

Filming Government Agents Does Not Work

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Police officers have bullied Americans for far too long. Their incessantly rampant abuse of our liberty is absolutely intolerable; so, the question then becomes, what can Americans do to hold these disgusting cops accountable? Reformists tend to think that working within the judicial branch of government, as well as raising public awareness of this truly horrific epidemic, are viable approaches that should be taken to protect Americans, yet they have failed to address any critiques to their methodology that are offered in good faith.

For over the better part of a decade, it has become a frequent technique for American political dissidents to film government agents, albeit with different stylistic approaches. The first version is now known as “[copblocking](#),” which is defined as the act of filming police officers during an encounter of some kind (such as a [traffic stop](#)) with the goal of providing objective transparency for the event, especially if the situation [were to degenerate violently](#). A variation on this are called “[confrontations](#),” whereby citizens initiate an encounter with a politician (usually either a legislator or a bureaucrat) with the goal of asking hardball questions in order to solicit a response they hope is demonstrative of governmental tyranny. Both approaches share the attributes of using digital consumer electronics (especially hand-held video cameras) and those videos of such encounters are made publicly available by being uploaded to an Internet video-sharing website, such as [YouTube](#).



A commonly annoying habit of such government agents, but especially that of cops, is of claiming during such encounters that they would prefer to not be filmed, either because doing so would interfere with their investigation, or because it violates their individual privacy. Last time I checked, unless police investigations are confidential affairs performed under the auspices of secrecy, I don't understand why they would have a problem with the collection and storage of data. Although individual privacy is held as [one of the most sacrosanct of personal liberties](#), the moment a person dons a uniform (or is otherwise representing the government in his official capacity), any reasonable expectation of privacy is forfeited so long as he operates as an [agent of the State](#). There are tradeoffs to be considered whenever statisticians want to assume coercive power and forceful domination over their fellow man.

Filming government agents requires a savvy knowledge of consumer electronics. The main piece of equipment is a digital video camera, whether hand-held or strapped to one's body in some fashion. Prices of these consumer goods range from somewhat cheap to pretty expensive, typically \$80 – \$1,500. Most of these cameras rely on SanDisk (SD) memory cards, which range in price from \$8 – \$300, depending on quality and capacity; it should also be noted that there is an emerging trend towards live-streaming capability, primarily because some unfortunate copblockers have had police confiscate their SD cards. Despite the high technology currently available for sale, I can't help but wonder what the tradeoffs for dissidents would be regarding their wish for government transparency relative to the privacy implications of frequently using such surveillance equipment; put another way, does the utilization of the equipment required for filming government agents inadvertently acclimate dissidents towards regularly practicing [sousveillance](#), and if so, would this be evidence of them tacitly supporting the justifications made for the

existence of the surveillance police state apparatus?

As much as the technique of filming cops and politicians has been heralded by the [alternative media](#) as if it were indisputably wonderful, there has been little follow-up as to how effective such a method is for providing transparency and accountability in any level of government. Unfortunately, such “transparency” and “accountability” are vaguely defined, if at all, and their lack of applicability to filming government agents just comes across as nothing more than empty activist rhetoric. When you consider how such accountability is to be enforced, there are only two ways this could possibly be done with copblocking and confrontations, respectively – the number of cops being dragged into court and getting convicted, and the number of politicians who were fired or otherwise thrown out of office; in other words, how many cops have been punished and how many politicians have lost their jobs *because* of “copblocking” and “confrontations?”

Sadly, neither copblocking nor confrontations have conclusively demonstrated to have held police and politicians accountable for their tyrannical actions. [Wishful thinking](#) predominates the minds of activists, who are sincerely desperate for *anything* that might be able to prevent, mitigate, or expose the [misdeeds of government](#). Despite this, are there two chief arguments offered by such filming advocates, one for reformism explicitly, and the other in favor of public awareness. I would like to offer four different rebuttals to these two arguments in the hope that these assertions can either be finally debunked, or at least greatly challenged.

