Universal Challenges of Policing Rooted in Colonialism in the United States and Nigeria

Emma Goldfield

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Abstract

Growing awareness regarding police brutality has generated a massive shift in public views on police institutions and the need for reform. The universal challenges of police authority, abuse, and impunity plague policing institutions across the globe. The roots of many of these contemporary challenges can be traced to European colonization. This paper explores policing structures, abuse, and impunity in the United States and Nigeria.
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Introduction

It started with suspicion of a counterfeit $20 bill. Minutes later, George Floyd, a Black man was dead, at the hands of a white police officer. For more than nine minutes, now former Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin had kept his left knee between Floyd’s neck and head. Floyd pleaded more than 20 times that he could not breathe. Begging “please” over and over again. He gasped, “You’re going to kill me, man.” Chauvin did kill him. 1 Floyd’s death, like many others, could have been prevented. Floyd’s murder sparked a national uprising as demonstrations erupted in cities across the country, drawing mainstream attention across the globe against police brutality and racial justice.

Protestors worldwide spoke out against police brutality and called for better anti-racism efforts. Protesters in Belgium defaced Belgian King Leopold II symbols as millions of Congolese died under his rule when he colonized the Democratic Republic of Congo. 2 In the United Kingdom, statues of slave traders were torn down, such as Edward Colston’s who was a slave trader in the 17th century. Some of the largest protests outside the U.S. took place in Germany, where demonstrators called for acknowledgments of its colonial past and racism in the country. 3 Countries across the globe experience

dissatisfaction with current challenges of policing authority, abuse, and impunity. This thesis examines those issues in particular in the United States and Nigeria, and finds their roots in colonial structures, and institutional racism that accompanied those structures and continues to influence police structures and practices today.

**Literature Review**

The foundation of policing institutions within many countries can be linked to their colonial roots. Understanding the historical colonial legacy of policing forces is essential to understanding how and why those practices violated human rights and continue to do so.

A paper published by the American Sociological Association titled *Wicked Overseers: American Policing and Colonialism* by Kevin F. Steinmetz, Brian P. Schaefer, and Howard Henderson argues that “contemporary criminal justice and race struggles are a legacy of colonialism.”

It is essential first to understand why colonialism contributed to existing policing structures and behaviors. As defined by the Stanford encyclopedia, “Colonialism is a practice of domination, which involves the subjugation of one people to another.” Colonialism is both a structure and method of oppression, as “it traditionally involves the external domination of one group by another through ‘forced, involuntary entry,’ resulting in extracting labor and natural resources from the

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colonized and their lands.”  

Thus, colonization of a land and its people is inherently violent and exploitative.

Steinmetz explicitly links colonialism to racism. He writes “Colonialism is the imperialist expansion of capitalism sustained by racial ideologies that cast the colonized as mentally, morally, spiritually, culturally, or biologically inferior.” Casting those native to the colonized land as all forms of “inferior” is “justified by the colonizers on the grounds that the oppressed are undeserving of the rights and dignities enjoyed by the dominant caste or that such subordination is in the best interests of the colonized.”

Police forces, throughout historical colonial expansion, were established to secure the political and economic well-being of the colonizer and maintain order. This order was upheld by the police, who “become race biased as they manage colonial populations.” Through managing the colonized and in order to protect the interest of the colonizers, “the law fundamentally structures police action” and these police “do the dirty work for the larger system.” This “dirty work” entails whatever violence and suppression of resistance necessary to ensure the colonizer’s political and economic security.

In the U.S., “Characteristics such as skin color become associated with class position, generating what Brucato (2014) termed the ‘color line,’ which allows the control of African Americans and divides ‘the working class along racial lines. Such a

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7 Ibid
8 Ibid
9 Ibid
10 Ibid
link ensures that no matter how high a colonized person rises in prestige, he or she will almost always be of a lower status than the colonizing class composed of white elites and members of the white working classes (status is sustained only as long as the colonized support the colonial order).” 11

In the United States, “in each historical era of colonialism, the police (and military) act as frontline enforcers of laws that represent the interests of the dominant classes that adopt a particular racial character in American society,” and “this enforcement contributes to broader economic, social, cultural, political, and spatial forms of domination endemic to colonialism.” 12 Additionally, in the U.S., post-colonial states, policing forces took “the form of slave patrols, the enforcement of segregative laws such as the black codes and Jim Crow laws, and… the war on drugs, broken-windows and zero-tolerance policing, and police militarization.” 13 To separate post-colonial state policing forces views and behavior towards those considered “inferior” from the current state of police forces and institutions in the U.S. would be ignoring the clear historical influences that have continued to persist throughout its existence.

In a paper titled Colonialism, State and Policing in Nigeria written by professor of sociology, Etannibi E.O. Alemika, and published by the University of Jos in Nigeria, Alemika explores the relationship between the development of police forces and British colonial domination of Nigeria. Alemika contends, “the creation and maintenance of police forces that are para-military in organisation and which operate as apparatus of

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11 Ibid
12 Ibid
13 Ibid
violence used by the rulers to suppress opposition to social injustices and anti-democratic rule is one of the legacies bequeathed to Nigeria by British colonial rulers.”

The need for a colonial police force to maintain order and native domination is demonstrated in a letter from the first colonial governor of Lagos, William McCroskry, in which he stated that in Lagos, there were “no police, no jails, nor other efficient mode of punishment for offenders.” He later ensured that police forces, English law, and jail were created in this territory and thus “considered these institutions necessary for the pursuit of the objectives of colonial domination and exploitation.” Although Nigeria later gained independence from the British, and domination and oppression were no longer as racially exploitative, the policing structures set in place by the British are now used by the powerful and corrupt in Nigeria to uphold the political and economic hierarchy.

Both the United States and Nigeria are post-colonial states whose contemporary policing still reflect the structures of racial, political, and economic power the British established during their rule. The use of policing now reflects how it was then: a mechanism of control, oppression, and exploitation of minority groups.

Policing and Inequality

Influential political scientist Hannah Arendt once stated: “To be political, to live in a polis, meant that everything was decided through words and persuasion and not through force and violence.” The current definition of the word police stems from the

15 Ibid
16 Ibid
Greek word *polis*, meaning “city,” from the Latin word *politia* meaning “civil administration,” eventually becoming “the regulation and control of a community” in the 1500’s. Policing in the ancient Greek Polis protected the freedom and equality for a specific category of citizens, men. Everyone outside that category, such as women, slaves, and servants, were exempt from the equality the law created for specific men. In this way, all people who were not male citizens were othered, left unrecognized as citizens, and therefore unrecognized by protective laws. In modern-day America, and across the globe, “others” are still trying to gain entry as each “polis” falls short of granting everyone equal protection under the rule of law.

