

# REIMAGINING POLICING, PUBLIC SAFETY AND PROSPERITY

---

Ashwin Nair

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Executive Summary.....	3
2. Introduction.....	4
3. Demilitarization of Police.....	5
4. Decriminalization.....	7
5. Overhaul and Replacement of Traditional Police Services.....	11

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Though systemic racism in Canada manifests itself in several institutions, this report focuses particularly on systemic racism within the institution of policing. The racialized nature of policing in Canada, whether it be by city police forces, provincial police forces or the RCMP, has disproportionately targeted Black Canadians and Indigenous peoples.

This report makes three broad categories of policy options with their corresponding timeframes for introduction:

1. **Demilitarization of police** (short-term)
2. **Decriminalization** (short-term)
3. **Overhaul & replacement of traditional police services** (medium- to long-term)

Each policy option can be summarized as follows:

1. **Demilitarization of police** (short-term)
  - Canadian police forces can eliminate their procurement of military-grade equipment, including assault rifles and armoured vehicles, as well as guns and tasers in favour of increased public safety, all while redirecting funds toward improving local economic situations
2. **Decriminalization** (short-term)
  - Ending street checks, or “carding”, would render Canadian streets safer for Black and Indigenous peoples, the disproportionate targets of these checks
  - Several criminal acts, by today’s standards, are a result of harsh personal economic situations, and hence decriminalizing them in favour of redirecting police funds toward targeting the roots of poverty may produce better societal outcomes; this includes decriminalizing minor crimes, public transit enforcement, drugs and sex work
3. **Overhaul & replacement of traditional police services** (medium- to long-term)
  - Police duties can be reduced to dealing exclusively with violent crime, such as active shooter situations, kidnappings and murders, while existing funds can be redirected toward developing entirely new and separate mental health services, gender-based violence services and traffic services in order to promote universal safety and increased prosperity

# INTRODUCTION

The killing of George Floyd on May 25, 2020 in Minneapolis led to reignited calls for racial justice through mass Black Lives Matter demonstrations initially starting in the United States, but later spreading internationally, including to Canada. The primary focus of recent discussions on racial justice has been around policing, particularly with unified calls for governments to defund their police forces and reinvest those funds into community prosperity.

Canada has a substantial history of colonization, slavery and racist immigration policies that have informed the institutions with which Canadians interact. Examples of this include the North-West Mounted Police (NWMP), precursor to the RCMP, being established to facilitate European settlement in the west through the coerced dislocation of Indigenous peoples on to reserves, the last racially segregated school in Canada only closing in 1983, the Chinese Head Tax that discouraged Chinese immigration after the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway, as well as the Indian residential school system. Systemic racism in Canada today is centred around differential outcomes for Black, Indigenous and other racialized peoples when interacting with these institutions.

This report intends to reckon with the history of ongoing systemic racism in Canada, focusing on policing, which disproportionately affect Black Canadians and Indigenous peoples. It lays the policy groundwork to successfully divest from police forces for universalized public safety while working toward greater levels of prosperity among communities.

# DEMILITARIZATION OF POLICE

## Ending the use of military equipment by Canadian police forces

Recent years have seen an increasing procurement of military-grade weapons and equipment by Canadian police forces. In 2016, the Canadian Armed Forces donated more than 2000 assault rifles to 68 different police forces across the country<sup>1</sup>. Simultaneously, more armoured vehicles are being purchased by police forces, such as those in Halifax<sup>2</sup> and Calgary<sup>3</sup>. Additionally, the Toronto Police Service, in 2010, was able to keep over 400 gas masks and 4 Long Range Acoustic Devices, which were originally designed for use by the US military, after procuring them to confront the G20 protests.

The purchase of military-grade equipment is often justified by police forces citing occurrence of armed suspects followed by a shootout with the police, though such instances are quite rare in Canada. According to Statistics Canada, just 0.6% of police-reported crime in 2016 involved a suspect equipped with a firearm<sup>4</sup>.

The purchase of armoured vehicles costing approximately \$500,000 each, as was the case in Calgary, appears to be grossly disproportionate to crimes that threaten large-scale public safety in Canada. Instead, funds going toward armoured vehicles, assault rifles and other military-grade equipment can be redirected toward improving how we fare in terms of social development.

