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Police Brutality post George Floyd:

Have the aftermath had a significant legislative impact?

Bachelor's thesis in English
Supervisor: Terje Grytbak Wold
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Introduction

In recent times in the US, there are very few events that have spawned as much controversy and attention as the horrific murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis at the hands of American Police officers. This act of brutal behavior towards a detained and defenseless prisoner shocked both me and the rest of the world. It became an event that was frequently discussed by me and my friends during the period that it happened, we honestly could not believe that the police could act in such a way towards a detained prisoner, who did nothing to deserve such a rough and excessive treatment. Another thing we quickly were shocked by were how these could be considered police officers who were tasked with both abiding and enforcing the law in the country. Several questions did form as a result of observing the coverage of this heinous act by the police. Questions such as: How could people tasked with upholding the law violate everything that a police force should stand for? How could any of the police officers let it get to the point where Floyd's life was in danger? And finally, how would these police officers get punished for their role in Floyd's murder. I quickly thought that this issue was one that I could to a certain degree attempt to discuss in my bachelor's thesis.

The event did get me interested in exploring the topic of police brutality, as I have never really considered this a prominent issue before. Although I had some knowledge of the adversity that people of color in the US faced, I had no idea that this also included such treatment by the police. The event made a profound impact and made me interested in exploring why acts like the ones against Floyd or Breonna Taylor (who was also a victim of the police's use of controversial tactics, which led to her death), still occurs in our modern society. Could this be attributed to the lack of innovation and evolution in the institutions, or something like the sheer act of stereotypical judgments conducted by the same police officers who have taken an oath to protect and serve the society? Or maybe a mixture of the two? In this thesis I will be discussing the lawmaking and judgment in regard to police brutality both prior to and following the death of George Floyd. I have chosen to mainly focus on the legislative side, although I will be briefly mentioning other topics that are relevant in relation to proposed reforms. How has this significant event impacted a topic that has been controversial for a long time, but has only in more recent times gained publicity and scrutiny? I will start by summarizing the history of this topic from the late 1800s until today as noted by different researchers, before I start to discuss and look at different elements within the topic of police brutality that have been targeted for reforms as a result of the recent acts of the police. Lastly, I will be discussing the impact that the recent events have had on the policemen and their use of force in the aftermath. My main

research question will be: in what ways is the murder of George Floyd changing the topic of police brutality?

Theory

In order to answer this research question there are a few books and articles that will be relevant. Together, they all cover different aspects of the topic of police brutality that is important to look at in order to gather insight into the proposed reforms that have come about as a result of the George Floyd murder. Historically, the works presented also provide a good mixture of coverage on the topic both before as well as after the murder.

This thesis draws much of its perspective on Policing and Police Brutality prior to the Floyd murder from the book written by Alpert & Dunham, titled: “Understanding Police Use of Force: Officers, Suspects and Reciprocity.” This is a particularly central book in relation to this topic, as it details the history of police brutality, from the end of the 19th century and up until the time of publication (2004). It explains the way policing and The American society’s view on the police have changed and evolved gradually throughout time. The book further focuses on the way the police have gradually become more supervised, with newer technology and resources playing a central part in this evolution. This is vital in order to explain the way legislation has changed as a result of what happened to Floyd.

Another central work for this thesis about the relation between race and police brutality is written by Holmes & Smith, and is titled: “Race and Police Brutality: Roots of an urban dilemma”. The reason for this being a central work for this thesis is that their book takes a closer look at one of the central issues of police brutality, namely racism. It provides a different perspective compared to the other books that will be used in the discussion. Although racism is not the major focus of this thesis it remains a central element and a driving force for the proposed changes in legislation. Because of this, it becomes important to acknowledge how important this topic is in relation to the use of excessive force by the police departments in The United States. In addition to covering the topic of racism, it also covers the topic of police brutality more generally.