Unequal protection under the rule of law is especially obvious within policing in the U.S. and other countries. Police are placed in communities with the task of protecting everyone within them, but far too often misconduct themselves and abuse the power and authority they have been given. Moreover, police are often granted a certain amount of impunity, making it difficult to hold police officers accountable.

At the core of the tension between police authority, abuse, and impunity is a political and economic hierarchy. Across the globe, police have too often been used to protect the interests of the powerful at the cost of the weak. The system of historical oppression used by those in power has materialized in the normalization of violence acted upon those existing lower in the hierarchy; when those lower in the hierarchy respond

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with violence, it is met with further repression. This exploitation of the vulnerable and 
upholding of existing social hierarchies through police violence is common worldwide.

United States

*Origins of Policing in America*

Policing in America originated in the early American colonies in the 1600s. “Policing in Colonial America had been very informal, based on a for-profit, privately funded system that employed people part-time.”¹⁹ Different regions across the nation used different policing systems. Northern towns would often enlist volunteers to partake in a “night watch” looking out for colonists participating in illegal activities such as prostitution. This form of policing was inefficient and had a bad reputation. As urbanization increased with population, this system became even more inefficient. Eventually, merchants and businesses in shipping centers, who had been hiring people to protect property and ensure safe transportation of goods, created organized publicly-funded police forces. ²⁰

Meanwhile, the origins of policing in the South stem from “slave patrols.” Created in the early 1700s in the Carolinas, slave patrols had one mission: “to establish a system of terror and squash slave uprisings with the capacity to pursue, apprehend, and return runaway slaves to their owners. Tactics included the use of excessive force to control and produce desired slave behavior.” ²¹ Slave patrols persisted after the Civil War

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²⁰ Ibid

and the passage of the 13th amendment in the form of militia-style groups with the desire to deny equal rights to freed slaves and to enforce Black Codes restricting formerly enslaved people’s access to a variety of freedoms, such as voting rights. 22

The ratification of the 14th amendment abolished these Black Codes, but they were replaced under the disguise of Jim Crow laws and a multitude of state and local statutes supporting segregation. In the 1900s, many police departments across the East and Midwest were created to enforce such laws. Local governments used these forces through the 1960s to “exert excessive brutality on African Americans who violated any Jim Crow laws.” 23 Thus, policing in the US was rooted in preserving the political and economic hierarchies of white supremacy and suppressing the rights of Black Americans to do so. American policing, then, is intrinsically tied up with its fundamentally racist foundation.

_Police Institutions in America_

There is no international set of rules as to how a country must organize its police forces, resulting in different structures and cultures of policing in every country. Police organization is centralized in many countries around the world, which have national police forces. In the United States, there is no national police force; law enforcement is decentralized, with policing institutions at the federal, state, county, and local levels.

There are around 65 different Federal Law Enforcement Agencies including the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (ATF), the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), the U.S. Marshals Service, the

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22 Ibid
23 Ibid
Secret Service, the Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS), and the Transportation Security Administration (TSA). These federal law enforcement agencies’ missions are to “prevention, detection, and investigation of crime, as well as the apprehension of alleged offenders.” 24 Most federal law enforcement agencies are organized under the Department of Justice (DOJ) and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

There are also more than 17,000 state and local law enforcement agencies, with local police departments making up more than two-thirds of this number. 25 Every state except Hawaii has a state-level police force. State police are tasked with numerous responsibilities. One major responsibility is to conduct patrol services on remote highways or in unincorporated areas that lack local law enforcement. State police also aid local law enforcement in criminal investigations, and they maintain centralized criminal records for the state, operate crime labs, and train local officers. Local law enforcement agencies, in turn, are responsible for detecting, investigating, and preventing crime within specific municipalities or counties within the U.S. These local law enforcement agencies include police and sheriff departments.

All police officials are expected to conduct their responsibilities in accordance with the U.S. constitution and protect everyone’s constitutional rights. A DOJ paper states that “Police organizations, like all organizations, rely on distinctive structural

forms and management processes to maintain accountability. Characteristically, their structures are centralized with functionally defined bureaus, and their management processes emphasize preservice training and elaborate command and control mechanisms. In many respects, police organizations have typified the classical command and control organization that emphasizes top-level decision making: flow of orders from executives down to line personnel, flow of information up from line personnel to executives, layers of dense supervision, unity of command, elaborate rules and regulations, elimination of discretion, and simplification of work tasks.” 26

Police funding comes from federal programs, state governments, and local governments and is put into different sections of law enforcement such as police, courts, and corrections. Police, sheriffs, state highway patrols, and other governmental departments tasked with protecting public safety contribute to police expenditures. In 2018, state and local governments spent $119 billion on police and $130 billion on courts and corrections, which includes prisons and jails, probation officers, parole boards, and activities associated with the court system. 27 State and local government spending on police increased 180% from 1977 to 2018, from $43 billion to $119 billion with inflation adjustment.

Chuck Wexler, executive director of the Police Executive Research Forum, states, of the US, “It’s unlike any other country, in places like the United Kingdom, you have a Home Office, you have standards. In Germany or Israel … they have a national police. Our policing is completely fragmented, decentralized, with no national standards.” The decentralized structure of policing in the U.S. makes it easy for police training to differ across the nation. A lack of national standards in the U.S. allows for more than 17,000 police departments to train their officers differently. Use of force and training differ from department to department allowing for more gaps in misconduct and accountability. Gun training for officers, for example, can range from ten weeks to 36 weeks, depending on the state.

The police agencies across the U.S. employ more than 420,000 officers. There is an average of 2.2 law enforcement officers for every 1,000 people in the U.S. Each police department varies in size based on its location. Larger cities, such as New York, have enormous police departments (the NYPD employs over 50,000 individuals), but local police departments across the country are much smaller. According to the Washington Post, “Nearly half of all local police departments have fewer than 10 officers. Three in 4 of the departments have no more than two dozen officers. And 9 in 10 employ fewer than 50 sworn officers.” Often, these smaller departments have

28 Ibid
advantages, such as employing officers with close ties to their community, but they also have a number of disadvantages regarding accountability and over-extension.

*Police Abuse and Misconduct in America*

Often police departments and officers violate their responsibility to the community, abuse their power, and are not held adequately accountable, if held accountable at all. In 2020, 1,126 people were killed by police. 31 Of these killings, officers were charged with a crime in only 16 of these cases, one percent. The Police Violence Report was only able to identify officers in 445 cases. At least 14 of those officers had shot or killed someone before, and 5 had multiple prior shootings. 32 Six hundred twenty of these killings began with an officer responding to a non-violent offense or no reported crime. One hundred twenty people were killed after police stopped them for a traffic violation, 309 were killed in response to a suspected violent offense, and 77 killings with reasoning unknown. 33 Ninety-seven people were killed after police responded to reports of erratic behavior or dealing with a mental health crisis. Eighty-one people killed by police were completely unarmed. Most of those unarmed people were people of color. Police brutality disproportionally impacts the Black community.

