ShotSpotter™ in Durham, NC:

A Community Sentiment Evaluation

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Executive Summary

In July 2023, the Wilson Center conducted nine focus groups and two individual interviews, with a total of 30 participants who live in the ShotSpotter pilot area in Durham, North Carolina. Participants were asked to discuss their perceptions of safety, gun violence, policing in their neighborhoods, ShotSpotter technology, and changes in policing or violence since the ShotSpotter pilot began.

Participants had not observed any impact on gun crime since ShotSpotter was implemented, nor did they believe ShotSpotter could help to reduce gun crime. No resident identified any negative change in police activity or tactics since ShotSpotter was implemented. The participants who reported seeing changes in policing since ShotSpotter described those changes in a positive light.

For participants who expressed opposition to having ShotSpotter in their neighborhoods, their opposition was rooted primarily in a lack of trust rather than direct experiences. This mistrust was directed toward City Council, ShotSpotter as a corporation, policing as an institution, and concerns about technology storing sensitive data.

The majority of participants who spoke about the cost of ShotSpotter expressed negative views and suggested that the money would be better spent on other initiatives. Additionally, some residents felt unheard in the decision-making process to pilot ShotSpotter, which contributed to negative feelings about both the technology and City Council. Still, participants expressed

hopes that ShotSpotter may lead to faster response times and more direct communication between residents and police, both of which they believe may work to enhance community members trust in police officers.

Regarding whether ShotSpotter should continue in their community, two participants expressed strong support for continuing the ShotSpotter program, eight participants expressed strong opposition, and ten participants expressed conditional responses or uncertainty. For example, some participants would support the program if there were data that demonstrated ShotSpotter was impactful and effective.

> Participants had not observed any impact on gun crime since ShotSpotter was implemented, nor did they believe ShotSpotter could help to reduce gun crime.

ShotSpotter Comes to Durham

In September 2022, Durham City Council voted to enter a one-year, $197,500 contract with ShotSpotter. City Council then worked with the Durham Police Department (DPD) to choose a pilot area that covers three square miles in East and Southeast Durham where a third of all gunshot injuries and deaths occur. Sensors were installed in the pilot neighborhoods, which included Albright, Cleveland-Holloway, East Durham, Franklin Village, Golden Belt, Hayti, Old Five Points, Southside, and Wellons Village. ShotSpotter went live on December 15, 2022.[1] On December 18, 2023, City Council voted to not extend its contract with ShotSpotter. According to DPD's Data Dashboard, which does not include ShotSpotter alerts from New Year's Eve, New Year's Day, or the Fourth of July, there were 1,426 alerts during the pilot period.[2]

From the outset, Durham City Council committed to basing its decision whether to continue its use of ShotSpotter on the data that came from the pilot period. Mayor pro-tempore Mark Anthony Middleton said in a September 2022 city council meeting that "this will be the most transparent, studied, vetted pilot in the history of this city."[3] To that end, DPD made a public data dashboard where it published metrics such as police response times, spatial accuracy, and evidence collection.[4] At the request of DPD, the Wilson Center for Science and Justice at Duke Law ("the Wilson Center") is also conducting an independent quantitative evaluation of the pilot that will be made public.

To supplement its quantitative evaluation, the Wilson

Credit: City of Durham

Center conducted a community sentiment evaluation with residents who live in the pilot neighborhoods to examine whether and in what ways ShotSpotter impacts perceptions of policing and gun violence. This is of particular importance because the pilot area includes historically economically disadvantaged communities of color that may have disproportionately experienced negative police contact.[5]

Although many researchers have studied ShotSpotter's efficacy in gun violence reduction, few have sought community input. Whether community members are in favor of using the technology should be factored into City Council's decision-making, not simply from an ethical standpoint, but also because community-police relations are essential for maintaining public safety. "Policing is far more difficult without public support," write criminologists Anthony Braga and Rod Brunson, pointing to the influence of community-police relations in maintaining public safety.[6] Positive community-police relations form the basis of mutual trust fundamental to fair treatment, crime reporting, and case clearance.

Methodology

Recruiting Participants

Durham is a city with strong community organizations, close-knit neighborhoods, and powerful activists. We sought to harness this existing community organizing network to reach residents of the pilot neighborhoods. To do so, we engaged with organizations including the Community Empowerment Fund, the Pauli Murray Center, and Durham Beyond Policing to reach their members and seek their participation. Additional outreach efforts included presenting at Partners Against Crime (PAC) meetings in Districts 4 and 5, as well as at the McDougald Terrace Resident Council meeting. We forwarded recruitment information to neighborhood listservs; posted information on the Wilson Center's social media, website, and newsletters; and posted information on Durham community social media pages and community organization social media pages including @downtowndurham, @sunrisedurham, and @peoplessolidarityhub. CBS 17 also interviewed Angie Weis Gammell, the Wilson Center's policy director, about this study, which they aired on the nightly news and published in a digital news article. Lastly, the Wilson Center posted flyers with permission in local businesses and walked door to door in McDougald Terrace, East Durham, Wellons Village, and Albright. In all of these efforts, we included that we were offering focus group participants $20 for their time along with instructions on how to sign up to participate.

The Focus Groups

The Wilson Center conducted nine focus groups and two individual interviews for a total of 30 participants throughout the month of July 2023. The sample included seven Cleveland Holloway residents, four Hayti residents, ten Southside residents, seven East Durham residents, and two McDougald Terrace residents. Most participants learned about the evaluation from their neighborhood listserv or from on-the-ground flyering. Focus groups had between two and five participants and were moderated by Pilar Kelly, a Senior at Duke University and Researcher with the Wilson Center. The sessions were held in the Durham County Main Library, Holton Career and Resource Center in East Durham, and McDougald Terrace resident community center. Each focus group and interview lasted about 45 minutes and followed the same questions outlined in the interview guide (see Appendix for full interview guide). Participants were asked to discuss their perceptions of safety, gun violence, and policing in their neighborhoods, as well as their understanding and opinions of ShotSpotter technology. They were also asked whether they had observed any changes in policing or violence since the ShotSpotter pilot began in December 2022. At the end of each session, the moderator asked participants to reflect on whether they considered ShotSpotter a good use of public funds, whether they would like Durham to extend its contract with ShotSpotter, and what interventions they believe would effectively address gun violence. The focus groups were recorded with Otter.ai software, and each participant received $20 in cash for their time and participation.

30
PARTICIPANTS

2-5
PARTICIPANTS PER FOCUS GROUP

45
MINUTE INTERVIEWS

Qualitative Analysis

After the completion of the focus groups and interviews, the researcher reviewed each verbatim transcript generated by Otter.ai, a real-time voice transcription software. The cleaned transcripts were then uploaded to NVivo, a qualitative data coding software. The researcher who moderated all data collection events, analyzed the data with the support of two research team members from the Wilson Center. Data was analyzed by categorizing each comment under a specific thematic code. Because the responses related to the continued use of ShotSpotter were particularly rich and nuanced, this data was additionally reviewed by other research team members. With each coding pass, the codes were separated into more specific categories, and the coding structure was continuously reorganized to best fit the ideas expressed in the transcript. This method allowed themes to emerge directly from the data, as opposed to the researcher attempting to fit participants' nuanced responses into predetermined boxes. Lastly, the researcher summarized the themes and debates within each category.

