Armored Response Vehicles

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Definition

A police armored vehicle is a ballistic-protected rescue or tactical vehicle deployed to high-risk incidents to provide officers and other persons with protected mobility, cover, rescue capability, observation, and a safer operating position. Common examples include purpose-built armored rescue vehicles, tactical armored vehicles, ballistic-protected trucks, armored personnel carriers adapted for police use, and other vehicles specifically designed or modified to resist firearm threats and support tactical operations.

For this evidence library, the category concerns the presence and operational use of a ballistic-armored police vehicle at the incident scene, recorded in the dataset as `I_ARV`. The vehicle is a specialist resource, not a force option: it does not restrain or incapacitate a person, compel surrender, establish legal containment, resolve a crisis, or substitute for negotiation, tactical command, or other intervention. Its primary function is to change the physical risk environment in which other interventions occur.

How It Is Designed to Work

An armored vehicle creates a protected mobile space from which police can approach or withdraw from a hazardous area, move and deliver specialist personnel, establish a protected observation point, provide ballistic cover, position officers closer to a threat without equivalent exposure, evacuate civilians, support negotiation or communication, shield officers during prolonged containment, and reduce the need for officers to expose themselves while moving between cover positions.

In the United States, armored vehicles occupy two overlapping roles: they are operational safety resources used by tactical teams and rescue personnel, and they are among the most visible material symbols in the police-militarization debate. A national U.S. survey of law-enforcement agencies that had obtained armored vehicles, rifles, or body armor through the federal 1033 Program examined how that equipment was actually used rather than merely whether agencies possessed it (Koslicki, 2023), an important distinction because equipment acquisition alone does not establish frequency, context, or purpose of deployment.

U.S. research on mine-resistant ambush-protected vehicles (MRAPs) shows that armored-vehicle acquisition became geographically widespread through the 1033 Program; more than 800 domestic law-enforcement agencies had received surplus MRAPs in the dataset examined by Burkhardt and Baker (Burkhardt & Baker, 2019), though their work addresses acquisition and agency characteristics rather than incident-level effectiveness. Direct practitioner research specifically examining why police value tactical armored vehicles remains

comparatively sparse in the United States; Canadian qualitative work based on 117 tactical officers is therefore retained as comparative operational evidence, not as the primary contextual frame (Towns & Ricciardelli, 2026).

The vehicle changes exposure, not the threat itself

This distinction is fundamental to evaluating what an armored vehicle can and cannot accomplish. If a person is armed with a firearm, the vehicle may provide ballistic protection from at least some potential projectile threats, depending on armor rating, glazing, angle, ammunition, distance, vehicle orientation, and whether officers remain inside or behind the protected structure. If a person is armed only with an edged weapon, the protective function is conceptually simpler: a knife, machete, sword, or similar hand-held edged weapon cannot penetrate the intact ballistic hull of a properly armored police vehicle in the way it can injure an exposed officer, and the vehicle therefore provides a safe area of refuge from direct contact with the edged weapon while officers remain protected by the vehicle structure.

That protection does not mean the vehicle contains the subject. The person may still move around the vehicle, leave the immediate area, approach other people, enter a building, obtain another weapon, damage unprotected property, self-harm, or threaten someone not protected by the vehicle. The vehicle creates cover and protected mobility, not a perimeter by itself.

Primary Operational Functions

Mobile cover

Unlike a fixed wall, engine block, or building corner, an armored vehicle can reposition, allowing officers to carry ballistic or physical cover forward, backward, or laterally as the incident changes. This can reduce the need to sprint between exposed positions, approach an injured person without cover, stand behind inadequate concealment, remain fixed to one piece of hard cover, or force an immediate confrontation simply because officers lack a protected position.

Rescue

One of the strongest practical rationales for armored vehicles is protected rescue. The vehicle can allow police to approach injured civilians or officers, trapped persons, hostages who have escaped, persons in exposed areas, or other people who cannot safely reach cover on their own. The empirical literature is much stronger on practitioner descriptions of this protective role than on comparative outcome statistics showing how many injuries or deaths armored vehicles prevent (Towns & Ricciardelli, 2026).

Protected transport

The vehicle can move tactical officers, negotiators, medics, rescue personnel, or evacuated civilians through an area where ordinary vehicles or foot movement would create greater exposure.

