

Being Black in Europe

SECTION ONE

Black Lives Matter Arrives in Britain

By [Mirren Gidda](#) On 9/13/16

SOURCE: <http://www.newsweek.com/2016/09/23/black-lives-matter-britain-police-racism-mark-duggan-497918.html>

After rehearsing with his hip-hop band one evening last summer, 25-year-old Josh Virasami began making his way to his home in Tottenham, North London. He headed into New Cross Gate station, where he planned to take a train. It was late, but the station was busy—supporters of the Clapton Ultras, a non-league soccer team, were returning from a game. As he walked toward the turnstiles, Virasami noticed police officers searching two black men, who were stood up against the wall of the station. Virasami, who is also black, began filming the incident with his phone.

Less than a minute later, Virasami says, [a white officer came up behind him and twisted his arm behind his back](#), causing him to drop his phone. The officer then handcuffed him and began to search him. “Under what section are you searching me?” Virasami says he asked. The officer responded, he says, by calling over to the two black men: “Do you know this guy?”

Officers then dragged Virasami out of the station and into the back of their van. [“This is unlawful. This is racist,” he says he told them.](#) The officers drove him to the Lewisham police station, a 10-minute drive, then led him into a small, windowless room. They ordered him to strip naked, turn around, bend over and cough. Virasami says that during this body search the officers laughed at him.

Once the search was over and he was released, Virasami says he waited at the station for two or three hours, asking the police for paperwork documenting what had happened. Eventually, he gave up and went home. (The Lewisham police station says it has no record of this incident.)

Virasami believes the officers who detained him are racists, an accusation that racial equality campaigners have long made about British police. It’s a criticism that intensified on August 15 following the death of Dalian Atkinson, a black man and former soccer star who passed away after police tasered him during an encounter in Telford, in the west of England. (An investigation into Atkinson’s death is ongoing.)

As British police continue to detain, arrest and kill black people in disproportionate numbers, a group of anti-racism campaigners—Virasami among them—are organizing and looking to the U.S., where the Black Lives Matter movement has galvanized thousands of people to protest against racial injustice. Virasami and his colleagues, some of whom know the three U.S. founders of Black Lives Matter, decided to adopt the moniker for their group. Armed with the most potent name in modern anti-racism activism—and one that protesters have chanted throughout Europe—Black Lives Matter UK wants to unite people across Britain to defy racial inequality. On August 5, the group held its first protests, shutting down roads in Birmingham, Nottingham and London.

Like its U.S. counterpart, Black Lives Matter UK has made opposing police violence a priority. Since 2004, the Independent Police Complaints Commission, a government-funded organization, has collected data on the number of people who have died during or following police contact in that time frame: 1,115 people, or 93 deaths a year. Black people—who make up 3.4 percent of Britain’s population—account for 7.89 percent of the fatalities.

[...]

In 2011, police shot and killed a 29-year-old black man named Mark Duggan, who lived in the Broadwater Farm estate. His death sparked five days of rioting across Britain, which resulted in around £200 million (\$265 million) of damage.



Carole Duggan (center), aunt of Mark Duggan who was shot dead by police five years ago, walks with the friends and family of Jermain Baker, another man shot by police, during a march in Tottenham, north London on August 6 to remember those killed by police. Daniel Leal-Olivas/AFP/Getty

Today, Broadwater Farm is a more peaceful place. Housing up to

4,000 people, it feels like a self-contained town. Residents live in colored tower blocks, linked by walkways; also on-site is a nursery, a playground and a church. At the back of the estate is the Broadwater Farm community center, where Clasford Stirling, who runs the center’s soccer club and who has lived in Tottenham for decades, spends most of his time. In 2007, the queen gave him an MBE—a community service award—for his work. Now, Stirling says, for all that he has done, one problem remains unchanged. “[Police racism] hasn’t gone; it hasn’t gone at all,” he says, sitting at a table in one of the center’s rooms across from the sports hall. “And we feel it every day. Why is it so [much easier] to assault a black person on the street than it is your white brothers and sisters?”

Around the table, other youth workers murmur their agreement. “Is there any difference to the ’60s?” Stirling says. “The only thing is, [the police] are not beating you visibly on the street, like they did in the ’60s. But the racism is just the same.”

[...]

Stirling does not believe the police have made enough of an effort to improve community relations. He says he and other black parents have taught their children to be wary of the police, particularly as they approach adolescence.

