



Ideation Title: Divest from the Police State

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Racial violence is a cornerstone of the US criminal justice system. For example, in 2016, 43 percent of people killed by police officers in the United States were Native American, Black, or Latino even though these groups combined comprise only 32 percent of the US population. These victims of police killings are not only boys and men of color, but are also girls and women of color, and people who are gender-nonconforming, LGBT, poor, and undocumented.

Police killings are recurring fatalities in a system that trades in the currency of everyday violence. Thus, imagining how to stop police killings is not enough—even as a starting point. It is critical that we focus on the entire police state, which encompasses police officers as well as correctional officers, parole officers, legislators, judges, and prosecutors. In addition to police killings, the police state inflicts violence through less obvious tactics such as fines and fees that reduce the already-meager incomes of poor people of color, and the doling out of felony charges that increase mass disenfranchisement and unemployment.

Failure to understand the broader workings of the police state is why mainstream reforms like police force diversity, body cameras, mental health testing, and demilitarization are unable to stop police killings. Baltimore’s police force is 53 percent cops of color but Freddie Gray was killed. Multiple people of color have been killed on body cameras, and cops like John Rogers and Andrew Hutchins in Dallas remain unprosecuted. Officer Timothy Loehmann who killed Tamir Rice failed psychological screenings three times. Not one military grade weapon was used when the NYPD officers killed Eric Garner. As these examples highlight, the police state cannot be “fixed” within the logics of mainstream reforms.

What is needed is a turn to innovative solutions for divestment from the police state. Our approaches must reveal and dismantle the police state as profit-driven, racially defined, and structurally operated before the moment of death. The following three approaches do just that:

Approach 1: Defund police forces to free public funds to be used for meeting human needs such as food, housing, livable wages, education, employment and healthcare.

HOW: Build grassroots movements that place demands on local, state, and federal governments to fund human needs. Implement participatory budgeting processes in which local residents manage funding allocations via voting and public forums.



EXAMPLE: New York City’s Safety Beyond Policing campaign, which launched in

February 2015, outlined alternative uses for the estimated \$97 million annual cost of funding the city council’s proposal to hire 1,000 new NYPD officers. Organizers of the campaign argued that this money should be spent on hiring social workers, providing low-income New Yorkers with free public transit access, funding youth jobs programming, and financing resident associations and programs in the city’s public housing developments. Similarly, Neighbors Organizing for Change in Minneapolis was able to secure \$1.5 million for safety beyond policing strategies such as community-led violence prevention services in the city’s 2016 budget.

Approach 2: Promote safety through fostering non-police, community-directed security measures.

HOW: Invest in community-based security strategies that disrupt the structural forces, norms, and practices that lead to violence or crime. This differs sharply from what is popularly known as “community policing,” which simply reinforces hyper-policing by increasing daily contact between police officers and communities.

EXAMPLE: The Cure the Violence research-based health model has proven to reduce violence from 40 to 70 percent in over twenty cities. The model does not involve police but implements a three-pronged health approach: (1) Detect and interrupt the transmission of violence; (2) Change the behavior of the highest potential perpetrators of violence; and (3) Change community circumstances and norms. This approach helps to reduce the police state by centering local people in addressing their issues without guns, arrests, or prisons.

Approach 3: Replace police forces with community-based conflict resolution teams.

HOW: Create viable alternatives that people can turn to instead of calling 911 when conflicts occur.

Conflict resolution teams should embody a commitment to restorative justice, in which punishment is deemphasized and, instead, the goal is helping involved individuals and their communities to effectively move forward.

EXAMPLE: The Chicago-based group Circles & Ciphers convenes peace circles across the city where people go and work out conflicts ranging from property disputes to interpersonal harm. Multiple organizations such as Creative Interventions and Safe OUTside the System Collective, and even an app called Concern, provide toolkits and response teams to help handle complex situations like domestic violence or mental health crises without involving the police.

In conclusion, these approaches for divesting from the police state reimagine community



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safety and security through the lens of human needs. Situating human needs as the focus allows us to ask how we can help all of us rather than some of us—a question too often the police state demands we ignore. As evidenced above, many activist groups and communities have already begun the work. Our duty is to join them.