

Bad Apples Come From Rotten Trees

Ashley N. Gonzales Oropeza

University of California, Merced

Abstract

This research paper analyzes the budgets of police departments who have the highest and lowest number of criminal charges. It questions if whether or not police department budgets affect the number of police brutality cases and accountability. With the information presented, law enforcement is conflicted knowing their policies and approaches need to be changed to hold the police accountable. Some law enforcement officials may argue they are simply enforcing what they were trained to do. Evidence is presented in this paper on gun ownership, criminal charges, demographics in police departments, the victim's race, the name of police officers involved in multiple police shootings resulting in the death of a civilian, and the amount of police shootings in known cities. In order for there to be less police brutality and more accountability in law enforcement, training needs to be focused on de-escalation methods, civilian payouts must use money from the budget of the police department responsible, and independent investigations have to be overseeing the officers' police brutality cases.

Keywords: Police Brutality, Law Enforcement, Phoenix Police Department

Introduction

When thinking of the police we envision an agency whose goal is to protect and serve its residents. The forces maintain public order, ensure public safety, enforce laws, detect and investigate crimes. Officers on-duty may need to use physical force in situations of danger. When police officers overstep their mandate by employing excessive force against those civilians is when it becomes an issue, known as police brutality.

Although the number of police brutality cases date back to the formation of police departments in the United States, the number of incidents continue to unknowingly emerge. In recent years, the public has broken their silence to discuss this issue. Police brutality can take the form of physical abuse or psychological abuse. Examples of police brutality can be the misuse of firearms resulting in officer-involved shootings, clobbering with batons, unnecessary use of pepper spray, false arrests, or racial profiling.

With the increase in cases of police brutality, it is imperative to discuss what may have caused such an increase and how it relates to the budget of affluent police departments. The increase of budgets is a topic debated every year between the media and police departments. Once proposed, police department budgets are released as well as the gradual increase of police department police brutality incidents. I do not solely believe police department budgets are the only indicator for police brutality rates, but I do believe they are a contributor.

Background

Police Shootings Are Also Part of America's Gun Problem

According to German Lopez, the Senior Correspondent of Vox (2018), this rise is due to various situations where cops mistake wrenches for guns and assume people are taking out a gun

but are actually lifting their loose-fitting shorts. These incidents show that there is a constant mutual fear of guns. Criminal justice and policing experts claim it is reasonable for police to fear as there is a tremendous amount of civilian-owned guns in the United States. It has been estimated that there are more firearms in the United States than there are people, which demonstrates on a larger scale the potential threat to police. The report also finds that there is a positive correlation between killings by police officers and the state's gun laws and gun ownership rate (as seen in Figure 1). Unfortunately, Lopez explains that guns are not the only explanation for this, but rather a part of it. There is also a strong correlation between police shootings and structural racism, which speaks to the racial disparities in the police's unnecessary use of force.

Toledo Police Budget has Grown Over Several Decades

According to Toledo Blade reporter Snyder (2020), the Toledo Police Departments' budgets continue increasing at a faster rate than police departments around the world. As a justification for these budget increases, Chief of Police George Kral reminds the community that he is following the recommendations of the International Association of Chiefs of Police for a city of this size (2020). At the moment, Toledo police had 621 officers, but to fully patrol and keep the Toledo community safe, there needs to be more officers on duty. Working alongside Chief Kral is Mayor Wade Kapszukiewicz, who campaigned on a promise to grow the police department by 15 officers every year he is in office. This would get the police department up to 660 officers by the end of his four-year term in 2022. At the same time, there have to be more funds to pay officers and to keep the department's facilities functioning. Recently, Mayor Kapszukiewicz announced he would be taking the initiative to treat gun violence as a public health crisis by investing money in a program to determine the causes of police brutality.

