

Community Partnerships and Problem Solving in Chicago¹

by
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This paper examines the role that public involvement and the coordinated delivery of city services can play in community policing. Chicago's program emphasizes both of these components in its community policing program. Through public meetings and committees, the general public has the opportunity to voice their fears and concerns. Administrative mechanisms were created to ensure that a broad array of city service agencies, and not just the police, would be available to respond to these concerns. This paper describes the rationale for including these components in Chicago's community policing program, and describes how they operate. It then presents an analysis of the linkage between public priorities and service delivery. The data suggest that the distribution of city services has broadly responsive to public needs, and that active citizen involvement in community policing targets the delivery of city services. Not surprisingly, other factors – including city politics – played a role as well.

Public Involvement

While definitions vary, public involvement (along with organizational decentralization and the adoption of a problem-solving orientation by police) is among the core components of most community policing programs (Skogan and Hartnett, 1997). Forms of involvement vary considerably. In some places police try to educate residents by involving them in informational programs or enrolling them in citizen police academies that give them in-depth knowledge of law enforcement. Residents are often asked to assist the police, usually by being their “eyes and ears” and reporting crimes promptly when they occur. Residents sometimes get involved in the coproduction of safety, when they partner with the police in crime prevention projects or walk in officially sanctioned neighborhood patrol groups. Finally, residents may be called upon to represent the community by serving on advisory boards or decision-making committees. Even where these are old ideas, pushing them to center stage as part of a larger strategic plan showcases the apparent commitment of police departments to resident involvement.

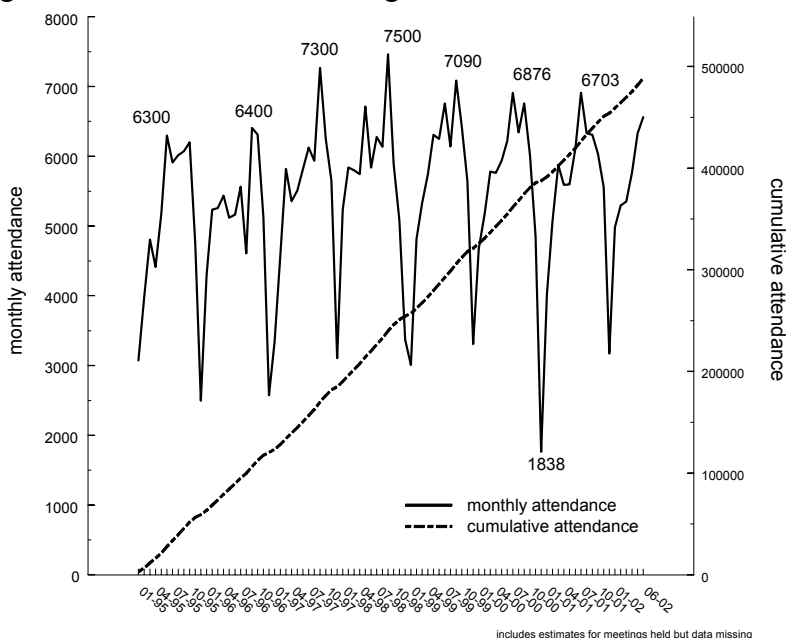
The issue is whether these are real and effective avenues for resident involvement. Police can hope to gain even if they are not. They can get some good publicity and perhaps popularity by announcing that they are responding to the public. One reason – perhaps the major one – why American cities adopt community policing is to solve their legitimacy problems and buy peace in poor and disenfranchised neighborhoods. But cities also have a history of not following through very well on promises made in these communities, especially if they are at all difficult, costly or politically risky. So, rather than taking claims about resident involvement in community policing at face value, analysts need to ask hard questions about them: Who is the community? Who gets involved? Does their involvement make any difference? Whose interests are served by the program?

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Chicago's community policing initiative features a number of organizational strategies, and resident involvement is built into virtually every aspect of the program. The department adopted a decentralized turf orientation by reorganizing patrol work around small geographical areas, the city's 279 police beats. The 911 dispatching process was adjusted to keep officers on their assigned beats while answering calls. Officers assigned to beat teams are expected to engage in identifying and addressing a broad range of neighborhood problems in partnership with neighborhood residents and organizations, and to attend community meetings. Tactical teams, youth officers, and detectives are also expected to work more closely in support of beat officers, and to exchange information with them and the community more readily.

The mechanism for grass-roots consultation and collaboration between police and residents is neighborhood meetings that are held in almost all of the city's 279 police beats, almost every month. For example, during 1998, an average of 250 beat meetings were held each month and about 5,800 persons attended. As Figure 1 indicates, attendance at the meetings is very seasonal, low in the winter and high in the summer. It was lowest during a month-long siege of near-record snow and low temperatures in December 2000. Attendance has remained remarkably stable, averaging 6,000 persons or more per month. Chicagoans attended beat community meetings about 59,000 times during 1995. The figure for 1997 was almost 65,000, and in 2001 66,600 residents showed up. Over the 90-month period between January, 1995 and June, 2002, more than 488,000 Chicagoans attended about 21,000 beat meetings. In a city-wide survey conducted in 2001, 16 percent of Chicagoans said they had attended at least one beat meeting in the previous year.

