

PUTTING AN END TO POLICE BRUTALITY: DEMILITARISING THE POLICE AND DIVERSIFYING PUBLIC SAFETY

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11th November, 2022



A photograph of Police Officers violently attacking protesters of the Black Lives Matter Movement in 2020. It serves as just one minute example of the enormous issue of Police Brutality in the USA. (Bassim, 2020)

The Black Lives Matter movement in the past two years has highlighted the issue of police brutality in the USA and its disproportionately high impacts on minority groups in the country. Despite the recent nature of this movement, this has been an issue devastating the USA for decades. In 2013, it was recorded by the Mapping Violence Organisation that the police killed 1,087 people. Despite the many social justice movements and 'reforms' that have been undergone by police departments across the USA, the statistics have not improved. In 2021 alone, it was recorded that the police killed 1,149 people in the USA. This brief seeks to identify the necessity of demilitarising the police in the United States and reallocating funding and resources to well-researched efforts that will more effectively provide sustainable protection and security within communities.

AN EPIDEMIC OF STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE: THE ISSUE OF POLICE BRUTALITY AND RACISM

As a globally powerful and modernised country, the prevalence of Police Brutality in the USA is a significant failure of the State and an injustice to the American people. This is especially true when the historical context of policing is explored. The emergence of policing came about during the era of the Trans Atlantic Slave Trade in which black slaves were subdued using various inhumane methods by white men with 'policing' responsibilities (Iheme, 2021).

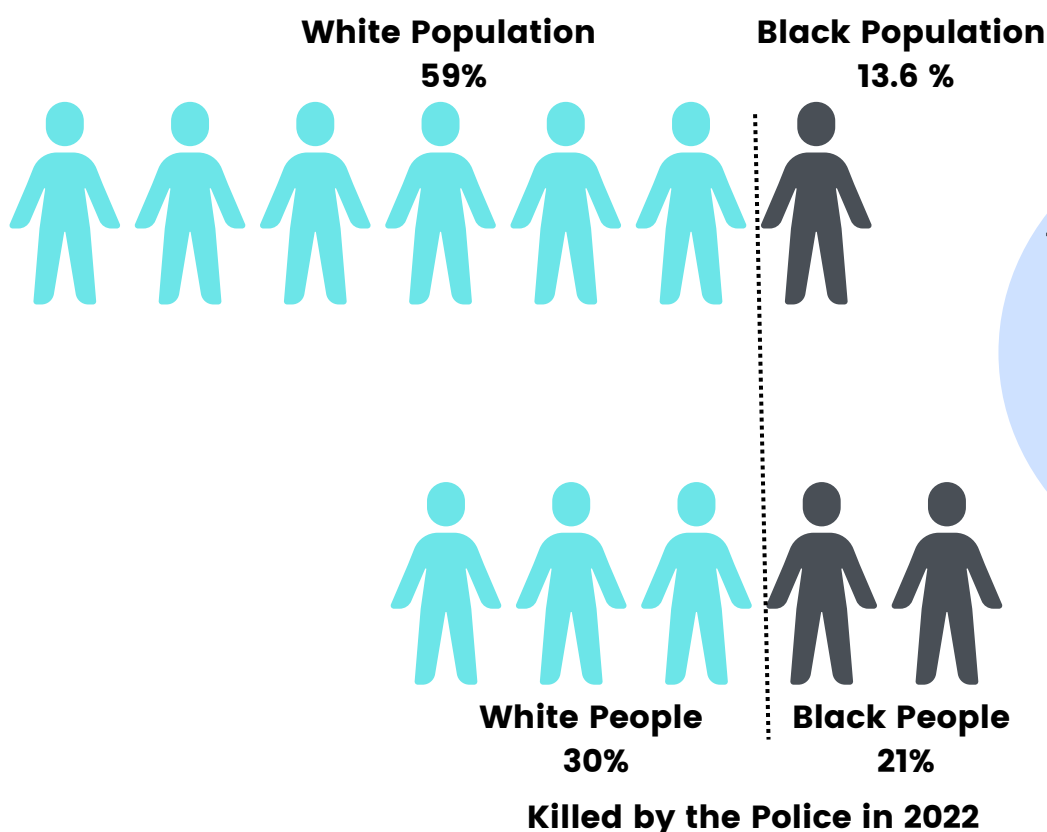
As a nation that hopes to move pass its racist past, it is critical that the structures that allow for the unnecessary abuse of particularly Black and Latino communities evolve in a more sustainable and equitable way.

This issue is not just merely a fleeting headline. The tragic events that led to the death of posthumously well-known names such as George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and Trayvon Martin at the hands of the police are not isolated events.

How Many People Are Killed by the Police in the USA Each Year?

Statistics on police killings are not officially published by the State. Independent organisations such as the [Mapping Violence Organisation](#) seek to fill this void with useful information and data on the issue. The accompanying infographics uses information from the Mapping Violence Database and the United States Government's Census.

The percentage of black people being killed by the police (**21%**) is significantly higher than the percentage of black people living in America at only **13.6%**



These Statistics highlight the nature of racism and inequality existent in the police force as Black people are disproportionately more affected by Police Brutality than white people.

