

Officer-Involved Shootings in Fresno, California: Frequency, Fatality, and Disproportionate Impact

Introduction

Since the late 1990s, there have been almost 200 officer-involved shootings by officers from the Fresno Police Department.¹ The victims in these shootings are overwhelmingly Black and Latino.² Many community members perceive that Fresno police officers fire their guns too willingly, and that a lack of accountability for police officers involved in shootings and transparency in the investigations have severely damaged the relationship between residents and the department, erasing trust in the police in many of Fresno's more vulnerable communities.³ While communities that are heavily impacted by the frequency of officer-involved shootings in Fresno perceive their neighborhoods to be over-policed, Fresno officers have maintained that implicit biases have not led to over-policing of minority, low-income neighborhoods.

To provide context for the frequency, fatality, and disproportionate impact of officer-involved shootings in Fresno, I will be using several mapping tools to answer the following questions:

- Do officer-involved shootings disproportionately impact communities of color, specifically Black and Latino communities?
- Are officer-involved shootings more frequent in low-income communities?
- Are officer-involved shootings clustered in specific areas throughout Fresno?
- Are specific neighborhoods in Fresno statistically more likely to experience officer-involved shootings?

Officer-Involved Shootings: Frequency, Fatality, and Disproportionate Impact

Officer-involved shootings refer to any incident in which a police officer fires his or her handgun outside of a training exercise. The term, therefore, includes any incident in which an officer fires a gun, regardless of the reason or the outcome of the shooting.

Fresno police officers are involved in shootings at a rate that is 1.8 times more frequent than the Los Angeles Police Department, despite the fact that Los Angeles is eight times the size of Fresno.⁴ In 2015, Fresno's rate of officer-involved shootings was 27 percent higher than Los Angeles's, per 100,000

¹ Coleman, N. (2016). Fresno Police Department OIS ICD and Use of Force Incidents. Unpublished internal document, *American Civil Liberties Union of Northern California*.

² *Ibid.*

³ Rocha, V. (2016, July 5). Teen's father contends Fresno police have a 'culture' of shooting unarmed people. *Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved from: <http://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-fresno-police-dylan-noble-20160715-snap-story.html>

⁴ Coleman, N. (2016 March). Do Fresno Police Have a Secrecy Problem? *American Civil Liberties Union*. Retrieved November 17, 2016, from <https://www.aclunc.org/blog/do-fresno-police-have-secrecy-problem>

residents.^{5,6} The toll of these shootings has been especially high in communities of color; in 2014 Black and Latino people accounted for 70 percent of officer-involved shooting victims in Fresno.⁷

Not only is the frequency of shootings high, the outcomes of shootings are disproportionately fatal. According to data collected by police use of force advocacy organizations, the Fresno police department killed more people in 2014 than in any other city in California except for Los Angeles.⁸ Between 2010 and 2014, the Fresno Police Department had a per capita rate of more than 2 fatal officer-involved shootings per 100,000 residents.⁹ Per 100,000 residents, the Fresno police department had more than three times the number of fatal officer-involved shootings than Los Angeles in 2014.¹⁰ In 2015, the Fresno Police Department had nearly double the Los Angeles Police Department's per capita rate of fatal officer-involved shootings.¹¹ And between 1997 and 2010, Black and Latino people accounted for more than 65 percent of the people killed in officer-involved shooting whose race or ethnicity was recorded.¹²

Data

This project uses the following data:

- 2015 U.S. Census Bureau Data, Percentage of Hispanic Residents in Fresno
- 2015 U.S. Census Bureau Data, Percentage of Black Residents in Fresno
- 2015 U.S. Census Bureau Data, Percentage of White Residents in Fresno
- 2015 U.S. Census Bureau Data, Median Income Levels in Fresno
- 2006-2016 Fresno Police Department, Officer-Involved Shooting Data (retrieved through Public Records Act Request)

This project uses the following shapefiles:

- 2016 Fresno Police Department, District Boundaries
- 2015 U.S. Census Tract shapefile (clipped to Fresno Police Dept. District Boundaries)

Fresno: Officer-Involved Shootings

The following map shows a general representation of where officer officer-involved shootings have occurred between 2006 and 2016, separated by police district boundaries. This indicates that officer-involved shootings throughout the last decade have occurred throughout south Fresno, the police department's central and southern districts.

