



An Evaluation of the Implementation Purposes of the Militarization of the American Police Force

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Abstract

There is a new era of policing as American societies organize in a manner to respond to modern threats. A momentous contemporary development and change in policing was implemented in 1997 through the issuing of Program 1033, ultimately allowing transfers of excess military equipment to local law enforcement agencies. However, following the shooting of Michael Brown in 2014, paramilitary responses to nonviolent protests in Ferguson, Missouri sparked controversy, fear, and outrage regarding Program 1033 as media postings of this response were spread nationally. By virtue of this, discussions and debates surrounding the implementation purpose and necessity of militarization, or the transfer of excess military equipment, were reintroduced. Even with the center of attention revolving around the intentions of Program 1033, there is insufficient statistical evidence or research that covers all aspects of the purposes of militarization. Therefore, this study aims to evaluate Program 1033's effect on its original implementation purposes of enhancing officer protection, reducing violent crime, and promoting positive public perception and support for the overall police environment.

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Andrew Liu
805-358-2745
andrewliu799@gmail.com

Introduction

Police militarization is the use and transfer of excess military equipment to local law enforcement agencies (LEAs). This is made possible through the implementation of Program 1033 by the 104th Congress in 1997, allowing the Secretary of Defense to transfer excess military equipment to LEAs throughout the United States. Under Program 1033, excess military equipment is shipped to local LEAs at little to no cost. To put this into perspective, released data from the US Department of Defense (DoD) indicates that between 2006 and 2012, there were more than 176,000 transfers of equipment throughout 8,000 police agencies in the United States. Today, the equipment distributed by militarization programs is predominantly utilized by Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) teams and other paramilitary forces.

Moreover, the national discussions and debates surrounding Program 1033 and militarized police forces were introduced through events in Ferguson, Missouri on August 9, 2014. On this date, protracted nonviolent protests were performed following the shooting of an unarmed 18-year-old African American named Michael Brown. To regulate the protests, the Ferguson and St. Louis County Police Department took a paramilitary response by deploying military grade weapons, vehicles, and equipment. Consequently, fear was spread nationwide through social media postings, photos, and images of heavily armed police officers confronting unarmed civilians, provoking renewed interest in police militarization. Subsequently, the separation between the military and law enforcement was disintegrating through this visual representation of Program 1033. The use of military weapons in the situation was widely criticized by popular stakeholders, policymakers, and even former President Barack Obama. The backlash has predominantly revolved around whether or not militarization achieves its expectations in benefiting the overall policing environment. Because of the focus surrounding these aspects, this study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of police militarization in achieving the purposes of implementing Program 1033 and militarization.

Question

Does the transfer of military equipment to local law enforcement agencies (LEA) achieve its implementation purposes for the overall enhancement of officer protection, violent crime reduction, and police legitimacy in the day-to-day policing environment?

Police Safety

One of the goals of implementing police militarization is to enhance police safety. To measure police protection, data was acquired from the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) Law Enforcement Officers Killed and Assaulted (LEOKA) program. Datasets from the program include the number of officers killed feloniously throughout the years 1999-2017. According to the FBI, when an officer is killed or assaulted during the line of duty, the FBI gathers data about circumstances pertaining to the death. As LEAs' acquisition of excess military equipment increased from 1997-2017, the data will conclude whether or not the growth in distribution corresponds to the trends of officer death through the comparison of the levels of low accumulation versus high accumulation. This comparison of the levels of accumulation is conducted by sorting the period into two eras: years of lower accumulation (1999-2007) and years of higher accumulation (2008-2017). The averages of lower accumulation will be compared with the averages of higher accumulation to display the comprehensive effects of the addition of military equipment. To measure the distinct influence high exports of excess military equipment has had on police safety, the comparison of the accumulation of excess military equipment and the number of officers feloniously killed during the years 2006-2013 are evaluated. The years 2006 and 2013 are significant as there was a 1,414% increase in the value of excess equipment transferred from 2006 to 2013. This substantial percent increase will provide insight into how the immense acquirement corresponds to the number of officers feloniously killed through the specific analysis of the years 2006 to 2013.

Violent Crime Reduction

The FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) program is utilized to analyze trends of violent crime in relation to the cumulation of militarization. The UCR provides the number and rate of specific violent crimes throughout the years spanning 1998-2017. The violent crimes evaluated in this study are as follows: rape, murder, nonnegligent manslaughter, and aggravated assault.

