

Research Article

# Policy Windows and Protests: Black Lives Matter Protests and Calls to Defund the Police in the United States

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## Abstract

The murder of George Floyd fueled local level protests calling to defund the police. The study examines if a policy window was opened for decreased allocations to police department funding after the murder of George Floyd and the protests. The study focuses on 26 politically left-leaning cities with a population of 100,000 or more that had protests with at least 500 people in the United States. Budget allocation to each city's police department were examined using descriptive statistics to determine if the budget allocation to police departments changed following the protests. The results show that 19% of cities in the study decreased funding to police departments in 2021, and 50% cities decreased funding to police departments in 2022. The results support the argument that a national focusing event can open a policy window for changes to local level budget allocation by connecting the concept of policy windows to the open systems theory of budgeting. However, cities remain constrained by circumstances in their external environment, meaning some cities were not able to reduce resource allocations to police departments. These constraints include counter actions by state governments to prevent reducing the allocation of funds to police departments and increasing crime rates. This research presents insights into local government budgetary decision-making in response to a national focusing event.

## Keywords

Police Funding, Protests, Local Budget, Focusing Event, Policy Window

## 1. Introduction

Activists and social movements use protests to signal support or opposition to a policy to policymakers, and such signaling can help shape policy agendas. Late spring and summer of 2020 saw widespread protests, with people demanding a decrease in funding for police departments after a series of events involving both police brutality and murder that began with the murder of George Floyd captured on video. These protests were part of a larger political and social movement occurring in the United States that centers on the police treatment of the Black community and the disproportional

harm they encounter. The origins of this movement can be traced to the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the death of the 17-year old Trayvon Martin and the use of the #BlackLivesMatter (BLM) hashtag in 2013. However, this movement has mostly targeted policies at the local level, unlike other movements such as the women's rights and civil rights movements, which focused more on federal policies.

State and local governments spend large sums of public funds on the police. For example, in 2019 (the latest available data), state and local governments spent \$123 billion on the

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police [44]. Furthermore, this amount has increased over time. “From 1977 to 2019, measured in 2019 inflation-adjusted dollars, state and local government spending on police increased from \$44 billion to \$123 billion, an increase of 179 percent” [44]. In 2019, 87% of all police spending was done by local governments [44]. While state and local spending on police increased significantly from 1977 to 2019, yearly changes were more incremental. An earlier analysis of local government spending patterns concluded that the spending on police departments exhibits few drastic changes year-to-year when compared to other areas such as recreation [23]. Therefore, this article focuses on the issue of the funds allocated to police departments, which was brought to attention by the protests. The purpose of this research is to examine local government responsiveness to BLM protests to defund the police by assessing the general fund allocation to the operating budgets of police departments. It seeks to understand if local government officials will respond positively to public demands to decrease police department funding, an area of public funding that typically has broad support from elected officials.

Local governments are expected to be responsive to the public’s demands because they are the “closest to the public.” Hence, these governments create policies and programs as well as provide resources to the smallest populations in comparison to the state and federal government. Members of the public can engage with local government officials in a variety of ways: speaking at city council meetings, participating in nonprofit or non-governmental organizations that focus on communicating with elected and unelected government officials, joining local government commissions or boards that permit citizen participation, and protesting to bring attention to a problem.

Thus, this research examines the allocation of general funds to 26 politically left-leaning cities in the United States where protests were conducted by at least 500 people. The main research question answered: Did the murder of George Floyd, and the following local protests, cause a decrease in local government allocation of general funds to police departments? The timing of the research is valuable because the majority of the calls to defund the police occurred in the summer of 2020, which is when city budgets were mostly decided for the upcoming fiscal year. Cities have now had an opportunity to draft new budgets that consider a reallocation of resources. The study contributes to our understanding of the impact of national events that spark local protests on local government budgets, specifically the allocation of resources in the context of protestors’ calls to defund the police.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Policymaking and Budgeting: Government Response to Protests

