ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis:	PERCEPTIONS OF POLICE AND RELATED REFORM STRATEGIES
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After a year of highly publicized police killings and widespread protests, calls to defund and/or abolish the police have become louder and louder. Suddenly, what was considered by many to be a fringe opinion has started seeing coverage in the mainstream news media, with political figures from both sides of the aisle weighing in. But despite the idea of police abolition making its way into the mainstream, there is next to no scholarship about it. This study aimed to fill that void by measuring how college students feel about the police and about specific reform strategies aiming to completely rid the country of police. Do people truly want to abolish policing as we know it?

PERCEPTIONS OF POLICE AND RELATED REFORM STRATEGIES

by

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Chapter 1: Introduction

During the summer of 2020, protests erupted throughout the nation. After the highly publicized police killings of citizens like George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, people from all walks of life took to the streets. Widespread chants included not just the mantra of "Black lives matter," but demands to "defund" or "abolish the police" (Cineas 2020). Suddenly, what was considered by many to be a fringe opinion started seeing coverage in publications such as the New York Times, the Atlantic, and Vanity Fair (Kaba 2020; Purnell 2020; Rice 2020). In the following months, even well-known political figures such as Former President Barack Obama, Former President Donald Trump, President Joe Biden, Senator Mitch McConnell, and Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez have all offered their varying opinions on the matter (Duster 2020; Gambino 2020). Activists who have been calling to abolish the police for years suddenly began to enjoy a widespread popularity; Anti-racism books by notable proponents of police abolition such as Angela Davis began to sell out at bookstores (Spectrum News Staff 2020). But despite the idea of police abolition making its way into the mainstream, there is next to no scholarship about it. Polling conducted during the summer of 2020 indicated growing support and curiosity for "defunding" the police among the general population, but also revealed confusion about the specifics of the movement (Russonello 2020).

This study will fill this void by measuring how subjects feel about the police and about specific strategies aiming to completely rid the country of police. The core motivating question is: How are people defining the police abolition movement?

More specifically, this study intends to examine the goals and viability of this movement among current college students. Do people truly want to completely get rid of the police? Perhaps people would rather change the way policing works through reform strategies, or think that nothing should change at all. However, if people do want to abolish the police, then how and why do they want to do so?

Finding out what the public, especially young people, thinks of specific strategies aimed towards reforming or abolishing the police has much larger implications than simply fleshing out the definition of police abolition or discovering the goals of the police abolition movement. Public opinion surveys have had tangible impacts on how the police operate. Community-based policing, a popular reform strategy that has involved the police attempting to provide "progressive policing" and build relationships with communities (Horne 1992:268), was based in part on a "convincing academic critique of police efficiency and effectiveness" (Murphy 1989:338). Young people, and college students in particular, have played a large role in advocating for these changes. From the Civil Rights Movement, to the anti-Vietnam War Movement, to Occupy Wall Street, to the Black Lives Matter Movement, young people have consistently mobilized on college campuses and been able to spur change (Earl et al. 2017). Discovering how viable this audience finds the movement could mean discovering if a world without police is truly possible.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

POLICE ABOLITION

ROOTS IN SLAVERY AND PRISON ABOLITION

The idea of abolishing the police is not a new one. However, it was not until recent incidents of police brutality occurring across the nation that the movement specifically dedicated to this form of abolition emerged (Davis and Rodriguez 2000; Kaba 2020). Historically, the term 'abolition' has been used in the context of abolishing slavery, and then in the context of abolishing the prison system. Scholars have been drawing connections between slavery and the United States prison system for a long time and have described the prison abolition movement as "related" to this connection, with "some 20th-century abolitionist movements [connecting] themselves expressly with the tradition of 19th-century abolitionists and antislavery advocates" (Gilmore 2000:196). Angela Davis, one of the founders of the prison abolition movement, wrote that she "choose the word 'abolitionist' specifically," in reference to the language of the 13th amendment that "abolished slavery...except for convicts" (Davis 1996:26; Gilmore 2000:196).

While the term 'prison abolition' implies the movement is focused solely on abolishing prisons, the police have always been involved in the discussion of prison abolition. However, it is hard to pinpoint an exact history of this, or of the ideals that the movement propagates. This is because, as Angela Davis herself puts it, "there are multiple histories of prison abolition" (Davis and Rodriguez 2000:215). She specifically discusses how the movement is not "a homogenous and united international effort," describing how it was her own personal experiences that led her

to become involved (Davis and Rodriguez 2000:213). Because abolition "crosses multiple historical periods, social movements, and academic disciplines," there are many political differences that exist in abolitionist literature and between abolitionists themselves (McDowell and Fernandez 2018).

That being said, there are many monumental texts that can help date the general time period in which the contemporary movement started gaining traction. Davis herself points to 1974's *The Politics of Abolition* by Thomas Mathieson as an important early text, although Mathieson himself was Scandinavian and focused mostly on European carceral systems (Davis and Rodriguez 2000:215). Specific to the United States, one of the most foundational abolitionism texts is George Jackson's *Blood in my Eye*, completed just before Jackson was killed by a prison guard in 1971 (Jackson 1971; Jackson 1994). Davis also identifies 1976's *Instead of Prison: A Handbook for Prison Abolitionists* by Fay Honey Knopp as an important early text for U.S. abolitionists (Davis and Rodriguez 2000:215). Davis' (2003) own work, *Are Prisons Obsolete?*, is now considered a keystone text of contemporary abolitionism. In all of these texts, the prison system seems to be at the forefront of the abolitionist conversation. However, in an academic conversation with Dylan Rodriguez, Davis clarifies that not only does the prison system need to be challenged, but so does "prison architecture, prison surveillance, and prison system corporatization, prison culture, with all its racist and totalitarian implications," which Rodriquez follows by bringing up the "policing and jurisprudence system" (Davis and Rodriguez 2000:215). The contemporary abolitionist movement may have been primarily focused on prisons for a long time, but the state of policing has always been a part of

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the conversation. This quote by Davis also brings up another important aspect of the conversation: race.

RACE AND POLICING

Race, specifically the experiences of Black Americans, has always been a key part of the abolition movement. Not all, but many of the popular abolitionist texts were written by African American scholars. Jackson and Davis, specifically, drew on their own experiences dealing with the American justice system as Black Americans. Davis has claimed that radical positions needed to be taken or else the system would continue to, "claim ever increasing numbers of people of color," and it is not hard to see why she would say such a thing (Davis and Rodriguez 2000:215). People of color, and specifically Black people, have always been disproportionately affected by the American criminal justice system (Kovera 2019). This is true in courts (Fischman and Schanzenbach 2012; Kutateladze et al. 2016), in stops by the police (Harris 1997; Langston and Durose 2013), in arrests (Brame et al. 2014; Koch et al. 2016: Gaston 2019), and in incarcerations (Blumstein 2015).

Past research suggests a long history of racially biased policing that many activists believe necessitates change. This history is long and complicated, and race has continuously played a large role. In the Southern United States, police forces began as slave patrols. Described as the "first publicly funded police departments in the American South," these patrols were responsible for controlling the slave populations (Durr 2015:3; Walker 1980). They enforced slave codes, regulated the movement of slaves (and free Black Americans), prevented revolts and escape

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attempts, and were overall "known for their extreme cruelty and mercilessness" (Durr 2015:3; Hadden 2003; Barlow and Barlow 1999). After the Civil War, these patrols morphed into modern police departments that controlled freed slaves and enforced segregation laws (Potter 2013). The War on Drugs, spearheaded by Richard Nixon in the 1970s and Ronald Reagan in the 1980s, saw police disproportionately target and arrest Black Americans (Tonry 1994; Cooper 2015). Further, the expansion of police power during this era resulted in more incidents of police brutality, which also disproportionately affected Black Americans (Cooper 2015). Today, despite crime rates steadily decreasing since the mid-1990s (Oliver 2002), police departments still disproportionately target Black Americans through racial profiling or with policies such as Stop and Frisk, and have been called "a more delicately obscure adaption of the slave patrols" (Durr 2015:3). "Proactive policing" methods have resulted in the hyper-surveillance of young, poor Black Men, which in turn has negative effects on their development (Jones 2014). Black Americans are also overrepresented among victims of police shootings (Sekhon 2017). These disparities within the history and current practices of policing are cited by those who support police abolition, with abolitionist essayists arguing that "policing in America has always been about controlling the Black body" (Hasbrouck 2020:1108). It is why the police abolition movement is often connected to the Black Lives Matter movement, an organization that has loudly called to defund the police (Black Lives Matter 2020). To many, the institution of policing is inseparable from systemic racism.

