examining summer employment programs suggest they are associated with a significant drop in arrests for violent crime. In one study, published in the Review of Economics and Statistics, found that violent crime arrests among kids in Chicago’s summer jobs program dropped by 42% in the first year following employment but no significant changes in other types of crime.

“Anecdotal evidence from employers provides another hypothesis for why violence, which by definition involves conflict with other people, may change: Employers report helping youth develop self-regulation and respond positively to criticism, which could reduce conflicts outside the workplace as well,” researchers wrote.

But with social distancing requirements still in place and many businesses closed, summer youth employment will look different in many cities over the coming months.

“With so much unknown, the city made a decision to go ahead and move to a virtual platform to ensure there would be programming,” Hedrick said.

In Denver, the plan will include more young people than usual, but fewer hours of work. Around 375 teens will receive a stipend from the city for completing an online curriculum focused on career development skills, like how to communicate with a manager and write a resume.

Arys Subiadur, who works on family and community engagement (FACE) for Denver Public Schools, says the city worked hard to create a worthwhile program under difficult circumstances.

“As it has been no simple task to transform this program due to the lasting impact of COVID-19, FACE has worked very hard and developed a number of paths forward to ensure that this resource is available to youth in the Denver community,” Subiadur wrote in an email.

The city departments backing summer employment are working to get this year’s proposed plan to Denver’s City Council so they can vote on it.

Other cities around the country are also scrambling to adjust. The New York City Council is working to fund its youth employment program — following an uproar after initially canceling it. Washington, D.C. is taking most of its program virtual, as are cities like Chicago, Philadelphia and Atlanta.

But this shift to virtual does have its downsides.

“I think some of those soft skills, how you interact with your co-workers, how you speak to your employers, and how you interact with the public,” Hedrick said. “Some of those things are the pieces that will be lost.”

It is those soft skills that may make the greatest difference in outcomes, according to a 2017 study from the Brookings Institution.

“The one thing that is correlated with a reduction in crime is improvements in soft skills,” said Alicia Sasser Modestino, an economist at Northeastern University and author of the Brookings study. “They get to practice them on the job before they become disconnected from school or the labor market … it’s really the long-term behavioral change that is driving the reduction in crime.”

This summer, young people are up against a lot. In May, unemployment among teenagers aged 16-19 was at 30%, more than double what it was compared to May 2019. Some kids may be competing with adults for work. Many available positions are risky front-line jobs.

So there may be upsides to summer jobs programs going virtual. Modestino says virtual programs may be able to serve more young people — these programs are usually in high demand.

“I know from working with my peers online, there are ways to write a proper email to get a good response and other ways that don’t,” Modestino said. “And youth will be learning those kinds of skills in the virtual space, which isn’t a bad thing knowing how in the professional world we rely on those kinds of communication.”

Neveah Casanova (top right) and other members of Denver’s Public Safety Youth Leadership Team participate in a social media training for youth councils run by Facebook and moved online due to the pandemic.

Leigh Paterson / KUNC

Gun Violence Prevention, But Online

Like many teens, Nevaeh Casanova has had a strange few months: She graduated virtually from high school, is putting off college for a semester, and won’t be going into her usual job at the Boys & Girls club this summer. But she has a different job lined up: as a youth brand ambassador at the University of Colorado–Boulder, where she will be creating videos, social media posts and virtual events focused on youth gun violence prevention.

As someone who is fearful of gun violence in her own neighborhood, Nevaeh says she wants people to know that gun violence “isn’t worth it.”

“That’s where we keep falling out,” she said. “People just think ‘I’m going to do this and get revenge for this and not really think about the outcomes.’ You don’t know if he’s the dad and he has kids and they don’t have anybody else … and then they follow the chain.”

She is looking forward to using her experience to connect with vulnerable young people — even if it has to be online.

“I’m excited to see what it’s going to bring and what experiences I’m going to get out of it,” she said. “Because I’ve gotten experiences out of everything, so I’m excited to see what this brings.”

Guns & America is a public media reporting project on the role of guns in American life.

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Mayor de Blasio, Bring Back Summer Jobs. Sara Heller, Judd B. Kessler. (<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/29/opinion/coronavirus-summer-jobs.html>)

As our country grapples with both a pandemic and the devastating impacts of long-term systemic racism, political leaders are rightfully looking to enact policies that meaningfully benefit low-income and minority communities. Many solutions will take time, but there is one action that mayors across the country — including in New York City — can take right now to support the communities hurting the most: Restore summer jobs programs for young people.

In April, faced with peak numbers of new Covid-19 cases and an accompanying budget deficit, Bill de Blasio, the mayor of New York, announced that this year’s Summer Youth Employment Program would be canceled. Last summer, the program — the largest in the country — provided jobs to approximately 75,000 young people between the ages of 14 and 24, nearly half of whom are black and a quarter of whom are Hispanic.

Typically the city’s program, and those like it around the country, pay participants to work in nonprofits like day camps and day care centers, government agencies, and for-profit businesses.

Uncertainty about the availability of these jobs helps explain why Mr. de Blasio — and two-thirds of municipalities recently surveyed — thought cutting summer programming made sense. New York City summer camps, if they open at all, will be substantially smaller than usual. Many other nonprofits and businesses have only just started reopening or will be allowed to reopen in July. States with rising Covid-19 cases may further delay their opening plans.

But the solution is not to cancel; it is to adapt. Service providers across the country are figuring out how to offer safe, alternative job opportunities in these circumstances. Boston has increased the size of its program, allocating $11.9 million to fund summer jobs for 8,000 of its young residents. The program will include a mix of safe in-person and remote opportunities like conducting census outreach, developing a Covid-19 awareness program and taking college courses for credit.