Observation

The vehicle may provide a protected observation position closer to the scene than officers could safely occupy on foot. Depending on vehicle configuration, it may support elevated observation, protected windows, roof hatches or observation ports, lighting, camera systems, or a stable protected platform for specialist personnel. For an edged-weapon incident, this may be particularly useful because officers can remain physically inaccessible to the weapon while monitoring behaviour at relatively close range.

Support for negotiation

An armored vehicle can indirectly support negotiation by giving officers enough protection to remain patient. Where officers would otherwise be exposed to a potentially armed person, protected positioning can make it more feasible to slow the encounter, maintain distance, wait for negotiators, communicate over time, avoid rushed physical contact, and sustain containment. In this sense, an armored vehicle can function as a de-escalation-enabling resource, even though the vehicle itself does not communicate or de-escalate.

Evidence of Effectiveness

Overall assessment

Evidence strength: Moderate for operational utility as a protective tactical resource; low for direct causal evidence that armored vehicles reduce injuries, deaths, or use of force.

The research base on armored vehicles is substantially thinner than the literature on firearms, CEWs, police dogs, CIT, negotiation, or tactical teams generally. Much of the available evidence concerns acquisition, practitioner experience, tactical-team organization, public perception, militarization, and legitimacy rather than incident-level outcomes. Few studies provide a clean denominator–something like “armored vehicle deployed in X incidents, preventing Y injuries compared with otherwise similar incidents without one”–and that evidence gap should be explicit.

U.S. deployment evidence

Koslicki (Koslicki, 2023) surveyed a national sample of U.S. law-enforcement agencies that had used the 1033 Program to acquire armored vehicles, rifles, and body armor. This study is particularly useful because much prior 1033 research measured equipment receipt, while the survey examined how often and in what contexts agencies used the equipment after acquisition, moving the evidence one step closer to the relevant intervention question of whether an armored vehicle was operationally deployed rather than merely owned. The study does not establish that armored-vehicle deployment reduces injuries, prevents shootings, causes surrender, improves crisis resolution, or reduces use of force, but it provides important U.S. evidence that possession and operational use should not be treated as equivalent measures.

MRAP acquisition in the United States

Burkhardt and Baker (Burkhardt & Baker, 2019) examined the distribution of surplus mine-resistant ambush-protected vehicles (MRAPs) to U.S. law-enforcement agencies and found that more than 800 domestic agencies had received MRAPs through the 1033 Program, providing strong evidence that military-origin armored vehicles became an established component of American police equipment after the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The study does not establish that every MRAP was routinely deployed, that every deployment was tactical, that the vehicle improved incident outcomes, or that military-origin vehicles and purpose-built police rescue vehicles are operationally equivalent.

Comparative practitioner evidence

Towns and Ricciardelli (Towns & Ricciardelli, 2026) provide unusually direct research on why tactical officers themselves perceive armored vehicles as useful, identifying safety, rescue, mobility, and tactical-support rationales in a national Canadian sample of 117 tactical officers. Because comparable U.S. practitioner studies are limited, this research remains useful as comparative evidence of operational mechanism, though its limitation is important: practitioner perceptions do not establish a causal injury-reduction percentage or prove that the same deployment patterns occur across U.S. agencies.

Acquisition is not effectiveness

Across both U.S. and comparative research, the same caution applies: ownership, acquisition, deployment, and effectiveness are four different questions. A department may own an armored vehicle without using it frequently; a vehicle may be deployed without affecting the outcome; and a vehicle may be operationally valuable in a specific rescue or containment event even if aggregate militarization research finds no department-level crime or officer-safety benefit.

Injury and Safety Evidence

No inherent subject-injury mechanism

An armored vehicle is unlike a firearm, baton, CEW, impact projectile, chemical agent, or police dog in that its ordinary use does not require the vehicle itself to inflict force on the subject. Its safety effects are therefore primarily protective and indirect.

Officer safety

The clearest proposed benefit is reduced exposure to gunfire, thrown objects, edged weapons, hostile approach, uncertain windows or doorways, open ground, and rescue environments where officers would otherwise lack adequate cover.

Civilian rescue

An armored vehicle may also reduce risk to civilians by allowing police to reach them without first neutralizing every potential threat in the area, creating an important conceptual distinction: the vehicle may allow rescue before complete scene resolution.

Vehicle use itself can create hazards

Armored vehicles are large, heavy vehicles whose potential risks include collision, restricted visibility, striking persons or objects, property damage, blocked emergency access, difficulty manoeuvring in constrained environments, and unintended tactical effects created by positioning–hazards qualitatively different from the ballistic or contact threat the vehicle is intended to mitigate.

