

GUNS AND PEOPLE OF COLOR: VOICES FROM THE COMMUNITY

A PROJECT OF THE URBAN INSTITUTE, THE JOINT CENTER ON ECONOMIC AND
POLITICAL STUDIES, AND THE JOYCE FOUNDATION



TheJoyceFoundation

OVERVIEW

In recent years, Americans have gained a new awareness of the scourge of gun violence, punctuated by periodic mass shootings. But there is a larger and too-often ignored element to the gun violence crisis: its unique and devastating effects on communities of color every single day. Gun violence isn't just something on the evening news for millions of African Americans and Latinos—it is part of daily life.

African-Americans account for over 56 percent of the victims of gun homicide, even though they make up only 13 percent of the U.S. population. Gun violence is the leading cause of death for African American males ages 15-34, and the second leading cause of death for Latino males in the same age group.

Communities of color bear a disproportionate impact of America's gun problem, yet have not been sufficiently heard when it comes to the experience of neighborhood gun violence or what can be done to alleviate it. That is changing.

The Joint Center for Economic and Political Studies, The Urban Institute, and The Joyce Foundation joined together in mid-2015 on a project to engage communities that are most impacted by gun violence. More than 100 community leaders in three cities hit hard by gun violence participated in a series of convenings. A national survey of 600 African Americans and 600 Latinos conducted by Benenson Strategy Group from Feb 22-28, 2016 complements their insights.

From the convenings in three cities and subsequent national survey, it is clear that communities of color have complex and nuanced views when it comes to the intersection of gun violence, race, policing and incarceration. There is deep concern about gun violence, and about responses to gun violence that emphasize aggressive policing tactics and -incarceration.

Participants indicated that getting guns off the streets means fewer people committing crimes with guns, a smaller prison population, and better community relations with police. There was also overwhelming support for community-based solutions to gun violence, like job training, youth programs, and increased police accountability.

“ENGAGING COMMUNITIES” ROADMAP

The “Roadmap” report, titled “Engaging Communities in Reducing Gun Violence: A Road Map for Safer Communities,” collects the findings and recommendations generated at convenings of more than 100 community members in three diverse cities—Richmond, VA, Milwaukee, WI, and Stockton, CA.

The convenings included faith leaders, law enforcement, social service providers, formerly incarcerated individuals, elected officials, and other community members.

The goal was to hear directly from communities about the factors driving gun violence, and the strategies that could reduce gun violence and make neighborhoods safer. Participants expressed the view that gun violence is a multifaceted challenge that demands a wide set of solutions.

For example, gun violence is seen as interconnected with issues of policing and prosecution, disinvestment, and marginalization of community voices. Participants said that limiting access to deadly weapons must be part of the solution, but it’s not the only part. Improving police-community relations and enhancing law enforcement accountability, investing in community-based supports, and creating opportunities for the community to engage in violence prevention are critical to a comprehensive approach to reducing gun violence in communities of color.

The recommendations of the Engaging Communities roadmap include the following:

- Prevent the diversion of firearms to people at high risk of gun violence through universal background checks, mandatory reporting for lost and stolen firearms, permit to purchase laws, increased oversight of licensed firearm dealers, and community programs that discourage straw purchasing.
- Repair police-community relations with surveys of community satisfaction with police, civilian review boards, body-worn cameras, and the collection of key data (e.g., use of force data, racial data on police stops, and arrests).
- Invest in wraparound social services that address the full spectrum of challenges faced by many individuals at high risk of gun violence and their families, such as mental health treatment, trauma care, drug treatment, housing, job training and placement, and mentoring.
- Improve engagement, collaboration, communication, and strategic planning between those who work to reduce gun violence, including religious leaders, nonprofit social service providers, police, other government officials, and community members.

NATIONAL SURVEY OVERVIEW

Benenson Strategy Group conducted 1200 telephone interviews, of 600 African Americans and 600 Hispanics nationally, including an oversample of 18-29 year olds, from February 22 to February 28, 2016.

In a nutshell, respondents believe that gun violence, incarceration and police misconduct are serious problems, are interconnected, and require solutions

that address specific needs in their communities.

African Americans and Latinos believe that gun violence, incarceration, and police misconduct are extremely serious problems (5 on a 5-point scale).

- Gun Violence: African Americans: 80%, Latinos: 54%
- Incarceration: African Americans: 69%, Latinos: 43%
- Police Misconduct: African Americans: 50%, Latinos: 24%

These three challenges are interconnected rather than discrete problems.

- Most African Americans (56%) and Hispanics (70%) disagree that “passing new gun laws will only lead to more people of color being sent to prison and will do little to reduce gun violence.”
- 74% of both groups said that “because committing a crime with a gun often means serving time in prison, if we keep the guns out of the wrong hands, we can also help decrease the number of people who are in prison.”
- About 60% of both groups agreed with that statement that “[f]ewer guns on the streets would improve the relationship between the police and the communities they serve.”

Nationally, 7 to 9 out of 10 respondents in both groups strongly support these gun violence solutions:

- Investing in job training, mental health services, and programs for young people.
- Background checks for all people buying guns no matter where they buy them.

- Require individuals to notify law enforcement when their gun is lost or stolen.
- Increased accountability for the police, including civilian review boards, body-worn cameras, and the ability of police chiefs to fire officers who exhibit racial bias.