Methodological Limitations

The structure of focus groups enables participants to discuss and develop ideas with fellow community members. Participants not only express their individual opinions, but also explain themselves to each other, eliciting a complex understanding of community sentiment. The researcher can find meaning in topics that incite debate, disagreement, or resonance among focus group participants. The conversational and open-ended nature of focus groups allow the researcher to observe the process by which opinions are formed by the way they choose to answer questions, how they qualify their responses, and how they respond to each other.

This methodology also has limitations. First, the group dynamics may influence what participants choose to express and how they choose to express it. Participants may modify their responses to align with perceived social norms or the expectations of the moderator, such as refraining from sharing opinions that are not held by the majority of the group, especially surrounding controversial topics like policing, race, and politics.[7] Second, here, the participant sample represents individuals who have free time and access to transportation, which does not fully represent these communities. Additionally, though the recruitment strategies attempted to reach individuals at all levels of political engagement, individuals who are already active in community organizations or politics are more likely to be aware of and take part in the evaluation. Lastly, participants did not provide their race, ethnicity, socio-economic background, gender, or educational background. This missing demographic data creates a challenge to discern if the opinions expressed within the focus group are representative of the diversity within these communities.

Findings

The Communities: Close-Knit, Gentrifying, and Familiar with Gun Violence

When asked what they liked about their neighborhood, participants from virtually every neighborhood sampled referenced a strong sense of community, whether it was mutual aid networks in Cleveland-Holloway during the pandemic or "keeping an eye out for each other" in Southside. Forms of community support manifested in WhatsApp groups and listservs that allowed neighbors to notify each other about gunshots, community centers where neighbors had periodic meetings (sometimes attended by DPD chiefs) to discuss neighborhood-specific gun violence interventions (e.g., Southside traffic calming project), and neighborhood watches.

The theme of gentrification changing the economic and social diversity of the pilot neighborhoods arose in eight of the focus groups, and many participants tied it into their responses around policing and gun violence. Long-term residents of Cleveland Holloway, East Durham, and Southside described how their neighborhoods had significantly changed in the last

20 years because of increasingly unaffordable housing. The impact of gentrification on gunviolence is complex; for some areas previously "scarred by poverty and violence," gentrification improved material conditions, and violence seemed to decrease. However, it also exacerbated housing insecurity among lower-income residents as property tax rates rose and houses flipped. Many Durhamites were thus barred from accessing this new investment of wealth in their neighborhoods. Instead, gentrification worked to concentrate homelessness and poverty into specific areas, which some participants said intensified gun violence. Without economic opportunity or healthy living conditions, people were "forced to survive in hard ways,"turning to gun violence or other forms of crime.

Participants' perception of the amount of gun violence in their areas varied, even between participants who live in the same neighborhood. While some residents reported that they heard gunshots every day, others reported that they heard gunshots a few times a year. Several participants also noted that crime seemed to come in waves, with periods of quiet followed by dramatic increases. These participants often connected the unpredictable nature of crime to their stress. Other participants observed that gun violence was predictably higher during nighttime hours, during summer months, and during holidays.

One debate that emerged was whether violence was an issue everywhere in Durham or if it was concentrated in particular areas and during certain times. One long-term Durham resident suggested that she wouldn't move

away from her neighborhood, even though she perceived frequent gun violence, because:

> "There's no safe places in Durham. It doesn't matter where you live or how much mortgage or how much your house costs. Crime is everywhere… at least I know my area."

Another resident pushed back that crime was concentrated in specific areas, such as "drug corners." In fact, the vast majority of participants described gun violence as contained to people who knew each other and thus not "random." Their primary stressor was that they would be hit by a stray bullet as a bystander.

One important theme was the prevalence of participants who had directly been impacted by gun violence around their homes, either through witnessing shootings, witnessing victims after being shot, or personally knowing gunshot victims. The most common form of gun violence described was drive-by shootings. Conversations specifically about the prevalence of drive by shootings emerged in four focus groups, mentioned by residents of Cleveland-Holloway, Southside, Hayti, and East Durham.

The Communities: Relationship with Police

When asked about their perceptions of whether police have the needs of the community in mind or are able to effectively address crime in their neighborhoods, participants often mentioned anecdotes of interactions they, or their friends or family, have had with Durham Police Officers. To evaluate these responses, the researcher coded each of these interactions "Positive," "Negative," or "Neutral." Of the 16 participants who spoke about their interactions with police, seven had Negative experiences, four had Positive experiences, and seven had Neutral experiences.* The Negative experiences ranged from officers' escalatory behavior in response to minor crises, to officers addressing neighbors with offensive and racist language. The Positive interactions reflected friendly conversations, rapid and professional responses to calls for service, and following up with community members regarding complaints or crimes in their neighborhoods.

When asked about their level of trust in the police, many participants differentiated between their trust in the institution of policing and their trust in individual police officers. Participants who did not trust the police either referenced fundamental opposition to policing as an institution, perceived misbehavior of police officers against themselves or their neighbors, or their inability to trust DPD officers because they did not "know" them (i.e., recognize the same faces, know their names, etc.).

In response to questions about the community's relationship with the police, most participants answered that they did not know any of the police officers who patrol their areas. In some cases, participants mentioned higher-level police officers attending community meetings, but these were not the police officers that responded to everyday calls. In four focus groups, people recalled times in which they felt like they personally recognized or knew the police officers, either in the past

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* Some participants discussed multiple experiences that fell under different categories, resulting in the difference between the number of interactions and the number of participants.

or in other cities where they previously had lived, which had a positive effect on community-police relations. One Cleveland Holloway participant discussed the positive impact of unarmed truant officers when she was growing up, who patrolled streets to make sure children were in school. In another focus group, a long-time East Durham resident argued that crime would decrease if there were more community-engaged police officers:

> "If you put these police officers out here on foot patrol, and let them talk to these people in these people in these communities, and get to know these people, half of this stuff they doing will stop… So why are you putting people down and putting an instrument above? You spending all this money on equipment above us, but if you go out here and find decent and respectful people and pay 'em like you said and put them to work, you'd see it a whole lot different."

Several other participants in the group voiced their agreement, and spoke about other areas where they had lived, where having police officers on the street that knew neighbors worked better. One participant added that the current system of policing did not financially reward police officers who were more engaged in the community, even though "the hard way is usually the best way." In a separate focus group, a Southside resident relatedly explained that police officers engaging with children in the community was a preventative mechanism that could be paired with projects like ShotSpotter.

Strong community relationships with the recognizable police officers, thus, seemed to have an important connection to trust. One participant commented specifically on this association, tying together the themes of DPD understaffing, community relationships with police, and trust:

> "I barely see them, so...So I will say this is difficult for me. I respect the police...**trust would require me to know the exact person who polices that neighborhood, is frequently there**. And they can't do that because they're **short staffed**. So they have a different person coming that way. So I think the trust is not really feasible to build because what we had previously... even when I grew up at McDougald, there was one little bad apple, **but I knew most of the cops that frequented that area. So it wasn't as abrasive in terms of policing**."
> (emphasis added).

