

# Evidence-Based Examination of Systemic Police Bias in the United States

As of this writing, there have been weeks of protests, many violent, in the streets of Minneapolis, Los Angeles, Washington, D.C., Atlanta, and New York City, with many businesses attacked, looted, and set on fire.

Ostensibly, the protests are about the alleged epidemic of widespread and race-based police brutality against blacks and the lack of confidence, in the case of George Floyd, that justice will be done. The problem with these assertions is that they are false, not supported by the data.

There is no epidemic of racist cops killing black unarmed suspects. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, police killings of blacks declined almost 80% from the late '60s through the 2010s, while police killings of whites have flatlined. Meanwhile, in 2017, according to the CDC's National Vital Statistics Reports, non-Hispanic blacks were eight times more likely to be a victim of homicide (homicide death rate: 23.2 per 100,000) than non-Hispanic whites (homicide death rate: 2.9 per 100,000).

The narrative that law enforcement in the United States is endemically racist has become ubiquitous on mass media. Groups such as BLM argue for systemic police bias. Upon closer examination, however, the available evidence paints a different picture.

The charge of systemic police bias is wrong. We can all agree that the video of Floyd's arrest is sickening and reflects poorly on men and women wearing the police uniform. It isn't, however, representative of the 375 million annual interactions that police officers have with civilians. A solid body of evidence finds no structural bias in the U.S. criminal justice system with regard to arrests, prosecution, or sentencing. Crime and suspect behaviour, not race, determine most police actions.

According to the Washington Post police shootings database, in 2019 police officers fatally shot 1,004 people, most of whom were armed or otherwise dangerous. 371 were white, 236 were black, 158 were Hispanic, 39 were of another race, and 200 were of unknown race. These numbers indicate that African-Americans were about a quarter of those killed by cops in 2019 (235), a ratio that has remained stable since 2015. Police shootings are a function of how often officers encounter armed and violent suspects. In that regard, the above share of black victims is less than what the black crime rate statistics would predict.

It's important to understand crime statistics in the context of the overall demographic data. According to the 2010 census, the racial composition of the U.S. is as follows:

- ♦ White: 223.6 million (72%)
- ♦ Black: 38.9 million (13%)
- ♦ Hispanic: 50.5 million (16%)
- ♦ Asian: 14.7 million (5%)
- ♦ American Indian: 2.9 million (0.9%)
- ♦ Some other race: 19.1 million (6%)

In 2018, the latest year for which such data have been published by the FBI, African-Americans made up 53% of known homicide offenders and committed about 60% of robberies, though they account for 13% of the population. Most of those African-American homicide offenders are young males between the age of 18 and 35.

According to the Washington Post database of police shootings, police in the U.S. fatally shot 55 unarmed individuals in 2019. 25 were white and 14 were black. The Post defines "unarmed" broadly to include such cases as a suspect in Newark, N.J., who had a loaded handgun in his car during a police chase.

In 2018 there were 7,407 black homicide victims, 88% (6,518) of which were killed by other Blacks. Assuming a comparable number of victims in 2019, those 14 unarmed black victims of police shootings represent 0.19% of all African-Americans killed in 2019. It's important to note that most homicides in 2018 were intra-racial, with 84% of

white victims killed by Whites, and 93% of African American victims were killed by African Americans. These numbers are, for the most part, consistent across time. From 1976 to 2005, 94% of black victims were killed by other African Americans.

By contrast, a police officer is 18½ times more likely to be killed by a black male than an unarmed black male is to be killed by a police officer. This is according to FBI data, which also found that 40% of police killers are black.

An impartial observer from another planet might logically ask: “So when do the protests for all the police officers being killed at the hands of Blacks begin?” The answer is “Not any time soon” because the above numbers do not fit the narrative we’re being sold by mass media, various advocacy groups, and politicians.

It’s worth noting that 89 law enforcement officers were killed in the line-of-duty incidents in 2019. Of these, 48 officers died as a result of felonious acts, and 41 officers died in accidents. 49 alleged offenders were identified in connection with the 48 law enforcement officers feloniously killed. 28 were white and 15 were black.

