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SEPTEMBER 16, 2014

## When bad cops get new jobs

 September 1, 2014 by [stevenyoder](#)  [Leave a Comment](#)

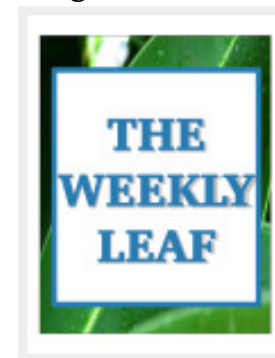
If the officer involved in the Michael Brown shooting is found guilty of misconduct or worse, there's a good chance he could skip town and get a police job elsewhere. His new employer might never find out his history. Police observers say that's because multiple flaws in the systems for tracking bad-actor cops let them slip through the cracks.

For much of its history, America has treated policing—like education—as a local matter. Police were hired on the basis of their political alliances and therefore were often uneducated and untrained, [notes](#) Thomas Jurkanin, a criminal justice professor and former head of the Illinois state agency that trains cops. The resulting cases of illegal police behavior and unethical acts cemented in the public mind an image of cops as “unregulated government hacks,” he says.

That changed in the 1950s, when most states started creating agencies to train cops, set standards, and revoke their licenses for serious or criminal misbehavior.

But while it might seem that such oversight would work, in reality state systems are full of problems. Six states—California, New York, New Jersey, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, and Hawaii—don't have authority to revoke the licenses of cops who

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abuse the badge. That makes it easy for cops fired in one department to get a job in the next town over. Jurkanin notes that all 50 states issue revocable licenses to a range of professionals like accountants, cosmetologists, and real estate agents. That is, barbers and realtors have stricter licensing requirements in those six states than do police.

Even many of the 44 states that do revoke licenses have lax systems for reporting bad actors. In about a third of those, cops actually have to be criminally convicted to have their licenses stripped, says Roger Goldman, the leading expert on revocation and a professor at the St. Louis University School of Law. That means misbehavior that's never prosecuted is excluded, like working while drunk, sexually harassing female staff, or having an affair while on duty—all [actual cases](#). In an additional 10 states, local chiefs aren't even required to report the names of officers dismissed for misconduct to their state agencies, so they do so inconsistently, according to an [article](#) last May in *Police Quarterly*.

Perhaps worst, no national system keeps bad-actor cops who have lost their licenses from crossing state lines to get another job. True, a National Decertification Index holds the names of officers nationwide who have lost their certification for misconduct or criminal behavior. But participation in it is voluntary, and only 37 states contribute.

Those who defend the current system say local police departments have the ability to screen out bad apples through their background checks. But those don't always catch cops who have had problems in previous jobs—sometimes problem officers willingly leave in exchange for their department not revealing their record to future employers, Goldman says. Chiefs do that because it saves them the expense and hassle of going through a hearing.

Broken systems have real-world consequences, as experience shows in California, a nonrevocation state. Last May, 33-year-old David Silva [died](#) during an arrest in Bakersfield. A civil-rights lawsuit filed by Silva's family charges that sheriff's deputies beat him with batons while he lay defenseless on the ground. The sheriff's department contends he was drunk and uncooperative and fought back during the arrest. But one

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of the accused deputies may have been involved in a previous similar incident—he has the same name as one charged in the 2010 beating of a man that resulted in a \$4.5-million court judgment against the department. The sheriff declined to tell *The Los Angeles Times* whether he is the same officer.

Goldman points to another incident last year, this one in Los Angeles. There County Sheriff Lee Baca [hired](#) dozens of officers from another county police force that had been disbanded in 2010 even though investigators had found significant misconduct in their backgrounds.

And in 2008, the city of Maywood hired an interim chief who pleaded no contest to charging for bogus overtime during a previous stint with the Los Angeles Police Department. A 2007 investigation by *The Los Angeles Times* found that at least a third of the officers on Maywood’s force had either left other police jobs under a dark cloud or had brushes with the law while working for the city.

Proponents of better policing say that if states aren’t going to change their systems, Congress needs to step in. Making state participation in the National Decertification Index mandatory instead of voluntary would seem a logical step, argues Goldman.

It’s been almost 20 years since Congress tried to do something like that. In 1996, Senator Ben Nelson and Representative Harry Johnston, both Democrats, introduced bills to create a national registry of officers whose certification had been revoked. Both bills died in committee.

Until a case involving a cop with a bad history who hurts or kills an arrestee gets the kind of attention that the Brown case has, Congress won’t likely feel any pressure to try again.

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## Commentary: The irony of Turkey hosting a UN-sponsored Internet forum

September 3, 2014

By [Liz Fields](#)

The decision to host  
a major UN-backed

Internet forum in Turkey this week, despite the country’s displays of spiraling contempt toward web and social media freedoms, seems to be rewarding Turkish government for its draconian censorship laws, rather than denouncing them. The Internet Governance Forum (IGF), being held between 2-5 Sept. in Istanbul, is a gathering [...]



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## United States

September 1, 2014 By [Patrick R.](#)

[Romain](#)

The standing of the United States will likely weaken over the next several years, setting the country on a path to become an also-ran middle tier power by 2035. By most measures and indicators that bear on future performance and strength, America's advantage over other countries is disappearing – fast. Meanwhile, the country's political leadership [...]



## Commentary: Journalists at risk in Iraq and Ferguson, Missouri

August 30, 2014 By [Patrick R. Romain](#)

The Islamic State's gruesome killing of Associated Press reporter James Foley is a stark reminder of the ultimate danger faced by journalists who cover various state and regional conflicts around the world. The profession is predicated on providing transparency to local and global constituents on issues that impact human progress and development. That mission is no less

[...]

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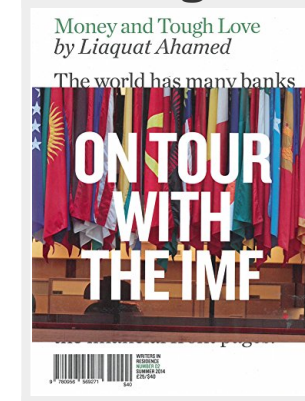
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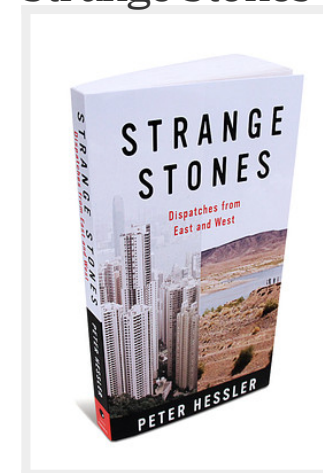
## Book recommendation: Money and Tough Love

[Amazon](#)



## Book recommendation: Strange Stones

[Amazon](#)



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