

THE USE OF JUDO THROWS AS A FORM OF PHYSICAL COERCIVE MEANS BY THE SLOVENIAN POLICE

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Abstract:

The article presents the applicability of judo throws as a form of physical force in the Slovenian police. Professional throws are generally considered the most severe form of physical force, as they can cause more serious bodily injuries when subduing an individual who is violating the law. The legal framework, conditions, and principles for the use of coercive means by the Slovenian police are defined, followed by a more detailed discussion of physical force, with a focus on professional throws. The effectiveness of these throws is compared, the advantages and disadvantages of different throwing techniques are described, and their usefulness in a police officer's application of physical force is assessed. Successful and effective execution of a professional throw requires a high level of officer proficiency, which is virtually unattainable given the limited number of hours allocated for police education, further training, and professional development during employment. We reviewed and analyzed the statistics on the use of coercive means by the Slovenian police to determine the extent to which Slovenian police officers resorted to professional throws when subduing individuals between 2015 and 2024, and to examine whether their use was lawful, professional, and effective.

Keywords: *police, coercive means, physical force, judo throws*

Introduction

Slovenian police officers frequently encounter situations in which the use of coercive means against individuals is required. In such cases, officers must not only adhere to legal requirements but also follow general principles of police work and professional standards. This necessitates proper training and proficiency, as the use of coercive means significantly interferes with human rights and fundamental freedoms. Consequently, police procedures may result in serious injuries, both to officers and to individuals against whom force is used.

Among the available coercive means is physical force, which is considered one of the least severe options within the police force. Within the scope of physical force, police officers may use professional grips and strikes, as well as professional throws. Professional throws represent a more severe form of physical force. These throwing techniques are derived from the martial art of judo (Žaberl et al., 2015, p. 298). They are executed by first unbalancing the opponent through a pull or push, and then using the officer's body or part of the body to throw the person to the ground.

This paper presents the effectiveness of such throws and identifies the most suitable forms for police duties. We will also highlight the dangers police officers need to be aware of when performing different throws. Finally, we will analyze and present statistical data on the use of physical force and

professional throws by the police against individuals in the Republic of Slovenia between 2015 and 2024, followed by concluding observations.

1. The Use of Coercive Means in the Police

The use of coercive means applies only when police officers, in the course of performing their duties, employ any of the coercive tools listed below to directly act upon individuals, in accordance with the Police Tasks and Powers Act (hereinafter referred to as ZNPPol, 2013, Article 73).

While performing police duties, officers may use the following coercive means:

- instruments for handcuffing and binding
- physical force,
- gas spray,
- baton,
- service dog,
- electric stun gun,
- means for forcibly stopping vehicles,
- mounted police force,
- special motor vehicles,
- water cannon,
- gas agents and other passivation agents,
- firearms (ZNPPol, 2013, Article 73).

In addition to the above, it is important not to overlook the duties of police officers prior to the use of coercive means, as defined in Article 75 of the Police Tasks and Powers Act (ZNPPol, 2013). The first paragraph states: *“Before using coercive means, police officers shall order the person what to do or refrain from doing, and warn them that coercive means will be used if the order is not followed.”* The second paragraph adds: *“Regardless of the previous paragraph, police officers may omit the order or warning if doing so would prevent the execution of the police task, or if the circumstances of the situation do not allow for it.”*

Coercive means must be used directly against individuals. Direct use is considered to occur when the consequence of the police officer’s action is directly related to the person against whom it is applied (Žaberl, 2009, p. 135). Coercive means may only be used for as long as necessary to achieve the intended purpose or until it becomes clear that the purpose cannot be achieved (Čas, 2019, p. 91). The police officer must submit a written report on the use of coercive means as soon as possible, or no later than the end of their shift, by completing and submitting an official record (Kotnik, 2025, p. 35).

When using coercive means, police officers must respect human dignity and personal integrity. This includes avoiding the use of such means against children, visibly ill individuals, and others who fall into the category of so-called privileged persons. These are individuals who, due to their physical constitution or other clearly recognizable characteristics, are unlikely to strongly resist police officers, pose a threat, flee, or harm themselves. The use of coercive means on such individuals may negatively affect their mental state or, due to their physical vulnerability, provoke public outrage.

