SAFETY + JUSTICE CHALLENGE

REDEFINING COMMUNITY SAFETY IN THREE US COUNTIES

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INTRODUCTION

Everyone wants to feel safe in their community. Yet, little is known about how people make sense of what community safety looks and feels like to them. Discussions among policymakers and in the media often emphasize crime rates as a key measure of community safety and the criminal legal system as the primary means of achieving this goal. This traditional conceptualization has several negative consequences. First, it often overlooks the perspectives and experiences of people most impacted by violence, high levels of enforcement, and mass incarceration, many of whom are people of color. Second, low crime rates do not necessarily ensure that residents perceive their community is safe. Other factors, such as media coverage and the physical and social environment, also play a role in shaping views of safety.[i] Moreover, not all crime is reported to authorities, and this may be particularly true in areas where residents experience elevated levels of police enforcement activity and have little trust in the police.[ii] Third, relying on crime and other criminal legal system data can provide a narrow and skewed conceptualization of safety because they tend to reflect law enforcement priorities, police discretion, and willingness to report crime. Finally, aspects of safety captured by criminal legal system data may not align with community priorities or values. Narrow crime-oriented definitions often fail to recognize that conversations around community safety are highly localized. Allowing communities to define what safety means to them facilitates the development of locally driven priorities for action and interventions, ultimately helping advance the goal of safety for all.

This report explores the meaning of community safety for people who live and work in three US counties (Missoula County, Montana; St. Louis County, Missouri; and Mecklenburg County, North Carolina) by documenting local dynamics of crime, the criminal legal system, and conversations around the meaning of community safety. These counties are currently working to enhance community safety, in part, through the MacArthur Safety and Justice Challenge. The findings are based on data from community surveys, as well as interviews and focus groups. The surveys were designed to capture a diversity of community voices. The interviews and focus groups allowed for a more in-depth examination of the views of criminal legal system actors, system-impacted individuals, and people who work with system-impacted persons, groups whose voices are often omitted in work of this type. Throughout, we draw on the interviews to highlight key findings and bring voice to the people closest to the challenges of building and maintaining safe communities.

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KEY TAKEAWAYS

The three counties faced a number of challenges that impact community views of safety.

- In Missoula, there is general agreement that the physical and social environment is rapidly changing. Housing-related concerns and the visibility of the unhoused population dominated conversations around safety. Part of these changes are due to an influx of new residents and associated increases in home prices, making basic needs less affordable even for people with stable employment. Few people we spoke with were unaffected by rising housing costs. For example, people working in the criminal legal system and service providers reported their own personal challenges with housing and discussed the impact of this issue on hiring and retaining staff. Many perceive that the unhoused population is growing in visibility due to a higher prevalence of drugs, a limited supply of low-income housing, and difficulty accessing mental health and substance use treatment services. Residents also indicated that domestic violence and missing and murdered indigenous persons should be top priorities.

- In St. Louis County, violence is a significant concern for area residents. Like in many places, aggravated assaults and homicides rose at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Concerns about violence are exacerbated by the county's proximity to St. Louis City, which has high rates of these crimes. Black county residents, particularly those residing in North County, are disproportionately impacted by crime and the criminal legal system. St. Louis County's high level of fragmentation generates frustration and makes it challenging to address crime and related issues in a coordinated fashion.

- Violence is also a major concern for people in Mecklenburg County. Aggravated assault and homicide increased rapidly from 2018 through 2020, before leveling off and falling; however, these crimes continue to be viewed as significant problems. Other forms of violence, including youth and police violence, are also top safety-related priorities.

Media coverage of crime trends often features the perspectives of government officials and criminal legal system actors. An analysis of local media articles discussing crime trends found that coverage in Missoula focused primarily on drug-related issues and violence. In St. Louis and Mecklenburg Counties, the media covered stories of violence more than any other crime type. In all three counties, individuals who work for the criminal legal system (e.g., courts, police) and government officials were most frequently quoted. The perspectives of people directly affected by crime and the legal system were rarer.

- In Missoula County, media reporting primarily attributed rising and persistent rates of violence to root social issues, such as mental health and substance use, while discussions of solutions focused equally on addressing root social problems and criminal legal system responses.

- In Mecklenburg County, the media also mainly ascribed increasing and persistent rates of violence to root social issues, especially residents' basic needs going unmet, but solutions focused on criminal legal system responses, such as bolstering police resources and enforcement.

- In St. Louis County, the most prevalent causes and solutions discussed in the media were tied to the criminal legal system.

- Despite high rates of gun violence in St. Louis and Mecklenburg Counties, relatively few articles discussed the role of firearms in driving violence or identified solutions specifically focused on addressing gun-related issues.

- Across all sites, the emphasis on criminal legal system actors and responses may reflect, in part, the ease of accessing government actors and the recognition that effective immediate short-term responses to violence often involve law enforcement partners. This does not diminish the fact that all voices and perspectives need to be heard in these discussions, given the prominent role of media narratives in shaping public perceptions of safety.

Community safety is a multifaceted concept and reflects the diversity of the community. We surveyed community members about what safety means to them and then collaborated with a group of local stakeholders to help organize and make sense of these responses. **A Community Safety Concept Map was generated that has 11 components, which can be categorized into five domains or "regions"**: 1) Personal safety and security; 2) Thriving and socially connected community; 3) Resources and services for a socially and economically just community; 4) Responsive and effective government and public safety agencies; and 5) Systems for preventing and addressing harm.

The Five Domains of Community Safety

Personal Safety & Security

Thriving & Socially Connected Community

Systems for Preventing & Addressing Harm

REDEFINING COMMUNITY SAFETY

Resources for a Socially & Economically Just Community

Responsive Government & Public Safety Agencies

Personal safety and security are at the heart of community safety; yet the types of harm and day-to-day hassles that most concern residents vary based on life experiences. These differences underscore that conversations about community safety must be inclusive and include the perspectives of marginalized groups, as their safety concerns may require a different set of policies and actions.

- **In Missoula County**, the unhoused population was primarily concerned with violent victimization and having their belongings taken. This group, along with system-impacted individuals and people of color, discussed feeling unsafe because they perceive that they receive lower-quality emergency services than others. Some residents reported worrying about their safety and, more often, the safety of their children in areas where unhoused individuals congregate because they view this group as unpredictable.

- **In St. Louis County and Mecklenburg County,** there was general agreement that violence, particularly gun violence and violence among youth, is of significant concern. Moreover, many individuals recognized that one's level of safety is currently a function of where they live, and some groups, especially people of color and those with lower incomes, bear the burden of living in unsafe places. These groups discussed feeling unsafe because they believe that they receive sub-par emergency services, are at high risk of being mistreated by the police, and fear police violence.

- Individuals who work in the criminal legal system, particularly law enforcement and probation and parole, described how their work-related experiences made them hypervigilant in their daily lives. They were concerned that someone they had encountered on-the-job would target them or their families.

Viewpoints on the role of the criminal legal system in promoting community safety are often nuanced and conflicting. A common theme was that the criminal legal system is a key partner in community safety, but current systems can be unjust, ineffective, and harmful to people and communities.

- Many community members believe that the police play an essential role in keeping communities safe, and they feel safer when police are visible and active in their neighborhood. Others, especially system-impacted individuals and those from marginalized groups, indicated they feel unsafe around law enforcement and avoid calling them for help. These views are rooted in personal or shared negative prior experiences with the police. However, many of these same individuals also described positive interactions with law enforcement. For them, it is the unpredictability of how the police will treat them that leads them to avoid law enforcement.

- While people acknowledged the importance of accountability for those who cause harm, they also indicated that current systems are inequitable, ineffective, and make people and communities feel less, not more, safe. A common theme, particularly among victims of violence, was that those who engage in harm should be held accountable, and steps should be taken to ensure that they do not continue this behavior. At the same time, others perceived that the criminal legal system does not achieve this goal and instead creates

long-term barriers that make it hard for system-impacted individuals to succeed. Some respondents highlighted the importance of identifying effective alternate models of accountability.

Community safety is multidimensional, and survey respondents rated all 11 components of community safety as important or very important. Recognizing the overlap of safety with other community priorities, such as ensuring that everyone has their basic needs met and an equal opportunity to lead a stable life, can help promote and sustain collaboration among agencies.

- Respondents in Missoula County were most likely to rank social and economic justice (e.g., having access to attainable housing, healthy food, quality education) as the most important components of community safety; however, they felt these aspects of community safety are currently underprioritized.

- In St. Louis and Mecklenburg Counties, respondents ranked gun violence prevention, freedom from violence and other harm, and feeling safe in daily life as the most important components of community safety.

Safety cannot be measured with a narrow set of indicators. Participants agreed measuring safety is challenging, and there was no consensus regarding the most effective method to measure this concept. Many recognized that administrative data, including crime statistics and perceptual measures typically collected with surveys, have their strengths and weaknesses. Other common themes included the importance of disaggregating data to look at disparities, the need to measure factors "upstream" of crime (e.g., poverty, graduation rates, employment), and the value of regularly convening people to review data. In addition, accessibility and quality of supportive services were identified as important, but sometimes overlooked, measures of community safety.

Community safety should be a collective responsibility, not just the responsibility of the police and/or those who live in areas that are most impacted by crime, violence, and high levels of enforcement. Participants felt that everyone benefits when people work together to reduce violence and other harms; however, some believed that the burden of crime and the responsibility for increasing safety are not equally distributed in the community.

Several universal recommendations emerge from these findings.

- Frame conversations around "community safety" instead of "public safety" to help people think more expansively about what safety looks like and how to achieve this goal. This also has the potential to reveal the broader historical forces that create and sustain inequalities associated with safety.

- Communicate to residents and leaders a more inclusive and equitable vision of community safety. While low rates of violence and feeling secure are key components of community safety, it is much more than that. The methods used in this report can help residents and stakeholders think more inclusively about safety.

- Identify local priorities and structure future action using the Community Safety Concept Map generated from this research. This map is designed to be a dynamic tool to engender discussions about safety and

ensure that a holistic perspective is being considered by a multitude of stakeholders (e.g., community groups, local leaders, education providers).[iii]

- Collect data from a representative group of individuals, including groups most impacted by crime and the criminal legal system. This includes unhoused individuals, people of color, and other minoritized groups as well as people who work in the criminal legal system. Rural communities may have unique perspectives on safety and should be included in any effort of this type.

- Make data on community safety easily accessible to the public. All three counties have ongoing data collection efforts that can be leveraged to measure the various components of community safety identified in this study. Creating a dashboard or website that brings together these data and makes it easily accessible can empower communities to assess their progress toward achieving safety.

- Promote the message that creating and sustaining safe communities is a collective responsibility and support initiatives that take this approach. For example, Mecklenburg County is mounting a campaign to educate residents about the urgent need to address violence in the community.

- Work with local media to ensure the voices of those most impacted by crime and the criminal legal system are represented in news coverage. Hold the media accountable for following best practices when reporting on crime trends. Resources are available that outline best practices for the media when reporting on crime trends.[iv]

- When resident input is solicited, ensure there is follow-up, so communities know how the information is being used. For example, local stakeholders could partner with the media to describe what is being done to address safety-related concerns and educate the public on how they can contribute to these efforts.

- Replicate this work, focusing on the experiences of youth. Youth are an important part of the community that we were not able to reach, and they may have different views than older community members. From an equity and representation perspective, it is important to continue to broaden the voices considered when developing effective public policy.

- Connect with other local and national efforts to reimagine public safety. Throughout the country, there are ongoing efforts to rethink what makes a community feel safe and how to achieve this goal. Bringing this work together can help catalyze change.

- Perceptions of community safety can change, which necessitates regular public input to reflect shifting priorities. Changes in the demographic or economic profile, like what happened during the COVID-19 pandemic, can shift resident perceptions. Views on safety are dynamic and should continue to be reassessed. The Toolkit for Prioritizing and Measuring Community Safety associated with this project provides a step-by-step guide for local communities interested in reimagining community safety. Communities may want to partner with a local university if more advanced analyses, like those conducted in this report, are desired.

03

BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION

In 2020, high-profile police killings, including those of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, led to widespread discussions on the meaning of community safety and the role of equity in these conceptualizations. Among politicians and local leaders, there have been recent efforts to "reimagine public safety" and invest in new tools, approaches, and methods to keep communities free from harm. Many scholars, practitioners, and activists have called for a broader understanding of the meaning of safety, who benefits from the current conceptualization, and who should play a role in setting safety-related priorities.[v]

This push for new ways of thinking about safety has been complicated by highly publicized increases in violence in many urban areas, including all three counties in this study.[vi] Some increases coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic. Nationally, some have attributed the rise in violent crime to changes in criminal legal system policies, such as bail reform, decarceration, and decriminalization of minor offenses, despite a lack of evidence linking these practices to increases in the crime rate.[vii]

These challenges highlight that **"reimagining public safety" requires moving beyond a reliance on criminal legal system data—such as crime, arrests, jail admissions, and police calls for service—which are traditional benchmarks for evaluating safety.** Yet, there is little consensus on new ways to conceptualize and measure community safety. This gap can hinder the development of effective and equitable reform and safety initiatives.

WHY DOES THE WAY WE DEFINE AND MEASURE COMMUNITY SAFETY MATTER?

A comprehensive, localized definition and measure of community safety can provide a foundation for effective, equitable action tailored to community needs, priorities, and values. First, how safety is conceptualized shapes the types of solutions implemented. Thus, a community-driven definition can lead to solutions that align with community needs and values.[viii] Conversely, a failure to unpack the meaning of this term can lead to continued reliance on a narrow set of traditional crime control strategies, especially if calls for "public safety" are conflated with enforcement and incarceration. Second, the current dependence on official crime data can contribute to stigmatizing narratives that some neighborhoods are "dangerous." It also fails to recognize that communities with high rates of reported crime suffer from many issues that negatively impact safety, such as limited access to health care and mental health treatment. At the same time, it overlooks that areas with lower rates of reported crime may struggle with less visible forms of harm, including domestic violence, mental health issues, and substance use disorders. Third, if the success of programs and policy changes is measured exclusively by their effects on crime, the broader positive impact of these initiatives on residents' daily lives and well-being can be overlooked. In other words, **a more holistic set of community safety measures allows for the inclusion of various social, economic, and political indicators, such as access to affordable healthcare and government accountability**. Finally, there is a broad understanding that "what gets measured gets done." Most current public safety initiatives focus on

reducing crimes reported to the police and may not reflect the broader safety goals of a community. Regularly measuring and monitoring key non-crime indicators helps ensure a sustained focus on locally identified safety priorities and can be used to assess if, and under what conditions, initiatives have a positive impact. In addition, these measurements can help gauge if existing policies and programs are generating unintended consequences or harms that undermine community safety.

This report explores issues around the meaning and measurement of community safety in three counties and presents a more holistic conceptualization of these ideas. To provide background for the findings, it begins with a discussion of the local context for each site, describing recent trends in safety-related issues. We also discuss changes in local policies, laws, and programs implemented in response to pressing local safety-related issues. Then, we describe the multi-faceted conceptualization of community safety derived through an iterative engagement process with stakeholders across the three counties. Results from two surveys are used to identify the most critical components of community safety for study participants at each site. Next, we draw on interview data to discuss issues and recommendations surrounding the measurement of community safety. Finally, we summarize the key findings and identify their broad implications and how they might support local efforts to promote community safety.

Community Safety versus Public Safety

Across all three sites, stakeholders suggested using "community safety" instead of "public safety" to emphasize a more expansive and inclusive way of thinking about safety that moves beyond a focus on crime and the criminal legal system. Community safety recognizes that harm can come from many sources, including the criminal legal system itself. **Community safety emphasizes that safety is a collective endeavor.** As a victim advocate from Mecklenburg County stated: "I think community safety includes what a community is, so that includes residents, that includes law enforcement, that includes churches, hospitals, schools, resources. To me, an effective community, a safe community, has all of those things actively working together and I feel like it's an ecosystem that supports each other." Further, unlike public safety, community safety highlights that efforts to define safety must be community driven. As an educator in St. Louis explained, "'public' almost feels like ... there's one answer for everything. But 'community' might be the better way to look at it, because it's going to have to be local and tailored to that ... neighborhood, whether that's a block or municipality or region." A person in Missoula who works on criminal legal system reform noted that this requires approaching conversations around safety with an equity perspective: Threats to safety that a more privileged person experiences look different from those faced by marginalized communities. Finally, continuing to rely on notions of public safety helps sustain reliance on traditional law and order solutions. An activist from Mecklenburg County argued that the term public safety is tied to traditional mechanisms for achieving safety and that efforts to "re-envision public safety" recreate "the same carceral methods, repackaged and renamed," necessitating a move towards collective safety and harm reduction approaches.

04

LOCAL CONTEXT

To develop a more inclusive conceptualization of community safety, it is important to consider the local context. For each site, we provide an overview of county demographics and other characteristics that shape how safety is experienced, including housing and crime trends. Recent legislative, programmatic, and policy changes are detailed. Given the role of the media in shaping public views of safety, a descriptive account of local newspaper coverage for a five-year period is presented.

LOCAL CONTEXT - MISSOULA COUNTY

Missoula County, Montana, is located at the western edge of Montana in the Northern Rockies, approximately 45 miles from the Idaho border. After Billings, the county is the second-largest metropolitan area in Montana. According to the U.S. Census, the population of Missoula County was 121,041 in 2022.[ix] Over the past decade, the county has gained approximately 10,000 new residents.[x] Missoula County has a majority white population (91.3%), with small percentages of residents who identify as Native American/Alaskan (2.8%) and Black (0.5%).[xi]

Changes in the housing market and issues with houselessness have significantly influenced how residents of Missoula County think about safety. It is one of many metropolitan areas where a drastic uptick in housing and rental prices on the heels of a low supply of available housing has created an unstable housing market.[xii] Median home values jumped in 2021, increasing 24.2% to $415,600. At the same time, Missoula has experienced a shortage of homes on the market and rising rent costs. In 2021, the median monthly rent paid by individual renters in Missoula was $1,034.[xiii] This was up from $783 in 2017, an increase of 32.1%.[xiv] Many people we spoke with attributed the rise in housing costs to an influx of out-of-state residents. In 2020, for every person moving out of Missoula, 7.1 people moved in. This ratio decreased in 2022 but was still high—2.4 people moved into Missoula for every one person who left.[xv]

From 2017 to 2021, the median household income in Missoula rose 11.3% to $66,803, but most residents interviewed indicated this increase was not enough to keep pace with rising housing costs. Although lower than national averages, both renters and homeowners face considerable financial burdens related to housing costs. In 2021, 44% of renters and almost 20% of homeowners spent 30% of their income or more on housing (see Figure 1). Individuals working in the criminal legal system indicated that the inflated cost of housing made it difficult to hire and retain staff, placing a strain on public safety-related services.

Figure 1. Housing Cost Burden in Missoula, 2021

Source: Missoula Organization of Realtors, Social Data Dashboard
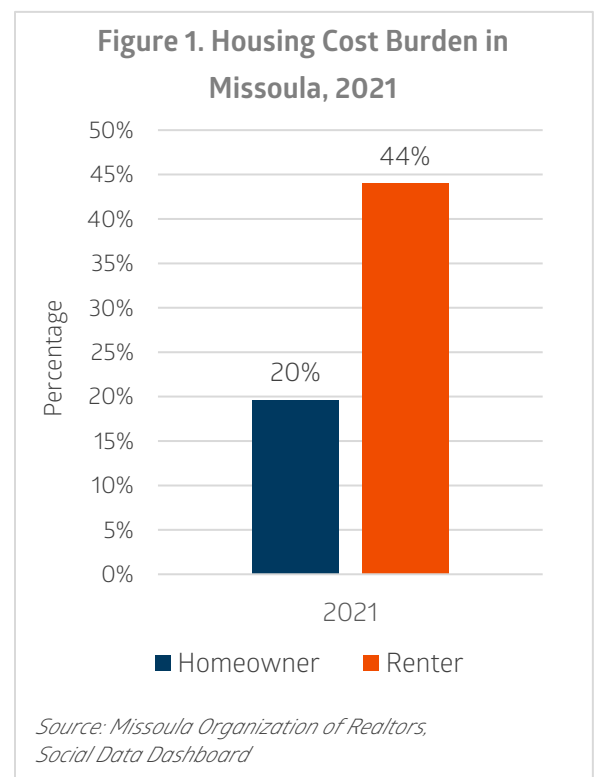
Poverty rates and reliance on some forms of public assistance increased with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021, 13.9% of residents were categorized as living in poverty, compared to 11.5% in 2019. Participation in the Supplemental Nutrition Program (SNAP) also increased sharply during this period, from 6.9% in 2019 to 10.9% in 2021, [xvi] but remained below the national rate of 12.5%.[xvii]

Houselessness is tied to the housing crisis and rising rates of poverty. As seen in Figure 2, the number of unhoused individuals receiving services from Missoula agencies and local non-profits peaked at 803 in February 2023. In this month, a disproportionate number of those unhoused and receiving services were persons of color, particularly Indigenous residents. **While Native American/Alaskan people make up 2.8% of the population in Missoula County, they made up 13% percent of the unhoused individuals receiving services. Black residents make up 0.5% of the population but comprise just under 4% of residents experiencing houselessness.**[xviii] Survey and interview data indicated that housing insecurity and the unhoused population are at the center of many people's safety concerns, and that unhoused individuals feel particularly vulnerable to victimization.

Figure 2. Clients Enrolled in Missoula's Homeless Management Information System

Source: Missoula Organization of Realtors, Social Data Dashboard
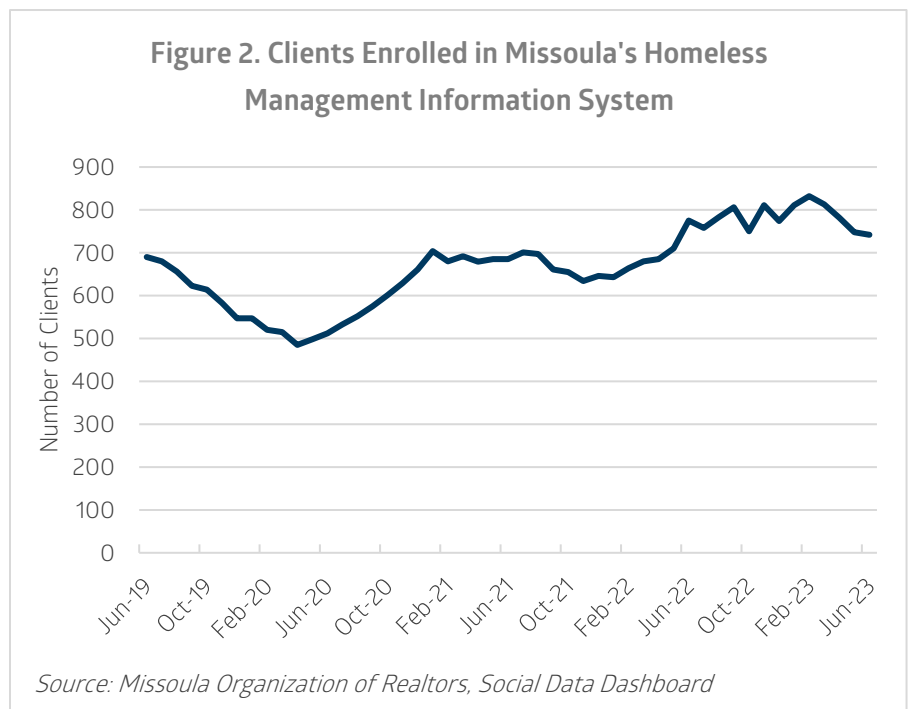
Local Criminal Legal System Reforms - Missoula County

In recent years, Missoula County has enacted reforms to enhance the safety of residents and address their concerns related to crime and the criminal legal system (see Figure 3).[xix] Many of Missoula's efforts aim to divert individuals away from the criminal legal system. For example, in 2019, the county implemented Calibrate, a prosecution-led diversion program that seeks to divert adults who do not have significant prior interaction with the criminal legal system out of the court process and into programming that can address the underlying causes of their law violating behavior. In addition, the Missoula Public Defender's Office provides a support specialist to assist Indigenous defendants with navigating the criminal legal system. In the fall of 2020, Missoula launched a Mobile Support Team to respond to low-risk behavioral health 911 calls with the goal of diverting individuals from jail and hospitals. In

response to the rising rates of substance use, Missoula County invested in several diversion courts, including ROAD (Responsibility, Opportunities, Accountability for Drivers) Court and SMART (Strategies in Maintaining Addiction Recovery and Treatment) Court. As of May 2023, ROAD Court had 39 graduates and diverted 1,014 days (approximately 3 years) of jail time.[xx]

Missoula County and the state legislature have taken additional steps to address jail overcrowding. In 2017, the Montana Legislature created the Pretrial Program, which established the use of evidence-based detention risk assessments and recommendations for supervising individuals who are released and awaiting trial. In 2017, state policymakers also enacted nine pieces of "justice reinvestment legislation" that contain policies designed to slow the growth of Montana's incarcerated population.[xxi] **Taken together, this legislation seeks to: limit the length of incarceration for people convicted of less serious violations; develop pretrial services programs and deferred prosecution programs; prioritize supervision resources (e.g., probation) for people who are most likely to reoffend; reduce penalties for specific nonviolent drug, property, and traffic offenses; and increase the quality of and access to community-based resources (e.g., housing, behavioral health care) for people returning to their communities after incarceration.** Spurred by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Missoula County Commission also adopted Resolution No. 2020-029 in 2020, which stated that the Missoula County Detention Center would no longer accept individuals charged with nonviolent misdemeanor offenses.[xxii]

Individuals we spoke with in Missoula indicated domestic violence is a serious concern. To help combat domestic violence, in 2017, strangulation was reclassified as a felony offense, which carries a term of imprisonment of up to five years for the first offense. Strangulation was targeted due to the potential lethality associated with this act and the belief that it is a precursor to intimate partner homicide.[xxiii] Still, some domestic violence survivors and criminal legal system actors that we interviewed indicated more needs to be done to address this issue. Another issue raised in interviews was Missing and Murdered Indigenous Persons (MMIP). According to the Montana Attorney General's Office, there were 3,254 unique individuals recorded as missing between 2017 - 2019, a quarter of whom identified as Native American.[xxiv] In response to this issue, legislation was enacted in 2021 that formed a Missing Indigenous Persons Task Force, created a missing persons database, and instituted a Missing Persons Review Committee. These measures were intended to facilitate the review of cold cases and to identify potential ways in which law enforcement can better address the issue of MMIP.

FIGURE 3. MISSOULA COUNTY REFORM TIMELINE

2015

The Missoula Police Department (MPD) implemented the requirements of its agreement with the DOJ to improve its response to reports of sexual assault

2017

State policymakers enact nine pieces of legislation—Senate Bills 59, 60, 62, 63, 64, 65, 67, Senate Resolution 3 and House Bill 133— that contain policies to slow the growth of Montana's correctional system

Strangulation becomes a felony under state law

The Montana legislature passes Senate Bill 29 that revises the definition of the word "consent" and eliminates the requirement that rape involve force

The Montana Legislature creates the Pretrial Program, which establishes the use of an evidence-based detention risk assessment and recommendations

2018

The Missoula Criminal Justice Coordinating Council (CCJC) is formed to address issues such as jail crowding, ethnic and racial disparities in the criminal justice system, the juvenile justice system, and pre-trial diversion

Justice and District Courts begin participating in the Montana Public Safety Assessment (PSA) Pilot Project, a pretrial risk assessment tool to be used by courts to assign release conditions and determine placement options

2019

Calibrate, a prosecutor-led pretrial diversion program, is established in Missoula to divert low-risk, first-time offenders from criminal charges

The Montana Legislature passes Senate Bill 52 to address the high number of sexual assault evidence kits that are never processed

The Responsibility, Opportunities and Accountability for Drivers (ROAD) Court begins to minimize alcohol or drug-related traffic offenses by holding participants accountable for their actions and addressing any chemical dependency and/or co-occurring issues

2020

Missoula County Commissioners adopts Resolution No. 2020-029, stating that the Missoula County Detention Center will not hold individuals who have been charged with non-violent misdemeanor offenses

Missoula's Mobile Support Team (MST) begins operations, a collaboration between the Missoula Fire Department and Partnership Health Center that provides emergency response for individuals in crisis

Justice Court and District Courts develop a standardized felony Conditions of Release Order to help defendants understand their conditions of release

2021

Resolution No. 2021-071 is adopted in Missoula, increasing judicial discretion over which defendants are admitted to the Missoula County Detention Center

Gov. Greg Gianforte signs two bipartisan bills to address the crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Persons in Montana

Gov. Greg Gianforte signs House Bill 553 into law, setting a 20-year limit on suspended sentences for sex offenders and those convicted of homicide

2022

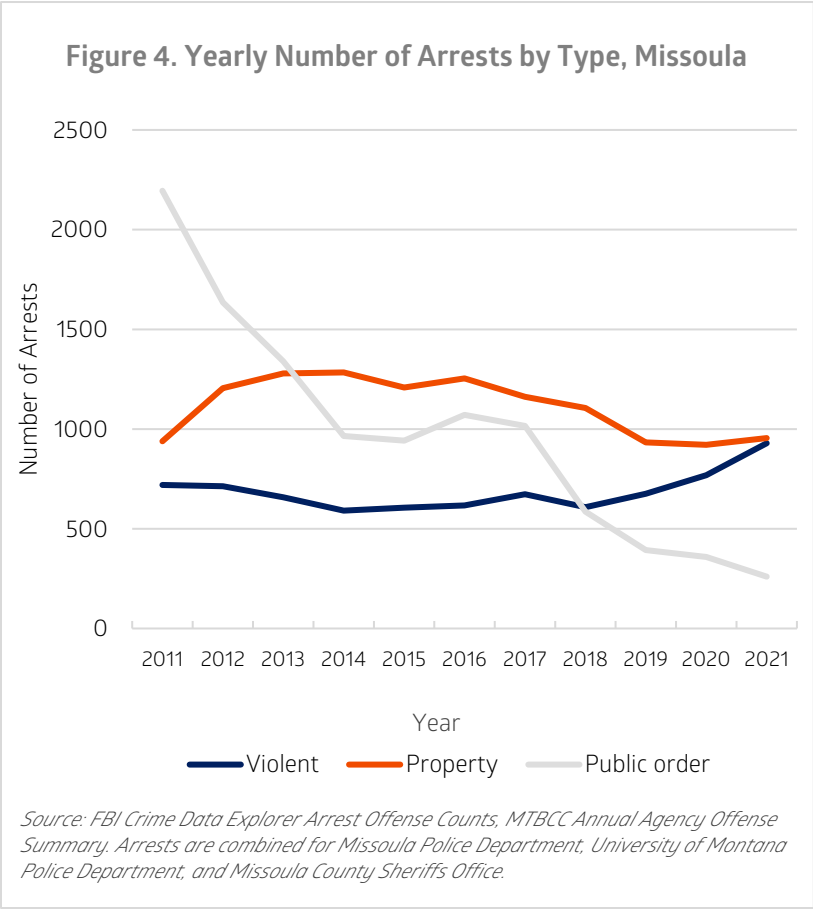The Missoula Crisis Intervention Team Program (CIT) is implemented as a full program to improve community responses to mental and behavioral health crises
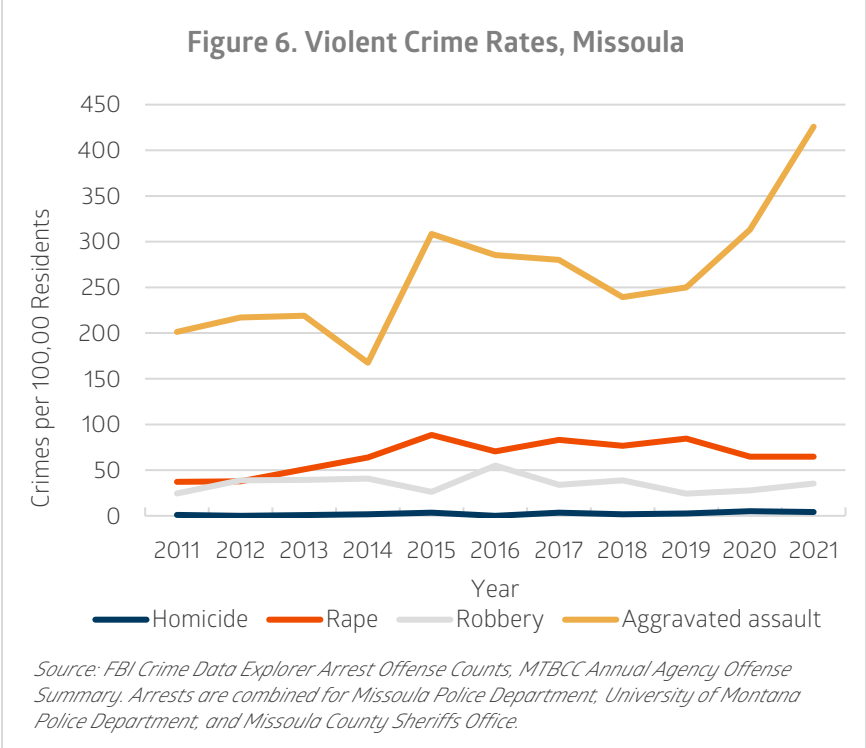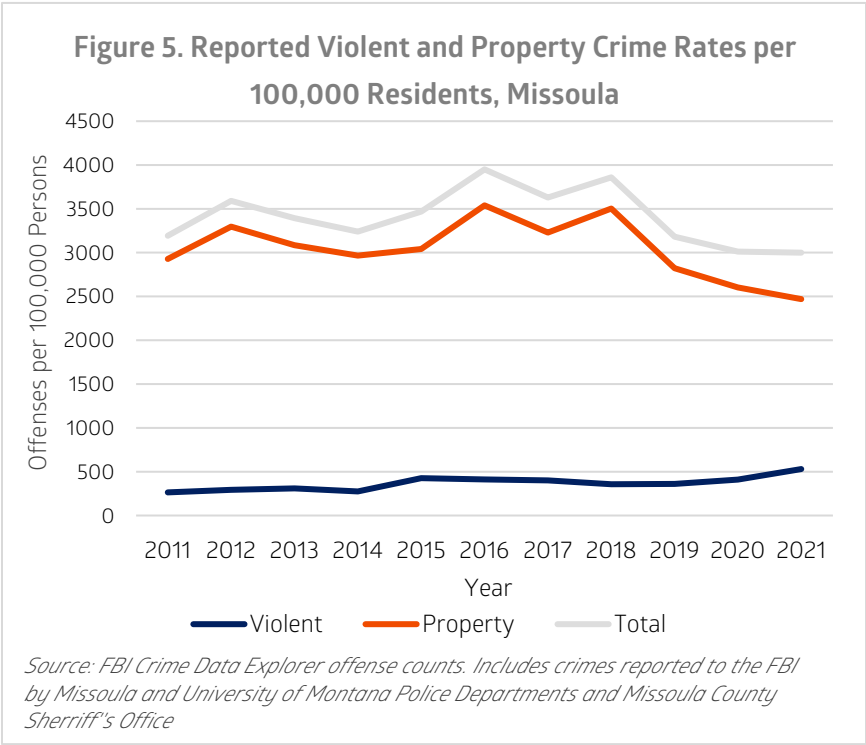
Arrest and Crime Trends - Missoula County

The results of these reform efforts can be seen in trends in arrests and jail populations. Over the last decade, arrests have declined by 48% in Missoula County. When broken up by crime type, much of this drop is attributed to an 88% decline in low-level, public-order arrests (see Figure 4).[xxv]

Over the past five years, the quarterly average daily population (ADP) housed in the Missoula County Detention Center has fluctuated.[xxvi] During the period with available data, the ADP was highest in September 2018, with an average of 209 individuals in jail on a given day. The ADP was lowest in April 2020 (106) during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although most detained individuals are White, Indigenous individuals are consistently overrepresented in the jail population. For example, in July of 2022, American Indian/Alaska Native individuals made up 20% of the average daily jail population in Missoula, even though they constitute only 2.8% of the county's total population. In July 2022, more than half of (52%) detained individuals were awaiting trial. While this percentage is high, it is lower than the national average of 71%.[xxvii]

Figure 4. Yearly Number of Arrests by Type, Missoula

Source: FBI Crime Data Explorer Arrest Offense Counts, MTBCC Annual Agency Offense Summary. Arrests are combined for Missoula Police Department, University of Montana Police Department, and Missoula County Sheriffs Office.