Present day calls to abolish the police in mainstream conversation are fueled by the mistreatment that Black Americans have experienced. With recent incidents of lethal police brutality becoming more publicized and rapidly spread throughout social media, popular news sources have been discussing the movement (Bonilla and Rosa 2015). Trayvon Martin's death in 2012 and the subsequent acquittal of the perpetrator in 2013, while not directly related to police brutality, sparked national outrage and discussion about police violence towards the Black community (Ince et al. 2017). Michael Brown's death in 2014 caused not only a series of uprisings in Ferguson, Missouri, but resulted in police abolition "[gaining] national traction" (McDowell and Fernandez 2018). In 2016, following the police-brutality-related deaths of Alton Sterling and Philando Castile, activist Jessica Disu appeared on Fox News and brought up the subject of police abolition. A Chicago Reader op-ed titled "Abolish the police? Organizers say it's less crazy than it sounds," was later published describing the incident (Dukmasova 2016). Even more recently, with the 2020 death of George Floyd at the hands of police and subsequent protests, reputable news sources such as the New York Times have published op-eds not just discussing the subject of police abolition, but explicitly advocating for it. An op-ed titled "Yes, We Mean Literally Abolish the Police," claims that reform is impossible and "the only way to diminish police violence is to reduce contact between the public and police" (Kaba 2020). The author, an organizer named Mariame Kaba, explains that she has advocated for abolition for years, but George Floyd's death has revitalized the movement with, at the time, "two weeks of nationwide protests [that have] lead some

to call for defunding the police" (Kaba 2020). The New York Times is not alone in publishing articles like this - Vox, Vanity Fair, and the Atlantic have all published similar articles in 2020, written by or interviewing police abolitionists (Cineas 2020; Rice 2020; Purnell 2020). These articles were not just being published over the summer during the height of the George Floyd protests, but also well into autumn. The article on Vox, published in October 2020 and titled "What the public is getting right - and wrong - about police abolition," explicitly states that "it's not a political fad," and that the abolition movement is here to stay after the "wave of attention" it got over the summer (Cineas 2020).

CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE ON ABOLITION

Policing is a well-studied aspect of the criminal justice system, with entire academic journals such as *Policing*, *Policing and Society*, *Police Quarterly*, and more dedicated to it. However, despite the abolition movement's long history and recent coverage from major news media, there is limited empirical research dedicated specifically to the topic of abolishing or defunding the police. Further, despite recent research beginning to emerge on the topic, many questions remain about the history of abolition and any overarching trends. Research does not adequately address abolition's history, and there does not seem to be any research dedicated to documenting the movement's roots in anti-slavery and anti-prison activism. This may simply be due to the nature of the movement and previous empirical research simply not existing; When Angela Davis described the history of the abolition movement in her conversation with David Rodriguez, she referenced personal experiences and non-

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empirical literature written by and for abolitionists rather than any studies (Davis and Rodriguez 2000). The lack of empirical research, current and past, also means there does not seem to be any noticeable patterns or consensus among scholars. The literature that does exist offers a variety of both approaches to research and perspectives on how the movement should proceed, unique to each article, if a perspective is even offered.

Much of the research does not attempt to offer specific examples about how the police should be abolished, but simply makes the theoretical argument that reforming the institution is impossible. Seigel (2017) explains, from an abolitionist perspective, that the police cannot be reformed due to their roots in colonialism and slavery. To demonstrate how difficult reformation would be, he analyzes how the term 'racial-profiling' has been co-opted by more conservative-leaning people to effectively distance bad police practices from the institution as a whole (Seigel 2017). Saleh-Hanna echoes this anti-reform sentiment in her paper, also specifically identifying historical ties to colonialism and racism as two key reasons why the institution cannot be reformed (Saleh-Hanna 2017). She seems to be targeting fellow abolitionists who may not agree with her, implying the existence of a subset of people within the abolition movement who may not, in her opinion, be adequately taking the police's history into account. Unfortunately, there does not seem to be empirical scholarship from this perspective.

Aside from describing the goals and reasoning behind the movement, another approach to abolitionist research is identifying specific means of abolishing the police. McDowell and Fernandez, in their analysis of how modern abolitionists are

operating "when the institution of law enforcement, rather than prisons, becomes the explicit target," extensively reviewed material authored by organizations explicitly aiming to abolish the police and drew upon their own involvement in grassroots organizations (McDowell and Fernandez 2018:373). They found that activists use a variety of strategies aimed at disarming and disempowering law enforcement - challenging the institution's "very right to exist" (McDowell and Fernandez 2018:375). These strategies include direct action, "from protests, to occupations, to die-ins, to blockades, to disruptions," divestment campaigns that call for the police to be defunded and resources re-allocated, and campaigns that call for the police to be physically disarmed (McDowell and Fernandez 2018:383). Abolitionists are also "building alternatives that directly challenge the legitimacy of the police," by challenging people to re-think about how they respond to harm, and creating resources that "provide support, healing, and accountability for people in need," without needing to call the police (McDowell and Fernandez 2018:386). One example of this is the Safe OUTside the System project in central Brooklyn, that aims to provide support to victims of police and hate violence without resorting to law enforcement (McDowell and Fernandez 2018). Ultimately, McDowell and Fernandez (2018) argue that these strategies of disempowerment, by building alternatives to law enforcement and completely undermining the police, hold a lot of potential for eventually abolishing the police all together.

Other abolitionist scholars seem to share this opinion that the police should be completely replaced by something new. Gimbel and Muhammad (2019) draw inspiration from the question Angela Davis posed about prisons, applying it instead to

the police. They argue that police are indeed obsolete and offer an alternative: communities should police themselves through entirely new, non-law-enforcement institutions. Specifically, they suggest treating violence as a public health issue, utilizing "community-based violence interruption programs" rather than law enforcement (Gimbel and Muhammad 2019:1508). Despite these abolitionist scholars taking different approaches to research and identifying different perspectives within the movement (specifically, Saleh-Hanna suggesting that activists may not be considering the problematic history of the police), they are all ultimately suggesting that the police must be abolished.

CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE ON OTHER REFORM STRATEGIES

One body of literature examines alternatives to abolition and finds that reform strategies, rather than complete abolition, could be successful. While defunding departments may be an aim of abolitionists looking to eventually completely disempower the police, redistributing funds in some capacity has also been suggested as a more moderate reform strategy. Rushin and Michalski (2020) call on states to not simply defund the department, but regulate funding to "ensure that all localities have minimally sufficient resources… regardless of the strength of the local tax base," and require that departments allocate a certain amount of their budget towards "officer training and accountability" (Rushin and Michalski 2020:278).

Another proposed reform strategy is called apologia, and involves police departments addressing long-standing racial problems by giving an "effective" apology to the African American community (Benton 2020:3). Like the abolitionist

approaches of Seigel and Saleh-Hanna, this strategy attempts to take into account the racist history of the police - and the research is tentatively positive. One 2012 case study by Androff, cited by Benton (2020:6), found that apologizing for "historical police racial discrimination" could inspire "feelings validation and catharsis," for victims. An experiment by Benton (2020) on the effectiveness of apologia involved subjects being randomly presented with hypothetical situations wherein an activist brought up issues with a fictional police department, and that police department gave a response advocating for community policing, either with or without an apology. Based on the responses, Benton concluded that apologizing could "provide some small effect" in boosting public support for the police, but that it "should be followed up by implementation" of other reforms (Benton 2020:26).

Finally, research has suggested that providing the police with certain training could have positive results. A 2014 study found that the crisis intervention team (CIT) model, a "widely implemented police-based program to improve officers' responses to individuals with behavioral disorders," had positive effects on officer response to individuals with suspected behavioral, developmental, or drug problems (Compton et al., 2014:523). The researchers analyzed reports of 1,063 encounters from 180 officers and concluded that CIT-trained officers were "more likely than officers without CIT training to refer subjects to services or transport them to a treatment facility, and less likely to execute an arrest" (Compton et al., 2014:528). A similar study measuring CIT by collecting data on a smaller scale, from 25 officers, also found that CIT improved officer knowledge of, perception of, and attitude towards mental illness (Ellis, 2014). Another type of training, implicit-bias training, has also

been shown to be a potentially successful training program. Police officers in a 2019 dissertation survey described implicit-bias training as helping them to "communicate and interact more effectively with members of diverse communities," "manage assumptions during their decision-making process," increase their "awareness" of bias's existence, expand "understanding of other cultures," and improve "ability to manage their personal biases" (Whitfield, 2019:94-95). This survey only asked police officers about their perceptions of implicit-bias training rather than measuring the training itself or asking the non-police. Would these results translate to a civilian population?

