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# The Promise of Policing: Evaluating the Performance, Productivity, and Potential of Local Law Enforcement

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This article examines policy evaluation in the conduct of American policing at four levels of increasing scope: at the level of *performance* (asking how well assigned tasks are being carried out); *productivity* (asking about the consequences of those tasks); *potential* (asking how much policing could accomplish); and *alternatives* (asking if it would be better to spend law enforcement money in some other way). The article reviews recent research on policing relevant to each of these foci. Despite the importance of the police function and the enormous budgetary implications of policy-making about municipal police, this research literature is limited in quantity and quality. The issue of why there has been so little systematic policy analysis in police work is addressed in some detail.

## INTRODUCTION

Direct expenditures by all levels of government on criminal justice activities totaled over 17 billion dollars in 1975, the latest year for which detailed information is available. Of that, policing consumed the lion's share—

nearly 53%. Most of this money was raised and spent at the local level. In the same year, 61% of all direct criminal justice expenditures were incurred by counties and municipalities, and an additional 26% by state governments. Local-level expenditures were largely directed at policing; 66% of all criminal justice funds there went to police departments (U.S. Department of Justice, 1977).

That was a lot of money, and the question repeatedly has been raised, Is it well spent? Money for law enforcement largely comes at the expense of competing uses for tax dollars, and in terms of percentage *increases* in expenditures, more has gone in the direction of crime-control than has been spent on either education or health services in the United States since 1965 (Skoler, 1975).

One reason for skepticism is that crime rates have skyrocketed at the same time as expenditures for their control have risen sharply. Between 1960 and 1975, official homicide *rates* (controlling for increases in the population) went up 88%, robbery up 263%, and burglary 200%. In 1960, local police reported 912,000 burglaries to the FBI; by 1975, that figure had risen to 3,250,000 (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1976).

While there are many explanations for this increasing rate of crime, the most common response to the problem has been to turn to the police. Because policing is an extraordinarily labor-intensive activity, "doing something" about crime has meant, in practice, hiring more officers. Unfortunately for municipal budgets, this manpower push has come at a time of rapidly escalating living and labor costs, labor union militancy, and the emergence of a law-and-order cast to city politics which made it difficult to resist demands for higher wages by policemen. As typically over 90% of police department's budgets go to wages and salaries, the result was that they went through the ceiling.

All of this has led of late to a wave of interest in re-evaluating the cost and effectiveness of traditional police practices. Most police practices are traditional. Police departments are far from responsive to suggestions for innovations of all types, and through the years they have remained relatively immune from the investigations of time-motion experts, performance budgeters, and others who might question the way they define their task and the manner in which they are organized to carry it out. In most places this has not changed yet, but the combination of local "budget crunches" and demands for innovation by outside funding sources has made some significant inroads into the previously monolithic front presented those who have attempted to make change in police departments from without. Further, a new post-war generation of leaders is rising now to head those organizations, and it is far easier than a decade ago to assemble an all-star cast of innovative chiefs for grant lists or award banquets.

In this paper I shall describe briefly some of the things they have done—or should be doing—to make their departments more efficient and effective. As I see it, the analysis of policy-making in police work can be examined at four levels of increasing scope:

- At the first level, we can focus upon police *performance*; the issue is how well assigned tasks are being performed, if at all.
- Next, we can examine *productivity* questions; i.e., To what end are these tasks being performed?
- Third, we should be focusing on the *potential* of police work; we need to raise the question, How much can policing accomplish if we do it as well as it can be done?
- Finally, we need to look at *alternatives* to policing; the relevant query is, Could we get more for our money by doing something else?

In each case, I will attempt to summarize the approaches currently employed to examine these questions (or how we might go about it), the political and organizational forces which shape those activities and affect their utility, and models of successful programs or research which have shed some light on the questions if they have not yet provided answers.

## IMPEDIMENTS TO POLICY ANALYSIS

But first, the question of why doing this sort of thing has proved so deucedly difficult in the area of policing. This is in part to explain why there are so few good research models to emulate. There are at least six good reasons why formulating and evaluating policies is extraordinarily difficult in this area: policing is a public good; it often involves no tangible product; the object of much police activity is at best only partially responsive to their efforts; the data on what's going on is extraordinarily poor and difficult to secure; the nature of the police task and the way in which they are organized makes difficult for anyone to know what is going on most of the time; and there are severe limitations on our ability to conduct rigorous evaluation research within this context.