As displayed in Figure 5, overall rates of crime known to the police dropped in Missoula County, reaching a low of 3,000 reported offenses per 100,000 residents in 2021. Decreases in property crime, particularly larceny, drove this decline, while violent crime rates rose to a high of 530 per 100,000 in 2021,
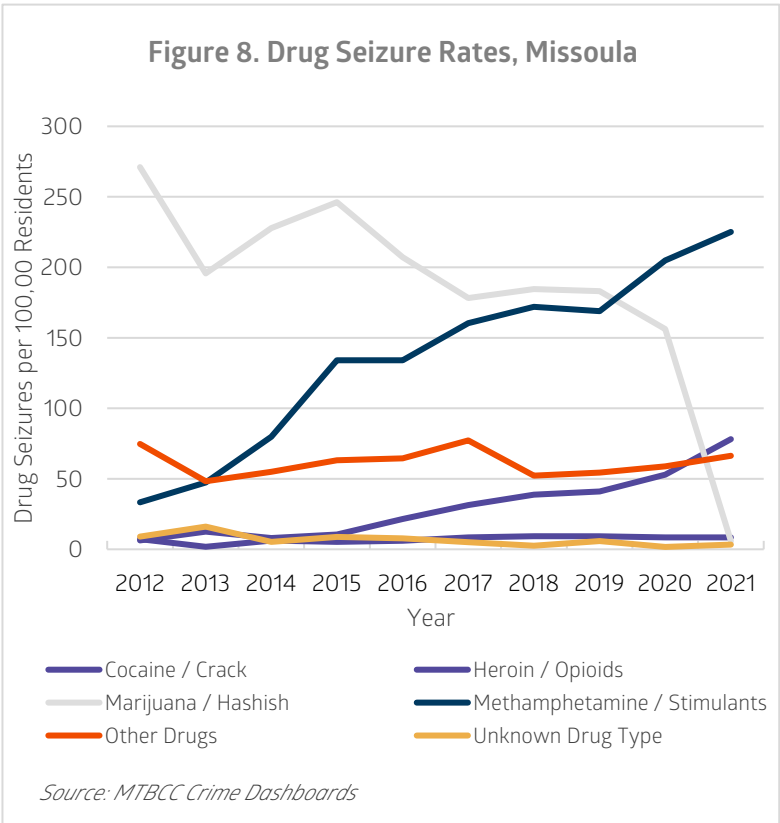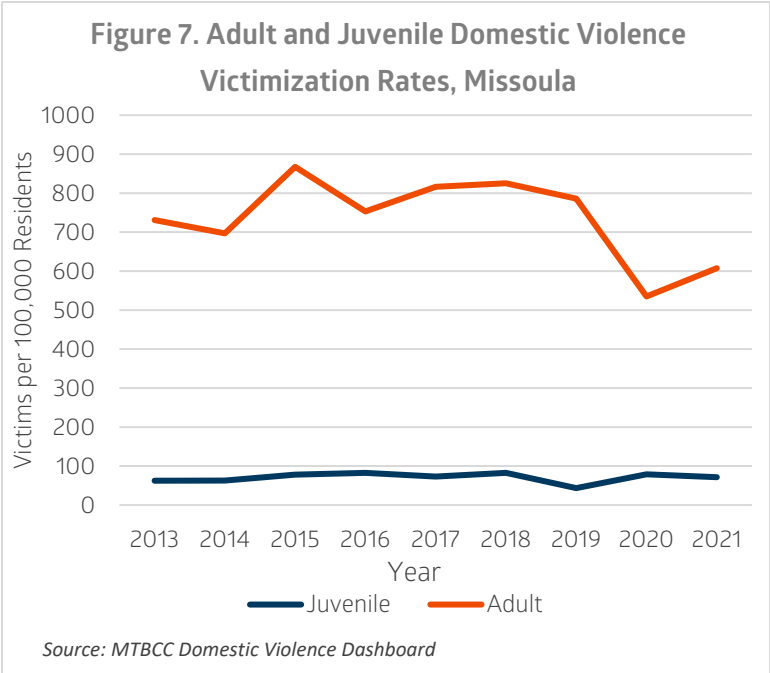
Reported aggravated assault rates remained high and experienced a notable increase, rising 154% from a low of 168 per 100,000 in 2014 to 426 in 2021 (see Figure 6). Homicide rates also climbed from 2019 to 2021, but these crimes remained infrequent (4 per 100,000). Rates of rape fluctuated over time as well; these peaked in 2015 at 89 per 100,000 and then fell to 65 per 100,000 in 2021. Domestic violence is a persistent issue in Missoula County. Adult domestic violence victimization rates have fallen since 2012 but remain elevated, while juvenile domestic violence victimization rates remained stable (see Figure 7). In 2022, the Montana Board of Crime Control reported 743 domestic violence-related victimizations in Missoula County, highlighting the ongoing prevalence of this issue. Notably, despite American Indians making up less than 3% of the county's population, they accounted for almost 10% of domestic violence victims.

Figure 5. Reported Violent and Property Crime Rates per 100,000 Residents, Missoula

Source: FBI Crime Data Explorer offense counts. Includes crimes reported to the FBI by Missoula and University of Montana Police Departments and Missoula County Sherriff's Office

Figure 6. Violent Crime Rates, Missoula

Source: FBI Crime Data Explorer Arrest Offense Counts, MTBCC Annual Agency Offense Summary. Arrests are combined for Missoula Police Department, University of Montana Police Department, and Missoula County Sheriffs Office.

Like many other areas across the US, Missoula County has faced an ongoing drug epidemic. As shown in Figure 8, both heroin/opioid and methamphetamine seizures steadily increased over the last 10 years. **From 2019 to 2021, there was a 91% increase in the rate of opioid drug seizures (from 41 to 78 per 100,000) and a 33% increase in methamphetamine seizures (from 169 to 225 per 100,000).**[xxviii]
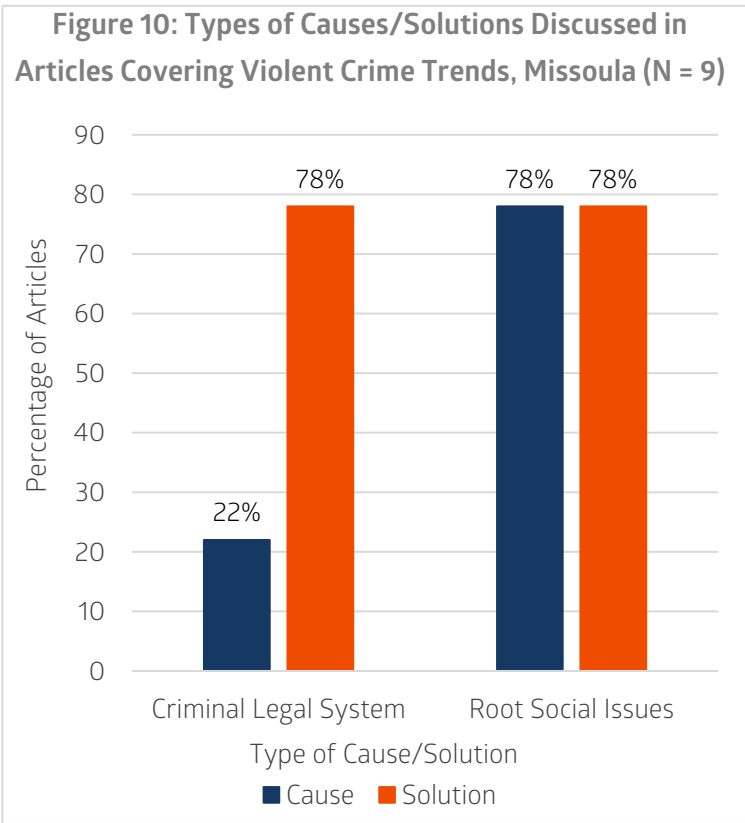
Media Depictions of Crime Trends – Missoula County

The media plays a significant role in shaping how people think about crime, including its nature, its causes, and potential solutions.[xxix] An examination of 39 articles spanning five years of crime trend coverage (2017–2021) from *The Missoulian* indicates **drug-related crime was the most common type of trend covered, and most of the 14 stories on this issue described it as an increasing (11) or persistent problem (3)**. [xxx] This coverage of drug-related crime corresponds with the significant rise in seizures of methamphetamines and heroin/opioids as reported in law enforcement data for this period (see Figure 8). Violence and homicide were the next most prevalent crime trends covered by *The Missoulian*. All nine of the articles that covered increases in serious violent crime and/or homicide framed these as increasing or persistent problems.[xxxi] Although serious property crime dropped from year-to-year after 2018 (see Figure 5), none of the articles discussed this declining trend.[xxxii]

Figure 7. Adult and Juvenile Domestic Violence Victimization Rates, Missoula

Source: MTBCC Domestic Violence Dashboard

Figure 8. Drug Seizure Rates, Missoula

Source: MTBCC Crime Dashboards

How an issue is framed depends, in part, on whose viewpoints are represented in the media. The groups most often quoted in articles discussing crime trends were those of government actors, primarily representatives of the courts and law enforcement, who each appeared in 41% of the articles, followed by elected officials (31%) and government representatives (23%) (see Figure 9).[xxxiii] Among those directly or indirectly impacted by crime, victims were most likely to be quoted (18%), followed by indirectly impacted person (8%), such as a victim's family member or an impacted member of the community. The perspectives of people impacted by crime were often shared via service providers and advocacy groups. Quotes by system-impacted individuals were rare and only appeared in 3% of articles.[xxxiv]
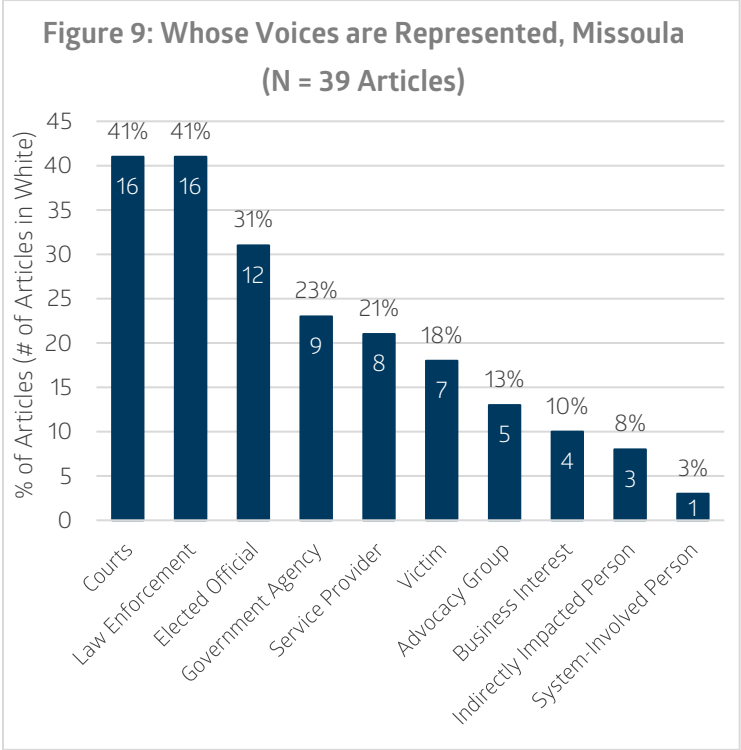
Violent crime rates in Missoula increased sharply after 2019 (see Figure 5). To understand how discussions of increasing and persistent violence are framed, we identified the causes and proposed solutions described in the subset of nine articles covering increasing violence and/or homicide. Causes and solutions were classified depending on whether they were related to 1) root social issues or 2) the criminal legal system. As displayed in Figure 10, **root social causes were most often described as driving the increase in violence, appearing in seven of the nine articles. Most frequently mentioned were substance use and mental health issues**, which appeared in four of the nine articles. Other root causes discussed less often included unemployment, housing issues, untreated trauma, poverty, and inequality. In contrast, **the criminal legal system was portrayed as contributing to increases in violence in just two articles**.

Figure 9: Whose Voices are Represented, Missoula (N = 39 Articles)

Figure 10: Types of Causes/Solutions Discussed in Articles Covering Violent Crime Trends, Missoula (N = 9)

Although the discussions of causes skewed more heavily toward root social issues than criminal legal system interventions, the two types of strategies were equally prevalent in discussions of solutions, each appearing in seven of the nine articles. For root social issues, the most common types of solutions discussed were interventions intended to address mental health issues and substance use, which were featured in five articles. Solutions related to the criminal legal system primarily focused on better coordination among agencies, which appeared in four articles.

LOCAL CONTEXT - ST. LOUIS COUNTY

St. Louis County is Missouri's most populous county. According to the US Census, the population was 990,414 in 2022. Over two-thirds of the population in St. Louis identify as white (67%), while Black residents make up about a quarter of the population (25.1%), followed by small percentages of Asian (5%) and Hispanic (3%) residents.[xxxv] Poverty rates and reliance on public assistance remained relatively stable over the past five years, and in 2021, approximately 10% of households were categorized as living in poverty.

St. Louis County borders the City of St. Louis, and many people travel between the county and city daily. Therefore, the city and county have overlapping safety-related issues that can be difficult to disentangle, particularly for people who live in the suburbs that border the city. In addition to the fluid nature of the city-county divide, St. Louis County itself is characterized by a high level of fragmentation. There are 88 municipalities in St. Louis County and 53 independent police agencies or policing collaboratives that rely on 15 different dispatch services to handle 911 calls.[xxxvi] Many of these dispatch centers are understaffed, and long wait times have been reported by people seeking assistance.[xxxvii] A Department of Justice Investigation following the police killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, a municipality in St. Louis County, described how some local police agencies used aggressive enforcement practices to generate funds through criminal legal system fines and fees.[xxxviii] These practices disproportionately harmed people of color and cultivated a mistrust of local law enforcement. There is evidence that these practices continue today, despite some reforms.[xxxix]

Figure 11. St. Louis County Region Jail Admissions in 2019 by Zip Code

SOURCE: St. Louis County Department of Justice Services, US Census, NaturalEarth
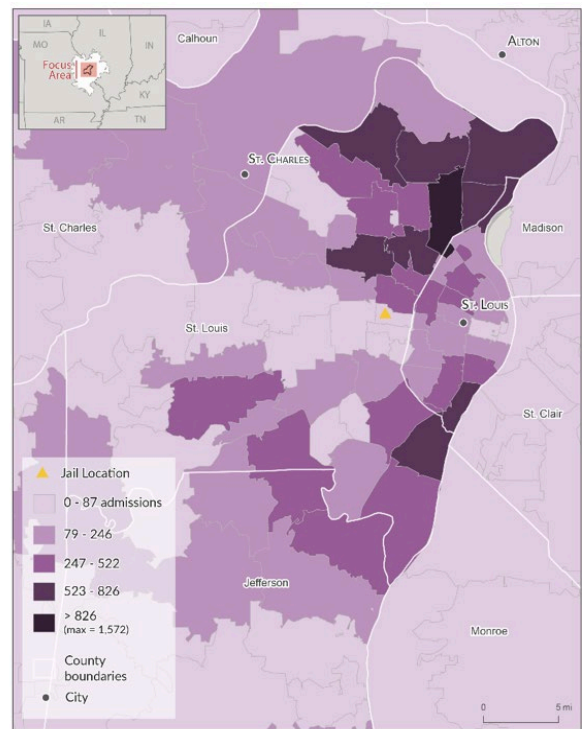
St. Louis County is racially segregated, with a higher population of Black individuals living in the northern part of the county, an area that has faced historic disinvestment. Crime rates tend to be higher in North County, and residents are disproportionately affected by the criminal legal system. [xl] Admissions in 2019 to the St. Louis County Justice Center jail by zip code highlight the disproportionate impact of the criminal legal system on individuals in North County. Figure 11 shows 2019 admissions to the St. Louis County Justice Center jail by zip code. In total, 68% of admissions (13,711) were for individuals living in St. Louis County, while 26.7% (5,398) were for persons who resided in the City of St. Louis. The northern part of St. Louis County accounted for the greatest number of admissions. Five zip codes in the north (63136, 63125, 63033, 63114, and 63138) each had over 700 admissions to the jail, making up about one-quarter (23.8%) of the admissions within the region.[xli]

There are also racial disparities in the St. Louis County Jail population. The jail population has been trending downwards over the past five years but has recently increased post-pandemic. Black persons continue to make up a disproportionate share, and in 2022, they represented 72% of those detained.[xlii] People being held pretrial are a key driver of the county jail population. In July 2022, 95% of the people detained in jail were awaiting trial.

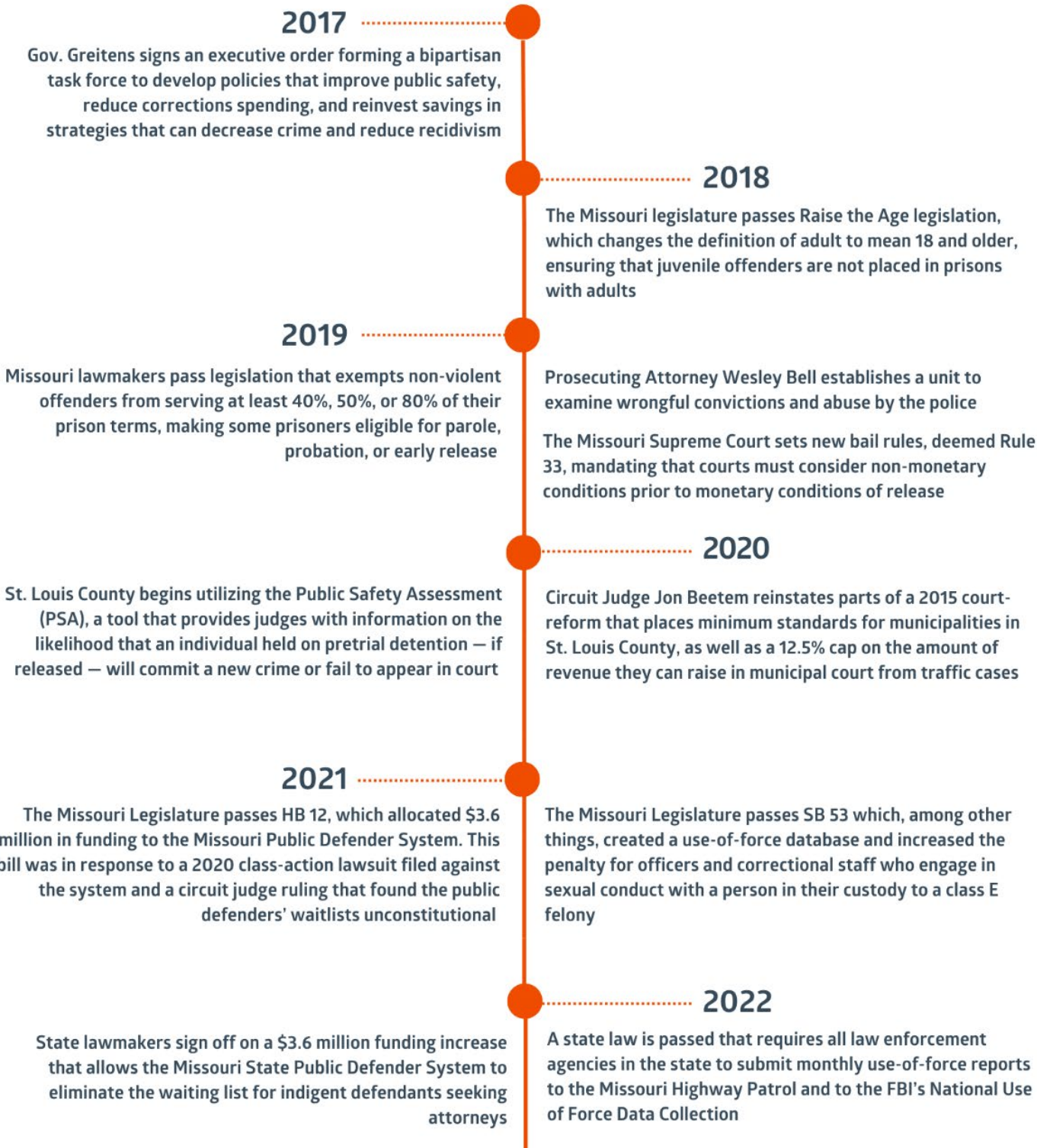## Policy Context – St. Louis County

In recent years, legislators and policymakers in the State of Missouri and the St. Louis County region enacted reforms to enhance the safety of residents and address their concerns related to crime and the criminal legal system (see Figure 12). Several of these policy changes focused on reducing spending on corrections, given that Missouri consistently has one of the highest incarceration rates nationally.[xliii] In 2017, the Governor enacted legislation to develop a policy around justice reinvestment with the goal of reducing the local prison populations and using these funds to enhance supportive services for those on parole. This Justice Reinvestment initiative led to policies that allow for a reduced length of community supervision for positive behaviors, revised parole protocols, and enhanced treatment.[xliv] As part of these reforms, the state also raised the age for incarceration in adult facilities to 18,[xlv] and there were revisions to mandatory sentences for nonviolent offenses.[xlvi]

In addition, the Missouri Supreme Court set new bail rules (Rule 33) in 2019 and 2020 that made changes to pretrial detention.[xlvii] Under the new rules, the court may not order an individual to pay any portion of the costs of any release conditions without first considering how to minimize or waive these costs.[xlviii] The state enhanced public funding for the Missouri State Public Defender system, allocating an additional 3.6 million in funding in 2021, with additional funding provided in 2022.[xlix]

Many recent efforts to enhance public safety were developed with funding from the MacArthur Foundation through the county's participation in the Safety in Justice Challenge. For example, the county began an interdepartmental jail population review team to guide local criminal legal system policy reform efforts.[l] The county subsequently implemented several strategies to safely reduce its jail population, including enhancing its pretrial release program, providing early representation to individuals at first appearance, expediting cases for probation violations, and expanding the use of treatment courts. In addition, the "Bail Project St. Louis" began providing bail assistance and pretrial support to detained individuals in St. Louis County in 2018.[li]

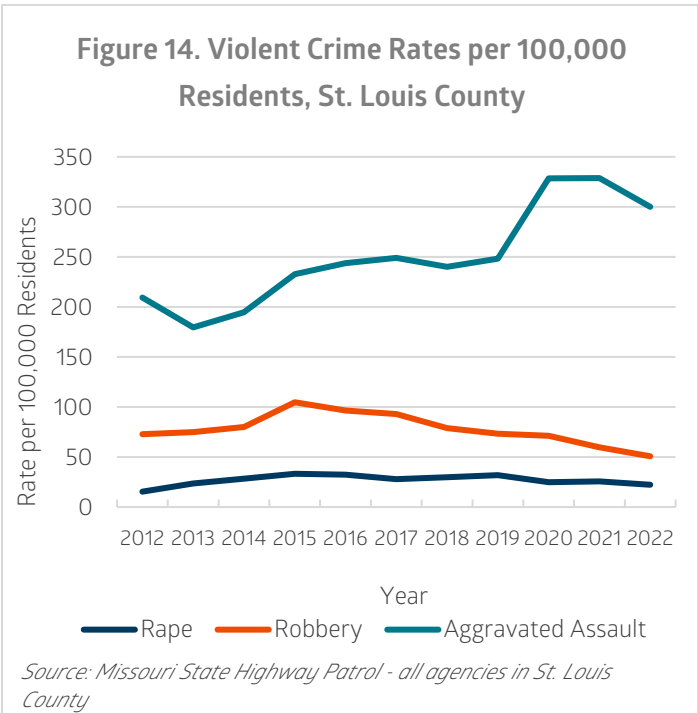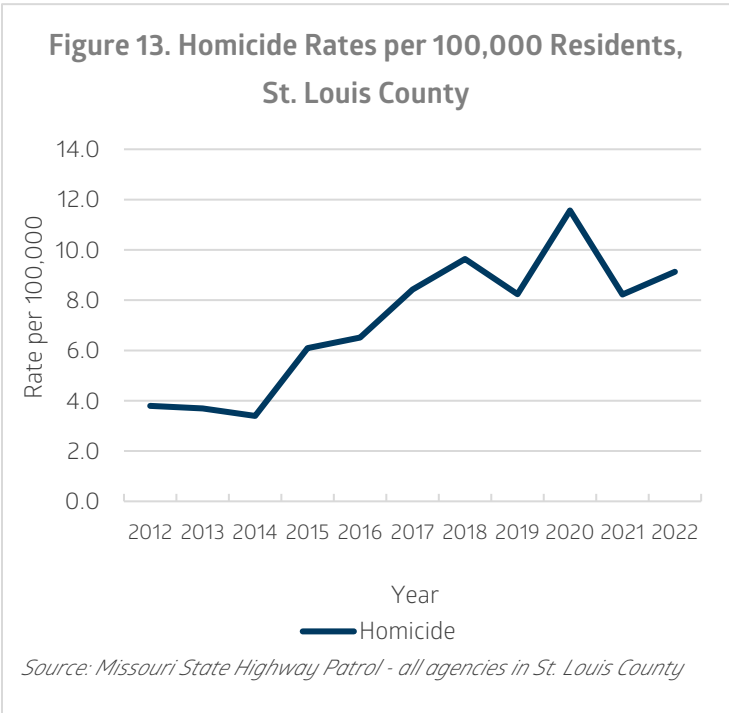In 2019, county residents elected Wesley Bell as the new Prosecuting Attorney. He has been touted by many as a progressive prosecutor, and he ran on a platform to reduce mass incarceration. [lii] While in office, Bell developed a unit to investigate wrongful convictions and police abuse. At the state level, in 2021 and 2022, legislation was passed that mandated law enforcement agencies provide data on use-of-force incidents.

FIGURE 12. ST. LOUIS COUNTY REFORM TIMELINE

2017
Gov. Greitens signs an executive order forming a bipartisan task force to develop policies that improve public safety, reduce corrections spending, and reinvest savings in strategies that can decrease crime and reduce recidivism

2018
The Missouri legislature passes Raise the Age legislation, which changes the definition of adult to mean 18 and older, ensuring that juvenile offenders are not placed in prisons with adults

2019
Missouri lawmakers pass legislation that exempts non-violent offenders from serving at least 40%, 50%, or 80% of their prison terms, making some prisoners eligible for parole, probation, or early release

Prosecuting Attorney Wesley Bell establishes a unit to examine wrongful convictions and abuse by the police

The Missouri Supreme Court sets new bail rules, deemed Rule 33, mandating that courts must consider non-monetary conditions prior to monetary conditions of release

2020
St. Louis County begins utilizing the Public Safety Assessment (PSA), a tool that provides judges with information on the likelihood that an individual held on pretrial detention — if released — will commit a new crime or fail to appear in court

Circuit Judge Jon Beetem reinstates parts of a 2015 court-reform that places minimum standards for municipalities in St. Louis County, as well as a 12.5% cap on the amount of revenue they can raise in municipal court from traffic cases

2021
The Missouri Legislature passes HB 12, which allocated $3.6 million in funding to the Missouri Public Defender System. This bill was in response to a 2020 class-action lawsuit filed against the system and a circuit judge ruling that found the public defenders' waitlists unconstitutional

The Missouri Legislature passes SB 53 which, among other things, created a use-of-force database and increased the penalty for officers and correctional staff who engage in sexual conduct with a person in their custody to a class E felony

2022
State lawmakers sign off on a $3.6 million funding increase that allows the Missouri State Public Defender System to eliminate the waiting list for indigent defendants seeking attorneys

A state law is passed that requires all law enforcement agencies in the state to submit monthly use-of-force reports to the Missouri Highway Patrol and to the FBI's National Use of Force Data Collection
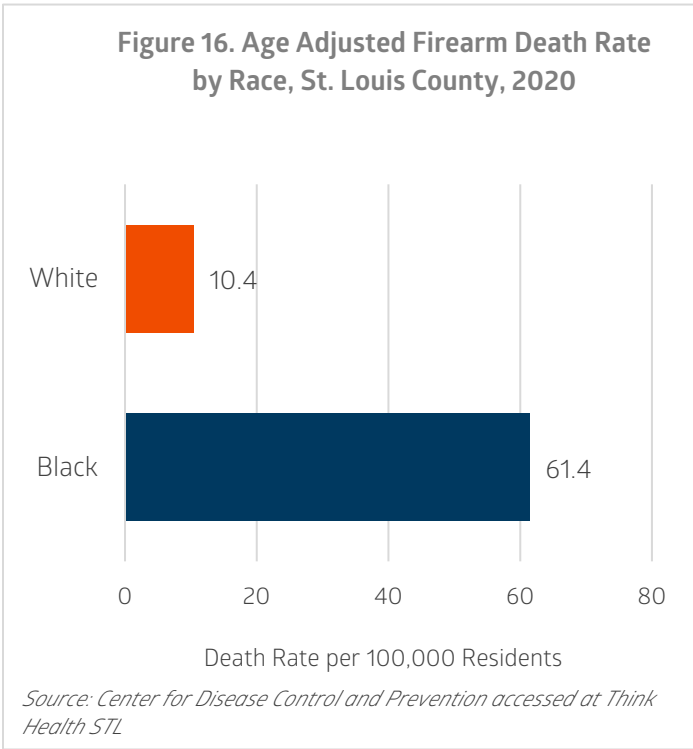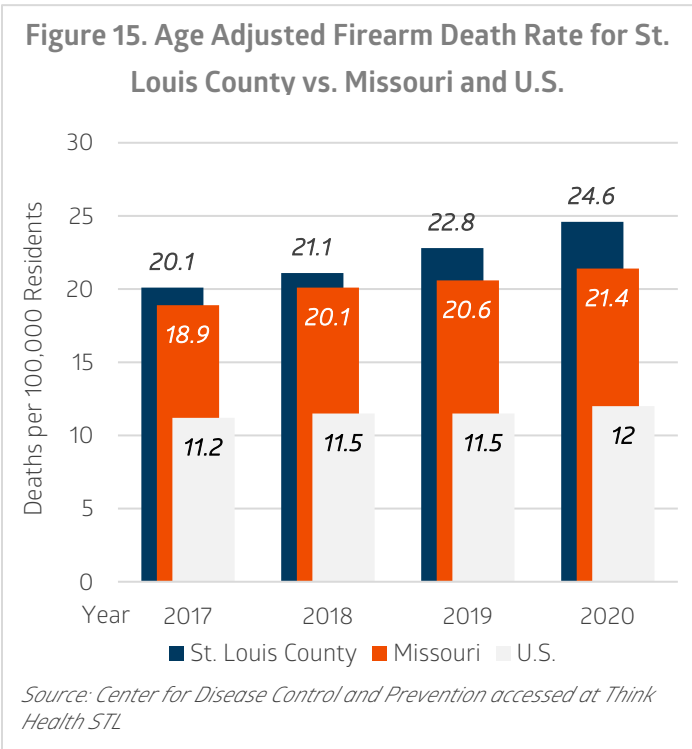
Crime Trends – St. Louis County

Violence is a significant concern for the people who live and work in St. Louis County. Over the past decade, the homicide rate in St. Louis County rose steadily (Figure 13). There was a sharp uptick in murders from 2019-2020 (from 8.2 homicides per 100,000 residents to 11.6) that coincided with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The homicide rate dropped after 2020 but remained elevated compared to a decade ago. Like homicides, reported aggravated assault rates climbed over the last ten years, and they also rose sharply after the onset of the pandemic in 2019 (Figure 14). Other violent crimes fluctuated (rape) or declined (robbery).

Figure 13. Homicide Rates per 100,000 Residents, St. Louis County

Source: Missouri State Highway Patrol - all agencies in St. Louis County

Figure 14. Violent Crime Rates per 100,000 Residents, St. Louis County

Source: Missouri State Highway Patrol - all agencies in St. Louis County

In the St. Louis region, gun violence is perceived to be a significant problem. The 3-year average age-adjusted firearm-related death rate, which includes homicides as well as suicides and accidental shootings, increased in recent years from 20.1 per 100,000 residents in 2017 to 24.6 in 2020 (see Figure 15).[liii] The St. Louis County 2020 firearm death rate was slightly higher than that observed for Missouri (21.4), but more than double the national rate of 12 per 100,000. Race differences in firearm-related deaths are stark: In 2020, for every one white person whose death involved a firearm, six Black individuals were killed with a gun (see Figure 16).

Figure 15. Age Adjusted Firearm Death Rate for St. Louis County vs. Missouri and U.S.

Source: Center for Disease Control and Prevention accessed at Think Health STL

Figure 16. Age Adjusted Firearm Death Rate by Race, St. Louis County, 2020

Source: Center for Disease Control and Prevention accessed at Think Health STL

Media Depictions of Crime Trends – St. Louis County

To describe media narratives on crime and violence in St. Louis County, we examined 42 articles spanning five years of crime trend coverage (2017–2021) from *The St. Louis American* and the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. [liv] Findings indicate that serious violent crime and homicides were the most common trends covered. There were 29 articles that covered violence or homicide, and all but 4 **framed it as persistent or increasing**. Most of these articles were published in 2017, when homicide rates were increasing (see Figure 13).

As in Missoula County, t**he groups most often quoted in crime trend coverage were government actors, primarily law enforcement (76%) and elected officials (48%)** (see Figure 17). Business leaders or representatives appeared in more than one-quarter (29%) of articles, and researchers were quoted in 17% of stories. People indirectly impacted by crime, like community members and family members of victims, appeared in 31% of articles, but **victims were quoted less frequently (12%), and no quotes were attributed to system-impacted individuals**. The perspectives of people impacted by crime were often shared via advocacy groups or service providers, with each of these groups quoted in more than a quarter of articles. [lv]

We took a deeper dive into the causes and proposed solutions described in the subset of 25 articles that covered increasing violence and/or homicide. Six categories of causes and solutions were identified: 1) root social issues; 2) criminal legal system; 3) gun-related; 4) technology/social media; 5) community assistance; and 6) target accessibility (i.e., target hardening). As displayed in Figure 18, **increasing and persistent violence was most often attributed to**

failings of the criminal legal system (12 articles), particularly lack of police enforcement or resources, which was discussed in 9 articles. Root social issues were identified as causes less frequently (8 articles), and these most often discussed the pandemic, substance use/mental health issues, and a failure to meet people's basic needs (e.g., poverty/inequality, housing) (appearing in 3 articles each). Other factors identified as contributing to violence, but less frequently, were gun-related issues (3 articles), such as access to guns, and social media (1 article).

Solutions for combating violence most frequently involved the criminal legal system (23 articles) and included things like increasing police resources/enforcement (17 articles), enhancing coordination among agencies (12 articles), improving police-community relations (9 articles), and changing police tactics (6 articles). Although less prevalent (appearing in 13 articles), solutions that focused on addressing social causes were most likely to discuss interventions intended to address mental health issues and substance use and help ensure people have their basic needs met (5 articles each).[lvi] Despite the significance of gun violence in the region, discussions of firearm-related solutions were relatively rare. Other solutions that were discussed include utilizing technology such as a gunshot detection system, requesting help from the community, and target hardening strategies intended to prevent victimization by changing behaviors or adding security. A more detailed analysis of

Figure 17: Whose Voices are Represented, St. Louis County (N = 42 Articles)

Figure 18. Prevalence of Different Causes and Solutions in Articles on Increasing Violence, St. Louis County (N = 25)
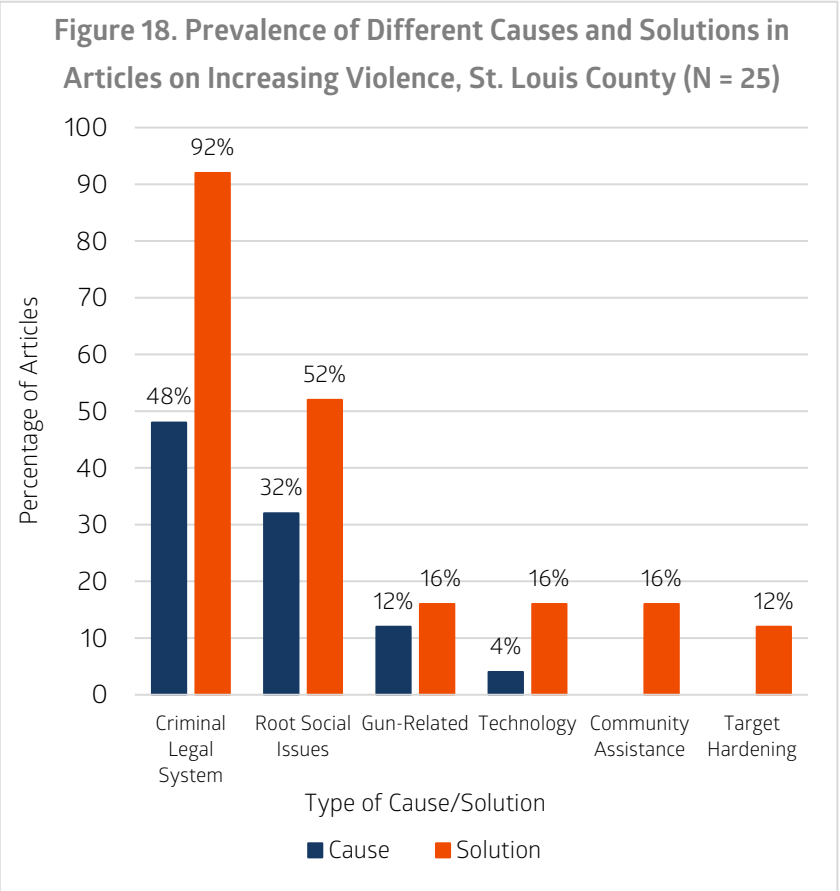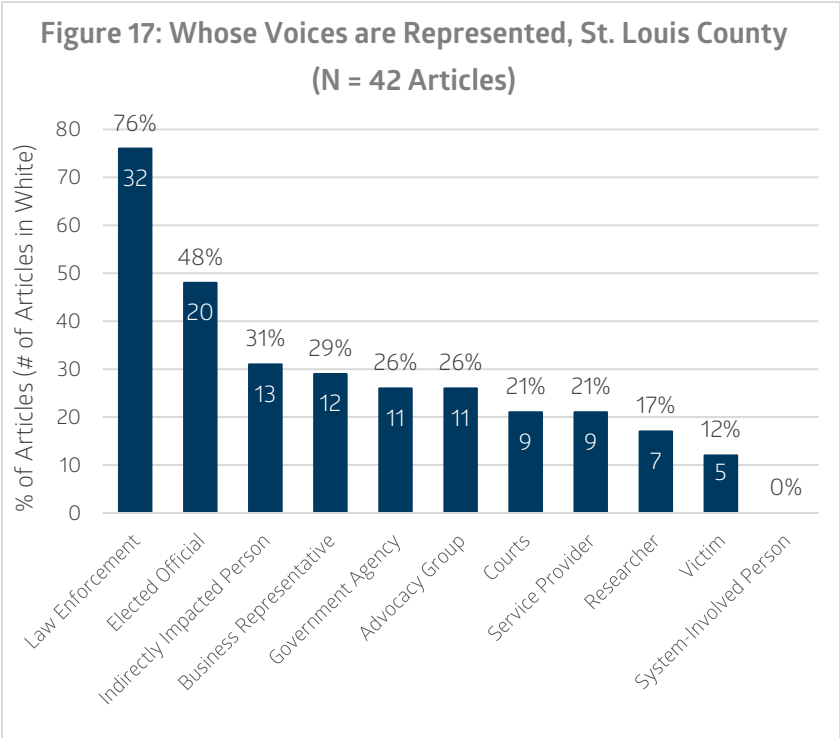
the media narratives on crime trends can be found in the accompanying publication, "Media Narratives on Increasing Violence in St. Louis County, Missouri."