Additionally, even among the participants who felt that they had generally positive or neutral interactions police officers, many still did not trust them because they had observed or perceived that officers treated marginalized groups poorly. Some participants felt like police officers treated neighbors differently based on "how they presented themselves." For example, in response to a question about whether police officers have the wellbeing of the community in mind, several participants reported that unhoused neighbors or neighbors experiencing substance use disorders were harassed by police officers, decreasing the participants' level of trust. This also affected their willingness to communicate about crime with the police. For example, one participant said:

> "We stopped calling 911 shortly after we moved into the neighborhood because it then brought police that then harassed our neighbors."

Several residents raised the issue that residents and police officers did not cooperate effectively to address gun crime, either because there was not a strong enough basis of trust for residents to talk to police (i.e., by calling 911) or because police did not routinely communicate the closure of cases or look to residents for input during investigations.

Participants generally believed that the current role of policing was to react to, not to prevent, gun violence. In their view, police officers were tasked with too many roles without having the tools necessary to address gun violence. Most participants described reactive policing as negative, but they also acknowledged that an efficient and quick response was an important part of public safety. Additionally, participants mentioned ways that policing could be reformed to improve community-police relations, especially through neighborhood teams that build relationships with community members to prevent gun violence. One theme that emerged was that police officers were tasked with too many roles and too much responsibility without having the tools necessary to prevent gun violence.

Knowledge of ShotSpotter

A.   General Awareness and Understanding

Almost all participants said that they had learned about ShotSpotter from either 1) their neighborhood listserv, 2) local news publications, or 3) social media. Additionally, one participant said he had learned about ShotSpotter from City press releases, and one participant said that DPD came to a resident council meeting to talk about the technology. Participants' explanations of ShotSpotter's function were generally accurate; most knew that ShotSpotter technology involves microphones on buildings and poles that use

audio to detect location. Several participants mentioned ShotSpotter's use of artificial intelligence. However, only one person mentioned the human element of the ShotSpotter algorithm, in which a ShotSpotter staff member reviews the sound waves to decipher between a gunshot and an alternative sound. Some participants were unclear about whether the microphones were always recording, as well as if there were several microphones around the neighborhood or just one big microphone. Six participants asked questions about ShotSpotter's intended goal and the ways that the city was evaluating its efficacy (e.g., attempting to reduce response time, reduce the incidence of gun violence, or confiscate firearms). Though some participants mentioned the ShotSpotter data dashboard on the DPD website, the majority of participants who spoke about evaluating the pilot were not aware of which metrics City Council was considering.

B.   Durham's Decision to Pilot

Focus groups were asked about the extent to which their communities were engaged in the City's decision to implement ShotSpotter in their neighborhoods. Three participants, two from Southside and one from McDougald Terrace, had heard of community meetings attended by a ShotSpotter representative. The rest of the participants answered that there was no engagement or effort to inform all neighbors. Many of the participants were not aware of ShotSpotter until after it had already been implemented.

One theme that emerged from this discussion was that residents felt unheard in the decision-making process, which in itself, contributed to negative feelings about ShotSpotter and City Council. These participants felt the technology was installed without regard for their input. A participant who attended a community meeting attended by a ShotSpotter representative described ShotSpotter representatives "selling" the technology, rather than

eliciting feedback. He further explained,

> "Our neighborhood has had conversations with city council and the police department to put forward different ideas for responding to crime. It hasn't been shared decision-making power in any regard. I feel like a lot of citizens in Durham really spoke up against ShotSpotter, and I'm sure some people spoke for it."

One Southside resident connected this lack of outreach and collaboration to residents' reception of the technology. She believed the lack of community engagement through the implementation process could have affected the way residents received ShotSpotter.

> "In this case… how much does the community feel like they were a part of this decision? And that's integral in terms of how things are received by the general public. How do I feel like it was a part of this? A lot of the time folks think that things just happen willy-nilly, and they were never a part of the changes."

The perceived lack of community engagement may have contributed to confusion about the technology and its purpose, as well as trust in the police and City Council.
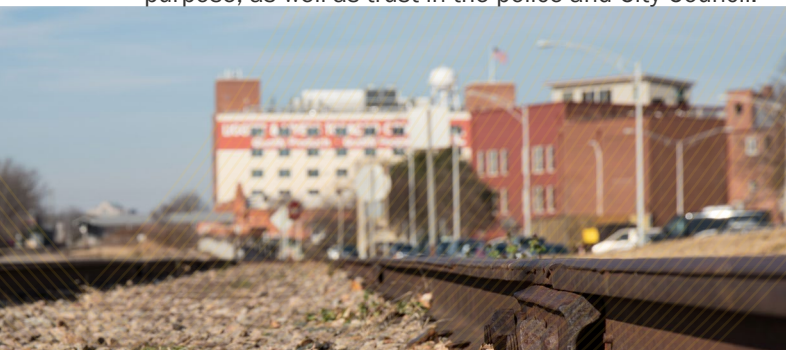
Concerns about ShotSpotter

Separate from how ShotSpotter may impact policing and gun violence, participants expressed concerns about the use of ShotSpotter that fell into four main categories: 1) ShotSpotter is a technology sold by a for-profit corporation; 2) City Council members have a political stake in the success of ShotSpotter; 3) using ShotSpotter may infringe on people's privacy through surveillance, but also may improve data collection; and 4) the financial costs and opportunity costs may not be a good use of public funds.

A. Monetary Motivations

In five focus groups, there were participants who said that they did not trust ShotSpotter because they believed the company cared about making money rather than helping the community. Some connected ShotSpotter's perceived drive for profit as "monetizing" their communities.

> "I don't think ShotSpotter is in it to help people, they're in it to make money."

Additionally, several participants brought up the implications of a private corporation collaborating with the police department. They worried that ShotSpotter might persuade police officers to change data in court (one brought up a highly publicized Chicago case[8]) or that police departments might secretly encourage ShotSpotter to tamper with data to support their claims.

> "The connection between the corporation and the police departments, that's going to be harmful toward the way our justice system operates. They have more collaboration and secrecy, more dark areas for things that the average person doesn't know."

B. Political Motivations

Another theme that emerged in six focus groups was participants' belief that City Council members had a political stake in the success of ShotSpotter.

The moderator did not ask any questions about ShotSpotter's political nature; instead, across the focus groups, these concerns were expressed in response to different questions, ranging from participants' comments on downsides of ShotSpotter, on the extent of the City's community engagement about ShotSpotter, and at the end of sessions when participants were asked if there was anything they would like to add. Several participants alleged that implementing ShotSpotter was a way for City Council members to appear to be doing something about gun violence, regardless of whether it proved to be effective. Similarly, some doubted that elected officials who had advocated or voted for ShotSpotter would admit failure because of their reputational stake in its success.

C. Data Collection and Surveillance

The moderator did not ask any questions that specifically asked about data processing or surveillance. Yet, debates surrounding the ethics of ShotSpotter as an AI-powered, data-collecting technology emerged in nine focus groups. ShotSpotter's potential effect on data collection emerged as one of the most discussed impacts, in both positive and negative lights.

Some participants were unclear about the kind of data collected by ShotSpotter. Though the company says that it does not process conversational data, several participants asked the moderator whether the microphones could pick up voices or other sensitive information.

