

Good morning. Derek Chauvin, convicted of second-degree murder, is the exception of exceptions.

By [David Leonhardt](#)

A Rare Conviction: **One in 2,000**



Reactions to the guilty verdict at George Floyd Square in Minneapolis. Victor J. Blue for The New York Times

The murder conviction of a police officer is an exceedingly rare event.

There have been [only seven](#) murder convictions of officers for fatal police shootings since 2005, according to Philip Stinson of Bowling Green State University. That suggests the chances of a killing by the police leading to a murder conviction are about one in 2,000.

Yet a jury in Minneapolis yesterday [convicted Derek Chauvin of second-degree murder](#) (as well as two other charges) for killing George Floyd last May. A typical sentence for that

felony in Minneapolis is [12½ years in prison](#), although prosecutors have asked for more and the maximum is 40 years. A judge [will sentence](#) Chauvin in about eight weeks.

Floyd's relatives said they felt relieved by the verdict. "I finally have the opportunity to hopefully get some sleep," Philonise Floyd, George's brother, said.

Chauvin's conviction does not automatically signal a new era of police accountability. The Floyd case was the exception of all exceptions. A [video](#), watched around the world, showed Chauvin pressing his knee onto Floyd for more than nine minutes. That footage led to weeks of protests that were among the largest in U.S. history. And at the trial, the so-called blue wall of silence — that is, many officers' willingness to protect colleagues, regardless of their misbehavior — [crumbled](#). "For so many, it feels like it took all of that for the judicial system to deliver just basic accountability," President Biden [said late yesterday](#).

Most of those factors will not apply to future police killings. Those cases will instead be more likely to resemble the deaths of Michael Brown, Philando Castile, Eric Garner, Freddie Gray, Daniel Prude, Tamir Rice, Breonna Taylor and hundreds of other cases [that have not lead to a murder or manslaughter conviction](#).



Still, the Chauvin trial is not guaranteed to be simply a one-off event, either. Some of the same factors that make it distinct could also cause it to have a wider impact. Before Floyd's death, it was hard to think of a signature trial of an American police officer, one that received sustained national attention, as the trial of a celebrity might.

This trial, of course, did receive such attention. Television networks halted their normal coverage yesterday to broadcast the verdict, and the president of the United States organized his schedule around it.

That attention has made it clear that a police officer *can* be charged with murder and convicted of it. It's an idea that will linger in the minds of prosecutors and future jurors. Perhaps most important, it may affect the thinking of other officers, when they find themselves considering whether to use physical force when it is not necessary.

Commentary roundup

- [Barack Obama](#): “True justice requires that we come to terms with the fact that Black Americans are treated differently, every day. ... And it requires us to do the sometimes thankless, often difficult, but always necessary work of making the America we know more like the America we believe in.”
- [Rosa Brooks](#), in Politico: “While the national media understandably puts a spotlight on Chauvin, we should not forget that three other Minneapolis police officers were also on the scene that day last May: Officers Tou Thao, Thomas Lane and J. Alexander Kueng. Their sheer passivity was, in some ways, more stunning than Chauvin’s casual cruelty.”
- [Quin Hillyer](#) of The Washington Examiner: “The judicial system worked. It usually does. It won’t bring George Floyd back, or eliminate all bad policing — but police are now on notice.”
- [Michele Norris](#): “Can we all sing a praise song for Darnella Frazier who had the presence of mind to film that video that made such a difference.”
- Many police shootings are justified, [German Lopez](#) of Vox has written. But Stinson, the Bowling Green professor of criminal justice, told Lopez that the number of officers charged with wrongdoing “seems extremely low.”
- Rodney Floyd, George Floyd’s younger brother, called for the passage of the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act, which would make it easier to prosecute police officers for misconduct. The House has passed it, and Biden favors it.
- In Times Opinion, [Esau McCaulley](#) writes about the verdict.