

Statement of the American Society of Criminology Executive Board regarding the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery.

The horrifying violence against Floyd, Taylor, and Arbery reveals, yet again, the systematic and disparate impact of the criminal justice system on communities of color in the United States. These victims, along with countless contemporary and historical others, cry out for justice. In each of these instances, the very institutions responsible for protecting the public have failed to act properly or promptly to protect citizens of color.

Research has shown that communities of color are far more likely to be exposed to the criminal justice system than native born whites, and that certain laws and police practices have increased their relative risk of arrest and incarceration (The Growth of Incarceration in the United States, National Academy of Sciences, 2014). Although reform policies have been widely advocated (e.g., police training for police officers was a central feature of President Obama's Task Force on 21st Century Policing in the wake of police violence against African Americans), many reforms geared toward rectifying harm have yet to be implemented or were eviscerated by the Trump administration (such as the use of consent decrees with police departments to encourage reform). Too often, new ideas are implemented absent stringent empirical testing and without consideration of unintended consequences or input from affected communities. Such ideas should be rooted in empirical research and evaluated by authoritative experts in order to be certain that they achieve their desired goals.

As the Executive Board members representing the American Society of Criminology, we uniformly speak out against the disparities, the injustices, and the systematic racism that pervades our criminal justice system. We encourage our members to continue their hard work in studying these important issues and are committed to continuing our support of their research. And, more generally as a Society and as a country, we must collectively confront the daily indignities of racism. We recognize that we can – and all must – do better.