

# A History of Police Reform in England and Wales



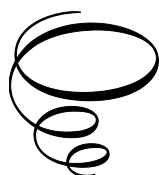
# A History of Police Reform in England and Wales:

*300 Years of Reforming  
the Police*

By

Timothy Brain

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A History of Police Reform in England and Wales:  
300 Years of Reforming the Police

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To Elisabeth, Richard, and Kate



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## PREFACE

“Reform”, generally with a capital letter, has been linked with various movements for political, social, moral, and organisational change since the later decades of the eighteenth century. It had to wait, however, to the last decade of the twentieth century before it was consciously and officially linked with “Police”. The Conservative government of John Major (b. 1943), under the specific direction of the Home Secretary Michael Howard (b. 1941), was the first political party to claim ownership of the term. There then followed two more specific “Police Reform” programmes in the two succeeding decades, under Labour in the 2000s and then under the Conservative-led Coalition government in the 2010s. That three programmes should follow so closely together suggests that either the preceding programme had failed, or at least largely so, or that wider political rather than organisational forces were at work.

Although it was necessary to wait until the 1990s before a programme of comprehensive change was labelled “Police Reform”, with both words spelt with capital first letters, these were not the first programmes of “police reform”. In fact, there were eight preceding programmes, although none of them were formally labelled “Police Reform”. There were various reasons why this was so, sometimes political, sometimes contemporary linguistic, sometimes practical. Nevertheless, there existed programmes of profound organisational change, invariably driven by external intellectual fashions, social dynamics, and political forces, dating back to the early decades of the eighteenth century.

These programmes of reform have been of critical importance in shaping the British police service, and consequently the policing of much of what is still termed “the free world”. There are other policing systems, notably the French, that have been influential, but it is the British system and its variants that form the basis of policing in the English-speaking world, including that of the United States. It has transpired that none of the later reform programmes have entirely obliterated those which preceded them, indeed it has been the essence of most of these programmes that they either build on the foundations of what has gone before, or at least claim to have done so. Nor, furthermore, are police reform programmes a thing of the historical past. If anything, the tendency is for there to be more frequent bouts of police reform, too frequently some might argue. There have been

three reform programmes in the last decades straddling the turn of the twenty first century; there is, therefore, every reason to suppose that there will be further reform programmes in the years ahead.

There can, thus, be no doubt of the importance of “Police Reform” in shaping the contemporary police service in the way it is organised and operates, and ultimately in the way it serves the people. Yet to date there has been no comprehensive and detailed study of the individual programmes of reform and their effects.

It is the purpose of this study to fill that historical gap. It is, therefore, a resource for police historians, students, and researchers of and those with a general interest in police history, as well as those interested in how social dynamics, ideas and politics combine to drive policy, and the policy of reform in particular.

However, it is also intended as a resource for those who make or influence police policy, whether as politicians or professionals, whether at national or local levels. The evidence from this study is that there have been several reform programmes that have succeeded, to greater or lesser degrees, in their own times leaving beneficial legacies, vestiges of which remain today. Only one, the most recent, is assessed to have largely failed, for reasons that will be apparent when reading chapter twelve of this book.

George Santayana famously wrote that, “those who cannot remember the past are doomed to repeat it.”<sup>1</sup> Given that there have been successful historical examples of police reform, the message that should be taken from this study is the reverse: those who are prepared to learn from the positive outcomes of previous police reform programmes may benefit by repeating their principal features, or at the very least adapting them to contemporary circumstances.

There are some general observations to make concerning this study. First, it is a historical, and not criminological or sociological, study and, therefore, follows a broadly chronological and narrative sequence. Some of the subject dates back hundreds of years, some of it just a few, or, at the time of finalising this text (April 2023), just weeks. Historians writing of events hundreds even decades ago have a freedom of judgement denied to the historian of “near history”, who must write with less certainty of outcomes. In these circumstances, circumspection of judgement must prevail over sweeping generalisations.

Second, it is a study of police reform in England and Wales. This is not to say that examples, events, and policies in the other constituent parts

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<sup>1</sup> “Santayana Quotations,” Santayana Edition, accessed 9 November 2022, <https://santayana.iupui.edu/about-santayana/santayana-quotations/>.

of the British Isles (Great Britain and Ireland) and elsewhere have not been important and sometimes influential, and where this occurs due notice is given, but they are not the subject of this study.

Finally, I write using the techniques and disciplines of a historian but from the perspective of a former career police officer, who served in four forces, starting as a constable in Avon and Somerset in 1978 and retiring as chief constable of Gloucestershire in 2010. I cannot, and have no wish to, ignore that perspective, but have sought to ensure that is balanced by the discipline of historical study, basing conclusions and opinion on the historical evidence. Further, of the eleven reform programmes I describe I experienced at first hand the continuing impact of one (Police Act 1964) and the development, implementation, and consequences of four of them (PACE, Macpherson, the Conservatives in the 1990s and Labour in the 2000s). Where my experiences and contributions might provide insight, I have included them.