Phoenix Cops' Extreme Response to Shoplifting Caught on Tape

According to Trevor Noah (2019), the Phoenix police had a preposterous reaction to a 911 call reporting a little black girl who stole a dollar store doll. As the parent's exited the dollar store, a customer reported that the little girl was leaving the store with a doll in her hand. Once the police were able to locate the family's vehicle at an apartment complex, they confronted them in an unprofessional manner. Fortunately, the news reports, as well as the videos from the civilians, revealed the police officers' actions of screaming, mistreatment, and use of profanity. The videos clearly show how Officer Meyer kicked the leg of the handcuffed father. On the contrary, his police report states he "...made him spread his feet" (2019). Not only were Phoenix police officers screaming at the woman, but the cops were also exclaiming they will "bust caps in their heads". These videos are evident of the excessive force used, which was not included in the picture painted by the cops' reports or the internal investigation updates. This story makes you question how many individuals were actually arrested and put in jails. This is because everyone accepts the police reports as the version of the truth for when we lack video evidence. Fortunately, no one was shot, and the family is suing the Phoenix Police Department for 10 million dollars, which will hopefully increase police accountability (2019).

Phoenix police shot at more people than NYPD did in 2018. Will that change?

According to Burkitt and Garcia (2020), major U.S. police departments had a decline in officer-involved shootings, but there have been 44 officer-involved shootings in 2018 in the Phoenix Police Department. There is no clear answer, but Phoenix leaders have promised to make changes in the training and approaches now that they are aware of the situation. Demographics show Hispanics make up 43% of Phoenix's population and 42% of them were shot (Burkitt and Garcia, 2020). The White population makes up 42% of Phoenix's population

and 38% of them were shot (Burkitt and Garcia, 2020). The Black population made up 7% of the population and 14% of them were shot. Native Americans only make up 2% of Phoenix's population, but 6% were shot (Burkitt and Garcia, 2020). One reason as to why the shooting rates were so high is because the concept of being armed is subjective. Therefore, the police assume these individuals were armed in that moment depending on how threatened they feel. Another reason is the shifting in training methods after the Columbine High School shooting in 1999. Before, they were trained to assess a situation and determine the best approach instead of rushing in. When the law enforcement officials received noticed of the two-armed individual inside the high school, they decided to wait to find the best course of action. This meant that even when the two individuals continued shooting, SWAT did not enter until after the two shooters killed themselves. After the Columbine shooting, law enforcement was criticized since they waited outside of the high school while the two responsible shooters were on a rampage inside. After the Columbine shooting, police academies focused on a proactive approach. Now, instead of assessing the threat, officers are taught to take immediate action to neutralize the perceived threat. This teaching method and approach has now spread throughout the day-to-day policing tactics, which results in officer-involved shootings and police brutality (2020).

Phoenix Police Face Pressure Over Spike in Officer-Involved Shootings

According to Jeff Pegues (2019), Phoenix police Chief Jeri Williams showed a lack of sympathy in the case of Marco Zepeda, a blind man, who scuffled with a Phoenix police officer in a gas station bathroom. Chief Jeri Williams could not recall seeing the tape stating, "I have not seen the tap. Or have I seen the tape...I do not need to see the tape" (2019). She does recognize the use of force incidents with and without guns is increasing (2019). Therefore, she has pushed

forth the use of body cams and the involvement of the Federal Bureau of Investigation to conduct an independent civil rights investigation.

After this incident, Commander Jennifer Larogue was assigned to oversee implicit bias and de-escalation training. She explains, “The old military style where we start screaming at people, that is not happening here anymore. We need to get back to the basic skills of how to take someone into custody without thinking of using the tool belt as a first resort” (2019). In hopes of reducing the number of officer-involved shootings Phoenix Police Department seems to be showing initiative.

How can we Enhance Police Accountability in the United States?

According to Ray (2020), law enforcement agencies are rooted with structural racism and a lack of accountability. Typically, officers who are charged with killing an unarmed black person are not convicted. People perceive police officers’ actions as justifiable. We assume the actions of law enforcement were done for the protection of the officer or society. Therefore, the threshold for charging and convicting officers is higher than it is for a normal citizen.

Prosecutors then take more time gathering information to create a solid case. Throughout this process, the bad-acting police officers are allowed to stick around on desk duty. Derek Dhauvin, the officer who killed George Floyd, had at least 18 police misconduct cases, was involved in police shootings, and police brutality. When officers are dismissed, the Fraternal Order of Police help them resign quietly instead of firing them for breaking the code, which ultimately allows them to be transferred into another department. The issue, Ray explains (2020), is that these internal investigations rarely leave the department. Ray explained that reforms that may change police accountability are: 1) Officers who were terminated due to police misconduct should not be able to work in law enforcement and 2) There needs to be a restructure of civilian payouts

from taxpayer money to police department insurance policies (2020). This is already occurring at the local level and already occurs in other practices (such as health care malpractice insurance).

