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An Examination of Racial Disparity in Police Hiring Practices

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America has a powerful, underutilized and often ignored workforce whose employment would be a powerful force in dismantling systemic racism. Yet, in nearly every profession in America, this workforce is overlooked for workers of different races and socioeconomic backgrounds. Black workers in America are not given the same opportunities of employment as their White, Hispanic and Asian counterparts, and it has led to devastating consequences for fragile communities.

Consider the Economic Policy Institute's 2019 study on [racial disparities in employment outcomes](#), where researchers discovered Black workers are twice as likely to be unemployed as white workers overall (6.4% to 3.1%). Even when employed, the Institute found that 40% of Black workers with any college degree are in a job that does not require advanced education. That's higher than the 31% of White workers who are college educated but working in positions that don't require higher learning.

These extreme disparities in racial hiring are dangerous for Black communities, which have a detailed history of strained relationships with law enforcement professionals who are relied on for order and protection. Like nearly all other professions in America, the racial disparities in hiring practices at police departments exacerbate systemic racism.

Some critics may dismiss racial disparity in hiring practices at police departments as a red herring when it comes to deadly encounters between police and Blacks and people of color. Consider that a [2016 Pew Research survey](#) found that "nearly all White officers (92%) - but only 29% of their black colleagues - said the U.S. has made the changes needed to assure equal rights for Blacks." In an age where Black Americans are routinely shot and killed by White police officers, it is clear that the culture of law enforcement is in need of immediate and drastic change. Hiring a more diverse police force has shown to build more trust between communities of color and the police, potentially leading to less crime and incarceration rates.

National data shows that Blacks are the second-largest racial/ethnic group in American policing. It is essential to understand the local reality, given that 80% of criminal justice is local. A look at a large Southwestern metropolitan police department recruits for the years 2014, 2016, 2017, and 2018 indicates that Asians, Hispanics, and Whites are more likely to make it to Phase 1 than Black applicants, representing the largest group of initial applicants. This is especially troubling given that a companion Pew Research [survey taken amongst police officers](#) reveals that "A majority of black officers (57%) say these (deadly) encounters are evidence of a broader problem between police and blacks, a view held by only about a quarter of all white (27%) and Hispanic (26%) officers."

In this study, the Center for Justice Research examined the hiring practices of a large Southwestern metropolitan police department recruits for the years 2014, 2016, 2017, and 2018. The data indicates that Asians, Hispanics, and Whites are more likely to make it to Phase 1 than Black applicants, representing the largest group of initial applicants.

Previous Research

Previous research shows agencies that reflect the communities they engage in will have tremendous success at repairing relationships and rebuilding their trust with community members. "Recruiting, selection, and training have become pivotal issues for police agencies due to major shifts in the role and function of policing and external demands for greater accountability, transparency, professionalism, and legitimacy (White & Escobar, 2008, p. 119). Recruiting, hiring, and retaining a representative police force is one way to repair fractured relationships and improve the image of the police, police-community relations, trust, and the delivery of police services."

A 2013 study conducted by the Bureau of Justice Statistics showed that minority groups remain significantly underrepresented in nearly all local law enforcement agencies. Recruiting, hiring, and retaining diversity within law enforcement agencies that reflect the communities they serve is vital because citizens are more willing to cooperate and be supportive if they perceive the police as legitimate and credible (Shusta et al., 2011, p. xi). This shows that “officers come into contact with persons from different cultural or economic backgrounds, socioeconomic classes, religions, and sexual orientations daily” (Shusta et al., p. 41). Shusta et al. also state that the different groups of people that police interact with bring different perspectives to these interactions. Police agencies with officers from diverse backgrounds are more responsive in providing authority to three services (p. 41). Weak interactions with citizens lead to poor police-community relations, increase tension, and diminish trust and cooperation from the community.

