

Police Brutality can only be Ended when Officers Face Justice

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Institutions paid for by the public must always be held to account, especially when we entrust public servants like the police with a responsibility to ensure that the most vulnerable in society are protected. Sadly, the opposite is often the case.

We seem to see an increasing number of examples when the weakest and most vulnerable in society are finding themselves victimized and criminalized at the hands of the police who as members of the public should be accountable for their actions the same way as anyone else. Globally however – from the poorest communities to the most “developed” – this is not the case and police has become the militarized arm of the state.

But there’s an interesting reaction you often get when criticizing the police through the lens of reform and calling for accountability, a knee jerk reaction which reveals the extent to which people are often blindly conditioned to accept certain authority figures without ever questioning them. Often they question you for questioning the police.

Perhaps, this goes some way in explaining why in many cases, including in the UK for example, police officers themselves never seem to face the long arm of the law when a death in custody occurs. A culture exists which allows those who are supposed to implement justice, to avoid facing justice when they themselves break the law.

To deny that any tool of the state can potentially be used as a means of rich and powerful [interests](#) to keep people subjugated is to indulge in such denial.

It’s interesting that it’s usually people who have no direct knowledge, or indeed no direct experience with police brutality, who deny there is a problem.

Police brutality is a global problem. But when the highest levels of power are filled with corruption, should this really come as a surprise?

Is it any wonder, that when cases of police brutality hit the headlines, we almost never see a serving officer convicted? It’s a rarity at least.



Image: AFP Photo / Ed Jones

Through social and [alternative media](#) people are now able to see the problem of global police brutality in a much wider sense, seeing for themselves how many communities often find themselves brutalized and repressed at the hands of the police and in some places, pretty worryingly, an increasingly [militarized](#) police force.

The issue of deaths in [custody](#) often disproportionately affects Black and Brown communities, and again this is a global problem, a hangover from colonialism, which arguably although the frontiers have shifted, never left remained.

Poor and disenfranchised communities being brutalized at the behest of the powerful is nothing new and not exclusive to any one country. And it's not limited as many seem to think to poor or under developed nations.

Indeed, police brutality is prevalent all over the world including the [USA](#), the [UK](#) and [Australia](#), and I mention these initially, as many are often surprised when they begin to understand the nature of police brutality in so-called [developed nations](#) like these.

And excessive police violence is not limited to simply deaths in custody or brutality at the hands of the police in general.

As we saw over the past few years, in the football World Cup in South Africa in 2010, and this summer in Brazil, the police were [employed](#) to “cleanse” certain neighborhoods which were impoverished anyway, to make way for the big corporations which stood to make profits from the World Cup. People's homes being destroyed, with people being violently beaten became common scenes, but evidently those cases were not widespread enough to bring it to a halt.

Undoubtedly, many factors must surely contribute to what is a widespread issue.

And it's also worth bearing in mind that the increasing number of prisons which are becoming privatized too might play a role in increased police brutality.



Image: AFP Photo / Angelos Tzortzinis

According to the [Office for National Statistics](#) levels of crime in the UK are decreasing. But the phenomena of [privatized prisons](#), prisons for profit, has created a climate where it now pays to keep prisons filled. The police like all public servants already have challenging and difficult roles. But boardrooms and corporations wielding influence over services is never a good thing, and even more so when it affects the lives of ordinary people on the ground.

I'm sure that decent police officers like the public would agree that improving and reforming the police is important and ultimately beneficial for us all.

What is clear, however, is that those among the police who have clearly and obviously brutalized people must end up facing justice themselves. There have been many questions raised about the effectiveness of the [justice system](#) in general in ensuring that police do not receive special treatment when they commit a crime. This is the case in the US, and is also now being acknowledged in the UK.

Also in the UK it's been acknowledged that [different groups](#) operating within the police, as might also the case within the [judiciary](#), might cause a conflict of interest and prevent justice from being done.

In the UK, with the tragic case of Azelle Rodney, the officer charged with his murder will go to trial [next year](#). Many are skeptical and don't believe the officer will be jailed. But if Anthony Long, the officer in question were to face jail, it might set a new precedent for the future. Maybe.

Police brutality will continue until an effective and robust legal system, free from corruption,

ensures that anyone who commits a violent act is subject to the law. When officers start to face justice like everyone else and we see custodial sentences handed out to those in the police who have committed violent acts, maybe it will begin to send a message to other police officers that they themselves will face justice if they break the law.

There's probably no easy answer in addressing such a widespread issue like police brutality, but raising awareness of the issue is at least a start. Often many in the media fail to talk about the issue in a meaningful context in which the public relate too and it is often left to artists to bring such problems to the forefront of people's attention.

Rapper and activist Logic speaking about deaths in custody and global police brutality recently said "This is one of many issues that need addressing globally. Until the people unite against these injustices we will always be losing this battle. A public servant is also a member of the public and should therefore be treated like one."

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