

This issue snapshot is excerpted from [Unmasking the Future](#) (2021), a scan of major current socio-economic trends and developments, at local, provincial, national and international scales, authored by James Stauch of the Institute for Community Prosperity, commissioned by the Calgary Foundation.

THERE AND **BACK AGAIN**:

Rediscovering the Community Policing Paradigm

Policing in Canada has gone through many transitions, always pulled in two directions: One toward hard-nosed militarization, the other toward responsive, sensitive, community integration. There is a somewhat related tension between self-policing and community oversight. Since the murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police in the spring of 2020, a galvanizing moment that otherwise was one of countless incidents of mortal racism at the hands of North American police forces, the very institution of policing has been put under the microscope. Between the extremes of a literal interpretation of “defund the police” (an unhelpful phrase)

and the defensive posturing that many police unions have taken, lies ample opportunity for positive reform of 21st Century policing. There are opportunities to reform both the RCMP and local policing.

The Northwest Mounted Police, which later became the RCMP, was established as a quasi-military front-line of colonial rule, modeled after the Royal Irish (later Royal Ulster) Constabulary, which kept Ireland firmly under the boot of British rule.²⁵³ There’s a reason, after all, that so many communities were originally called “forts”. The RCMP had a central role in spying on dissident Canadians, enforcing Indigenous parents’ compliance with the residential school system, and in committing many acts of harassment, brutality and more subtle forms of racism vis-à-vis Indigenous peoples and black Canadians in particular, many of which have come to light in the wake of the #BLM and #defundthepolice movements. There was even a Royal Commission investigating illegal RCMP activities in the late 1970s.²⁵⁴ But Hollywood and Canada’s own mythology has also portrayed the RCMP as benign guardians of *Peace, Order and Good Government*, the frontline against the lawless, murderous American manifest destiny, and quintessentially politely

“You’re getting stopped and harassed all the time, for no other reason than, quite frankly, driving while Black, walking while Black, or just being Black.”

Kingsley Massiah, Calgarian and victim of racial profiling²⁵⁹

“We will never have true civilization until we have learned to recognize the rights of others.”

Thomas King, *The Inconvenient Indian: A Curious Account of Native People in North America* (2012)

Canadian (with all the warm fuzzy thoughts that phrase evokes). The gallant musical ride is the symbol we prefer to remember, compared with, say, that of Mona Wang, a 20-year-old nursing student who earlier this year was dragged by an RCMP officer by her hair down a student apartment complex in Kelowna. More recently, we have seen tepid admissions of systemic racism and sexual harassment in the force, a Public Inquiry into the Nova Scotia mass murder investigation, and incidents of RCMP failing to intervene or lay charges amid assaults in the Mi’kmaq fisheries dispute and white-supremacist clashes with anti-racist protestors in Alberta. As the bad news for the force piles up, expect to see either a more comprehensive federal Public Inquiry or a Royal Commission into the RCMP. Meanwhile, Alberta’s Fair Deal panel convened by the UCP government is looking into the potential of a provincial police force to replace the RCMP. Without guessing what the panel’s recommendations will be, this may be perhaps the least controversial, particularly because Quebec and Ontario already have their own province-wide police forces.

Calgary’s municipal police force is a good example of an organization navigating the tension between community imperatives and thuggish militia-aping aesthetics and tactics, a tension perhaps best captured by the logos on police cruisers; the newer “Vigilance, Courage, Pride” (read, “it’s all about us”) vs. the former “To Serve and Protect” (“it’s about serving and protecting the community”). The 2020 documentary film *No Visible Trauma* shines the light on one particular incident of excessive force, accompanied by an alleged cover-up. But the same force has also come out with one of the most vocal and honest statements on

systemic racism, with Police Chief Mark Neufeld acknowledging that a new “paradigm” of policing is needed, one that is more community-focused and embedded, alongside reforms to use of force policy and procedures.²⁵⁵ In late November, the Community Safety Investment Framework was presented to City Council. The framework will create an \$8 million annual alternative call response, expanding the Policy and Crisis Teams (PACT) as well as supporting community partners like the Alpha House DOAP team, as well as \$2 million to address anti-racism work, including for the Indigenous Liaison Officer Program.²⁵⁶ Weirdly, although the Police Service recommended that the \$8 million come from within their own budget, the supposedly cash-strapped City Council chose to instead pay for this from the City’s own reserve fund.²⁵⁷ The Police Service also announced that they would eliminate the practice of “carding”, a key racial profiling practice.

One cornerstone of the paradigm shift that many North American cities, from Los Angeles to New York are adopting, is the dispatch of mental health crisis workers (in lieu of, or as need dictates, alongside) police officers.²⁵⁸ The pilot for this was a program called CAHOOTS which has been running in Eugene, Oregon since 1989. Last year, 20% of the city’s dispatches were handled by mental health workers, with only 150 of 24,000 calls requiring police back-up. What is striking about CAHOOTS is that it is yet another social innovation that has a decades-long lag time from proof-of-concept to scaled adoption, a phenomenon previous scans have touched upon. innovation that has a decades-long lag time from proof-of-concept to scaled adoption, a phenomenon previous scans have touched upon.