In order to discuss changes in legislation after the death of George Floyd, books about the event itself and the legal implications becomes relevant. In particular I would like to highlight the book: “The Killing of George Floyd” written by Burling & Harris. This book delves deeply into the event itself and the effect it had on the American society. The authors also view the event with some historical background, but what is most interesting in relation to this thesis is the

way they discuss the aftermath. The authors highlight key elements of acts of police brutality, while also investigating why they occur. They (2020) highlight the main police officer that was responsible for the death, Derek Chauvin. Furthermore, they look at the charges that were raised against him, namely a third-degree murder charge and a second degree charge of manslaughter, which outraged the family of Floyd who called for a first degree murder charge instead. The difference between these being that a third-degree murder charge would imply that Chauvin never intended to murder Floyd (p. 52-54). This is important to note, as the repercussions of this event has largely shown how the issue of police brutality will be treated or aims to be treated through legislation in the future.

In relation to the impact of the death of George Floyd, an article written by Boudreau, Mackenzie and Simmons, becomes relevant. The article is titled: “Police Violence and Public Opinion After George Floyd: How the Black Lives Matter Movement and Endorsements Affect Support for Reforms” and it was written in April 2022 and could therefore be seen as a more recent analysis of the legislative aftermath of the murder of Floyd. The article covers proposed reforms that has come about as a result of the murder itself, as well as the rallies by the Black Lives Matter movement. It’s main concern however is the way the topic of police reforms is viewed by citizens of both sides of the political landscape in California: republicans and democrats. It also covers whether or not support for the BLM is significant when deciding to support the proposed reforms or not.

Another article that is relevant to use is written by Lauren Gambino of The Guardian, titled: “Biden signs police reform executive order on anniversary of George Floyd’s murder”. This article details more of the recent legislative changes in relation to police brutality.

To investigate similar events, the book “Rodney King and the L.A riots” by Rebecca Rissman becomes relevant to use in this thesis. The book covers the gruesome riots in Los Angeles during the 1990s, which came as a result of one of the most media covered acts of police brutality in the US. It provides valuable insight into the handling of such acts of excessive force during the 90s. The book also details how the public have previously responded to acts of injustice towards not just a defenseless man, but a defenseless colored man.

Lastly, statistics from Statista will be central in order to provide insight. The first statistic is related to the American people’s support for the police following the George Floyd killing. The second statistic is related to the amount of people being shot to death by the police in the period between 2017-2022.

Discussion

What constitutes Police Brutality? In order to discuss this topic, it is useful to start with defining this term, which could easily confuse people due to the uncertainty of what it entails exactly. A different issue with this term is also that it might be unclear as to which acts by the police crosses the line between justified and non-justified actions, and if their actions are deemed necessary based on the circumstances of which they find themselves in. Holmes & Smith are especially concerned with the difficulty in defining the term. Holmes & Smith (2008) details how some citizens consider the use of profanity, racial abuse, and unjustified searches as police brutality, but they themselves chooses to highlight that the term police brutality is mainly related to the use of excessive force. (p. 6). Furthermore, they (2008) go on to define what makes the use of force excessive:

Accordingly, the use of force by the police may be proper or excessive, depending on whether it is necessary to accomplish a legitimate police duty. Force that occurs “under color of authority, without lawful necessity” constitutes excessive force or police brutality (p. 7).

Using the definition presented here, the term becomes a lot easier to discuss whilst looking at relevant incidents involving police brutality. The other side of police brutality mentioned by Holmes & Smith, that the actions are done without lawful necessity is a topic that will be further discussed, as it could be considered one of the most challenging things when creating new legislation related to the legal implications of the use of excessive force by the police departments in the US.

Although the topic of police brutality has only recently gotten the amount of attention and scrutiny that such a controversial topic deserves, it is not a new issue in the US. The topic of police brutality goes far back in the history of the United States. The sheer evolution of this topic from the late 1800s and until today can easily be summarized by looking at factors such as, who held the police departments accountable, and the amount of trust that the public had in their ability to deliver impartial justice. This is detailed by Alpert & Dunham who divides the early evolution of police brutality into three different eras based on the degree of regulation the police departments were under. They refer to these as the era of non-regulation, the era of self-regulation and the era of external regulation. They start by detailing the era of non-regulation, this era is attributed to the end of the 19th century. Alpert & Dunham (2004) notes that the era of non-regulation was characterized by a severe lack of trust in the police force by the public, and a belief that they only served the higher social classes while not being concerned about the

lower class or the working class. As a result of this non-regulation, the police force could mainly do whatever they wanted, and their lack of accountability often led to the public responding to brutal acts by confronting the police force themselves. Those in power were also interested in keeping the conditions as they were, as the situation with the police largely favored them as opposed to the lower-class people. (p. 4-6).