## Banning the carrying of firearms by police officers

Canada has seen a steady increase in civilians killed by police between the years 2000 and 2017, totalling 461 incidents during this period of time<sup>5</sup>. More than 70% of the victims of these encounters were experiencing mental health and substance abuse problems, and the two ethnic groups that were disproportionately targeted were Indigenous peoples and Black Canadians. In Toronto, Black Canadians made up 37% of all victims while only representing 8.3% of the population. In Winnipeg, Indigenous peoples represent 10.6% of the population but made up over 60% of all victims.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://thetyee.ca/News/2020/06/23/Canadas-Military-Gave-2000-Assault-Rifles-To-Police/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://globalnews.ca/news/6110179/halifax-police-armoured-vehicle-spring-2020/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/calgary-police-new-arv-purchase-1.5090813>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-005-x/2018001/article/54962-eng.htm>

<sup>5</sup> <https://newsinteractives.cbc.ca/longform-custom/deadly-force>

Over 80% of civilians killed by police over the 18-year period did were not equipped with a firearm. While the aforementioned statistic was reflective of fatal police encounters exclusively, police have an even lower chance of encounters involving a civilian with a firearm more largely. Therefore, it is worthy of discussion whether it is even necessary for police officers to be armed with weapons of force, such as guns and tasers, if their encounters by and large do not require them.

In countries similar to Canada, such as Great Britain and New Zealand, as well as in Norway, officers are not armed on duty<sup>6</sup>. Interestingly, fewer civilians are killed by police in these countries. In 2016, just one person was killed by police in Norway<sup>7</sup>, compared to the 41 people that were killed by police in Canada in that same year. In 2018, just one person was killed by police in New Zealand<sup>8</sup>, whereas the same figure in Canada was at least 57 in the same year<sup>9</sup>. In spite of police officers in New Zealand being unarmed, 18 police officers in New Zealand have been killed on the job by a criminal act between 1961 and 2009<sup>10</sup>. This is a significantly lower number than the 133 Canadian police officers that were killed on the job during the same time period<sup>11</sup>. This may support the theory that an armed suspect would be much less likely to shoot an unarmed police officer, as proposed by the author of *The End of Policing*, Alex S. Vitale, in his book.

---

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/02/18/5-countries-where-police-officers-do-not-carry-firearms-and-it-works-well/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.thelocal.no/20161128/norwegian-police-involved-in-just-fourth-fatal-shooting-in-14-years>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.police.govt.nz/sites/default/files/publications/annual-tactical-options-research-report-7.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.straight.com/news/1186606/jeff-shantz-another-deadly-year-policing-least-57-police-involved-deaths-canada-2018>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.police.govt.nz/about-us/history-and-museum/memorial/officers-killed-criminal-acts>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2010003/article/11354-eng.htm>

# DECRIMINALIZATION

## Ending patrolling and street checks

In Vancouver, over a 10-year period, 15% of the targets of street checks, or “carding”, were Indigenous, despite making up only 2% of the city’s population<sup>12</sup>. According to the Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission, over a 12-year period, Black Nova Scotians were found to be nearly six times more likely to be street checked by police compared to their white counterparts<sup>13</sup>. In Montreal, an independent report commissioned by the City of Montreal found that Black and Indigenous peoples were 4 to 5 times more likely to be street checked in the city when compared to their white counterparts<sup>14</sup>. A large volume of research has been conducted demonstrating that the primary targets of street checks are Black and Indigenous peoples, leading to a civilian database at police headquarters across Canada that disproportionately consist of members of these communities.

Street checks are traditionally perceived to be a crime-reduction strategy, though there is a lack of evidence to corroborate this claim. Internal emails obtained by the Toronto Star in 2015 revealed the Peel police Chief at the time asking senior uniformed staff for “success stories” as a response to media scrutiny on the issue<sup>15</sup>. Additionally, an independent report by Ontario Court of Appeal Justice Michael Tulloch found that there is little to no evidence of the efficacy of street checks in reducing crime, and called for police carding to be banned in Ontario, citing a “social cost” to the program<sup>16</sup>. A report on street checks by the Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission elaborates on the social cost of street checks, saying that the racial profiling caused by street checks can negatively impact mental and physical health, as well as undermine the legitimacy of the criminal justice system amongst groups most targeted by the police<sup>17</sup>.