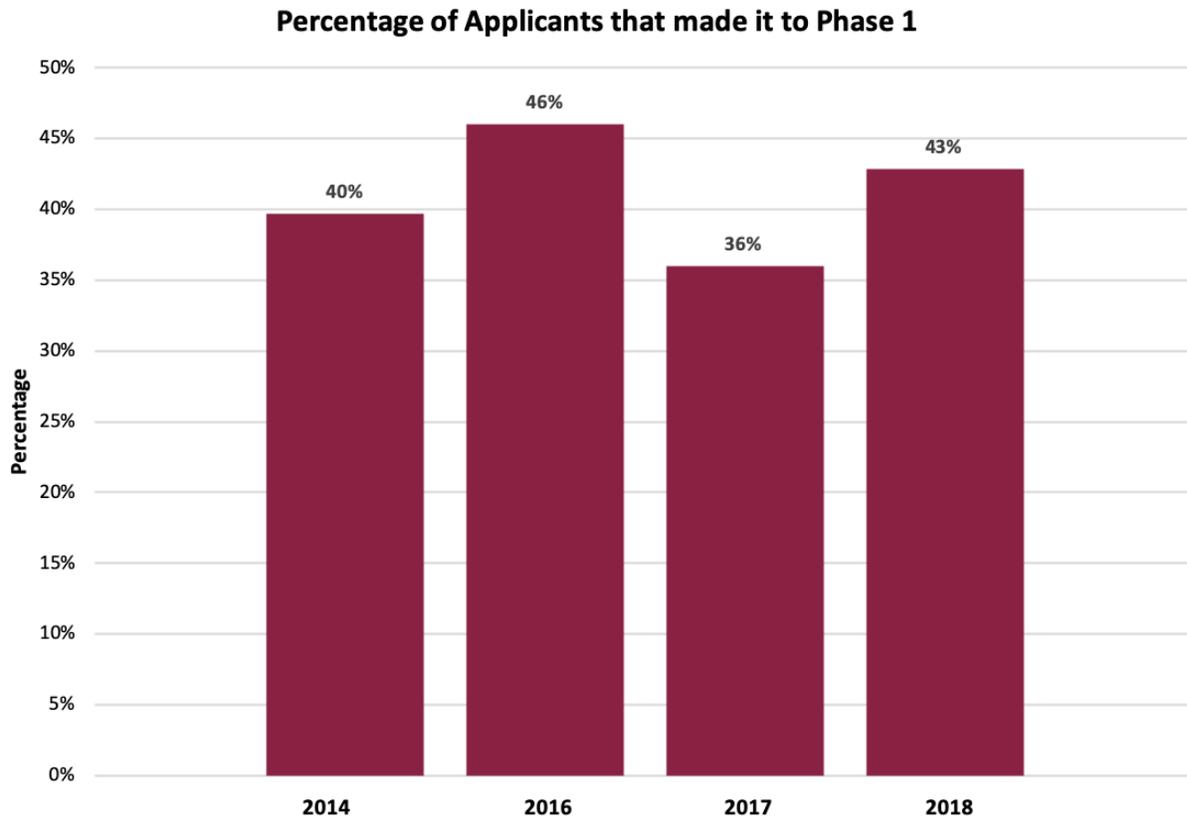
There were several agencies and people who wrote reports which supported the recommendation that police agencies should reflect the communities they serve. The special reports include Task Force Report: The Police (U.S. President’s Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice, 1967), the Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (U.S. National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, 1968), the Report of the Independent Commission on the Los Angeles Police Department (Independent Commission on the Los Angeles Police Department, 1991), Revisiting “Who is Guarding the Guardians”: A Report on Police Practices and Civil Rights in America (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2000), the After-action Assessment of the Police Response to the August 2014 Demonstrations in Ferguson, Missouri (Institute for Intergovernmental Research, 2015), and the Final Report of the President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing (President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing, 2015). Agencies have made efforts to increase the representation of women and officers of color through different means like affirmative Action and consent decrees. Despite all this effort, many law enforcement agencies still have not achieved “labor population benchmarks” and do not reflect the demographics in the communities they serve (Matthies et al., 2012; Sklansky, 2006). The Kerner Commission, formed because of the Watts riots, found that there was a significant problem with the lack of African American officers and recommended improving minority hiring and promotion policies and procedures (U.S. National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, 1968; Shusta et al., 2011, p. 82). The Warren Christopher Commission Report on the Los Angeles Police Department that followed the Rodney King riots found bias and racism with the police department (Independent Commission on the Los Angeles Police Department, 1991; Shusta et al., 2011, p. 82).

Applicants that made it to Phase 1 of the Hiring Process

In 2014, the police department had 40% of its applicants make it to Phase 1 of the hiring process. In 2016, there were 46% of applicants who made it to Phase 1, but the next year, 2017, the number of applicants that made it to Phase 1 dropped to 36%. Calculating a 4-Year average for 2014, 2016, 2017, and 2018’s hiring data, we observe that while Blacks had the highest number of initial applicants, only 28% made it to Phase 1. White applicants represented the second-highest number of initial applicants, yet 57% made it to Phase 1. Asian applicants represented the fourth-highest number of initial applicants, and yet 62% of them made it to Phase 1. The data shows that there is an apparent disparity in the hiring process of the police department.