The reformist argument claims that “[we](#)” should hold government agents accountable for their actions by documenting their atrocities for the benefit of the court, so they can be convicted and punished later. My utilitarian rebuttal is that there is no provable track record demonstrating the effectiveness of copblocking, other than the trend of documenting the existence of the abuse itself. If the police encounter leads to a hearing or even a trial, all that the prosecutor has to do is to file a motion for suppression of evidence regarding the recording in question, and if the judge grants that motion (or even arbitrarily declares the evidence as *somehow* inadmissible), then the defendant’s case is greatly handicapped, if not outright lost, because in a strict contest between a citizen’s testimony versus that of a police officer’s “expert” testimony, the cop wins hands down (with regards to politicians, the underlying assumption is that *some* of them can be voted out of office, which is silly to assume because not only does it fail to address the bureaucracy, but it also neglects to mention the fact that [voting does not work](#)). My deontological rebuttal is that copblocking and confrontations both require direct physical contact with government agents, so unless you are only “working within the system” for some guerrilla purpose (such as [whistle-blowing](#), [paper-tripping](#), or [monkey-wrenching](#)), then you are engaging in reformist tactics (such as [litigation](#)); if you want nothing to do with the State, then filming government agents is contradictory to your own goals because it increases your direct contact with the government that much more than if you had not.

Advocates further assert that regardless of the reformist argument, video-taping cops and politicians is still valuable because of its propaganda value, so as to motivate people to become [minarchists](#). My utilitarian rebuttal is that there is no proof demonstrating this to be true at all; in fact, there is already a plethora of police brutality videos on YouTube, as there are numerous confrontation videos. Although one could infer it *might* be effective in moving an individual along [the other \(not so\) thin line](#), this is still wishful thinking (and for those who have had personal experience where they know for certain that these videos *did* help someone else to begin caring about their liberty, they certainly aren’t talking about it publicly). My deontological rebuttal is that if uploading videos of abusive cops and corrupt politicians were valuable as propaganda, then the whole facade of trying to “hold them accountable” would be broken in the minds of the viewers because the footage would very strongly suggest that you *cannot* hold such government agents “accountable” at all. Considering also the historical precedent that much lesser forms of proof were sufficient for motivating vigilante justice against such government agents, as well as the fact that there is no trend of cops being frequently shot or politicians being regularly tarred and feathered before being run

out of town on a rail, then this would mean (more likely than not) that such copblocking and confrontations utterly fail to motivate dissidents to do much of anything else other than run around and film these government agents some more; if anything, I would further suggest that such a profuse diet of unproductively volatile footage serves to *promote* fear and anger against the government *without* a [guerrilla remedy](#) or some other outlet for such frustration, thus this discontent is left to fester and eat away at your soul.

I find it ironic that [anarchists spearheaded the development of this method](#). Perhaps their motivation lay in the assumed propaganda value of trying to delegitimize the State by recording the atrocities and abuses committed by government agents. Yet, with regards to reformism (and particularly to copblocking), I question their integrity simply because if they maintain that the State does not exist, then why does something that does not exist need to be held accountable at all? [As Pete Eyre said](#):

“Having an objective record of the interaction between yourself or somebody else and police employees is crucial because if something goes down and you don’t have that video, then it’s a situation where it’s you versus their word, and when their friends are the people judging the situation they tend to side with those folks with badges, so the camera creates that transparent record and speaks truth.”

Maybe Eyre doesn’t understand this communications medium all that well, but this just isn’t always true. Anyone who has ever played around with videography knows how easy it is to manipulate and edit footage. An abuse of this ability to do so has been argued previously by [Gary Hunt](#) in his seminal article, [Because YouTube Said So...](#) (an [audio version of the article](#) is also available). Having [been on that side of the fence not that long ago](#), I can more deeply appreciate than most so-called “activists” the inherent dangers of overly relying on film as a way to secure my liberties. Although I still enjoy watching open-source documentaries on “BoobTube,” I am now much more discriminating when I analyze the claims being made, in much the same manner as [I study mainstream television](#).

