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Beyond the Ballot Box: A Conversation About Democracy and Policing in the United States

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Abstract

Political scientist Hakeem Jefferson (Stanford University) facilitated a discussion about race, policing, and the state of American democracy with fellow political scientists Cathy J. Cohen (University of Chicago), Yanilda M. González (Harvard Kennedy School), Rebecca U. Thorpe (University of Washington), and Vesla M. Weaver (Johns Hopkins University) on May 26, 2021. The conversation occurred a year after George Perry Floyd Jr., a 46-year-old Black man, was murdered by a White police officer in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Moving beyond common notions of democracy that focus primarily on voting and electoral participation, the panelists discussed how American policing and the criminal justice system, more broadly, redefine citizenship, redistribute power, and shape marginalized people's understanding of their place in society. Closing remarks addressed the potential for change in how criminal justice institutions treat marginalized

people and how political scientists can more usefully contribute to efforts that strengthen democracy for all. This is an edited transcript of the conversation and includes a bibliography of the sources mentioned. A video of the conversation is available online at **https://www.annualreviews.org/r/BeyondtheBallotBox**.

INTRODUCTION BY THE FACILITATOR

Hakeem Jefferson: A year ago yesterday, George Perry Floyd Jr. was murdered in Minneapolis, Minnesota, by Derek Chauvin, a White Minneapolis police officer who knelt on Floyd's neck for nine minutes and 29 seconds. Floyd's alleged crime: paying for goods at a corner store with a counterfeit $20 bill. In the aftermath of Floyd's murder, many have asked if this time would be different. Would this moment of reflection and enlightenment alter the lived experience of Black people in this country, particularly as it relates to our interactions with the criminal legal system, or as some scholars term it (Soss & Weaver 2017), the carceral state? Many of us who study and think about race and justice in this country were skeptical, not because of a desire for cynicism, but because we know and understand the long history of injustice and inequality that so characterize the experiences of marginalized folks at the hands of police, who, even in so-called democracies, engage in a form of authoritarian policing that sustains racial hierarchies and undermines human flourishing.

Just yesterday, on the anniversary of George Floyd's murder, I awoke to a tweet that called attention to a news story reported a few days prior by NPR. I want to read just a bit of that news story as we begin our conversation today (Associated Press 2021). Here's an excerpt:

> Louisiana state troopers were captured on body camera video stunning, punching and dragging a Black man as he apologized for leading them on a high-speed chase—footage of the man's last moments alive that The Associated Press obtained after authorities refused to release it for two years. "I'm your brother! I'm scared! I'm scared!" Ronald Greene can be heard telling the white troopers as the unarmed man is jolted repeatedly with a stun gun before he even gets out of his car along the dark rural road.

Continuing, NPR reports, "Troopers initially told Greene's family he died on impact after crashing into a tree during the chase. Later State Police released a one-page statement acknowledging only that Greene struggled with troopers and died on his way to the hospital."

The interaction Greene has with officers is striking, though familiar. He's disrespected. As the officers wipe blood off their hands and faces, one remarks, "I hope this guy ain't got fucking AIDS." His life is treated as disposable by those sworn to protect and serve him, who at this moment failed to render aid after putting him in a chokehold, punching him in the face, and dragging him on his stomach.

We have convened this conversation at a moment in American history when questions regarding the health of American democracy are top of mind. For many folks, these questions focus on Republican attacks on the franchise, and on the dangers of an unconstrained Executive. We have gathered today to consider what experiences like George Floyd's, and Ronald Greene's, and Breonna Taylor's, and those of unnamed Black and Brown folks across this country, and everyday interactions with police and the criminal justice system can tell us about the state of American democracy.

We ask, in this conversation, a revised version of a question that Frederick Douglass [2007 (1852)] asked on July 5, 1852: What, to those who experience the daily harm of policing in this country, is democracy?

To answer this question, we have convened four brilliant scholars whose work has so powerfully shaped our understanding of policing and the criminal justice system here in the United States

and abroad. Instead of introducing each one of these amazing scholars, I want to invite them to describe what insights they believe their work provides for this moment. In particular, I invite the scholars to share key takeaways from their work that they believe can help us understand and make sense of the moment that we're in, and frankly, the moment that we've been in for some time.

I want to turn first to Professor Cathy Cohen, the David and Mary Winton Green Distinguished Service Professor at the University of Chicago.

OPENING COMMENTS BY THE PARTICIPANTS

Cathy Cohen: Let me start by saying I'm not sure we can make sense of this moment. It is nonsensical. It is, as Saidiya Hartman (2008) reminds us, the "afterlife of slavery." It is not meant to make sense, but it is something we have to understand, have an analysis around, and think about what resistance looks like. I am honored to be here in conversation with brilliant colleagues, and I dare say comrades. By way of introduction, I'm a political scientist, among many things, who studies American politics, but with a focus on race, gender, and sexuality. I often say I study people positioned on the margins of our society. That has been the focus of my books, *Boundaries of Blackness* (Cohen 2009) and *Democracy Remixed* (Cohen 2010), as well as an edited volume entitled *Women Transforming Politics* (Cohen et al. 1997).

More important maybe than the books is that I've spent my career studying not only the ways that Black people in particular are oppressed but, more importantly to me, the ways in which they resist—sometimes in the forms of what might be considered recognizable political participation, but at other times in the spaces of deviance (Cohen 2004), we might say, fighting for things like joy, and love, and family, and limited agency. So, I guess at this moment I'd like to think that my work tells us something about the formations and the forms of White supremacy, of anti-Blackness, and again, more importantly, of the ways in which Black people come together in different formations and are struggling against the extended reach of the carceral state, trying to reimagine what life might be like, trying to reinvigorate, possibly, something we might call democracy.

A few key takeaways from my research on young Black people: It tells us about the reach of the carceral state, to remind people that it extends beyond the infrastructure of prisons and into their daily lives and into their communities. They understand themselves to be overpoliced, they believe that they have inferior access to education and other needed resources, and large majorities of them believe not only that racism remains a major problem in this country but that the killing of Black people by the police is an extremely or very serious problem. I'm calling those out because other young people, and particularly young White people, don't always agree (Cohen et al. 2017) with those sentiments. So that is part of where we are as a people, and at this moment.

I think if you look at the data, and we'll talk about this later, we know that young people, especially young Black people, are deeply alienated. They don't believe in electoral politics, they haven't recognized or realized the promise of anything we might call democracy, and they understand that the only way to remake their lives and remake the society is outside of the electoral arena, engaged in protests and movements and sometimes even revolution.

Hakeem Jefferson: Thanks, Cathy. We're going to talk about all of that in our conversation today. Next I want to turn our focus to Vesla Weaver, who is the Bloomberg Distinguished Professor of Political Science and Sociology at Johns Hopkins University.

Vesla Weaver: Cathy, it's always hard to follow you because we stand on the shoulders of giants like yourself and, really, had you not published your 2004 *Dubois Review* article (Cohen 2004), had you not written *Boundaries of Blackness* (Cohen 2009), had you not been the scholar in the world that you are, many of us would not have felt empowered to start to question ideas of deviance. Ideas of how policing is not just a subject for criminal justice scholars, but is really about power,

and is really about subjugation, and is really a governing arrangement. I think that's where I've tried to intervene in this field. In *Arresting Citizenship* (Lerman & Weaver 2014), Amy [Lerman] and I called policing an antidemocratic institution; now I'm calling it an arrangement of racial authoritarianism.

Our field has really neglected this. Policing is central to the machinery of racial repression in this country. It is not a bureaucratic arrangement to be studied in ways that disappear institutional arrangements and longstanding historical governing political authority in Black communities, in race–class subjugated communities. And so, one of the things that I'm trying to do across my body of work is to say that policing subverts democracy. And that policing (and the carceral state) is government. It is tied to other aspects of government. It is a race-making institution. Racial authoritarianism is perhaps the longest-standing institutional arrangement in this country. It has shaped literally every freedom struggle in this country. It has shaped how people come to understand their own citizenship and their own government in ways that I think our field completely missed. As political scientists wrote about pluralism, and representation, and voting, political science became obsessed with understanding citizens' voluntary engagements with government rather than the government coming and kicking their door in.

My intervention was to get us to see that as important as the first face of the state, the representational arrangements, were the more coercive regulation-driven disciplinary arrangements that were the core of how many experienced government. I think the other thing that I'm trying to do in my work is to say that this is not something new—this is not the 1990s, this isn't the early 2000s—but that if you look to the historic canvas of race–class subjugated expressions across time, you will find the features of racial authoritarianism dating back to the Works Progress Administration narratives, dating back to the Jim Crow narratives, dating back to the first prison memoir ever written by a Black man born free but taken to the house of refuge at age six, named Austin Reed [2017 (1858)].

By not tracing those through lines, we continually create and reinforce this distorted understanding of American democracy that deep-sixes this idea that regulation and coercion, suppression, predation have been essential.

I thank my colleague Lester Spence for pointing me to the fact that, in 1975, the very first journal of the National Conference of Black Political Scientists was not called "representation," or "let's study Black voting habits," or "Black politics as a representational phenomenon"—it was called the *Journal on Political Repression*. It centered political violence, state violence. And the very first issue was on police repression. It says, "The *Journal on Political Repression* (JOPR) begins with the assumption that the repression of Blacks is an essential condition of the American political system, and that repression has been intensified in direct proportion to increased Black agitation for equal treatment. Recognition of the systemic character of violence and terror to keep Blacks in 'their place' is not new" (Jones 1975, p. 6).

In my work, I want to unearth and bring back an understanding that there is a very long tradition in the Black counterpublic of understanding this relationship of state violence with Black communities that is completely consistent; in fact, it has upheld American democracy.

Hakeem Jefferson: Thank you, Vesla. Let's turn next to Professor Yanilda González, who is an Assistant Professor of Public Policy at the Harvard Kennedy School.

Yanilda González: I can't think of two scholars who have shaped me in my work and my thinking about all of these questions more than Cathy and Vesla, so this is a very humbling moment for me as somebody who's been thinking and trying to make sense of these questions for about half my life at this point.

I was really struck, Hakeem, by the quote that you read from the story of Ronald Greene. I had read that before and it has haunted me, because not only does it refer us to think about Cathy's

work, but it reminds me of one of the—at the time—largest police massacres in Latin America of 111, at least, unarmed prisoners in Carandiru Prison in 1992 (González 2020b). And I stress "unarmed" because even in my conversations with police 20 years later, they say, "Well, these prisoners had syringes with their blood in it, and we thought they might infect us with AIDS," as part of the way that they justified the repressive actions on that day in October of 1992. These are cyclical questions; they're the different ways that repression and anti-Blackness manifest then and now, in Brazil and the United States, and certainly in many other contexts as well.

