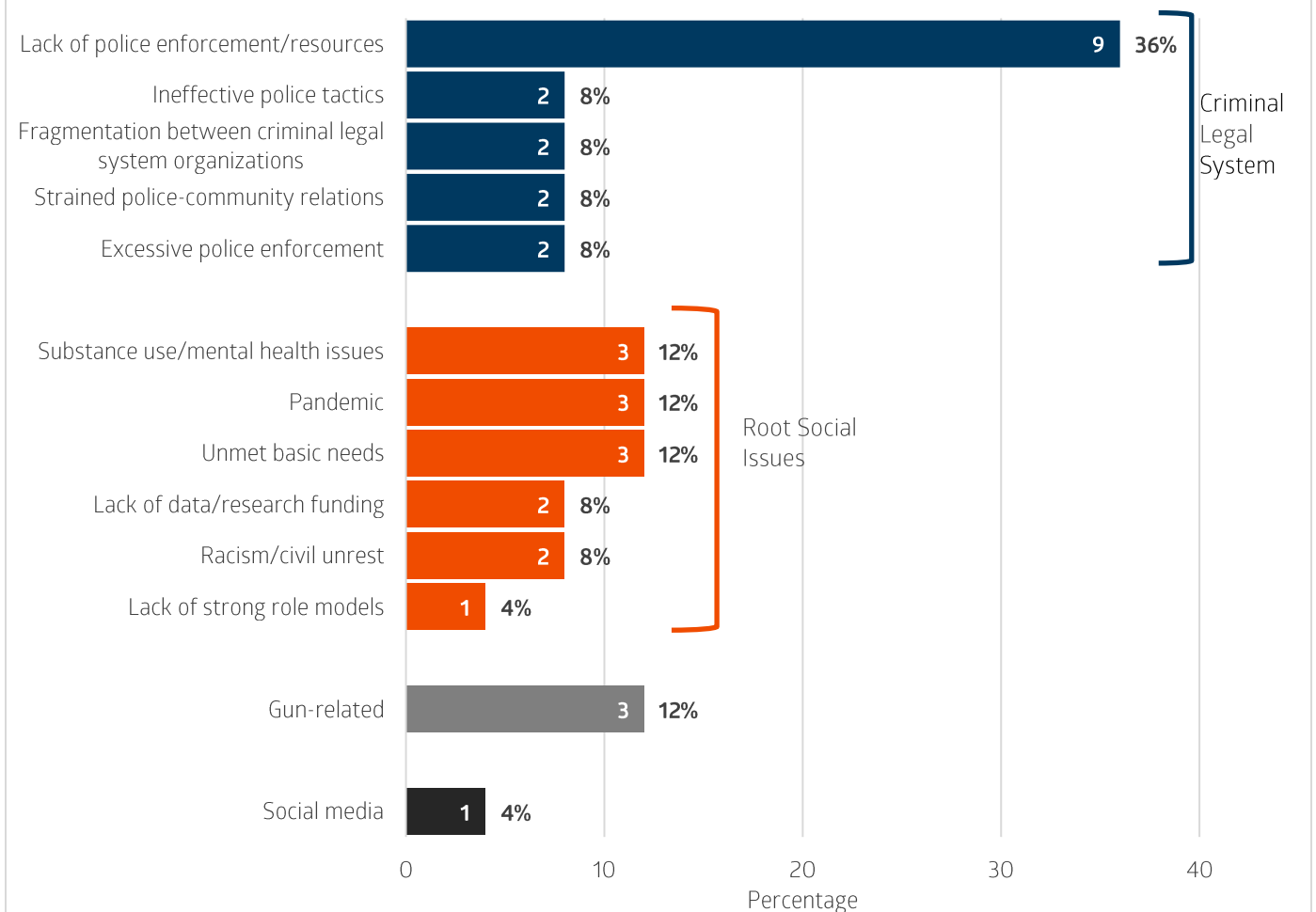


# MEDIA NARRATIVES ON INCREASING VIOLENCE IN ST. LOUIS COUNTY, MISSOURI

The media plays a significant role in shaping how people think about crime, including its nature, its causes, and potential solutions. To understand how the media frames violence, we examined five years of coverage (2017 – 2021) on increasing rates of violence in *The St. Louis American* and *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. For each of the 25 articles that covered this issue, we identified the types of causes (Figure 1) and solutions (Figure 2) that were discussed. **We found that the criminal legal system was portrayed as primarily responsible for rising rates of violence, and solutions were most likely to rely on police.** Despite the significance of gun violence in the region, discussions of firearm-related causes and solutions were relatively rare. The emphasis on criminal legal system responses may reflect that many short-term evidence-based solutions to violence rely, at least in part, on law enforcement. Still, media coverage shapes public views on the factors responsible for rising violent crime rates, who is responsible for addressing this issue, and appropriate strategies for combatting violence.

