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## ISSUE BRIEF

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# DETROITERS' VIEWS ON CRIME AND POLICING - SUMMER 2021

## OVERVIEW

This report is part of a series of reports highlighting findings from a recent survey of the Detroit Metro Area Communities Study (DMACS). The survey was fielded between June 2nd and July 9th, 2021 and captures the views of a representative sample of 1,898 Detroiters. Previous reports from this survey wave presented results on COVID-19 vaccination rates and intentions to vaccinate, willingness among parents to vaccinate children, support for vaccine requirements, and employment dynamics during the COVID-19 pandemic. This report focuses on Detroit residents' experience with crime, satisfaction with policing, and views on police use of force.

[See full results from DMACS surveys here.](#)



## KEY FINDINGS

- Nearly 3 out of 10 Detroit residents said they have been the victim of a crime in the past year (28%).
- Nearly half (45%) of residents agree that police in their neighborhood can be trusted. Similarly, 46% of residents somewhat or strongly agree that the police are doing a good job protecting their neighborhood.
- When it comes to the effect of a greater police presence in their neighborhood, 42% of residents said that it would make them feel safer. Just 10% say more police in their neighborhood would make them feel less safe.
- Black, Latino, and White Detroit residents were about three times as likely to say a greater police presence in their neighborhood would make them feel safer as opposed to less safe.
- A majority of Detroiters believe police killings of Black and Latino people are part of a broader pattern of mistreatment of people of color by the police and would like to see significant police reforms. Seventy-nine percent of residents favor requiring police to be trained in nonviolent policing methods, 68% favor giving the civilian oversight board power to investigate and discipline officers for misconduct, and 66% favor using unarmed first responders for mental health calls.

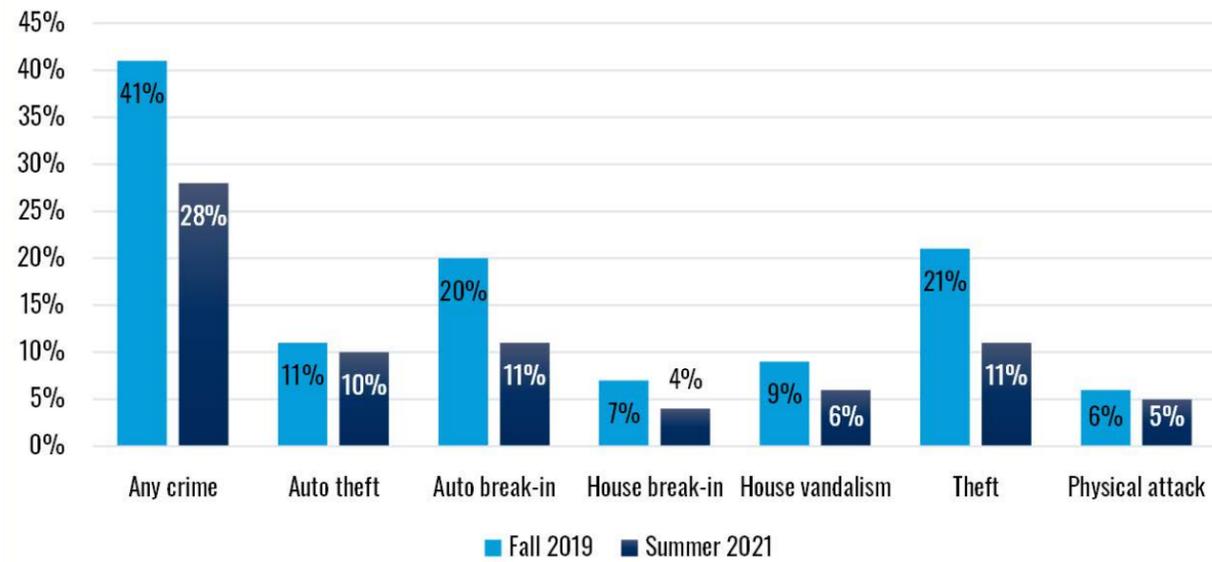
## INTRODUCTION

Across the country, 2020 saw an uptick in violent crime. In Detroit, the overall crime rate fell between 2019 and 2020, largely driven by a **24% reduction in property crime**. However, the number of violent crime incidents in the city—**already the highest in the nation in 2019**—**increased by 13%**, with homicides and shootings increasing 19% and 53% respectively. These fluctuating crime levels coincide with a national and local conversation about the role of police and racial bias within the criminal justice system, as well as with widespread demonstrations against police brutality and misconduct. Against this backdrop, this report examines Detroiters' attitudes towards policing and public safety. In keeping with **similar polling of Detroit residents**, DMACS data find that residents are four times as likely to say increased police presence in their neighborhoods would increase rather than decrease their sense of safety, though a large majority also favor implementing reforms to guide police conduct.

