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Research Co-Authors Represent GWU, Harvard, Stanford, and University of Cincinnati

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C. – A new study on the connection between police militarization and civilian casualties is receiving national attention, and Gardner-Webb University Assistant Professor of Political Science Dr. Casey Delehanty is at the center of it. The research is being publicized in the *Washington Post* and is being discussed among public policy organizations like the CATO Institute, based in Washington D.C.

photo of Dr. Casey Delehanty

Delehanty, along with co-authors Jack Mewhirter (University of Cincinnati), Ryan Welch (Stanford University), and Jason Wilks (Harvard University), researched the effects of the 1033 Program, theorizing that increased militarization of police leads to an increase in civilian casualties. The 1033 program was created by the National Defense Authorization Act as part of the U.S. Government's Defense Logistics Agency Disposition Services (DLA) to transfer excess military equipment to civilian law enforcement agencies (LEAs). The act was signed into law by President Bill Clinton in September of 1996.

“It was a topic of particular interest to us, as we had plenty of debates about police militarization in the grad student lounge during the Ferguson, Mo., riots,” Delehanty explained. “The *New York Times* had released newly-available data on 1033 transfers. As empirical social scientists, you always want to be the first to jump on a new data set and having that happen relating to a really relevant and attention-grabbing topic [like the Michael Brown case] was even better.”

The researchers tested the effect of 1033 transfers on three dependent variables that typically convey police violence: the number of civilian casualties; the change in the number of civilian casualties; and the number of dogs killed by police. They found a positive and statistically significant relationship between 1033 transfers and fatalities from officer-involved shootings across all models.

“I personally don't impart any sort of animus on the part of police officers; I just think that when someone gets scared in a dangerous situation, they default to the training they believe will keep them safe,” he reflected. “Unfortunately, in more militarized departments, that training often involves fatal shootings. Having officers patrol in

camouflage, body armor, armored-personnel carriers, etc., only deepens the divide between civilians and police and creates an us-versus-them mentality on both sides. The research indicates that increased levels of militarization will generally only make the problem worse.”

One specific challenge the researchers encountered was finding documentation on incidents of police-civilian violence. “In the U.S., there is not a systematic, official count of police shootings for a given year. I can give you an exact count on the number of bicycles stolen last year, but I can’t tell you how many people were actually shot,” Delehanty observed. “We needed data covering the years of 1033 transfers we had data for, and that just didn’t exist at the national level. Luckily, we came upon D. Brian Burghart’s ‘Fatal Encounters’ project, which, to our knowledge, was the first that attempted to actually keep track of officer-involved shootings.

“Unfortunately, this information was only fully available for four states at the time, but we went ahead with that smaller-than-ideal sample size. Our future efforts will be using expanded data that has come out since we sent the article off for publication.”

The recent directive from the U.S. Department of Justice to remove Obama-era restrictions on the kinds of equipment that can be transferred as part of the 1033 program will likely have very grim results, Delehanty believes.

“I think it will likely lead to more deaths, and it will likely exacerbate the already-strained relationship between police and civilians,” he stated. “I study both policing and counter-insurgency, and we find that better outcomes accrue as positive, non-punitive interactions between civilians and police increase.

“Gardner-Webb has a fantastic example of this form of policing, in that our campus officers make a concerted effort to assist students with simple, day-to-day needs outside of their duties as law enforcement officials. Not only does this benefit our students but it deepens the relationship between our campus police and the students they interact with. Now, when something unfortunate happens, our campus police often know both the perpetrator and victim by name, and everyone is a bit more trusting of one another, which tends to lead to better outcomes.”

For now, the research has provided some much-needed empirical data on the effects of increased militarization among law enforcement agencies on civilian populations. Delehanty hopes to build upon this scholarship and continue to investigate related issues.

“We’ve got a number of things we’re working on. Number one will be expanding the data set as more data comes out about shootings during the time period we’re interested in,” Delehanty said. “I also have some ideas about looking at how militarization affects deployments and how militarization affects civilian attitudes towards police; I’m looking at

scraping Twitter data to run a geo-coded sentiment analysis to discover how people feel towards their local police forces, and comparing that to the amount of military-style gear received by those very same local LEAs. There's a ton of work still to be done; our work is really more of a first pass at the question than a definitive answer."

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