The American Racial Divide in Fear of the Police

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Abstract:

The mission of American policing is "to protect and serve," but recent events suggest that many Americans, and especially Black Americans, do not feel protected *from the police*. Understanding policing-related emotions is vital not only because they are at the heart of the United States' police legitimacy crisis, but also because they may have far-reaching effects on citizens' lives. We measured personal and altruistic fear of the police in a nationwide sample of Americans (N = 1,150), which included comparable numbers of Blacks (N = 517) and Whites (N = 492). Most Whites felt safe, but most Blacks feared the police even more than crime, being afraid both for themselves and for others they cared about. The racial divide in fear was mediated by past experiences with police mistreatment. In turn, fear mediated the effects of race and past mistreatment on support for defunding the police and intentions to have "the talk" with family youths about the need to distrust and avoid officers. A Rawlsian cost-benefit analysis revealed that about half of Blacks would rather be the victim of a serious crime than be questioned or searched by the police. Taken together, the findings indicate that when it comes to the police, Blacks and Whites live in different emotional worlds, one of fear and the other of felt safety. This deep racial divide in fear represents a racially disparate health crisis, a breach of the social contract in which the state promises protection in exchange for compliance, and a primary obstacle to law enforcement's capacity to serve all communities equitably. Acknowledging and reducing Blacks' fear is essential to resolving the police legitimacy crisis in the United States.

Keywords: policing, fear, police-civilian relations, race, Black Lives Matter

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Introduction

How afraid a citizenry is of those policing it tells us a great deal about a society. No one in a just society would need to be fearful of being mistreated by the police. Widespread fear portends abuse of legal authority, much as disparities in fear across citizens by race speak loudly to the amount of racial injustice in their midst. Fear of police mistreatment is disconcerting for another reason. A voluminous literature on a closely related social problem—the fear of crime— shows that being afraid for oneself and especially for others—what is known as "altruistic fear"—profoundly affects people's daily lives (1). Being personally or altruistically afraid of state representatives who are armed with lethal weapons and empowered with unparalleled discretion could only be more consequential (2).

In the United States, the potential for unjust policing to foster fear is enormous. Each year, more than 50 million Americans have contacts with the police, about half of which are officer-initiated (3), and millions more experience contacts vicariously. The signs are growing that many Americans, particularly Black Americans, are living in fear of the police (4), not only for themselves but also for others, such as their family members and friends. Calls to defund or disband the police suggest fear is prevalent. The emergence of the Black Lives Matter movement also suggests it, as do the unprecedented protests that erupted across the country after George Floyd Jr.'s killing beneath the knees of police. That police violence harms not only those directly involved, but also those living nearby suggests it as well—fear is one mechanism that would produce vicarious effects (5).

Unlike with the fear of crime, which has been studied for decades, the evidence on the prevalence and consequences of police-related fear remains thin (4). Prior studies have examined perceptions and attitudes about policing, such as general beliefs about whether the police are

biased against Blacks, but have mostly overlooked emotional reactions, like personal and altruistic fear. What we know is that students do worse in school after exposure to aggressive policing (6, 7), and that suffering police mistreatment predicts later suicide ideation and attempts (8, 9). Even experiencing routine enforcement practices, such as stops and searches, appears to increase future depression and psychological distress (10-12). All of this suggests that many Americans find various types of interactions with police to be traumatic, that they are afraid of those interactions occurring, and that this fear is a significant factor in their lives.

Several critical questions about police-related fear remain unanswered, however. Are personal and altruistic fear of the police widespread in the United States, or are they only prevalent among Black Americans? Because police are more likely to disrespect Blacks than Whites (13), and because Blacks have a much higher lifetime risk of being killed by the police (14), a racial gap in police-related fear is likely, but how large is it? Does past experience with police mistreatment mediate the racial gap in fear? What consequences does police-related fear have for Americans' policy attitudes and social lives? How frightening are different types of police contact to members of the public? Our study uses recent survey data from a large national sample to answer each of these questions.

Results

To investigate police-related fear in the United States, we surveyed a nationwide sample of Americans (N = 1,150), matched and weighted to population parameters by YouGov, the polling firm that fields Harvard University's Cooperative Election Study (15) and *The Economist*'s election polls. Our survey was administered in 2021 both to a general population sample (N = 700) and to an oversample of Blacks (N = 450), to ensure that the total number of Blacks (N =

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517) and non-Hispanic Whites (N = 492) in the combined sample would be sufficient for meaningful comparisons by race.

The results showed that personal fear of the police is widespread among Blacks, but not among Whites [Fig. 1]. It would be difficult to overstate the racial divide in police-related fearfulness ($d = 1.07$, $t = 15.40$, $p < .001$). For example, 42% of Blacks were "very afraid" that the police would kill them in the next five years, compared to only 11% of Whites. In fact, the modal responses among Blacks and Whites to this question were mirror opposites: "very afraid" versus "very unafraid." The same was true for the questions about being hit, pinned to the ground, tased, or pepper sprayed by the police (not shown).

Even more startling was the comparison of personal fear of the police to fear of crime [Fig. 1]. Although Blacks were more afraid than Whites of crime ($d = .35$, $t = 5.20$, $p < .001$), the magnitude of this difference paled in comparison to that for fear of the police ($d = .35$ vs. $d = 1.07$). To illustrate, most Blacks (58%) were either "afraid" or "very afraid" of being killed by the police, but only 34% were fearful of being murdered by criminals. In both cases, the comparable percentage for Whites was 16%. Indeed, when the two personal fear indices were differenced, most (61%) Whites were more afraid of crime than of the police, but most Blacks (55%) were more afraid of the police than of crime ($d = .76$, $t = 11.18$, $p < .001$). The police may have it as their mission "to protect and serve," but our data show that Black Americans fear them more than criminals.

[Insert Fig. 1 about here]

Are Blacks also more fearful than Whites that the police will hurt other people—that is, are they more altruistically afraid? The response distributions for altruistic fear are shown in Fig. 2. As with personal fear, altruistic fear of the police was much higher among Blacks than Whites (d

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= .98, t = 13.94, p <.001). For example, a majority (51%) of Blacks worried "often" or "very often" about their family members being hurt by the police, compared to only 9% of Whites. The clear takeaway is that Black and White Americans live in different emotional worlds. Most Blacks live in fear of the police mistreating them and hurting others whose safety they value. Comparatively few Whites do so.

[Insert Fig. 2 about here]

Why are Blacks more afraid than Whites of the police? The racial divide in fear may be mediated by past experiences with police mistreatment (16, 17). Alternatively, it may reflect differences in other relevant experiences, in residential context, especially in perceived neighborhood conditions (17, 18), in socioeconomic status, in family structure, or in political and religious socialization—factors that influence other types of fear and/or attitudes toward criminal justice. Our survey measured these potential sources of police-related fearfulness. The racial divide in fear may also reflect broadly "shared historical memories of police malfeasance" among Blacks (19). If so, the association between race and fear should persist after controlling for past experiences and other social and contextual factors.

