

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/target-2020/data-backed-outrage-police-violence-by-the-numbers>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

The United States and its thousands of law enforcement agencies have a historic opportunity to end our nations crisis of over-enforcement and over-criminalization. The worst abuses in policing including killings of unarmed civilians disproportionately affect communities of color. And far too frequently, these abuses go unchecked due to a systemic lack of accountability and transparency for police misconduct. In just the past five years, there have been at least [1,377 documented incidents](#) of police officers shooting and killing Black people. (Although the focus of this blog post is the policing of Black people, Native Americans and Latinx people also experience [disproportionate police violence](#).) This devastating statistic represents just a fraction of our nations problem of police violence and reflects U.S. law enforcements origins in [slavery and white supremacy](#).

Over the past decade, the widespread use of cell phone cameras and social media has brought more public consciousness to the cold reality of police brutality, including the killings of unarmed Black men, women, and children. The tragedies of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd this year ignited overdue awareness, outrage, and calls to action from a wider segment of the countrys population calls that have been made by communities of color for hundreds of years. The Vera Institute of Justice (Vera) shares this outrage over violence in U.S. policing and we have the data to illustrate how disparate law enforcement practices are.

The problem of overpolicing is due in large part to over-arrest. Being arrested or receiving a summons or citation is usually a persons first step into the criminal legal system. Enforcement of all forms, but arrests in particular, have damaging consequences for individuals, families, communities, law enforcement officers and departments, and the nation. Veras [Arrest Trends](#) tool provides users with an interactive visualization that can help educate community members and elected officials about the problems of overpolicing and over-enforcement in their towns, cities, counties, and states, and at the national level. For example, the tool can pinpoint jurisdictions that have substantial racial disparities in arrest numbers or high rates of arrest for low-level offenses or where law enforcement officials fail to report critical data.

Here is a sampling of numbers behind the crisis of overpolicing:

The problem of police violence is partially rooted in over-enforcement and the resources required to support this apparatus. In every arrest lies [the threat of escalation, injury, and death](#).

Over-criminalization and excessive reliance on arrests also lead to mass incarceration, diminished public health and economic prosperity, racial inequities, and mistrust among communities and police. Cities and communities [spend far more on policing](#) than on most other services, such as welfare or housing. Police department budgets remain at an all-time high, while state and local jurisdictions are facing a period of austerity and cuts likely to reduce critical public services such as education and community mental health resources.

Vera recently shared our data with the [Presidents Commission on Law Enforcement](#). We need policies that transform how we conceive of and achieve public safety. To this end, Vera recommended, at a minimum, the following steps:

Vera is committed to dismantling the current culture of policing and working toward solutions that shift power and public investment back to communities. Lets not spend any more time tinkering with incremental reforms. We call on all elected officials and candidates for public office to look at the plain evidence of racial bias that is apparent from our data and use it to enact wholesale change.

NEWS

NEWS

NEWS

Transformative change, sent to your inbox.

Vera Institute of Justice. All rights reserved.