

An Introduction to Police Fraternal Organizations

WHAT IS A POLICE “UNION”?

Police Fraternal Organizations (PFOs), often incorrectly referred to as police unions, are **organized political groups of cops who advocate on behalf of the police**.

They include a number of national groups with chapters across the country, including the Fraternal Order of Police (FOP), the International Union of Police Associations (IUPA), The International Brotherhood of Police (IBP) and the National Association of Police Organizations Employees (NAPOE).

Over 55% of employees of 12,000 local police departments in the country are part of a PFO. More than 70% of all rank and file officers are covered by some form of collective bargaining agreement. Only 10% of the overall workforce are union members.

HOW PREVALENT ARE THEY?



“For the first half-century after police began organizing around 1900, police unions were illegal in most of the United States, especially after the suppressed Boston police strike of 1919. City governments feared the negative political repercussions of permitting the independent organization of the agents of state violence. In some cities, these de jure bans did not prevent police associations from lobbying over compensation and working conditions. But overall, these associations were relatively weak.

This picture changed in the 1950s and ‘60s, when police unions first won widespread recognition and collective bargaining rights, organizing in response to political reformers who worked to rein in police corruption and the police abuse that fell heaviest on the backs of Black communities.”

Reframe

Police Fraternal Organizations (PFOs) or “Cop Frats”

Why do we call them PFOs?

- That’s what they call themselves - the Fraternal Order of Police is one of the largest police associations.
- That is how they organize themselves
 - the majority of PFOs are organized and recognized by law as fraternal organizations not as labor and agricultural organizations.

Why PFOs are not unions

- PFOs are on the side of the boss, not workers
- PFOs are negotiating for the right to kill, maim, coerce, surveil, violate, and criminalize with impunity.
- PFOs are treated differently from labor unions. They get special treatment:
 - At the bargaining table
 - In the budget
 - When it comes to discipline

“It is not within the province of the trade union movement to especially organize policemen, no more than to organize militiamen, as both policemen and militiamen are often controlled by forces inimical to the labor movement.”

– SAMUEL GOMPERS, FOUNDER OF THE AMERICAN FEDERATION OF LABOR

WHY DO WE CARE ABOUT PFOS?

PFOs are a powerful political force that stand in the way of our progress on every front.

They support Right-wing candidates opposed to reproductive, gender, and racial justice.

- PFOs were among Trump's staunchest supporters and campaigned on his behalf all over the country.
- The Fraternal Order of Police, the International Union of Police Associations and the National Border Patrol Council all endorsed Trump.
- Nearly 85% of police voted for Donald Trump.
- Norman, Oklahoma's FOP lodge #122 endorsed the same 5 candidates endorsed by "Unite Norman," a local extremist group with documented sympathies for white supremacist and Right wing groups, including one who posted materials supporting the Qanon conspiracy theory on his social media accounts and participated in the January 6, 2021 "Stop the Steal" action in Washington, D.C.

- **They cover up, condone, and create conditions ripe for police violence against Black women, girls, trans and nonbinary people, including sexual violence by cops.**
- PFOs are powerful propaganda and lobbying machines, shaping public debate around "crime" and public safety and advancing criminalization, policing and punishment as default societal responses to every issue.
- They take money from collective resources.
- They work to build police power and aggressively target opponents.



HOW DO PFOS SPECIFICALLY HARM WOMEN AND GIRLS OF COLOR?

They cover up police sexual violence.

In 2018, a New York City PFO filed a lawsuit challenging the Civilian Complaint Review Board's exercise of its independent investigatory jurisdiction over complaints of sexual harassment and violence by police. While the legal challenge was ultimately defeated, PFOs successfully stalled the process for several years. The Civilian Complaint Review Board continues to struggle to receive sufficient funding to offer support to survivors who come forward, while the NYPD's budget now tops over \$14 billion.



They support groups opposed to reproductive justice.

Renee Bracey Sherman documents where police aid anti-abortion protestors in their article, [People Who Have Abortions vs. the Police](#).

In January 2022, "police gave safe passage to Patriot Front, a white supremacist group, attending the annual March for Life rally in Washington, D.C., organized by anti-abortion groups."

They steal our money.

In local municipalities, PFOs exercise unique control over city and county budgets through the contracts they negotiate. For example, bloated police pensions PFOs have successfully negotiated threaten to drive cities like Milwaukee into bankruptcy. Police benefit from public pensions 15% more than they contribute toward them, creating underfunded pension liabilities that have compounded over the years.

SYSTEMIC RESPONSES

Target contract negotiations

Alienate PFOS from labor organizations and movements

Limit their power through litigation or legislation (repeal LEOBRs)

Starve them of funding

Make PFO endorsements toxic to politicians

Challenge PFO copaganda

Expose their political vision and affiliations

Build labor investment in a just transition to a non-carceral economy

**NO JUSTICE
NO PEACE
NO RACIST
POLICE**

For more information, check out the IC Fight the (FOP) Power Playbook for Organizers at bit.ly/laborplaybook

**IC INTERRUPTING
CRIMINALIZATION**