⁵ Los Angeles Police Department. (2016). LAPD Use of Force Year-End Review Executive Summary 2015. *Los Angeles Police Department*. Retrieved from: <http://assets.lapdonline.org/assets/pdf/UOF%20Executive%20Summary.pdf>

⁶ Coleman, *op. cit.* 1.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Mapping Police Violence. (n.d.). City Comparison Tool. *Mapping Police Violence*. Retrieved from: <http://mappingpoliceviolence.org/cities/>; Coleman, *op. cit.* 1.

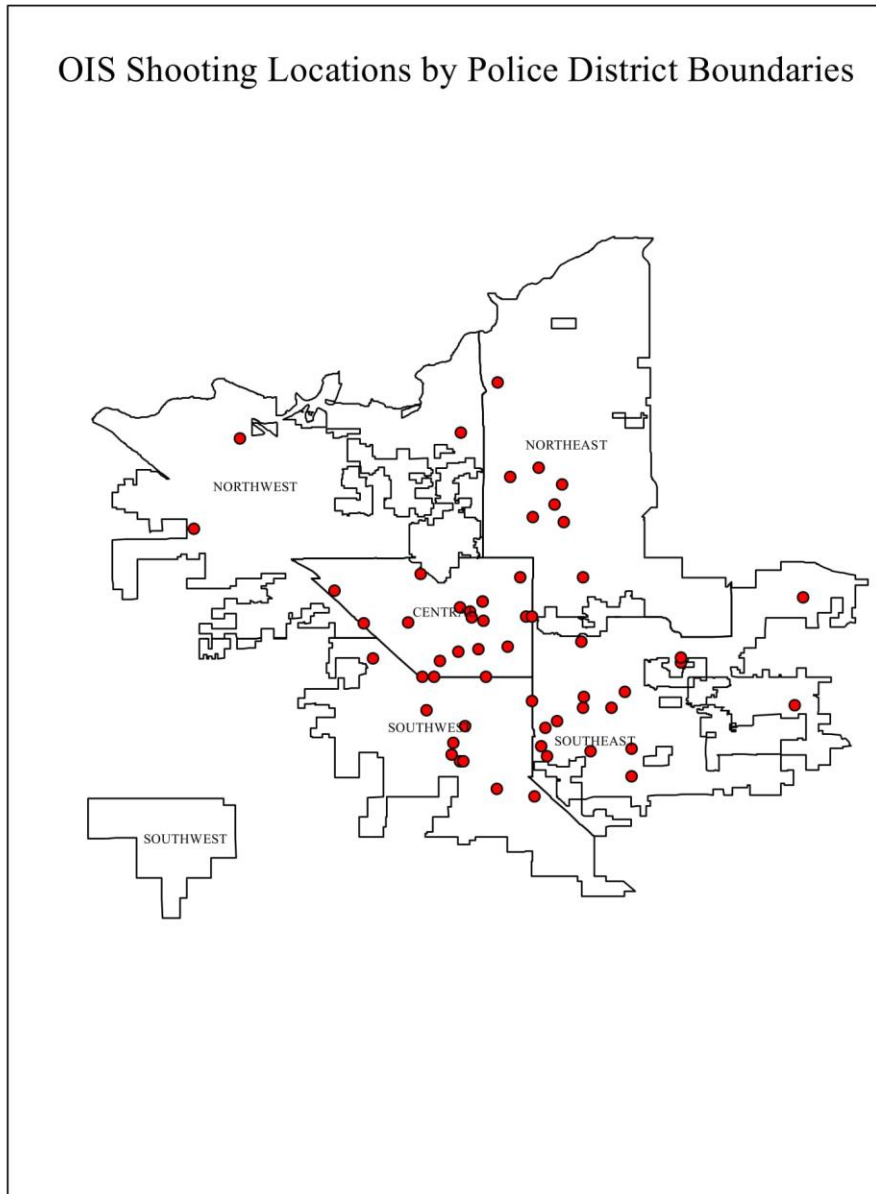
⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Mapping Police Violence, *op. cit.* 11.; Coleman, *op. cit.* 1.

