

# Policing America

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## The State of Policing in America

American policing has never been more controversial than it is in 2021. In 2020, with the world in the midst of a global pandemic that disrupted daily life and shocked economies around the world, repeated incidents involving the controversial police treatment of African Americans gave new impetus to the Black Lives Matter movement, which emerged in 2014 to protest racial bias in policing. By the end of the year, many municipalities were considering dramatic changes to the way that tax revenues are allocated, reducing budgets for police departments and expanding funding for alternatives to policing. The national “Defund the Police” movement had begun to gain steam and, for the first time in American history, a majority of Americans agreed that police engaged in discriminatory violence targeting minority Americans disproportionately. Polling organizations found that, across America, faith and trust in police had fallen. This, coupled with budgetary problems related to the COVID-19 pandemic, placed police departments in a precarious position, with many facing potential funding and personnel shortages.<sup>1</sup>

Across the nation, there was widespread disagreement about the state of policing. Donald Trump and many of his allies alleged that calls for reform had been overstated and even suggested that the rise of militant leftist organizations was connected to this controversy, a claim that has been disproven. Many Americans likewise embraced the idea that police were being unfairly criticized, and there were counter movements to express support for police. Thanks to the political rhetoric and divisiveness that characterized American political life in 2020, the debate became increasingly hyperbolic. However, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that calls for police reform are justified. The question is, can police and activists work together to find a path to reform that addresses the criticisms of the public without sacrificing the welfare of police?

## A Tough Job

To be certain, working in a police department can be a difficult and demanding job. Police are called upon to intercede in conflicts and thus are sometimes asked to place themselves in harm’s way. Even when not confronting danger directly, police frequently face workplace pressure and stress and, because they are charged with enforcing laws that are frequently unpopular, they are more likely than persons in many other professions to encounter hostility from citizens. The stress of police life is one of the reasons that police suffer from a higher rate of burnout than those in many other fields, and early retirement is also more common.<sup>2</sup>

Each day in America police officers effectively help citizens with a wide variety of problems. From handling domestic disturbances to investigating crimes, there are thousands of earnest police officers and administrators who put forth an honest effort to help those in need and endeavor to live up to the oaths that police take, to serve the public trust. Further, being a police officer in America is a task that has become more difficult over time. Police in 2020 faced shrinking budgets, problems attracting new officers and trained specialists, and increasing danger on the job not because of rising crime rates but because their duties brought the risk of exposure to COVID-19. Meanwhile, widely circulated instances of police misconduct brought entire departments, including officers who attempted to perform their duties fairly, under increasing scrutiny, exposing them to vehement anger from the public. There has perhaps never been a more stressful time to be a police officer. However, the fact that there are “good cops” trying to perform well in their jobs in no way delegitimizes the very real problems within the policing system.

## **The Structural Problems**

The essential argument among those calling for reform is that police departments have not done enough to combat racial prejudice, to punish officer misconduct, or to prevent officers from using excessive and unnecessary force. Further, critics allege that police departments actively discourage officers and staff from reporting misconduct and, in many cases, shield members of police departments accused of misconduct from punishment or scrutiny. The reform movement is not about targeting police but about instigating significant changes in the structure and administration of policing that can address these long-standing problems.

Contrary to popular belief, racial prejudice among police and the misuse of force is not primarily a matter of individual bad actors engaging in misconduct. It is a signifier of a deeper problem. Research indicates that prejudicial treatment and the excessive use of force are the result of structural prejudices that have been incorporated into police culture. Over the decades, police have become increasingly militaristic, in part because of political influence shaped by misconceptions about the relationship between crime, race, and economic class. Violent crime rates in America have been falling since the 1960s, and yet violent interactions between police and citizens have increased over this same period.<sup>3</sup> Over the decades, police have adopted increasingly militant tactics even as violent crime has plummeted. The primary reason for this is political. For centuries, politicians in America have utilized the fear of crime to gain support. By threatening an increasing risk of violence and crime, even if the threat is not realistic, politicians attempt to frighten citizens into giving their support by promising to “clean up” society. Politicians in this vein often offer solutions that involve increasingly punitive “crime fighting” laws and policies, and among these has been the incorporation of military-style equipment (firearms, protective gear, the use of tear gas) and militant tactics into domestic police departments. The American “SWAT Team” is essentially a domestic security unit that was modeled after military strike teams.