To examine whether past mistreatment mediated the effect of race on personal and altruistic fear, we first rescaled the outcomes to range from 0 to 100, so that the coefficients could be interpreted as percentage point changes, and then estimated three linear regressions for each type of fear. The first provided a baseline, and included only race, sex, and age. The second added social and contextual controls. The third included past personal and vicarious experiences with police mistreatment.

We found a "racial gradient" (16) in both types of police-related fear [Fig. 3]: Blacks were the most afraid, Whites were the least afraid, and other racial/ethnic minorities fell in-between.

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In the baseline models, the adjusted differences in means between Blacks and Whites were significant ($p < .001$) and substantial, exceeding 20 percentage points (well over half a standard deviation in the outcomes). Although reduced in size, the Black-White divide in fear persisted after adding the additional controls, and it persisted in the full models, after accounting for experienced police mistreatment. In the full models, the Black-White disparity was 16 points for personal fear and 9 points for altruistic fear ($p < .001$ for both).

The full models explained nearly 50% of the variation in both outcomes. In these models, one of the strongest predictors of both types of fear was past experience with police mistreatment (personal fear: $b = 8.77$, $p < .001$; altruistic fear: $b = 7.53$, $p < .001$). Blacks also experienced far more police mistreatment than Whites ($d = .76$, $t = 11.18$, $p < .001$). Bootstrapped mediation tests showed that past mistreatment mediated 17% of the Black-White disparity in personal fear (indirect effect: $b = 3.38$, $p < .001$) and 25% of the disparity in altruistic fear (indirect effect: $b = 2.90$, $p < .001$). However, much of the race effect on fear was direct, likely reflecting broadly shared historical memories of police mistreatment.

[Insert Fig. 3 about here]

There are many possible consequences of police-related fear. We explored two: support for defunding the police and intentions to engage in defensive legal socialization—that is, to have "the talk" with young family members about the need to avoid the police and to take precautions around them (20, 21). Both outcomes were measured by averaging responses to multiple items, and were rescaled to range from 0 to 100. For each outcome, we estimated two linear regressions, in order to test whether police-related fear mediated the effects of race and police mistreatment. One was the full specification from the earlier analysis [Fig. 3]. The other added the two measures of police-related fear. The results are shown in Fig. 4.

The models including police-related fear explained over 50% of the variation in both outcomes, and the fear variables were among the strongest predictors in the models. Both types of police-related fear were associated with increased support for defunding the police ($b = .16$, $p <.001$ and $b = .27$, $p < .001$). Going from the lowest (0) to the highest (100) level of personal and altruistic fear increased predicted support for defunding by 16 percentage points (over half a standard deviation) and 27 points (nearly a standard deviation), respectively. Both types of fear were also associated with intended defensive legal socialization ($b = .21$, $p <.001$ and $b = .20$, $p < .001$). For both types of fear, going from the lowest to the highest level increased predicted socialization by about 20 points, over half a standard deviation in the outcome.

Before including police-related fear in the models, Blacks and those who had experienced more police mistreatment expressed greater support for defunding the police ($b = 6.72$, $p <.001$ and $b = 4.00$, $p < .001$) and intentions to engage in defensive legal socialization ($b = 19.53$, $p <.001$ and $b = 7.97$, $p < .001$). These effects were reduced after including personal and altruistic fear. Bootstrapped mediation tests showed that police-related fear mediated 74% of the Black-White disparity in support for defunding the police (indirect effect: $b = 4.98$, $p < .001$), and 27% of the disparity in socialization (indirect effect: $b = 5.18$, $p < .001$). For past mistreatment, police-related fear mediated 87% of its effect on support for defunding the police (indirect effect: $b = 3.47$, $p < .001$), and 42% of its effect on socialization (indirect effect: $b = 3.38$, $p < .001$). These findings show that police-related fear is consequential and helps to account for differences across Americans in how they view the role of policing both in society and in their lives.

[Insert Fig. 4 about here]

A key question that follows is: how frightening is the prospect of a police contact to Blacks and Whites? To answer this question, we used an experimental design and Rawlsian cost-benefit

analysis, a contingent valuation procedure that measures relative preferences for events (22, 23). We asked respondents whether they would rather be the victim of a serious felony (randomly assigned: robbery or burglary) or experience one of three types of unprovoked ("without good reason") police contact (randomly assigned: questioned, searched, or arrested). The full question wording for this experiment is provided in the online supplement (Table S3). Part of the motivation for the experiment was scholarship arguing that evaluations of confrontational policing tactics, such as stop-and-frisk, should consider their noxiousness for innocents (24). Because the results were similar by crime, we combined the crime conditions in the analysis.

The type of police contact had a significant effect on evaluations ($V = .20$, $\chi^2 = 38.64$, $p < .001$). Respondents viewed police questioning as the least frightening type of contact, and arrest as the most [Fig. 5]. Most important, evaluations varied significantly by race ($V = .18$, $\chi^2 = 31.17$, $p < .001$), showing a clear racial divide. The prospect of police questioning was far more frightening to Blacks than to Whites [Fig. 5]. Strikingly, 45% of Blacks preferred to be robbed or burglarized than to be questioned by the police. Only 18% of Whites felt this way. Although differences narrowed for other types of police contact, racial disparities persisted: 52% of Blacks versus 36% of Whites preferred crime victimization over being searched, and 60% of Blacks versus 51% of Whites preferred it over being arrested.

[Insert Fig. 5 about here]

Discussion

The American racial divide that exists in police-related fear is immense, overshadowing the racial divide in fear of crime. Both personal and altruistic fear of the police are widespread among Blacks—in fact, Blacks are more afraid of the police than of crime. Both types of police-

related fear result in part from past experiences with police mistreatment, and both are consequential. Many Blacks would rather be the victim of a serious crime than be questioned or searched by the police. These findings suggest that Blacks do not believe that they share equally in a basic citizenship right, one which is essential for justice and fundamental to the social contract: state protection. Whereas most Whites take for granted that police are integral to their well-being and guardians of their safety, most Blacks live in fear of the police mistreating them and hurting those they care about.

The policy implications of our findings are fourfold. First, reforms are needed to reduce racial bias in policing and police mistreatment of citizens. Because White male officers are the most likely to harass and use force against Black citizens, police diversification is a promising reform that should be pursued (25). Second, in evaluating and improving policing tactics it is important to consider the distress they cause citizens and how to reduce it (24). Our findings show that for many Americans, being questioned or searched by the police without receiving a good explanation is worse than being robbed or burglarized. Because using the worst of two evils to prevent the lesser one is destructive, ensuring that good reasons exist for officers' actions and that they are provided to citizens should be a priority. Third, and related, procedural justice training, which encourages officers not just to explain their actions to citizens but also to treat them respectfully, fairly, and with dignity, may improve officer behavior and reduce public fear (26). Fourth, there should be efforts to foster positive, non-enforcement contacts between Blacks and the police, as these interactions may help to reduce anxiety and improve attitudes (27, 28).