Roughly every 40 hours, a black person is killed by police.34 The 2020 deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Rayshard Brooks, and Jacob Blake ignited widespread

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32 Ibid
33 Ibid
uprisings and protests against racial injustice and police brutality. Responses from law enforcement regarding these horrid targeted abuses of power have been widely categorized as insufficient.\(^\text{35}\) According to a study piloted by the *Washington Post*, in the last ten years, around 26,000 murders that occurred in major U.S. cities did not result in an arrest. In almost three-quarters of those murders, 18,600 of them, the victims were Black. \(^\text{36}\) This study, one of many, demonstrates that although a significant role of the police is to respond to and investigate crimes, fewer than half of most violent and property crimes in the U.S. are reported, and most of the reported crimes are not solved.

The racial disparities within policing and the criminal justice system are extensive and have been long embedded in the history of the United States. The disproportionate use of force towards people of color is rooted in America’s history of systemic racism. The legacy of slave patrols still exists in modern America. According to Harvard Kennedy School professor of history, race, and public policy, Khalil Gibran Muhammad, “The surveillance, the deputization essentially of all white men to be police officers or, in this case, slave patrollers, and then to dispense corporal punishment on the scene are all baked in from the very beginning.” \(^\text{37}\) For example, in the 1900s, when police forces became full-fledged professions and departments, their work was guided by crime


statistics. It is then, “For the first time, Americans with European roots were grouped into one broad category, white, and set apart from the other category, Black.” 38 This was a turning point for discrimination within professionalized police forces.

The consequences of police forces using subjective crime statistics were dire for the Black community because these statistics were “weaponized” to employ more policing of Black communities. 39 These consequences are summarized by Harvard historian Jill Lepore who said, “Police patrolled Black neighborhoods and arrested Black people disproportionately; prosecutors indicted Black people disproportionately; juries found Black people guilty disproportionately; judges gave Black people disproportionately long sentences; and, then, after all this, social scientists, observing the number of Black people in jail, decided that, as a matter of biology, Black people were disproportionately inclined to criminality.” 40 Like the author Heather Mac Donald, many people reject the idea that the history of crime and current criminal behavior is a result of social and economic standing and use statistics based on predictive technology to place police forces in high crime areas. The problem with using predictive technology regarding crime statistics is the inherent bias within the data or algorithms of the technology itself. 41

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38 Ibid
39 Ibid
There is constant skepticism surrounding whether racism exists within policing and the criminal justice system. The relationship between police and the communities they serve differs from community to community. The fact is, there is not just evidence demonstrating disproportionate use of force across communities served by police, but there is actually overwhelming non-biased evidence.

There is concrete evidence that profiling in policing disproportionately impacts minorities. In May 2020, a massive study was published by Nature Human Behavior that found of 95 million traffic stops by 56 police agencies between 2011 and 2018, “black drivers were less likely to be stopped after sunset, when a ‘veil of darkness’ masks one’s race, suggesting bias in stop decisions. Furthermore, by examining the rate at which stopped drivers were searched and the likelihood that searches turned up contraband, we found evidence that the bar for searching black and Hispanic drivers was lower than that for searching white drivers.” 42

According to a 2019 study, “The highest levels of inequality in mortality risk are experienced by black men. Black men are about 2.5 times more likely to be killed by police over the life course than are white men. Black women are about 1.4 times more likely to be killed by police than are white women.” Additionally, “Among all groups, black men and boys face the highest lifetime risk of being killed by police. Our models

predict that about 1 in 1,000 black men and boys will be killed by police over the life course.”

Another study published after the death of George Floyd by the New York Times found that “while black people make up 19 percent of the Minneapolis population and 9 percent of its police, they were on the receiving end of 58 percent of the city’s police use-of-force incidents.” These highly-accredited studies, among many others that have been published, provide evidence that police profiling disproportionally impacts minorities.

Institutional Obstacles to Improved Policing in America

It is incredibly difficult to hold police officers accountable in the United States. Law enforcement impunity is so strong that after the murder of George Floyd, the UN released a global report calling on member states to put an end to “impunity for human rights violations by law enforcement officials and close trust deficits in this area.” They call on States to “ensure that the voices of people of African descent and those who stand up against racism are heard and that their concerns are acted upon; and acknowledge and

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confront legacies, including through accountability and redress.” Many reasons exist as to why it is so hard for citizens to hold law enforcement officers accountable.

One of the major contributors to law enforcement impunity in the United States is how police officers’ use of deadly force is evaluated. This is because “the United States Supreme Court has established the Constitutional boundary to be one of ‘reasonableness’, which in practice creates a wide breadth of discretion for police action and ‘justified’ use of force, while making it difficult to hold officers accountable through the criminal legal system.”

Each accountability mechanism available to citizens has severe challenges along with pursuing it. There are three main options in attempting to hold police officers accountable for misconduct. These options include criminal investigation and trial by state and federal prosecutors. This option is plagued by pressure from police unions, court bias in favor of the police, and victim resource constraints. The second option is for the victim to pursue suit in civil court for monetary damages. Successfully pursuing this option is difficult due to the fact that “civil suits are resource- and time-intensive, restricting the availability of such remedies to select plaintiffs.” Additional obstacles to this option include “Procedural constraints – including state statutes limiting who and when may bring suits and high pleading standards.” The last option is that a civilian or

46 Ibid
48 Ibid
49 Ibid
50 Ibid
Police department can request an internal investigation. The handling of each investigation is different based on jurisdiction, which causes further “inconsistency and lack of transparency characteristic of these processes.”\textsuperscript{51} Additionally, it is rare that an internal investigation will find wrongdoing.\textsuperscript{52} A study formulated by the Bureau of Justice Statistics found that use of force complaints filed with large state and local law enforcement, 92\% were dismissed.\textsuperscript{53} These mechanisms supposedly attempting to hold law enforcement officers accountable for misconduct more often than not cost extreme emotional and financial resources to both parties and are not thorough.

\textbf{Police Unions}

The role police unions and advocacy groups play in policing oversight and accountability are of important note. Dale Belman, a labor relations professor at Michigan State University, categorized the role of police unions as an “insurance policy.”\textsuperscript{54}

According to Vox, police unions, in general, have become the most vocal interest group opposing criminal justice reforms, especially reforms to police discipline and the use of force. Historically, they have, unlike most unions, been profoundly conservative institutions that uphold a particular white ethnic, “law and order”-focused variant of

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid
\end{flushleft}
right-wing politics.” 55 In the wake of the Black Lives Matter uprisings and protests against police brutality and racial injustice, police unions have objected to more police accountability. 56

Advocacy Groups

There are also numerous advocacy groups organizing around police accountability. Many of these groups call out police abuse and work to reform the criminal justice system. Some of these groups include the Coalition for Police Accountability, The Cop Accountability Project (CAP) of the Criminal Defense Practice’s Law Reform and Special Litigation Unit working under the Legal Aid Society, The National Police Accountability Project, and many more. Other advocacy groups organize in support of law enforcement, such as the National Police Association and the National Police Foundation.