As I try to sit with that reflection that your comment brought up, Hakeem. . . I would say two things about my work and how I think it relates to the current moment. I started working on these issues after September 11, when I saw a new policing security apparatus be built up and utilized against communities of color, in a sequence beginning with Muslim, South Asian folks, but then spreading to immigrants and then spreading to ultimately the same strategies being used against Black communities, against the Latino immigrant communities, against Muslim communities, etc.—the same repressive forms.

The thing that struck me at the time, in my late teens, was that this was done with a lot of support from a big chunk of society. This was something that generated questions for me about democracy, policing, and authoritarianism that I explore in my work. So, I think the first takeaway from my work for this moment is about police as authoritarian enclaves. It's not just that police violate democratic norms, or that they act in ways that are inconsistent with democratic principles—all these things that we might hear about how they violate human rights, etc.—it's that they can very often function as explicitly authoritarian enclaves in otherwise democratic societies. I think that's important in particular in this moment of democratic backsliding because policing is an arena where a big chunk of us was perfectly comfortable with authoritarianism. It was an arena where people were very comfortable with the deprivation of rights, with the repression, with violence, with the death of particular people in the name of security.

That [attitude] stretches to fear of crime, fear of terrorism, etc., so that authoritarianism was something that many of us tolerated—not just tolerated but celebrated and demanded—for a very long time. That has begun to spread to other arenas of political life in places like the United States, Brazil, and, of course, many others. So, that's something that I thought a lot about. . . and it's an argument that I try to emphasize in my work. Given the role of inequality, in unequal societies, in unequal democracies. . . democratic processes reinforce those authoritarian patterns of policing (González 2017). And that inequality in society creates a constituency for authoritarian coercion, for authoritarian policing.

That constituency makes authoritarian policing very difficult to eradicate. So, when we talk about reforming the police, defunding the police, abolishing the police, there's that underlying power structure and those power inequities in society that I think lead us to question, well, what other systems are possible when there is a structure in society that favors some system of subjugation, of domination. What other system of domination would replace the police if we got rid of it and if we don't also transform those patterns of inequality in our society?

Hakeem Jefferson: Thank you, Yanilda. One of the things that most struck me in reading your work, as we're convening a conversation about democracy, is that the very pillars of democracy—some of these elements that we talk so much about, like attention to and responsiveness to public opinion—it's those aspects of democracy that can help to sustain this repressive and coercive and authoritarian state of policing that we have. That's something that I certainly want us to dig into in just a bit. But let's finish off this first part, before we go into a back and forth, with Professor Becca Thorpe, who is an Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Washington.

Rebecca Thorpe: It's really an honor and a privilege for me to be here. I'm deeply moved and inspired by all of the scholars on this panel. I'm actually straddling two projects right now.

I've done work on rural prison proliferation and the political economy of prisons (Thorpe 2014, 2015; Walker et al. 2017). I've also been working on a new book manuscript for several years now, examining state violence and divestment in American cities in the post–World War II decades.

My current project shows that post–World War II government projects, fortifying White suburbs, and gentrifying cities promoted racial engineering and concentrated poor Black Americans in physically isolated spaces cut off from resources, investment, and opportunities. These episodes of state violence precipitated conditions fueling all sorts of organized resistance, including [armed resistance] and violence.

I think that this work speaks to our current moment in several important ways. In the past several years, Department of Justice reports (US Department of Justice 2015) have documented a range of police abuses, including the excessive use of force, harassment, and predatory systems of revenue extraction. All of these cases disproportionately affect Black residents. Meanwhile, 99% of police killings (Higgins & Schoen 2020) have not resulted in any criminal charges. The COVID pandemic has inflicted extraordinary economic and physical harm on communities of color. In many of the states that were shaken by uprisings last summer, Black deaths related to the virus occurred at two to three times the rate of White deaths (Gawthrop 2022). The point that I really want to highlight is that these persistent inequalities are rooted in a much longer and larger history of state violence.

An unsegregated America might produce instances of police brutality that are randomly distributed across the population, but my work shows that the geographic concentration of poverty, violence, and incarceration all coincide with historical patterns of redlining and segregated housing markets (Aaronson et al. 2021) that were underwritten by the federal government, as well as things like freeway construction (Baum-Snow 2007, Karas 2015) and land clearance projects that disproportionately tore through and destroyed Black neighborhoods (Gilmore 2007). Now these communities face extraordinary levels of insecurity and are cut off from a range of social goods, including capital mobility and police protection. And these are the same communities today that are destabilized by militant, aggressive, and authoritarian forms of policing and incarceration. So I guess the point I want to make is that it's the convergence of these crises, a virus disproportionately killing Black people and a long history of state violence targeting Black Americans, that led thousands of people to risk physical harm in order to protest the killing of George Floyd, an unarmed Black man who was pinned down and suffocated for nine minutes by a police officer.

Hakeem Jefferson: Thank you all so much for those introductory comments. Having now taken a good look at your bodies of work, there's a through line that joins the many projects that you all are working on: You attend to these experiences of marginalized folks. There are a lot of places we can look to in thinking about policing and the carceral state, but for all of you, there's this attention to what it's like on the ground for people who face this repressive and coercive arm of the state.

PERSPECTIVES ON THE STATE FROM BELOW

Hakeem Jefferson: I want to open up the conversation by asking why it's important that we focus our attention there and not elsewhere. What is it that you've learned from attending to these experiences, talking to these folks, centering their experiences, and thinking about the state of American democracy as it relates to the carceral state?

Vesla Weaver: Hakeem, I want to start with a maybe provocative statement. And maybe it has a question mark at the end of it, but I'm not going to state it like it has a question mark. I think we know next to nothing about the experience of democracy, about what government is and does, and what the state is and does, from quantitative survey indicators of American political life.

And I've moved very far in this direction: that until you turn to the central witnesses of the state's coercive arm, you have an extraordinarily impoverished understanding of American democracy—one that highlights its best aspirations; one that continues to prop up this understanding that we are this vaunted, celebrated nation to which all others ought to be compared.

When I read Yanilda's book (González 2020a), when I read the expressions there, when I read the oral histories, the hundreds of thousands of pages of collected transcripts that are the central evidence base... when I read them, what I see is a remarkably persistent pattern. One that includes broad criminalization and stigma, including for the law abiding. One that includes selective enforcement of the law, such that one could say a dual legal system exists. One that shows us that access to democratic freedoms is incredibly prescribed: stripped powers to move about freely, to exercise the vote, restrictions on assembly. Gathering on one's front porch is all of a sudden considered against the law in common knowledge, if not by formal municipal code. State violence is routine. Intensive surveillance permeates private space. Police retaliation is routine. Personal autonomy is limited, and criminal punishment encompasses broad demographic groups and is decoupled from actual law disobedience.

When we learn as a field about authoritarianism abroad, we're not picking up that those expressions that I'm talking about show an incredible mapping. Somehow, we have created this idea of American democracy that is not lived in race–class subjugated communities. And so, my provocation is that our method has gotten us into trouble. Our hyperfocus on quantitative indicators of American political life has routinely disappeared the acute political vocabularies of race–class subjugated communities that tell you, "Freedom is not here." Communities that tell you, "Government is a boot on my neck," and that routinely tell you, "Well, we have to live by a different set of laws. The law might say this, but let me tell you how it actually works."

So one of the things that I think we ought to consider is that our methods have constrained our understanding of American democracy. And where I have pivoted is that I'm living inside stories right now. I am trying to piece together a subaltern canon, piece together all of the writings across time in the way that Saidiya Hartman (2019) does in *Wayward Lives*, where she's trying to get the figures, the people that we didn't think were experts and yet had the most sophisticated understanding of what political life actually was.

Cathy Cohen: I want to ask you this question because I don't think it's method, necessarily. I think it's who we think is worthy of talking to, right? I do surveys, but I do oversamples of Black people, of young people, of folks on the margins. And from those types of surveys, we can get some information. There are brilliant scholars, many of them are on this call, who have done interesting and important ethnographic and multimethodological work that give life to the different ways in which people experience the state and particularly the carceral state. There is an elaboration in the theory around the liberal state versus the second face of the state (Soss & Weaver 2017) or the carceral state.

I feel like we do know about how democracy is experienced in race–class subjugated communities. I'm not sure the discipline cares. I think those people who dominate this discipline don't live that experience, don't understand that as worthy, have been trained to understand democracy as, "Is everyone allowed to vote? What are the norms? What are the guardrails? Oh my God, Trump."

Yes, Trump was a disaster, but Black people were being killed before Trump. Can we have a functioning democracy when Black lives are thought to be expendable; when young people are overpoliced, as Becca said; when we see a system of extraction from the police, from the courts, from welfare systems? I know we stand on the same side, but I'm not sure it's that we political scientists don't know. If we don't, it's because folks don't care and we're not training people to care, or to think that these are important questions that they should pursue.

I have loads of students, largely students of color, who care about these issues, who write about these issues, who research these issues, and who are "supported" in a department. But there is American politics and then there's those of us who do race. And there are people who proceed to teach like democracy functions for everybody in the same way, that it functions at all, who are concerned about the norms and the Senate when Black people are being killed, and it's ridiculous.

Vesla Weaver: Thank you, Cathy, for pushing back because I don't think those two things are separable. I think because you don't care, you study things in a certain way. You study it as though political exclusion is the democratic threat rather than coercion and state violence. And so many of us have had to lean on comparative politics scholars for whom using a vocabulary of repression is okay, and bring that into what we're doing.

Let me give you an example of what I mean when I make my methodological critique. When you actually live inside the narratives, live inside the portrait of Black life that has been gathered from a Black studies tradition, not from a political science tradition, you will hear concepts like expendability, which I'm glad to hear you say, and misrecognition (Thompson & Yar 2011). You will hear how people actually theorize what they're living as not democratic.

When you don't do that, then those concepts never make it onto surveys. Yes, they make it onto your [Cathy's] surveys, maybe, and that's because you do these listening investigations and focus groups. But for the most part, the loss of those concepts is the reason that Amy [Lerman] and I had to go to surveys outside of our field. And the reason why Hakeem and I are developing these new concepts to put on the Collaborative Multiracial Post-Election Survey is because we continually measure political life in these tired ways that don't get to the core of the rebuttals that race–class subjugated communities are making.

That's what I mean about method: Until you listen, until you do the work of actually hearing how democracy is theorized, you won't know what to ask on the surveys. So you'll keep asking, "Well, how much confidence do you have in X or Y political leader? How much trust do you have?" And then that itself constrains our theories because we use those typical measurements to write our books.

Hakeem Jefferson: We will return to this critique of political science. I think this is a really important site. But I want to invite Becca and Yanilda to respond to some of what we've heard and to bring in those cases that you've been focused on.

Yanilda González: I would love to come back to that question of methods, and also who's allowed to use certain methods and who's allowed to ask particular questions in particular ways, I think, is also an important way to challenge our discipline.

But I wanted to just pick up on something that Vesla was talking about. When you are coming from and working with folks in marginalized communities and race–class subjugated communities, the folks have a much more clear sense of what our democracy is actually like than the elites that are much more frequently the folks who are studied and have a voice in our particular discipline and probably many others, as well.