¹¹ Los Angeles Police Department, *op. cit.* 8; Coleman, *op. cit.* 1.

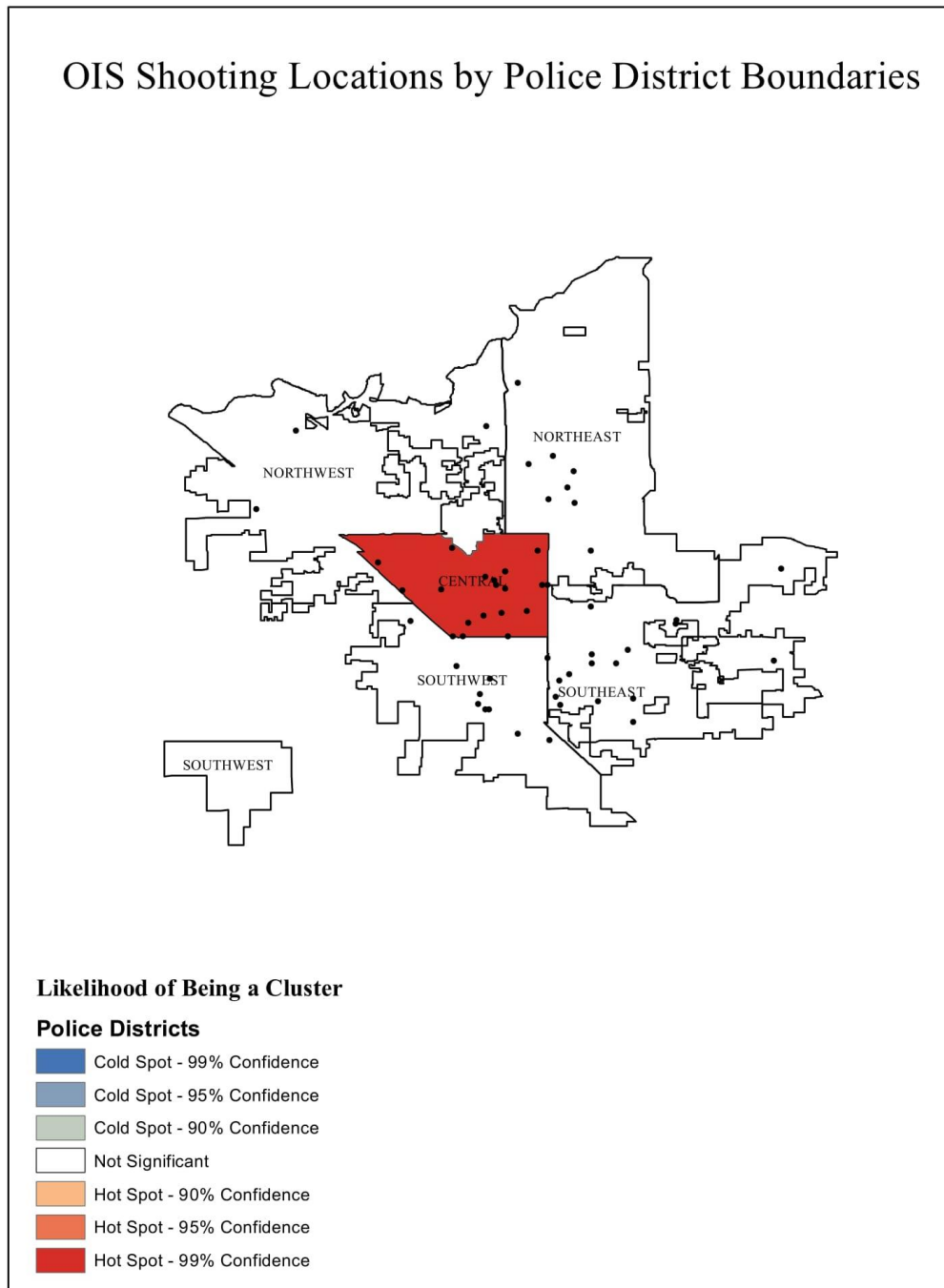
¹² Coleman, *op. cit.* 1.