Smaller Departments

Smaller departments have limited resources and capacity, making it harder for departments to require new training and adopt new practices. 57 Not only do departments widely range in employed population, but how they enact their policies and practices are very different. Dennis Kenney, a retired Police officer and now a professor at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York said, “the rules of policing change depending on where you are,” and “It's not even county to county,” he said. “It's city to city. Within a county, you can have one police department that has one set of policies and

55 Ibid
56 Ibid
57 Ibid
another that has another set of policies. And certainly the level of training varies greatly.”

**Culture of Impunity**

The lack of data regarding police use of force is indicative of the overall problem rooted in a police culture of impunity. Journalists have been forced to gather data surrounding police abuses because of the lack of official data. The importance of data concerning police behavior can “can help reveal prejudicial policing, extreme use-of-force, and racially-motivated patterns of violence.” But “Unfortunately, there is very little standardized data collection on police use-of-force, at either the state or federal level.”

Of the data that does exist regarding police killings, as found by researchers at the University of Washington and published by The Lancet, which examined police killings between 1980 and 2018, found that 55% of these fatal encounters with police were listed as another cause of death. Not only does misguided data like such exist, but there are a number of laws that protect officers from being held accountable.

**Defund the Police in America**

In the wake of George Floyd’s murder and other incidents of police brutality against the Black community, “defund the police” was a rallying cry by progressive left protestors nationwide in 2020 for larger-scale accountability from law enforcement.

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58 Ibid
Police across the country have taken different actions in response to the protests, such as redirecting funding, cutting department budgets, and firing members from their police force. According to the Movement for Black Lives, “when we talk about defunding the police, we’re talking about making a major pivot in national priorities. We need to see a shift from massive spending on police that don’t keep us safe to a massive investment in a shared vision of community safety that actually works.” 61 The movement aspires to redirect police funding to support safety and economic programs that will benefit societal problems such as mental health crises and homelessness in an effort to develop alternative ways to police response. This redirection of funds to trained mental health and social workers will reduce unnecessary violent encounters between police and citizens.” 62

Although advocates have a general understanding of what the slogan means, it means many different things to many people. 63 The word “defund” has created widespread confusion regarding the movement’s goals. Individuals interpret the word “defund” in a range of ways. Many individuals confuse the word “defund” with “abolish.” These individuals using the term “abolish” are not necessarily arguing to immediately and radically eliminate police departments. Instead, these advocates use the word “abolition” in an “attempt to think big in a moment that cries out for root-and-branch

transformation.” Existing reform mechanisms have not worked and thus proving it ever so crucial to examine deeper and more impactful implementation of reform targeting the very core of American institutions.

Nigeria

*Origins of Policing in Nigeria*

Before colonization by the British in 1861, policing was centered around the community using traditional policing methods that were intertwined with social and religious structures. As the British began colonizing Nigerian territory, decentralized local police forces were established by the British administration. In 1861, the first police force was constructed to police the Lagos colony. Police forces of different compositions based on location began popping up throughout the country. These police forces deployed recruits to communities from outside their own.

Original police forces were used to advance the political and economic agendas of the colonizers. The forces were known for abuse and lawlessness. The police used brutal force to control communities, and any resistance to colonial rule was met with ruthless suppression. The early established police forces’ use of violence towards local communities within Nigeria set up a broken violence-based relationship between the two parties that still exists today.

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The first national police force was created in 1930 when the northern and southern police forces coalesced into the Nigerian Police Force, led by an Inspector General of Police. Policing organizations changed throughout the following years, reflecting the federalism of Nigeria, with both federal and regional governments having responsibility for maintaining law and order.

Nigeria gained independence from the British in 1960. Nigeria’s first constitution split power among three regional governments in the Northern, Western, and Eastern regions. After gaining independence, “public perceptions of the police were firmly grounded in their experience of the use of the police force to extend colonial domination, for example, in the suppression of demonstrations from the late 1920s, workers’ strikes in the 1940s and communal violence from the 1950s.” 65 Control of society through military regime in order to enforce authoritarian rule after gaining independence only further embedded a culture of police violence within the Nigerian community. Ever since the British colonization of the country, police in Nigeria have continued to prey on Nigerian citizens for economic gain rather than do their job of protecting them.

**Police Institutions in Nigeria**

The NPF uses a centralized command structure. According to section 214 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) is a federal police force, and no state nor local government can create its own police force. 66

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The NPF works within each of the 36 Nigerian states and the federal capital territory. The NPF is led by the Inspector General of Police, appointed by Nigeria’s president, who must consult the Nigeria Police Council before making the appointment. This Police Council is comprised of 36 state governors. The Nigeria Police Council has rarely met in the past ten years. 67

The Graduate Institute of International Studies in Geneva published a study conducted by the Small Arms Survey stating that the NPF deploys an administrative state command unit in each of the 36 states of Nigeria. The state commands are divided into 12 different zones, with each zone between two and four states in each zone. These state commands work under an assistant general of police. State commands are led by a commissioner of police appointed and held accountable by the assistant inspector general of police. Population and configuration of each state police command differs based on the suspected need for police presence as well as the population of the community. Police recruits are trained for a total of 18 months: six months each in basic training, intermediate training, and finally, advanced stage training.

The NPF is headquartered in Lagos and divided into five departments: Department A, which is in charge of administrational duties; Department B is in charge of communications; Department C is responsible for finance and resources; and Department D controls criminal records and investigations. The Criminal Investigation Department operates under Department D. Department E is in charge of internal security.

The NPF has doubled in size from 160,000 officers to over 300,000 since 1999. As of 2021, the NPF has a population of 370,000 police officers to protect the 220 million citizen population.\(^{68}\) The NPF is reportedly understaffed and often faces resource shortages.\(^{69}\) As of 2017, there was a combination of 5,556 police stations, posts, commands, and headquarters.\(^{70}\)

The vision of the NPF is “To make Nigeria safer and more secure for economic development and growth; to create a safe and secure environment for everyone living in Nigeria.” The mission statement is as follows:

“To partner with other relevant Security Agencies and the public in gathering, collating and sharing information and intelligence with the intention of ensuring the safety and security of the country. To participate in efforts aimed at addressing the root causes of crime while ensuring that any criminal act is investigated so as to bring the criminals to justice in a fair and professional manner. To engender an efficient, effective, well-trained and highly motivated workforce, with deliberate efforts aimed at improving the capacity and welfare of all officers and men of the Force. To build a people’s friendly Police Force that will respect and uphold the fundamental rights of all citizens. To build a gender sensitive and gender friendly Police Force that will give equal opportunity to female Police Officers, while at the same time respecting their peculiarities.”\(^{71}\)


\(^{69}\) “Nigeria; Structure and Size of the Police Force; Availability of Complaint Mechanisms; Whether There Is Communication between the Divisions and Commands across the Country; Whether Authorities in Sharia States Can Execute Their Warrants, Make Arrests and Lay Charges in Non-Sharia States,” n.d., 6.


