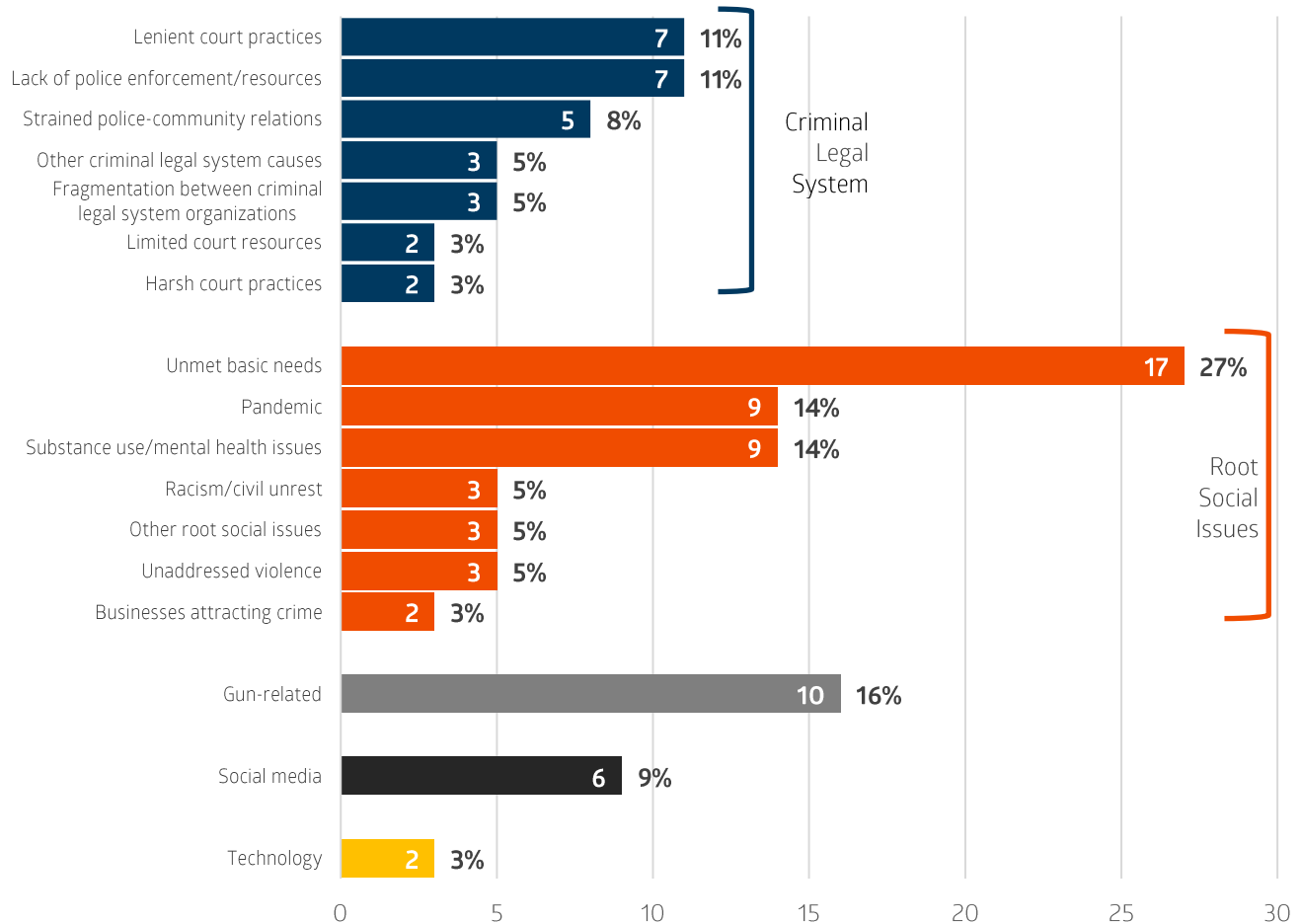


MEDIA NARRATIVES ON INCREASING VIOLENCE IN MECKLENBURG COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA

The media plays a significant role in shaping how people think about crime, including its nature, its causes, and potential solutions. To understand how the media frames violence, we examined five years of coverage (2017 – 2021) on increasing rates of violence in *The Charlotte Observer* and *Charlotte Post*. For each of the 25 articles that covered this issue, we identified the types of causes (Figure 1) and solutions (Figure 2) that were discussed.¹ **We found that root social issues were portrayed as primarily responsible for rising rates of violence, but solutions were most likely to rely on police. Despite the significance of gun violence in the region, discussions of firearm-related causes and solutions were relatively rare.** The emphasis on criminal legal system responses may reflect that many short-term evidence-based solutions to violence rely, at least in part, on law enforcement. Still, media coverage shapes public views on the factors responsible for rising violent crime rates, who is responsible for addressing this issue, and appropriate strategies for combatting violence.