By public good I mean that the “product” of policing is only partly attributable to discrete activities and only partially separable into discrete “delivery units.”† We may all get order and security from police activity, but it is hard to know how much any of us got or from what action, how much we all got in the aggregate, or how much of it can be attributed to

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† Elinor Ostrom and her colleagues at Indiana University have written extensively on the “public good” question. See Ostrom, 1973; Bish and Neubert, 1976.

policing as opposed to (say) school programs which keep kids off the streets. Further, how much we "value" the police product cannot readily be measured by either our willingness to pay for it (the police are off the market), or how often we demand it (that is caused by an exogeneous factor—the intrusion of a criminal—and is hardly a measure of citizen satisfaction).

In addition, most of the activities of police officers leave behind no tangible trace. At best we can count things they do, such as the number of family disputes they intervene in (but not "solve", for the police are powerless to do much more than provide a common enemy for the participants). More important goals like "detering crime" involve *inherent unobservables* for which we have at best indirect aggregate indicators. If the police are successful, people will often choose not to do things, and that is very difficult to know about.

Further, no one believes that the major focus of police activity—crime—is anything but partly responsive to their efforts. The big question is, How Responsive, and econometricians are now attempting to make some estimates about that. Everyone believes the causes of crime are "fundamental"—although what these causes are is not agreed upon, and that crime goes up or down for reasons having only something to do with policing. Also, most would agree that the police are only one—and perhaps not the most important—institution responsible for trying to reduce crime. Many lay the blame on schools, families, churches, or economics departments as well. The problem for evaluators is that the police have an effect only at the margins.

This problem is confounded by the fact that the data about police work is very poor, which makes it difficult to tease evidence of weak effects from it. Information about crime is sketchy at best. Perhaps 50 to 70% of crimes in some major categories are never reported to the police in the first place (Skogan, 1976). The police compound the problem by failing to record much of the remainder under many circumstances. Clearance rates—the proportion of crimes which somehow are "cleared up"—are notoriously subject to manipulation (Hatry, 1975). Even arrests, perhaps the "hardest" countable element in the process, vary greatly in quality and in the extent to which they will lead to further prosecution. Measures of non crime-related activities are skimpy at best, usually limited to counts of the number of children freed from locked bathrooms, persons taken to the hospital, and liquor license inspections performed.

One reason why the data is so bad is that ultimately its production lies in the hands of small, detached, unsupervised teams of workers. They do their job, producing what they think they are expected to produce in the way of information about their activities, and it has proven difficult and expensive to get any independent information about those actions. It is very

important to understand that police departments are organized differently than most "producing" organizations: *operating discretion increases the lower one goes in the hierarchy*. In factories people at the bottom do the most routinized, repetitive, observable, supervisable tasks. In police departments they go off into the night, sworn to maintain order.

This reflects a more general problem for policy analysts, the nature of the police mandate and how they are organized to carry it out. It is difficult for anyone inside or outside the organization to know what is going on out on the street, and to know in particular if policies even are being carried out, much less if they are effective. Police departments have severe "implementation" problems.

Partly this problem stems from the discretionary character of police work. We can observe—now systematically—if street litter is being swept up, but it is more difficult to know if human litter is being effectively swept up, or if it should be. A great deal of illegal activity is known about only because the police expose it. Because that crime is knowable only through the ability or willingness of the police to root it out, it is difficult to know independently if they are finding all, some, or only just a little of it. Further, cops are a close-knit, cynical and secretive lot, and they don't like information going either up or out of their organization. This is encouraged in part by the very important role of corruption, or potential corruption, in police work. When police officers go on the take, pressure to keep outsiders and the top brass from knowing what is going on is intense. When the administration knows, corruption becomes a "dirty little secret" that they all work to keep under wraps; it binds them together, unites them against information-seekers from without, *and* makes it more difficult for people at the top to behave legalistically in telling those at the bottom what to do, or how.