Ultimately, the research suggests that there is support for certain strategies that would confront the police's problematic history. While some of these proposed strategies do not involve completely getting rid of police departments, police abolition has appeared to gain attention from both mainstream news sources and the academic community, with recent empirical research being released on the subject. However, the perceptions and attitudes of the movement in general have yet to be systematically examined. The extent of public support for abolition on its own and in comparison to other views, such as support for less extreme reform or for additional resources to be provided to the police, is unknown. The scholarship makes suggestions about certain abolition and reform strategies, but there is not enough of it to draw a consensus about the general public's perception of these strategies or their perception of the abolition movement itself.

MEASURING PUBLIC OPINION OF POLICE

In contrast to the limited research on police abolition, there is a large body of literature assessing public opinion of the police generally. Much of this scholarship focuses on measuring how favorably the public looks upon the police, either in general or in response to specific incidents, and why they hold the attitudes they do. Although the literature is not without issues, there are several connected themes that the literature seems to come to somewhat of a consensus about, namely: race, legal cynicism, and police brutality.

RACE AND LEGAL CYNICISM

In 1981, Scott Decker conducted one of the principal literature reviews in the field of measuring public opinion of police. One of the main findings was that across surveys, race impacted attitudes towards the police (Brown and Benedict 2002:543). Hagan and Albonetti (1982, cited in Sampson and Bartusch 1998:783), similarly found that "the relationship between race and perceptions of injustice was particularly strong from items involving the police." This link between race and perceptions of police has broad implications that are reflected in other past literature - specifically, to the concept of legal cynicism.

Sampson and Bartusch (1998:783) proposed that "inner-city contexts of racial segregation and concentrated disadvantage… breed cynicism and perceptions of legal injustice." They ultimately suggest that policymakers must take this into account and involve the community if they want to effectively police this population. Just as Sampson and Bartusch suggested that legal cynicism in disadvantaged communities

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requires updating police policy to reflect community values, Kirk and Matsuda (2011) found that legal cynicism impedes the ability of the criminal justice system to find and sanction criminals, and that changes must be made. Specific to law enforcement, they found that in neighborhoods "characterized by high levels of legal cynicism," crimes are "much less likely to lead to an arrest" (Kirk and Matsuda 2011:1). They also suggest that police must take steps to improve their legitimacy if they want to more effectively police these communities. Similarly, Moule et al. (2018:21) found that "higher levels of cynicism correspond with stronger beliefs that the police are too militarized," and that Black Americans overall have lower beliefs in police legitimacy and therefore, lower support for police militarization. This study also helps to fill the gap in research related to political identity and perception of police pointed out by Brown and Benedict (2005), finding that the more conservative an individual is, the more supportive they are of police militarization (Moule et al. 2018:22). Ultimately, it is suggested that these findings have important real-world implications in that police must re-examine their models of policing and their practices (Moule et al. 2018 23). These findings are also particularly relevant to this research, as participants will be asked specifically about their racial and/or ethnic identity, political identity, and their opinion on whether the police should be given more resources. As demonstrated in the literature, analyzing the relationship between these factors can prove important for evaluating policing practices, as "national conversations about both the causes and consequences of police practices… necessarily require the input of the public" (Moule et al. 2018:26).

The vast majority of more recent studies measuring perception of police among different populations have reiterated that race is a large contributor as to whether people have positive or negative feelings about the police, with African Americans consistently having the most negative attitudes (Nadal 2017; Peck 2015). When past literature was reviewed by Peck (2015), she found that out of 92 studies focusing on demographic differences in attitudes towards police, nearly all of them came to the same conclusion: non-whites, and especially Black Americans, have more negative views of the police. Even studies published as recently as 2019, such as Wheelock et al.'s look into the attitudes of Milwaukee citizens, further back up the claim that African Americans have more negative views of the police. They also found some evidence that the complex histories of minority groups in the United States contribute to why they view the police more negatively than the white population does (Wheelock et al. 2019).

POLICE BRUTALITY

There were also public opinion studies that focused specifically on the aftermath of police brutality, and the different effects these incidents had on different demographics. Lasley (1994) looked into the aftermath of the Rodney King incident, and found that, regardless of demographics, attitudes about police fairness were significantly more negative. This was especially true of attitudes in the African American community (Lasley 1994). Similarly, Tuch and Weitzer (1997) looked at variation in public reaction over time across race following incidents of police brutality (specifically Eulia Love and Rodney King's cases). They utilized several

polls that had been conducted in Los Angeles from the late seventies and into the

nineties by the *Los Angeles Times*, which had asked questions regarding police

approval or disapproval. By comparing the results of these polls from before and after

incidents of police brutality, they too found that African American attitudes were the

most adversely affected (Tuch and Weitzer 1997). In the same vein as these previous

studies about specific incidents of police brutality, White et al. (2015) looked at

attitudes in Baltimore following the death of Freddie Gray. However, in a departure

from previous research, they noted no major change in attitudes following Gray's

death and concluded that "macro-level events" such as publicized police killings, may

not have as much immediate impact on "attitudes of police legitimacy and procedural

justice" (White et al. 2015:829, 845). This is not to say that the past literature was

incorrect, rather, they suggest that "longer term historical relationships between the

police and the public" may be more important to consider than specific incidents of

brutality (White et al. 2015:829). Attitudes may be fixed depending on that longer

term relationship, with people maintaining "historical, almost inherited attitudes of

the police" (White et al. 2015:846).

OTHER FACTORS

Attitudes being fixed is another important theme of past scholarship,

alongside factors such as age and past experiences with officers. When Decker looked

into how a variety of demographic factors contributed to how people viewed the

police, in addition to finding that race impacted attitudes towards the police, he found

that youths held more animosity than others. Decker also found that "positive

encounters with the police did not seem to improve" a person's attitude towards the police (Decker 1981:85). Other factors that seemed to have no effect on a person's attitude was being a victim of a crime and implementing reform efforts such as civilian review boards (Decker 1981).

The idea of attitudes towards the police being fixed was also reflected in Miller et al.'s (2004) study, which measured how (if at all) the news affected citizens' feelings towards the police. Despite variation in news coverage of the police, attitudes remained stable (Miller et al. 2004). Tuch and Weizer followed up their research regarding the Rodney King incident with a different study, seeking to determine why different races may have such different attitudes towards the police. They found that besides race, perception of police among different people and communities also depends on factors like personal experience with officers, neighborhood crime conditions, and police practices used (Weitzer and Tuch 2005). Weitzer and Tuch's findings about a correlation between attitudes toward police and neighborhood conditions is also supported by recent research. Perkins' (2016) survey of New York citizens found that the public's confidence in police heavily depended on perceptions of their neighborhood, and that police must tailor their methods to specific areas if they want to be looked upon favorably. This is also supported by findings that suggest that in general, personal experiences with officers heavily shape attitudes, and negative interactions with the police and feeling a lack of respect from officers contribute to negative citizen attitudes (Millet et al. 2004; Wheelock et al. 2019).

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COMPLICATIONS

While much of this research is largely consistent, there are still many complications that arise when trying to measure attitudes towards police. In their review of past literature, Brown and Benedict (2005) found some inconsistencies. While there is no question that race is a factor, they identified a great deal of confounding variables that had yet to be identified and researched appropriately (Brown and Benedict 2005). Of particular relevance is a gap in research regarding personal ideology, although existing studies indicate that Democrats and liberals view the police less favorably than Republican and conservatives do and Moule et al.'s (2018) more recent work indicated that conservativism correlates with support for police militarization (Brown and Benedict 2005).

There is also conflicting research about the role of gender. According to Brown and Benedict (2005), there is a history of women being more likely to have positive attitudes towards the police (Hadar and Snortum, 1975; Smith et al., 1991; Lasley, 1994; Cao et al. 1996; Reisig and Giacomazzi, 1998; Cheurprakobkit, 2000). However, Brown and Benedict (2005) also identified a fair amount of research finding that men are more likely to have positive attitudes towards the police (Gourley, 1954; Brown and Coulter, 1983; Correia et al., 1996). Finally, they found a vast amount of research finding that gender has no effect, citing over fifteen studies (Brown and Benedict, 2005).

