

# Policing

**My frame of the conversation around Reform, Defund, Abolish**

**I am not an expert.**

**Are the police successful ?**

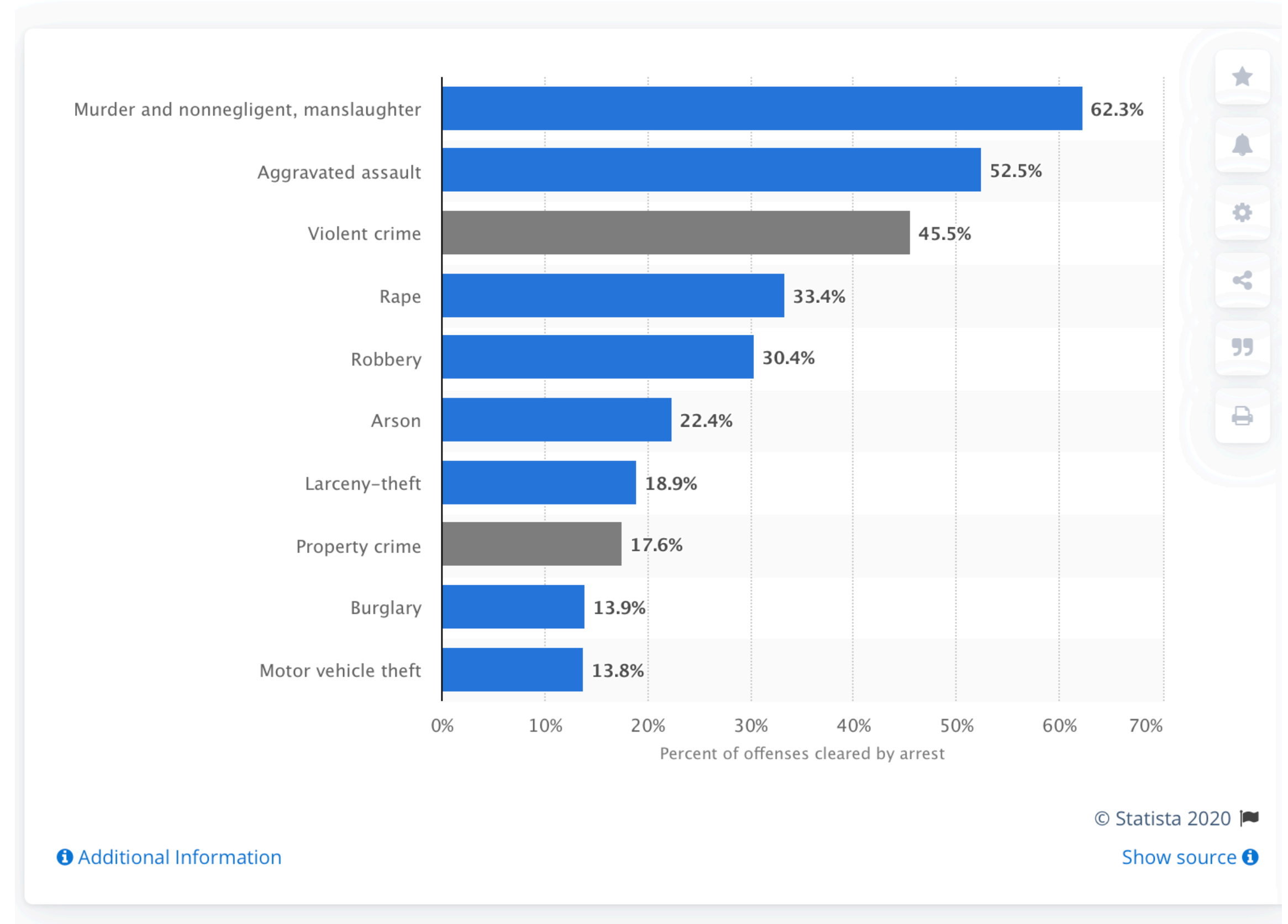
# Background - Results

- Only the most violent crimes get cleared more than half the time

but best case scenario is ~60% of crimes get cleared.

