

Study finds tactical gear does not cause police to be more aggressive but more oversight needed

August 30 2017, by Lydia Mccoy

The acquisition of surplus military equipment through the US Department of Defense Law Enforcement Support Officers 1033 Program does not cause police to be more aggressive, according to a study published this week by a team of researchers from UT's Boyd Center for Business and Economic Research.

The federal government has transferred more than \$5.2 billion in decommissioned tactical military gear to local [law enforcement agencies](#) through the program since 2006.

On Monday, the Trump administration announced it is lifting limitations on the program that were put in place by the Obama administration.

"Peacekeeping Force: Efforts of Providing Tactical Equipment to Local Law Enforcement," written by Matt Harris, Jinseong Park, Don Bruce, and Matt Murray, was recently published in the American Economic Journal: Economic Policy. The paper is the first to evaluate the consequences for local communities of local law enforcement agencies acquiring military armaments through the 1033 Program.

Results indicate that acquisition of tactical items from the federal government reduces citizen complaints and assaults on [police](#) officers, and does not lead to increases in offender deaths. The authors stress that the limitations of the paper are as important as the findings.

"The paper is not a referendum on police militarization, which is the product of several factors including who is hired, training, leadership, procedures, practices, department culture, equipment, and other factors," Harris said. "We only consider the role of a single factor—surplus military equipment acquired from the federal government."

Harris described the key takeaways: "While the military kit makes for a striking image, our findings imply that the path to improving police-community relations is about the people, not the equipment. Second, more oversight and transparency are needed. Our research used the best available data, which was quite limited in some instances.

"Police departments are funded by the public to provide a public service in the form of public safety. Knowledge of equipment acquisition and the good and bad outcomes resulting from that provision should be public, and informed by standardized reporting practices."

Provided by University of Tennessee at Knoxville

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