

From: Data For Progress and The Justice Collaborative Institute

Re: New Poll: Voters Support Local Government — Independent of Police Department PR — Providing Public Safety Information

Date: 08/04/2020

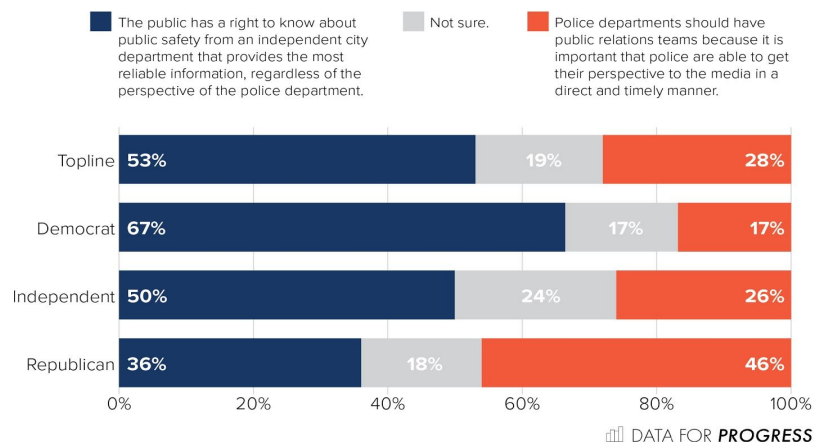
Police communications are not reserved for communicating to the public about ongoing emergencies. Instead, police departments have their own publicly-funded public relation teams which they have long used to control public narratives about crime and public safety, promote police power, stoke fear about crime, and conceal police abuse and other misconduct. While these public relation departments are quick to push out narratives that validate police actions, they also dehumanize people who come in contact with police and twist or neglect to mention key facts.

For example, after Minneapolis police officers murdered George Floyd, [the police department issued a statement](#) saying that “man dies after medical incident during police interaction,” and noting that Floyd “physically resisted.” It said nothing about Officer Derek Chauvin kneeling on Floyd’s neck for 8 minutes.

Asking police officers to comment on and provide details about the work of their fellow officers creates a conflict of interest, often leading to false or misleading information that prioritizes the police department’s public image over the truth. Shifting some or all of the communications function to civilians within the city government will replace this conflict with at least some measure of independence.

In new public opinion research, Data for Progress and The Justice Collaborative Institute asked voters which paradigm they prefer. A majority (53%) agreed that the public has a right to know about public safety information from an independent city agency that provides the most reliable information, regardless of the police department’s perspective.

We asked voters which statement most closely reflects their view:



This polling comes as an important national conversation is unfolding around how to reduce our reliance on police and how to make our communities safer. As we continue to discuss defunding the police for purposes of community safety, the conversation must include how public safety information can be conveyed to communities in a way that is independent, reliable, and free of the bias often used to justify abuses of power or irrationally elevate fears of crime.

### **Methodology**

From 7/31/2020 to 8/1/2020, Data for Progress conducted a survey of 1,098 likely voters nationally using web panel respondents. The sample was weighted to be representative of likely voters by age, gender, education, race, and voting history. The survey was conducted in English. The margin of error is +/- 3 percent.