

HOT AIR

The police-ification of everything

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Carlson's recommendation highlights one half of this phenomenon. We might call it the popular half: our cultural tendency to see calling the cops as an acceptable solution to interpersonal problems in which no one is at risk of criminal violence.

Most 911 calls "are unrelated to crimes in progress," reports the Vera Institute, a think tank focused on the justice system.

"Many are for quality-of-life issues like noise, blocked driveways, or public intoxication. Others are for problems like drug abuse, homelessness, or mental health crises that would be better resolved with community-based treatment or other resources — not a criminal justice response."... Then there's the other half of this phenomenon, which I'll label the policy half: the addition of a law enforcement edge to ever more parts of American governance.

Overcriminalization is perhaps the single greatest culprit. We have so many laws on the books, and so many of them are ill-considered and/or paired with unduly harsh punishments.

"In addition to the thousands of criminal laws," explains Cato Institute scholar Tim Lynch, "there are now tens of thousands of regulations that carry criminal penalties, including prison time. The web of rules has become so vast that it seems as if most Americans are now criminals whether they realize it or not."

Anything related to terrorism, kids, drugs, or some combination thereof is particularly ripe for policification.

Think of the post-9/11 expansions of the surveillance state (particularly digital spying and airport security theater), cops in schools, and the massive expansion of the American police state the drug war has occasioned. Even the Postal Service is getting in on this now, trawling Americans' social media posts for (constitutionally protected) protest plans and reporting its findings to various other federal agencies.