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Opinion

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Map of botched SWAT and paramilitary raids points to systemic failures in the War on Drugs

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This [map of botched SWAT and paramilitary police raids](#) created by the *Cato Institute* and based on [a paper by Radley Balko](#) is an excellent illustration of our failed drug policies. It's not surprising that where population increases, so do the number of botched raids. Then again, Phoenix, AZ isn't nearly as bad as many other metropolitan areas with similar population levels. New York, Texas, and California are all especially bad, with over 30 instances each. Florida has 26 botched raids. A couple other states rank in the teens, and pretty much the rest have under 10, most hovering around 3 – 5, with a few states coming in at zero.

Naturally, Texas, California, and New York have the highest populations in the country, but to have *ten times* as many botched raids as states like Nevada and Massachusetts?

When looking at the map, remember that these are just botched raids. According to Balko's paper, some estimate SWAT and paramilitary raids at close to 40,000 per year. That they are not all failures still begs the question: Isn't the fact that our society condones tens of thousands of armed, paramilitary raids on its citizenry a year a failure in and of itself? That much of this falls on the heads of the poor and minorities is simply a fact. Here's [Conrad Black in National Review](#) on that very subject:

[T]he public-policy decision has been informally concerted to leave middle-class, prosperous American secondary-school and university youth alone with at least their soft drugs, while trolling relentlessly through poor African-American areas rounding up dealers and users, and imprisoning them en masse.

For blacks, the chances of being arrested and charged and convicted for cannabis offenses are 300 percent greater than for whites. Sending nearly half a million cannabis offenders to prison each year inflicts a \$40,000 annual charge per prisoner, not counting the processing costs of the mass-convict-production U.S. law-enforcement system. Domestic consumption of cannabis is an approximately \$140 billion industry in the U.S., which, despite large domestic production, requires large imports, especially from Mexico, Canada, and Colombia. In Mexico, 20,000 metric

tons of cannabis are shipped annually to the U.S., and the U.S. is in the position of telling foreign nations to cease production, while it will not impose the same solution on itself nor even make an all-out effort to discourage imports. The result is a virtual civil war in Mexico, where 28,000 people have died in drug-related violence in the last four years, five times the number of Americans who have died in Iraq and Afghanistan in the last nine years. The beneficiaries of official American policy are the drug cartels, who make billions on it annually, and maintain private paramilitary forces including armored vehicles, submersible drug-transport ships, and a range of aircraft.

These are policies of violence and destabilization. Violent cartels and inherently violent police enforcement of laws that do nothing but tear at the social fabric of our poorest communities, leaving American taxpayers footing an enormous bill to arrest and incarcerate hundreds of thousands of non-violent offenders. Something has to give. Perhaps passage of Proposition 19 in California will be a start of something greater to come. An end to the violence at the very least, and a restoration of civil liberties, a sane drug policy, and a more limited government. Conservatives should heed Black's words, and take a long hard look at the map from *Cato*. This may one of the most important questions of limited government this generation will face.

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