## WHILE CRIME REMAINS PREVALENT, DETROITERS REPORT FEWER EXPERIENCES WITH PROPERTY CRIME THAN IN 2019<sup>1</sup>

- When asked about their experience with a variety of property-related crimes and physical attacks, more than one-quarter of Detroit residents (28%) say they have been the victim of a crime in the past year.<sup>2</sup> This is a significant decrease from fall 2019, when 41% of Detroit residents reported being a victim of a crime in the previous 12 months.<sup>3</sup>
- While in 2019 1 in 5 Detroiters reported that they had experienced damage to or a break-in of their motor vehicle and an equal proportion reported being victims of property theft, the proportion of residents who reported experiencing those types of crimes dropped by half by 2021.

**FIGURE 1**  
**DETROITERS' EXPERIENCE WITH CRIME**

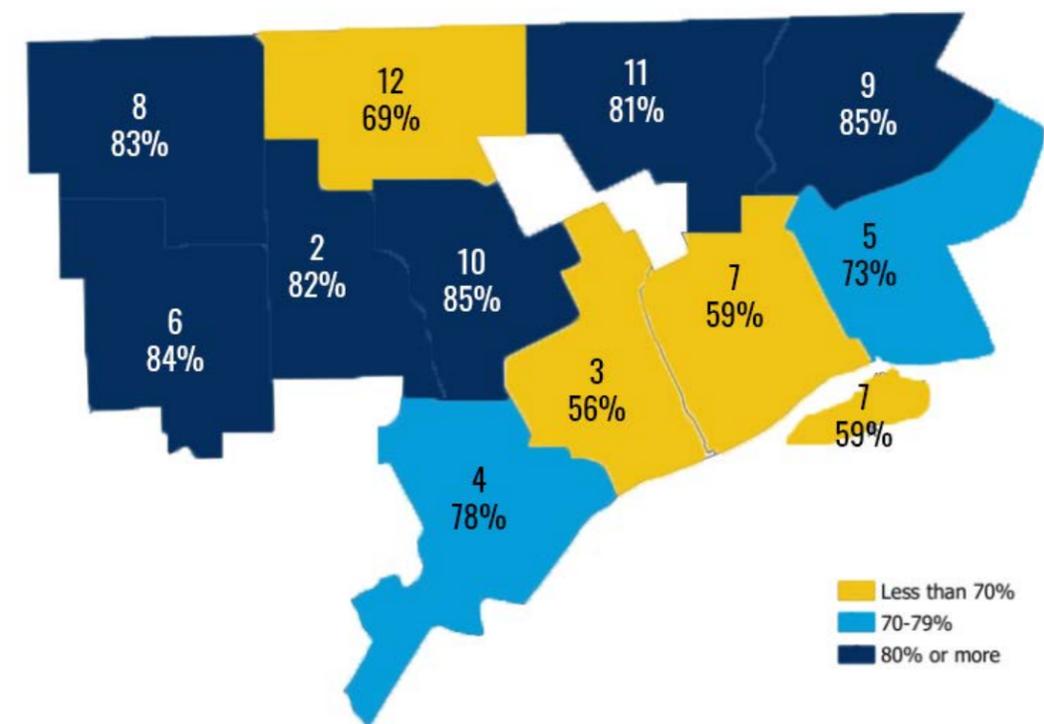


- In summer 2021, 40% of Latino residents say they have been the victim of a crime in the last year, compared to 27% of White and 26% of Black residents.<sup>4</sup>
  - In particular, Latino residents are three times as likely (15%) as Black (5%) or White (5%) residents to report that their home has been vandalized or intentionally damaged.
- Similarly, crime victimization is more common among younger residents: one-third (33%) of adults under 40 say they have been victims of crime compared to 16% of elderly residents (those over 65).
- Lower-income residents—those earning less than \$30,000—are more likely than higher-income residents to report being a victim of any crime. This is especially true of experiences with violent crime, where lower-income residents are 10 times as likely to say they have been the victim of a physical attack compared to higher-income residents.

## RESIDENTS, ESPECIALLY THOSE LIVING ON THE WEST SIDE, REPORT HEARING GUNSHOTS IN THEIR NEIGHBORHOODS

- Three-quarters of Detroiters report that they have heard gunshots in their neighborhood in the past 12 months, roughly equivalent to the 74% who reported hearing gunshots in fall 2019.
- Similarly, residents' reports that they have witnessed drug dealing in their neighborhoods has changed only slightly since 2019, falling from 38% to 35%.