Participants also raised questions about where the data was stored, who handled it, and what it could potentially be used for.

> "I feel like I hear a lot about like that we should be worried about surveillance, I think I don't know enough about how the sound is recorded and stored. And what's done with it to know whether that actually is something to be concerned about or not. So as with most things, it probably depends on how it gets used. Not like it's bad, per se. But it could be bad depending on how it's used."

Participants disagreed on whether surveillance or data collection should be a concern. In one focus group, two participants discussed how they actually believed acoustic recordings were less invasive than the data already being collected by the internet, Ring cameras, Amazon, etc. They explained they no longer worried about privacy because their sense of privacy was already relinquished in the digital age. One participant in a separate focus group expressed the same sentiment, and added that he didn't care that his data might be collected for two reasons: first, that he didn't feel he was that interesting and second, that if "me giving up that privacy saves a couple of kids getting from shot… I'll give it up."

Participants also had mixed views on the value of ShotSpotter data. Although several participants noted data collection as a benefit of ShotSpotter, due to its ability to map more gunshot incidents than 911 calls, several other participants suggested that ShotSpotter data would deepen negative stereotypes about marginalized communities. They each described a negative feedback loop in which ShotSpotter is placed in only the neighborhoods deemed to be "dangerous" and then collecting data on just these neighborhoods which then justifies increased police presence without

collecting data on all neighborhoods. Several other participants argued that collecting more data would not create much of a difference either way, because the gunshots were still occurring.

D. Cost and Opportunity Costs

The moderator asked the focus groups directly whether the ShotSpotter pilot was an effective use of public funds.

The four participants (each in a different focus groups) who expressed positive views on the worth of the ShotSpotter pilot did so in response to this direct question. They believed that the cost of the pilot was "worth the experiment." One participant suggested that the city spent money on much less important causes, so she was supportive of it. Five participants were undecided and said that they needed more data before concluding whether it was worth the money.

The majority of participants who spoke about the cost of ShotSpotter expressed negative views, either in response to the direct question about cost or in response to the question about its potential downsides. Generally, those who spoke negatively about the cost suggested that the money would be better spent on other initiatives, including giving it to Durham's HEART Program[9], funding more social services, hiring more officers to address understaffing, or hiring more public health workers.

> "Every dollar spent on [ShotSpotter] will be better spent on other things."

One participant said that that City Council funding ShotSpotter was affirming the idea that policing could

prevent gun violence, with which she disagreed. Many participants shared the perspective that the money used to fund ShotSpotter would be better used in addressing root issues of gun violence. ShotSpotter represented a tool in a broader paradigm of reactionary safety in which some participants fundamentally did not believe in.

> "I love the idea of... addressing some of the root causes of why people are living in such a way that using guns to resolve conflicts is the first option. I don't see how policing, the prison system, addresses the reason why people are firing guns at each other."

Participants identified the root causes of gun violence as job and housing insecurity as well as drug and gang activity. They suggested increasing funding for affordable housing, education, job creation, and harm reduction. This sort of sentiment was one of the most prevalent themes throughout the focus groups.

Not all participants believed the approach had to be one or the other. When asked about ways to reduce violence, one McDougald resident suggested: "Something for these kids to do," also citing that all their playgrounds had been removed. The other resident in the focus group replied, "Something for the kids to do, but most of them are teenagers with guns. Some of them are adults . . . get the adults something to do." They proposed ShotSpotter and funding social services as important to addressing gun violence:

> "All of them and one. Everything. It's a must. We need each and every one of these things."

The Impact of ShotSpotter in Durham

A. Police Activity

1. Observed Impact

The majority of participants did not observe any changes in policing tactics or activity in their neighborhoods during the pilot, explaining that they had perceived it to be the "same as it had always been." Most participants simply said "No" or that they "hadn't noticed a difference" either way. The ones who provided a longer explanation talked more about the unique characteristics of their neighborhood, rather than ShotSpotter. For example, one Southside resident hypothesized that she had not noticed a difference because the majority of violence in her neighborhood was from drive-by shootings, and ShotSpotter is unable to identify gunshots coming from inside a vehicle. A Hayti resident explained that police presence was already ubiquitous, so a change would be hard to identify. Another Hayti resident described one interaction with DPD officers as the same type of interaction they had had before ShotSpotter was implemented:

> "I went to find out what was going on, and just like all the times before ShotSpotter, no one would talk to us. Then one female officer kind of let us know what was going on: 'someone was shot, did you see anything' So the same thing as before."

Not a single resident identified any negative change in police activity or tactics. The four participants who did say that they observed changes described them in a positive light. One participant said that he noticed a change in police tactics when asked about ShotSpotter's benefits:

> "I have noticed a difference in police tactics. When they get an alert, they don't roll out sirens blazing. They kind of lurk about. So, if there are shots, they sort of find themselves in the area. And then if there are more shots, they're real quick to get there. There's probably value to it. I don't know how that value aligns to the cost. I think there probably are benefits – I don't think it's a completely negative thing."

This observation aligns with the observations of two McDougald Terrace residents, who strongly insisted that police officers had been responding to gunshot incidents much quicker since December, and they had been arriving much closer to the scene of the shooting. In response to a question about the prevalence of gun violence in the neighborhood, the two same participants agreed that recently it had been relatively quieter in McDougald Terrace, and that when shootings did occur, police officers responded accurately to the location.

> **Participant 1:** "Since they put the ShotSpotter, the police have been coming right here."

> **Participant 2:** "They've been coming right here!"

Later in the session, in response to a question about their sense of safety, the same participants cited faster police response time.

> **Participant 1:** We could have 9 of us on the phone with them and it would take them 30-40 minutes to get here. But with that ShotSpotter thing… boom.. they're here. Like that was quick!

Participant 2: I feel more safe that they respond to those shots fired. Because they respond to that quicker than the 911 calls.

One Cleveland Holloway resident described a positive interaction with police officers which she believed was facilitated by ShotSpotter. She explained that before December 2022, when she would call in gunshots, she did not expect DPD to follow up with her. However, during the pilot, ShotSpotter registered a gunshot on her property, and a DPD officer showed up to her door in a "very quick" and "professional" manner. After finding a casing at the intersection in front of her house, detectives later followed up, looking for security footage.

These examples where ShotSpotter led to faster response times and more direct communication serve as examples where ShotSpotter enhanced community trust in police officers.

2. Expected Impact

The participants' expected impacts on police activity were markedly more negative than their observed impacts. These comments arose in response to the question about ShotSpotter's potential downsides. In four focus groups, participants conveyed that while they have not yet observed such interactions, ShotSpotter may have the potential to increase high-intensity police interactions in marginalized neighborhoods. For example, six participants explained that police officers might respond to ShotSpotter alerts in an unnecessarily escalated way because they would lack the context or "human element" of the situation. This, participants suggested, could lead to over policing or harmful police interactions when they would otherwise not occur without ShotSpotter. They further explained if ShotSpotter leads to an increase in escalated police responses, then community members not involved with the gunshot situation may still be implicated, simply because they are in the area at the time.