Our study is not without limitations, which provide opportunities for future research. First, although there is strong evidence supporting the generalizability of findings from YouGov surveys (29-32), our sample is not a probability sample of the general public—it is a matched

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sample of opt-in panelists. The key assumption made in using such samples is that adjusting for the matching and weighting variables (and for the covariates in the regression models) renders online selection ignorable with respect to the specific outcomes examined (33). We believe this is a reasonable assumption, but future research should attempt to replicate our study using a probability sample. Second, our study is cross-sectional, meaning that unless the causal order between variables is established by their natural time ordering, as it is for race, it can only be assumed based on theory or question wording (e.g., for the relationship between fear and socialization intentions). Additional studies are thus needed that explore the relationships examined herein with longitudinal data to establish the causal order empirically.

To conclude, the different emotional worlds inhabited by Whites and Blacks, and the different understandings of the police—as protectors versus aggressors—that underpin them, are indicative not only of a citizenship deficit in the United States but also of racial injustice. In a just society, police-related fear would be low in all racial groups, because no one, regardless of race, would have to be afraid of being mistreated by the police. In a just society, no one would have to have "the talk" with family youths about the need to be wary of officers, who may be untrustworthy and dangerous. This is not the case in the United States. Blacks' fear of the police should be acknowledged as a criminological fact and a public health risk (8-10). The large racial divide in fear documented herein represents a stain on American democracy and its ideal of equal justice before the law. A bipartisan effort should be made to show Blacks that their fears are recognized, legitimate, and merit our collective concern and action.

Materials and Methods

YouGov fielded our survey using a two-step sample-matching procedure (15). For the general population sample, YouGov used a synthetic sampling frame (SSF) constructed from the American Community Survey to select matched respondents from its large (2 million US panelists) opt-in panel. The matching variables were race, gender, age, and education. To correct for imperfect matching, the matched cases were weighted to the SSF using propensity scoring (based on region of residence and the matching variables), and the weights were then post-stratified on 2020 Presidential vote choice, and a four-way stratification of gender, age, race, and education. The sampling procedure was the same for the Black oversample, and, except for race, the same matching and weighting variables were used.

Studies have shown that YouGov's sampling methodology produces high quality data (29-32). For example, data collected by FiveThirtyEight, an aggregator of election polls, shows that YouGov surveys called 89% of political races correctly, which is more than surveys by Gallup (69%), Sienna College (73%), IPSOS (75%), Emerson College (76%), Monmouth University (78%), Suffolk University (81%), Quinnipiac University (82%), or Marist College (83%). More importantly, the policing attitudes in our sample and the racial differences in those attitudes both appear to be similar to those in the general population (see Table S1 in the online supplement).

In our survey, we measured both personal and altruistic fear of the police. To measure personal fear, we asked respondents about their emotional fear "that the police will do the following things to you without good reason in the next five years." They rated how afraid they were (0 = very unafraid, 4 = very afraid) of falling victim to ten types of mistreatment (e.g., "punch or kick you," "pepper spray you," "kill you"). For comparison, we measured personal fear of crime using the same response scale, the same five-year window, and five serious

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criminal offenses (e.g., "break into your house," "rob or mug you on the street," "murder you").

For each type of personal fear, we averaged the items to construct an index ($\alpha = .98$ and $.91$,

respectively) on which higher values indicated greater fear. To measure altruistic fear of the

police, we asked how often (0 = very rarely, 4 = very often) the respondents "worry about the

police hurting the following people," and listed seven groups (e.g., "your family members,"

"your friends," "your neighbors"). The items were averaged to form an index ($\alpha = .93$) where

higher values indicated greater fear.

The primary mediator of interest in our analysis of the relationship between race and

police-related fear was past experience, personal or vicarious, with police mistreatment (16, 17).

Similar to previous studies (17, 18), we measured experienced mistreatment with six questions

that asked how many times (0 = never, 3 = three times or more) police officers had done the

following things either to respondents or to their family members and close friends: stopped

them without good reason, used insulting language with them, and used excessive force against

them. We averaged the responses to these items to construct an index ($\alpha = .90$) on which higher

scores indicated more past experience with mistreatment.

We explored two potential outcomes of police-related fear: support for defunding the

police and intentions to engage in defensive legal socialization ($\alpha = .70$ and $.87$, respectively).

The questions about police defunding asked how much respondents supported (0 = strongly

oppose, 4 = strongly support): 1) "cutting funding for the police and using that money instead to

help communities develop service programs (e.g., drug treatment, mental health care)," and 2)

"disbanding the police entirely and replacing them with social workers." The questions about

defensive legal socialization asked respondents how likely (0 = very unlikely, 4 = very likely) it

was that they would do four things if they had a new family member, such as a new child or

grandchild: 1) "advise them to stay away from police officers," 2) "teach them how to protect themselves from police officers," 3) "tell them they cannot trust police officers," and 4) "discuss with them how to keep from getting hurt if stopped by police officers."

The data were weighted for the univariate and bivariate analyses. For the multivariable models, we combined the general population sample and the Black oversample. In the full regression models, in which we tested for mediation, we controlled for residential context as well as sociodemographic, economic, political and religious factors. The models also controlled for fear of crime, to account for individual-differences in general fearfulness. The question wording for each of these variables is provided in the online supplement, and Table S2 shows the weighted descriptive statistics for all variables used in the regression models. We estimated the models using ordinary least squares regression, with robust standard errors to correct for heteroskedasticity. Multicollinearity was not problematic in any of the models: the largest variance inflation factor (VIF) was 2.88, and the mean VIF was 1.68. Because the full regression models included most of the covariates used to construct the weights, and because weight association tests showed that weighting the data did not significantly improve model fit (34), we used unweighted data for the regression models. This decision did not affect the main findings. Weighted regression models yielded substantively identical conclusions.

