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LAPD suffers hiring shortage following a shift in how Angelinos view police

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Loyola Marymount University
University Honors
Program

LAPD suffers hiring shortage following a shift in how Angelinos view police

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements of the University Honors Program
of Loyola Marymount University

by

Nicole L. Norman

May 1, 2023

Abstract: This is a news article written about how the nationwide police shortage following the murder of George Floyd has affected the City of Los Angeles. According to a poll done by Suffolk University and the LA Times, about one third of Angelinos believe that the police are performing poorly. However, those who are younger than 35 are more than twice likely to believe that police are performing poorly. Through this article, I will explore the changes that the LAPD is making in order to keep up with a changing social climate and an upcoming workforce that is not interested in being police officers. It will also explore how the history of the LAPD has led us to this moment in history. It will attempt to make a connection between the drop off of LAPD officers and young Angelinos perception of how they want to be policed.

Key Words: LAPD, police, Los Angeles, shortages, defund, change, community-policing

LAPD suffers hiring shortage following a shift in how Angelinos view police

By Nicole Norman



[A sergeant at the Alhamson Recruit Training Center walks applicants through the steps they can take to be more competitive during their application process | Nicole Norman]

People of all different ages and backgrounds trickled into a conference room at the Alhamson Recruit Training Center to take a test that would be the first step on their journey to hopefully becoming a police officer in Los Angeles.

Captain Robin Petillo, Los Angeles Police Department's new Commanding Officer of the Employment Division, stood at the front of the room full of LAPD hopefuls. Everyone from young girls looking for their first job to older men looking to make a career change was eager to ask her questions about joining the LAPD. Petillo recently took on the position of Commanding Officer of the Employment Division in March, becoming a female leader in a male-dominated field. She assured them that there could be a place for them there if they worked hard for it.

"The LAPD is changing," she said. "We are becoming more accepting ... Here, you can be yourself."

The push for a more diverse police force is more than an innocent sign of the times for Patillo; it is a necessary change.

Faced with the pressures of COVID-19, the recent spotlight on national policing tactics, and local calls for community involvement, police departments nationwide are struggling with [hiring shortages](#). In Los Angeles, the police force has shrunk from just over 10,000 officers in 2019 to 9,013 sworn officers as of April 2023. The shrinking size of the force causes existing officers to work overtime, and the department cannot replace officers as quickly as they are retiring or quitting.

The hiring crisis at the LAPD is a multifaceted problem. A severe drop in hiring in 2020, an increase in quitting and retiring officers who resigned or retired, and an inability to relate to the communities they represent have put the department in a situation where they need to increase the number of officers hired to keep up with the need for policing.

The Los Angeles Police Department plans to hire 780 new officers in the 2022-2023 fiscal year, a sharp increase from their usual 500 hires per year. This ambitious plan requires LAPD to swear in 60 new officers a month. However, reaching that number is not as simple as receiving 60 applications.

"It's not for lack of trying, but it's really a lack of applicants." said Patillo, "You have 1200 applicants. But, to get to 60, they get reduced at each level of the process. We have pretty stringent guidelines."

The LAPD [2022-2023 proposed budget](#) anticipated rehiring up to 200 sworn personnel through the Recall Program, otherwise known as the ["Bounce" Program](#). Its implementation would allow officers who left or retired to return to the LAPD. It would serve as an interim strategy to bolster critical staffing positions. However, Patillo reports that no officers have been hired using the program.

"Its a bit of a long process": The road to becoming LAPD

The LAPD application is a six-month, seven-step process requiring mental and physical toughness.

"It's a bit of a long process, a lot of documentation, a lot of tests, and a lot of hurdles to jump through. But do not give up, we need good people like you," said a sergeant while explaining the process that the room of cadets had now committed themselves to.

It begins with a multiple-choice test. Cadets also must submit a personal history statement as the first step of their background investigation.

Then they must pass Physical Fitness Qualifier (PFQ). Because the PFQ is so essential and grueling, candidates are encouraged to get tips and training from recruitment officers through the Candidate Advancement Program. Candidates will be in this stage until they are in the physical shape to move on.