When Its Use May Be Appropriate

Armored vehicles are most defensible where the vehicle provides a concrete protective or rescue function. Examples include:

- active shooter or firearm incidents;
- barricaded armed persons;
- hostage incidents;
- officer or civilian rescue;
- high-risk warrant service;
- uncertain weapons threats;
- prolonged tactical containment;
- movement through exposed areas;
- evacuation of civilians;
- incidents where tactical personnel need protected mobility; and
- situations where protected observation can reduce the need for closer exposed contact.

Protective deployment without immediate assault

The vehicle does not need to be used aggressively to be useful. Simply positioning it as cover, refuge, observation, protected transport, or rescue capability may materially change the safety of the incident. This matters for crisis response: an armored vehicle can support a wait-and-talk strategy rather than only a forced tactical intervention.

When Its Use May Be Inappropriate or Unnecessary

No meaningful protective function

Deployment may be difficult to justify operationally where there is no credible violence risk, no rescue requirement exists, ordinary cover is adequate, the vehicle adds no tactical capability, its presence interferes with communication or access, or deployment is primarily symbolic.

Routine use

Armored vehicles are specialist resources. Normalizing their use for low-risk calls can blur the distinction between ordinary patrol, crisis response, and high-risk tactical intervention, and this normalization concern is central to the broader U.S. police-militarization literature (Kraska, 2007; Mummolo, 2018; Steidley & Ramey, 2019).

Relevance to Edged-Weapon Encounters

The armored vehicle has an unusual relationship to edged-weapon incidents. It is extremely protective against the contact mechanism of the weapon but does almost nothing to control the person unless the broader tactical environment also limits movement.

Potential role

Where a person has a knife, machete, sword, axe, or similar hand-held weapon, the armored vehicle may provide a protected refuge for officers, a secure observation position, a protected platform for communication, safe movement for specialist personnel, cover during rescue, protected withdrawal, a barrier between officers and the subject, and a place from which officers can wait for negotiators or additional resources. For officers inside or fully protected by the vehicle, the subject's edged weapon cannot ordinarily reach them, and that changes the immediate risk calculation.

It does not contain the subject

The vehicle should not be confused with containment. A person with a knife may still walk away, run around the vehicle, move toward civilians, enter another location, evade observation, gain access to another weapon, or create a new threat elsewhere. Meaningful containment still depends on geography, perimeter officers, barriers, tactical positioning, subject behaviour, and control of access to third parties.

Conditions favouring deployment

An armored vehicle is most valuable in an edged-weapon encounter where:

- the incident is prolonged;
- the subject is contained or partly contained;
- officers need a safer observation point;
- exposed officers can reposition behind armor;

- a civilian or officer may require rescue;
- negotiators or tactical specialists need protected access;
- conventional cover is inadequate; or
- the vehicle allows officers to create more time instead of closing distance.

Safe area of refuge

This is one of the strongest edged-weapon-specific benefits. An officer behind ordinary concealment may still be vulnerable if the subject closes distance, while an officer inside a secured armored vehicle has a qualitatively different level of protection from a hand-held edged weapon. That can allow officers to disengage, reassess, communicate, wait, coordinate, observe, and avoid unnecessary close contact, thereby reducing the urgency created by officer exposure even though the vehicle does not remove the danger the subject may pose to anyone outside the protected area.

Elevated observation

Where the vehicle provides a protected elevated viewpoint, it may improve the ability to observe hand position, weapon possession, movement, attempts to leave, interaction with hostages or third parties, and changes in behaviour. This is a capability claim, not evidence that elevated observation itself produces better outcomes.

Failure consequences

The main failure risk is conceptual rather than mechanical: mistaking officer protection for scene control. Officers may be highly protected while civilians remain exposed, the subject remains mobile, a hostage remains at risk, or the broader scene remains unstable. The vehicle can protect personnel without resolving the underlying threat.

Risk trade-off

For edged-weapon incidents, the vehicle can shift risk away from officers by making physical contact with the weapon much more difficult, creating more opportunity for negotiation, CIT, tactical planning, family or clinician consultation, patience, and voluntary surrender. The same vehicle may also visibly transform the scene into a tactical or militarized police operation, which raises a second and very different question.

Does the Armored Vehicle Escalate the Crisis?