Findings

With the information I gathered from the articles and narratives from news series, along with the Mapping Police Violence database, I was able to gain a better understanding of the relationship between the increase in cases of police brutality and the budgets of affluent police departments.

Lopez’s findings (2018) determined that there continues to be a positive relationship between the number of police killings and gun ownership (as seen in Figure 1). When determining other variables that affected the numbers of police killings in the United States, it was predicted that the amount of gun ownership would be affected.

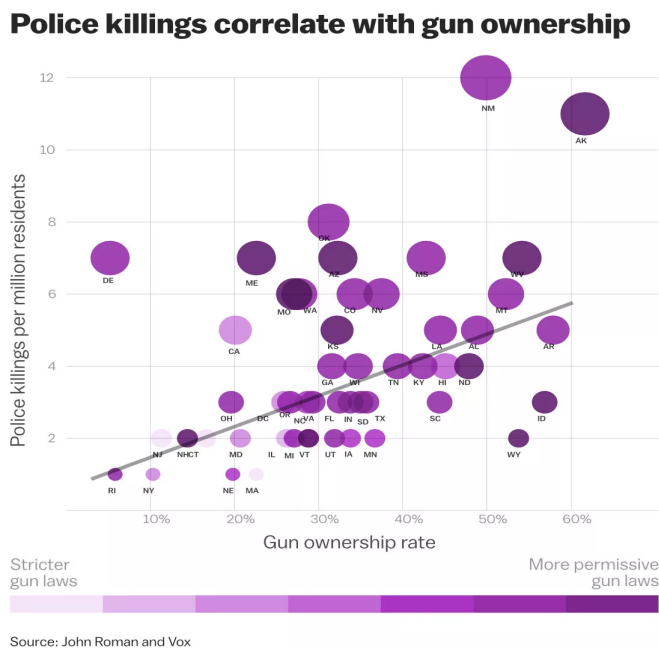


Figure 1. The relationship between police killings and gun ownership.

demographic in Phoenix. It shows that these disproportions may contribute to the higher numbers of Hispanic deaths in Phoenix through police shootings.

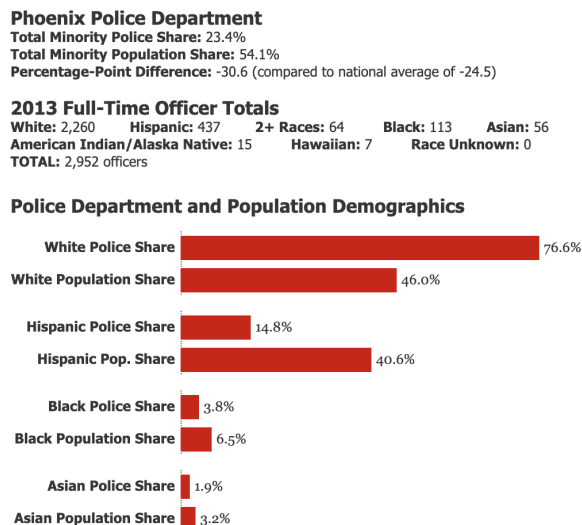
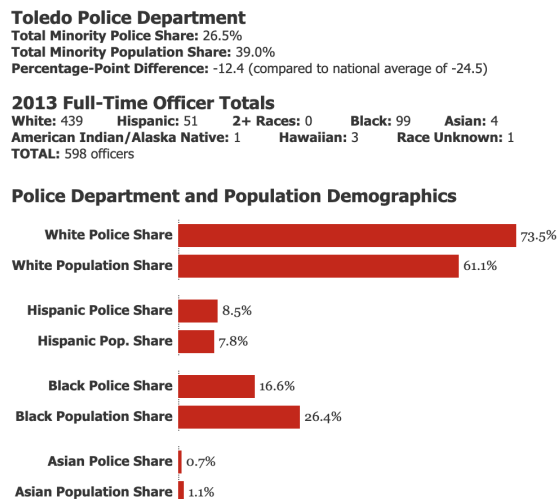


Figure 3. The demographics of the Toledo Police Department and the Phoenix Police Department and how they compare to the overall population of Toledo city and Phoenix city.