Chicago announced last Friday that it is offering 20,000 positions, two-thirds of the program’s normal size. The jobs will consist of a combination of online professional development and remote employment, as well as a service corps that will make masks, conduct phone welfare checks of elderly residents and develop a Covid-19 public information campaign. Washington, Philadelphia and Baltimore have all developed plans to offer almost exclusively remote summer jobs and training.

Why is it so important to continue summer jobs programs even with the difficulty of operating and funding during a pandemic? In part, because the spending is well targeted to those hardest hit by both the virus and systemic racism: young people of color and their families. Historically, workers in summer programs are paid minimum wage for 25 hours a week for six to seven weeks over the summer. In New York City, where the minimum wage is $15 an hour, a summer worker can earn more than $2,000.

Surveys of program participants in other cities suggest that these wages both help workers’ households and stimulate the local economy. In Chicago, almost 80 percent of net wages went to local businesses and participants’ families. Nearly half of Boston summer jobs participants reported contributing to paying household bills.

But the benefits of summer jobs extend well beyond cash.

For nearly a decade, we have studied the impact of these programs across multiple cities, including New York and other cities. We compare program applicants who won a random lottery for limited program slots to applicants who lost the lottery and did not receive job offers. The two groups are otherwise basically identical, except for the luck of the draw. So, any differences between them are attributable to the summer jobs program.

The effects are profound. Those who participated in New York’s program between 2005 and 2008 were 10 percent less likely to be incarcerated in New York State prisons by 2013 (the effect was 44 percent for those 19 years and older).

In Chicago, the results were similar: Joining a summer jobs program cut the number of violent-crime arrests among program participants by a third to almost half over the following year, even after the program ended. An evaluation of Boston’s program by Alicia Modestino at Northeastern University documented a similar pattern, including a 35 percent reduction in arraignments for violent crimes.

The program also saves lives. Those who participated in the New York program between 2005 and 2008 had 18 percent lower mortality by 2014, driven by a decline in homicides. The mortality effect got larger over time, suggesting that summer jobs put participants on a safer long-term path.

Obviously, our research results are from normal times and not during a global health crisis. Since the pandemic will force programs to look quite different this summer, the protective effects of summer jobs may also be different.

But there is reason to expect additional public health benefits this year. Summer jobs would keep young people busier, either with remote work inside their homes or in settings where public health measures are carefully enforced.

In states like New York, keeping tens of thousands of young people occupied with work could help prevent them from catching and transmitting the virus, reducing the likelihood of a second wave of infections. In states like Florida, where cases are very much on the rise, replacing beach time with homebound paid work could help flatten newly rising curves.

Earlier this month, Mr. de Blasio publicly committed to divert a percentage of the Police Department’s budget to youth programs and social services. In line with this commitment, the Mayor’s Task Force on Racial Inclusion and Equity announced plans for approximately 2,800 jobs this summer, designated for those in neighborhoods hard-hit by Covid-19. This was a step in the right direction, but a very small one — representing less than 5 percent of those who would normally participate in the city’s program.

This weekend, the mayor hinted that summer jobs may be back on the table. As the city’s budget negotiations enter the 11th hour, Mr. de Blasio and the City Council should follow through. Social service agencies are ready to deliver shorter, adapted versions of the program. Potential participants are clamoring for the opportunity.

The research is on their side. Leaders in New York and cities across the country are facing fiscal crises that will no doubt force many tough choices. Choosing to fund summer jobs should be an easy one.

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Global Employment Trends for Youth 2022: Investing in transforming futures for young people. International Labour Organization. (<https://www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS_853321/lang--en/index.htm>)

Incorporating the most recent labour market information available, Global Employment Trends for Youth sets out the youth labour market situation around the world. It shows where progress has or has not been made, updates world and regional youth labour market indicators, and gives detailed analyses of trends and issues facing young people in the labour market.

The 2022 edition discusses the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on young people and their labour market prospects during the recovery and beyond. Youth have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic and youth labour markets are now being buffeted by the lingering impacts of the pandemic, geopolitical risks and macroeconomic risks such as the impact of supply chain disruptions and rising inflation, particularly that of food and energy. There is also the potential permanent damage wreaked by these crises on the fabric of labour markets. As countries seek to address these multiple challenges, they must also not lose sight of longer-term priorities. In particular, targeted investment in the green, blue (ocean), digital, creative and care economies hold great potential to provide decent jobs for young people while setting economies on path towards greater sustainability, inclusiveness and resilience.

### *A randomized controlled trial on the interconnected systems framework for school mental health and PBIS: Focus on proximal variables and school discipline.* Weist, Mark D.

Abstract

This study reviews findings for the first randomized controlled trial (RCT) on the Interconnected Systems Framework (ISF) for school mental health (SMH) and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS). Since its development in the late 2000s, the ISF has been supported by federally funded centers for SMH and PBIS, and, guided by a national workgroup, is being implemented in >50 communities in the United States. This experimental evaluation of the ISF involved an RCT implemented in 24 schools in two southeastern states, with the ISF implemented in eight schools, PBIS alone implemented in eight schools, and typically co-located PBIS+SMH implemented in eight schools. Related to very poor implementation, documented by two sources of fidelity data, two ISF schools were dropped from major analyses; hence, the study used a treatment on the treated (ToT; Rubin, 1974) as compared to a more traditional Intent-to-Treat approach (ITT; Lachin, 2000). This is the first paper from this large study, with emphasis here on proximal variables and school discipline. Within schools' multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS), ISF schools delivered more Tier 2 (early intervention) and Tier 3 (treatment) interventions to a greater proportion of students than the other two conditions by the second year of the intervention. There was also a dramatic difference in the provision of interventions by community mental health clinicians in ISF schools (almost half of interventions delivered) as compared to PBIS+SMH schools (around 3% of interventions delivered), underscoring the critical role of the ISF in integrating clinicians into MTSS teams and core school functions in SMH. As compared to the other two conditions, ISF schools also had reduced office discipline referrals (ODRs) and in-school suspensions, as well as reduced ODRs and out-of-school suspensions for African American students. Findings are discussed in relation to future directions of education-mental health system partnerships in improving the delivery and impact of SMH programs and services, demonstrated in the ISF.