However, there are situations in which police officers have no alternative but to use coercive means to control resistance, attacks, threats to life or property—whether their own or others’—or when other circumstances directly endanger their life or health. In such cases, coercive means must also be used against these individuals (Pozderek, 2020, p. 226). The police officer makes decisions based on the circumstances observed in the given moment, evaluating the situation and determining which powers and coercive means to apply (Pozderek & Kotnik, 2023, p. 17).

2. Physical Force

The general conditions for the use of physical force are defined in Article 80 of the Police Tasks and Powers Act (ZNPPol, 2013): **“Police officers may use physical force if they are unable to:*

- *subdue a person's resistance,*
- *repel an attack, or*
- *prevent a person from self-harming.”**

Article 81 of ZNPPol (2013) further defines the use of physical force as follows:

- *“The use of physical force includes the direct application of force by police officers through professional holds, strikes, and throws.*
- *It also includes professional pressure techniques, individual or group application of force to push, shove, carry, or separate individuals.*
- *Physical force is also considered to be the use of a shield to push, shove, or separate persons, or the use of a baton to perform professional holds, apply pressure, push, shove, carry, or separate individuals during individual or group interventions.*
- *To subdue passive resistance, police officers may only use professional strikes and throws if professional holds or other forms of physical force from the second paragraph of this article have proven ineffective or if, due to circumstances and the need to ensure the safety of life, personal safety, or property, they are not feasible.”*

Police officers may use forms and methods of physical force derived from various martial arts and police practice, as defined by professional standards in internal police regulations, or acquired through police education, advanced training, and operational instruction (Rules on Police Powers, 2017, Article 40).

In several parts of the Police Tasks and Powers Act (ZNPPol), where the conditions for the use of specific types of coercive means are defined, the necessity of such use is implicitly emphasized, while also suggesting a certain degree of discretion. For example, in specifying the conditions under which different coercive means may be used, the legislator states that a police officer *“may,” “is allowed to,”* or *“has the right to use”* certain types of coercive measures. In contrast, when it comes to the use of firearms, the Act specifies that an officer *“may only use a firearm if there is no other way”* to carry out a specifically listed police task. This indicates that firearms should only be used as a last resort (*ultima ratio*). From this, it follows that the legislator does not impose a duty on police officers to use permitted means in legally defined situations but rather allows their use only when absolutely necessary (Žaberl & Pozdrec, 2014, p. 7).

Police officers frequently encounter unpredictable and dangerous situations in their work that the legislator has not regulated in detail. In such cases, officers must take all necessary actions to prevent harm or danger to protected goods. When this occurs, broader action is permissible under ZNPPol or other relevant laws to prevent threats to key values such as human life, health, liberty, or significant property. This approach to preventing danger and ensuring police intervention upholds the right to personal safety guaranteed by the police and, in turn, strengthens public trust in the rule of law.

The police may only use those powers that are appropriate given the circumstances and that can prevent, eliminate, or reduce the impact of danger or unlawful acts in the least severe way possible. Police conduct and the legal basis for action will therefore depend on the specific circumstances of each event—whether it is a protest, traffic blockage, or any other situation involving clear threats to public safety or property—which may require the use of coercive means to restore order (Žaberl, M., Pozdrec, F., & Oberman, I., 2017, p. 290). In practice, it is almost impossible for police officers to complete a police procedure using only a single police power (Pozdrec & Kotnik, 2022, p. 195).

3. Professional Throws

The techniques of professional throws, which police officers learn during their basic training and continue to refine throughout their careers, originate from the martial art of judo. Judo is a modern

Japanese martial art that was developed in 1882 by Jigoro Kano from various traditional forms of jiu-jitsu. It is known as an unarmed combat discipline that includes both standing and ground techniques. In addition to combat, judo also has a philosophical component closely connected to its practice. Through long-term training, individuals not only develop physically but also cultivate their personality and intellect, achieving a high level of inner peace (Pozdrec, 2016, p. 8).

Professional throws are classified as a more severe form of physical force. There are several reasons for this classification: during the execution of a professional throw, it is more difficult to control the opponent's fall compared to using holds or strikes. Moreover, most offenders do not know how to fall properly - except for those rare individuals who have previously trained in martial arts that teach safe falling techniques. Field experience shows that falls onto hard surfaces such as concrete, asphalt, or wooden floors often result in injuries, primarily because the individuals do not know how to fall correctly. Furthermore, executing throws properly and in a controlled manner requires significant skill and sensitivity, which gives a substantial advantage to officers who have trained or are still training in judo. In practice, police officers often use throws in combination with professional holds when taking someone down. However, when used in this way, the technique is categorized as a *professional hold*, not as a *professional throw* (Nemanić, 2007, p. 56).

