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LDF Releases New Report Debunking False Crime Narratives

Today, the [Legal Defense Fund](#)'s (LDF) [Thurgood Marshall Institute](#) (TMI) released *Lies, More Lies, and the Truth Behind Crime Statistics: Avoiding Distortions and Improving Public Safety*, a critical [new report](#) that explores how current politicized discussions of crime ignore or distort crime data to intensify public fear and debunks false narratives used to explain the 2020 nationwide increase in homicides.

As the report details, requiring cash bail, the election of "tough on crime" prosecutors, and level or increased funds for police departments did not prevent cities from experiencing a 2020 homicide spike. Relatedly, cities with bail reform, progressive prosecutors, and proposals to redirect police funding were no worse off than other cities, disproving the link between increased crime and these reforms. The report also offers a robust analysis that highlights reasons for the 2020 increase in homicides, including pandemic-induced instability and inequality, as well as pre-pandemic housing and economic inequality.

"Crime statistics are too often manipulated and used to distort the realities of violence in this country to advance political agendas, which dangerously undermines public safety." said LDF President and Director-Counsel Janai Nelson. "Our research highlights how to interrogate and understand these statistics, and advocates for improving public safety with data-driven, community-based solutions rather than defaulting to race based fear-mongering rhetoric that is not grounded in empirical evidence and does not solve or prevent crime.

"In addition to debunking false narratives, the report offers a more accurate framework to evaluate crime statistics. By accounting for systemic misreporting, evaluating the impartiality and independence of sources, and contextualizing observations with local, regional, and national patterns, this alternative framework allows individuals and, perhaps, most important, policymakers to avoid distortions and propaganda."

This analysis comes at a critical time when stakeholders and government officials at the federal, state, and local level are enacting or advocating for policy changes based on the inaccurate and misleading arguments that progressive reforms are leading to an increase in violence.

"The research is clear: cash bail reform, progressive prosecutorial practices, and the level of police department funding are not the causes behind the 2020 homicide spike," said Dr. Kesha Moore, Senior Researcher with LDF's Thurgood Marshall Institute and the principal author of the report. "Crime statistics continue to be sensationalized, inflated, and oversimplified to promote punitive practices and policies that have not been proven to lead to a decline in homicides. The factors that impact violence are varied and misdiagnosing the reasons behind increases in violence leads to policy decisions that adversely impact the

health and safety of Black and Brown communities. To keep all communities safe, we must instead address the true root causes of violence.”

The report’s findings are based on an analysis of 61 of the 100 most populous U.S. cities, controlling for those cities with historical data. Key takeaways include the following:

1. The COVID-19 pandemic drove the 2020 homicide spike, but local factors influenced whether and how quickly a city bounced back in 2021.
2. "Tough on crime" practices, such as law-and-order prosecutors, cash bail regimes, and inflated or increased police budgets, did not prevent cities from experiencing a homicide spike in 2020.
3. Social and economic instability and heightened inequalities generated by the COVID-19 pandemic best explain the recent increases in homicides.
 - a. *Pandemic-induced economic instability is associated with increases in homicides.*
 - b. *Pre-pandemic economic inequality is associated with an increase in homicides.*
 - c. *Pre-pandemic evictions are associated with increases in homicides.*

Download *Lies, More Lies, and the Truth Behind Crime Statistics: Avoiding Distortions and Improving Public Safety* [here](#).

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