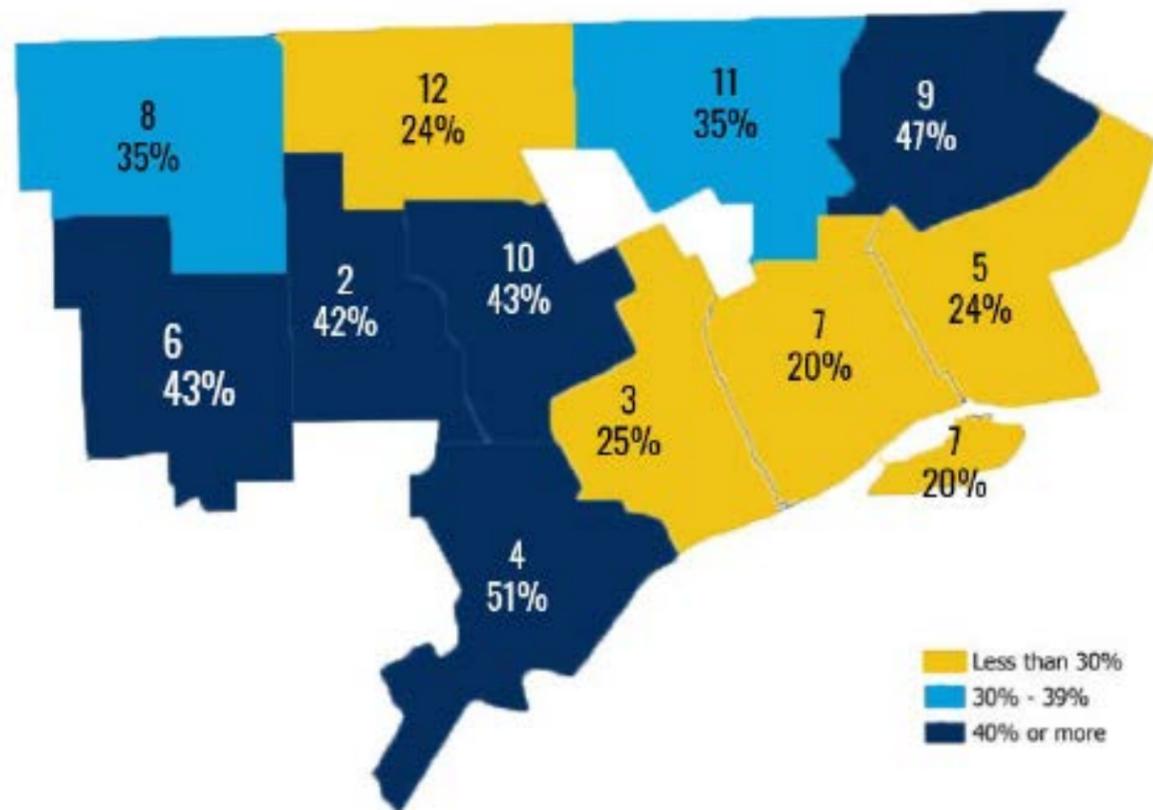
**FIGURE 2**  
**DETROITERS' REPORTS OF GUNSHOTS IN THEIR NEIGHBORHOOD BY POLICE PRECINCT**



- Residents in neighborhoods on the west side of Detroit are especially likely to report hearing gunshots in their neighborhoods. More than 80% of residents in Detroit Police Department (DPD) precincts 2, 6, 8, and 10 report hearing gunshots in the past year.
- By contrast, around half of residents in DPD precincts 3 and 7—which include the Downtown, Midtown, and The Villages neighborhoods—report hearing gunshots in their neighborhood in the past year.
- Reported drug activity appears to follow a similar geographic pattern, with fewer residents in the city’s core reporting witnessing drug activity in their neighborhoods.

