

# New Mexico state police note “significant increase” in police shootings

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A July 19 report by Albuquerque news outlet KOB4 quoted New Mexico State Police (NMSP) Major Matt Broom as saying that there has been “a significant increase” in shootings by law enforcement in the state this year. According to the report, shootings by State Police, county sheriffs and local cops from January 1 to July 19 totaled 18 in 2019 and 20 in 2020.

For 2021, the number had jumped to 34 in the same timeframe. Of these, the NMSP is investigating 21, which break down to 11 people killed, eight injured and two escaped. One NMSP officer was killed.

Broom told the channel that the shootings “aren’t centralized to Albuquerque, they are not centralized to Las Cruces [the state’s second most populous city, with a metro figure of about 218,000], or any particular part of the state. There’s just been a significant increase.” He admitted at the same time, “We have not seen a significant increase in violent crime outside of officer-involved shootings.

“The largest increase has been with smaller police departments, concentrated in rural parts of the state,” according to the report. Broom said, “I really can’t tell what the driving force for that [is].”

Police shootings in 2021 have borne out Broom’s statement:

- In Santa Fe County, home of the eponymous state capital, there were four shootings from June 23 to July 7, three of them fatal, involving Santa Fe police, Santa Fe County sheriff’s deputies and NMSP officers.

- Albuquerque Police Department officers shot a man in the chin after he stole a bait car (a decoy used to entrap car thieves) on July 6. Officers said that he had pulled a gun and shot at them. He was taken to the hospital and survived the wound.

- In Roswell, in southeastern New Mexico, two Chaves County sheriff’s deputies shot and killed a man

while responding to a domestic violence call on June 27. One deputy claimed, “As we approached him at gunpoint, he pulled something out of his pocket. He had a quick movement toward us,” and that they feared for their lives. They found a cell phone, but no weapon, by his body.

A lapel camera filmed the encounter. Sheriff Mike Herrington asserted after seeing the video, “I believe it will be a justifiable shooting. The deputies did exactly as they were trained to do.” However, civil rights attorney Laura Schauer Ives told KRQE, “It looked like an execution to me.”

- On July 16, Roswell Police Department officers, along with officers from multiple other agencies shot a man who they said shot at them. He fled but died from his wound. No officers were hurt.

- In Las Vegas, a city of about 14,000 in the state’s northeast, local police shot and killed a 30-year-old man who they said pointed a gun and shot at them. The NMSP is conducting an investigation.

As throughout the country, police violence has been a constant scourge in New Mexico year after year, including killings of political activists as well as the mentally ill and homeless people, in addition to those deemed “suspects.” New Mexico is tied with Alaska for the highest number of police killings per capita since 2015, according to the database of fatal police shootings maintained by the *Washington Post*. There were 129 recorded police killings in the state between January 13, 2015 and July 17 of this year, or more than 61 deaths for every one million residents. This averages out to one police killing approximately every six weeks.

Following the March 16, 2014 killing of mentally ill homeless man James Boyd by two APD officers in the Albuquerque foothills and protests against the long

record of police violence, the federal Department of Justice (DoJ) under President Barack Obama intervened in an attempt to quell popular anger.

The DoJ issued a report that included the unsurprising statement that “we have reasonable cause to believe that APD engages in a pattern or practice of use of excessive force, including deadly force, in violation of the Fourth Amendment [the constitutional provision barring ‘unreasonable searches and seizures’]. ... We have determined that structural and systemic deficiencies—including insufficient oversight, inadequate training, and ineffective policies—contribute to the use of unreasonable force.”

The WSWS commented on August 12, 2014:

The summary concludes that there is nothing “isolated or sporadic” about the APD’s use of excessive force, but rather that it “stems from systemic deficiencies in oversight, training, and policy,” primarily “failure to implement an objective and rigorous internal accountability system. Force incidents are not properly investigated, documented, or addressed with corrective measures.”

What followed the report was a “settlement agreement” with mostly cosmetic changes, a series of carefully controlled “community meetings” and the reshuffling of the Police Oversight Commission following the resignations of three of its members. In the following years, the APD increased its stockpile of weapons and obtained military vehicles courtesy of the Obama administration.

The trial of the two officers who murdered Boyd finally took place in October 2017. The special prosecutor lowered the charge to second-degree murder under the assumption that a conviction would be easier to obtain. The outcome of the trial was a hung jury, and the possibility of a retrial appears a closed book.

As has happened in other cities, the settlement agreement and the hoopla around it did not bring real changes to police violence in Albuquerque or anywhere else in New Mexico. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the crises of poverty, homelessness, health care, education, inequality and abuse of immigrants in New Mexico, one of the poorest states, and throughout the US. In the eyes of the ruling class, more, not less repression will have to be deployed against the working class as the capitalist crisis deepens.

Since the function of police forces is to “protect and

serve” the interests of the ruling class, not of the working-class majority, bringing the epidemic of police violence to an end is not a matter of training or reform. It is up to the working class to rid the world of the source of police violence, capitalism, and replace it with socialism, the only progressive alternative.



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