Next, the LAPD will give a polygraph examination, and they will interview the cadet to confirm the information and assess the candidate's personal accomplishments, skills, and motivations.

The last three steps involve medical and physical evaluations and a deeper dive into the candidate's personal life by interviewing friends and family members.

This lengthy process, which consists of even more tests and evaluations than listed, is not turning out police officers at the rate needed to meet its hiring needs. In 2020, the department only hired 79 officers. Usually, the force hires up to 500 officers a year.

"That put us well behind," said Lt. Aaron McCraney, outgoing Commanding Officer of the Employment Division. "Once you stop hiring at a big organization like this, it takes a while to build it back up and get it going to where it normally would be."

Mayor Karen Bass has called on the LAPD to expedite their hiring process to get officers into the field quicker, but the department needs to avoid risking quantity over quality.

"If we reduce our standards, then we're probably going to see a rise in risk activity," said Patillo.

Quality over quantity is essential for police officers to avoid the problem. Still, when the police department is crunched for time, they will have to find a way to uphold their standard while hiring at a faster rate.

"With this hiring shortage, [the LAPD] really doesn't want to lower their hiring standards just to hire more people coming out of COVID and the 2020 critiques of police ... That's how you get Rodney King and Rampart," said Dr. Max Felker-Kantor, professor of history at Ball State University and author of *Policing in Los Angeles: Race, Resistance, and the Rise of the LAPD*.

Beyond the lengthy recruitment time, the LAPD has also largely dropped in favorability with the age group it must recruit from the most. In March, the [Suffolk University Political Research Center and the L.A. Times reported](#) about one-third said they were performing poorly. However, a closer look at the data reveals Angelenos younger than 35 were more than twice as likely as those 55 and older to say that the LAPD is doing a poor job.

Overall, how would you rate the job the Los Angeles police are doing in the city?

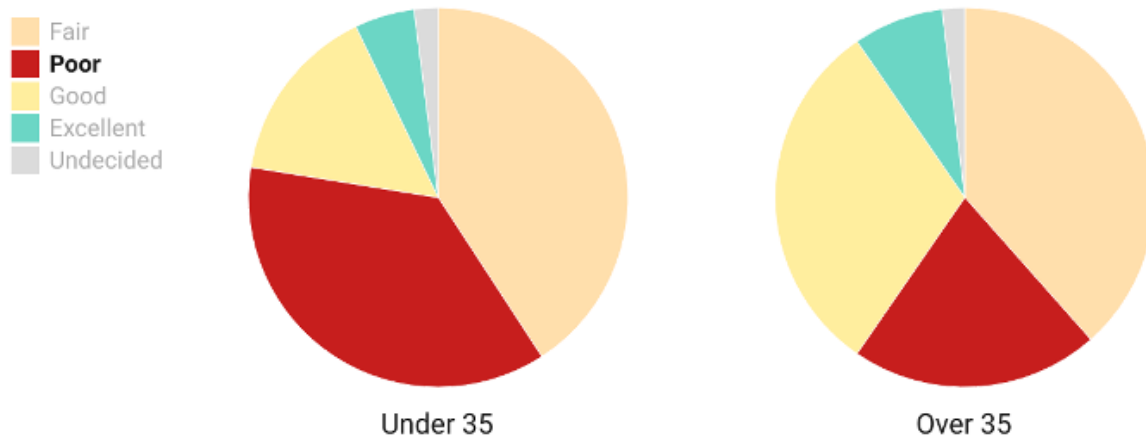


Chart: Nicole Norman • Source: Suffolk University Political Research Center • Created with Datawrapper

"That number is not unique to Los Angeles," said Professor David Paleologos, Director of the Suffolk University Political Research Center. "We polled a bunch of other cities ... and those numbers were pretty bad, but L.A. was one of the worse when it comes to rating the police."

A history of problems in the LAPD

The most recent national uprising against police, sparked by the murder of George Floyd, has caused a rift between the LAPD and the Angelenos they serve. However, LA is no stranger to conflicts between the community and the police. The city is home to the third-largest police force in the United States even despite hiring shortages.