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## The Police Force



By Rickmouser45, via Wikimedia.

A mural in honor of George Floyd in Portland, Oregon. Floyd's death at the hands of police sparked nationwide protests.

# Understanding Police Brutality

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Police brutality and the use of excessive force is one of the most controversial issues in America, and with good reason. Police are granted authority, through municipal, regional, state, and federal law, to curtail the civil liberties of citizens and to utilize force and even violence to uphold the law. Citizens in democratic societies place their faith in the state and its agents, and when these individuals abuse their authority, it is a violation of this trust and of democracy itself, which depends on mutual trust between the citizenry and the state.

The proliferation of social media and private digital technologies has greatly changed the debate over police misconduct. Citizens utilizing digital cameras have documented and distributed evidence of police misconduct, changing the debate over police reform. In addition, research and analysis stretching back for decades has shown, without question, that African Americans and minority Americans are more likely to be subjected to abuse by police officers. The combination of increased documentation and research indicating widespread racial bias among police has made the issue of police reform one of the most controversial political issues as America enters the 2020s.

## Bad Apples or a Rotten Tree

Each year, around 1,000 American civilians are killed by police. Data indicates that as many as 2,000 more are shot by police but do not die from those injuries. Thousands more are injured each year in incidents not involving a gun.<sup>1</sup> On the surface, these statistics mean very little, because evaluating the use of force by police must take into account whether that force was justified or necessary. Police are charged with intervening in dangerous situations and, in some cases, with confronting potentially dangerous individuals. For this reason, police are authorized to utilize force (even lethal force) when required. Thus, the fact that police shoot more than 3,000 Americans each year does not, in itself, indicate that they are engaging in misconduct. What must be ascertained is whether the use of force by police is justified and is being handled in a fair manner.

One of the data points that raises concern among public safety advocates is that the use of force by police is far more common than the use of force by citizens against police. Each year in America, around forty to fifty officers are shot in the line of duty, while police shoot more than 3,000 people. This means that it is at least sixty times more likely for a police officer to shoot a civilian than for a civilian to shoot a police officer.<sup>2</sup> Again, this statistic does not independently indicate a high level of police misconduct, because it is impossible to ascertain whether this level of police violence can be justified. However, there is sufficient data to suggest that police in

the United States have a tendency to utilize confrontational and potentially violent methods excessively.

Interestingly, data from around the world suggests that it is not entirely necessary to utilize force to the extent that U.S. police officers do. Studies show, for instance, that U.S. officers kill more suspects in a single year than officers in the United Kingdom do in more than a decade. While one might argue that the United States has more crime or more dangerous criminals than the United Kingdom, this is not the case. UK crime rates are similar to those in the United States, and UK police appear to be as, if not more, effective as U.S. police in preventing crime and apprehending criminals.<sup>3</sup> Different policing strategies are not the only difference between the two nations, however. The United Kingdom has far more stringent laws on gun ownership, and research indicates that higher levels of gun ownership are equated with higher levels of violent crime.

Those who argue that U.S. police are always or very often justified in using force must also contend with decades of research suggesting that police in the United States are more likely to use force when confronting African American or minority suspects than when confronting white suspects suspected of the same crimes. Though many Americans do not believe that racial bias is prevalent in U.S. policing, there are many independent studies going back to the 1970s that collectively prove that African Americans are more likely to be stopped, investigated, arrested, imprisoned, subjected to force, or killed by police.<sup>4</sup> A 2018 study conducted in Chicago, for instance, indicates that Chicago police were fourteen times more likely to use force when engaging an African American citizen than a white citizen.<sup>5</sup> Studies indicate that 1 out of every 1,000 black men will be killed by police, making police violence the sixth-highest cause of death for black males in America.<sup>6</sup> Some have argued that black men are more likely to be involved in crime, but this is not the case. White Americans commit more crimes, in every category of crime, than African Americans. The perception of high rates of criminality among African American populations is an artifact of a long-standing pattern in which police target predominantly African American communities.