Figure 1 is an illustration of the percentage of applicants that made it to Phase 1 of the department’s hiring process for the years 2014, 2016, 2017, and 2018. For 2014, forty percent made it to Phase 1, in 2016, forty-six percent made it to Phase 1, in 2017, thirty-six percent made it to Phase 1, and in 2018, forty-three percent made it to Phase 1.

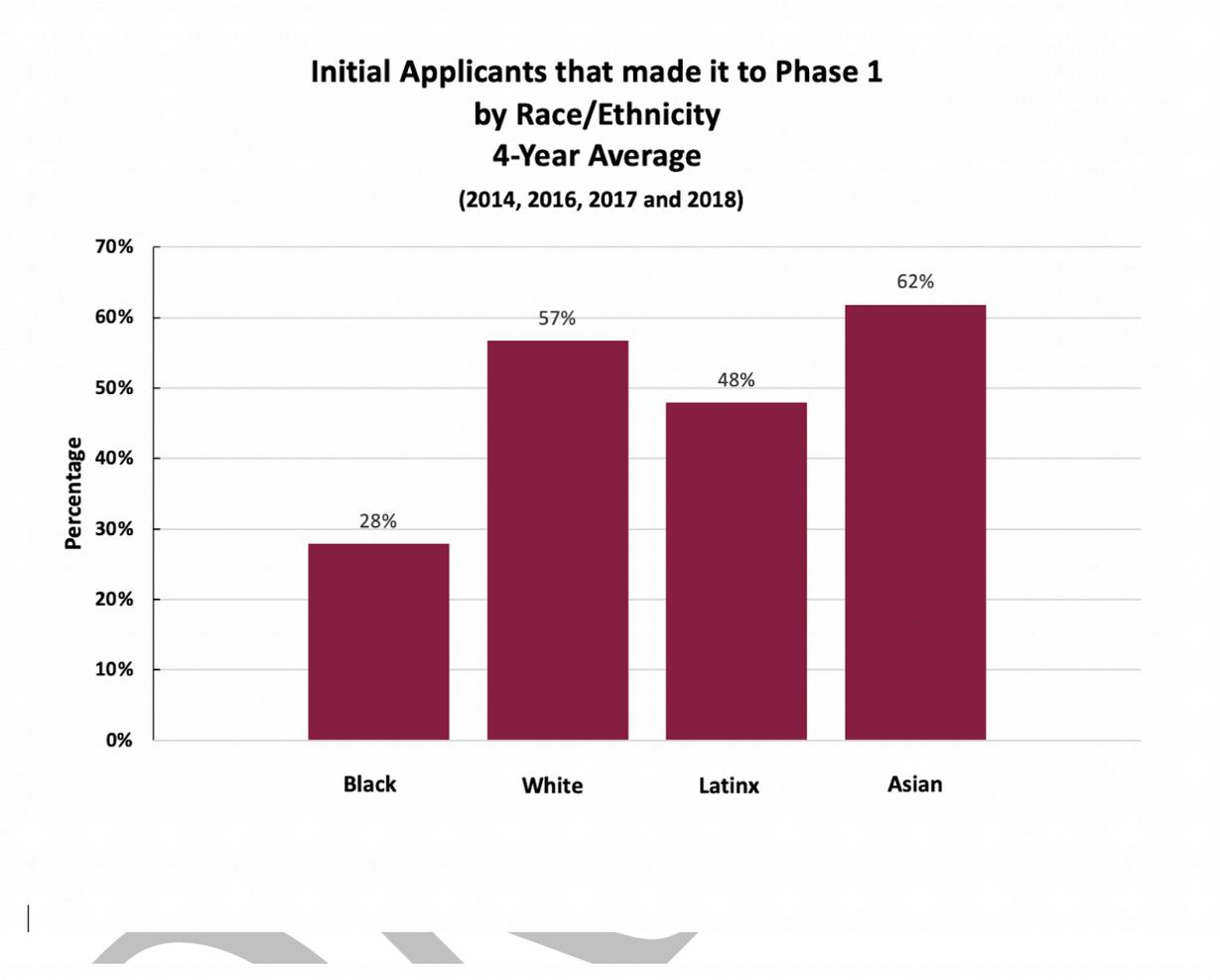
Figure 1: Percentage of Applicants that made it to Phase 1 (2014, 2016, 2017, and 2018)



	Initial # of Applicants	Made it to Phase 1	Made it to Phase 1
	n	n	%
2014	2105	835	40%
2016	2328	1076	46%
2017	2615	935	36%
2018	2748	1177	43%

Figure 2 illustrates the 4-year average of initial applicants who made it to Phase 1 by race/ethnicity. Twenty-eight (28%) of Black applicants made it to Phase 1, followed by 57% of White applicants, 48% percent of Hispanic applicants, and 62% percent of Asian applicants.