**FIGURE 3**

**DETROITERS' REPORTS OF DRUG DEALING IN THEIR NEIGHBORHOOD BY POLICE PRECINCT**



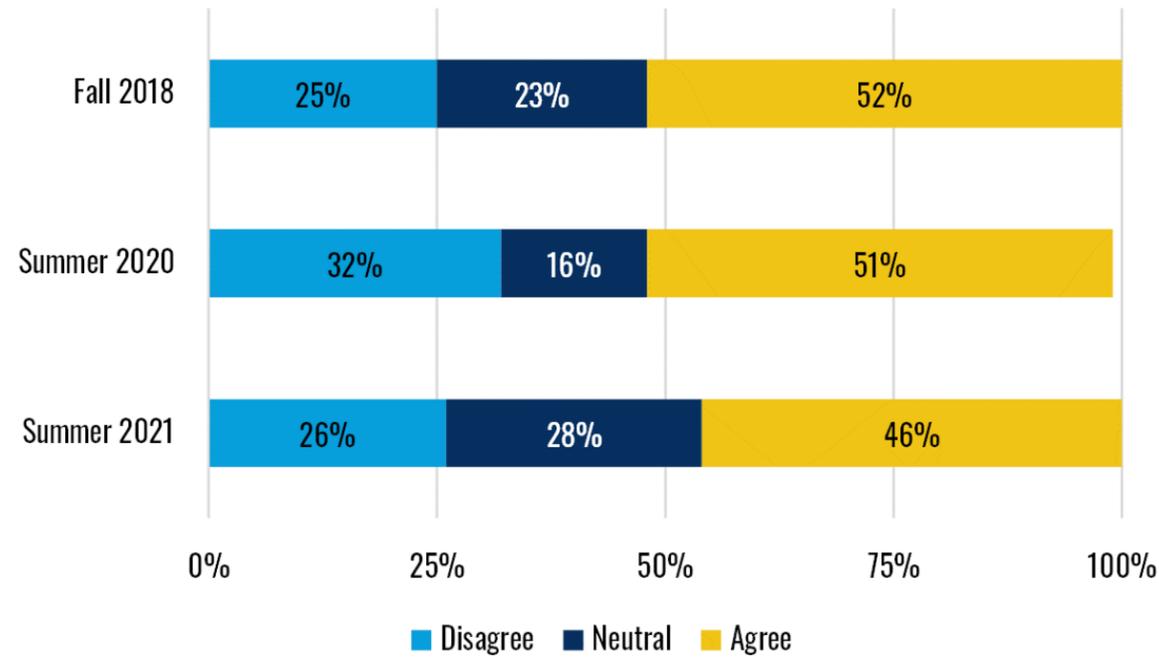
## CRIME VICTIMS ARE MORE LIKELY TO WANT TO MOVE FROM THEIR NEIGHBORHOOD

- Nearly 70% of Detroiters who report being a victim of crime in the past year say they have considered moving from where they live now.
- The desire to move is even higher among those who report having been physically attacked: 81% of residents who report being physically attacked in the last year say they have considered moving from where they live now.
- However, victims of crime are not more likely to say they want to move out of the city than to another neighborhood within Detroit.
- Nearly half (46%) of respondents who moved in the past 12 months cited crime and safety as a reason for their relocation.

