

LmunA 2024

Research report

Forum: Human Rights Council

Issue: Discussing strategies to bring an end to police brutality

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Introduction

There are strict international laws and standards governing how and when police can use force – particularly lethal force.

The UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials (BPUFF) is the key international instrument that deals with police use of force.

Under international law, police officers are only allowed to use lethal force as a last resort. This means when such force is strictly necessary to protect themselves or others from the immediate threat of death or serious injury, and only when other options for de-escalation are insufficient.

Many killings by the police that have been seen around the world do not meet this criteria.

Definition of key terms

Police brutality

Excessive, unwarranted and often illegal use of violence by a member of law enforcement, particularly a police officer, while on duty against an individual or against a group. This also includes beatings, racial abuse, unlawful killings and torture.

General Overview

USA

The USA has a long history of police brutality spanning many decades, and there have been several noteworthy cases throughout the years.

The amount of media attention that police brutality cases have received is critical to informing communities and the public about it.

For a variety of reasons, incidents of police brutality against black Americans became more frequent and more intense throughout the country in the decades following World War II.

One of those reasons was that the victory of the forces of democracy in the war overseas created among black American citizens expectations of greater freedom and democracy at home, especially as many of them had served in combat in the U.S. armed forces. As African Americans began to assert their formal rights and liberties, demanding that they be respected by the local and federal government and the law-enforcement agencies, their

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demands had the effect of reinforcing the tendency of white police officers to view themselves as protectors of white communities.

Secondly, the migration of rural white people to nearby cities in search of better economic opportunities encouraged police to view their own violence against African Americans as a more acceptable means of control than the hysteria that rural white people had been accustomed to and that urban spaces simply did not allow. During this period, white supremacist and terrorist organisations such as the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) and the White Citizens' Council operated openly in Southern cities, where police brutality against African Americans was allowed by government and political leaders, district attorneys, and judges, among others.

In 2020, in Minnesota, police responded to a call of resident George Floyd using counterfeit money. Four police officers escalated the disturbance in an attempt to arrest Floyd. With one of the officers pinning Floyd down, footage put on the internet by bystanders shook the country. Some bystanders were trying to intervene but were stopped by the three other police officers who were at the scene. The time before his death, Floyd repeatedly said that he was not able to breathe. An autopsy later showed "asphyxiation from sustained pressure." Another report associated a heart disease with his death. All involved officers were fired and charged. Protests and riots developed instantly across the U.S., growing into a public revolution over police cruelty.

Psychology

There could be multiple reasons that may play a role in police brutality, not all of which have to do with the underlying personality of the officer who engages in the act.

However, each of them can be considered from a psychological standpoint or psychological lens.

- The mental health of the offending officer may play a role. A 2019 study found that officers who self-reported engaging in abusive police practices tended to have higher levels of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms.
- If the police department sets limits for the use of force that allows police officers to use their own discretion (in other words, limits that are too vague), then it is likely that officers will use more excessive force.
- Research has also demonstrated that the risk of being killed as a result of the use of excessive force by police in the United States varies by racial and ethnic group membership

The consequences of such systems being trusted with power by the state to carry weapons with work that is essential to help communities be safe and make sure that citizens are

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following the law. When distrust, abuse of power, and discrimination are associated with the police force, it does the opposite of the intent. When the police force themselves are not following the law, and in fact breaching international human rights by discriminatory crimes, the system does not work.

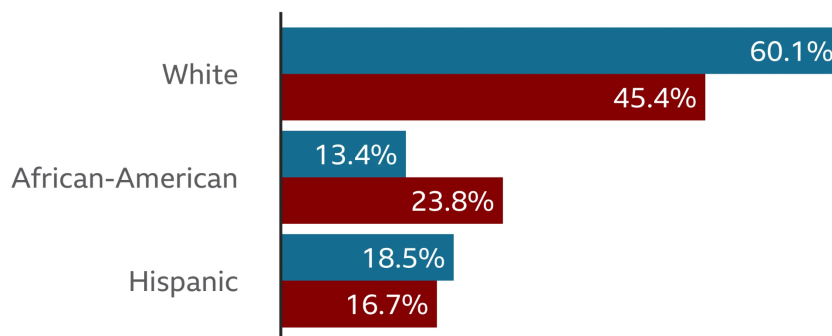


Remembering George Floyd - Ford Foundation

Fatal police shootings and population size by ethnic group

Total shootings reported between Jan 2015 and Mar 2021

■ Population ■ Killed in police shootings



Note: Remaining fatal shootings among other minorities or unknown ethnicities

Source: US Census Bureau, Washington Post police shootings database



George Floyd: How are African Americans treated under the law

Major parties involved

OHCHR

The United Nations Human Rights Office is an office of the United Nations that works to protect the human rights in all nations, as all have signed the Universal Declarations of Human Rights which give them the right to operate under international law. This has significance to this situation because the right to not be discriminated against is a right that is breached by police brutality.

Previous attempts to solve the issue

On June 19th 2020, the United Nations passed a resolution that the UN high commissioner along with UN experts on the subject write a report on the global situation with systematic racism and the law enforcing discrimination against people of colour specifically of African descent. Cases of racism in the police force, such as the one of George Floyd, will be fixated on and this will contribute to holding the criminals, systems and police force further accountable. This will help such a powerful nation be held accountable by the Human Rights Watch, as according to the Human Rights Watch no country no matter its power should be able to commit such breaches against human rights without consequence.

Possible solutions

- Authorities could create programs with which police officers and departments could reduce bias.
- Police forces should be more regularly checked for discriminatory behaviour towards citizens.
- The United States and other countries should hold their systems accountable for systematic racism, and the Human Rights Watch should further hold these nations accountable for such breaches of human rights.

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