Funding for the NPF has been a consistent problem for the force. The NPF receives extensive funding from the federal government annually. The force also gains money from state governments, local governments, private sector donations, and trust funds. In a study of police corruption in Nigeria, the Human Rights Watch found that there should be more than enough resources for the police and that shortages might in part be explained by “theft and mismanagement” hidden in the opaque accounting of the police administration.72

According to the 2021 Nigerian Inspector General of Police Baba Usman, “We have no account to go and dip our hands and do the quick deployment in terms of mitigation or even proactively stopping what is to come.” Therefore, the force has “problems meeting emergencies.” Usman says, “normally, operations should have a fund that you can quickly deploy to areas whether it is a natural or man-made crisis. The police do not have that at all. We always rely on our budgetary allocations which are not enough.” 73 The issue of police funding was addressed in 2019 when President Muhammadu Buhari signed the Nigeria Police Trust Act into law. The act “established a special intervention fund for training and retraining of personnel of the Nigeria Police Force and for the provision of state-of-the-art security equipment and other related facilities for the Police. The Fund is meant to benefit from a levy of 0.005% on the net profit of companies

operating business in Nigeria; 0.5\% of the total revenue accruing to the Federation Account; as well as proceeds from grants, aids, gifts, donations, and investment income."

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*Police Abuse and Misconduct in Nigeria*

The Nigeria Police Force placed dead last out of 127 countries in a 2016 report on world policing.75 Because of the nature of the formation of the original colonialist police force in Nigeria, policing now subjects citizens to extortion and human rights abuses every day. The black-on-black violence in Nigeria stems from the colonial mindset where the locals turned against other community members that were seen to be working for colonial authorities. The Nigerian Police Force “had been formed as an occupation force for a narrow and specific reason: to maintain the power of the state even if the state is illegitimate” and therefore was never a force that was rooted in protecting the locals or fostering comfortable community relations. 76

If citizens stand up against exploitation, in other words, if they do not comply with financial extortion at the hands of police officers, they face several cruel consequences such as threats, unlawful detainment, sexual assault, torture, and even death. Perception of police is summarized by one trader residing in Lagos who states, “When you have a problem, you should expect the police to help you, to safeguard life

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and property—but instead, they go the other way.” 77 When a policing organization is rooted not in upholding public safety but in ensuring the oppression of one group and the gain of another, it reasonably follows that this organization maintains these tenets throughout time.

Contemporary police brutality across Nigeria is rampant. Cases of brutality, abduction, extortion, extrajudicial killings, and false imprisonment are just a few of the reported police violations. One of the forces most responsible for committing egregious acts of violence towards Nigerian citizens was the Special Anti-Robbery Squad, or SARS.

SARS was built in response to a violent crime epidemic in 1992. In just three years, 2017-2020, members of the SARS unit were found to have committed at least 82 acts of torture or extrajudicial execution. 78 SARS habitually tortures and extorts families in Nigeria, negotiating their victims’ releases by demanding money from their parents. Young men walking the streets were forced to give up their phones. They would brutally torture anyone who did not comply with their orders. According to multiple reports, if a SARS divisional office existed, so did a torture cell. 79 Their prerogative, not unlike the point of police department quotas in the United States, is to make as much money as

possible. Justice or public safety is no longer the primary motivating factor for policing, sowing distrust in communities and demonstrating that policing is not inherently synonymous with equality, safety, or genuine aid.

_Institutional Obstacles to Improved Policing in Nigeria_

_Corruption_

While police corruption is a significant problem within many countries, it is especially rife within Nigeria. Corruption is defined as “dishonest or illegal behavior especially by powerful people (such as government officials or police officers).” In 2020, the Afro Barometer, an organization that conducts national public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, and society, found that among Nigerians who had contact with the police during the last year, 77% said they paid bribes to get police assistance, and 66% said they paid bribes to avoid problems with the police.

The U.S. is not the only country to use policing as protection of the elite, but Nigeria’s police protection is for sale as well. As of 2009, more than one-fourth of Nigeria’s police force, 100,000 police officers had been “assigned by their superior officers to work for wealthy individuals or private businesses as security guards and personal orderlies.” The 271, 800 officers who have not been illegally sold off and

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assigned to protect the elite in Nigeria are supposed to protect the other 150 million Nigerian citizens. Given the vast corruption of Nigerian police and their abuse of power, those citizens in the majority supposedly “protected” are not. The practice of illegally assigning officers to the Nigerian elite has been characterized by civil society leaders and police officials as “widespread.”83 Additionally, such behavior has benefitted senior police officials who take money from Nigerian elite in return for assigning officers to private posts while also charging those assigned officers. One “police constable assigned to a bank in Lagos told Human Rights Watch that he receives an extra 10,000 naira ($66) weekly allowance from the bank but has to pay 2,000 naira ($13) a week to his posting officer.”84

Investigations into this bribery practice have found that police at all levels participate in this behavior. The money that the police officials and officers get is not accounted for and put into their own pockets. A famous case brought to court in 2005 “found that former inspector general of police Tafa Balogun extorted 30 million naira ($227,000) from the Societe Generale Bank of Nigeria by threatening to withdraw the police assigned to protect the bank’s headquarters. Balogun then laundered the money through one of his front companies.”85

In 2009, the Inspector General of Police at the time, Ogbonna Onova, made an announcement where he said, “most of the police escorts and orderlies were assigned illegally,” and he stated they must return to their stations. 86 This statement did not make

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83 Ibid
84 Ibid
85 Ibid
86 Ibid
much headway, and by 2010 these corrupt police activities were still occurring. The minister of police affairs at the time stated that such activities have continued due to “the connivance of the high command of the Nigeria Police Force.” 87 One police sergeant in Lagos corroborated this statement by saying, “This thing [corruption] is like a disease in all of us.” 88 The systemic corruption practices carried out by all ranks of policing in Nigeria “perpetuate police corruption and its associated abuses.” 89 A multitude of examples exists regarding the flourishing corruption within the system. The fact that corruption continues to exist without accountability demonstrates the impunity given to the whole police system and everyone working within it in Nigeria.