Timothy Brain  
Cheltenham

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Although writing a book is an intensely individual experience, one cannot be written without the support and encouragement of others, and this work is no exception. Accordingly, I am grateful for such support. Professor John Williams and the late Professor Chris Harding of the Aberystwyth University School of Law gave me much encouragement to embark upon the project in the first place. My friend and academic mentor of over four decades, Dr. Martin Fitzpatrick, has kindly perused every chapter and given invaluable help and insight. Historian of Herefordshire Suffragism, Clare Wichbold, gave encouragement and help in the pre-publication stage. Drs. Mary Fisher and Martin Wright, and Professor Martin Innes have also provided valuable support.

Although the wonders of the internet have supplemented the resources of physical libraries and archives, the reality is that these institutions remain the bedrock of historical research, and I am grateful to the staff of the libraries of Aberystwyth and Cardiff Universities, and the National Library of Wales. I am especially grateful to Sue Webb, Gloucestershire Constabulary Archivist, for her expertise and patience in directing me to the appropriate sources for the early history of the Gloucestershire Constabulary, essential in framing the story of not only that force's beginnings but also of those first forces created under the County Police Act of 1839.

Finally, my thanks go to my own family. My son, Richard, and daughter-in-law, Kate, have brought the insight of young, skilled professionals working in the reality of twenty-first century Britain to a history which stretches back over a thousand years. My ultimate appreciation is, however, to my wife Elisabeth, whose encouragement, unfailing support, and critique, from the book's beginnings in the early days of lockdown to the final preparation of the publishing draft, ensured the work transferred from concept to reality.

## ABBREVIATIONS

AC	Audit Commission
ACC	Assistant Chief Constable
ACPO	Association of Chief Police Officers
AFO	Authorised Firearms Officer
APCC	Association of Police and Crime Commissioners
ARA	Anti-Racist Alliance
ASBO	Anti-Social Behaviour Order
ASU	Administrative Support Units
AC	Audit Commission
b.	born
Bame	Black Asian Minority Ethnic
BAT	British American Tobacco
BCS	British Crime Survey
BCU	Basic Command Units
BLM	Black Lives Matter
BME	Black Minority Ethnic
BPA	Black Police Association
c.	circa
CAF	Central African Federation
CCT	Compulsory Competitive Tendering
CFF	Crime Fighting Fund
CID	Criminal Investigation Department
CLRC	Criminal Law Revision Committee
COBR	Cabinet Office Briefing Room
CPOSA	Chief Police Officers' Staff Association
CPS	Crown Prosecution Service
CRE	Commission for Racial Equality
CRR	Community and Race Relations
CSEW	Crime Survey for England and Wales
CSO	Community Support Officer
d.	died
DCI	Detective Chief Inspector
DNA	Deoxyribonucleic Acid
DPP	Director of Public Prosecutions
EEC	European Economic Community

FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FLO	Family Liaison Officer
FTAs	Fixed Term Appointments
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GLC	Greater London Council
HMCIC	Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary
HMIC	Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary
HMICFRS	Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (His Majesty's after 8 September 2022)
HMSO	Her Majesty's Stationery Office
HOC	Home Office Circular
HOLMES	Home Office Large Major Enquiry System
HRA	Human Rights Act
IAGs	Independent Advisory Groups
IANs	Independent Advisory Networks
IOPC	Independent Office for Police Conduct
IPCC	Independent Police Complaints Commission
IT	Information Technology
JCC	Joint Consultative Committee
JP	Justice of the Peace
LGC	Local Government Commission
Lib Dems	Liberal Democratic Party
Met	Metropolitan Police
MIR	Major Incident Room
MPA	Metropolitan Police Authority
NCCL	National Council for Civil Liberties
NCIS	National Criminal Intelligence Service
NCPE	National Centre for Policing Excellence
NCS	National Crime Squad
NHS	National Health Service
NIM	National Intelligence Model
NPB	National Policing Board
NPCC	National Police Chiefs' Council
NPIA	National Policing Improvement Agency
NPM	New Public Management
NPP	National Policing Plan
NUPPO	National Union of Police and Prison Officers
<i>OPR</i>	<i>Operational Policing Review</i>
PACE	Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984
PAF	Police Allocation Formula
para.	Paragraph