Last, all of this is related to some severe limits upon our ability to conduct systematic policy evaluations to guide police administrators. Some of those limitations are the usual ones faced by evaluators studying public service-providers. It is impossible to get chiefs to agree to withhold service, and researchers must make very credible claims that any proposed experiments will not significantly degrade (i.e., change) many current elements of police work. While Campbell and Boruch (1975) have proposed some clever ways for making the case for randomized assignment, police administrators are not easily going to allow cars to respond to some crimes more slowly, completely withdraw officers from any areas of a city, or halt stop-and-frisk activities.

Also not unique is the fact that powerful political forces have vested interests in established arrangements in police organizations. Many pressing policy issues in police work are the subject of union-management contract negotiation, and will be settled over the bargaining table. These include the

deployment of one or two-man patrol cars, the creation of "fourth shifts" which swing on during peak crime hours (weekend evenings), and the rational allocation of manpower across day and night shifts generally. These are all working-conditions issues with tremendous budgetary implications. Other issues have high emotive, symbolic value for police officers, a group given to responding strongly to such stimuli. These include the employment of women in the field and civilians in the office, and controls on the use of force and firearms. Educational incentive systems fall somewhere in-between, and they too have been stoutly resisted by police unions (Juris and Feuille, 1973).

In addition, there is a strong feeling that "we know what needs to be done" among many police administrators. Unlike other organizations, which can go to Harvard or GM to promote up new managers, police departments are universally led by men who have come up through the ranks, usually of *that department*. There also is no lateral mobility within the craft. This makes it hard to learn that things are being done differently elsewhere (although this is changing, thanks to some public and private agencies), and few "new brooms" come in to sweep away accumulated deadwood. Because of civil service, it is difficult to do this in any circumstance. There is, in general, an anti-innovation bias in police departments.

Finally, it can be extraordinarily expensive to conduct the kind of policy evaluations that will be credible in this community. They have to be done in the "real world," out in the field. Policemen do not think that anything generalizes to the dirty work they do there. Studies have to be replicated. Every police administrator has worked out a glib reason why his town "isn't like Kansas City." These often include observations like there is (or isn't) a river running through the middle. The costs these requirements imply mount rapidly because policing is so decentralized and labor intensive; it costs a great deal to have a department do anything on a large scale, and it requires many trained observers to watch them do it. The current Kansas City Response Time Study funded by LEAA will cost about \$650,000 by the time the report gets written, which is a lot to know something about one element of police work in one place.

## POLICY AND PERFORMANCE

The first question which needs to be asked of police departments is, Are assigned tasks being performed? Policy analysts need to know how well and how often policy decisions at the top are converted into viable field operations by supervisors and actually carried out in the field. This question assumes (or at least does not actively challenge the assumption) that the

activity is worthwhile performing in the first place. At root it calls for a process evaluation—the task is one of monitoring field activity and accounting for the performance of a program. Evaluators both inside and outside the department look for gaps between policy and practice and attempt to explain observed discrepancies. These typically might be attributed to management or administrative problems, communication, the reward structure, or other process-related problems.

While there are many specific tasks performed by police departments, there are not many measures of these activities. Most are unit counts—the number of calls answered, ambulances dispatched, fire scenes policed, or speeders ticketed. These are essentially “body counts,” a form of evaluation not notably related to goal attainment during the recent unpleasantness in Southeast Asia. The problem, as in that case, is that the measures are not related in any way to the (admittedly sketchy) theory we have about how police can deal with the problems that face them. With a few exceptions, those things are counted because they are countable; the accumulation of these numbers flows from the task organization of departments. Police work is largely responsive to complaints or requests for service which come from citizens over the telephone to dispatch centers. A card is kept there for each case in which a vehicle is sent in response. The car is “punched” in and out, and its driver reports briefly over the radio the substance of the case and its disposition. This is the stuff from which internal statistical operations reports are generated, and on which operational planning is based.

