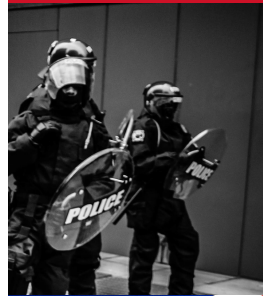




# Military or Police - What's the Difference?

Caleb Slotten

The similar militaristic roots of Mexican and British policing have cultivated cultures of violence and corruption. Both must now grapple with the reality that the time for radical change is long overdue.



# History of British and Mexican Police

## Irish Influence

One of the first policing organizations was London's Metropolitan Police in the 1830s. What started as an "unarmed, non-military" force turned into a force of officers who carried cutlasses and pistols and was deployed alongside the military in times of great internal disorder. This change was marked by Robert Peel, former head of the Irish Constabularies taking control of the Metropolitan Police and incorporating Irish tactics into Britain (Sinclair 2006). Residents at the time described Peel's police force as "paramilitary" due to its violent appearance and tactics.

## Militarization to Fight Cartels

Mexico went a step further than Britain by utilizing the military themselves in their policing. In 2006, newly elected President Felipe Calderón vowed to use "all the force of the State" to combat organized crime and cartel violence ("Calderón: 'Neither truce nor barracks'" 2007). He regularly sent military into traditional policing situations, going as far as to completely replace the Ciudad Juárez public security institution with former military personnel for a year, then replacing them with federal police (Moloeznik 2013).



# Modern Contexts

To Britain's credit, they have appeared to learn some lessons from their past and are making changes to have less of a violent and militaristic reputation. One of the most notable changes has been the implementation of Police Community Support Officers, or PCSOs. PCSOs are unarmed and utilized for smaller tasks that regular, armed police are not necessary for (Metropolitan Police). Mexico, on the other hand, is continuing to look more like the Metropolitan Police of old. Current President López Obrador has deployed nearly 150,000 troops to perform civilian police duties since taking office in 2018 (Human Rights Watch).



# Modern Issues

## Accountability

Despite moves in opposite directions, both countries have a serious problem with a lack of police accountability. England's complaints system launched in 2020 has yielded underwhelming results, with just 3% of the 2,157 misuse of force allegations being referred to disciplinary proceedings (Wall 2023). Accountability in Mexico is becoming decreasingly possible as the federal government continues to take over policing operations. There appears to be no changes to that trend any time soon, as Congress voted in 2022 to allow armed forces to perform domestic law enforcement duties through 2028 via Constitutional reform (Stevenson 2022).

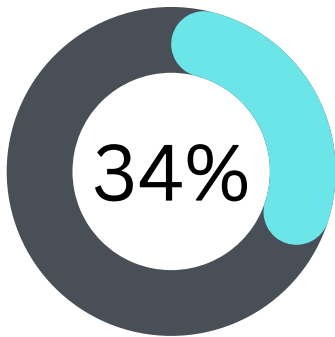
## Corruption

Looking specifically at the police forces in modern London and Mexico City show deep institutional corruption. A March 2023 official report of the Met in London found a culture of sexism and racism. 12% of women in the force reported being harassed or attacked at work, and one-third experienced sexism. It also found the Met was more likely to discipline or fire minority ethnic officers and use excessive force against black people (Dodd 2023). In Mexico City, police officers have arrest quotas that have made planting drugs on detainees and breaking into homes without warrants not uncommon (Fisher & Abi-Habib 2022)



# Public Trust

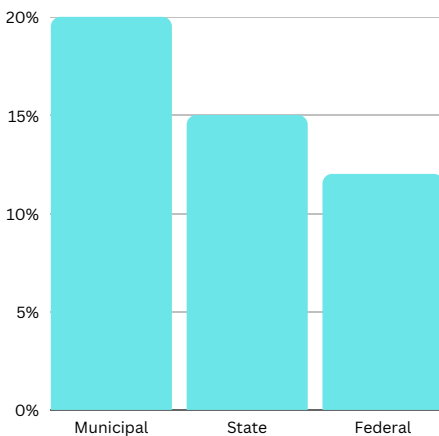
Percentage of Britons that believe the police treat all people with respect (2022)



Source: Ipsos (2022)

There is a glaring lack of trust for police in Britain, especially amongst minorities. Just 34% of citizens believe the police treat all people with respect, and that number is just 28% for ethnic minorities. About only 40% of minorities find the police to be trustworthy, honest, competent, or fair (Ipsos 2022).