"I think that you can see just from the areas that they chose to roll it out, it's going to bring police to minority neighborhoods more often and quicker. It also sets up a sort of presumption of guilt. If I'm responding to shots fired, then everybody I see is a suspect."

Participants shared multiple positive theorized impacts as well. For example, participants theorized that police response time would be faster, which one participant said was particularly important because the majority of violence came from drive-by shootings, and the officers are "reliant on speed" in those situations. The other participant suggested that faster response time could help victims of gun violence. Some participants theorized that ShotSpotter's data generation could be a helpful tool for police departments. They believed it could help police be more informed about where violence was occurring, increase the percentage of gunshots that are reported instead of relying solely on 911 calls, and generate less biased data. One participant suggested that ShotSpotter data could be used to evaluate the efficacy of other gun violence intervention programs.

B. Rates of Gun Violence

1. Observed Impact

No participants reported that they had observed a change in gun violence directly attributable to ShotSpotter. In response to questions about the amount of gun violence in their neighborhoods (before the topic of ShotSpotter had been introduced), two McDougald Terrace residents mentioned that it had seemed quieter in the prior months, but did not connect that trend to ShotSpotter. One McDougald resident explained that she would not expect ShotSpotter to reduce gun violence; she simply wanted it to improve response times.

> "It can't prevent [shootings] from happening. They can't prevent these people from being looney. No. As long as they got a perfect response to it, I think that's, that's great because ShotSpotter ain't gonna…. it's gonna cost us some money to prevent the shots from being fired."

Similarly, participants from other neighborhoods expressed that gun crime might have changed in the past months, but that any change should be attributed to other factors and not to ShotSpotter's presence.

2. Expected Impact

No participants expected that ShotSpotter would influence gun violence, with the exception of one participant who believed that it might deter people shooting a gun into the air for fun. Two residents in a different focus group argued that it would not deter any kind of gun violence, because people who are perpetrating it are either too reckless to care about ShotSpotter, don't know about ShotSpotter, or have forgotten it is there. Additionally, several participants noted that it would not deter drive-by shootings, because people are aware that ShotSpotter cannot pick up gunshots from inside a vehicle or home.

One Southside resident theorized that the data collection enabled by ShotSpotter may help police better understand where gun violence is happening, but did not think this would ultimately reduce the volume of gun violence:

> "I think it could help in a very narrow way. In that can make reporting shots that have been fired more accurate, but shots are still being fired, like its reactive rather than proactive to decrease violence, and it's not improving anyone's lives, or opportunities or livelihoods. So, I guess, in the sense of data gathering yeah, that's an improvement from 911 calls."

C. Engagement with 911 System

Before asking questions about ShotSpotter, the moderator asked, "in what circumstances would you dial 911?" Participants' answers varied. Three said that they would call the police only if they actually knew someone got shot, but not because they heard gunshots; three said that they would report gunshots that they personally witnessed; three said they would report gunshots they heard; two would not call the police because they believed their other neighbors would get there first; and one said that he would only call if there were a fire or multiple people were having medical emergencies. Two participants reported that long-term residents in their neighborhood didn't call the police under any circumstances. One Cleveland-Holloway resident said,

> "I'd say the people who have been in the neighborhood longer have a "We don't call the police attitude." And then we get the new people who move in and get on the list serv and people are, like, you know, don't call the police. 'We don't call them here.'"

Later, the moderator asked participants whether knowledge of ShotSpotter's presence influenced their tendency to call 911. The majority of respondents expressed that ShotSpotter had no effect on their decision to call 911. Within this group, some explained that they never called the police, with or without

ShotSpotter. Others explained that they would always call to report gunshots, regardless of ShotSpotter.

Two Southside residents in separate sessions observed that since ShotSpotter, their neighborhood WhatsApp and listserv had been less active in communicating about shooting incidents. Before ShotSpotter, neighbors would collaborate to identify where gunshots had occurred. One of the residents said,

> "Since we found out ShotSpotter had started, we're like don't--you hear shots, you go inside. And you just don't call 911. You don't call your neighbors, and you just like trust that it's being taken care of. And so I think I don't know what the cost is. But I feel like there's some sort of cost-- either we're not getting the 911 data that might be useful, or we're not having the community building that might be useful, or the community care that might be useful. There's just sort of a trust that there's this machine dictating to police when they should do what."

Another significant theme that arose in three focus groups was that ShotSpotter relieved the "burden" of calling the police. "Burden," however, meant something different in each context. Several participants said that describing the location of gunshots was very difficult in Durham because the City's hilly environment tended to distort audio. With ShotSpotter, residents did not have to worry about deducing the location of gunshots or mistakenly giving misleading information to the police. One participant said that a benefit of ShotSpotter was that,

> "There are places people feel as if they cannot call the police, and it relieves some of that burden in those instances."

This was supported by another theme that arose in the focus groups, in which several white participants described how their Black neighbors would ask them to call or interact with the police in their place.

Lastly, one participant explained that sometimes he hesitated to call 911 if he knew that he would be facilitating a police interaction with a young Black person:

> "This is just a white guilt thing, I'm sure... so far as ShotSpotter will take that out of my hands and dust off my conscience, just from a very self-interested point of view, I'm liable to support it. But I am sensitive to these downstream effects that leads to over policing and so forth."

Whether to Continue ShotSpotter

As the sessions concluded, participants were prompted to share their views on whether City Council should continue with the ShotSpotter initiative. Out of the 30 participants, 20 provided responses that we categorized as either "Supportive," "Conditionally Supportive," "Opposed," "Conditionally Opposed," or "Unsure."

Two participants were outright "Supportive" of ShotSpotter's continuation, citing their observations of faster police response time. Eight participants provided responses that were categorically "Opposed" to the continuation of ShotSpotter, with concerns rooted in over-policing, increased surveillance, and a belief that the funds allocated might be more effectively used to enhance other gun violence reduction strategies.

"Not a good use....They might find that giving money to social services that would support vulnerable communities would be better."

The other half of the responses were characterized by conditional stances and uncertainty. Five participants were "Conditionally Supportive," expressing support and a desire for more comprehensive data and an extended evaluation period to assess the effectiveness and community impact of ShotSpotter. One person remarked:

"I was supportive of the pilot because it felt like the amount of money it costs to try it out was worth the experiment.... I would like to hear from the police and communities about their experience with it."

Two participants were "Conditionally Opposed," expressing that they could be swayed to support the program if presented with evidence of ShotSpotter's effectiveness and positive impact on the community. Three participants were "Unsure," indicating a need for more information to form a definitive opinion, and they expressed uncertainty around whether there are more effective options. One of the unsure participants expressed:

"It depends. I think, I don't know that it's being used for its full potential. And if it's used to its full potential, then maybe, and if not, it's not that it isn't good. But you know, it's expensive. And I wonder whether there are other things like preventing the gun violence in the first place, that might be a better use of that money."

Conclusion

Conversations with 30 residents of ShotSpotter's three-square mile pilot area revealed nuanced opinions on the role of police officers, the ethics of technology in policing, and the importance of community engagement and transparency in policymaking. Less often did these conversations reveal any observed changes in their neighborhoods after ShotSpotter was implemented. On the positive side, this means that residents generally did not observe negative outcomes that some other cities experienced, such as over-policing. If Durham reconsiders its use of ShotSpotter in the future, City Council members and DPD should consider the perspectives and suggestions of its residents who are most affected by policing and gun violence. Moreover, these focus groups provide key insights about how City Council and DPD should approach other potential pilot projects or changes to policing.

