



What is Your *Real* Hiring Pool?

[Richard R. Johnson, Ph.D.](#)

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Law enforcement agencies are often confronted about the racial makeup of their departments by members of the news media, civil rights activists, community groups, or local politicians. Often those who are criticizing police agencies compare the racial composition of the police department's employees to the racial composition of the city or county that they police. When racial minority group members make up a larger percentage of the total community population than is represented on the police department, racial discrimination in hiring practices is often alleged.

However, making a simple comparison to U.S. Census statistics is severely flawed because (1) the hiring pool of eligible applicants does not stop at the city limits, and (2) not everyone within the city limits is eligible to apply to be a law enforcement officer. The Census data, for example, include children and senior citizens who are ineligible to be police officers. It also includes people who lack a high school education, individuals who cannot speak English fluently and persons who are not U.S. citizens. Furthermore, Census data includes persons who are not in the labor force due to profound disabilities or because of institutionalization in prisons, jails, or medical or psychiatric facilities.

A more sophisticated analysis of a jurisdiction's Census data often reveals a very different picture of the racial demographics of those men and women who are actually eligible to serve as law enforcement officers. Census data already include information regarding the citizenship, English proficiency, education level, employability, veteran status, and age of the individuals surveyed. Even without the ability to exclude individuals from the Census data due to background issues such as a prior criminal history or illegal drug use, simply excluding individuals who are not U.S. citizens, lack basic English proficiency, lack the minimum education level, are institutionalized, or are too young or old to apply for a law enforcement job, can reveal striking changes in the racial composition of who is eligible to even apply for a law enforcement job.

In a 2015 article, the *New York Times* compared the racial demographics of several city law enforcement agencies with the basic Census demographics of those cities to reveal which had the greatest racial disparities.¹ The article implied that these city police departments were, at the least, insensitive to the communities they policed and, at the worst, engaged in discriminatory hiring practices to prevent minority candidates from being hired. Moreover, their analyses neglected to consider that police officer recruitment often casts a wide net and potential candidates will reside not only within the city limits, but also in the greater metropolitan area. These conclusions based on a cursory look at Census data is all too common and fails to take into account the discoverable factors that could account for what may appear to be inexplicable racial disparities in law enforcement agencies.

The material to follow will examine the statistical evidence of two major cities with large racial disparities in hiring—Baltimore and Houston—using a more common sense approach that *actually analyzes* the Census data.

Baltimore

As of 2016, Baltimore, Maryland had a population of 614,664 inhabitants, of which 63% were African-American. The police department is only 44% African-American. In other words, African-Americans are under-represented on the Baltimore police force by 19 percentage points, and Whites are over-represented on the force by 20 percentage points. This calculation, however, does not take into account the actual hiring pool for the Baltimore Police Department, which is comprised of those who meet the minimum requirements to even apply to become an officer.

According to the Baltimore Police Department's website, applicants for the position of police officer must be (among other things) a U.S. citizen, be able to speak, read, and write in English, at least 20 years and 9 months old, possess a high school diploma or GED, pass a physical agility test, pass a medical screening, and pass a mental health screening. Although the department has no established maximum age limit, it is assumed no one age 65 or older (the U.S. Social Security age for retirement) would be applying to begin a career with this department. Table 1 below displays the racial composition of all 2016 inhabitants of Baltimore, and the racial composition of the Baltimore Police Department. It then displays the racial demographics of the Baltimore inhabitants in the metropolitan area (approximately a 30-mile radius from the city center) who meet the most basic requirements to apply to become Baltimore officers. These are people who are at least age 21 and less than age 65, have at least a high school diploma or GED, are U.S. citizens (including naturalized citizens), and speak English "well," "very well," or fluently. Individuals who reported they were not in the labor force (such as due to a disability, stay-at-home parenting, early retirement, or institutionalization) were also excluded.