Similar to the previous factor of police protection, the aspect of violent crime reduction is measured through the overall rates of violent crime of the years 1998-2017 to display the comprehensive correlation of militarization and violent crime. The number of violent crimes committed per case will be evaluated through the rate of the specific violent crime per 100,000 inhabitants to compensate for the growing population of the US. Again, the averages of these rates will be categorized and separated by spans of years of varying degrees of accumulation: 1998-2007 and 2008-2017. Furthermore, the overall standard deviation of the years 1998-2017 will be used to display the degree in which the data deviates to ultimately reveal the significance of the impact of Program 1033 on the specific violent crimes.

Public Perception

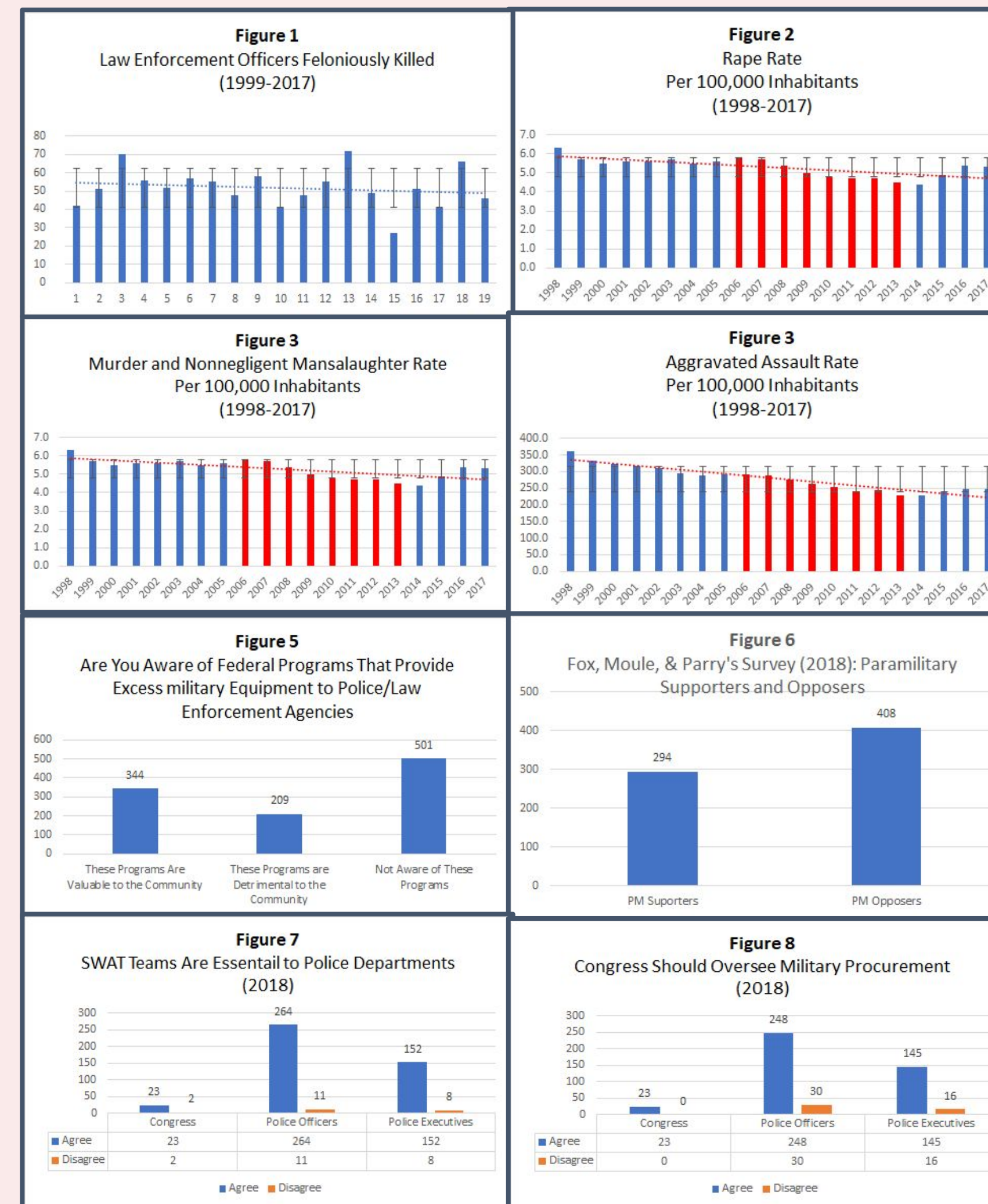
Public perception is evaluated through a 2018 survey from a study conducted by Richard K. Moule Jr., Bryanna Hahn Fox, and Megan M. Parry (2018) in their article Categorically Complex: A Latent Class Analysis of Public Perceptions of Police Militarization. In this study, a survey was sent out to 702 American adult citizens to evaluate their perception of police militarization. The survey was created and distributed through the survey website, Qualtrics, and distributed to the 702 Americans. With a large survey number, the survey reached out to diverse populations and the respondents were stratified on "gender, race, and household income to mirror the composition of American adults" to ensure the heterogeneity of the survey sample. The survey took approximately 18 minutes as it assessed the respondent's opinions of the police use and exercise of militarization programs.