Percentage of Mexican citizens who have no trust in different police force types (2012)



Source: Esparza & Ugues (2020)

Because of the widespread corruption in local police, Mexican citizens find the Federal Police to be the most trustworthy policing entity, despite how militaristic it's become (Esparza & Ugues 2020)

# Analyzing the Solutions

Policing in these contexts needs change. But what would work?

## Reform

Simply reforming the current policing systems in both contexts would be ineffective. This is because of the lost trust the publics have for their respective police forces. Alex Vitale notes how most modern reform proposals such as better police training, better police equipment, and more resources involve giving more power to an institution that has broken roots (Beyond Prisons). No matter how many more resources and trainings you give police, it's not going to change the fact that the public simply doesn't trust the institution as a whole.

## Democratization

Democratization is already being tried in England and Wales. The results, however are proving underwhelming, with just 3% of misuse of force allegations leading to possible disciplinary action. This is similar to São Paulo, Brazil's policing public forums where citizens can come to meetings with police officers and voice their concerns (Gonzalez & Mayka 2022) This is Britain's way of allowing citizens to voice concerns to police officers, but it isn't producing results. With the vast corruption amongst local police and increasingly federal control of policing duties in Mexico, there is far too much disconnect for citizen say in policing to be feasible in the country.



## Abolition & Transformative Justice

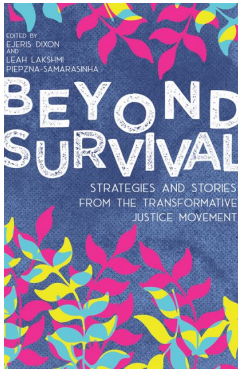
Police abolition is the reallocating of resources and responsibility away from the police and into alternative methods of community safety (Jodice 2021). Transformative justice goes a step further and attempts to address violence without the help of the state (Dixon 2019). With the widespread lack of trust and inability to democratically make a change, both contexts will want to shift away from reliance on policing entirely. Instead of fighting the cartels in Mexico, it would be wiser to ask the question of why the cartels are so successful in the first place. Shifting resources away from policing and focusing on drug use with rehabilitation centers and mental health institutions is going to yield more fruitful, long-term results. British citizens need different systems to lean on that they actually trust, especially ethnic minorities. With the police force's tendency to use excessive force on minorities, it's imperative that these communities take on transformative justice ideals and learn deescalation tactics themselves so they don't need to call for police assistance in the first place.

# Why Compare the Two?

It may seem random to compare policing contexts that are so geographically distant, but that is exactly the point. The point of comparing two seemingly different contexts is to show that there are more similarities in policing issues across the globe than we realize. It shouldn't make sense that 2000s Mexican policing saw similar trends to 1830s British policing - but it does because the globalization of the policing institution. It shows how influential colonization was on spreading policing practices. Mainland Britain's policing culture of today originated from one of its colonies, Ireland, in the 1800s. This comparison also shows that while countries can differ in their exact circumstances, they often times share the same need for similar solutions. Policing is a global phenomena - no context exists in a vacuum.



# Relevant Materials



## Dixon - "Beyond Survival"

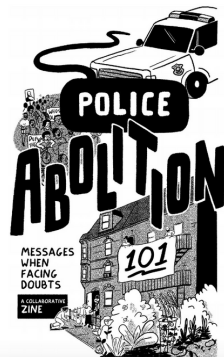
In the first chapter, Dixon outlines exactly what transformative justice is and how it can be used to build safer communities.

## Gonzalez and Mayka - "Policing, Democratic Participation, and the Reproduction of Asymmetric Citizenship:

In this essay, Gonzalez and Mayka explain how democratic attempts at policing don't always prove effective, as evident by São Paulo's policing forums that furthered class divides in the city.

## Jodice - "Police Abolition 101"

This is a zine in which Jodice outlines exactly what the phrase "police abolition" refers to, explains what it would look like in practice, and debunks some common myths and arguments against it.



# Summary

British and Mexican police share similar militaristic roots. In Britain this comes from the influence of the Irish Constabularies; in Mexico this comes from an effort to fight drug cartels.



Britain is relying less on violence and weapons in its policing, while Mexico is handing more policing power to its military.

The main issues with both countries are lack of accountability, corruption, and low public trust.



Democratization and reform are not feasible solutions. Both countries need elements of police abolition and transformative justice.

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