Studies indicate that white officers are more likely than minority officers to use force, including lethal force, and that white officers are more likely to use force against African American suspects as opposed to white suspects.<sup>7</sup> Statistics in this vein would seem to indicate that the use of excessive violence against minorities might be the result of individual racism among officers who apply their own racial prejudice to their work. However, studies also indicate that minority officers are also more likely to use force against minority suspects, and this indicates that the problem is more complex. Research indicates that the use of violence by police, and racial disparities in police treatment of citizens, is institutional in nature. While there are individual bad actors within police departments who harbor racial prejudice and demonstrate racial bias in their handling of situations, the culture of policing in America encourages and exacerbates racism and the use of violence and further results in officers being pressured to utilize or to accept the use of violence and differential treatment of suspects based on race and class.

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# Policing in Place



By Carl Wycoff, via Wikimedia.

Iowa police officers taking part in community outreach during a Police Week.



# Community Policing and the Role of Police

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At a time when trust in police is at its lowest historical level, those seeking to initiate reform or to rehabilitate the public image of policing in America must deal with a host of issues beyond allegations of racial prejudice and violence. Police have also frequently been critiqued for failing to effectively represent the public that they are assigned to protect and of relying on ineffective or inappropriate militant and adversarial tactics. One of the reasons that policing has become so controversial is because of differing political and public pressures on police officers, and this has frequently placed officers in difficult positions as symbols of unpopular or controversial political directives.

## What Is the Role of Police?

While controversy is sometimes the result of police misconduct, it is often related to politics. For instance, since 2017 the Trump administration has embraced some of the most extreme and controversial immigration policies in American history. Separating immigrant children from their parents and confining them without judicial oversight was so controversial that U.S. citizens protested these policies continuously for several years, and the United States drew the kind of criticism from international governments typically levied only at autocratic regimes. The administration's aggressive anti-immigration policies affected every level of the government. States were pressured to do more to locate and imprison or deport undocumented migrants. In many states, local police were asked to make immigration enforcement part of their job. A police officer performing a traffic stop might, therefore, be ordered to check the immigration status of the driver or passengers, a task that would typically be left to federal authorities.<sup>1</sup> Some cities refused to obey the Trump administration's policies on immigration, and these "sanctuary cities" became one of the great controversies of the first two years of Trump's time in office.

Whether working in a sanctuary city or in a community more aligned with controversial immigration goals, police were placed in a difficult position during Trump's time in office. Those who participated in immigration enforcement risked public condemnation, as a majority of Americans opposed the Trump administration's stance on aggressive enforcement. But police were also under pressure from local and national political leaders. Critics have raised a number of concerns about asking or requiring local police to play a role in immigration enforcement. Some argue that police resources are limited and that police should not be expending resources to address issues that are federal priorities. When police officers in a city or county spend time checking the immigration status of individuals who are apprehended in a traffic stop or other minor violation, or if local police apprehend

and detain individuals with questionable immigration status, this uses time and resources that might be better spent addressing local crime.

There is a deeper issue involved when police begin addressing immigration enforcement as well. In addressing local crime, police are dependent on the cooperation of local citizens and noncitizens within their communities. Very few successful investigations conducted by police are the result of police effort alone. Police depend on members of the public to report crimes and to supply the essential information that ultimately leads to successful investigations. Police also frequently rely on informants whose lives intersect with criminals or criminal organizations. It has been argued that local police enforcement of immigration issues, especially given the wide variety of Americans who disapprove with the anti-immigrant positions of the Trump administration, could potentially hinder the ability of police to secure cooperation from citizens. Undocumented migrants, or citizens whose families or social groups contain undocumented migrants, may be less likely to report information to police out of the fear of increased police scrutiny.<sup>2</sup>