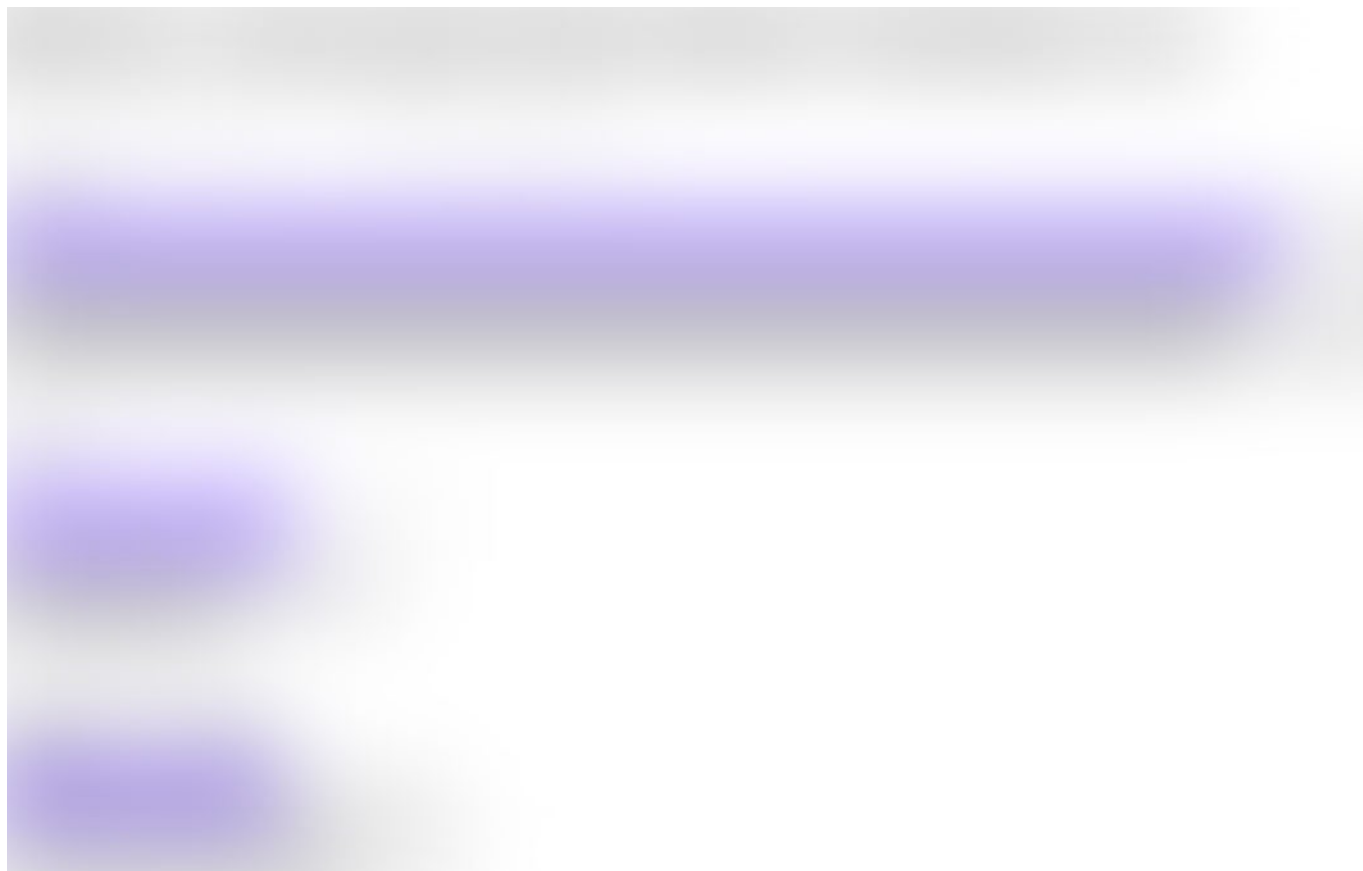
As Chicago reeled from violent protests on Memorial Day weekend following the police killing of George Floyd, 85 people were shot, 24 fatally, over the course of 48 hours — the most violent weekend of 2020. The city saw widespread protests, riots and looting throughout the city. The victims were overwhelmingly black.

Police shootings are not the reason that blacks die of homicide at 6 times the rate of whites; criminal violence is.