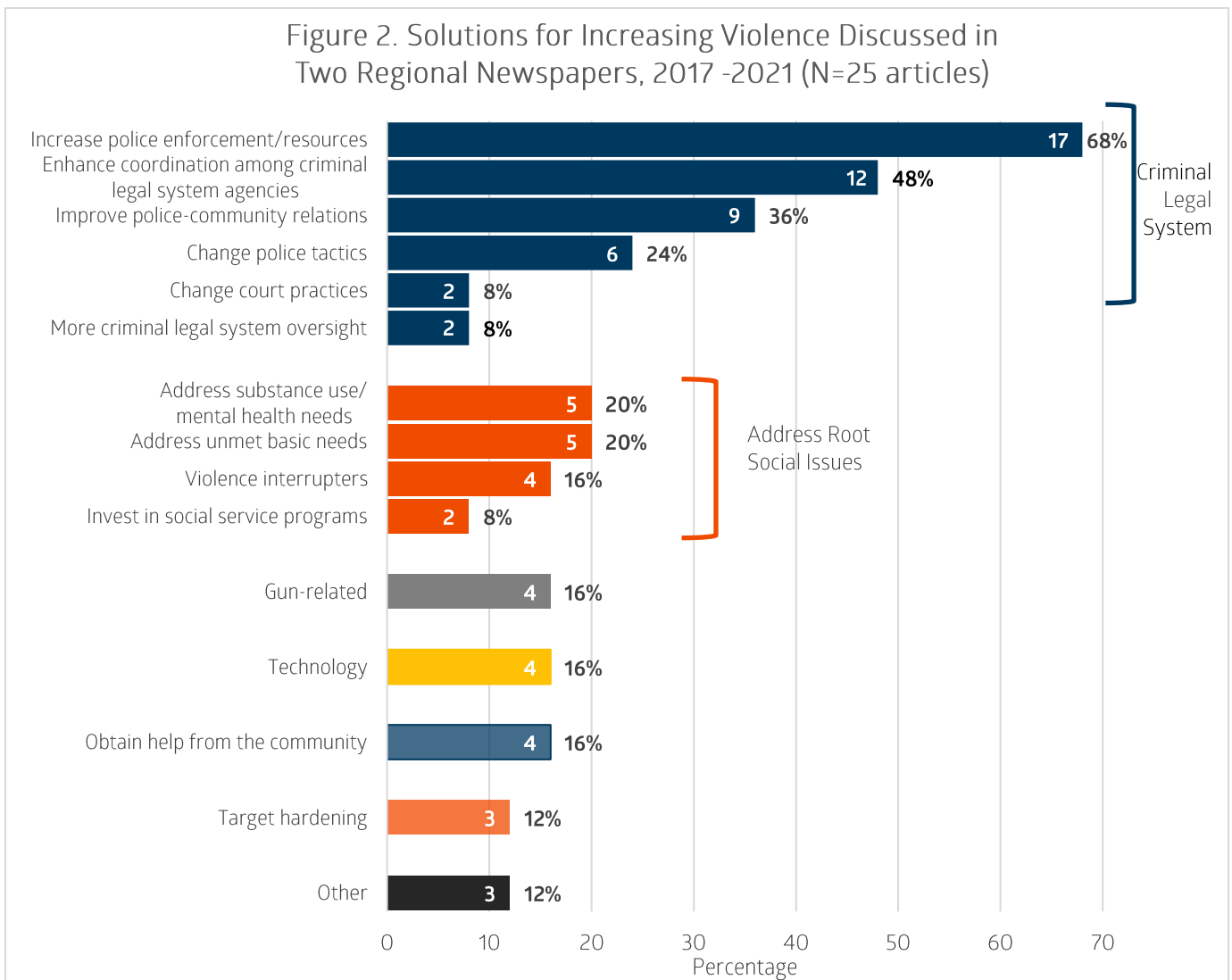
Figure 1. Reported Causes of Increasing Rates of Violence in Two Regional Newspapers, 2017 -2021 (N=25 articles)



**Causes of increasing violence.** Increasing violence was often attributed to failings of the criminal legal system, particularly lack of police enforcement/resources (Figure 1). Root social issues were less frequently identified as causes, and most often discussed were the pandemic, substance use/mental health issues, and a failure to meet people’s basic needs (e.g., poverty/inequality, housing). Other issues identified as contributing to violence were issues related to guns and gun laws and social media.

**Solutions.** Solutions for combatting violence predominantly involved the criminal legal system, most frequently increasing police resources/enforcement (Figure 2). Solutions addressing root social issues were less prevalent in the articles we reviewed. When discussed, the focus was on addressing mental health and substance use issues and helping people get their basic needs met. Other solutions identified as contributing to violence were related to guns, technology, obtaining help from the community, and target hardening.<sup>i</sup>

Figure 2. Solutions for Increasing Violence Discussed in Two Regional Newspapers, 2017 -2021 (N=25 articles)



<sup>i</sup> The “other” category specified collecting additional data, physical improvements to neighborhoods, and changing members of the Bi-State board.