Figure 1: Trends in Beat Meeting Attendance 1995-2002



An average of seven police officers attend each meeting as well, including the beat's sergeant, beat officers who are on duty, and a few beat team members from other shifts. The latter are paid overtime, at a yearly cost of more than \$1 million. The meetings frequently feature presentations by police from special units or detectives, and those who attend include

representatives of city service agencies, aldermanic staff, school personnel, local business owners and landlords, and activists representing area community groups. These meetings are perhaps the most important link between residents, police and many of these agencies and community leaders. Beat meetings are intended to be forums for exchanging information and for identifying, prioritizing and analyzing local problems. They also provide occasions for police and residents to get acquainted, and a vehicle for residents to organize their own problem-solving efforts.

Perhaps most importantly, beat meetings are to provide a forum for identifying and discussing neighborhood problems. In the 1998 study, observers watched for discussions of a checklist of 72 issues and concerns. In addition to recording what was discussed, they also distributed a questionnaire that enabled every participant to rate the extent of neighborhood problems.

A long list of concerns falling in the social disorder category topped the list; they were discussed at 88 percent of the beats. Among these, concern was expressed about groups of people loitering in the streets in 50 percent of the beats, followed by problems associated with alcohol and with noise. Drug problems were brought up at two-thirds of the beats. These included discussions of drug sales and use, drug houses, and gang involvement in the drug business. Discussion of physical decay problems was also frequent; they came up at 58 percent of the meetings. Abandoned buildings were discussed in 30 percent of the beats, and there was frequent mention of graffiti, trash and junk, loose garbage and abandoned cars. Parking and traffic concerns were also high on the list, discussed in 57 percent of the beats. Concern about parking, speeding and reckless driving (frequently motorists ignoring stop signs) came up often. Gang problems and property crimes were discussed about half the time. Gang violence, fear of intimidation by gangs, burglary and theft were brought up at about one in five meetings. Concern about personal crime followed closely, at 47 percent.

What was discussed at beat meetings was related to the character of the neighborhood. This was examined by linking the observer's reports to social, economic and demographic data about each area. In general, residents of poor African-American beats talked about drugs. Concern about drugs was also closely linked to family disorganization, poor schools and bad health. Residents of heavily Latino beats brought up gangs, especially in areas with a high concentration of recent immigrants. Property crime came up most frequently in better-off, predominately white areas. The other frequent topic of conversation in better-off beats was traffic and parking problems. Physical decay issues came up in lower-income areas where the housing stock is older and in poor condition, and where many buildings sit vacant.

Chicagoans who attend beat meeting also report being active in community problem solving efforts and other community policing activities. In a study conducted in a smaller sample of beats in 2002, 3,700 people were surveyed who were attending a meeting. The participant survey included questions about various forms of CAPS activism. Residents were asked if they had participated in each activity during the past 12 months "in your beat or district." Overall, 64 percent of those who attended reported participating in at least one of the activities that were listed. Table 1 presents detailed findings from the survey.

Table 1
Beat Community Meeting Participant Activism

Percent of Meeting Participants Involved in CAPS Activities in the Past 12 Months			
Aggressive Activism		Involvement in CAPS	
marches or rallies	25	city or area Neighborhood Assembly	18
prayer vigils	13	CAPS fair, forum or education program	16
smoke outs, CAPS picnics or barbeques	12	attended court for court advocacy or a Court Advocacy subcommittee meeting	11
positive loitering	9	Vote Dry or liquor control projects	12
parent patrols or walking school bus	6	worked with the CAPS office to organize a neighborhood group	14
neighborhood patrols or watches	21	contacted police or elected officials about a problem	39
percent involved in aggressive activism**	43	percent involved in CAPS neighborhood projects**	53

** See text for definition of activism measures.

An analysis of patterns in the activities described in Table 1 found they fall into two distinct clusters. One is aggressive activism. Activities in this cluster are listed on the left side of Table 1, and includes marches, prayer vigils, smoke outs, positive loitering, parent patrols and neighborhood watches. Participating in marches and rallies was the most frequent activity in this category. Twelve percent reported participating in “smoke outs, CAPS picnics or barbeques.” These events are aggressively anti-crime, for they are deliberately held in the midst of street drug markets or prostitution zones and are intended to drive both sellers and their potential customers from the area. “Walking school buses” are parent groups that walk through a neighborhood each morning to escort children safely to school. Neighborhood watches or patrols were surprisingly popular, reported by 21 percent of those attending. Overall, 43 percent of those attending beat community meetings reported being involved in at least one of these efforts.

Activities reflecting involvement in neighborhood projects are listed on the right side of Table 1. These ranged from attending neighborhood assemblies to being a court advocate, working on liquor control projects and organizing neighborhood groups. Court advocacy is an official CAPS project that is sponsored by the districts’ advisory committees, and 11 percent of those attending reported some involvement in that effort. Neighborhood assemblies and CAPS fairs or forums are events organized by the CAPS Implementation Office, a civilian-staffed arm of the police department. “Vote Dry” is the common label for efforts to close down troublesome

liquor establishments in the city using a referendum process, and 12 percent indicated they had been involved in that or some other liquor control project. Overall, 53 percent of those attending beat community meetings in the summer of 2002 reported being involved in at least one of those activities. “Contacting police or elected officials about a problem,” which is a fairly passive form of involvement, was the most frequent activity reported in the survey (at 39 percent), and it fell in this category.