Another element of these confrontations and copblocking episodes is how the cameraman will constantly interrupt the government agent, and thus not allow him the opportunity to give him enough rope to hang himself with. This is very noticeable, particularly with the confrontations of politicians, and leaves the viewer either titillated with [reality TV excitement](#), or amazingly frustrated. Take the style of [James O’Keefe](#), for instance. Regardless of your attitude towards [his undercover exposes of ACORN](#) back in 2009, what was valuable about what O’Keefe did was how he was able to elicit a response from his interviewed subjects. Although his techniques might not work well during copblocking, it would certainly have increased the probability of success in getting any answer from politicians in those confrontation videos; in that sense, I think it is more than fair to say that James O’Keefe totally upstaged [Luke Rudkowski](#), and rightfully so (ironically, even though Rudkowski has made a name for himself in the alternative media for these so-called “confrontations,” he himself [behaves exactly like one of those politicians whenever anyone else tries to “confront” him about anything](#)).

Unfortunately, copblocking and confrontations can become a danger to your financial health, if you let it. Far from encouraging you to [frugally enjoy your liberty](#), the hobby of filming government agents has quickly become evocative of anti-free market [corporate consumerism](#). For example, [Rudkowski admitted that he has](#) a \$20 shoulder harness, a Go Pro camera (\$200 – \$400), a DSLR 60-D (\$500 –\$1,500), an iPhone (\$50 – \$700, depending on series and capacity), an Android cellular telephone (\$100 – \$200), a \$5

adapter between the iPhone and the Android phone, and [an Energizer XP18000 Universal AC Adapter with External Battery](#) (\$150). A year later, [Eyre judged Rudkowski's updated equipment as being terrific](#), especially since Rudkowski added to his kit a *custom* wireless microphone, a pair of goggles, a walkie-talkie, video recording glasses (\$50 – \$150), police scanner with earpiece (\$90 – \$500), and multiple unrevealed hidden cameras. I guess Rudkowski had to [figure out a way to spend all that donation money](#), and it would seem to be the case that he did, even if he had to engage in the odd [activist legal defense fund scam](#) to do it.

Once you understand that [cops aren't even constitutional](#), then you begin to also understand why any notion of trying to “hold them accountable” by filming them seems rather ineffective. Considering also how [the American prison population is by far the largest in the world](#) in what is ironically called “the land of the free,” [how police at all levels of government actively encourage a snitch culture](#), and what you should contemplate doing to [protect yourself from these insatiable predators](#), it becomes quite clear that any notion of “working within the system” is just pure *lunacy*. Filming cops will not save you from jail, and filming politicians will not stop them from passing whatever unconstitutional statutes they damn well want. The only possible exception to this rule would be [if you recorded a police officer at a traffic stop using a digital audio recorder](#) (\$30 – \$80); however make sure ahead of time that either you live in a “one party” state ([such as Texas](#)), or in the case of a “two-party” state, make sure to get the officer's consent, otherwise the tape is worse than useless because you could be prosecuted if you were ever caught with that recording, or if it was made public. Besides this mitigation, the only realistic moves you have left is to *strongly* encourage these government agents to voluntarily quit their jobs while you [discretely form security teams](#); never forget that the government jobs that comprise entire police departments and judicial courts are just another [welfare state handout](#).

In conclusion, it saddens me to bear witness to how individuals have been suckered into counter-productive hobbies that unnecessarily increases their opportunity costs. This is by no means a “holier-than-thou” statement, for even the best of us get suckered in by the unmitigated promotion of bad techniques like this, for even [Chris Cantwell goes cop blocking](#). Perhaps someday when more of us [learn how to strategically plan](#), as well as how to [objectively evaluate our tactics](#), then maybe Liberty can indeed be secured once again from the ravaging monsters who inhabit the darkest corners of the human soul.