Further, research does not seem to agree how education plays a role in attitudes towards the police - many studies suggest that lower-income means a less favorable attitude toward law enforcement, but many studies also suggest a

correlation between education and liberalism (Brown and Benedict 2005). These gaps are important to consider, and the proposed research hopes to survey college students, as well as consider how political ideology and gender affects attitudes towards the police and police abolition.

CURRENT RESEARCH

This study first and foremost intends to measure public opinion on how police departments should be dealt with, and further scholarship on the perceived goals and viability of the modern police abolition movement in comparison to other views and strategies. Despite researchers facing many challenges when trying to accurately measure attitudes towards the police, there is a large consensus among decades of literature that race and negative interactions with officers in particular contribute heavily to why one may feel negatively about the police. This, in turn, has been demonstrated to have far-reaching implications. While this study is limited to a sample of college students, it adds to the national conversation and provides insight into whether factors such as race and negative perceptions of police may influence perceptions of the police abolition movement. Another important aspect of this study is measuring general attitudes towards the police. Digging deeper into the views people hold on abolition and reform, this study intends to measure whether certain personal identities shape attitudes towards the police, or if people who support complete abolition rather than reform have stronger negative feelings towards the police.

Chapter 3: Data and Methods

DATA SOURCE

        Data were derived from an electronically disseminated survey to undergraduate students. Inclusion in the study was restricted to those currently enrolled as an undergraduate student over 18 years of age. As the survey was originally distributed to only University of Maryland students before being opened up to all undergraduate students, at least 45.8% of those who engaged with the survey were University of Maryland students. Notable research on the subject of public perception of the police, from various points in time, has very successfully utilized survey results as a data source (Decker 1981; Lasley 1994; Weitzer and Tuch 1997; White et al 2018). There is also a history of using college students as experimental subjects for the social sciences, and of University of Maryland students in particular participating in criminological studies (Peterson 2001; Paternoster et al. 2013). Sampling students at the University of Maryland was also important in attempting to promote participants with varying political opinions. While Maryland has consistently voted Democrat in recent presidential elections, the state has a Republican governor (as of 2020) and a long history of being affiliated with more conservative states, even as far back as when it was a border-state during the Civil War (Federal Election Commission 2018; Brugger 1996). There are also many out-of-state students that hail from conservative and liberal states alike, although state is not necessarily an indication of personal political affiliation. As of the Fall 2019 semester,

approximately 24% of the student body was from out-of-state (University of Maryland 2020).

Overall, it is important to ask young people in particular about these topics, seeing as many voted for the first time this year and are beginning to become active, engaged citizens. As touched upon in the beginning of this paper, college students have also played a large role in enacting social change. In regards to racially-charged issues, college students helped organize sit-ins during the Civil Rights Movement and have pushed for immigration policy changes in order to protect DREAMers (Earl et al. 2017). Many college students, marginalized students in particular, are also specifically involved in the Black Lives Matter movement, which has ties to police abolition (Hope et al. 2016). Further, there is a long history of college students playing a "critical role" in the rise of conservative social movements (Munson 2010:1). Sampling from this population in particular, many of whom may be politically involved and familiar with or even involved in the police abolition movement, was intended to lend a certain clarity that sampling from a more general population would not. Namely, it could have resulted in gaining a clearer picture of police abolition's viability as a social movement, and also of what the movement's goals truly are - with survey answers stemming from the source.

COLLECTION METHOD

At first, the survey was sent out utilizing email to students enrolled in CCJS100: Introduction to Criminal Justice and SOCY100: Introduction to Sociology. Professors distributed the survey link themselves, using language approved by the

Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Maryland. The courses that were selected for the first phase of survey distribution were those available to the entire undergraduate student body and were courses that can be taken for general education credit. This means that a large number of students from a variety of grades and majors enroll in them, and demographic variety among these students was expected.

However, after not receiving a large enough sample, the survey was distributed via the researcher's personal Instagram, utilizing an IRB approved flyer. Viewers of the content were able to post this flyer on their own Instagram profiles or share on other social media platforms. In order to obtain a larger sample size, there were no exclusion criteria aside from subjects having to be at least 18 years of age and a currently enrolled undergraduate student. Ultimately, 44 responses were recorded using the original distribution strategy. After utilizing social media, the survey received 48 more responses. In total, 92 participants engaged in the survey, and 79 participants (85.87%) completed the survey. The majority of participants who did not complete the entire survey exited during or directly after the first section of the survey, which asked for consent and demographic information. There were 7 participants who did not engage with the survey beyond the consent form and were thus excluded from all analysis.

SURVEY

The survey included several items capturing perceptions of the police, perceptions of abolition, ideas regarding specific reform efforts, and respondent

demographic characteristics. Certain demographic items such as subject racial/ethnic identity, gender identity, major(s), and political identity were partially open-ended, with an option to type in answers. Collecting demographic information by allowing subjects to self-identify is more culturally sensitive, as "forcing them to choose prescribed categories...can be perceived as discriminatory," (Nadal and Davidoff 2015:4; Nadal 2011). While there may be concerns about leaving the question about political identity partially open-ended, the survey also contained several close-ended items about ideology in the case that there were unfamiliar or unique responses that needed to be interpreted. Ultimately, any open-ended responses to demographic survey items were to be coded independently into appropriate, broader categories (Nadal and Davidoff 2015). All other demographic items were entirely close-ended, such as age and state of primary residence.

Nadal and Davidoff's (2015) Perceptions of Police Scale (POPS) was used in order to collect background information about more general attitudes towards the police. These items measuring attitudes towards police were phrased as a mix of positive and negative statements that respondents had to strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree with. In order to measure attitudes specifically towards police abolition and reform, new items were constructed. Police abolition and police reform were not operationalized for participants; Instead, specific abolition and reform strategies were proposed within the survey in order to measure subject perception of these movements. Respondents were asked to evaluate these specific strategies by indicating how often they believed statements such as "The

abolish the police movement seeks to decrease funding to the police," to be true (see Appendix).

MEASURES

There were four variables measuring perceptions of police and related reform strategies: Attitude Towards Police, Attitude Towards Abolition, Attitude Towards Disempowerment, and Attitude Towards More Resources. All four were mean scales, constructed by taking the average of several relevant survey items:

A series of twelve items tap into Attitude Towards Police, taken from Nadal and Davidoff's (2015) Perception of Police Scale (POPS). Four of the items from the original POPS were re-phrased negatively in order to provide survey participants with heterogeneity. The full set of survey items are as follows: Police officers are friendly, The police are not trustworthy, Police officers are unbiased, The police are reliable, Police officers do not care about my community, The police are helpful, The police are good people, Police officers do not treat all people fairly, I like the police, Police officers protect me, The police do not discriminate, The police do not provide safety. Responses to each item range from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Statements 2, 5, 8, and 12 (The police are not trustworthy, Police officers do not care about my community, Police officers do not treat all people fairly, The police do not provide safety) were re-coded so that all responses were coded in the direction where a higher value indicated a more positive attitude towards the police. An average score was then calculated and assigned to each participant to create the Attitude Toward the Police mean scale.

Respondents were asked about their level of agreement with specific police reform strategies. These strategies were split into three major groups: reform strategies that would abolish the police, reform strategies that would disempower the police, and reform strategies that would give the police more resources. The *Attitude Towards Abolition* category was composed of the following proposed strategies, all of which would result in dissolution of the current policing institution: The police should be completely abolished, The police should be completely defunded until they no longer exist, The police should be completely abolished and not replaced with anything, The police should be replaced by a public health agency (formulated from Gimbel and Muhammad, 2019), The police should be replaced by a new law enforcement agency. These items were moderately to strongly correlated (ranging from .272* to .937**; $p < .05$).