One of the toughest questions to answer in public sector

budgeting is “On what basis shall it be decided to allocate x dollars to activity A instead of activity B” [24]. Many cities in the U.S. use a budgeting process that begins with the chief executive, or mayor, providing budget guidelines and a call for agency budget requests. Agencies prepare their budget requests and send them to the chief executive’s office. These requests are combined into a formally proposed budget that is then sent to the legislative body, or city council, and then reviewed, debated, amended, and passed as an adopted budget. The public is given access to the budget process during the legislative body’s review and debate process; these meetings are typically open for public comment. Next, the adopted budget is returned to the chief executive for implementation. Once a budget has been implemented, it is later reviewed or audited by the chief executive, legislative body, internal or external auditors, or some combination of the above. Moreover, more and more cities are providing their budget documents online, and some even provide budget dashboards that improve transparency with the public. The budget cycle can mirror the policymaking process, and for this reason, the literature on policymaking is relevant to the current research.

Protests are one method the public can use to convey their demands and can aid in setting a policy agenda [34]. Policy agenda-setting theories argue that external events, such as protests, can act as shocks to the political system, which forces actors in the system to consider issues that were previously ignored and open windows of opportunity for policy change [2, 22, 25]. There are other methods of interacting with policymakers and signaling for desired policy changes, such as writing and calling policymakers directly, gathering petition signatures in support or opposition of a proposal, and attending meetings to speak to policymakers [5]. However, protests are different because they are more likely to garner media attention and increase the coverage of an issue [46]. Furthermore, protests with a larger number of participants signal the constituents’ views about an issue to lawmakers [3, 11, 17, 18]. Additionally, research on elected officials in the federal government found that they are attentive to their constituents’ policy preferences and changes that occur in the geographical location they represent [12, 14, 16, 28].

Beyond the agenda-setting part of the policymaking process, there is mixed empirical evidence that protests impact policy design and implementation [1, 7, 30, 34]. The relationship between social movements and policy implementation in the Mississippi civil rights movement and War on Poverty has been examined; the findings show that the local infrastructure of the social movement impacted funding for community programs, meaning the stronger the local infrastructure, the more funding they were able to secure because they had access to decision-makers that enabled them to provide input regarding the content of the community’s anti-poverty programs [1]. Additionally, the impact of different types of environmental protests on environmental legislation from 1961–1990 has been examined; the results found that protests increased Congressional hearings on the environment

but did not directly impact the passage of environmental legislation [34].

While the majority of protests held during the summer of 2020 were peaceful, there are some well-documented incidences of violence as opposing groups of protestors clashed, such as in Kenosha, WI, New York City, NY, and Seattle, WA. There is conflicting evidence regarding how governments respond to protests that have some element of violence. Researchers have found evidence that riots do not increase the amount of funding allocated to police services [48], but instead decrease support for liberal policies related to race [38, 45] or, conversely, increase negative attitudes toward the group that is rioting while also increasing support for the policies advocated by riot participants [4]. However, government response to the 1992 Los Angeles riot marked a shift in policies that are more liberal [10]. The riot, along with the increased mobilization of white and black voters, likely contributed to the liberal shift in local policies [10]. More extreme protests, meaning those with violence or property damage, have a positive impact on Congressional pro-peace voting while more persuasive protests, such as large demonstrations, decrease the likelihood of voting in favor of pro-peace outcomes [30].

Although most research has focused on government response to protests at the national level, there is some research on government response to protests at the sub-national level [37, 41]. For example, protests in favor of gun control policy, following the mass shooting in Parkland, FL, are positively associated with state legislatures considering gun control. However, marches against increased gun control did not have the same impact [37]. Another study found that pro-immigrant protests influence local policy by facilitating the adoption of ordinances that support immigrants [41]. However, researchers have not focused on the impact of protests on local government budgets or the impact of protests on local government budgetary resource allocation. Therefore, this article aims to fill the gap regarding the impact of protests calling to “defund the police” on local government allocation of resources to police departments.

