

Chicago police shoot someone every five days

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A newly released report revealed that the Chicago Police Department (CPD) shot and killed 92 people between 2010 and 2015 and wounded 173 people during that time. Over the course of the last six years, more than 2,623 bullets have been fired by officers in 435 shootings in areas of high poverty and in deep social distress. On average, every five days a Chicago police officer shoots someone.

The database of information on recent police shootings was obtained by the *Chicago Tribune* as part of a Freedom of Information Act Request detailing every time a police officer fired a weapon at someone. The majority of these cases have never been brought to public attention or scrutiny. The city of Chicago currently outpaces other major cities—such as New York, Los Angeles, Houston and Philadelphia—in officer-involved shootings over the last five years.

According to the database, of the 435 shootings at least 235 incidents involved a person getting shot by a bullet. Four out of five of those shot were African-American males. The officers that fired a weapon were mostly veteran police officers with more than a decade of experience. Of the 520 officers that fired shots, at least 60 were involved in repeat shootings. The individuals shot range from those in their early teens to a 92-year old woman.

While the majority of those shot were African-American nearly fourteen percent of the shooting victims were Hispanic and a little less than six percent were white. The common feature in all these police shootings is that they occurred in areas of Chicago with high indices of poverty and unemployment.

Over the course of the last year Democratic mayor Rahm Emanuel and the CPD have faced growing public outrage against rampant police brutality.

Official investigations into police brutality and killings largely proceeded within the CPD and its oversight body, the Independent Police Review Authority (IPRA), with details of investigations covered up and hidden from the public. The standard operating procedure for a police report included a pro forma statement from a police union spokesperson or the department. The police review and oversight agency largely functioned as an appendage of the CPD and the mayor's

office.

A few videos have surfaced in response to mass outrage, most notably the murder of 17-year-old unarmed teenager Laquan McDonald by Officer Jason Van Dyke in 2014. The video of McDonald's shooting was only released to the public in the fall of 2015 after an independent reporter sued the city of Chicago for obstruction of access to public records. Prior to the release of the video of the shooting, the city quickly made a financial payout of \$5 million to the McDonald family in an attempt at damage control, fearing broader public unrest.

Emanuel and the Democratic Party establishment in Chicago played a central role in the cover-up of McDonald's killing. In the wake of the release of the McDonald video, the Emanuel administration has been in damage-control mode to try to quell mass unrest and protests against police killings. Since then, Emanuel has made cosmetic changes to the CPD personnel with various proposals to suggest that his police force's actions will be "transparent" in the future.

In fact, Emanuel and the police department have continued to block efforts of public oversight into officer-involved shootings since then. Despite a seven-month-long request by the *Tribune* to acquire information about police shootings, the data was only handed over when the newspaper threatened to sue the department for repeatedly obstructing access to public records.

In the wake of the McDonald video's release, the mayor's self-appointed Police Accountability Task Force presented superficial proposals for "reform," one of which included the recommendation that the police superintendent acknowledge the force's "history of racial disparity and discrimination." Such claims are made to prevent any real examination of the roots of police violence.

While racism no doubt plays a role in these police shootings, the socioeconomic features of these shootings highlight the fundamental class character of police brutality. Even as the majority of the shootings occurred in neighborhoods that are predominantly African-American, they are also areas that reflect the concentrated impact of the social and economic crisis of capitalism. Decades of

deindustrialization have resulted in extreme poverty in many working class neighborhoods on the city's South and West side.

The neighborhood of Auburn Gresham took the lead with over 30 police shootings where someone was injured or killed. The per capita income in this neighborhood is just \$16,032. Unemployment is more than 24 percent and nearly 25 percent of households live below the official poverty line. Other highly impoverished areas also had high numbers of police shootings that resulted in death or injuries, including the districts of Englewood, Calumet, Grand Crossing and Harrison.

Significantly, more than half of the officers involved in the shootings were minority police officers, either African-American or Hispanic. Hispanic officers, according to the report, make up only 19 percent of the CPD, but they account for more than 26 percent of police-involved shootings.

The CPD officer that shot their gun the most was Tracey Williams, a female African-American tactical officer who opened fire five different times in five years, killing one person, wounding another and missing three more people.

These facts highlight the essential class character of the police, regardless of the individual officer's race or gender, as armed guards of the state to repress the population, overwhelmingly the poor and working class layers of society.

According to the data released by the *Tribune*, only a handful of cases of officer-involved shootings were claimed to be unjustified. In most cases, the agency declared the use of force by police officers to be justified and in almost all of these cases the police were declared to be the only witnesses involved. The police, in other words, self-report on their activity with no real oversight. Without video evidence or other eyewitness testimony, the police frequently can engage in cover ups and frame ups, as well falsely reporting the facts of the case.

The CPD and the Fraternal Order of Police—just as every police department across the nation— has claimed without fail that the officers “feared for their life” in each case in order to justify their killings.

However, a joint study conducted by the *Chicago Reader* and *City Bureau* found that the majority of CPD statements on police shootings have turned out to be fabricated and based on lies. Statements given by the police union since 2012 were shown to be false by legal testimony, video, media investigations, and contradictory statements given by the police themselves.

In the wake of all these revelations, the Emanuel administration has continued to work to cover up the key role played by his administration, the Democratic Party and

the highest levels of the state apparatus in the United States that perpetuates the reign of police violence.

Recently, Chicago police Superintendent Eddie Johnson formally sought to fire the officers involved in the cover-up of the police murder of McDonald. Such a measure is little more than an effort to quash anger and deflect the blame from Emanuel's administration's role in covering up police murders.

Emanuel also recently submitted a proposed ordinance for a vote by the City Council which would rebrand the widely discredited oversight agency IPRA and replace it with another called the Civilian Office of Police Accountability (COPA). The replacement of IPRA by COPA does not, however, herald a new era of policing in Chicago. Police killings and shootings have continued unabated since Emanuel began proposing his “transparency” and “accountability” measures earlier this year.

Moreover, the new agency remains entirely subject to Emanuel's control and cannot function in any genuine sense as an independent agency to review police misconduct and violence. COPA's funding remains entirely dependent on Emanuel and the Democratic Party establishment which has overseen decades of police violence and brutality. Moreover, COPA will not have the power to hire independent counsel and will have to go through City Hall's Law Department, which is a major conflict of interest. The Law Department and its lawyers already represent the mayor and the police officers, who are often the ones involved in cases of police misconduct.

IPRA itself was formed in the wake of anger against the previous police “oversight” agency, the CPD's Office of Professional Standards, which failed to carry out any action against Jon Burge and other police officers implicated in torture. In its eight years, IPRA carried out superficial investigations, collaborated closely with the mayor's office of communications, and ruled that the vast majority of police misconduct cases were justified. COPA's new interim chief will be the current head of IPRA—Sharon Fairley— which merely highlights the fraud of so-called “civilian oversight” and police “reform” measures.



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