OIS Shooting Locations by Police District Boundaries



The next map shows the results of a statistical analysis to see if specific areas in Fresno are more likely to experience officer-involved shootings. One area of Fresno presents as a statistically significant hot spot for officer-involved shootings. In order to identify if these incidents of officer-involved shootings represent a cluster, a spatial analysis was conducted. The spatial statistics method uses a fixed-band to identify if there is a relationship between incidents and specific areas. The fixed-band allows each police boundary to be compared at a consistent scale of analysis to determine whether or not certain districts are more likely to experience officer-involved shootings relative to their size in relationship to neighboring boundaries. Police boundary districts with a disproportionately high or low number of officer-involved shootings, are flagged as being clusters with accompanying likelihood of experiencing an officer-involved shooting. The analysis provides a localized understanding of the spatial relationship

between places and officer-involved shootings as it allows for identification of areas where it is likely or unlikely to have an officer-involved shooting.

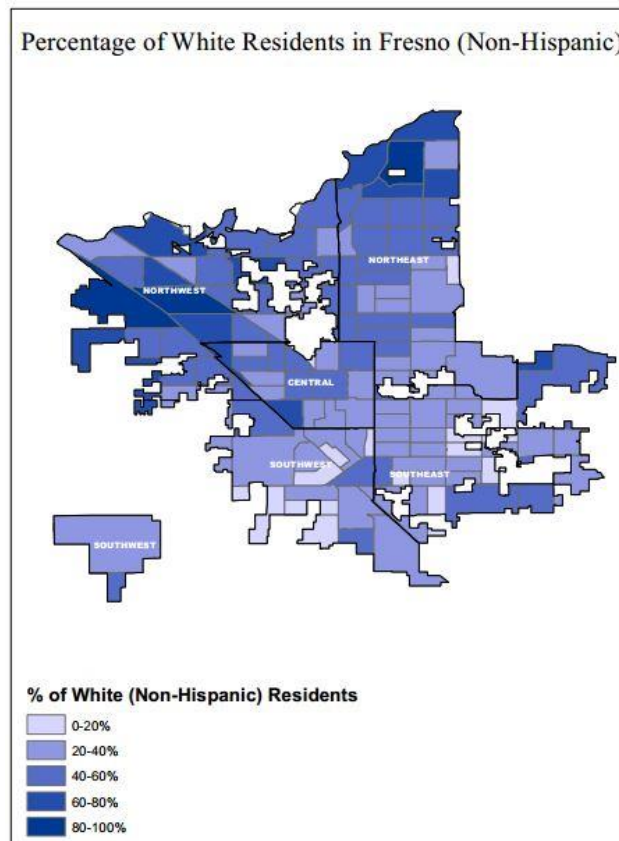


This particular block has one of the lowest median household income levels and some of the highest shares of Black and Hispanic residents. This area is positively correlated with incidents of officer-involved shootings at the highest confidence level. This indicates a nonrandom relationship between those communities and officer-involved shootings; residents of this census block group are at a much greater risk of exposure to officer-involved shootings than anyone else within Fresno.

Fresno: A Tale of Two Cities

The fifth largest city in California, Fresno is a racially and ethnically diverse city; 60 percent of residents belong to a racial or ethnic minority group.¹³ The city is also one of the poorest in California, as approximately half of all Fresno residents have family incomes that fall below 200 percent of the federal poverty line.¹⁴ The income gap between rich and poor residents in Fresno is also higher than the gap that exists statewide.¹⁵ Fresno's demographics make it particularly vulnerable to the effects of officer-involved shootings as the impact of officer-involved shootings are magnified in low-income communities of color, where trust is lower for police officers than wealthier communities.¹⁶ Throughout this section, any reference to White residents in Fresno refers to residents that identify as White, non-Hispanic; any reference made to Hispanic residents refers to those that identify as non-White, Hispanic. Data for these maps reflects these distinctions.