The following day, Stirling is finishing soccer practice for the 14- to 17-year-olds he coaches. He calls them over, and they gather around him, squinting in the sun. They are around the age Virasami was when police began to stop and search him for no apparent reason. One 15-year-old boy says his school holds regular classes to teach him and his friends about their rights and what to do if the police stop them.

He says the police are racist and not to be trusted, and the rest of the group nods in agreement. “If you’re in the presence of the police, we know that if you’re black, you might be stopped,” another teenager says. “I wouldn’t call the police [if I was in trouble]. If you get robbed, you’re not going to call the police.”

The group brightens, however, at a mention of Black Lives Matter. They have heard of the U.S. movement and the British group. One teenager says, “[Black Lives Matter] is good ’cause they’re trying to prove a point. They’re doing something, finally.”

Though the name Black Lives Matter carries recognition worldwide, it inevitably invites comparison to what’s happening in the U.S.

In 2015, according to the *Washington Post*’s database of police shootings (no official figures exist), U.S. police shot and killed 990 people, 258 of whom were black. In Britain, officers are usually unarmed, so police shootings are infrequent, but Virasami says officers have too often avoided punishment for the deaths of black people who have died during incidents involving the police.

According to the Institute of Race Relations, a London-based charity, the last time a British police officer was convicted over involvement in a black person’s death was in 1971, when two police officers were found guilty of the lesser charge of assault—not manslaughter— during their trial for the death of a homeless man, David Oluwale.

[...]

Virasami says Black Lives Matter UK, which has supporters of all ethnicities, sent white activists to the airport because it believed there was less risk the police would harm them.

Black Lives Matter UK is a young movement, with young members, and it still trying to establish itself. Though the September 6 protest may have angered people like Scott, who saw it as a flashy stunt, it earned the group widespread media coverage, and its fans are now waiting for the group’s next move. As are its critics.

This article originally incorrectly stated that the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) has collected data on the number of people the police have killed. The IPCC’s data is for deaths that occur during or following police contact.

SECTION TWO

A Divided Britain

SOURCE: <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/publication-download/healing-divided-britain-need-comprehensive-race-equality-strategy>

Our report ‘Is Britain Fairer?’²¹ (EHRC, 2015) brought together evidence on equality and human rights across 10 domains – spheres of life which underpin and illustrate people’s economic, social and personal well-being, and their life chances in Britain. It highlighted a range of areas in which people from ethnic minority communities experience worse treatment and outcomes.

These inequalities are of significant concern. Not only do they mean that individuals are facing barriers in accessing jobs and services that impact on their ability to fulfil their potential, they also indicate that some parts of our community are falling behind and can expect poorer life chances than their neighbours. Multiple disadvantages result in social and economic exclusion for some groups and create tensions between communities – putting the ‘haves’ and the ‘have nots’ in conflict.

[...]

The key challenges to race equality

Part 2 of this report builds on the evidence from ‘Is Britain Fairer?’ and draws on our submission to the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) (EHRC, 2016a) to present a fuller and more up-to-date analysis of the key challenges to race equality in Britain. It sets out evidence-based findings in five major areas of life: education and learning; work, income and the economy; health and care; justice, security and the right to life; and the individual and society.



Challenges are wide-ranging, as the following examples show:

1. Permanent school exclusion for Black Caribbean and Mixed White/Black Caribbean children in England is around three times the exclusion rate for all pupils.
2. In England and Wales, White boys receiving free school meals had the lowest educational attainment at the age of 16 in 2015.
3. Over the last five years, the number of young ethnic minority people in the UK who are long-term unemployed has almost doubled, whereas for young White people it fell slightly.
4. People from ethnic minorities are twice as likely to live in poverty compared to White people across Britain.
5. In Scotland, ethnic minority households are nearly four times more likely to experience overcrowding.
6. In 2014, the probability of Black African women being detained under mental health legislation in England was more than seven times higher than for White British women (CAAPC, 2016).
7. Rates of prosecution and sentencing for Black people in England and Wales are three times higher than for White people.

8. Ethnic minorities in police custody in England and Wales are significantly more likely to be physically restrained than White people.

9. Race hate on railway networks across Great Britain rose by 37 per cent between 2011 and 2015.

10. Ethnic minorities (along with women and disabled people) in the UK continue to be underrepresented in higher positions in public life.