The *Attitude Towards Disempowerment* category was composed of proposed strategies that would take some form of power away from the police, or require the police to acknowledge mistakes, without either completely abolishing the institution of policing or giving them more resources. The statements are as follows: Communities should decide how to police themselves (formulated from Gimbel and Muhammad, 2019), Some of the police's funding should be cut, The role of the police should be decreased and delegated to others, such as health professionals, The police should apologize to the public (formulated from Benton, 2020). These items were moderately correlated (ranging from .405** to .631**; $p < .00$). Also important to note is that the statement "Communities should decide how to police themselves," is actually an abolitionist suggestion (Gimbel and Muhammad, 2019). However,

separated from the context of Gimbel and Muhammad's argument, this statement on its own would likely not suggest to survey participants that the current policing institution should be abolished. Instead, it just suggests that communities should have the power to decide how they are policed. Therefore, I placed it in the Disempowerment category.

Finally, the *Attitude Towards More Resources* category was composed of proposed strategies that would, in some capacity, provide police departments with more resources: The police should be required to complete implicit bias training (formulated from Compton et al., 2014; Ellis, 2014), The police should be required to complete crisis-intervention training (formulated from Whitfield, 2019), The police should be provided with more resources. Only the first two statements were strongly correlated (.575**; $p < .00$). However, the lack of significant correlation between the last statement and the others is in itself an interesting result and will be discussed in the following sections. Once again, averages were calculated for each separate category of reform. Participants were each assigned a score on a mean scale from 1 to 5, with 1 meaning Strongly Disagree and 5 meaning Strongly Agree.

Demographic variables include: Gender Identity, Racial/Ethnic Identity, and Political Identity. *Gender Identity* was determined by asking respondents: What is your gender identity? Response categories included woman, man, nonbinary, other (please specify). *Racial/Ethnic Identity* measured by asking respondents: Which of the following best describes your racial or ethnic heritage? Response categories included Asian or Pacific Islander, Black, Afro-Caribbean, or African American, Latino or Hispanic, Native American or Alaskan Native, White or Caucasian, Other

(Please Specify). For these analyses, all participants who did not answer "White or Caucasian" were grouped into the category "Non-white." This is over-simplistic, but required given the small sample size and even smaller response from non-white participants. *Political Identity* was taken from the following survey item: What is your political identity? With response categories: Leftist, Liberal, Moderate Liberal, Moderate, Moderate Conservative, Conservative, Alt-right, Unsure, Other (Please Specify). Due to the small sample size, those who identified as "Moderate Liberal" were grouped with those who answered "Liberal," and those who identified as "Moderate Conservative" were grouped with those who answered "Conservative." Nobody responded that they identified as "Alt-right" or typed in a response for "Other." Further, those who answered "Unsure" were excluded from bivariate correlation calculations.

Chapter 4: Analysis and Limitations

ANALYSIS

SAMPLE

This sample overrepresents individuals who identified as a woman (69.6%), white (57.6%), and/or on the political left (72.8%). No participants identified as Nonbinary or any genuine Other gender identity. No participants identified as Alt-right or any Other political identity (see Table 1).

Table 1. Frequencies of Nominal Demographic Variables

	Frequency	**Percent**
Gender Identity		
Man	20	21.7%
Woman	64	69.6%
Non-binary	0	0.0%
Racial/Ethnic Identity		
White	53	57.6%
Non-white	32	34.8%
Political Identity		
Alt-right	0	0.0%
Conservative	5	5.4%
Moderate	9	9.8%
Liberal	44	47.8%
Leftist	23	25.0%
Unsure	4	4.3%

Overall, the average Attitude Towards Police was slightly negative, with a mean score of 2.61 out of 5 (1 being the most negative attitude and 5 being the most positive). That is, respondents in this sample tended to hold a negative attitude towards the police (e.g. police are biased, unfriendly, do not treat people fairly) (See Table 2).

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Attitude Towards Police

	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Attitude Towards Police	2.61	.772	1 (Negative)	5 (Positive)

Running a bivariate correlation between all of the demographic variables revealed that Attitude Towards Police and Political Identity were significantly correlated. The more right-leaning a participant was, the more likely they were to have a positive attitude towards the police. No significant associations were found for the Gender Identity or Racial/Ethnic Identity measure (see Table 3).

Table 3. Bivariate Correlation of Attitude Towards Police, Gender Identity, Political Identity, and Racial/Ethnic Identity

	Gender Identity (1 = Woman)	Political Identity (4 = Conservative)	Racial/Ethnic Identity (1= Non-white)
Attitude Towards Police (5 = Most Positive)	-.165	.715**	-.143

To assess if the average scale capturing Attitude Toward Police masked important trends in the data, I ran bivariate correlations of the three demographic

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variables (Gender Identity, Race/Ethnic Identity, Political Identity) against the

individual items used to measure Attitude Towards Police, which showed more

variation than the aggregate measure reflected (see Table 4).

Table 4. Bivariate Correlations of Specific Attitudes Towards Police, Gender Identity, Political Identity, and Racial/Ethnic Identity

	Gender Identity (1 = Woman)	**Political Identity** (4 = Conservative)	**Racial/Ethnic Identity** (1 = Non-white)
Police officers are friendly.	-.140	.620**	.049
The police are not trustworthy.	.079	-.531**	.042
Police officers are unbiased.	.050	.544**	.053
The police are reliable.	-.186	.603**	-.136
Police officers do not care about my community.	.142	-.424**	.267*
The police are helpful.	-.136	.479**	-.029
The police are good people.	-.155	.575**	-.093
Police officers do not treat all people fairly.	.185	-.630**	.321**
I like the police.	-.185	.695**	-.063
Police officers protect me.	-.097	.444**	-.327**
The police do not discriminate.	-.079	.504**	-.089
The police do not provide safety.	.185	-.593**	.088

Political Identity still significantly correlated with every statement in a way

that indicated that the more right-leaning participants were, the more positive their

attitudes toward the police were, and vice versa. Despite not being correlated to the overall Attitude Towards Police score, Racial/Ethnic Identity was significantly correlated with specific items. Racial/Ethnic Identity was significantly positively correlated with the statement "Police officers do not care about my community," and very significantly positively correlated with "Police officers do not treat all people fairly." This means that Non-white participants were more likely to agree with those statements than White participants. Racial/Ethnic Identity was very significantly negatively correlated with the statement "Police officers protect me," meaning that Non-white participants were much less likely than White participants to agree with that statement. Despite these significant correlations, there was no significant correlation between Racial/Ethnic Identity and the statement "Police officers are unbiased."

ATTITUDES TOWARDS REFORM STRATEGIES

The average attitude towards reform strategies aiming to abolish the police was negative, with a mean of 2.31 (SD = .918) on a scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree), indicating that, on average, participants disagreed with abolition as a reform strategy. The average attitude towards reform strategies that would disempower the police was slightly positive, with a mean score of 3.72. On average, participants leaned towards agreeing with these types of strategies. However, it also had a standard deviation of 1.01, the highest out of the three reform strategies. The most popular and least divisive reform strategy, on average, was reform that involved providing the police with more resources. It had a mean score of 4.16 out of

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5, indicating that the average participant agreed with these strategies. It had a

standard deviation of .627, the lowest standard deviation out of the three reform

strategies (see Table 5).

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics of Reform Variables

	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Attitude Towards Abolition	2.31	.918	1 (Strongly Disagree)	5 (Strongly Agree)
Attitude Towards Disempowerment	3.72	1.01	1	5
Attitude Towards More Resources	4.16	.627	1	5

To determine how these reform strategies were perceived by participants

belonging to different demographic groups, I ran a means comparison between each

reform variable and Gender Identity, Racial/Ethnic Identity, and Political Identity (see

Table 6). Ultimately, each demographic variable followed the overall trend of

Abolition being the least popular group of reform strategies, Disempowerment being

in the middle, and More Resources being the most popular. However, Women had

slightly stronger support for each group than Men did, with higher average scores for

each reform variable. This is also the case for Non-white participants, compared to

White participants. Though women and men, and White and Non-white participants

differed in their mean scores, differences were not statistically significant (*t*-test

means comparison).