## 2.2. Protests Calling to Defund the Police

Different perspectives and lenses have been used to examine calls to defund the police and the allocation of resources to police departments. An institutionalist and democratic perspective of completely defunding and disbanding the police as a reform strategy was used to argue that police and sheriff's departments are too insulated from democratic oversight to be disbanded [33]. Calls to defund the police have been analyzed through the lens of power, and the authors concluded that the notion of expertise that is given to police officers and agencies often denies agency to people who most often interact with the police [39]. A lens of agency termination and political accountability was used to categorize proposals by the assignment of functions to an organization [40].

Further, the lens of intersectionality was used to focus on the vulnerability of Black women to police violence and the need to include them in the defund movement [29]. In addition, scholars have posed the question of whether the police can be defunded by examining police response to 911 calls for service and whether some of those calls can be transferred to other agencies [27]. Other scholars have also examined calls to defund the police and provide cautionary notes regarding unintended consequences, such as increased crime rates, minimized control of officer misconduct, and reduced officer safety [36].

The problems with policing, as they intersect with more recent calls to defund the police, have been investigated. An examination of policing problems was completed, which resulted in the identification of a two-tier policing problem [8]. The two tiers involve the use of the police to enforce racial dominance over minority groups and police training that creates an expectation of unquestioned compliance among police officers paired with the use of force when compliance is not given [8]. They argue the problem results in over-policing, which is harmful. Additional research adds how police officers are expected to be first responders to behavioral health concerns, and it negatively impacts communities of color [47].

Solutions to policing problems and the allocation of funds have also been researched. These solutions include re-allocating police funding to support government and community services to vulnerable groups [8], re-allocating funds to address mental health [47], transferring some 911 calls for service to other agencies [27], and viewing policing as a public good that is “equitably distributed to the population to need” to ensure all areas within the state have sufficient resources for public safety [36]. In some cases, altering the structure of state and local government to challenge police power must occur before other actions can be taken [33].

Researchers have also found that some calls to defund the police were met with counter actions. Chicago's mayor used gun crimes, including a rhetoric about illegal guns, to legitimize an increase in police resources [21]. The increase in police resources in Chicago occurred while BLM activists were working with the state of Illinois' decision-makers to overhaul the criminal justice system and pressuring the city to reallocate resources and reform the police department [21]. The history of the defund the police movement and backlash that resulted from the movement was examined; the results show the backlash included state policies that curbed local government defunding of police agencies, which could hinder local control over the agencies [42]. Other mechanisms of state and federal control included grants to local governments for police agencies, which can cut spending on other services as local governments try to maintain the police funding once the grants have expired [42]. They argued that police funding must be democratically controlled by local governments before police agencies can be reformed [42].