Alpert & Dunham then goes on to describe the era of self-regulation which largely started at the beginning of the 1920s. They (2004) note that the focus during this period of time was to improve the processes within the police departments themselves, this included better training and increasing the standards when hiring and promoting police officers. The reforms presented at the time had the main idea that the police could regulate themselves through improved internal mechanisms. The changes also included more supervision and accountability, which along with new technology such as radios and telephones would assist in the regulation of the police officers out on patrol. Further attention was made to distinguish the police organ from the political parts that had previously affected the accountability of the police, this was important in order to give legitimacy to the police forces as unbiased upholders of justice in the society. Although the police force showed signs of improvement after these reforms, the changes did not stop police brutality and many situations during the civil unrest during the 1960s were met with excessive use of force that was not controlled or supervised (p. 6-8).

Finally, the era of external regulation, the term the authors use to describe the reforms that occurred during the 1970s-1980s. Alpert & Dunham (2004) details how this era signals a shift in the authority of judgment over the police departments' actions. For the first time, there were multiple sources responsible for the regulation of the police. There were major reforms being proposed due to the low support that the police held due to extremely violent acts during the 1960s-1970s. In these times, the courts started to gain the power to dictate the punishment of those crossing the line, looking at existing practices and procedures, and holding officers and their departments criminally liable. This shift occurred despite significant resistance from the police departments, who did not want to be held accountable from anyone outside of their own branch. Nevertheless, due to the growing support for external regulation, those fighting for reforms succeeded with getting many of their proposed reforms approved (p 9-10). They also note how there also were other instances that held the police accountable during this era, such as commissions and the citizen reviews. The commissions were especially central. These commissions were tasked with investigating and highlighting the police and the American

justice system. The authors write that the reports that were presented by the commissions have had a real impact in justifying the need for reforms (p. 11).

Based on what Alpert & Dunham are writing, there can be seen a clear connection between the evolution of the institutions holding the police departments accountable for their actions, and the public gradually gaining trust in their ability to provide unbiased and impartial justice. As becomes evident throughout research, the topic of the legislative consequences of violent acts committed by the police has changed a lot from the end of the 19th century until today. While the legislative consequences were largely non-existent in early times, they are much graver in today's modern society. The main issue to consider is that, despite a clear evolution from the conditions presented by Alpert & Dunham, there are still major differences from state to state. This historical perspective provides a broad analysis of the themes that have and continues to still influence the police departments and the public's perception of them and their actions.

Not only has police brutality in itself been an issue historically, but it is also fair to briefly mention in relation to the topic of racism. Racism is, as police brutality, an issue that has a long history in the US, a history that is too complex to discuss in detail in this thesis, but it is important to note. Racism is very important to discuss in relation to the development of police brutality in America, as quite often recurring topics such as stereotypical judgments and common presumptions dictate the actions taken by the police. These stereotypical judgments could be related to the clothes they wear, the neighborhood they live in, the way they talk etc.

An interesting angle on racism is presented by Holmes & Smith (2008), they highlight stereotypical judgments made by minorities towards the police. Just as the police have certain stereotypes of different minorities, the minorities have stereotypes of the police. They highlight the way minorities living in poor neighborhoods are more likely to view the police as hostile compared to those living in mid-class neighborhoods. This view is shaped by stories told within their group, of officers using abusive techniques, painting them as dangerous people that they should be advised to stay away from. (p 75-76). It could be argued that such judgments made by different minorities in the US could have further enhanced the negative view of the police force following the death of George Floyd. If many already saw the police as hostile and untrustworthy towards minorities including colored people, they most likely needed very little encouragement in order to further cement that attitude, which they could further have given to others within their group.