As Vesla was thinking about someone's narrative where the law says one thing but the reality is another, memories are coming back to my mind from my fieldwork: a Black lawyer in the periphery of São Paulo talking about, "Are we going to tell people in the favelas to tell the police, 'Well, do you have a search warrant to break down my door and come on in with guns blazing?' That would be actually putting their lives at risk, to tell them something like that."

I'm thinking also of a workshop that I did just before COVID hit in rural Dominican Republic with Dominicans of Haitian descent. Young, Black people who are stuck in a system that deprives them of their full citizenship in a very real sense. We were doing a "Know Your Rights" workshop, where the young people themselves were constructing the "Know Your Rights" document that was going to be distributed in the community. And they were like, "Well, if we're advising people

on what to do if they're stopped by the police, do we tell them what their rights actually are and potentially subject them to more abuse and harassment? Or do we tell them how to stay safe?"

This is something that the young people themselves brought to the table; this is a question that they ask and that is far clearer to them than many of us academics and many of the elites that we tend to speak to. I think that raises the really clear question you posed at the beginning, which is, what do we get when we look at the state from below? We get a reality check. We get a real sense of the extent our democracy actually reaches everyone as promised and as should be.

I think it's also important to look throughout the societal hierarchy. In my work, I not only spent time with folks in marginalized communities in the different countries that I studied, but also spent time with political leaders, with police commanders, with more well-to-do citizens who run the community security council, the business owners, the property owners who in many ways help to reproduce and sustain and demand that continued subjugation and the lack of real rights for many people in these communities.

Studying the state not only from below but also from above, together, gives you a sense of how these patterns are sustained and why they are just so intractable. And why they reproduce themselves, why Vesla and I have such very similar accounts in US cities and in cities throughout Latin America.

Rebecca Thorpe: I'd just first like to respond to this discussion about the discipline and about the methods. And then I'll talk a little bit about my work on rural prison proliferation and the political economy of punishment.

There's a certain institutional violence that regards certain lives as worthy of preserving and others as disposable. And I think that logic is really reflected in academia and in our discipline specifically. It is a problem with methods, but it's not a problem solely with methods. It reflects this broader question: Whose lived experiences matter? I think that helps to address and understand why we don't see more of these histories from below, and why these experiences of people in race–class subjugated communities are largely marginalized in the discipline and continue to be marginalized.

Shifting focus, my work on prison proliferation (Thorpe 2014, 2015) shows that as policing became more militant and as criminal punishments became more severe, elites lobbied for prisons as an economic development tool in impoverished rural communities. So, just as aggressive surveillance and policing were deployed to combat risk and vulnerabilities that clustered in isolated urban districts, prison development essentially became a jobs program for many impoverished, rural White districts.

Now, prisons don't draw very much social or economic capital, but rural elites still have really powerful interests in soliciting and then protecting these investments. Prisons essentially became an economic stimulus for distressed rural communities. They're stable, they're even touted as being recession-proof, they're a source of jobs and revenue, and they draw infrastructure to serve the prison.

There are also less visible political advantages (Walker et al. 2017) to hosting prisons: for example, the Census practice of counting prisoners as residents where they're confined. The Census counts are used to determine political reapportionment in things like the state legislature, the US House, the Electoral College. And they also determine state funding formulas, so they're used to distribute funding for things like education, infrastructure, and Medicaid.

Prison gerrymandering essentially distorts the picture by artificially inflating the population in otherwise declining rural spaces where prisoners are confined and decreasing the population counts in urban areas where most prisoners are from. This essentially takes political power away from racial minorities and cities and transfers it to rural prison communities. The upshot here is that many rural, White districts are essentially empowered to speak for disenfranchised urban

minorities. And this has pernicious self-reinforcing effects. Compared to their partisan counterparts without any prison infrastructure, lawmakers in more rural areas that do have prison infrastructure are more likely to support harsh punishments (Thorpe 2015) for even nonviolent offenses, and oppose reforms even where there's otherwise bipartisan consensus that we need to reform these structures.

This framework illustrates a particularly pernicious component of American democracy where these rural prison investments tie the economic and political viability of rural Whites to the continued confinement of poor communities of color. This political economy component is really important to recognize and reflect on, as well as thinking about how intractable the system of punishment has become, and the level of investment in the punishment apparatus. And just the scale of opposition that we need to confront when thinking about and reimagining other alternatives.

DISPOSABILITY, MISRECOGNITION, AND DEMOCRACY

Hakeem Jefferson: One of the things that came up in this back-and-forth was about the disposability of Black life and the lives of these subjugated folks that we all care about. I want to invite you to reflect on what you've learned as you think about this disposability, not only in American democracy. We've heard about it in the context of the discipline and the perceived disposability of these folks and our thinking about democracy more broadly. These experiences of subjugation condition how folks come to think about their place in society, how they come to think about what it means to be a citizen in the countries where they live.

You have talked to these folks. You've been on the ground with these folks. Cathy, I'm thinking about not just your scholarly work, but your activism, too. I'm just wanting to hear some of these narratives that give us some light and texture on what it's like to be a subjugated person experiencing this repressive arm of the state. What are the kinds of things that folks tell you? How does it affect their place in the world and their thinking about their place in the world?

Cathy Cohen: There's so much to say here about how young people, Black people or queer people experience their lives, what we might call "on the margins," the margins of society in terms of their relationship to something called full citizenship. For example, when we ask a question of young Black people, "Do you feel like a full and equal citizen in this country?" Barely a majority say yes to that. It is the contradiction of having something we might call formal citizenship but being very clear about the secondary status of their position in this society. And when we've done focus groups, they talk about overpolicing, what happens when they're walking through their neighborhood and they get pulled over. They talk about the fewer resources that are devoted to their education and educational systems.

They see the disinvestment in their communities. I think for most people in this society—how democracy is lived—that is the reality. Now I want to jump and say that it also means that they are much less invested in some kind of superficial promise of democracy. So again, when we use this method of surveys, which is, of course, incomplete, we know that young Black people are less likely to believe in things that some people consider to be the fundamentals of democracy, like the Constitution. They're less likely to hold to principles about free speech because they understand free speech is often directed and kind of weaponized against them. They don't believe that the legal system treats everyone the same. They don't believe that everyone has an equal chance to make it in this society.

I think they are clear about the perils of the democracy that they live with. A democracy that is often about extraction, that is about surveillance, that is about penalizing and regulating. And it's not just the police; it's ICE, it's welfare systems, it's educational systems, the way we've weaponized educational systems. It is the totality of their lives.

That's not to say that there aren't places of joy and that they don't have wonderful things in their communities. But over and over again, what we hear is that they largely live in the carceral state (Cohen 2010). That is their experience with democracy. And if that's their experience with democracy, why would we ever expect them to believe in the promise of democracy? And I will say, I think they are conflicted.

They also understand, when we've done focus groups with them, that the promise of electoral representation doesn't change their lives. These are young people who have grown up with Black mayors, with Black city council members, now with a Black president. And as they would say, "Fantastic symbolically, but it didn't change my neighborhood. It didn't change my school. It didn't change my job prospects. I live in Chicago. It doesn't change the possibility that I will be shot in my neighborhood."

How can we say democracy is functioning from the bottom, from the sides, when young people experience their lives on a day-to-day basis in a democracy that is failing (Brower 2019)?

Hakeem Jefferson: Yeah, there's this highfalutin way that so many folks talk about democracy as a sort of abstraction, but for a kid in Chicago or Baltimore and the rural places where I grew up, this is no democracy. And Vesla, I know you've been reading through and collecting these narratives by way of the Portals Policing Project (**https://www.portalspolicingproject.com/**). Those narratives are so textured, so real, to listen to people talk about their experiences. As you comment in whatever way you want, I'd invite you to help us experience some of these narratives.

Vesla Weaver: They are complex. They borrow storylines from past historical eras. They talk a lot about resistances that we've never sought to measure, small and large. I was looking at the narratives, the oral history collection that is housed at Duke University, interviews of people who had lived during the 1930s and 1940s during the height of Jim Crow. The interviews are not just about police. They're about life. What was life like? And I'm reading some right now called the Baltimore Neighborhood Heritage Project that was done with people who were born in the 1890s (Baltimore Neighborhood Heritage Project 1978–1981). They had lived through the Baltimore fire. They had lived through the Great Depression. Many of them had served in World War I. Here's one, and this is what you will miss if you don't listen, if you don't read these first-person witness testimonies. This is what resistance is like during that era, during Jim Crow: "They just simply wouldn't accept it anymore." This is a woman who's speaking about her uncles (Griffin 1995):

> They decided, "I will not walk out in the street for you. I will not accept you hitting me without hitting you back. If you're going to kill me, you're just going to have to kill me, because I'm tired. I'm very tired, and I'm not going to do it anymore. I'm not going to accept it anymore." And they voiced it. And oftentimes—this officer, his name was Mr. Greer, was the sheriff then. And he... oftentimes would arrest them, and he would put it on drunkenness because we weren't supposed to have, you know, drink. You do these things and speak up for yourself. It didn't occur to them that you were not drunk, you were just tired.

And here's another something that we will miss if we don't look at resistance in these testimonies (Alexander 1993).

> During the period of time when there was such cruelty in the lower south, when they uncovered the peon areas those plantations down there they had blacks that were in prison on the plantations. Many blacks escaped from those. See what they would do, I'm a farmer. I'd buy, I'd purchase the persons who were jailed, black. I'd purchase their time and they would have to come and work for me for a certain number of years, work that time out. And many of them never got out of those plantations. When they'd try to leave, they'd kill them and bury them. When the investigation began to open up and these things were found, many of those people escaped. Many times we have slept what we might call escapees from those camps in our funeral home on their way to different places. And those were things that very few blacks knew about because we couldn't even trust blacks. We had a lot of Uncle Toms, you know. We couldn't even trust blacks to let us know what we were doing.

That's Zechariah Alexander, who is describing a literal underground railroad happening long after slavery, during the era of prison farms and convict leasing. A network of Black funeral homes that helped escapees from the plantation camps.

The other major narrative that we are coming across a lot, happening across history and in the Portals narratives, is something we call misrecognition. . . . As Cathy pointed out, they [Black Americans] know that they've had electoral politics all along; the core complaint is not "Oh, we need more voting power" or "We need elected officials to come listen to us a little bit more." The core complaint is an intimate presence of police in their neighborhoods without an understanding of who they are. A flattening of their struggles without a context to understand their lives. And routine misrecognition. "We operate this way. This is what we're doing. This is why we're walking through the alleys to get home. But they see us as this one thing. They flatten us, they script us, they see us not in our full truth, they don't understand how our community operates, they don't understand what we go through on the day-to-day. And fundamentally, because they can't understand that, because they don't have that context, what is the presumption of my worth? What is their ability to come into my neighborhood and not make me expendable if they don't understand me? More than having my vote registered or more than having greater distribution, fundamentally, a core presumption of my worth, a core understanding of me and my community. . . . What is their capacity to intervene in my neighborhood with anything other than state violence and repression?"