Table 6. Means Comparison with Nominal Demographic Variables

	Abolition	Disempowerment	More Resources
Gender Identity			
Man	2.18	3.68	4.05
Woman	2.36	3.76	4.21
t-test (p)	-.761 (p=.647)	-.321 (p=.380)	-1.006 (p=1.000)
Racial/Ethnic Identity			
White	2.27	3.60	4.06
Non-white	2.37	3.93	4.35
t-test (p)	-.465 (p=.487)	-1.384 (p=.006)	-1.979 (p=.662)
Political Identity			
Conservative	1.20	1.90	3.80
Moderate	1.48	2.75	4.04
Liberal	2.08	3.78	4.33
Leftist	3.30	4.49	4.00
Unsure	1.80	2.67	4.11
F-test (p)	23.846 (p=.000)	20.149 (p=.000)	1.605 (p=.182)

Differences in attitude toward reform based on Political Identity emerged; Attitude Towards Abolition (*F*-test = 23.846; p = .000) and Attitude Towards Disempowerment (*F*-test = 20.149; p = .000) were statistically significant. Overall, these results follow the trend of Abolition being the least popular and More Resources being the most popular. The exception was Leftists, who on average agreed the most with strategies aiming to disempower the police (mean = 4.49). Another interesting result that emerged here is that Leftists, on average, agreed more strongly with reform strategies that would give more resources to the police (mean = 4.00) than they agreed with reform strategies aiming to abolish the police (mean = 3.30).

How much participants agreed with certain reform strategies was only significantly correlated with Political Identity and Attitude Towards Police. The more right-leaning the participant and the more positive the participant's attitude towards the police, the less likely they were to agree with reforms aiming to abolish and disempower the police (see Table 7).

Table 7. Bivariate Correlations of Gender Identity, Racial/Ethnic Identity, Political Identity, and Attitude Towards Police with Attitude Towards Abolition, Attitude Towards Disempowerment, and Attitude Towards More Resources

	Abolition	**Disempowerment**	**More Resources**
Gender Identity	.087	037	.115
Racial/Ethnic Identity	.053	.156	.220
Political Identity	-.716**	-.716**	-.022
Police	-.791**	-.761**	-.071

After looking at how broad reform categories related to different demographic variables, I explored what participants thought about the specific reform proposals that were grouped into those broad categories. On average, participants felt positively about the three strategies falling under the More Resources category (The police should be required to complete crisis-intervention training, The police should be required to complete crisis-intervention training, The police should be provided with more resources). Participants, on average, agreed with requiring crisis-intervention training (mean = 4.58). Nobody responded "Strongly Disagree" to that statement, the only specific statement about reform for which that is true. Participants also felt very positively towards requiring implicit bias training (mean = 4.63), echoing how the police officers surveyed by Whitfield (2019) felt that there were positive effects

stemming from this sort of training. However, the average score for the statement

"The police should be provided with more resources" was over a full point lower than

the other two proposed strategies (mean = 3.27, compared to 4.63 and 4.58) (see

Table 8).

Table 8. Descriptive Statistics of Attitude Towards More Resources

Attitude Towards More Resources	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
The police should be required to complete implicit bias training.	4.63	.771	1 (Strongly Disagree)	5 (Strongly Agree)
The police should be required to complete crisis-intervention training.	4.58	.691	2 (Disagree)	5
The police should be provided with more resources.	3.27	1.237	1	5

On average, participants also agreed with several specific reform strategies

that would disempower the police (Communities should decide how to police

themselves, Some of the police's funding should be cut, The role of the police should

be decreased and delegated to others, such as health professionals, The police should

apologize to the public). The most supported strategy in this group was partially

defunding the police (mean = 4.03), with the average participant agreeing to the

statement "Some of the police's funding should be cut" (see Table 9).

Table 9. Descriptive Statistics of Attitude Towards Disempowerment

Attitude Towards Disempowerment	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Communities should decide how to police themselves.	3.10	1.30	1 (Strongly Disagree)	5 (Strongly Agree)
Some of the police's funding should be cut.	4.03	1.22	1	5
The role of the police should be decreased and delegated to others, such as health professionals.	3.85	1.32	1	5
The police should apologize to the public.	3.90	1.22	1	5

On average, participants had a negative attitude towards every proposed reform strategy that aimed to abolish the police (The police should be completely abolished, The police should be completely defunded until they no longer exist, The police should be completely abolished and not replaced with anything, The police should be replaced by a public health agency, The police should be replaced by a new law enforcement agency). Interestingly, attitudes towards statements about replacing the police such as "The police should be replaced by a public health agency" (mean = 2.89) and "The police should be replaced by a new law enforcement agency" were more positive (mean = 2.90) than attitudes towards statements using forms of the word "abolish" or discussing the police no longer existing (see Table 10).

Table 10. Descriptive Statistics of Attitude Towards Abolition

Attitude Towards Abolition	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
The police should be completely abolished.	2.14	1.24	1 (Strongly Disagree)	5 (Strongly Agree)
The police should be completely defunded until they no longer exist.	2.13	1.22	1	5
The police should be completely abolished and not replaced with anything.	1.48	.731	1	5
The police should be replaced by a public health agency.	2.89	1.21	1	5
The police should be replaced by a new law enforcement agency.	2.90	1.22	1	5

Despite an average, negative Attitude Towards Abolition, there were participants who agreed or even strongly agreed with abolition. Who were these people? The vast majority of both White and Non-white participants disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement "The police should be completely abolished" (72.6% of White participants and 75.0% of Non-white participants). However, there was a much higher percentage of Non-white participants who strongly agreed that the police should be completed abolished (14.3%) compared to White participants (2.0%) (see Table 11).

Table 11. Crosstabulation of Abolishing the Police by Racial/Ethnic Identity

The police should be completely abolished.	White n(%)	Non-white n(%)
Strongly Agree	1 (2.0%)	4 (14.3%)
Agree	8 (15.7%)	2 (7.1%)
Neither	5 (9.8%)	1 (3.6%)
Disagree	19 (37.3%)	9 (32.1%)
Strongly Disagree	18 (35.3%)	12 (42.9%)
Total	51 (100.0%)	28 (100.0%)

Similarly, the majority of both men and women disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement "The police should be completely abolished" (80.0% of men and 70.4% of women). No men at all strongly agreed that the police should be completely abolished (see Table 12).

Table 12. Crosstabulation of Abolishing the Police by Gender Identity

The police should be completely abolished.	Man n(%)	Woman n(%)
Strongly Agree	0 (0.0%)	5 (8.6%)
Agree	3 (15.0%)	7 (12.1%)
Neither	1 (5.0%)	5 (8.6%)
Disagree	4 (20.0%)	24 (41.1%)
Strongly Disagree	12 (60.0%)	17 (29.3%)
Total	20 (100.0%)	58 (100.0%)

Looking at how support for abolition broke down by Political Identity yielded interesting results. Participants who identified as Leftist, the most left-leaning political identity listed as an option on the survey, were the only ones who selected Strongly Agree in response to the statement, "The police should be completely

abolished." However, some Leftists selected Disagree or Neither, although none

selected Strongly Disagree (see Table 13).

Table 13. Crosstabulation of Abolishing the Police by Political Identity

The police should be completely abolished.	Conservative n(%)	Moderate n(%)	Liberal n(%)	Leftist n(%)	Unsure n(%)
Strongly Agree	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	5 (21.7%)	0 (0.0%)
Agree	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (2.5%)	9 (39.1%)	0 (0.0%)
Neither	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (2.5%)	4 (17.4%)	1 (33.3%)
Disagree	0 (0.0%)	1 (12.5%)	22 (55.0%)	5 (21.7%)	0 (0.0%)
Strongly Disagree	5 (100.0%)	7 (87.5%)	16 (40.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (66.7%)
Total	5 (100.0%)	8 (100.0%)	40 (100.0%)	23 (100.0%)	3 (100.0%)

Running a bivariate correlation for all of these variables resulted in results

similar to the bivariate correlation in Table 7, where Political Identity and Attitude

Towards Police were significantly correlated with Attitude Towards Reform:

Abolition. Here, the more right-leaning the participant and the more positive the

participant's attitude towards the police, the less likely they were to agree with the

statement, "The police should be completely abolished" (see Table 14).

Table 14. Bivariate Correlations of Gender Identity, Racial/Ethnic Identity, Political Identity, and Attitude Towards Police with Attitude Towards the Statement "The police should be completely abolished."

	Attitude Towards the Statement "The police should be completely abolished." (5 = Strongly Agree)
Gender Identity (1 = Woman)	-.193
Racial/Ethnic Identity (1= Non-white)	.024
Political Identity (4 = Conservative)	-.694**
Attitude Towards Police (5 = Most Positive)	-.757**

PERCEPTIONS OF THE POLICE ABOLITION MOVEMENT

The next question asks: what did participants think about the police abolition movement itself and the movement goals? On average, participants did not indicate completely dissolving the police institution as something the police abolition movement always seeks to do. On a scale of 1 = never and 4 = always, responses averaged a 2.49 when asked if completely dissolving the police institution was a goal. Instead, participants more often perceived the police abolition movement as mainly wanting to defund the police (mean = 3.58), increase funding to communities (mean = 3.58), increase funding to health services (mean = 3.45), require implicit bias training (mean = 3.47) and/or crisis-intervention training (mean = 3.43) (see Table 15).

