

→ Mark your confusion.

→ Purposefully annotate the article (1-2 mature, thoughtful responses per page to what the author is saying)

→ Write a 250+ word response to the article.

(If you are a teacher or student who would like to modify this Google Doc, go to File > Make a Copy. I cannot and do not respond to Share requests -- my apologies!)

## After the BLM Protests

By *The Week* staff, February 16, 2021

*Millions of Americans took to the streets last summer to demand police reform. Did anything change? Here's everything you need to know:*

### What did protesters want?

A fundamental transformation of American policing. After watching the horrific video of Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin driving his knee into George Floyd's neck for seven minutes and 46 seconds, killing the 46-year-old Black man as three other cops stood by, an estimated 26 million Americans marched in the streets of cities and towns across the nation. The largest U.S. protest movement since the Vietnam War demanded sweeping police reform, arguing that law enforcement was militarized and systemically racist. Minneapolis had supposedly been a model of less radical reform: installing a Black police chief, requiring de-escalation training and body cameras, and implementing a system to flag misbehaving officers. But after Floyd's death, there was a widespread sense that "reform didn't work, so we have to rethink policing completely," said anti-crime expert Chuck Wexler. By mid-June, public opinion had swung dramatically in that direction, with 69 percent of U.S. adults — including 65 percent of white people — saying the criminal justice system needed "major changes" or a "complete overhaul."

### What was actually done?

Denver, St. Louis, and three other cities enacted all "8 Can't Wait" reforms endorsed by the activist group Campaign Zero, including requiring officers to attempt de-escalation and issue a warning before firing their weapon. Most cities and states, however, reformed around the edges. Philadelphia, Phoenix, and 30 of the other 65 largest U.S. police departments barred officers from using chokeholds or other neck restraints. Twenty-one cities, including Atlanta, San Diego, and Dallas, required officers to intervene if a colleague used excessive force. Seattle and Philadelphia outlawed the use of tear gas for crowd control, while Denver and Washington, D.C., barred police from indiscriminately firing rubber bullets at demonstrators. Louisville banned the kind of "no-knock" search warrant that led to the fatal shooting of Breonna Taylor last March, and Houston prohibited officers from kneeling on a suspect's neck. Albuquerque and Olympia, Washington, tasked civilian "crisis responders" with defusing nonviolent situations called in to 911. Many communities also took steps to hold police officers more accountable for their behavior with civilians.

### In what way?

California required a prosecutor in its state attorney general's office to investigate every police shooting that resulted in the death of an unarmed civilian. New York state created a special prosecutors' unit to probe deaths resulting from encounters with police. Massachusetts and New York state revoked qualified immunity, which shields government employees from civil lawsuits for on-the-job behavior. New York also required police departments to disclose alleged officer misconduct, and Denver mandated that officers report every time they point a firearm at someone. Connecticut joined several states in broadening requirements for body cameras. A swath of cities, from San Francisco to Pittsburgh, created independent police oversight commissions.

### Why did some proposals fizzle?

Legislation encountered fierce resistance. In June, House Democrats passed the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act, which would have required federal police officers to wear body cameras, barred chokeholds, and restricted distribution of military gear to police departments. The bill was dead on arrival in the GOP-controlled Senate, with Republicans saying it would "cripple our police force and put the safety of Americans at risk." Even California's overwhelmingly Democratic legislature couldn't agree on a law restricting how police use deadly force. Powerful police unions fought virtually every proposed change,

and over time, public attention and support waned. From last June to September, support for the Black Lives Matter movement dropped 10 percent, according to the Pew Research Center. That drop came when some protests led to an eruption of violence, arson, and looting, with an estimated \$1 billion to \$2 billion in damage to property. In Minnesota's Twin Cities, at least 1,500 businesses were vandalized, and in Kenosha, Wisconsin, where protests broke out after the August police shooting of Jacob Blake, more than 35 small businesses were destroyed.

### **Has reform helped?**

There are glimmers of progress. Police misconduct complaints in Baltimore, for example, dropped 40 percent last year, after the department adopted less aggressive tactics. But last year there were still 1,004 fatal police shootings in the U.S., five more than in 2019, and Black people continued to be killed at disproportionate rates. Derrick Johnson, president and CEO of the NAACP, said the major issues remain. "We need to evaluate the culture of police departments," he said. "We need to look at the conduct of problematic police officers, and we need to ensure that training police officers entails de-escalation tactics."

### **Defunding the police**

Far-left calls to "defund the police" created massive headaches for Democratic candidates in the 2020 election, but few departments actually saw budget cuts. In fact, law enforcement spending as a share of general costs in the 50 largest U.S. cities actually ticked up this year. Some cities did make cuts: Portland, Oregon, slashed police funding by 6 percent, inciting more than 100 days of violent protests from activists who deemed the \$15 million cut insufficient. Austin cut \$150 million from its \$434 million police budget, San Francisco diverted \$60 million from police funding toward low-income health programs, and Los Angeles reallocated \$150 million from the police toward programs supporting people of color. New York City cut \$1 billion from its \$6 billion police budget, removing homeless monitoring and school protection from the department's purview. In Minneapolis, the city council voted to trim the department's 2021 budget by \$8 million and redirect those funds to mental-health and violence-prevention initiatives. But the cuts won't cost any of the city's 888 officers their jobs, and amid a nearly 25 percent increase in violent crime in the city last year, the department remains widely mistrusted. A survey of city residents found that 75 percent of Black respondents said they still do not believe officers are held accountable for misconduct. The Minneapolis PD, the survey concluded, "does not respect the community ... is racist, rude, lacks compassion, and uses excessive force that has resulted in general mistrust."

### **Response option(s):**

- After reading the article, what is one main idea that you find most remarkable (meaning, "most worthy of a remark" -- so it can be interesting, concerning, confusing, alarming, offensive, etc)? What is it that you find so remarkable? Explain.
- After reading the article, what additional questions do you have? Research these on your own and write about what you find.
- Summarize any point made in the article and respond.