The important role played by beat meetings in articulating public priorities and mobilizing residents for action raises issues of representation that will be examined here. Unlike formally constituted bodies – made up, for example of heads of a list of formal organizations, official nominees of the mayor, or elected representatives – beat meetings are composed of those who happen to hear about them and choose to attend. Attendance at beat meetings has remained remarkably strong, but only a small percentage of beat residents will attend the meeting. Although the average beat is home to about 7,500 adults, a good meeting by Chicago standards draws about 30 residents. This is only about 0.4 percent of the adult population. By contrast, in the average beat about 2,210 voters participated in the 1995 mayoral election, or an average of 29 percent of age-eligible residents. Sheer numbers are not the only issue, it is also important that beat meetings represent the interests of residents. Even a small meeting can do this effectively, if those who attend adequately articulate the concerns of the general public. This paper addresses representational questions about beat meetings: Do they accurately represent to the police the problems facing beat residents? Does involvement in beat meetings have any impact on neighborhood conditions, by affecting the priorities of service providers?

City Services

Why does community policing involve the coordinated delivery of a broad range of “non-crime” services? While both police and residents are vitally interested in crime, an important feature of Chicago’s program is that the problems it addresses do not have to be conventional criminal matters. An effective community policing program inevitably involves an expansion of the police mandate to include a broad range of concerns that previously lay outside their competence. The expansion of their job description is probably typical of departments that launch serious community policing initiatives, and in Chicago it had two sources.

First, it is the price of citizen involvement. When beat officers face residents at neighborhood beat meetings, the concerns that are voiced include all manner of problems, and often the kinds of crimes that police traditionally are organized to tackle are fairly low on the public’s list of concerns. Residents are as worried about garbage strewn in alleys, graffiti on garage doors and landlords renting to threatening-looking people as they are about burglary and car theft. We found that physical decay problems were brought up at almost 60 percent of beat meetings. More meetings featured discussions of abandoned buildings than of gang violence or burglary, and residents were also concerned about graffiti, loose garbage and abandoned cars. The leaders of Chicago’s program knew that if officers’ response to many community concerns was “that’s not a police matter,” many residents would not show up for the next meeting. They had to have a positive response available.

In Chicago, belief in “broken windows” was another force pushing the expansion of the police mandate. It is widely believed that crime is rooted in a range of neighborhood conditions and events, and that it is necessary to address both criminal and criminogenic problems if the city is to take its mission of preventing crime seriously. The police department’s document describing the rationale for the new program noted,

. . . CAPS recognizes that graffiti, abandoned vehicles and buildings, malfunctioning street lights and other signs of neighborhood disorder do have an adverse effect on both crime and the public’s fear of crime. By addressing these relatively minor problems early on, police and other government agencies can prevent them from becoming more serious and widespread crime problems (Chicago Police Department, 1996, p. 2).

An important difference between Chicago’s program and the response to “broken windows” in some cities is that in Chicago the focus is on fixing the windows. Once the program started, police quickly found themselves involved in orchestrating neighborhood clean-ups and graffiti paint-outs. The districts named “problem-buildings officers” who inventoried dilapidated and abandoned structures and tracked down the owners of the property in order to bring them into court. Police stood with residents at prayer vigils and guarded marches in prostitution zones. They distributed bracelets that would identify senior citizens if they fell down and took note of street lights that were out and trees that needed trimming. They were steered toward problems like the sale of loose cigarettes and individual cans of beer (both are against the law), as well as toward the open-air drug markets that plague too many neighborhoods.

As a result, community policing could not be just the police department’s program; it had to have the assistance of other city agencies. Residents attending a beat meeting may identify a problem of rats in their alley, but some other government agency will have to respond to apply the poison and clean up the loose garbage. So from the beginning, Chicago planned that coordinating the delivery of the full range of city services would be an integral part of community policing, and that service requests routed through the police would receive priority attention. The process is initiated when police officers complete a CAPS Service Request Form. These forms capture information about the services being requested and problem locations. They include space for a brief narrative description of the problem. Most service needs can be described on the form with only minimal effort, reducing the paperwork burden that police officers dread. Completed forms are forwarded to a branch of the Mayor’s Office which is responsible for coordinating city service support for CAPS. There, problems are prioritized, given an identification number, entered into a computerized case tracking system and sent to the proper city agency. Problems are often identified by officers on routine patrol, but many surface at beat meetings or in informal contacts between beat officers and residents. Figure 2 presents a sample service request form. It described the kinds of problems that could be dealt with using this prioritizing process.

communication problems. Changes were made in city ordinances to facilitate expedited building demolition and car tows, two frequent service needs. Beginning in early 2000, service requests were entered directly into the city's service tracking system using computers located in police district stations. The system allows station personnel to check the status of individual requests and print out reports on service requests for distribution at beat meetings.