### *Threat assessment as a school violence prevention strategy*. Cornell, Dewey G.

What to Do About School Threats. Christopher J. Ferguson. (<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/checkpoints/202112/what-do-about-school-threats>)

Balancing the law and mental health for school threats among youth.

Posted December 16, 2021 | Reviewed by Michelle Quirk

KEY POINTS

* Threats of violence at schools require serious attention.
* Mental health care for youth has been seriously neglected.
* A one-size-fits-all harsh legal response to all threats may cause more harm than good.

Following the horrific 2018 Marjory Stoneman Douglas shooting in Parkland, Florida, schools, police, and policymakers were desperate to prevent similar events from happening in the future. Prevention focused on the issue of school threats and the need to take them seriously. But we must balance taking threats seriously without imposing draconian penalties on youth or young adults who have mental health issues or who make a mistake.

Balancing Legal Response to Threats

In Florida, it is a second-degree felony for someone to send or make a threat, whether written or on social media, anonymous or otherwise. A recent spate of school threats made by minors in Florida raises serious concerns. On one hand, these threats absolutely need to be taken seriously and to be investigated by school officials and police officers. On the other hand, the harsh legal penalties currently imposed for such behaviors are likely to destroy the lives of some minors who were never serious threats or would have benefited from mental health care. Attendant news coverage, particularly if an offender’s name is released (though they are often withheld for juveniles) can result in public shaming that may be impossible to recover from.

Kids make threats for a variety of reasons. Obviously, the most worrying are those who seriously intend to carry out the threat. Individuals who commit serious incidents of school violence may have chronic mental health problems, come from difficult homes, have a history of anger problems, and see themselves as victimized by others. These are just general findings—not a definitive “profile.” Just as many people who fit this pattern never commit acts of violence, it’s important not to dismiss a threat because someone doesn’t fit this profile.

Other kids may have no intention of carrying out a threat. Some kids may think it’s a “prank,” may be motivated by resentment toward their school, or may have poor impulse control. Still others may make a threat in the heat of an argument; the proverbial “I’m gonna kill you” said on schoolyards across the world for generations is only now locked into social media as undeniable evidence.

Dismissing threats as “kids being kids” is definitely a bad idea, as this obviously risks missing a serious incident. But bringing the hammer of a felony charge down on kids regardless of intent or circumstance is likely to cause great harm as well. The United States already has a widespread problem with mass incarceration and draconian punishments. Adding to this isn’t going to help. In many cases, identifying the source of a youth’s motivation, focusing on mental health rather than incarceration, providing resources for a struggling youth and family, and supportive monitoring while keeping a child in school can deflect potential violence. An initiative of Miami-Dade’s Threat Management Section appears promising in this regard. The unit removes firearms from the possession of individuals making threats but also fosters relationships with them, helping them gain access to social and mental health services, often without making arrests.

Underinvestment in Mental Health

A large part of our problem is our underinvestment in mental health. In the case of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas shooting, the perpetrator was well-known to have mental health problems. The schools and mental health professionals struggled to know how best to serve him while keeping the community safe. It may be time to reconsider the need for state-funded, humane, long-term inpatient care with clear due process procedures so that we don’t return to the abusive asylums of the past. This will require funding and a lot of human rights oversight but may nonetheless be more fruitful in helping truly ill individuals than employing the criminal justice system as a crude instrument.

I applaud efforts by the state to take school threats seriously. Yet there is a difference between taking each school threat seriously and treating each school threat as serious. With a renewed focus on mental health care and social services for all but the most dangerous offenders, we can avert tragedies without shattering salvageable lives.

Does hardening schools make students safer?. Elizabeth K. Anthony. (<https://theconversation.com/does-hardening-schools-make-students-safer-184036>)

The first real possibility for federal firearms legislation in decades has been sketched out by a bipartisan group of senators.

It comes in the wake of the May 23, 2022, school shooting in Uvalde, Texas, in which an 18-year-old gunman killed 19 children and two teachers before himself being killed in a gunfire exchange with police.

Perhaps inspired by concerns that the shooter entered the school through a door whose lock malfunctioned, and faced few other barriers or restrictions during his attack, the bipartisan proposal would boost both physical security measures and the number of mental health workers in schools. It could come on top of US$1 billion in proposed funding to hire more school counselors, nurses, social workers and school psychologists.

Another approach popular among some politicians to increase school safety is so-called school hardening. Hardening encompasses a wide range of physical defenses, such as surveillance cameras, metal detectors, door-locking systems, arming teachers and even armed guards. In the weeks following the Uvalde shooting, support for arming teachers and employing police officers in schools has been renewed by leaders from both political parties.

Analysis of the world, from experts

The Uvalde shooting, like every school shooting, raises questions and concerns for parents and community members about how schools might be able to deter a prospective shooter from attacking. Sadly, my research and the research of others finds that there is no way that schools can become so secure as to prevent gun violence.

Addressing the threats

As a professor researching school safety and child trauma, I study how environments help or hinder healthy growth and development. School is an important environment to consider since kids spend more than six hours at school each day with their peers and teachers.

Researchers like me use the term school climate to describe the attitudes, beliefs, values and expectations that hold together school life, and the extent to which members of the community endorse them. While physical security features affect students’ perceptions of school safety, school climate and the actions of teachers and staff also factor into feelings of safety.

School security is big business

School security has become a major industry in the United States. Each year, more than $2.7 billion are spent on hardening schools.