While there is much written about the BLM movement and

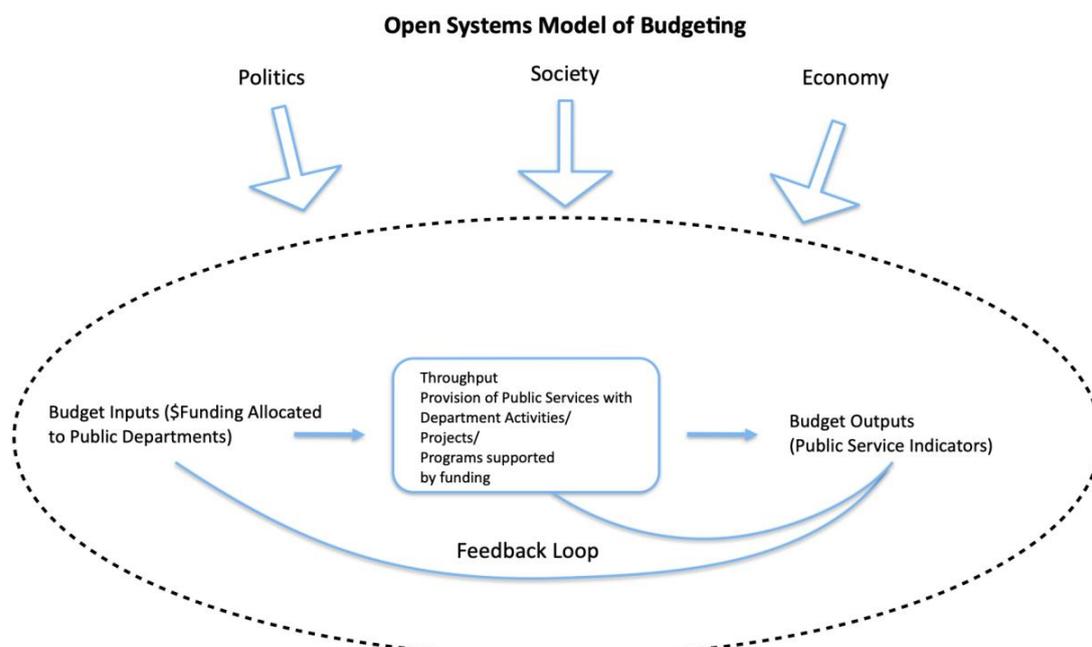
calls to defund the police, a gap in the literature exists regarding whether or not the movement impacted funding allocations to local police departments. Additionally, focusing events and agenda setting are well-researched at the national level in the United States, but there is a gap in the literature regarding the impact a national focusing event on local level budget decision-making.

### 3. Theoretical Framework

The term focusing event was first used by John Kingdon as part of the foundation for the Multiple Streams Framework. Focusing events, such as a crisis or disaster, are part of Kingdon's problem stream; these events can cause shifts in public opinion and create pressure on government officials to address a problem. Indicators are also part of the problem stream. In a later work, Kingdon explained that a private problem becomes a public problem when an indicator shows a change in the state of a system [25]. Policymakers use indicators to assess the magnitude of a problem. An indicator can include the cost of a given service becoming too expensive for the government to the impact of a service on the public. Indicators may not be self-evident to policymakers; the public can bring changes in indicators to the attention of policymakers. Focusing events can also draw attention to changes in indicators and can act to mobilize the public around an issue. Focusing events are "sudden; relatively uncommon; can be reasonably defined as harmful or revealing the possibility of potentially greater future harms; has harms that are concentrated in a particular geographical area or community of interest; and that is known to policymakers and the public sim-

ultaneously" [6]. Harms directed at a specific community of interest are as significant as harms that are typically concentrated in a geographic location [6]. In other words, focusing events can occur for both communities of interest that are dispersed geographically, such as the Black community, as well as the harm that occurs at a specific location, such as a natural disaster. Focusing events can promote changes in the policy by placing an issue on the policymaking agenda. Kingdon refers to this as windows of opportunity where proponents of policy change force their issue onto the government's agenda of issues to be addressed [25]. Agenda setting is an important component of the policymaking process because it is the process by which government officials become aware of an issue and decide government action is necessary to address the problem [19]. It is at this point that focusing events can be connected to the open system theory of public sector budgeting.

Gibran and Sekwat posit that "budgeting theory at the policymaking or institutional level should reflect the more fluid, non-rational nature of interaction with the environment" [15]. Open systems theory can be used to describe and predict changes in the allocation of resources; the theory posits that the public budgeting process, including the allocation of resources, is impacted and influenced by the social, political, and economic environment in which government functions [15]. Elements of the external environment can include intergovernmental systems, interest groups, citizens, private businesses, and political parties. See Figure 1 for a visual of open systems theory as it has been applied to public sector budgeting and explained by Gibran and Sekwat [15].



*Figure 1. Model of Open Systems Theory of Budgeting.*

This research focuses exclusively on the politics and society factors in the external context of the budgeting process as they relate to impacting decisions about the amount of funding allocated, or budget inputs. Specifically, the theoretical framework for this research combines the concept of focusing events with the open systems model of budgeting. Focusing events occur in the external environment of the budget pro-

cess and may impact both the politics and society factors that are considered in the open systems theory of budgeting. This concept is unique and the theoretical framework has not been applied to other studies. See Figure 2 for a model that combines focusing events, and the open system theory of budgeting used in this research.