That's something that we're calling misrecognition. It has not been well theorized within American politics. It's theorized by sociologists. It's theorized by political theorists who talk about recognition. But while we're so busy looking at the tightness of the connection between the electoral leader and the elites and the public, what they're actually saying is, "They just have to understand my neighborhood context. And they can't understand that because they don't live in my shoes. They don't understand that I grew up with an uncle that's a drug dealer, and that that is the life path that I was exposed to." I want to read one from Crown Heights in 1991 (Brooklyn Hist. Soc. 2017):

> But I don't feel like I can walk into my own apartment building, now, if there are police officers standing in front, without feeling a certain level of scrutiny. "Do I belong here? What am I doing here? How long am I staying there?" And even if it's not meant with a certain hostility, it's still the fact that I have to be assessed in my own building, walking down the street that I, you know, basically grew up on. . . it comes down to just the assumption of belonging, I guess. Like, "I belong here. These are my streets. I know these streets. I know the history of these streets. I know what I want the future of these streets to be. I am invested in this community." I don't care if you mean good or ill, I'm not going to take kindly to some outsider coming in and telling me how things should go. And let's be clear, the police are outsiders. Like, by definition they are not supposed to be policing the neighborhoods they live in. So, how well do you know my 'hood?

Listen to the misrecognition here: "How well do you know the people of my 'hood? To talk to me, or look at us, and judge who belongs and who doesn't? . . . On what basis are you making your assumptions? And what are your assumptions about the people in the neighborhood? Because just because you assume that I belong here, doesn't mean that you assume good things about me."

Again and again and again, we were struck by how often people don't couch their grievance or their critique of democracy in terms that normally we, as political scientists, have been trained to measure. Instead, the core of the grievance is, "I'm not known or understood in my full truth. And therefore, I can never access this public good. Political authority can't come into my neighborhood and respond appropriately because they don't understand, they don't know us." I think that's something that we've been missing as political scientists while we've been training our gaze on how much people feel responded to by elites. This kind of more basic fundamental criterion for nondehumanization is just to know us.

Cathy Cohen: I want to push back a little.... You could read that as saying we can reform policing through community policing, or we can reform policing through residency rules, which have, of course, been tested over time (Murphy & Worrall 1999). There is an argument, in particular from young activists as they and we raised the question of abolition, which is to say at its fundamental core, as an institution, policing doesn't work. It's a failed institution: They don't solve cases, they harass Black communities, they extract resources....

Is the answer that I get Mr. Joe or Ms. Josephine to be a police officer and they live in the community and they know me? Because, in fact, there's an argument that says you are socialized through the institution of policing to wipe out the humanity of the people that you're policing. In part, it's about fear, but it's also about everything that you've learned about presumed guilt and criminalization of those people. I want to figure out how we think about misrecognition, but also hold onto the fact that there's an institutionalization. Misrecognition, let's go back to your point, brings it down to the unit of analysis of the individual. If I don't see you... I mean, maybe I am taught to misrecognize you.

I want to figure out if the work of the carceral state is misrecognition. I know it's fundamental, but I'm wondering what else has to go with it.

Vesla Weaver: There's a lot in that question. I actually would say that when you really listen to what they're saying about misrecognition, it does not follow that the core political aspiration then is, "Oh, I just need an officer that lives in my neighborhood," because they're misrecognized by Black officers, by officers that have been in their neighborhoods, by 32-year-long veteran police officers. I don't think what they're saying is, "Oh, you just have to grow up in my neighborhood, and then all would be good. Then the misrecognition gap would be solved." I actually do think that what they're saying is, "In a society predicated on the afterlife of slavery, predicated on the exploitation and dispossession of Black and Brown people... we will never be fully recognized. And so, political authorities that come in will always misrecognize our condition, will always put it on crime and simplistic understandings." I think that's what they're saying. In fact, in many of the narratives, they say, "Oh yeah, it doesn't matter if it's a Black officer." In fact, some of the most interesting narratives are by Black officers themselves when they're out of uniform experiencing misrecognition (Paul & Birzer 2017). "Oh yeah, when I'm driving, and I don't have my badge and my uniform on, the same script governs how police interact with me, too."

Cathy Cohen: I just want to underscore the significance of power in the process of misrecognition through institutions. And that in those cases, there's not one person asking to be visible or to have the people in the neighborhood. They're saying, "Shift power into our neighborhoods where we can decide what's needed, where we can hold you accountable." That part of the misrecognition is just fundamentally institutional and not an individual answer. It's not a bad cops issue. It's a bad institution.

UNEQUAL DEMOCRACY: POWER AND THE CARCERAL STATE

Hakeem Jefferson: I'm so glad that we've invoked the language of power because this is a crew that thinks about power. As political scientists, you'd think we would be talking about power more often. But political scientists don't talk about power as frequently as we ought. Becca, as Cathy invoked the language of power here, I was thinking that your work so clearly demonstrates how all of this mess that we're in—the system, the carceral state, all that—reifies a kind of power hierarchy. How it helps to situate some folks at the top of a power hierarchy and some other folks at lower rungs of the same. Perhaps you can help us think through the way that the system of power is maintained, given the state of the carceral system.

Rebecca Thorpe: Yeah, I'll address that question. I'd actually like then to circle back to Vesla's concept of misrecognition as well.

I mentioned this really perverse aspect of our American democracy where rural prisons link the political power of rural Whites to the continued confinement of predominantly poor urban minorities. I want to be clear that this isn't a windfall for these rural prison communities either. The prisons fail to diversify the economy. They become basically these one-company towns, and residents grow to rely on the prisons to survive. To me, this suggests that the criminal justice system is really a site of dual exploitation (Thorpe 2015). You have poor communities of color that face disproportionate levels of physical displacement, discipline, and surveillance, while these lower-class rural communities provide expedient dumping grounds to warehouse prisoners for what's basically limited, often transitory, economic relief. I think this reinforces this system or the perpetuation of a base subsistence in rural areas while perpetuating forms of punishment that continue to destabilize poor urban neighborhoods. So, we see that the most devastating costs of our prison system and our systems of punishment are imposed on a largely invisible class of social, economic, and political exiles. People in prison, upon release, can't live in public housing. They're excluded from certain loans. They're discriminated against on the job market. They're disenfranchised, politically. These mutually exploitative structures make our penal system particularly difficult to dismantle while they continue to reify these racial hierarchies.

Hakeem Jefferson: Yanilda, I wonder if you had any comments that you wanted to reflect on.

Yanilda González: I was just thinking about a really interesting, and I think telling, through line between all of our work. Going back to my earlier point about what you see if you don't only look at the state from below but also look at the factors and people and constituencies that sustain the carceral state, Becca's work also looks at who's benefiting from sustaining it in that way. I look at it in that way as well. This makes me think about work that I'm doing now with my colleague Lindsay Mayka about asymmetric citizenship. The policing doesn't just constrain or limit the citizenship of race–class conjugated communities (González 2017); it actually expands the citizenship of other types of citizens, of those who are higher up in the hierarchy.

So, in Becca's case, it's the rural White communities who get to see an expansion of their citizenship. I take her point that it's a really limited expansion through all those different economic factors, but they get that political responsiveness. They get politicians who are voting to sustain their local economy. They get politicians who are listening to what they need. They get employment. They get all these sorts of benefits. . . like the folks who are in these community security meetings that I attended during my fieldwork, they're getting policed. And sure, they're asking for the majority Black people experiencing homelessness to be removed from the front of their business, from in front of their homes, etc., to the detriment of the rights of those folks who they're asking to be removed, but they feel their own rights being expanded. The state is responding to them and what they need.

I think that this duality, maybe it's a hyperrecognition. . . if there's misrecognition on one end. . . the carceral state is ultimately a mechanism for redistributing power and redistributing recognition in that sense, in addition to all the other resources that are also distributed in that respect. And I think that really ought to make this a much more central question than it is in political science. . . . [After the murder of George Floyd and] the post-Ferguson era. . . the world really became aware of the extent of this problem in the United States.

For us comparativists, we've always looked at the United States as a case in terms of the philosophy of democracy, but I think for American politics, this is really a moment to consider all of this and I think Vesla has been really compelling in her advocacy of that. But in the United States specifically, because there are so many peculiarities to US institutions—gerrymandering, the Electoral College, and all these different things that you don't necessarily see in other parts of the world—how do all those peculiarities of our institutions feed into this redistribution and distortion of power of recognition along such clear race, class, ethnic, etc., lines? I think that

recasting the carceral state as a mechanism for redistributing power recognition has caused us to think about it in different ways than we typically do.

Hakeem Jefferson: I was just going to note this point from Yanilda's work: It's really striking how we think about these social divisions in society and how they further maintain the system of inequality and policing.

Vesla Weaver: I want to riff off of Yanilda because you nailed it. I think you just put it so plainly, and it made me think: What are the frameworks right now that we need to junk? That are too confining, too constraining? Yanilda, you just made me think that this is why I don't like the inequalities and bias language. And almost never do you hear, in theorizations from "below," people talking about bias. "Well, if you just tweak, if you just make police a bit more equal, if you just let them treat us the way they treat White communities. . ." because it's not a bias. It's not a situation of bias or inequity or disparity; it's a matter of how the government orients itself to Black life.

This is how people across generations, communities, regions, across time are governed. And when we switch our lens from bias—"If we just put on the body cameras and make police a bit more equal, and we put them in Black communities the way that they operate in White communities, all would be good, democracy would be whole"—[we realize] that's the wrong way to think about it because it is about power. I loved the way you put that. And Becca's work suggests that we should think about the carceral state and police authorities as distributing worth and power. And when you switch to that lens, the body cam is not going to fix that. This is my objection, even though I have coauthors who orbit the field of police legitimacy and procedural justice—this is my problem with that too—it's not just that the officer comes in and should "yes ma'am" you (Voigt et al. 2017) and give you more voice in the interaction. It's that from a very young age. . . why is a nine-year-old learning that they can be asked what they're doing on the street? Why is an elderly Black woman learning that she can't be on her front porch? That's about orientation; that's not about equity or bias.

The other thing I wanted to point to is political space, public safety discourse, and how that discourse has legitimated incredible interventions—expensive interventions—into the lives of citizens. One of the kinds of frameworks that I want to get rid of is public safety. I want to talk about safety deprivation. I want to use that term. Because safety has been used time and time again as a rationale to intervene in repressive ways in communities. Becca, you were talking about this earlier, talking about the linkage between extraction and dispossession and redlining with the carceral landscape: Once you switch your frame to a frame of safety deprivation, where safety is actually created and distributed through public policy, that changes things. You can no longer use safety as a rationale for massive coercive interventions.

