

Behind the epidemic of police killings in America: Class, poverty and race

Part two

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Income and poverty

According to the US Census Bureau, 328 million people reside in the United States. Non-Hispanic whites make up 60.7 percent, black or African American 13.4 percent, and Hispanics or Latino 18.1 percent of the population. The annual median household income (MHI) in 2016 dollars amounts to \$55,322 and the percentage of the population living in poverty stands at 12.3 percent. There is wide variation in these figures from state to state. Table 2 below highlights these facts. The table also demonstrates a broadly uniform phenomenon: the areas in which police killings occurred—either the cities and towns, or in the case of rural districts, the counties—almost always have lower median household incomes and more people living in poverty than the statewide average.

In 2017, according to the *Washington Post*, 987 people were shot and killed by the police. Overwhelmingly, men constituted 95.2 percent of those killed. Racial demographics included 475 white non-Hispanic victims (48.2 percent), 231 black victims (23.4 percent) and 209 Hispanic victims (21.2 percent). Twenty-five Native Americans made up 2.5 percent of those killed though they constitute only 1.3 percent of the population. On the other hand, 19 Asians represented 1.9 percent of those killed though they constitute 5.8 percent of the US population.

Twenty-six people (after the data was cross-referenced with KilledbyPolice.net and news sources) had an unknown race assigned. They made up 2.6 percent of those killed by police.

When this data is standardized to the number killed per 100,000, whites were killed at 0.237 per 100k, blacks at 0.530 per 100k and Hispanics at 0.358 per 100k. The ratio of black death rate to white death rate stands at 2.24 and the ratio of Hispanic death rate to whites death rate at 1.51. This data is consistent with the published literature and often quoted to support the racist perspective.

The police killing zone: USA?

However, when we calculated the demographics only for the regions in which a police killing occurred, there was a significant shift in both the demographics and socioeconomic status of this new population. We used the suffix minus (?) to denote the narrower region where a killing occurred. Illinois? would mean only those cities and rural counties in Illinois where police killed civilians. USA? includes only the cities and rural counties throughout the country in which a police killing occurred.

The region designated USA? accounts for 91,526,100 people. In other words, slightly more than one-quarter of the US population lives in a city or county where a police killing took place, and conversely, just under three-quarters live in cities or counties that were free of such killings.

The population of USA? has significantly different demographics from the USA as a whole. Non-Hispanic whites made up 44.5 percent, blacks 18.6 percent and Hispanics 26.7 percent of this region. The median household income is slightly lower at \$52,218 per annum, and the percentage in poverty (PP) is much higher, at 19.5 percent.

If one compares the poverty rate of USA? to the poverty rate of the remaining nearly three-quarters of the country, where no police killings took place, the disparity is even more stark. The poverty rate is 19.5 percent in what might be called the police killing zone. It is only 9.5 percent, less than half that rate, in the rest of the country.

While poverty becomes a much more salient factor when considering just USA?, the opposite is true for race. In USA?, non-Hispanic whites experienced 1.169 deaths per 100,000, blacks 1.357 per 100,000 and Hispanics 0.856 per 100,000. The ratio of the black death rate to the white death rate was cut nearly in half, to 1.16, and the Hispanic to white ratio declined by more than half, to 0.73. Though blacks continued to be killed at a higher rate than whites, the differences between them became less profound. Comparing observed to expected, based upon the population living in USA?, 38 more whites (8.6 percent) were killed than expected, 47 more blacks (25.6 percent) were killed than expected but 67 fewer Hispanics (25.5 percent) were killed than expected.

When looking at economic data by race, in USA?, regions where

white non-Hispanics were killed, the mean household income was \$46,720 and 17.6 percent of the population was living in poverty, for blacks the figures were \$47,010 and 20.3 percent, and for Hispanics, \$50,070 and 19.1 percent.

Urban and rural differences

Only eighty-two black individuals (35.5 percent of all blacks killed by police) died in rural areas with populations of less than 100,000, excluding suburbs. These represented 8.3 percent of all people killed by police in 2017. The median household income in these regions is \$41,661, and the proportion living in poverty stands at 20.9 percent.