Another arena in which local police have been positioned in the political cross-fire is in the use of police during civil rights protests. The Trump administration's polarizing policies brought about some of the largest protest movements in the history of America, and the most controversial of these were those that followed allegations of police violence against African Americans. Protest movements united behind the "Defund the Police" and the "Black Lives Matter" movements spread to cities around the United States, and police were called upon to confront these protests. Over two months of sporadic protests, an investigation by *The Guardian* found that U.S. police engaged in 950 instances of violence against protestors and journalists across the United States.<sup>3</sup> In some cases, such as in New York City, civil rights organizations sued local government and police departments, alleging brutality against protestors.<sup>4</sup>

The right to gather and to conduct peaceful protests is enshrined in the Constitution of the United States. By extension, all those who represent any branch of American government, either at the federal, state, or municipal level, are sworn to uphold this right. On the other hand, riots in some cities and towns resulted in the destruction of property. The riots were not directly connected to the protests, and many independent reports from journalists provided data suggesting that protestors were largely peaceful. Nonetheless, some politicians, most notably Donald Trump, claimed that the protests were part of a larger surge in violent lawlessness and called on police and, in some cases, federal authorities to violently end the protest movement. This political messaging placed police officers in a difficult position, associating them with a controversial political administration and exacerbating claims of authoritarianism among police officers. The fact that the protests were labeled and widely perceived as "antipolice" protests was also likely a factor, inciting some officers involved to feel personally or professionally targeted. In any case, police response to the protests has been widely criticized by activists, civil liberties experts, and international observers and journalists. The public perception of police abuse



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## Plague Policing



By Becker1999, via Wikimedia.

Enforcing lockdowns and other measures became the responsibility of police departments during the COVID-19 pandemic, with varying degrees of success.

# Policing in the Age of COVID-19

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For many, the COVID-19 pandemic dramatically changed life in America. Activities once considered safe suddenly became potentially deadly, and Americans in every sector of society were forced to weigh their personal liberty against the collective welfare of society. While some Americans were fortunate enough to transition to remote work or were working in businesses able to mitigate COVID-19 risk with new policies, workers in jobs designated as “front line” or “essential workers” were faced with a more difficult challenge. For these workers, whose jobs necessarily involve frequent contact with unfamiliar members of the public, COVID-19 represented a more potent and continuous threat. But the continued service of essential workers was also absolutely necessary for American society to endure the changes brought about by the disease.

## The Dangers of Policing

Police officers are called upon to intervene in conflict and must sometimes willingly place themselves at risk of injury or even death. Each year, approximately thirteen out of every 100,000 officers are injured on the job, which means that around 100 American police officers are injured on the job each year.<sup>1</sup> While this is a high level of risk, on-the-job injury and death is relatively rare for police officers. Workers in America’s most dangerous jobs, such as logging, commercial fishing, and waste collection, endure up to 900 times the risk of injury or death as police. However, for police officers working during the COVID-19 pandemic, the risk of on-the-job injury or death increased dramatically.

Police, like many other essential workers, work in a profession where contact with the public is an important part of the job. Police minimize the risk of dangerous encounters by working in groups, utilizing protective equipment, and establishing sometimes controversial policies for engaging with the public. During COVID-19, however, simply being in close proximity to members of the public and managing routine tasks carried the risk of infection. This risk was even more elevated for officers whose families or social circles contained elderly individuals or those at high risk of serious complications from COVID-19 infection.

As COVID-19 spread in early 2020, police departments around the country issued new policies for officers in an effort to minimize the risk of contracting the disease and, secondarily, to minimize the risk of infected officers spreading COVID-19 among the public. Typically, COVID policies included wearing masks, maintaining social distancing when able to do so, and being aware of symptoms that might indicate infection. Despite these measures, COVID-19 became the leading cause of officer injury and death in 2020, greatly outpacing all other dangers. To highlight the seriousness of the situation, the number of officers and other emergency responders

injured or killed by COVID-19 surpassed the number of first responder deaths after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. The number of deaths and injuries surpassed the average injury and on-the-job fatality rates in the years before the pandemic.<sup>2</sup>