PBO	Policing By Objectives
PC	Police Constable
PCA	Police Complaints Authority
PCB	Police Complaints Board
PCC	Police and Crime Commissioner
PCMB	Police and Magistrates' Courts Bill
PCP	Police and Crime Panel
PCSO	Police Community Support Officers
PEEL	Police Effectiveness, Efficiency, and Legitimacy
PFEW	Police Federation for England and Wales
PFF	Police Funding Formula
PFI	Private Finance Initiative
PITO	Police Information Technology Organisation
PLDB	Police Leadership Development Board
PMCA	Police and Magistrates' Courts Act
PNB	Police Negotiating Board
PPAF	Police Performance Assessment Framework
PRA 2002	Police Reform Act 2002
PRC	Police Recorded Crime
PRP	Performance Related Pay
PRRB	Police Remuneration Review Body
PSNI	Police Service of Northern Ireland
Quango	Quasi-autonomous national government organisation
RIC	Royal Irish Constabulary
RUC	Royal Ulster Constabulary
s.	section
SAP	Senior Appointments Panel
SDP	Social Democratic Party
SIO	Senior Investigating Officer
SJC	Standing Joint Committee
SMART	Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound
SOCA	Serious and Organised Crime Agency
SPG	Special Patrol Group
STD	Subscriber Trunk Dialling
TGP	Total Geographic Policing
TQM	Total Quality Management
TUC	Trades Union Congress
UKIP	United Kingdom Independent Party
VfM	Value for Money



# STYLISTIC CONVENTIONS

## **Spelling and Capitalisation**

When quoting from or citing original sources, spelling has generally been modernised, except where the original might lend greater insight. Original capitalisation has generally been retained, except where modernisation adds greater clarity. English versions of foreign place names are normally used. Where “City” is used, it means the City of London. “Mayor”, with an upper case first letter, means the “Mayor of London”, an elected office for the Greater London area, excluding “the City”, created in 2000 and holding responsibility for such strategic functions as planning, fire and emergency planning, transport, and the Metropolitan Police.

## **Gender**

The conventions of the period under study are followed with their usual meaning at the time applied.

## **Ethnicity**

This work seeks to follow December 2021 UK Government guidelines when describing ethnicity, unless quoting directly from sources.<sup>1</sup>

## **Report Titles**

Where an official report has a clearly identifiable author, chairman or chair of a committee or commission that has produced it, the convention will be followed of using their name as the short title of the report. Where there is no such obvious individual, a contracted version of the report’s title will be used in references.

## **Dates**

To aid with contextualisation, wherever possible, dates of principal individuals are given.

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<sup>1</sup> “Writing about Ethnicity,” GOV.UK, December 2021, accessed October 19, 2022, <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/style-guide/writing-about-ethnicity>.

### Political Parties

In the various historical periods covered in this work, there were many political parties and these in turn possessed a variety of names. Some generalisation is necessary, and a degree of practicality has therefore been adopted in this work to distinguish them. Party names to distinguish groups or factions in Parliament only became common from the late seventeenth century, often at first as a term of abuse, and it took several decades before they were generally adopted, and then often informally and inconsistently.

As a generalisation, “Whigs” were those who adhered to a set of political principles broadly outlined in the 1689 Bill of Rights, who favoured toleration in religion and, latter, reform of the electoral system. “Tories” were those who put loyalty to the monarchy and established church first, which made them resistant to change which threatened either. Most mainstream politicians by the mid-late eighteenth century would regard themselves as “Whigs”. The key political battles for power, therefore, were between factions of the party, both of whom would have regarded themselves as the true heirs of the 1688 Glorious Revolution settlement. For example, William Pitt the Younger (1759–1806) is normally regarded as a Tory, though viewed himself as an “independent Whig”, but one who placed service to the Crown above abstract principles; his great opponent Charles James Fox (1749–1806), also a Whig, might be said to hold the opposite view, or at least something close to it. As a generalisation, for a generation, the Whigs promoted parliamentary reform, and were more comfortable with reforms in general, while Tories tended to oppose any fundamental change in politics and society because they feared this might lead to Revolution, as happened in France. Tory Pragmatists, like Robert Peel (1788–1850), were prepared to initiate timely moderate change to avoid more radical alternatives from other parties. “Ultras” were those Tories opposed to any change.

In the eighteenth century, neither party possessed permanent organisations in the modern sense, although the Whigs were arguably more definable as a party than the Tories. Neither party were socially or politically radical, although the political scene was enlivened by individual radical MPs, such as John Wilkes (1725–97), attached to neither party. In the early nineteenth century, the Whigs tended to be comfortable being so labelled; Tories tending to be more reticent in being labelled.<sup>2</sup> Party labels became more distinct in the early-mid nineteenth century, but party discipline was weak and there remained loose groupings of MPs that cut across these

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<sup>2</sup> D. E. D. Beales, *The Political Parties of Nineteenth-Century Britain* (London: Historical Association, 1971), 5.

emerging parties, such as “Radicals” (pro-radical electoral and other reforms, eventually merging with the Liberals in the 1850s), or those associated with prominent individuals, such as adherents of William Huskisson (1770–1830) and, after the split in the Conservatives over the repeal of the Corn Laws, Sir Robert Peel himself (“Peelites”). Despite emerging parties, until party discipline became more rigid in the late nineteenth century, governments could only rely on the votes of office holders and some core supporters, and, therefore, had to rely on argument, influence, and even sentiment to get their more controversial legislation through.