But there is currently no conclusive evidence that any of these measures prevent school shootings. In some cases, attackers have shot out windows to enter the building or triggered fire alarms to cause the school’s occupants to exit. Schools’ attempts to make students safer don’t actually do that, and cost schools money that could help increase staff and better equip classrooms for learning.

Even inexpensive fixes that safety professionals consider best practices, like locking exterior doors, are of limited effectiveness. Door-locking policies are not always enforced. Or, as in the Uvalde shooting, the equipment meant to keep doors locked malfunctioned. All this spending and activity may give students and teachers a false sense of security.

Missed opportunities

School administrators feel pressure to make quick decisions about security, often based on limited or poor information.

When they buy equipment, administrators may fall prey to the idea that the systems are taking care of things, so the people don’t need to prepare.

In addition, enforcing police officers, metal detectors and other punitive measures at schools can increase school violence for historically marginalized students, spur higher rates of disciplinary action against students and reduce the availability of extracurricular activities.

In addition to not being effective in reducing gun violence, an overreliance on surveillance strategies may make students feel less safe at school. The presence of metal detectors has complicated effects and contradictory research findings. For example, metal detectors may increase students’ feelings of fear and may also violate privacy. At the same time, they may reduce the number of weapons brought on campus.

Another complicated response is lockdown drills. While some research suggests they can be effective at preventing school violence and preparing students to respond to a range of emergency scenarios, other research suggests these drills may confuse children and increase fear and anxiety.

Using evidence to protect schools

Complicating the notion of hardening access to school buildings is the fact that about half of school shootings are carried out by people within the school community – students, alumni, staff or family members – who would likely be allowed into the school and permitted to pass through various security checks.

School safety is not just a physical challenge, but a psychological one too.

A comprehensive approach to school safety actively engages students, teachers and parents, identifies high-risk individuals using threat assessment techniques, and instructs teachers and administrators to refer these students to mental health services.

Increasing school-based mental health services is a proven way to increase school safety and promote a positive school climate, and includes teaching students conflict management and emotional coping skills. Research suggests that these efforts support the well-being of students, thereby increasing school safety. These services can also help school communities deal with trauma in the aftermath of violence.

Helping schools become ready to implement a comprehensive approach is an important task. Many schools lack the financial resources to pay for those programs and services.

The new legislation provides an opportunity. Schools have historically struggled to fund an adequate number of counselors and social workers for the needs of the school community. Particularly as COVID-19 relief funds are drying up, schools are scrambling to hire and retain sufficient mental health staff. The new federal proposal could help fund those efforts.

Schools cannot be hardened enough to prevent gun violence. Schools can, however, become more physically and psychologically safe so students can learn and thrive.

**Note: This article appears 15 more times in different media outlets.**

Saudi crown prince pays first visit to Turkey since Khashoggi murder. Agence France-Presse. (<https://www.rawstory.com/saudi-crown-prince-pays-first-visit-to-turkey-since-khashoggi/>)

Saudi Arabia's de facto ruler will on Wednesday take another step towards breaking his international isolation by paying his first visit to Turkey since the murder in 2018 of journalist Jamal Khashoggi in the kingdom's Istanbul consulate.

The talks in Ankara between Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan come one month before a visit to Riyadh by US president Joe Biden, for a regional summit focused on the energy crunch caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Erdogan's decision to revive ties with one of his biggest rivals is also driven in large part by economics and trade.

Turks' living standards are imploding one year before a general election that poses one of the biggest challenges of Erdogan's mercurial two-decade rule.

After Khashoggi's death, Erdogan's Islamic-rooted government released drip-by-drip details of the gruesome murder that deeply embarrassed the Saudi crown prince.

But it is now drumming up investment and central bank assistance from the very countries it opposed on ideological grounds in the wake of the Arab Spring revolts.

"I think this is probably one of the most significant visits to Ankara by a foreign leader in almost a decade," said the Washington Institute's Turkey specialist Soner Cagaptay.

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"Erdogan is all about Erdogan. He's all about winning elections and I think he has decided to kind of swallow his pride."

Cagaptay said Prince Mohammed is also trying to see whether he can win broader backing ahead of a possible new nuclear agreement between world powers and the Saudis' arch-nemesis Iran.

"I think the Saudis are hedging their bets," Cagaptay said.

'You should be ashamed'

Turkey's rapprochement with the Saudis began with an Istanbul court decision in April to break off the trial in absentia of 26 suspects accused of links to Khashoggi's killing and to transfer the case to Riyadh.

US intelligence officials have determined that Prince Mohammed approved the plot against Khashoggi -- something Riyadh denies.

The court's decision drew strong protests from Khashoggi's Turkish fiancee, Hatice Cengiz.

But it paved the way for a visit to Saudi by Erdogan three weeks later, when he hugged the crown prince.

"He gets off the plane and hugs the killers," fumed Turkey's main opposition leader, Kemal Kilicdaroglu -- Erdogan's likely chief rival in the presidential race.

"You should be ashamed."

Ankara expects the mending of fences between the two Sunni powers to help prop up the Turkish economy at a crucial stage of Erdogan's rule.

A Turkish official said the sides will discuss a range of issues that include cooperation between banks and support for small and medium-size businesses.

Lack of trust

Erdogan's unconventional economic approach has set off an inflationary spiral that has seen consumer prices almost double in the past year.

Analysts believe the resulting drop in Erdogan's public approval and the depletion of state reserves means the Turkish leader can ill afford to maintain his hostile stance toward the petrodollar-filled Gulf states.

Turkey's problems with the Saudis began when Ankara refused to accept Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi's ouster of the Muslim Brotherhood from power in Cairo in 2013.

The Saudis and other Arab kingdoms viewed the Brotherhood as an existential threat.

Those rivalries intensified after Turkey tried to break the nearly four-year blockade the Saudis and their allies imposed on Qatar in 2017.