These challenges build on and complement those highlighted in the Equality and Human Rights Commission's submission to CERD.³ It highlights the following key issues:

1. Access to civil law justice

Restrictions in the scope of legal aid in England and Wales are having a significant impact on people's ability to access justice when their rights have been breached. Legal aid is no longer available for most housing, immigration, social security, employment and education cases.⁴ These changes have had particularly adverse impacts on access to justice for people from ethnic minorities.

2. Criminal justice and immigration

As well as being more likely to be a victim of hate crime, ethnic minorities and migrants are much more likely to experience disadvantage in the criminal justice system. The latest Home Office figures on stop and search, for example, show that a Black man is still five times more likely to be stopped and searched by police than a White man in England and Wales.⁵

Institutional Racism

- ◉ Where racism is a basic feature of the rules and routines of Britain's social institutions (*e.g. the police/courts, the education system, the housing markets...*).
- ◉ Not usually conscious or intentional (*e.g. schools are committed to equality but still expel four times as many black children as white*).

3. Education

Ethnicity has been shown to impact a child's educational attainment at GCSE level in England and Wales, and the GCSE equivalent (Standard Grade) in Scotland.⁶ Data in England shows that Gypsy/Roma, Irish Travellers and Black Caribbean pupils have the lowest attainment. In addition, 'Is Britain Fairer?' found that White boys receiving free school meals in England and Wales had the lowest educational attainment at the age of 16 in 2015.

Recent evidence suggests that children are still victims of bullying because of their race, ethnicity or religion.⁷ An Equality and Human Rights Commission study from March 2015 found that one in four of the pupils surveyed in Scotland said that they were aware of peers in their school experiencing prejudice-based bullying.⁸

4. Access to work and just and favourable conditions of work

People from ethnic minorities have disproportionately high unemployment rates. Our research on ethnicity and employment trends in 2013 found that White people had a higher employment rate (at 74.7 per cent) than those from ethnic minorities (59.3 per cent).⁹ Across Great Britain, Black and Asian workers are also moving into more insecure forms of employment at higher rates than White workers. Black and Asian workers were more than twice as likely to be in agency work in 2014 (TUC, 2015a).

[...]

NOTE: If you wish to read the full report (titled *Healing a Divided Britain: The Need for a Comprehensive Race Equality Strategy*) then it can be accessed here:

<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/publication-download/healing-divided-britain-need-comprehensive-race-equality-strategy>

SECTION THREE

France's Approach to Fighting Racism: Pretty Words and Magical Thinking

By [Crystal Fleming](#)

SOURCE: <https://www.huffingtonpost.com/crystal-fleming/frances-approach-to-fight-racism-7231610.html>

I first came to France twelve years ago during my junior year abroad. I was the first person in my family to get a passport and I could barely contain my excitement. In the winter of 2003, two years before [the riots](#) that followed the untimely deaths of 15 year old Zyed Benna and 17 year old Bouna Traore, I landed in Paris bright-eyed and bushy tailed, armed with a very shaky grasp of French and a naive fascination with this beautiful country.

As an African-American, I was vaguely aware that France did not deal with issues of race the way we do in the United States. And when I happened to forget, French white people were keen to remind me. In one of the sociology classes I took at a university in the south of France, I hesitantly raised my hand to ask a question. The white French professor had been lecturing on youth and delinquency. I asked, in my broken French, if the dynamics he described had any relation to racial or ethnic belonging. *"We don't have that kind of problem here,"* he said, adding: *"This isn't the United States."* Embarrassed and flustered, I nodded and continued taking notes. After class, one of the only other black students pulled me aside: *"We do have those kinds of problems here. Hang out with me and I'll tell you about it."*

My new friend was from Cameroon and had moved to France along with her sister and brother several years prior. Over the course of the semester, her family basically adopted me, inviting me to dinners, showing me the area and telling me about their lives. I learned that despite the fact that each of them had white French partners and white close friends, they nonetheless experienced racism. But, as I learned in that sociology class that day, many French people denied that racism was actually a problem in their supposedly colorblind society.

