

# US police kill more than two people a day

By Patrick Martin  
1 June 2015

US police shot and killed nearly 400 people during the first five months of this year, according to a front-page report published Sunday by the *Washington Post*. The death rate from police violence against the people they allegedly “serve and protect” amounts to 2.6 per day, or about one person every nine hours. At that rate, American police will shoot to death nearly 1,000 people this year.

The *Post* study counts only victims of police gunshots, excluding those who die in police custody from other forms of violence, such as Freddie Gray in Baltimore, who died April 19 of a fractured spine after a deliberate “rough ride” in the back of a police van.

The newspaper embarked on a comprehensive, year-long survey of police shootings because there is no central record of such deaths. An FBI estimate of 1.1 shooting deaths by police per day proved to be less than half the number of killings the *Post* was able to document, using interviews, police reports, local news accounts and other sources.

The preliminary findings through the first five months of the year give a grim picture of the daily toll from police violence.

- Half of those shot to death by police were white, one third black and the remainder Hispanic or Asian. The vast majority of the victims were poor or working class.

- Half of police killings took place after police were called to intervene in a social situation like a domestic disturbance, suicide attempt, or mental breakdown, not a robbery or other crime.

- One-quarter of the victims, 92 out of 385, were described as mentally ill.

- One-sixth of the victims, 63 out of 385, were completely unarmed (49) or carrying toy weapons (14). Of these, 20 percent were shot while fleeing from police.

- Eight of the victims were children younger than 18 years old. The oldest victim was 83.

- Los Angeles police had the most fatal shootings of any department, eight since January 1.

In only three deaths out of 385, less than 1 percent, have charges been brought against the police. In each of these

cases there was video evidence against the officer who fired the shots. These include the well-publicized killing of Walter Scott, a 50-year-old black man in South Carolina, where police officer Michael Slager was caught on a cellphone camera shooting the victim in the back; the killing of Eric Harris, a 44-year-old black man, by reserve deputy Robert Bates in Oklahoma; and the killing of David Kassick, a 59-year-old white man, by officer Lisa Mearkle, who shot him twice in the back after he refused to pull over for a traffic stop in Pennsylvania.

The *Washington Post* story made headlines around the world, with many newspapers publishing excerpts of the report under headlines like “Police kill two a day in US.” Among the news outlets calling their readers’ attention to official brutality in the United States were Sputnik International (Russia), Press TV (Iran), *Daily Sabah* (Turkey), the *Manila Standard* (Philippines), the *Hindustan Times* (India), the *Toronto Star* (Canada), and the *Sydney Morning Herald* (Australia).

Since the eruption of popular protest last August over the unpunished police murder of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, and the massive, military-style repression of the protests by police and National Guard troops, press reports, and especially social media, have given the world’s population a far different—and far more accurate—understanding of the brutal reality of social relations in the United States.

And the carnage continues. On Friday night, Oklahoma highway patrol officers shot to death a man who they were supposedly rescuing after his pickup truck stalled in rising floodwaters. Two men, apparently brothers, were trying to push the truck free when the police arrived and told them to leave the vehicle and evacuate to higher ground. An argument followed. Nehemiah Fischer, 35, allegedly attacked the police and they shot him to death on the spot. The second man, Brandon Fischer, 40, was arrested and taken to Okmulgee County jail.

The same night, two Oregon State Police troopers killed a man in rural Josephine County, after responding to a domestic disturbance call. The victim, 55-year-old Robert

Box, died at Three Rivers Medical Center in Grants Pass. No details of the circumstances of the killing have yet been made public.

Also Friday, Lyndhurst, New Jersey police shot and killed 36-year-old Kevin K. Allen, an African-American man. The police claim that Allen, who had arrest warrants for failure to appear for a county work-release program, came at them with a knife after they recognized and accosted him inside the public library. This was the second fatal shooting in northeast New Jersey in 10 days, after the May 21 killing of Elvin Diaz, 24, in Hackensack, following an altercation with two cops who went to his home at the request of his probation officer.

On Thursday night, a Carrollton, Georgia police officer shot and killed a man who he claimed was reaching for a holstered gun. Police Corporal Chad Cook shot Kenneth Joel Dothard twice in the head. Dothard, a 40-year-old Air Force veteran, had two drug convictions after leaving the military, the last six years ago, and was living in a motel room at the time of his death.

Last Wednesday, Long Beach, California shot and killed a 20-year-old man after he fell through a second-story window in a drunken altercation with friends. Feras Morad was cut and bloodied when police arrived, and “continued to behave irrationally,” according to the police account, threatening the cop, who then shot him to death. Morad, a Cal State Long Beach student and champion debater in high school, was unarmed.

All these police killings took place in the week following the decision of an Ohio judge to clear police officer Michael Brelo, who fired 49 shots into the car occupied by an unarmed black man and woman, Timothy Russell, 43, and Malissa Williams, 30, in November 2012. Brelo was part of a lynch mob of more than 100 Cleveland cops who took part in the chase that ended with 137 rounds fired, all by the police. Brelo stood on the hood of the car and took the last 15 shots of the fusillade, after every other cop had ceased firing. The judge acquitted him on the spurious legal ground that it could not be determined with certainty exactly which cops had fired the 47 shots that hit the two victims.

Brelo’s exoneration is not the exception, but the rule, not only in Ohio, but everywhere in the United States. According to a report in Sunday’s *New York Times*, reviewing police shootings in Broward County, Florida, just north of Miami, since 1980, a period that covers 168 shooting deaths, no police officer has ever been charged.

The Obama administration has gone out of its way to defend the police at all levels against charges of brutality

and murder. Only three days after the exoneration of Brelo, the Justice Department announced a settlement with the Cleveland police that mandated a series of toothless “reforms” while failing to call for the prosecution of officers guilty of brutality, including the officer who shot 12-year-old Tamir Rice in Cleveland last year. The purpose of the settlement was clear: to put the administration’s stamp of approval on the exoneration of Brelo and other killer cops, while lending support to the city’s Democratic political establishment.

A week earlier, Obama himself traveled to Camden, New Jersey for a photo-op with the local police department, announcing an additional \$163 million in funding for local police forces, with a large share of the funds targeted for training police to use military hardware. Obama declared, “The overwhelming number of police officers are good, fair, honest and care deeply about their community, putting their lives on the line every day.”

Actually, according to federal reports, a total of 57 police officers (out of more than 1 million local, state and federal cops) died by violence in the line of duty in 2013, the latest year for which comprehensive statistics are available. Contrary to the claims of police apologists, that makes being a policeman one of safer occupations in America, much less dangerous than working class jobs involving physical labor in mining, manufacturing, construction, transportation or agriculture.

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