

# **Private security in patrolling public places: overview of developments in the Netherlands and the ambivalence about plural and private policing**

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# Plural policing in the Netherlands

## Three forms of non-police policing:

- Private security
- Municipal patrol officers (City Guards and MLE-Officers = Municipal Law Enforcement-officers)
- Private security workers contracted by municipal governments as patrol officers

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# Private security in the Netherlands

- Strong growth since 1980 (from 10.000 in 1980 to 32.100 in 2010)
- Regular police still twice as large (2010 65.000 vs. 32.100)
- Relative growth of private security much stronger than growth of regular police
- Since 2010: drop in numbers of private security workers of about 11 percent

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# Municipal Patrol Officers

- Late 1980s: introduction of City Guards
  - no specific formal powers
  - schemes for creating jobs for the long-term unemployed
- Since 1994: municipal governments able to employ MLE-officers
- MLE-Officers: formal powers (stop citizens, ID, fines for parking offences and disorderly behaviour)
- Since 2006: both City Guards, and MLE-Officers employed in Municipal Enforcement of Surveillance Departments
- 2015: about 90% of Dutch municipalities have MLE-officers (in sum: 4.000)

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## Local governments contracting private security as MLE-officers

- 2005: local governments allowed to contract private security companies for the position of MLE-officer
- 2014: private MLE-officers same formal powers als public MLE-officers
- Only difference: private MLE-Officers only handcuffs; public MLE-Officers may also have baton and pepper spray
- Not recognizable as private security officer (same uniform)

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# Motives of municipal governments to contract private security companies for MLE-officers?

## *General motives:*

- public safety as an important social and political (local) issue
- rising expectations about municipality as the dominant actor in local public safety policy
- regular police concentrate on 'core tasks' and neglect local patrol and rule enforcement

## *Specific motives:*

- efficiency and flexibility

## *Strong growth of these contracts:*

- from 14% of the municipalities (2010) to 35% (2015)
- main factor: the establishment of the National Police in the Netherlands

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## Private MLE-officers as street-level workers

- Often very proud on their job
- Negative consequences of flexibility:
  - short term contracts
  - uncertainty about their future
  - back to a position as private security worker? felt as a degradation
  - work only at peak hours: often no full-time position
  - private MLE-officers as “disposable workers”
- Policing by MLE-officers asks for: time, continuity, stability
  - hard to combine with short-term contracts, flexibility and uncertainty of markets

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## Ambivalence and private policing of public places: different and contradictory sets of values

*At the street level:*

- quest for security in a market context results in uncertainty
- policing needs continuity, stability and enduring relations: hard to reconcile with flexibility, short-term contracts, etc.

*At the institutional level (example of Austria):*

- Pluralization of policing as an almost unstoppable process
- Viewed with reluctance and suspicion (historical reasons)
- Sensitivities and symbols refer to fundamental principles of *Rechtsstaat* and monopoly of violence

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