A related process evaluation format which is now being touted by the International Association of Chiefs of Police is their “Daily Activity Log.” In this scheme, the unit of evaluation is the patrol team, and data is generated on the proportion of each shift which is spent on various kinds of activities—store checks, traffic stops, street-light outage reports, etc. Of course, this presumes that police administrators know how patrol time *should* be spent and that the task of management is to profitably maximize the use of time by their personnel. In aggressively modern police departments like Los Angeles, this has led to the promulgation of time-utilization standards (like “18 minutes for a burglary”), and supervisors are expected to lean on officers who spend more time on a case than they “should.” Like most rules based upon time-motion studies, these criteria are quite unpopular in the ranks.

Dissatisfaction in the ranks can prove a formidable obstacle even to simple performance monitoring, as recent experience in St. Louis illustrates. There, an LEAA grant was used to purchase “automatic vehicle locators” for over 300 patrol cars. The system, developed by an aerospace contractor along the lines of a submarine inertial guidance system, constantly signals by radio to a special computer the speed and direction in which each vehicle is moving. These are plotted based on computations made by the computer,

giving dispatchers a continuously up-dated picture of the exact physical location of each patrol car.

There are two problems with the system. First, it shows an alarming tendency to locate vehicles in the Mississippi River, or within the confines of Busch Stadium. Second, the units are often out of commission. Police officers see them for what they are, a time-motion management device. They may assist dispatchers; they also indicate which cars are parked in back of the Dunkin Donut. In fact, there is little other utility in knowing *exactly* where your cars are to the degree of precision potentially provided by the system. Officers in St. Louis learned rapidly that a swift kick in a strategic location would disable the works in their car, however, and they apparently have been employing this tactic with a vengeance.

Although they employ some new measuring devices, these are both quite traditional measurements. They do not differ in principle from the old police sergeant's tactic of feeling his officer's coats on a cold day to see if they were warm—an indicator that they had spent their tour somewhere other than on the beat. Workable measures of this sort rely upon those patrolmen now to fill out forms describing what they did with their day. This probably is less reliable than the coat tactic. And, as I indicated, in the absence of good knowledge about what uses of time *are* productive, keeping careful track of it is of dubious utility for policy analysts.

Two performance measures more closely related to crime-control "theory" which are in common use are those gauging response time and patrol density. While there is some reason to be skeptical of both the reliability of the measures and the utility of the theory, they do represent an attempt to bridge the gap between principle and practice in patrol operations.

The response time of a police patrol usually is measured as the elapsed time between the point at which it is dispatched by radio to the scene of a crime and that at which it arrives at the designated address. Response times are reported either as means, or as the proportion of calls answered within some standard number of minutes. If there is *an* accepted piece of received wisdom in police work, it is that rapid response times are good. Almost everyone thinks that rapid police response greatly increases the chance of apprehending an offender, especially for personal crimes, and that citizen perceptions of the quality of police service are greatly affected by the rapidity with which officers reach the scene during times of crisis.

Correlational evidence for the latter assumption is quite strong (Skogan, 1975). However, advance reports about the Kansas City Response Time Study indicate that other pay-offs from rapid response may not be all that great. In that study, victims were interviewed to determine the *total* amount of time which typically elapses between criminal incidents and the arrival of the police. Preliminary data on Part I crimes indicates that events *preceding*



the mobilization of the police consume almost 50% of the total response time.† Not surprisingly, the study indicates that the speed with which citizens call—not police response speed—is the major key to apprehending offenders. Also it is the best determinant of the presence of witnesses and by-standers on the scene, another presumed benefit of rapid police response time. In part because total elapsed response times are typically lengthy, the report concludes, only in 3.7% of Part I incidents could arrests be attributed to rapid response (Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, 1976).

One reason this experiment is important is that rapid response times are expensive. They demand high patrol density (see below) and sophisticated communication equipment, and they require plenty of slack patrol time so that personnel are available when needed. All of this costs a lot of money.

