Policing: By the Numbers examines issues from staffing and budget to public perceptions

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WASHINGTON — Six years after George Floyd's murder sparked nationwide calls for police reform, and after a sharp rise and fall in violent crime, the Council on Criminal Justice (CCJ) today released an updated collection of data examining law enforcement trends in America.

First published in 2021 by the Council's Task Force on Policing, *Policing: By the Numbers* brings together more than two dozen statistical trends on U.S. law enforcement. The updated resource includes data, in some cases stretching back 45 years, on police staffing and spending, agency composition, spending, public contact with police, fatal police encounters, officer safety, and public perceptions of law enforcement.

The public debate over policing has shifted dramatically since 2020. Calls for reform after high-profile police killings were soon followed by a sharp rise in violent crime and a political backlash. Today, with homicide rates falling to or near historic lows, policing remains at the center of contentious debates over federal, state, and local approaches to public safety—from National Guard deployments and immigration enforcement to changes in support for community policing and violence prevention programs.

Taken together, the metrics illuminate broad patterns in policing over time, helping governments, law enforcement agencies, and communities better understand and pursue the twin goals of safety and justice.

Key findings include:

- **Police staffing has grown substantially over the long term, but staffing has not kept pace with population expansion.** While the number of sworn officers roughly doubled since 1980, the rate of officers per 100,000 residents peaked in 2009. Staffing dipped after 2020 and hiring began to rebound in 2022, but it has not fully returned to pre-pandemic levels.

- **Because crime has fallen sharply since the 1990s, and staffing levels have increased, the number of officers relative to serious crime is much higher today than in 1980**. The ratio of officers to reported serious crimes is now more than 3.5 times higher than it was 45 years ago.

- **Police spending has increased significantly, but its share of government budgets has remained stable.** Spending on police continues to account for just over 3% of total state and local government expenditures.

- **Public contact with the police has declined in recent years.** Contacts began falling in 2020 and dropped substantially in 2022. Racial patterns also shifted: In 2015, Black residents experienced the highest rates of police-initiated contact, while from 2018 to 2022, White residents had the highest rates.

- **Fatal police encounters have increased gradually over time, with substantial differences by race and ethnicity.** White people account for the largest share of those killed by police—about 45% in a typical year—but, after adjusting for population size, Black and American Indian/Alaska Native people are killed at the highest rates.

- **Fatal assaults on officers remain relatively rare, while nonfatal assaults have risen sharply.** Between 25 and 80 officers are killed each year. Nonfatal assaults increased 82% from 2021 to 2024, reaching about 86,000.

- **Trust in police among Black Americans has risen since 2020, but trust levels remain divided by race.** White Americans consistently report higher levels of confidence in the police and more favorable perceptions of fairness and respect than Black Americans. After a significant decrease in 2020, however, confidence and trust in police have climbed modestly among Black Americans.

- **Women remain underrepresented in policing despite steady gains.** The share of female sworn officers has nearly tripled since 1980, rising from about 5% to 14% in 2024.

“It’s been six years since the murder of George Floyd and calls to defund the police, and yet law enforcement budgets and staffing are up, public trust has rebounded, and crime has fallen sharply,” said CCJ President and CEO Adam Gelb. “There’s been a striking reversal in public safety and public sentiment.”

“American policing has been the subject of sustained public scrutiny and debate for more than a decade,” said CCJ Policy Director Stephanie Kennedy, who produced the updated report. “By bringing the most up-to-date law enforcement data together in one place, this resource gives leaders, researchers, journalists, and communities a clearer view of how policing has changed over time. The picture that emerges is complex and nuanced, reflecting both national trends and the diversity of conditions across communities.”

“The significant nationwide reductions in violent crime reflect the everyday efforts of law enforcement and their invaluable collaboration with the communities they serve,” said CCJ Senior Fellow Thaddeus Johnson, a criminologist and former law enforcement official. “A fact-based understanding of our criminal justice system, and the tools and strategies at our disposal, is essential to building on that progress while acknowledging the work that remains.”

About the Council on Criminal Justice

The Council on Criminal Justice is a nonpartisan think tank and invitational membership organization that advances understanding of the criminal justice policy choices facing the nation and builds consensus for solutions that enhance safety and justice for all.