Direct evidence is weak

There is not strong empirical evidence that the arrival of an armored vehicle independently causes a person in crisis to become more aggressive, more suicidal, or more resistant. Most research on armored vehicles and escalation concerns public perception, police militarization, legitimacy, tactical-unit deployment, or organizational culture rather than the behavioural response of the armed subject during a live crisis.

Accordingly, this evidence library should distinguish plausible interactional escalation from demonstrated public-perception effects of militarized police presentation, since these are different claims requiring different evidence.

Symbolic escalation

An armored vehicle is not visually neutral. It can communicate danger, state power, expectation of violence, tactical escalation, siege, coercive capability, or military resemblance. For some subjects–particularly those who are paranoid, psychotic, frightened, ideologically hostile to police, intensely distrustful, or interpreting police actions as evidence of persecution–the visible arrival of a large armored tactical vehicle could plausibly affect behaviour. This remains a case-specific hypothesis, not a proven general effect.

Public perception and legitimacy

The strongest evidence for a possible downside of armored vehicles concerns public legitimacy and the symbolic meaning of militarized police presentation, not behavioural escalation by the crisis subject. Mummolo (Mummolo, 2018) used U.S. administrative data and survey experiments to examine militarized policing and found that exposure to militarized police imagery reduced public support and perceived legitimacy. Critically, the armored vehicle was not isolated as the sole treatment–the images also differed in uniforms, weapons, number of officers, and other militarized characteristics–so the study supports the conclusion that militarized police presentation can reduce perceived legitimacy without establishing that the armored vehicle itself independently causes a specific reputational effect.

A Canadian experiment by Blaskovits and colleagues (Blaskovits et al., 2022) reached broadly compatible conclusions about militarized police appearance, finding lower ratings of approachability, trustworthiness, and morality alongside higher perceptions of strength, confidence, and preparedness. That study is useful corroboration but should be treated as comparative rather than primary evidence for an American audience.

Public attitudes toward police equipment

Wozniak, Drakulich, and Calfano (Wozniak et al., 2021) found that public opinion concerning police weapons and equipment is not uniform and depends partly on the equipment, context, and public attitudes, reinforcing the need to treat tactical utility, symbolic meaning, and legitimacy as analytically distinct questions.

Armored Vehicles and Police Militarization

Armored vehicles are among the most visible material symbols in the U.S. police-militarization debate.

The U.S. 1033 Program

The federal 1033 Program permits transfer of excess Department of Defense property to federal, state, local, and tribal law-enforcement agencies, including rifles, body armor, aircraft, tracked and wheeled vehicles, mine-resistant vehicles, and many categories of non-lethal equipment. Armored vehicles became especially

prominent in public debate after the 2014 police response to protests in Ferguson, Missouri, where military-style uniforms, rifles, tactical teams, and armored vehicles became nationally visible. Radil, Dezzani, and McAden (Radil et al., 2017) documented the geography and expansion of 1033 transfers across the United States, while Burkhardt and Baker (Burkhardt & Baker, 2019) focused specifically on MRAP acquisition, making their work especially relevant to this intervention.

Militarization is broader than an armored vehicle

Kraska (Kraska, 2007) conceptualizes police militarization as involving multiple dimensions: material, cultural, organizational, and operational. An armored vehicle is therefore one material indicator of militarization; its presence does not by itself establish that an agency uses military-style tactics routinely, operates with a "warrior" culture, deploys SWAT excessively, uses more force, or treats civilians as enemy combatants. Conversely, an agency can adopt militarized tactics or culture without owning a military-origin armored vehicle.

Acquisition, deployment, and outcome must be separated

This distinction is especially important in the U.S. literature, where many studies use the value or quantity of 1033 equipment received as a measure of militarization. That is not the same as measuring an armored vehicle physically present during a particular critical incident. Koslicki (Koslicki, 2023) directly addresses part of this problem by examining how agencies actually used selected 1033 equipment after acquisition. Crum, Corradi, and Ramey (Crum et al., 2024) likewise show that agencies request 1033 equipment for a wide range of perceived law-enforcement and public-safety functions, complicating any simple assumption that every transfer represents an intent to conduct more coercive policing.

Militarization and police violence

Delehanty and colleagues (Delehanty et al., 2017) reported a positive association between 1033 equipment transfers and measures of police violence, including fatalities from officer-involved shootings. However, subsequent work has demonstrated how sensitive such conclusions can be to data cleaning, agency size, measurement of equipment, longitudinal structure, and model specification. Koslicki, Willits, and Brooks (Koslicki et al., 2021) re-examined the relationship between 1033 acquisitions and fatal police force and found that results changed substantially depending on how the data were structured and analyzed, with estimated relationships disappearing in several agency-size analyses. This is an important caution: agency-level militarization associations cannot be converted into an armored-vehicle effect at the incident level.

