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By Bob Livingston



Federalized Local Police: More Armor, Deadlier Force, Less Honor

May 31, 2012 by [Sam Rolley](#)



Local police in the United States have become increasingly militaristic in the past several decades.
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There are many good law enforcement officers in the United States who take seriously their duty to serve and protect the citizenry; but, as referenced all too often in media reports, there are many police officers who are themselves criminals.

Recent headlines in the case of Florida shooting victim Trayvon Martin blared, with a sense of misplaced shock, the fact that Martin's killer George Zimmerman had been critical of his local police department in Sanford, Fla., in years past. Zimmerman reportedly even went as far as going on a ride-along with an officer and reporting back to the City Council the "disgusting" lack of motivation to combat crime in the area.

What many people who are concerned about the growing number of stories about police misconduct and abuse find shocking, however, is why it seems out of the ordinary for citizens to demand that their local police departments operate in a manner that cuts crime without eviscerating the Constitutional rights of innocent citizens.

Last week, the Cato Institute reopened a blog that focuses solely on documenting examples of police misconduct throughout the Nation. Here is a sampling of some of the events [the blog reported](#) last Friday:

- A Denver, Colorado police officer allegedly sexually assaulted a woman during a traffic stop. The officer was charged with [rape and kidnapping charges](#)
- A lieutenant with the Schenectady County Sheriff's Office has been demoted and suspended for [striking a correction officer](#)
- Dallas City Council approves \$500,000 settlement for motorcyclist, Andrew Collins, whose beating was caught on a police dash-cam. "It was a good resolution to a bad situation," said Mr. Collins' attorney. "It was an acknowledgment from the city that Mr. Collins' civil rights had been seriously violated." [Criminal charges are pending](#) against the three former officers
- A New Jersey officer tried to set up a sexual encounter with a *12-year-old girl*. The officer sent explicit photos of himself in uniform. The accused Woodland Park [officer pleaded not guilty](#) to charges ranging from attempted aggravated assault to luring and enticing a child
- In Barre, Vermont, prosecutors alleged an off-duty cop left a bar Jan. 3, 2011, entered his neighbor's apartment and stole a flat-screen TV from under her Christmas tree. When confronted at his home by two officers, the cop, Zak Winston, tossed the TV into the river behind his apartment. Winston was [found guilty](#) of felony unlawful trespass, misdemeanor unlawful mischief and misdemeanor resisting arrest
- Lanagan, Missouri police chief and officer have been [indicted and suspended for forgery](#) pertaining to racial profiling reports and citations

In light of some of the disturbing trends being discovered regarding many police officers' lack of restraint and disdain for the rule of law on and off duty, the increasingly militaristic nature of domestic law enforcement has also come under scrutiny. Reports like this one from [KRDO](#) in Colorado are becoming commonplace throughout the country:

Police are using some new tactics and equipment to protect themselves in dangerous situations.

In the past, you wouldn't see a Colorado Springs police officer with a ballistic shield, helmet and rifle on your average police call, but that's changed.

"It might look like SWAT activity is going on when, really, it's just patrol officers using some new equipment that's been made available to us over the last couple years," said Sgt. Darrin Abbink. "We've had quite a bit of training going on with our patrol officers to provide them with better officer safety tactics."

And a set of recent studies shows that even when police use less-than-lethal tactics to subdue lawbreakers, the outcome has an increasingly negative effect on the life and limb of citizens. The two studies from the University of Central Florida and Michigan State University are published in the journals *Justice Quarterly* and *Police Quarterly*. Researchers looked at injuries associated with stun guns. The devices produce an electrical charge up to 50,000 volts and can be deployed by pressing the stun gun against a person or by shooting two probed darts at a person from a distance. Their use has been controversial because of some reported deaths following the use of stun guns, as well as their use on vulnerable citizens such as [pregnant women](#), the elderly and children.

In their studies the researchers analyzed nearly 14,000 incidents from seven agencies. Of those, stun guns were used in more than 2,600 cases. They report that citizens were injured 41 percent of the time when stun guns were used as the only type of force and 47 percent of the time when they were used in conjunction with another form of force. That compares to people being injured 29 percent of the time when no stun guns were used.

“The bottom line is there is an increased risk to citizens,” said Gene Paoline a UCF associate professor of criminal justice and one of the authors of the studies. “On the other hand, the devices increase the safety of officers when used as the sole method of restraint. In essence, we have to consider the costs of citizen harm versus benefits of officer safety. It is something for police agencies to weigh when setting up policies on their use, or whether or not to even use them at all.”

Unfortunately, as the police state burgeons (as do reports of misconduct and abuse), it looks as though citizens can expect little protection from the courts from overzealous police who find it necessary to use excessive force during even the mildest encounters “for their own safety.”

The Supreme Court decided on Tuesday that it will not review the appropriateness of stun guns used by police on suspects. The high court refused to hear appeals from police in Hawaii and Washington, or people who got stun-gunned by officers in a case that was handled by the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals. The lower court ruled that officers could not be sued in Federal court. But judges also said officers used excessive force by using stun guns.

Perhaps the only way to keep local police forces from growing out of control and becoming rife with misconduct is to encourage transparency through citizen involvement, as organizations such as The John Birch Society suggest. Currently, by attending [Redefining the Role of Local Police](#), a JBS speaking tour, citizens can learn to ensure accountability of local police. Former police officer and JBS National Director of Field Activities Jim Fitzgerald is currently headlining venues across the country, discussing ways to support local police while keeping them from becoming a national police force through protecting the interests of the community verses the interests of the Federal government.