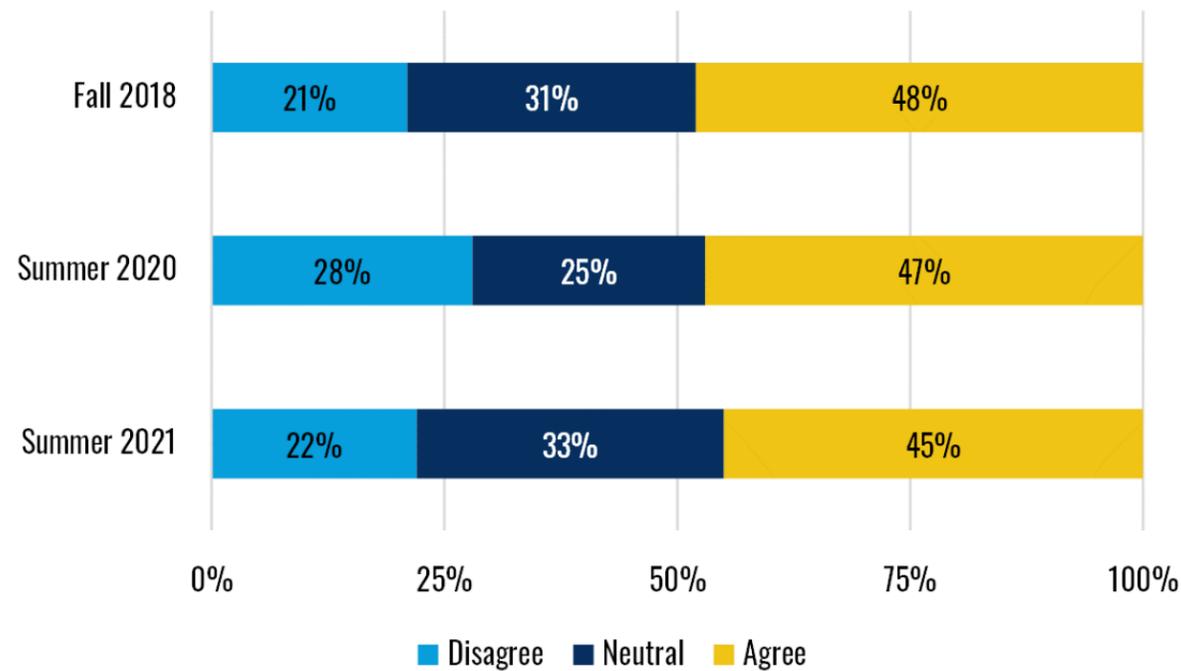
## MANY DETROITERS HOLD POSITIVE PERSPECTIVES ON POLICE

- Despite the recent spike in violent crime in Detroit and the ongoing national social movement against over-policing and police brutality, many Detroiters hold positive perspectives on the police.

**FIGURE 4**  
**POLICE DOING GOOD JOB PROTECTING NEIGHBORHOOD**

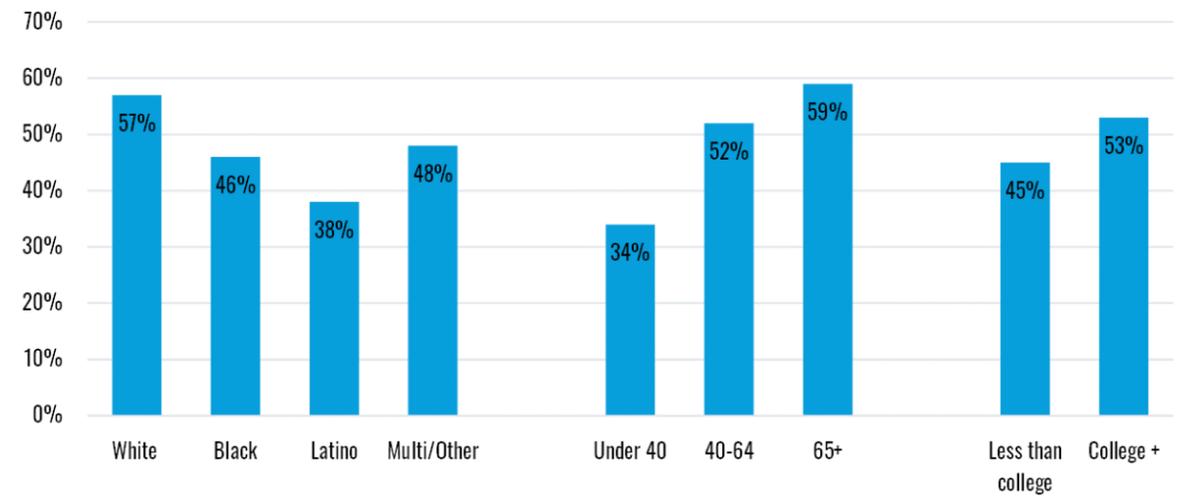


**FIGURE 5**  
**POLICE CAN BE TRUSTED**



- Detroiters' perceptions of police performance have remained relatively stable over time. In 2021, a nearly equal proportion of residents agree that police can be trusted and are doing a good job protecting their neighborhoods as felt that way in 2018 and 2020.
- In summer 2021, nearly half (46%) of residents somewhat or strongly agree that the police are doing a good job protecting their neighborhood. Similarly, 45% somewhat or strongly agree that police in their neighborhood can be trusted. Nearly one-quarter of Detroiters do not feel that police are trustworthy or are doing a good job protecting their neighborhood.
- Not all Detroiters feel equally positive about police performance in their neighborhoods. Compared to residents of color, White residents are significantly more likely to agree that local police are doing a good job of protecting them in their neighborhoods. Similarly, while 54% of White residents feel that police in their neighborhoods can be trusted, just 43% of Black residents and 44% of Latino residents similarly feel their local police are trustworthy.
- Older residents and those with a college degree are also more likely to feel that their local police are doing a good job and are trustworthy, compared to younger residents and those with lower levels of educational attainment.