Public safety advocates argued that the threat of transmitting COVID-19 meant that the basic strategies utilized by police needed to be temporarily altered. Speaking to *American Progress*, former Police Chief Ron Davis argued that police should treat arrest and confrontation as a tool of last resort, both to prevent officers from contracting COVID-19 and to prevent officers from becoming vectors for the disease. Davis and other public safety strategists recommended that police should limit traffic stops and other types of routine arrests, and that police departments should reduce the number of public interactions for each officer during a routine shift.<sup>3</sup>

A number of public safety advocates also argued that the recent increase in local police assistance in tracking and/or identifying potential undocumented migrants was a waste of resources and an unnecessary risk during the pandemic, forcing police into potentially dangerous encounters during a time when processing, imprisoning, or deporting unauthorized migrants was especially difficult and dangerous. The controversy surrounding local law enforcement involvement in immigration enforcement overlapped with the broader controversy of immigration enforcement at the federal level, with a number of advocates arguing that the risk involved in imprisoning and deporting undocumented migrants was too great and that federal authorities should reduce emphasis on combating illegal migration until the end of the COVID-19 crisis.

While police departments around the country responded in very different ways to the pandemic, many police divisions did reduce emphasis on traffic stops and low-level crimes and took other steps to reduce officer contact with the public. However, the response differed from region to region, and some police departments made few changes to standard procedures. As a result, some areas experienced far higher levels of infection and COVID-19 deaths among police officers and staff. Texas was one of the states that made fewer changes to address the threat of COVID-19, resulting in the highest level of COVID-19 infection among officers. Though the final analysis of police-department-oriented COVID-19 management has not yet been completed, it appears that states in which COVID-19 policies were more relaxed experienced higher rates of officer infection and death.<sup>4</sup>

### **Exacerbating Challenges**

Studies of crime during the COVID-19 crisis showed that some types of crimes decreased as more members of the public avoided social situations. Other types of crimes increased, most notably burglaries targeting businesses that were temporarily or permanently closed. The COVID-19 crisis also saw unemployment and poverty rates rise sharply, which typically results in a surge in economic crime. Changes in patterns of crime posed a major challenge for the nation's police, especially in the arena of funding and the allocation of resources. Adjusting quickly to changes in crime rates is a difficult task for any police department, but it was especially

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## Training Days



US CBP—US Customs and Border Protection, via Wikimedia.

Supporters of reform criticize the militarization of the police force. Above, a U.S. Customs and Border Protection agent in a cloud of tear gas during violent protests in Portland, Oregon, in July 2020.

# Police Education and Policy

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The history of policing in America is rich and varied. In some states, organized policing grew out of the systems that colonial British governments established for enforcing colonial laws. In other states, policing was entangled with the slave trade, with groups of local men recruited into teams whose primary purpose was to capture slaves that tried to escape. At each stage of development, the establishment of policing systems reflected Americans' greatest hopes for what their communities could become, but also incorporated prejudice and ignorance. What this means is that the philosophy of policing has evolved in different ways in different communities. In some communities, police emphasize "keeping the peace," intervening only when necessary to protect citizens, to arbitrate disputes, and to address any disturbance to the peace. In other communities, police are used as "law enforcers," and are encouraged to actively seek out violations of law and to aggressively punish infractions.

The basic philosophy of policing is important because it determines how new and veteran police officers are trained and encouraged to perform their jobs. Police departments that emphasize aggressive enforcement tend also to subscribe to the idea that the fear of police or of aggressively punitive policies will deter crime. It is a fear-based approach to preventing disturbances within a community. Those who subscribe to the peace-officer approach tend to emphasize rehabilitation and problem solving. Police under this model are expected to try to avoid disturbing the peace through their own actions as well as addressing the actions of others. The underlying idea is that members of a community should view their police as protectors and problem solvers and that deterring crime is best achieved by utilizing community resources.