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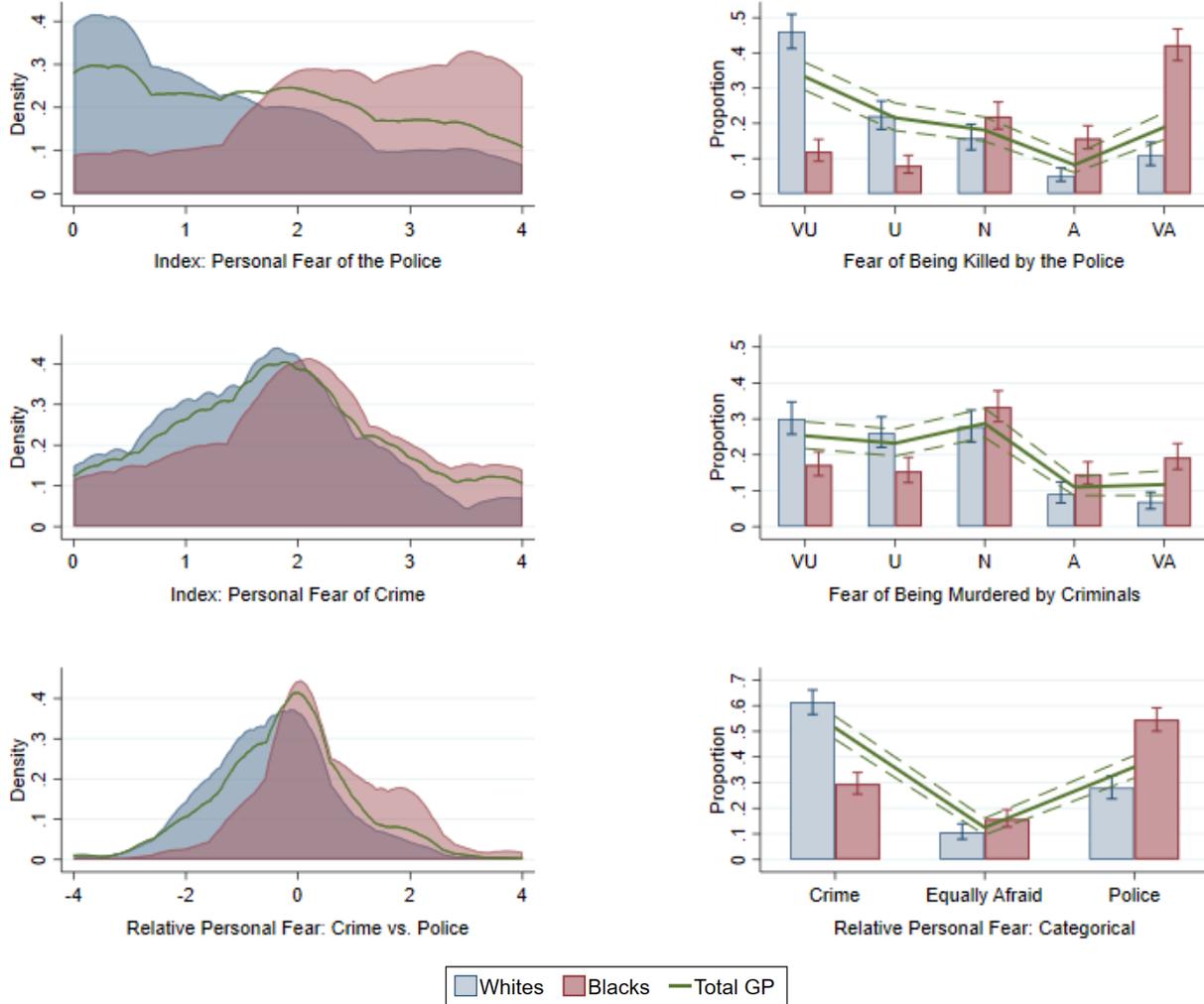
Fig. 1. Personal Fear of the Police and Crime, by Race. The left panels show the kernel densities for the fear indices. For illustrative purposes, the top and middle panels on the right show the distribution for one of the measures used in each index. Total GP = general population sample. VU = very unafraid, U = unafraid, N = neither afraid nor unafraid, A = afraid, and VA= very afraid.
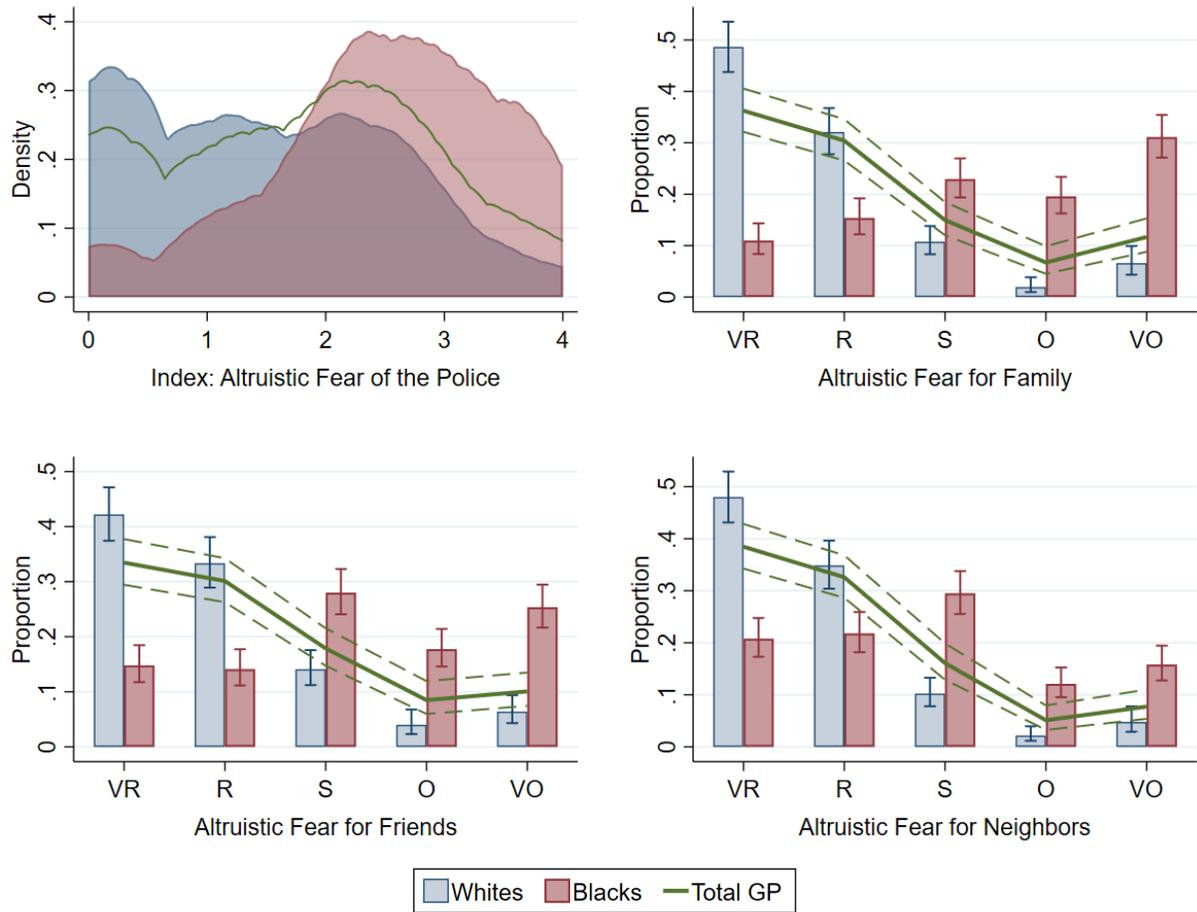
Fig. 2. Altruistic Fear of the Police, by Race. Top left panel shows kernel density for the altruistic fear index. Other panels show the proportions for three of the seven items in the index. VR = very rarely, R = rarely, S = sometimes, O = often, and VO = very often.
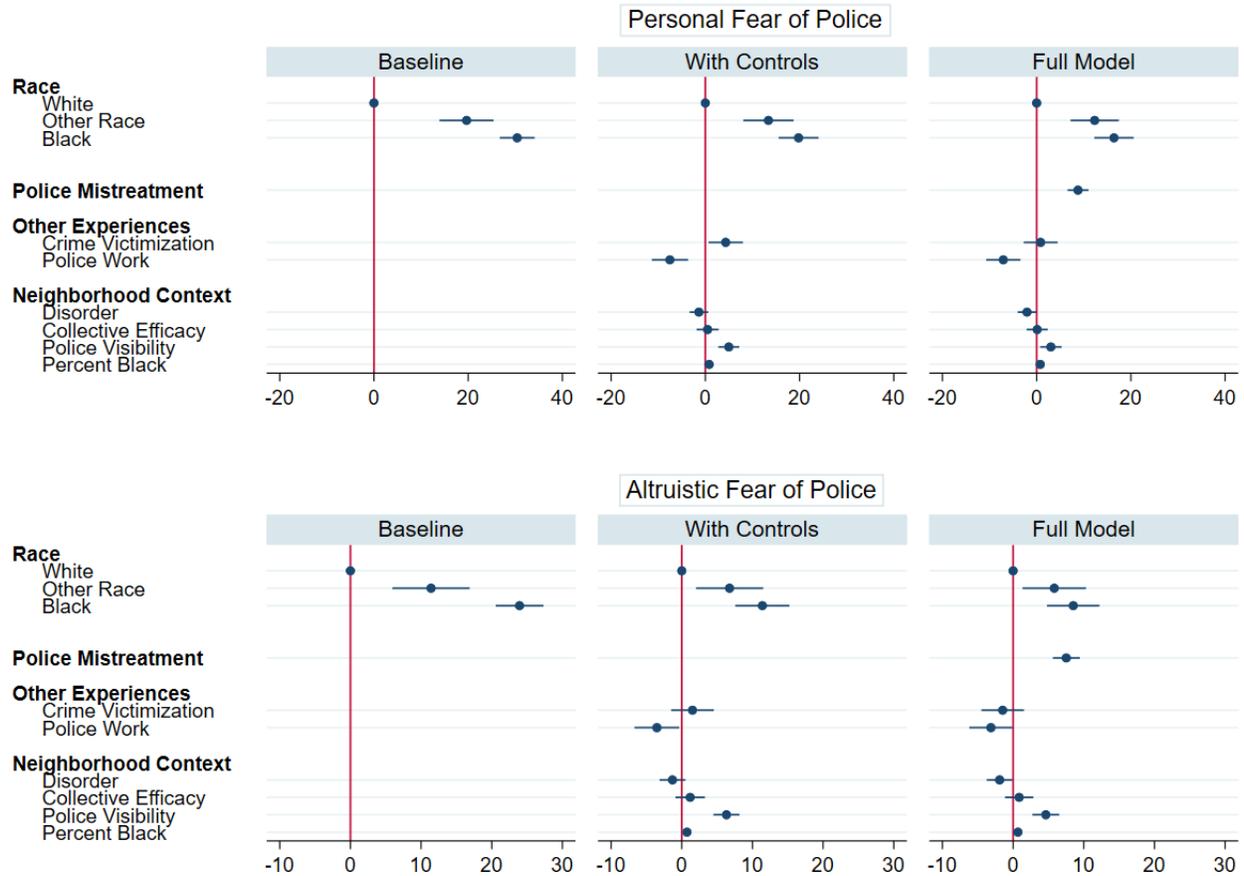