**FIGURE 6**  
**RESIDENTS WHO FEEL POLICE DO A GOOD JOB PROTECTING THEIR NEIGHBORHOOD**

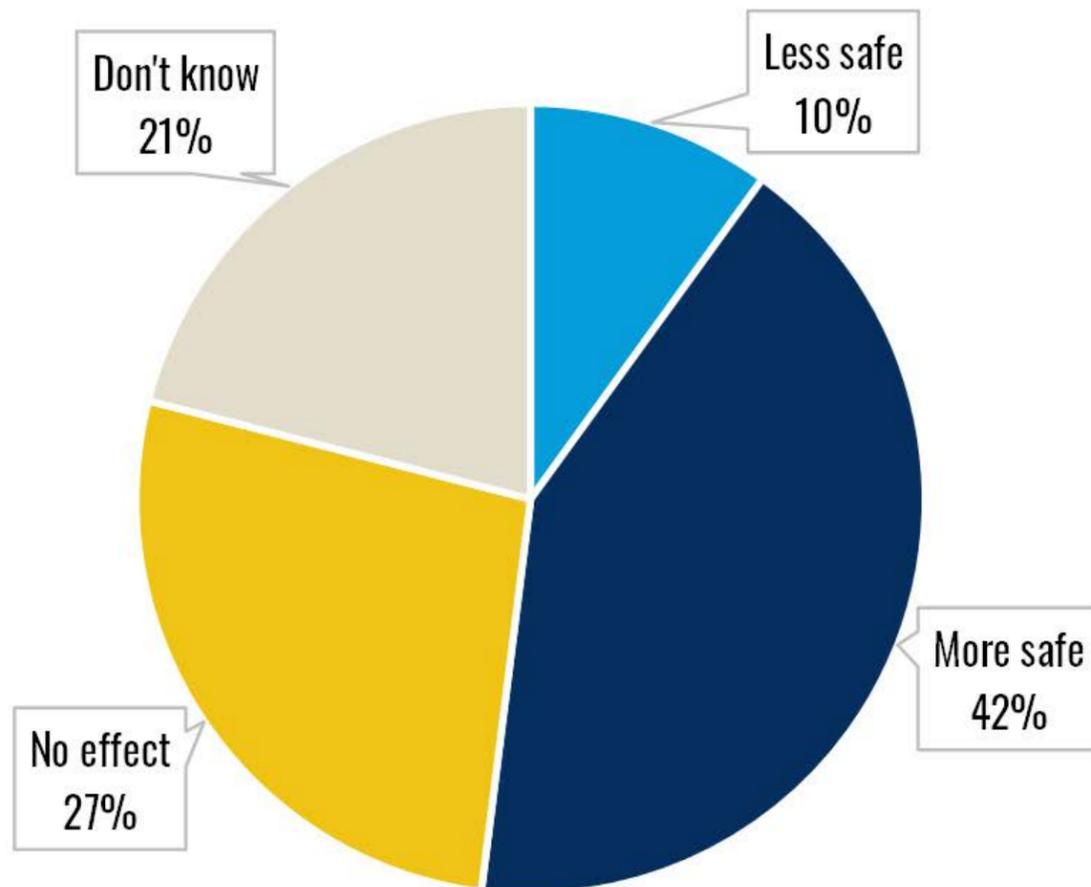


- Residents who feel that their local police are doing a good job and are trustworthy are less likely to desire to move either within Detroit or away from the city than residents who do not trust or feel protected by police in their neighborhood.