In the aftermath of the protests around George Floyd, if there's one thing I'm scared of, it's that. . . Yanilda, you mentioned something like, "Well, now that the big reveal has happened and suburban Whites finally understand. . . ." And I don't know that that's right. I had many neighbors who protested, and yet if Black people moved into their public school tomorrow, they'd be the first to be talking about safety. I think what grabbed their moral imagination (Chudy & Jefferson 2021) was really fatal state violence, excessive state violence. But the broader orientation, the broader surveillance, the regular regulation of communities is perfectly okay with them. As you said, Yanilda, earlier, they would sign up for that tomorrow. So I think. . . we are going to have an uphill climb to get away from where we protest and we are morally incensed when we have sadistic, capricious violence, but when it's just regular stopping boys on the corner, asking them for their ID, asking them what they're doing, telling them to move on, telling them where they can and can't go, we're okay with that. We don't actually link that to the body bleeding out in the street by the sadistic officer.

Yanilda González: I think that's a great point, Vesla. It has to become a spectacle. It has to become really exceptional—in the sense that it gets all this media coverage, not that it's exceptional in its occurrence—for people to say, "Okay, this is what I'm not okay with." Yet we know from research with folks, Forrest Stuart (2016) and many others, that daily harassment, that daily being stopped for instance, has huge implications (Jackson et al. 2019) for young Black boys and girls and gender nonbinary folks of color. The extent to which they actually just feel free to be a kid—the ability for them to exercise their rights as children—is deeply affected by those kinds of policing that most of those folks are perfectly fine with and, in fact, are actually demanding. In the research on complaint-oriented policing, we look at so many of the killings that become very prominent: They start with somebody calling the police for small stuff. This person has a counterfeit bill, this person is selling loose cigarettes. . . .

Again, I think it goes back to this question of redistribution of power and recognition. That I feel better if I feel that when there's discomfort in my neighborhood, my neighborhood, my space, I can call the police to come and address it—it is a kind of a currency that people bring to the table, and they don't want to give that up. They don't want to give up the ability to stop, question and frisk, harass, tase, etc. So often we ask, "Well, why didn't they just use the taser," as though that is an improvement.

As you were talking about bias or body cams, I remembered an interview I did with a lawyer who defends and works with families of police killings in Argentina, predominantly people from low-income neighborhoods, the villas [*villas miserias*, "misery settlements"], that are affected by this. I was talking about police reforms and she said, "What are we going to say? Can you just tase us with a slightly lower voltage? Can you use a smaller club to beat us?"

I think that there's a real skepticism, rightfully so. When White communities in the United States or more well-to-do communities elsewhere realize that there's a problem, where are they locating that problem? Is it just, "I don't want to see this extreme violence on my television, but I'm fine with the other stuff"? What are the possibilities then, for transformation, if that's where folks are at? I know you don't like the talk of inequality (I want to unlearn that term and maybe think of a better way to describe it), but that unequal power in our society all goes back to that, and that persistence of a police force, of a carceral state, that operates to redistribute power, recognition, worth, and humanization.

Rebecca Thorpe: I love the term that you used, hyperrecognition. I think one of the most important things to understand about the carceral state is the redistribution of political power. Because of the primary residents, prisons essentially amplify democratic voices of otherwise shrinking rural areas. And I wanted to just circle back to Vesla's term of misrecognition. Vesla, you mentioned that you had to go to sociology and other disciplines in order to even really adequately theorize this concept.

We know that race–class subjugated communities experience a range of disadvantages. A wealth gap, concentrated poverty, failing schools, abusive policing, exposure to pollutants, and poor health and mortality. In my own work, I've found that these residents are also disproportionately exposed to lethal violence and experience violent victimization at the same rates as people living in some of the most dangerous countries.

This is really a race experience, if you look at American politics at the aggregate level. The United States is the most prosperous and powerful country on Earth. So, these aggregate metrics really obscure these pockets of what international relations scholars refer to as state failure (Miller 2015), meaning a failure to provide a range of public goods—among them, providing for people's physical safety. I've struggled in my own work to adequately theorize what's happening and come up with appropriate terms in order to fully conceptualize these experiences. I've also turned to a lot of comparative work and international relations theory as well in order to really get at this.

Because of decades of racialized housing policies, targeted land clearance projects, policing, and incarceration that had destabilized communities of color, and extracted wealth from them, residents are therefore exposed to increased levels of violence, insecurity, and mortality.

There's a form of violence that a Cameroonian philosopher, Achille Mbembé (2003), calls necropolitics. It's violence that leaves certain people to die or refuses to offer the necessary assistance to save their lives. I finally settled on the term state abandonment, where the state essentially abandons people to death. As I referenced before, part of it is institutional violence that regards certain lives as worthy of recognition and worthy of preserving and others as disposable.

Vesla Weaver: I want to push back a little bit. I use abandonment in my work as well when I'm talking about distorted responsiveness. The two things are linked: they [race–class subjugated communities] get capricious regulation and when they're constantly dying and they call for help, where's the state?

But I want to push back on this term because it's come up a couple of times in this conversation: destabilized communities, which is a close cousin, I think, to disordered communities, which is something that Cathy has pointed out to our discipline. Actually, there's a lot of political agency, and a lot going on. We just don't really seek to measure it in the right ways. In the Portals narratives, there are probably hundreds of examples of people, with shoestring budgets and without traditional resources, forging communal protection.

Now, it doesn't look the way that we often think of. It doesn't look the way that MacArthur Foundation or Arnold Ventures is going to fund. But it's all these efforts. And I've been thinking about Elizabeth Hinton's work too. . . a lot of these shoestring, communal efforts to provide safety, to initiate collective guardianship, to, in small ways and large, provide protection, to keep the shorties safe on the block, are not recognized (Hinton 2017). And not only were they not recognized; they were told by federal agencies that if you want any grant money, you have to have police sign off on it first. It's a part of her book that doesn't get a lot of attention, but I think is huge because it underwrites the later discounting of those communal efforts. We literally wrote them out of our grant programs.

Instead, the lion's share of the funds went to agencies that were tied to what? Criminal justice and police. And District Attorneys' offices. We did that by design. And so, in the Portals narratives, one of the things we're trying to map is all of the really quotidian ways that people were stepping in the breach of state abandonment to provide something, to keep their elderly neighbor safe, to intervene in the little dispute between two neighbors before they called the police.

We found in our own Portal in Chicago (**https://www.portalspolicingproject.com/chicago**) they worked out a gang truce, without recourse to police. They worked out an agreement with a local liquor store to stop selling to underage customers, without recourse to police. I think we have to start to study—and I see it all the time in journalistic circles, in academic circles, in public policy circles—this idea that Black people don't know how to self-govern. Actually, when you look, the fact is that they're doing all of these things: starting up little local groups, neighborhood councils—ways that we don't seek to measure but that are there—turning toward their communities, building from within, with very little support.

I'll give you an example (paraphrased from **https://www.portalspolicingproject.com/milwaukee**). "Look, we're having these little beefs at school. They're unnecessary, and they open us up to surveillance. So hey, let's go box it out." [These high school students] started a boxing group, and they would throw 30 seconds of punches in the ring. And then they were criminalized for doing that. So, their effort of trying to do something different to provide safety and to ensure that little disputes wouldn't get out of hand, the police came in and shut it down, literally criminalizing safety provision. And they said, "Maybe we weren't doing it the right way, but we were doing it the way we know how."

I think that is also part of the intellectual violence that has happened in this moment. Everybody's surprised that activist groups are saying we need community structures. We actually are the best ones to know how to provide safety in our boundaries. And everybody's like, "Well, give us some scalable models." What scalable model? We have over the last 40 years made sure that they're not scalable because we've underfunded them and not even recognized them. Meanwhile, we're pushing funds toward big outfits that come in and further destabilize the community.

Cathy Cohen: I want to cosign what Vesla just said—like I often do, yes—and underscore a couple of things. One is, we've often talked about what does it mean to live under, we could say, the boot or the knee of the carceral state. It is oppressive, but it's also generative. Once you realize the state and democracy as we talk about it don't work for you, it is generative in the sense that people begin to think of new ways of being.

Robin Kelley (2003) talks about "freedom dreams." And we get new language from activists that challenges us, and people push back, but it moves us. If we think about abolition, if we think about transformative justice, if we think about restorative justice; if people understand that the criminal justice system, the carceral state—as my colleague Reuben Miller says, the surveillance state (Miller & Alexander 2015)—crushes communities of color, crushes poor communities in particular. People find ways, as Vesla said, of not just making do, but making life. I always refer back to. . . a political project around joy. If in fact you live with the carceral state, to find spaces of joy and love and laughter is resistance. And people are doing that, plus they're doing the work of producing safety for their communities.

Now, having said that, I also want to recognize that it is complex for folks. If you live in a neighborhood where there has been systemic disinvestment, in part because of neoliberalism and the abandonment or the shrinking of a safety net, then you do deal with something that we might call crime. So the question is, how do you protect your family, your neighbors? And there's this question—I think Vesla's absolutely right—the question of public safety.

What we've seen is, after disinvestment, the way in which institutions regulate those spaces is they use a police force. And it's not just at the city level. We all work at institutions—at least I do at the University of Chicago. And I believe it now has the third largest police force in the state of Illinois. And they will say, we push them to say, "Well, we have to do something different." They say, "Oh, but the community wants more policing." And if you ask, "Do you want to be safe?" through this framework that Vesla talked about as public safety, and if the only option is policing, people will say yes to policing because they want to be safe and they should be safe in our functioning democracy.

It is incumbent upon us, I think, as a discipline to think about how do we pay attention to the work—and this again goes back to everyone's work here—of people creating new ways of being safe? Of really engaging ideas of what does abolition mean if we're thinking about the carceral state and the transition toward abolition at the same time that we're keeping people safe and shifting power into communities? There are big questions that political scientists could take up, and I think younger political scientists are taking up. A lot of the best work, I dare say, is outside of our discipline. There has been great work: Vesla and Amy (Lerman & Weaver 2014), and Traci Burch (2013), and Naomi Murakawa (2014). But I think some of the best work in helping people think through these questions really is outside of the discipline. I would want to cosign this idea that being under the boot of a failed democracy can be generative. Because people have to lean on each other, to build new ways of governance, new ways of producing safety, and, yes, new ways of producing joy.

Yanilda González: I wanted to pick up on something that Cathy just said, because I think it's one of the key questions here. State abandonment often looks like everything else but police. The absence of and disinvestment in every other possible state institution and service but police. That's

something I encountered every day in my fieldwork; I think this is definitely something that's happening in the United States. Police just expanding their footprint, particularly in low-income communities, in marginalized communities, communities of color, in ever-expanding ways. In my fieldwork I saw police in low-income communities, favelas, etc., having computer centers in the police station, having libraries in the police station, having soccer teams.... One woman talks about having the police take her to the hospital (González 2017) when she gave birth because the ambulance didn't come to her community. The local secretary of labor was using the local police station to get people to sign up for a jobs program. When you have that kind of uneven disinvestment, it's not across the board abandonment, it's selective abandonment.... That's not different in the United States. We see the police expand. Police are in schools, police are responding to issues of homelessness, responding to issues of mental health, enforcing COVID restrictions, handing out masks.

