



POLICY BRUTALITY

Although police brutality has been a tragic reality for Black and brown Americans throughout the decades, the horrific murder of George Floyd has recently pushed the issue of police brutality in the United States to the forefront of global consciousness. Thanks to the Black Lives Matter movement, measures such as mandatory body cameras and the banning of chokeholds and no-knock warrants have been enacted in states across the country to pave the way for greater racial equity.



MASS INCARCERATION

Longer sentencing laws mean that more and more Americans are being sent to jails and prisons, especially people of color. As of 2016, 2.3 million people were incarcerated in the United States—a 500% increase from the mid-1980s. While people of color make up 37% of the country's population, they comprise 67% of the prison population. Mass incarceration leads to overcrowded prisons and significant costs for taxpayers and states, despite mounting evidence that incarceration is ineffective at reducing many types of crimes.



DRUG POLICY

In the 1980s, 40,900 individuals in America were incarcerated due to drug offenses. By 2015, that number had reached 469,545. Of the more than 1.5 million Americans arrested on drug charges in 2016, more than one-third were arrested due to marijuana violations—99% of which were due to possession. Advocates of criminal justice reform point to abolishing marijuana laws as one of the most beneficial changes that the federal government can make to improve criminal justice in the United States. Many reformers also call for the decreased stigmatization of addiction via harm reduction and mental health resources.



RE-ENTRY

Advocates of criminal justice reform often point to high recidivism rates (the percentage of people who re-offend) as evidence that the system is broken. After release, many formerly incarcerated individuals face significant barriers, including long-term unemployment and poverty. These challenges are worsened by federal restrictions on access to jobs, housing, welfare, and essential services like mental health and addiction treatment. Successful reintegration depends on well-funded government programs and strong community support—both of which are often lacking.