Mummolo's broader finding

Mummolo (Mummolo, 2018) found no detectable average benefit of broader militarized policing for violent-crime reduction or officer safety in the nationwide analyses reported, alongside reputational costs associated with militarized police imagery. That finding should not be interpreted as proof that an armored vehicle fails to

protect an officer physically behind its armor, because the levels of analysis are different. One question asks whether greater agency militarization improves aggregate public-safety outcomes; the other asks whether a protected vehicle reduces a responder's exposure during a particular dangerous incident. Both questions matter, but they require different evidence.

A dual interpretation

For a U.S. audience, the evidence supports a deliberately dual interpretation. Armored vehicles can provide genuine rescue, cover, transport, and protected-observation capability during high-risk incidents, and military-origin vehicles and their visible deployment contribute to a broader American debate about police militarization, legitimacy, racial equity, and normalization of exceptional tactical resources. These conclusions are not mutually exclusive.

Contrast With Co-Responder Crisis Response

Armored vehicles and mental-health co-response can appear to represent opposite philosophies: one is visually associated with armor, tactical capability, specialist police response, and protection against violence, while the other is associated with clinical expertise, communication, diversion, voluntary care, and reduced criminalization. That contrast is useful but can also be misleading.

They solve different problems

A co-responder addresses how responders can better understand and communicate with the person in crisis. An armored vehicle addresses how responders can remain physically protected while the threat remains unresolved. Those functions can coexist: a person in psychosis contained with a knife can be managed by officers using an armored vehicle as protected cover and observation while negotiators and a clinician advise from safety, with officers avoiding unnecessary approach and the person eventually relinquishing the weapon. In that scenario, armor does not replace de-escalation; it creates conditions in which de-escalation can continue more safely.

Where the tension becomes real

The tension appears when specialist equipment changes the police response from protected crisis management into premature tactical dominance or coercive escalation–a distinction that depends on how the resource is used, not merely whether it is present. An armored vehicle parked as refuge and cover during a six-hour negotiation is operationally different from a vehicle used as part of an aggressive forced-entry tactic. The dataset variable `I_ARV` records presence, but presence alone may therefore conceal very different tactical meanings.

Relationship to Tactical Units

Armored vehicles are strongly associated with tactical teams, creating an important transition to the next specialist-resource topic. The vehicle itself does not tell us whether a tactical team took command, whether a forced entry occurred, whether officers used specialty munitions, whether a marksman deployed, whether negotiators were present, whether the tactical team simply maintained containment, or whether the vehicle was used only for rescue or cover. This is why Armored Vehicle and Tactical Unit should remain separate variables and separate evidence-library entries.

For a U.S. audience, the armored vehicle should therefore be understood in relation to–but kept analytically separate from–SWAT deployment and agency militarization. The vehicle may arrive with a tactical team, but the presence of one does not establish what the other actually did. Comparative systematic-review evidence also cautions against assuming that tactical experience automatically produces more aggressive force decisions (Jenkins et al., 2024). The tactical-team explainer should therefore examine the team as an organizational and decision-making intervention, not merely as a bundle of weapons and equipment.

U.S. Legal Considerations

No separate constitutional threshold for armored-vehicle presence

The presence of an armored vehicle is not ordinarily a distinct use of force requiring its own constitutional threshold. Legal analysis generally concerns the broader police action, including seizure, warrant execution, tactical entry, detention, use of force, property intrusion, or reasonableness of the operation as a whole.

Manner of deployment may matter

The vehicle may become legally relevant if it is used to damage property, force entry, physically strike or pin a person, block movement in a way constituting seizure, facilitate an unreasonable tactical operation, or contribute to an excessive overall show of force. Those questions depend heavily on facts and jurisdiction.

Presence is different from force

A vehicle positioned as cover, rescue capability, protected observation, or transport is analytically different from intentionally using the vehicle itself as physical force, and the evidence library should preserve that distinction.

Ethical and Moral Considerations

Protection versus intimidation

The strongest ethical justification for an armored vehicle is protection of life. If the vehicle allows police to rescue someone, avoid unnecessary exposure, delay a risky entry, create time for negotiation, or withdraw from

close contact, its protective value may reduce overall coercion. The ethical concern is that the same resource can also communicate overwhelming state power.