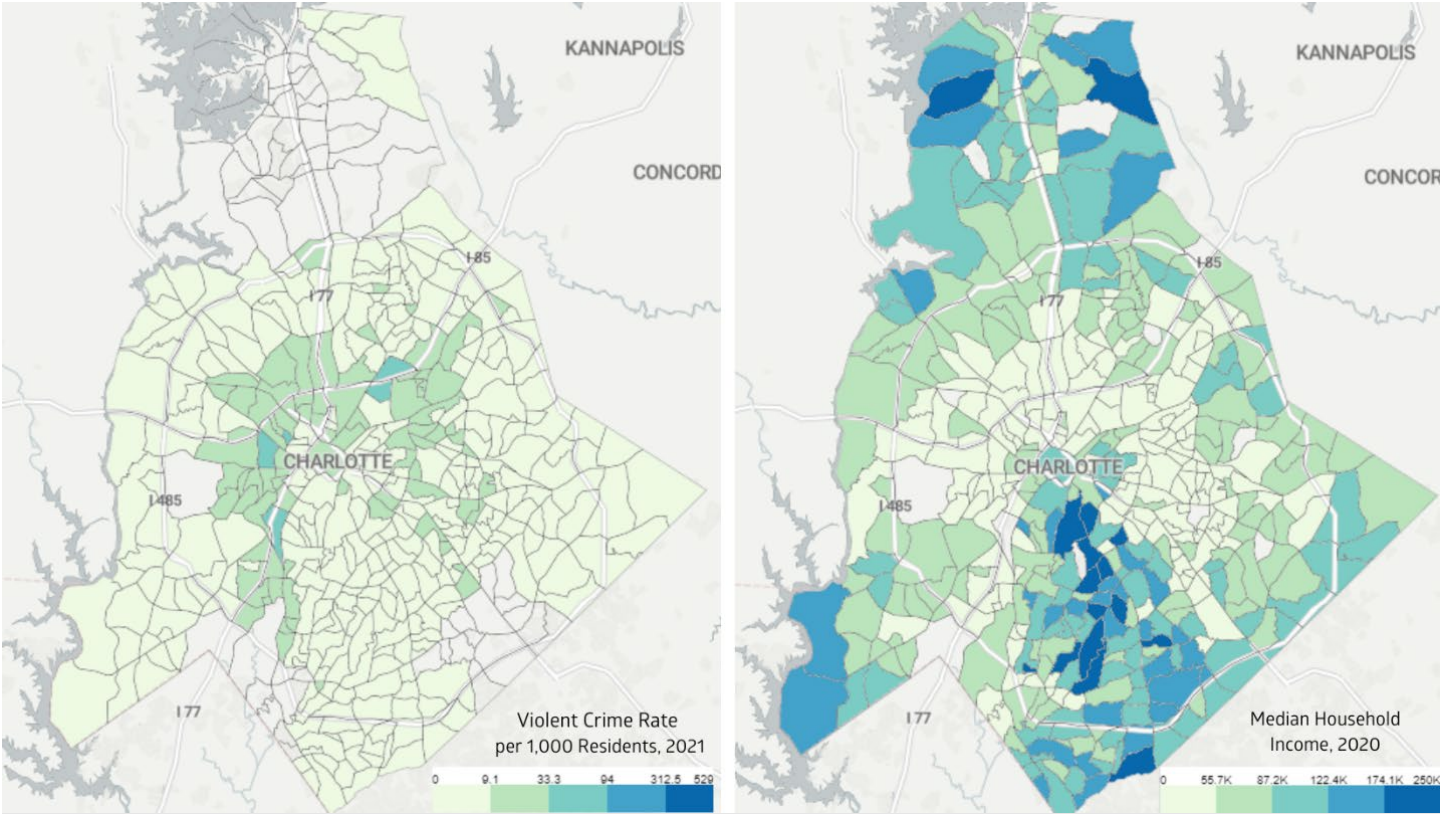# LOCAL CONTEXT – MECKLENBURG COUNTY

Mecklenburg is North Carolina's second-most populous county, and it continues to increase in population. According to the U.S. Census, the population grew from 923,427 in 2010 to 1,122,276 in 2021, a 22% increase.[lvii] More than half (56.6%) of the residents are white, while Black residents make up about a third of the population (33.3%), followed by Hispanic (14.4%) and Asian (6.5%) residents.[lviii]

Like in Missoula, housing prices and rental prices in Mecklenburg County have rapidly increased, creating an unstable housing market. While the unadjusted median household income in Mecklenburg rose slightly over the past five years, from $65,588 in 2017 to $74,890 in 2021, median home values jumped more sharply, increasing from $234,100 to $335,100.[lix] Rental costs also rose in Mecklenburg County. In 2021, the median monthly rent paid by individual renters in Mecklenburg was $1,328, up from $1,099 in 2017. [lx]

The housing crisis exacerbated housing instability and houselessness. Information from a point-in-time survey from the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Housing and Homelessness Dashboard indicated there were 2,624 individuals experiencing houselessness on January 31, 2022.[lxi] Individuals who identify as Black or African American are disproportionately represented among the unhoused population, with more than three-quarters (76%) of houseless individuals identifying as Black and 14% as white. Poverty rates and reliance on some forms of public assistance in Charlotte-Mecklenburg remained stable over the past five years. In 2021, 13.4% of households had incomes below the poverty line, and 9.2% participated in the Supplemental Nutrition Program (SNAP).[lxii]

The terms "Wedge" and "Crescent" are commonly used to describe distinct geographic regions of Mecklenburg County characterized by disparities in socioeconomic status, rates of violent crime, and racial demographics. The "Wedge" refers to the affluent, primarily white, southern area of Charlotte, while the "Crescent" encompasses the eastern, western, and northern regions predominantly comprised of Black communities that have suffered from disinvestment and have a higher concentration of low-income households and crime.[lxiii] Figure 19, which displays rates of violent crime (left panel) and median household income (right panel), shows the geographic overlap between rates of violence and economic disadvantage in the "Crescent" area of the county.[lxiv] Recently, this entrenched pattern has begun to shift, and rising living costs have led to the displacement of long-term residents from historically black neighborhoods. [lxv] Simultaneously, the suburban "Wedge" region is growing more diverse, particularly as Hispanic and immigrant populations settle in this area.[lxvi]

Figure 19. Violent Crime Rate (2021) and Median Household Income (2020) for Neighborhoods in Mecklenburg County
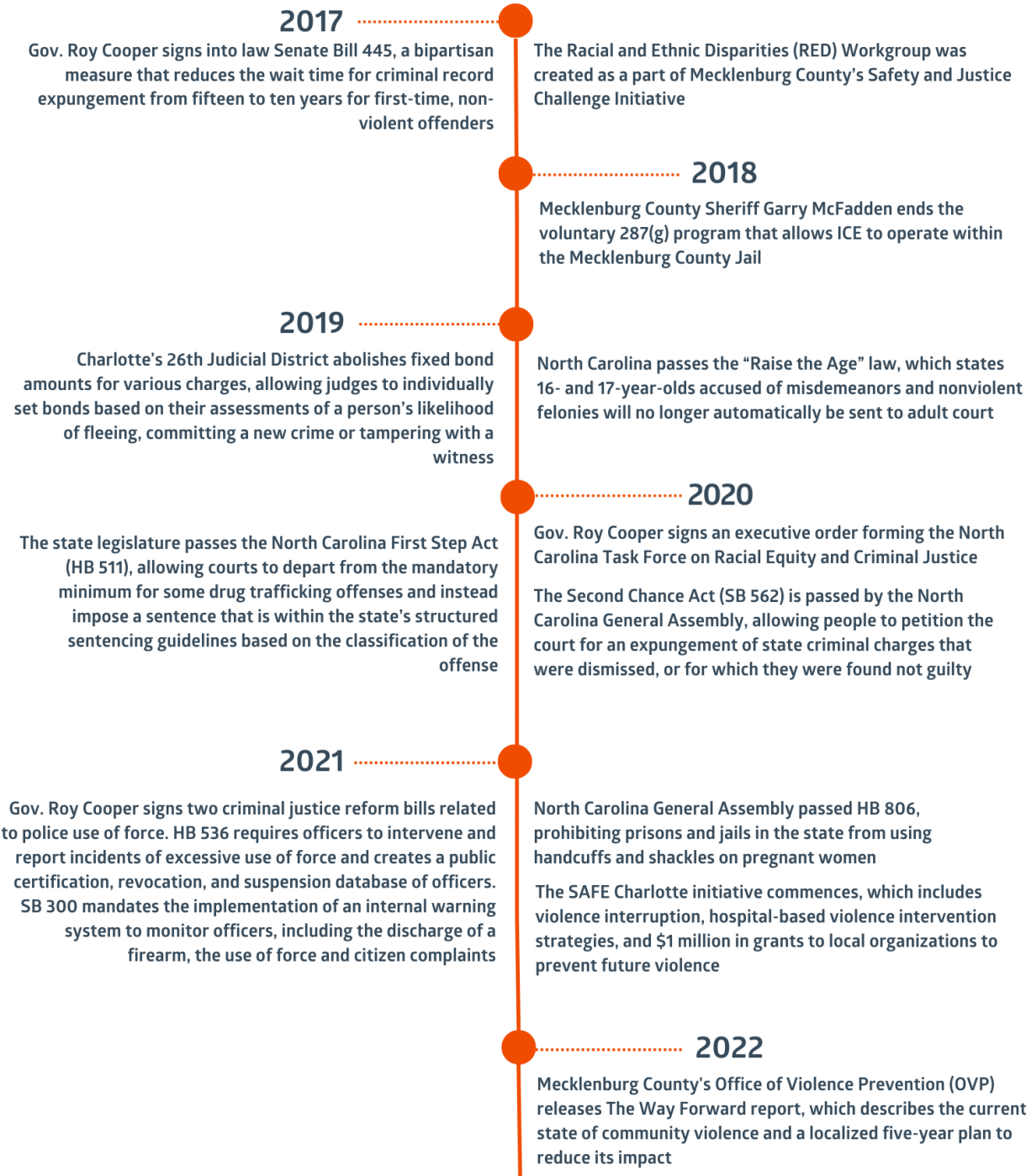

Crime and Criminal Legal System Context – Mecklenburg County

In recent years, Mecklenburg County has implemented several criminal legal system reforms, ranging from addressing police use of force to implementing new violence prevention programs (see Figure 20).

Court Reform

Many criminal legal system reform efforts in Mecklenburg were aimed at the courts. For example, the North Carolina legislature passed the "Raise the Age" law in 2019 so that 16- and 17-year-olds accused of misdemeanors and nonviolent felonies are no longer automatically referred to adult court. Another 2019 state law targeted bail reform and requires all defendants except those charged with capital offenses to be released without paying money while they await trial unless they pose a risk of flight or committing another crime. The North Carolina Senate also passed the First Step Act in June 2020, which provides judges more discretion when sentencing certain types of drug-related offenses (rather than impose mandatory minimums) and allows some individuals incarcerated for drug crimes to request reduced sentences.

FIGURE 20. MECKLENBURG COUNTY REFORM TIMELINE

2017

Gov. Roy Cooper signs into law Senate Bill 445, a bipartisan measure that reduces the wait time for criminal record expungement from fifteen to ten years for first-time, non-violent offenders

The Racial and Ethnic Disparities (RED) Workgroup was created as a part of Mecklenburg County's Safety and Justice Challenge Initiative

2018

Mecklenburg County Sheriff Garry McFadden ends the voluntary 287(g) program that allows ICE to operate within the Mecklenburg County Jail

2019

Charlotte's 26th Judicial District abolishes fixed bond amounts for various charges, allowing judges to individually set bonds based on their assessments of a person's likelihood of fleeing, committing a new crime or tampering with a witness

North Carolina passes the "Raise the Age" law, which states 16- and 17-year-olds accused of misdemeanors and nonviolent felonies will no longer automatically be sent to adult court

2020

Gov. Roy Cooper signs an executive order forming the North Carolina Task Force on Racial Equity and Criminal Justice

The Second Chance Act (SB 562) is passed by the North Carolina General Assembly, allowing people to petition the court for an expungement of state criminal charges that were dismissed, or for which they were found not guilty

The state legislature passes the North Carolina First Step Act (HB 511), allowing courts to depart from the mandatory minimum for some drug trafficking offenses and instead impose a sentence that is within the state's structured sentencing guidelines based on the classification of the offense

2021

Gov. Roy Cooper signs two criminal justice reform bills related to police use of force. HB 536 requires officers to intervene and report incidents of excessive use of force and creates a public certification, revocation, and suspension database of officers. SB 300 mandates the implementation of an internal warning system to monitor officers, including the discharge of a firearm, the use of force and citizen complaints

North Carolina General Assembly passed HB 806, prohibiting prisons and jails in the state from using handcuffs and shackles on pregnant women

The SAFE Charlotte initiative commences, which includes violence interruption, hospital-based violence intervention strategies, and $1 million in grants to local organizations to prevent future violence

2022

Mecklenburg County's Office of Violence Prevention (OVP) releases The Way Forward report, which describes the current state of community violence and a localized five-year plan to reduce its impact

The results of these reform efforts are reflected in jail population trends. The quarterly average daily population (ADP) for Mecklenburg County jail fluctuated has since April 2016 but generally declined in recent years.[lxvii] In July 2022, the ADP was at 995, which is lower than its peak of 1,222 in April 2017, but higher than in July 2020, when it reached a low of 864 during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. The size of the pretrial population has also dropped since its peak of 1,147 people in July 2017; however, the pretrial population in July 2022 still made up a significant percentage of the total confined population (80%).

Community Violence

The people we spoke with reported that violence is a problem in Mecklenburg County. Beginning in 2012, aggravated assault rates held steady or increased slightly until the onset of the pandemic, when they surged to 536 per 100,000 residents in 2020 (see Figure 21). In contrast, robberies declined after reaching a peak of 201 per 100,000 in 2016. Rates of rape were relatively steady, but in recent years, they have remained at higher levels than 10 years ago. Homicides exhibited more variability over time; after a sharp drop from 2017 to 2018, they began to climb, reaching a peak of 10 per 100,000 in 2020 (Figure 22). Violence is not experienced equally across all communities. For example, homicides are geographically concentrated, and just over half (50.9%) of homicides from 2015–2020 occurred in five zip codes.[lxviii]

Figure 21. Violent Crime Rates per 100,000 Residents, Mecklenburg County

Source: FBI Crime Data Explorer, Offense Counts. Includes offenses reported by the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department.
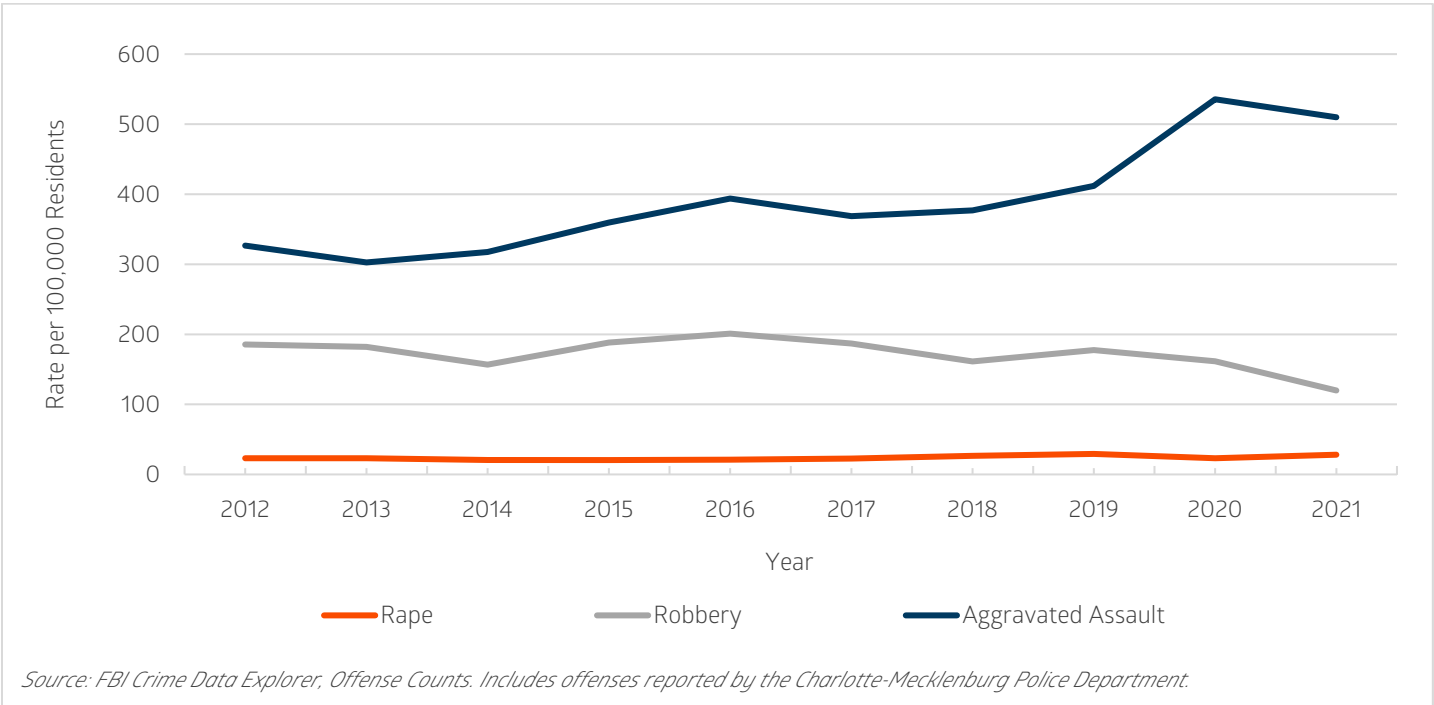
Figure 22. Homicide Rates per 100,000 Residents, Mecklenburg County

Source: FBI Crime Data Explorer, Offense Counts. Includes offenses reported by the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department.
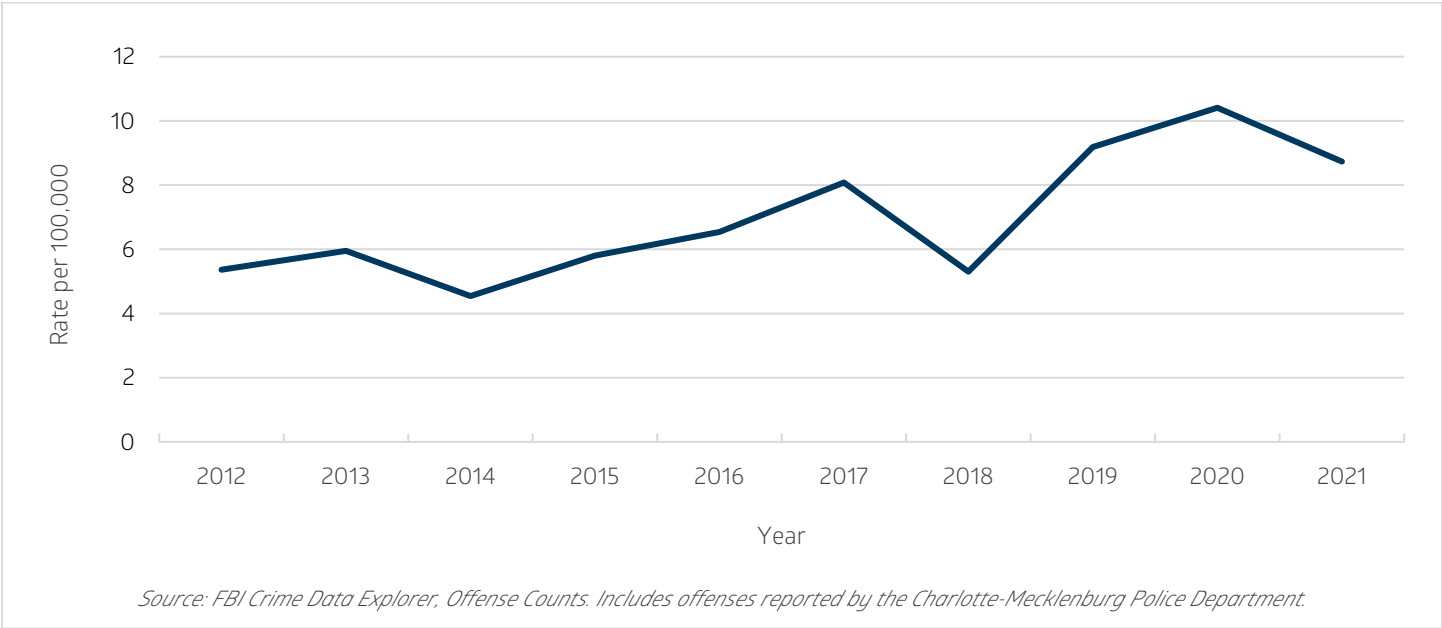
Gun violence and juvenile violence were raised as particular concerns among the people we spoke with. Violence involving juvenile victims rose between 2018 and 2021, climbing from 147 per 100,000 juvenile residents to 245 before declining in 2022 (see Figure 23). In 2022, 16% of victims of violence were juveniles. Youth violent offending rates were higher than victimization rates but have been declining, except for 2017–2019, when they increased from 538 to 616 offenses per 100,000 juveniles.

Figure 23. Juvenile Violent Offense and Victimization Rates per 100,000 Juveniles, Mecklenburg County

Source: Charlotte Community Violence Dashboard
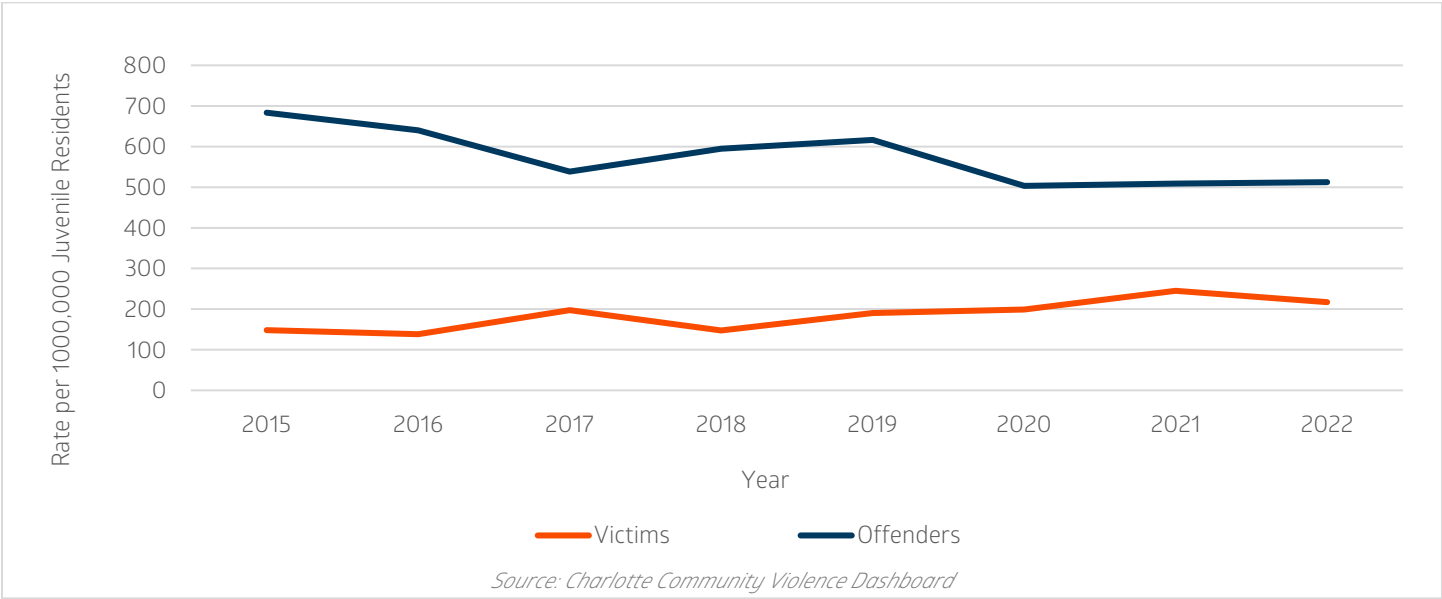
All forms of firearm deaths increased in recent years, although the one-year firearm death rate (not age-adjusted) in Mecklenburg County (14.3 per 100,000) is slightly lower than in North Carolina and on par with the US (Figure 24). Figure 25 shows that firearms disproportionately impact Black residents. The 2020 Black firearm death rate of 27.1 per 100,000 is more than three times the death rate for white and Hispanic individuals.

Figure 24. Firearm Death Rate for Mecklenburg County vs North Carolina and U.S.

Source: North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, National Estimates from Kegler et al. (2022)
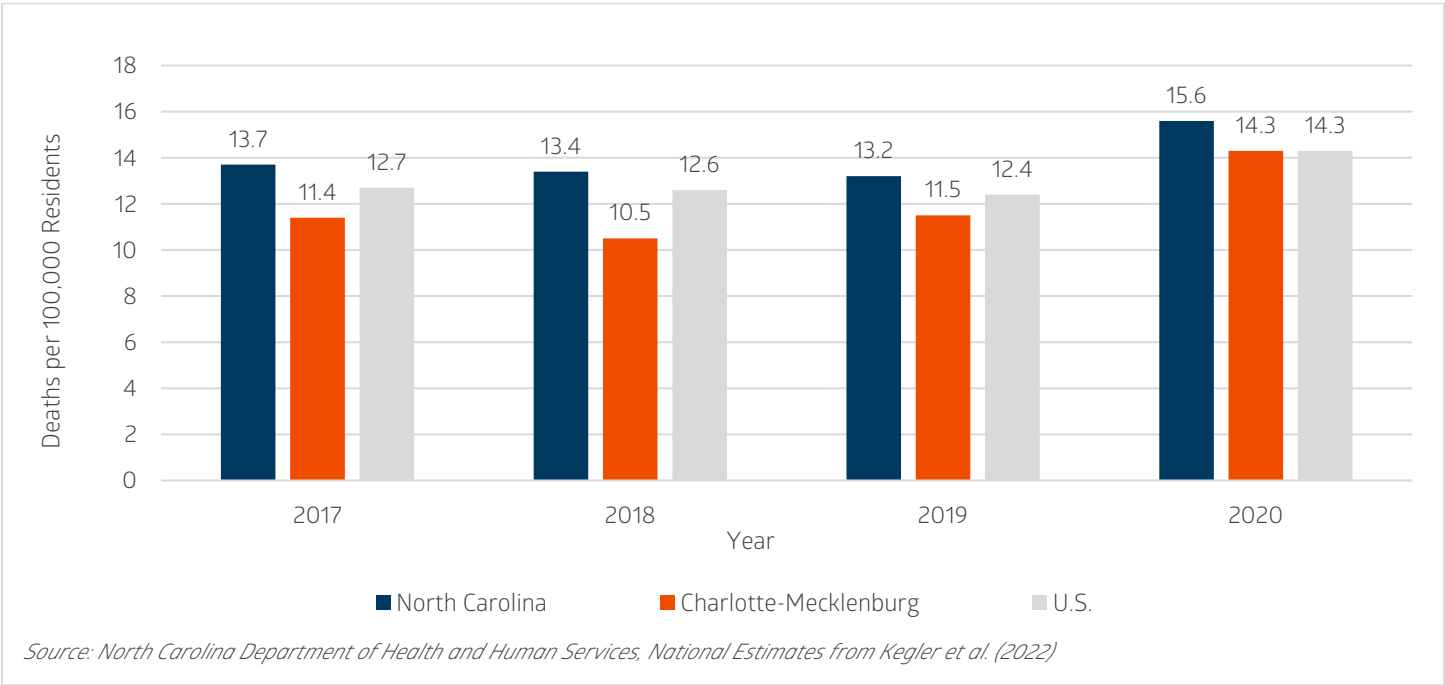
Figure 25. Firearm Death Rate by Race/Ethnicity, Mecklenburg County, 2020

Source: North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services
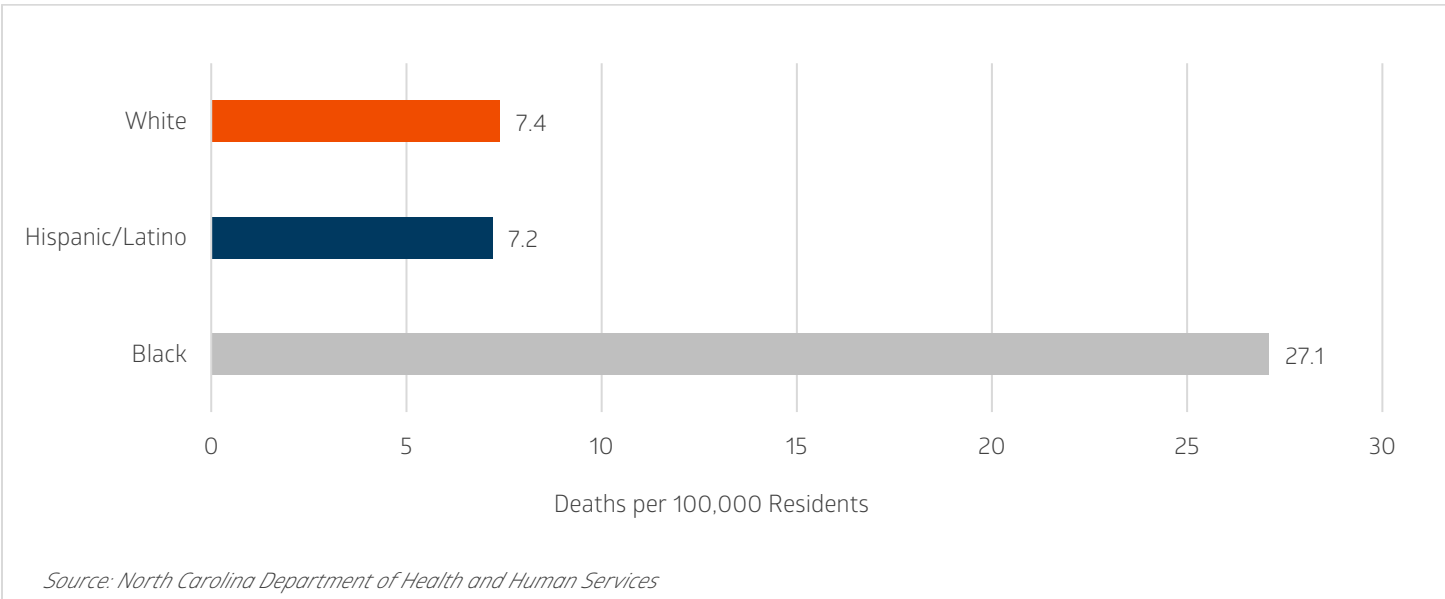
In response to increasing violence, Mecklenburg County implemented the SAFE Charlotte initiative. As part of this initiative, the city implemented a violence interruption program (Alternatives to Violence) that employs and trains people with ties to specific neighborhoods to de-escalate situations before they turn violent. Additionally, $1 million in grants was awarded to local organizations to prevent future violence and promote racial equity. Another strategy involves a new tool, the Community Violence Data Dashboard, that is intended to help the city and its partners better understand violent crime. The dashboard is linked to Charlotte-Mecklenburg's Quality of Life Explorer, which archives social determinants of health indicators (e.g., poverty, education, employment) that impact community violence. And the recently created Office of Violence Prevention released a comprehensive plan for reducing homicide and gun violence over the next five years, titled *The Way Forward*.[lxix] This plan, which draws on the input of over 400 Mecklenburg residents, takes a public health approach to violence prevention and has five areas of focus: 1) community engagement and partnerships; 2) support for youth and families; 3) economic opportunity; 4) intergovernmental collaboration; and 5) safer and healthier neighborhoods.

Police Misconduct and Use of Force

Many study participants raised concerns about police misconduct and violence. In 2022, there were 53 complaints levied against the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department (CMPD) from someone outside the department.[lxx] This is 19.5% higher than the three-year average of 44.3 from 2020–2022. The majority (83%) of these complaints were related to an arrest, search, or seizure. Also relatively common were complaints about officer demeanor (i.e., courtesy) and use of force, with each issue being raised in one-third of the complaints. Many complaints were not upheld upon investigation by the police.

From 2010 to 2022, there were 72 incidents involving 75 civilians in which an officer from the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department discharged a firearm at a person.[lxxi] Twenty-nine (39%) of the individuals were fatally shot, while 16 (21.3%) were shot at but not hit. Seventy-two of the victims were male (96%), and just over two-thirds were Black (51 individuals) (see Figure 26). Six victims were under 18 years of age, and one of these juveniles was killed.

Figure 26. Number of Victims in Police Involved Shootings by Race and Gender, 2010 - 2022, Mecklenburg County (N = 75)

Source: Charlotte OpenData, CMPD Officer-Involved Shootings - Individuals
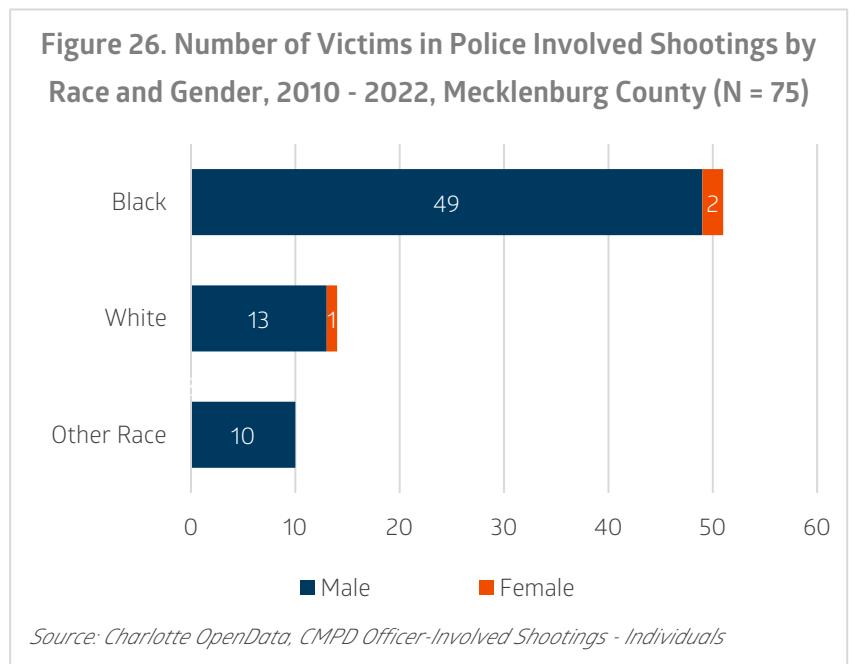
Of the 72 shooting incidents, 55 (75.0%) were determined to be legally justified, 11 (15.2%) required no legal review under CMPD guidelines, and 6 (8.3%) were pending review. Only one shooting was determined not to be legally justified, and this was one of the two incidents that involved an unarmed subject. In 2022, there were 6 officer-involved shootings, which is just above the county average of 5.8 shootings per year and well below the county high of 12 in 2016.

Charlotte-Mecklenburg has taken steps toward addressing police misconduct and the use of force over the past several years. In 2021, House Bills 536 and 300, which address police use of force and misconduct, were signed into law. These laws mandate that law enforcement officers intervene and report excessive use of force by fellow officers; create a public certification, revocation, and suspension database of law enforcement officers as well as a database of use of force incidents involving police; require agencies to implement an "internal warning system" to better monitor officer actions and behaviors, including the discharge of a firearm, use of force, and citizen complaints; and make it easier for relatives of victims of police violence that result in deaths or serious injury to obtain body camera footage.

Media Depictions of Crime Trends - Mecklenburg County

To assess the framing of discussions on crime and violence trends in the media in Mecklenburg County, we examined 90 articles published in *The Charlotte Observer* and *Charlotte Post* between 2017 and 2021. As in St. Louis, the most common type of trend covered was serious violent crime, including homicide.[lxxii] All but 4 of the 68 articles on this issue described serious violence as an increasing or persistent problem, and most of these appeared between 2019 and 2020, when rates of homicide and aggravated assault were rising.

Similar to the other counties in this study, the groups quoted most frequently were government actors, primarily law enforcement, who appeared in 64% of articles, and elected officials (29%) (see Figure 27).[lxxiii] Among those impacted by crime, indirectly affected individuals, such as a victim's family member or a member of the community, were most likely to be quoted (21%). The voices of victims were rarer (appearing in seven articles), and a system-impacted person was only quoted in one article. However, the perspectives of people impacted by crime were often shared via service providers and advocacy groups, appearing in 11% and 24% of articles, respectively.[lxxiv]

Figure 27: Whose Voices are Represented, Mecklenburg County (N = 90 Articles)
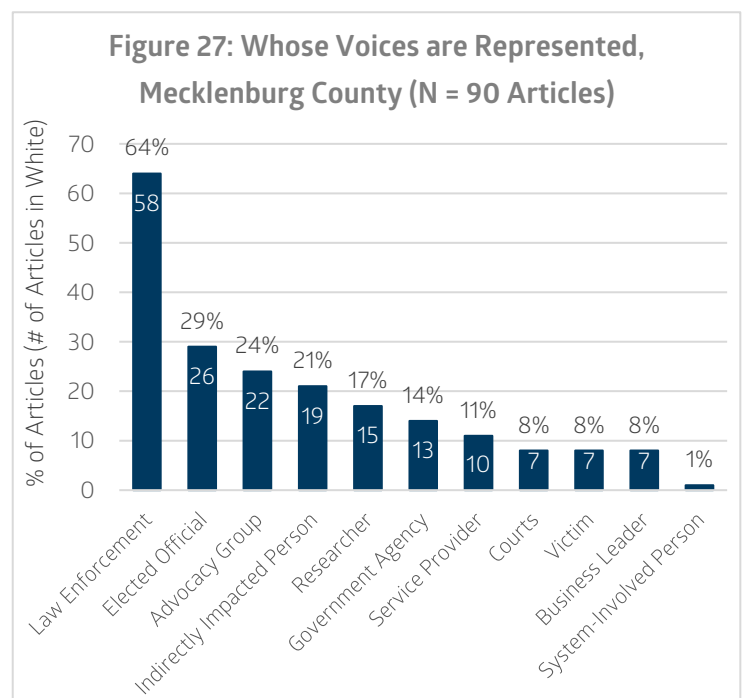
We identified the causes of and solutions to increasing violence that were discussed in the subset of 64 articles covering increasing violence and/or homicide (see Figure 28). Causes and solutions were grouped into the same six categories used in the St. Louis media analysis, plus one additional category: collecting more data and research. **In half the articles (32 articles), increasing or persistent violence was attributed to root social causes; most common (appearing in 17 articles) were discussions of people's basic needs going unmet due to conditions such as poverty and inequality, housing issues, unemployment, and a lack of education.** Criminal legal system issues were identified as contributing to violence in 21 articles and were frequently linked to issues with the courts (7 articles) and a lack of police enforcement and resources (7 articles). Also prevalent was coverage of gun-related causes (10 articles) and technology (8 articles), primarily social media (6 articles).