Table 15. Descriptive Statistics of Perceptions of the Police Abolition Movement

The abolish the police movement seeks to:	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Decrease funding to the police	3.58	.725	1 (Never)	4 (Always)
Increase funding to health services	3.45	.810	1	4
Completely dissolve the police institution	2.49	.994	1	4
Reform the police institution	3.35	.843	1	4
Increase resources to communities	3.58	.776	1	4
Reduce the number of police	3.15	.901	1	4
Require crisis-intervention training for police	3.43	.868	1	4
Require implicit bias training for the police	3.47	.871	1	4

Political Leaning was significantly correlated with Attitude Towards Police, Racial/Ethnic Identity, Attitude Towards Reform: Abolition, Attitude Towards Reform: Disempowerment, and Attitude Towards Reform: More Resources. Breaking the results down by Political Identity shows that the more right-leaning participants were, the less likely they were to believe that the police abolition movement seeks to decrease police funding, increase health services funding, increase community resources, reduce police numbers, and require crisis intervention training (see Table 16).

Table 16. Bivariate Correlations of Perceptions of the Police Abolition Movement and Political Identity

The abolish the police movement seeks to:	Political Identity
Decrease funding to the police	-.322**
Increase funding to health services	-.622**
Completely dissolve the police institution	-.211
Reform the police institution	-.160
Increase resources to communities	-.581**
Reduce the number of police	-.408**
Require crisis-intervention training for police	-.299**
Require implicit bias training for the police	-.202

Participants with positive attitudes towards the police were similarly less likely to believe that the police abolition movement seeks to decrease police funding, increase health services funding, increase community resources, reduce police numbers, and require crisis intervention training. Given the significant, positive relationship between Attitude Towards Police and Political Identity, it makes sense that they have very similar relationships to these statements (see Table 17).

Table 17. Bivariate Correlations of Perceptions of the Police Abolition Movement and Attitude Towards Police

The abolish the police movement seeks to:	Attitude Towards Police
Decrease funding to the police	-.382**
Increase funding to health services	-.611**
Completely dissolve the police institution	-.151
Reform the police institution	-.089
Increase resources to communities	-.507**
Reduce the number of police	-.311**
Require crisis-intervention training for police	-.306**
Require implicit bias training for the police	-.187

Race was significantly correlated to just two survey items measuring perception of the police abolition movement (Require crisis-intervention training for police, Require implicit bias training for police). These results indicate that White participants were more likely to believe that the police abolition movement seeks to require crisis-intervention and implicit bias training (see Table 18).

Table 18. Bivariate Correlations of Perceptions of the Police Abolition Movement and Racial/Ethnic Identity

The abolish the police movement seeks to:	Racial/Ethnic Identity
Decrease funding to the police	.120
Increase funding to health services	.192
Completely dissolve the police institution	-.109
Reform the police institution	.213
Increase resources to communities	.180
Reduce the number of police	-.155
Require crisis-intervention training for police	.261*
Require implicit bias training for the police	.247*

There were significant positive correlations between agreeing with reform strategies aiming to abolish the police and the statements "Decrease funding to police," "Completely dissolve the police institution," and "Reduce the number of police." Participants who agreed with reform strategies aiming to abolish the police were likely to believe that the abolition movement seeks to accomplish the goals specified in those statements. However, even more significantly positively correlated to agreeing with reform strategies aiming to abolish the police were the statements "Increase funding to health services" and "Increase resources to communities." Also interesting is that there was a significant positive correlation to requiring crisis-

intervention training, which police departments have to pay for - seemingly

contradicting the idea that the movement seeks to decrease funding to the police.

There was no significant correlation to the goal "Reform the police

institution." Given that this was the only variable with a significant correlation to

"Completely dissolve the police institution," perhaps those who agree with strategies

aimed to abolish the police think of "reform" as a separate term. Further, there was no

significant correlation to the goal "Require implicit bias training," perhaps due to

differing opinions on the perceived effectiveness of implicit bias training vs. crisis-

intervention training (see Table 19).

Table 19. Bivariate Correlations of Perceptions of the Police Abolition Movement and Attitude Towards Reform: Abolition

The abolish the police movement seeks to:	Attitude Towards Reform: Abolition
Decrease funding to the police	.288*
Increase funding to health services	.484**
Completely dissolve the police institution	.261*
Reform the police institution	.032
Increase resources to communities	.441**
Reduce the number of police	.374*
Require crisis-intervention training for police	.236*
Require implicit bias training for the police	.132

The correlations between proposed goals of the abolition movement and

Attitude Towards Reform: Disempowerment are similar to those in Table 19.

However, one difference is that there was no significant correlation to the goal

"Completely dissolve the police," and a significant positive correlation to "Require

implicit bias training for police." This suggests that agreeing with reform strategies

aiming to disempower the police (which are less extreme than strategies aiming to abolish the police) means a less extreme view of the police abolition movement. There is also a significant positive correlation to "Reform the police institution." (see Table 20).

Table 20. Bivariate Correlations of Perceptions of the Police Abolition Movement and Attitude Towards Reform: Disempowerment

The abolish the police movement seeks to:	Attitude Towards Reform: Disempowerment
Decrease funding to the police	.318*
Increase funding to health services	.676**
Completely dissolve the police institution	.048
Reform the police institution	.295**
Increase resources to communities	.694*
Reduce the number of police	.364**
Require crisis-intervention training for police	.410**
Require implicit bias training for the police	.265*

Following the trend of "reform" being viewed as separate from "abolition," the more participants agreed with reform strategies aiming to provide the police with more resources, the less likely they were to perceive the abolition movement as aiming to "Completely dissolve the police institution." Instead, they were much more likely to perceive the abolition movement as aiming to "Reform the institution." (see Table 21).

Table 21. Significant Bivariate Correlations of Perceptions of the Police Abolition Movement and Attitude Towards Reform: More Resources

The abolish the police movement seeks to:	Attitude Towards Reform: More Resources
Decrease funding to the police	.116
Increase funding to health services	.190
Completely dissolve the police institution	-.244*
Reform the police institution	.379**
Increase resources to communities	.266*
Reduce the number of police	-.184
Require crisis-intervention training for police	.416**
Require implicit bias training for the police	.407**

LIMITATIONS

There were several limitations of this survey that are important to keep in mind before discussing these results. To begin, no definitive conclusions or causations can be drawn from these analyses. This is especially true given the sample's limits. This was a sample of convenience, meaning it is non-probability and prone to issues such as homogenous responses and unpredictability, and the results are not representative of the general population (Etikan 2016).

There are also many known biases that may have stemmed specifically from utilizing a sample of college students. Firstly, colleges tend to reject applicants with criminal records, which could certainly have affected the results of this research, as it involved measuring attitudes towards law enforcement (Stewart and Uggen 2019). The majority of survey participants had never been stopped by a police officer. For those that had, 25 had been stopped for traffic violations and only 8 had been stopped for other reasons. Further, while the research regarding whether or not college students are automatically more liberal-leaning and likely to hold negative attitudes

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toward law enforcement is somewhat conflicting, the vast majority of my sample was on the political left, and average Attitude Towards Police was negative. As previously discussed, a large number of studies have found that age has an effect on attitudes towards the police, with younger people harboring more negative feelings, and that there may be a positive correlation between education and liberalism (Brown and Benedict 2005). Specific to college students, one study found that college students had more negative attitudes towards the police than the faculty did (Cordner et al. 1986).