Residents of Fresno perceive north Fresno to be where wealthier, White families live.¹⁷ An analysis of census data indicates that that belief is well founded.¹⁸ The following map shows the percentage of the population of a census block group that identify as being White alone.



¹³ United States Census Bureau. (2015). *2010-2014 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Table B19013. United States Census Bureau*. Retrieved from: <http://factfinder.census.gov/>

¹⁴ California HealthCare Foundation. (2009, July). Fresno: Poor Economy, Poor Health Stress an Already Fragmented System. *California Health Care Almanac*. Retrieved from: <http://www.chcf.org/resources/download.aspx?id={C8FBE756-A6A7-4D67-801E-5F36F591B36D}>

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

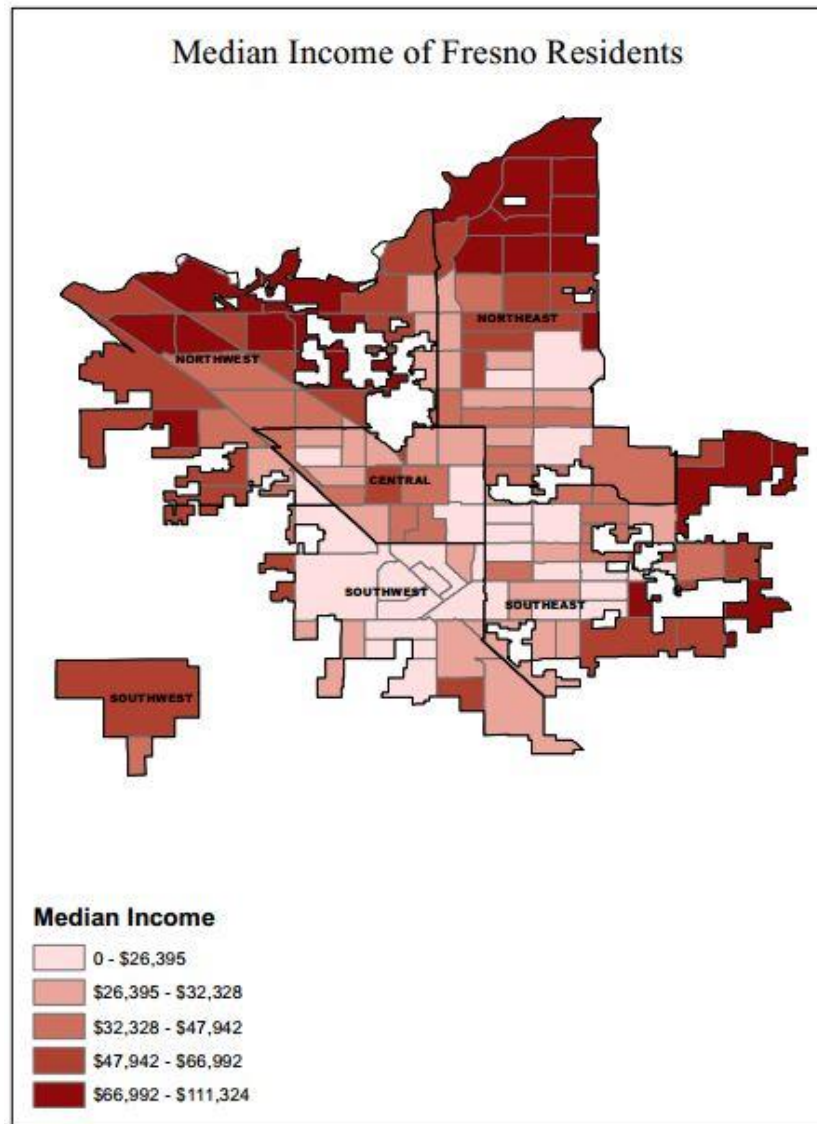
¹⁶ Newport, F. (2016, July 8). Public Opinion Context: Americans, Race and Police. *Gallup*. Retrieved from: <http://www.gallup.com/opinion/polling-matters/193586/public-opinion-context-americans-race-police.aspx>

¹⁷ Faith in Community. (2017, February 4). Personal interview with organizational representatives.