#### Theoretical Model Combining Focusing Events to the Open Systems Theory of Public Budgeting

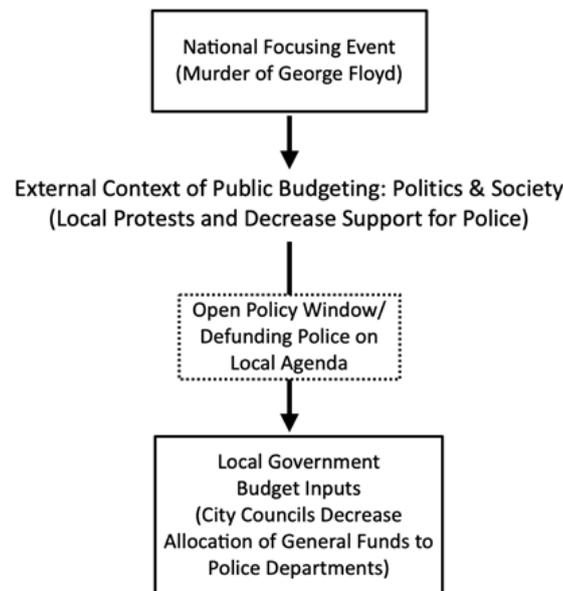


Figure 2. Model connecting focusing events to open systems theory.

## 4. Methodology

This study seeks to examine if a national focusing event, the murder of George Floyd, and the resulting protests that called to “defund the police” resulted in decreased general fund allocations to local police departments. This study examines 26 cities where protests with calls to defund the police occurred during the late spring and summer of 2020. Cities that were the most likely to decrease the allocation of funds were selected. Researchers have noted that protests with a larger number of participants may have more impact on policymaking [3, 11, 17, 18]. Cities with the following characteristics were included – population of 100,000 or more and had at least one local protest that included 500 or more people during the period from May-July 2020 that involved calls to defund or reduce funding for police services. The U.S. Census Bureau’s 2020 Census was used for population information, and the Crowd Counting Consortium was used for estimates regarding protest size. The availability of information at the local level frequently hinders research on local government [43]. This problem applies to local government budgets and was addressed by collecting original data on the city budgets

for the 26 cities. This allowed the identification of changes in the allocation of resources to police departments. Cities were further narrowed by the availability of online budget documents through the city’s website and maintenance of a municipal police force, meaning the city had no contract with another entity for police services, which is more likely to occur in smaller cities. Lastly, only cities with a majority of Democratic voters were selected. Cities with a majority of Democratic voters were identified by the political affiliation of their mayors or if the majority voted for Joe Biden in the last election when local elections were non-partisan or the city did not have a strong mayor-council form of government. These cities were selected in an attempt to study left-leaning cities since Democrats, at the time, were more sympathetic to the BLM movement. A study from the Pew Research Center found that 85% of Democrats/Democrat-leaning independents support BLM while 78% of Republicans/Republican-leaning independents oppose BLM, including 58% who strongly oppose BLM [20]. Another study, by Reny and Newman, had similar findings; they found the protests decreased support for the police among politically liberal people in the United States [35]. Politically conservative people in the United States had unchanged attitudes in their support of police officers [35]. As a result of drawing from the findings of Reny and Newman as

well as the Pew Research Center, only left-leaning cities are included in the study. It is assumed the politically right-leaning cities and left-leaning cities without local protests would not have changed the amount of funding allocated to local police departments. Thus, the following cities were selected based on the above-listed criteria: Atlanta, Austin, Baltimore, Birmingham, Boston, Chicago, Cincinnati, Dallas, Denver, Detroit, Houston, Los Angeles, Louisville, Madison, Minneapolis, New Orleans, Oakland, Philadelphia, Phoenix, Portland, Providence, San Diego, San Jose, Seattle, St. Louis, and Tampa.

