

The policing system and its replacement—draft resolution by Malik M, Ansar F & Dianne F

This resolution outlines how the police are instigators and perpetrators of race and class violence rather than providers of safety for the working class and nationally oppressed populations.

The resolution's objective is to outline a perspective to *abolish the system as it exists and replace it* with a radically new concept of what community security should look like.

The policing system targets African Americans and other People of Color (POC). That targeting is revealed in the statistics of who is stopped, who is arrested, who is the object of police fury, who is convicted and who is imprisoned. It is also seen in the history of U.S. policing as a slave-catching, Black Codes-enforcing and anti-working-class institution.

As revolutionary socialists, we see abolition of the institution of the police as the framework from which various demands should be made to take away the power of the police. Although policing is just one element of state violence, for Black people in particular it is the first stop.

Interrupting that initial encounter and dismantling the work and method of policing will impact the system as a whole. It is a system that disempowers communities, and particularly Black and other POC communities, who disproportionately bear the burden of police violence and its consequences.

The resolution ends with a series of concrete demands that, if implemented, would help undermine the racist and anti-working-class ideology and practice of the policing system. It would provide resources to build safer communities from both the police and anti-social crime.

Both ruling-class parties -- Republicans and Democrats — demand more police, granting them legitimacy and power to enforce their will on the population without fear of prosecution. Altering this dynamic would significantly reduce the violence vulnerable communities experience.

The key to winning *radical and transformational* changes of the policing system, with the eventual goal of abolition, is building a mass independent street-based movement that makes its demands directly on government institutions, whichever ruling party is in office. As the Black Lives Matter movement has shown, anti-police movements with popular support are possible. The question remains: how can we sustain these movements beyond protests in response to the latest killings or brutal beatings?

The challenge

The public outcry that followed George Floyd's brutal murder in 2020 at the hands of the Minneapolis police involved an estimated 25 million people. Yet it could not stop the annual murders of more than 1,000 people killed by police. In fact, in 2022 the figure rose to 1,192, according to the Mapping Police Violence website (<https://mappingpoliceviolence.org>). Black people are almost three times more likely to be murdered than whites.

From grade school on we are taught the myth that police provide security, but the reality is that the police are a source of violence. Most police beatings and killings arise in the context of people being stopped for minor traffic “violations” and other concocted situations. Most demonstrations express outrage over these incidents. While it is necessary to hold individual cops responsible for their crimes, focusing exclusively on that task ignores the reality of the institutional violence inherent to policing. That’s why the movement for Black lives raised the demand of dismantling and defunding the police.

While the police response to police “misconduct” is to blame this violence on a few “rotten apples,” Justice Department investigations reveal the escalating level of discrimination: when an individual is stopped. They are more likely to be a person of color and searched, brutalized, arrested, or killed.

Fifty-four percent of all murders perpetrated by the police occur as the result of traffic stops, responses to mental health crises or other situations where the victim of police violence did not have a weapon. So why do the police arrive armed with billy clubs, tasers, and guns?

The mainstream solution offered is that better training, better equipment, and higher wages will encourage police to be responsive to community needs. But the police force, its training and use of technology, does not address the problem; police often escalate violence and perpetuate racial discrimination. In fact, police often respond to protest demonstrations -- and with the journalists covering them -- with brutality.

Baked into police training programs is the need for police to maintain a disciplined social system. Any breach of that discipline is used as justification for police intervention. It is that reality that fuels opposition to Cop City in Atlanta.

Police escalation of situations from benign to violent is a feature of everyday policing. Then one-sided police violence is justified by officers’ claims that *their* lives are the ones in danger.

Currently 18,000 different police units gobble up 30-40% of the city or county budget. Investment in technology, including body cameras, costs millions to install and maintain. Through programs with the military, many departments now have tanks, planes and surveillance equipment that is disproportionately installed in Black, brown and Native American communities. Much of this equipment was “field-tested” by the Israeli police apparatus in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

The public is told that this new, expensive technology will improve police protection. But when queried, companies that developed facial recognition technology were forced to admit it isn’t accurate in identifying African American faces.

Nonetheless the system was marketed and sold in the majority of Black cities such as Detroit. After spending millions to install, Detroit has been sued for false arrests. The city’s police commission has subsequently ruled that the technology can be used to charge someone only as supplementary to more substantial evidence.