¹ Ashkenas, J., & Park, H. (2015). The race gap in America's police departments. *New York Times*, April 8, 2015. Retrieved from:

<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/09/03/us/the-race-gap-in-americas-police-departments.html>

Table 1. Baltimore, Maryland Estimates (2016)

	Total City Census Population ²	Baltimore P.D. Sworn Personnel ³	Eligible Census Metro Population ⁴
Number	614,664	2,952	1,126,246
African-American (non-Hispanic)	63.0%	44.0%	27.7%
White (non-Hispanic)	27.7%	48.0%	62.0%
Hispanic	4.8%	7.0%	3.5%
All Other Racial Groups	4.5%	1.0%	6.7%

Note: Census data estimates for metropolitan areas have a margin of error of approximately ± 1.9 percentage points

When examining the data for the metro area (again, 30 mile radius from the city center), only 41% of the individuals in the Census data for the metro are met these basic eligibility criteria. Table 1 reveals that even though 63% of the inhabitants of the city may be African-Americans, only 27.7% of those who met the minimum requirements to apply to be a police officer in the metropolitan area are African-Americans. This reveals that rather than being under-represented on the Baltimore police force by 19 percentage points, African-Americans are actually over-represented by over 15%. Regarding Whites, instead of being over-represented by 20 percentage points, they are actually under-represented by 14% in the pool of eligible candidates. Furthermore, Hispanics are employed by Baltimore at a rate twice as high as the proportion of Hispanics that make up those eligible to apply. In other words, when one considers those who are actually eligible to apply to be police officers in the Baltimore metropolitan area, the Baltimore Police Department appears to have done an admirable job of creating a police force that represents the racial proportions of their city.

Houston

Similar issues exist in Houston, Texas where, when compared to the total Census for the city, African-Americans are equally represented, but Hispanics are under-represented by 22 percentage points and Whites are over-represented on the police force by 27 percentage points. Once again it is important to consider who among the city's inhabitants are actually eligible to even apply for the position of law enforcement officer. Among other things, the minimum requirements for application to the Houston Police Department include a high school education and either two years of college, or prior military service, or prior service as a law enforcement officer. Houston also requires applicants to be U.S. citizens, be able to read and write in English, and be at least 20 years and six months old and no older than 44 years old. How do these basic requirements change the landscape of who in Houston is eligible to apply to be a police officer? Table 2 below reveals the results.

In order to determine the demographics of those eligible to apply to the Houston Police Department, the metro area Census data (30 mile radius from the city center) was filtered to find

² U.S. Census Bureau Data (2016)

³ Ashkenas & Park (2015)

⁴ U.S. Census Bureau Data (2016)

only the individuals who were between ages 21 and 44, were citizens, spoke English, and were either veterans or had at least 2 years of college. Persons who were not in the labor force (due to early retirement, stay-at-home parent, disability, or institutionalization) were also excluded. After filtering the Census data, only 9.9% of the individuals in the metro area met the basic requirements to apply to be a Houston police officer.

Table 2. Houston, Texas Estimates (2016)

	Total City Census Population ⁵	Houston P.D. Sworn Personnel ⁶	Eligible Census Metro Population ⁷
Number	2,303,482	5,295	662,094
African-American	22.8%	22.0%	19.5%
White (non-Hispanic)	25.1%	52.0%	50.4%
Hispanic	44.3%	22.0%	18.0%
All Other Racial Groups	7.8%	4.0%	12.1%

Note: Census data estimates for metropolitan areas have a margin of error of approximately ± 1.9 percentage points

Table 2 reveals that when comparing those that met these basic application requirements with those actually employed by the Houston P.D., Hispanics were slightly over-represented on the police force by 4 percentage points, while African-Americans and Whites were relatively on par, and all other racial groups (primarily Asians) are under-represented by 8 percentage points. Again, rather than being vilified by the press and civil rights activists, Houston should be lauded for the racial diversity it has attained in the face of fewer qualified inhabitants.