Communities of color have met their legacy of violence with several social uprisings that have sparked change within the past few decades. From the Watts Riots in the 60s

to the Rodney King Riots in the late 90s, to this most recent national uprising, they have faced eras of change and even a [consent decree](#) from the federal government.

Some calls for change have remained consistent, but this push to change how neighborhoods are policed has recently become part of a national conversation.

"It's that move towards defunding and even abolition, which some people were having right after [Rodney King]," noted Felker-Kantor. "Even after Watts, groups would have been pushing in a direction that we might call defunding or abolition, even though they might not have had that language."

Before the 1960's L.A. remained a primarily white city, but during the postwar period, African American and Latino communities reshaped the city's racial geography. Threatening the 'whiteness' of Los Angeles, the LAPD used racial targeting to expand their power and defend the streets.

Then, from the 1960s to the 1990s, lawmakers and police officials in Los Angeles advocated for expanding the funding and staffing of the LAPD, calling it a war on crime. Mayor Tom Bradley faced political pressure to contain crime and grew the police force from about 5,200 to 8,400.

Tensions came to a head in March 1992 when the brutal beating of an unarmed African American man Rodney King by police officers was caught on video, exposing a pattern of discrimination and use of excessive force. The acquittal of these officers sparked a violent six-day riot that would lead to African American and Latino residents putting pressure on elected officials to end racist and abusive police policies. [Approval ratings](#) for the department shrunk to 32%, causing them to make revolutionary changes for the times. They included discipline reports, a database about officers and supervisors, and revised procedures on search and arrest.

Relations with the community improved from these changes. And while other incidents caused public outrage, nothing was quite as significant as the 1992 Riots until the death of George Floyd in 2020. This caused nationwide outrage and a call for the defunding of police.

Soon after, The city cut the LAPD budget by [\\$150 million](#). They also shrunk the department by about 500 officers and cut specialized units to favor patrol and support the newly expanded Community Safety Partnership Program.

However, their operating budget is still \$1.9 billion, representing 16% of L.A.'s overall budget. The move to expand the force after change is also not unique to this moment in history.

"Reform often actually leads to the expansion of policing in ways that we don't often think," said Felker-Kantor.

In the Tom Bradley Era, police expanded their power by adding a SWAT team and other resources.

"In these moments of unrest and reform, the police say, 'We need resources to do XYZ,' and so you get this way that reform can lead to calls for more police. It might be counterintuitive, but I think historically, we see that over and over again," said Felker-Kantor.

However, Felker-Kantor cannot recall another time when the public responded in such a way that caused the police to suffer a hiring shortage, indicating that this shift differs from the rest.

"I think we have to understand that within the context of the prior decade, Black Lives Matter, and the growing kind of broadened consensus around policing — especially among young people — there is probably something there like an attitude shift that probably lead to a lot of people not wanting to become police officers," he said.

The LAPD attempts to change

Now, coming off the back end of large race riots, younger Angelinos are calling for police that looks more like them and treat members of the community with respect. And to the credit of the LAPD, they have considered this feedback.

"We're really trying to place an emphasis on hiring more African Americans, more Asian Americans, more Pacific Islanders, and more women," said Lt. McCraney.

Even though they have taken up this initiative, it hasn't yet changed the public perception of police officers.

"The impression of the community is that the makeup of the department didn't look like the community. So, over the years, we started trying to hire more diverse candidates and people of color. And I think we've succeeded," said Captain Petillo.

[The latest data](#) reveals that the LAPD is about 50% Hispanic and only about 30% white. Black and Asian cops both make up less than 10% each. However, the most significant disparity lies within the gender gap. Males make up 82% of the force and females only make up about 18%.

Petillo, who came to her current position under this demographic, understands how the LAPD can intimidate young women.

"It's not the traditional cultural norm to be in this type of job for a lot of women," she said. "Women are expected to raise the children and then work this crazy schedule in what I guess you could call a nontraditional field. But there's nothing that says that it's only for certain women. This is totally something any woman could do."