But even this seemingly simple process faced the challenge of police culture. Initially, officers were skeptical that the city's cumbersome bureaucracies would be sufficiently agile to meet their requests, and feared they would be "left twisting in the wind" after promising residents that something would be done about a problem. At one training session we observed, officers laughed when the head of the streets and sanitation department claimed that her agency would come through for them. There was emotional as well as practical resistance to getting police involved in filling pot holes. In the early years some officers simply refused to fill out request forms. A vocal faction of beat officers resented their new role as the first link in the process. They felt that they would not only be held responsible by residents for ignored service requests, but also that there was a fundamental unfairness to the assignment, because "they don't call streets and sanitation workers when there's a robbery!" One officer lamented, "Everybody complains to us. Why can't the community call their alderman to complain? What do potholes have to do with police work?" In the area he worked in, we found that beat officers could not be bothered reporting collapsing sidewalks or open fire hydrants. In another beat we studied intensively, officers resented serving as what they dubbed "the pooper-scooper police." In the most graffiti-ridden area we could find, beat officers had not filed a single request for a site clean-up. In the beginning, this feeling was a general one. In the spring of 1995 we surveyed 7,300 police officers from every district of the city. Asked if they agreed that "police officers should try to solve non-crime problems in their beat," only 30 percent did. Seventy percent were pessimistic when asked if CAPS would result in "more unreasonable demands by community groups"; two-thirds feared it would lead to "greater burden on police to solve all community problems" (see Skogan, et al, 1999).

But during the program-development period the service-delivery component was one of the most successful elements of CAPS. The evaluation found that, in contrast to matched comparison areas, physical decay went down in all three of the most troubled prototype districts (Skogan and Hartnett, 1997). In districts where building abandonment, graffiti and trash were ranked among the most serious problems, these problems declined substantially in comparison to trends in comparison areas. Several districts made effective use of the new service delivery emphasis to target specific problems, including abandoned buildings and autos, trash and graffiti.

In time, service requests became a routine way of responding to residents complaints at beat meetings. Further impetus to coordinate city services with policing projects came in 2000, when the police department instituted their own version of New York City's famous "CompStat." Chicago's version is a management accountability process which holds district commanders responsible for identifying local priorities and resolving them. A regular feature of the review sessions that are held at police headquarters is a discussion of the use of CAPS Service Requests to clean and repair priority target areas, and commanders who do not make use of this process can find themselves in trouble.

In addition, the Mayor created a civilian-staffed CAPS Implementation Office to support problem solving projects and coordinate the delivery of city services in areas identified by police as a high priority. Their staff of 90 works to turn more people out for beat meetings, organizes block clubs, and supports community problem solving efforts. A number of different police initiatives have coupled intensive enforcement efforts with extensive clean-up projects. This includes “superblock” projects that focus community involvement and infrastructure rebuilding efforts on very small areas, and the city’s weed-and-seed-style Distressed Neighborhood Program. Even while police were still securing these areas, city crews could be seen towing abandoned cars, clearing alleys, trimming trees and erecting new street lights. Since early 2000, service requests have been entered directly into the service tracking system using personal computers located in police district stations. The system allows station personnel to check the status of individual requests and print out reports on service requests for distribution at beat meetings.

One novelty of this new service delivery model is that it drew a closer, faster connection between residents and service providers. As one police officer described it:

I think it's empowered people, it's put them in touch with city services. They used to depend on the alderman, which was good if your alderman was strong, but otherwise things didn't get done. That's not true any longer. People can control the policing that occurs in their neighborhoods.

As district commander noted, “The way this is set up, it really levels the playing ground for everyone. Everyone is entitled to – and gets – a good level of services.”

The coordinated delivery of city services is thus an integral part of community policing in Chicago. It linked to what they believe the causes of crime and neighborhood decline are, and to their need to be responsive to the concerns expressed by the public via the citizen involvement parts of the program. It is also there because the Mayor, who is very interested in the effectiveness of municipal services, saw the process as another mechanism for forcing his many bureaucracies to focus on their ultimate customers and generate more “consumer satisfaction.”

Public Involvement, Neighborhood Problems, Service Delivery

This section of the paper examines representational and outcome issues in Chicago’s community policing program. I first examine how effectively beat meeting represent the interests of the community as a whole, and then turn to the issue of how effectively they steer the delivery of city services. A variety of data are used to address these questions. The results of surveys will be used to represent the views of neighborhood residents, while the findings of questionnaires distributed at beat meetings describe what their concerns were. Data from city agencies is used to describe the distribution of city services. An appendix to this chapter describes all of the surveys and the wording of questions addressing neighborhood problems and perceptions of police. All of the data are centered around 1998, the year when beat meetings participants were surveyed.

Representation of Neighborhood Interests

The question considered here is, To what extent did those who attended beat meetings represent the views of residents concerning the problems they faced? To examine this, I compare reports of the extent of neighborhood problems gathered in surveys of beat residents with those expressed by beat meeting participants. The data indicate that meeting participants were more concerned about problems than were the residents of their beat. Those who attended gave higher ratings than did their neighbors to a broad range of problems, and this was one of the reasons why they were at the meetings. Second, the data indicate that those who come to the meetings broadly represent the views of beat residents, but more accurately for some issues than for others.