Twelve years later, I am now a sociologist and professor [finishing a book](#) on racism and the legacies of slavery in France. And while some things have changed here, many French people are still in denial. Over the past decade, French minority groups have made important gains. 2005 was a water-shed year for raising consciousness about the weight of racism in France. In addition to [the riots](#) sparked by the death of French minority youth fleeing the police, new anti-racist groups emerged, such as the Representative Council of Black Associations and Indigenes de la République. There is now a national day of memory for slavery and the slavey trade (May 10th) thanks to a law proposed by Christiana Taubira, now France's first black (and female) Minister of Justice. New, powerful minority voices have emerged in the public sphere, including filmmaker, TV personality and activist Rokhaya Diallo and scholar-activist Maboula Soumahoro (who spearheaded France's first "Black History Month" in 2012).

Ten years after the riots, the police involved in chasing Zyed Benna, Bouna Traore and their friends are finally being [tried for negligence](#). Ten years later, it is more difficult for the French to deny the plight of ethnic and racial minorities — though some, especially conservatives, deny this reality daily.

Yet, despite these transformations, the French government seems to have almost entirely abdicated its responsibility for dealing with racism. In terms of policy, French “anti-racism” is a total disaster. Instead of formulating anti-racist policies and collecting anti-discrimination statistics, the country contents itself with anti-racist discourse and magical



thinking. In 2011, the U.N. [issued a report](#) condemning France for its “racist climate” and lack of “real political will” to address racial discrimination. In 2013, French politicians took steps to [remove the word “race” from its laws](#), apparently guided by the magical belief that changing words is enough to fight racism.

In France, it is illegal for the government to include race or ethnicity on the census, as doing so is framed as a violation of so-called “Republican” values, which insist that the French Republic is “indivisible” and should not be distinguished in terms of race or ethnic origin. The problem with this is that the majority population fails to acknowledge that the Republic has been making racial and ethnic distinctions for a very long time. This, too, stems from denial and ignorance. The truth is that French people who cherish dominant interpretations of “colorblind” Republicanism help maintain the racial status quo. By refusing to support the collection of statistics that

could be used to generate policies and measure their effectiveness, they undermine the work of minorities and activists who are working hard to counteract the tide of Republican denial.

While some argue that France doesn’t need more data to fight racism, this almost argument is never made concerning sexism. Most people are aware that sexism exists, but it would be absurd to say: *“We already know sexism exists and therefore don’t need data on gender discrimination..”* Yet, this is the same kind of magical thinking that prevails in much of the so-called “anti-racist” discourse one encounters in France.

[...]

The more time I spend in France, the more it seems to me that some French people (especially politicians) are extraordinarily skilled at talking about principles that they have no intention of doing anything about. Perhaps the French are stuck because they are far too philosophical and not at all practical when it comes to anti-discrimination.

[...]

I denounce white supremacy in the United States on a daily basis and I have no illusions that numbers will save the day. But it matters that activists and scholars in the United States can point to statistics within communities, organizations and institutions to measure just how much has changed — and just how much has not. It matters that we can use these numbers to inform policies and measure their effectiveness (or lack thereof). No, these statistics are not a panacea. Yes, black people and other minorities continue to experience the on-going racial tyranny of white supremacy. But the numbers help combat the denial and magical thinking frequently found among white

people and other dominant groups — denial that would have you believe that centuries of race-making can be undone with beautiful principles and kumbaya colorblindness.



[...]

Graffiti reads “Fuck the Police”

In my view, French magical thinking about race is reinforced by the near total ignorance of the population with regard to its racial past. The French are struggling, in part, because they do not have widely read sociologists or historians of race. During my time in France this spring, I’ve met young French

scholars of race who are doing really important, desperately needed work. But the political and intellectual landscape in which they must work is absolutely depressing. Not only does the French academy lack serious programs in race, but it is also overwhelmingly white and elite. One does not need statistics to see this. Enter any French elite university and you will find very few minority professors, chairs of departments or administrators. There are only a few books that could fall under the umbrella of “Black Studies” in France. Not only is there nothing even approaching “post-colonial studies” — the history of colonialism itself is mostly a *non-lieu de memoire*: barely taught in schools, mostly forgotten and marginalized in the nation’s collective memory. There is no French equivalent of W.E.B. Du Bois (who essentially founded urban sociology in the United States and pioneered studies of race, racism and whiteness). And there has not yet emerged a French equivalent of [Kimberlé Crenshaw](#) or [Patricia Hill Collins](#) — scholars who have revolutionized entire fields of thought through their contributions to Black Feminist scholarship and critical race theory. Yes, the [Nardal Sisters](#) and Cesaire and Fanon exist, but French scholars of color are still mostly ignored by white French people. Indeed, [negritude](#) was far more influential outside of hexagonal France than within it.

