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ABSTRACT

In 2015, over 1,000 people in the United States were killed by police and law enforcement officers, leading some to question not only the necessity of lethal force, but also potential prejudicial motivations of law enforcement officers. For example, over 26% of fatality victims had a race listed as black, while roughly 12% of the national population is black. This may be indicative of racial bias on the national scale, but does not take into account whether the racial and ethnic makeup of victims is proportional to the racial and ethnic composition at finer scales where fatalities occur, raising issues of scale dependency that aren’t often considered by reporting agencies and the media. For this research, geospatial techniques and chi-squared analysis were used to test for statistical significance of racial bias in police-caused fatalities at multiple scales. A database of police and law enforcement fatalities occurring in 2015 was used to investigate racial bias at the state, county, census tract, and block group levels,. Preliminary research has revealed that fatalities do not occur independently of race and ethnicity at the national level, but that this pattern isn’t necessarily consistent at finer scales. Results of this study will aid in identifying problematic areas at appropriate scales and moving toward conflict resolution in places that may have systemic racial bias among law enforcement officers.