Impunity

Holding the NPF accountable for corruption has proven to be a daunting task, given majority of senior police leadership denies the existence of corruption in the first place. In 2009, the Human Rights Watch interviewed the Lagos state Police commissioner who strenuously refuted that police officers “make returns” to superior officers: “That is not true…. Nobody does that. If I get such reports, that DPO [divisional police officer] is finished. We have human rights sections and a provost here. No junior officer has ever reported to me that they are asked to give money.” The Chairman of the Police Service Commission additionally stated, “I have heard of this but have not received any complaints.” Although most officials deny the corruption within the system, some do acknowledge its existence. One senior official at the Police Service Commission

87 Ibid
88 Ibid
89 Ibid
said, “the commission is aware that many police officers picked up on the street [for extortion] make returns to their superior officers.” Even if these abuses are acknowledged, holding those involved accountable is even more difficult. When these cases are investigated, “it is difficult to prove such cases, because it is the junior officer found with the money and then it is his word against the superior officer’s word.” It is infrequent for an officer to be held accountable for their involvement with corruptions, so much so that “a senior official at the Police Service Commission told Human Rights Watch that he was not aware of any cases in which a senior officer had been disciplined, let alone prosecuted, for taking returns from a subordinate officer.” The lack of transparency and oversight of these police funds enables such endemic corruption to continue.

#EndSARS in Nigeria

While outcries for “Defund the police” by protestors in the U.S. were occurring, simultaneous calls to #EndSARS were happening in Nigeria. #EndSARS is a decentralized movement piloting a series of protests against the police brutality and human rights violations occurring in Nigeria that was specifically carried out through the SARS unit. This campaign was started in late 2017 by Nigerian human rights defenders and activists, but the movement surged in October 2020 when Nigerians took to the street to protest peacefully. The SARS unit was discontinued on October 11th, 2020. The

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92 Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Obi Ume-Ezeoke, then-director of the Police Discipline Department, Police Service Commission, Abuja, October 17, 2009.
movements momentum kept tens of thousands of citizens protesting for social justice and especially attracted attention after the Nigerian security force opened fire on unarmed protestors in Lagos on October 20th, 2020. The #EndSARS campaign was not just targeted at SARS but also a broader call for social justice from Nigerian youth. Although the SARS unit was disbanded, other police units have been created carrying out similar forms of abuse. According to one 22-year-old from Nigeria, “The protests were successful in showing us what could be in Nigeria.” Another citizen told BBC news, “I think the legacy of EndSars is that everyone has seen that the skills they use in their daily lives can be useful as far as taking back the country is concerned. Young people are organising for the 2023 elections. There's quite a bit of work being done.” 93 These protests led by young Nigerians offer Nigeria hope for reform in the future.

Competing Views: U.S. Context

As mentioned at the outset, there are long-standing effects of the colonial structures that were in place in both the United States and Nigeria. Brutal violence, racism, and corruption enabled the universal challenges of authority, abuse, and impunity to be baked into the current institutions in both countries.

Although police violence has been normalized in many countries, its roots are contextual. In the American context, policing is rooted in systemic racism. Also called structural racism or institutional racism, systemic racism is defined as “systems and structures that have procedures or processes that disadvantages African Americans.”94

The term’s origin can be traced back to the civil rights movement of the 1960s. It describes how historic and discriminatory actions continue to create disparities within society, such as the criminal justice system, healthcare, education, politics, employment, and housing. One significant realm where systemic racism is most apparent is the disproportionate police violence against Black Americans. It also, however, influences how people think about mitigating this problem.

There is no one agreed-upon answer to the universal challenges of policing. Social norms and deep-seated institutionalism offer insights into countries’ differing approaches to address these universal challenges. In the United States, three experts, Heather Mac Donald, Michael Fortner, and Alex Vitale, represent three distinct points of view when addressing the issues of policing in the United States. Each of these authors brings a different perspective to the societal roles and intersections of race and policing in America. They are examining contemporary challenges, but these have deep roots in how both issues of race and structures for policing evolved in the U.S.

Essayist, author, and political commentator Heather Mac Donald is the Thomas W. Smith Fellow at the Manhattan Institute. Mac Donald is a New York Times bestselling author and contributing editor of the City Journal. She has written for The Wall Street Journal, Washington Post, New York Times, Los Angeles Times, The New Republic, and The New Criterion. Additionally, she is a non-practicing lawyer who has clerked for the Honorable Stephen Reinhardt, U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit. She has

also been an attorney-adviser in the Office of the General Counsel of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and a volunteer with the Natural Resources Defense Council in New York City.

Mac Donald is known for her pro-police views and opposition to criminal justice reform. In 2016, Mac Donald published a *New York Times* bestseller, *The War on Cops: How the New Attack on Law and Order Makes Everyone Less Safe*. With rising attention to police abuse around the nation, specifically focused on police brutality towards the Black community, attention often has been directed towards systemic racism within the criminal justice and law enforcement systems. Heather Mac Donald argues that police should be held accountable for excessive force, but she writes that there is no evidence of widespread racial bias in policing. The narrative that systemic racism exists within policing has been around for a long time, but conservative-leaning analysts dispute that. Notably, these critics misrepresent the claim, however, incorrectly defining systemic racism as accusing everyone within the system of being racist when the actual definition “systems and institutions that produce racially disparate outcomes, regardless of the intentions of the people who work within them.”

In any event, Mac Donald is deeply skeptical of claims of systemic racism in American police forces. On June 10th, 2020, she testified to the House Committee on the Judiciary regarding policing practices. She stated, “It is understandable and appropriate, when viewing the horrific arrest and death of George Floyd, to ask whether we are seeing...”

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the tip of the iceberg when it comes to policing and the brutal indifference to human life. The history of law enforcement in the U.S. was interwoven with slavery and segregation. The memory of policing’s complicity with racial oppression cannot be easily erased. But I urge this committee to reject the proposition that law enforcement today is systemically biased. The evidence does not support that charge.”  

96 While Mac Donald appears to acknowledge that the “history of law enforcement in the U.S. was interwoven with slavery and segregation,” she maintains that this history does not extend to the present day.

According to a Wall Street Journal op-ed MacDonald published in 2020, “A solid body of evidence finds no structural bias in the criminal justice system with regard to arrests, prosecutions or sentencing. Crime and suspect behavior, not race, determine most police actions.”  

97 In another testimony before the House Judiciary Committee in 2019, Mac Donald stated: “The anti-police narrative deflects attention away from solving the real criminal justice problem, which is high rates of black victimization. Blacks die of homicide at eight times the rate of whites. The homicide death rate for black males between the ages of 15 and 24 is 16 times higher than that of young white men. That is the civil rights problem that should most concern us. Those black victims are killed not by cops, not by


whites, but by other blacks. Blacks commit homicide nationally at eight times the rate of whites and Hispanics combined.”

