



September 30, 2024

ISSUE BRIEF | Center for Law & Justice

KAMALA HARRIS' DANGEROUS VIEWS ON LAW ENFORCEMENT AND PUBLIC SAFETY

Scott G. Erickson and Kaitlin Owens

TOPLINE POINTS

- ★ Kamala Harris' public stance as a tough-on-crime advocate contradicts her actions as a California prosecutor, District Attorney, CA Attorney General, U.S. Senator, and Vice President, such as supporting the “defund the police” movement and enabling rioters during the 2020 protests—positions that undermine public safety and law enforcement.
- ★ Harris' approach to law enforcement, including advocating for a reduced police presence and restricting law enforcement access to vital equipment, is misaligned with public sentiment and has contributed to a decline in police staffing and effectiveness across the Nation.
- ★ An America First approach to public safety emphasizes the need for increased support and respect for law enforcement, accountability for criminal actions, and

Introduction

Democratic presidential nominee Kamala Harris presents herself as a tough-on-crime, pro-police advocate, yet her handling of troubling incidents, such as the fatal shooting of a San Francisco police officer during her tenure as the city's district attorney, is at odds with this attempted re-branding ([Stannard, 2004](#)). As recently as June 2020, Harris praised the “defund the police” movement during a radio interview by saying, “The idea that putting more cops on the street makes us safer, is wrong” ([Kaczynski & Steck, 2024](#)). She also was an enabler of left-wing rioters during 2020's summer of violence, posting a link to a bail fund for those who wreaked havoc across our Nation to save them from time in jail ([Harris, 2020](#)). The evidence presented in this brief counters the claim that Vice President Harris backs the blue.



Since 2014, there have been an average of more than 56,000 assaults against police officers and an average of 250 line-of-duty deaths per year. ([National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund \(NLEOMF\), n.d.](#); [Officer Down Memorial Page \(ODMP\), n.d.](#)). All the while, Harris has been doubling down on her misguided approach to public safety, stating that “it is old, tired, wrong, status quo thinking to think you get more safety by putting more police officers on the street” ([MSNBC, 2020](#)). At the height of the 2020 protests and riots, polling showed how truly out of step she was with the American public, particularly the African American community, 81 percent of whom indicated they wanted the same or more policing in their neighborhoods ([Saad, 2020](#)).

During the summer of violence in 2020, more than 2,000 law enforcement officers were injured in the line of duty ([Police staff writer, 2020](#)). Notably, New York, one of the most liberal states in America, last year had the highest number of line-of-duty deaths for police officers ([NLEOMF, 2024](#)). According to a 2023 year-end report, firearm fatalities were the leading cause of these deaths ([NLEOMF, 2024](#)). Despite this, Harris has repeatedly stated that officers should not have access to certain equipment to protect themselves against these unlawful acts.

Kamala Harris’ Dangerous Views on Law Enforcement

Far from improving outcomes by “reimagining” public safety, Harris’ approach to law enforcement would endanger our communities, continue to imperil the law enforcement profession, and place the interests of law-abiding Americans squarely behind those of the criminally convicted. Among the ideas Harris has espoused are those discussed below.

Top-Down, One-Size-Fits-All Federal Mandates Telling Police How to Do Their Jobs

Harris would ensure stakeholders such as the Black Lives Matter movement and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) had input on when and how police officers performed their duties or took action to protect themselves ([Harris, 2020](#)).

Developing a standardized set of policies and procedures that would require every law enforcement agency, from federal bodies to small municipal police departments, to operate in an identical manner presents significant challenges. The diversity among the 50 states, each with its own unique characteristics and within countless communities nationwide, affects policing practices. Differences between rural and urban environments further complicate the application of standardized policies across all jurisdictions.

Defunding the Police

Harris’ rhetoric on law enforcement has been antagonistic at best. For instance, during the summer of violence in 2020, Harris said in an interview with Nick Cannon that we should “redirect resources” away from law enforcement ([NBC News, 2024](#)). In an even more shocking statement, in her first solo speech in 2020 as the Democrat vice presidential



nominee, Harris vowed to stand with the protesters in Kenosha, Wisconsin, stating, “People are rightfully angry and exhausted...it’s no wonder people are taking to the streets. And I support them” ([Perry & Erickson, 2020](#)). She made this statement while businesses within the city of Kenosha burned to the ground. This type of rhetoric could easily be viewed as encouragement from a public leader to continue the destruction and chaos, disregarding the impact it may have had on law-abiding citizens and the law enforcement community.