Fig. 3. Association of Race and Fear of the Police. The baseline model only includes sex and age. The other two models include controls for sex, age, education, income, employment status, marital status, parental status, partisan identification, political ideology, religious identification, religiosity, fear of crime, urbanicity, and region. All models are estimated with linear regression and robust standard errors. Marginal effects are shown.
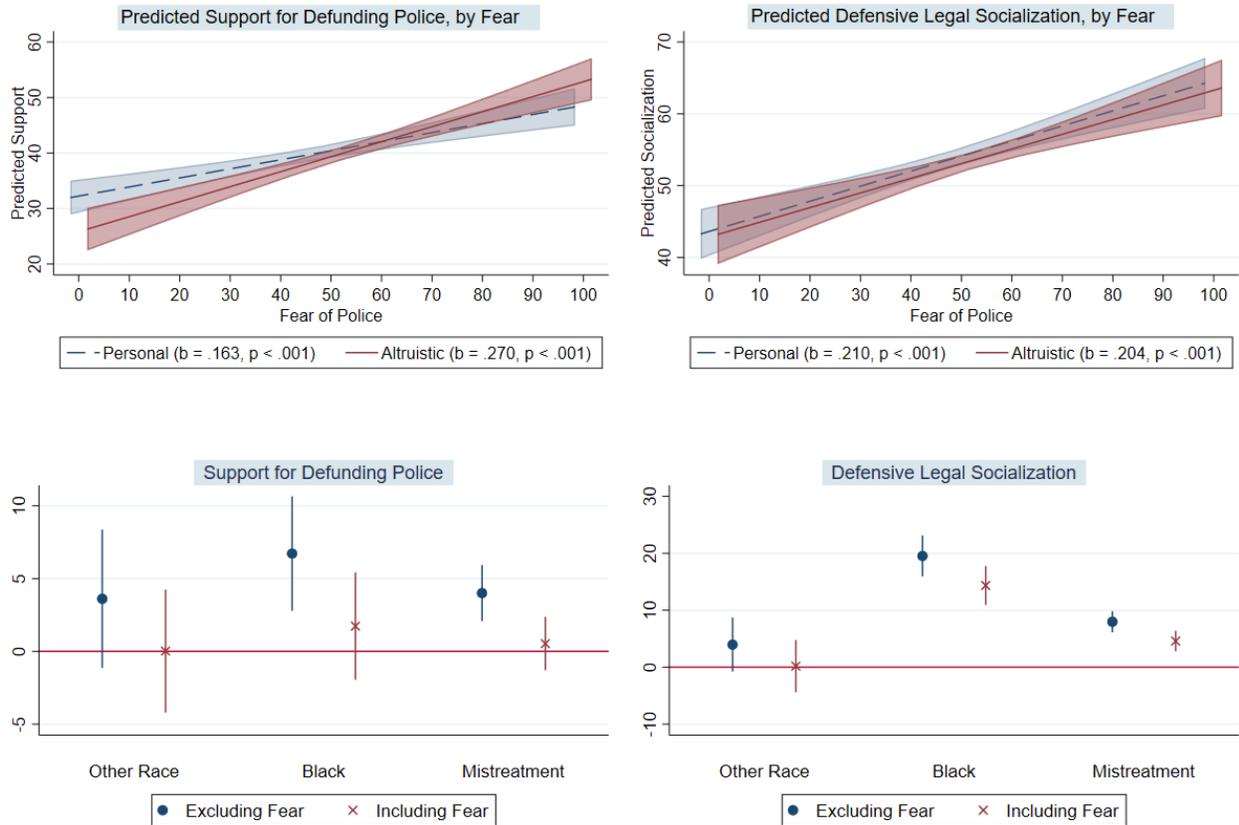
Fig. 4. Predicting Support for Defunding the Police and Defensive Legal Socialization.
Top panels show adjusted predictions from full models, with covariates set to their means.
Bottom panels show marginal effects from full models, excluding and including fear. The
reference category for race is "White." All models are estimated with linear regression and
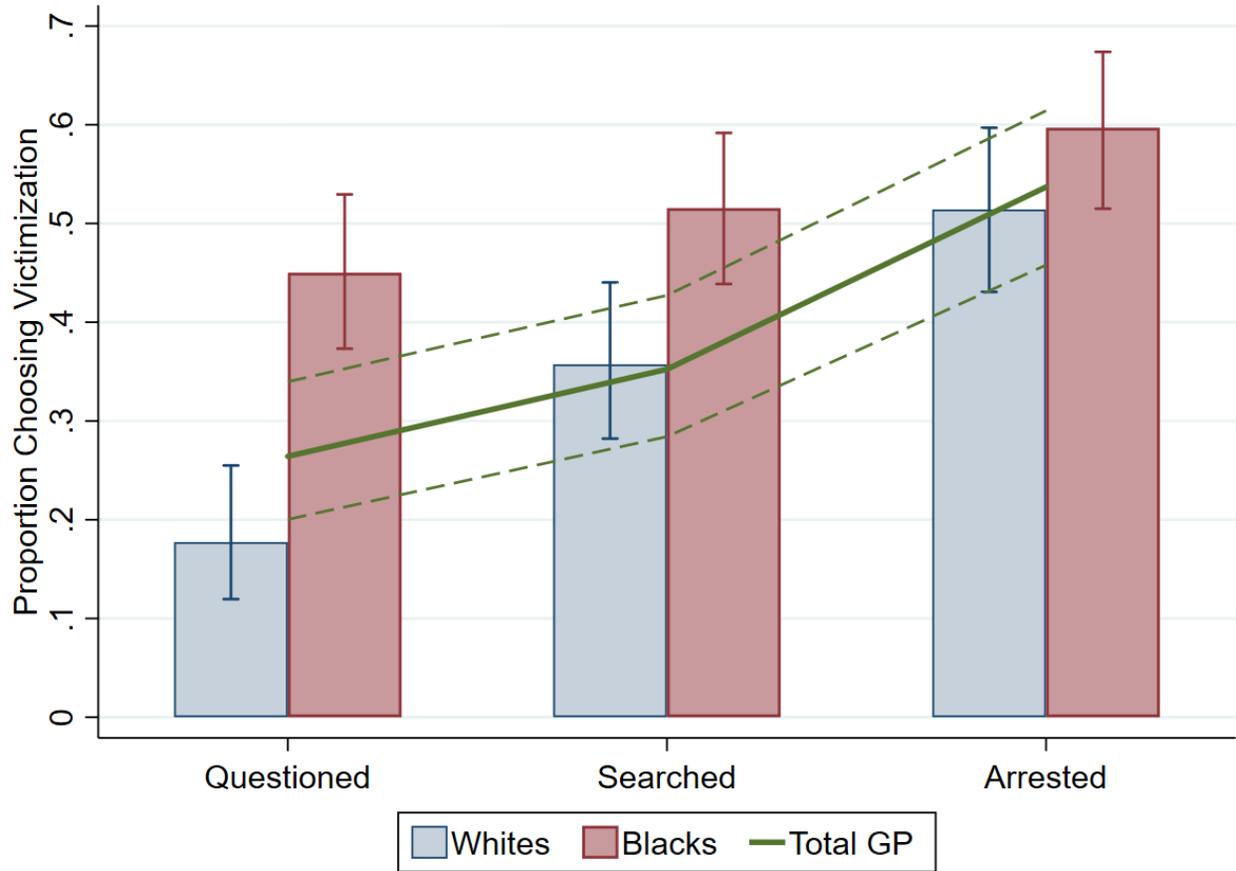robust standard errors.

