



A Few Thoughts in Anticipation of the Derek Chauvin Verdict

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Whatever happens, much will remain to be done to curb police abuse. But there is still no justification for rioting.

As we await the now-imminent jury verdict in the trial of former police officer Derek Chauvin for killing George Floyd, it is worth remembering that, no matter what the jury decides, much work remains to be done in curbing police abuses. At the same time, even if the jury commits what I would consider a terrible error and acquits Chauvin on all charges, there is no justification for rioting, which will predictably harm innocent people and set back the cause of police reform. I made these points in a series of posts last year, which I think remain relevant today.

1. "How to Curb Police Abuses—and How Not to"

This post outlines several strategies for curbing police abuses, and also explains why rioting is both wrong in itself and likely to be counterproductive. Sadly, public opinion research suggests that last year's riots did indeed lower white support for police reform. And it is undeniable that the rioting harmed large numbers of people. Since I wrote that post, some progress has been made on reforms such as ending qualified immunity. But much remains to be done through both litigation and political action. The "other" Ilya—Shapiro of the Cato Institute—has an excellent article on how many police abuses of constitutional rights can be curbed by cutting back or eliminating the War on Drugs. We differ on some other issues. But the Ilyas are very much of the same mind on this one!

2. "The Problem of Racial Profiling—Why it Matters and What Can be Done About it"

This post summarizes the evidence that racial profiling is a serious problem, and makes the case for various measures to curb it. Anyone who believes that government must be color-blind and abjure racial and ethnic discrimination cannot make an exception for those government officials who carry badges and guns, and have the power to arrest people (and, in extreme cases, kill or severely injure them).

3. "Rights and Wrongs of 'Defunding the Police'"

This post describes some ways in which the role of police in society can be beneficially reduced, but also warns against more radical forms of "defunding the police," particularly in light of extensive social science evidence that having more police on the streets reduces violence and property crime (of which poor minorities are disproportionately victims).

The above combination of views may (for different reasons) annoy both some conservatives and some on the left. But I nonetheless hope that a wide range of people might eventually agree that we need to hold police accountable for abuses, curb racial discrimination, and also ensure that police can protect people against violence and theft.

UPDATE: Chauvin was convicted on all three counts.

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