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<div align="center">Arrest-Related Deaths in Florida, 2010-2019</div>

<div align="center">Final Project Rationale and Reflection</div>

Introduction

This infographic document explores the issue of arrest-related deaths (ARDs) in Florida from 2010-2019 by examining the number of deaths per year, the causes of death, and the officer's intended use of force. The document is designed with the general public in mind: individuals who represent a range in demographics, ideology, and life experience. The charts are created to be concise and easy to understand; they have the potential to provide supporting evidence in an article about the frequency, causes, impact, and prevention of ARDs. It was important to create an informative document that enhances reader's conversations (Cairo 188), whether they be engaged in police reform, defenders of current law enforcement practices, advocates for vulnerable populations, or supporters of law enforcement transparency.

Topic Selection

The coverage of police-involved deaths by news media, community organizers, and politicians is often biased, divisive, and emotional. This document is a way to research these incidents in an attempt to better understand trends in data. I was curious whether ARDs were a "red car" phenomenon: were there truly more instances of police-involved deaths, or did it only appear to happen more frequently as I began paying more attention? (The answer is both. As of November 24, 2020, there were 142 deaths—a 33% increase from 2019.) The charts are designed to inform and present patterns in the data, but as Cairo states, "a chart shows only what it shows, and nothing

else" (154). The purpose of this document, ultimately, is to engage the reader so that they can ask more questions and participate in more conversations.

Data Selection

The data selection process revealed one of the first problems: there is no centralized database of arrest-related deaths. The Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) has the potential to be this source, but they are not equipped to supply this level of data at this time. The BJS defines arrest-related deaths as the death of a person either

> during the process of arrest or while in the custody of state or local law enforcement
>
> personnel… civilian deaths caused by any use of force by state or local law enforcement
>
> personnel as well as those not directly related to actions of law enforcement, such as deaths
>
> attributed to suicide, intoxication, accidental injury, illness, or natural causes.
>
> ("Arrest-Related Deaths")

This definition includes individuals who die as a result of an interaction with law enforcement officers, regardless of whether the individual was presumed innocent, guilty, armed, or unarmed.

After the Death in Custody Reporting Act of 2000, the BJS began collecting self-reported information from agencies nationwide, but by 2011 the Bureau determined that the data did not meet data quality standards. As recently as 2019, the BJS has made efforts to improve the standardization of their data collection methodology, leaving a reliable data source yet to be found for this document.

Several factors were important in the search for a data set: reports going back at least ten years, a broad definition of arrest-related deaths similar to the BJS definition, and a transparent methodology. The most reliable and robust data sets come from journalists, non-profit organizations, and community activists: potential sources for the document included *Mapping Police Violence*, the *U. S. Police Shooting Database*, and the *Washington Post*.

After considering the most important factors and evaluating possible sources, the selected data set comes from *Fatal Encounters*. Site author D. Brian Burghart uses paid researchers, public records, and crowdsourced data to create a database of police-involved deaths going back to 2000. The database meets many of Few's characteristics of meaningful data (Ferster 72-73): the records are updated frequently, are freely available, and include a comprehensive look at every incident of the 29,216 deaths between January 1, 2000, and November 24, 2020 (to date). Every incident is verified and includes data about age, race, date, and location of injury, agency involved, cause of death, the intended use of force, supporting document link, and a brief description. I narrowed the scope of data to incidents occurring from 2010-2019 in the state of Florida, the cause of death, and the officer's intended use of force.

Conversations about police-involved deaths often include the inherent risks that law enforcement officers face in the line of duty. Officers indeed find themselves in dangerous or unknown situations, and I was curious how often officers died in the line of duty. As a way to address this particular argument and provide context for the number of ARDs, figures from the FBI's annual report of Law Enforcement Officers Killed and Assaulted (LEOKA) are included in the year-over-year line graph.

For my reference, I went to the Florida Department of Law Enforcement site to find information about crime totals, the number of arrests made, and population changes from 2010-2019. I wanted to put the ARD and LEOKA figures into context by examining the full scope of crime in Florida. Crime and arrests make up a small percentage of the population, and ARDs make up a small percentage—between 0.01 and 0.02%—of crime and arrests. Given this finding, it did not seem appropriate to add the total crime figures to the document. The volume of total crime and the instances of ARDs are on different scales of magnitude and attempting to draw comparisons

would detract from the focus of the infographic. While the arrest totals are not included in a chart, there is a note in the introduction stating the rate of ARDs compared to arrests.

Design Process

Arrest-related deaths is a complex topic, and there are countless ways to dissect the data. The initial draft included four visualizations of nationwide ARD data: a line graph showing the change of ARDs year over year; a donut chart showing demographic data; a map and bubble chart illustrating the distribution of ARDs by state; and a treemap outlining the cause of death. *Fatal Encounters* supplied each of these data points, but after collecting and graphing the data, the infographic appeared unfocused.