Tactical patience

Armor can ethically support patience. If officers are protected, there may be less reason to force an immediate resolution solely because they feel physically exposed, and this effect may be particularly important in suicidal crises, mental-health incidents, barricades, and edged-weapon encounters.

Normalization

The ethical problem changes when exceptional equipment becomes routine. Repeated use of armored vehicles for increasingly low-risk incidents may normalize a style of policing in which tactical equipment becomes the default response rather than a specialist safety resource, and this concern is central to the U.S. militarization literature (Kraska, 2007; Mummolo, 2018; Steidley & Ramey, 2019).

Community legitimacy

Even tactically justified equipment can carry legitimacy costs. Police should therefore distinguish whether the vehicle is operationally necessary from how its deployment is perceived and communicated, recognizing that a resource can simultaneously be useful and symbolically costly.

Evidence Limitations

Direct armored-vehicle effectiveness research remains sparse, and most operational evidence is qualitative and practitioner-based, which means that acquisition should not be treated as proof of effectiveness and that aggregate militarization studies cannot isolate the protective effect of a single armored vehicle in an individual incident. Public-perception experiments typically manipulate several militarized cues simultaneously rather than the vehicle alone, and there is little direct evidence in either direction that armored-vehicle presence independently escalates or de-escalates the behaviour of a person in crisis. The vehicle's value depends heavily on how it is used, since rescue, cover, containment support, observation, forced entry, and intimidation are not equivalent deployments, and vehicle armor ratings and configurations differ substantially. Edged-weapon-specific outcome research is essentially absent; tactical-team deployment is a major confounder because armored vehicles typically arrive with specialist personnel, weapons, uniforms, and tactics; and the presence variable may conceal duration and role, since a vehicle used briefly for rescue is analytically different from one positioned for hours during a barricade.

Bottom Line

Protective capability

Strong in principle; moderately supported empirically. A ballistic armored vehicle provides genuine protected space and mobility, but there is little high-quality comparative research quantifying injury prevention.

Rescue capability

Operationally important but poorly quantified. Practitioner evidence strongly supports rescue and protective roles, while causal outcome evidence remains limited.

Edged-weapon relevance

High as a protection resource, low as a containment mechanism. A person with a hand-held edged weapon cannot ordinarily defeat the intact armor protecting officers inside the vehicle, giving police a reliable refuge and observation platform. The vehicle does not, however, prevent the subject from moving or threatening unprotected people.

De-escalation

Potentially enabling, not inherently de-escalatory. By reducing officer exposure, armor may create time for negotiation, CIT, observation, and tactical patience.

Escalation

Plausible symbolically but not demonstrated behaviourally. There is good evidence that militarized police presentation can reduce public perceptions of legitimacy and approachability. There is weak evidence that an armored vehicle itself causes a crisis subject to escalate.

Militarization

Real but analytically separate from tactical utility. Armored vehicles are highly visible symbols of militarized policing, yet that symbolic role does not negate their physical protective function.

Risk-benefit assessment

The strongest use of an armored vehicle is where it provides a clear protective, rescue, observation, or mobility function that allows police to manage a dangerous incident with less exposure. Its weakest use is routine or symbolic deployment where no meaningful protective need exists and the primary effect is to increase the tactical appearance of the police response.

Core Peer-Reviewed Evidence

1. Koslicki, I. (2023)

Inside the “black box” of 1033 Program military equipment use by local law enforcement.
Policing: An International Journal, 46(3), 553–566.
DOI: 10.1108/PIJPSM-07-2022-0103

Citation key: `<span class="cite">(Koslicki, 2023)</span>`

Priority: Essential U.S. armored-vehicle deployment evidence.

Contribution: National survey of U.S. agencies that had acquired armored vehicles, rifles, or body armor through the 1033 Program, examining how the equipment was actually used in 2019 and 2020.

Key value: Moves beyond acquisition data toward operational deployment and directly demonstrates why equipment ownership and equipment use should be analyzed separately.

Limitation: Does not provide a causal estimate of whether armored-vehicle deployment reduces injury, force, or death.

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2. Burkhardt, B. C., & Baker, K. (2019)

Agency Correlates of Police Militarization: The Case of MRAPs.

Police Quarterly, 22(2).

DOI: 10.1177/1098611118800780

Citation key: `<span class="cite">(Burkhardt & Baker, 2019)</span>`

Priority: Essential U.S. vehicle-specific militarization evidence.