Over the past century, the peace officer model has been eclipsed by the law enforcement model, and this has made policing increasingly confrontational and aggressive. The reason for this is primarily political. The fear of crime is a powerful motivator, and politicians have frequently tried to increase their appeal with voters by offering more aggressive and punitive approaches to crime. Such politicians market themselves as "law and order" leaders and promote the idea that the way to "solve" a crime problem is to get tough. In practice, decades of research show that this approach is ineffective, but it remains an expedient political strategy that has proven perennially popular with voters.

## Domestic War Zones

The shift from rural agricultural life to industrial life pushed American policing away from peace keeping toward law enforcement, and this is one of the factors that has seen an increasing level of conflict and distance between police and citizens.

The Industrial Revolution saw a dramatic increase in poverty in America's cities, resulting in the rise of organized crime. Aided by America's lax laws on weapons ownership, criminal gangs proliferated in the early twentieth century and, when the Prohibition movement succeeded in banning the sale of alcohol, these gangs filled the void with bootleg liquor. Competition for access to this lucrative industry fueled rising violence, and crime became one of the most controversial issues of the era. A 24 percent increase in crime over the early years of Prohibition made crime control one of the top political priorities. The solution arrived at was to provide more weapons and tactical training to police officers, and this was the beginning of a trend that has been called the "militarization of police." Another major factor was the reorganization of the national police model, through a series of reforms introduced in the early twentieth century that sought to reorganize the structure of police ranks using the U.S. military as a model. Concurrent with the addition of tactical weapons and equipment, the training given to police officers began to more closely resemble the kinds of training used in the military. The idea behind this was to increase officer safety while also preventing corruption and misconduct by creating a more rigid chain of command and to introduce more rigorous officer training.<sup>1</sup>

One of the problems with the military model is that it encourages members of police departments to view citizens as potential enemies rather than as charges to be afforded protection and assistance. Militaristic and aggressive methods have also been unevenly utilized against minority and poor communities, exacerbating racial discrimination and reducing the trust of the poor and minority Americans in both the government and policing. During the 1960s civil rights movement, police around the nation were criticized for their aggressive and confrontational approach to protests and marches, and film of police abusing protestors in the South was one of the factors that helped motivate public support for new civil rights legislation at the federal level. But what grew out of this was the perception among many African Americans who had witnessed police hostility firsthand that police were enforcers of political will, not protectors of the peace. In the 1980s, the "War on Drugs" saw American police organizations going further and further down the militarization path. SWAT teams and military-grade equipment became a standard feature in policing in the effort to get tough on crime or to win the alleged war against drugs. The primary problem with this is that police are not at war, and citizens in America's cities and towns are not enemy combatants, whether or not they break the law. Drugs and violent crime are complex problems arising from sociological factors and, over the decades, sociologists have produced numerous studies indicating that the militarization approach has been ineffective at reducing crime and has decreased police safety by making violent confrontations more common.<sup>2</sup>

### **The Community Reforms**

In the 1960s and 1970s, reformers urged police departments to change the way that police were being trained to increase cohesion between police and the public. This was not a new idea at the time, but drew from some of the early philosophies of modern policing. Sir Robert Peel, the man credited with establishing London's



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## Policing the Digital Citizen



By Paul Sableman, via Wikimedia.

Police surveillance cameras and drones, as well as police bodycams, have raised questions of privacy, both for the police and for the public.

# Technology in Policing

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The “Digital Age,” the name that scholars use to describe the era in human history marked by the emergence and spread of digital technology, has forced Americans to adjust to new ways of managing nearly every aspect of their lives. As this change has occurred, the organs of the state have also been forced to change their routines and processes to keep apace. For police departments across America, the shift to the digital age has been transformative, but also controversial. Many of the new technologies that have been adopted, such as facial recognition and remote drones, have raised questions about privacy and personal security. In some cases, digital advances in police tech have been necessary to help police keep ahead of how digital technology has increased the potential for new kinds of crime, but these technologies have also contributed to declining public trust.

## High Tech Surveillance

Drones, also called unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), are one of the more controversial developments in digital technology. Drones can be either remote-controlled or automated and can be outfitted with cameras and other kinds of surveillance equipment. Drones vary in complexity, from store-bought miniature drones made for recreational and hobbyist use to ultra-advanced multimillion-dollar military and police drones, outfitted with the latest in surveillance technology and, in the case of the military, with deadly weaponry.