Ethnic minorities trust in the police is further highlighted in a statistic provided by Statista. The report takes a closer look at the support for the police during the George Floyd protests, the statistic was ordered by ethnicity of those asked and included six possible answers: Strongly support, somewhat support, neither support or oppose, somewhat oppose, strongly oppose, and don't know/no opinion. The statistic found that as many as 62 % of African Americans responded that they strongly opposed or somewhat opposed the police, while as little as 24 % percent of white Americans responded the same. Instead, 56 % of the white Americans asked, responded that they strongly or somewhat supported the police during these protests. Meanwhile, the Hispanics that were asked provided a very mixed response, as 38 % strongly opposed or somewhat opposed the police, and 37 % strongly supported or somewhat supported the police (Statista, 2020). The statistic shows clear differences in the faith in the institution, the result is not surprising however, as many African Americans historically have a more troubled relationship with the police, than white Americans due to stereotypes. Put together, these points on racism and the police's relationship towards minorities, paints a clear picture of why there have been a stronger focus on training and supervision following the death of Floyd. One could argue that the proposed changes in legislation towards police brutality and the police departments in general, in large part comes as a result of racial judgments made by the police. As they frequently serve as the victims of such actions of excessive force, the murder of Floyd, another person of color was seen by both citizens and politicians as the last straw

In modern times, most people still alive in the US have not experienced the different eras presented by Alpert & Dunham. Most people that are alive today do not have much knowledge of a time where the police departments were self regulated, and certainly not times where they were not regulated at all. For most people alive today the police departments have always been under external regulation. However, many Americans may have experienced the elements of the self-regulating times described by Alpert & Dunham without being educated in them. Despite no longer being strictly self-regulated, there have still been instances where the police officers have covered for each other in cases that has led to deathly outcomes, which could be seen as one of the reasons why police officers have seldom been charged. This is also connected to their right to qualified immunity, which will be further discussed in the coming paragraphs.

Because legislation related to punishing police officers responsible for use of excessive force has been scarce, one could argue that it explains some of the cases where the perpetrators within the police force have not been punished for their actions. As noted by Burling & Harris (2020) there have been many cases where the officers in question have not been punished appropriately

or not at all. They highlight that some of these cases goes back to the 90s, while others are as recent as the 21st century. Their examples include the actions by police officers against Rodney King in 1991, King was a black man who was beaten up to 50 times and tased, while the police officers responsible later were acquitted of all charges in the so called “Simi Valley” trial (p.35). This example is very relevant to look at in comparison with the George Floyd case. The Rodney King case and its aftermath shared a lot in common with the Floyd case, though King did not die. The event and the Simi Valley trial eventually led to protests and riots, just like what happened after the Floyd murder. The protests in relation to both of these cases also led to chants about justice for each of the individuals involved. Rissman (2014) details how the Simi Valley trial led to extensive protests and riots in Los Angeles following its verdict. These riots led to looting and also started a race war between Latin American looters and Korean Americans, who were often the owners of the shops being plundered. The race war escalated to the point that many of the shop owners felt they had to arm themselves with guns in order to protect themselves. Although the riots started as a result of the verdict, Rissman (2014) also argues that years of financial stress was a significant factor. At the end of the first day, 10 people had been killed, and 140 had been wounded as reported by the news stations. Many in the media, law and the citizens wondered how it would transpire from there. (p. 61-67). Rissman (2014) further notes how the riots eventually lasted for 5 days until the police was finally able to take back control, by then the city had suffered over 1 billion dollars of property damage, more than 2000 people had been injured and over 50 people had died (p. 72-73). Finally, Rissman (2014) notes how the King case eventually led to a federal trial, with a more diverse jury, this trial ended up convicting two of the officers involved (Koon and Powell), while the other two (Wind and Briseno) were acquitted of the charges (p.80, 85).