[...]

I don’t think most people (French or otherwise) understand that it takes *centuries* of diligent activism, statistical tracking, policy making and scholarship to even begin to address the damage of racism. The U.S. case shows that it is **extremely difficult** to confront and combat racism, even when you have the intellectual resources and data. But the French case shows that it is **impossible** to effectively identify and challenge racism without these things.

Further, French chauvinism prevents many people here from actually embracing a global understanding of racial processes and white supremacy. References to race in the United States or the UK are portrayed as too foreign — imposing an “anglosaxon” lens. White French people will sometimes say that their country can’t learn anything about race from the United States because the two societies are so different. And yet, the same people point to the continued existence of racism in the U.S. as “proof” that our approach to using ethnoracial statistics “hasn’t helped”. But if the U.S. is “too different” to teach anything to the French about race, then it cannot also be used by the French as “evidence” that ethnoracial statistics are a bad idea. It is intellectually dishonest to claim that one can’t learn *anything* from another society, yet also use that same society to justify one’s position. Further, the fact that France does not collect ethnoracial data means that it is *impossible* to seriously compare the situation of minorities in most spheres of life (e.g. housing and employment discrimination, political representation and so on). But the

French think that they don't need data to say that their society is less racist than the U.S. — all they need are Republican words. Thus, instead of learning from other nations that have a much longer history of studying race, many of the French prefer their colorblind ignorance.



As perhaps one would expect, the black community is not the only target of French police violence. Here the Asian community is protesting the police killing of one of its members in 2017.

The bottom line is that from what I have seen, the French majority population does not think racism affecting people of color is important. The reason the French majority population doesn't

think racism is important is because they have not been made to believe it is important. French people of color currently lack the political power and internal organization to compel the majority population to care about addressing racism. And, the French government's role in suppressing ethnoracial statistics continues to undermine people of color who are organizing to fight racism.

The irony of all this is that the French are currently moving forward with an intelligence law that [rivals the Patriot Act](#) in its blatant disregard for civil liberties. The French government wants to collect data on almost everything French people think, write or say but - but no data on racism! When it comes to fighting terror, the French know very well that knowledge is power. But when it comes to fighting racism? Data? Knowledge? Not necessary.

Too many French people seem to imagine that if they close their eyes to race, click their heels three times and repeat the words "Liberty", "Equality" and "Brotherhood", the boogeyman of racism will simply vanish and disappear. No systematic data or policies necessary. Only pretty, magical, colorblind words.

SECTION FOUR

Racism, sex abuse and impunity: French police's toxic legacy in the suburbs

Benjamin Doddman February 23, 2017

SOURCE: <http://www.france24.com/en/20170222-france-racism-sex-abuse-rape-impunity-suburbs-banlieues-theo-adama-traore>

A horrific case of alleged rape by police officers has once again highlighted the culture of abuse and impunity that has driven a wedge between law enforcement and youths in France's deprived suburbs.

Alexandre T. was enjoying some late drinks with his friends when a police car rolled up outside their estate, one of the huge – and often bleak – housing blocks that have turned parts of [Paris](#)'s northern banlieues (suburbs) into giant dormitories. When the inebriated young man reportedly insulted the officers, he was bundled into their car and driven to the local police station. Shortly after, he landed in hospital with a 1.5-centimetre-deep anal perforation caused by an expandable police baton. His blood was found on his clothes and in the car. The tip of the police baton bore traces of his DNA.



Sixteen months later, the 28-year-old man told a court in Bobigny, northeast of the French capital, that he was still bleeding from the wound, had trouble sleeping, and had lost his job as a result. The public prosecutor

asked for the officer who wielded the baton to be given a six-month suspended jail term, charging him with “aggravated assault”. He dismissed calls for rape charges, arguing that the incident had a “sexual connotation” but not a “sexual character”. The nuance was rejected by the court, which [ruled](#) on Monday that the policeman should indeed face “criminal proceedings” for rape.

Welcoming the ruling, the victim's lawyer Marie-Cécile Nathan said the prosecutor had been “wrong” to reject rape charges. She suggested the initial leniency was indicative of a wider tendency to hand out “disproportionate sanctions” when dealing with police violence. “Abusive police officers do get punished,” she told FRANCE 24. “The problem is that the punishment hardly ever reflects the gravity of the offence.”