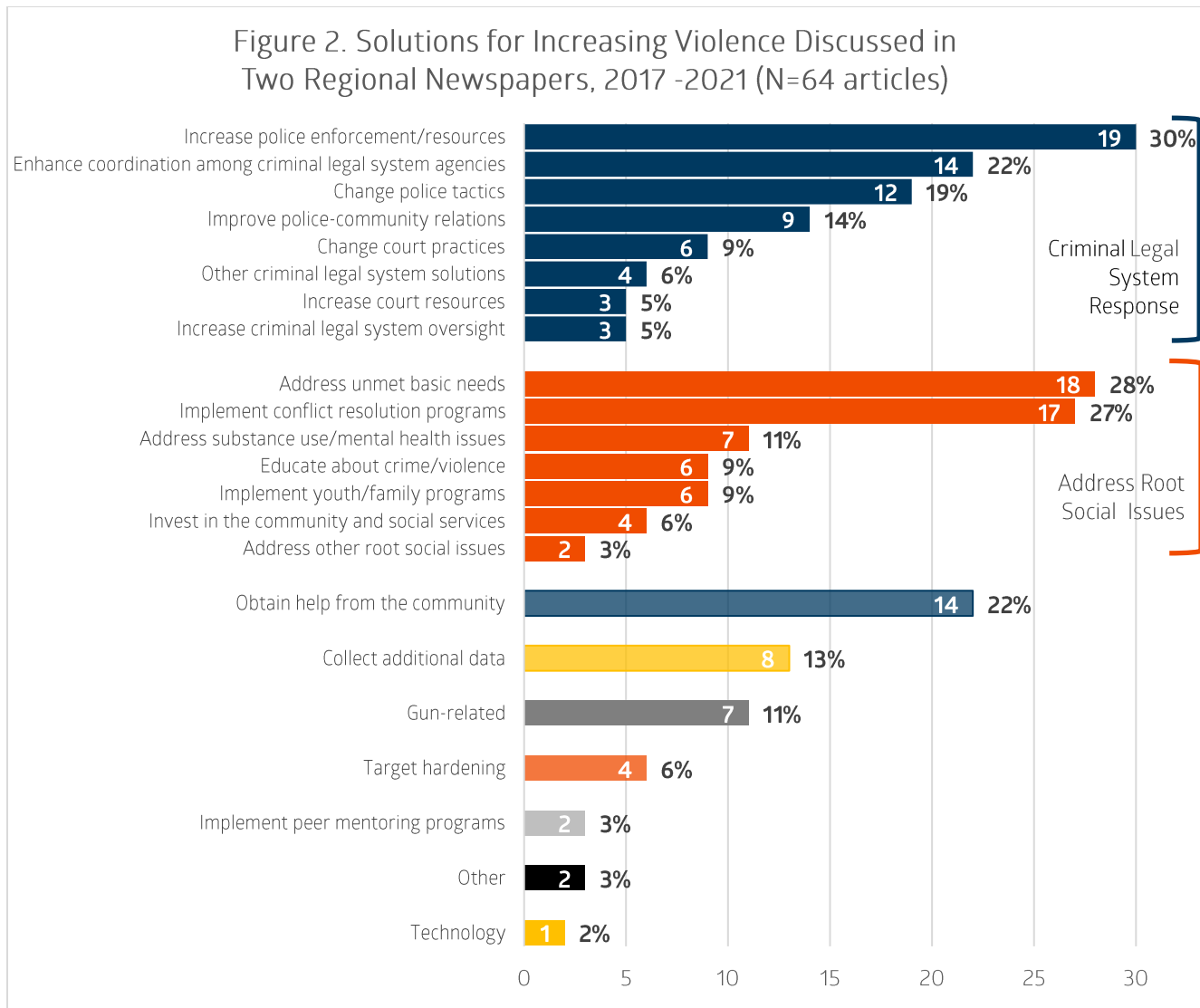
Causes of increasing violence. In half the articles, violence was attributed to root social causes. Most common were discussions of people’s basic needs going unmet due to conditions such as poverty/inequality, housing issues,

Figure 1. Reported Causes of Increasing Rates of Violence in Two Regional Newspapers, 2017 -2021 (N=64 articles)



unemployment, and lack of education (Figure 1). Criminal legal system issues were common, but less prevalent, and were frequently linked to issues with the courts and lack of police enforcement/resources. Other causes identified as contributing to violence included gun-related, social media, and technology.

Solutions. Although the discussions of the factors driving rising violence skewed more heavily toward root social causes, solutions leaned towards those involving the criminal legal system, especially increasing police resources/enforcement and improving coordination (Figure 2). Solutions to address root social issues were slightly less common and focused on helping people get their basic needs met and conflict resolution programs. Other less frequent solutions were obtaining help from the community, collecting data, gun-related, and target hardening.



ⁱ “Other” criminal legal system (CLS) causes included lack of evidence, racism, and limited CLS oversight. “Other” root causes included bad laws, limited nonprofit funding, and raising the age for charging adults. “Other” CLS solutions included a youth academy, forfeiture filings, re-entry services, and getting tough on problem landlords. “Other” root cause solutions included changing local culture, hiring bilingual advocates, and identifying high risk individuals. The “other” category specified better coordination between community programs and partnerships, and resident/neighborhood patrols.