¹⁸ U.S. Census Bureau (2016). *Hispanic or Latino Origin By Race, 2010-2015 American Community Survey 5-year estimates*. Retrieved from: <https://factfinder.census.gov>

The highest concentration of White residents are located in north Fresno, with many blocks having two-thirds or more, between 80-100%, of their residents identifying as being non-Hispanic Whites. The communities within south Fresno have by far the lowest share of White residents, with many blocks having less than 20 percent of their population identifying as being non-Hispanic Whites; some blocks have no White residents at all.

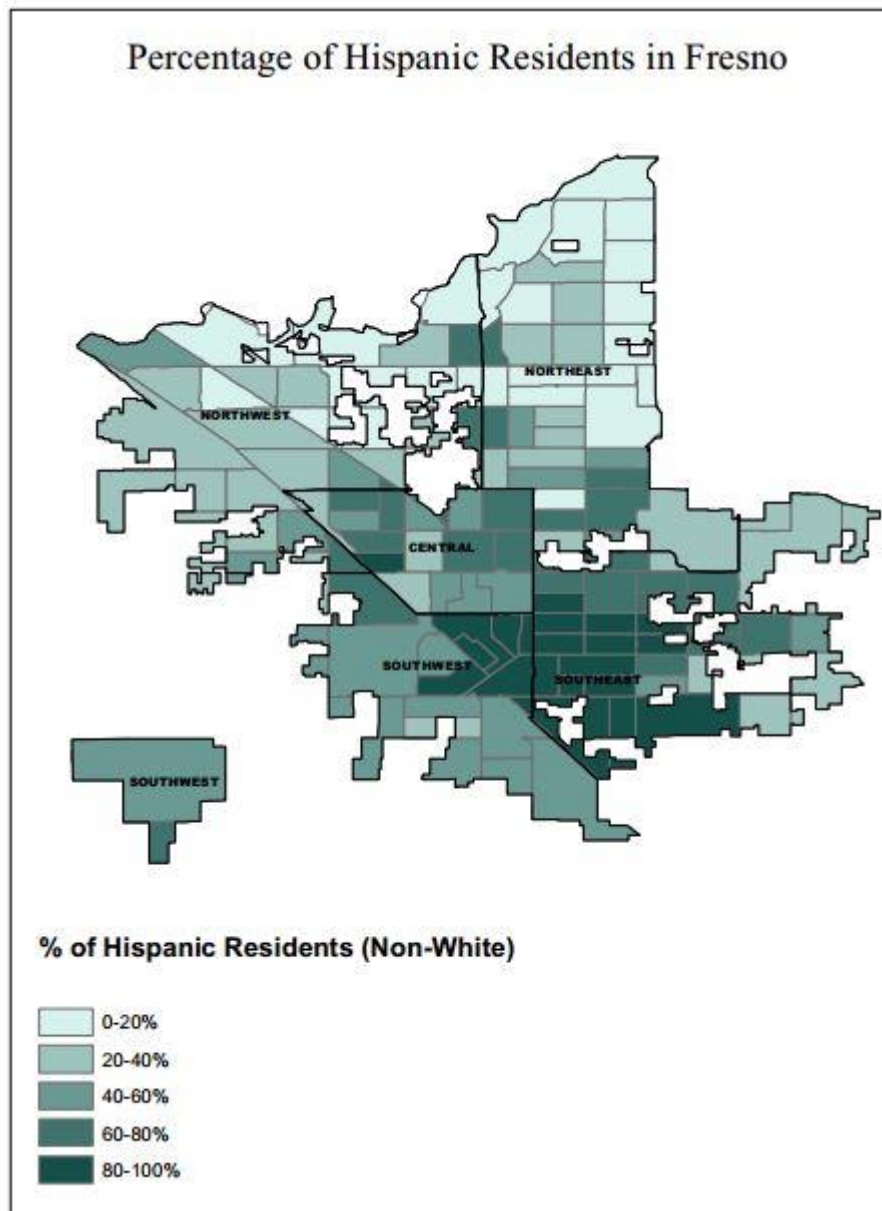
The following map displays the median household income by census block group.¹⁹