Although the discussions of the factors driving rising violence skewed more heavily toward root social causes, solutions leaned towards those involving the criminal legal system, which appeared in 41 articles. Among those most frequently discussed were increasing police resources and enforcement, which appeared as solutions in 19 articles, followed by improving coordination among criminal legal system agencies (14 articles). The 31 articles featuring solutions focused on addressing social causes were most likely to discuss programs or policies that helped people meet their basic needs (18 articles) and conflict resolution programs (17 articles). Other solutions commonly discussed included getting the help of the community to combat violence (14 articles), collecting additional data or research (8 articles), and addressing gun-related issues, for example, by changing laws or policies (7 articles). The accompanying document, "Media Narratives on Increasing Violence in Mecklenburg County," includes a more detailed analysis of the media narratives on crime trends.

Figure 28. Prevalence of Different Causes and Solutions in Articles Covering Increasing Violence, Mecklenburg County (N = 64)
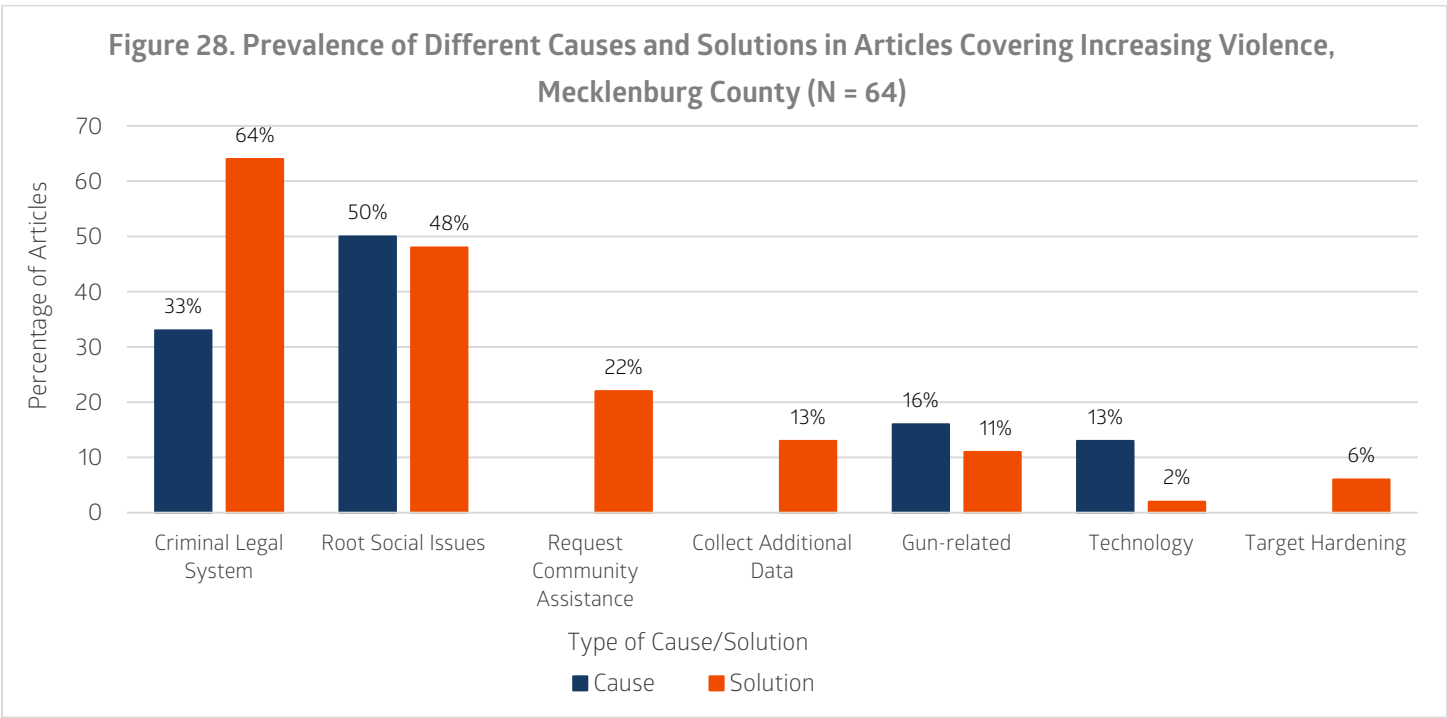
Views on the Media

In all three sites, the people we spoke with reported getting information about crime through multiple forms of media, including newspapers, news apps, social media, and television news; however, some indicated they actively avoid the news because it makes them feel overwhelmed and unsafe. A student at a St. Louis community college noted, "Even sometimes in your own home you don't feel safe because of what the news portrays," while another St. Louis community member simply stated, "I don't even watch TV news ... it is so negative, and it feels like you're so helpless." Many residents indicated that they believe the media portrays issues in a way that harms the community by generating fear and reinforcing racial stereotypes that link Black individuals to violence. A woman who works for a Mecklenburg County agency that provides criminal justice services noted, "I'm not a fan of the media. ... I think the media can strike up fear. I think they strike up biases or increase biases. I think sometimes they give a lot of misinformation." Similarly, a St. Louis resident stated, "I think the news is a big part of perpetuating every single negative narrative that they can to incite fear in the overall community." A public-school educator in Missoula also described the media as increasingly biased and detailed what is needed to get an accurate picture of the news, stating, "I feel like our news is getting more biased, and so you have to watch three different news channels to get the whole story. You have to watch how Fox presents it. You got to watch how CNN presents it, and you watch NPR, and then you can put the whole picture together."

People we spoke with discussed the role of the media in stigmatizing places, which they suggested can have negative consequences for both the area and its residents. In St. Louis County, several participants discussed how the media covered the killing of Michael Brown by a police officer in Ferguson, Missouri, and the ensuing civil unrest. For example, a St. Louis government official recalled, "I think Ferguson was destroyed by the media. I think they did a horrible job. What a great community. They had their head on, doing things right, and they were just destroyed by bad media. And it still hasn't recovered". A trauma surgeon in Mecklenburg County discussed the stigmatizing nature of media coverage of violence in West Charlotte. As he recalled, "So, [the media will] say, 'Shooting in West Charlotte.' And they'll show you the intersection of the street signs. And again, I think that reinforces for people here that violence occurs in specific areas." Another Mecklenburg County resident who works in violence prevention stated, "If it's something that happens, say, on Beatties Ford Road [an area with elevated rates of crime north of uptown], you'll hear, 'well, that's expected; that's what happens over there.' So, media has the ability to fuel a lot of things."

More generally, in both Mecklenburg and St. Louis Counties, participants believed that the media often calls out communities with a higher percentage of Black and lower-income residents as "violent places," reinforcing the narrative that violence is only a concern for some groups of people and only those who reside in select places. A woman who works for a St. Louis non-profit that addresses community trauma made this point. "God, the media is the devil. Really, honestly, all they talk about is violence in Black neighborhoods. I don't even watch the news that much anymore." She then described the media coverage of North County in St. Louis,

which has a high population of Black residents. "If you listen to the media, that's all they talk about. It's horrible [in North County]. It's shootings there. This is bad. It's vacant buildings, it's this, it's that ... they just want to talk about what's happening in the Black community." Similarly, a woman who works for an agency in Mecklenburg County that provides criminal justice services reported, "I feel like there's crime everywhere, but to me, it's only highlighted if it's targeted areas where most times, to me, it's more people of color and probably poverty. I feel like those areas are typically highlighted more in terms of crime, in terms of public safety risk, compared to other more affluent neighborhoods". This perpetuation of negative stereotypes can have significant ramifications for communities of color. For example, a Mecklenburg County resident who directs a non-profit that assists formerly incarcerated individuals stated, "Showing dead Black bodies on the news every day across the country does nothing to increase safety; it only gaslights."

In Missoula County, several people we spoke with discussed how the media also stigmatizes individuals, explicitly calling out the practice of publishing mugshots online. One formerly incarcerated person described this practice. "It's embarrassing. They're putting [people with substance use disorders] on the news for crimes ... they aren't hurting other people ... you can't come back from that. That's permanently online." One unhoused mother shared her frustrations with inaccurate news portrayals of an incident that involved her, and then discussed the difficulty of getting this information removed. "[The media] said some awful things about me. And so now I can Google my name or Google my eight-year-old daughter's name, and that's the first thing that pops up, and things that were said were untrue... and so I've been trying to get it removed, but I'm having a hard time." She later recalls the negative impact this had on her life. "I ended up painting my car a different color because I was recognized all the way in Billings and had the cops called. ... I lost a job because of it."

When asked how they wanted the media to cover crime, most people discussed a desire to hear positive stories or coverage about ongoing efforts to address safety-related issues. For example, some participants mentioned "positive news time" and "positive messaging in the media." One unhoused resident of St. Louis County stated, "I think they should be focusing on those things if they're trying to help those people. ... The whole point of news is so it can be informational, so that information can help people. If it's not helping people, then why is it on TV?"

SUMMARY OF LOCAL CONTEXTS

Missoula County has undergone many transitions in recent years. The county has experienced a growing population, coupled with a shortage of housing and rising rates of houselessness. The prevalence of drugs, including methamphetamine and opioids like fentanyl, has emerged as a significant concern, as have increasing rates of violence. Recent criminal legal system reforms focused on diverting people away from jail and into treatment and safely decreasing the jail population using tools such as risk assessments and specialty courts.

St. Louis County is racially segregated, and many municipalities in North County, which has a higher population of Black residents and higher reported rates of crime, suffer from disinvestment. The county's high level of fragmentation creates many challenges for community safety as it hinders the ability to address crime and safety-related concerns in a coordinated fashion. Moreover, some local municipalities have relied on fines and fees to fund government operations and their police force, which strained relationships between residents and government officials. Black county residents, particularly those residing in North County, are disproportionately impacted by crime and the criminal legal system. Violence, particularly gun violence, is a significant concern for area residents. Like in many places, aggravated assaults and homicides rose at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Recent criminal legal system reforms have focused on addressing issues related to policing for profit, safely reducing jail populations using risk assessments, bail reform, and providing more resources for public defenders.

Mecklenburg County, like Missoula, is experiencing population growth accompanied by rising housing costs and rates of houselessness. Aggravated assault and homicide climbed rapidly from 2018 through 2020, before leveling off and falling. However, violence, particularly gun violence, continues to be a significant safety-related issue. Other forms of violence, including among youth and police violence, are also viewed as serious concerns. Recent criminal legal system reforms have focused on reducing police and community violence, bail reform, and reducing incarceration for certain types of offenses.

Media Coverage of Crime Trends in all three counties primarily featured the voices of people who work in the criminal legal system and government. The perspectives of system-impacted individuals were rare. There are many factors that might explain these patterns, including differences in the accessibility of these groups to the press and reluctance of some groups to speak to the media. Regardless, the outcome is that when it comes to coverage of crime trends in the media, the views predominantly represented are those of government actors.

In both Missoula and Mecklenburg counties, media stories discussing rising or persistent rates of violence primarily attributed these increases to root social causes, especially mental health issues and substance use (Missoula) and basic needs going unmet due to poverty, inequality, and housing issues (Mecklenburg). In comparison, the solutions presented were just as likely or more likely to rely on the criminal legal system as to target underlying causes. In St. Louis County the criminal legal system was most likely to be implicated in both the causes of and solutions for rising violence. Across all three counties, the focus on criminal legal system responses may be due to the recognition

that many short-term, evidence-based solutions to violence incorporate police interventions.[lxxv] Although news coverage of violence is shaped by a variety of factors, these narratives hold significant sway over public perceptions of this issue.

The local context plays a significant role in shaping how people define safety and their primary safety related concerns. This can be observed in the remainer of the report, which details a broad conceptualization of safety that draws on the perspectives of individuals across three counties, Throughout, we highlight how the meaning and prioritization of various components of a safe community varies across locales.

05

STUDY METHODS

To explore how community safety is conceptualized, this study took a multi-method approach drawing on the perspectives of a broad range of stakeholders. Figure 29 provides an overview of the study methods. A more detailed account of the methods can be found in Appendix A.

Group Concept Mapping

The Community Safety Concept Map was developed using a process called Group Concept Mapping (GCM). Conceptually, this process involved giving volunteers a deck of 120 cards, each containing a different statement describing or defining a safe community. These statements were created from responses to survey prompts and discussions with local stakeholders. Each volunteer "sorter" was instructed to make sense of these data by sorting statements into "piles" that captured similar ideas. Next, the sorter was asked to give each pile a name that best reflected the statements in the group. This information was then analyzed to create a visual representation of the data, or concept map, in which statements that tended to be sorted together were placed into the same group, or "cluster." On average, sorters placed the statements into 11 clusters, representing various aspects of community safety. A series of focus groups were held in which project participants were shown a draft of the concept map and asked to provide their feedback regarding the statements and cluster names. The map was revised accordingly and appears in Figure 33.

FIGURE 29. A MULTI-METHOD APPROACH TO REDEFINING COMMUNITY SAFETY

CONTEXT SETTING

Analyzed local media, met with community groups and agencies, and conducted interviews and focus groups with 121 people to learn their perspectives on community safety.

GROUP CONCEPT MAPPING

BRAINSTORMING

Surveyed 1254 people about what community safety means to them. The research team then reduced the responses to 120 unique statements on the meaning of safety.

SORTING

62 volunteers sorted statements into groups capturing similar ideas.

VISUALIZATION

Analyzed sorting data and generated a visual map of community safety that identified 11 distinct aspects of a safe community.

MEANING MAKING

Held focus groups to get feedback on the Community Safety Concept Map and revised it accordingly.

RATING

Surveyed 726 residents to identify components of community safety they view as most important.

THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Used interview and focus group data to contextualize the components of community safety.

06

DEFINING COMMUNITY SAFETY

OPEN-ENDED PROMPT RESPONSES

A key goal of this study was to develop a comprehensive and inclusive definition of community safety. The first step in this process involved administering a survey to people who live, work, or go to school in the participating counties. Survey participants were asked to complete a prompt that asked them to explain, in their own words, the meaning of community safety. These responses contained 120 unique aspects of community safety that were used to create the Community Safety Concept Map. Before presenting the map that draws on the richness of these data, for each site, we identify the most prevalent themes in the prompt responses.

Missoula County

As depicted in Figure 30, the 469 Missoulians who completed the survey prompt most often mentioned feeling safe as they moved through their daily lives as a key characteristic of a safe community (35%), closely followed by minimal crime (32%).[lxxvi] When a specific crime type was mentioned, it was most frequently violence (in 12% of all responses). These two themes highlight the dual importance of the more "objective" aspects of traditional conceptualizations of community safety (i.e., crime), as well as the more subjective perceptual and emotional side. While perceptions of safety are influenced by exposure to crime, many discussed other factors that affect day-to-day feelings of safety, such as fear of harassment and discrimination. The third most prevalent theme was neighborhood relationships, appearing in almost 18% of responses, particularly neighbors being willing to assist each other and offer support (9%).[lxxvii]

Figure 30: Most Common Community Safety Themes in Open-Ended Responses, Missoula (N = 469)
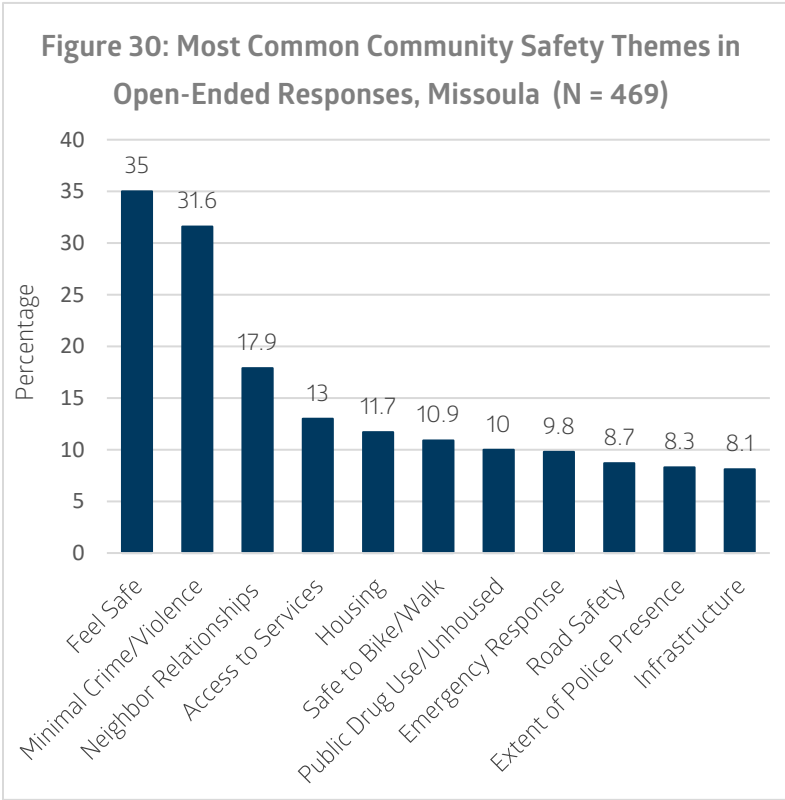
Several other common themes represented more traditional conceptualizations of safety, including emergency response, the extent to which police were present and visible, road safety, and public drug use and/or presence of unhoused individuals. At the same time, other themes represented a more expansive and inclusive conceptualization of safety, such as access to supportive services like mental health care and substance abuse treatment and attainable housing.[lxxviii]

St. Louis County

Figure 31 depicts the most common prompt responses from the 559 respondents in St. Louis County, which in many ways mirror the findings in Missoula County. Like in Missoula County, survey respondents in St. Louis most often mentioned feeling safe as they moved through their daily lives as a key characteristic of a safe community (42%) as well as minimal crime (approximately 40%), particularly low rates of violence (in 11% of all responses). Relationships with neighbors was the third most prevalent theme, appearing in about 27% of responses, particularly neighbors being willing to assist each other and offer support (11%). The other common themes represented more traditional conceptualizations of safety and included emergency response, the extent to which police were present and visible, road safety, and physical disorder (e.g., abandoned buildings, trash, overgrown lots).

Figure 31: Most Common Community Safety Themes in Open-Ended Responses, St. Louis (N = 559)
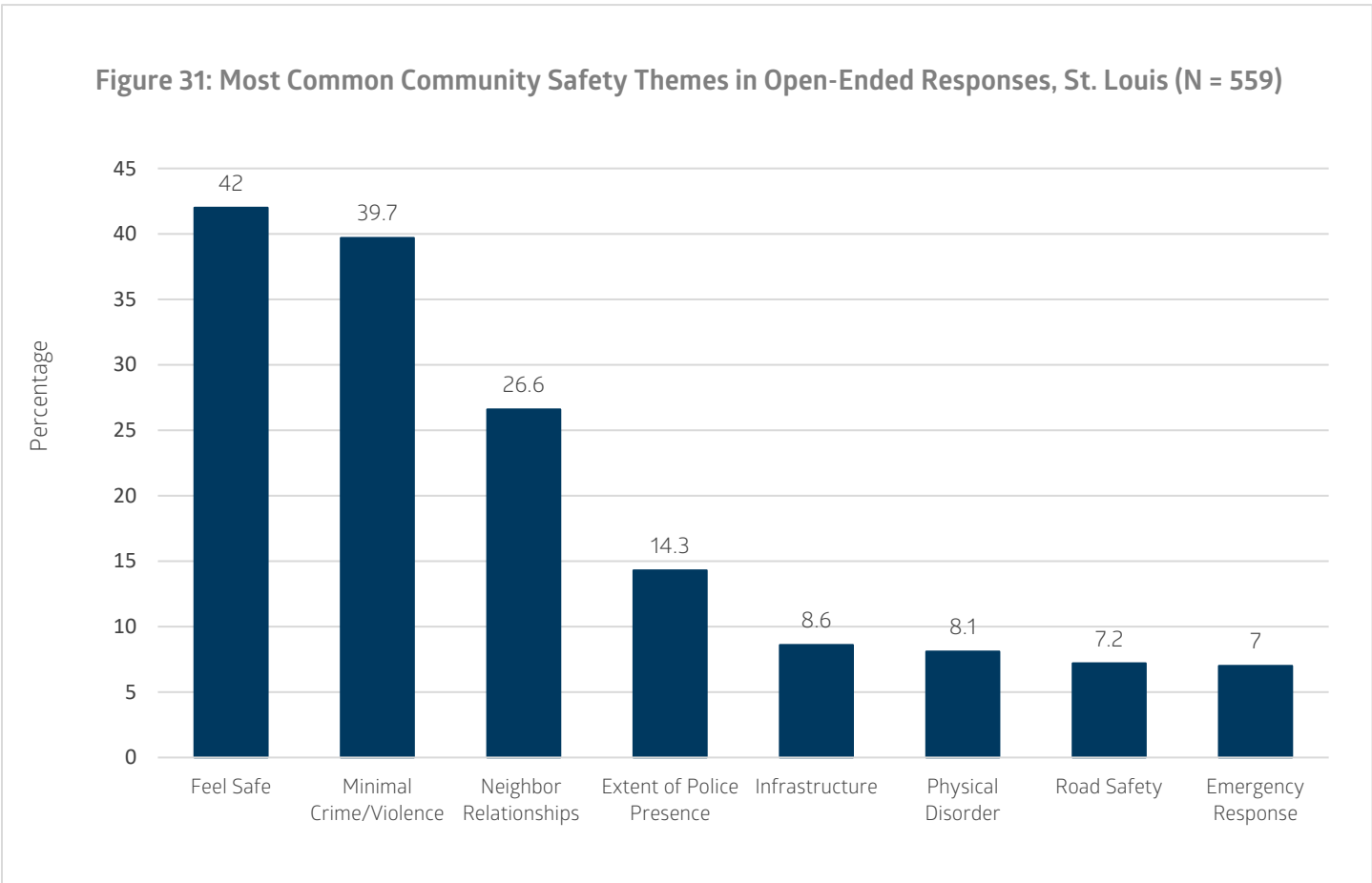
Mecklenburg County

As depicted in Figure 32, the three most prevalent themes in the 226 prompt responses provided by residents of Mecklenburg County were: 1) minimal crime (40%), including low rates of violence (in 12% of all responses) the safety of children in school and other public places (in 9% of all responses); 2) feeling safe in day-to-day life (31%); and 3) relationships with neighbors (27%), particularly neighbors being willing to assist each other and offer support, which appeared in 9% of all responses (see Figure 32). As in the other sites, more traditional conceptualizations of safety were also prevalent, including the extent to which police are active and visible and physical disorder (e.g., abandoned buildings, trash, overgrown lots). Discussions of infrastructure, especially adequate lighting, were also common. In addition, 7% of people mentioned ideas related to collective efficacy, which characterizes neighborhoods in which people trust one another and work together towards shared goals.

Figure 32: Most Common Community Safety Themes in Open-Ended Responses, Mecklenburg (N = 226)
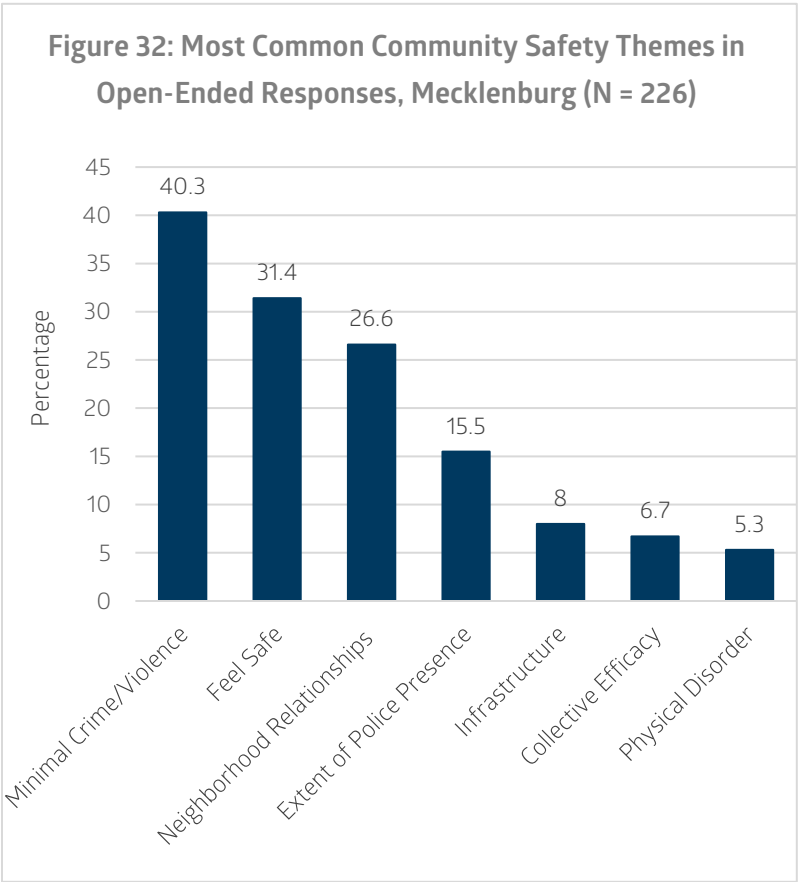
Summary

The research across the three sites shows that when people are asked to define community safety, they usually emphasize traditional notions of personal and public safety, which include freedom from crime and violence, living without fear of victimization or harassment, and being protected by the police. However, some pointed to other factors, like supportive relationships with neighbors, collective efficacy, and attainable housing. Overall, the responses contained 120 different facets of a safe community. This broader set of responses helped inform the development of the holistic and multifaceted conceptualization of community safety that is described in the next section.

A HOLISTIC AND MULTIFACETED CONCEPTUALIZATION OF COMMUNITY SAFETY

The survey prompt responses were distilled into 120 different statements describing a safe community. As described in Section 5, "Study Methods", 62 volunteer "sorters" independently placed these 120 statements into similar groups. This information was used to generate a visual representation (i.e., concept map) of community safety, consisting of 11 different components that fall into 5 different broad domains, or "regions". The final Community Safety Concept Map and its components can be found in Figure 33.[lxxix]

This section describes each component of community safety by region. We also provide a sample of statements that participants associated with that aspect of safety. Next, for each region, we describe how the individuals we interviewed link these concepts to safety.

Figure 33. Community Safety Concept Map

Personal Safety & Security

- Freedom from Violence and other Harms
- Day-to-Day Feelings of Safety

Thriving & Socially Connected Community

- Sense of Community
- Investments in infrastructure and Programming

Systems for Preventing & Addressing Harm

- Fair and Ethical Policing
- Accountability for Harm

REDEFINING COMMUNITY SAFETY

Resources for a Socially & Economically Just Community

- Social and Economic Justice
- Access to Supportive Services

Responsive Government & Public Safety Agencies

- Responsive, Ethical, and Transparent Government
- Comprehensive and Effective Emergency Responses
- Gun Violence Prevention

Definition of Community Safety

When viewed holistically, the Community Safety Concept Map defines safe communities as places in which people, individually and collectively, can live their lives free from a wide range of real and perceived threats that include crime and other harm. When harm does occur, safe communities have well-funded, accessible resources and community support to help impacted people cope. Furthermore, not only are basic needs fulfilled, but individuals are also treated with respect and dignity, residing in environments that promote their overall well-being and allow them to thrive.

Region: Personal Safety and Security

Freedom from Violence and Other Harm

This component of safety includes ideas related to traditional conceptualizations of public safety (e.g., low rates of crime and victimization). It also involves avoiding harm that many people of color and other marginalized groups, like LGBTQ+, experience daily, such as discrimination.

- There are low rates of violent crime.
- People are not injured or killed by stray bullets.
- Children are safe from harm both inside and outside of school.
- There are low rates of property crimes, such as theft, vandalism, or car theft.
- There are low rates of drug use, including public drug use, and drug-related harm (e.g., overdoses).
- People do not stereotype, discriminate against, or harm others based on their race, ethnicity, or other personal characteristics.

Day-to-Day Feelings of Safety

Statements that capture people's perceived ability to live their daily lives without worrying about harm make up this component of community safety. Many of the statements capture emotions and feelings of security.

- People can travel freely anytime, anywhere, including late at night, without being on alert.
- People feel safe and secure in their homes.
- People are not worried they will be victims of crime.
- People are not harassed when walking down the street.

Region: Thriving and Socially Connected Community

Sense of Community

Many people described a safe community in terms of their relationships with others. It is a place where people watch out for one another and provide support and assistance when needed. In addition, people trust one another and work together to address common problems, and neighbors are friendly and welcoming to all.

- Community members trust one another.
- People watch out for each other and provide support and assistance for neighbors in need.
- Neighbors know one another and talk regularly.
- There is a lot of activity, with people out in the community and children playing outside.
- People in the community are welcoming and respectful to all, regardless of their identity or personal characteristics, such as age, sexuality, gender, or race.
- Community members work together to solve local problems.

Investments in Infrastructure, Businesses, and Programming for a Thriving Community

This component of safety encompasses thriving businesses and local organizations that are invested in the community. A thriving community also includes well-maintained and developed infrastructure. People also associated this component of safety with access to amenities, like restaurants and childcare, and recreational opportunities, as well as a clean community with little physical disorder, such as overgrown lots and abandoned buildings.

- Business owners are invested in the community, and businesses are thriving.
- There are programs youth can participate in outside of school.
- There are grocery stores, and people have access to healthy food.
- There are shops, restaurants, and entertainment venues.
- There are public libraries and institutions that support the arts.
- There are well-maintained parks and access to outdoor recreational activities.
- Infrastructure, such as roads, sidewalks, lights, and signs, are well-maintained.
- There is adequate lighting, including lights on the streets and roads.
- Infrastructure allows for people to walk and bike safely.
- There is reliable and safe public transportation.
- The community is clean, and there are no run-down, boarded up, or empty buildings or overgrown lots.

Region: Resources and Services for a Socially and Economically Just Community

Access to Supportive Services

This component includes statements related to access to and quality of supportive services and aid for people in need.

- Everyone who needs it has access to comprehensive mental health services and treatment for substance use problems.

- Resources and support are available for all victims of crime and violence, regardless of the circumstances in which they were harmed.

- Resources are available to help support vulnerable populations, including people experiencing houselessness.

- Social services agencies are adequately staffed by competent and compassionate people.

- When natural and man-made disasters occur—such as flooding, hurricanes, tornadoes, and fires—there is aid for those affected.

Social and Economic Justice

The statements in this cluster reflect what a community looks like when fairness, equality, and human dignity are upheld for all individuals.

- A quality education is free and accessible to all.

- Affordable, quality housing is available for people of all income levels.

- People do not need to worry about where their next meal will come from.

- Everyone has access to quality healthcare and healthcare providers.

- There are good job opportunities, and everyone can earn a living wage.

- There are low rates of income inequality.

- People are financially secure.

- There is clean air to breathe and clean water to drink.

Region: Responsive Government and Public Safety Agencies

Responsive, Ethical, and Transparent Government

This aspect of safety describes a well-functioning government that acts in the community's best interests. Statements also focused on government transparency, information sharing, and communication.

- Elected officials with different viewpoints work together to solve community problems.

- Government agencies are transparent and act in an ethical manner.

- People in power make fair, just, and unbiased decisions.

- The government is responsive to the needs of all and acts in the community's best interest.

- Information about how to access government services and the legal system is easily available.

- There is consistent and open communication from public officials.

- Community members have a voice in decisions that affect the community.

- People can reach out to local officials, and they know they will be respected.

Comprehensive and Effective Emergency Response

Some survey respondents described community safety in terms of well-prepared and effective emergency response systems, including those traditionally associated with public safety (e.g., police, fire department, and emergency medical technicians). They also discussed first responders who are part of a "re-imagining" of public safety, such as mental health workers and alternate responders.

- First responders—including the police, fire department and emergency medical technicians—arrive quickly when called and are well-trained and equipped to handle an emergency.

- People aside from the police, such as mental health workers, are available to respond to emergencies and provide help.

- The local government invests in crime prevention and solutions that do not involve the police.

- People are educated about and prepared to handle natural disasters, including flooding and fires.

Gun Violence Prevention

In addition to low rates of gun violence, some people indicated that they feel safer when efforts are in place to ensure that guns are used responsibly and safely and kept out of the hands of people who could use them to harm themselves or others, such as children and people struggling with mental health issues. However, there was general agreement that gun violence prevention is a highly nuanced concept, and the meaning varies across people and communities.

- Children do not have access to guns without the supervision of a responsible adult.

- Guns are kept out of the hands of people not allowed to own them.

- People are educated about owning and operating firearms safely.

Region: Systems for Preventing and Addressing Harm

Fair and Ethical Policing

This component of safety captures various aspects of fair and ethical policing, including freedom from harm at the hands of the police; community preferences regarding the visibility of police; and police and the public working together to make safe communities. Many people feel this is what ideal policing looks like, but some, particularly people of color, questioned whether this vision would ever be realized in their communities.

- Police treat people in a way that is fair, just, and respectful.

- Law enforcement is trustworthy and acts in the community's best interests.

- People in the community respect and support local law enforcement.

- Police and community members work together to solve problems, prevent crime, and address concerns.

- Police officers know the members of the community.

- Law enforcement visibility and activity are aligned with community needs and preferences.

- People do not fear getting harassed, harmed, or killed by the police.

- No one has to worry about being stopped by law enforcement or federal immigration authorities because of their race, ethnicity, or immigration status.

Accountability for Harm

This aspect of safety includes ideas related to holding individuals, institutions, and businesses accountable for harm. It encompasses fair and consistent courts, and well-trained police and prosecutors who take violent crimes seriously. Some participants pointed out how research and lived experiences show that traditional forms of punishment, such as incarceration and detaining people who are awaiting trial, do not contribute to community safety and, in fact, can increase offending and make communities less safe. Others argued that if the criminal legal system does not hold people who cause harm accountable, it makes communities less safe, especially if these individuals harm again or if victims believe they need to take responsibility for their own safety (e.g., through retaliation). Still, others suggested a potential common ground between these two views—effective alternatives to incarceration. Statements regarding government and business accountability emerged in the stakeholder interviews and were added to provide a more inclusive conceptualization of accountability that recognizes those in power can also cause harm.

- Individuals who commit violent crimes & felonies are held accountable.

- Effective alternatives to incarceration are available when people have caused harm.

- Police and prosecutors take violence, including domestic and sexual violence, seriously and have significant training in how to handle reports and investigations.

- Police enforce laws in accordance with community needs and preferences.

- The courts can be trusted to uphold the law in a fair and just manner, giving out consistent and appropriate penalties for breaking the law.

- Police are held formally accountable for their actions.

- Governments and businesses are held accountable for harm they have caused.

COMMUNITY SAFETY IN THEIR OWN WORDS

We spoke with stakeholders and community members to learn more about how they conceptualize community safety. In each county, at least one representative from each of the following agencies was interviewed: 1) law enforcement, 2) courts, and 3) corrections. We also interviewed multiple individuals who had been involved in the criminal legal system, as well as people who are service providers or work for community-based organizations or advocacy groups (see Appendix A for additional information on the people who were interviewed). In this section, we describe how the individuals we spoke with linked each of the five domains to community safety. Findings indicate that safety is more complex and nuanced than crime and criminal legal responses, which tend to dominate public conversations on this issue. Still, issues with law enforcement permeated discussions. In addition, we found that the meanings of these components vary across groups, and we highlight some of these differences.

Region: Personal Safety and Security

This region of the map encompasses both more "objective" components of safety, such as rates of violence, which are often measured with administrative criminal legal system data. It also captures less quantifiable emotional perceptions or feelings of safety, such as people's perceived ability to live their lives without worrying about their safety or security. While these two things are related, participants recognized that people can still feel unsafe even when their risk of experiencing crime or violence is low. A woman who does work related to community safety for a St. Louis non-profit stated, "Part of [feeling safe] is psychological, and part of it is physical.... It's not to say that the psychological things aren't real. It's to say that the perception of what crime is and what the problem is, can or could be different than what is actually happening physically."

A core component of community safety is the ability to move through daily life without fear of victimization or harassment.

Most people we spoke with indicated a key component of community safety is the ability to move through their daily lives without worrying about being physically harmed or harassed. As one female community member in Missoula described, "To me, it means that I don't feel fear of being harmed in my own home or when I'm out walking. I was the victim of a crime in my own home. It was a sexual crime, and [so] feeling safe really just means that I don't feel fear." A Black system-impacted St. Louisan highlighted that safety is not just physical, but also psychological and emotional: "Safety is unadulterated. It's for everybody. Everybody should be able to walk around in peace in their own skin without feeling judged, without feeling afraid or targeted. That's my idea of safety; being able to go to work, come home knowing that everything at my home is okay and I don't have to call the police for anything. That's safety."

Primary safety related concerns varied depending on life experiences.

Although most people discussed freedom from harm as central to safety, the types of harm deemed most concerning differed according to their life experiences. One woman who works in violence prevention in Mecklenburg County stated, "Depending on who you're asking, I think the definition [of safety] is different. [It's] what their experience is. It's their lived experience that defines how they define safety. Someone that lives in a neighborhood that is predominantly safe all the time, and they don't have things happening, their safety is immediately going to go to something that's more like a mass shooting type situation because they're not concerned about their neighborhood." She recounted the contrasting experiences of two mothers she spoke with on the same day. One mother, who lived in a low-crime, wealthier community, feared that her child would be killed or injured in a mass shooting. The other lived in a neighborhood with elevated levels of violence, and she took nightly precautions to protect her child from stray bullets. While both mothers worried about their children being victims of gun violence, the nature of the violence they feared differed because of their divergent lived experiences.

Across the three counties, people with children often viewed safety through the lens of a parent. They were especially concerned about their children becoming victims of violence. For example, when asked what feeling safe means to him, a Black father living in Mecklenburg County stated, "Man, to go to a gas station and pump my gas and not have to look over my shoulder. To drop my daughter off at school and not have to worry about does she have her cell phone or not. To be able to trust the teachers to be able to call me if something happens. Right now, if I don't have access to my children, I'm in a worry. And to know that there aren't heavy artillery or guns on the street. Those things, I worry about."

Some parents discussed restricting their children's movements to protect them from violence. When asked about her worries for her children, a mother living in North St. Louis County stated, "I'm always with my kids, I don't let them go outside. It's just not happening…. But honestly, my biggest fear is kidnapping or a stray bullet hitting them."