Analysts believe that Washington is watching this gradual return of regional calm with an approving nod.

"Encouraged by the United States, this rapprochement is relaxing tensions and building diplomacy across the region," said Gonul Tol, Turkish studies director at the US-based Middle East Institute.

But Tol questioned whether Prince Mohammed was prepared to fully trust Erdogan.

The crown prince "will not easily forget the attitude adopted by Turkey after the Khashoggi affair", she said.

"In the short term, I do not think there will be a dramatic improvement in the Turkish economy."

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**Note: This story appears 4 more times on other media outlets.**

Trump administration's relationship with Proud Boys 'will be the subject' of future J6 Committee hearings: DOJ. Brad Reed. (<https://www.rawstory.com/trump-proud-boys-2657543381/>)

Future House Select Committee hearings are going to detail the Trump administration's relationship with the far-right Proud Boys gang, according to a new filing by the United States Department of Justice.

As flagged by CBS News' Scott MacFarlane, the DOJ argued in a recent court filing that there should be a delay in the trial of several Proud Boys who have been accused of seditious conspiracy for their roles in inciting the January 6th Capitol riots.

The reason for the delay is that the DOJ wants access to full transcripts from the House Select Committee, which it says are essential evidence to both the government's case and the Proud Boys' defense.

What's more, the DOJ specifically says that "the relationship between the Trump Administration and the Proud Boys and other groups will be the subject of a future hearing" from the January 6th Committee.

During a presidential debate with Joe Biden in 2020, Trump infamously told the Proud Boys to "stand back and stand by" when he was asked if he'd denounce them by a debate moderator.

The DOJ has gathered evidence that the Proud Boys played a central role in inciting the Capitol riots, and they've been among the very few January 6th defendants who have been hit with the very serious charge of seditious conspiracy.

A campaign of terror that came straight from the top': CNN's Abby Phillip on Trump's attacks on election workers Sarah K. Burris. (<https://www.rawstory.com/trump-campaign-of-terror/>)

Testifying before the House Select Committee on Tuesday, Wandrea "Shaye" Moss answered questions on the fourth day of public hearings around former President Donald Trump's attempt to overturn the 2020 election.

After the testimony, a CNN panel confessed that it was emotional for them.

"How anybody could hear what happened to these two women and think that lies were no big deal or were perfectly appropriate, is beyond me," said Jake Tapper.

"It was, I think, today, a picture of a campaign of lies and a campaign of terror that was carried out against a lot of people and Lady Ruby [Freeman] and her daughter Shaye Moss were just two examples of how this played out: threats and harassment," said Abby Phillip. "But the key thing here was that it came from the president of the United States. It was so powerful to hear Ruby Freeman talk about how she felt tearfully, she lost her name, she lost her reputation, she couldn't go anywhere. Her daughter says she gained 60 pounds."

Phillips noted that Moss testified that she feels all of the attacks on her mother and grandmother were her fault.

"They talked about Shaye Moss' grandmother whose house was broken into by Trump's minions, frankly, looking for Shaye and Lady Ruby and trying to make a, 'Citizens arrest.' It's chilling. It's just some of the examples. Rusty Bowers, we heard earlier today, from Arizona, talking about his terminally ill daughter who would hear people outside of their home threatening them."

Liz Cheney explains how Trump was told his claims were lies — but wouldn't stop pushing. Sarah K. Burris. (<https://www.rawstory.com/liz-cheney-trump-election-lies/>)

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Rep. Liz Cheney (R-WY) told reporters outside of the House Select Committee hearing room on Tuesday that the testimony heard was "compelling" and that all of those who testified were trying to simply do their jobs to uphold the election.

"I think that you've seen throughout the hearings that we are putting forward very clearly, a number of instances, in which there are serious questions about the actions of the former president," Cheney explained. "We'll continue to do so."

She then noted that the testimony on Tuesday was "clearly compelling," and included both Republicans and Democrats "being in a position to say that they did their duty. They did what was right, in the face of — you know, Donald Trump had been told multiple times by his attorney general, by his deputy attorney general, by his campaign officials, that what he was saying was not true, that these were lies. Yet, he continued to push them."

Cheney spoke at the top of the hearing saying that former President Trump "did not care about these threats of violence" and said, "we cannot let America become a nation of conspiracy theories and thug violence."

At the close of the hearing, Cheney called the United States a "nation of laws" and that institutions don't defend themselves. "Individuals do that," she said.

"We also had been reminded what it means to take an oath under God to the Constitution," Cheney continued.

She also called out former White House officials who continue to refuse to cooperate and testify before Congress despite orders to do so.

"Mark Meadows has hidden behind President Trump's claims of executive privilege and immunity from subpoenas," Cheney said. "We are engaged now in litigation with Mr. Meadows."

She named former White House Counsel Pat Cipollone, who has yet to speak to the committee.

What Do We Need To Learn About Preventing Mass Shootings? Heather M. Harris. (<https://www.healthaffairs.org/content/forefront/do-we-need-learn-preventing-mass-shootings>)

The negative public health consequences of mass shootings reach far beyond the people who experience them directly—both temporally and spatially. Understanding the breadth and depth of these deleterious outcomes can help national, state, and local governments build on recently passed federal legislation to design and evaluate integrated policy frameworks that prevent mass shootings and reduce the harm they cause.

In a recent Health Affairs Health Policy Brief, Aparna Soni and Erdal Tekin review emerging research that examines how mass public shootings shape community well-being. For young people, nearby school shootings engender lower self-reported health and greater involvement in risky health behaviors in young adulthood. Mass shootings also appear to pose health risks for the next generation, with infant mortality and premature birth rates rising after a community experiences a mass shooting. Just as the meaning of “community” extends beyond geography, so do the impacts of mass shootings. Shootings that target specific groups of people, such as racial, religious, or sexual minorities, have national consequences because they inflict psychological distress on people who are part of that cultural community, no matter where they live.