---

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.straight.com/news/1090451/stakes-are-high-chief-adam-palmer-he-defends-vancouver-police-street-checks>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.thestar.com/halifax/2019/03/27/black-people-in-halifax-almost-6-times-more-likely-to-be-stopped-by-police-than-white-report.html>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/spvm-racial-profiling-report-recommendations-and-findings-1.5311589>

<sup>15</sup> [https://web.archive.org/web/20151105004915/http://www.thestar.com/news/city\\_hall/2015/09/30/peel-police-struggle-to-find-proof-carding-works-emails-reveal.html](https://web.archive.org/web/20151105004915/http://www.thestar.com/news/city_hall/2015/09/30/peel-police-struggle-to-find-proof-carding-works-emails-reveal.html)

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2018/12/31/police-carding-should-be-banned-in-ontario-independent-review-says.html>

<sup>17</sup> <https://humanrights.novascotia.ca/streetchecks>

## Ending the criminalization of the symptoms of poverty

### Minor Crimes

The goal of ending the criminalization of certain street-level offences is to reduce an armed, force-based presence within the public sphere that may particularly threaten the safety of marginalized and vulnerable peoples in society.

In the same spirit of the racial profiling in street checks that occur across Canada, laws like unlawful assembly, loitering, public intoxication and more disproportionately target Indigenous peoples, Black Canadians, other racialized Canadians and the unhoused in society. By ending the criminalization of laws like these, marginalized communities are no longer vulnerable to police interventions that may threaten their safety.

### Public Transit Policing

In Edmonton, Indigenous peoples were found to make up 43.8% of tickets and 44.5% of warnings issued by the Edmonton Transit Service, despite only making up 6% of Edmonton's population<sup>18</sup>. In Toronto, the Toronto Star investigated and found that Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) officers were disproportionately targeting Black Canadians for tickets and recorded their personal information when they were issued warnings<sup>19</sup>. There was another instance on the TTC in February 2018 where multiple police officers and a TTC fare inspector had pinned down a Black teenager on a streetcar for approximately 20 minutes<sup>20</sup>. Ending the presence of officers on public transit across Canada would ensure a safer public space for Black and Indigenous peoples, and the resources originally allocated to fare inspection can be redirected to making transit more affordable or even free. Luxembourg became the first country in the world in 2020 to make all public transit free<sup>21</sup>, though some jurisdictions in Canada already have a portion of their transit available at zero-cost for passengers. In Calgary, the CTrain is free-of-charge between City Hall and West/Kerby

---

<sup>18</sup> <https://edmontonjournal.com/news/local-news/indigenous-people-racial-minorities-over-ticketed-on-edmonton-transit-data-shows>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2019/09/18/ttc-commits-to-using-race-based-data-to-eliminate-discrimination-every-rider-should-feel-safe-and-respected.html>

<sup>20</sup> <https://toronto.ctvnews.ca/video-shows-black-teen-pinned-to-ground-ttc-fare-inspector-suspended-with-pay-1.3817021>

<sup>21</sup> <https://qz.com/1810923/luxembourg-follows-dozens-of-cities-making-public-transit-free/#:~:text=Luxembourg%20just%20became%20the%20first,an%20annual%20pass%20until%20now.>



Stations<sup>22</sup>. In Winnipeg, the Downtown Spirit is a bus route that operates in the downtown area for free<sup>23</sup>.

### Drug Offences

According to VICE news, prior to Canada's legalization of cannabis, Indigenous peoples in Regina were nine times more likely to get arrested for cannabis possession than white people between 2015 to the first half of 2017, while Black people in Halifax were more than five times more likely than their white counterparts to be arrested for possession of cannabis during the same time period<sup>24</sup>. This is in spite of relatively similar levels of cannabis use among Black and white populations<sup>25</sup>.

In Toronto, Black Canadians with no criminal history are three times more likely than their white counterparts to be arrested for a simple drug possession<sup>26</sup>. Additionally, nearly 50% of new HIV infections among Indigenous peoples are attributed to injection drug use<sup>27</sup>. A report written in 2017 by the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination expressed concerns over Canada's drug policy and its relationship with the incarceration of Black, Indigenous and other racialized minorities<sup>28</sup>. There is a need to shift from viewing drug abuse as a criminal issue toward viewing it as a public health issue. Through decriminalization, funds from the policing of drug use, often a symptom of precarious conditions and poverty, can be redirected toward needle and syringe programs and safe supply.