Other Considerations

While these basic estimates reveal significant racial demographic differences between the total population of a community and those who meet some basic age, educational, and employability criteria, such analyses still do not account for a host of other legitimate screening criteria. Law enforcement recruits should be free of background issues such as a criminal record or poor driving record. A number of criminological studies have indicated that, compared to other racial groups, African-Americans are over-represented among those arrested and convicted of violent crimes—increasing the proportion of African-Americans ineligible to serve as law enforcement officers.⁸ One study found that, compared to drivers of other racial groups, African-American drivers were significantly more likely to have a suspended or revoked driver’s license, or be driving without ever having obtained a license.⁹

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ashkenas & Park (2015)

⁷ U.S. Census Bureau Data (2016)

⁸ Felson, R. B., Deane, G., & Armstrong, D. P. (2008). Do theories of crime or violence explain race differences in delinquency? *Social Science Research*, 37, 624-641; Felson, R. B., & Kreager, D. A. (2015). Group differences in delinquency: What is there to explain? *Race and Justice*, 5(1), 58-87; Walker, S., Spohn, C., & Delone, M. (2011). *The Color of Justice: Race, Ethnicity, and Crime in America*. New York, NY: Wadsworth.

⁹ Regoeczi, W., & Kent, S. (2014). Race, poverty, and the traffic ticket cycle: Exploring the situational context of the application of police discretion. *Policing: An International Journal of Police Strategies and Management*, 37(1), 190-205.

Might there also be racial and ethnic differences in the proportions of individuals willing to pursue employment in law enforcement based on education and professional opportunities in the private sector? The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports reveal that as of 2016, 52% of Asian-American adults held employment in professional careers such as doctors, nurses, lawyers, accountants, engineers, scientists, university professors, and business executives. Only 40% of Whites, 30% of African-Americans, and 22% of Hispanics hold such careers.¹⁰ While only 12% of the U.S. population holds an advanced graduate degree, more than 20% of Asian-Americans hold such a degree.¹¹ **Is it realistic to expect large numbers of Asian-Americans to give up high-paying careers, for which they spent many years in college to earn, to take jobs as law enforcement officers with middle-class pay, shift work, and higher risks for danger?**

Migration patterns also can have an influence. The racial or ethnic demographic composition can sometimes change very rapidly. For example, the police in Ferguson, Missouri were derided in the media because the department lacked many African-American officers. In 1990, the city population was only 25% African-American—one-quarter of the community. In 2000, African-Americans had grown to 52% of the community, and by 2010, the city population grew to 67% African-American. Ferguson is a small city of nearly 21,000 inhabitants, and a police force of only about 45 officers. It would be unconstitutional and illegal to fire White officers, hired when the city was mostly White, once the city became majority African-American. While such a police force should take steps to increase the racial diversity of its new hires as the diversity of the city grows, 20-30 year careers prevent this transition from happening as fast as demographic shifts in the community. It would be equally inappropriate to begin laying off African-American officers in cities that become gentrified and see growths in White populations.

In 2015, while speaking at the annual conference of the International Association of Chiefs of Police, President Barack Obama stated, “Too often, law enforcement gets scapegoated for the broader failures of our society and criminal justice system.”¹² Law enforcement agencies should not be defamed or slandered for the societal circumstances that result in racial and ethnic differences in citizenship, education, age distribution, health, and career preferences.

Why You Need an Analysis

When challenged by local politicians, concerned citizens, activist groups, or the media, municipal and law enforcement leaders will need their own analysis to provide responses and develop strategies that are based upon available data. Dolan Consulting Group is available to

¹⁰ U.S. Department of Labor (2017). Retrieved from:
<https://www.bls.gov/opub/reports/race-and-ethnicity/2016/home.htm>

¹¹ Ryan, C. L., & Bauman, K. (2016). Educational attainment in the United States: 2015. Retrieved from:
<https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2016/demo/p20-578.pdf>

¹² Korte, G. (2015). Police officers too often ‘scapegoated’ for problems in society, Obama says. *USA Today*, October 27, 2015. Retrieved from:
<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2015/10/27/police-officers-too-often-scapegoated-problems-society-obama-says/74662192/>

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