Mac Donald contends that “The best solution to urban crime is to reconstruct the family. That is a long-term project, however. In the meantime, the policing revolution that began in New York in the 1990s and spread nationwide has given law-abiding residents of high crime communities greater freedom to take their children to school or go to the grocery store without fear, an expectation that is the government’s most fundamental obligation to meet. Policing today is more professional and restrained than at any time in its history. And there is no government agency more dedicated to the proposition that black lives matter than the police.” 98 She bolsters this assertion in another Journal op-ed on The Myth of the Racist Cop, in which she says, “four studies out this year show that if police are biased, it’s in favor of blacks.” 99 She does not refer or link these studies in her article.

While Heather Mac Donald argues against police reform and denies systemic racism within the law enforcement system, Michael Fortner argues that there is indeed systemic racism within the law enforcement system but that elites misunderstand Black attitudes toward crime and policing. 100

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Michael Fortner is an associate professor of government at Claremont McKenna College. Fortner studies the intersection of American public policy and political philosophy—specifically the fields of race, ethnicity, and class. He is the author of *Black Silent Majority: The Rockefeller Drug Laws and the Politics of Punishment* (Harvard University Press, 2015), a *New York Times Book Review* Editors’ Choice and winner of the New York Academy of History’s Herbert H. Lehman Prize for Distinguished Scholarship in New York History. He has also written for *The New York Times*, *Newsweek*, and *Dissent* magazine. His research has been covered in major media outlets, such as the *Atlantic*, *The New York Times*, the *New Yorker*, *New York Magazine*, the *Daily Beast*, *Time*, WNYC, and NPR. 101

In a policy essay published by the Niskanen Center titled “Reconstructing Justice: Race, Generational Divides, and the Fight Over ‘Defund the Police,’” Fortner examines a numerous polls on public opinions towards police and community relations and movement “defund the Police” based on race and age. He finds a few focused takeaways starting with “the fight over ‘defund the police’ is as much a conflict between young and old and left and center as it is between Black and white.” Regarding his analysis of polling, he says, “national polls demonstrate that there is a great deal of confusion around the word “defund,” and most African Americans see it as something other than completely ridding cities of cops.” The confusion surrounding the defund the police movement is widespread, but the movement calls for reallocation of funds towards

mental healthcare and social workers and “most Americans, especially Blacks, see room for community groups and non-law enforcement professionals, such as social workers and doctors, in a broader public safety strategy. The evidence recommends the same.” 102

After investigating the multitude of polls, Fortner concludes that African Americans’ preferred response to police abuses is not the abolition of the police but better policing, alongside the shifting of some police responsibilities to other social services. It is not difficult for one to question the fundamental logic of policing in the U.S., but “The persistence of police brutality might suggest that coercive organizations cannot execute their mission fairly amid vast inequality.” Given the history of policing and the U.S., as well as clear cut evidence of disproportionate police brutality towards the Black community, “it is not unreasonable to seek alternative strategies to achieve public safety that do not rely on the state’s monopoly on violence, especially when the death of civilians at the hands of law enforcement continually calls into question the legitimacy of its use.” 103 Fortner also discusses the limits to the current age of reform. “As the polling suggests, neither ‘abolition’ nor severe cuts to police budgets appear to have the requisite public support to be enacted.” He says that “While African Americans no longer have an appetite for harsh sentences and aggressive policing, they also don’t hunger for less policing.” He argues that polling shows Black neighborhoods across the nation believe policing is needed even “if it is flawed, dangerous, and, all too often, racist.” 104

102 Fortner, Michael Javen. “Race, Generational Divides, and the Fight Over ‘Defund the Police,’” 2020
103 Ibid
104 Ibid
Thus, while Fortner’s data-based argument indicates little public support, especially among the Black community, for police abolition, he does mention the importance of reform and police accountability. He cites, for example, that the officer who killed George Floyd had 17 complaints against him. The officer who murdered Laquan McDonald had 20 complaints against him, including ones related to the use of excessive force. Fortner says that the data show, “overwhelming numbers support maintaining public records of use of force and police misconduct and abuse.” Additionally, there is increased suspicion towards police unions and their ability to have unreasonable influence in limiting the punishment officers face for misconduct or abuse. He writes: “In police departments across the country, dangerous individuals remain on the job and frequently escape any punishment as they are shielded by collective bargaining agreements.”\(^{105}\) Fortner says the country does not need to wait for abolition to end the careers of police officers involved in misconduct and abuse.

In order to end the over-policing and under-protections of African Americans, Fortner argues, it is essential to rebuild “the civic infrastructure and social safety net in urban black communities.” Rebuilding will take serious strategy, coordinated policymaking, agile leadership, and negotiating collective bargaining agreements with police unions. This is not an easy task and will be even more difficult, Fortner says, since the racial awakening many had after the media coverage of George Floyd’s murder is weakening, and with that, so is the support for making needed changes. “Among whites and Blacks, disapproval of the police has begun to fall towards its pre-George Floyd levels. Images of

\(^{105}\) Ibid
violence, disorder, and devastation might alienate moderates. If recent upticks in murder rates become a long-term trend, we might see the return of ‘get tough’ politics.” Fortner writes that the opportunity for police reform is viable within the center-left coalition and “We should seize this moment while it lasts.” Ultimately, he believes there is space for police reform and structural changes within policing but little desire for total police abolition.

In contrast to Fortner, Coordinator of the Policing and Social Justice Project and Professor of Sociology at Brooklyn College, Alex Vitale argues that the focus does not need to be on police reform or officer retraining, but the fundamental existence of policing itself. Vitale is both a consultant to police departments and human rights organizations internationally. He is the author of *City of Disorder: How the Quality of Life Campaign Transformed New York Politics* and *The End of Policing*. His writing has been published in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Guardian*, *The Nation*, *Vice News*, *Fortune*, and *USA Today*. His academic work on policing has also been published in *Policing and Society*, *Police Practice and Research*, *Mobilization*, and *Contemporary Sociology*.

Vitale’s book, *The End of Policing*, critiques policing practices within the United States and offers a comprehensive discussion of the productivity of police reform efforts. Vitale believes that police reforms cannot fix the current police crisis, arguing “what we really need is to rethink the role of police in society.” Vitale calls for changes to the

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106 Ibid
107 Alex S. Vitale, *The End of Policing* (Verso 2017)
current economic structure and criminal justice system. In addition to this, he argues that there will need to be cultural shifts paired with value changes. While Vitale does not recommend the complete abandonment of policing, he does posit the inevitable question of how to implement effective police accountability.

