



TEXAS SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY

Barbara Jordan – Mickey Leland
School of Public Affairs
Center for Justice Research

Officer Involved Shootings

Leyda Johnson Pereyra
Olumuyiwa E. Soyele

centerforjusticeresearch.org

Introduction

The debate over police violence and the killings of unarmed Black Americans intensified nationally when Houston-native George Floyd, 46, died at the hands of Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin. While citizens took to the streets after being far beyond tired of seeing another Black man or woman killed by police officers, some Americans called the protests an overreaction, misclassifying peaceful demonstrations as riots. “Police killing Black people and other Americans are rare incidents. There is no need for protests,” is a common argument police sympathizers make when it comes to the topic of police violence.

Data on police violence shows Floyd’s death is unfortunately not an isolated incident. According to [Mapping Police Violence](#), the police have killed 874 people so far in 2020. Many of the deaths caused by police do not involve alleged counterfeit bills like the case of Floyd or even the committal of a crime, despite what many law enforcement supporters claim. Take for example Patricia Spivey, 52, who was fatally shot by her husband, Harris County Deputy Renard Spivey over an alleged domestic dispute. Spivey is a member of the 28% of Black people who have been killed by the police in 2020, despite Black people only making up 13% of the population, according to Mapping Police Violence.

While Minneapolis may be miles north of other local police departments geographically, far too many officers across the nation have echoed Chauvin’s actions, injuring and killing Black citizens at a disproportionate rate while on the job. Amid growing conversations about transparency and accountability with America’s police officers, the Center for Justice Research reviewed data provided by a local police department to see what trends exist among citizens and officers when it comes to race and other demographics. Our researchers are also utilizing this data to assess any inconsistencies that may exist within the police department’s reporting system.

Objective

To identify trends in officer-involved in shootings.

Previous Research

Police shootings in the United States have been a long-debated issue by different scholars. Discussions range from racial bias in profiling and encountering suspects, implicit bias in individual officers' psychology, structural biases created by the existing social order, social dominance orientation, and the issue of minorities as threats.

A study by Sekhon in 2017 of officer-involved shootings in Chicago between 2009 and 2014 states that officer-involved-shooting victims inordinately are minorities and, in particular, Black. Sekhon says 95% of the victims during this time period were minorities. The disparity between the portion of victims who are Black and the share of Chicago's population that is Black in the study is particularly stark. While less than one-third of the population was Black, 80% of the victims described in the study are Black (Sekhon, 2017).

According to an analysis done by Swaine et al. in 2015 on police killings, racial minorities make up about 37.4 % of the general population in the United States and 46.6 % of armed and unarmed victims. However, they make up 62.7% of unarmed people killed by police.

In a study published in February 2018 in the Journal of the National Medical Association, researchers found that for every 10-point increase in a state racism index, there is a 24% increase in the ratio of police shootings of unarmed victims. The study is based on data on fatal police shootings from 2013 to 2017 from the Mapping Police Violence Project database (Krisberg, 2018).

Methodological Overview

The data for this study is derived directly from a local police department's website. The information in the dataset consists of citizens and police officers involved in shootings from 2005 to 2020. All shootings occurring within the jurisdictional limits of this particular police department are

independently investigated by multiple divisions and agencies. The dataset is comprehensive and contained variables such as sex, race, age, injury, weapon, police officer on duty, response type, number of officers, and synopsis. To ensure accuracy, the research team scoured these reports and coded each case by the incident number.

After coding each variable, researchers compiled the raw materials into an excel spreadsheet. Upon compiling, the team cleaned and proofread the data by removing input errors, standardizing the formatting, and making other essential changes to ensure that each case was rightly imputed into the spreadsheet. The final table then was reduced from 15 years (2005- 2019) to 5 years (2015-2019) to show citizens and officers involved in shootings.

Due to the exploratory nature of the data, the analysis was done using frequency and chi-square. The average age of the citizens and police officers involved in shootings was determined by frequency analysis. To determine the frequency and percentage of citizens and police officers' race and gender during the shootings, we ran an across-tabulation analysis.

The results provided after the data analysis are relevant to the problem and help to show the number of citizens killed by gender and race—furthermore, the racial makeup of police officers involved in shootings.

Results

The US city studied in this analysis has a population of 2.3 million citizens with 45% of them being Hispanic, 23% Black, 25% White, and the rest of the population identifying as Asian or other. The results from the data show that Black and Hispanic citizens were more likely to be shot at and killed by White, male, local police officers.