An integrated policy framework that could minimize the harm caused by mass shootings might include three broad goals: minimizing the prevalence of mass shootings; reducing injuries and fatalities when shootings do happen; and mitigating the immediate and ongoing harm done to those affected by mass shootings (Exhibit 1). Achieving each of these goals would require different policy interventions to target specific objectives -- as shown in Exhibit 1 -- that could reduce mass shootings, shape how mass shootings unfold, and influence how they impact community well-being.

Exhibit 1. Goals and Objectives of Policy Interventions to Reduce Harm from Mass Shootings

SOURCE: Author’s analysis.

Evaluating whether policy interventions achieve these goals and objectives is critical. Thanks to investments recently made in studying responses to active-shooter incidents, experts are building an evidence base about how first responders can rapidly intervene to subdue shooters and tend to the wounded to minimize injuries and fatalities. However, the widely-criticized response to the recent school shooting in Uvalde, Texas indicates room for improvement, especially with respect to how this expertise is disseminated.

Similarly, experts have developed supportive, evidence-based systems to help individuals and communities cope with and overcome traumatic events after they have occurred. Unfortunately, many of these systems are under-resourced and often unavailable to those affected by mass shootings. For example, one national survey of public schools found just 17 percent had plans to address shooting-related trauma.

Though we have some research on effective interventions to reduce the severity of mass shootings and mitigate harm after they occur, we know less about minimizing the prevalence of mass shootings before they happen. Mass shootings remain a rare form of lethal gun violence—according to Soni and Tekin, less than 1 percent of homicide victims fall prey to mass shooters each year. Yet mass shootings have grown more prevalent over time. To understand why, consider Exhibit 1. Preventing mass shootings requires some combination of protecting public spaces, stopping would-be shooters, and addressing how weapons are acquired—and there are challenges associated with all three of these approaches.

Protecting Public Spaces

Built environments can be modified to make mass shootings—about 90 percent of which take place indoors—more difficult. Polling suggests that people do avoid public spaces after a mass shooting, but people also demonstrate a robust willingness and desire to gather in public, as seen amid the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Designing or redesigning spaces specifically to thwart these rare events may not be logistically possible, economically feasible, or socially desirable. For example, Soni and Tekin note that 28 states require schools to secure their buildings. Yet most steps that schools have taken to fortify their physical environments are not evidence-based, and actions like increasing visible security measures to protect schools against mass violence have not been evaluated for efficacy, perhaps in part because developing an evidence base around how to prevent rare events is challenging.

Identifying And Stopping Would-Be Shooters

Ideally, we would like to identify likely shooters and intervene to prevent shootings. Research has therefore focused on actual mass shootings and, more recently, on averted attacks. We now understand that chronic social stigmatization and life crises often (but certainly not always) trigger mass shooters. Yet collecting population-level indicators of these attributes is infeasible. Even if such data were available, the rarity of these tragic incidents, combined with the complexity and the interconnectedness of potential contributing factors, make it difficult for researchers to develop reliable statistical models that could accurately predict mass shootings.

In the absence of accurate predictive models based on public data, options that leverage detailed private information are needed to identify shooters and intervene to stop them. Though in its infancy and heavily skewed toward school shootings, research on averted attacks indicates that most were thwarted because someone—usually a friend or acquaintance—said something. Notably, the would-be shooters in more than nine in ten thwarted incidents had plotted against specific targets, and 72 percent had already acquired firearms.

This research suggests that reporting and evaluation infrastructures that credibly identify threatening—and not just odd or annoying—people could help authorities to more readily disarm dangerous individuals and thwart mass shootings. Some schools have already deployed these “threat assessment systems,” and the results have been promising in terms of reduced violence and improved school climate. A holistic community-based system for assessing and responding to threats would cultivate an informed (rather than fearful) populace that understands the risk factors for mass violence. Such a system would include mechanisms that allow concerned people to report those exhibiting warning signs, as well as protocols that enable accurate and discreet evaluation of whether such reports are credible.

Addressing The Accessibility Of Firearms And Ammunition

Gun control features prominently in debates about how to address mass shootings because addressing what kind of firearms and ammunition are accessible and to whom could help achieve two policy goals: preventing mass shootings and reducing their severity. Strategies that limit who can own firearms and ammunition can constrain the pool of likely mass shooters. However, widely opposing views on gun ownership in the US and the need to protect the constitutional rights of the broader citizenry present challenges for this potential policy approach. Moreover, research on the effectiveness of limiting access to guns and ammunition is still emerging. As discussed by Soni and Tekin, red flag laws have shown promise in this regard, as have gun permitting laws.

Limiting availability of certain types of weapons may be a more promising strategy because doing so could also reduce the severity of mass shootings. Specifically, semiautomatic weapons and large-capacity magazines are used in between 20 and 67 percent of mass shootings. Incidents in which these weapons, especially large-capacity magazines, were used resulted in more injuries and fatalities. Limiting access to large-capacity magazines could reduce mass shooting deaths by up to 15 percent and injuries by up to 25 percent. More research—especially experimental and quasi-experimental research—is needed to determine how to structure laws to achieve this objective. For example, outright bans, which are the subject much of the existing research, may not be necessary to realize similar reductions in fatalities and injuries.

Looking Ahead

Since the mass public shootings in Buffalo, New York, and Uvalde, Texas, the United States has entered a new policy paradigm. For the first time in nearly thirty years, federal lawmakers enacted bipartisan legislation to address gun violence. The Bipartisan Safer Communities Act (SCA) includes multi-dimensional provisions to address gun violence and its impacts on communities by reducing gun trafficking, restricting gun possession, improving school safety and student health, and investing in community mental health and violence prevention.

