

2,500 people killed by police in the US since 2015 were attempting to flee

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Approximately one-third of those killed by police in the US since 2015 were running away, driving off or attempting to flee when lethal force was used against them. The *Guardian* published this conclusion on Thursday after reviewing a database of police killings in the past seven years maintained by the research group Mapping Police Violence.

The report notes, “police in America have killed more than 2,500 people who were fleeing, and those numbers have slightly increased in recent years, amounting to an average of roughly one killing a day of someone running or trying to escape,” and that, in many cases, “the encounters started as traffic stops, or there were no allegations of violence or serious crimes prompting police contact.”

Additionally, in some cases, “people were shot in the back while running and others were passengers in fleeing cars,” the *Guardian* report says.

The Mapping Police Violence database was founded and is maintained by Samuel Sinyangwe, an American policy analyst and political activist.

He told the *Guardian*, “In 2014 and 2015, at the beginning of this national conversation about racism in policing, the idea was, ‘There are bad apples in police departments, and if we just charged or fired those particularly bad officers, we could save lives and stop police violence,’ but this data shows that this is much bigger than any individual officer.”

Like the Fatal Encounters database of the University of Southern California and the Police Shootings Database maintained by the *Washington Post*, Mapping Police Violence has been documenting police killings “whether a firearm is used or not.” The public has direct access to the full dataset, which goes back to 2016, and the website presents the data in graphical form showing that police killings in the US are

widespread and growing annually.

The *Guardian* report says the data shows that, “Despite a decades-long push to hold officers accountable for killing civilians,” prosecution of police remains “exceedingly rare.” Of the 2,500 people killed by police while fleeing, “only 50 or 2 percent have resulted in criminal charges. The majority of those charges were either dismissed or resulted in acquittals. Only nine officers were convicted, representing 0.35 percent of cases.”

As of July 16, a total of 663 people have been killed this year by police, 202 of them while fleeing. Only three officers have been charged in the cases of flight and, so far, there have been no convictions.

A recent instance of police shooting to death someone fleeing was the brutal gunning down of 25-year-old Jayland Walker in a hail of gunfire in Akron, Ohio, on June 27 during a traffic stop. Although Walker was unarmed at the time of the shooting and did not have any drugs or alcohol in his system, he was pursued on foot by officers who fired more than 90 times at him.

An autopsy showed that Walker was struck with 46 police bullets, at least 5 of which entered his back. The medical examiner said that he was hit so many times and that so many of his injuries were life threatening that it was impossible to determine with certainty which bullet caused his death.

Another instance of police shooting someone attempting to flee is the gunning down of 23-year-old Robert Adams in San Bernardino, California, on July 16. Surveillance video shows Adams standing in a parking lot when an unmarked police vehicle pulled up and two officers jumped out with guns drawn. When Adams turned and ran, one of the officers shot him and he died later at the hospital.

Of the nine fleeing cases where officers were found

guilty or signed a plea deal in the last seven years, “the conviction and sentence were much lighter than in typical homicides,” the *Guardian* reported. The report went on to give examples.

In 2019, a Georgia officer who killed an unarmed fleeing man was “acquitted of manslaughter, but found guilty of violating his oath and given one year in prison.” A sheriff’s deputy in San Diego “pleaded guilty earlier this year to voluntary manslaughter after he killed a fleeing man, but he avoided state prison, instead getting one year in jail.” In Tennessee an officer who was found guilty of “criminally negligent homicide after shooting at a fleeing car and killing the passenger, a 20-year-old woman, was sentenced to community service.”

The *Guardian* makes the point that police in the US “kill more people in days than many countries do in years, with roughly 1,100 fatalities a year since 2003.”

Paula McGowan, whose son, Ronell Foster, was killed while fleeing in Vallejo, California, in February 2018, told the *Guardian*, “If a person is running away, there is no reason to chase them, hunt them down like an animal and shoot and kill them.” In this case, the officer, Ryan McMahon, claimed he was trying to stop Foster, a 33-year-old father of two, because he was riding his bike without a light.

McMahon shot Foster in the back of the head and police authorities later said that Foster, who was unarmed, had grabbed the officer’s flashlight and presented it “in a threatening manner.” McMahon, who was never charged or prosecuted for killing Foster, went on to shoot another man, Willie McCoy, while he was sleeping his car.



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