Fig. 5. Would Choose Criminal Victimization Over Police Contact. This figure shows proportions (with 95% confidence intervals).

Supplementary Materials for

The American Racial Divide in Fear of the Police

QUESTION WORDING AND CODING FOR ALL VARIABLES

Personal Fear of the Police

Stem:

Now, we want to ask about EMOTIONAL FEAR. How afraid or unafraid are you that the POLICE will do the following things to you WITHOUT GOOD REASON in the next five years?

Items:
1. Stop you
2. Search you
3. Yell at you
4. Handcuff you
5. Punch or kick you
6. Pin you to the ground
7. Pepper spray you
8. Use a taser on you
9. Shoot at you with a gun
10. Kill you

Response Scale: Very afraid, afraid, neither afraid nor unafraid, unafraid, very unafraid.
Cronbach's α: .980   Factor Loadings: .823 to .958
Notes: We recoded the items so that higher scores indicated greater fear and then averaged them.

Altruistic Fear of the Police

<u>Stem:</u>

How often or rarely do you WORRY about the POLICE hurting the following people?

<u>Items:</u>
1. Your family members
2. Your friends
3. Your neighbors
4. Immigrants
5. Black citizens
6. Hispanic citizens
7. Protesters

<u>Response Scale:</u> Very often, often, sometimes, rarely, very rarely.
<u>Cronbach's α</u>: .933   <u>Factor Loadings:</u> .714 to .877
<u>Notes:</u> We recoded the items so that higher scores indicated greater fear and then averaged them.

Defensive Legal Socialization

<u>Stem:</u>

Imagine that you had a NEW FAMILY MEMBER—say a new child or grandchild—how likely or unlikely is it that you would do each of the following?

<u>Items:</u>
1. Advise them to stay away from police officers.
2. Teach them how to protect themselves from police officers.
3. Tell them they cannot trust police officers.
4. Discuss with them how to keep from getting hurt if stopped by police officers.

<u>Response Scale:</u> Very likely, likely, neither likely nor unlikely, unlikely, very unlikely.
<u>Cronbach's α</u>: .867   <u>Factor Loadings:</u> .692 to .844
<u>Notes:</u> We recoded the items so that higher scores indicated greater socialization intentions and then averaged them.

Support for Defunding the Police

<u>Stem:</u>

POLICE MISCONDUCT includes officer behaviors like stopping and searching people without good reason, and using excessive force. Below is a list of REFORMS that have been proposed to try to reduce police misconduct. How much do you support or oppose each of these reforms?

<u>Items:</u>
1. Cutting funding for the police and using that money instead to help communities develop service programs (e.g., drug treatment, mental health care).
2. Disbanding the police entirely and replacing them with social workers.

