

# **Vera Institute of Justice**

## **Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights**

**<https://www.vera.org/publications/civilian-oversight-of-the-police-in-democratic-societies>**

## **Policy Issue Resources**

### Publication

In democratic societies, the police are accountable for many things and to many different people. Most prominently, police are accountable for the effectiveness with which they deal with crime and disorder, as well as for the legality, professionalism, and respect with which they treat people. While authoritarian police are accountable only to their superiors, democratic police are accountable to a multiplicity of bodies. In addition to their superiors, democratic police are accountable to the legislature, to the courts, to members of the public who seek their assistance, and to society as a whole through the press and organizations of citizens. The creation of mechanisms for the routine oversight of police conduct on behalf of the public, mechanisms that curb or correct abuses of power, is a common project of democratic societies. Prepared for the third global meeting on Policing in Democratic Societies, this short framework paper reviews some of the common dilemmas that arise in the design of such police oversight authorities.

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