By further exploring the demographics provided by the Mapping Police Violence database, we see that police departments killed more people from the white race than from any other race (as seen in Figure 4).

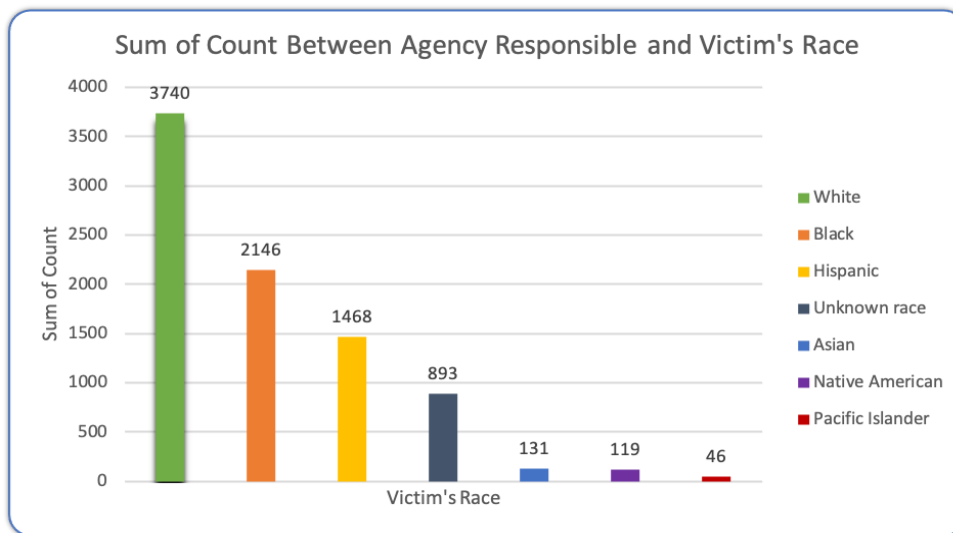


Figure 4. The sum of count between agency responsible and victim's race.

When comparing police departments with the victims whose cause of death was by gunshot, there was a similar pattern. Once again, Phoenix Police Department was one of the top departments that killed more people by gunshot after the Los Angeles Police Department (as seen in Figure 5).

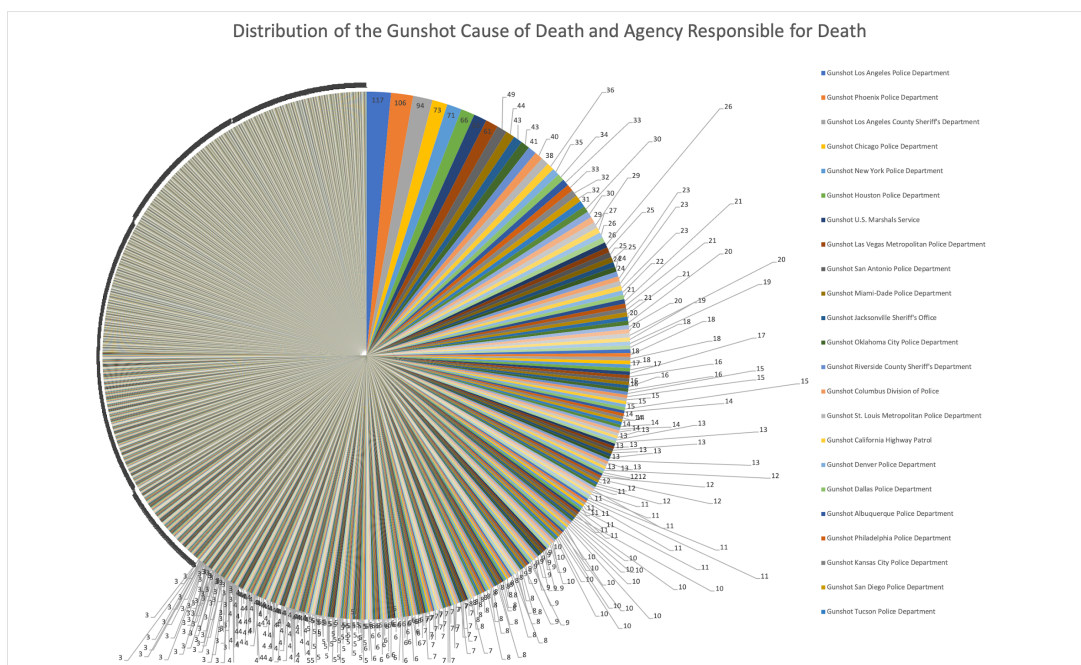


Figure 5. The distribution between the gunshot cause of death and the agency responsible for death.

