

Using “The Counted” to Study Police-Related Killings: What You Need to Know

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The death of Michael Brown highlighted deficiencies in the US government’s attempts to account for (or simply count) US residents killed in encounters with law enforcement. Official statistics on police-related killings are of such poor quality that FBI Director James Comey characterized them as, “embarrassing and ridiculous.” The lack of quality data coupled with an increase in public interest, prompted the British newspaper, *The Guardian*, to begin their own data collection. Their efforts have resulted in “The Counted,” a publicly available database of all known law enforcement-related deaths in 2015 and beyond. Their data reveal that at least 1139 residents were killed in encounters with law enforcement in 2015—more than double what had been reported in official statistics from previous years. “The Counted” provides criminologists a unique opportunity to better interrogate law enforcement-related deaths, but, as with all databases, there are important limitations about which researchers should be aware. Drawing on our attempts to analyze the data and discussions with *The Guardian* staff regarding decision rules, we detail the ways that these data can and should not be used.