

License to kill: US police killed over 1,200 people in 2023

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29 December 2023

Nearly a decade after popular protests broke in Ferguson, Missouri, following the police shooting of 18-year-old Michael Brown, MappingPoliceViolence.us (MPV) has found that police killed at least 1,213 people this year in the US, slightly more than the 1,202 deaths tabulated by MPV in 2022.

According to MPV, citing data from police use of force collection programs, the Gun Violence Archive, the Fatal Encounters database, and public news reports, police in the United States killed more people in 2023 than any other year in the last decade.

There is no doubt the number of deaths recorded by MPV will rise before the end of the year; on average, police in the land of inequality kill just over three people a day. According to MPV, there have been only 18 days in the US this year where police did not kill someone, while there were at least 71 days where police killed five or more people in 24 hours. There were several days this year, such as July 3 and August 25 where police killed 9 people in single day.

Since MPV began tracking police violence in 2013, there has not been a single year in which cops have not claimed the lives of at least 1,039 individuals, overwhelmingly working class and poor. It total, since 2013, MPV has recorded 12,318 police killings in the US, over 5,000 more deaths than all US military personnel killed in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Yemen and other “war on terror” battlefields from October 2001 through October 2019, according to the Watson Institute at Brown University.

The killing of over 12,000 people by the police in the last decade is in indication of the deep fear that has gripped the ruling class. Unable to justify their parasitic existence and sociopathic policies—including the “let it rip” approach to COVID-19, which has killed over 700,000 Americans since Biden took office, and the

transfer of billions of dollars in war materiel to neo-Nazis in Ukraine and genocidal Zionists in Israel—and amid a growing upsurge in working class opposition, the ruling class is increasingly turning to wanton police violence in an effort to maintain their grip on power.

In an attempt to obscure the class character and widespread brutality of police violence, which is directed against workers and youth of all backgrounds, local police agencies and the federal government refuse to keep accurate, publicly-available information on the number of the deaths their agents cause every year, leaving it up to independent researchers and media agencies to try and piece together the grim toll.

The figures tabulated by MPV are similar to those gathered in a separate database maintained by the *Washington Post*. Unlike MPV, the *Post* only keeps track of how many people were shot and killed by police, leaving out deaths caused by police tasers, fists, batons, ‘less lethal’ ammunition, car chases and other causes.

Even with this limitation, the *Post* found police gunned down at least 1,089 people 2023, only seven less than the 1,096 recorded by the *Post* last year, which was the “highest number of people on record” according to the paper.

While police violence is overwhelmingly presented in the mainstream press as a racial question, data from MPV shows that the most killings per capita so far this year were in the states of New Mexico, Alaska, Idaho, Colorado and West Virginia, none of which have a black population above 6 percent. In these states most of the victims were white or Hispanic.

While black people continued to be killed by police at a disproportionate rate compared to their actual share of the population, with racism likely playing a factor in many

cases, MPV data, shows that overall, 441 victims of police violence in 2023 have been identified as white, the most out of any racial group, with 62 more deaths than recorded by MPV last year. At the same time at least 261 black people were killed by police this year, 9 less than MPV recorded last year.

While police killings are generally swept under the rug by the media, with local news reports typically reproducing police statements verbatim and uncritically, the *World Socialist Web Site* reported on dozens of killings this year. These are just a few of the more high profile cases:

- On January 7, Tyre Nichols, a 29-year-old black man was savagely beaten to death by five black officers from the Memphis Police Department. Nichols' killing refutes the racist narrative advanced by the Democratic Party and its identity politics allies who claim that police violence is an expression of "white supremacy," which can be rectified with the hiring of more black cops and black police chiefs. All of the cops videotaped beating Nichols were members of the "Scorpion unit," an ultra-violent outfit created by Memphis police chief Cerelyn Davis, a black woman, with funding provided by Democratic President Joe Biden's American Rescue Plan earmarked for "community policing."

- On January 18, 26-year-old environmental and anti-police violence activist, Manuel Esteban Paez Terán, known by friends and comrades as Tortuguita, was shot and killed by police while protesting the construction of the \$90 million public taxpayer-funded Atlanta Public Safety Training Center, known as "Cop City," in the South Rivers forest in Georgia. Despite the presence of dozens of police from several different agencies, police claim no body camera footage exists of the shooting and killing of Terán. As is the case in over 98 percent of police killings, after a whitewash investigation, prosecutors announced in October that no charges would be filed against any of the police involved in the murder of Tortuguita.

- On August 14, 27-year-old mechanic Eddie Irizarry was shot and killed by Philadelphia police officer Mark Dial during a traffic stop. Despite the fact that Irizarry did not have a gun, and never attacked police, a Pennsylvania judge dropped all charges against Dial shortly after they were filed, claiming prosecutors did not present sufficient evidence.

- On March 1, 25-year-old Chase Allan, who was white, was shot and killed by Farmington, Utah, police during a traffic stop over his license plate. During the stop, Allan advanced Sovereign Citizen-esqe arguments to justify his non-compliance with police. Police shot and killed him after they claimed he was reaching for a gun he was legally allowed to own in Utah.

This snapshot of police killings occurring this year is a fraction of the enormous scale of state violence inflicted on workers and their families on a daily basis through what Friedrich Engels noted are the "special bodies of armed men" created and elevated by the capitalist system to defend the unearned privileges and property of the ruling class and maintain the inequality this creates.

The record number of police killings recorded in 2023 is a grim warning for the working class. Under conditions where millions of youth and workers have not only participated in strikes in the face of surging inflation and unbridled corporate profiteering, but also in mass protests against the US-backed Israeli genocide in Gaza, police in the US, with the full support of both major capitalist parties, continue to kill with virtual impunity.

This upcoming year, 2024, will be the tenth anniversary of the Ferguson protests and four years since the upsurge of mass anger sparked by the police murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis.

The continuing wave of police violence after years of peaceful protests under Democratic and Republican administrations exposes the dead end of identity politics and those who promote illusions in police reform. The data shows that police violence cannot be reformed away and is not fundamentally a racial issue, it is rooted in the capitalist system and the nature of the police as the ruling class' defenders of inequality. Only the socialist transformation of society through the mass mobilization of the working class will finally put an end to the police reign of terror.



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