<u>Response Scale:</u> Strongly support, support, neither support nor oppose, oppose, strongly oppose.
<u>Cronbach's α</u>: .702   <u>Correlation:</u> .549
<u>Notes:</u> We recoded the items so that higher scores indicated greater support for the policies and then averaged them.

Past Experience: Police Mistreatment

<u>Stem:</u>

Please think about the EXPERIENCES that you and the people you know have had with the POLICE. How often have the police done each of the following?

<u>Items:</u>
1. Stopped you on the street without good reason
2. Stopped your close friends or family members on the street without good reason
3. Used insulting language toward you
4. Used insulting language toward your close friends or family members
5. Used excessive force against you
6. Used excessive force against your close friends or family members

<u>Response scale:</u> Never, once, twice, three times or more.
<u>Cronbach's α</u>: .901   <u>Factor Loadings:</u> .698 to .848
<u>Notes:</u> We averaged the responses to these six items.

Neighborhood Disorder

Stem:

How much of a problem is each of the following in your NEIGHBORHOOD?

Items:
1. Litter and trash
2. Graffiti
3. Rundown or vacant houses
4. Noisy neighbors
5. Teenagers hanging out on corners
6. Beggars on the street

Response scale: Not a problem, a small problem, a problem, a big problem, a very big problem.
Cronbach's α: .891 Factor Loadings: .659 to .801
Notes: We averaged the responses to these six items.

Neighborhood Collective Efficacy

Stem:

Thinking about the people living in your NEIGHBORHOOD, how much do you agree or disagree with each of the following?

Items:
1. They get along with each other.
2. They are willing to help their neighbors.
3. They share the same values.
4. They can be trusted.
5. They would step in if teenagers were disrespecting an adult.
6. They would break up a fight if one broke out in the neighborhood.

Response scale: Strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree.
Cronbach's α: .884   Factor Loadings: .687 to .784
Notes: We recoded the items so that higher scores indicated greater perceived collective efficacy and then averaged them.

Neighborhood Police Visibility

Stem:

How often or rarely do you see the POLICE doing each of the following in your
NEIGHBORHOOD?

Items:
1. Driving around in a patrol car.
2. Walking on foot patrol.
3. Stopping people or drivers.
4. Arresting people or drivers.

Response scale: Very often, often, sometimes, rarely, very rarely.
Cronbach's α: .784   Factor Loadings: .519 to .810
Notes: We recoded the items so that higher scores indicated greater perceived police visibility
and then averaged them.

Neighborhood Percent Black

Stem:

Please think about the people who live in your NEIGHBORHOOD—that is, within a mile of
your home. What PERCENT (or how many out of 100) of these people would you say are
White, Black, Latino, or some other race/ethnicity? (Your answers should add to 100).

Items:
1. White (%): _____
2. Black (%): _____
3. Latino (%): _____
4. Other race/ethnicity (%): _____

Notes: We used the estimated percent Black, and rescaled the measure, which originally ranged
from 0 to 100, to range from 0 to 10, so that its coefficient would be easier to see in the figures.

Past Experience: Crime Victimization

Stem:

Over the past five years, has anyone in your household been the victim of a crime?

Response options: Yes, no, don't know.
Notes: We dummy coded this measure (0 = no or don't know, 1 = yes).

Past Experience: Police Work

Stem:

Do you, a family member, and/or a close friend work for a police agency (local, state, or federal)?

Response options: Yes, no, don't know.
Notes: We dummy coded this measure (0 = no or don't know, 1 = yes).

Fear of Crime

Stem:

How afraid or unafraid are you that someone will try to commit the following CRIMES against you in the next five years?

Items:
1. Steal money or property from you.
2. Break into your house.
3. Rob or mug you on the street.
4. Rape or sexually assault you.
5. Murder you.

Response scale: Very afraid, afraid, neither afraid nor unafraid, unafraid, very unafraid.
Cronbach's α: .914   Factor Loadings: .747 to .860
Notes: We recoded the items so that higher scores indicated greater fear and then averaged them.

Sex

Stem:

Are you male or female?

Response options: Male, Female

Notes: We dummy coded this measure (0 = male, 1 = female).

Race

Stem #1:

What racial or ethnic group best describes you?

Response options: White, Black, Hispanic/Latino, Asian, Native American, Middle Eastern, Mixed Race, Other.

Stem #2:

Are you of Spanish, Latino, or Hispanic origin or descent?

Response options: Yes, no.

Notes: We created a categorical variable, where "non-Hispanic White" is the reference category. We combined all non-Black minorities into an "Other Race" category, and retained "Black" as a separate category.

Age

Stem:

In what year were you born?

Notes: We subtracted the responses from 2021 to measure age in years.

Education

Stem:

What is the highest level of education you have completed?

Response options: No high school degree; high school graduate; some college, but no degree; 2-year college degree; 4-year college degree; postgraduate degree.

Notes: This variable was treated as ordinal in the analysis, coded 0 = no high school degree, and 5 = postgraduate degree.

Household Income

<u>Stem:</u>

Thinking back over the last year, what was your family's annual income?

<u>Response options:</u> Less than $10,000; $10,000 - $19,999; $20,000 - $29,999; $30,000 - $39,999; $40,000 - $49,999; $50,000 - $59,999; $60,000 - $69,999; $70,000 - $79,999; $80,000 - $99,999; $100,000 - $119,999; $120,000 - $149,999; $150,000 - $199,999; $200,000 - $249,999; $250,000 - $349,999; $350,000 - $499,999; $500,000 or more; prefer not to say.

<u>Notes:</u> This variable was treated as ordinal in the analysis (0 = less than $10,000, and 15 = $500,000 or more). Approximately, 11% of respondents answered "prefer not to say." To avoid dropping these respondents due solely to item nonresponse on this one control variable, we imputed (with linear imputation) their responses based on the values of the other variables used in the analysis. However, this did not substantively change the findings. The same key results emerge when we these respondents are dropped from the sample.

Employment Status

<u>Stem:</u>

Which of the following best describes your current employment status?

<u>Response options:</u> Working full time now, working part time now, temporarily laid off, unemployed, retired, permanently disabled, taking care of home or family, student, other.

<u>Notes:</u> We dummy coded this measure (0 = other, 1 = temporarily laid off or unemployed).

Marital Status

<u>Stem:</u>

What is your marital status?

<u>Response options:</u> Married, living with spouse; separated; divorced; widowed; single, never married; domestic partnership.

<u>Notes:</u> We dummy coded this measure (0 = other, 1 = married).

Parental Status

Stem:

Are you the parent or guardian of any children under the age of 18?

Response options: Yes, no.

Notes: We dummy coded this measure (0 = no, 1 = yes).

Political Identification

Stem:

Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a…?

Response options: Strong Democrat; not very strong Democrat; lean Democrat; Independent; lean Republican; not very strong Republican; strong Republican; not sure

Notes: This variable was treated as categorical in the analysis, with dummy variables entered for all categories except the reference category, "strong Democrat."