Vitale writes that police have been tasked with addressing an unmanageable number of social problems in the United States. Policing is used to address students’ intransigence in schools, issues of homelessness, untreated mental illness, youth violence, and numerous other community challenges. Vitale calls for rethinking “why we've turned all of these social problems over to the police to manage. And as we dial those things back, then we can think more concretely about what the rest of policing should look like and how that could be reformed.”108 When communities or governments turn societal problems such as homelessness over to the police to manage, it will result in violence “because those are ultimately the tools that they are most equipped to utilize: handcuffs, threats, guns, arrests. That's what really is at the root of policing. So if we don't want violence, we should try to figure out how to not get the police involved.”109

Vitale is not arguing for a scenario in which a switch is flipped, and there are no police. Instead, he proposed “the systematic questioning of the specific roles that police currently undertake, and attempting to develop evidence-based alternatives so that we can dial back our reliance on them. And my feeling is that this encompasses actually the vast

109 Ibid
majority of what police do.” He provides the example of burglary to support his argument. “Even if you take something like burglary — a huge amount of burglary activity is driven by drug use. And we need to completely rethink our approach to drugs so that property crime isn't the primary way that people access drugs. We don't have any part of this country that has high-quality medical drug treatment on demand. But we have policing on demand everywhere. And it's not working.”

Vitale states that the steps toward moving in a direction in which police are relieved of responsibility for most social problems include a series of local budget battles and “rallying city council members and mayors around a new vision of creating healthier communities.” He argues that “part of our misunderstanding about the nature of policing is we keep imagining that we can turn police into social workers. That we can make them nice, friendly community outreach workers. But police are violence workers. That's what distinguishes them from all other government functions. ... They have the legal capacity to use violence in situations where the average citizen would be arrested.”

Police are ill-trained in responding to a variety of calls, and as their profession is intrinsically violent, society must create alternatives to police response.

It would be irresponsible to ignore the importance of the history of policing. Historical knowledge has continued to help academics explain human nature. Heather Mac Donald’s views on systemic racism and reform towards policing are not consistent with the understandings of the origins of policing. Michael Fortner’s arguments take

\[^{110}\text{Ibid}\]
\[^{111}\text{Ibid}\]
\[^{112}\text{Ibid}\]
\[^{113}\text{Ibid}\]
history deep into account, using public polling to support his argument. Alex Vitale’s argument is consistent with history and takes the origins of policing into his account examining police abolition and alternatives. There is a clear demand for change in policing institutions in both the U.S. and Nigeria consistent with public opinion polls.

Conclusion

The U.S. and Nigeria face deep-rooted policing challenges of authority, abuse, and impunity. These challenges stem from the original policing systems put in place as a result of colonization. Tackling these universal challenges to policing is a daunting task, especially considering the multitude of controversial approaches to reform. Making reform even more difficult are the individuals who do not believe reform is even necessary. It is reasonably confusing to those who do not know the right approach to reform. One must rely on the facts in order to understand the best approach to police reform.

In the United States, the voices of all Americans must be considered, not just those with power. The majority of Americans, 58%, say major changes are needed to make policing better, 36% say minor changes are needed, and 6% say no changes are needed. Additionally, the striking partisan divide regarding police reform must not be ignored. According to Pew Research, close to nine out of ten Democrats, 89%, support major changes in policing. Only 14% of Republicans say the same. Independents stand at

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around 60%. Most Republicans, 72%, say minor changes are needed. One must also consider the differences in demographic groups. Around nine in ten Black Americans, 88%, say major changes are needed, while around 63% of Hispanic Americans and 51% of White Americans. A 2020 Gallup poll surveyed Americans’ support for different approaches to police reforms and found the below-attached results.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Americans’ Support for Policing Reform Options, by Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>All Americans</th>
<th>Black Americans</th>
<th>Asian Americans</th>
<th>Hispanic Americans</th>
<th>White Americans</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Changing management practices so officers with multiple incidents of abuse of power are not allowed to serve</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>99</td>
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<td>97</td>
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<tr>
<td>Requiring officers to have good relations with the community</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>97</td>
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<tr>
<td>Changing management practices so officer abuses are punished</td>
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<tr>
<td>Promoting community-based alternatives such as violence intervention</td>
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<td>Ending stop and frisk</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eliminating police unions</td>
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<td>Eliminating officer enforcement of nonviolent crimes</td>
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<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reducing the budgets of police departments and shifting the money to social programs</td>
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<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abolishing police departments</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

GALLUP PANEL, JUNE 23-JULY 6, 2020


116 Ibid

While there is insignificant polling regarding questions related to police reform in Nigeria, there is significant polling evidence regarding police brutality in Nigeria. NOIPolls conducted a public perception survey on police brutality, which found that 77% of Nigerians say that police brutality is a prevalent issue in Nigeria. This majority percentage of Nigerians who say that police brutality is a prevalent issue in Nigeria demonstrates the need for police reform in the country. It is important Nigeria takes steps towards reforming its policing institutions, and central to doing so is eliminating corruption from within itself. Officers who act with excessive force and brutality must be held accountable. Additionally, Nigeria’s government needs to acknowledge the extent of violence the Nigerian Police Force uses on those they are sworn to protect.

119 Ibid
Centuries of systemic racism dating back to the colonization of America have plagued American institutions. American policing is broken. While incremental reforms are a step in the right direction, they have not proven all effective. Eric Garner and George Floyd are still dead regardless that New York had banned chokeholds decades ago and officers are required to step in when witnessing a fellow officer using excessive force. Expanding body camera programs, while beneficial in shedding light and drawing attention to officer misconduct, police impunity structures make it all too difficult to hold officers engaged in abuse and misconduct truly accountable. It is time to rethink public safety measures, including alternatives to policing.

The evidence demonstrating the need for police reform in the United States and Nigeria is clear. The impact of colonization significantly contributed to the problems within both country’s policing institutions and their behaviors. While it is impossible to recreate history, both countries can take much-needed steps to better their policing systems.

Perhaps some of the best insights into the future of policing in the U.S. are offered in this quote from the Senator from New Jersey, Cory Booker:

“I’m optimistic about the future because there has been a growing consciousness in our country. When you actually get away from the politicians and talk to people from local activists to local leader’s to city council members to mayors all across the country and leaders in the police, they all know that reform is needed, and you are starting to see a lot of reform around this country. I’m hopeful that we’re going to get to a point where we empower the police profession to be the kind of leaders in our communities and connected to the community and respectful of the community, and honor the rights of citizens. I’m excited that a whole bunch of other ideas that are flourishing that police leaders know we need would reduce the demand on police officers in the first place. Things like mental health, things like investing in harm reductions for drug addiction, things like treatment, there’s a lot of really enlightened policies that would make us all safer without even the need for police officers in the first place. I’m a prisoner of hope. The future is going to be difficult. I think we’re still going to see instances in our country,
but hopefully, they will be ignition points for more activism, more change more people coming together around evidence-based reforms that make a difference for our public safety and our well-being in our communities.”  

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120 Booker, Cory. Interview by Emma Goldfield. Personal Interview. December 5th, 2021.
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