Additionally, a 2018 study conducted by Aaron C. Davenport, Jonathan William Welburn, Andrew Lauland, Annelise Pietenpol, Marc Robbins, Erin Rebhan, Patricia Boren, and K. Jack Riley (2018) aimed to evaluate various factors of public perception. In this study, the diverse sample size of 1,044 U.S. citizens, identified based on race and age, was surveyed through RAND's American Life Panel (ALP). The ALP "is a nationally representative, probability-based panel of over 6,000 members ages 18 and older who are regularly interviewed over the internet for research purposes" (RAND, 2019). This survey evaluates the awareness of the Department of Defense's 1033 program and the respondents' extent of support for limiting militarization. The study was aimed to record the public awareness and opinions of Program 1033 and the current law enforcement environment.

Executive Perception

Frederick W. Turner II & Bryanna Hahn Fox (2017) conducted a study on the executive perception of militarization to uncover their concerns and opinions on the current militarization system. In this study, three perspectives were explored: Members of the 114th Congress U.S. House of Representatives, law enforcement executives, and law enforcement officers across the United States. These members were purposively sampled through the survey website, SurveyMonkey.

Results



Methods

Discussions

Police Protection

The statistics for police protection further suggest that militarization does not have a clear effect on enhancing its safety in day-to-day policing. A reason for this, mentioned by Mummolo (2018), is because the rates are so low, thus "it would be hard for anything to have an effect on them". Nonetheless, the lack of effect on police protection demonstrates the low impact and involvement militarization holds on day-to-day policing as it fails to enhance the daily factor of officer safety.

Violent Crime Reduction

The data presented exemplifies the psychological effect militarization has on the fear of committing these specific violent crimes with paramilitary forces in the environment. It also displays how citizens are likely to adapt to a new role and increased awareness linked with the accumulation of excess military equipment. However, the psychological influences of fear may be a deficit in the aspect of public perception.

Public Perception

Even though there were a considerable amount of supporters in both surveys, it is likely that militarization advocates generally supported it due to the belief in the need to "enhance officer safety." Thus, the feelings and assumptions of these supporters may be inaccurate as their beliefs do not correspond to the presented data from the LEOKA. On the other hand, the feelings that Program 1033 is detrimental to communities indicate that if militarization pursues in the direction of direct involvement, the number of opposers will increase. Nevertheless, even though militarization does not effectively promote positive perception, it is important to take into account that militarization may weaken the "community relations necessary for effective policing." Essentially, as Program 1033 strives to improve contemporary policing, there may be a compromise as strengthening policing through militarization evidently correlates to the reduction of violent crime; however, the public perception is weakened consequently.

Conclusion

Ultimately, militarization is a necessary resource that has the potential to control extreme crime and uphold feelings of safety. However, the utilization and deployment of paramilitary forces need to be shifted to a direction favoring minimal deployments and a role that does not hinder society from operating freely. Instead of distributing military equipment for the enhancement of day-to-day factors, directions of militarization should change to aim towards controlling extreme crime, while it continues to indirectly reduce and deter crimes psychologically. Essentially, revising the roles and purposes of militarization will contribute to the push towards the provision of feeling safe without inflicting on the notion of freedom in American society.