

With US police killings on track to eclipse last year's record, Democratic-run cities seek to add killer robots

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Recent statistics from researchers at MappingPoliceViolence.us indicate that police killings in the United States are on pace to eclipse last year's record number.

Fueled by billions of dollars in local, state and federal funding and political support from Democrats and Republicans alike, police in the US, as of November 27, 2022, have killed 1,054 people. The staggering figure is 20 more than the number of people killed by police at the same time last year.

In the land of inequality, on average police kill three people a day, however there were several days this year on which police killed six or more people. As of November 27, there were only 13 days in the US on which police did *not* kill someone, according to MappingPoliceViolence.us.

Slightly higher figures have been compiled by the *Washington Post* which found that between December 1, 2021, and December 1, 2022, police had shot and killed at least 1,091 people in the last year. There is no central national database for police killings, leaving it up to news outlets and researchers to compile lists based on local news reports and records requests.

In contrast to the racist narrative of police violence advanced by the Democratic Party as a way to obscure the class character of police violence, according to the *Washington Post* 226 people identified as white have been killed by police so far this year. This figure is more than the combined 212 people shot by police this year who were identified as either African American, Hispanic or "other."

The race of the majority of those killed by police, 568, was classified as "unknown" by the paper. However, as is the case every year, victims of police

violence are overwhelmingly working class males between the ages of 20–39.

Rejecting demands from millions of workers and youth of all races who marched throughout the United States and internationally in opposition to unending police violence in the summer and fall of 2020 following the police murder of George Floyd, the Democrats, led by President Joe Biden, have completely abandoned any pretense of supporting reform measures and have demonstrably rejected the popular call to "defund the police."

Instead, the Democrats have sought to outflank their "Republican colleagues" to the right when it comes to lavishing praise, funding and military-grade weaponry on police departments across the country.

In San Francisco on Tuesday, the city's Democratic Party-controlled board of supervisors, in an 8–3 decision, voted to approve a new "Law Enforcement Equipment Policy" that allows the San Francisco Police Department to equip robots in their possession with explosives.

While hundreds of police departments across the US already use robots for surveillance, bomb disposal and rescue operations, it appears San Francisco is the first city to legalize the use of robots for the killing of humans.

Currently the city is in possession of 17 robots which they report they acquired between 2010 and 2017. Police spokesperson Alison Maxie said that the department, which has killed over 50 San Franciscans since 2000, did not have any current plans to arm the robots with guns, only bombs.

Maxie said that the explosive charges affixed to the robot would not be "pre-armed." Maxie claimed that

the killer robots would only be used under “extreme circumstances” to “contact, incapacitate, or disorient, violent, armed, or dangerous suspect[s] when lives are at stake.”

The measure to arm the robots has to go through another vote next week before Democratic Mayor London Breed, who has already signaled her support, can sign it into law. In addition to Breed, all 11 board members, each of whom are paid a salary in excess of \$140,000 a year, are Democrats.

Speaking in favor of giving police the authority under “emergency” situations to deploy remote-controlled ground-based robots with explosives to obliterate “suspects,” supervisor Rafael Mandleman said that he thought it was “bad” for Democrats “nationally” to look “like they are anti-police.”

Supervisor Matt Dorsey, former head of communications for the San Francisco Police Department, said he was “not prepared to be the first of 509 police departments in California to restrict this technology.”

Supervisor Dean Preston, one of three to vote against the proposal, noted that San Franciscans previously voted 62–38 against arming police with tasers and that he was “pretty sure” they would not approve of “killer robots.”

Preston said there was “serious potential for misuse and abuse of this military-grade technology, and zero showing of necessity.”

Nevertheless, on Tuesday, San Francisco Police Chief Bill Scott thanked the board for passing the measure saying that the police needed the “option.”

While the US military and CIA routinely use remote-controlled drones to assassinate the enemies of US imperialism around the world, the first instance of US police using a robot to kill someone was in Dallas, Texas, in 2016.

In that incident, Micah Xavier Johnson, an Afghan War veteran, launched an attack against the Dallas police department killing five police officers and injuring seven more. After the initial shootout with cops, an injured Johnson retreated into a nearby parking garage where he was cornered by police for several hours.

Police claimed that during the standoff Johnson threatened to shoot more cops and blow up buildings where he claimed to have planted explosives, thereby

leaving them “no choice” but deploy a robot equipped with a bomb against Johnson, killing him in the process.

In an interview with the *Washington Post* following the incident, Peter Singer, author of *Wired for War*, noted that US military forces deployed to Iraq regularly used robots to deploy antipersonnel mines against suspect “insurgents” located in crowded alleyways and buildings.

Speaking on the proliferation of robots within the police and military, Singer told the *Post* in 2016 that the US military has “over 12,000 robotic systems today—and police all over the place use robots for bomb disposal and surveillance.”

San Francisco is not the only city in California where the police are urgently seeking approval to use killer robots against the population. In a series of meeting beginning in September between the Oakland Police Department and the city’s civilian oversight board, it was revealed that the police were seeking approval to outfit robots with guns.

While the measure was not initially approved, Oakland officer Lt. Omar Daza-Quiroz told the *Intercept* in October that the police were still advocating for a policy that would allow the cops to deploy a robot that could shoot people with shotgun-like shells.

“Yes,” Daza-Quiroz told the *Intercept*, “we are looking into that and doing more research at this time.”



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