

Black Lives Matter co-founder pushes back on Democrats' criticism of 'defund the police'

Alicia Garza emphasized the role that Black activists played in securing Joe Biden's win.

By **Maya King**

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Black Lives Matter co-founder and principal of the Black Futures Lab Alicia Garza rebuked Democrats' attacks on the push to "defund the police." Their dismissal of the slogan, she said, is an insult to activists who helped secure Joe Biden's victory.

Her comments come in the wake of a reckoning among House Democrats, who insist the movement's calls to "defund the police" contributed to down-ballot losses that slimmed Democrats' majority in the House of Representatives. In a Dec. 1 interview, former president Barack Obama criticized the slogan, calling it "snappy," arguing it could alienate those who take the phrase at face value.

"This movement, which really helped to push [Biden's] campaign over the finish line, was used as a political football all throughout this election cycle and that was true in 2016 as well," Garza said in an interview for POLITICO's Women Rule Capstone event. "There's a lot of valuable airspace that was used to be condescending to the very people who have opened the imagination of what this country can be — and how we can get closer to the promise that this country has offered to so many."

Following a summer of protests against police violence and systemic racism, activists with the Black Lives Matter Global Network and Movement for Black Lives organized several national campaigns to mobilize millions of Black voters. Their efforts bore fruit in Georgia, which flipped blue for the first time in 30 years, as well as in the key "Blue Wall" states of Michigan, Wisconsin and Pennsylvania, where historic turnout among Black voters helped pushed Biden and Kamala Harris over the top.

Garza said she wants Congress and the Biden-Harris administration to make policy changes addressing police brutality and police accountability. She endorsed the The BREATHE Act, a four-part legislative proposal drafted by Black Lives Matter activists, which calls for divestment from law enforcement agencies and investment in communities of color.

She also emphasized the importance of diversity in the Biden/Harris administration. It's "more than unfortunate," Garza said, that women, people of color, the disabled and members of the LGBTQ community have been underrepresented in political spheres.

"It is their experiences that help us shape what the best solutions are," Garza said. "It's really a missed opportunity for this administration to not be looking at this in

that way. And it's a missed opportunity to really mark a concrete shift from what we're coming out of with the Trump administration."

Garza, who as principal of the Black Futures Lab polls Black political behavior, said Democrats could do a better job of engaging their base — overwhelmingly voters of color — by addressing the issues they care about. Black Lives Matter, she said, "is not only changing conversations but it's changing laws."

"There are not enough of us looking at how we legislate — how we make the rules, how we shape the rules, how we change the rules of not just policy but of our society and our culture," Garza explained. "And how we do so in a way that doesn't just rely on symbols but relies on substance."