Forty-five percent of all blacks killed by police were killed in large urban areas with populations of more than 300,000 (including the suburbs) while 20 percent were killed in smaller urban centers between 100,000 and 300,000, for a combined total of 65 percent of all blacks being killed in urban centers. The median household income and proportion in poverty in the urban centers where blacks were killed were \$48,088 and 20.8 percent, respectively. Only seventeen black people were killed in suburbs (7.4 percent of all blacks and 1.7 percent of all people killed by police) where the median household income and proportion in poverty stand at \$67,178 and 10.5 percent, respectively.

In contrast, out of 478 whites killed by police, 292 (61.7 percent of all whites killed and 29.6 percent of the people killed by police) were killed in rural areas with less than 100,000 population. The median household income and proportion living in poverty were \$42,213 and 18.0 percent, respectively.

This figure is worth pondering. The number of whites killed by police in rural areas, 292, is just about exactly twice the number of blacks killed by police in urban areas, 149. But these white victims of police violence are almost invisible when it comes to reporting in the corporate-controlled media, speeches by Democratic Party politicians, or commentary by the pseudo-left groups. Moreover, the income and poverty rates in the two areas are comparable: both white and black victims of police violence live in lower-income working-class areas characterized by much higher than average poverty rates.

There were 124 (25.9 percent of whites killed) in population centers (excluding suburbs) with more than 100,000. Of these, 66 whites (13.8 percent of whites killed by police and 6.7 percent of all victims) died in large urban centers with more than 300,000 population. The median household income and proportion in poverty were \$48,675 and 18.5 percent, respectively. Sixty white people were killed in suburbs, accounting for 12.5 percent of whites killed. These regions have a median household income and proportion in poverty of \$69,082 and 8.0 percent, respectively.

The demographics of Hispanics killed by police were closer to those of blacks than whites, in that more were killed in larger urban centers. Rural areas accounted for 40.9 percent of Hispanics killed by police (8.6 percent of all victims) while 59.1 percent of Hispanics (12.5 percent of all victims) were killed in urban

centers, including the suburbs and metro areas.

The most dangerous area: rural America

Metropolitan centers denote urban centers with more than one million people. There were ten such centers in which 76 people were killed. This region contributed 28.4 percent of USA? but accounted for only 7.7 percent of those killed. Blacks and Hispanics accounted for 35.5 percent each to those killed while whites were only 27.2 percent. Blacks were over-represented in metropolitan centers, at almost twice their proportion in the population.

Large cities included urban centers between 300,000 to one million people. There were 152 people killed in 46 cities and large suburbs. This region accounted for 27.4 percent of USA? but contributed to 15.4 percent of those killed. Blacks again were over-represented in these regions at nearly twice the expected rate, comprising 40.1 percent of those killed.

Population centers with more than 100,000 people but less than 300,000 included many small cities and exurbs. In these regions, 171 people were killed. Combined, they contributed 22.7 percent of USA- and contributed to 17.3 percent of those killed. The rate of whites killed rose while that for blacks declined to a level more consistent with their population in these regions though blacks continued to be over-represented.

Together these urban centers accounted for 399 killed, making up 40.4 percent of those killed by police in 2017. These areas, however, represented 78.5 percent of the population in USA?, the combined regions where police killings occurred. By contrast, the rural regions, which encompassed 463 small and medium towns, including counties with less than 100,000 people, accounted for only 16.8 percent of USA?. However, they accounted for 50.2 percent of the people killed by police, a remarkable 496 victims.

By comparison to urban centers where death rates are on the order of magnitude less than one killed per 100,000 people, medium-sized cities had a rate for whites of 1.946, blacks 3.564 and Hispanics of 2.259. In small towns and rural areas, these rates climbed to a staggering 12.016 per 100,000 for whites, 15.703 for blacks and 11.755 for Hispanics.

To be continued



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