Figure 1

From the years 2015-2019, Black and Hispanic citizens made up 79% of persons shot at by a local police officer. The likelihood of citizens being shot at by race was analyzed and it was discovered that: In 2019, Blacks were more likely to be shot at than Whites by 2.7 times and more likely to be shot at than Hispanics by 2.37 times. In 2018, Blacks were more likely to be shot at than Whites by 5 times and more likely to be shot at than Hispanics by 1.6 times. In 2017, Blacks were more likely to be shot at than Whites by 2.75 times and more likely to be shot at than Hispanics by 11 times. In 2016, Blacks were more likely to be shot at than Whites by 4.2 times and more likely to be shot at than Hispanics by 3.5 times. In 2015, Blacks were more likely to be shot at than Whites by 2.5 times more likely to be shot at than Hispanics by 1.43 times.

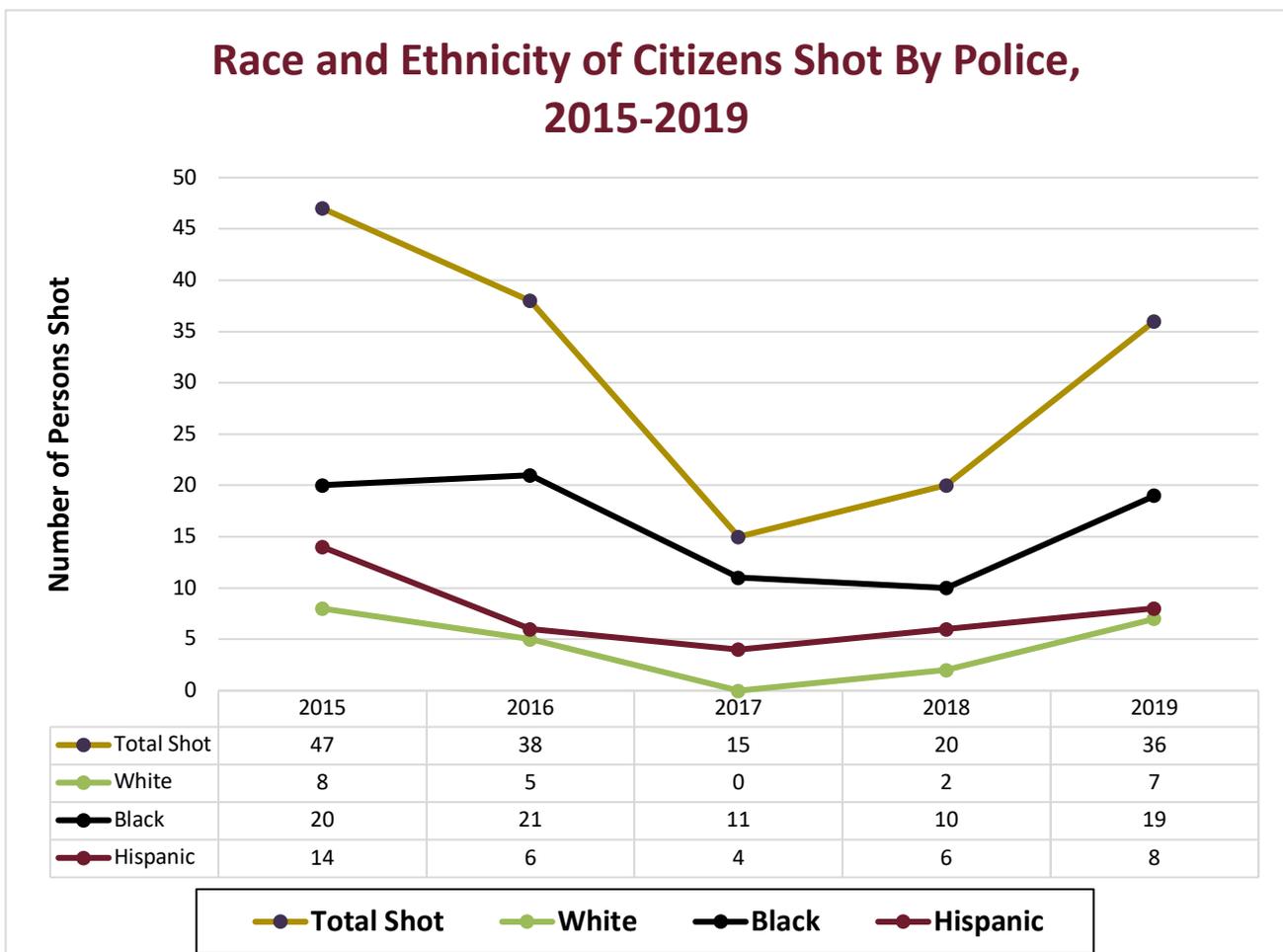


Figure 2