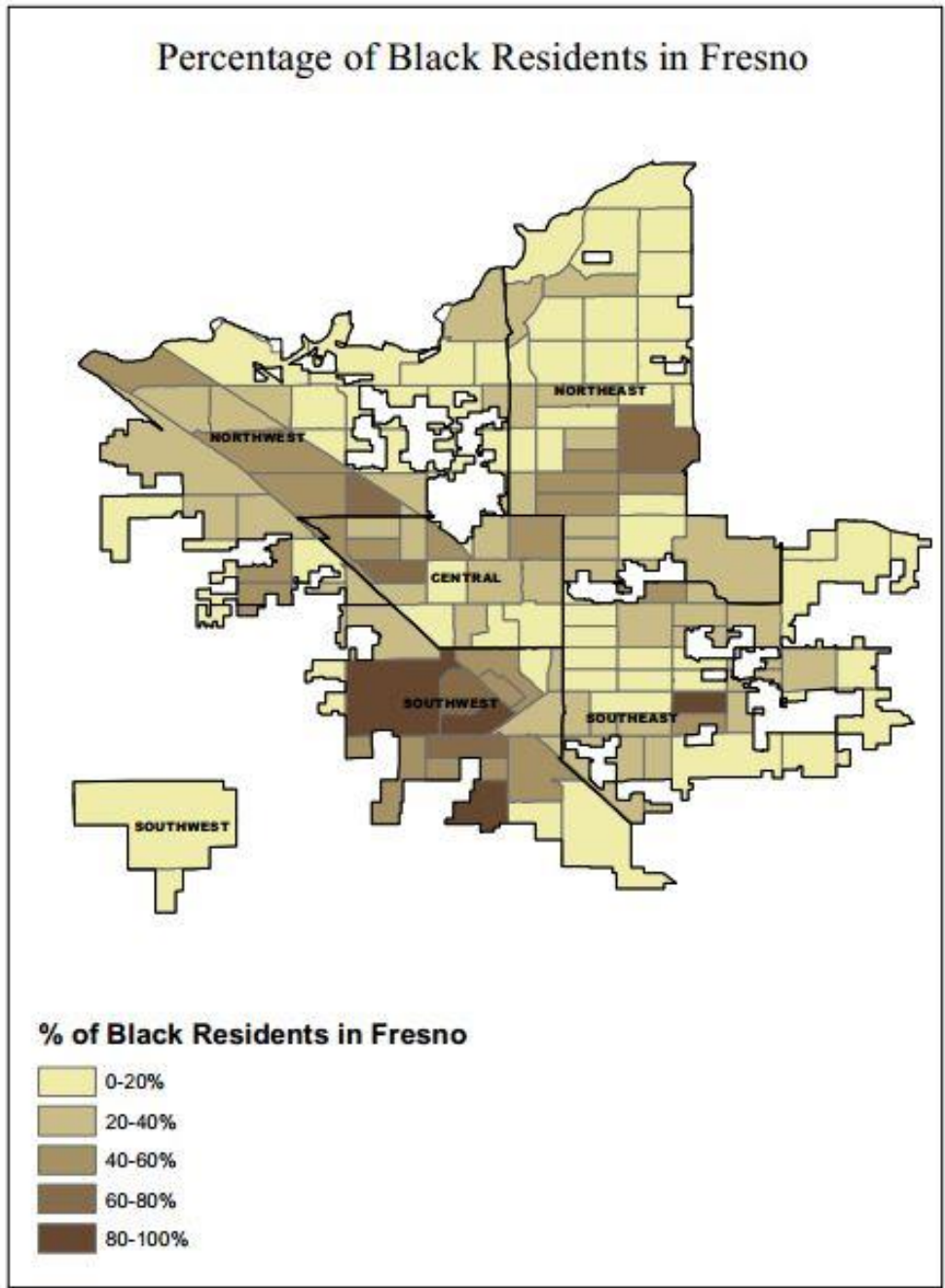


The census block groups with the highest concentration of White residents also have some of the highest median incomes in the city. These block groups have household incomes well above Fresno's median income; some block groups in Fresno have median incomes more than three times as high as the city's median income, indicating that more than half of the households in those block groups earn more than triple the income of half of all Fresno households.

¹⁹ U.S. Census Bureau (2016). *Median Household Income in the Past 12 Months (in 2015 Inflation Adjusted Dollars), 2010-2015 American Community Survey 5-year estimates*. Retrieved from: <https://factfinder.census.gov>

South Fresno is notably different from north Fresno. The next two maps display the percentage of the population for each census block group that identify as either Hispanic (non-White) or non-Hispanic Black.





Both groups are heavily concentrated in south Fresno, with some census block groups having as much as 80-100% percent of their population identifying as Hispanic. Much of south Fresno is composed overwhelmingly of Black and Hispanic residents. Some of these census block groups have no White residents at all.

This particular block has one of the lowest median household income levels and some of the highest shares of Black and Hispanic residents. This area is positively correlated with incidents of officer-involved shootings at the highest confidence level. This indicates a nonrandom relationship between those communities and officer-involved shootings; residents of this census block group are at a much greater risk of exposure to officer-involved shootings than anyone else within Fresno.

Fresno is a city characterized by division. North and south Fresno are composed of notably different communities, with vastly different racial, ethnic, and economic makeups. These different communities

differ greatly in their exposure to officer-involved shootings. North Fresno, particularly its Whitest and wealthiest areas, are less likely than anywhere else within the city limits to be exposed to an officer-involved shooting. South Fresno, including its poorest communities, are much more likely to be exposed to officer-involved shootings. Community members report that there is a significant difference between how residents of north and south Fresno perceive the police, an outcome that is not unlikely when such strong spatial disparities exist.²⁰