In order to improve the effectiveness of the document, the scope was narrowed from the entire nation to the state of Florida. As mentioned previously, additional context was included in the line graph by showing the number of law enforcement officers killed every year.

I also re-examined the narrative of the document. Rather than building a profile of the victims, the charts outline the incident itself by providing visualizations of the cause of death and the officer's intended use of force. The final document includes three graphs: Comparison of Individuals Killed versus Law Enforcement Officers Killed, Cause of Death for Individuals Killed, and Officer's Intended Use of Force.

Comparison of Individuals Killed versus Law Enforcement Officers Killed

Over the past ten years, the number of arrest-related deaths increased. Since 2016, there have been more than 100 civilian deaths per year. To compare, fewer than 10 law enforcement officers have been killed annually during the same period. Considering that officers interact with civilians more often than civilians interact with officers, this comparison suggests that an individual is more likely to die in an arrest scenario than the other way around.

Cause of Death for Individuals Killed

More than 76% of individuals killed were killed by gunshot. Vehicles were the second-leading cause of death, at 17%. The remaining deaths are attributed to a variety of causes, including tasering, drowning, falling, medical emergency, and being restrained.

Officer's Intended Use of Force

Comparing the cause of death with the intended use of force yields points of inquiry that can be further explored in the *Fatal Encounters* database. From there it is possible to see correlations, for example: of the 732 deaths attributed to deadly force, 731 of these were due to gunshot. There are many details, however, that can be teased out of the database but are not evident in the charts. There are 23 deaths where officers report no use of force used: 10 were instances of individuals fleeing the police and drowning, and the remaining 13 include a variety of situations, including a medical emergency, drug overdose, and murder/suicide. The purpose of the document is to reveal patterns and initiate further conversation, and it has been challenging to accept the reality that not all questions can be answered with a few graphs.

This subject matter is complicated, nuanced, and serious; the intention behind a simple color palette and sans-serif typeface is to draw the reader in so that they are more likely to "interact with [the charts], to understand its meaning, or to extract information" (Ferster 121). The primary focus is the three charts that occupy most of the page. Each chart is accompanied by a summary of the findings. The introduction defines ARDs, puts the subject into context, and informs the reader how they can find more information. Rather than forcing a specific perspective, I thought it best to present the data honestly and allow the reader to form their own conclusions.

Problems Encountered

The first problem encountered was finding reliable data. The Bureau of Justice Statistics offered a promising start until I saw that they suspended ARD data collection in 2014. If the federal government did not have a centralized dataset for reporting, then the information would come from another source. Evaluating multiple sources allowed me to refine the factors that would be important for this document. The decision to use a broad definition of ARDs, for example, removed databases that only accounted for shootings.

The next problem was analyzing the data and deciding how to visualize the information. I chose this topic because it is something I am curious about, and the more I learned the more questions I had. Defining and maintaining narrative focus throughout the document design process was challenging as I developed more questions as time went on. The tension between the question and the visualization has been an underlying theme in the course readings— "Good visualizations are driven by good questions" (Ferster 45) and "Good charts empower us to pose good questions" (Cairo 33)—and I struggled with this balance while developing the document.

The initial questions that drove the project were "how common is this?" and "what are the common factors?" As mentioned previously, I decided to shift from building a victim profile to focusing on the circumstances surrounding the death. This change from asking "who are the victims" to "what was happening at the time of death" gets closer to my ultimate question: why does this happen? And was the officer justified in their actions, even if it led to a civilian death? Based on the data from multiple sources, including *Fatal Encounters*, I am confident that many people are working to add data points that will enable this level of analysis.

Areas of Success

This was my first attempt to intentionally tell a story using data. The processes of selecting a topic, finding data from reliable sources, and aligning data points with the document narrative took the majority of my concentration. To focus my attention on the unfamiliar aspects of the project, I selected tools that I am comfortable using. Excel and Canva were the appropriate platforms to sort, assess, and visualize the data. In the future, I would like to explore other tools, such as Infogram, Timeline JS, or StoryMaps.

The peer review discussion was incredibly helpful. In addition to gaining an outside perspective on my work, it was instructive to see the projects of other classmates. Reading the discussions about struggles in data selection and chart design provided insights into how I could improve my document. Ramara Reisch's "Florida Crime Visualization" is closely related to my topic, and the suggestions made in Michelle Start's review proved useful as I was also struggling to articulate what story I was trying to tell.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this project, I did not know what insights the data would reveal. At the end of the project, I am left with many more questions than I started with. Ultimately, I believe that I asked a good question, found reliable data, and represented it faithfully in graphic form, but creating a narrative arc continues to be a struggle. Ferster states that the "goal of the narrative arc is to move the viewer from *possibility* to *causality*…provid[ing] context and add[ing] interest… until a *resolution* is reached" (Ferster 176). Whether or not this goal was achieved in this document, I am confident that the data is portrayed honestly. Arrest-related deaths continue to be an area of interest to me, and I hope that this document shows that there are more patterns to uncover.

Works Cited

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