The misguided “defund the police” rhetoric has had lasting consequences, such as discouraging people from pursuing careers in law enforcement due to fears that any actions taken in self-defense or to protect others will be overly scrutinized or even criminalized. These individuals serve the public and should be held to high standards, not only through accountability but also through appropriate praise, compensation, and admiration.

Today, most law enforcement agencies in the United States face an increasingly urgent staffing crisis unlike anything seen in a generation. Not long ago, law enforcement agencies routinely received more than 100 applications for every open position. Unfortunately, the circumstances today are far different. According to a Police Forum (PERF) survey completed in the fall of 2023:

- Officer retirements and resignations have increased. Sixty-five percent of agencies reported an increase in retirements between 2020 and 2022, and 66 percent reported an increase in resignations.
- Applications for open officer positions have decreased. Sixty-nine percent of agencies saw a drop in the number of applications for full-time officer positions between 2020 and 2022.
- Officer staffing levels are dropping. Overall, officer staffing levels fell by 4.8 percent nationwide between January 2020 and January 2023 ([PERF, 2023](#)).

Prohibiting Law Enforcement from Obtaining Necessary Equipment

Harris would likely continue the Obama-Biden-Harris policy of restricting the ability of state and local law enforcement agencies from obtaining necessary equipment through the Department of Defense’s (DOD) 1033 program, in which surplus military equipment suitable for domestic law enforcement use could be obtained by police agencies that are in need ([Kelepecz & Duggan, n.d.](#)). Instead, during a 2020 radio interview in New York, Harris accused U.S. cities of “militarizing police” and fretted about the amount of money spent on police departments ([Breakfast Club Power 105.1FM, 2019](#)).

Initiatives like the DOD’s 1033 program have proven vital in allowing state and local law enforcement to acquire items needed for search and rescue operations, disaster response, and active shooter situations that they otherwise would not be able to afford. This equipment has not led to the “militarization” of police but rather has proven to be essential in protecting communities against violent criminals, including in active shooter situations. This equipment can range anywhere from body armor to helmets to drones, which are increasingly necessary amid the changing domestic threat environment.

Disturbingly, the legitimate and well-demonstrated needs of police officers are



seemingly being overlooked due to the optics of law enforcement agencies obtaining this equipment from the DOD.

The America First Solution to Supporting Law Enforcement and Improving Public Safety

Instead of persisting with progressive criminal justice policies and law enforcement approaches that undermine public safety, an America First approach that emphasizes the rule of law and respect for law enforcement should be adopted. [An America First approach](#) to protecting our Nation's communities from left-wing violence and civil unrest requires the approach outlined below.

Supporting Law Enforcement

Our Nation is founded upon the principle of the rule of law and on no group of people being above the law in our society. Our Nation's law enforcement community is tasked with upholding this foundational principle, and we must support them in their efforts to do so. Anti-police sentiment and calls to defund the police only undermine the law enforcement community and make our Nation less safe. Further, we must support the law enforcement community and encourage a return to more proactive policing, which has been proven to reduce crime ([Weisburd & Majmundar, 2018](#)).

Accountability

Accountability is crucial, particularly in ensuring that those who disrupt societal order and break the law are held responsible for their actions. This accountability must be firm and consistent, reinforcing the social contract that binds us together. Accountability must be a universal principle applied to those who violate the law and those entrusted with enforcing it.

More Law Enforcement Officers

Police departments and local communities must implement policies that actively encourage and incentivize careers in law enforcement. A greater number of police officers can lead to a reduction in crime, making it imperative for leaders at the federal, state, and local levels to prioritize closing the personnel gap that currently affects police departments across the Nation. This can be achieved by offering competitive salaries, benefits, and career development opportunities, as well as fostering a positive and supportive work environment. Also, investing in recruitment campaigns and educational programs that highlight the importance and rewards of a career in law enforcement can attract a new generation of officers. Addressing this personnel shortage is critical to ensuring public safety and maintaining the rule of law in our communities.



Mitigating Threats

Reducing harm often necessitates proactive measures. Law enforcement may need to intervene to protect lawful protesters from potential threats posed by those with opposing views to safeguard the public's rights to free expression and assembly. Similarly, for individuals to genuinely feel secure in their persons and property, they require not only the state's restraint but also its active protection.