From the 1830s, different nomenclature began to appear, with “Liberal” often being used in conjunction with “Whig”, and Conservative as an alternative to “Tory”. Formally, the Whigs became the “Liberals” in 1859 when Whigs, “Peelites”, and various independent radicals agreed to unite in opposition to the Conservative ministry of the Earl of Derby (1799–1869). Consequently, to describe these groups “Whig”, “Whigs” or “Whig–Liberals” will be used up to 1859, and “Liberal” or “Liberals” thereafter.

“Conservative” was first suggested as a more appropriate name for the Tories in an article in the Quarterly Review of 1830 and became general after the election campaign of 1834. Consequently, as a matter of practicality, “Tory” or “Tories” will be used before 1834, and “Conservative” thereafter. The title “and Unionist” was appended informally from 1895, and formally from 1912, but was dropped from the 1970s. For convenience, this has been ignored.

The Liberal Party split in 1916 when approximately half the party supported David Lloyd George (1863–1945) in the wartime coalition government (“Coalition Liberals”) and half followed former prime minister Herbert Asquith (1852–1928) into opposition. The split continued until 1923 when the party was reunified. The party split again in 1931 over the formation of the National Government. Those who joined the government were known as “National Liberals”. The party reunited again in 1948. In 1983, the party formally merged with the “Social Democratic Party” (SDP), founded in 1988 by breakaway centre-right Labour MPs, to form the “Liberal Democrats” (colloquially Lib Dems).

The Labour Party was formally called the “Labour Party Representative Committee” from 1900–06, combining the Independent Labour Party, the Social Democrat Federation, and the Fabian Society. The title “Labour Party” was adopted in 1906. “New Labour” was informally adopted in the 1990s. In this work it will be simply called the “Labour Party” or “Labour”, “New Labour” being used only when historically appropriate.

During their history, the main British political parties have only ever adhered to broad political principles rather than rigid doctrine or dogma.

Consequently, they have evolved and changed, with the result that the Conservative party of David Cameron (b. 1966) was not that of Peel, nor the present day Liberal Democrats the party of W. E. Gladstone (1809–98), nor the Labour party of Tony Blair (b. 1953) that of Keir Hardy (1856–1915), much as current politicians might claim to be the true heirs of their party founders. It is beyond the scope of this book to trace the evolutions of the political parties, so the outcome of changes will be simply noted where relevant.

## PROSPECTIVE

### THREE CENTURIES OF POLICE REFORM

This work is a history of police reform, what it is, and why it matters. It is also a history of how ideas are developed and become policy.

Understanding police reform is important because the police is a vital public service, and police reform constitutes the mechanism by which fundamental change is introduced into it and delivered. Furthermore, police reform is not consigned to history. In the future, there will be new reform programmes as social, operational, and political demands require. It is the purpose of this book to understand how police reform has been shaped in the past, and how this will shape police reform in the future.

By the definition adopted in this work, and outlined below, there have been eleven programmes of “police reform”, although only the most recent examples have deliberately used the term. Previously, politicians have been more reticent about using the “R” word in association with policing, even though their schemes meet the definition of the word in its common usage since the late eighteenth century. Since 1993, politicians of both main parties have been decidedly more unabashed about using it, for reasons that will be explored later in this study.

#### **What is “police reform”?**

Although present in the English language since the late fourteenth century, it was only from the late eighteenth century that the word “reform” came into regular use. Until then, “reformation” was preferred, for example as with the sixteenth century Protestant “Reformation” of religion, or in the late the seventeenth century with the “Society for the Reformation of Manners”. In both cases “reformation” meant improving by going backwards, backwards to a supposedly better time. In the case of religion, “Reformation” meant getting closer to the Christianity envisaged in the Gospels. The eighteenth-century campaign in Britain for the “Reformation of Manners” sought to return to the moral standards of a purer age.

The word “Reformation” had come to the English language from Latin and French, and is a compaction of two words, “re” and “formare”, which

together literally means to make again.<sup>1</sup> Technically, until the middle of the eighteenth century, “reform” was used as a verb, whereas “reformation” was a noun, but they were both acquiring a notion of positive and progressive “change for the better”, without the need for a retrogressive destination. By the end of the eighteenth century, “reform” was used as both a verb and a noun.<sup>2</sup>

From the last quarter of the eighteenth century, the word “reform” acquired a powerful connection with which it would for ever thereafter be associated: “Parliamentary Reform”. In this connection it is generally recognised as having first appeared in the “Petitioning” movement inaugurated in Yorkshire by the Reverend Christopher Wyvill (1740–1822) in the winter of 1779–80. In his address to the first meeting of the Yorkshire Association, Wyvill announced the intention of forming a committee to “support that laudable reform, and such other measures as may conduce to restore the Freedom of Parliament.”<sup>3</sup> Henceforward, “reform” would become increasingly associated with change programmes including not only reform of Parliament, but also of government administration in general, the governance of India, the law, and the Church.

