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Thurgood Marshall Institute's Research Finds Racial Justice Protests More Likely to Have Police Violence

Today, the [Legal Defense Fund's](#) (LDF) [Thurgood Marshall Institute](#) (TMI) released *Police and Protests: The Inequity of Police Responses to Racial Justice Protests*, a new [research brief](#) showing that, during summer 2020, police were more likely to be violent when responding to racial justice protests.

The brief details how police have repeatedly and disproportionately responded with elevated violence and suppression to racial justice protests, as compared to other protests. The findings have specific implications for all who exercise or seek to exercise their constitutionally protected First, Fourth, and Fourteenth Amendment rights to engage in lawful protest without discriminatory harassment.

“In the wake of the unprecedented 2020 protests against racialized police violence, a growing assault on the right to protest is sweeping the nation. New legislation, aimed at criminalizing protestors and stifling dissent, threatens our fundamental democratic freedoms. Through rigorous research, this brief uncovers clear evidence that racial justice protestors have been disproportionately subjected to violence by law enforcement. This is not a coincidence,” said Karla McKanders, Director of LDF’s Thurgood Marshall Institute. “Our research underscores the undeniable link between protestors who are advocating for human dignity in support of Black lives and the disproportionate level of police violence they face compared to other protestors. We call upon local, state, and federal authorities to ensure that racial justice protestors can freely exercise their constitutional rights without the specter of police violence and harassment.”

“When communities protest against racial injustice and police violence, they are routinely met with even greater police violence. Our analysis demonstrates the full scope of this tragic irony, documenting the disturbing pattern of law enforcement responding more violently to racial justice protests compared to other protests,” said Dr. Sandhya Kajeepeta, Senior Researcher with LDF’s Thurgood Marshall Institute and the co-author of the brief. “As this inequitable police response shows, the right to protest is under attack, creating an urgent need to remove law enforcement from protest management. Until that happens, everyone who protests in support of Black lives is at risk of police violence.”

Dr. Dan Johnson, Senior Research Fellow at TMI and Professor of Economics and Business at Colorado College, also co-authored this brief.

The brief's findings are based on an analysis of approximately 1,900 protests in 27 U.S. cities during 2020. Key takeaways include:

- Police were twice as likely to show up at racial justice protests compared to non-racial justice protests after controlling for contextual differences.
- Police in riot gear, state police, and/or the national guard were three times as likely to be present at racial justice protests compared to non-racial justice protests.
- Police were nearly four times as likely to use violent force through weapons such as rubber bullets, flash bangs, tear gas, and pepper spray at racial justice protests compared to non-racial justice protests.

Read *Police and Protests: The Inequity of Police Responses to Racial Justice Protests* [here](#).

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