Throwing techniques (*Nage waza*) are divided into two main groups:

- Throws performed from a standing position (hand, hip, and foot throws),
- Body throws (techniques involving the practitioner falling backward or sideways during execution).

To successfully perform any of these techniques, proper balance-breaking, correct entry movements, and control during execution are essential (Pozdrec, 2016, p. 57).

When performing professional throws, the police officer must consider the following phases:

- **Unbalancing (Kuzushi)** – During the throw, the opponent is brought out of balance and their basic stance is disrupted so that, with a proper entry, they can be thrown with minimal use of force. The opponent can be unbalanced by pulling or pushing in the following ways:
 - By strongly pulling or pushing in the direction of the throw,
 - By briefly pulling or pushing in the opposite direction and breaking their balance in the direction of their reaction.
- **Entry (Tsukuri)** – During the entry, the officer uses short movements while forcing the opponent into longer movements. The correct moment for entering the throw occurs:
 - During an attack (the principle of yielding),
 - When the opponent makes a mistake (the principle of timing),
 - When deceiving the opponent (the principle of action and reaction).
- **Execution of the Throw (Kake)** – This is the result of proper unbalancing and a well-timed entry. After the throw is completed, the opponent should be held by the sleeve or arm to allow for a proper fall (Pozdrec, 2016, pp. 58–59). *Kake*, or the execution of the throw, is considered the natural conclusion of the entire action (Škraba, 1980, p. 48).

In performing a professional throw, it is important that the executor - in this case, the police officer - uses the entire body. However, the classification of the throw depends on which part of the body is most prominent during the execution of a given technique (Brousse & Matsumoto, 2002, p. 15).

4. Analysis of the Use of Physical Force and Professional Throws by the Slovenian Police

In this chapter, we present statistics on the use of professional throws in comparison to other forms of physical force by the Slovenian police between 2015 and 2024. We expect that the proportion of professional throws used will be significantly lower than other forms of physical force. This is because police officers must adhere to the principle of proportionality in their work. As already mentioned in this paper, the successful execution of a throw requires a high level of training and skill,

which is virtually impossible to achieve given the limited number of training hours allocated for learning throws during police education and subsequent in-service training.

Table 5.1: Overview of the number of uses of physical force and professional throws by the Slovenian police between 2015 and 2024

YEAR	PHYSICAL FORCE	PROFESSIONAL THROW
2015	3499	94
2016	3506	84
2017	3825	75
2018	3581	71
2019	3670	67
2020	3948	69
2021	4266	121
2022	3693	93
2023	4220	92
2024	4468	76

Source: Statistics on the Use of Force Against Individuals by the Slovenian Police 2015–2024.

If we examine the statistics on the use of force in the Republic of Slovenia, we find that the highest number of professional throws was used in 2021, followed by 2015, and the lowest in 2019. The largest number of uses of physical force occurred in 2024, followed by 2021, and the least in 2015.

When reviewing the statistics on the use of throws by the Slovenian police, we find that police officers very rarely decide to use a professional throw in comparison to other forms of physical force such as professional holds, strikes, pressures, individual and group use of physical force for carrying, pushing, separating individuals, choking, etc.

Conclusion

When a police officer decides to use force, they must do so when the legal conditions are met (principle of legality). Legality means that police officers may exercise police powers based on and within the scope defined by law, and in the manner prescribed by law or a subordinate regulation (Pozderec, 2020, p. 25). Police officers are permitted to use coercive means while performing police duties. If a police officer lacks a legal basis to carry out a specific power through the use of coercive means, the use of that particular coercive measure is unlawful. However, it is sometimes not enough for the officer to immediately use force, as they must also consider a range of other principles in addition to the legal conditions. Already in the provisions that state the conditions for the use of force, the principle of necessity is embedded. This is defined in the conditions for the use of physical force with the phrase "if it cannot be done otherwise." This means that if police officers are unable to carry out their duties using other police powers, they are permitted to resort to coercive means. A police officer must first attempt to perform a specific police task using "non-violent" powers, thereby respecting the

principle of the gradual use of police powers. If it is determined that the task cannot be successfully carried out using a warning, command, or other authority, the officer may use coercive means (Žaberl et al., 2015, p. 278).