Key considerations

1 Cost and Opportunity Cost: Of primary importance is determining whether the initiative improves the safety or feelings of safety for residents to the extent that it merits the cost. Participants recognized that the City has a finite sum of money to address their neighborhood's most pressing problems and thus tended to frame discussions of ShotSpotter's price tag in terms of opportunity cost: less funding for improvements within the police departments, less funding for preventative measures, and less funding for social services. Thus, in the eyes of the community, the cost is not just the expenditure, but also the opportunity cost of not funding other violence prevention approaches with that funding.

2 Communicate Clearly: City Council and DPD should transparently communicate the goals of the initiative, as well as the metrics being used to evaluate its efficacy. Though most participants understood ShotSpotter's function, few understood what the tool intended to accomplish – whether it aimed to decrease police response time, improve data collection, improve the arrest rate, or decrease gun violence – making it more difficult to assess. If City Council decides to reconsider engaging with ShotSpotter in the future, it should give residents sufficient notice so that they have an opportunity to be heard in the decision- making process. Increased transparency and consideration of data in decision-making could also assuage residents' suspicions of any City Council member's political interests in ShotSpotter.

3 Connect with the Community: Participants, generally, did not feel engaged or informed about the City's decision to implement ShotSpotter. If City Council revisits ShotSpotter, it should proactively engage the community by inviting community members to a hearing and/or community roundtable prior to the hearing when the decision will be made.

As City Council and DPD reflect on the ShotSpotter pilot, they should address the concerns raised in these focus groups. Many of the themes revealed underlying concerns with policing that can be addressed with internal reforms in the police department.

Most importantly, DPD can prioritize improving the relationship between the police and the community. These focus groups revealed that participants value information sharing and when police officers make an effort to know the community on a personal level. Community members are more likely to accept a new technology or intervention when it comes from an institution that they trust to have their neighborhood's best interest in mind.

The City could also consider other interventions to address gun violence that are more preventive, rather than responsive, which aligns with the sentiment of the focus group participants. The City can increase funding for summer and after-school programs to address participants' suggestions to create "[s]omething for the kids to do"; the City can fund "housing first" shelters and invest in public housing to address participants' concerns about unhoused neighbors and drug use; DPD can create engagement teams in high-crime neighborhoods to respond to participants' interest in more community-engaged police; and the City can build more speed bumps and roundabouts to address participants' concerns of drive-by shootings. There is no panacea to gun violence. With or without ShotSpotter, Durham must have a multifaceted and community-informed approach in preventing and responding to gun violence.

Appendix

Interview Guide

Introduction:

Hi, my name is Pilar, I'm a senior at Duke studying public policy, and I'm a summer intern at the Wilson Center for Science and Justice at Duke Law. The Wilson Center works to advance criminal justice reform and civil rights through the application of legal and scientific research.

The Wilson Center is conducting an independent evaluation of Durham's pilot program of ShotSpotter. In this evaluation, the Center is analyzing data from the DPD that examines various outcomes such as police response time, the amount of evidence collected, the number of shooting incidents, and the number of arrests that are made. In addition to the data analysis, an important part of the evaluation is to learn about how community members feel about ShotSpotter. That is the aspect of the evaluation that I am working on and is why I am here today to speak with you. I am not affiliated with the DPD or ShotSpotter.

Consent statement:

Before moving forward, I would like to confirm that you agree to be audio recorded.

We will anonymize your information and will not publish anything that can be tracked back to you. However, given the nature of a group discussion, we cannot guarantee full confidentiality for participation. We encourage all attendees to respect the privacy of fellow attendees, but even still, encourage you to only share information that you would be comfortable sharing outside the group. Is everyone ok with being audio recorded and participating in this discussion?

Do you have any questions for me before we start?

1. **"I'd like to start by asking you some questions about your neighborhood."** (can group some of these) (10 minutes)

   A. What neighborhood do you live in?

   B. For how long have you lived there?

   C. Where did you move from?

   D. What do you like most about your neighborhood?

   E. Do you feel safe in your neighborhood?

   F. How do you feel about gun violence in your neighborhood?

       i. Do you hear gun shots while you are in or around your home?

           1. If so, how often?

       ii. In the past year, how many times are you aware of someone having been shot in your neighborhood?

       iii. Do you consider gun violence to be a problem in your neighborhood?

           1. If so, how concerned are you about it?

       iv. How often do you worry about gun violence in your neighborhood?

       v. Have you considered moving out of your neighborhood as a result of concerns about gun violence?

2. **"Next, I'm going to ask you about how you generally feel about the police who work in your neighborhood."** (do not group these) (10 minutes)

   A. "We'll start with some questions about trust."

       i. Do you trust the police who work in your neighborhood?

       ii. Do you think that the police in your neighborhood have good intentions?

           1. Can you say more about what makes you feel that way?

       iii. Do you think that the police in your neighborhood are concerned about your wellbeing?

           1. Is there anything in particular that has made you feel that way?

       iv. Do you think that the police in your neighborhood are concerned about the wellbeing of your neighbors? And what about your neighborhood as a whole?

   B. "Now I'd like to move to some questions about the effectiveness of the police in your neighborhood."

       i. Do you think that the police in your neighborhood are competent or incompetent?

           1. Can you provide an example?

       ii. Do you think police are fast or slow in response to calls for help?

       iii. As far as you are aware, how often do police make an arrest in connection to a shooting incident?

           1. How often do police not make an arrest in response to a shooting incident?

C. "I also have a few questions about how you engage with the 911 system."

    i. How many times in the past year have you called 911?

    ii. In what situations are you likely to call 911?

    iii. In what situations would you not call 911?

3. **"Now we're going to transition to questions that are more specific to ShotSpotter."** (5 minutes)

A. To your knowledge, what is ShotSpotter and how does it work?

B. How did you learn about ShotSpotter?

C. To what extent were you or organizations in your community engaged in the decision to implement ShotSpotter?

D. Do you think ShotSpotter has any benefits?

    i. If so, what are they?

E. Do you think there are any downsides to ShotSpotter?

    i. If so, what are they?

F. Has having ShotSpotter in your neighborhood influenced your decision to call 911?

    i. If yes, can you please elaborate?

4. **"The next questions are about whether ShotSpotter has changed policing or gun violence in your neighborhood. For the next series of questions, when I say "gun shots fired" that refers to any instance where a gun is fired, regardless of whether someone is hit. When I say "shooting incident" that refers to a situation where someone was hit by a bullet. And ShotSpotter was first launched in your neighborhood on December 15th, 2022, so these questions are asking about the period from December 15th of last year until now."** (10 minutes)

A. Do you think police are responding more quickly to gun shots fired or shooting incidents since ShotSpotter was implemented?

    i. If yes, for both gun shots and shootings or just one type?

B. Do you think police are responding to a higher percentage of gun shots fired or shooting incidents since ShotSpotter was implemented?

    i. If yes, for both gun shots and shootings or just one type?