Another example mentioned by Burling & Harris (2020) is the incident involving Breonna Taylor in 2020 where the police broke into the apartment Taylor was while looking for drugs and responded to gunfire by her boyfriend. The eight shots taken by the police officers ended up killing Taylor, after a trial her family won the lawsuit, albeit the officers responsible ended up with not being charged for their actions (p. 39-40). Burling & Harris (2020) note that the killing of Breonna Taylor did not initially gain much nationwide attention. It was fairly common for colored women to be killed by the police and not being given much attention. It was not until the murder of Floyd that the case of Breonna Taylor became known across the nation. Following this, protests and cries for Justice for Breonna Taylor, along with the #Sayhername became a regular happening (p. 42). Average American citizens, as well as politicians have

called for changes to the legislation related to the punishment of officers. As noted in the theory section, this is partly the reason for the demonstrations and rallies, people have gradually started to lose faith in the institutions' ability to deliver rightful and true justice to perpetrators of violent acts. This is one of the main ways that the death of Floyd has changed the legislation of police brutality, now the focus is on creating clear legislation that accurately punishes the police officers who's unjustified actions lead to life altering injuries, or even worse, death.

On the topic of the society's trust in the police it becomes relevant to mention the effect that the death of Floyd had. In the immediate aftermath the public trust in the police could be summarized by one of the slogans being promoted in the protests and rallies, this was named "defund the police". Burling & Harris (2020) notes that there are very different views on the topic, with some considering the funds given to the police as fine with the further thought that defunding would lead to more harm than good. On the other hand, some think that the police departments are given too much money and would simply be better used in other areas that could benefit the society (p. 88-89). The cries of defunding the police paints a picture of citizens who have not been content with the police departments and feels that the police officers are not able to do their job of providing justice. This does obviously not translate to all citizens in America, and there are many who did not support this slogan, the trend remains important to note though, as it says something about the police's role in the US.

The changes in legislation towards police brutality have mostly been concerned with improving conditions, setting higher demands for those seeking to become police officers. This has been a prevalent development and area of focus from the era of self-regulation until today. This included a greater amount of training, with special attention being paid to the use of weapons while on duty. There has been outrage over the issue that police officers have become people in power despite not being aware of the true responsibility and power that they hold. However as noted by Alpert & Dunham, this has been an area that reforms have sought to improve since the early 1900s, so why is this still an issue being discussed in 2022? This has further intensified as a result of the murder of George Floyd, which served as a catalyst for justice in similar cases of police brutality, such as the tragic death of Breonna Taylor.

Boudreau et al (2022) points to different reasons that explains the minimal significant changes in policing over the years, these are mainly: elements of the politics of policing that can impede change, decentralized nature of policing, as well as the police themselves actively resisting changes (p. 2) Boudreau et al (2022) notes that the weight of public opinion must lead to favorable reform proposals, which supporters and opponents must voice their opinion on. They

further highlight that there have been very mixed views in the public, related to reform proposals in the past, much due to different powerful factions influencing the opinions of people no matter which parties they support (p.2).

In relation to the situation today, Boudreau et al (2022) presents in their study that there is strong bipartisan support not only for the BLM movement, but also for real legislative reforms related to the police. In their study, they have focused on viewing the support for police reforms among citizens in California, looking at how elements such as BLM support, partisanship and support of groups such as the CLBC (California Legislative Black Caucus) and the CPCA (California Chiefs Police Association) affect their responses. Their results present that the support for reforms remains high among both democrats and republicans, despite being informed of the positions of groups related to the parties' citizens' support. The research presents that even republicans who do not support BLM are in favor of police reforms, though this majority is minimal compared to the republicans who do support BLM (p.12). This is important to take notice of, as it says something about the support that Floyd and the BLM has generated, support that goes beyond even partisanship, in a country that has traditionally been very based on which party the citizens support.

The main changes that have been proposed in the aftermath of the murder of George Floyd have primarily been related to three controversial sides of American policing. The three elements are all part of what was named the "George Floyd Justice in Policing Act", an act of legislation that have been pushed to be put into effect. The three sides of American Policing discussed in this act are the chokehold, qualified immunity as well as the no knock warrant. These three could be considered the main areas of Policing that Congress have been trying to make alterations to. I would like to argue that all of these three, represent issues that have persisted throughout time, but might finally be changing. This is particularly relevant in relation to the chokehold, which has a long and troubling connection with the use of excessive force.