The results of the Kansas City Preventive Patrol Experiment, despite some controversy over their validity (Larson, 1975), tend to discount the significance of patrol density, another performance measure with some apparent crime-control linkage. This aspect of departmental performance typically is measured by the frequency with which patrol cars pass a given spot, or by the geographical size of the beat assigned each car. The assumption behind these patrol density measures is that the visible presence of the authorities on the streets: (a) deters potential criminals who fear they will be apprehended rapidly, if not interrupted in progress by the police, and (b) re-assures citizens that they are safe and that help is near-by in case of emergency. Patrol density measures also flow rather naturally from the task organization of police departments, which largely allocate their resources geographically. (Sophisticated patrol allocation formulae use patterns of reported crimes, often weighted for seriousness, to match resources with demands for their use. This is a “per-crime” rather than “per square mile” concept of density, although the principle remains the same.) Research in Kansas City indicated that the difference between heavily patrolled, and unpatrolled neighborhoods was slight, measured by victimization rates, apprehension rates, and survey indicators of citizen satisfaction with patrol.

As these sketchy summaries may suggest, we do not have much information about what policing strategies (if any) *do* relate in some substantial way to crime control or citizen satisfaction. In the absence of such information, counts of activity tell us relatively little about the effectiveness of various departments or individual patrolmen. We currently employ a limited set of measures of *means* which bear a problematic relationship to the *end* of the criminal justice system, which is to provide safety, order and security to the community. Only when we have multiply-replicated and reliable measures

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† “Part I” crimes include rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny-theft, auto theft, and homicide. They were selected by the FBI for detailed record keeping because they are common and relatively frequently reported to the police.

of performance with some strong linkage with desirable outcomes will it make much sense to count activities and call it evaluation.

## POLICY AND PRODUCTIVITY

Productivity questions ask, How effective are police policies? By effective policies I mean those which aid the police in clearing up the real problems they face. The problem for analysts is to determine what policies will maximize the effectiveness of the criminal justice system.

The tasks facing the police are at least three-fold: they are called upon to apprehend criminals, deter crime, and provide emergency and other non-crime services. The police contribute to clearing up these tasks by successfully arresting criminals, reducing the crime rate, and providing services to individual citizens with relevant needs and to the community as a whole.

If we knew more about the productivity of various policies aimed at these goals we could make useful judgments about two kinds of budgetary decisions. First, we could provide estimates of the probable benefit (net of costs) of adding more of "X" to the police budget. For example, in 1963 there was a rapid 40% increase in police manpower in the 20th police precinct of New York City (the Upper West Side). Using control groups and other post-hoc comparisons, a New York City Rand study (Press, 1971) concluded that as a result that area enjoyed a 33% decrease in robberies visible from the street, a 49% decrease in outdoor auto thefts, and a 49% decrease in outdoor larceny thefts.

Second, more information on policy consequences would enable us to compare the expected net benefits of policy "X" as opposed to policy "Y". For example, Kansas City and the Police Foundation recently concluded a study of the relative effectiveness of two crime-control strategies: a Location-Oriented Patrol program (which patrolled high-crime areas), and a Perpetrator-Oriented Patrol program (which "surveiled a selected group of perpetrator subjects"). Measured by the number of man-hours invested in certain criterion arrests, the former was much more effective than the latter. Location-oriented teams invested an average of 150 hours of work in each arrest, while those stalking likely suspects spent almost 250 hours achieving the same end. The "quality" of those arrests differed as well. The LOP team interrupted a robbery or burglary in progress 7.2% of the time, while the POP team did so in only 4% of all cases (Pate, Bowers and Parks, 1976).

This sort of research is extraordinarily important, for the productivity of much traditional police work is relatively low. Therefore, to get more of the outputs above we usually have to add substantial numbers of officers to the force. For example, in the South Patrol Division in Kansas City (one of three areas in the city) an average of almost 530 man hours is invested in

each serious arrest, and crime-in-progress interruptions of the type described above are made in only  $2\frac{1}{2}\%$  of all cases (Pate, Bowers and Parks, 1976). At that rate, perhaps more than one-half year of operational staff time is devoted to *each* arrest for a serious crime in Kansas City. Again, the labor-intensive nature of police work has tremendous budgetary implications when demands for service and crime rates are on the rise.

