

More black police won't result in fewer police-involved homicides of black citizens

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Hiring more black police officers is not a viable strategy for reducing police-involved homicides of black citizens in most cities, according to new Indiana University research that is the first in-depth study of this increasingly urgent public policy question.

IU researchers tested a potential solution that emerged following the [police](#) shooting of an unarmed black citizen in Ferguson, Missouri, as well as similar [homicides](#) in more than a dozen other cities. The shootings triggered nationwide "Black Lives Matter" protests and heated political debates.

The study finds that, for many cities, it would take a massive increase in the percentage of black police officers to reduce the number of police-involved shootings of black citizens. Adding just a few black officers, the researchers say, won't help and might make matters worse.

"More black officers are seen as a way to directly reduce unnecessary violence between police and citizens," said study co-author Sean Nicholson-Crotty. "We found that, for the vast majority of cities, simply increasing the percentage of black officers is not an effective solution.

"There may be other good reasons to have a police force that is more representative," he said, "but there is little evidence that more black cops will result in fewer homicides of black citizens."

The full analysis by IU researchers is presented in the article, "Will More

Black Cops Matter? Officer Race and Police-Involved Homicides of Black Citizens." It will appear in the March/April issue of *Public Administration Review* as part of a symposium on policing and race.

Until recently, no data existed that allowed a study of police homicides, according to the authors. Local law enforcement agencies have not been compelled to report deaths in custody by race, and there was no federal source for the information. To produce the first peer-reviewed study of its type, Nicholson-Crotty and co-researchers Jill Nicholson-Crotty and Sergio Fernandez, all from IU's School of Public and Environmental Affairs, used new data from two sources:

- Mapping Police Violence, an advocacy group that developed a database of police homicides in 2014 in the 100 largest American cities.
- A Washington Post collection of data on police-involved homicides in 2015.

Previous studies have examined the effect of hiring more black officers on policing outcomes such as arrests, citizen complaints and traffic stops. Findings were mixed. The studies found that greater representation reduces discrimination in some cases, has no effect in others and leads to more discrimination against black citizens in yet other situations. Furthermore, the IU researchers argue, the studies do not tell us much about the likely impact on police-involved homicides.

"Because of these inconsistent conclusions, we want to find out if there's a critical mass, a point at which the impact of more black officers on police-involved homicides changes from positive or neutral to negative," Jill Nicholson-Crotty said.

The authors found that, until the number of black officers reached between 35 percent and 40 percent of the police force, adding black

officers had no effect on the number of police-involved shootings of black citizens or was associated with a higher number of such shootings. After the number of black officers surpassed between 35 percent and 40 percent, they found, adding black officers had no effect and, in some cases, may have been associated with a lower number of police-involved shootings of black citizens.

"At that point [35 to 40 percent] and higher, individual officers may become less likely to discriminate against black citizens and more inclined to assume a minority advocacy role," Fernandez said.

The sticking point is that in Ferguson and most other places, even doubling or tripling the number of black officers won't result in a percentage as high as 35 percent to 40 percent. The authors also caution that: "In most cities, a critical mass of black officers on the police force can be achieved only by over-representing blacks and making bureaucracy even less representative of the community it serves."

They say more investigation is needed to find solutions and fully understand how questions of race affect protection of peace and administration of justice.

More information: Sean Nicholson-Crotty et al, Will More Black Cops Matter? Officer Race and Police-Involved Homicides of Black Citizens, *Public Administration Review* (2017). [DOI: 10.1111/puar.12734](https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.12734)

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