[A mural in the Alhamson Recruit Training Center depicts a female police officer. Captain Petillo has made it part of her mission to increase the number of women in the police force. | Nicole Norman]

Beyond their words, the LAPD is also making changes that would actually make it easier for women to enter the force. Petillo noted that the force has been looking into having more part-time work, so someone could work and spend more time at home. They have also introduced lead-free ammunition for people who are breastfeeding and don't want to expose themselves to that on the range.

"It's just things we have never thought of before," said Petillo.

Beyond creating better opportunities for women to enter the force, the LAPD has begun implementing other measures that make the job more appealing to a broader range of people, which experts say would be a step towards solving their hiring shortages.

"I can't say quantifiably that it is the primary reason, but I'm looking at the data and saying, 'Why would anybody want this job?'" said Dr. Paleologos.

To make the job more appealing, the LAPD has requested to be able to hire all new police candidates with a \$15,000 signing bonus. This will also help them stay competitive with other police forces nationwide to appeal to potential applicants and stay competitive with other police forces and fields. Also, to offset the price of living in Los Angeles, they now offer a housing program that grants up to \$1,000 a month for up to 24 months for new hires. McCraney notes that they have recruited 40 officers through this program and plan to hire up to 100.

Officers and even other city employees can also receive a bonus through the Police Officer Referral Incentive Program when people they refer get hired.

They also want to improve things internally to promote a more healthy and encouraging work environment, which Petillo says she did not have as a young officer working her way up in the force.

Captain Petillo also hopes to improve relationships with the community to enhance their image. With a need for younger people to join to keep up with the physical demands that it takes to become a police officer, it is vital to appeal to their age demographic, but Petillo and McCraney argue that violent police encounters have likely impacted the way that younger generations perceive police.

"We're trying to let the community know that we're investing in them. We don't just show up and do our job," Petillo said. "It's a holistic approach. We're trying to look at the whole picture rather than just be an occupying force."

However, L.A. residents younger than 35 have made it clear that they want to see fewer police officers in their community. They are more likely to support the diversion of funds to social services than other cities. However, Patillo points out that the police force actually does have a lot of community initiatives that will be getting some more attention this year.

As an initiative of her first year in office, Mayor Karen Bass plans to expand and improve community policing. Although she disappointed some activists by [supporting Police Chief Michael Moore's reappointment](#), she has specific goals that she expects the department to meet before he steps down from his position. These include mental health training for all officers, a partnership between the LAPD and the new Office of Community Safety, and the reform or removal of the All Civilian Option from the Board of Rights hearings to increase accountability for officer misconduct.

However, it is unclear whether this is enough to effectively improve the relationship with the communities that they have seemingly lost the trust of.

"Police can't engage in community engagement because, by design, policing is anti-black," said Dr. Tabatha L. Jones Jolivet, representative of Black Lives Matter Los Angeles. To some Angelinos and advocates, the only real way to build community is from within it.

Instead of increasing the police force, some community coalitions would rather see things like mental health and health care, affordable housing, and investments in education, transportation, and infrastructure.

66% of Angelinos believe that the LAPD racially profiles Black Angelinos at a higher rate than any other group, according to [a study](#) done by the Center for the Study of Los Angeles. They also reported that 70% of Angelinos would support reallocating parts of the LAPD's budget to social workers, mental healthcare and other social workers. Angelinos would rather see city funds go to organizations independent of the police.

If you had the choice, would you prefer to see more LAPD officers patrolling your neighborhood or would you prefer to see fewer officers?