Recently the *Washington Post*’s collection of data on nearly 40,000 payments by 25 of the nation’s largest police and sheriff’s departments lifted the curtain on the economic cost to

those cities due to police misconduct: cases of outright murder, use of “excessive force,” illegal arrests or wrongfully searched homes. Over the past decade, the paper found that more than \$3.2 billion was paid out to settle claims. Yet no federal agency collects data on the various forms of police violence. Of course, this snapshot cannot capture the trauma this brutality causes individuals, families, and communities.

How to secure community safety given that mass killings are an everyday occurrence? There are now more guns and military-style rifles than the number of people living in the United States (at least 129 guns per 100 people). The view that the police force, and a growing police presence in schools, can provide a solution is prevalent, especially among white people. Some gun enthusiasts even propose supplementing the police by arming the population.

Most Americans have not thought about possible alternatives to policing. But the reality is that when police are called, either the crime has already occurred, or there is the possibility of a volatile situation escalating *with* police intervention.

Historic Roots of Policing

In Solidarity, we understand the role of the police and the resulting system of punishment that reinforces fundamental societal inequalities of capitalist society. This system of “criminal justice,” among other outrages, permanently stigmatizes incarcerated people even after their release from prison.

The foundations of the country, starting with the arrival of the first European settlers, are rooted in racial oppression and white supremacy. Native People were viewed as “uncivilized” and thus easily driven elsewhere or massacred. African slaves were seen as less than human and workhorses for slaveholders.

The policing system was created to protect the existing political power and economic supremacy, first of slaveholders and later of manufacturing and banking capital. A racialized hierarchy was maintained, denying their access to political power and economic opportunities. The Jim Crow system was central to the counter-revolution that followed the abolition of slavery.

Even given the outlawing of Jim Crow laws in the 1960s, the modern-day debate over policing needs to start with these historical facts. That legacy is far from erased. While Black and brown people are in the military and police force without legal restrictions, the fundamental role of the policing and criminal justice system remains based on the ideology of white supremacy. In fact, the “integrated” police force is a smoke screen for its fundamentally racist role.

Because of labor law, police are allowed to form bargaining units . with city, county, and state governments. Technically the units are called “unions” even though their primary role is to protect police officers involved in violence against oppressed communities and to protect employers’ property when workers go on strike. The function of these “unions” is similar to protection cartels. For that reason, these “unions” should not be recognized as part of the labor movement whether as independent associations or part of bigger international unions.

Defund the police demand

The objective behind the slogan to “Defund the Police” is both a political line in the sand and a democratic demand to shift resources to communities who are not protected by -- but are rather under threat from -- the police. It opens a way to shift budget debates away from further arming of the police to more resources for social needs. It seeks to create a safe society, thereby reducing the power of the carceral state.

Especially since the George Floyd and Breonna Taylor murders in 2020, there is a growing awareness that the system of policing breeds violence. Rather than false solutions of more money and weapons for police, we support reform proposals that:

- View security as enabling people to live in communities with resources that include affordable housing, quality schools, community centers open and staffed around the clock, opportunities for meaningful work at good wages. It includes direct community control over police, not toothless advisory review boards without the power to fire.
- Establish paid and voluntary teams to respond to 911 calls made up of non-uniformed, unarmed, and well-trained health care professionals, community members and social workers who are provided with the resources to help those in need. Cops will no longer respond to mental health calls, arrest people for possession/use of drugs, homelessness, sex work, or traffic violations.
- End “qualified immunity” for police who even when charged for a crime typically have been able to collect full pay during investigations.
- End surveillance technology over communities, which are always disproportionately POC communities.
- Support those who are attempting to stop Cop City, a high-tech training center that will drain Atlanta’s budget for years to come without providing the security its citizens desire. It is also environmentally destructive.
- View these demands as reallocating city/county/federal budgets to provide adequate resources that will bring security to all communities.

The institution of racial discrimination rooted in white supremacy is why the positive changes from mass protests are limited. However, democratic reforms that impact the quality of life of working-class oppressed communities are possible.

Because of the work of Black Lives Matter and Critical Resistance, the demand for abolition of policing as it exists today is more popular than mainstream media and politicians will acknowledge. Police murders are the tip of the iceberg, revealing one part of a system of state-sponsored violence.

What this resolution seeks to do is outline elements of a concrete program of action that can move toward reducing the repressive institutions of the state. We seek to challenge the violence of society through a transitional method that can give people, especially targeted POC communities, confidence that we can implement a meaningful alternative.

Meaningful security means creating an egalitarian society where access to basic needs is a given. It is the lack of access to these resources which creates both the conditions of insecurity that people experience and the “need” for police, whose false but ostensible function is to protect us.