Portugal became the first country in the world to decriminalize the possession and consumption of drugs in 2001, where authorities would issue warnings or a fine or require users to appear before a local commission consisting of a doctor, lawyer and a social worker to discuss treatment<sup>29</sup>. Results of drug decriminalization in Portugal include drops in substance abuse, HIV and hepatitis

---

<sup>22</sup> <https://freepublictransport.info/city/calgary/>

<sup>23</sup> <https://winnipegtransit.com/en/service/downtownspirit/>

<sup>24</sup> [https://www.vice.com/en\\_ca/article/d35eyq/black-and-indigenous-people-are-overrepresented-in-canadas-weed-arrests](https://www.vice.com/en_ca/article/d35eyq/black-and-indigenous-people-are-overrepresented-in-canadas-weed-arrests)

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.thestar.com/news/insight/2017/07/06/toronto-marijuana-arrests-reveal-startling-racial-divide.html>

<sup>26</sup> <https://ricochet.media/en/1951/un-report-finds-canadian-drug-policy-is-failing-racialized-communities>

<sup>27</sup> <https://ricochet.media/en/1951/un-report-finds-canadian-drug-policy-is-failing-racialized-communities>

<sup>28</sup>

[https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CERD%2fC%2fCAN%2fCO%2f21-23&Lang=en](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CERD%2fC%2fCAN%2fCO%2f21-23&Lang=en)

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2017/dec/05/portugals-radical-drugs-policy-is-working-why-hasnt-the-world-copied-it>

infection rates and overdose deaths<sup>30</sup>. Furthermore, in July 2020, the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police have called for the federal government to decriminalize small amounts of drugs for personal consumption<sup>31</sup>.

### Sex Work

Contemporary legislation leaves sex workers particularly vulnerable to exploitation and a lack of support from the police. Black, Trans, Indigenous and Asian sex workers are particularly targeted by police and are often victims of intimidation, threats and use of excessive force<sup>32</sup>. In 2016, an Indigenous sex worker, named Brandy, was beaten by police officers, resulting in her ribs being broken, while she was on her way to meet a client<sup>33</sup>. The existing criminalization of sex work has left sex workers vulnerable to exploitation and unable to count on police services to help them in such situations. According to Sandra Wesley, an advocate for women in the sex industry, sex workers are currently under-protected and are accustomed to taking care of hostile situations with a client on their own, due to the fear of arrest if the police is called<sup>34</sup>. The full decriminalization of sex work signifies the decriminalization of sex workers and offers increased protections for sex workers without fear of apprehension.

To conclude, the funds saved from no longer requiring the policing of those found to be loitering, fare-evading on public transit, possessing small amounts of drugs and soliciting or engaging in sex work can be redirected by municipalities to improve the conditions of those living in poverty by investing in affordable housing, public transit and other anti-poverty measures.

---

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2017/dec/05/portugals-radical-drugs-policy-is-working-why-hasnt-the-world-copied-it>

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/chiefs-police-decriminalize-possession-personal-use-1.5643687>

<sup>32</sup> [https://www.actioncanadashr.org/sites/default/files/2019-04/2807\\_HIVLegalNetwork\\_SexWorkerDocumentation\\_Report\\_English\\_Final.pdf](https://www.actioncanadashr.org/sites/default/files/2019-04/2807_HIVLegalNetwork_SexWorkerDocumentation_Report_English_Final.pdf)

<sup>33</sup> [https://www.actioncanadashr.org/sites/default/files/2019-04/2807\\_HIVLegalNetwork\\_SexWorkerDocumentation\\_Report\\_English\\_Final.pdf](https://www.actioncanadashr.org/sites/default/files/2019-04/2807_HIVLegalNetwork_SexWorkerDocumentation_Report_English_Final.pdf)

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.ctvnews.ca/canada/murder-of-sex-worker-exposes-canada-s-hypocrisy-on-prostitution-advocate-1.4814177>

# OVERHAUL & REPLACEMENT OF TRADITIONAL POLICE SERVICES

## Mental health crises

Given that more than 70% of the civilians that were killed by police in Canada between 2000 and 2017 were suffering from a mental health crisis or substance abuse<sup>35</sup>, armed police officers responding to civilians in distress or for wellness checks can be replaced by social workers or other professionals trained in mental health crises and de-escalation to handle the situation instead. This has already been the case in Eugene, Oregon since 1989, where Crisis Assistance Helping Out on the Streets (CAHOOTS) dispatches medical professionals and crisis worker teams to attend to those who may be in a psychological crisis<sup>36</sup>. They have proven to handle 99.4% calls independently without the presence of a police officer<sup>37</sup>. Additionally, in Stockholm, Sweden, a mental health ambulance has been established to respond to people in mental health crises<sup>38</sup>. It is important to note that, while police officers being replaced with social workers reduces incidents that cause physical harm, it does not necessarily eliminate system discrimination in the way that these services are provided.

