

# NATIONAL REVIEW

## How to Sustain a False Police Shooting Crisis

The facts are a mere inconvenience for progressives stoking racial conflict.

By David French — August 26, 2016

It's hard to recall a political movement built on more verifiable lies and misinformation than Black Lives Matter, which exists to advance that notion that America is in the midst of a race-motivated epidemic of police shootings. From “hands up, don't shoot” to the extraordinary claim that it's “open season” on young black men, America is awash in rhetoric and fury that is already proving to be deadly to police and deadly to black communities across the United States.

Even worse, the rhetoric persists in spite of the facts: Individual stories of police misconduct are often far more complex than activists portray, and the accumulated data shows that black men are not, in fact, facing a wave of racist police killings. For a summary of the available evidence, Heather Mac Donald's video is outstanding:

Are The Police Racist?



Yet the narrative has been fixed. The crisis must be sustained, evidence be damned.

*Vox* has an interesting feature called a “card stack,” a site dedicated to a single issue, allowing you to quickly click through specific links and educate yourself. They created a [card stack about police brutality](#) — and it is a textbook example of how the sophisticated progressive looks at racial issues. This is how the Left sustains a false racial crisis:

**Step One** — Begin with the misleading use of statistics.

After some throat-clearing about how American police use force more than police in many other countries — conveniently ignoring the fact that we also have much higher rates of violent crime than those nations — *Vox* gets right to the heart of leftist thinking about race: “There are huge racial disparities in how U.S. police use force.” The proof for that statement? Black people are a mere 13 percent of the population but comprise a whopping 31 percent of all people killed by police.

Case closed, right? If police forces were truly colorblind, they’d kill black people at the exact same rate as people from all other races, correct? Not so fast. *Vox* could have just as easily led with the statement that “there are huge racial disparities in violent-crime rates.” The numbers are staggering. As [Mac Donald relates](#), blacks “commit homicide at close to eight times the rate of whites and Hispanics combined.” In 2014 — the last full year for which statistics are available — black Americans made up a [majority](#) of those arrested for murder, robbery, and aggravated assault.

*Vox* barely mentions these inconvenient facts, noting in passing that “black Americans are much more likely to commit crime than their white counterparts,” before immediately blaming the problem on “poverty, unemployment, segregation,” and — you guessed it — the police. Under this reading, if the police aren’t actually killing black Americans at rates out of proportion to their criminality, then it’s only because the police helped create their criminality in the first place. Even exculpatory evidence indicts the police!

**Step Two** — Ignore recent, contrary evidence.

To make its case for police bias, *Vox* cites a [study](#) that purports to show that racial differences in police shootings are “not explainable as a response to local-level crime rates,” ignoring the other studies that directly contradict this conclusion. A recent, [widely reported study](#) by Harvard’s Roland G. Fryer found no racial bias in police shootings in ten major U.S. cities:

In shootings in these 10 cities involving officers, officers were more likely to fire their weapons without having first been attacked when the suspects were white. Black and white civilians involved in police shootings were equally likely

to have been carrying a weapon. Both results undercut the idea of racial bias in police use of lethal force.

It is infinitely easier to make a case when you cite only the evidence that supports your position.

**Step Three** — Throw in a dash of complete and utter nonsense.

In addition to focusing on race, *Vox* explains the frequency of police shootings by reference to the legal rules of engagement governing the use of force. “Legally, what most matters in these shootings is whether police officers reasonably believed that their or others’ lives were in danger,” they write. “Not whether the shooting victim actually posed a threat.”

Think about that statement. How, pray tell, is a police officer supposed to discern whether a shooting victim “actually” poses a threat other than through their “objectively reasonable” beliefs? How can anyone tell?

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Imagine that you are a few feet away from a man brandishing a knife. Your training tells you that he might lunge toward you and close the distance, perhaps before you could even hit him with a single shot. He refuses to put the knife down. He keeps refusing. He’s threatening to kill you.

Is he an “actual” threat?

Legally and in the real world, yes he is. He’s carrying a deadly weapon. He’s refused commands to drop the weapon. At any moment he might inflict death or serious injury on a police officer. Only God knows if he will actually lunge, and the police officer isn’t God.

**RELATED: Black Lives Matter Is Pushing Our Cities Back to the Brink**

Reformers often urge cops to focus not on what’s “legal,” but rather on what’s “preventable.” Unfortunately, since the vast majority of police shootings involve a police officer under attack or defending someone who is, one cop’s caution could mean another cop’s (or innocent civilian’s) death. At the end of the day, the officer is still going to have the right to defend himself and members of the public, and so long as he retains that right, there will be no appreciable difference in police shootings. Self-preservation is a powerful motivator.

There is not a rational person alive who disputes the notion that there are some racist police officers. (Indeed, the very study that undercuts the claim of racial bias in the use of lethal force also *supports* claims of racial bias in the use of lesser degrees of force, a finding that is deeply

concerning.) Nor is there a single rational person who believes that every use of deadly force by a police officer is justified. But it's more than a few steps too far from those realities to an entire movement built on the notion that the police — as a class — are targeting and killing black men merely because they are black.

If true, this would constitute a national crisis, one worth addressing at the highest levels of American cultural and political life. But to make the claim is not to prove the claim, and no amount of leftist “allyship” is worth torturing facts and logic to sustain a movement that increasingly seems to be based mainly on fear, deception, and media manipulation.

Lives are at stake. Yet given the choice between explaining the news and sustaining the crisis, too many journalists choose the crisis.

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