

# Public safety under challenge

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By Terry A. Hurlbut

May 1, 2023



To challenge the very notion of public safety – of an institution called “police” – has become fashionable on the left. Perhaps it always was, but once this attitude was fashionable with almost as many “anarcho-capitalists” as leftists. It was, but for totally different reasons. Anarcho-capitalists feel that those having the most to lose to criminals, should pay the most – or shoulder the entire burden. But leftists have an entirely different motive. They want nothing and no one safe from them. Public safety, to them, is an inherently oppressive concept.

## History of public safety

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Some kind of public safety has been a feature of cities since humans began building cities. But the usual public safety providers were either the military or a private militia. Possibly the first municipal public safety force were a cadre of municipal slaves in ancient Athens. They carried rods, and the city tasked them with crowd control at public functions. Athens called them the *rhabdouchoi* – the rod bearers. Not only has the name stuck, but police officers ever since have carried some kind of rod, as a symbol of authority (like the Roman lictors that served as magisterial escorts) or as a weapon.

Police as we know them today began in Paris in 1667, under King Louis XIV – the Sun King. The French coined the word *police* from the Greek *politeia*, from *polis*, meaning a city. The custom spread over the ensuing decades to other countries in Europe. In 1829 Sir Robert Peel founded the London Metropolitan Police, called “Bobbies” or “Peelers” as puns on his name. Public safety in the United States began with local sheriffs (and federal marshals, especially in the expanding West). As cities grew, they established police departments. The oldest police force in the United States is the Philadelphia police department, dating to 1751.

## Opposition to the concept

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But police have always had opposition wherever established. This opposition usually comes from the notion that the police selectively enforce the law and selectively target certain groups. But opposition tends to decline when people perceive that they have equal opportunity – and opportunity requires an ordered society to be worth having. In general, those who have something worth stealing, and perceive themselves as targets, welcome any public safety measures. But those who do *not* have anything worth stealing, don't care. And perhaps those who want to *do* the stealing, resent the police more than anyone else.

Robin Hood, whether he was a real person or not, remains a symbol of championship of the poor against a sheriff who looked after the interests of the rich at their expense. Jesse James was a real person, who developed a reputation for doing in real life what Robin Hood did only in legend. (Perhaps he did not deserve that reputation; no one ever saw him share his loot with anyone.) Nevertheless, as opportunity arises for more people, people appreciate measures for public safety and regard police as their friends.

## A liberal journalist defends public safety

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Yesterday a liberal journalist, one of the original Twitter Files journalists, defended the concept *public safety* on Twitter. Lee Fang, of The Free Press, is a resident of San Francisco. His colleague Mike Shellenberger, and Twitter owner Elon Musk, have noticed something very wrong with San Francisco recently. It started with the closure of the Whole Foods Market in the Trinity section of the city.

Lee Fang started with this thread, describing the plight of a friend who has suffered eight burglaries:

I have a friend in SF whose home under renovation construction has been burglarized \*eight\* times recently — they steal tools, appliances, washer dryer, etc. Cops literally won't do anything. He has video footage of perps, who work in teams w getaway car. Police shrug it off.

— Lee Fang (@lhfang) April 30, 2023

Absolutely not lol. This person supports public safety and votes accordingly. Yet SF city services are garbage if you live under threat of violence. Basic government services are gutted by far left pressure groups. <https://t.co/xjfSL9BI3R>

— Lee Fang (@lhfang) April 30, 2023

It's his only home you knuckledragging idiot. But yea the far left is so captured by woke NGO billionaire ideology that their preferred solution is privatized security. Let's have a society where public safety is only ensured with private police, sounds wonderful and just. <https://t.co/l5Z8uDXnMZ>

— Lee Fang (@lhfang) [April 30, 2023](#)

Aside from the users whose replies Mr. Fang quoted in his thread, someone else suggested that he move out of San Francisco. That started an interesting debate:

I'm losing patience with these types of stories. People have voted Democrat for years in these places and this is the result. Then expect some sort of sympathy for the hell they created themselves. And if the guy is a conservative, he needs to move.

— James DeRoest (@JamesDeroest) [April 30, 2023](#)

Yup, and vast majority is in Democrat controlled cities, which is where the policing is done, and where police priorities are set.

— James DeRoest (@JamesDeroest) [April 30, 2023](#)

Pretty much yes. Local policing priorities are set locally and not at state. Prosecution priorities are also set locally which is why you have DAs refusing to enforce laws as well.

The state controls their own state trooper department which generally don't get involved in local...

— James DeRoest (@JamesDeroest) [April 30, 2023](#)

Three hours later, Lee Fang dropped these tweets:

Would any of the billionaires funding the dozens of defund the police NGOs and woke media outlets around the country accept no safety for themselves? How about they give up their private security guards the second they call for destroying public safety for the rest of us?

— Lee Fang (@lhfang) [April 30, 2023](#)

Another user, who didn't know Lee Fang's reputation, dropped this thread, thinking to dispute him.

1. This guy is a jerk and an idiot who deals in vibes rather than data. In this thread he blames the left wing for the fact that his friends house is burglarized and police do nothing about it. So here is some data. <https://t.co/sAdQdOcb8V>

— David Menschel (@davidminpdx) [April 30, 2023](#)

3. And contrary to lazy takes by reactionary reporters this is hardly unique to San Francisco. According to the FBI, prior to the 2020 protests American police left about 86% of burglaries unsolved. This data is from the FBI. It took me less than two minutes to find this data. <pic.twitter.com/uyZIsLqHqN>

— David Menschel (@davidminpdx) [April 30, 2023](#)

Mr. Fang replied:

Another data point: you work at a foundation endowed by your ultra wealthy Goldman Sachs executive father, which pays your salary while you engage in class war against adequate public safety for people who lack any level of your privilege.

<https://t.co/ntzrvJ9wLS>

— Lee Fang (@lhfang) [April 30, 2023](#)

These cherry-picked stats David cites are meant to justify the misery and inaction. Every family getting attacked, robbed, shot, etc. deserves safety and responsive police. A just society means high quality healthcare, education, housing \*and\* public safety.

— Lee Fang (@lhfang) [April 30, 2023](#)

See for yourselves what this illustrates. Mr. Fang represents that part of the political left that still understands, and values, public safety. But now an increasing part of the left wants nothing to do with public safety. And why? Because a thief is an irregular wealth redistribution agent. (And a murderer is an irregular population thinner.)

Mr. Fang, like his colleague Mr. Shellenberger, still values public safety – and can't understand those who don't. And they don't understand him, either – they actually think he's a conservative, when he is not. Nor will they understand when everyone else moves out – except the criminals.