

# Most UK police forces have disproportionate number of white officers

Figures paint picture of police service in which people from ethnic minorities have less chance of jobs than white counterparts



Police officers take part in the passing out ceremony at the Hendon police academy.  
Photograph: Max Nash/PA

A white applicant to the police has a better chance of getting a job than someone from an ethnic minority in more than two-thirds of the UK's forces, according to official data.

The figures, released under the Freedom of Information Act, paint the most complete picture yet of a police service in which people from ethnic minorities are represented in disproportionately low numbers and have less chance than their white counterparts of getting jobs<sup>[1]</sup> when they do apply.

## Analysis Police forces much whiter than the communities they serve, analysis finds

Analysis shows that in some of the biggest forces the percentage of non-white officers is a third of the proportion of non-white people in their area

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The data will put more pressure on police bosses to improve diversity. It comes after

the home secretary, Theresa May, attacked Britain's forces<sup>[2]</sup> for not employing enough black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) officers. In a speech in October, May said four forces – Cheshire<sup>[3]</sup>, North Yorkshire, Dyfed-Powys and Durham – did not have a single serving black officer. She also said 11 forces had no officers from ethnic minorities above the rank of chief inspector.

The newly published data shows that 31 of the UK's 45 territorial police forces appoint a greater proportion of white applicants than they do people who identify themselves as being from a BAME background.

According to the figures, London's Metropolitan police, as well as the Gwent and Hertfordshire forces, displayed the greatest discrepancies. Three forces appointed a lesser proportion and 11 did not provide enough data to make a fair comparison. In the Met, 28.1% of applications come from black and minority ethnic groups but they make up only 17% of appointments.

The data also shows that more than four-fifths of UK police forces – 39 of the 45 – appoint a disproportionately low number of people from BAME backgrounds, when compared to the makeup of the areas they serve.

The Met, West Midlands and Bedfordshire and police forces were among the least representative in that respect, followed by those serving the City of London, West Yorkshire, Greater Manchester and Surrey.

The figures also show that more than three-quarters of the UK's forces (34 of the 45) received a disproportionately low number of applications from BAME communities. The Met, as well as the Bedfordshire and West Midlands forces, had among the greatest discrepancies.

Janet Hills, the new president of the National Black Police<sup>[4]</sup> Association (NBPA), said trust and confidence in the police among minority ethnic communities was partly to blame.

The figures portrayed the need for positive action and greater scrutiny of police chiefs, who should be held accountable for failing to ensure that their forces reflect the communities they serve, Hills told the Guardian. "We find that, where there is no accountability, nothing gets done. It is unfortunate because everyone will talk the talk but, when it comes to the action, that is not so visible.

"On the national level, you have got fewer forces recruiting, you have got the legacy of

the community engagement, so there are the trust and confidence issues instilled in communities.

“One example is stop and search<sup>[5]</sup>. Nationally, it is disproportionately more BAME people being stopped. So, ultimately, just on that alone, you are not making friends.”

She cited the Police Service of Northern Ireland’s drive to recruit more Catholic officers under the post-Good Friday Patten reforms, as well as what she saw as recent improvements by the Met as examples of how positive action could work.

Chief constable Giles York, of the National Police Chiefs Council, said forces better reflecting the communities they served would improve ties with the public but that progress had been slower than he wanted.



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“The rate of officer recruitment from black and minority ethnic communities is increasing. It has risen from 3.6% in 2006 to 5.5% in 2015. Forces have encouraged more BAME people to join the police.

“There’s much more to do and, with reduced budgets constraining recruitment, it is difficult to move at the pace we need to. Police chiefs are committed to continuing to do everything they can to increase diversity in the service, working with the College of Policing, but there are no quick or easy solutions within current legislation.”

His highlighting of funding as a contributing factor followed the home secretary's insistence that, despite the chancellor's spending review promise to protect police budgets, every force would nevertheless be expected to find savings.

