



# Diversity in Police Recruiting—What Draws Members of Racial Minority Groups?

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Many law enforcement agencies today are struggling to recruit enough quality applicants to fill the law enforcement officer vacancies they currently have or will have soon. At the same time, these agencies are under increasing pressure to achieve greater racial diversity in their pool of qualified applicants. To do so, **law enforcement agencies need evidence-based information about how to increase the effectiveness of their recruiting efforts and how to attract more qualified applicants who are members of racial minority groups.**

Dolan Consulting Group (DCG) recently conducted a large survey of existing law enforcement officers from across the nation in order to determine what factors influenced them to pursue a law enforcement career. Specifically, **we surveyed 1,673 law enforcement officers, knowing that all of these participants had already successfully become law enforcement officers, proving they have the necessary backgrounds and skills to successfully gain employment as law enforcement officers.** We were interested in determining what factors influenced these officers to choose their current profession. **We examined if any significant differences existed in their answers between officers of different racial / ethnic groups.**

## The Sample

All sworn law enforcement officers who attended the various training courses offered by DCG between August 2018 and March 2019 were given the opportunity to participate in our *DCG Police Recruiting and Hiring Survey*. A total of 1,673 sworn personnel took the survey, of which 286 (17.1%) were female and 1,387 (82.9%) were male. The racial composition of the respondents were 83.4% White (non-Hispanic), 6.8% African-American, 5.4% Hispanic, 1.4% Multiracial, 1.0% Native American, 0.4% Asian, and 1.6% all other groups. In terms of highest education level, 30.8% had less than an associate's degree, 18.2% had an associate's degree, and 51% had a bachelor's degree or higher. A total of 52.8% of the respondents held the rank of officer, deputy, or trooper, while another 10.0% held the rank of detective. About 23.0% held first-line supervisory ranks (corporal or sergeant), 4.5% held middle-management ranks (mostly lieutenants), and the remaining 9.7% held command staff ranks (captain or higher). Approximately 65% of the respondents were assigned to the patrol division of their agency, while 14% were assigned to investigations, and 14% to command or administration. The

remaining 7% indicated other assignments such as training, community policing unit, or media relations. These respondents came from 49 different states and agencies ranging in size from less than a dozen officers to agencies with thousands of officers.

### Reasons for Selecting the Career

The survey respondents were presented with a list of 17 factors that might have influenced them to pursue a career in law enforcement. The respondents were asked to reflect on their own lives and indicate if each of these factors played a role in shaping their decision to become a law enforcement officer. For each of these 17 factors, the respondents were to indicate their level of agreement (from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*) on the extent to which each factor influenced their career choice decision. As revealed in our earlier article published on July 9, 2019, [\*Why do People Become Cops?\*](#), only seven of these factors played a notable role with 25% or more of the sample saying these factors were an influence. The remaining ten factors were each identified by less than a quarter of the respondents. Therefore, we focused on these seven most important factors which are displayed in Table 1 below.

**Table 1. Reasons for Selecting a Law Enforcement Career (Entire Sample)**

Reason	Percent Agreed or Strongly Agreed
Wanted a career with interesting or exciting work	77.9%
Wanted to help people or serve society	68.0%
Saw the police at work in my community and interacting with citizens	44.6%
Knowing an officer personally (family, friend, neighbor, etc.)	42.8%
Seeing injustice in the world and wanting to correct it	41.3%
Having a friend or family member recommends the career	35.0%
Seeing popular media portrayals of police work (TV, movies, etc.)	26.7%

### Racial Group Differences

The three largest racial / ethnic groups among the survey respondents were Non-Hispanic Whites (1,395 respondents), African-Americans (114 respondents), and Hispanics (90 respondents). The remaining 74 respondents were spread out across five more categories, including multiracial, so the analysis was limited to only the three categories with substantial numbers of respondents—Whites, African-Americans, and Hispanics. The responses of the participants in the survey are displayed by race within Table 2 below. **As Table 2 reveals, some notable racial differences were found when it comes to why individual respondents pursued a career in law enforcement.**

More than two-thirds of the respondents in each of the three groups selected a career in law enforcement because it was interesting / exciting work, but responses differed by race for several of the other influences. While a strong majority of all three groups indicated they were drawn to the career by a desire to help people and serve society, **the African-American respondents**

ranked this desire to help people much higher than did White or Hispanic respondents. This difference was statistically significant. Placed into context, this means that out of every 100 white officers, about 68 indicated they selected the career to help people, and about 71 out of every 100 Hispanic officers did as well. Out of every 100 African-American officers, however, about 83 indicated they chose their career to help people or service society.

