

So, What's Changed?

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Walking down 38th Street one can still be reminded for a brief moment of the swell of action taken by Minneapolis residents the summer George Floyd was murdered.

The mural hanging painted onto Cup Foods, the spread of rotating fresh flowers dressed all around the intersection, and the roundabout, centered by a metal clenched fist holding

solidarity against the elements. A couple more blocks down from here, and you're just at Dairy Queen.

A vile, malicious second that reverberated across the planet. From police clashes in downtown LA to statues celebrating slave traders in Bristol being torn down by the English citizens denouncing such a structure. For a moment, it felt like something might actually change.

Minneapolis has recently undergone another election cycle. A ballot that offered the city a chance to vote for new city board members, a new mayor, and three separate questions regarding the mayor's powers, rent control, and the police department. Let's focus on the last here—the question about police reform.¹

Hotly contested, tough, a not-very-straight-forward bill to pass, initially even needing a rewording to properly communicate what it meant. Regardless of what text you use, no one was sure what would actually happen if the bill passed. Too many stories of uncertainty, with only some general support for “doing something” about changing our standards of policing. While we could credit a rough year for getting this question on the ballot in the first place, it's that same rough year that saw Minneapolis's violent crime rate increase by 17%.

While I could personally pout that my “ACAB bill” didn't pass, I'd have to acknowledge this question: “Even if it had passed, would anything have changed?”² This wasn't exactly a police reform or defunding bill. It wasn't a specific plan that details how we incorporate an alternative “peace officer,” or a breakdown of how we plan to efficiently fund and hire the program. It was just a sidelining of a large issue—a vague promise that these parallel discussions will most definitely be talked about.

¹ For more on this ballot initiative, see: [https://ballotpedia.org/Minneapolis,_Minnesota,_Question_2,_Replace_Police_Department_with_Department_of_Public_Safety_Initiative_\(November_2021\)](https://ballotpedia.org/Minneapolis,_Minnesota,_Question_2,_Replace_Police_Department_with_Department_of_Public_Safety_Initiative_(November_2021)).

² See Emily Eaton, “ACAB for the average citizen: The radical case for not so radical change,” *The Minnesota Daily*, December 9, 2020, <https://mndaily.com/264436/opinion/eaton-acab-for-the-average-citizen/>.

It's a problem emblematic not just of Minneapolis, or the state (by any means), but the whole country.

We're patching a terminal illness with a band-aid.

Granted, over the past year there has been some measures taken by police departments around the country. About half of United States major police departments, for example, have banned chokeholds and/or carotid holds. House Democrats were also able to pass the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act. However, any further progress of adorning it into law it has been stuck in the Senate for months now, with no sign of getting through.

The George Floyd Justice in Policing Act is only partially in good faith. It covers many basic points like eliminating biased profiling, chokehold bans, reducing the amount of military grade equipment put into police departments, and introduces the mandatory use of body cams. Where it misses its mark, though, is in not attacking the police problem deep enough. The ACLU says it best in an open letter to Congress, "it must perfect the legislation to ensure that the intent of federal lawmakers to address systemic police violence is realized."

Calling for officers to always be held accountable, eliminating the use of military grade weapons and facial recognition technology, and, finally, reconsider how the federal government hands out money to solve these issues. Rather than load the pockets of state police agencies across the country with about a billion dollars, invest into the communities that are seeking systematic change.

Despite George Floyd Square on 38th and Chicago Avenue still standing strong, the conversation around systematic racism and police brutality is not yet front and center. It's a sad sight to see a summer of protest and riot eclipsed by yet another election cycle where politicians shake hands and pat backs—with little to no change.

Another year that ended in rinse-and-repeat voting for the same "safe" moderate mayor who doesn't seem to much care for serious police reform (in fact the opposite), by a populace who will protest, post, and tweet for change, but vote moderate and safely yet again at the ballot, when all that work is supposed to culminate to matter the most.

All of this for a bill that, even if passed, would simply be more lip service to mitigate a non-problem that doesn't even need solving. It speaks to an unengaged, apathic community who'd rather just reminisce about, "that crazy summer." And at the end of the day only look out for their own interests rather than consider trying to fix the problems.

I guess we'll just dust them under the rug again for another year of overpolicing.

**Photography by Jasmin Webber.*