The new figures show that three forces appointed only one BAME officer each in the years up to 2014 for which they provided data. Three more appointed none, but these figures relate to only a short period of time. In some cases, all the officers self-identified as white. In others, those who did not say they were white preferred not to disclose their ethnicity.

Cheshire was the only police force that reported appointing a greater proportion of people from BAME communities than live in its local area.

The figures go back as far as 2005. While some forces released a decade's worth of records, others only provided figures from a portion of that period – including some that covered only one year. Three – North Yorkshire, Staffordshire and Sussex – released no data at all.



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The forces were asked to specify the ethnic breakdown of people who applied to join and those appointed as police officers over the last decade. It should also be noted that not everybody who was successful will have been appointed in the same year as they applied.

Many constabularies, though not all, provided very detailed breakdowns, dividing the ethnicity into several subgroups. However, since not all the constabularies provided data in this way, the Guardian chose to add together all black, Asian and other ethnic minorities into one group and white into the other group.

## **‘There is a culture that I do not think is tailored for diversity’**

One newly appointed BAME officer, who did not want to be named, said he was initially put off applying to the police because he did not think he would be welcomed. It took working alongside officers in another job to convince him it was worth applying. “It took me a while to make the decision, purely because I did not think I would be successful. It was just a perception that I had and a few of my friends have it as well. One friend to whom I mentioned the idea of joining the police force ruled out my chances of being accepted because I am a first generation immigrant.

“You feel like you are different because there is a culture in the police service that I do not think is tailored for diversity. It is not a deliberate structure, but it is probably because there have not been a lot of BAME people joining. Sometimes, I feel like I am alone. I sit among all of these officers and I am the only person from a BAME background. Nevertheless, my force has done well in making it easier for people to join.”

## **‘I want black people to apply so we can change the stereotype’**

Tezra Nassimbwa started volunteering with Victim Support, a charity that works on behalf of the police, in September. She said she wanted eventually to work in Derbyshire constabulary’s CID but needed to gain experience first. She said she was, however, the only one of her friends who would consider doing so.



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“When I said I wanted to work for the police, my friends said, ‘Why? We hate the police.’ I do not, I want black people to apply so we can change the stereotype. I think they wonder why they should go through the process to be told ‘no’. They think, ‘I might as well work somewhere else.’ It is quite sad because they are losing out on that opportunity.

“I am the only person I know who has applied to the police. I think others haven’t because, with things like the riots or stop and search, they are not keen on them. They wonder why I would want to waste my time working for the police. They do not understand my position; for them, I am working for the enemy. But I want to serve the community.

“With my friends, maybe if they saw more black people they would be more comfortable. Some of my friends feel like they cannot approach the police because they think, ‘Well, last time, I got stopped and searched and that was not fair.’”

### **‘I have not seen any improvement or will to get better’**

One Greater Manchester police officer, who wished to remain anonymous, said he was shocked when he heard that nearby Cheshire police had no black officers. “Chief officers do need to be held to account. They can all use excuses about the current cutbacks and lack of money for recruitment but a lot of forces have been taking on and

training student officers over the last two years.

“They have not embraced the skills of BAME officers for the cause of increasing representation in a sustained manner. As for progression and retention, that is another matter again. In the next five years, BAME representation is set to halve, due to retirements and people choosing to leave. It upsets me that, in all my time with the police, I have not seen any improvement or will to get better.

“The facts speak for themselves and the police have to make efforts to go into communities and ask for their help. Unfortunately, the police service lacks pioneers and too many of the leaders are from the same safe schools of thought.”

### Links

1. <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2015/oct/22/police-forces-ethnic-makeup-population-figures>
2. <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2015/oct/21/theresa-may-criticises-police-chief-bernard-hogan-howe-stop-search-race-record>
3. <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2015/oct/22/police-chief-no-black-officers-open-positive-discrimination>
4. <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/police>
5. <http://www.theguardian.com/law/2010/jun/02/police-stop-search-black-asian>