From the years of 2015-2019, Black and Hispanic citizens made up 71% of the persons killed by local police officers despite the fact that in 2019, Whites were killed by officers more than any other race. In our analysis of the likelihood of citizens being killed by race, we discovered the following: In 2019, Whites were more likely to be killed than Blacks by 1.4 times, and more likely to be killed than Hispanics by 7 times. In 2018, Blacks were more likely to be killed than Whites by 6 times, and more likely to be killed than Hispanics by 3 times. In 2017, Hispanics were more likely to be killed than Blacks by 1.6 times, and more likely to be killed than Whites by 5 times. In 2016, Blacks were more likely to be killed than Whites by 5 times, and more likely to be killed than Hispanics by 5 times. In 2015, Blacks were more likely to be killed than Whites by 1.3 times, and more likely to be killed than Hispanics by 1.3 times

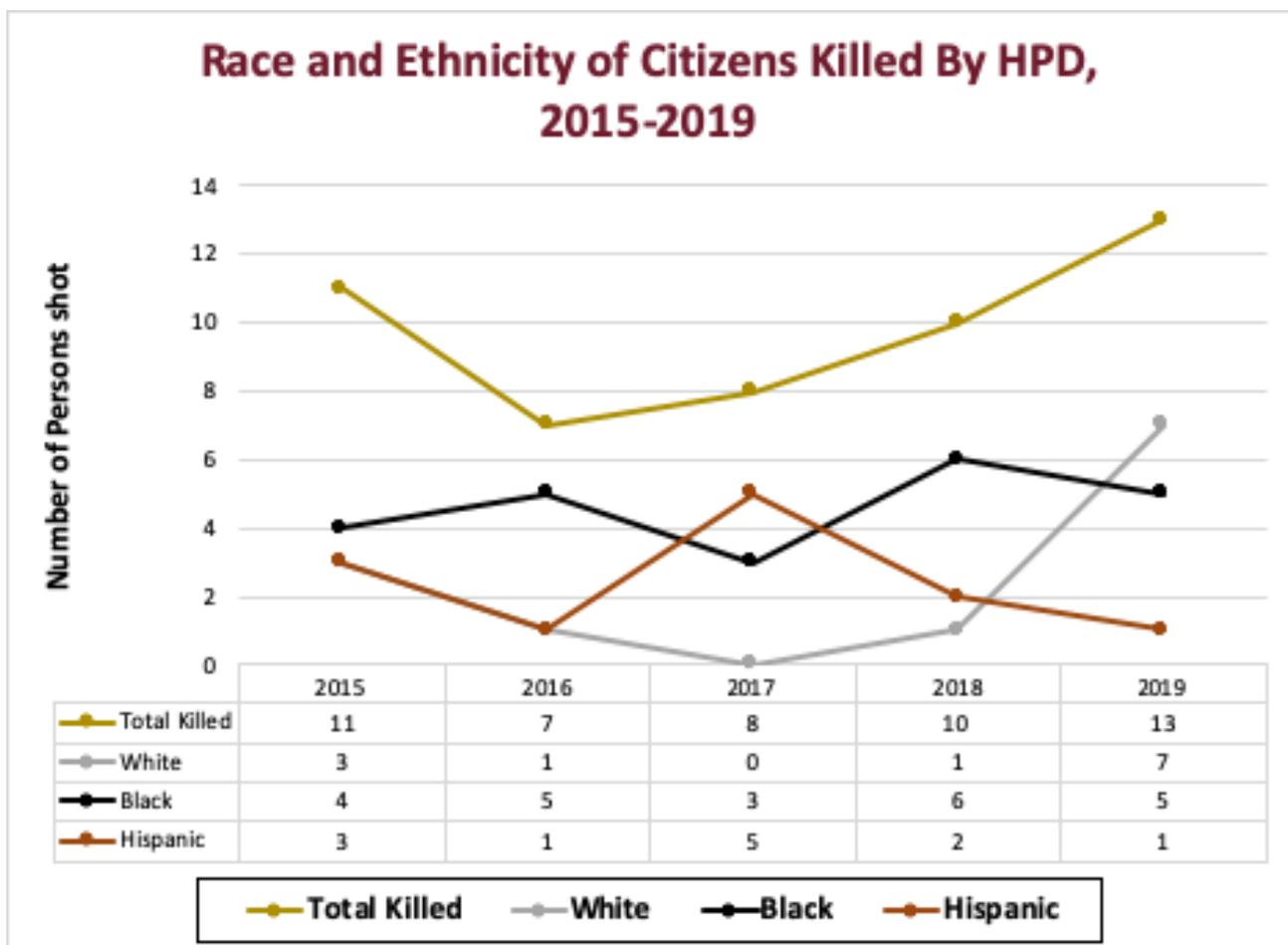
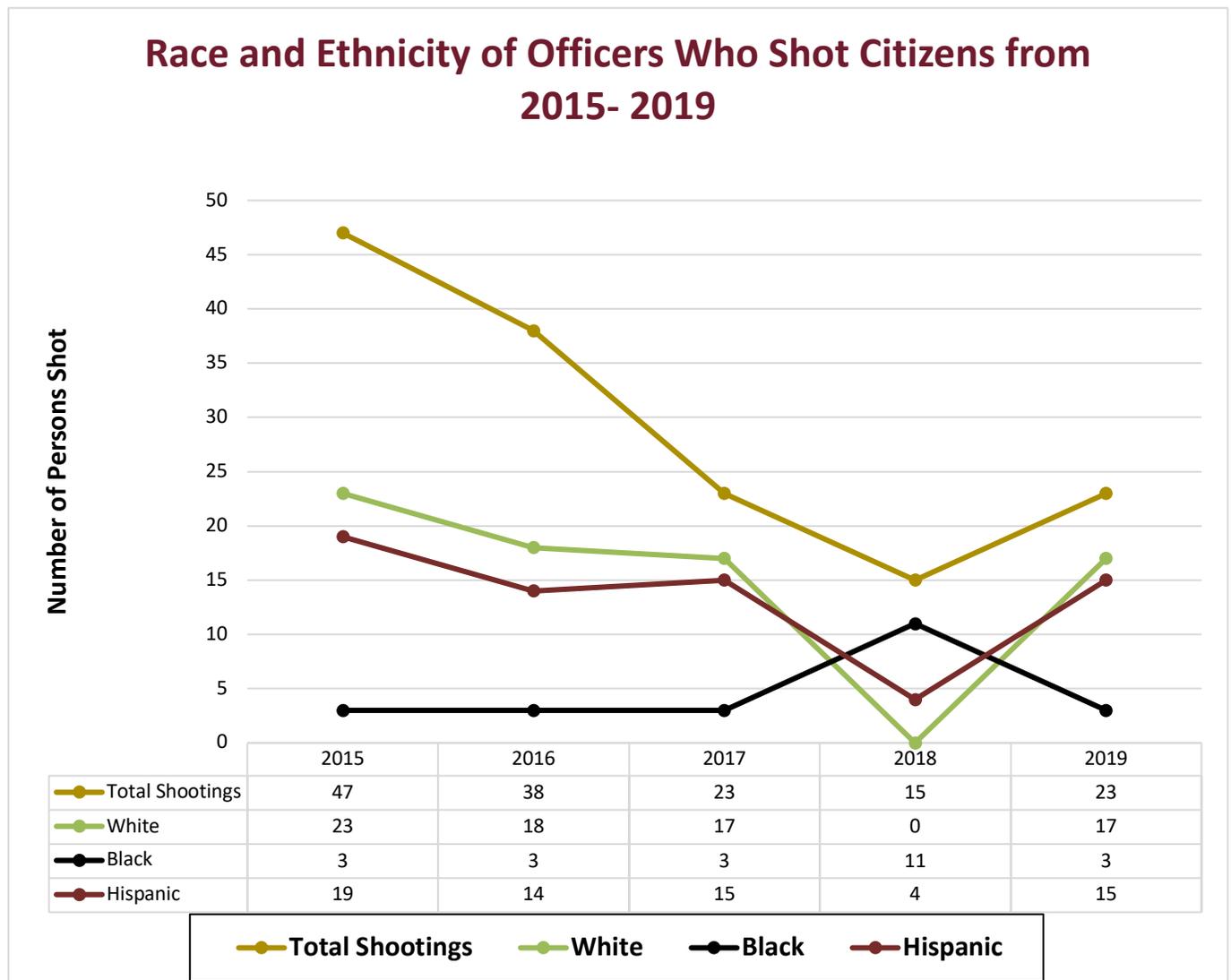


Figure 3

The police department studied in this data is composed of 5,310 officers. Of those officers, 2,224 (42%) are White, 1,579 (30%) are Hispanic, 1,097 (21%) are Black, and the rest are of other racial backgrounds. From the years 2015-2019, the data shows that White officers make up 47% of those officers doing the shooting. The likelihoods show this as well.



Limitations/Future Research

More research is needed in order to analyze the different variables of citizens and police officers involved in the shooting. The number of officers at the scene was said to be one officer, or two officers present with no backup en-route recorded in the dataset. Another limitation was the police officer witness statements provided with every OIS case, which did not clearly explain the incident. Furthermore, future research should show what type of de-escalation techniques were used before the shooting occurred, such as 'verbal commands' and 'intermediate weapons'.

Selected References

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