Source: Statista

Crime clearance rate in the United States in 2018, by type

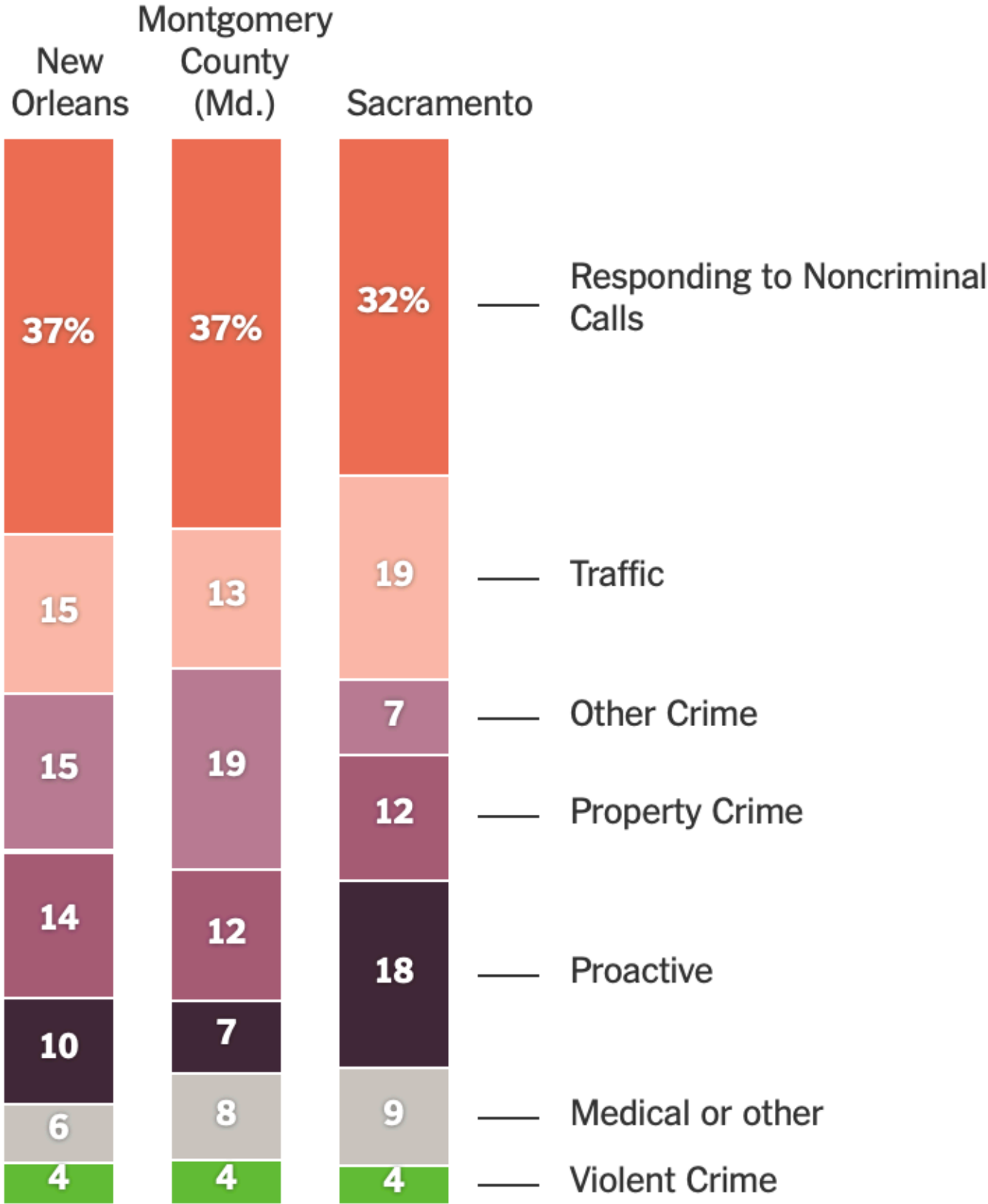


# Background: what cops do

- About 1/3rd of the time is other noncriminal distress calls

## Typical Shift by Officer: Time Spent

In three police departments so far this year, officers have spent roughly 4 percent of their time on serious violent crimes.