Contribution: Uses national U.S. data to examine agency acquisition of surplus mine-resistant ambush-protected vehicles.

Key finding: More than 800 domestic law-enforcement agencies had received MRAPs in the data examined.

Key value: Directly documents the diffusion of military-origin armored vehicles into American policing.

Limitation: Acquisition study; does not establish how frequently vehicles were deployed or whether they improved incident outcomes.

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3. Mummolo, J. (2018)

Militarization fails to enhance police safety or reduce crime but may harm police reputation.

Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 115(37), 9181–9186.

DOI: 10.1073/pnas.1805161115

Citation key: `<span class="cite">(Mummolo, 2018)</span>`

Priority: Essential U.S. militarization/legitimacy evidence.

Contribution: Combines U.S. SWAT deployment data, nationwide militarization measures, and survey experiments.

Key finding: No detectable aggregate violent-crime or officer-safety benefit in the analyses reported; militarized police imagery reduced public support and legitimacy.

Critical limitation: The experimental treatment combined armored vehicles with other militarized cues and therefore cannot isolate a vehicle-specific effect.

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4. Delehanty, C., Mewhirter, J., Welch, R., & Wilks, J. (2017)
Militarization and police violence: The case of the 1033 program.
Research & Politics, 4(2).
DOI: 10.1177/2053168017712885

Citation key: `<span class="cite">(Delehanty et al., 2017)</span>`

Priority: Important U.S. militarization-and-force evidence.

Contribution: Examines associations between 1033 military-equipment transfers and measures of police violence.

Key finding: Reports positive associations between transfer measures and fatalities from officer-involved shootings.

Critical limitation: Agency equipment transfer is not equivalent to armored-vehicle presence in an individual incident, and later research has identified important data and measurement sensitivities.

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5. Koslicki, W. M., Willits, D. W., & Brooks, R. (2021)
Fatal outcomes of militarization: Re-examining the relationship between the 1033 Program and police deadly force.
Journal of Criminal Justice, 72, 101781.
DOI: 10.1016/j.jcrimjus.2021.101781

Citation key: `<span class="cite">(Koslicki et al., 2021)</span>`

Priority: High U.S. methodological evidence.

Contribution: Re-examines the relationship between 1033 acquisitions and fatal police force using alternative data structures and agency-size analyses.

Key finding: Estimated relationships changed materially depending on data treatment and disappeared in several agency-size analyses.

Key value: Demonstrates why aggregate 1033 findings should not be treated as simple causal evidence about armored vehicles.

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6. Radil, S. M., Dezzani, R. J., & McAden, L. D. (2017)

Geographies of U.S. Police Militarization and the Role of the 1033 Program.

The Professional Geographer, 69(2), 203–213.

DOI: 10.1080/00330124.2016.1212666

Citation key: `<span class="cite">(Radil et al., 2017)</span>`

Priority: High U.S. institutional-context evidence.

Contribution: Examines the legal history, geography, and spatial distribution of 1033 transfers.

Key value: Places armored vehicles within the broader American expansion of military-surplus equipment to local policing.

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7. Wozniak, K. H., Drakulich, K. M., & Calfano, B. R. (2021)

Public opinion about police weapons and equipment: An exploratory analysis.

Criminal Justice Policy Review, 32(9), 960–991.

DOI: 10.1177/0887403421l005005

Citation key: `<span class="cite">(Wozniak et al., 2021)</span>`

Priority: Supporting U.S. legitimacy/equipment evidence.

Contribution: Examines American public attitudes toward police weapons and equipment.

Key value: Supports treating equipment legitimacy as contextual rather than uniformly positive or negative.

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8. Kraska, P. B. (2007)

Militarization and policing–Its relevance to 21st century police.

Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice, 1(4), 501–513.

DOI: 10.1093/police/pam065

Citation key: `<span class="cite">(Kraska, 2007)</span>`

Priority: Foundational U.S. militarization framework.

Contribution: Defines police militarization across material, cultural, organizational, and operational dimensions.

Key value: Prevents treating armored vehicles as synonymous with the entire phenomenon of police militarization.

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9. Crum, J. D., Corradi, A., & Ramey, D. M. (2024)

For law enforcement purposes: The complicated relationship between the 1033 program and the expanding police mandate.

Journal of Criminal Justice, 91, 102166.