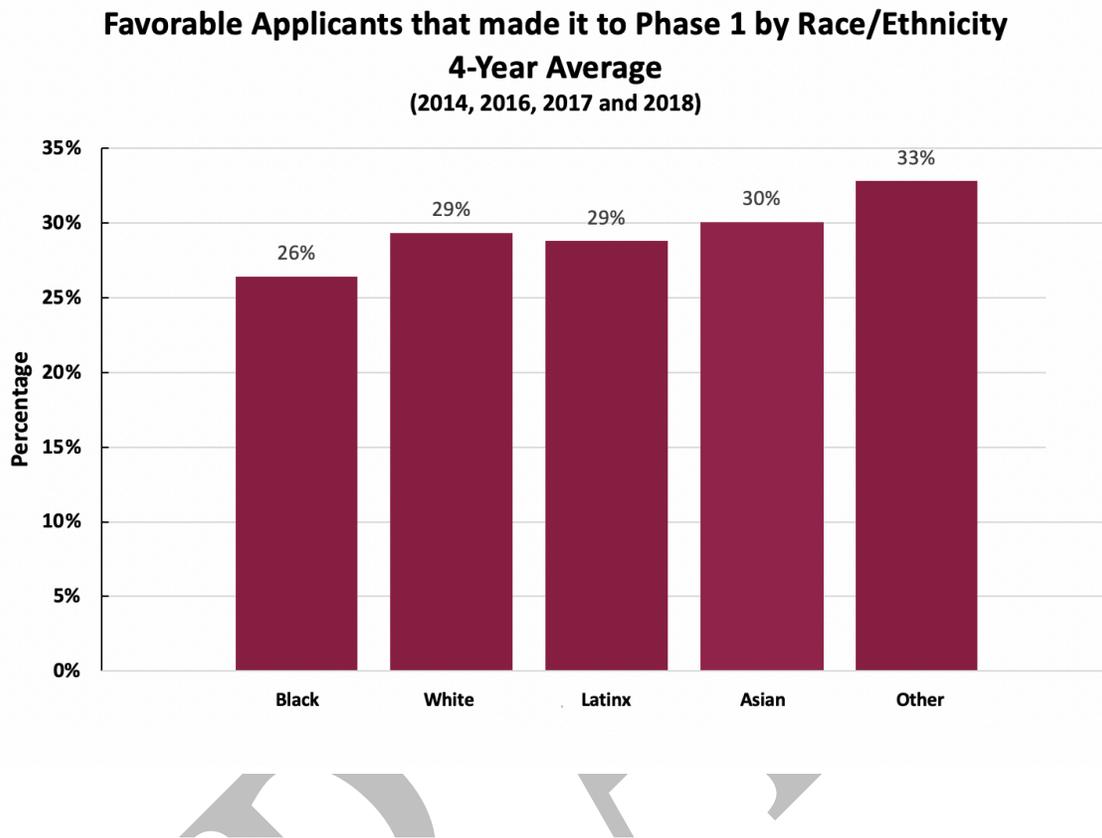
Figure 2: 4-Year Average of Initial Applicants that made it to Phase 1 by Race/Ethnicity



	2014			2016			2017			2018			4-Year Average
	Initial # of Applicants	Made it to Phase 1	Made it to Phase 1	Initial # of Applicants	Made it to Phase 1	Made it to Phase 1	Initial # of Applicants	Made it to Phase 1	Made it to Phase 1	Initial # of Applicants	Made it to Phase 1	Made it to Phase 1	Made it to Phase 1
	n	n	%	n	n	%	n	n	%	n	n	%	%
Black	625	171	27%	718	228	32%	824	191	23%	933	272	29%	28%
White	652	368	56%	665	431	65%	814	388	48%	746	432	58%	57%
Hispanic	481	223	46%	594	318	54%	731	269	37%	175	96	55%	48%
Asian	95	64	67%	119	92	77%	142	81	57%	791	360	46%	62%

Figure 3 illustrates the 4-Year average of the percentage of favorable applicants by race/ethnicity that made it to Phase 1. The following shows that 27% of Black applicants, 29% White applicants, 29% Hispanic applicants, and 30% of Asian applicants were deemed favorable. Overall, 33% of Other applicants that made it to Phase 1 were considered favorable.