## MANY DETROITERS FAVOR INCREASED POLICE PRESENCE

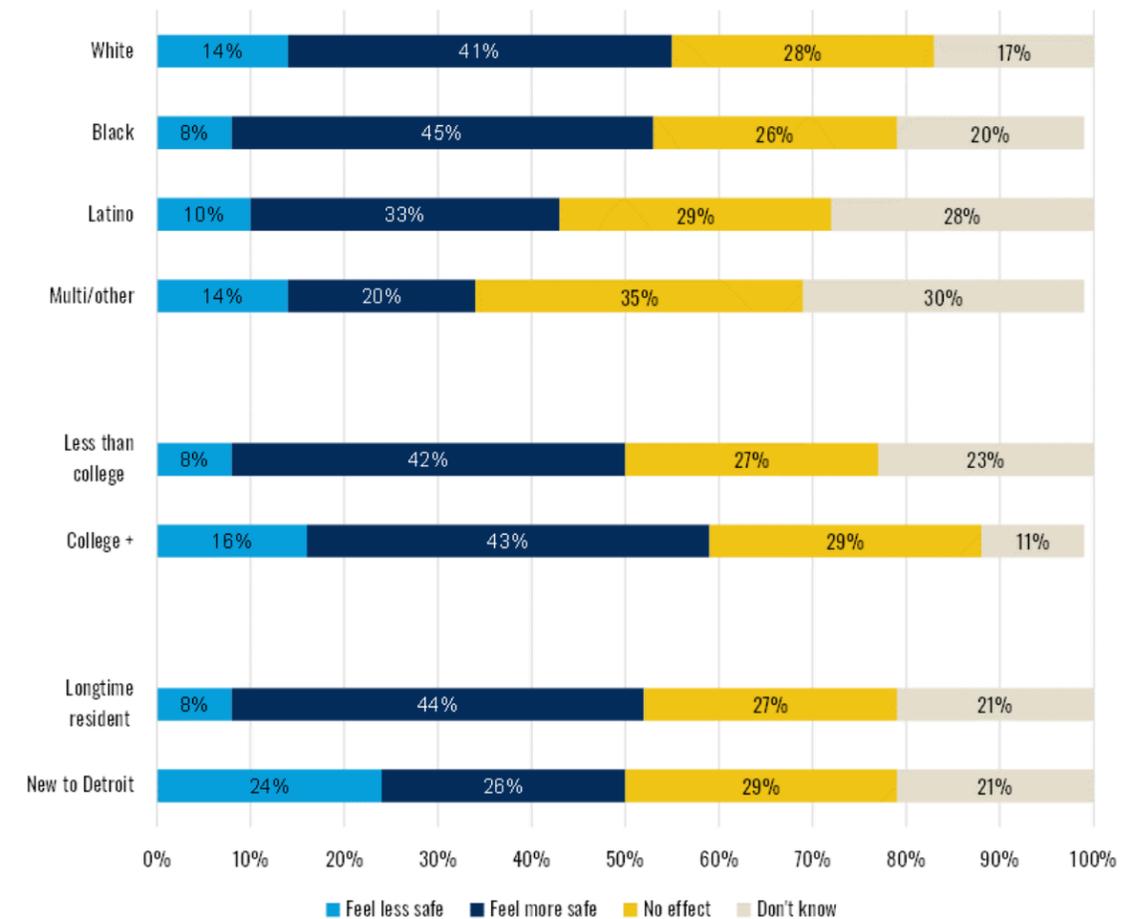
- What is the impact of police presence on Detroiters' perceptions of safety? Forty-two percent of residents say increasing police presence in their neighborhood would make them feel more safe. Just 10% say more police in their neighborhood would make them feel less safe. Roughly one-quarter (27%) say that increasing police presence would not affect how safe they feel in their neighborhood, while 21% say they don't know.

**FIGURE 7**  
EFFECT OF INCREASED POLICE PRESENCE



- Response to increased police presence varies considerably by group. For example, though nearly half of White (41%) and Black (45%) residents say increased police presence would make them feel more safe, White residents (14%) are nearly twice as likely to say that increased police presence would make them feel less safe in their neighborhoods compared to Black residents (8%).
- Latino residents and residents of Asian, mixed-race, or who declined to share their race were significantly less likely to say increased police presence would make them feel more safe in their neighborhoods.

**FIGURE 8**  
RESIDENTS' RESPONSE TO INCREASED POLICE PRESENCE IN NEIGHBORHOODS



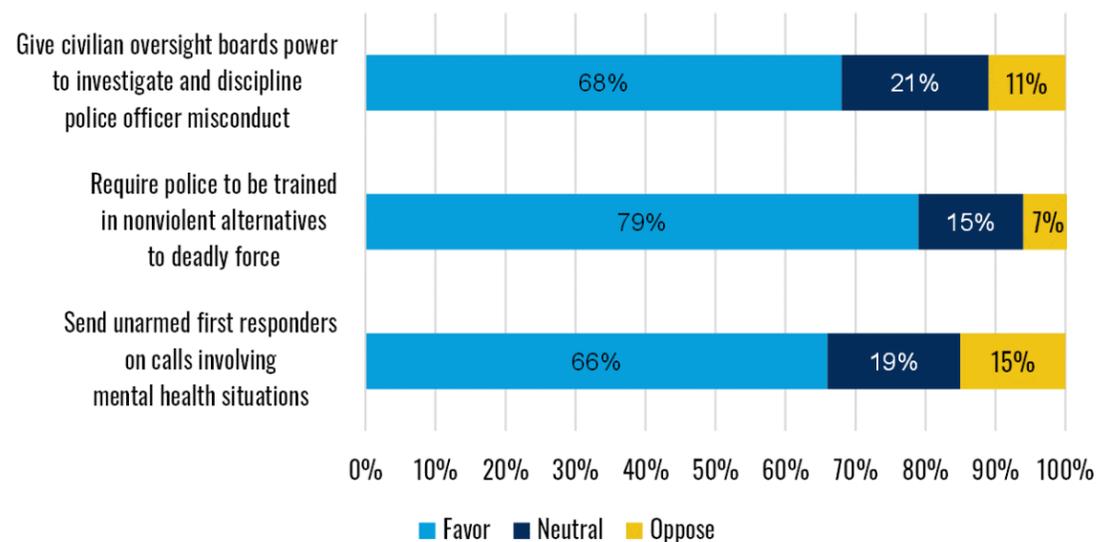
- Additionally, those with a college degree are twice as likely to say greater police presence would lower their sense of safety: 16% of residents who hold a college degree say they would feel less safe with increased police presence compared to 8% of residents with less than a college degree.