Another limitation stems from the small sample size. There was an especially low number of Men, Non-white participants, and Conservatives. Given the political nature of this topic and its ties to the fight for racial equality, more participants in these demographic categories are needed.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Future Directions, and Conclusion

DISCUSSION

Do people, specifically college students, truly want to abolish the police? The results of this research suggest that no, they do not. There was a lack of support for actually getting rid of the police, with the average participant disagreeing and strongly disagreeing with reform strategies that would aim to abolish the police. However, this does not mean that there was no support for reform at all. On average, participants felt positively towards strategies aiming to disempower and give more resources to the police in the name of reform. There weren't any big differences in these beliefs by Gender or Racial/Ethnic Identity, and Attitude Towards Police factored in how one might expect, as those with more positive attitudes towards the police were more likely to be against Abolition or Disempowerment. However, there were some differences and unexpected results depending on Political Identity. Many self-described Leftists actually disagreed that the police should be abolished and on average, agreed with strategies that would give more resources to the police. This suggests varying interpretations of the label "Leftist," or perhaps participants overestimated how far to the left they truly were. This mirrors the results of a recent study about college students, which suggested that there may be a disconnect between perception of liberalism and how students really feel about liberal policies (Bailey and Williams 2016).

Varying interpretations of different phrases or concepts among participants was a large trend, not just for Political Identity labels. An example of this can be seen

in how a lack of support for abolition did not translate to a lack of support for the police abolition movement. This is perhaps due to misunderstandings and varying interpretations of "abolition" vs. "abolition movement". While not many respondents wanted to completely dissolve the police institution, many identified strategies they did support as goals of the abolition movement. For example, the more participants agreed with strategies aiming to provide more resources to the police (such as requiring crisis-intervention and implicit bias police training), the more likely they were to think that the police abolition movement seeks to require this training, and the less likely they were to think that the movement seeks to completely dissolve the policing institution. It was almost as if abolition and the abolition movement were viewed as two separate entities.

Even among those who did support abolishing the police, the perception that the police abolition movement actually seeks to completely abolish the police was not the dominant view. While there was a moderately significant positive relationship between supporting abolition and believing that the movement seeks to abolish the police, those in favor of complete abolition were most significantly likely to perceive the main goals of the movement as being "Increase funding to health services" and "Increase resources to communities."

This could be explained by looking at how Racial/Ethnic Identity contributed to perceptions of the police abolition movement. Survey participants were overwhelmingly White, and White participants were more likely to believe that the police abolition movement seeks to require police training. Perhaps, since the abolition movement and abolitionist texts are rooted in the experiences of Black

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Americans, those who are white are less likely to have an understanding of the police abolition movement that aligns with those texts. Exploring this further would depend on a larger sample, with more Non-white participants.

Another trend seen in the analysis was that participant response seemed to heavily depend on how things were phrased. When looking at specific survey items listing reform strategies that would give the police more resources, the more agreeable strategies were those that were not directly phrased as giving more resources to the police. Looking at specific survey items listing reform strategies that aimed to abolish the police, the more agreeable strategies were those that did not directly mention abolishing or completely getting rid of the police. On both ends of the spectrum, participants shied away from the more extreme strategies.

Despite the divisiveness of abolition and variety of perceptions relating to the police abolition movement, dislike of the police was a unifying theme. This may be why, despite varying attitudes towards different strategies, participants agreed with at least some type of reform. Looking more closely at how Racial/Ethnic Identity related to Attitude Towards Police also revealed some similar patterns to past scholarship, even from decades before this research (Decker, 1981; Hagan and Albonetti 1982; Sampson and Bartusch 1998). Non-white participants were significantly more likely to disagree with statements pertaining to personal interactions with the police, agreeing that "Police officers do not care about my community," and "Police officers do not treat all people fairly," while disagreeing that "Police officers protect me." These statements seem to be getting to the issue of racial bias among police without specifically naming it. However, there was no significant relationship to the

statement, "Police officers are unbiased." This is another interesting example of how phrasing played a role in participant response, and paints a picture that Non-white participants are concerned with how police personally view them and their community, but may not want to specifically call it out as racial bias.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

There are several possible future directions for this research, many stemming from the limitations of the sample and variables that were not used. Age has been shown to be strongly correlated to attitudes towards the police, and measuring the attitudes towards reform strategies and perceptions of the abolition movement among age groups that are both younger and older than college students could reveal interesting results (Decker, 1981). The same is true of past, negative interactions with the police. This research was more concerned with demographic variables concerning identity, and the vast majority of survey participants had never been stopped by the police outside of traffic violations. As stated, of the 33 participants who had been stopped by police, 25 had been stopped for a traffic violation. Future research should not only look into whether past traffic violations play a role, but include a larger number of participants with more serious past interactions with law enforcement. Other unused variables from this survey that were ultimately outside the scope of this particular research include participant state of residency, primary college major, perceived viability of abolition and reform, and perceived safety of abolition. These variables could certainly be explored in the future.

There are also many other questions that participants could be asked in the future, based on the results of this research. In tandem with being asked about perceptions of the police abolition movement's goals, participants could be asked about attitudes towards the movement itself. Do they have positive or negative feelings towards the movement? How does that compare to their perceptions of the movement's goals? It also may be prudent to ask more questions about political identity, or measure that variable longitudinally. While this survey asked a question about whether or not participants changed their political identity in the past year, this research was ultimately more interested in capturing current attitudes and perceptions. However, considering the unexpected results regarding those who identified as Leftists, future research should explore whether recent changes in ideology or label have any relationship to attitudes and perceptions.

CONCLUSION

This research was originally inspired by the high-profile calls to abolish the police during the summer 2020 police killings of Black Americans such as George Floyd and Breonna Taylor. As those calls steadily rose in volume, it became clear that there was an empirical void that needed to be filled, especially if the police abolition movement was here to stay. By measuring college student perceptions of the police, police reform, and the abolition movement, this research was able to get a sense about what the next generation believes must be done in the way of reform. Despite a lack of support for complete abolition and varying opinions on specific types of reform, the majority of these students believe that some form of change is necessary and that

the police abolition movement is trying to enact this change. More research will be necessary to determine whether these beliefs translate to a larger, more general population, but the abolition movement seems to be more nuanced than many may have thought - and considering the support for many of its perceived goals, it may be here to stay.

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Appendix

Survey: Perspectives of Police and Social Movements

What is your age?
- 18
- 19
- 20
- 21
- 22+

What is your primary major?
- [UMD major codes]
- Dual degree: (Please Specify)

What is your state of residency?
- [U.S. states/provinces]

Which of the following best represents your racial or ethnic heritage?
- Asian or Pacific Islander
- Black, Afro-Caribbean, or African American
- Latino or Hispanic
- Native American or Alaskan Native
- White or Caucasian
- Other: (Please Specify)

What is your gender identity?
- Woman
- Man
- Nonbinary
- Other: (Please Specify)

Have you ever been stopped by the police?
- Yes
- No

If yes, was it for a traffic offense?
- Yes
- No

What is your political identity?
- Leftist
- Liberal
- Moderate liberal
- Moderate
- Moderate conservative
- Conservative
- Alt-right
- Unsure
- Other: (Please Specify)

Have you changed your political identity within the last year?
- Yes
- No

In this section, you will be asked how strongly you agree or disagree with statements about the police and our criminal justice system.

	Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neither, Agree, Strongly Agree
Police officers are friendly.	
The police are not trustworthy.	
Police officers are unbiased.	
The police are reliable.	
Police officers do not care about my community.	
The police are helpful.	
The courts deal with criminals too harshly.	
The police are good people.	
Police officers do not treat all people fairly.	

I like the police.	
Police officers protect me.	
The police do not discriminate.	
The police do not provide safety.	
Persons convicted of murder should face the death penalty.	
Police need to be armed to do their job.	

In this section, you will be asked about potential goals of the movement to abolish the police.

The abolish the police movement seeks to	Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Always
Decrease funding to the police	
Increase funding to health services	
Completely dissolve the police institution	
Reform the police institution	
Increase resources to communities	
Reduce the number of police	
Require crisis-intervention training for police	
Require implicit bias training for police	

In this section, you will be asked how strongly you agree or disagree with statements about potential police reforms.

	Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neither, Agree, Strongly Agree
The police should be completely abolished.	
The police should be provided with more resources.	
The police should be completely defunded until they no longer exist.	
The police should be required to complete crisis-intervention training.	
It is possible for lawmakers to cut the police's budget.	
Communities should decide how to police themselves.	
Abolishing the police would decrease public safety.	
The police should apologize to the public.	
Some of the police's funding should be cut.	
The police should be replaced with a new law-enforcement agency.	
Crime would increase if the police were abolished.	
The police should be completely abolished and not replaced with anything.	
The police should be replaced with a public health agency.	

The role of the police should be decreased and delegated to others, such as health professionals	
It is possible to completely abolish the police.	
The police should be required to complete implicit bias training.	