DOI: 10.1016/j.jcrimjus.2024.102166

Citation key: `<span class="cite">(Crum et al., 2024)</span>`

Priority: Important contemporary U.S. 1033 context.

Contribution: Qualitatively analyzes more than 125,000 agency justifications for requested 1033 items.

Key value: Shows that agencies describe military-surplus acquisition in relation to a broad and changing police/public-safety mandate rather than one uniform tactical purpose.

Limitation: Agency justifications do not establish actual deployment or effectiveness.

Comparative / Direct Operational Evidence

10. Towns, Z., & Ricciardelli, R. (2026)

"It's imperative. We can't do it, without it": Why Do the Police Need Tactical Armored Vehicles in Canada?

Crime & Delinquency.

DOI: 10.1177/00111287261425616

Citation key: `<span class="cite">(Towns & Ricciardelli, 2026)</span>`

Why retained: One of the most direct peer-reviewed studies of how tactical officers describe the operational safety, rescue, and mobility functions of armored vehicles.

Limitation: Canadian practitioner sample; should support mechanism rather than lead the U.S. contextual analysis.

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11. Blaskovits, B., Bennell, C., Baldwin, S., Ewanation, L., Brown, A., & Korva, N. (2022)

The thin blue line between cop and soldier: examining public perceptions of the militarized appearance of police.

Police Practice and Research, 23(2), 212–235.

DOI: 10.1080/15614263.2021.1889378

Citation key: `<span class="cite">(Blaskovits et al., 2022)</span>`

Why retained: Useful experimental corroboration that militarized police appearance can reduce approachability and trust while increasing perceptions of strength and preparedness.

Limitation: Canadian public sample and not vehicle-specific.

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12. Jenkins, B., Semple, T., Suss, J., & Bennell, C. (2024)

Primed to use force? A systematic review examining the relationship between tactical experience and use of force.

Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology.

DOI: 10.1007/s11896-024-09647-0

Citation key: `<span class="cite">(Jenkins et al., 2024)</span>`

Why retained: International systematic-review evidence useful for the transition from armored vehicles to tactical teams.

Limitation: Tactical-officer evidence rather than armored-vehicle-specific research.

Evidence Rating

Physical protective capability: ★★★★★

The basic protective principle of armor is straightforward, though vehicle-specific protection depends on rating and configuration.

Operational utility: ★★★★☆

U.S. deployment and acquisition research confirms meaningful operational use and wide institutional diffusion; comparative outcome research remains limited.

Rescue / protected mobility: ★★★★☆

Strongly represented in operational accounts, but U.S. denominator-based rescue-effectiveness evidence remains poor.

Officer injury reduction: ★★☆☆☆ to ★★★☆☆

Likely in specific exposure situations, but direct causal estimates are limited.

Crisis de-escalation: ★★☆☆☆

May enable patience and negotiation by improving officer safety, but the vehicle itself is not a de-escalation intervention.

Crisis escalation: ★☆☆☆☆ to ★★☆☆☆

Plausible in some cases; little direct evidence that vehicle presence causes subject escalation.

Public-perception / legitimacy effects of militarized presentation: ★★★★☆

Supported by experimental and observational research, though vehicle-specific effects are difficult to isolate.

Edged-weapon-specific evidence: ★☆☆☆☆
Direct empirical studies are essentially absent; the protective inference is based on the physical mechanism of an edged weapon versus armored refuge.

Overall confidence: Moderate.

Police armored vehicles are best understood as specialist protective infrastructure rather than force technologies. Their principal value is that they alter officer exposure: they can provide mobile ballistic cover, protected rescue and transport, a safer observation position, and a refuge from threats that would otherwise force officers to remain behind fixed cover or approach in the open. In an edged-weapon encounter, this protective effect is particularly clear, since a person with a hand-held knife, machete, sword, or similar weapon cannot ordinarily penetrate the intact armored compartment to reach officers inside it, and that can materially reduce the urgency created by officer vulnerability while creating more time for communication, negotiation, clinical consultation, or tactical planning. The limitation is equally important: armor protects officers but does not contain the subject or protect anyone who remains outside it. Broader research on police militarization shows that militarized police presentation can reduce perceived legitimacy and approachability, but the literature does not establish that an armored vehicle itself causes a crisis subject to escalate. The most defensible interpretation is therefore dual: armored vehicles can provide genuine life-safety capability while simultaneously contributing to the visual and institutional militarization of police, and their value depends less on mere presence than on whether they are used to create protection and tactical patience or to support unnecessary coercive escalation.

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