Similarly, a mother in Missoula County stated she is far more concerned with her child's safety than her own, "Personally, it's not something that I worry about a ton…. Missoula is a place that you can walk around at night by yourself and have a reasonable expectation that no one's going to mess with you. For me, at this point in my life, I guess I gauge my personal safety by whether or not I can leave my kid at home and whether or not she's safe." A father residing in St. Louis indicated he generally did not worry about his safety, but he was concerned about the

safety of his 28-year-old son and, more generally, the younger generation. "It's sad because, as a parent, how do you make your children feel safe? ... I have a lot of death, but it's illness. It's different from people his age and younger that are getting murdered, or in car accidents, or that type of thing."

While gun violence was a significant safety-related concern in St. Louis and Mecklenburg Counties, in Missoula, people indicated that the visibility of unhoused individuals and public drug use led them to feel unsafe, even if they recognized unhoused individuals were unlikely to harm them. A Missoulian stated that he avoided downtown due to "all the needle use and stuff. I just don't want to be around anything because people like that just have tempers and triggers or switches." Unhoused individuals, on the other hand, often described safety in terms of freedom from personal harm, including serious violence and the security of their belongings. A formerly unhoused individual who had been a victim of serious violence while living on the streets in Missoula defined safety as "when I lay my head down at night, I don't have to worry about getting beat up in my sleep."

People working in the criminal legal system, including law enforcement, also worry about their personal safety and the safety of their families, particularly from individuals they have encountered as part of their job. According to one police officer in Missoula, "We have now become targeted ... because I interacted or intervened during some criminal offense. Then they take offense to that action itself, and they will take that back out on me and potentially my family. There are, unfortunately, plenty of examples where an offender or a convicted party has shown up at the home of a law enforcement officer with an intent to do harm." He described how police officers' work experiences shape the way they approach a situation, and "from the outside, it starts to almost look like a sense of paranoia, where officers are constantly scanning an environment to be able to identify all the known and potential threat factors."

Safety includes freedom from worrying about identity-based harassment or harm.

For others, personal safety was more encompassing than physical safety and included being able to "take up space" and experience bodily autonomy. A system-impacted Black woman and activist described bodily autonomy as "the ability to determine what happens to your body, how your body shows up. ... It's the will to do what you see fit with your body, and to take up space in the world, and to show up and identify in the world, and without the threat or harm coming to you for that identity or for that presentation."

Related to this idea, many participants expressed that personal safety included freedom from worrying about being targeted due to their identity, including their race. When asked what safety meant to him, a Black system-impacted person in Mecklenburg County discussed the profound effect of race in his life, stating that as a Black person in America, there is no safety for him.

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Well, as a Black person in America, there's a thought process that you don't even have [safety], right? It's not even in your brain when you get in your car; you have to go this way, or you have to be conscious of these things. When you get out of your car and go into a place, to know that you're going to be looked at simply because of your skin color and treated a certain kind of way because of that. There's always a measure of unsafety for us in that realm. Then, the communities that we're forced to live in and work in are ridden with drugs and the hopeless and those who suffer from despair generationally.

Women, unhoused individuals, and Native Americans voiced concern about violence, human trafficking, and missing and murdered Indigenous women. When asked if there was anything else she wanted people to know about safety in Missoula, a young Native American woman replied, "I guess I want people to not be afraid to talk about the missing, murdered Indigenous people. … It's like they're trying to wipe out the Indigenous people by kidnapping them, murdering them. … And it's sad because Native and Indigenous people are just as human as anybody else." Similarly, a system-impacted woman living in Missoula stated,

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Sometimes you'll hear about if a white male goes missing and it's a huge deal, but then there's all these missing Indigenous women on the reservations and stuff like that. And because it's such a common occurrence over there, it's not [seen] as a big deal. But, really, there's 100s and 100s of cases in Missoula that, from what a police officer told me, and by going to the police station, they have a board up about all these missing people, but the officer told me, he's like, 'That doesn't even cover a quarter of how many people are really missing,' and it's mostly females.

People discussed the negative impact of racism when talking about the safety of their children. As one mother in Missoula, who identified as part Native American, stated, "[I] have two boys … they're big, Brown men, and so it's hard. My younger one, he's always been profiled. Like, I take him to the mall and when we go shopping at one of the stores specifically, people at the store would just follow him around all the time. And that's not a state that makes you feel safe." A Black mother in Mecklenburg County similarly shared her anxieties about her son navigating the world as a Black man: "Safety goes beyond just yourself, it's also people around you. I have a Black son [and] I find that the older he's getting, the more anxiety I'm getting in regard to his safety. … But there is something that I don't think anyone else can say they experience in America like a Black mother because there are certain things that only happen to our children." Similarly, a Black St. Louis father stated, "My definition of safety is basically…I don't want my child to have to go with a stigma on him or he's walking around feeling targeted or being looked at awkwardly because he's just who he is."

Others reported safety-related concerns related to their gender or sexual identity. One female resident of Missoula, who had been a victim of a violent crime, stated, "I don't often go out by myself after dark. I think that is a universal experience for a lot of women, even here." A Missoulian who identified as gay noted that she was more concerned

with "having the little sideways microaggressions more than not feeling safe because somebody's going to break into my home and assault me."

Region: Thriving and Socially Connected Community

Many participants described safe communities as vibrant places, referencing both the social fabric of neighborhoods and the physical environment. This region includes both a strong sense of community and investment in infrastructure, businesses, and programming that generates a thriving community.

Safety includes a strong sense of community, with neighbors who are willing to help each other and act for the common good.

Safe communities were characterized as places where neighbors know, look out for, and support one another. In these communities, people are friendly, welcoming, and respectful of differences, and people trust one another and work together to solve problems. In Mecklenburg County, a Black mother's discussion about why her community feels safe exemplifies these ideas. "The demographic is very diverse—really, the melting pot here. And it's kid-friendly; [there are] lots of children in this neighborhood.… What makes me feel safe? My neighbors are all really, really kind.… Everyone knows each other, knows of each other. Everyone speaks friendly and we keep each other updated on things. So, if there's something going on, we text each other, we're in contact."

A woman who works on community-based crime prevention for a non-profit in St. Louis similarly described the importance of social relations for a safe community, describing it in terms of "community care".

> When I think about public safety or community safety, I think a lot about community care, and those are often the things that people are looking for. They want to live in a community where they know their neighbors. They want to live in a community where they feel like, if something happened, their neighbors would look out for them. Most of the time, people want to be able to walk outside and do a thing. Maybe it's [to] go get ice cream with their family, or go to the park.… I think people are often looking for a return to the community.… It feels safer when there are other houses and other people in those houses, and I know the people in those houses. And if something happened to me, somebody would come out and see what was happening, somebody would interfere, somebody would stop it.

Safe communities facilitate a sense of belonging.

Relatedly, people discussed the importance of welcoming neighbors who cultivate a feeling of belonging. According to a woman who does equity work in Missoula County, belonging means "being able to be in a space and be who you are and be comfortable with that, and not expect any sort of confrontation … knowing you're accepted, and

that people are not going to target you for whatever reason." Several people indicated that communities could facilitate a sense of belonging by making efforts to be inclusive and "treat people like humans." For example, one participant who works in behavioral health in Missoula discussed how a program that provided haircuts to unsheltered people cultivated belonging, which was central to her definition of safety. I think that unsheltered people are told all the time they don't belong. They have to get out. When I first started… I was doing the thing where they get a haircut. [The people giving the haircut] spend almost an hour with each person, and the person ends up looking great. … To me, [unsheltered individuals] want a haircut, and they want somebody to take that time with them. They felt great. I want that for them everywhere.

People also discussed how the built environment can be designed in a way that facilitates a sense of belonging for groups that are often marginalized, making them feel safer. A St. Louis County teacher discussed "feeling seen" and being accommodated. "You know, from simple ways of being greeted or people knowing you all the way to…feeling seen because you use a wheelchair and there's an accessible ramp into a building, you know, that's a way of being seen that makes people feel safe."

Safe communities have thriving businesses, amenities, greenspace, and recreational opportunities.

Safe communities were described as having activities and events for people to do and places to go, such as parks, libraries, and grocery stores, and supporting thriving businesses that are invested in the area. One person who works for the courts in Mecklenburg County identified how a robust and thriving business community is a key safety component through its link to employment.

> I believe in business because I think business creates jobs, [and] jobs create stability. It allows people to feed, and educate, and take care of their families, and house themselves. But I think that the watering down of our revenue base, particularly in communities, has made us do justice systems cheap, healthcare cheap, education cheap, and at a time where our needs are greater than they've ever been. And so that leaves you with a desperate population. And when people get desperate, people commit crimes. Simple as that.

Parks and green spaces were often discussed when describing safe communities as well as "places looking pretty." According to a Black community organizer in St. Louis, "In a lot of marginalized communities, we just don't have nice things to look at. And that does something for the spirit, for the soul, for the mind…if we see nice pretty green spaces that are safe and healthy and where the air is clean, and people can run and exercise and feel safe doing it. That's also part of it." Thus, green spaces promote emotional and psychological safety and can be havens in communities that have faced disinvestment.

Well-maintained infrastructure, including lights and sidewalks, make communities safe.

Aspects of the built environment that were often linked to community safety were adequate lighting, well-maintained sidewalks, and neighborhood upkeep. "Street lighting and sidewalks" is how a woman working in strategic community planning in Missoula summarized the findings from a recent effort to learn what makes specific neighborhoods feel safe. She and others pointed out how these issues were particularly important for people with mobility issues, including people in wheelchairs.

When asked what a safe neighborhood looks like, one St. Louis County teacher stated, "I think being able to see, whether that's like lighting at night or whether that's plants that are trimmed back so I can see where I'm traveling and what have you. Feeling like the neighborhood is in a state of good repair. The sidewalks aren't crumbling, there's not broken glass or trash and things like that". Other aspects of the built environment discussed included infrastructure that facilitated safe movement around the county, such as bike lanes, crosswalks, and convenient and well-run public transportation. A St. Louisan who works in community health noted, "St. Louis pedestrians are so at risk of being hit by cars. There's no public transit really." People living in more rural areas in Missoula indicated that cell phone coverage and internet access made them feel safe because they could get help if needed.

Some communities suffer from disinvestment due to historical forces, like racism. Care must be taken to ensure improvements and new development in these areas benefit current residents rather than displacing them.

People discussed the need to recognize the historical forces, such as racism, that allowed some communities to suffer from unmaintained infrastructure and lack of amenities. A Mecklenburg County resident who works for a victim services provider stated:

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> *Well, I think first we just have to look at the underbelly of why [disinvestment in some areas] exists in the first place. How did we get here, right? How is it that the people who are 10 minutes up the street have high rises, and Starbucks on the corner and dog parks, and the people over here have boarded-up buildings and you don't even have a decent gas station. So how did we get to where those people get things continuing to come to them, and buildings and resources and businesses and people investing in their community, and the people over here are dying off? Why does that exist?*

Several people recognized that making communities more vibrant can sometimes come with costs, including the risk of being priced out of neighborhoods. For example, a system-impacted person in Missoula stated that new development and amenities might lead him to be "pushed out", but still, these changes made him feel safer: "You just think 'Oh man, these are some pretty respectable people and places and things,' it might just make me feel more safe. [Or] it might run me out because I can't afford it...." Similarly, even though there is desire for more amenities, individuals we spoke with suggested that people living in communities experiencing historic disinvestment are skeptical that community improvements are made to benefit them.

A St. Louis community organizer noted that "[Residents are] aware of the overt racism that occurs in St. Louis, the segregation. ... While we see some improvements, we know that it's more about gentrification than it is about uplifting some of the families in communities that lack access. That it's not about getting those folks in those communities access but more about bringing the community up to squeeze those folks out." A director of an anti-violence organization in Mecklenburg County described how new investments can destabilize and undermine safety.

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> *I think people think if you build nice things, it's going to make a community safe. Or if you move a certain amount of people out, it's going to make a community safe... . So, we're not really focused on the renewal of people's minds, the restoring of their hearts, the revival of a community. We're not focused on those things that can really change the community. We want to build shiny new toys and just place them there and say, 'It looks better. New people will move here. Let's raise up the rent so people can't afford to live here, and it'll be safe.' And then it's a safe community until everybody moves 10 minutes away, and then that community isn't safe. So, we have to change people. We have to be focused on investing in people and really changing how people are instead of just changing where people live.*

Region: Resources for a Socially and Economically Just Community

Many people we spoke with conceptualized community safety as a more equitable distribution of opportunities and resources that would ensure people not only have what they need to get by, but to thrive. Participants emphasized the importance of a network of well-resourced supportive services and access to a good education, job training, and quality employment opportunities.

A foundation of safety is having basic needs met.

A common theme was that a safe community is a place where everyone's basic needs are met. For example, when asked to define safety, a system-impacted individual and activist in Mecklenburg County replied, "Safety looks like food, clothing, shelter. I can promise you that if every single person has guaranteed food, clothing, and shelter for the rest of their life, you will see safety emerge." A police officer in Missoula provided a similar answer to this question, emphasizing the need for a comprehensive approach. "[Safety has] got to be not just addiction. It also has to be people. Are their basic needs being met? I mean, do they have shelter? Do they have three meals a day? Do they have access to medical care and medicine if they need it? If those needs aren't being met, we're not going to be able to do anything. And that's really unfortunate because you've got people out there where those needs aren't being met."

Some participants emphasized the need to focus on the most vulnerable in the community. A person who works in the St. Louis County court system stated, "Community safety would be prioritizing the health and wellbeing of all members of the community, but with an especially high prioritization for those who are most vulnerable. So those who are ill, injured, or recently victimized, those types of things. Their needs need to be bumped to the front of the line."

Safe communities ensure quality education is available to all.

Another theme was the role of education in safety. A student at St. Louis Community College noted, "One of the best preventative measures in regard to crime is education. You see places where there's a good education, there's like no crime. So, leaders need to know that." Participants indicated that without a quality education, it is difficult for people to meet their basic needs, which can lead to offending. A formerly incarcerated person in Missoula who viewed lack of education as a barrier to safety stated, For me, what [safety] means is food security, housing security, good health plans, decent wages, better education. Because I noticed the more educated people are, the less likely they continue to do certain things. … [My buddy] was in prison for 13 years. He got out and he didn't know how to read and write. Those were, I think, very big barriers for his safety…and being a good member of society.

A police officer in Mecklenburg County discussed the role of education in providing youth not only with opportunity but also hope and a path forward.

> *So, I think that's where people are having issues, is a lack of access, lack of opportunity. ... [Youth] see what they have now, and...it's hard to show them what they could have. That's why it's so important to connect them to other places, show them that the possibilities are there, show them how to get there, show them that college is attainable. If you don't want to go to college that's fine, here's some other options with trade school, and some other different schools at community college.*

Inequities in school funding and access to quality schools were viewed as particularly problematic in St. Louis, where there are 15 school districts and high levels of inequality in the tax bases supporting each one. A St. Louis community organizer linked this lack of investment in education to crime and safety, saying: "We have to look at how our schools are funded and how there is a disadvantage up front for students in certain communities... the way we are affecting our school system is inadvertently affecting the crime in our neighborhoods as well, so addressing that would be a great start."

Housing is fundamental for safety.

The fundamental association of housing with safety was a prevalent theme in the interviews. When asked about community safety, a person who works on violence prevention in Mecklenburg County noted,

> *I would say community safety is ... being able to live in a place that isn't your second, third, or fourth choice because it's unsafe in terms of violence. [Or] it's unsafe in terms of you're living in a hotel. ... And so, I think it is making sure that we have places for people to live in this city that fit all different types of living situations, lifestyles, et cetera. But they all have a common thread of you'll be able to go to sleep at night and wake up in the morning, and you'll be okay. You won't be kicked out of your house, or have someone break into your house, or shoot into your house, or home, or apartment, or wherever you are living.*

A system-impacted man living in Missoula described how, for him, safety means stability, which is predicated on having a place to live. He also notes that having stable living contributes to community safety because it keeps him from engaging in illegal behavior.

> *For me, safety means being able to know that I can care for myself, and I can work to take care of myself and my family. That way, I don't have to do stupid things for money, whatever those may be. ... For me, it's stability. Being able to have a place to come to after I work ... a place to wash my clothes, to rest my head, to make my meals, to do what I need to do—and because I finally have that, things are working for the better—a positive change in my life. It has been tremendous since I've started my recovery journey because I have a place to stay.*

A similar view was expressed by a woman who works for Mecklenburg County in violence prevention: "I think safety and stability should basically be mentioned in the same breath. Because if you don't have a good job and a safe place to live, [it increases the] chances that you're going to have to do something illegal to support your family, or you're going to have to live in a situation surrounded by people who are in a similar situation, which exposes you to crime."

For those who are unhoused, housing provides a measure of protection from potential victimization, including both serious violence and the security of their belongings. For example, when asked to describe a safe situation, an unhoused woman in Missoula said, "Being in a home and not being vulnerable in a tent." A person who works in community behavioral health in Missoula recounted how unhoused individuals may cope with their fear of victimization and trauma with illegal behavior. She described how she had met an unhoused mother of two children, who was living in her car while escaping an abusive relationship. This woman explained to her that she uses IV drugs because "they increase my sense of safety right now. When I am alone in my car overnight with my children, I am able to stay awake and alert so I can protect my children, because that is the time when we feel the most vulnerable, and that is when we are most at risk of being found [by the partner she was running away from]."

However, several people who work with unhoused individuals noted that some chronically unhoused individuals feel safer being outside than living in a house. A Missoulian who works in behavioral health stated, "There are absolutely tons of folks that might feel safer being unhoused than they feel being housed, depending upon the length of time they've been unhoused. That just becomes their new normal and their baseline. … They know the neighborhoods, they know the people, the places, the safe spaces. … What feels less safe to them is being closed in as opposed to being outside, where you can see all around you."

Addressing how poverty pressures people into crime is important for community safety. This includes recognizing that the criminal legal system can play a role in perpetuating poverty and inequality.

Many participants discussed how poverty is tied to safety because it can lead people to engage in crime. A service provider who works with system-involved youth in Missoula noted that many theft-related charges are "directly a

result of [youth] taking something that they needed or taking something that a sibling needed." A victim advocate in Missoula spoke more broadly on this issue, noting that "the root is poverty, to me. If we can work on the disproportionate effects of poverty versus middle class even, I think we would see a lot of drug use go down. We would see a lot of violence go down. We would see a lot of theft go down because people would have their needs met." An unhoused man living in Missoula explained that the way to make everybody feel safe is to "give the same quality of life to everybody, or the chance to have a better quality of life to everybody… Give everybody equal living conditions, equal rights. That's the only way it's going to ever happen."

People also discussed the role of the criminal legal system in perpetuating poverty, economic inequality, and crime. For example, one St. Louis community organizer described how cash bail keeps people with limited financial resources detained, destabilizes their lives, and removes wealth from families and the community. Relatedly, a system-impacted person from St. Louis suggested that removing the employment and education barriers for people with felony convictions could lead to a decrease in crime through its effect on financial security, which he equated with safety. Another participant who works for a St. Louis non-profit that helps families who have lost a child to violence, including police violence, highlighted the perception of police in economically marginalized communities where they are "viewed more as a militarized force in a third-world country, here to suppress the poor or to keep you poor."

Supportive services in the community contribute to safety by addressing the underlying causes of crime and providing help for those who have been harmed.

In discussing the importance of meeting basic needs, others highlighted the role of supportive services for safety. A person who works for the courts in Missoula stated, "I think that the availability of services… those are directly related [to safety] in my mind because they are responsive to an attempt to address criminogenic factors in people's lives. Even though they're not direct barometers of things like crime, I think that their correlation to criminality and, subsequently, victimization seems pretty apparent to me." Others suggested that access to services is key because it is unrealistic to expect total freedom from harm. A woman living in Missoula who had been a victim of violence noted, "I don't think everyone can feel safe with everything all the time. I don't think that's realistic. But I think knowing that there's resources when you don't feel safe is important."

Another woman in Missoula who works with vulnerable populations described how problems accessing services can make communities less safe, even leading to death. A huge [layer of safety is] for people to know exactly where to go in the event that things go haywire, or they're at rock bottom, or they need to go into recovery like today and not wait forty-five days for a bed date. Because what happens when people are waiting for those times? They die, they die. They find them in ditches, they go to jail. So those lag times in between actually getting services is a huge deal, and we see it over and over again.

A person who works on violence prevention for Mecklenburg County suggested, "Like many cities, a good amount of our violent crime takes place in a couple of geographies. And so, if we can help address those communities—connect them to resources, improve their job prospects, provide them housing—I think that's the way that we can really start to move the needle on some of these things and not just push the crime to other areas in the city." A Mecklenburg County resident who does equity work expressed a similar idea concerning accessing health care and treatment: "There's so much in public safety. … Look at healthcare. I mean, that is a public safety issue if people aren't getting the same access. It's a public safety issue if all people are not being able to get substance abuse treatment if all people are not able to have access to mental health care… There are so many levels to safety." A St. Louis social worker suggested that resources also make communities safer by reducing the individual and collective stress residents face.

In addition to having enough supportive services, people we spoke with emphasized the need for those services to be high-quality and accessible to all. A woman who works for St. Louis County on criminal legal system reform stated,

> *What I think of as… a safe community is the people and the community know how to get resources if they are needed and that they are received appropriately. So, I guess it's community satisfaction with various measures of what safety would be … things like if you're having a mental health crisis, do you know who to call? Has this ever happened to you? How did that go? Same thing [for] substance abuse crises or general mental health issues, [those] safety net-type things. If you needed food stamps, [do] you know where to go? Do you need different child welfare issues as well? … Just feeling like you could get what you need where you are.*

Historical forces, like racism and disinvestment, contribute to and reinforce the unequal distribution of services and resources.

Some people framed the unequal distribution of resources and services as a component of a larger issue of systemic racism and divestment in marginalized communities. One system-impacted individual stated that unless the economic injustices and disparities faced by Black communities are addressed, we cannot truly address safety. "Mecklenburg County … is safe below the crescent. Outside of the Black neighborhoods, the city's very safe. … We're talking about crime and safety in certain sections of the cities of the United States of America… That's everywhere. That is economic, and that is intentional. Until those things are addressed, everything else is just a moot conversation."

One St. Louis County participant who works in community health describes what this entails, noting that the unequal distribution of resources results from historic disinvestment in some communities.

> *[Safety] is all of those social determinants of health that really keep people thriving, that give people purpose, that show that they can live in this country or in this city with dignity. Things like having access to healthcare, having access to safe and equitable housing. … To me, these are very simple things that it is almost like a misallocation of resources. … I don't think it's unintentional. I think it's a legacy of this in our country. Money filters up rather than down, and resources trickle up rather than down.*

Region: Responsive Government & Public Safety Agencies

This region of the map includes clusters linked to government and emergency response systems. Statements emphasize local government officials acting ethically, fairly, and in the community's best interest. Safety in this region is also about having a voice in decisions that affect the community and being treated with respect when making complaints or requests to local officials. People also discussed the role of well-trained first responders who arrive quickly when needed, particularly focusing on police responsiveness. People tended to associate gun violence prevention with government and public safety agencies, perhaps because much of the responsibility for these aspects of safety falls on these two groups.

The government plays a key role in safety by passing laws and regulations that promote safety and advance the community's interests.

The government was often discussed as one of the primary groups responsible for promoting community safety. Some described the government as a system of agencies that enforce an expansive set of laws and regulations intended to keep people safe and healthy. According to a police officer in Missoula,

> *Safety within my community is not just like police officers or sheriff's officers' interactions. The entire government system, in essence, is built on some form of enforcing of the law in general. And so that's your health department, that's your code enforcement, that's your billing department. And so, what is safety? Safety is to ensure that I hold the proper permits to ensure that my electrician is laying down electricity in the right way in my house, so that I don't flick on a light switch and my house burns down.*

A person who works for an anti-violence organization in Mecklenburg County defined safety as knowing that local leaders are collectively working to address issues and improve safety. "Just being able to know that the leadership that surrounds this city is moving with integrity and excellence, and that it's trickled down from the head to the rest of the body of the institution that they work for. And that's safety to me. Knowing that my kids are safe when they go to school. … When I go to work, I'm in good hands. And when I'm in my house, I'm in good hands."

People also defined a safe community in terms of government functioning and effectiveness, which includes making decisions and enacting policies that benefit the entire community, not just those who are privileged. A woman who works in public health in St. Louis spoke about safety in terms of protections put in place by the government: "Community safety. I would say doing things, and creating policies and procedures so that every individual in the community, whether they're living there [or] working there, says they feel safe when asked, 'Do you feel safe?'"

In St. Louis, participants discussed how regional fragmentation is a barrier to creating safe communities. As a person who works for a non-profit that does community capacity building in North County noted, one reason for this is that small municipalities with a low tax base do not have the "financial and the foundational support to actually take care of and protect their communities." As a result, there is limited code enforcement, and essential functions like policing are often outsourced. People recognized that resolving this issue is not easy because they perceived it as the result of decades of segregation and disinvestment. Some reported that when government funding for programming is targeted at disinvested communities, it is often too little, or the investment is not sustained over time. Discussions of this issue in St. Louis often centered on North County. A person who works for a non-profit that does community capacity building in this area of the county stated:

> City clerks and the mayors are doing the best they can, with incredibly limited resources. And same with the police departments. … I feel like it's unfair to be like, 'Well, the residents and the elected officials are responsible for taking care of their own,' when in many ways they're victim to a lot of very intentional and predatory disinvestment. I keep saying disinvestment, and there isn't new growth. And our structures are very similar to public schools where … there's no shared pot that's being equally distributed. It's very inequitable. … This localized local government thing can really disenfranchise low-income areas.

In a safe community, the government takes concrete steps towards combating gun violence, and solutions are community supported and driven.

In St. Louis and Missoula Counties, a common theme was the failure of government to make communities safe by tackling gun violence. A person who works for the courts in St. Louis stated, "All this gun violence is horrific. … And you have people kind of talk about it … but I don't see any leaders in this area screaming out, that [people] shoot every day. … What are we going to do about ending it?… I think we should have county-wide [and] city-wide meetings every day until we come up with concrete plans and then we should hear on the news every night what's being done to change this."
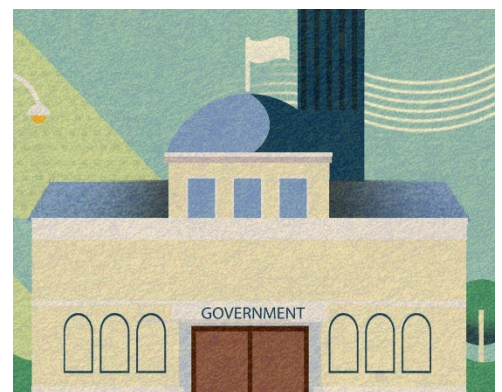
A system-impacted person in St. Louis similarly expressed his frustrations around gun laws and the prominence of gun violence in the region, attributing inaction to profit and capitalism.

> *They [are] worried about all this violent crime here in the state of Missouri. But this is an open-carry state. So, what do you expect to happen if you're putting the guns out here in the street? You're allowing people to go in the store and buy these high-power munitions, which are basically meant only for military usage. So why would you put this stuff out here on the streets if you didn't want none of this stuff to happen?... Because America gets paid off of death. America gets paid off of crime.*

A trauma surgeon in Mecklenburg County linked government inaction around gun violence to the increasing polarization and politicization of this issue. He believed that some representatives in the state are uninterested in passing legislation that will address gun violence in Charlotte because they don't perceive it as an issue in the community they represent.

> *If you live in the suburban areas [of Charlotte], you don't believe that violence is a big issue. And maybe you even resent the fact that people are talking about putting resources into those communities. I think it's the same thing on the state level. If you're a senator or a representative from a more rural area, even though gun violence rates are increasing in those areas, you see that. And we've heard people tell us, 'That's an urban problem. That's not my problem.' I said, 'Well, aren't you a representative for the state?' 'Yeah, but I represent my constituency first'. People just don't seem to be willing to walk in the shoes of other people and understand that it's not just their own little corner of the world, that there are repercussions to the decisions that they make in other parts of the city and other parts of the state that really deserve to be seriously considered.*

Another theme was that when the government does take steps to address gun violence, solutions need to be community driven. For example, a person who does equity work in Mecklenburg County described the importance of allowing the community to have a voice.

> *Gun violence definitely needs to be addressed from all angles. And the community really needs to have a voice in what is going on. A genuine voice. Not a checkbox to say that you spoke with someone, but genuinely listening to the community and trying to collaborate to create practices and policies that will make them feel like they're included in the decision making. Because a lot of times, what's being reflected or the practices and policies are not necessarily in the best interest of the community, but in the best interests of the [government] systems.*

A director of a violence prevention organization in Mecklenburg County shared a similar sentiment but expressed frustration that the community is often left out when solutions are implemented.

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> *If we say, 'We don't want military guns on the street,' let's find a way not to have military guns on the street if we know that's a problem in our community. And if the community says, 'This is a problem,' let's bring all of our resources to that community and say, 'Well, here's the resources to fix that problem. How do you think is the best way to do it?' Right now, what happens is they say, 'What do you think should be done?' And then we tell them what should be done, and then they implement it without us. And I think that's where we lose a lot. … We need to be at the table, not just when we're brainstorming, but when we're saying, 'It's time to put it in action,' and that's where the community's voice is the strongest.*

A safe community has well-trained first responders who arrive quickly. Variability and unpredictability in police response makes people feel unsafe and reluctant to call the police.

When discussing safety, participants regularly mentioned the government agencies connected to the first response system, including the police, emergency medical technicians, and fire departments. Many people indicated that a safe community is one in which first responders arrive quickly when called and are well-trained and equipped to provide quality services to those in need. One North St. Louis County resident described: "I feel safe when you call the police, and they respond immediately. You don't have to keep waiting and then calling back. Those are scenarios where I feel safe, where I know I can depend on the law to protect me."

People reported a great deal of variability in the quality of police responses. In St. Louis County, participants described how problems with the functioning of the 911 system made them feel unsafe. They described being put on hold by 9-1-1 operators and lengthy wait times for first responders to arrive, if they came at all. One system-impacted person in St. Louis County remarked, "I don't know what's wrong with the dispatchers, but while they're sitting there telling people, 'Could you please hold,' somebody can be losing their life at that moment in time." A North St. Louis County resident similarly expressed her frustrations, stating, "It's been times where people call the police or try to call the police, [but] they don't get phone calls right away, or they brush off certain situations. 'Oh, it's not that important.' And before you know it, it's too late. Y'all were there, and then you guys left, and then you had to come back to someone dying or someone being hurt.

Another North County resident discussed the variability in the quality of police responses to her calls for assistance:

> *I've had two different experiences with the police. [The first] situation was kind of nonchalant, not really caring. 'Oh, okay, well, there's nothing we can do about it.' The second time … they were amazing. They came out … he actually called me two weeks later just to check on us. … And with that first officer, he never even communicated with us. But this [second officer] felt … that we were important enough that he needed to call us, and reach out, and to stay in contact, and to communicate with us.*

Some participants stated that the unpredictable nature of emergency response systems led them to avoid seeking help in an emergency. A system-impacted woman stated, "It's like if something bad were to happen and I want to call them for help, but then there are times where they haven't helped me. … How do I know what I'm going to get? I don't feel comfortable calling them and knowing that I'm going to get the help that I need. So, it's like I got to try to find as much resources that I can do for myself."

Others described how they are reluctant to call the police because the outcome is unpredictable and could end in police violence. One woman in Mecklenburg County explained, "As a Black person who lives in a predominantly white neighborhood, I don't feel safe calling the police if my house got broken into… Not the way that a white person will feel like, "Oh my God, this thing is happening. Let me call the police; they'll come to help. I'm automatically thinking about all of the things that could possibly go wrong." An educator in St. Louis County expressed a similar fear around calling police to handle issues at schools: "[some students] have had experiences with police officers escalate. And that if there's a problem, we need to handle it ourselves. Because if the police are involved, then they're going to handle [the situation] in a way that's not constructive or it's actively destructive to us."

For some, there was a perception that emergency responses differed based on race, housing status, living location, and whether they had been involved in the criminal legal system. With respect to race, people of color perceived that they did not get the same level of emergency services as more privileged groups. One Black woman who works for an agency in Mecklenburg County that provides services to victims discussed how emergency response systems disproportionately benefit white individuals who "exist in a world where you know that you can call the police, they'll be there, you can call an ambulance, they'll come quickly." Similarly, a Black resident living in North St. Louis County questioned whether she could count on the police to keep her safe in an emergency. She said, "You know how you have confidence in something like, I can call this person, and I know they're going to take care of me. I can't say that I'm all the way confident that if something was to happen to me or my family, that my life would be of value to [the police]. I'm not confident in that."

In Missoula, some Native American persons described experiencing long wait times for police and emergency medical technicians. A Native American man described his experiences:

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So many times, it has taken the ambulance or police so long. … I used to live with this family, and they needed help there. They know that's a Native American household. It would take them 45 minutes to an hour to sometime two hours for them to arrive for help if they even showed up at all. Well, meanwhile there's white neighbors … sometimes we would actually ask them to call for us, because they would show up immediately and it was awful. … So we just say, all right, this is how it is. So, we just pull together, and we take care of each other.

A system-impacted individual in St. Louis attributed differences in the level and quality of police response to socioeconomic status. He stated, "Anybody that has money, they get immediately responded to. But even the lower middle class, all the way down to the impoverished. We ain't going to get no response like a person that's upper middle class or a person that is of the upper-class status. We ain't going to get that response. We deserve to have that response, though."

Others attributed inadequate emergency responses to stereotyping and discrimination against people involved in the criminal legal system and those with substance use disorders. A system-impacted resident of Mecklenburg County described feeling unsafe because, as a person convicted of a felony, he perceived, "There's not the expectation that government and police will protect me because I'm forced to live in a community where that doesn't exist in that way. That expectation is not there." An individual in Missoula, who was in recovery from a substance use disorder, described being treated dismissively by hospital staff: "[The hospital staff] were very judgmental and they thought maybe I was coming in there drug seeking, or they didn't take me seriously."

Inadequate emergency responses contribute to the cycle of violence and victimization.

Participants said an inadequate emergency response not only made them feel less safe but also harmed community safety because people felt they could not rely on the police for assistance and needed to handle problems on their own. For example, one system-impacted woman in Missoula indicated that rather than relying on the police to keep her safe, she depended on her deep connections with biker gangs. Because of the protection she received from these groups, people knew that there "would be consequences if something did happen to me." Similarly, a woman who works with system-impacted juveniles in Missoula discussed how youth sometimes carried guns because they felt they had no other option for staying safe. She noted, "They're unsafe, and they feel unsafe, and this is the only way they're going to keep themselves safe. And they don't understand how that puts the community then in an unsafe situation because they're on survival mode."

In addition, when people who have been victimized refrain from seeking help from the criminal legal system due to their prior negative experiences with the system, it puts them at risk for future victimization. As noted by one woman who works in victim services in Mecklenburg County, people with prior criminal legal system experiences are often deterred from "doing things that might help to prevent violence because they risk facing more violence from the systems."

Part of a safe community is having people aside from the police available to respond to some emergencies.

Some people looked beyond traditional public safety agencies and indicated that community safety should include the availability of alternative or co-responders for people in crisis, such as mental health professionals or social workers. As one St. Louis County public school teacher stated, "Safety can mean that there is a safe place for people to calm down or that there is a number that you can call that's not the police if someone's having a mental health crisis, you know, to intervene with them."

A police officer in Missoula explained that people turn to the police when they don't know where else to go. Still, law enforcement does not always have the tools to assist them, which is why he supports the integration of crisis intervention training (CIT) in policing.

> *Officers are the master problem-solvers whether they are the best problem solver for the problem or not. When there is no other clearly identified or defined place for somebody to be able to go, they land on my doorstep. So why CIT works from a law enforcement perspective is we are the last line, and we ultimately push back and push these problems back into other resources, or other departments, or other areas where there are better solutions. Because my options as a law enforcement officer also are limited.*

Respondents in Missoula also highlighted the work of the Mobile Response Team, which is a partnership between the Missoula Fire Department and Partnership Health Center that promotes community safety by responding to behavioral health crisis calls therapeutically. However, they also identified challenges with staff burnout and recruiting staff who are prepared to handle the challenges associated with this job.

Region: Systems for Preventing and Addressing Harm

This region of the concept map generated considerable discussion. While a focus of the prior domain was the role of police in providing timely, effective, and equitable emergency responses, here, the focus is more broadly on the contribution of police treatment to feelings of (un)safety. Statements in this region also focus on holding individuals, institutions (e.g., police, courts), and businesses accountable for the harm they have caused. There was general agreement that these aspects of safety mean different things depending on a person's life experiences, particularly their prior interactions with the criminal legal system.

Views of the police are complex and varied. While not everyone supported the idea of a visible and active police force, there was broad agreement that law enforcement should treat people with fairness, compassion, and respect.

Many described an active and visible police force as a key component of a safe community. These individuals often discussed the role of law enforcement in enforcing laws that protect the public and reported that they feel safe when police are visible and active. At the same time, they were clear that they want a police force that acts in the public's best interest, exhibits genuine concern for the welfare of residents, and focuses on reducing harm and not harassing individuals. One Black North St. Louis County resident reported, "I feel safe in neighborhoods where the police are regularly patrolling and not patrolling just to bother you or harass you, but actually are concerned about your wellbeing and concerned about your property... If they're visible, I can see them; they're doing their job."

The people we spoke with often indicated they want police to protect the community when needed but to do so in a calm, respectful, and understanding manner that does not involve harassment. A system impacted Missoulian, who used to feel unsafe around law enforcement, discussed this tension.

> *When I see [the police], that stigma of not just anticipation but insecurity and paranoia aren't there anymore. I know that they're doing their jobs, and if they're doing their jobs, they're out here protecting the overall welfare of the community. I'm fine with that. But when they're out there stereotyping people. ... I've seen the police go out there and do some really awful things to people because of where they're from, who they are, and what they know, and what they think they know. ... But when I see the police now, I feel like they're doing their jobs. If I'm in the wrong, I'm doing something I'm not supposed to be doing, then yeah, by all means, they're doing their job. I don't feel any way about it, because then I know already that those things are put in place for a reason. But if they're out there, if they're going to just be messing with me for no reason, then I would have to speak up about that.*

Similarly, when asked to describe interactions with the police that made her feel safe, an unhoused woman said, "They would approach the situation calmly. They would let you know that they don't want to hurt you...they're there to help you and understand what's going on in that situation. And they would just be really ... what's that word? Care. They cared about your well-being, and they would ask if you needed any medical help." Moreover, people indicated wanting a police force that knows the community and is dedicated to serving the public's best interests. Many vocal critics of the police still saw a role for law enforcement in creating safe communities but believed that they needed better training and vetting.