Politically, however, the call for “reform” generally came from those in opposition; the “outs” who wanted to become the “ins”. In essence, the Whigs argued for reform on both grounds of principle and practical politics, the latter because they believed the old system on Church and state was weighted against them, preserving government by the king’s ministers, whom they increasingly labelled as Tories. At the turn of the eighteenth century, governments became wary of reform because they feared it might start a chain reaction of change and destabilisation similar to that instituted by the French Revolution in 1789 and which led to “The Reign of Terror”

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<sup>1</sup> "reformation, n.1". OED Online. September 2022. Oxford University Press. <https://www-oed-com.abc.cardiff.ac.uk/view/Entry/160997?isAdvanced=false&result=1&rskey=3V236P&> (accessed September 20, 2022).

<sup>2</sup> Compare the entries for “reform” in the 1755 and 1794 editions of Dr. Johnson’s dictionary. Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English language: in which the words are deduced from their originals, explained in their different meanings, and authorised by the names of the writers in whose works they are found* (London, 1755), vol. II, [255], and Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English language: in which the words are deduced from their originals, explained in their different meanings, and authorised by the names of the writers in whose works they are found* (London, 1794), vol. II, 247.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Sebastian Meurer, “The Dawning of the Age of Reform: Epistemic and Semantic Shifts in Georgian Britain,” in *Languages of Reform in the Eighteenth Century: When Europe Lost Its Fear of Change*, ed. Susan Richter, Thomas Maissen, and Manuela Albertone (London: Routledge, 2021), 62–84, loc. 67.

(1793–4), the execution of the French king, and much consequent social and political turmoil. In contrast, moderate reformers argued that Britain's political and social institutions had to adapt to changing circumstances or risk what most people wanted to avoid, revolution. For them, timely "reform" was a preferable alternative to "revolution".

For many of a conservative persuasion, however, the distinction was at best a fine one, and at worst one they did not recognise, with "reform" being synonymous with "revolution"; consequently, both were to be avoided, even opposed. For many, "improvement" was the preferred term. It implied limited change for the better, not the fundamental change implicit even in peaceful reform. For example, in the later editions of Johnson's dictionary, "improvement" meant "advancement from good to better", almost the same as "reform" but without its pejorative overtones.<sup>4</sup>

"Improvement" became a popular word. Numerous towns, especially those rapidly growing because of the social consequences of the Industrial Revolution, sponsored customised "improvement" acts in Parliament, to bring improvements in paving, street lighting, policing (in its broadest sense), civic governance, and civilised living in general. As an example relevant to this study, Tory Home Secretary Robert Peel would use the word "improving", rather than "reform" in the preamble to his Metropolitan Police Act of 1829. Peel was a cautious reformer, so although his act was of sufficient depth and breadth to constitute *reform*, he found it prudent to avoid the word if he wished to convince nervous conservative backbenchers to support him. In practice "reform" and "improvement" became synonymous with the idea of "progress", the intellectual dynamo of the "Enlightenment" of English and European thought.<sup>5</sup> Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century police reform was, therefore, very much an intellectual product of the Enlightenment.

Accepting that the use of the word has developed over the centuries, what then is a working definition of "police reform"? No standard definition has been adopted over the years, so one must be created for this study.

"Police reform" is first and foremost an example of "social innovation". This is a process which has been defined as "innovative activities and services that are motivated by the goal of meeting a social need and that are predominantly diffused through organizations whose

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<sup>4</sup> Johnson, 1794, [452].

<sup>5</sup> Roy Porter, *Enlightenment: Britain and the Creation of the Modern World* (London: Penguin Books, 2001), 426. The intellectual movement known as "The Enlightenment", generally accepted as commencing in the late seventeenth century, as a generalisation, saw the development of new ideas based on human reason and science rather than tradition.

primary purposes are social.”<sup>6</sup> The goal of any police reform programme, even if it is not explicitly stated, must, therefore, be social benefit, in other words making life better for most people. However, it is also a political process, and that social benefit will ultimately be viewed from the standpoint of the politicians who have initiated the process and who, therefore, use ideas which conform most closely to their own worldview. However, the evidence of this study demonstrates that until the 1990s political benefit was almost an unintended consequence of reform. In the last forty or so years, however, politicians have expected to see a political benefit as synonymous with intended social and organisational benefits.

