

# NATIONAL REVIEW

## Unmoored from the Facts, Leftist Police Reform Would Raise Crime Rates

When we hem in cops, criminals, obviously, enjoy greater latitude.

By David French — September 26, 2016

Last week the *Washington Post* reported, with more than a little incredulity, that police shootings are on a pace to match or possibly exceed last year's total. In other words, “even as demonstrations and anger have erupted in cities across the country in recent years, pushing this issue firmly into the national consciousness,” the police keep pulling the trigger. Why?

The answer is in the *Post*'s own data. Last year it conducted a massive study of all fatal police shootings in the United States, and it found that — surprise, surprise — in the overwhelming majority of cases, the “police were under attack or defending someone who was.” There was no wave of racist executions, no evidence of cops systematically out of control. Instead, there was evidence of hundreds of snap decisions, almost all made in moments of maximum stress — including moments when men and women in uniform thought their own lives were in danger.

Indeed, there is no reason for cops in 2016 to respond any differently to perceived threats than they did in 2015. Should they not intervene to protect lives or seek to save their own?

Yet Black Lives Matters stubbornly clings to the notion that police shootings are the result of racism — and that, nonsensically, police shootings should track the proportionate share of the total population, not the proportionate share of the *criminal* underclass. To quote the *New York Times*' Charles Blow, the problem is not so much “rogue officers” but a “rogue society.” And what's the solution? Some propose thought control.

Here's Sherrilyn Ifill, president and director-counsel of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund: “That's why we must immediately take steps to demand that local police participate in a national regime of mandatory training — including proper supervision and assessment of bias among police officers and, where necessary, discipline and removal of officers from patrol who demonstrate strong and unmanageable indicators of bias.”

But when a black officer is facing a black suspect with a gun, as reportedly happened in Charlotte, all the training in the world won't guarantee a peaceful resolution, in large part because all the training in the world won't allow a police officer to peer into the mind of a man who might shoot him in less than one second — the time it takes to raise a gun and fire.

The number of truly unjustified killings nationwide is extraordinarily small. As the *Post* noted, white officers kill unarmed black men in less than 4 percent of police shootings, and when we examine those incidents, we find that the number of truly contentious shootings drops even lower. In other words, the vast majority of police shootings are unquestionably justified. A much smaller number represent good-faith mistakes. A tiny number represent criminal acts.

Given the millions of police–citizen interactions, the risk of a fatal interaction is extraordinarily small. Comply with police demands — drop a gun, for example, or submit to arrest — and the chances of dying are close to zero. But if we adjust the balance of power between cop and criminal, granting the criminal greater freedom of action, then the costs can be staggering.

This morning, the [FBI released data](#) showing that the murder rate jumped almost 11 percent from 2014 to 2015. While the rate is still far from that of the bad old days of the early 1990s, an increase of that size represents more than 1,500 lives, many of them concentrated in cities where the police have been most under fire.

Activists often stupidly talk as if their suggested reforms would be cost-free, as if a city or a county could adjust a key part of a successful crime-fighting effort — police behavior — without affecting crime rates or the overall safety of the general public. This is foolish. Restrict police rules of engagement and you will grant the far more dangerous person, the criminal, greater latitude. If you maintain rules of engagement and yet try to change things like “unconscious bias,” you’ll intimidate officers into mouthing politically correct platitudes without doing anything at all to alter the split-second calculus that occurs when a man rushes at a cop in the dark, or when a threatening suspect won’t put down his gun or knife.

Rarely in modern history has so consequential a movement — Black Lives Matter — rested on a more preposterous series of lies. It is not “open season” on black men. There is not an epidemic of unjustified police shootings. And if activists want police actions against black men to shrink closer to their proportionate share of the population, the solution isn’t to ignore actual crime but to decrease criminality.

None of this means there aren’t corrupt cops or even corrupt departments. None of this means that the rule of law shouldn’t apply to police officers just as it does to the population. But the hard, cold realities of crime do mean that unless we want citizens to bear increasing risks and

costs from criminal behavior, then we will have to empower police officers to use their best judgment in times of ultimate distress. And when they do, some small number of men and women will die. That's sad, but it's not as sad as the much greater toll imposed when criminals, not cops, rule American streets.

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