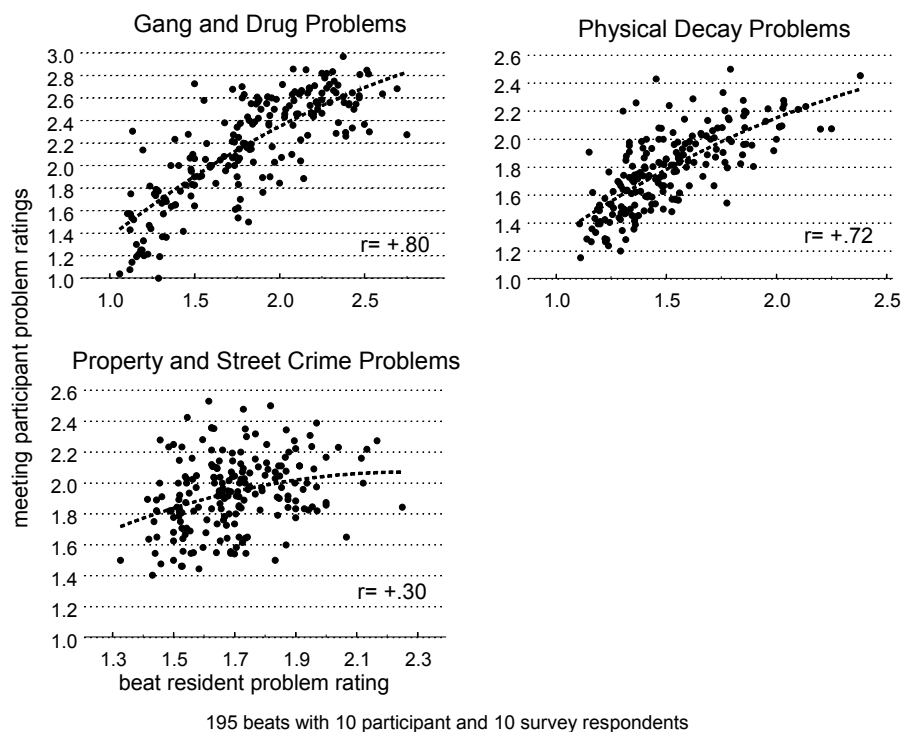
To make these comparisons, the results of city-wide surveys conducted during 1997, 1998 and 1999 were aggregated to the beats in which the respondents lived. The yearly surveys were quite large, averaging about 3,100 completed interviews, but because the respondents were scattered throughout Chicago many beats were still sparsely represented. Not all beats had a full set of participant data, either. Our observers could not attend and successfully survey all of them, and some meetings were only sparsely attended. The analysis presented here requires ten survey respondents as the minimum number for characterizing a beat. As a result, it examines 195 beats (70 percent of the city's 270 residential beats) where at least ten meeting participants completed questionnaires and ten residents were interviewed in the city surveys. As a group these beats were somewhat better-off and lower-crime than the 75 beats that were excluded, but the biggest difference between the two groups is population size. The beats represented in the study are about one-third larger than those that are not, because residents there were more likely to be sampled in the city-wide surveys.

Comparisons between residents and beat meeting participants could be made for assessments of the magnitude of seven neighborhood problems that were included in both surveys. Both groups were asked to rate whether each was a "big problem," "some problem," or "no problem" in their neighborhood. The results illustrated how those who attended the meetings were much more concerned about neighborhood conditions. The largest gap between meeting participants and residents concerned street drug sales. Almost half of those who attended beat meetings reported that street drug sales were a big problem in their neighborhood, compared to 32 percent of residents. Gang violence and graffiti came next; the gap between residents and participants was about 12 percentage points for both problems. Other gaps were smaller, but those who came to meetings were more concerned than were their neighbors about all seven problems.

The three panels in Figure 3 address the extent to which residents' perceptions of beat problems were reflected in the level of concern that participants brought to the meetings. Beat by beat, the Figures compare ratings of problems gathered in the city surveys with ratings of the same problems supplied by meeting participants. Responses to questions about three forms of physical decay—abandoned cars, abandoned buildings and graffiti—were combined to form a neighborhood physical decay index. Questions about the extent of problems with burglary and street crime formed a personal and property crime index, while questions about gangs and drugs

constituted a measure of their own.² Figure 3 presents average resident and beat meeting participant scores on these measures for each beat.

Figure 3: Concerns of Meeting Participants and Neighborhood Residents



The strong relationship between resident and participant ratings of gang and drug problems is apparent in Figure 3.³ The correlation between the two measures was $+ .80$. Likewise, there was a strong link between beat and participant assessments of the extent of physical decay in their area; that correlation was $+ .72$. In these domains, where residents are concerned, so are those who show up at meetings; where they are not, many participants share that view as well. Chicagoans can feel fairly confident that those who attend meetings in their beat reflect their views about the seriousness of gang, drug and neighborhood physical decay problems.

The link was weaker between beat meeting participant's views of crime problems and what the general public thought about burglary and street crime. As Figure 3 indicates, the two were correlated only $+ .30$. Public concern about street crime translated to the meetings a bit more directly (the correlation between the two measures was $+ .48$ for street crime and $+ .22$ for burglary), but neither linkage was particularly strong. Careful inspection of Figure 3 also reveals that there was less variation across beats in the views of both groups, when it came to crime. The high-to-low range for each group was smaller, and more beats were clustered near the city average.