More Officers Fewer Officers Remain the Same Undecided

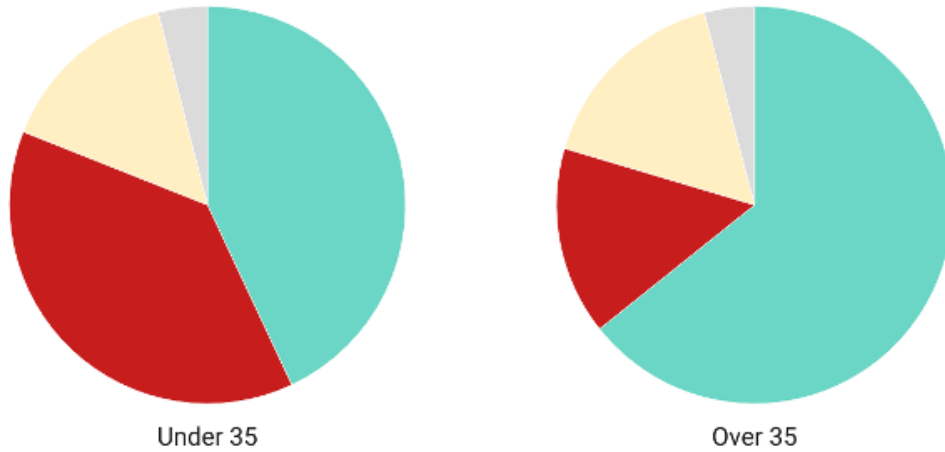


Chart: Nicole Norman • Source: Suffolk University Political Research Center • Created with Datawrapper

"I think it's fantastic to see the decrease in the number of people who are signing on to become police because it is our desire and our goal to abolish policing as we know it and to actually invest in the things that we know actually keep our people safe," said Jolivet.

However, police forces will still be around for the foreseeable future. Research shows that putting time and effort into [upgrades.. need a better word] can effectively improve community relations. Paleologos previously conducted similar research in Newark, New Jersey. Their police department was under a consent decree with the Justice Department since 2016 after an investigation found that the NPD engaged in patterns of excessive force and violations of the First, Fourth and 14th Amendments.



[Via Suffolk University Political Research Center]

The consent decree required that an independent monitor conduct a comprehensive survey of the Newark community's experience and perception of the Newark Police Division and public safety. After polling from Suffolk University revealed that the community was dissatisfied, he and his team created New Arc for Newark, a list of recommendations for their police department based on their poll findings. It included highlighting positive interactions between NPD and citizens, more community interaction, and even social media usage to relate to younger children.

Implementing these changes manifested itself in actual change. "By the time we did the second survey, not one shot was fired by a police officer in that one-year period of time," reported Paleologos.

"Policing is necessary for society"

"You know, there's a lot of people who say we should have less police, they don't want to see us," says Patillo. But for now, budgets include police expansions and the effort to rebuild the department to what it was before the pandemic continues.

To their credit, today's LAPD is not the LAPD of the 1960s, but one thing that has not changed is the character of the candidate they are looking for.

"I think we are looking for candidates that can think about that and understand that policing is necessary for society. There are people that would love to see policing reduced, but what they are leaving out is a lot has to change about society before that happens," says Patillo.

However, young people are rejecting the role of a police officer, and nothing has inherently changed about the position. After 2020, the [LAPD vowed](#) to enhance community neighborhood-based policing, modify enforcement strategies and enhance police training, amongst other things. But the community has not responded to them in a way that has bolstered their hiring efforts.

"Let's look at the positives," said Paleologos. "Most people feel safe where they live ... but there is a lot of work to be done."

Though the changes, like the newer financial benefits, may attract some new applicants, people like Jolivet are unsure whether it will be enough to bring in enough officers to build the LAPD back to 10,000+ officers.

"People want to see a divestment in policing and an investment in the kinds of resources that helps them to flourish as communities," she said. To communities like hers, this does not include police.

To McCraney, what it means to be a police officer has not changed, which is the problem for people like Jones. But McCraney says that even though incidents of violence give the public a sense of corruption, it was never the intended purpose of policing.

"I've been doing this for quite a while. And without fail, when I interview potential candidates, and I ask them, 'Why do you want to be a police officer,'" he said. "And time and time again, what I get back is: 'I want to give back to my community, I want to serve my community, I want to make a difference.' And that has not changed. And so those are the people that we're looking for."

However, the shrinking department and the struggle to rehire indicate that the amount of people who want to serve their community in an LAPD uniform is shrinking.

"The perspective of potential applicants has changed a lot," said Lt. McCraney. "So we just have to adjust."

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