While not everyone supported the idea of a visible and active police force, some did discuss a desire to see more police in their community. This view was more prevalent among people living in neighborhoods with high rates of violence who perceive that police officers are scarce and do not seem invested in helping the community. A person

who works with a St. Louis non-profit in North County relayed that "most people [she works with] are still interested in having police in their communities, but there is a lot of discontent with how the policing happens and what happens. And most of the time, their concern is they feel like they're not getting enough of it, that they're paying the police, but they don't ever see them in their community." Another North St. Louis County resident believed police were scarce because they were fearful of the community and the people who lived there, stating, "If it's a neighborhood where there's not a lot of police, I feel that maybe the police don't patrol that area because of fear or what's going on in the neighborhood. ... I think a lot of times the officers just give up on certain neighborhoods because it's just like, 'it's not worth my life.'"

Police violence and harassment is a significant concern, particularly for marginalized groups and people of color.

For people from marginalized groups and system-impacted individuals, the potential for police harassment and violence was a key factor that undermined feelings of safety. A Black mother in Mecklenburg County said that safety "looks like being able to send your children to the store with their friends and the police not killing them and accusing them of shooting or stealing or any of that." A system-impacted person living in Mecklenburg County described safety in the following manner: "To feel safe as a Black man in this community when you get pulled over by an officer to know that you're going to be okay and that they have your best interests."

Others described being harassed by the police and accused them of abusing their power and using unnecessary violence. One Black resident compared the policing in St. Louis to Illinois, stating,

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> *I stayed over in the state of Illinois for the last 10-plus years or whatever, and I've never experienced harassment in my life since the last time I stayed over here in St. Louis. ... If you are doing some stupid or sinister stuff, then you deserve to be approached and confronted about it. But if you're just a person that's just minding your business and not being a hindrance or a nuisance to anybody, why would [the police] harass a person? It's the way the officers look at certain individuals, especially people of color.*

There is variability in the types of crimes that should be enforced by the police.

People spoke about the role of law enforcement in enforcing different types of laws that protect the public. In the interviews, participants generally agreed on the enforcement of laws related to severe harm such as violence, especially domestic violence, and sexual assault, and maintaining safe roads. There was less consensus around the enforcement and court processing of quality-of-life crimes, like public drug use and loitering, particularly in Missoula, where these behaviors were more likely to be viewed as safety issues. For example, some Missoulians, especially those who completed the survey prompt, described a safe community as one in which these laws are enforced. Others suggested the most concern was around unhoused individuals who engage in violent crime. A woman working on criminal justice reform in Missoula described what she was hearing related to this issue,

emphasizing the challenges of working with unhoused individuals who cycle in and out of jail. "Where the line seems to be really drawn is people who are unhoused, who are committing violent crimes, were being let out of jail—'Why didn't you just lock this person up because they're back again?' [But] it's a population that is really hard to serve, and it's a population that's really hard to supervise."

One woman in Missoula who had experienced serious violent victimization and the murder of a family member believed that strict enforcement of minor offenses diverted attention away from serious crimes. She said, "[The police] are more focused on the drugs and everything else that, yes, it's important, but it's like, okay, but murders are happening, and they're being put on the back burner. ... It's all backwards. You shouldn't feel unsafe because of the crime. And then, on top of it, feel unsafe because the police force is doing nothing about it."

Individuals who cause harm should be held accountable, but current systems are unjust, harmful, and ineffective.

In many ways, discussions around accountability mirrored those of policing. People described this as an essential part of community safety, arguing that when people are not held accountable, it endangers the public and makes communities more dangerous. At the same time, many viewed the current criminal legal system, particularly incarceration, as ineffective, harmful, and unjust.

A common theme was the link between accountability for harm and safety. A man who works with at-risk families and youth in Mecklenburg County perceived that people who commit serious acts of violence are currently not held accountable. As a result, the public is reluctant to assist the police and courts, and in turn, victims don't get justice and people who commit harm go undeterred.

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> *It's bad. Folks don't want to be involved because they don't feel like there's any help for those that have lost [someone] or those that have experienced situations of violence. The perpetrators don't feel anything's going happen to them. And so why should I put my home in jeopardy getting involved with the police, and then DAs [District Attorneys]? The DAs are just going to clear them out and put them right back into my community.*

Another Missoula community member who had been incarcerated expressed concern about DUI case handling. She reported that while she was detained, she saw people with this charge released and then almost immediately re-arrested for a new DUI offense.

In addition to accountability and crime deterrence, another concern revolved around victims and their families feeling inclined to take the law into their own hands. A person who works for the judicial system in Mecklenburg County noted,

It is abysmal that a resolution of a misdemeanor ... can take a couple of years to resolve. ... That's before we get to the armed robbery, the rape. The murder, which in this county, if someone insists on a trial, is going to take five years to resolve. That is a civilization broken down. ... When you start talking about waiting five years for accountability, it's kind of like, "Well, can I really rely on this? And if I can't rely on this, do I need to find some other way to resolve my problem?

Several people, both victims and system actors, expressed concern that not enough is being done to hold accountable individuals who commit domestic violence and sexual assault, and this puts people at risk for repeat victimization. A Missoulian working in probation and parole indicated he would feel safer if the courts took violent offenses a little more seriously. "Some judges are a little too lenient, and they are letting out domestic violence abusers a day after they just beat up their girlfriend. And we all know exactly what that's going to look like. And 9 times out of 10, it does, and they're back beating them up again." While he praised recent changes that made strangulation of a partner or family member a felony on the first offense, "that's still just a band-aid on the issue of a severed arm." He was more hopeful about new strangulation training for law enforcement that might lead to more police identification and reporting of the offense.

A woman living in Missoula shared with us, "When I got sexually assaulted and stuff, [the police] literally didn't do anything. They took the reports and everything, and they said if they had contact with him, then, at that point, he would be served and arrested." In contrast, a Missoulian who was dealing with a partner's violence said she felt the criminal legal system was contributing to community safety "a little" because they were holding the perpetrator

and themselves accountable. "He's in jail, and I think they're going to hold him accountable, which is great. ... And I'm pretty sure the district attorney—because they're the ones that are actually pressing charges on him, not me—I think they are holding themselves accountable and doing what they're supposed to, which is great because I've seen that not happen a couple of times with family members."

While most people acknowledged the importance of accountability for safety, many also indicated that current systems are inequitable, ineffective, and make communities less, not more, safe. They noted that incarceration often disrupts people's lives and hinders their ability to meet their basic needs, ultimately leading them back to crime and making the community less safe. A person who works for the courts in Missoula made this point.

I think, again, it begs the question: someone experiencing poverty who steals food from Walmart three times, if we put them in jail for 30 days at public expense, are we categorically safer on the back end than if that mandatory minimum is five days? I think there's probably a pretty good amount of academic

support that says we're actually less safe because that person's probably been destabilized and probably lost employment and maybe housing. And you've just ironically dramatically increased their likelihood to steal again in the future, thereby making us less safe.

A formerly incarcerated person in Missoula expressed a similar viewpoint, describing the lack of substance use treatment in jails, which puts the community at further risk. "They are throwing a lot of addicts in jail, and they're not giving them the help that they need, and then they're throwing them back on the streets. So, therefore, they're more likely to commit the crimes. … I've just dealt with it myself. … I've seen a lot of friends … they're not able to access help, and it's so hard to get help for stuff like that."

One St. Louis County participant who works for an organization that helps people who have lost a child to violence highlighted how the negative consequences associated with incarceration are amplified for people of color, a group disproportionately detained: "They're not getting the help, for lack of a better word, that they need, [so] they're going to return right back to those things that they were doing because there aren't policies in place, there aren't programs in place to help to rehabilitate that individual."

A woman who works with victims in Mecklenburg County described the ways she perceives current court systems of accountability as failing not only those who have caused harm but survivors:

> *Most of the survivors I have worked with over the years do not feel like they've gotten justice from the courts, either because the charges of the person who harmed them were dismissed, or information was shared with their abuser during court that jeopardized their safety further, or information was shared about them that created additional stigma for them. Survivors' experience with courts, in general, from what I have heard and seen, lacks that awareness of trauma and ability to respond to that and not re-traumatize somebody. … There are some things that are intended to be good, like treatment courts, for example, that focus on diversion. But overall, the parts of our courts that get the most investment are the parts that lead to prisons. Then, in prisons, in jails, the capacity or prioritization of getting people help while they're there, coming up with a solid reentry plan, eliminating barriers is just so under-invested in that there are a lot of people who come out the same or worse off than they were before.*

People perceive there are differences in how current court systems hold people accountable, with more privileged people receiving more lenient sentences.

Another concern people raised was unequal treatment by the courts. One Missoulian described how his stepdaughter's father, who identifies as Native American, accidentally shot someone, "and they gave him the harshest sentence that the judge possibly could give him. But yet, you hear and see all these others where white people did this exact same thing, and their total sentence is half the time of what he ended up with." Similarly, when asked how his experiences with the criminal legal system shaped his views of safety, a system-impacted Black man

from St. Louis recounted his firsthand experiences, stating, "I don't see justice. Now, I will admit every crime that I was accused of, I actually did. The problem that I had was not that I did the crime; it was the way they did me. I saw people that were incarcerated with me [get treated more leniently for the] same kind of crimes. The difference is he's a white guy, and I'm a Black guy." A system-impacted individual in St. Louis County shared this view: "If you're Black and Brown color, the chances of you receiving a fair, just situation in the justice system is unlikely."

In Missoula, people perceived that unhoused individuals receive less fair treatment in the courts. A woman in Missoula described a recent court experience in which she witnessed this:

> *I was driving on suspension, and I went to court. And back then, it was mandatory two days jail time. Well, my son had just purchased a mobile home for me. And the judge says, 'What kept you from coming to court?' And I said, 'Well, your Honor, I'm sorry. I forgot. I just moved into a new place.' And she stops me, goes, 'Really? Congratulations. Case dismissed. Time served.'... Well, my friend,...she was the next person in line. They call her name. She goes up there, and the judge tells her she's a menace to society, and people like her should be locked up, and the key should be thrown away. Because she was homeless? Are you kidding me?*

Effective and equitable alternatives to incarceration are needed.

Given the perceived failings of the current system, some people discussed the need to implement new or improved systems for accountability. When asked what accountability should look like in Missoula, a system-impacted woman who had been the victim of domestic violence stated, "Just that all people should be accountable, I mean, but without blasting about it, and I feel like [the courts] should consider them needing help. Doing the help instead of just throwing them in jail or something like that. It's like trying to help the situation, not just throw it away."

People who work on criminal legal system reform in Missoula County also expressed a desire for new forms of accountability. One pointed out the adverse effects of jail time on health and inequality, arguing for the need to create alternatives to incarceration.

> *There's a lot of research at this point that going to jail is generally not good for your life, and for your stability, and for your public health. So ideally, we should be trying to minimize that, as long as it doesn't pose greater risks elsewhere. And certainly, we see a disproportionate amount of people of color go to the detention facility. ... And so, I think when we're talking about community safety, that's certainly an aspect of it. Involvement in the justice system itself poses risks to these populations and further marginalizes them. And so, we should be thinking about how can we find resources or alternatives to try and limit their exposure.*

Another person working on criminal legal system reform for Missoula County described how pandemic-related decarceration policies had opened the door for new conversations around accountability and public safety that focused on "intelligent use of incarceration so that we keep our jail useful." She indicated discussions were now centered on "How do we ensure public safety while still doing some recognized best practice that mitigates those kind of collateral incarceration impacts for people who aren't necessarily a danger to public safety awaiting trial? I think that while that might've been a foreign language lesson 10 years ago, that is a very widely accepted topic of conversation at this point."

One formerly incarcerated woman and activist in Mecklenburg County advocated using non-carceral forms of accountability, such as restorative justice. "[Safety] looks like when things happen in community, we talk about those things. We work through that conflict. If somebody steals my bike, I don't call the police. I want my bike back. And I want them to tell me, number one, that they're not going to do it again, and we going to talk about, 'How can we get you a bike, so we don't got to go around stealing,' right? That's safety." A woman who works in Mecklenburg County providing community support described a picture of community policing that "is more focused on connecting people with resources to try to divert and prevent harm."

The government and criminal legal systems also need to be held accountable.

Finally, although most people referenced personal accountability for harm, some discussed the importance of holding the government and the criminal legal system accountable for the harm they cause. When asked if institutions are held accountable, a system-impacted woman in Missoula said, "They aren't necessarily held accountable for things. I've had friends who have died in the jail and things hadn't changed… and there was still no repercussions… A lot of the time in Montana, things are just not talked about again." An unhoused woman discussed how the $130 she had to pay for weekly drug tests as part of her pre-trial release hindered her ability to save for a place to live despite the fact she was employed at a local fast-food restaurant. She felt this was particularly unfair since she had not been convicted of a crime, and if she was ultimately found innocent, no one would hold the criminal legal system accountable for addressing the hardship this financial burden created in her life.

For some, the lack of accountability for government agencies, particularly police departments, made them feel unsafe when interacting with the criminal legal system. As one resident of St. Louis County, whom the police had previously stopped, reported, "I don't really like that [the police] are not being held accountable for a lot of the bad things they do. Being around someone with that amount of unchecked power feels really unsafe. Being around someone with that much power and no accountability, I feel like if they were held accountable better, I'd feel safer."

People suggested that more police accountability is needed. A woman in Missoula who had experienced violence stated,

66

[The police's] actions should be really looked into, and the way they go about things and their protocol. And all that needs to be better documented or better watched, and actions should be taken on the police that are making illegal decisions or doing things not by protocol. There should be better consequences for that. They shouldn't just get an 'Oh, well, you're not supposed to do it that way,' so the case gets thrown out. No. That can't just be okay. That is wrong.

A law enforcement officer in Mecklenburg County explained how one of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department's core values is accountability, and he believes they are meeting this vision. A person who works for local government discussed how the community plays a key role in keeping the county *government* accountable by protesting, speaking to the county council, or calling the media when they feel the government is not acting in their best interest. "If we leave someone out unintentionally, they get their voice heard. I feel confident that people hold us; the community holds us highly, highly accountable if they don't think we are going down the right path."

SUMMARY

Conceptualizations of community safety are individualized and depend heavily on personal experiences. Differences that were particularly evident in interviews included experiences with the criminal legal system and being unhoused, minority status, gender and sexuality, and exposure to victimization. Moreover, some safety domains were given greater priority by some groups versus others. These findings highlight the need for conversations around community safety to be inclusive and localized. The next section provides a more in-depth examination of how various components of community safety are prioritized in each of the counties.

TOP SAFETY-RELATED PRIORITIES FOR LOCAL RESIDENTS

A key theme that emerged is that the meaning of safety differs across communities and people with different life experiences. Many people indicated that safety must be locally defined and that communities need to determine the aspects of safety that are most important to them. To this end, a second survey was administered that asked people to rate the importance of each component for community safety using a scale of 1 (not at all important) to 4 (very important). Respondents were also asked to rank in order the top three **most important** components of community safety (1 = most important). Finally, respondents were asked to rank the three aspects of community safety that they **believe their community currently gives the most priority**. When compared to the rankings on perceived importance, this information provides further insights into areas of consensus for problem-solving and action-taking.[lxxx] It also helps to identify aspects of safety that survey respondents perceive their community currently underprioritizes relative to their importance.

MISSOULA COUNTY

On average, when asked to rate the importance of each component of community safety on 1-4 scale, survey respondents in Missoula rated all the components of community safety as important or very important. The safety component with the highest rating score was freedom from violence & other harms, with an average rating of 3.73 (see Figure 34). The next six most highly rated components had similar levels of importance, ranging from 3.62 to 3.66. These included day-to-day safety feelings, followed by comprehensive and effective emergency responses, rated at 3.65. The least important aspect was investment in infrastructure, businesses, and programming for a thriving community.

Figure 34. Average Importance Ratings for Components of Community Safety, Missoula (N= 224)

Component	Rating
Freedom from Harm	3.73
Day-to-Day Safety Feelings	3.66
Emergency Response	3.65
Ethical & Respectful Policing	3.64
Social & Economic Justice	3.63
Accountability for Harm	3.63
Responsive Government	3.62
Gun Violence Prevention	3.56
Sense of Community	3.53
Supportive Services	3.5
Investment & Infrastructure	3.36
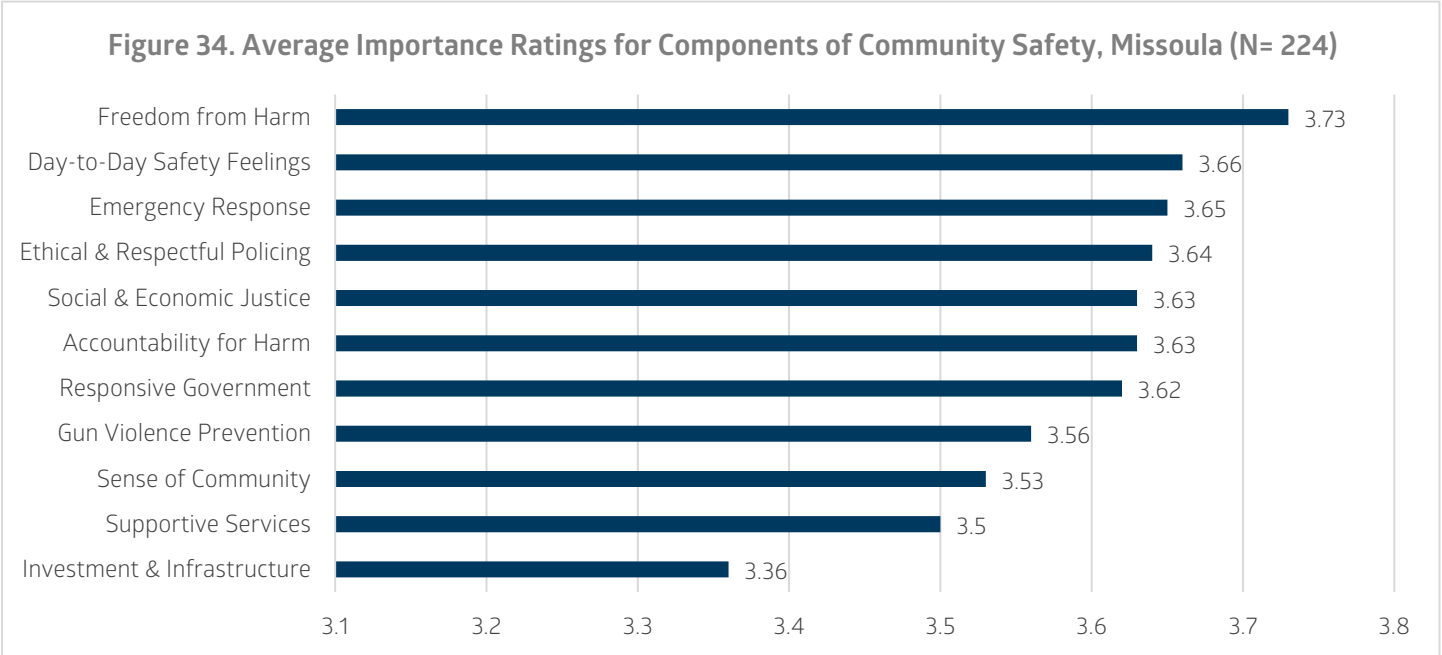
Respondents were also asked to identify and rank the three most important components of community safety. Focusing on the top ranking is particularly informative, given the similarity in the rating scores across safety components. The results for Missoula are displayed in Figure 35. Social and economic justice was most consistently ranked in the top three (41%), and it had the greatest percentage of #1 rankings (22%). This was followed by freedom from violence and other harm, which was ranked among the three most important components of community safety by 35% of respondents. Surprisingly, despite being rated relatively high in importance (see Figure 33), comprehensive and effective emergency responses and ethical and respectful policing, traditionally associated with public safety, received among the fewest top ranks in Missoula.

Figure 35. Percent of Times Component was Ranked Among Top Three Most Important, Missoula (N = 220)
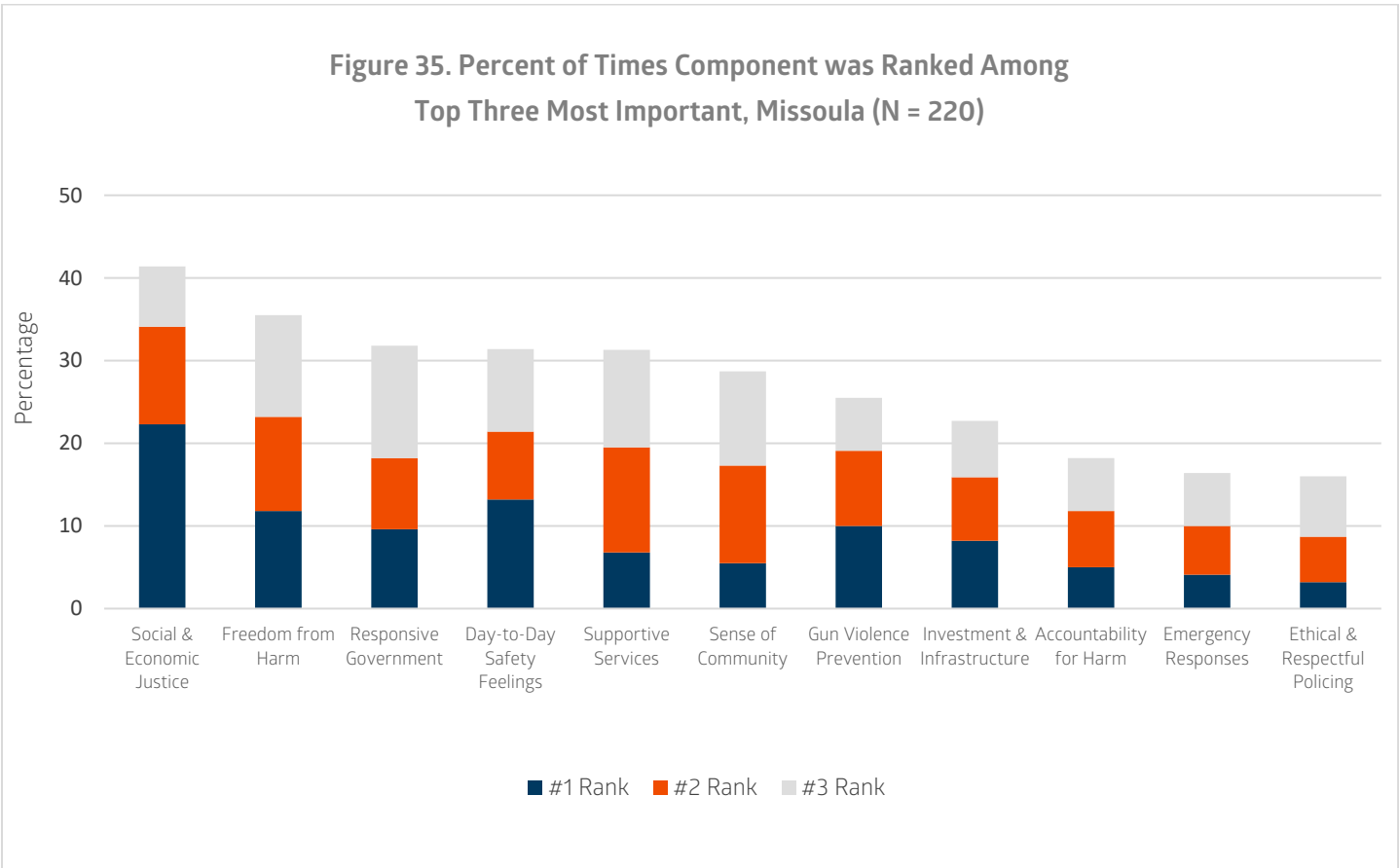
Survey respondents were also asked to rank the top three components of safety currently prioritized in their community. In Figure 36, each component of safety was placed on a matrix according to the percentage of respondents in Missoula who ranked it as one of the top three most important components of safety (horizontal axis) and the percentage who reported that it was currently one of their community's top three priorities (vertical axis). This allows us to identify the aspects of safety that respondents view as highly important, but only a small percentage believe are being treated as top priorities in their community.[lxxxi]

The data indicated that among respondents in Missoula, there was more consensus around a sense of community and supportive services, meaning that a high percentage of respondents think they are important for safety and that their community is currently prioritizing this component. For example, 31% of respondents in Missoula indicated that they viewed supportive services as one of the top three most important aspects of community safety, and a similar percentage (33%) thought their community made providing these services a top priority. In comparison, a relatively high percentage of Missoula respondents believed that a responsive government, freedom from harm, and day-to-day safety feelings are among the most crucial elements of a safe community, but a smaller percentage believed that their community gave these things top priority. Thus, respondents perceived these safety aspects as under-prioritized in their community relative to their importance. While half of respondents in Missoula reported that investment in infrastructure and businesses is currently treated as a top priority, less than a quarter ranked this as highly important. Emergency response is similarly overprioritized relative to its perceived importance.

Figure 36. Most Important Components of Community Safety versus Highest Current Priority, Missoula

ST. LOUIS COUNTY

Like in Missoula County, on average, most survey respondents in St. Louis County rated all the components of community safety as important or very important (see Figure 37). The element of safety with the highest rating score in St. Louis was day-to-day feelings of safety, with an average rating score of 3.67. The next five most highly rated components had remarkably similar levels of importance, ranging from 3.59 to 3.65. They included more traditional aspects of public safety, such as comprehensive and effective responses to emergencies, gun violence prevention, freedom from violence and other harm, ethical and respectful policing, and accountability for harm. St. Louis participants rated a responsive, ethical, and transparent government as the least important elements of community safety (average rating of 3.39).

Figure 37. Average Importance Ratings for Components of Community Safety, St. Louis (N= 324)
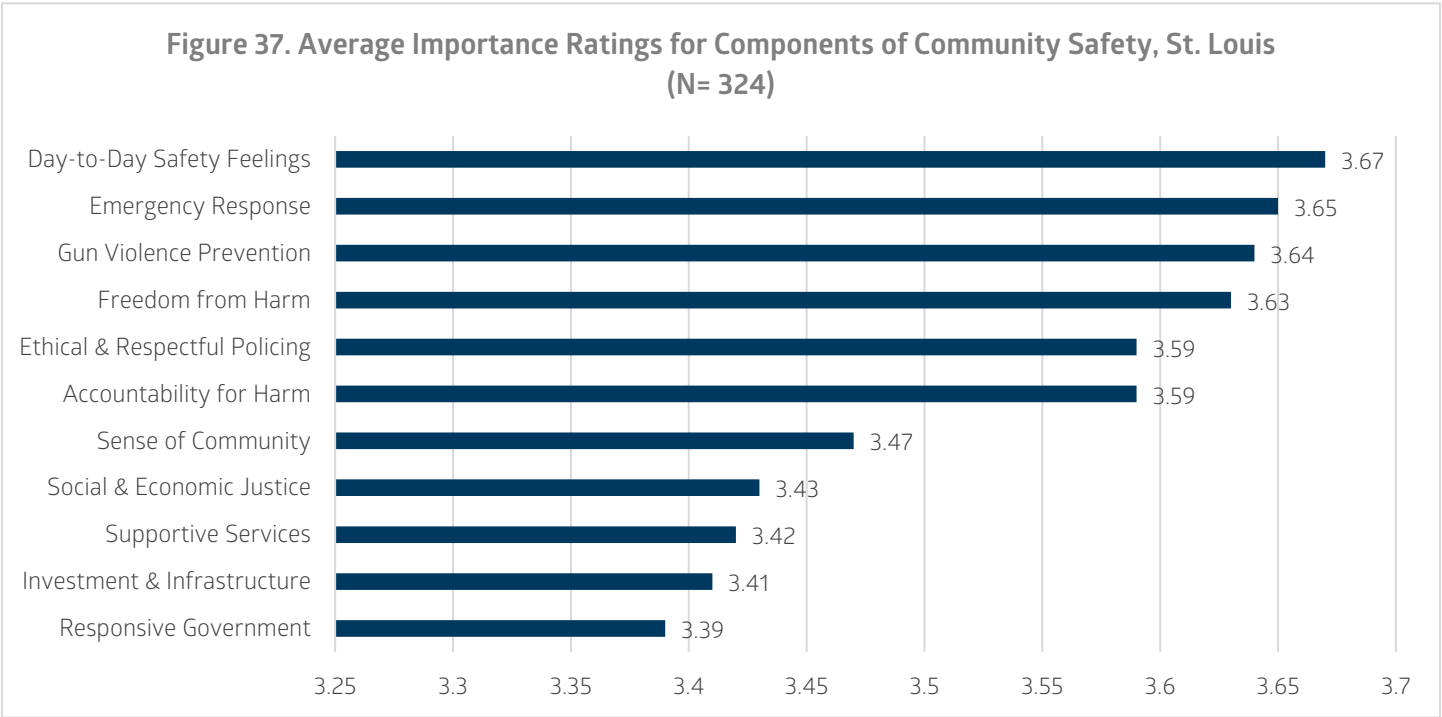
When asked to rank the top three most important aspects of community safety, survey respondents in St. Louis consistently placed gun violence prevention in the top three (37%), and this component of safety had the greatest percentage of #1 rankings (16.9%) (see Figure 38). This was closely followed by freedom from violence and other harm, ranked among the three most important components of community safety by 36% of respondents.

Figure 38. Percent of Times Component was Ranked Among Top Three Most Important, St. Louis (N = 314)
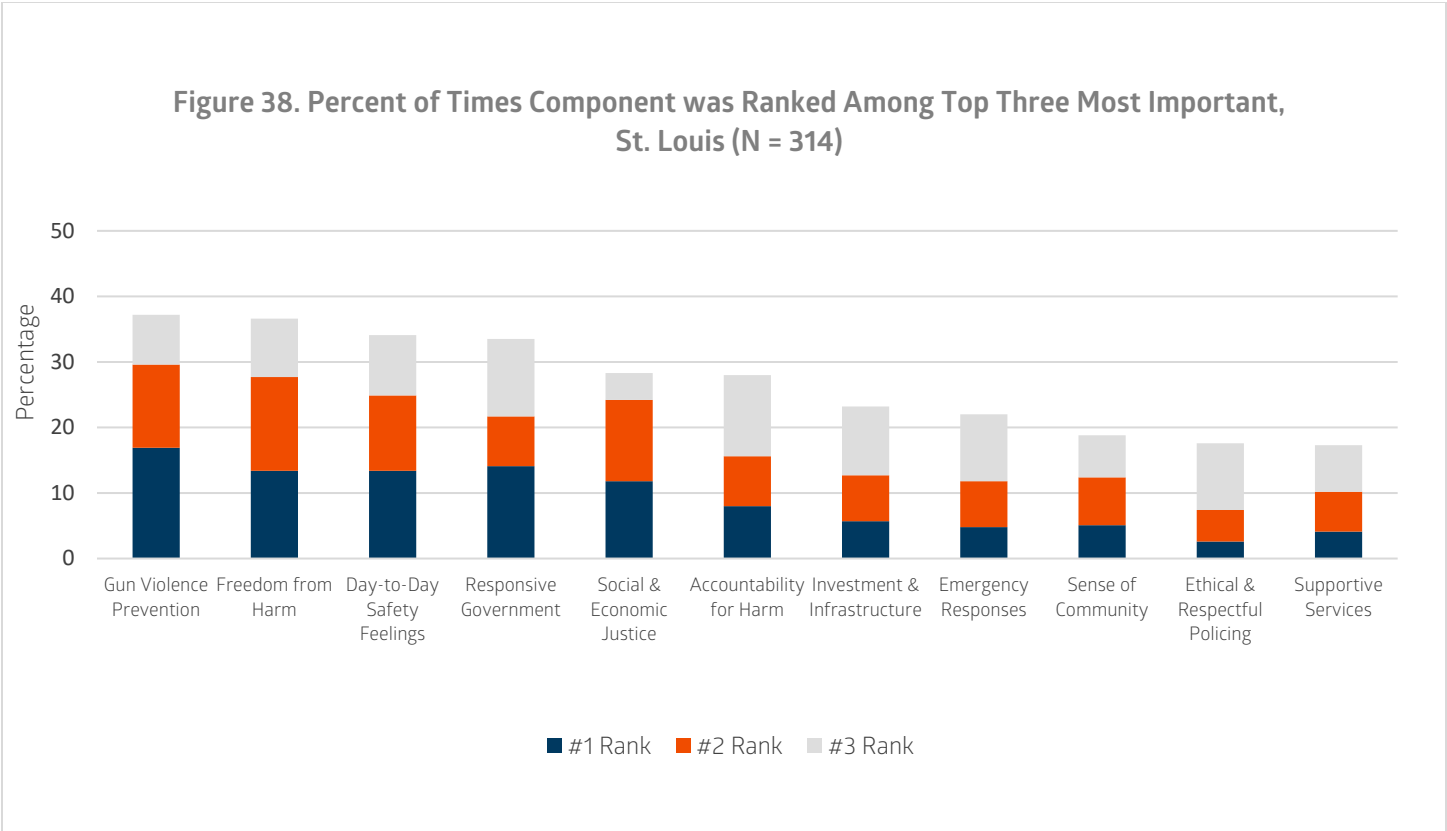
As displayed in Figure 39, when the components of safety ranked as most important are compared to those ranked as currently highly prioritized in the community, we observe the most consensus around day-to-day feelings of safety. This was ranked among the top three most important aspects of community safety by 34% of participants, and it was ranked among the top three current priorities by 29% of survey takers. Freedom from violence and other harm, gun violence prevention, and a responsive, ethical, and transparent government were also ranked as high in importance by a significant percentage of respondents. Still, they were less likely to be identified as a current top priority in their community, indicating they are seen as underprioritized. In contrast, a sense of community, comprehensive and effective emergency responses, and investment in infrastructure and businesses seem to be overprioritized. A high percentage of respondents perceived that they are top community priorities, but fewer ranked them as high in importance.

Figure 39. Most Important Components of Community Safety vs. Highest Current Priority, St. Louis
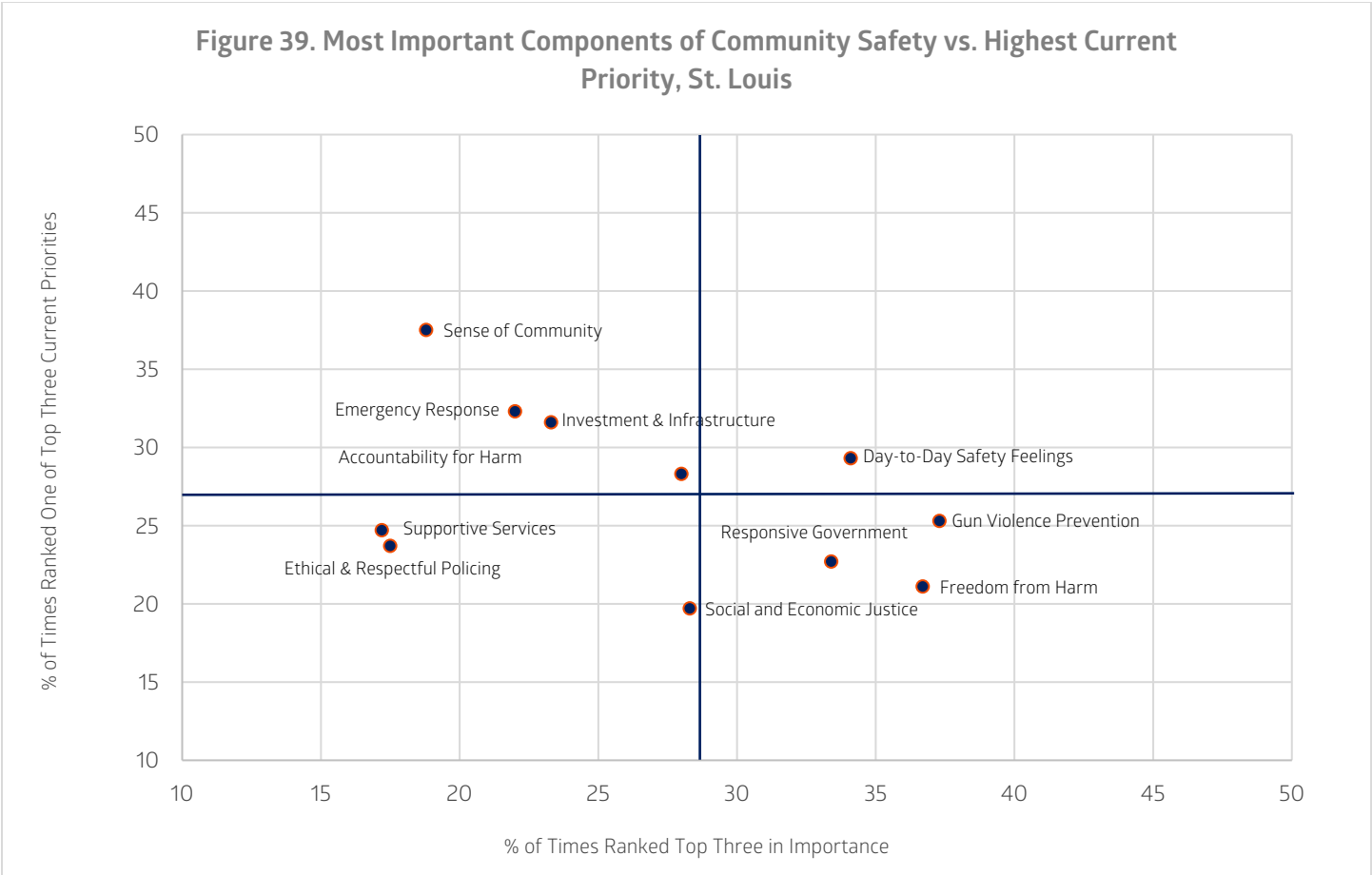
MECKLENBURG COUNTY

As in other sites, survey respondents in Mecklenburg County rated all the components of community safety as important or very important. As displayed in Figure 40, the component of safety with the highest rating score in Mecklenburg County was day-to-day feelings of safety, with an average rating score of 3.67. This was followed closely by gun violence prevention and ethical and respectful policing. The next two most highly rated components—comprehensive and effective responses to emergencies and freedom from violence and other harm— are also traditionally associated with public safety. The least important aspects of community safety in Mecklenburg County were investment in infrastructure, businesses, and programming for a thriving community, as well as responsive, ethical, and transparent government, which both had average ratings of 3.38.