The first area of police brutality that is a subject for reform in the aftermath of the George Floyd murder, is the controversial topic of qualified immunity. Qualified immunity could be seen as one of the major reasons why police officers involved in situations such as the Breonna Taylor incident, or other fatal situations have avoided criminal charges. Burling & Harris (2020) describes qualified immunity as something that protects officers from being criminally punished, unless the victims are able to prove that their rights were violated. Furthermore, they go on to detail how significant this is, as they present that out of the 1147 people killed in the US in 2017 by the police, officers were charged in only 1 percent of the cases. They further

highlight the reason for this topic being so controversial, namely that the police see the qualified immunity as a necessity due to the extreme situations that they find themselves in. On the other hand, those opposing this immunity argues that it lets the police act without being held accountable for their actions and lets them operate as however they see fit (p. 83-85). Because this is such a vital reason for why acts of police brutality go unpunished, any changes should be considered a monumental step towards police reform and finally being able to hold police officers accountable for their actions. At the time of publishing, the George Floyd policing act was still awaiting if it was going to be put into effect, however as mentioned by Boudreau et al (2022), the act had already been approved in The House of Representatives in 2021, but still awaited a vote in the Senate at that point in time (p.2). Nevertheless, the mere fact that this issue was finally being discussed in congress should be seen as a clear effect that the murder of Floyd has had on the legislation. Restricting or getting rid of qualified immunity would go a long way in solving a problem that has historically troubled the process of convicting police officers.

Another reform that is being proposed is to the no knock warrant, this is an issue that was not related to the George Floyd murder itself but was rather connected to the murder of Breonna Taylor. Despite not being directly related it still remains an almost as controversial topic as the qualified immunity. The no knock warrant could be defined as a warrant the police could obtain, that enables them to enter an apartment/house etc without announcing themselves until the moment they break down the door. Main reasons for it being such a controversial topic includes that many feel like the use of the no knock warrant could easily lead to innocent people dying as a result of the police barging in without notifying who they are, as was the case with Taylor. The police, however, maintain that it is vital in cases where they are afraid that the suspects might dispose of the evidence that the police are looking for, in the time it takes for them to announce themselves. The Breonna Taylor killing was an especially controversial use of the no knock warrant, as highlighted by Burling & Harris (2020), the attorney of the Taylor family argued that the Police officers supplied false information in order to be granted the no knock warrant (p.40) The status of this proposed reform remained as unclear as the changes to the qualified immunity, as Boudreau et al (2022) mentioned that they are both part of the same act awaiting a decision in the senate, if approved however the decision would mean a complete ban of the no knock warrant (p. 2).

The third area that the policing act is seeking to change is to ban the use of chokeholds by federal agencies. Following the murder of Floyd, many states in the US have already banned the use of this technique by police officers. This is particularly relevant to Floyd as the use of a

chokehold is ultimately what ended up killing him. Furthermore, the ban on chokeholds could serve as another example of the effect that Floyd has had on legislation, as it connects to his and many other victims' final words, namely: "I can't breathe". This eventually became a common chant during the rallies in the aftermath of his murder. This particular change could also be viewed as long overdue as Floyd may be the most known instance of the use of this technique leading to death, but he is certainly not the only one. Examples of others who have been victims of this brutal technique are namely Eric Garner (who was the first to utter the now famous words of "I can't breathe", due to being put in a chokehold in 2014), and Manuel Ellis (a resident in Washington who was put in a chokehold by the police in 2020 after being pulled over in his car). Both of these men eventually suffered the same fate as Floyd, as they both died shortly after being put in a chokehold by the police for several minutes. Banning the technique on a federal level would mean that any federal agency such as the CIA, FBI or the DEA would not be permitted to use them.