Conclusion

An "America First" approach to protecting our nation's communities from radical liberal violence and civil unrest emphasizes several key principles. First, accountability is essential. Criminal perpetrators must be held responsible for their actions, as lenient criminal justice policies that coddle offenders only make communities more dangerous. Law and order must prevail, ensuring that criminals face real consequences for their behavior. Second, we must support law enforcement, as our nation's foundation rests on the rule of law, where no group is above the law. Law enforcement agencies are tasked with upholding this principle, and anti-police sentiments or calls to "defund the police" weaken their ability to protect our society. Finally, the abuse of the criminal justice system by rogue progressive prosecutors needs to end. These individuals have systematically undermined public safety by implementing liberal policies that fail to hold criminals accountable. Americans must demand that local justice officials uphold their obligations and prosecute perpetrators properly.



WORKS CITED

- Breakfast Club Power 105.1 FM. (2019, February 11). *Kamala Harris Talks 2020 Presidential Run, Legalizing Marijuana, Criminal Justice Reform + More* [Video]. YouTube. https://youtu.be/Kh_wQUjeaTk?si=SuFtiB6pYkV5b5C2
- Harris, K. [@KamalaHarris]. (2020, June 1). *If you're able to, chip in now to the @MNFreedomFund to help post bail for those protesting on the ground in Minnesota.* [X post]. X. <https://x.com/KamalaHarris/status/1267555018128965643>
- Harris, K. (2020, June 4). *To Be Silent Is To Be Complicit.* *Cosmopolitan*. <https://www.cosmopolitan.com/politics/a32766156/kamala-harris-black-lives-matter-protests/>
- Kaczynski, A. & Steck, E. (2024, July 27). *Kamala Harris praised 'defund the police' movement in June 2020 radio interview.* CNN Politics. <https://www.cnn.com/2024/07/26/politics/kfile-kamala-harris-praised-defund-the-police-movement-in-june-2020/index.html>
- Kelepecz, B. P., Esq. & Duggan, S. (n.d.) *The 1033 Program: Effect on Law Enforcement and the Debate Surrounding It.* *Police Chief Magazine*. <https://www.policechiefmagazine.org/the-1033-program-effect-on-law-enforcement-and-the-debate-surrounding-it/>
- MSNBC. (2020, June 19). *JusticeCon: A Path Towards Freedom' Social Justice Conference.* [Video] Youtube.com https://www.youtube.com/live/k3qjGl_DEuE?si=p1JR1V27iIWM1410
- National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund (NLEOMF). (n.d.). *Deaths, Assaults and Injuries 2012 – 2022.* <https://nleomf.org/memorial/facts-figures/officer-fatality-data/deaths-assaults-and-injuries/>
- NLEOMF. (2024, January 1). *2023 End-of-Year Preliminary Law Enforcement Officers Fatalities Report.* <https://nleomf.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/2023-EOY-Fatality-Report-FINAL.pdf>
- NBC News. (2024, July 25). *Meet the Press Now.* [Video] YouTube. <https://youtu.be/uZpGjyX7Pqg?si=AjLHaCVhDeagTnRs>
- Officer Down Memorial Page (ODMP). (n.d.). *Find a Fallen Officer.* <https://www.odmp.org/search?name=&agency=&state=&cause=&from=2014&to=2024&filter=nok9>
- Perry, T. & Erickson, B. (2020, August 28). *Staring down Trump, Kamala Harris says she stands with protesters on racial equality.* CBS News. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/kamala-harris-kenosha-protests-racial-equality-trump-covid-pandemic/>



Police Executive Research Forum (PERF). (2023, August 1). *Responding to the Staffing Crisis: Innovations in Recruitment and Retention*.

<https://www.policeforum.org/assets/RecruitmentRetention.pdf#:~:text=URL%3A%20https%3A%2F%2Fwww.policeforum.org%2Fassets%2FRecruitmentRetention.pdf%0AVisible%3A%200%25%20>

Police Staff Writer (2020, December 3). More Than 2,000 Officers Injured in Summer's Protests and Riots. *Police*. <https://www.policemag.com/patrol/news/15311242/more-than-2000-officers-injured-in-summers-protests-and-riots>

Saad, L. (2020, August 5). *Black Americans Want Police to Retain Local Presence*. Gallup. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/316571/black-americans-police-retain-local-presence.aspx>

Stannard, M. B. (2004, April 14). *San Francisco / D.A. Won't pursue death in cop slaying / Harris fulfills campaign pledge with decision*. SFGate. <https://www.sfgate.com/crime/article/SAN-FRANCISCO-D-A-won-t-pursue-death-in-cop-2767716.php>

Weisburd, D. & Majmundar, M. K. (Eds). (2018). *Proactive Policing: Effects on Crime and Communities*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/24928>.