Figure 40. Average Importance Ratings for Components of Community Safety, Mecklenburg (N= 178)
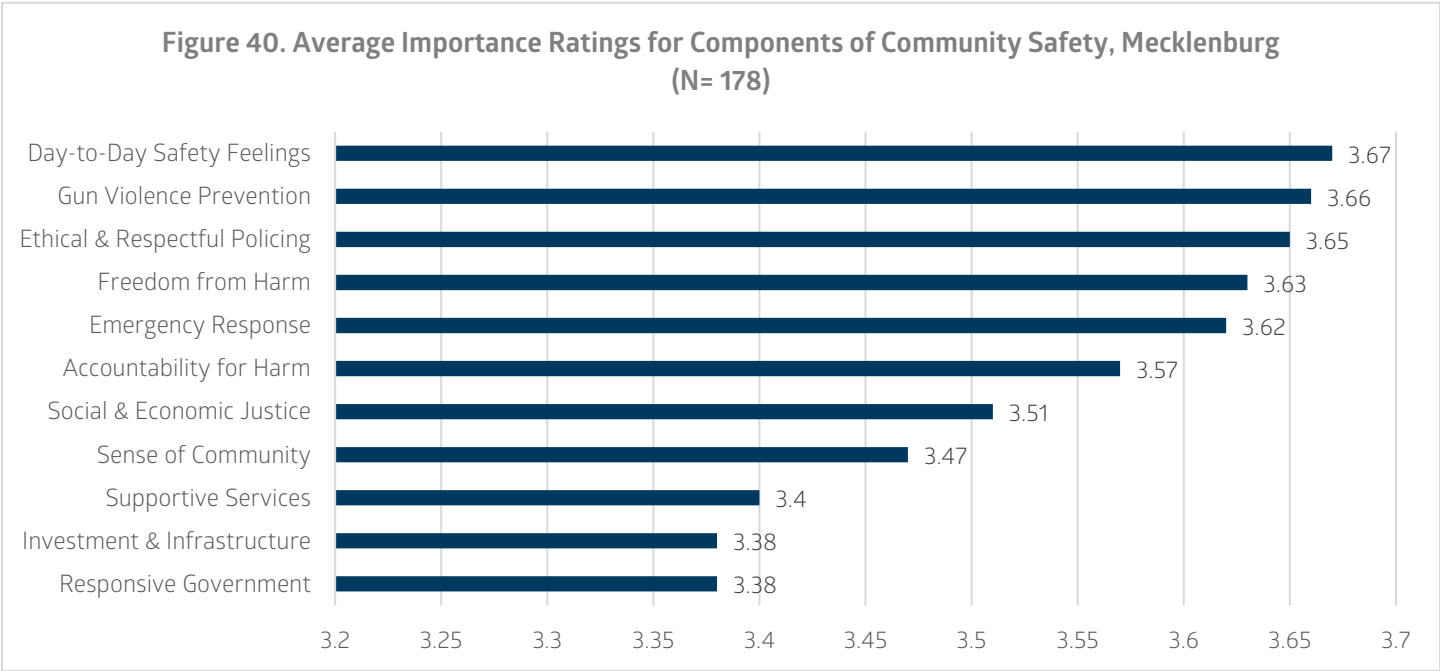
Figure 41 presents the percentage of respondents in Mecklenburg County who ranked each element of safety as one of the three most important. Like St. Louis, gun violence prevention was most consistently ranked in the top three (46%), and it had the greatest percentage of #1 rankings (23%). Feeling safe in daily life was next, with 42% of respondents ranking it as one of the most crucial components.

Figure 41. Percent of Times Component was Ranked Among Top Three Most Important, Mecklenburg (N = 178)
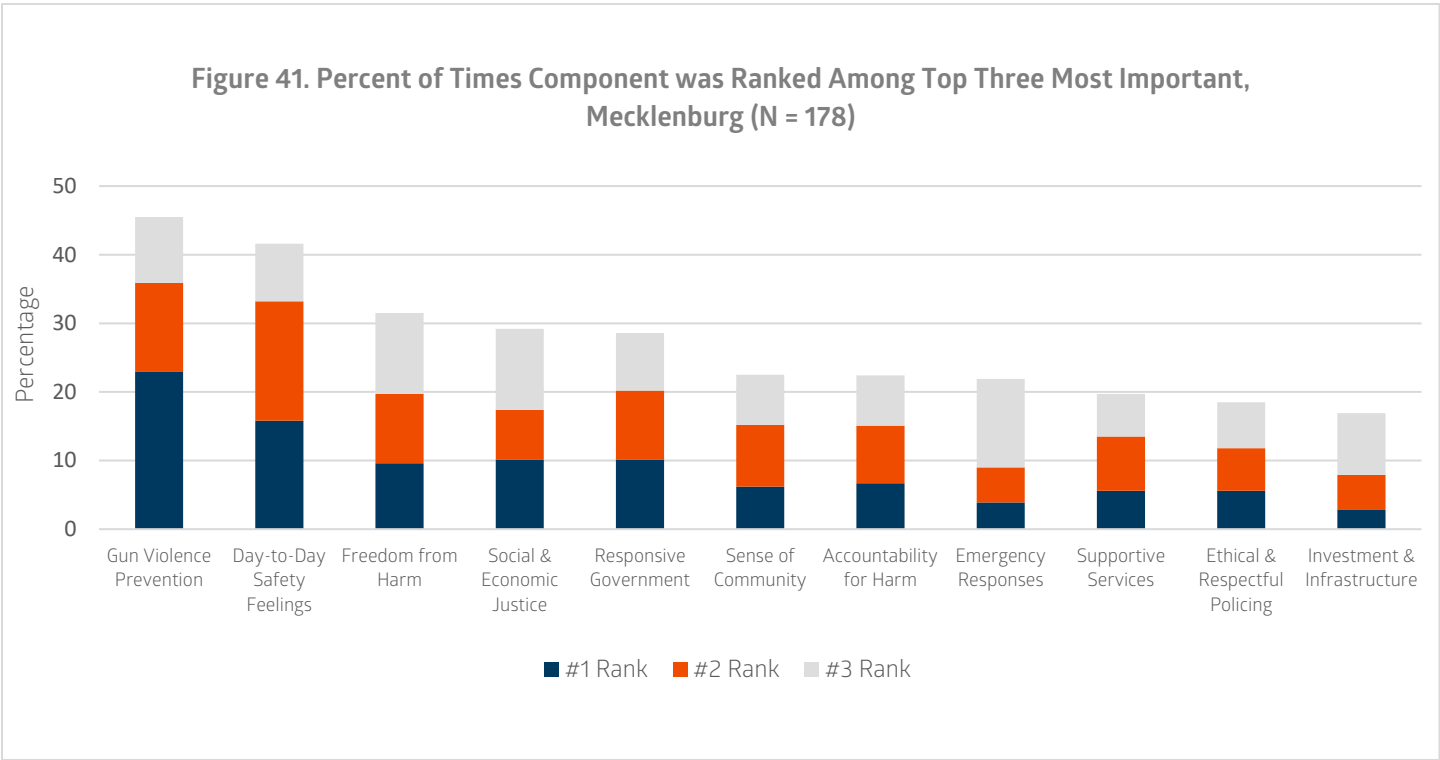
When the importance and priority rankings are compared, the data show that in Mecklenburg County, survey respondents agree that gun violence prevention, day-to-day feelings of safety, and freedom from violence and other harm are both important and currently prioritized in their community (see Figure 42). For example, gun violence prevention was ranked among the top three most important elements of community safety by 46% of respondents in Mecklenburg County, and it was viewed as a top community priority by 35% of survey takers. A responsive, ethical, and transparent government was also ranked as high in importance, but it is viewed as under-prioritized. In contrast, a high percentage of Mecklenburg County respondents perceived that a sense of community, comprehensive and effective emergency responses, supportive services, and investment and infrastructure are currently top priorities in their community, but these were less likely to be ranked as highest in importance, meaning they are currently viewed as somewhat over-prioritized.

Figure 42. Most Important Components of Community Safety vs. Highest Current Priority, Mecklneburg
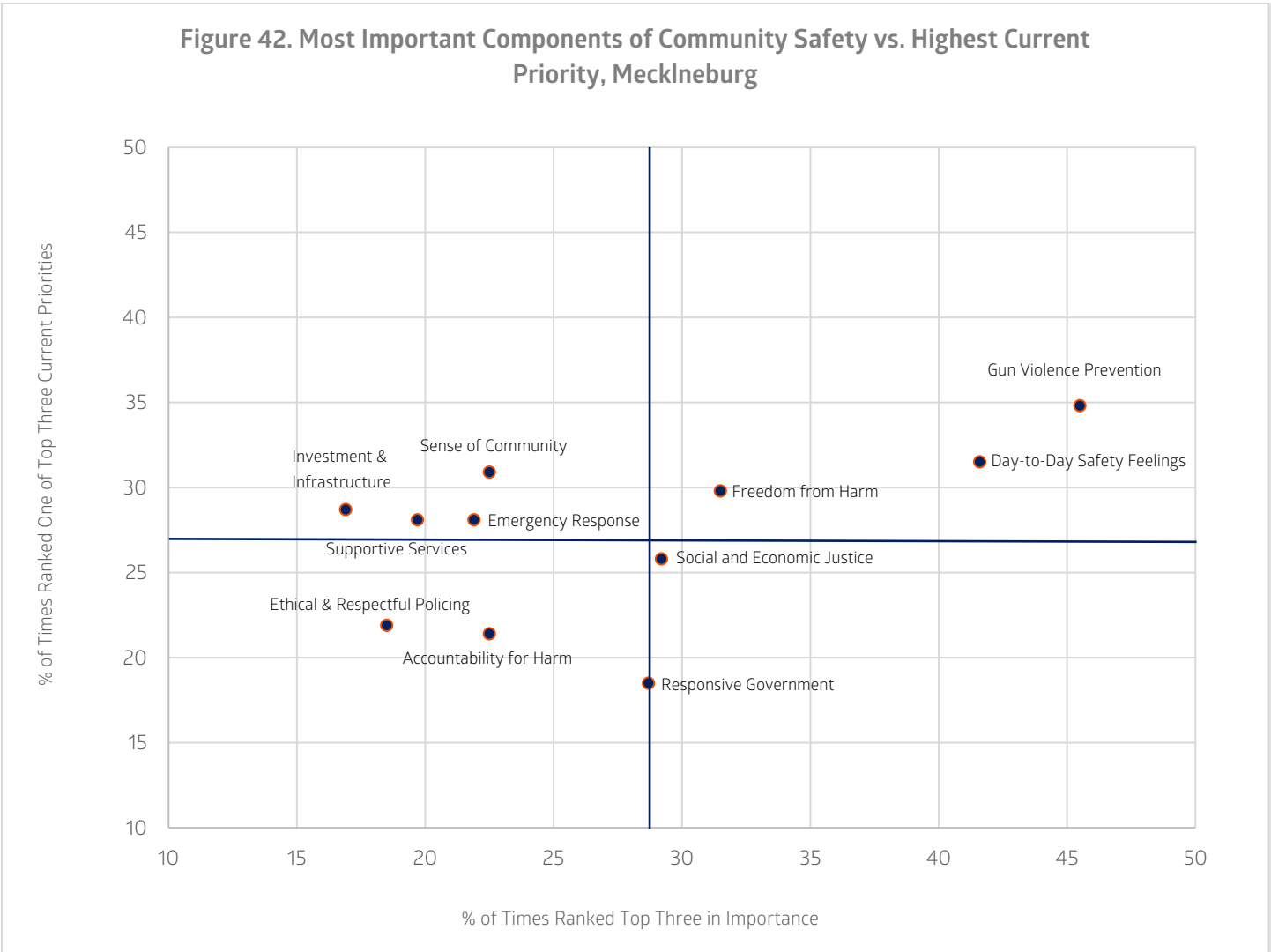
SUMMARY

All data sources (interviews, prompt responses, and rating surveys) point to personal safety and security as key elements of a safe community. In St. Louis and Mecklenburg Counties, gun violence prevention was also consistently ranked among the most important components of a safe community. However, survey data highlight that across the three sites, all components were rated as important or very important, stressing that people see community safety as more than just safety from physical harm and low crime rates. In addition, comparing the results from the open-ended prompt responses (Figures 30–32), where survey respondents defined safety for themselves, to the above rating and ranking results bolsters the idea that when people are provided with options for what a more expansive conceptualization of safety might include, they recognize the value in thinking about this concept broadly. For example, social and economic justice was consistently ranked among the top three most important components of community safety in Missoula County, as was responsive government in St. Louis County.

08

MEASURING COMMUNITY SAFETY

A multifaceted definition of community safety necessitates a new way of measuring this concept and its various components. We interviewed people about how they think we should measure community safety, and this section describes the key themes from the responses we received across the three counties. Broadening the focus of safety initiatives requires a set of indicators that move beyond crime data and other measures associated with the criminal legal system. Appendix B outlines indicators that can be used in each county to assess the various components of community safety and promote action, transparency, and accountability.

PERCEPTUAL MEASURES VERSUS CRIMINAL LEGAL SYSTEM DATA

Across the three study sites, when asked how to measure community safety, most people we interviewed identified police administrative data (e.g., reported crimes, calls to the police) and surveys that capture individuals' perceived level of safety as key indicators. However, they also acknowledged that there is often a disconnect between the two, and each has strengths and limitations. For this reason, a prevalent theme was the recommendation to use both objective crime data and perceptual measures.

Problems with Criminal Legal System Measures

Individuals who reported that community safety is best measured "in the eyes of the people who live in those communities" identified administrative data as problematic for multiple reasons. They indicated that police data miss many crimes, and it is more likely to undercount crime for groups of people who do not trust the police, such as system-impacted individuals, people who identify as non-white, and immigrants. A police officer in Mecklenburg County discussed this reporting issue: "The refugee community, they don't report crime because of the distrust and domestic violence; sometimes that goes unreported. … I think you need a lot of different metrics to capture that data; it just can't be what's being reported to the police department."

People also recognized that many factors go into creating "objective data," and some measures, such as calls to the police, may go up when people's trust in the fairness and effectiveness of the criminal legal system increases. Others described administrative data as problematic because they viewed crime as the outcome of poverty and inequality. They noted that measuring safety using crime data—and ignoring these underlying causes—leads us to view safety through a narrow lens and ultimately steers us toward criminal legal system solutions.

More broadly, people discussed that when we focus on crime, we miss other important aspects of safety. A person who works in criminal justice reform in St. Louis commented that using crime as a metric is problematic because it keeps a focus on the negative aspects of a community rather than the positive, which can be challenging to measure. "The disadvantage, I guess, would be that the things that we can measure are things that are usually not

positive, and it's much harder to measure protective factors. … So, it's not as great of a story to just say [positive] things because you can't really measure it very well."

Participants also noted that it can be limiting to evaluate the value of any given reform solely on its crime reduction potential. A court employee in Mecklenburg County discussed the importance of looking at the myriad of other benefits reforms can bring.

> *I think we look a lot at the numbers. I think numbers are often what drive budgets. It's funny. We've tried to push the construction of a family justice center here in the Mecklenburg County area. And everyone has said, 'Hopefully, this is going to reduce crime, and it's going to reduce the incidence of family violence, child violence, sexual assault.' And I'm like, 'Well, maybe.' The idea is that we know that stuff's going to happen. But we want to make sure that when [violence] happens, that people have the resources that they need. And we hope that it will ultimately reduce violence and be able to hold folks accountable. But truth is, reporting will probably go up more. And that's not bad. But everyone's so focused on the numbers as opposed to the experience that I think that focusing on the numbers doesn't necessarily equate to community safety.*

Problems with Perceptual Measures

People who supported the use of administrative data argued that relying on measures that capture people's perceptions of safety provides an inaccurate picture of what is happening in an area and makes comparing safety across places and over time problematic. They noted that perceptions of crime are shaped by the media, with social media and breaking news apps being particularly influential. Relatedly, people's perceptions of safety may be heavily influenced by one recent salient personal experience or represent feelings of "discomfort" and not actual safety. One court employee in Missoula made this point, noting, "I suspect that a lot of people are using anecdotal evidence in their own subjective interpretation of their safety (or lack thereof) as how they define it. I don't think it's quite as objective." Several participants suggested that the best way to align perceptions of safety with actual risk is through education.

People also recognized the difficulties associated with perceptual data: It is time consuming and difficult to collect, yet crime is viewed as a pressing issue that requires immediate action. Also discussed were challenges with representing the views of a wide range of people, especially since the people most impacted by crime are often the hardest to reach. Similarly, another common theme, particularly in Mecklenburg County, was that people living in marginalized communities are often reluctant to share their views because they feel they have been over-surveyed and underserved by the government.

IMPORTANCE OF DISAGGREGATING BY GROUPS

A second prevalent theme was that, regardless of how safety is measured, it is crucial to disaggregate measures by groups. This means examining disparate outcomes based on demographic characteristics such as race and ethnicity but also by geographic location and life experiences (e.g., victimization, involvement with the criminal legal system). Individuals also emphasized the importance of disaggregating data on resource access and utilization to determine who is (and isn't) accessing services and to pinpoint ways to distribute resources more equitably. For instance, a professional working with survivors of violence in Mecklenburg County suggested examining "how things are being divided in our communities"—such as which communities have access to better-resourced schools, more youth programming, and high-quality food—and asking, "How can we use the information we collect to divide things a little bit more equally?"

Another person discussed the value of moving beyond the traditional focus on differences by race and ethnicity and looking at other underserved groups, such as trans people and undocumented individuals. A formerly incarcerated person in Mecklenburg County noted that to generate an accurate and inclusive accounting of safety, it is vital that data collection efforts include system-impacted individuals. He stated data currently being used are often "not real" because it omits "a whole subsection of people, specifically criminal justice involved. … Nothing else really matters if that's not inclusive."

THERE IS A NEED TO CAPTURE MEASURES UPSTREAM OF CRIME

A third common theme was that safety should be measured using indicators "upstream" of interactions with the criminal legal system. This includes the underlying factors that can push people to engage in crime, like poverty, unemployment, limited educational opportunities, a lack of stable housing, and mental health issues. A woman who works in community mental health in Missoula stated, "I'm looking at access to housing, access to education, access to jobs that pay well. … I think zooming out and looking at the populations that are disproportionately impacted and figuring out what's the why of that."

Access to Stable Housing and Employment

The importance of measuring access to stable housing was frequently discussed. A system-impacted person in Missoula explained that when people don't have secure housing, it is difficult to maintain employment, and they may turn to illegal behavior to meet their basic needs. Reductions in barriers to entering the workforce, such as laws that prevent individuals convicted of crimes from getting the licensures needed for some types of employment, was also identified as another upstream measure.

Educational Outcomes

Participants also pointed to school outcomes as important indicators of safety, in part because of the links among quality education, employment, economic need, and offending. For example, an educator from Missoula linked graduation rates to violent victimization and perpetration via illiteracy, noting, "From a school system perspective, our graduation rates are really important to academic achievement and reading levels. I mean, there's so much correlation [between] if you can't read and your own exposure [to violence] or your violent tendencies."

Mental and Physical Health

Given that health issues can impede one's upward mobility, people also suggested using metrics for mental and physical health, such as obesity rates, to assess safety. Similarly, several mentioned the idea of utilizing trauma or ACE scores to determine individuals' exposure to experiences that undermine feelings of safety.

DATA ON THE PROVISION AND UTILIZATION OF SERVICES ARE KEY, BUT OFTEN OVERLOOKED, METRICS

The people we interviewed also suggested that safety should be measured using administrative data that captures the provision of services as well as people's subjective experiences finding and accessing resources.

Administrative Measures of Service Provision

Participants described the need to record and access information on the number of people served by local agencies and the types of services they received. The importance of service providers collecting data that allows them to measure the impact of their services was also discussed. People recognized that there are challenges associated with collecting this type of information and that agencies may need assistance building data collection capacity.

Perceptual Measures of Service Utilization

People also suggested measuring individual's subjective experiences when accessing services. This includes the public's knowledge about what services are available and how to access them, confidence in their ability to access needed support and resources, barriers to receiving assistance, and satisfaction with services received. However, one participant who works in behavioral health in Missoula noted that care needs to be taken to ensure individuals don't feel coerced into sharing information out of fear of being denied services.

THERE IS VALUE IN CONVENING PEOPLE TO DISCUSS DATA AND BUILD TRUST

Convening around Data

The value of regularly gathering people to analyze and discuss data is another issue that the people we interviewed, particularly practitioners, raised. They noted data measuring community safety are already being collected. Bringing stakeholders together can allow for a more coordinated data collection and dissemination strategy that reduces duplication of efforts and has the potential to increase transparency if these data are made readily available to the public. In addition, regular convenings provide an opportunity to bring together people from different sectors (e.g., law enforcement, hospitals, victim services, mental health providers, the community) to identify emerging issues and potential solutions as well as to determine how best to provide support and resources to people most affected by safety-related issues.

Building Trust

Others discussed the need for practitioners and researchers to work with stakeholders and the community to overcome distrust of data. A common theme among practitioners was that some segments of the community are skeptical of the accuracy of crime data and worry that it can be skewed depending on someone's interest or purpose. This was perceived as a particular issue in politics, where elected officials were described as sometimes cherry-picking data to serve their goals. Others indicated that people sometimes question the accuracy of data on safety-related issues. A person who works in criminal legal system reform in St. Louis stated, "[I am concerned with] the general consensus that some people have about not believing where data comes from, like, 'Oh, well, anyone can make up numbers.' And so that's just super difficult to deal with as researchers and people who really care about getting good data. It's hard to convince people, 'no, this is legitimate, this is what we found, this is what it means.' So that's disheartening."

At the same time, a person who works in violence prevention in Mecklenburg County discussed the distrust community-based organizations have around sharing data with government agencies and researchers. She noted that the government must be transparent with community partners about how their data will be used and reassure these organizations that they will be credited for their work.

09

MOVING FORWARD

The people closest to the issues surrounding community safety are best situated to offer suggestions on how a broader definition of this concept and a more expansive set of measures can be used to improve communities. Across the three sites, the people we spoke with offered the following ideas:

- **Language is important.** Framing conversations around "community safety" instead of "public safety" may help people think more expansively about what safety looks like and how to achieve this goal. Redefining community safety has the potential to reveal the broader historical forces that create and sustain inequality in access to safety. Many of our most unsafe places are contending with decades of neglect and divestment that contribute to neighborhood violence. Yet existing safety approaches often fail to recognize that communities with high crime rates suffer from various systemic issues that negatively impact safety.

- **Education is key for getting people to think more expansively about safety.** This includes not only a stronger educational system but also exposing people to what a safe, equitable community might look like. This was discussed by a woman who works for an advocacy organization.

> *And so, when we talk about safety and collective safety, we have to have people who are able to think critically, because what we see right now is the underfunding of education. … All of those things are equal impediments to safety, I would say. Because some people think locking their doors and carrying their shotgun that's the ultimate safety. And that's just because they don't know that safety could look like not needing food stamps at all, that your light bill is paid, that there is no light bill, [as a] matter of fact. Because then their definition of safety would be more expansive than locks on doors and more police on the streets.*

- **Community safety is everyone's responsibility.** Creating safe communities requires getting people who live and work in spaces that have less crime to see that violence is also their problem. Everyone is better off when safety is viewed as a collective, not individual, responsibility.

- **There are many aspects of community safety that people with various life experiences can agree are important.** As one community member from Missoula stated, there are "core values" of safety that everybody agrees with that can unite people across different communities. While some aspects of community safety may be more polarizing or contentious, it is possible to build off already-existing points of consensus. For example, a sense of community and supportive neighbors was one of the most common themes. Protecting children from harm was another.

- **Some elements of safety are universal, but the types of harm people are concerned about vary based on life experiences,** including racial, sexual, and gender identity, experiences with the criminal legal system, and exposure to victimization and violence. Although safety is a collective responsibility, its meaning, safety-related priorities, and the preferred methods for achieving these priorities will vary from community to

community. It is important that people critically reflect on which current strategies are making communities safer versus just making a subset of the community feel safe.

- **When developing policies and practices, the perspectives of those most impacted must be heard and considered.** As one woman who works with unhoused individuals discussed, decision-makers traditionally rely on best practices and research to make decisions but don't consider the views of the people who will be impacted by these changes. Moving toward a more equitable vision of safety requires having a more diverse set of voices at the table. The people most impacted by crime and the criminal legal system should be consulted when identifying the nature and causes of safety-related issues, determining the types of strategies that should be implemented, and implementing solutions.

- **It is crucial to measure safety with a wide range of indicators that capture community priorities.** What is measured is what gets done. Tracking and communicating information about a more expansive view of community safety can help engage additional stakeholders and partners, communicate progress or areas of underinvestment, and help promote accountability across sectors and communities.

- **Connect with other local and national efforts to reimagine public safety.** Throughout the country, there are ongoing efforts to rethink what makes a community feel safe and how to achieve this goal. Bringing this work together can help catalyze change. Some examples of organizations doing work of this type include Forward Through Ferguson, The People's Plan, Center for Police Equity, Alliance for Safety and Justice, National League of Cities, and Mecklenburg County's Office of Violence Prevention,

Safety is Everyone's Responsibility

There was a consensus that everyone has a role in creating safety, and community members—not law enforcement—should take on a larger role. In addition to the criminal legal system and other government agencies, the responsibility for protecting communities must be shouldered by friend and family networks, neighbors, teachers, researchers, religious leaders, non-profit organizations, social service workers, and businesses. It is these individuals and entities that are closest to the problems facing communities and, therefore, have the most insight on how to make communities safer. But perhaps most critical is getting people who live and work in spaces that have less crime to see that violence is also their problem, not just someone else's. It is a collective approach that will ultimately make everyone safer. A police officer in Mecklenburg described his vision of safety as "collaboration. Collaboration between law enforcement, criminal justice, the community, community organizations, faith-based groups.... I think people push safety on other people. But it's everybody's responsibility."

ADDITIONAL SITE-SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

Missoula County

- **In Missoula, there is general agreement that the physical and social environment is rapidly changing, especially in the years following the COVID-19 pandemic.** Escalating housing insecurity and the increasing visibility of the unhoused population dominated conversations around safety. Moving forward, Missoulians must grapple with the myriad of safety concerns that revolve around housing instability.

- **Personal safety and security are at the heart of community safety for most people in Missoula.** The idea of personal safety, however, is quite diverse and encompassing. Unhoused, system-impacted, and Native American Missoulians discussed feeling unsafe because they perceive that they receive lower quality emergency services than other individuals and are mistreated by the police and others. These findings underscore that improving personal safety and security must be inclusive and include the perspectives of marginalized groups, as their safety concerns may require a separate set of policies and actions.

- **There is broad consensus that investment in high-quality and accessible supportive services is both important and currently prioritized in Missoula**. However, the accessibility and quality of supportive services is viewed as an overlooked measure of community safety in the region. Tracking and communicating information and data about supportive services could help communicate progress toward this community safety priority. Moreover, measuring the impact of supportive services on residents' daily lives and well-being can help secure funding to expand social services and programming.

- **System-impacted** individuals described being harmed by the media's practice of publishing arrest photos. For example, they discussed feeling stigmatized and facing challenges obtaining employment, which can contribute to further offending. Any value associated with publishing booking photos should be weighed against this practices' potential harm.

St. Louis County

- **In St. Louis County, there was general agreement that violence, particularly gun violence, is a significant safety issue for residents.** Black individuals and those with lower incomes bear the burden of living in disproportionately violent places. Accordingly, their perspectives must be heard and considered when developing and implementing anti-violence policies and practices.

- **Community safety was widely seen as a collective endeavor, but the news media in St. Louis County often portrays crime as the primary responsibility of the criminal legal system.** While criminal legal

system responses, such as heightened enforcement, may have a short-term effect on crime and violence, longer-term solutions require collaboration among a range of stakeholders and addressing root social factors.

- **St. Louis County's high level of fragmentation creates many challenges for safety as it hinders the ability to address crime and related concerns in a coordinated fashion.** Creating a community dashboard that compiles indicators of community safety and makes them easily accessible—like the Justice Services Dashboard,[lxxxii] which provides up-to-date visualizations of data on the jail population—could help increase coordination. For crime and policing data, this will require getting buy-in from municipalities and providing them with the resources and assistance needed to regularly provide data.

- **Media reliance on official crime data, the voices of criminal legal system actors, and criminal legal system solutions overlooks that communities with high crime rates confront a broad range of systemic issues that negatively impact safety.** Moreover, when safety is measured exclusively by crime rates, the broader positive impact of current community safety initiatives in high-crime areas can easily be missed. The local media can be a powerful partner in reshaping the way the community thinks about safety to include various social, economic, and political indicators, such as access to affordable healthcare and government accountability. It can also help educate the public on positive changes in the community and how they can help make the region a safer place.

Mecklenburg County

- **Freedom from harm is central to safety in Mecklenburg County, but the types of harm that concerned them differed according to life experiences.** Although the importance of feeling comfortable when moving about the community is universal, residents of color expressed how concerns about harassment and discrimination in their day-to-day lives compromised their feelings of safety.

- **Violence, especially violence among youth and gun violence, are pressing concerns for residents of Mecklenburg County.** Gun violence prevention was ranked among the top three most important and prioritized aspects of community safety. There was less consensus on how to address gun violence, however. Many highlighted the importance of including the community when determining how to address this issue and when implementing solutions.

- **Views on the police and systems for holding people accountable are complex and varied in Mecklenburg County.** For some, safety means a visible and active police force, with officers regularly patrolling the community. For others, particularly people from marginalized groups and system-impacted individuals, the presence of the police was more complicated. They reported fearing police violence, harassment, and abuse. Moving toward a more equitable vision of policing and safety will likely require listening to and accounting for these differing viewpoints.

- **Mecklenburg County has already completed a five-year plan for tackling violence and creating safer communities that involved extensive community involvement.** They also have dashboards that make data on many aspects of safety easily accessible to the public. These resources can be used to assess progress toward their safety related goals and to hold agencies and local government accountable.

- **Building safe communities is a collective responsibility, yet this burden has historically fallen on impacted communities.** The media can be a powerful partner in helping those less impacted by crime understand that they have a role to play in this endeavor and sharing opportunities for people to get involved.

CONCLUSION

Regardless of how individuals defined community safety, there was a consensus on the necessity of transitioning from simply identifying problems to taking concrete steps to actively make communities safer. Contrary to dominant approaches that explore community safety as an individual experience, this report emphasizes that safety is a collective endeavor in which people are encouraged to think critically about others' definitions of safety, evaluate them, and identify areas of consensus for action. We show that "handing the microphone" to individuals closest to the problem illuminates overlooked areas of safety that are often taken for granted or not considered in mainstream discussions.[lxxxiii] As such, the derived concept map should not be considered to have the final say on how safety is and should be defined. Rather, the clusters serve as topics or themes that structure collective actions that are aligned with community priorities and values. To this end, local conversations are more centered on the advancement of achieving safety for all than narrow crime-oriented definitions that may be only a small part of how many people actually experience and think about safety.

APPENDIX A. STUDY METHODS

To explore how community safety is conceptualized, this study took a multi-method approach, drawing on the perspectives of a broad range of stakeholders. Each of the study methods we employed is detailed below.

MEDIA ANALYSIS

Members of the research team analyzed articles that covered crime trends and were published during a five-year period (2017-2021) in select local newspapers. In doing so, we sought to understand how media covered traditional markers of a safe community and whose voices are heard. This analysis focused on understanding how local *crime trend* reporting is portrayed, as shifts in the nature and extent of crime can spur policy changes and, when depicted as on the rise, can generate public concern. Using the news aggregator Access World News, we identified newspaper articles discussing crime and victimization trends during the study period. We used the following search terms: (crime OR violence OR assault OR strangulation OR strangle OR drug* OR gun* OR burglary OR rape OR arson OR theft OR arrests OR jail admissions) and (increase* OR decrease* OR rose OR fell OR trend* OR spike* OR crisis OR drop*). Given the centrality of violence to discussions of community safety, we delved deeper into the subset of media stories that discussed this form of crime. This exploration included identifying the causes and solutions that were discussed around violence.

- **Missoula County:** Analyzed 39 media stories on crime trends from *The Missoulian,* with a more in-depth analysis of the 9 stories focused on increasing and persistent violence.
- **St. Louis County:** Analyzed 42 media stories from *The St. Louis American* and *St. Louis Post-Dispatch,* with a more in-depth analysis of the 25 stories focused on increasing and persistent violence.
- **Mecklenburg County**: Analyzed 90 media stories from *The Charlotte Observer* and *Charlotte Post,* with a more in-depth analysis of the 64 stories focused on increasing and persistent violence.

INTERVIEWS AND FOCUS GROUPS

Members of the research team interviewed and conducted focus groups with individuals residing or working in each respective county to better understand their views on community safety. We made a concerted effort to speak with those people who are most impacted by crime and the criminal legal system. These included people who work for the criminal legal system (courts, corrections, law enforcement), people who had been impacted by the criminal legal system (arrested, incarcerated, victims of crime), and individuals who worked with system-impacted individuals (e.g., service providers, advocates, county employees).

- **Missoula County**: We interviewed 50 individuals, and an additional 8 people participated in focus groups. Many (10) of these individuals were current or former representatives of criminal legal system agencies

(law enforcement, courts, and corrections) or worked with populations that are often system-impacted (8). A sizable portion had been involved in the criminal legal system (20), described being victims of violent crime (20), and/or were currently or formerly unhoused (13).

- **St. Louis County:** 32 individuals were interviewed, and an additional 17 participated in focus groups. Six of these individuals identified as current or former representatives of criminal legal system agencies or worked with system-impacted individuals (12). Four reported that they had been involved in the criminal legal system, and three were currently or formerly unhoused.

- **Mecklenburg County:** A total of 14 individuals were interviewed, and an additional three shared their views as part of focus groups. Two people we spoke with were current or former representatives of criminal legal system agencies (law enforcement, courts), while seven worked with system-impacted individuals. Three self-reported being victims of violence, while four indicated that they were formerly incarcerated.

We conducted a thematic analysis of the interview and focus group data for all three sites to identify primary safety-related concerns, conceptualizations of community safety, and views on how community safety should be measured.

GROUP CONCEPT MAPPING

The research team used group concept mapping to identify the various components of community safety and to describe how the people we spoke with in each county conceptualized these elements. Group concept mapping is a research technique that empowers diverse participants to articulate their own definitions of safety, ultimately generating a visual representation of this concept. This technique, which incorporates data from surveys, focus groups, and interviews, involves three phases: brainstorming, sorting, and generating a map.

1) Brainstorming. The research team conducted both online and in-person surveys with residents from Missoula County, St. Louis County, and Mecklenburg County in fall 2022. We aimed to understand how individuals from various backgrounds and perspectives described community safety in their own words. We sent the online survey to our contacts in the three counties, which included people from local criminal legal system agencies, advocacy organizations, neighborhood associations, service providers, and religious congregations. We then encouraged our contacts to circulate the survey within their organizations. We also posted the survey on multiple social media platforms. In Missoula and St. Louis Counties, we established advisory boards to provide feedback on the project and assist in disseminating the survey. Moreover, in Missoula, we displayed the survey on the engagement platform, Missoula County Voice, and distributed it in person at the Western Montana Fair. In St. Louis, we also conducted surveys at a local farmer's market. To broaden the diversity of our respondents, we partnered with

Qualtrics to distribute the survey to a sample of individuals representing the racial, ethnic, and political diversity of each county.

In the survey, participants were asked to complete the following prompt:

> "Safety can mean different things to different people. Pause for a moment and envision a safe community. Think about safety broadly, including what safety means and looks like in your daily life, in your neighborhood, and in your interactions with local organizations and agencies such as the police, courts, social service providers, schools, etc. Think about the things you find in safe communities as well as the things that are absent. Now complete the following statement. You are encouraged to be as specific as possible in your response and avoid one-word answers. You may provide more than one response. When I think about a safe community, I think about...."

Participants also answered questions about their demographic characteristics and life experiences, including involvement with the criminal legal system and victimization.

The survey generated 1,254 valid prompt responses. The number of completed prompts for each county was:

- Missoula County: 469
- St. Louis County: 559
- Mecklenburg County: 226

We also spoke with individuals who had been involved in the criminal legal system, organizations that serve system-impacted groups, and criminal legal system actors to ensure their perspectives were represented. From these discussions and the prompt responses, the research team compiled 120 unique statements that described various aspects of community safety. Additionally, stakeholders from each site read through the statements and provided feedback on the content and the wording.

2) Sorting. Sixty-two volunteers from across the three sites independently organized the statements into groups that captured similar ideas and then named these clusters.

3) Map Generation. We used a statistical method called "multidimensional scaling" to analyze the sorting data and create a visual representation of meaning of community safety. This concept map was shared with 31 individuals who provided feedback, and a final graphic representation of community safety was produced.

RATING SURVEY

In the spring and summer of 2023, we conducted a second community survey in which we asked respondents to rate the importance of the 11 components of community safety previously identified through concept mapping. We computed mean rating scores to identify the most important components of community safety. Respondents were also asked to rank the top three most important components of safety and the three elements they believed were currently given the highest priority in their community. To identify aspects of safety that are currently underprioritized, components of safety were compared in terms of importance and current priority.

To ensure broad distribution, we used the same channels as the original brainstorming survey. Additionally, we directly emailed participants from the fall 2022 survey who expressed their interest in further involvement in the study. The rating survey generated:

- 224 valid responses from Missoula County.
- 324 valid responses from St. Louis County.
- 178 valid responses from Mecklenburg County.

Although efforts were made at each stage of the project to reach a diverse group of people, these findings cannot be generalized to the population of each respective county due to convenience sampling. The tables below provide characteristics and demographic information for the sample and the populations of Missoula County, Mecklenburg County, and St. Louis County.

SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

Missoula County Survey Sample Characteristics

	Brainstorming Survey Sample % (N = 469)	Rating Survey Sample % (N=224)	Missoula County %
Race			
White alone	79.9	86.1	91.4
Black/African American alone	2.0	.93	0.5
American Indian & Alaska Native alone	3.1	1.4	2.7
Asian, alone	1.1	.93	2
Other, including multiracial	13.9	9.3	3.4
Hispanic/Latino	4.4	1.4	3.9
Gender			
Male	30.4	21.9	50.5
Female	53.9	64.3	49.5
Non-binary/Gender fluid	3.4	2.8	
Missing	12.2	11.2	
Foreign born	2.4	2.8	3
Age			Median age = 34.7
18-20	3.6	1.3	
21-26	8.7	4.5	

27-32	14.3	15.2	
33-43	26.0	22.3	
44-54	16.0	23.2	
55-65	17.1	17.4	
66-76	12.8	13.8	
77 or older	1.5	2.2	
Bachelor's Degree or Higher	57.6	72.3	44.2
Worked or volunteered for an organization that works with victims	61.7	40.8	
Worked or volunteered for an organization focused on safety	52.1	55.5	
Worked or volunteered for an organization that provides services to system-impacted individuals	36.3	36.2	
Worked for a criminal legal system agency	17.3	12.4	
System impacted (e.g., arrested, charged, jailed)	18.7	17.1	
Someone close has been system-impacted	38.0	45.0	
Victim of violence	26.0	22.7	
Someone close has been a victim of violence	40.3	37.5	
Population data obtained from https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/missoulacountymontana/PST045222#qf-headnote-a			

St. Louis County Survey Sample Characteristics

	Brainstorming Survey Sample % (N = 559)	Rating Survey Sample % (N=324)	St. Louis County %
Race			
White alone	69.4	67.5	67.1
Black/African American alone	15.6	17.2	25.2
American Indian & Alaska Native alone	1	1	0.2
Asian, alone	2.9	3.2	5
Other, including multiracial	11.1	11.1	2.5
Hispanic/Latino	3.7	6.4	3.3
Gender			
Male	34.4	37.5	47.9
Female	56.7	53.2	52.1
Non-binary/Gender fluid	0.4	0.3	
Missing	8.6	8.9	
Foreign born	3.3	6.1	7.6
Age			
18-20	1.8	3.1	
21-26	9.5	8	
27-32	11.6	8.6	

33-43	17.4	22.8	
44-54	18.6	17.9	
55-65	22.5	20.9	
66-76	13.1	14.2	
77 or older	5.4	4.6	
Bachelor's Degree or Higher	62.2	56	45.3
Worked or volunteered for an organization that works with victims	24.6	26.8	
Worked or volunteered for an organization focused on safety	34.5	35.7	
Worked or volunteered for an organization that provides services to system-impacted individuals	26.6	25.2	
Worked for a criminal legal system agency	19.1	16.4	
System impacted (e.g., arrested, charged, jailed)	14.3	13.7	
Someone close has been system-impacted	34.5	31.8	
Victim of violence	22.5	21	
Someone close has been a victim of violence	31.5	27.3	
Population data obtained from https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/stlouiscountymissouri/PST045222			

Mecklenburg County Survey Sample Characteristics

	Brainstorming Survey Sample % (N = 226)	Rating Survey Sample % (N=178)	Mecklenburg County %
Race			
White alone	41.6	35.6	56.4
Black/African American alone	24.9	22.6	33.2
American Indian & Alaska Native alone	1	1.1	0.9
Asian, alone	5.9	5.7	6.7
Other, including multiracial	26.6	35	2.8
Hispanic/Latino	23.4	25.9	14.4
Gender			
Male	32.7	33.2	48.4
Female	61.1	62.9	51.6
Non-binary/Gender fluid	0.4	0.6	
Missing	5.8	3.4	
Foreign born	10.8	11.3	16
Age			
18-20	8	9.6	
21-26	16.8	19.7	
27-32	15.5	11.8	

33-43	16.8	19.1	
44-54	11.5	6.2	
55-65	21.2	20.8	
66-76	8.9	11.8	
77 or older	1.3	1.1	
Bachelor's Degree or Higher	42.9	37.1	46.9
Worked or volunteered for an organization that works with victims	29.9	23.2	
Worked or volunteered for an organization focused on safety	38.9	35	
Worked or volunteered for an organization that provides services to system-impacted individuals	26.7	19.2	
Worked for a criminal legal system agency	16.4	11.3	
System impacted (e.g., arrested, charged, jailed)	16.8	15.3	
Someone close has been system-impacted	38.1	39.6	
Victim of violence	22.1	22	
Someone close has been a victim of violence	35.4	35	
Population data obtained from https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/mecklenburgcountynorthcarolina/PST045222			

APPENDIX B. POTENTIAL MEASURES OF SAFETY

Broadening the focus of safety initiatives requires access to a set of indicators that move beyond crime data and other measures associated with the criminal legal system. This appendix outlines indicators that can be used in each county to assess the various components of community safety and promote action, transparency, and accountability. To identify these indicators, we relied on existing reports and research projects.

MISSOULA COUNTY

FREEDOM FROM VIOLENCE AND OTHER HARM

	Indicator	Potential Data Source
Physical Violence	• Violent Crime Rate	• Montana Board of Crime Control Violent Crime Dashboard
	• Domestic Violence Victimization Rate	• Montana Board of Crime Control Domestic Violence Dashboard
	• Victimization Rate for Individuals under 18	• Montana Board of Crime Control Violent Crime Dashboard
	• Rate of Missing Indigenous Persons	• Montana Missing Persons Database
Drug Crime and Harm	• Rate of Drug Overdose Deaths	• CDC National Center for Health Statistics Provisional County-Level Drug Overdose Death Counts
	• Rate of Drug Crime	• Montana Board of Crime Control NIBRS Offense Summary Dashboard
Other Crime	• Rate of Property Crime	• Montana Board of Crime Control Property Crime Dashboard
	• University of Montana Campus Crimes	• University of Montana Police Department Crime Log

DAY-TO-DAY FEELINGS OF SAFETY

	Indicator	Potential Data Source
Perceptions of Safety	• Community Survey	• 2020 National Community Survey Report – Missoula County
Number of Calls for Service	• Law Enforcement Annual Reports	• 2021 Missoula Police Department Annual Report
Traffic Safety and Accidents	• Traffic accident and fatality rates	• 2021 Missoula Police Department Annual Report

SENSE OF COMMUNITY

	Indicator	Potential Data Source
Sense of Community and Trust in Neighbors	• Community Survey	• 2020 National Community Survey Report – Missoula County
Inclusivity of Neighborhood	• Community Survey	• 2020 National Community Survey Report – Missoula County
Civic Engagement	• Community Survey	• 2020 National Community Survey Report – Missoula County

INVESTMENTS IN INFRASTRUCTURE, BUSINESSES, AND PROGRAMMING FOR A THRIVING COMMUNITY

	Indicator	Potential Data Source
Satisfaction with Outdoor Space and Community Parks	• Community Survey - Level of satisfaction with parks, trails, open space, and recreation	• City of Missoula Resident Survey
Satisfaction with Public Works Maintenance	• Community Survey - Level of satisfaction with street repair and maintenance	• City of Missoula Resident Survey
Access to Recreational Outdoor Amenities	• Community Survey – Level of importance attributed to outdoor amenities	• City of Missoula/University of Montana 2018 Survey

ACCESSIBILITY AND AVAILABILITY OF SUPPORTIVE SERVICES

	Indicator	Potential Data Source
Access to Resources for Vulnerable Populations	• Satisfaction with Access to Mental Health Services such as Crisis Intervention	• City of Missoula Resident Survey
Utilization of Services Related to Housing	• Number of People Served by Homeword, a Non-profit that Provides Home Ownership and Financial Literacy Counseling and Training	• Missoula Organization of Realtors' Social Data Dashboard
	• Number of Clients Enrolled in Missoula's Homeless Management Information System (HMIS)	• Missoula Organization of Realtors' Social Data Dashboard

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE

	Indicator	Potential Data Source
Attainable Housing	• Satisfaction with Housing Affordability •	• City of Missoula Resident Survey • 2022 Community Needs Assessment
	• Housing Burden – Percent of Renters and Homeowners who Spent 30 Percent of their Income or more on Housing	• Missoula Organization of Realtors' Social Data Dashboard
	• Housing Affordability Index	• Missoula Organization of Realtors' Social Data Dashboard
	• Percent of Recipients of Missoula Housing Authority Vouchers who Secure Housing before their Voucher Expires	• Missoula Organization of Realtors' Social Data Dashboard
Access to Healthcare	• Percent of Persons without Health Insurance, Under the Age of 65	• US Census, Quick Facts •
Financial Stability and Security	• Poverty Statistics •	• Census Poverty Statistics for Missoula County
	• Unemployment Rate •	• Missoula County Unemployment Rate
	• Minimum Wage •	• State of Montana Minimum Wage •
	• Income Tax Brackets	• State of Montana Income Tax Brackets

RESPONSIVE, ETHICAL, AND TRANSPARENT GOVERNMENT

	Indicator	Potential Data Source
Access to Government Services	• Satisfaction with Access to Information and Engagement with City Government	• City of Missoula Resident Survey
Satisfaction with Government Services	• Community Survey – Level of Satisfaction with Law Enforcement Services, Municipal Court Systems	• City of Missoula/University of Montana 2018 Survey

COMPREHENSIVE AND EFFECTIVE EMERGENCY RESPONSE

	Indicator	Potential Data Source
Satisfaction with Government Responses and Services	• Satisfaction with Fire Services	• City of Missoula Resident Survey
Alternatives to Law Enforcement Responses	• Crisis Intervention Team	• City of Missoula Crisis Intervention Team
Resources Regarding National Disasters	• Flood Resource Guide	• Missoula County Resource Guide for Flooding
	• Wildfire Resource Guide	• City of Missoula FD Fire Prevention and Awareness

GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION

	Indicator	Potential Data Source
Gun Violence	• Gun Violence Statistics	• State of Montana Gun Violence Statistics
Access to Guns	• Requirements for Concealed Carry	• Missoula County Requirements for Concealed Carry Permits
	• Gun Confiscation Laws • Confiscation Laws for Domestic Violence Misdemeanants	• State of Montana Firearm Confiscation Laws • State of Montana Firearm Prohibition Laws

FAIR AND ETHICAL POLICING

	Indicator	Potential Data Source
Police Use of Force and Misconduct	• Rates of Use of Force Incidents	• Missoula Police Department Annual Report
	• Rates of Citizen Complaints about the Police	• Missoula Police Department Annual Report
Resident Perceptions of the Police	• Satisfaction with the Police, Resident Survey	• City of Missoula Resident Survey
Willingness to Call the Police	• Rates of Citizen Requests for the Police (i.e., Calls for Service to the Police)	• Missoula Police Department Annual Report

ACCOUNTABILITY FOR HARM

	Indicator	Potential Data Source
Enforcement of Laws	• Rates and Types of Arrests	• FBI Crime Data Explorer
Satisfaction with Government Services	• Satisfaction with Municipal Court services	• City of Missoula Resident Survey
Accountability for Criminal Acts	• Crime Incident Clearance Rate	• Montana Board of Crime Control Dashboard
	• Number of Drug Seizures	• Montana Board of Crime Control Dashboard

ST. LOUIS COUNTY

FREEDOM FROM VIOLENCE AND OTHER HARM

	Indicator	Potential Data Source
Physical Violence	• Violent Crime Rate	• 2022 St. Louis County Annual Report
	• Number of Incidents of Homicide/Manslaughter	• St. Louis County and Municipal Crime Map
	• Number of Forcible Sex Offenses	• St. Louis County and Municipal Crime Map
	• Number of Incidents of Human Trafficking	• St. Louis County and Municipal Crime Map
Drug Crime and Harm	• Rate of Drug Overdose Deaths	• CDC National Center for Health Statistics Provisional County-Level Drug Overdose Death Counts
	• Number of Drug-related Crimes	• St. Louis County and Municipal Crime Map
Other Crime	• Property Crime Rate	• St. Louis County and Municipal Crime Map

DAY-TO-DAY FEELINGS OF SAFETY

	Indicator	Potential Data Source
Perceptions of Safety	• Perceptions of Community Safety, Community Survey	• St. Louis Community Themes and Strengths Assessment
Traffic Safety and Accidents	• Traffic Accident and Fatality Rates	• St. Louis County Trailnet Annual Report

SENSE OF COMMUNITY

	Indicator	Potential Data Source
Civic Engagement	• Community Survey, Civic Engagement Equity Indicators	• St. Louis County Civic Engagement Indicators
Racially and Ethnically Diverse Communities	• Community Racial and Ethnic Statistics	• St. Louis County Racial and Ethnic Group Statistics

INVESTMENTS IN INFRASTRUCTURE, BUSINESSES, AND PROGRAMMING FOR A THRIVING COMMUNITY

	Indicator	Potential Data Source
Support for Small Businesses	• Community Survey – Need for More Support for Small Businesses	• St. Louis County ARPA Community Needs Survey
Access to Recreational Outdoor Amenities	• Community Survey – Improving and Maintaining Parks and Recreational Areas	• St. Louis County ARPA Community Needs Survey
Access to Reliable Internet Coverage	• Community Survey – Needs Assessment for Better Quality Internet	• St. Louis County ARPA Community Needs Survey

ACCESSIBILITY AND AVAILABILITY OF SUPPORTIVE SERVICES

	Indicator	Potential Data Source
Utilization of Services Related to Housing	• Community Survey, Housing Needs Assessment	• St. Louis County ARPA Community Needs Survey
Access to Resources for Vulnerable Populations	• Community Survey, Access to Availability of Mental Health Services	• St. Louis County ARPA Community Needs Survey
	• Community Survey, Need for Increased Services for Victims of Domestic Violence	• St. Louis County ARPA Community Needs Survey

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE

	Indicator	Potential Data Source
Attainable Housing	• Housing Affordability Index	• St. Louis County Housing Affordability Index
Access to Healthcare	• Percent of Persons without Health Insurance, under the age of 65	• US Census, Quick Facts
Financial Stability and Security	• Poverty Statistics •	• Census Poverty Statistics for St. Louis County
	• Unemployment Rate	• St. Louis County Unemployment Rate
	• Minimum Wage	• State of Missouri Minimum Wage Schedule
	• Income Tax Brackets	• State of Missouri Income Tax Brackets

RESPONSIVE, ETHICAL, AND TRANSPARENT GOVERNMENT

	Indicator	Potential Data Source
Access to Government Services	• Community Survey, Need for Additional Government Services	• St. Louis County ARPA Community Needs Survey

	Indicator	Potential Data Source
Resources Regarding National Disasters	• Flood Resource Guide	• St. Louis County Flooding Resources
	• Fire Resource Guide	• St. Louis County Fire Resources
Fiscal Investment in First Responders	• County Budgets and Resource Allocation	• 2022 St. Louis County Fiscal Budget (Courts, Prosecutors) • 2023 St. Louis County Budget Dashboard
	• Increase Police, Fire, and other Public Safety Services	• St. Louis County ARPA Community Needs Survey

GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION

	Indicator	Potential Data Source
Access to Guns among Youth	• Level of Concern Regarding Gun Violence in Schools, Student Survey	• St. Louis Community Themes and Strengths Assessment
	• Number of Youth Injured in Firearm-related Incidents	• Think Health St. Louis Data Dashboard • 2022 St. Louis Dispatch Report
	• State Laws	• State of Missouri Giffords Law Center Report

Regulations on Access to Guns	• County Regulations	• St. Louis County PD Concealed Carry Requirements
Gun Violence	• Gun Violence Statistics	• St. Louis County and Municipal Crime Map
	• Weapons Law Violations	• St. Louis County and Municipal Crime Map

FAIR AND ETHICAL POLICING

	Indicator	Potential Data Source
Resident Perceptions of the Police	• Number of Complaints Filed Against Law Enforcement Officers	• Collaborative Reform Initiative Assessment of St. Louis County Police Department
Enforcement Levels	• Rates and Types of Arrests	• FBI Crime Data Explorer
Number of Calls for Service	• Number of Calls for Service	• St. Louis County Monthly Calls for Service Log

ACCOUNTABILITY FOR HARM

	Indicator	Potential Data Source
Enforcement of Laws	• Rates and Types of Arrests	• FBI Crime Data Explorer
Accountability for Criminal Acts and Enforcement of Laws	• Clearance Rates for Felony Cases	• St. Louis Circuit Court Felony Clearance Rates
	• Number of Motions to Revoke Bonds	• Revocation of Bonds

MECKLENBURG COUNTY

FREEDOM FROM VIOLENCE AND OTHER HARM

	Indicator	Potential Data Source
Physical Violence	• Violent Crime Rate	• Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department Year-End Statistical Report • Charlotte/Mecklenburg Quality of Life Explorer
	• Homicide Counts and Rate	• Mecklenburg County Community Violence Strategic Plan
Drug Crime and Harm	• Rate of Drug Overdose Deaths	• CDC National Center for Health Statistics Provisional County-Level Drug Overdose Death Counts
	• Substance Use Disorder Statistics	• Mecklenburg County Community Health Assessment
Other Crime	• School Safety	• Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department School Safety
	• Property Crime • Nuisance Violations	• Charlotte/Mecklenburg Quality of Life Explorer2

DAY-TO-DAY FEELINGS OF SAFETY

	Indicator	Potential Data Source
Perceptions of Safety	• Perceptions of Safety in Public Domains; Community Survey	• Perceptions of Safety in Mecklenburg County Parks
	• Perceptions of Safety at School; Community Survey	• Safety from Bullying at School
Traffic Safety and Accidents	• Number of Crashes and Injuries	• Mecklenburg County Traffic Crash Facts • Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department Traffic Accident Tracker

SENSE OF COMMUNITY

	Indicator	Potential Data Source
Racially and Ethnically Diverse Communities	• Community Racial and Ethnic Statistics	• Mecklenburg County Racial and Ethnic Group Statistics
Investment in Safer and Healthier Neighborhoods	• County-Level Government Strategic Plans	• Mecklenburg County Community Violence Strategic Plan
Inclusion of Community Members in Decision Making Processes	• Shared Decision-Making Frameworks	• Mecklenburg County Community Violence Strategic Plan

INVESTMENTS IN INFRASTRUCTURE, BUSINESSES, AND PROGRAMMING FOR A THRIVING COMMUNITY

	Indicator	Potential Data Source
Resources for Community Members and Businesses	• Community Resource Centers	• Mecklenburg County Community Resource Centers
Health and Food Services	• Access to Health and Food Services	• Mecklenburg County Health and Food Services
Outdoor Space and Community Parks	• Community Survey Regarding Quality and Safety of Parks and Recreation	• Mecklenburg County Community Survey
Investment in Community Programming	• Grants to Community Organizations	• Mecklenburg County Community Service Grants

ACCESSIBILITY AND AVAILABILITY OF SUPPORTIVE SERVICES

	Indicator	Potential Data Source
Resources for Vulnerable Populations	• Substance Use Services and Resources	• Mecklenburg County Substance Use Programming and Resources
	• Housing Services and Resources	• Mecklenburg County Housing Programs and Resources
Statistics Regarding Homeless Population	• Number of Homeless Individuals	• Charlotte-Mecklenburg Housing and Homelessness Dashboard
Response to Natural and Man-Made Disasters	• Strategic Plans	• Mecklenburg County Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan
	• Resources and Aid for Residents	• Mecklenburg County Housing Programs and Resources

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE

	Indicator	Potential Data Source
Financial Stability and Security	• Poverty Statistics	• Census Poverty Statistics for Mecklenburg County
	• Unemployment Rate	• Mecklenburg County Unemployment Rate
	• Minimum Wage	• State of North Carolina Minimum Wage
	• Income Tax Rate	• State of North Carolina Income Tax Rate
Access to Healthcare	• Percent of persons without health insurance, under the age of 65	• US Census, Quick Facts
Affordable Housing	• Affordable Housing Programming and Initiatives	• Mecklenburg County Affordable Housing Initiative • Charlotte-Mecklenburg Housing and Homelessness Dashboard

RESPONSIVE, ETHICAL, AND TRANSPARENT GOVERNMENT

	Indicator	Potential Data Source
Satisfaction with Government	• Community Views of Government Services •	• Mecklenburg County Community Survey
Community Participation in Policy Decisions	• Opportunities for Citizen Participation in County Policy Development and Decision Making	• Mecklenburg County Community Survey

COMPREHENSIVE AND EFFECTIVE EMERGENCY RESPONSE

	Indicator	Potential Data Source
Education Regarding Natural Disasters	Flood Zone Map	Mecklenburg County Flood Zone Map
	Fire Safety and Education	Mecklenburg County Fire Marshall Safety and Education
Investment in First Responders	County Budgets and Resource Allocation	FY 2023 Adopted Budget for Mecklenburg County including Sheriff's Office, Courts, Law Enforcement Service Districts, and Fire Protection Service Districts
Alternatives to Law Enforcement Responses	Crisis Intervention Team	Mecklenburg County Crisis Response Team Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Contract with Mental Health Clinicians
Investment in Crime Prevention Solutions	County Municipal Budgets	Mecklenburg County Adopted Municipal Budget FY 2024

GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION

	Indicator	Potential Data Source
Gun Violence	• Gun Violence Statistics	• State of North Carolina Gun Statistics • Gun Violence in the City of Charlotte
Access to Guns	• State Laws	• State of North Carolina Law Restricting Use of Firearms for Children under 12
Educational Resources Regarding Firearms	• Resources Regarding Safe Storage of Firearms	• Mecklenburg County Violence Prevention • Safe Storage Infographic – Mecklenburg County

FAIR AND ETHICAL POLICING

	Indicator	Potential Data Source
Police Involvement in the Community	• Participation in Community Safety and Diversion Programs	• Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department Community Services and Engagement
	• Involvement in Community Programs	• Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Community Programs and Community Services
Resident Perceptions of the Police	• Level of Trust in Police, Resident Survey	• Social Capital in Mecklenburg County
Enforcement Levels	• Police Enforcement Activity (i.e., stops, searches, arrests)	• Summary of Traffic Stop Statistics Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department
Police Use of Force and Misconduct	• Internal Affairs Annual Reports	• Internal Affairs and Complaint Statistics
		• Internal Affairs Annual Reports

ACCOUNTABILITY FOR HARM

	Indicator	Potential Data Source
Accountability for Law Enforcement	• Citizens Review Board Statistics, Number of Appeals	• City of Charlotte Citizens Review Board Annual Reports
Enforcement of Laws	• Rates and Types of Arrests	• FBI Crime Data Explorer
	• Crime Statistics Report	• Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Crime Statistics Report
Alternatives to Incarceration	• Number of Individuals screened by a mental health clinician for jail diversion programs	• Mecklenburg County Criminal Justice Services Data Dashboard
	• Number of Youth served by Juvenile Crime Prevention Council	• Mecklenburg County Criminal Justice Services Data Dashboard

Endnotes

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[x] U.S. Census Bureau. (2022). *QuickFacts Missoula County, Montana*. https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/missoulacountymontana/PST045221 .

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xiv   U. S. Census Bureau. (2021). *Median Gross Rent.* American Community Survey, ACS 1-Year Estimates Detailed Tables, Table B25064. https://data.census.gov/table?t=Renter+Costs&g=050XX00US30063&y=2017&tid=ACSDT1Y2017.B25064.

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xvi   U.S. Census Bureau. (2021). *Food Stamps/Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).* American Community Survey, ACS 1-Year Estimates Subject Tables, Table S2201. https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST1Y2021.S2201?q=SNAP/Food+Stamps.

xvii   Halvorson, S. (2022, November 14). *SNAP participation varied across states from 2019 to 2021.* AgNet Media, Inc. https://southeastagnet.com/2022/11/14/snap-participation-varied-across-states-2019-2021/.

xviii   Missoula Organization of REALTORS®. (n.d.). *Social Data Dashboard.* https://www.missoularealestate.com/social-data/.; U.S. Census Bureau. (2022). *QuickFacts Missoula County, Montana.* https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/missoulacountymontana/PST045222.

xix   Petis, L. (2022, July 11). *Criminal justice reform efforts and rise in crime: Spotlight on Missoula, Mont.* R Street Institute. https://www.rstreet.org/commentary/criminal-justice-reform-efforts-and-rise-in-crime-spotlight-on-missoula-mont/.

xx   Mitchell, A. (2023, May 25). ROAD Court offers path to recovery for repeat DUI offenders. *The Missoulian.* https://missoulian.com/news/local/crime-courts/road-court-offers-path-to-recovery-for-repeat-dui-offenders/article_2fcaff3e-fb41-11ed-9c3b-bb0d3a203bc6.html.

xxi   Justice Center, The Council of State Governments. (2017). *Montana's Justice Reinvestment approach: Curbing state prison population growth and reinvesting in local public safety strategies.* https://csgjusticecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/6.6.17_Montana_Justice-Reinvestment-Approach1.pdf.

xxii   Jail admissions for non-violent misdemeanors is allowed on a case-by-case basis if deemed necessary by law enforcement who make the arrest. This allows for situational and collateral information to impact the hold decision. However, most individuals with non-violent misdemeanors are given citations instead of being detained (personal communication, Chelsea Wittmann).

xxiii   Valley, J. (2022, March 11). Full Report: New Missoula campaign takes aim at domestic violence, strangulation. *KPAX Missoula & Western Montana*. https://www.kpax.com/news/mtn-original-productions/full-report-new-missoula-campaign-takes-aim-at-domestic-violence-strangulation.

xxiv   Montana Attorney General's Office. (2020). *Missing persons data analysis 2017 – 2019 (revised August 2020)*. Montana Department of Justice. https://img1.wsimg.com/blobby/go/14e48d4c-14a5-4d6b-9df0-1964a3c954b0/MP-Data-Analysis-Revised-August-2020.pdf.

xxv   Violence includes arrests for aggravated assault, manslaughter, murder, rape, robbery, and simple assault. Property arrests include arson, burglary, embezzlement, forgery and counterfeiting, fraud, larceny, motor vehicle theft, stolen property offenses, and vandalism. Public order arrests include curfew and loitering violations, disorderly conduct, drunkenness, gambling, liquor laws, prostitution and commercialized vice, and vagrancy.

xxvi   The average daily population (ADP) represents the total population incarcerated divided by the number of days in the year. The ADP and other data on the jail population in Missoula County were provided by ISLG.

xxvii   Zeng, Z. (2022). *Jail inmates in statistical tables – 2021*. Bureau of Justice Statistics. https://bjs.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh236/files/media/document/ji21st.pdf.

xxviii   In Montana, beginning January 1, 2021, it was legal for adults 21 and over to possess and use up to one ounce of marijuana with no criminal penalties. See https://mtrevenue.gov/cannabis/faqs/#:~:text=Is%20adult%2Duse%20marijuana%20possession,public%20and%20certain%20other%20locations.

xxix   Garland, D. (2000). The culture of high crime societies: Some preconditions of recent 'Law and Order' policies. *The British Journal of Criminology*, *40*(3), 347-375.; Harper, C. A. & Hogue, T. E. (2015). The emotional representation of sexual crime in the National British Press. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, *34*(1), 3-24.; Hollis, M. E., Downey, S., del Carmen, A., & Dobbs, R. R. (2017). The relationship between media portrayals and crime: Perceptions of fear of crime among citizens. *Crime Prevention and Community Safety*, *19*, 46-60.

xxx   *The Missoulian* was selected based on conversations with local partners who indicated this news outlets that would provide a varied perspective on crime and the criminal legal system. Circulation is 34,855 on Sundays, 30,466 on weekdays (https://destinationmissoula.org/partner/missoulian).

xxxi   We use the term "serious violent crime" to refer to the FBI index crimes of homicide, aggravated assault, rape, and robbery.

xxxii   We use the term "property crime" to refer to the FBI index crimes of larceny, burglary, and motor vehicle theft.

xxxiii   Other government officials include government spokespeople and representatives from government agencies not associated with the criminal legal system (e.g., Department of Health).

xxxiv   Quotations from other groups were present in the articles, but no other group was quoted in more than three articles (8%).

xxxv   U.S. Census Bureau. (2022). *QuickFacts St. Louis County, Missouri.* https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/stlouiscountymissouri.

xxxvi   Furtado, K., Green, T., Chin, L., Shepherd, A., Lian Yang, J., & Dwight, D. (2023). *Transforming 911: Examining St. Louis' 911 system to reimagine public safety.* Forward Through Ferguson. https://drive.google.com/file/d/19DvYrqzfpKCrnQwG_77L8Ejc13SFMt9q/view.

xxxvii   Furtado, K., Green, T., Chin, L., Shepherd, A., Lian Yang, J., & Dwight, D. (2023). *Transforming 911: Examining St. Louis' 911 system to reimagine public safety.* Forward Through Ferguson. https://drive.google.com/file/d/19DvYrqzfpKCrnQwG_77L8Ejc13SFMt9q/view.

xxxviii   U.S. Department of Justice (2015). *Investigation of the Ferguson Police Department.* https://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/opa/press-releases/attachments/2015/03/04/ferguson_police_department_report.pdf.

xxxix   Forward through Ferguson. (2018). *The state of the report: Tracking the Ferguson Commission's calls to action.* https://www.dropbox.com/s/numwe2p88krdyiq/FTF_SOTR_FINAL__080818.pdf?dl=0.

xl   Huebner, B.M. Giuffre, A. & Slocum, L.A. (2021). *Understanding Trends in Jail Population in St. Louis County, Missouri: 2010 – 2019.* University of Missouri St. Louis. https://datacollaborativeforjustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/PEW_JAIL_REPORT_Final_St.LouisCounty1.pdf.

xli   The region is defined as the St. Louis-St. Charles-Farmington, MO-IL Combined Statistical Area.

xlii   The ADP and statistics describing the St. Louis County jail population were computed for this report using data provided by ISLG. Up to date information on the jail population can be found at https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/eb2a32fce07e4f2888f955012f11a3f7.

xliii   Council of State Governments Justice Center. (2017). *Justice Reinvestment in Missouri: Overview.* https://www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/justice-reinvestment-missouri-overview.

xliv   More information on justice reinvestment can be found on the Missouri Department of Corrections website at https://doc.mo.gov/justice-reinvestment-initiative.

xlv   More information on SB 793 can be found here - https://www.senate.mo.gov/18info/BTS_Web/Bill.aspx?SessionType=R&BillID=69675271.

xlvi   House Bill 192 can be found here - https://house.mo.gov/billtracking/bills191/hlrbillspdf/0761S.08T.pdf.

xlvii   Schallhorn, K. (2019, June 12). Federal judge says St. Louis jails can't hold inmates unable to afford bail in underscore of new Supreme Court rules. *The Missouri Times.* https://themissouritimes.com/federal-judge-says-st-louis-jails-cant-hold-inmates-unable-to-afford-bail-in-underscore-of-new-supreme-court-rules/.

xlviii   The Missouri Supreme Court Rules can be found here
https://www.courts.mo.gov/courts/ClerkHandbooksP2RulesOnly.nsf/c0c6ffa99df4993f86256ba50057dc
b8?OpenView.

xlix   American Civil Liberties Union. (2021, February 19). *Court rules Missouri's waiting list for public defender
violates constitutional right to counsel.* Press release. https://www.aclu.org/press-releases/court-rules-
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l   Huebner, B. M., Lentz, T. S., & Gibson, M. (2020). Systematic Case Review Strategies: An Application for Jail
Population Reduction. *Justice Quarterly, 37*(7), 1261-1276.

li   The Bail Project operates in the county and the city and will typically post bail up to $5,000. Although the
criterion to select cases can change and is made based on individual circumstances, individuals must only
have a bond in St. Louis County and no holds from other agencies to be considered. More information can
be found here https://bailproject.org/.

lii   Harris, M. (2019, August 9). "I Could Care Less About Conviction Rates:" St. Louis County Prosecutor
Wesley Bell on rethinking prosecution. *Slate.* https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2019/08/wesley-bell-
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liii   Age-adjustment standardizes rates to a standard population age distribution and allows the death rate to
be compared across different years in the study period. Information on fire-arm deaths was obtained
from the St. Louis Partnership for a Healthy Community's Think Health St. Louis which is available at
https://www.thinkhealthstl.org/indicators/index/view?indicatorId=104&localeId=1630.

liv   These newspapers were selected based on conversations with local partners about news outlets that
would provide a varied perspective on crime and the criminal legal system. The *Post-Dispatch* is the daily
local paper with the largest readership with a weekday print circulation of 54,512. The *St. Louis American*
is a weekly newspaper serving the African-American community of St. Louis, that has a weekly circulation
of approximately 60,000.

lv   Quotations from other groups were present in the articles that were coded, but were no other group was
quoted in more than three articles.

lvi   The other three articles discussed a variety of solutions intended to address root social issues such as
providing strong role models.

lvii   U.S. Census Bureau. (2022). *QuickFacts Mecklenburg County, North Carolina.*
https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/mecklenburgcountynorthcarolina/PST045221.

lviii   U.S. Census Bureau. (2022). *QuickFacts Mecklenburg County, North Carolina.*
https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/mecklenburgcountynorthcarolina/PST045221.

lix   U.S. Census Bureau. (2022). *QuickFacts Mecklenburg County, North Carolina.*
https://issuu.com/belkcollege/docs/2021_11_11_stateofhousingreport2021.docx.

lx   U.S. Census Bureau. (2021). *Median Gross Rent (Dollars)*. American Community Survey, ACS 1-Year Estimates Detailed Tables, Table B25064. https://data.census.gov/table/ACSDT1Y2021.B25064?q=rental+costs&t=Renter+Costs&g=050XX00US37119&y=2021.

lxi   Charlotte-Mecklenburg Housing & Homelessness Dashboard. (n.d.). *Housing Data Snapshot Charlotte-Mecklenburg.* https://mecklenburghousingdata.org/welcome/housing-data-snapshot/#:~:text=As%20of%20January%2031%2C%202023,(comprised%20of%20803%20people).

lxii   U.S. Census Bureau. (2021). *Food Stamps/Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)*. American Community Survey, ACS 1-Year Estimates Subject Tables, Table S2201. https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST1Y2021.S2201?q=SNAP/Food+Stamps.

lxiii   Portillo, E. (2019, May 28). *Five maps that show inequality in Charlotte in surprising ways.* UNC Charlotte Urban Institute. https://ui.charlotte.edu/story/five-maps-show-inequality-charlotte-surprising-ways.

lxiv   Maps were created using the Mecklenburg County Quality of Life Explorer, which can be accessed at https://mcmap.org/qol/#62/.

lxv   Chemtob, D. (2023, February 13). Analysis: Charlotte's longstanding crescent and wedge narrative is crumbling. *Axios Charlotte.* https://charlotte.axios.com/320247/analysis-charlottes-longstanding-crescent-and-wedge-narrative-is-crumbling/.

lxvi   Lacour, G. (2019, March 19). Breaking down the wedge in Charlotte. *Charlotte Magazine.* https://www.charlottemagazine.com/breaking-down-the-wedge-in-charlotte/.

lxvii   The ADP and statistics describing the jail population in Mecklenburg County were computed for this report using data provided by ISLG.

lxviii   Mecklenburg County Office of Violence Prevention. (2023). *The way forward: Mecklenburg County community violence strategic plan (FY2023 – FY2028).* https://mecknc.widen.net/s/sn9pq8sszl/the-way-forward —-community-violence-strategic-plan.

lxix   Mecklenburg County Office of Violence Prevention. (2023). *The way forward: Mecklenburg County community violence strategic plan (FY2023 – FY2028).* https://mecknc.widen.net/s/sn9pq8sszl/the-way-forward —-community-violence-strategic-plan.

lxx   Data on complaints were obtained from the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Internal Affairs Annual Report available at https://www.charlottenc.gov/files/assets/police/documents/reports/ia_anlrpt2022.pdf.

lxxi   Data on officer involved shootings were obtained from the CMPD website at https://www.charlottenc.gov/cmpd/News-Resources/Resources.

lxxii   These newspapers were selected based on conversations with local partners about news outlets that would provide a varied perspective on crime and the criminal legal system. The *Charlotte-Observer* is the daily local paper with the largest readership with a weekday print circulation of 75,329 and a Sunday print

of 108,372 (2018 data). The *Charlotte Post* is a weekly newspaper serving the African-American community that has a weekly circulation of approximately 15,000 (2016 data).

lxxiii   Other government officials include government spokespeople and representatives from government agencies not associated with the criminal legal system (e.g., Department of Health).

lxxiv   Quotations from other groups were present in the articles that were coded, but were no other group was quoted in more than three articles (8%).

lxxv   Abt, T. (2019). *Bleeding out: The devastating consequences of urban violence and a bold new plan for peace in the streets*. Hachette UK.; Weisburd, D. & Braga, A. A. (2019). *Policing innovation: Contrasting perspectives* . Cambridge University Press.

lxxvi   The theme day-to-day safety feelings encompassed the following statements: feel safe at home; can travel freely without being on alert or harassed; and property unlocked without fear. The theme minimal crime includes the following statements: little crime or victimization; low rates of property crime such as theft, vandalism, or car theft; low rates of violent crime such as murder, robberies, and assaults; no gangs in the community; few/no hate crimes; people are not victimized in their homes; minimal drugs in community; low rates of gun violence; and most people follow the law.

lxxvii   Neighborhood relationships included: Neighbors watch out for each other and provide support; events bring people together; and neighbors know each other and socialize/talk regularly.

lxxviii   Access to services included: Access to mental health/substance use resources; resources for vulnerable groups; resources, support for victims; and bullying addressed.

lxxix   The original map created through GCM and the summary of the feedback from community members that guided its revisions are available from the report authors by request.

lxxx   Unidos, M., Udani, A., Torres Wedding, M., Flores Fontanes, Á., John, S., & Seleyman, A. (2023). Envisioning A world without prisons: Group concept mapping as a collective strategy for justice and dignity. *Politics, Groups, and Identities*. DOI: 10.1080/21565503.2023.2266721.

lxxxi   The quadrants were created using the average percentages for importance (M = 27%) and priority (M = 27%), This allowed us to identify components of community safety that a high percentage of people think are important and are currently prioritized (high consensus); a low percentage of people think are important and are currently prioritized (low consensus); a high percentage of people think are important, but few people think they are currently prioritized (more importance than priority); and a low percentage of people think are important, but high percentage of people think they are currently prioritized (more priority than importance).

lxxxii   The Justice Services Dashboard can be accessed at https://stlouiscountymo.gov/st-louis-county-departments/justice-services/justice-services-dashboard3/.

lxxxiii   For an exception see Unidos, M., Udani, A., Torres Wedding, M., Flores Fontanes, Á., John, S., & Seleyman, A. (2023). Envisioning A world without prisons: Group concept mapping as a collective strategy for justice and dignity. *Politics, Groups, and Identities*. DOI: 10.1080/21565503.2023.2266721.