C. Do you think police are making arrests in a higher percentage of gun shots fired or shooting incidents as a result of ShotSpotter?

    i. If yes, for both gun shots and shootings or just one type?

D. Has gun violence in your neighborhood changed since December 15th, 2022?

    i. If so, in what ways? Is there more or less gun violence since ShotSpotter was implemented?

    ii. Do you think these changes (or lack of changes) are related to the police department's use of ShotSpotter?

E. Have you noticed any change in the frequency that police are in your neighborhood since ShotSpotter was implemented?

   i. If so, can you say more about that?

   ii. And if so, do consider that change to be positive or negative?

5. **"Finally, we will wrap up with some questions about your overall impressions of ShotSpotter and how you would like the city of Durham to move forward."** (5 minutes)

   A. Have you had any interactions with police in your neighborhood since ShotSpotter launched?

      i. If so, can you share what that interaction was like?

   B. Do you want the Durham Police Department to continue using ShotSpotter in your neighborhood?

      i. If so, for how long?

   C. The ShotSpotter pilot program cost the city of Durham $197,500. Do you believe this was an effective use of city funds?

      i. Why or why not?

   D. Aside from ShotSpotter, are there approaches to preventing gun violence that you would like to see implemented in your community?

      i. What kind of role should police have?

6. **"Is there anything we did not cover already that you would like to add or think it is important for us to know?"**

Outreach Efforts & Community Partners

The Wilson Center pursued multiple outreach strategies to recruit participants from across the pilot area. The Center prepared a recruitment message and flyer including a description of the purpose and structure of the project, the list of neighborhoods from which participants were being recruited, the rate of compensation, and a link or QR code to the interest form. These materials were distributed in the following ways:

Community Networks

The Center forwarded the recruitment message to the Cleveland-Holloway and Southside neighborhood Listservs, as well as the NCCU Law Listserv. The Center attempted to contact Listserv administrators in the other pilot neighborhoods, using contacts received from the Durham Neighborhood Improvement Services Department, however, these messages did not receive a response.

Additionally, the Center presented at Partners Against Crime (PAC) meetings in Districts 1, 4, and 5, as well as a resident council meeting at McDougald Terrace, and an all-city PAC meeting to publicize the project and recruit participants.

The Center reached out to 21 Durham community organizations and churches, requesting that they pass recruitment information to their members and/or

suggest community leaders to contact. Staff members at the Community Empowerment Fund, The Pauli Murray Center, and the Duke Office of Community Affairs sent recruitment information to their members. The Wilson Center also forwarded recruitment information in its newsletter.

Social Media

The Wilson Center publicized a flyer describing this project on its Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram accounts. Pilar Kelly contacted eleven Durham community organizations on Instagram and Facebook, and @peoplessolidarityhub, @durhamdowntown, and @sunrisedurham posted the flyer and interest form to their online networks.

On the ground

Because the Center was not able to contact Listservs in Albright, Hayti, East Durham, Golden Belt, Franklin Village, and Wellons Village, these neighborhoods were prioritized when distributing flyers. Flyers included information about the project and a QR code for individuals to sign up, and they were posted at local businesses, (with owner permission), recreation centers, community centers, and parks. Additionally, the researcher walked door-to-door for two hours in these neighborhoods, talking to residents who were outside or leaving flyers in their mailboxes.

News media

On June 28, 2023, CBS 17 published a story about the project and included a link to sign up to participate in the project. https://www.cbs17.com/news/local-news/durham-county-news/duke-law-program-working-to-collect-community-feedback-on-shotspotter/

Additional Focus Group Information

Gun Violence in Pilot Area

When participants were asked about their feeling of safety in their neighborhoods, many differentiated between feeling as if they would be an intentional target of violence versus being hit by a stray bullet as a bystander. The sentiment that violence is interpersonal, context-specific, or a result of personal or gang conflicts was mentioned by 15 interviewees across seven focus groups. Though many interviewees mentioned having witnessed shootings or their aftermath, no participant reported feeling as if they would be the direct target of gun violence. The following quote illustrates a common sentiment held throughout the focus group; that there is a lot of violence, but it usually surrounded intrapersonal conflicts:

> "I've always found the violence within Cleveland-Holloway to be really personal, like interpersonal – men beating women or young people violent towards other young people they know. So there's really not a randomness to it. I've witnessed a lot of violence, but have always felt safe. Kids walk to school and play. Neighbors know who they are. And you know, again, its interpersonal between people who know each other. It's not directed out broader, it's not random, so it's a different awareness. But there's gunshots all the time".

However, just because participants did not feel targeted by violence did not mean they felt safe in their neighborhood. Seven participants across six focus groups referred specifically to being fearful of being stricken by a stray bullet ("bystander concerns") (i.e. a bullet going through a window or being in similar physical

location as a targeted shooting), and six participants across six focus groups reported concerns about raising children in the neighborhood or factoring into their decision to stay in the neighborhood long-term. One Southside resident had a bullet go through his kitchen window three weeks prior to the interview while his wife and two daughters were inside, which prompted a discussion about whether to move.

Race Relations

Race, in the context of distinct experiences with policing and gun violence, emerged as a common theme throughout the focus groups. Some white participants acknowledged that gun violence affected their Black neighbors differently or more intensely than themselves. For example, one Hayti resident felt as if his whiteness kept him and his children safe from what he described as targeted and concentrated gun violence:

> "My kids know what drive by shootings are like, my kids know what CPR on a bleeding out person is, my kids know what it's like to watch somebody resurrect when they got hit with Narcan. My kids are safe. Even seeing those things, even being that close. My kids are safe in our community. But it is their white privilege that keeps them safe… I think we have to tell a clear narrative that economically distressed predominantly black areas are the areas that are being targeted by violence".

More commonly, however, participants described race as a factor in interactions and relationships with DPD. For example, some white participants said that their interactions with the police were generally positive but mentioned that they had observed police officers treating their Black neighbors negatively. Others expressed that their Black neighbors were not comfortable calling the police or went to their white neighbors if they needed to call 911.

One participant shared an anecdote of a positive interaction she had with a police officer responding to a ShotSpotter alert in her backyard. When another participant asked her how the officer would have approached the situation if she had refused him entrance to her backyard, she replied,

> "There was no presumption I was involved. I live in a nice house, I'm a white lady with a large white husband".

Here, the participant implies that the presumption of innocence, and the interaction, might have been different if she and her husband were not white.

Lastly, two participants shared experiences in which DPD officers were outwardly racist to them or others. A McDougald Terrace resident said that an officer called her neighbor a "dirty Black b****" and that they "talk to you like you're dirty rags nowadays". A participant who went to NCCU and lives in the area shared several anecdotes of police officers shouting racial epithets from their cars.

Perception of Policing

The lack of communication was often mentioned in discussions of trust. When participants were asked whether they believed police officers in their neighborhood addressed crime efficiently, they felt like they couldn't know because they were rarely notified when investigations were closed or arrests made.

> "Usually, after we've had a big incident, they just tell us that it's in the investigations unit, we never hear anything back. So I actually have no idea whether any arrests have ever come from any of the reported incidents or any incidents that have happened".