² See the Appendix for the exact wording of the survey questions.

³ Figure 3 presents curvilinear regression lines that better fit the relationship between the two problem measures. The correlations reported there are ordinary Pearson's Rs.

There are at least two plausible explanations for the limited correspondence between resident and activist concern about crime. One is visibility. Most of the remaining problems probed by the surveys have visual manifestations. Graffiti, abandoned cars, empty buildings, street drug sales, and even some aspects of neighborhood gang activity are clearly visible neighborhood issues. Seeing them provides evidence of their magnitude that can be shared by broad segments of the community. Graffiti has as its “victim” everyone who views it and is offended by it, and unless it is cleaned up they will see it over and over again. By contrast, burglary and street crime victimize individuals and households, and they are crimes of stealth. People may hear and gossip about victims of these offenses, but they rarely see such crimes in progress, and after the fact they leave few visible scars. They do not present the kind of shared, visible, repetitive experience that other problems in our inventory can manifest, even if they are widespread in a community.

Another possible explanation for the relatively weak link between residents’ views of crime and those of beat meeting participants is representational. The issue is, To what extent do biases in the representation of groups account for any lack of correspondence between the views of the general public and those that are carried into beat meetings? The views of beat meeting participants vary somewhat, depending on who they are, so demographic imbalances in representation may have an impact on the correspondence between the priorities of the general public and the issues that concern just those who show up.

I have examined the issue of the demographic representativeness of beat meetings in another article (Skogan, 2003). In general, the meetings over-represent the most established people in the community: older residents, those who have lived there a long time, those who are better educated, and home owners rather than renters. The group that made the largest difference was older people. Their over-representation affected the views of the group, for they tended to see fewer crime problems than did their younger counterparts. Residents over age 65 were only half as likely as those age 18-29 to report that street crime was a big problem in their neighborhood, and the gap was almost as wide for burglary. The varying mix of younger-versus-older participants at the meetings thus had a substantial effect on the gap between beats and meetings, the strongest effect of any demographic factor. The correlation between the average age gap between beat meeting participants and residents and the under representation of crime problems at the meetings was .21. In contrast, there were only small differences between older and younger people when they were asked about neighborhood physical decay or drug and gang problems, so age misrepresentation had a much smaller effect on the match between the views of residents and beat meeting participants.

Representation and Service Delivery

The second issue addressed in this paper is whether community policing makes a difference for a city’s neighborhoods. This is a difficult question to address, for crime and the character of neighborhoods in a large city like Chicago is influenced by a broad range of macro as well as micro-level forces. The macro level forces are very powerful, including large-scale immigration, a shift from manufacturing to services as the economic engine of the city, and the exodus of the child-rearing middle-class to the suburbs. Compared to this, the representativeness

of beat meetings probably is not very consequential. At the local level, beat meetings compete with a long list of policies and practices for affecting the course of neighborhood development, and probably they do not account for as much as do many other factors.

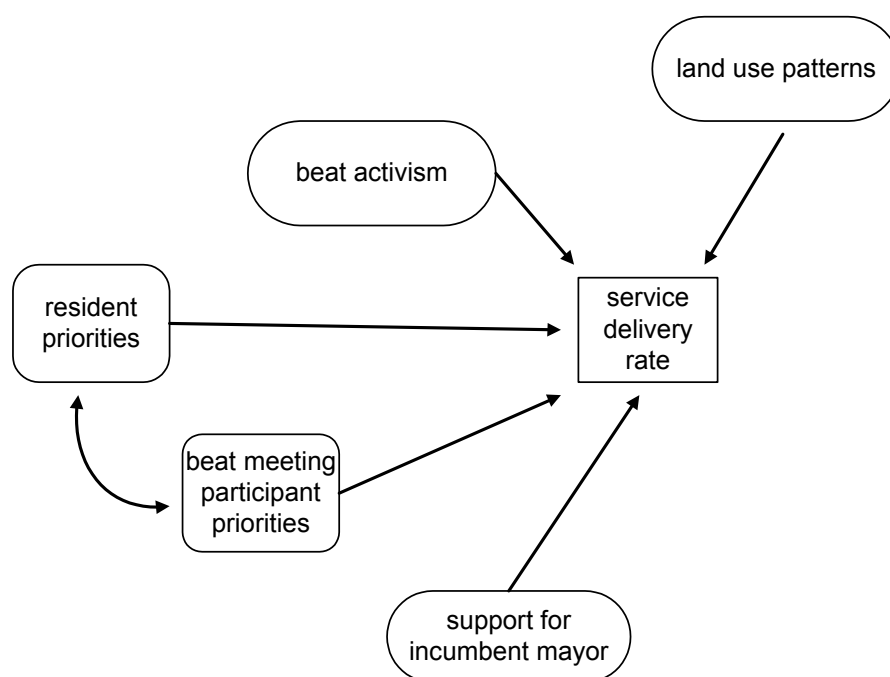
The proper place to look for the effect of beat meetings is closer to home, in the operation of the program itself. Does the city respond effectively to the concerns of residents, as they are articulated through beat meetings and other venues? Do “the goods get delivered” in response to citizen priorities? Even then, there inevitably will be other forces at work affecting how the program operates and who enjoys its benefits, so the question becomes, What is the role of beat meetings in comparison to other factors determining who gets what from the program?