Since drone technology evolved to its current state, a variety of different uses for drones have been found. Perhaps the most controversial use of drones has been in the realm of national security. Since the 2000s, military branches and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) have been utilizing drones extensively in the ongoing “War on Terror.” Semiautomated drones can be used to conduct remote strikes on military targets, and it has been estimated that the United States has killed tens of thousands of people, both combatants and civilians, with drone strikes.<sup>1</sup> In an effort to reduce the potential for unintended casualties, drones can be adapted to utilize facial recognition technology, enabling drones to identify targets before launching attacks. This technology has been used to identify suspected terrorists before military strikes are conducted.

The potential to use drones for long-distance surveillance is the primary reason that police departments around the country began looking into the use of drones in local law enforcement. Long-distance camera and video technology enable police to utilize drones in tracking suspects during police pursuits, while facial recognition technology raises the possibility that police could use drones to search for suspects among crowds or in public places. However, the use of drones for surveillance raises thorny questions about personal privacy.<sup>2</sup> To locate a suspect, police may first

engage in widespread surveillance of crowds, potentially filming or photographing hundreds or thousands of citizens without their knowledge. The question is whether the American public is comfortable with potentially being watched and monitored by police, en masse, if doing so means that police might succeed in capturing wanted criminals. As of December 2020, there is no federal framework to establish protocols for the use of drones by police or other state agencies, and so some have argued that enabling police to freely use drones is dangerous until a system of laws is created to regulate the use of drones and to establish when and how police can use them for public surveillance.<sup>3</sup>

The use of facial recognition systems with drones is also part of a broader controversy regarding the overall use of facial recognition systems by police. Facial recognition programs utilize cutting-edge algorithms to map facial features. These maps can then be used to comparatively search through other available photos in an effort to locate suspects. As of 2021, facial recognition technology is not covered by any overarching federal regulations but is governed only by local and municipal law. As a result, police departments around the country have been utilizing facial recognition technology for street-level surveillance. The proliferation of this emerging technology has accelerated due to the involvement of major corporations, including Amazon, which have been developing and are now selling facial recognition tools to police departments.<sup>4</sup>

The problems with the use of facial recognition technology are similar to the problems that activists have identified with the use of drones, and come down to concern about enabling or allowing police to engage in mass surveillance. Proponents of facial recognition technology argue that the tools could allow police to identify and apprehend suspects that might otherwise remain at large, but critics have argued that the potential violations of personal privacy are not worth the potential rewards. Utilizing cameras and drones, police might need to capture and analyze photo or video of hundreds of citizens before identifying a person of interest. Further, studies have shown that “false negatives,” in which facial recognition systems mistakenly identify a suspect due to recognition errors, are not uncommon. Data has also shown that African American or darker-skinned individuals are more likely to be misidentified by facial recognition systems, which has raised the concern that the use of the technology may deepen racial bias in policing.<sup>5</sup>

Ultimately, the argument from opponents of facial recognition technology is that researchers and regulatory agencies must establish clear rules for the way that police departments can use this technology that are designed to ensure privacy and to prevent violations of rights. For instance, should police be allowed to conduct mass surveillance looking for any crime that is visible on camera or should the use of facial recognition be limited to situations in which police are searching for an identified suspect and have obtained a warrant to analyze data? Requiring police to file legal notification to analyze surveillance data would ensure that there is oversight and that police use of the technology remains more limited in scope. But as of 2021, only some states have adopted laws regarding how police may use data collected through cameras and other surveillance systems. The central issue that members of

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### ***Black Lives Matter Network***

*www.blacklivesmatter.com*

The Black Lives Matter movement is a decentralized political action movement focused on calling attention to police abuse of African Americans. The movement became one of the most controversial of the 2010s when critics mistakenly alleged that the BLM movement was a violent or radical leftist movement or that members of the movement were involved in destructive looting following high-profile controversies like the George Floyd killing. There is no evidence that BLM members or organizers have been involved in any violent activities or property destruction, but local chapters of the organization have been active in organizing protests and demonstrations across the country.