**Table 2. Reasons for Selecting a Law Enforcement Career by Race / Ethnicity**

Reason	White Percent Agreed or Strongly Agreed	African-A merican Percent Agreed or Strongly Agreed	Hispanic Percent Agreed or Strongly Agreed
Wanted a career with interesting or exciting work	78.0%	75.0%	73.0%
Wanted to help people or serve society	67.5%	83.3%	70.7%
Saw the police at work in my community and interacting with citizens	45.7%	38.9%	47.8%
Knowing an officer personally (family, friend, neighbor, etc.)	43.6%	40.0%	37.5%
Seeing injustice in the world and wanting to correct it	39.4%	58.2%	50.0%
Having a friend or family member recommends the career	36.1%	34.6%	22.7%
Seeing popular media portrayals of police work (TV, movies, etc.)	25.9%	38.2%	23.8%

Compared to Whites and Hispanics, the **African-American respondents were less likely to be drawn to the career by seeing the police at work in their community or interacting with these officers. Perhaps this suggests a greater need for outreach and citizen interactions by beat officers working in predominantly black neighborhoods.** This difference, however, was not statistically significant.

**Compared to Whites, the African-American and Hispanic respondents were much more likely to say they chose their career to correct injustices in society.** About 40 out of every 100 White officers indicated this was an influence, compared to 50 out of every 100 Hispanic officers and 58 out of every 100 African-American officers. This difference was statistically significant. Compared to Whites and African-Americans, the Hispanic respondents were less likely to indicate they selected their career due to a recommendation from a friend or family member.

Our results also revealed that, compared to Whites and Hispanics, the African-American respondents were more likely to have been influenced by popular media portrayals of the law enforcement career (i.e., television shows and movies). In terms of advertising mediums, this finding reveals important racial and ethnic differences. According to a large study published by the Nielson ratings organization in 2014, African-American households generally watched more

television as compared to White, Hispanic, and Asian households. According to that study, the form of entertainment media most consumed by African-American households was traditional television (cable, dish, or antenna). Among Hispanic households, the most consumed media was radio. Among White and Asian households, the form most consumed was Internet content.<sup>1</sup> Recruiting efforts may benefit from strategically targeting these media forms with advertising about the career, with advertising content targeting each group by the media source.

## Conclusion

**Our findings suggest that there are noteworthy differences between racial / ethnic groups in what influenced their decision to become law enforcement officers.** The primary motives for pursuing the career for all racial groups was a desire to do interesting work and help people, but the “helping people” part was a markedly stronger influence for African-Americans as compared to other groups. African-American and Hispanic officers were also found to be more attracted to fighting societal injustice than were White officers. Recruiting messages directed toward minority groups should emphasize these aspects of the job.

**As White officers were more likely to have known a law enforcement officer personally, and have someone in their life recommend the career, this also suggests we need to be more proactive in establishing personal relationships with members of minority communities and encouraging qualified individuals from those communities to consider the profession.**

Interestingly, African-Americans also appeared more likely to have been drawn to the career by entertainment media portrayals of the career field. The law enforcement profession can lobby for positive entertainment media portrayals of the law enforcement career, especially featuring African-American officers. Nielsen research has also revealed that radio is one of the most effective ways to reach the Hispanic community, so recruiting efforts targeting this segment of the population should include radio advertising.<sup>2</sup>

**It is obviously difficult to lump *all* African-Americans or *all* Hispanic-Americans in one uniform group without recognizing that individual motivations vary for reasons that have nothing to do with race. However, as agencies struggle to find a more diverse pool of qualified applicants, evidence-based strategies seem much more likely to succeed, rather than those based on purely anecdotal examples.**

## References

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<sup>1</sup> Nielsen Corp (2014). *The Total Audience Report, December 2014*. New York, NY: Nielson.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.