This principle is followed by the principle of proportionality¹, which requires the officer to use the least severe coercive measure that would allow the task to be carried out safely and effectively. When the officer assesses that the police task cannot be performed in any other way, they decide to use coercive means. In doing so, the officer must also consider the principle of professionalism and apply the coercive measure in a professional and effective manner, in accordance with all professional standards. Following this principle is the principle of proportionality, where the officer must use the least force necessary to safely and effectively perform their task. When the officer assesses that the police task cannot be completed in another way, they decide to use force. In doing so, they must also adhere to the principle of professionalism², using the force in a professional and effective manner according to the rules of the profession. Due to the principle of proportionality, officers in most cases first opt for using professional holds or individual physical force rather than throws. Often, the individual actively resists, which leads officers to combine various forms of force to successfully control the resistance. Active resistance can vary in intensity, and officers must recognize this on the scene in order to determine which form of force will be effective. In some cases, active resistance may escalate into an attack on the officer. In addition to the factors mentioned, there are many other factors that officers must consider when using force, which we cannot cover in this article. Based on this, we conclude that the officer must first be properly trained and qualified to use force, not just be aware of the conditions for its use. If the officer is adequately trained and prepared, they will also be more confident, which brings numerous advantages.

We find that the execution and successful completion of a professional throw require police officers to have a great deal of skill, knowledge, reliability, professionalism, and intuition. Professional throws are considered the most severe form of physical force among the coercive measures. They require the officer to incapacitate the individual during the throw, but to do so with professionalism, ensuring that no unnecessary injuries are caused to the individual. Legality must also be considered, meaning that the officer must not exceed their authority in using a throw when a less severe form of force could have been used.

Moreover, when performing the throw, it is essential to be aware that most individuals who are thrown by the police are unfamiliar with falling techniques, which may result in unnecessary pain or injury. This highlights the importance of how the officer executes the professional throw. Therefore, it is crucial for police officers to be well-trained and skilled in performing professional throws. Frequently, the throw is used after the officer initially decided to apply a professional hold, and due to either passive or active resistance, or the physical state of the individual, the officer may determine that a simple hold will not suffice to accomplish the task or incapacitate the individual, thus transitioning the hold into a professional throw. Officers with prior knowledge of judo are at a great advantage in such situations.

We have found that the use of professional throws requires a high level of expertise, as executing the throw itself demands coordination, agility³, strength, and perfect timing. The officer must

¹ The principle of proportionality imposes a duty on police officers to, as a rule, use other powers before resorting to coercive means—powers that enable them to carry out a police task with less severe consequences for the individual compared to coercive measures. Coercive means may be used only if the use of other powers has proven unsuccessful or if, due to the circumstances and the need to ensure the safety of life, personal safety, or the protection of property, their use would not be possible (Žaberl et al., 2015, pp. 278–279).

² Police officers must follow professional standards and promote integrity when carrying out police duties. They must exercise police powers in a manner that does not endanger the lives of individuals who are not involved in the police procedure, nor may they impose unnecessary obligations on them (Pozdarec, 2020, pp. 24–26).

³ According to the Dictionary of the Standard Slovenian Language, agility is the characteristic of someone who is active, skillful, and able to quickly and effectively respond and adapt to circumstances (Dictionary of the Standard Slovenian Language, n.d.).

understand the mechanics of the throw, including the basic principles required to successfully throw or topple someone to the ground. Police officers typically practice throws on mats (tatami). However, when executing the throw on a hard surface in a real-life situation, the throw must be controlled even further, as most individuals do not know the basic techniques for falling. Officers need to know how to perform throws from various situations, such as a direct entry into the throw, using the throw from a clinch, or executing the throw when the person shields themselves with their hands or attacks the officer. For this, constant practice and training are required, but unfortunately, officers are not provided with sufficient training in this regard during their education and continued training, let alone receiving adequate training in these advanced techniques.

Just as different martial arts adapt techniques to comply with current sports regulations, police officers must adapt their throws to the specific dangers they face in their line of duty. These dangers include not only hard surfaces (asphalt, concrete, tiles, etc.) but also: wet or uneven ground, furniture, the risk of strikes, the carrying of coercive tools, the potential interference from other individuals in the police operation, the possibility of individuals carrying dangerous objects or weapons to use in an attack, etc.

In conclusion, we hope that in the future, there will be even less use of physical force against alleged offenders during police operations and that tasks can be resolved and concluded in a peaceful manner. However, this does not mean that police officers should not continuously strengthen and enhance their knowledge and skills in martial arts.

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