- Longtime Detroit residents are more likely to say increased police presence would make them feel safer. Just 8% of residents who have lived in the city for more than 5 years think increased police presence would make them feel less safe, compared to 24% of newer residents. Just a quarter (26%) of newer residents say that increased police presence would increase their sense of safety.

## DETROITERS SEE BIAS IN POLICE USE OF FORCE AND FAVOR REFORMS

- The majority of Detroiters believe police killings reflect a pattern of bias. Two thirds (66%) of residents believe police killings of Black people are part of a broader pattern of mistreatment of people of color by the police. Fifty-eight percent of residents similarly view police killings of Latino people as part of a broader pattern of police mistreatment.
- Many residents also believe that police in Detroit are more likely to use force against people of color. Half (50%) of residents believe that police in Detroit are more likely to use force against Black people than White people. Forty three percent of residents believe that police in Detroit are more likely to use force against Latino people than against White people.
- A large majority of Detroiters favor police reforms including requiring police to be trained in nonlethal use of force (79%).

**FIGURE 9**  
**RESIDENTS' SUPPORT FOR DETROIT POLICING PROPOSALS**



## ENDNOTES

- 1 There are a number of distinctions between DMACS data and official crime data captured in Uniform Crime Reports (UCR). First, DMACS data ask respondents about *their experience* with various types of crime over the previous 12 months, whereas UCR data are compiled by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and capture counts of crime incidents reported by local law enforcement agencies. Crime experiences reported by residents reflect a substantively distinct way of measuring local safety conditions than a count of crime occurrences documented in the UCR. Second, DMACS data capture if a respondent experienced a type of crime in the past 12 months at all; DMACS data do not capture the frequency or number of experiences over that time period. For example, respondents who have experienced multiple incidents of vandalism to their property are counted only once in DMACS data whereas those incidents would be counted separately in UCR data. This means that though DMACS data show fewer people overall are reporting being victims of crime over time, this does not necessarily indicate fewer crimes have occurred and could instead mean more crime incidents are concentrated among a smaller group of people. Third, the categories of crime asked about on the DMACS survey (see Note 2) do not correspond directly with categories of crime included in UCR data. For example, DMACS asks “Have you been physically attacked by someone?” but does not ask respondents to specify the nature of that attack, making it difficult to compare directly to official types of violent offenses that might include physical attacks including rape, aggravated assault, robbery, or non-fatal shootings. Finally, UCR data is only reported by calendar year (January- December) whereas DMACS surveys are fielded at various points in the year. Thus, DMACS data collected in July 2021 capture respondents’ reported experiences with crime between July 2020 and July 2021, whereas the most recently available UCR data cover January 2020 through December 2020.
- 2 DMACS respondents were asked about six types of crimes they may have experienced in or around their neighborhood in the past 12 months. Specifically, the survey asked “In the past 12 months...” [1] “Have you or a member of your household had a motor vehicle (like a car, van, truck, motorcycle, or motor scooter) stolen?” [2] “Have any of the motor vehicles belonging to your household been deliberately damaged or broken into (in your neighborhood)?” [3] “Did anyone get into your house/apartment without permission and steal or try to steal something?” [4] “Did anyone vandalize or intentionally damage your home or a structure on your property?” [5] “Has anyone taken something that was kept outside your home or happened to be left out, such as a bicycle, clothing, tools, or toys?” and [6] “Have you been physically attacked by someone?” If a respondent answered yes to one or more of these crime experiences, they were counted as having been a victim of crime in the past 12 months. In this report, we do not examine the variation in the number of types of crime experienced by respondents.
- 3 Crime types captured on the DMACS survey focus on property crimes—auto and home break-ins, theft of property—and do not ask explicitly about a variety of violent crimes including homicide, rape, or non-fatal shootings. Thus, respondents reported experience with crime may under-represent some types of crime occurrences, particularly violent crimes.
- 4 This report uses the following ethnoraical categories: “Latino” refers to any respondent who identifies as being of “Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin.” “White” and “Black” refer to respondents who selected only those respective categories (and no other ethnoraical categories) and who do not identify as Latino. Respondents who identified using other ethnoraical categories, who did not identify with any of the ethnoraical categories, or who identified using multiple ethnoraical categories were coded as “Other” (omitted).

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## FOR MORE INFORMATION

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