To constitute “reform” the changes envisaged must also be “comprehensive”, that is “including or dealing with all or nearly all aspects of something, of large content or scope”.<sup>7</sup> They must be “fundamental”, that is “forming an essential or indispensable part of a system, institution, etc.”.<sup>8</sup> It must, therefore, be a “programme” of comprehensive and fundamental change to constitute “reform”. There may be examples of “change” to the status quo which are important in themselves, and which may contribute to the advent of “reform”, but they are examples of “incrementalism” not reform. Take for example, the establishment of the “Bow Street Runners” in 1749 by Henry Fielding (1707–54) and their expansion by his brother Sir John Fielding (1721–80). These were important examples of change, but they remained isolated in their scale and scope. In contrast, Peel’s Metropolitan Police “improvement” scheme of 1829 was unquestionably “comprehensive” and “fundamental”, and therefore constituted “reform”.

So, piecing together the requirements of social benefit, fundamental change leading to improvement, plus scale, we come to the definition of “police reform” I have developed for this work.

***A far-reaching government programme of connected fundamental changes to legislation, policies, procedures, structures, and working practices, singularly or in combination, which is intended to produce enduring positive outcomes in the organisation collectively known as the police for the benefit of society.***

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<sup>6</sup> Geoff Mulgan, “The Process of Social Innovation,” *Innovations: Technology, Governance, Globalization* 1, no. 2 (2006): pp. 145–162, 146.

<sup>7</sup> “comprehensive, adj.,” in Angus Stevenson, *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>8</sup> “fundamental, adj, and n.,” OED Online, accessed 2 November 2022, <https://www-oed-com.abc.cardiff.ac.uk/view/Entry/75497?redirectedFrom=fundamental%2B>.



Labour home secretary David Blunkett (b. 1947) came close to using this definition when he set out his intentions in his 2001 white paper, *Policing a New Century: A Blueprint for Reform*.

In simple terms, we want to look at the way in which we can substantially improve the standard, reliability, consistency, and responsiveness of the service... A new approach is needed from all of us, from Ministers to those we represent, from the beat constable to the chief constable, and from Parliament which should exert new influence on both outcome measures and sentencing through to the judiciary who apply and uphold the law. That is the spirit in which we approach this white paper. Outdated and outmoded attitudes, regulations and procedures, should be swept away.<sup>9</sup>

Conservative Home Secretary Theresa May (b. 1956) was not to be outdone in hyperbole when she announced the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition government's version of police reform, launched just nine years after Blunkett's ambitious vision. Her reforms were intended to deliver "the most radical reforms to policing in at least 50 years".<sup>10</sup>

### **Why does police reform matter?**

Since 1829, the year Peel's Metropolitan Police Act was passed, a police reform programme has been initiated on average every 17½ years, but the reform initiatives have not been evenly spaced. The first recognisable police reform programme was that initiated by the Middlesex Justices Act 1792. It would be thirty-seven years before the next one, Peel's Metropolitan Police Act. Two more would follow in rapid succession, the Municipal Corporation Act 1835, and the County and District Constables Act 1839. There was then a 27-year gap, followed by one of 64 years. Since the 1990s, however, the pace of "reform" has distinctly accelerated, with four occurring between 1993 and 2020. One, the Macpherson reforms, published in 1999, was never officially labelled a "reform" programme, but it meets all the criteria for fundamental and enduring change, so is included here.

Police reform programmes are great episodes of police history. They represent those leaps forward when, after years of incremental change, or even little change at all, policy makers decide that fundamental change is

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<sup>9</sup> Home Office, *Policing a New Century: A Blueprint for Reform* (London: The Stationery Office, 2001), [3].

<sup>10</sup> Home Office, *Policing in the 21st Century: Reconnecting Police and the People* (London: The Stationery Office, 2010), 2.

required and become determined to undertake it. This is not to say that the intervening examples of incremental change have not been important, but they have been just that—incremental. “Reform” is necessarily more fundamental, more comprehensive, more insistent. It is these reform programmes that have ultimately shaped the modern police service.

However, police reform is not simply a matter of history; it is very much a matter of contemporary politics. Every government since 1993 has launched reform programmes—the Conservatives in 1993, Labour in 1999 and 2001, and the Conservative-led Coalition in 2010. Following its election in 2017, the Conservative administration led by Boris Johnson (b. 1964) did not launch a police reform programme of its own, but instead began to incrementally reverse some of the key principles of the Coalition reforms. These will be explored in chapter XII. Johnson’s resignation in July 2022 led to several months of political confusion. The short administration (September–October 2022) of Liz Truss (b. 1975), with new Home Secretary Suella Braverman (b. 1980), suggested that the process of reversing much of the 2010 reforms would continue, but this was thrown into doubt by Truss’s own resignation because of a self-inflicted financial crisis. The policy of her replacement, Rishi Sunak (b. 1980), suggested a preference for the Coalition’s localism, but with him reinstating Braverman in October 2022, the direction of Conservative police policy was a matter of considerable uncertainty.<sup>11</sup>

A delay in a new police reform programme may only be a matter of time, however, as a Labour party challenging for power is likely to seek a distinctive police reform programme of its own by tapping into general concerns over deep cuts in police numbers, a perceived withdrawal of the police from local communities, and declining public confidence.<sup>12</sup>

If a future Labour, or even Conservative, government does decide to launch a new police reform programme then understanding the mechanisms and legacies, in essence “what worked”, of those past reform programmes might prove useful, even valuable.