The dependent variable was the percent of the city's general fund allocation to police departments. The percent in general fund allocation to the police department was calculated for each city from 2020–2022 as well as the amount of change from 2020–2021 and 2020–2022. The year 2020 was selected as a baseline year because budgets for the 2020 FY were decided before the protests occurred. The information was compiled manually by searching for city budget documents. Changes by at least 1% increase or decrease in total allocation to the police department were recorded as signifi-

cant; if the change was less than 1%, it was noted as “no change” because it was not significant and budget decision-making would be described as incremental, or not impacted, by the national focusing event and local protests. If the general fund allocated to the police department decreased by 1% or more, it was recorded as a decrease. If the general fund allocated to the police department increased by 1% or more, it was recorded as an increase. The general fund was selected because these funds were not earmarked and there is more discretion from policymakers regarding their allocation. To use language from game theory, the allocation of the general fund is a zero-sum game, meaning every dollar dedicated to one service or department is a dollar that cannot be used elsewhere. Additionally, the total annual allocation for operating expenditures was not used to control for changes to city revenue. This measure, the total amount of general funds allocated to a police department's budget, is consistent with the measure of financial support noted in other studies [26, 31, 48, 49].

*Table 1. Variable Summary.*

Name	Description	Source
<i>Dependent Variable</i>		
General Fund Allocation to Police Department	Percent of General Fund allocated to police department in 2020, 2021, 2022	City websites for budget documents 2020-2022
<i>Independent Variables</i>		
City Population	Number of residents in city 100,000+	U.S. Census Bureau
Local Protest	Number of protestors in city 500+	Crowd Counting Consortium
Political affiliation of local voters	Percent of voters who support Democrat mayor/president in 2020 50%+	city websites for mayor political affiliation or secretary of state website for election data if no mayor-council government

## 5. Results

Since the protests occurred from late spring to early summer in 2020, budgets were already approved for the 2020 fiscal year (FY) before the protests began; the 2020 FY thus serves as the baseline for determining changes to police department funding. In the 2020 FY, the amount of general funds allocated to police departments averaged 31.29%, with a range of 11.87% to 52.47%. In the 2021 FY, there was a similar average and range of general fund allocations to police departments; the average was 31.12% with a range of 11.89% to 53.01%. During the 2021 fiscal year, five cities decreased the percent of the general fund allocated to the police department by at least 1% in the 2021 FY, ranging from a 10.74% decrease in Austin to 1.29% decrease in Denver. Further, 11

cities increased police department spending in 2021, which ranged from a 1.02% increase in Providence to a 4.58% increase in Birmingham. A total of 10 cities showed “no change” to their police department allocations in 2021, meaning the percent of the general fund dedicated to police spending did not change by 1%. In the 2021 FY, the average change across all cities in the study was -0.12%.

In 2022, the amount of general funds allocated to police departments averaged 30.31% with a range of 10.62% to 49.71%. Thirteen cities decreased general fund allocations to the police department by at least 1% from the amount allocated in 2020, which ranged from an 7.00% decrease in Tampa to a 1.06% decrease in Madison. Nine cities showed “no change” to the percent of the general fund allocated to police departments in 2022 because they are within 1% increase or decrease. In the 2022 FY, the average change across all cities in the study was -0.98%.