Project Limitations

While this project describes race and income demographics in Fresno, it has the potential to describe further analysis, particularly the relationship between the deployment of Fresno officers and the locations of officer-involved shootings. However, after several Public Records Act requests, data for the deployment of officers was unobtainable which did not allow for analysis of the relationship between deployment and officer-involved shootings.

Data

While there have been over 200 officer-involved shootings since the 1990's in Fresno and over 100 between 2006 and 2016, the data obtained through PRA requests for officer-involved shootings in Fresno only provide information on 90 shootings. This is because the Fresno Police Department does not consistently collect information on officer-involved shootings and thus, some officer-involved shootings are not associated with clear addresses. For example, over 20 shooting addresses are identified as occurring at the intersections such as Clover and Fresno. However, there are several streets, avenues, and boulevards with the name Fresno, coupled with direction indicators like north, south, east, and west. By not clearly identifying these addresses, it is impossible to accurately guess which intersection these shootings occurred. Consequently, shootings with unclear locations were dropped from this study which results in a sample size of only 60 officer-involved shootings. As a result, the data included in this project is not exhaustive and does not fully capture the impact of officer-involved shootings.

Spatial Analysis

Because of the small sample size that came because of inconsistent reporting from the Fresno Police Department, the spatial analysis is limited and could be more robust and accurate with a larger sample size. While the spatial analysis showed one police district as being statistically significant for officer-involved shootings, the presence of more officer-involved shootings in neighboring boundaries could decrease the level of significance of being involved in a shooting in Fresno police's Central district. Consequently, the spatial analysis results are likely skewed more than necessary because of limited data.

²⁰ Faith in Community, *op. cit.* 1.