Political Ideology

Stem:

In general, how would you describe your own political viewpoint?

Response options: Very liberal, liberal, moderate, conservative, very conservative, not sure.

Notes: This variable was treated as categorical in the analysis, with dummy variables entered for all categories except the reference category, "very liberal."

Religious Identification: Born-Again Protestant

Stem #1:

Would you describe yourself as a "born-again", or evangelical Christian, or not?

Response options: Yes, no.

Stem #2:

What is your present religion, if any?

Response options: Protestant, Roman Catholic, Mormon, Eastern or Greek Orthodox, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, Atheist, Agnostic, nothing in particular, something else.

Notes: We used these two questions to create a dummy variable (0 = other, 1 = born-again Protestant).

Religiosity

Stem #1:

How important is religion in your life?

Response options: Very important, somewhat important, not too important, not at all important.

Stem #2:

Aside from wedding and funerals, how often do you attend religious services?

Response options: More than once a week, once a week, once or twice a month, a few times a year, seldom, never, don't know.

Stem #3:

People practice their religion in different ways. Outside of attending religious services, how often do you pray?

Response options: Several times a day, once a day, a few times a week, once a week, a few times a month, seldom, never, don't know.

Cronbach's α: .845   Factor Loadings: .705 to .830
Notes: We recoded the responses to these three questions so that higher values indicated greater religiosity ("don't know" responses were coded as missing). Then we standardized the responses to each question and averaged across the three questions to form the index.

Urbanicity

Stem:

In what sort of place do you currently live?

Response options: Big city, smaller city, suburban area, small town, rural area.

Notes: This variable was treated as ordinal in the analysis (0 = rural area, 4 = big city).

Region

Stem:

What is your State of Residence?

Response options: List of state names.

Notes: We created a categorical variable for the analysis by collapsing the states into U.S. Census regions. For the analysis, Northeast was used as the reference category, and each of the remaining regions (West, Midwest, and South) was included as a dummy variable.

Table S1.   Support for Abolishing the Police: Our Study Compared to IPSOS Sample

Question Wording	Our Study			IPSOS Sample		
	"Disbanding the police entirely and replacing them with social workers."			"Do you support or oppose abolishing, or eliminating, the police?"		
Response	Gen. Pop.	Whites	Blacks	Gen. Pop.	Whites	Blacks
Oppose	72%	81%	55%	67%	77%	51%
Neither	15%	11%	29%	21%	14%	26%
Support	12%	8%	15%	11%	9%	22%
N	700	492	517	1,165	788	178

NOTES: The response categories also differed slightly in our survey (strongly support, support, neither support nor oppose, oppose, strongly oppose) and in the IPSOS survey (strongly support, somewhat support, neither support nor oppose, somewhat oppose, strongly oppose). Therefore, we collapsed the two support and two oppose categories to increase comparability.

Table S2.   **Weighted Descriptive Statistics**

Variables	General Population Sample		Black Oversample		Range
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Dependent Variables					
Defensive legal socialization	44.59	28.42	67.52	22.75	0–100
Support for defunding	35.26	30.02	47.93	26.28	0–100
Personal fear of the police	40.87	31.83	62.89	29.40	0–100
Altruistic fear of the police	43.35	29.56	61.96	25.90	0–100
Past Experiences					
Police mistreatment	.51	.74	.96	.94	0–3
Crime victimization	.25	.44	.22	.42	0–1
Police work	.19	.39	.19	.39	0–1
Residential Context					
Neighborhood disorder	.77	.89	1.04	1.01	0–4
Collective efficacy	2.60	.75	2.42	.76	0–4
Police visibility	1.32	.86	1.61	.93	0–4
Percent Black	18.04	20.66	41.52	28.86	0–100
Urbanicity	2.08	1.28	2.47	1.28	0–4
Northeast	.18	.38	.15	.36	0–1
Midwest	.19	.39	.18	.38	0–1
South	.39	.49	.58	.49	0–1
West	.23	.42	.09	.29	0–1
Socio-demographics					
Non-Hispanic White	.62	.49	—	—	0–1
Other race/ethnicity	.26	.44	—	—	0–1
Black	.12	.32	—	—	0–1
Female	.52	.50	.53	.50	0–1
Age	48.02	17.92	45.63	17.17	19–91
Education	2.37	1.51	2.06	1.40	0–5
Income	4.98	3.53	3.34	3.30	0–15
Unemployed	.13	.34	.18	.39	0–1
Married	.46	.50	.29	.45	0–1
Parent (child < 18)	.23	.42	.26	.44	0–1
Fear of crime	1.86	1.07	2.05	1.11	0–4
Parisian identification					
Strong Democrat	.25	.43	.44	.50	0–1
Not strong Democrat	.12	.32	.15	.35	0–1
Lean Democrat	.10	.30	.09	.28	0–1
Independent	.18	.39	.19	.39	0–1
Lean Republican	.07	.26	.02	.15	0–1
Not strong Republican	.10	.31	.03	.16	0–1
Strong Republican	.15	.36	.04	.20	0–1
Not sure	.02	.15	.05	.23	0–1
Political ideology					
Very liberal	.16	.37	.11	.32	0–1
Liberal	.15	.36	.18	.38	0–1
Moderate	.30	.46	.39	.49	0–1
Conservative	.19	.39	.09	.29	0–1
Very conservative	.11	.31	.05	.21	0–1
Not sure	.09	.29	.17	.38	0–1
Born-again Protestant	.21	.41	.24	.43	0–1
Religiosity	−.10	.90	.24	.77	−1.60–1.35

CONTINGENT VALUATION PROCEDURE

The experimental procedure was adapted from past research (22, 23), which used it to examine the relative perceived harmfulness of pretrial detention and wrongful conviction versus criminal victimization. As other scholars have explained (23), the advantage of this procedure "over traditional contingent-valuation surveys" is that "it avoids the need to quantify each harm in dollars." We used two of the same crimes used in past research (23): a robbery without serious injury and a burglary when no one was at home. The exact wording for this experiment is below.

Table S3.   Rawlsian Cost-Benefit Experiment

Introductory Text	
	To begin, we want to know how two different events compare in your mind.
Question Stem	
	[Manipulation A]
	If you had to choose between being a victim of this CRIME or being [Manipulation B] without good reason, which would you choose?
Manipulation A:	
	A1) Please think about a ROBBERY where nobody gets seriously injured. (A robbery is when someone takes or attempts to take anything of value from another person by force or threat of force.) A2) Please think about a BURGLARY where nobody is at home at the time of the crime. (A burglary is the unlawful entry of a building to steal something.)
Manipulation B:	
	B1) …stopped and questioned by the POLICE B2) …stopped and searched by the POLICE (i.e., they frisk your body and/or look through your vehicle) B3) …stopped and arrested by the POLICE
Response Options:	
	1) Victim of the crime 2) Stopped by the police