**Table 2.** Percent of General Fund Allocated to Police Departments.

City	2020 FY	2021 FY	2022 FY	Change from 2020 to 2021	Change from 2020 to 2022
Atlanta, GA	36.67%	38.56%	39.00%	1.89%	2.33%
Austin, TX	39.91%	29.17%	39.76%	-10.74%	-0.15%
Baltimore, MD	27.27%	28.50%	27.65%	1.23%	0.38%
Birmingham, AL	20.57%	25.15%	22.87%	4.58%	2.3%
Boston, MA	11.87%	11.89%	10.62%	0.02%	-1.25%
Chicago, IL	37.02%	38.58%	34.77%	1.56%	-2.25%
Cincinnati, OH	38.81%	39.17%	37.98%	0.36%	-0.83%
Dallas, TX	35.95%	35.74%	36.87%	-0.21%	0.92%
Denver, CO	18.54%	17.25%	16.41%	-1.29%	-2.13%
Detroit, MI	26.76%	27.34%	33.30%	0.58%	6.54%
Houston, TX	35.55%	37.05%	36.62%	1.5%	1.07%
Los Angeles, CA	26.39%	27.76%	24.00%	1.37%	-2.39%
Louisville, KY	30.42%	30.55%	27.33%	0.13%	-3.09%
Madison, WI	26.45%	25.68%	25.39%	0.77%	-1.06%
Minneapolis, MN	37.30%	33.91%	35.23%	-3.39%	-2.05%
New Orleans, LA	26.69%	28.06%	26.78%	1.37%	0.09%
Oakland, CA	48.65%	51.25%	42.82%	2.60%	-5.83%
Philadelphia, PA	15.39%	15.76%	13.84%	0.37%	-1.55%
Phoenix, AZ	52.47%	53.01%	49.71%	0.54%	-2.76%
Portland, OR	32.51%	31.63%	29.40%	-0.88%	-3.11%
Providence, RI	16.92%	17.94%	17.41%	1.02%	0.49%
San Diego, CA	34.41%	35.83%	34.48%	1.42%	0.07%
San Jose, CA	30.76%	30.47%	31.39%	-0.29%	0.63%
Seattle, WA	27.24%	22.59%	22.36%	-4.65%	-4.88%
St. Louis, MO	35.20%	36.89%	35.26%	1.69%	0.06%
Tampa, FL	43.90%	39.33%	36.90%	-4.57%	-7.00%
AVERAGE				-0.12%	-0.98%

## 6. Discussion

This research examined if the concept of a focusing event, as applied to public policymaking, can be connected to the open systems theory of budgeting as a way to determine if external events in the budgeting environment impact the allocation of resources to police departments, or if external shifts from focusing events and protests have little impact on resource allocations to police departments. There is some evidence to support the notion that national focusing events,

specifically the murder of George Floyd, and the resulting local protests did result in decreased budget allocations in some cities.

There are three findings from the data that were collected and analyzed. First, the results support previous research that government policymaking responds positively to demands from protests [1, 30, 41]; specifically, some local governments responded to calls to defund the police by reducing the allocation of resources to police departments. The size of the protests was likely a factor because there were at least 500 protestors, which supports previous research that protests with a larger number of participants may have more impact on

policymaking [3, 11, 17, 18]. However, cities exhibited delayed responsiveness to protestors' calls to defund the police. More cities reduced funding for police departments in 2022 than in 2021. Nineteen percent of the cities in the study reduced police department funding in 2021 by at least 1% of their general fund allocations, which grew to 54% in 2022. Only four cities reduced police department funding by more than 1% of the total general fund expenditure baseline in 2020 FY for both the 2021 FY and the 2022 FY. Additionally, of the five cities that reduced funding by at least 1% in 2021, one city, Austin, re-allocated police department funding as a percent of total general fund expenditures in 2022. While this evidence supports the impact of a national focusing event and local protests impacting resource allocation, it occurred over a year after the events. One way to explain the delayed response is many, if not most, local government budgets use July 1-June 30 for a fiscal year, which means a budget can be proposed by elected officials nearly 12 months before it will be implemented. Elected officials were responding to the protests, but some of them may have missed an opportunity to reduce allocations in the 2021 FY because those budgets may have been mostly decided, which means the 2022 FY would be the most recent opportunity for them to reduce police department allocations. As a note, a fiscal year is labeled by the year in which it ends, which means the 2022 FY would operate from July 1, 2021 - June 30, 2022. However, budget proposals for the 2022 FY would have begun much earlier, perhaps as early as October-December of 2020. Overall, this finding is significant because it shows there are circumstances in which the allocation of funds to police departments can be decreased in a manner that is not incremental. The national trend regarding the size of police departments in the United States has been on a consistent upward trajectory since 1977 [44].