Notably absent from the SCA, however, are provisions to improve the knowledge base around which policies and programs best prevent and minimize harm from gun violence generally and from mass public shootings specifically. As Soni and Tekin describe, retrospective and inconsistent data collection along with policy analyses based on weak research designs have contributed to our collective inability to reduce our nation’s gun violence problem. Planning for ongoing data collection and implementing policies and practices with an eye toward how to evaluate them are investments that can yield large dividends: we will know which interventions work and which do not and can spend our public money accordingly.

Mass shootings constitute a small subset of the gun violence problem. Yet they have increased in prevalence and severity in recent years. Similarly, evidence that mass shootings negatively affect public health is mounting. While expansive in scope, the new federal legislation does not pull all possible policy levers that could minimize mass shootings, reduce their severity, and mitigate their public health impacts. Augmenting the SCA within a policy framework that targets each of these policy goals, prospectively collecting robust data, and rigorously evaluating implemented policies can lead to safer and healthier communities.

A Florida School Received a Threat. Did a Red Flag Law Prevent a Shooting?. Sheryl Gay Stolberg.

(<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/16/us/politics/red-flag-laws-mass-shootings.html>)

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. — Seagull Alternative High School sits behind locked gates and a chain-link fence, a complex of low-slung buildings that provides an academic home for pregnant teenagers and students at risk of dropping out. On a Tuesday in early October, it was a target of the kind of threat that every school official dreads.

“I just might come to yo school and kill everybody,” a 17-year-old who had previously attended the school wrote in an Instagram message to a student, according to police records. He singled out the principal and a behavioral specialist and sent a chilling photograph: a handgun and an assault rifle, splayed out on a bed, with Seagull Alternative High School written across the top of the image.

Informed of the threat, law enforcement officials in Fort Lauderdale moved quickly. Making use of Florida’s so-called red flag law, the police obtained an order from a judge allowing them to remove any guns in the young man’s possession.

Gun safety activists and public health experts say that such orders — often known as extreme risk protection orders, or ERPOs — are a way to prevent mass shootings in a country that has been plagued by them. Nineteen states and the District of Columbia now have red flag laws, up from just two states a decade ago.

Advocates are pressing for more states — including Michigan and Minnesota, where Democrats recently took control of state legislatures — to pass them this year. Only two states controlled by Republicans, Florida and Indiana, have such laws.

What Are Red Flag Laws?

Sheryl Gay Stolberg

Sheryl Gay Stolberg

Reporting on gun policy and public health

Brendan McDermid/Reuters

Nineteen states and the District of Columbia have red flag laws, which authorize courts to issue temporary orders enabling law enforcement to remove firearms from people who are deemed dangerous.

Here’s how the laws work →

A brick-red metal awning runs the length of the flat-roofed single-story building housing the club. A line of mountains marks the horizon under a hazy blue sky. A large tree, bare of leaves, stands in the foreground with a length of yellow police-line tape tied to its trunk.

The massacre at a Buffalo supermarket raised questions about why the suspect had not been subject to a red flag order. Such orders are most widely used in New York in Suffolk County.

Item 1 of 6

Gun rights groups argue that the laws violate due process — the right to have one’s case heard in court. Erich Pratt, the senior vice president of Gun Owners of America, said the laws “don’t work,” citing back-to-back mass shootings in November in Colorado, which adopted a red flag law in 2019, and Virginia, which did so in 2020.

But a growing body of public health research suggests that the laws may prevent gun violence at least some of the time. A recent six-state study of more than 6,700 ERPO cases found that nearly 10 percent involved threats to kill at least three people.

Indeed, backers say the laws are not being used aggressively enough because law enforcement agencies lack the training or bandwidth to pursue court orders, and many people do not know the laws exist. Congress, recognizing these problems, passed bipartisan legislation last year that provides $750 million for state crisis intervention programs, including red flag laws.

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“People are quick to say, ‘You have this tool, you didn’t use it, what went wrong here?’” said Lisa Geller, a researcher at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health who studies policies to reduce gun violence. “Yes, these incidents still happen. But states are using their ERPO laws in ways that you wouldn’t know about because the shooting never happened.”

There was no shooting at Seagull Alternative High School. The threat and the resulting risk protection order against the former student offer a case study in how such orders work — and why some judges and law enforcement officers are uneasy about them, especially when they involve juveniles.

A Tip From a Student

The investigation in Fort Lauderdale began when a female student alerted a school police officer, who called Detective Cody Campbell, a member of the Fort Lauderdale Police Department’s six-person threat response unit.

Within hours, Detective Campbell said in an interview, he, the former student and the former student’s mother were meeting in a shopping mall parking lot. The detective wanted the young man’s phone and the mother’s help so he could confirm whether her son had weapons. The mother refused, he said: “There wasn’t a lot of cooperation.”

Image

A group holding candles at sunset.

Florida enacted its red flag law in response to the 2018 mass shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, a suburb of Fort Lauderdale.Credit...Saul Martinez for The New York Times

In a brief telephone interview, a woman who identified herself as the teenager’s mother declined to comment.

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It was a long night for Detective Campbell. “We burned the midnight oil,” he said, drafting paperwork asking a court to issue a risk protection order, as well as warrants for Instagram and the young man’s wireless phone provider and to search his home.

The requests were granted. But the results of the search were not what the detective expected.

Memories of Parkland

Nationally, more than 20,000 petitions for extreme risk protection orders were filed from 1999 to 2021, according to data collected by Everytown for Gun Safety, an advocacy group. A vast majority of those petitions — more than 18,600 — were filed after the 2018 massacre at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, a Fort Lauderdale suburb.

Florida — a state controlled by Republicans, who have traditionally been loath to impose restrictions on gun ownership — enacted its red flag law in response to that shooting. Its courts handled more than 8,100 petitions for risk protection orders from 2018 to 2021, according to Everytown.