Data from the city’s information system can be used to monitor two high-volume services that address problems of concern to the public and are widely discussed at beat meetings: graffiti and abandoned cars. The 1998 city-wide survey found that half of Chicagoans thought graffiti was either some problem or a big problem in their neighborhood, and 32 percent expressed similar concern about abandoned cars. Residents who turned out for beat meetings were more emphatic; in the same year, 76 percent of residents who attended beat meetings thought graffiti was a problem in their neighborhood, and 59 percent were concerned about abandoned cars. The question is, How closely does the delivery of services track the priority that residents of various beats give to these two problems.

To examine this, city data banks contributed indicators of the distribution of the relevant service responses for 1997 and 1998. In those two years there were almost 180,000 graffiti site clean-ups and 83,000 car tow requests. Over the period the average beat was cleaned 646 times and 225 car tow requests were filed. Since beats vary greatly in size (they were drawn to equalize police workloads rather than population), rates of service per 1,000 residents were calculated using Census 2000 estimates of the population for each beat. These rates can be contrasted with the measures of concern about graffiti and abandoned car problems gathered in surveys of beat residents and beat meeting participants.

Figure 4 describes the hypothesized relationship between factors that may influence the distribution of city services. There are “need” measures – the concern expressed by beat residents and those who attended beat meetings in the surveys. These could be expressed through beat meetings, but also through complaints to politicians or calls to city hotlines. The extent of the problem (but there is no direct measure of this) will also affect officer’s observations and some of the priorities set of city agencies. Another factor that may affect who gets what from community policing is beat activism – the extent to which residents turn out and get involved in beat affairs. This is represented by the 1998 beat meeting turnout rate (the number of participants per 1,000 adults). In Chicago, politics provides another priority-setting process which channels benefits to this neighborhood or that, and it needs to be taken into account in any portrait of the distribution of city services. In this case it is represented by the percentage of each beat’s vote that went to Richard M. Daley, the incumbent (and ultimately successful) mayoral candidate in the 1995 general election.

Figure 4
Beat Factors and Service Delivery Patterns



Finally, Figure 4 assumes that land use patterns will also affect the extent of service delivery. For example, many beats in Chicago contain a mix of residential and commercial buildings. Most include at least some retail shops, and some beats mix residential and industrial uses. Business owners, managers and employees also face neighborhood problems, and they have a variety of ways of expressing their concerns to the city. Resident-oriented mechanisms like beat meeting are therefore not be the only avenue for targeting the delivery of city services. Statistically, graffiti problems and cleanups are both affected by the density of non-residential buildings in a beat, and small businesses provide a common target for graffiti. Certain land uses (such as parking lots, automobile repair facilities, and others) concentrate cars in a beat. The analysis below controls for these factors; and their separate effect is presented at the bottom of Table 2.

The statistical relationship between these factors is described in Table 2. It indicates the strength of the correlations between service delivery and the factors sketched in Figure 4, and their relative impact when taken together in multiple regression. It documents that the link between service delivery rates, politics and beat activism varied from service to service.

Three factors were strongly related to the distribution of graffiti cleanups: politics (measured by the Mayor's percentage of the vote in the last election), the priorities of residents, and the concerns expressed by beat meeting participants. In addition, once they were taken into account (along with the control variables at the bottom of the table), it was apparent that beats with higher meeting attendance rates also did well in the competition for the attention of the city.

Action against abandoned cars was linked to some of the same factors. Beat meeting attendance rates were strongly linked to action against abandoned cars, and there were substantial direct links between the priorities of beat resident's and beat meeting attendees and who got what from the city. However, the city seemed disinclined to tow as many cars from neighborhoods where the Mayor found his strongest political support.

Table 2
Correlates of Beat Service Delivery Rates

Variable	(log) graffiti clean-up rate		(log) car tow rate	
	Standardized regression coefficient	bivariate correlation	standardized regression Coefficient	bivariate correlation
Resident Priorities	.30	.58	.29	.48
meeting attendee priorities	.18	.57	.29	.52
Meeting attendance rate	.21	(-.06)	.20	.42
vote share for the incumbent mayor	.36	.63	-.22	-.34
nonresidential land use	.18	.46	-.18	-.13
pct. of parcels small businesses	.18	.32	—	—
Building Density	.13	.20	—	—
pct parcels automobile uses	—	—	.34	.22
R ² (adj.)	.65		.54	

Note: Table reports standardized regression coefficients. All coefficients and correlations are significant $p < .05$ unless indicated by '()'. N=195

In both instances, the relatively strong and consistent impact of both beat meeting attendance rates and the priorities of those who attend is consistent with the argument that “the squeaky wheel is being greased” by Chicago’s community policing program.