Not only did the level of communication appear to affect residents' trust in police officers' competence, but vice versa: they also cited this lack of trust as a reason for not sharing information with police officers. For example, DPD officers would often encourage community members to call in shots as much as possible, because without the information, they couldn't address it. A Cleveland-Holloway resident shared this anecdote:

> "A long time ago, the Durham police came to a neighborhood meeting and told them to call every time they hear shots, and everyone –70 year olds, 20 year olds- rolled their eyes… They have told us to call it in, and neighbors did for years, and they never did anything about it".

Additionally, when asked about whether police officers seemed concerned with the wellbeing of the neighborhood, one Hayti resident referenced weak communication:

> "Some of the police talk to us and share information, but most of them do not. They complain about citizens not sharing information, but they clam up when we're around".

Thus, residents in many of the pilot areas described weak communication between community members and police officers, and this tied directly to their uncertainty in police officer's ability to address crime and their general perception of police's intentions.

For example, in one focus group, a Cleveland-Holloway resident responded to the question of trust by noting that the lack of neighborhood police meant that new officers were always in charge, blocking the possibility for community members to build trusting relationships with them. Meanwhile, a Southside resident described a different situation in her neighborhood:

> "They are generally concerned with our neighborhood… the police captain comes to our neighborhood meetings. So, we get a lot more positive police interactions because they come spend time with neighborhood association, like at our neighborhood night out in August".

DPD Understaffing

The theme of DPD's short staffing arose in seven distinct focus groups, with eight participants commenting on their perception of the issue. They often brought up the issue of understaffing in conversations about response time and in community trust of police. With the call center being "stretched-thin," they observed that 911 calls might never make it through hold. Some mentioned that 911 calls would receive no response at all because of this understaffing, and that there were even times when civilians were forced to handle gunshot situations without police presence either calls did not go through or the response was not fast enough.

Another theme that emerged was DPD's inability to support community police teams due to this short staffing. One Southside resident who grew up in McDougald Terrace mentioned that the community police teams she grew up with, which enhanced her trust and made policing "less abrasive," were no longer feasible because DPD is short-staffed. Two long-term McDougald residents in a separate group commented on the same topic—that there used to be a community-engaged policing team in the housing project, which contributed to their feeling of safety, but that the engagement team had been disbanded in recent years.

> "Yeah, they took the engagement team away from us, the Chief of Police. I think it was wrong for what she done. I know there's a shortage, you know, overworked, but they should have kept the engagement team for McDougald Terrace".

Later in the session, the two participants revisited the topic.

> **Participant 1:** "When a fight broke out, they knew how to control the situation, knew how to defuse it. And if other police officers didn't work here, they tell them 'We got it.' They tell them how to handle the person and stuff. I've seen it in action."

> **Participant 2:** "I think they took them away because they needed help in other places. So they kind of broke up this team here, because you know, they're underpaid, and short-staffed."

Addressing root causes

Addressing the root causes of gun violence was the most common suggestion for reducing gun violence, emerging in eight focus groups. This opinion often arose in conversations regarding dissatisfaction with ShotSpotter's reactionary, versus preventative, approach.

Rethinking the Role of Policing

In the focus group of two McDougald residents, when the moderator asked whether they felt safe in their neighborhood, the two participants began speaking about a "community engagement team" that used to be active McDougald but was removed because of DPD staffing concerns (*see DPD Understaffing*). They used to be on-site and on duty, and even held events like "lunch in the park." The participants revisited the topic several times throughout the focus group. One participant recalled specific nicknames they called the police officers, like "Top Flight" and "Soul Food." Kids could play outside without having to worry about gunshots. Simply the sight of them, or the knowledge that they were on sight, was enough to deter people from shooting:

> "With the crew here, people don't try to cut up like that because they know they out here. They'll think twice."

Conversations that spoke about community engaged police officers were virtually the only conversation in which participants spoke about police's role as preventative. The McDougald residents suggested that bringing the community engagement team back, in conjunction with ShotSpotter, would be the most ideal intervention to preventing gun violence. This sentiment was also expressed by a Southside resident who argued that money should be invested in "preventative mechanisms" like "having the police engaged with kids and the community," which could then be paired with projects like ShotSpotter.

Gun legislation

Another suggestion that emerged in four focus groups was enacting state and federal policies that reduced the accessibility of guns. For example, one Cleveland-Holloway resident lamented the lack of a North Carolina gun buy-back program. Another participant recalled her upbringing in the West End, in which conflicts were settled with physical fights rather than shootouts. She maintained that a driving force of gun violence was children and young adults easily accessing guns to address their interpersonal conflicts. However, participants did not seem confident in the feasibility of reforming gun laws.

HEART program

In seven focus groups, participants organically mentioned Durham's HEART program as a helpful initiative. HEART, which stands for Holistic Empathetic Assistance Response Teams, is a project originating in the City's Community Safety Department. The program

"works to enhance public safety through community-centered approaches to prevention and intervention as alternatives to policing and the criminal legal system."[10] Mental health clinicians are embedded in the 911 call centers, and unarmed teams respond to non-violent mental health crises. In situations that pose a higher safety risk, HEART teams pair with police officers.

Some participants expressed that HEART had been more transparent with data than ShotSpotter. Additionally, one Hayti resident and one McDougald Terrace resident said that they had observed HEART workers de-escalating situations, with the latter explaining:

> "I've seen it where they step in and tell the police officer, 'No you don't got to treat that person like that'… Because they're going through mental issues, so they take the foot off their neck… and I be like, you know what? I'm glad you're with them. Yeah, because that person could have died."

Eight participants said that they would prefer the money funding ShotSpotter to go to HEART. However, as mentioned in the "addressing root causes" section, not all participants framed it as a one or the other decision. Several participants said that they would feel better about ShotSpotter if police officers had a HEART worker accompany them.

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[5] For example, the pilot area encompasses neighborhoods such as Hayti. Hayti was a prosperous neighborhood until the 1970s, when City Council voted to construct the Durham Freeway, which displaced 4,000 families and 500 businesses. Additionally, individual experiences of mistreatment, hearing about the experiences of loved ones, or accumulated experiences of elders throughout years of racist police practices beginning with Jim Crow and continuing throughout the War on Drugs, can all create a feeling of mistrust towards the police. Addy, S. (n.d.). *Dismantling Hayti - Bull City 15*0. Retrieved March 22, 2023, from **https://www.bullcity150.org/uneven_ground/dismantling_hayti/**. Braga, A. A., Brunson, R. K., & Drakulich, K. M. (2019). Race, place, and effective policing. Annual review of sociology, 45, 535-555. Fagan, J., Geller, A., Davies, G., & West, V. (2010). Street stops and broken windows revisited. In S. White & M. White (Eds.), Race, ethnicity, and policing (pp. 309–348). New York University Press.

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About Us

The Wilson Center for Science and Justice at Duke Law seeks to advance criminal justice reform and equity through science and law. We engage with academics, policy makers, and community stakeholders to translate interdisciplinary research into effective and practical policy. Our work focuses on three key areas: improving the accuracy of the evidence used in criminal cases, promoting fair and equitable outcomes in the criminal legal system, and improving outcomes for persons with mental illness and substance use disorders who encounter, or are at risk for encountering, the criminal legal system. Learn more about the Center at **wcsj.law.duke.edu**.