### ***International Association of Chiefs of Police***

*www.IACP.org*

The International Association of Chiefs of Police supports research into outreach, education, and advocacy programs aimed at addressing problems faced by police. The IACP also funds and publishes research on police methods and strategies and on police culture. The IACP has supported some of the reform proposals put forward by organizations like Black Lives Matter, but has opposed the Defund the Police movement. The IACP does support moderate police reform and also funds and provides training and educational materials for regional police departments.

### ***International Association of Women Police***

*www.iawp.org*

The International Association of Women Police (IAWP) is an outreach and research organization focusing on women in law enforcement. The organization supports local and national lobbying to combat sex discrimination and to promote equal treatment of officers; supports research into issues surrounding female participation in police departments; and publishes research on challenges facing women in law enforcement around the world.

# Index

- 1963 March on Washington, 9  
287(g) program, 53-54, 56, 60  
2020 presidential election, 52, 151  
9/11, 76, 166, 199  
911 calls, 69, 166
- Abdullah, Melina, 142  
Aeryon Labs, 168  
aggressive policing, 14  
Aguilar, Armando, 174  
Akbar Nurid-Din Shaba, zz101  
Allen, Charles, 186  
Amazon, 160, 165-166, 171, 173, 175,  
178, 190-194  
ambush killings, 15  
Amdur, Spencer, 64  
American Civil Liberties Union  
(ACLU), 61, 65, 119-120, 175-176  
Anaheim Police Department, 172  
anti-bias training, 19  
anti-police bias, 32  
Arpaio, Joe, 56  
arrest, 13, 16, 21, 39, 56, 64, 76-77, 82,  
85, 93, 128, 130, 161, 172, 174-176,  
179  
Asian, 29, 175  
Atlanta Police Department, 114, 169  
audio analytic technology, 184  
Austin Police Department, 99-100  
automatic license plate readers, 166  
automatic pattern recognition, 166  
Azure cloud, 165-169, 171, 173
- bail, 37, 57  
Balko, Radley, 18  
Baltimore Police Department, 22  
Bannon, Stephen, 58  
Beckham, Nathan, 168  
behavioral health crisis, 111  
Best, Carmen, 140  
bias, ix, xi, 3-4, 19-20, 24, 32, 37-40,  
115, 128, 160, 175, 178
- Bicking, Dave, 125  
Biden, Joe, 52, 67, 148, 151  
Bierria, Alisa, 152  
Black Americans, ix, xiii, 4-5, 7, 9-11,  
13-14, 17-21, 23-24, 26-30, 32,  
34-35, 37-39, 44, 50, 68, 70-71, 98,  
111, 114, 124-126, 141-142, 145,  
147-148, 150-155, 162, 165, 169-  
171, 174-175, 178-179, 181, 195,  
199-200  
Black communities, 9, 11, 14, 20-21,  
30, 68, 151  
Black Lives Matter, ix, 9-10, 18, 44,  
124-125, 142, 153-154, 162, 165,  
174, 195, 199  
Black officers, 30  
Black Panthers, 152  
Bland, Sandra, 128-130  
Blasio, Bill de, 174  
“Blue wall of silence”, 50  
body armor, 11  
body cameras, 15-16, 120, 125, 147,  
150, 161-163, 166, 172, 180-189  
Boston Marathon bombing, 139  
Boston Police, 125, 181  
Bradford, Steve, 126  
Brannan, Andrew Howard, 14  
Bratton, William, 59  
broken windows theory, 24, 68  
Brooks, Rayshard, 111, 169  
Brown, David, 146  
Brown, Michael, 147, 181, 185  
Brown, Mike, 129-130  
Brown, Peter, 65  
budget reductions, 77, 137  
burglaries, 76, 91, 147  
Burlington Vermont Police Department,  
161  
Buscaino, Joe, 141  
Bush, George W., 54, 93  
Buttigieg, Pete, 120