The second and third findings support the open systems theory of budgeting, but they do not support the research model's connection with a national focusing event and local protests. The cities that did not reduce the allocation of resources to their police departments were responding to the constraints in their external environment, which is aligned with the open system theory. While these cities were likely to reduce funding to their police departments, other factors in their external environment took precedence. The second finding is that some cities were constrained by the state government with the passage of state policies to curb defunding of police departments, thus limiting their autonomy in resource allocation to police departments. This finding about state counter-actions provides empirical evidence to support the literature noting that protests can result in counter actions and backlash [42], and it adds to the research regarding the unintended consequences of defunding police departments [36]. Austin was forced to reallocate funds because the state of Texas adopted a new administrative code preventing municipalities from defunding, or allocating funds away from, police departments [32]. According to the new rule, the Office of

the Governor's Public Safety Office (PSO) is responsible for investigating whether a municipality has defunded its police department; if a municipality is found to have defunded the police department, it will be subjected to multiple budgetary penalties including tax rate limitations. Additionally, the PSO is required to conduct an annual budget review of municipalities with a population of 250,000 to determine if any police department was illegally defunded [32]. Another example of a state response can be found in Florida, which passed House Bill (HB) 1 in 2021. Here, the policy allows the state attorney for the judicial circuit in which the municipality is located or a member of the governing body who objects to the funding reduction to file an appeal for a budget reduction of municipal law enforcement [13]. The appeal is provided to the governor's office – the governor has the power to either approve the reduction or amend each separate line item of the operating budget for the municipal law enforcement agency [13]. At the time of this writing, nine cities filed a lawsuit against Florida's HB1, and a federal judge temporarily blocked parts of the policy related to free speech and the definition of a riot. The sections related to local government budgeting were not blocked [9]. Tampa's reduction to its police department funding occurred before HB1 went into effect. In these examples, states have taken some control over local government budgetary decisions. Third, some cities that were slated as likely to reduce budget allocations to police departments because they are left-leaning and had at least 500 protests, did not decrease their allocation of funds to police departments due to concern for the violent crime rate; some cities noted rising crime rates as a reason for their decision to increase or maintain a certain level of allocation of funds. Public statements and comments to news outlets regarding the rising crime rate occurred in the cities of Atlanta, Baltimore, Detroit, and New Orleans.

## 7. Conclusion

This study explored whether the murder of George Floyd and the local protests served as a national focusing event that corresponded with reduced allocation of funds to local police departments in politically left-leaning cities. The general fund allocation to police departments of 26 left-leaning cities with a population over 100,000 that had at least 500 protestors in 2020 were used in the study. The research findings show a majority of the cities did respond to the calls to defund the police for the fiscal year 2022. However, city budget decisions were impacted by other factors in their external environment, including actions by state governments and rising crime rates. Overall, the findings demonstrate that half of the local governments in this study did respond to calls to defund the police by reducing the percent of general fund allocations to the police departments, which supports the notion that a national focusing event that corresponds with large protests at the local level does impact budget decision-making of local elected officials. While this study does not offer conclusive

evidence regarding the impact of protests on local government budgeting, it does suggest that local government policymakers consider the point of view of protestors when making budgetary decisions. Funding of police departments should be tracked to determine the long-term impact of calls to defund the police.

The study has some limitations. It did not examine capital budgets because those are multi-year plans that typically involve municipal bond debt, meaning capital budgets are difficult to change. Additionally, the research examines two fiscal years after the BLM protests. Future research should examine later fiscal years as well as sustained pressure at the local level to continue to decrease police budget allocation and determine if funding was increased in cities that decreased police department budgets.

## Abbreviations

BLM	Black Lives Matter
FY	Fiscal Year
HB	House Bill
PSO	Public Safety Office

## Author Contributions

Jessica De Shazo is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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