Source: New York Times Study

**What role should the institution of  
policing play in ensuring public safety for  
the community ?**

# “Reform” (same role but better)

A few bad apples, mostly good folks. More training, more body-cams, as well as policy changes for more accountability & transparency.

might include things like ending qualified immunity, but mostly retains or increases the size of police institutions and budgets.

# “De-fund” (smaller role, to enable other institutions)

Police are doing too many things (1/3rd of calls are calls are distress related, not criminal.) Shrink the police institution and budget in order to redistribute those resources to institutions better suited to calls of distress (Homeless, Mental Health, etc) as well as provide funding for other programs education, training, jobs, health, child care, etc, programs that might be more effective in preventing crime.

Reduce the number of armed personnel acting in public safety roles.

# “Abolish” (rethink public safety, rethink justice)

I’ve found two “flavors” in the abolish camp.

(1) The problem of policing is not training, diversity, or methods. The problem is the dramatic and unprecedented expansion and intensity of policing (itself) in the last 40 years.

(2) Modern policing started as slave patrols and were later enforcing Jim Crow laws; these racist roots cannot be extracted and eliminated from the current institution.

The gist, incrementalism won’t work. The current institutions need to be abolished and new institutions of public safety and specifically law enforcement / criminal justice need to be created and aligned to the societal needs for each community.

Advocates for broader reforms, “Restorative Justice not Retribution Justice” ... e.g. things like decriminalization Sex work, Drug Possession, other minor offenses...consider fewer things “crimes”, so other institutions can intervene instead of law enforcement. .... frequently support Prison abolition

# Camden

## Reform or Abolition: the eye of the beholder

- NJ State's Attorney General is unique. Appointed not elected. Responsible for all law enforcement
- NJ AG, took over Camden PD, due excessive murders, crime rates, and hand selected new Chief (108 grievances & 8 law-suits first 6 months on job)
- Camden went into Financial Crises, NJ Governor took over city, basically removing authority of mayor & city council
- Camden PD dissolved, and new county-level law-enforcement establish, all officers had to apply for new positions, new standards of policing set and contractually bound, etc (Chief in terms of building culture vs changing existing culture: "I was able to do in 3 days what would have taken me 3 years.")
- Statewide budget crisis forced downsizing of police force
- Within months new police union formed but much more engaged with community, activists, and county officials
- Camden is now touted as a model for what policing could be
  
- Is this reform or abolition ? ... in reality its some combination of both...



What I remind myself: Don't pay too much attention to the word choice, I haven't heard anyone advocate for

- Removing responsibility or accountability when people are harmed in our society
- No longer enforcing laws ... however, the size, shape, and manner of law-enforcement might change dramatically between activists mission (Reform, Defund, Abolish)

- It's all local... more than 12,000 police departments in USA (that operate as part of municipality)
- It's not one size fits all ...
- What is happening in our community ? What are the needs of the community ? Are those needs being met?

**Are other systems of accountability more effective or better aligned to our values ?**

**What would rethinking public safety institutions look like?**

## **A message to police officers (a call for empathy)**

“This is what you need to understand. There is no person in this room that was standing on the other side of the bridge in 1964 at the Edmund Pettus Bridge. You may not be responsible to that, **but the uniform you wear is responsible for that.** So you got to understand that that is going to be an emotional, that is very real. It’s very visceral within people. So you can’t take it personal when they say and feel a certain way.”

**Scott Thomson, Camden PD Chief**

# Resources

- A pretty good article summarizing the defund the police landscape
- Stay Tuned with Preet Podcast (~1h); with Anne Milgrim (NJ AG) and Scott Thomson (Camden PD Chief)
- Vox Video (~10minutes), “What defund the police” really means