That not only shows people about what possibilities [they can] even imagine for what safety looks like, or security looks like, but also it expands the police's own structural power. Because once the police have a hand in all these different arenas of life, it enhances their ability to resist any kind of limitations on their power, any kind of resistance to their actions. Because if you're the politician you're depending on police, literally, to do everything. What possibilities do you actually have to say, "Okay, we're going to hold you accountable"? I would say that's very, very limited to nonexistent.

We have to think about that lack of imagination, lack of options that are presented for security. We can't blame communities for saying, "I want more police," because that's all that they're being presented with.... It's police or nothing. I think that is, again, something for our discipline to grapple with when we're thinking about how the state is showing up. It's not that it's altogether absent; it's that the state is showing up in pretty selective ways.

Rebecca Thorpe: I agree with all of that. I certainly didn't mean to minimize a sense of agency. I look at instances of organized resistance in my own work as well. For example, there's a group called Mama's Mafias (Venkatesh 2002), organized in the public housing projects in Chicago... predominantly women of color that organized to provide public safety, when the Chicago police department just refused or failed to respond. When I use terms like destabilization, I'm referring to specific instances of state violence—state interventions that either deliberately or inadvertently destabilized a community. I'm talking about things like racialized housing laws that moved people of color into the least desirable areas and denied them federally backed mortgages and extracted wealth from their community, and the land clearance programs that essentially became a new tactic for containing disorder and preserving White spaces.

Even instances of state abandonment: When Black Americans migrated to other neighborhoods to escape overcrowding, or as a result of displacement, they faced harassment, intimidation, and violence from White gangs and White mobs. And police and local political establishments routinely would endorse or tolerate, or even actively side with, White perpetrators. You have these instances of state interventions, violent interventions that disrupt communities and work simultaneously with these processes of state abandonment. That creates a condition where not only are communities at a disadvantage relative to other communities (I agree that the term inequality doesn't quite get at the scale and the scope of the problem), but the combination of state actions, of a violent intervention or a deliberate withdrawal, actually creates a crisis for communities. And then they're forced to respond on their own.

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF THE CARCERAL STATE

Hakeem Jefferson: At various points, we've talked about what we might regard as the political economy of the carceral state: the kind of economic conditions, contextual factors, and life that

give rise to this carceral state that's so violent and so repressive. I just want to use that as an opening question here, and maybe invite Yanilda or Becca to start us off in responding to how the political economy of the carceral state helps us make sense of what we are observing.

Rebecca Thorpe: I think it's really important to centralize the question of power when thinking about the carceral state: how carceral institutions, and other institutions, as well, redistribute political and economic power, and reinscribe racial and social hierarchies. I've talked about how prisons have served as a job program in a lot of economically distressed, rural areas. We can think of policing as a type of jobs program as well. That was amplified in Lyndon Johnson's war on crime, where, for the first time, we saw massive funding infusions from the federal government to local police departments.

I think it's also important to think about police historically. They've been a primary instrument for doing things like fortifying racial boundaries, preserving White spaces, and protecting White property. I think that all of those things have really been exposed and amplified in our current moment.

Yanilda González: One thing that I keep going back to is the role of business in shaping security policy, notions of security, notions of safety, and even what police do. I think a lot of business owners in low-income communities and outer peripheries, and in São Paulo particularly, but even in cities like Bogotá, Buenos Aires, where I also have done fieldwork. . . [these business owners are engaged in the] very democratic, participatory spaces where ordinary citizens can come and make demands on the police and other government officials. [I think of] the recurring power held by business owners in these democratic [spaces]. . . even in communities that are themselves stratified, in the communities that themselves are marginalized. . . spatially, they're marginalized. In the book (González 2020a), I call it a nested stratification, that even in a micro sense—and not the macro political economy of a city or a country or whatever—but even in a community that is itself low income, business owners end up creating this kind of demand for. . . or expressing demands for police repression.

I was thinking about these business-dominated community security councils and the number of times that I sat in low-income communities, majority Black communities, where the police had referenced killing someone, a suspect, and that being met with applause, being met with a kind of demand that the police are meeting. As a form of responsiveness. Just thinking a lot about the increase in crime, and in particular violent crime, that has been happening throughout the United States.

It's taking me back to sitting in those spaces, because I'm thinking about what kinds of demands are we going to be hearing from economic actors, business actors. I'm not even talking about the huge corporations in the United States but just the mom and pop small business shops, those that were "looted," "vandalized" during the protests, as a source of these types of demands for violent policing in this moment of increasing crime. . . .

Again, this is just in the level of race–class subjugated communities, not even the macro-level dynamics that are also going on. I'm just thinking about that and the kinds of shifts that we're going to see in response to that, in low-income communities of color, and are we going to see an increase in and demand for authoritarian policing as a result of this paired mobilization and resistance that people are doing, but also [as a result of] the increase in crime that is happening in many US cities. This is a different take on the political economy piece, but that's where I'm thinking about what these small businesses, community businesses, will be demanding in the coming months and years.

Cathy Cohen: I'll just jump in to build off of both of my colleagues, because I think they've presented us with a picture of the political economy of the carceral state. I just gestured toward incarceration in particular, and policing. We know about the extraction policies of policing. We've seen the Justice Department, through practice and pattern—studies tell us about the

disproportionate fines, the disproportionate ticketing, the bail that takes money out of communities at the level of incarceration. You notice the ways in which those who are incarcerated become workers, not for themselves, but in fact, any small amounts of money that are made are put against their "bill" for being incarcerated.

People who write about incarceration talk about the collect calls and the corporations that make money off of incarceration, not just small towns as Becca was talking about, but corporations who do everything: provide certain types of shoes that those who are incarcerated have to buy, so families have to figure that out; provide vans for families to get to visit their loved ones and charge exorbitant prices for that travel. There's just a full economy that we want to pay attention to, that benefits corporations, that benefits communities, that benefits in particular White communities off of the backs of people who are incarcerated.

When we think about the carceral state, we really have to think about the carceral economy—Ruthie Gilmore (2007) and others have written about this—and pay attention to the interlocking relationship between profit and incarceration. It is a profitable business for private companies, but also the state.

The other part of a political economy is to think about surplus labor: what have we done with surplus labor when we didn't invest in communities, when we haven't provided jobs for folks in marginalized communities. What we've done is arrest them and incarcerate them and ship them off and demand that, in fact, they labor for sub-minimum wages. It is a complex system, the political economy of the carceral state.

Vesla Weaver: I would agree with everything that's been said. This is one of the areas of scholarship that we know where really, the first bricks are being laid. I think Ruthie Gilmore is absolutely one of the best in this space, and there are several up-and-coming scholars who are starting to question this issue, and a lot of them are outside of political science. I just came from a talk by John Robinson (Pacewicz & Robinson 2021), a sociologist who works on Chicago. . . . Basically, his story is that Black suburbs, more affluent suburbs, who often have a Black leadership class, engage in some of the worst fining and feeing practices, in part because of a lack of an opportunity structure, where they have trouble attracting business and White capital, basically, for all the reasons we know, and therefore have to rely on regressive and punitive and predatory taxation schemes, and TIF [Tax Increment Financing], and all of this, that end up. . . preying on their citizenry. It's this complex picture.

I'll give you another anecdote. It's all swept up with property valuation having to do with safety logics that we talked about earlier, and how Black spaces, no matter how thriving, are stigmatized spaces. They are spaces that are held in by what Khalil Muhammad (2019) calls the ideology of Black criminality. No matter how safe they might be, they are still stigmatized as unsafe.

I'll give you a local example. I sit in Baltimore, and one of the strangest but. . . [most] encompassing ways of talking about the political economy of all of this is. . . [in] an area right next to Hopkins [Johns Hopkins University] that has been gentrified. It used to be a Black working class area, and it has been, with the help of Hopkins, prodded into redevelopment, and now boasts this really upscale food hall. You go, and you park in the police lot, and as you walk to this food hall, you pass several security officers who, in the dead of winter, are standing out there unprotected from the elements. They have nothing but maybe a little clipboard. They don't have any kind of thing that would actually enable them to enact safety. They're getting paid really poorly by the university, and they're mostly Black. They are there to protect this more affluent White space. And they come in from parts of the city that are not part of that space.

When you stop and chat with them, they know exactly what role they are playing in this scheme. And I'm sure Chicago has the same kinds of examples. Making sure that this little campus location remains bright and nice and affluent and safe, unable to partake in it, and probably coming from

the unsafe areas that Hopkins is trying to protect the student body from. And yet, they are not able to have secure, decent-paying jobs. To me, that example sums up the entire political economy of being enlisted to police, and they know exactly who they're looking for, and it's probably people that look like them minus the brightly colored, neon gear. That, to me, encapsulates all of this. . . at a local level.

We haven't done well to study all these relationships between urban space, gentrification, property valuation, safety logics, development imperatives. Some people have. Forrest Stuart (2016) does a good job in L.A. and the politics around Skid Row and the business development districts, or business safety initiative. . . . Colin Gordon (2019) does an excellent job in *Citizen Brown* in Ferguson, talking about Emerson Electric and all the ways municipal finance plays a role beyond what we knew from the headlines.

But as political scientists, we tend not to study the local level very well. We tend to look for (and I, myself, am guilty of this) the national story, the big elite proclamations, and changes that we saw at the national level, and really, that's only a real small part of criminal justice. . . . [We ought to look at] how policing and how these actors are making decisions at the local level that are very complex, that aren't just about law and order politics and federal funding and large-scale initiatives that built up the carceral state, but are more about the day-to-day, intractable problems of how do you ensure safety, how do you develop. . . [and] police places that have histories of highly unequal labor regimes and stratification and segregation.

THE ROLE OF UNIVERSITIES IN PERPETUATING UNJUST POLICING

Hakeem Jefferson: One of the things I was thinking about, particularly because Vesla is in Baltimore and Cathy is in Chicago, is that we can't think about the brutal death of Freddie Gray or of Adam Toledo in Chicago without thinking about the context, without thinking about the ways that these systems have been perpetuated. Given the academic audience that will take in our conversation, we can't help but think, too, about the way that universities and these otherwise liberal institutions help to sustain these systems, to sustain the carceral state. Perhaps, before we move to thinking about the possibility for reform and change, we can spend a few minutes thinking about the ways that universities and other such institutions have been a part of this political project, getting land that belonged to displaced folks, or having their own sorts of policing structures and the like.

