Los Angeles Police Department shootings doubled in a single year, report shows

Dan Conway, Marc Wells
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Describing the trend as "alarming," the president of the Los Angeles Police Commission reported last Tuesday that Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) shootings have doubled in 2015 with 45 instances, compared to 23 the previous year.

According to board president Matt Johnson, 19 of those instances resulted in fatalities, meaning that LAPD officers kill nearly two persons each month.

Moreover, this figure does not include individuals killed in confrontations with either the Los Angeles County Sherriff's Office or California Highway Patrol, in which case the actual number killed would be far higher. Multiple towns and medium-sized cities in the Los Angeles metropolitan area were also not included as they maintain their own departments separate from the LAPD.

The Los Angeles Police Commission, nominally the civilian leadership of the department, is completely embedded within the LAPD and exists to foster the illusion that a civilian oversight board exists to hold police accountable for misconduct. Their reviews of police killings are typically held in private with officers inevitably cleared of any wrongdoing, although the commission occasionally speaks on such issues openly when public anger over a particular police murder threatens to spiral out of control.

Nonetheless, the figures cited by the commission are quite alarming and reveal a working-class population in the nation's second largest city that is being regarded as nothing more than target practice by the state.

By contrast, according to the Officer Down Memorial Page, there have been only six deaths in the line of duty in California in 2015, including two in the K9 units. None of these, human or otherwise, worked in Los Angeles.

On Tuesday, the commission sought to address the rise in police shootings with a request for an inquiry into the use of force by LAPD in the last 10 years and a review of police body camera usage. It also called for an increase in the use of other allegedly nonlethal equipment, such as Taser and beanbag guns, even though both are responsible for serious injuries and deaths.

While police killings have increased, Los Angeles County has actually seen a steady decline in murder rates since 2001, when 588 murders per 100,000 people were reported. In 2013, that rate was at 251, a decline of 57 percent. The *Los Angeles Times*' Homicide Report also shows that in the entire County of Los Angeles, 578 homicides were counted in 2014, the lowest number since 2000.

Police killings therefore comprise an increasing percentage of overall murders in Los Angeles County.

The share of police homicides has more than doubled in 15 years, from 3 percent in 2000 to 7 percent this year. The *Times* report, a searchable crime database, shows that LAPD killings in 2015, with seven weeks remaining in the year, are already higher than in 2014, when officers killed 17 people.

Police in Los Angeles County are responsible for killing 589 people since 2000, or one person a week, according to a September 2014 report. Also, according to an article in the *Guardian* newspaper earlier this summer, the LAPD had killed more people than any other law enforcement agency in the country in 2015.

Given these numbers, an increase in police-involved shootings is all the more significant as it indicates an escalation in the establishment of police-state methods.

LAPD officers, like their counterparts across the country, act as a law unto themselves, terrorizing entire communities with impunity. With a Supreme Court ruling this week expanding the use of "qualified immunity" to grant officers a reprieve from even the most brazen acts of murder, cops can act with confidence that there will be no legal consequences whatsoever for their actions. (See: US Supreme Court expands immunity for killer cops)

Four days ago, Los Angeles police officers confronted 34-year-old Miguel Cano in the San Fernando Valley region of Los Angeles. Cano, who according to his mother was homeless with a history of alcoholism, had been standing in traffic and erratically running through cars before police were called.

The police confronted Cano, hitting him with at least one round from a "beanbag" gun and stun-gunning him. A

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beanbag gun is a regular 12-gauge shotgun loaded with shells containing tear-proof bags which themselves are loaded with #9 lead shot. Once fired, the bags travel at 300 feet per second and are designed to induce trauma to internal organs and thus incapacitate a suspect. A Taser is also similarly designed to cause “neuromuscular incapacitation” and delivers a powerful electric current via two barbed prongs shot into a suspect at high velocity.

Both of these “nonlethal” weapons are extraordinarily dangerous and life threatening. A beanbag gun caused the death of a Georgia man last April after a round delivered to his spleen caused irreversible internal bleeding. Tasers, since they were first mass-produced and delivered to police departments around the country, have caused the deaths of thousands. Nonetheless, these two measures were apparently insufficient for dealing with Cano this week, whereupon the two LAPD officers shot him dead.

Los Angeles police chief Charlie Beck responded to the shooting, making the highly implausible and oft-repeated police claim that the suspect grabbed for the officer’s gun even after he was hit by the initial impact of the stun gun and beanbag gun. “In fact, the individual was able to confront the officers that had the beanbag shotgun and take the beanbag shotgun from the officer,” Beck said. “The individual then deployed the beanbag shotgun, fired at least one round at our officers. They returned fire, killing the subject.”

Last month, in another high-profile police killing also in the San Fernando Valley region, LAPD officers shot and killed a man who had thrown a beer bottle through the back window of their police cruiser while stopped at a red light. The officers claim they believed a gunshot had caused the broken window and shot at the suspect fearing for their lives. The LAPD claims that the officers were not wearing body cameras at the time of the shooting and that their cruiser did not have a camera either.

The LA Police Commission had approved the use of body cameras last April, although the 7,000 body cameras are not scheduled to be fully deployed until the end of this year. There are no guidelines, however, as to how body camera footage is to be reviewed even if the majority of officers actually wear and enable their cameras while on duty.

In fact, the Police Commission guidelines give officers the right to review images from the cameras themselves before writing reports or giving statements to internal investigators. Moreover, footage will not be publicly released unless it is part of a criminal or court proceeding. Given recent high-profile exonerations of police killers, this effectively means that the public will never see footage from body cameras at all unless, one would assume, a rare case emerges in which police encounter actual violence from a suspect.

In more recent months, the department’s violent actions and brutal killings have been met with revulsion and protests, especially in cases where the victims were unarmed, homeless or mentally challenged.

Last May, Brendon K. Glenn, unarmed and homeless, was killed in Venice, California, by the LAPD, which refused to provide a full account to more than 400 people who attended a “community meeting” showing their anger for the killing.

An unarmed homeless man known as “Africa” was shot and killed on Los Angeles’s Skid Row last March, with a video of the incident viewed by millions of people worldwide. Nine police officers on the scene subdued the frail man with Tasers and shot him multiple times while he was lying prone on the ground. The bystander who video-recorded the shooting also denied the police version in which they once again claimed that the suspect had reached for an officer’s gun.

The last time the Los Angeles Police Commission spoke publicly was in June of this year over the killing of 24-year-old Ezell Ford. Ford, who was mentally challenged, was confronted by two veteran LAPD officers even though the officers had no reason to believe he was engaged in any criminal activity. Police claimed that Ford struggled with them and attempted to grab one of the officer’s guns, whereupon the officers shot him in the back.

The Police Commission found that neither officer was guilty of any wrongdoing, while one of them may have used “inappropriate tactics” in initially confronting the young man. The sole video footage of the incident was confiscated by the LAPD and has not been released to the public.

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