## Gender-based violence

There is currently little trust between survivors of sexual assault and harassment and the police. Only 5% of sexual assaults are reported to police<sup>39</sup>, largely due to survivors believing that reporting their assault to police was not helpful<sup>40</sup>. Additionally, an Ipsos poll conducted in 2015 showed that, of those who did report to the police, more than 70% of them reported a negative experience with the police<sup>41</sup>. Furthermore, between two and 51% of sexual assault complaints in Canada get dismissed as “unfounded” by police<sup>42</sup>. An option that can be considered to ameliorate the justice system for survivors of sexual assault and harassment is to focus on diverting funds from police to local sexual assault centres. This allows for survivors to be centred in the pursuit of justice by

---

<sup>35</sup> <https://newsinteractives.cbc.ca/longform-custom/deadly-force>

<sup>36</sup> <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/defund-police-mental-health-crisis-intervention-1.5608627>

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/defund-police-mental-health-crisis-intervention-1.5608627>

<sup>38</sup> <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/defund-police-mental-health-crisis-intervention-1.5608627>

<sup>39</sup> <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/pub/85-002-x/2019001/article/00017-eng.pdf?st=yG3tT1GE>

<sup>40</sup> <https://globalnews.ca/news/7092552/defund-police-sexual-assault/>

<sup>41</sup> <https://globalnews.ca/news/7092552/defund-police-sexual-assault/>

<sup>42</sup> <https://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/february-2020/rape-myths-and-sexism-still-cloud-police-responses-to-sexualized-violence/>

providing aid immediately after incidents but also providing long-term support<sup>43</sup>. In Philadelphia, an innovative model was developed that constructed partnerships between police and local sexual assault support centres in order to further understand and fix problems with sexual assault investigations, as well as review unfounded and closed cases to potentially identify investigative failures and rape myths and stereotypes within those cases<sup>44</sup>. Going further than this, funds can be directed toward setting up a separate law enforcement department that specializes in sexual assault and harassment, where social workers with special training in dealing with issues of sexual assault are hired and given the authority to investigate and charge suspects in addition to providing support to survivors. Some even suggest redirecting funds toward establishing separate courts for sexual assault trials, as they already exist in Ontario for mental health cases, drug-related cases and domestic violence cases<sup>45</sup>.

## Traffic services

Separate traffic control departments can be established with the redirection of funds from traditional police, where traffic officers would not be required to carry firearms. In fact, in all three of Canada's biggest cities, parking enforcement officers are not police officers, even though parking enforcement still exists under police forces in Toronto and Montreal.

In the Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo, five solar-powered automated machines equipped with cameras have been tasked with traffic policing and issuing fines when necessary<sup>46</sup>.

## Violent crime

Violent crime of a very serious nature, such as kidnappings, murders and mass shootings, make up a very a small percentage of crimes committed in a year. These type of crimes can be dealt with similar to how police respond to bomb threats; with a highly specialized team trained in resolving the issue. Today, Specialized Weapons and Tactics Unit (SWAT) teams are increasingly being deployed in Canadian cities<sup>47</sup>. Traditionally viewed as a last resort, SWAT teams are on the rise particularly because there is no national policy or law in place regulating the use of SWAT teams<sup>48</sup>. Highly-specialized and restricted SWAT teams should be used to combat serious violent crime,

---

<sup>43</sup> <https://www.mcgilldaily.com/PoliceIssue/Restorative-Justice.html>

<sup>44</sup> <https://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/february-2020/rape-myths-and-sexism-still-cloud-police-responses-to-sexualized-violence/>

<sup>45</sup> <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/alternatives-to-sexual-assault-trials-1.3451140>

<sup>46</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/travel/2015/mar/05/robocops-being-used-as-traffic-police-in-democratic-republic-of-congo>

<sup>47</sup> <https://theconversation.com/rise-of-the-swat-team-routine-police-work-in-canada-is-now-militarized-90073>

<sup>48</sup> <https://theconversation.com/rise-of-the-swat-team-routine-police-work-in-canada-is-now-militarized-90073>

though the circumstances under which a SWAT team is to be deployed should be highly regulated through public policy at the federal level.