Yanilda González: The dynamics that we've been talking about in terms of how. . . the social stratification lead[s] to a demand making that reinforces authoritarian policing—universities have been playing that out at a micro level for decades, [especially in] the construction of university police forces. . . . Objectively, there is this issue of high rates of crime and violence in the vicinity of the University of Chicago, [but] there's lots of ways that could've been approached. There's a lot of different ways that we think about how. . . we co-construct safety for everyone, how. . . we think about things in an inclusive way, which of course is difficult to do, considering the history of all of this, but let's just imagine that it happened. But the way that it actually played out is a demand from predominantly White parents saying, "We're not going to send our students there unless you have some safety." And the way that was thought about was, let's create a private police force.

That in itself shows how these patterns are so persistent, and [how] they replicate themselves over and over and over again. The turn to private policing, where. . . it wasn't enough that the Chicago police force was already policing in a racialized, stratified, authoritarian way. We then need to create another police force to do just that, and not only even in the campus. . . of the University of Chicago, but expanding its jurisdiction well into the south side of Chicago. . . .

This is the type of thing that we're not encouraged to study. No one's going to think that this is a particularly fascinating subject outside of this group. This is the type of thing that [is] expanding our understanding of what the political means, and the different spaces where these patterns of power, state repression, etc., are playing out. And the universities where we work are central to that.

Rebecca Thorpe: Vesla was mentioning we tend to emphasize the national as opposed to the local. I think that we also, as political scientists, tend to focus on the spectacular, rather than the mundane and . . . almost quotidian forms of violence. Recently, actually I think just yesterday, one of the headline pieces (Gayle 2021) in the *New York Times* was about the destruction of Black Wall Street in Tulsa. We've seen more media attention toward that, that White vigilante violence that killed hundreds of residents and destroyed thousands of homes.

Yet this sort of physical destruction of Black communities in the 1950s and -60s was routine government policy, albeit on a much smaller scale through things like freeway construction and urban renewal programs that systematically leveled family homes, local businesses, and community institutions, and resulted in evictions and mass migrations on an enormous scale, and [displaced] more than 100,000 families in Chicago alone. Tying that back to Yanilda's comments about how universities are implicated in this, the University of Chicago pushed for one of the largest urban renewal projects in 1948 to preserve its racial boundaries and protect White property values in Hyde Park.

Cathy Cohen: I would again just cosign everything that's been said. We could talk about the ways in which universities foster and facilitate gentrification and policing, the ways they make decisions about health care and whose bodies and whose lives are worth saving. We had a protracted battle with the University of Chicago for five years where folks from the community led the fight for the university to finally agree to provide a trauma center to save young Black lives, even though there was no trauma center on the south side. And the argument was, "It's too expensive." Saving Black life is too expensive. I'm sure they would say, "That's not what we meant."

But there's also the question of how we seek criminality on and off campuses. We have these big police forces, but we don't send them into campus. We know young people on campuses are selling and doing drugs. They're engaged in sexual assault. They're engaged in the things we might construct as criminal behavior, but we have found different ways of thinking about and producing public safety on campus versus what we do off campus.

The university is another site for us to think about the ways in which policing happens, the ways in which regulations and routines of carcerality emerge and get sustained, the ways in which we reproduce who's the criminal, and in fact who will protect us. Many White faculty members, when we suggest we need to dissolve the police department, will say, "Who's going to protect us?" There are lots of folks on campus, faculty of color, students of color, who don't feel safe and protected by the police. How do we have these conversations and a larger conversation about what this means for our discipline and the work we should be doing? I'll stop there.

IMAGINING A DIFFERENT FUTURE: REFORM AND ABOLITION

Hakeem Jefferson: You invoke the many ways that we have found to respond to campus events and the like. We have such a wide imagination when it comes to figuring out how not to jail, or police, or make victim to the carceral state, rich White students, for example. We have a big imagination. I think that's a nice segue for us to think about a place where we've had much less imagination: How do we construct the system that comes close to being more fair, more just, more equitable? I know that we don't like some of these words in this conversation, but as we look to the path forward, what do we think of is the prospect for arriving at any state of policing? That

assumes that we want something like that, but how can we imagine a path forward that's better than what we've got? And what's your sense of optimism or pessimism as we look forward to that path?

I know that's a big one, y'all, but you knew it was coming.

Cathy Cohen: Despite everything we've said for the last two and a half hours, I actually feel hopeful. I feel hopeful because there are millions of people who went into the streets last summer, whose consciousnesses were raised, and they opened up the possibility of not just reformers. We want nonreform reforms. We want, really, transition and the transformation of systems. And what I see is young people in particular, taking up bold and yes, provocative, ideas to reimagine what this might be.

The easiest one to point to, of course, is abolition, or the idea of "defund the police." Let's be very clear. . . . If you look at the organizers, they have said "Divest, invest." They've talked about the "defund the police" in relationship to building out other systems that support communities of color, that support poor communities. But what I am seeing is the idea that we can reimagine these systems, and that reimagination can start with and be anchored in young people who have to live with these systems daily.

The question for us as academics and as scholars and hopefully as activists is: Are we there? Are we participating in the conversation? Are we learning, are we studying, are we engaging them as we study?

I think they would say to be careful of this question of reform. I think, Hakeem, you said something about getting us closer to justice. What I've heard young people say, and I think it's right, is, "Yes, you can say yes to body cams. [But] what we find out is body cams don't stop Black people from being killed. They might, in fact, record Black people being killed, so maybe [they allow for] some level of accountability." Then there are ankle bracelets. People are like, "Let's move people out of the jails and we'll put them on ankle bracelets." Then we're expanding the surveillance state. . . . Biden says, "Let's make policing better. I'm going to give the police more money." These are reforms that don't move us toward transformation, but in fact hold us [back in the belief], in fact, that if we tinker on the edges, we can make policing better, or we can make the carceral state more livable. I don't agree with that, and so my hope of what's possible is really in listening to young people in the streets who say, "You may not think it makes sense, but here's how I'm reimagining how I want my life to be, how I want my relationship to be to the state, and what I think the state should do."

Yanilda González: Just to piggyback on that, I think it's very hard to be hopeful when one studies policing, because I think it's one of the most resilient institutions and processes that I can think of. If you'll allow me to inject a little comparative knowledge into this space: The two police forces that are considered the best in Latin America, over the last couple of decades, are the Colombian police and the Chilean police. [They are] considered the most professionalized, the most effective. They go around the region and train other police forces. And you don't have to look too deep into the headlines of those countries to see what's been going on with respect to policing, particularly in Colombia, and dozens of deaths at the hands of police in protests that have been going on since April 28 (Human Rights Watch 2021).

This is one of the countries that I study (González 2019), as this is a place where reform was done, a very, very comprehensive reform. If we don't reduce the footprint of policing, the power of policing, the autonomy of policing, we're going to end up in those same patterns. That's the takeaway of my work. I think that one of the things that also makes me hopeful, as Cathy was saying, thinking again comparatively, is that young people in particular have taken to the streets, at the risk of their lives in many instances, to demand change. It seems like it's something that, hopefully,

will be sustained, and that will hopefully lead to something more akin to a transformation of the crisis.

What has been happening for the last couple of decades is really not something that we want to see repeating itself. I think that the new models that are being imagined, the persistence of folks on the street, putting forth pressure in a way that the police have always been effective at putting forth pressure. . . is the source of optimism, at least for now. We'll see what emerges from it, but I think that is definitely something that could make one feel that maybe something akin to democracy is on the horizon for all of us.

Vesla Weaver: I agree with the notes of optimism. I do think for those of us who have been teaching for a while, this was really the first time in my lifetime that I felt like a new discourse was born. We started collecting the Portals narratives in 2016, largely after Freddie Gray and Michael Brown. And abolitionism was not a mainstream discourse. It was fringe even within the Black counterpublic. I think we are starting to see a new equilibrium where some of the long hegemonic, long dominant ideas have finally been ruptured. Some of [the Portals narratives] are like, "These communities are more criminal, and we need. . . ." Right before this moment, right before George Floyd, my university had voted to put in place, in large part modeling itself after the University of Chicago, a private armed police force, with some nods to, "We're going to invest in community too, but the short-term solution is really to beef up the boots on the ground."

But on the more pessimistic side of me, as a scholar, I understand how many years, decades of investment went into building up a carceral state from nothing (Weaver 2007). If you look at federal spending on criminal justice in 1960, it was literally zero. And I think walling youth off from police interactions means considering how thoroughly threaded in the fabric of our everyday lives policing is, how much we recourse to policing—because what else is there? We don't have a crisis intervention number to call. We have a police number. We have schools that have police forces that are quite, quite large.

Tulsa. The example brought up earlier. I was listening to Code Switch (Meraji 2021) this morning, and found it remarkable that when they mapped what businesses are left in Greenwood in Tulsa, one of them was the bail bondsman. Yes, we've pushed beyond technocratic solutions, but what would it mean to peel back the normalization of safety logics, the hegemony of safety logics, the normalization of police in everyday spaces, whether that be a neighborhood, a school, a shopping mall, a university, what have you? I find it very difficult to conceive of [the answer], even if we defund. . . . To me, the abolitionist ideal is one thing. How do we get there is another thing. I have trouble with that.

I look to history. Every single moment that challenged police power, what did it do? Birthed enormous expansions in the scope of police authority, in the funding of policing, in the professionalization of policing, which meant more justification for police intervention on a highly unequal landscape. It's hard for me to see how we get beyond that. Even having lived through this movement.

Hakeem Jefferson: I agree too. I think imagining something is one thing, figuring out exactly how to get there is another. But I think one of the bits of hopefulness that I hear is that there are people constantly pushing, and that's what we see in places like Chicago and Baltimore and other cities. Becca, do you want to give some final thoughts to this?

Rebecca Thorpe: I have two main thoughts on the how do we get there. One is that there are going to be a variety of different ways, and they have to be local solutions, grassroots solutions, driven by community members. The other one is that it's not going to be overnight. It's going to be decades-long and probably an intergenerational process. I think that it requires sustained social movements. But those are already in place. We have all sorts of racial and social justice movements, and activists that are really pushing for these sorts of changes.

I also think that it requires, as a society, that we reorient the way that we think about public safety. Shifting from a framework that emphasizes the culpability of criminally minded or predatory individuals to thinking about public safety and crime as more of a structural frame. Understanding that crime and violence are often a response to systems of subjugation and other forms of social depravation. Ta-Nehisi Coates (2015) put this really eloquently when he said you don't build a safety net for a generation of super predators, you build a cage. I think that building this movement will require serious reassessment of how to more effectively and humanely and equitably promote public safety over the long run.

One hopeful sign is that some communities are actually already doing this. Austin, Portland, and Minneapolis are all reimagining policing in various different ways. I think Austin cut its police budget by a third and is reinvesting in other forms of harm reduction (Venkataramanan 2020). Portland created an oversight board (Bailey 2020). It's actually an independent review board that has power to subpoena documents, fire officers, and investigate. Minneapolis has a couple of ballot measures for the creation of a new community resources department where people responding to 911 calls would be staffed with public health and social workers and other medical professionals (Kaste 2021).