Théo’s ordeal

Alexandre's case had gone largely unnoticed, until a similar [incident](#) involving a black man in the nearby town of Aulnay-sous-Bois cast a spotlight on the festering issue of police violence in some of [France](#)'s most deprived suburbs, blighted by poverty, unemployment and a dearth of public services. The brutal encounter, on February 2, between a police patrol and the young man, known as Théo L., left the 22-year-old with such severe wounds to the rectum that he required major emergency surgery and was declared incapacitated for 60 days. The incident, part of which was caught on CCTV, sparked outrage and protests – some of them violent – in suburbs across France.

Théo’s ordeal stemmed from a routine ID check, a fraught issue in France’s economically poor and immigrant-rich suburbs, where men of African and North African origin have long complained about being routinely stopped and searched simply because of the colour of their skin. A [study](#) conducted by France's National Centre for Scientific Research has shown that blacks are 11.5 times more likely to be checked by police than whites, and those of Arab origin are 7 times more likely. In a landmark case last November, France’s highest court [ruled](#) for the first time that police had illegally stopped three men based on racial profiling, setting more specific rules to ensure ID checks are not discriminatory.

Activists say the identity checks frequently bear a sexual component, ranging from heavy-handed frisking to extreme – and much rarer – cases such as Théo’s. On three occasions since 1999, the French state has been found guilty of police sex abuse by the European Court of Human Rights. The abuse included anal rape with a baton, a fractured testicle, and an attempt to [force oral sex](#). In each case the victim was a man of North African origin.

[...]

When *outrage* stifles outrage

Capitolin said many cases of abuse go unreported because victims fear they will be exposed to taunts in their neighbourhoods. “They dread being ‘the one who shows his arse to cops’ or ‘who got a baton up his bum’,” he said. “Besides, who are they supposed to report abuses to? The police? And then end up with an *outrage* and a conviction?” he added, referring to a “contempt of cop” rule, known as *outrage à agent public*, that allows for the arrest and prosecution of individuals deemed disrespectful of public authority.

Rights groups working in the banlieues have expressed fears that Théo’s ordeal will ultimately go unpunished, their suspicions heightened by a [police inquiry](#) that suggested the 10-centimetre-deep anal penetration had been “accidental”. Months earlier, the muddled investigation into the death in police custody of another black youth, 24-year-old Adama Traoré, had already amplified the feeling that the justice system cannot be trusted to protect minority youths and punish abusive officers.

Both cases have stoked fears of a repeat of the huge riots that followed the 2005 deaths of teenagers Zyed Benna and Bouna Traoré (no relation to Adama), who were electrocuted in a power station while hiding from police in the suburb of Clichy-sous-Bois. The officers in pursuit, who left the scene when a phone call would have sufficed to cut the voltage and save the two boys, were cleared of wrongdoing.

Sophie Body-Gendrot, a researcher at the Centre for Sociological Studies on Penal Institutions (CESDIP) who has written extensively about the 2005 riots and policing the suburbs, said the odds tended to be stacked in favour of the police when disputes made it to court. “It is hard to catch officers at fault, and their accounts are smoothed by lawyers and their hierarchy,” she told FRANCE 24. “In contrast, minority youths are generally reluctant to speak to institutions they don’t trust. And when they do come out, they are often intimidated, confused and incoherent.”

[...]

Body-Gendrot said the antagonism between police and minority groups in deprived areas reflected a structural reluctance to engage with local communities. “New recruits don’t join the police in order to give free rein to racist or violent impulses,” she said. “It is once they are inside the institution that a ‘them and us’ mentality develops. Officers feel – often wrongly – that they are despised by residents, magistrates and the media. Sometimes they snap, verbally or physically; particularly when they operate in small units, hidden from the public eye.”

The establishment of community policing, at the turn of the century, marked a short-lived attempt to bridge the gulf with residents of the banlieues. But the so-called *police de proximité* (proximity police) jarred with the tough “law and order” rhetoric of conservative firebrand [Nicolas Sarkozy](#), who disbanded the unit after becoming France’s interior minister in 2002. “You’re not a social worker,” Sarkozy famously told an officer who had helped organise a football tournament for youths in a poor suburb of Toulouse. Most unions were happy to see the programme ended. “Police unions hated the idea of being accountable to the local community,” said Body-Gendrot. As a result, “community policing was never really given a chance to prove its worth”.

[...]