At the time of writing, 26th of May 2022, there has recently arrived a major decision in relation to the George Floyd justice policing act that has been uncertain due to the senate. A news article by Lauren Gambino of The Guardian reports that, although the act still has not gone through the senate after being passed in congress, President Biden announced at the 2-year anniversary of Floyd's death, that he has signed an executive order to put a major policing reform into effect. The order directly targets some of the biggest issues that have plagued policing in the US since the early times. This mainly bans the use of chokeholds (by federal agencies), restricts no knock warrants, and aims to create a national database to track police misconduct as well as requiring agencies to implement tools looking for officers promoting unlawful violence or pushing white supremacist views. The act was signed by Biden with members of Breonna Taylor's and George Floyd's family present (Gambino, 2022).

It is however important to note that although this is a groundbreaking moment in relation to the topic of police brutality, there is still work to be done. Because an executive order only holds power over federal agencies, this does not mean that it directly affects state or local agencies, which differentiates this order from an act being passed in Congress. It does, however affect central agencies such as the FBI or the DEA, which are powerful agencies in the US. The order also takes a big step in countering the self-regulating practices that still occurs within US policing, by taking action to stop officers with unacceptable ideals. The reform put into effect by President Biden still does not affect the issue of qualified immunity which remains a troubling issue of American policing. Nevertheless, I would argue that the passing of this order

goes to show the major impact that the murder of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor has had on American policing. Gambino reported that President Biden himself stated after announcing the order: “It’s not about their death but what we do in their memory that matters,” (Gambino, 2022). This should be considered powerful, as the order directly prohibits actions that led to their deaths, the restriction on no knock warrants for instance will ensure that no more innocent victims such as Taylor will be killed in similarly tragic circumstances.

It becomes impossible to argue that the growth of social media has not played a major role in the proposed changes to the legislation. As previously mentioned, the media attention echoes that of the Rodney King case, the difference between them is that while the King case was largely a national event, the Floyd case ended up being an international event covered all over the world. Due to the extremely popular social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Reddit, etc, that have a large user base all over the world, it would be difficult to find someone who has not heard of the name George Floyd. Because of the increased coverage, the pressure has only increased even more on the politicians in the US, who have faced even more demands for reforms aimed at Police Brutality. Furthermore, the Politicians see that this has become a major topic, and one that has garnered significant interest from the public. Due to this, they may feel an even greater motivation to fight for changes, as they see a clear opportunity to gain voters, by fighting for the issues that the people are interested in.

I would also argue that the eventual sentencing of Derek Chauvin to 22.5 years in prison is a clear example of the way Floyd’s murder has changed the handling of police brutality. Due to the qualified immunity of police officers, such convictions have been a rare occurrence, as previously mentioned. The fact that the officer responsible for the most public and covered example of police brutality has been charged, could be seen as a signal that police officers will no longer be shielded by the law, and will finally be held accountable for their unjustified actions while on duty. This also goes for the other police officers that were involved: Tou Thao, Thomas Lane and J. Alexander Kueng. These were the officers that were observers of the actions taken by Chauvin and decided to go against their training and their duty, standing idly by while George Floyd was being choked. At this time, they are all awaiting sentencing, but have been convicted and found guilty. One could, however also counter this by mentioning that the responsible parties in the King case also ended up being convicted and charged for their brutal acts. Despite of this, other instances of police brutality in the US went on largely as before, still acquitting responsible police officers. There were numerous promises made of better times, but in the end, they ended up being nothing but empty promises.

Another factor to look at is how the policing reforms affect the role of the policeman in the US, who is under greater scrutiny than ever before. For the policemen in the American society, the death of Floyd signaled a large shift where they are more likely than ever before to be faced with punishment such as dismissal, fines or prison, should they cross the line of using excessive force without reason. As a result of police brutality becoming a central issue in American Politics, many may feel at risk when needing to actually use force in a critical situation. This echoes back to what Holmes & Smith noted, that police brutality is fairly hard to define, and the use of force that is deemed necessary, largely depends on the situation in which the police officers find themselves in. Because of this the policemen might have to consider their actions more carefully than ever before, due to the uncertainty of what is deemed a necessary situation to use force in and in what way.

