



Celebrities, Congressional Black Caucus: Let's Nationalize Police

Prominent celebrities and leaders of the Congressional Black Caucus have endorsed a major nationalization of local police forces with an August 25 [letter](#) to President Obama, calling for creation of a federal police "czar" and greater federal controls over law enforcement in the wake of the Ferguson, Missouri, shooting and protests.

"The Administration must appoint a federal Czar," the [letter](#) states, "housed in the U.S. Department of Justice, who is specifically tasked with promoting the professionalization of local law enforcement, monitoring egregious law enforcement activities, and adjudicating suspicious actions of local law enforcement agencies that receive federal funding."



The letter is signed by Congressional Black Caucus Chairman Marcia Fudge (D-Ohio), and her fellow members Elijah Cummings (D-Md.), Steven Horsford (D-Nev.), John Lewis (D-Ga.), Gwen Moore (D-Wis.), and Barbara Lee (D-Calif.). Also signing on to the letter are the leaders of the ACLU, several labor unions (AFL-CIO and SEIU), *Sex and the City* actress Cynthia Nixon, and several dozen others.

The letter is a direct result of the shooting in Ferguson, Missouri, and the subsequent protests. An excerpt reads:

Michael Brown, an unarmed African American teen shot multiple times and killed by a Ferguson, MO police officer, is only the latest in a long list of black men and boys who have died under eerily similar circumstances. Investigations into the Ferguson shooting are ongoing, and many of the specific facts remain unclear for now. However, the pattern is too obvious to be a coincidence and too frequent to be a mistake. From policing to adjudication and incarceration, it is time for the country to counter the effects of systemic racial bias, which impairs the perceptions, judgment, and behavior of too many of our law enforcement personnel and obstructs the ability of our police departments and criminal justice institutions to protect and serve all communities in a fair and just manner.

Allegations that law enforcement has not applied the laws fairly upon black Americans are based on statistics showing that blacks are convicted of an inordinate number of gun crimes and receive stiffer sentences for the same gun crimes, and Senator Rand Paul (R-Ky.) has made a [very public issue](#) of the disparity. The *Washington Post's* libertarian blogger Radley Balko [noted](#) on July 22 that "Last year, 47.3 percent of those convicted for federal gun crimes were black — a racial disparity larger than any other class of federal crimes, including drug crimes. In a 2011 report on mandatory minimum sentencing for gun crimes, the U.S. Sentencing Commission found that blacks were far more likely to be charged and



Written by [Thomas R. Eddlem](#) on August 30, 2014

convicted of federal gun crimes that carry mandatory minimum sentences. They were also more likely to be hit with ‘enhancement’ penalties that added to their sentences. In fact, the racial discrepancy for mandatory minimums was even higher than the aforementioned disparity for federal gun crimes in general.”

Ironically, the letter makes the valid point that “the militarization of police departments across the country is creating conditions that will further erode the trust that should exist between residents and the police who serve them. The proliferation of machine guns, silencers, armored vehicles and aircraft, and camouflage in local law enforcement units does not bode well for police-community relations, the future of our cities, or our country.”

The source of this militarization is not endemic racism, however; it has been federal intervention and aid through the Department of Defense’s Law Enforcement Support Office (LESO) under the auspices of fighting the “drug war” and “terrorism.” LESO notes on its [website](#) that “Since its inception [in 1991], the 1033 program has transferred more than \$5.1 billion worth of property. In 2013 alone, \$449,309,003.71 worth of property was transferred to law enforcement.” LESO boasts that some 8,000 police agencies are currently availing themselves of military equipment from the Department of Defense.

In other words, the same federal government that is responsible for militarizing the police to the tune of \$449 million per year is what Rep. Marcia Fudge and her colleagues suggest should be reviewing and controlling local police. “Police departments should not be solely responsible for investigating themselves,” the letter reads. “DOJ must set and implement national standards of investigation that are democratic (involving independent review boards broadly representative of the community served), transparent, and enforceable.”

Americans have been presented with the false choice between the militarization of police encouraged by the federal government and the overseeing of police by that same federal government that has created the problem.

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