The latest in a series of studies refuting the claim of systemic police bias was published in August 2019 in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences. The researchers found that the more frequently officers encounter violent suspects from any given racial group, the greater the chance that a member of that group will be fatally shot by a police officer. According to the abstract:

*“We find no evidence of anti-Black or anti-Hispanic disparities across shootings, and White officers are not more likely to shoot minority civilians than non-White officers. Instead, race-specific crime strongly predicts civilian race. This suggests that increasing diversity among officers by itself is unlikely to reduce racial disparity in police shootings.”*

Additional evidence backs up the last sentence in the above quote. For decades advocacy groups have pressured for more black police officers among the ranks of law enforcement in order to better reflect the makeup of their communities. According to the 2018 American Community Survey, U.S. Census, this goal has been successfully met:



Nationally, over 15% of law enforcement is black — a bigger share than the black U.S. population (13%). However, there's no hard evidence that improving diversity has led to fewer deadly interactions with the police.

A 2015 Justice Department analysis of the Philadelphia Police Department found that white police officers were less likely than black or Hispanic officers to shoot unarmed black suspects as their threat perception level was slightly lower than that of their black colleagues.

Research by Harvard economist Roland G. Fryer Jr. also found no evidence of racial discrimination in shootings. Any evidence to the contrary fails to take into account crime rates and civilian behavior before and during interactions with police. According to the abstract:

*“On the most extreme use of force – officer-involved shootings – we find no racial differences in either the raw data or when contextual factors are taken into account. We argue that the patterns in the data are consistent with a model in which police officers are utility maximizers, a fraction of which have a preference for discrimination, who incur relatively high expected costs of officer-involved shootings”*

Despite what we’re being led to believe, the number of black people killed by Police in the U.S. has been on the decline. Since the 2014 wave of protests in Ferguson, Missouri, the number of black people killed by police has gone down, according to data from Mapping Police Violence. So has the number of unarmed people of all races killed by police. The number of unarmed black people killed by law enforcement has seen a sharp decline as well.

The false narrative of systemic police bias has already resulted in targeted killings of police officers. As of July 2, 2020, 28 law enforcement officers have been reported feloniously killed and 28 were fatally wounded. On June 1, 2020, Officer Shay Mikalonis, 29, was shot in the head during a Las Vegas Strip protest of the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis. As a result, he was paralyzed from the neck down, on a ventilator and unable to speak. Officers are being assaulted and shot at while they try to arrest gun suspects or respond to the growing riots. The more violent protesters are allowed to attack police officers and cause chaos with impunity, the more violence it will encourage.

The 2014 officer-involved shooting death of a black teen Michael Brown in the St. Louis suburb of Ferguson put the national spotlight on police use of force and officers’ interactions with minorities. The “Ferguson effect” resulted in officers becoming less proactive in their policing out of fear their actions will be second-guessed by their superiors and the public. According to a 2017 study published by the Pew Research Center:

*“Majorities of police officers say that recent high-profile fatal encounters between black citizens and police officers have made their jobs riskier, aggravated tensions between police and blacks, and left many officers reluctant to fully carry out some of their duties. Three-quarters say the incidents have increased tensions between police and blacks in their communities. About as many (72%) say officers in their department are now less willing to stop and question suspicious persons.”*

If the Ferguson effect of officers backing off law enforcement in minority neighborhoods across the U.S. is reborn as the Minneapolis effect, the thousands of law-abiding African-Americans who depend on the police for basic safety will once again be the victims.

The Minneapolis officers who arrested George Floyd must be held accountable for their excessive use of force and callous indifference to his distress. Police training needs to double down on de-escalation tactics. But Floyd's death should not undermine the legitimacy of American law enforcement, without which we will continue on a path toward chaos and destruction.

The criminal murder of George Floyd by a police officer is not at all representative of the 375 million annual interactions that police officers have with civilians, which are overwhelmingly positive. The body of evidence referenced above finds little to no systematic bias in the actions of Police in the United States. In fact, the actual data suggests the opposite — that both black and white police officers go to extraordinary lengths to avoid it.

The reality is that crime and suspect behavior — not race — determine almost all police actions and to pretend otherwise only encourages resentful attitudes and actions among both Blacks and Whites that separate individuals further apart from each other.

Americans need to honestly accept the facts and stop regurgitating a false narrative promulgated by politically motivated media and various pressure groups that feeds negative preconceptions to the point that a large part of the American public now openly sympathizes with a manufactured reality of systematic racism that is unsupported by the available evidence.

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