In Fort Lauderdale, the memory of Parkland is strong.

Detective Chris Carita, who has a master’s degree in public health from Johns Hopkins, trains fellow officers in how to use the state’s red flag law. On a recent Wednesday, he could be found in a bare-bones classroom with seven new officers.

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“Law enforcement is a gun culture; the thought of taking someone’s firearms away may not sit well with us, right?” he told them. “That really is a problem for some of us, and so it’s important to understand the legal framework for these laws so that you can be comfortable and understand why it’s being used and how it’s being used.”

There are roughly 17,500 state and local law enforcement agencies in the United States; about 85 percent of them have fewer than 50 full-time officers. Many are unable to provide the kind of training available in Fort Lauderdale, said Chuck Wexler, the executive director of the Police Executive Research Forum, a nonprofit in Washington.

Even in bigger police departments, getting officers accustomed to using the orders can be a challenge. In Fairfax County, Va., Chief Kevin Davis has assigned a single officer to manage all emergency substantial risk orders, as they are called in that state. His department obtained 11 orders in 2020 and 26 in 2021. Last year, the number jumped to 80.

Image

Detective Chris Carita speaking at a lectern, as his image is reflected off a screen.

Detective Chris Carita teaching new officers about Florida’s red flag law at the Fort Lauderdale police headquarters.Credit...Josh Ritchie for The New York Times

Red flag laws are not only used to thwart criminal activity; often, they are directed at someone who is in a mental health crisis or contemplating suicide. Some states allow family members to seek the orders. Two state lawmakers are pressing legislation to permit that in Florida as well.

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In two oft-cited papers that helped make the case for the laws, Jeffrey W. Swanson, a professor in psychiatry and behavioral sciences at Duke University, studied their effects on suicides in the first two states to adopt them: Connecticut and Indiana. He calculated that for every 10 to 20 people who had guns taken away, one life was saved.

The six-state study found that of the extreme risk protection order cases related to threats to shoot three or more people, about half involved the kinds of “public mass shootings that we all fear,” said the lead researcher, April M. Zeoli of the University of Michigan’s Institute for Firearm Injury Prevention. K-12 schools and businesses were the most common targets for those large-scale threats.

“The big conclusion is that these really are being used in cases of multiple-victim mass shooting threats,” Dr. Zeoli said. “And these threats are largely determined to be credible by judges.”

Experts say it is extremely difficult to predict who will carry out a school shooting. But if there is a profile, the teenager in Fort Lauderdale seemed to fit it; past school shootings have often been committed by young men, including teenagers, who have signaled their intentions.

A Search for Guns

It took less than a day for the Fort Lauderdale police, working with the department’s legal adviser, to build a case for a risk protection order in response to the threat against Seagull Alternative High School.

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In an affidavit supporting their petition to the court, Detective Campbell wrote that the young man had told the female student over Instagram that he would “kill the principal y he walking to his car.”

A background check, the detective wrote, revealed that the former student was facing 13 felony and two misdemeanor charges, including robbery, carjacking and battery, stemming from previous episodes. He had also received a diagnosis of schizoaffective disorder, a condition in which patients experience psychotic symptoms, including hallucinations and delusions.

Image

A group of officers, not in uniform, sitting at desks in a class.

Many local law enforcement agencies do not have the bandwidth for the kind of training that Fort Lauderdale provides.Credit...Josh Ritchie for The New York Times

Experts say that only a small percentage of people with mental illness are violent. But the young man had been involuntarily detained eight times for psychiatric evaluation since 2020. In one previous interaction with the police, he said he was “tired of the world and wants to kill everyone,” the detective wrote.

Extreme risk protection orders are civil and carry no criminal penalties; as a result, the young man was not entitled to a public defender. That troubles Chief Judge Jack Tuter of Florida’s 17th Judicial Circuit, which includes Fort Lauderdale. While he said he supported the state’s red flag law, Judge Tuter, who was not involved in the young man’s case, said he was concerned about people under 18 who lack legal representation.

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“There is a due process aspect to juveniles — there always has been,” he said.

With the risk protection order and a search warrant in hand, the entire threat response team, along with a backup crew, parked themselves near the former student’s home. Hoping to avoid a confrontation at the front door, the officers watched him leave the house and served him the warrant during a traffic stop.

What they found when they searched the home surprised them. There were no guns. Detectives Carita and Campbell said they believed, but could not be certain, that the young man — aware that he was being watched — stashed the weapons that had appeared in the Instagram picture elsewhere.

That, however, is not the end of the story.

At the end of November, Detective Campbell was called to the teenager’s home to respond to an episode in which the young man “was alleged to have discharged a firearm multiple times, with one round ultimately striking his sister in the hand,” according to a police report.

Image

Balloons and flowers surround a sign for Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas.

School shootings like the massacre at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas, last year loom large in Americans’ fears of gun violence.Credit...Emily Rhyne/The New York Times

After being informed of his right to remain silent, the report said, the teenager admitted to owning and firing the gun that police recovered at the time of the shooting. He was arrested, charged with violating his risk protection order and transported to a juvenile assessment center. The police said that a criminal investigation was active, and they would not comment on how or when the young man obtained the gun.

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To Judge Tuter, that turn of events raises questions.

“What good did the risk protection order do,” he said, “if at the end of the day, he ended up getting a gun, which he was prohibited from doing; he ended up getting ammunition, which he was prohibited from doing; and he ended up using the gun?”

The police, however, are convinced that they prevented a mass tragedy that would have been perpetrated by an unstable young man who had a violent past, made a specific threat to kill school officials and students, and apparently had the means to carry it out.

“Based on his history, his posts and subsequent events, it’s very obvious that he is capable of violence,” Detective Campbell said. “When a person like that makes those kinds of statements, you have to take it very seriously.”

**Note: This article appears two more times on other media outlets**