

US police killed more than 1,150 in 2016

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At least 1,152 people were killed by police in the United States in 2016 according to the tracking site killedbypolice.net. While the total number of killings documented is slightly down from 2015's total of 1,208, police continued to kill at the rate of three people every day.

The number of people killed by police every year in the United States far dwarfs those killed by police in every other major advanced capitalist country. In 2015, for example, US cops killed 100 times more people than German police, despite the US having only about four times Germany's population. Meanwhile in the UK only 14 people were killed by police in 2014.

Paul Hirschfield, a sociologist at Rutgers University, found that the US police shot and killed at a ratio of 3.42 people per million inhabitants per year. In contrast, Denmark had a ratio of 0.187; France, 0.17; Sweden, 0.133; Portugal, 0.125; Germany, 0.09; Norway, 0.06; Netherlands, 0.06; Finland, 0.034; and England and Wales, 0.016.

The overwhelming and often deadly violence meted out by American police is, among other things, an expression of the brutal and tense state of class relations in the US. Large sections of the working class live in or near poverty with basic needs like clean water, nutritious food, a job, healthcare, a good place to live and an education beyond reach.

The state, in turn, has responded with brute force, cutting access to basic social services and spending billions of dollars upgrading and militarizing the nation's police force. This has included the mobilization of the National Guard and the imposition of states of emergencies to quell protests against police violence in recent years.

The United States is a country where fraud, bribery, deception and outright theft, all on a massive scale, are standard business practices for the major banks and corporations. Meanwhile the working class is held to an

entirely different standard, in which execution without trial by a police officer is an increasingly common punishment for the smallest of misdemeanors.

The end of the year is an opportunity to assess this mass loss of life and clarify the political issues at stake in this state sanctioned murder.

According to the *Washington Post*, which runs its own database on the number of people *shot* and killed by police (not just killed), 24 percent of the victims of police shootings and killings were black in 2016. That is 232 people out of 957 total shot and killed. In 2016 African Americans were shot at a rate double their percentage share of the total population.

While the media discussion around police killings and the protests by the Black Lives Matter organization has focused on the disproportionate rate at which blacks are killed by police, the largest share, 48 percent, are white.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* has emphasized, "Blacks are killed by police at a much higher rate than their proportion in the population, an indication that racism plays a significant role, but the number of white victims demonstrates that class, not race, is the more fundamental issue."

The exclusive focus on race by the pseudo left and the Democratic Party establishment conceals the most fundamental issue, that of class.

While the *Post* does not track the class of those killed going through each killing, though, case-by-case, one would be hard pressed to find people from the upper classes, let alone better off sections of workers and professionals, regardless of the color of their skin. Those who are killed are often from the lowest sections of the working class, and often its most vulnerable layers: the unemployed, the mentally ill, those living in the poorest neighborhoods, both rural and urban, and the homeless.

For example, of the 957 killed, 240 had clear

discernible signs of mental illness—that is, 25 percent of the victims.

Of the victims, 441 were not armed with a gun, 46 percent of those killed. One-hundred seventy people were armed with a knife. And, 44 had a toy weapon of some kind. Forty-seven were neither armed nor driving a car in a way the police deemed dangerous.

Sixty-five were driving cars, causing the police to categorize the vehicle as a weapon. However, in many instances there is no evidence to show that a vehicle acted as a weapon. For example, Christian Redwine, a 17-year-old white male, was shot after a car-chase in which Redwine crashed. He was unarmed and was suspected of stealing the vehicle.

Another notable fact is that 329 of the victims were fleeing, about 34 percent of the victims.

These cumulative statistics show the willingness of police to quickly kill people who pose little to no threat to them.

Police killings should be considered in the broader context of punishment for the most vulnerable and impoverished. In the United States, over 2 million people are in federal or state prisons. Furthermore, 4.75 million are on probation or parole. This means that about 7 million people, 3 percent of the adult population, have been or are in prison.

As in the case of police killings, many of these people have been locked up for shoplifting, grand theft auto and robbery. Many others are incarcerated for drug possession and use.

While millions of destitute and hopeless people in the US are brutally punished for relatively minor infractions, the real criminals, those in the Bush and Obama administrations responsible for wars of aggression that have cost the lives of hundreds of thousands in the Middle East, as well as the bankers who crashed the economy in 2008, have reaped the benefits of their much more serious crimes.

No amount of police training, community engagement or racial bias classes will end police killings. The deaths are born out of much more fundamental political and economic realities than what this or that police officer feels and thinks. In 2017, amidst a worsening political and economic crisis, the state will be even more ready to kill, harass and imprison the poorest section of the population.



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