Demonstrating the faultiness of officer accountability in police departments was possible with the Mapping Police Violence database. Having a drastic difference in the count of criminal charges demonstrates the lack of accountability of police officers when they kill on duty (as seen in Figure 6). This data showed that out of the 8,540 cases only three police officers were charged with a crime, whereas 8,409 cases have not registered any charges against the police officer. Along with the lack of charging police officers after killing during an officer-involved shooting, there is also no initiative to remove the officer from law enforcement when they kill more than

once. The data demonstrates that a total of nine police officers were involved in a shooting twice, where they killed an individual (as seen in Figure 7).

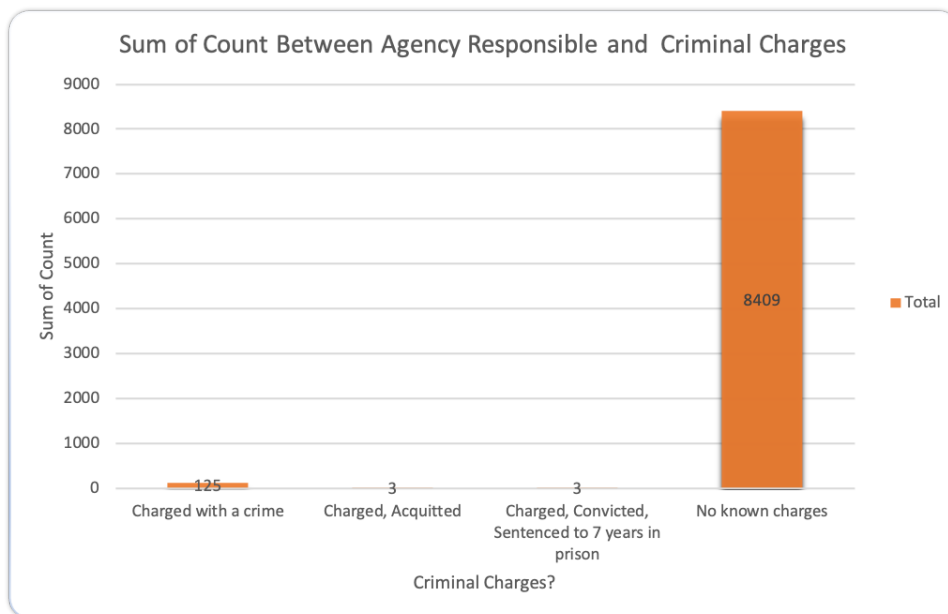


Figure 6. Sum of count between agency responsible and criminal charges.