One more thing to consider is that due to the recent executive order put into effect by President Biden, all federal agents are now required to have body cameras switched on at all times. The use of body camera by those enforcing the law is something that has been a priority to introduce following the death of Floyd, in order to have clear insight into the actions of policemen. This use of body cameras is something that might affect the judgment of federal agents being involved in potentially critical situations. Federal agents' use of force will need to be very considered and thought out, as every action taken by them will now be filmed and viewed by numerous others, which could easily lead to serious legal consequences should their acts be unjustified.

Statistics presented by Statista takes a closer look at an interesting side of policing, namely people shot to death by the police. The statistics presented shows the number of people shot to death each month from January 2017, until May 2022. The numbers that are most interesting to look at in relation to the policemen are the immediate numbers following the death of Floyd in May 2020. During the month of Floyd's murder, the numbers reached a high point with 111 people shot to death, some might have come as a result of the protests and riots in the aftermath. The next couple of months are interesting to view as the numbers in the immediate months after largely remained historically low with June (77), July (68), August (87) and September (59). September was a historic month as such low recordings of people shot to death had not been recorded since September 2018 (Statista, 2022). As for reasons why the numbers were low in the immediate months after Floyd's death, this only leads to speculation, I would however argue that one possible reason would be that the police officers were more reluctant to use deadly force after such a public case. Due to fear of being persecuted themselves during this highly

discussed and publicized event, many may have felt uncertainty in using force with potentially lethal consequences. The numbers did go up towards the end of the year with October (101) and November (91) being particularly high, I would argue that by then the case was not as public and widely discussed as in June, July etc and due to the qualified immunity, it would be fairly easy for police officers to slide back into old habits (Statista, 2022).

Historically, there have often been mentions of great reforms that would significantly change the ways of the police and police brutality, but the impact of these changes has not been particularly noteworthy. The main reason why I would argue that the handling of police brutality will not remain the way it is following the Floyd murder, is that there are clear reform proposals made, and now following the order sanctioned by President Biden there are actual legislative changes being set. The big words and promises are not empty anymore, and have been backed up by real and hopefully, lasting reforms. Although the impact of these proposed reforms remains to be seen, there is no doubt that there are signs of things heading in the right direction. The main hope is that the reforms that might go into effect will leave a lasting and improving impression on both the police force, and the American citizens' faith in the justice system's ability to provide true justice to culprits of police brutality.

Conclusion

In this thesis I have attempted to discuss the topic of police brutality in the US. By using the different sources, the aim of this thesis has been to provide a clear image of the topic, and by using statistics, strengthen the arguments made. The main focus has been in what way has the George Floyd killing changed the topic of police brutality in the country? With special attention paid to the proposed legislative reforms in the wake of the event. In order to answer this, I have tried to give some attention to the historical evolution of police brutality from the era of no regulation and until the era of external regulation. Another focus of the thesis has been to view the relation to racism, although as mentioned I have barely scratched the surface on the impact that racism has had on police brutality. I have highlighted other tragic instances of police brutality, in particular the Breonna Taylor case due to the extreme circumstances of her murder and the attention it got following the death of Floyd, as well as the Rodney King case due to the similarity to the Floyd case. Furthermore, I have tried to look at why the calls for police reforms have not been successful previously, such as in the aftermath of other significant events like the beating of King and the subsequent riots and protests in 1991 for example. A central part of this thesis has been to examine the different areas that are being targeted by legislation, as well as why they are significant areas in relation to police brutality.

Finally, I have attempted to discuss the impact of social media on the proposed reforms, and how the Floyd case has affected the use of force by the police shortly after.

I have tried to argue that the Floyd murder has changed police brutality and American policing in general, because of the legislative reforms that have been proposed as well as put into effect. By taking measures to prevent that what happened to Taylor and Floyd ceases to happen again, the cases where the use of excessive force leads to death may very well be shrinking. It is important to note however, that more still needs to be done in state laws in order to combat police brutality on a local scale. In conclusion, I will state that this is a difficult topic to discuss as the event is still fairly recent, and the true magnitude of changes such as President Biden's order will take several years to determine. However, as I have stated there are signs that the deaths of Floyd and Breonna Taylor have brought about changes that will have a major effect on American policing going forward.

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