

US Mainstream Media Wants You to Think Killings of Police Are on the Rise

By [Peter Hart](#)

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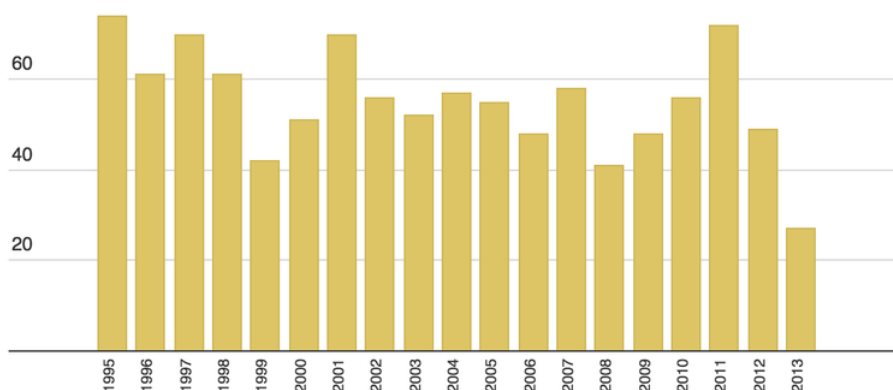
“Ambush Recharges Debate,” declares the front page of **USA Today** ([12/22/14](#)), a headline over a story about the killing of New York police officers Rafael Ramos and Wenjian Liu. The “debate” being recharged is presumably linked to the national protests against police brutality—protests that are in no way connected to this brutal murder.

USA Today’s contribution to this debate is to encourage readers to think that murders of police officers like these is becoming more common. A front-page graphic is titled “POLICE DEATHS ON THE RISE,” and it shows that overall police deaths increased from 100 last year to 123 this year. The increase is more dramatic when isolating police deaths by firearms: 31 deaths in 2013 and 49 this year.

The paper is very much invested in this storyline; on page 3 the paper runs [astory](#) headlined, “Ambush Killings Are Not Uncommon,” citing the same statistics.

But these statistics are highly misleading—in part because police deaths are not the same thing as police murders. As **Vox** ([12/22/14](#)) points out, data from the FBI’s Uniform Crime Report show that felonious killings of police officers average between 40 and 70 per year; in most years, slightly more officers are killed accidentally.

An average of 55 police officers are "feloniously killed" a year



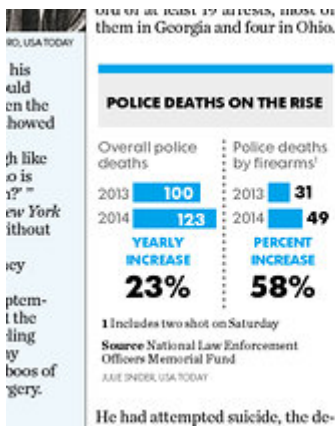
Source: FBI Uniform Crime Report



Vox’s chart on police killings looks much different.

In the year 2013, **Vox** notes, many fewer officers were killed than usual—so using it as half of a two-year comparison gives a false view of the overall trend, which is basically steady.

Indeed, **USA Today** appears to know that comparing just two years is problematic. It notes that officer deaths “have been subject to dramatic swings over the years.”



USA Today zeroes in on the last two years to suggest a trend.

The FBI numbers differ from the data the paper is using from the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund. But the trend is the same; the group counted 100 officer deaths in 2013, which was the lowest total in 50 years.

USA Today could have averaged several recent years to see if there was a meaningful trend. But they would have determined that this year was not unusually deadly for police officers; in the 10 most recent years (2004-13), the average number of total deaths was 150.

But instead of doing that, the newspaper decided to make a front-page graphic that only feeds the narrative that police officers are under attack.

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