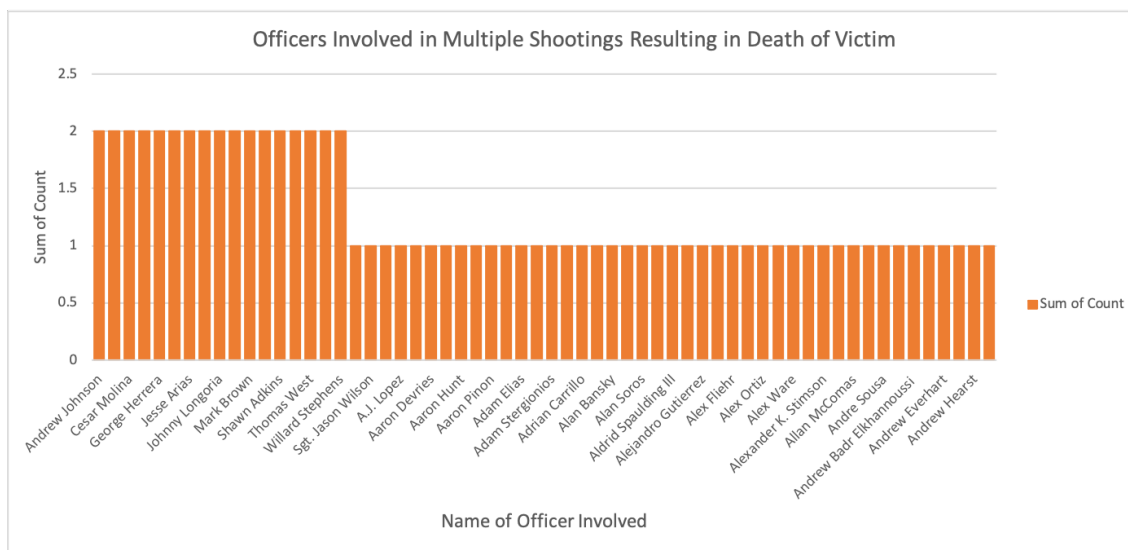


Figure 7. Officers involved in multiple shootings resulting in the death of victims.

It is important to mention that not only is the Phoenix Police Department the department with the most criminal charges, but it continues to have the highest record of police shootings. Although many other departments, such as Houston, Dallas, and Philadelphia appear to be

declining, Phoenix appears to be increasing (as seen in Figure 8). This shows that Phoenix Police Department's problem is more structural. There continues to be a rise in Phoenix because there in the structure of the department there is a lack of change in policies and the training emphasis in the Phoenix Police Department.

As comparable cities recorded declines in police shootings, Phoenix more than doubled.

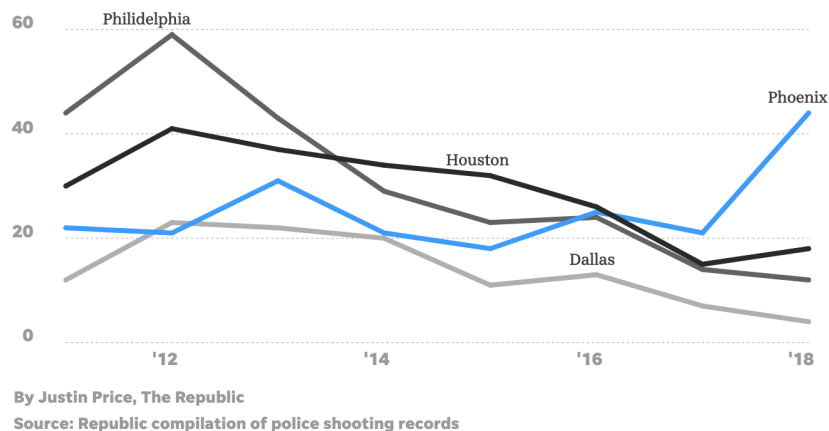


Figure 8. The amount of police shootings in cities, such as Houston, Phoenix, Philadelphia, and Dallas between 2012 and 2018.

Proposed Solutions

With all this said, there is no doubt the Phoenix Police Department has a problem within its agency and its approaches to resolving situations. There are three suggestions I would make based on past research and the findings. The police academy's training has to change its mind in the way Commander Jennifer Larogue suggested in the Phoenix Police Department (2019). Being able to spend more time training to de-escalate situations will allow lives to be saved and less discussion on police brutality, which will create trust between the communities and law enforcement. The police officer and the department he or she works for is never held accountable financially since they use taxpayer money to payout civilians. That has to change in order to allow the police department to use the millions of dollars from its own budget. Knowing they

have to pay would control their behavior and will cause them to use reason before they are involved in a shooting or use excessive force. When such injustices do occur, there needs to not be internal investigations to resolve the issue, but independent investigations. Keeping the issue within the police department will not only allow the bad apples to continue in law enforcement, but they would ultimately be transferred to another department quietly where they could kill another individual.

Conclusion

At the end of the day, the issue of police brutality does not necessarily correlate with the affluent police department's budgets, but it does determine the number of police officers in the force, who can ultimately cause harm to our nation. This rise in police brutality and a lack of police accountability causes a lack of trust between law enforcement and the community. What worsens the situation is not having stable governance. It is not a surprise to anyone that 2020 has been a year that highlighted the need for structural changes in law enforcement. Keeping dangerous cops off the streets and restructuring civilian payouts for police misconduct is a good place to start.

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