Of course, other factors were correlated with service delivery rates as well. There was a strong association between the size of a beat’s Latino population and both resident and meeting participant’s ratings of graffiti problems, and Latinos also voted heavily in favor of the

incumbent mayor. Only in the multivariate analysis was beat activism, which is relatively low in many Latino communities, also significantly related to the delivery of graffiti services. On the car-tow side, relatively few complaints were lodged in the city's better-off white neighborhoods; they were moderately concentrated in Latino and African-American areas, and voters in the latter were particularly indisposed to vote for the incumbent in 1995.

Summary

This paper finds that the representational structure created by Chicago's beat meetings to a significant extent translates resident's priorities into action by the city. While only a small fraction of city residents attend beat meetings in order to discuss their priorities with the police, those who show up broadly represent the concerns of their immediate neighbors. They do a better job of representing them when it comes to their area's most visible problems: physical decay and drug and gang problems. They are less effective at representing their neighbors view's of crime, due in part to the fact that older residents are more likely to attend and are less likely to be worried about crime *per se*. But when there is agreement between younger and older residents, and between home owners and renters (as there is over gangs and drugs) the fit between the views of residents and those who represent them is quite strong. In turn, there were strong correlations (.48 to .58) between resident's priorities and the delivery of city services that speak to two widely-discussed neighborhood problems, graffiti and abandoned cars. By this measure, residents needs were being met. The concerns of beat meeting participants added strength to their voice, especially where meeting turnout was high.

Citations

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Appendix on Data Sources

Observations and Participant Survey.

During 1998, trained observers attended 459 beat meetings in 253 beats. Some beats that were involved in a parallel study were observed more than once. The data for beats with multiple observations were weighted so that all areas are represented equally, and the unit of analysis here is the police beat. At the meetings the observers completed an observation form that systematically recorded important aspects of what took place at the meeting. They also counted the number, race and gender of residents and police who were there, and took note of city service representatives, local politicians, and other non-residents who attended.

The observers also distributed questionnaires to the residents and police officers who were present. They contacted district neighborhood relations offices and civilian beat meeting facilitators in advance of each meeting to ensure that they would be on the agenda. A primary goal was to not interfere with the flow of meetings, so observers were flexible in the administration of the survey. At the appointed time they arose to explain who they were and briefly described the purposes and goals of the evaluation. The questionnaires were necessarily short, so they would not take up much time, and they were designed and worded to be as accessible as possible to a wide audience. Questionnaires were available in both English and Spanish. Observers were instructed to assist any respondent who could not read the form, apart from the rest of the meeting's participants to avoid a breach of confidentiality. Police officers who were present filled out somewhat longer questionnaires while residents completed theirs.

The observers kept no formal records of refusals, non-completions or survey completion rates beyond informal reports made to the project manager. Beat meetings have a fluid character. Residents and police officers come late and leave early, and they often stand and stretch or mill around in the back, and conduct personal business out of the room. As a result, the simple question of how many are in attendance is a problematic one. Observers would generally recount meeting participants when they could in order to gauge survey response, but they were very busy during this period. Because the questionnaires were anonymous, it was not possible to determine who did not complete one, or supplied only partial information. Also, while observers handled inquiries from officers or residents on any number of issues regarding the questionnaire, in no case were potential respondents pressured into completing a questionnaire if they did not desire to do so. In a few instances the observers re-attended meetings in beats where the ratio of participants to completed interviews appeared to be low, and offered surveys to those who had not completed one previously.

Resident Surveys

The city surveys were conducted by telephone using random digit dialing procedures that ensured that unlisted households would be included in the sample. In 1998 and 1999 the random component of the sample was augmented by approximately 250 telephone numbers that were selected at random from published lists of numbers, in order to increase the number of completed interviews in a few low-population police districts. They are excluded from city-wide analyses,

but were included in the aggregated beat data examined here. The most conservative survey completion rates ranged from 40-60 percent, declining somewhat over time. The 1997 survey included 3,066 respondents; in 1998 it was 3,071, and in 1999 3,101. Of this group, about 6,800 residents lived in the 195 beats for which there was complete information for this study. The questions were administered in both English and Spanish. The surveys were conducted by the Survey Research Laboratory of the University of Illinois.

The resident and beat meeting participant surveys shared seven questions about neighborhood problems. Respondents were requested to rate a list of things "... that you may think are problems in your neighborhood." They were asked to indicate whether "... you think it is a big problem, some problem, or no problem in your neighborhood." Responses to three of these questions were used to assess the extent of neighborhood physical decay.

Abandoned cars in the streets and alleys.
Abandoned houses or other empty buildings in your area.
Graffiti, that is writing or painting on walls or buildings.

Responses to these questions went together consistently. In the resident survey they were correlated an average of +.45, and at the individual level the combined index had a reliability of .76.

Two questions about neighborhood crime drew strongly consistent responses, and they were more closely linked to each other than to any of the remaining questions. At the individual level, responses to these questions were correlated +.71 in the resident survey. Combined they formed an index of neighborhood gang and drug problems.

Shootings and violence by gangs.
Drug dealing on the streets.

The resident and beat meeting participant survey shared two questions about property and street crime. At the individual level, responses to these questions in the resident survey were correlated an average of +.56.

People breaking in or sneaking into homes to steal things.
People being attacked or robbed.