Figure 3: 4-Year Average of Favorable Applicants that made it to Phase 1 by Race/Ethnicity



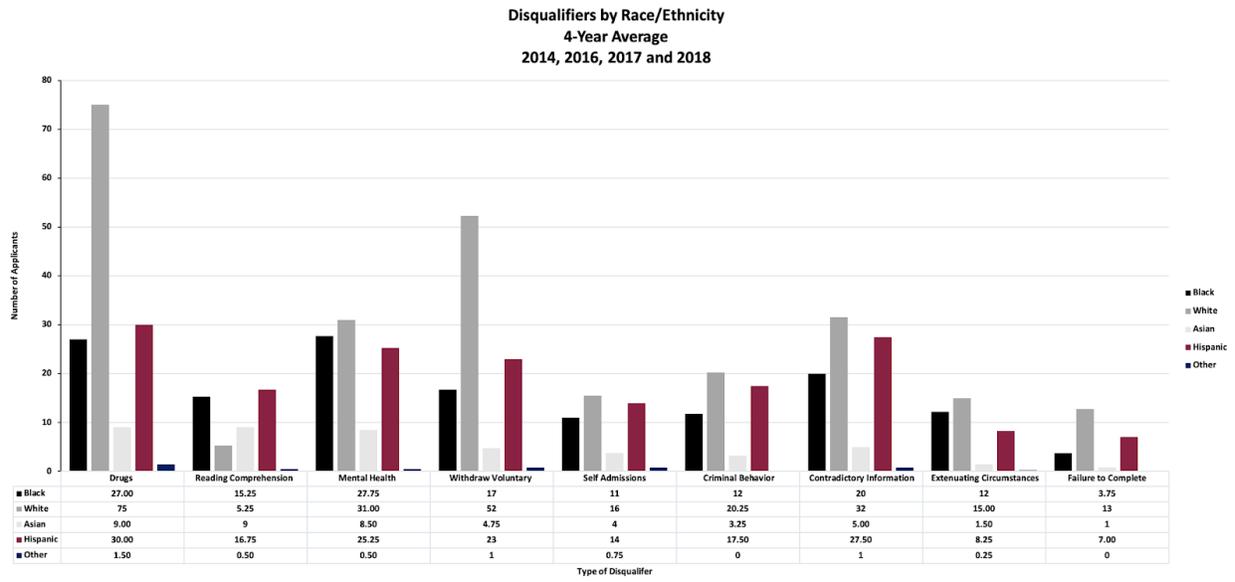
	2014			2016			2017			2018			4-Year Average
	Applicants that made it to Phase 1		Favorable Applicants	Applicants that made it to Phase 1		Favorable Applicants	Applicants that made it to Phase 1		Favorable Applicants	Applicants that made it to Phase 1		Favorable Applicants	Applicants that made it to Phase 1
	n	n	%	n	n	%	n	n	%	n	n	%	%
Black	171	38	22%	228	70	31%	191	55	29%	272	65	24%	26%
White	368	85	23%	431	148	34%	388	111	29%	432	135	31%	29%
Hispanic	223	50	22%	318	104	33%	269	97	36%	96	23	24%	29%
Asian	64	15	23%	92	31	34%	81	25	31%	360	116	32%	30%
Other	9	2	22%	7	2	29%	6	2	33%	17	8	47%	33%

Disqualifiers of the Applicants that failed to make it to Phase 1

Many applicants were disqualified and didn't make it to Phase 1 of the hiring process for reasons such as drugs, reading comprehension, mental health, etc. White applicants represented the highest population of applicants disqualified for drugs, withdrawing voluntary, mental health, and contradictory information. Black applicants were the highest group disqualified for reading comprehension, credit, and education. What are the challenges that impact the hiring disparities of local police departments?

Figure 4 illustrates the 4-Year average of disqualifiers by Race and Ethnicity. The following shows White applicants represent the highest population of applicants that were disqualified for Drugs, Withdraw Voluntary, Mental Health, and Contradictory Information.

Figure 4: 4-Year Average of Disqualifiers by Race/Ethnicity



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