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<sup>11</sup> “Cut ‘Symbolic Gestures’, Braverman Tells Police in England and Wales.” *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media, September 24, 2022, accessed 24 September 2022. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/sep/24/suella-braverman-police-symbolic-gestures-diversity-inclusion>.

<sup>12</sup> Andy Higgins, “Policing and the Public: Understanding Public priorities, attitudes and expectations”: The Police Foundation, accessed 26 May 2020, [https://www.police-foundation.org.uk/2017/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/insight\\_paper\\_1.pdf](https://www.police-foundation.org.uk/2017/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/insight_paper_1.pdf).

## Analytical framework

To provide for a consistent analysis of each reform programme, and to enable comparisons between them, I have developed an analytical framework for this study. It comprises seven elements. These are:

1. Preconditions
2. Building the case for reform
3. Political adoption of the reform programme
4. Legitimising the programme
5. Completing the required political processes
6. Implementation
7. Legacy

### *1. Preconditions*

Each reform programme takes place in a wider social, political, intellectual, and organisational context. These factors combine to create a dynamism which generates a growing opinion that the organisational status quo is inadequate and requires fundamental change. There may be “precipitants” that accelerate the momentum and a “trigger” cause, or catalyst, which finally initiates the reform process.<sup>13</sup>

A substantial factor shaping reform is the prevailing consensus on the purpose and structure of government itself. Over the periods studied since the inception of police reform in the eighteenth century, the conceptual purpose of government has changed. For much of the nineteenth century, politicians and mainstream theorists had a minimalist, or “laissez-faire”, view of the role of the state, focusing mainly on defence and some law and order. State interventions (the “Positive State”) in health and welfare become acceptable in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The era of total war (1914–45) saw the state (the “Managed Economy/Welfare State”) become dominant in a host of economic and social activities, a dominance which remained until the 1980s when governments and theorists envisaged a smaller role for the state. Politicians and activists on the right have argued for a return to a minimalist state with some mainstream politicians adopting their rhetoric. The principles of “small government” were adopted by the Conservative-led Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition (2010–15), and reflected in policing policy by decentralisation,

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<sup>13</sup> For the origins of the “Preconditions”, “Precipitants” and “Trigger” analytical framework see Lawrence Stone, *The Causes of the English Revolution 1529–1642* (London: Routledge and Paul, 1972), 58–145.

localism in the form of powerful locally elected political administrators (Police and Crime commissioners—“PCCs”), and spending cuts. From 2019, the Johnson-led Conservative government was theoretically heir to the Coalition doctrine of the small state, but this was more in terms of rhetoric than conviction. Events in the form of the Covid pandemic (2019–21) necessitated state intervention on a massive scale to shore up the economy, while adverse trends in crime and police capability resulted in a partial reverse of the Coalition’s cuts in police numbers. The Sunak administration, faced with a financial crisis generated by the Truss administration and rising inflation caused by the war in the Ukraine, nevertheless, continued with reversing some of the Coalition’s cuts.

## 2. *Building the case for reform*

When policymakers decide that fundamental change is needed, they seek solutions based on ideas which most accord to their own worldview. They use those ideas to analyse problems and develop solutions. However, the influence of ideas is not straightforward, and may even be confused. The creation and development of an idea is itself a complex human process. As cultural historian Peter Jones summarises:

Everyone learns and absorbs ideas from other people, from the context in which they live and from the traditions with which they become familiar. Very rarely have even the best-known thinkers originated the ideas for which they are famous; typically, what distinguishes them are the ways in which they mould, develop or emphasise existing ideas, make new syntheses and interpret their own context.<sup>14</sup>

Ideas are then interpreted, simplified, overlaid, or selected in a way that best suits the desired outcomes; in other words, politicians “cherry-pick”. Even then, the influence of ideas can be complex. Some ideas are consciously adopted, others subconsciously. The subliminal or unconscious transmission and absorption may be even more important than their deliberate and conscious adoption. As John Maynard Keynes put it,

the ideas of economists and political philosophers, both when they are right and when they are wrong, are more powerful than is commonly understood. Indeed, the world is ruled by little else. Practical men who

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<sup>14</sup> Peter Jones, “Introduction: Intellectual Origins of the Enlightenment”, in *The Enlightenment World*, eds. M. Fitzpatrick, et al. (London: Routledge, 2007), 8.

believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influence, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist.<sup>15</sup>

As an example, it is unlikely that many of the politicians, police officers, and members of the public who have over several decades lamented the demise of the “bobby on the beat” have linked that concept, much less his fictional epitome “Dixon of Dock Green”, with the Classic Criminology of Cesare Beccaria (1738–94), or the utilitarianism of Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832) and Patrick Colquhoun (1745–1820).<sup>16</sup>

How new ideas replace old ones and become new dominants is a specialist study, and still a process which is imprecisely understood, but several explanations can be offered here, which can operate singly or in combination. There is, in a paraphrase of Victor Hugo, the concept of an “idea whose time has come”, in other words an idea which has become irresistible.<sup>17</sup> This can certainly seem the case with some ideas in retrospect, and Peel’s Metropolitan Police Act of 1829 would seem to be a case in point. However, from the perspective of history, the questions are why did it take so long to adopt, why was any alternative not even considered, and why was it not taken up across the country almost immediately? The reality was more complex than an idea whose time had simply come. Peel’s 1829 scheme did not represent his first or even subsequent thoughts on the matter. Uncertainty remained in his mind as to what constituted the best solution for policing the Metropolis until just a few months before his reform bill was published, as will be explored further in chapter III below. In any case, the concept of “an idea whose time has come”, simply begs a further question, why has the time come? Conversely, why do internally cohesive ideas fail to become accepted, or at least take some time before they are,

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<sup>15</sup> John Maynard Keynes, “The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money,” in *The Collected Writings of John Maynard Keynes* vol. 7 (Cambridge (UK): Cambridge University press, 2013), 383.

<sup>16</sup> Long running BBC television drama series, 1955–76, the principal character of which was PC, later Sergeant, George Dixon played by Jack Warner (1895–1981). It was both popular and influential and is an interesting example of the inadvertent transmission of high intellectual ideas into popular culture, then being recycled into policy.

<sup>17</sup> Victor Hugo (1802–85) wrote: “*On résiste à l’invasion des armées; on ne résiste pas à l’invasion des idées*”. (Trans: “A stand can be made against invasion by an army; no stand can be made against invasion by an idea.”) Originally from *Histoire d’un Crime* (written 1851–2, published 1877). In Elizabeth Knowles, ed., “Victor Hugo 1802–85,” in *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

and, even then, possibly in a compromised form? The answers are to be found in terms of human psychology and human interaction.

There are several stages which combine before an idea is, or a collection of ideas are accepted. First, an idea needs to be internally cohesive, a cohesiveness aided preferably by data and observation. Second, it would need to be relevant, producing, at least, a feasible (or better still an actual) solution to a pressing problem.<sup>18</sup> Even then, the idea must be seen as appropriate to the circumstances. As advocacy and communications academic John A. Daly summarises: “Timing is everything.”<sup>19</sup> Consequently, a crisis can be valuable in getting an idea which might otherwise seem controversial accepted by creating a compelling sense of urgency that something must be done. As Stanford economist Paul Romer is reputed to have said, “A crisis is a terrible thing to waste”.<sup>20</sup> In the 1820s and 1830s Peel, Lord Melbourne (1770–1848) and Lord John Russell (1792–1878) were confronted by crises from which they were able to fashion durable policing reforms. Sometimes a crisis which does not yet exist, but which is anticipated, can achieve the same result of creating a compelling case for change. This happened in 2005, when Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) report, “Closing the Gap”, portrayed the existing 43-force structure as intrinsically unsuited to meet the anticipated challenges of serious and organised crime, major incidents, and funding constraints, and that forces should be amalgamated to create fewer but larger units. Close scrutiny, however, revealed that the case was far from compelling and the planned scheme of amalgamations was abandoned.<sup>21</sup>

This exemplifies that even compelling ideas need to gain traction, both with “opinion formers” and, at least, enough of the public and professionals to make its implementation practical. If it is to be successful, the idea needs “positive reinforcement”. This is the process in which an idea is developed; its originator receives positive reinforcement from friends and likeminded associates; it is published. From the seventeenth to the mid-twentieth centuries, this would have been primarily through print media, in the form of books, pamphlets, articles and reviews in such publications as *The Gentleman’s Magazine* or *The Spectator*, which had wide circulations. The

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<sup>18</sup> John A. Daly, *Advocacy Championing Ideas and Influencing Others* (Cumberland: Yale University Press, 2014), 201.

<sup>19</sup> Daly, 188.

<sup>20</sup> Quoted in Michael Barber, *Instruction to Deliver: Tony Blair, Public Services and the Challenge of Achieving Targets* (London: Methuen, 2008), 149.

<sup>21</sup> Denis O’Connor, *Closing the Gap: A Review of the “Fitness for Purpose” of the Current Structure of Policing in England & Wales* (England: HM Inspectorate of Constabulary, 2006). See below chapter XI.