

A record year of death: Who were the victims of police violence in the US in 2022?

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Police in the United States killed at an unprecedented rate in 2022, taking the lives of at least 1,176 people, for an average of 3.2 deaths every day, according to a year end tally by Mapping Police Violence. There were just 12 days where police did not kill someone. People were killed in every state by local and state police, county sheriffs' deputies and federal agents.

While African Americans continued to be killed by the police at a rate disproportionate to their share of the population, accounting for nearly a quarter of killings in 2022, as in previous years, victims were of every race and ethnicity, with those classified as white accounting for the largest number of deaths.

It was also a deadly year for migrants encountering border police. There were at least 40 fatal encounters with Customs and Border Protection agents, according to a tally maintained by the Southern Borders Communities Coalition, the highest total for any year tracked by the group except for 2021.

Despite the grim, nearly daily occurrence of murders and homicides by the police, cops continued to kill with impunity, almost never facing criminal charges or significant disciplinary action. Police officers were criminally charged in just ten cases last year, less than 1 percent.

Those who face punishment after killing someone, typically paid leave and slap on the wrist, are quickly returned to the streets. Las Cruces Police officer Jared Cosper was returned to duty just a few months after he shot and killed 75-year-old Amelia Baca in the doorway of her home in April, 2022. A still unidentified Jacksonville, Florida, sheriff's deputy has remained on the job and faced no charges or disciplinary action despite killing Kevin Mahan, a 43-year-old white man who was suffering from a mental health emergency in April.

The details of police killings largely go unnoticed in the national media, with only brief local reports, which uncritically reproduce the official police account, often full of lies and obfuscation, thus giving only a distorted glimpse into the deadly reality of policing in America.

A selection of killings last year gives a sense of the reign of terror being waged by police forces across the country:

- One of the first people to be killed in 2022, was James Williams, of Canton, Ohio. The father of six was shot and killed by police officer Robert Huber without warning while ringing in the New Year with his family with celebratory gunfire in their fenced-in backyard.

- Jayland Walker was killed in Akron, Ohio, on June 27, 2022, in a hail of 90 police bullets after a car chase and brief pursuit on foot. His death sparked multiple nights of protests demanding an end to police violence, which were met by brutal police repression. The eight officers who shot him have not officially been named or charged, and were put on paid leave before returning to desk duty in October.

- One of the oldest victims of the year, 82-year-old Jose Antonio Suarez, was killed by police in Margate, Florida on March 27. Police claim that he was pointing a gun at people and firing it into the ground. When he allegedly pointed the gun at officers they opened fire, killing him on the spot.

“He was a frail old man. He was 82. He was hard of hearing,” Suarez's son told CBS4, noting that the elderly man had recently been under intense stress. 'His wife has dementia, his bathrooms, he had mold in the house that was making him and his wife ill, he was stressed out about that. He had been reaching out to us for a month. He said he didn't feel well. He wanted to die. He even went to the doctor and said he wanted to die. He wanted to catch COVID.’”

•The youngest recorded victim of the year was two-year-old Clesslynn Jane Crawford, killed by a police bullet during a shootout between her father and officers in Baxter Springs, Kansas.

• Thomas Siderio, Jr., 12, was shot in the back in March as he ran from plainclothes cops in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The cop who killed him, Edsaul Mendoza, has been charged with first and third degree murder and is set to go to trial this year. This marks the first time in the history of the city that an officer will face first-degree murder charges.

•Dakota L. Coleman, 27, was killed during a traffic stop in Oconto, Wisconsin. According to police she approached the sheriff's deputy with a knife and did not comply with his order, so he shot and killed her. According to a friend, Coleman, who was homeless, had been in an abusive relationship with the vehicle's driver and had discussed leaving him just two weeks before she was killed.

•Among the final tragedies of the year were the deaths of Maggie Dunn, 17, and Caroline Gill, 16. The pair of high school students was killed when Addis, Louisiana, officer David Cauthron, 42, slammed his police cruiser into their vehicle during a high speed pursuit on New Year's Eve. Dunn and Gill, both cheerleaders, were mere bystanders, having nothing to do with the allegedly stolen vehicle Cauthron and other officers were recklessly pursuing. Dunn's brother, Liam Dunn, a college student at University of Louisiana at Lafayette, was also in the struck vehicle and has been left in critical condition. Cauthron was arrested Sunday on two charges of negligent homicide and one charge of negligent injuring.

Nearly three years since the mass protests triggered by the murder of George Floyd by four police officers in Minneapolis, Minnesota, the reign of police violence continues unabated. Groups like Black Lives Matter which present police killings solely as a racial issue promote "community oversight" and "racial equity" as solutions, which has meant in practice the enrichment of a narrow layer of middle class minorities. The leaders of Black Lives Matter have enriched themselves off popular anger against police violence, signing lucrative corporate deals and buying themselves mansions, while the families of the victims of police violence languish.

Meanwhile the Democrats and Republicans continue

to work to outdo one another on their support for the police. The latest federal budget signed by President Joe Biden includes more \$1.3 billion for local police agencies, including \$324 million in grant money for the hiring of 1,800 new officers across the US. Meanwhile, Republican-controlled legislatures have passed laws which restrict the ability of people to film and protest police brutality.

The record level of police violence in 2022 makes clear that the police, as Friedrich Engels explained, are "special bodies of armed men," established and maintained to defend the capitalist system and the inequality which it creates. In their defense of private property the police target the working class, in particular the most vulnerable—the poor, the homeless and the mentally ill. The most backward fascist and racist elements are deliberately cultivated within their ranks to suppress any sign of opposition from workers.

Putting an end to police killings is not a matter of reform but of ending the system which has produced historic levels of inequality and violence, and reorganizing society to meet the needs of the working class rather than a privileged few at the top.



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