Community control is crucial, but federal resources are there. They were available since the 1960s for police. I think communities can also be supported by federal resources and investment.

CONCLUSION: A NEW RESEARCH AGENDA FOR THE STUDY OF POLICING AND DEMOCRACY

Hakeem Jefferson: For our political scientists who are engaging this conversation about policing and democracy, can we zero in on what lessons we think ought to be taught in this moment for a kind of political science that's up to the task of responding to the kinds of concerns that we've all raised throughout our conversation? If you're teaching students today in American politics, what do you think they've got to know? What are some tools, some theories, some frameworks, some perspectives they ought to be taking on?

Cathy Cohen: I teach a pro seminar. We have two quarters. I coteach with Will Howell. We spend, when I'm doing my section, five weeks interrogating what we mean by democracy and how a lens of thinking about race should challenge everything that we know and think about democracy, how we think about politics, how we think about participation, and even something like political knowledge. Forget the one week on race and the training of American politics; it has to be integrated all the way through. You have to have a substantial commitment to it, and you have to really tear apart our essential categories like democracy.

Yanilda González: American politics really needs to break down the wall between American and comparative politics, and really bring in more insights from what's going on in other parts of the world. In comparative politics, we read a lot from American politics, of course, but it doesn't flow in the other direction. . . . Political scientists of color, and particularly Black political scientists, were not surprised to see Trump coming—but I think the discipline as a whole was [surprised by the election of Donald Trump]. . . because you didn't really consider the downfall, the breakdown of democracy and the rise of these types of authoritarian leaders in other parts of the world. In Latin America, it was not at all shocking, and the parallels between Trump and Bolsonaro were really self-evident. I would advocate for thinking across our national boundaries in that way, and thinking about how the understanding of American politics can be enriched by thinking about other contexts.

Rebecca Thorpe: I'm going to emphasize the point that I opened with: We need to centralize [the concept of] power for anyone studying political science in American politics, or any of the

numerous subfields within political science. We've talked about how carceral institutions redistribute political and economic power, but I think that question of power extends to other fields as well. Whether you're studying the Senate or the presidency, how do these various institutions function to reinscribe different forms of racial hierarchies in entrenched systems of advantage and deprivation?

Vesla Weaver: My advice to students is to read widely outside your field. I feel very much a political scientist even though I came through an interdisciplinary program. I feel so grateful because political science does give us the tools to study institutional arrangements, political history. In sociology, there's this fascination with culture. We kind of rise above that and we're able to study power; the tools and skills of political science actually open up a way of seeing policing as fundamental to the state. Even though I'm very critical of our field for neglecting some things, I was able to use the work of people like Theda Skocpol (1995), Jacob Hacker (2002), and Suzanne Mettler (2011), who were working on the welfare state, to understand the carceral state. It opened it up for me.

Yanilda, your work and thinking in a comparative way really liberated me, and enabled me to capture and deploy a language that went beyond the limited frameworks that I felt confined by. Authoritarian patterns of policing—that was super liberating. Michael Hanchard's (2018) work on how, basically, democracy was founded in ethnoracial hierarchy, and his genealogy of the field of comparative politics basically coming out of racial hierarchy. . . that really helped me.

I do think we don't do enough reading outside of the field, and so there was this moment right before George Floyd [when], yeah, people would cite my work or they would cite Cathy or they would cite Traci Burch, and they'd have the one little line on their syllabus on the carceral state, maybe. Maybe, if you were lucky. And yet, we had this range of scholars, really smart scholars telling you that democracy was worse off in the United States today, questioning the health of democracy—because of extreme polarization, extreme inequality, foreign interference in elections, the decline in civic organizations, the rise of the extreme right. And not because of racial repression. It was ridiculous to me. And I feel like this moment, if it's highlighted anything, it's that we cannot continue that ignorance. We need to measure democracy and its health differently, and perhaps first and foremost, by how the worst off in the democracy are doing. We can't discuss democratic backsliding and completely ignore the second face of the state.

Hakeem Jefferson: If I were giving some advice, I'd say to take the approach of these scholars, and to focus your attention on the folks at the margins. We can learn a lot about the health of democracy that way. For our lightning round here, the second question is what book or article would you recommend to people who are trying to make sense of this moment?

Rebecca Thorpe: I would recommend Ruth Gilmore's (2007) *Golden Gulag*, which other folks have referenced during this discussion. . . . It strikes me as the most powerful account, or among the most powerful accounts, I've read on the political economy of carceral institutions.

Cathy Cohen: I just finished reading my colleague Reuben Miller's (2021) book, *Halfway Home*. I think if people want to understand the day-to-day experience of carcerality and what Reuben calls carceral citizenship, if you want to understand the ways in which citizenship is not equally distributed, and the role of a carceral state, both when one is incarcerated and after one is incarcerated, its impact on community and families, then that would be an important book to pick up.

Yanilda González: It may just be because she's right in front of me, but one thing that I brought up in different talks that I've given in the last few days is Vesla's "Frontlash" article (Weaver 2007), because one of the things that has continued to come up is [why] wouldn't the left just reform the police. . . . I think that Vesla really put into words a lot of the dynamics that I've observed in the field, and that I think are central to understanding just how entrenched discourses of security are

and who's allowed to be safe, who's allowed to define what safety is, the way that law and order with justice never caught on even though Biden used it in. . . a debate during the campaign. But I think that is really essential for understanding. . . the difficulty of developing alternative visions of security and the strength and power of these tough-on-crime type of discourses.

Vesla Weaver: I think of Angela Davis's (2011) *Abolition Democracy*. It's a very small treatise and yet highlights everything that we've been talking about: political economy, law and order, the race and gendered logics of state violence. She was really ahead of her time. When I read that book, I feel like she anticipated so much of what we're now trying to theorize.

Monica Bell (2019) wrote an article recently called "Safety, Friendship, and Dreams," as well as her article "Anti-Segregation Policing" (Bell 2020), that I think are brilliant.

Hakeem Jefferson: We saw a lot of folks become activists in this past year. You have thought long and hard about the problems of policing. What advice would you give to those who are new to this kind of conversation, new to this kind of movement work? Cathy, I want to start with you here, given your activism. And then perhaps, move quickly to Yanilda, given some stories that she tells in the book.

Cathy Cohen: I don't mean to disparage and say that people weren't activists. I do think that people went into the streets, and that their consciousness was raised, and that they felt a calling, and those are very good things. Here's the advice. I would say find a movement organization to become a part of, where you can be accountable to a larger group, where you can engage in political education, where you can think about strategy and targets, and how, in fact, you want to transform systems. What I worry about is that there were a lot of people who went into the streets (and again, that's a good thing in terms of consciousness) but we want them to return. We want them to continue to be engaged. We want them to offer new ideas of the ways in which the society might be structured. We need to organize, organize, organize. I think that's the lesson, find a movement organization. Find an organization that you can attach yourself to.

Yanilda González: I'm going to go in a similar direction, but maybe in a different one than what I would've otherwise done had I not read an interview with Samaria Rice, the mother of Tamir Rice, by Imani Perry (2021). One of the things that I think political science needs to do is center the voices of people who have been directly affected by state violence, by police violence. I think my work was really redirected once I started working with mothers from Brazil who lost their children to police violence. And [my work has been redirected by] the critiques that Samaria Rice [makes in] her analysis. . . criticizing as a professional activist, the lawyers, [along with] I'm sure the academics, the researchers, everybody who makes a living off the backs of folks who have been directly impacted by state violence. I think that one of the things that I would say is to center their voices and create spaces for them in our institutions, rather than writing our bestselling book or making some other professional gain on the backs of folks who have done this. It's something that I have to remind myself about constantly.

For example, I just got a grant to do a project where some of the moms are going to be my co-PIs [principal investigators], and we're going to do some work in Brazil. Whether you're in an activist group, in journalism, in law, or in academia, how can you create spaces so that people can speak for themselves and not have us constantly speak on behalf of others?

Vesla Weaver: I completely agree with [Yanilda]. . . . I had a similar kind of personal development. . . I started out quantitatively, and then I started actually centering the voices. I learned so much more, and I think we don't do that [enough]. That's not a mode of study in our field. . . I was told point-blank, "You're not being objective. That's something that sociologists do. You should really stay in your lane." I'm glad that I didn't, because I think I never would've been able to theorize without centering voices and being part of, in a limited way, some of the activism locally.

The thing I'm worried about is that, as the movement becomes popularized and mainstreamed, some of the radical calls and vocabulary lose their edge, lose their power, become institutionalized, or become empty of meaning. Everybody is now talking about reimagining this, that, and the other, and I feel like it's already starting to take on that kind of diversity, inclusion, and equity rhetoric. . . . Or like in the 1980s, what happened with community policing, where it did not ever live up to its potential, let's say, and it in fact encouraged state violence in ways that were detrimental.

Rebecca Thorpe: I agree with all of those things 100%, and I echo everything that's been said. That was initially the point that I was going to make, the importance of listening to the most impacted communities, centering their voices rather than imposing solutions from the outside. To add maybe a different perspective, I think it's also important that we think more critically, maybe more capaciously, about what resistance looks like. We've seen the waves of protests over this past year that are clearly a deliberate democratic response to conditions that threaten our democracy, including the dehumanization of Black lives. And thinking of Elizabeth Hinton's work, which shows us that the civil rights protestors in the 1960s and -70s relied on a really wide variety of strategies, including both nonviolence and armed self-defense (Hinton 2021). It's just important to emphasize that we miss a lot when we only recognize peaceful protests as the only legitimate form of activism, and we ignore other forms of resistance. At the same time, I think it's important to keep in mind that state actors use labels like rioting in order to discredit those forms of, historically, Black activism.

Hakeem Jefferson: Thank you for that, Becca, and particularly for a broadening of our scope on what we should be looking to, in terms of resistance. I think it was Ayanna Pressley who said that the people closest to the pain should be closest to the power (**https://pressley.house.gov/about**). That resonated with me when she said it, and as we close out our conversation today, it's a message I certainly want to take away as well. And perhaps another way to revise that statement from Representative Pressley is to think that the people closest to the pain should be most on our mind as we're thinking about the problem of policing, be it in theorizing about it and/or designing studies, be they qualitative or quantitative.

I think if our conversation seems like it's gone in many different directions, it's because the problem of policing and democracy is a complicated and messy one. And hopefully what we've done today has just spread a bunch of breadcrumbs that others will pick up on, and other threads that folks will pursue in their research.

I want to thank Professor Cathy Cohen, Professor Yanilda González, Professor Becca Thorpe, Professor Vesla Weaver. And before we close, I want to thank my brilliant research assistant, José Gandara, who has worked tirelessly to help put this together. If I read these scholars' work closely, José has read it intensely. I just want to applaud his good work, thank him for helping to organize this, and to thank all of you for engaging in this important conversation. And we should all stay tuned for more to come.

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