A FAILING SYSTEM

Police Militarisation

Law Enforcement has increasingly seen federal funding providing them with military equipment that is unnecessary for the day-to-day execution of policing. The excessive arming of the police increases the potential of civilian interactions to dangerously escalate and encourages an unhealthy and ineffective antagonistic relationship between police officers and civilians. (American Civil Liberties Union ACLU, 2017)

An official report by the ACLU also found that Special Weapons and Statistics Teams (SWAT) are being deployed unnecessarily for lower level activities such as drug raids, when they are only supposed to be deployed for extreme emergency events. The inadvertent encouragement of forcible intervention by militarising the police is coupled by the structural failures of the police system.

The argument that these exertions of unlawful force by the police are simply the result of a 'few bad eggs' in the police force is a negligent dismissal of the structural flaws within the USA's police force that allow for these unfortunate events to occur.

The actions of the police have proven that they are largely incapable of effectively de-escalating high tension interactions, handling people with mental disabilities and assessing the necessity of lawful force.

In fact, the structural failures of the USA's police system have outlined by several organisations, as it has been found that there is not a single state in USA that is in compliance with International Humanitarian law. The existence of such blatantly low standards and a lack of accountability and legal compliance within law enforcement is an issue that can not be overlooked as it only perpetuates the issue of Police Brutality.

According to a report by Amnesty International in 2020,



“All 50 states and Washington DC fail to comply with international law and standards on the use of lethal force by law enforcement officers;



Nine states and Washington DC currently have no laws on use of lethal force by law enforcement officers; and



Thirteen states have laws that do not even comply with the lower standards set by US constitutional law on use of lethal force by law enforcement officers.”

POLICE REFORM IS NOT ENOUGH

In response to the backlash that the government has received as a result of protests of Police Brutality, several attempts to 'reform' the police have been made. Reformation has included banning certain restrictive actions like chokeholds, providing de-escalation training for police officers and banning certain violent actions like shooting at moving vehicles. However, these efforts are not significant enough to enact meaningful change in the police system and the minority communities that are affected the most by police brutality.



Procedural Justice does not equal Substantive Justice

A major feature of the Police Reform attempts has been Procedural Reform. This has consisted of police training in implicit bias and de-escalation methods and increasing policing standards and regulations to increase the legitimacy of Law enforcement. The effectiveness of this approach is hampered by the misalignment of the police to deal with certain social issues that would be more effectively tackled using other methods such as increased Education, Housing and mental health support. This is where the necessity of Substantive Justice is encompassed, as the nature in which the laws of policing are executed should not be the only target of reform. Instead, a reformation of the laws itself is necessary, to determine whether they are actually effective in their duties to protect citizens.

80% of arrests and prosecutions concern petty incidents and are linked to poverty and mental illness (Ruben, 2020). Regardless of the attempts to make the Police Force more procedurally adept, given the nature of militarisation existent, the police are incapable of effectively handling these petty incidents in a non-violent manner.

According to Brandon P. Ruben, Assistant Public Defender for the Maryland Office of the Public Defender in Prince George's County:

"The job of police is to forcibly intervene, but forcible intervention is unnecessary in the majority of cases to which police respond. In other words, police officers—no matter how accountable or well-meaning—are simply not the appropriate public safety personnel to assist the majority of citizens they serve."

MOVING FORWARD: DEMILITARISATION AND DIVERSIFYING PUBLIC SAFETY

1. Demilitarisation of the Police

- Demilitarisation of the Police Force will primarily include reducing certain amounts of funding that was being used to source military equipment that is unnecessary for regular policing activities. Through this measure, the possibility of unnecessary police violence is reduced.

In turn, these funds that will be removed from the State Budget for the police can then be reallocated and invested into Diversifying Public Safety.

Specifications of Diversifying Public Safety

To diversify public safety is to expand the possible institutions that can contribute to safety within communities, rather than solely relying on the police. These institutions will be more equipped and educated on specific social services and will be able not only to deter crime, but reduce the cyclical cycles within communities that contribute to crime rates.

This can be achieved in these proposed ways:

2. Implementation of Public Safety Practitioners

Public Safety Practitioners will be individuals specifically trained and educated on Social Services, Counselling and Mental Health. As 80% of crimes are petty incidents related to poverty and mental issues, these individuals will be more effective in handling these situations in a non-violent and constructive manner.

Through the implementation of this program, there will be:

- A significant reduction in petty caseloads that typically clog up the judicial system
- Reduction in potentially violent Police-Citizen interactions
- An increase in social well-being, especially in minority communities.

3. Increased Investment in Education

There is empirical data that proves that states with high investment in Education typically have lower crime rates and greater public safety, and resultantly minority communities typically have low investment in education and consequently higher crime rates. (Criminal Justice, 2019).

In order to bridge the gap between the White community and the Black and Latino Community, reallocating funding from federal police institutions to Education in these communities will lower crime rates and more effectively deter crime than the police can alone. This will remove the deficit of Substantive Justice within the Police System.



SOURCES

The following resources can be used to find more extensive information about the points described within this brief.

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