US police have killed more than 30,000 people since 1980

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A new study published in *The Lancet* found that US law enforcement killed at least 30,800 people from 1980 to 2019.

The study, conducted at the University of Washington School of Medicine's Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, also found a sharp increase in police killings over the period covering almost 40 years. During the 1980s the mortality rate associated with police violence was 0.25 per 100,000. By the 2010s the rate jumped up to 0.34 per 100,000, an increase of 38.4 percent.

Moreover, researchers discovered that more than half of fatal encounters with police in the United States went unreported at the same time. The study estimated 55 percent of deaths from police violence were not reported or were misclassified in official government databases between 1980 and 2018. These unreported killings represent more than 17,000 deaths at the hands of US police that were kept from public view over a period covering almost 40 years. However, this troubling statistic is still likely an underestimation of the real impact of police brutality.

The new study provides a clearer picture of the issue of police violence in the United States. However, it does not fully account for the real social toll. What's missing from this report is the untold number of victims that are brutalized by police but survive the physical and emotional scars bore by the victims and their families and the immeasurable suffering inflicted on families and communities that lose a loved one at the hands of police.

To grasp the extent of underreporting of police-involved killings, researchers compared data from the US National Vital Statistics System (NVSS), a government database that collates all death certificates, to three common open-source databases on fatal police violence: Fatal Encounters, Mapping Police Violence and The Counted. Open-source databases collect information from news reports and public record requests, encompassing a wider range of incidents.

The paper noted a Global Burden of Diseases, Injuries, and Risk Factors Study found that police killings accounted for 293,000 global deaths from 1980 to 2019. In 2019, the US accounted for 13.2 percent of the 8,770 global deaths at the hands of police, while only accounting for 4 percent of the world's population.

"The difference these practices have on loss of life is staggering: No one died from police violence in Norway in 2019, and three people were recorded to have died in England and Wales from police violence between 2018 and 2019," the researchers wrote.

Researchers discovered the top five states with the highest underreporting rates were Oklahoma, Wyoming, Alabama, Louisiana and Nebraska. The states with the highest mortality rate of police brutality were Oklahoma, Washington D.C., Arizona, Alaska, Nevada and Wyoming. Additionally, the paper found that men are killed by police at significantly higher rates than women, with 30,600 police-involved deaths recorded among men and 1,420 among women between 1980 and 2019, a difference of over 2,000 percent.

The study suggested "several factors" are behind the underreporting, including clerical mistakes wherein a coroner or medical examiner may fail to indicate police involvement in a death certificate's cause of death section. However, the grim reality is that the cover-up of police murders is a conscious policy of the American ruling class and police state.

The researchers noted the fact that coroners and medical examiners are often embedded within police departments and may feel "substantial conflicts of interest" that disincentivize them from indicating law enforcement involvement in a death. The study cited a 2011 survey of National Association of Medical Examiners members that found 22 percent of respondents reported having been pressured by an elected official or appointee to change the

cause or manner of death on a certificate.

The national media and the Democratic Party frame police violence as a purely racial issue. Following the sentencing of former Minneapolis Officer Derek Chauvin, President Joe Biden claimed the murder of George Floyd "ripped the blinders off for the whole world to see the systemic racism" imbedded in American society.

The "race, not class" mythology of police killings has been incessantly promoted by the Democratic Party and its political satellites. Regardless of a victim's skin color, the epidemic of police violence in America devastates families and impacts entire communities. However, this is not how police brutality is presented in the national media.

Undoubtedly, racism plays a role in many police murders and accounts for the fact that minorities are killed at rates disproportionate to their share of the national population. However, a more thorough analysis shows that the killing of minorities by police is only one aspect of the reign of terror by American police against the working class.

A 2018 analysis of police violence statistics published by the *World Socialist Web Site* found that when economic and social demographics of the cities and counties where people are killed by police are taken into account, the glaring racial disparities that are the focus of the media and the Democrats largely disappear.

Rather, police violence is concentrated on the poorest and most disadvantaged men and women. We noted:

> Police violence is focused overwhelmingly on men lowest on the socio-economic ladder: in rural areas outside the South, predominately white men; in the Southwest, disproportionately Hispanic men; in mid-size and major cities, disproportionately black men. Significantly, in the rural South, where the population is racially mixed, white men and black men are killed by police at nearly identical rates. What unites these victims of police violence is not their race, but their class status (as well as, of course, their gender).

In 2020, police killed 475 white people, 241 black people and 169 Hispanic people, as well as 126 people of unknown race. Police violence affects all sections of the working class. Presenting police violence as a racial issue only serves to divide the working class and obfuscate the social processes behind police killings. In truth, the epidemic of police violence in America is reflective of a society defined by immense and ever-growing social inequality.

For decades, conditions for American workers have become more dire as their real wages stagnate and social programs have been eliminated in favor of the militarist aims of American imperialism. The financial crisis of 2008-09 exacerbated the misery of the working class, as well as police killings. Significantly, the study published in *The Lancet* recorded a sharp uptick in police killings around this time, further indicating a link between America's social crisis and police killings.

This is further established by the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic. While workers and children are forced into unsafe environments, endless sums of money are made available to the ultra-wealthy to continue their bonanza of financial speculation on Wall Street. Meanwhile, poverty, hunger, homelessness and death have become commonplace among the working class.

The rise in police killings in the United States is the manifestation of the social inequality that pervades American society. Rather than being a "black vs. white" issue, it is the armed representatives of the capitalist state (frequently minorities themselves) carrying out their social function: protecting the property of the wealthy and violently suppressing working-class opposition to the capitalist system. Ending police violence requires the abolition of the capitalist system, which police ruthlessly defend with a bloody fist.

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