There are, however, some formidable obstacles to evaluating the productivity of various policing policies. Chief among them is the fact that one of the fundamental goals of police work—the deterrence of crime, or the prevention of incidents from occurring in the first place—is inherently unobservable. We cannot gauge the thousands of individual decisions by potential criminals not to break the law, or (more realistically) not to break it just *now*, or to do *something else*, or to do something *less serious*, or whatever. The problem of displacement is only slightly more tractable. We displace crime when we push it from one jurisdiction to another, from one time of day to another, from one crime type to another, etc. Like deterrence, we know of displacement effects only through indirect indicators of its occurrence. These include, primarily, comparisons with control groups which presumably reflect what “would have happened,” or residuals from regression equations which predict “expected” crime rates from past crime rates, demographic measures, or the experience of other jurisdictions (see Alberts, 1975).

We potentially can measure much more reliably what the police do with crimes which do occur (in one sense, their failures). Clearance rates measure the ability of the police to attribute (to their satisfaction) a crime to a perpetrator. There are, of course, numerous problems with the way in which this measure is applied in practice. Some offenders “clear up” numerous crimes when prompted to sing like a bird; many crimes are cleared without arrest; many crimes are “administratively” closed, and others are downgraded into unimportant categories when it becomes apparent that no one is going to be apprehended for them (Bloch and Bell, 1976). Perhaps a better measure of the ability of the police to *solve a case* would be something like, “the percentage of cases cleared up within ‘X’ number of days” (Hatry, 1975).

As the LOP-POP experiment in Kansas City suggests, there is also substantial variation in the quality of the arrests which police officers make. Arrests vary in the extent to which they are a “good pinch” (a solid arrest for a serious crime) and the likelihood that a viable prosecution will result. Some play a more important role than others in saving lives and protecting property, or in resolving serious disputes. Arrests also are made to seize weapons or contraband, recover stolen property, harass hard guys into leaving town, and to perform other non-prosecution-oriented functions.

None of these "extra-legal" functions were adequately represented in a recent LEAA-disseminated Prescriptive Package which recommends an "Arrest Productivity Index" based upon the seriousness of the charge, whether or not prosecution was pursued, and (if so) whether a conviction was secured or not (Bloch and Specht, 1973). They are, however, an extremely important tool for order maintenance by the police.

All of this suggests that we potentially can measure the productivity of individual patrolmen, patrol and other teams, or types of police units which face known and assigned tasks. This information can be extremely important. A recent RAND Corporation study of the productivity of detectives for example, has earned well-deserved attention in police circles. In brief, the RAND study indicates that most detective work consists of report-writing and filing. Detectives gather little original information about crime or criminals and they rarely affect arrests (Greenwood, *et al.*, 1975). At least one major innovator, the Birmingham, Alabama, police department, abolished their detective force following the report.

The unobservable character of deterrence means that it will be difficult to evaluate the performance of the criminal justice system as a whole, however. Ironically, we know what participants in the system do as individuals, but the aggregate impact of their activity upon the commission of crime remains problematic. This makes it difficult to compare the productivity of policing to other forms of social control, including welfare programs and schools.

Finally, there remains the public goods problem. Because many police activities are not separable into discrete delivery units, and because it is not possible to relate those activities to many important products of policing, it is difficult to assess their productivity. It is difficult to separately budget crime-related and non-crime activities, for example. Rapid response times may be more important for accident victims than the victims of crime who do not require emergency medical services. However, crime and non-crime activities compete for manpower, patrol time, and lines on the budget. There are few units of measurement by which the two can be measured comparably. Thus, neither inputs nor outputs can properly be assessed. In the absence of consumers "buying" one service or another, it is also difficult to assess the relative benefits of many possible outcomes which police departments might choose to maximize. Which are more productive, lawful arrests or the recovery of stolen property? Yet one may have to be traded off for the other. One reason for moving to sample survey measures of citizen satisfaction with police services is that attitudinal and perceptual indicators can be devised which standardize the "utility" of various outcomes, making it possible to evaluate the productivity of alternative police decisions based upon consumer preferences.

## POLICY AND THE POTENTIAL OF POLICING

As we have seen, there is evidence that certain kinds of police work are more productive than others, and that even marginal changes in their task organization can increase the rate at which they solve crimes. The question remains, How well can the job be done? If the police perform as effectively as possible, how good is it? Are there limits to policing inherent in their mandate and (within broad limits) the way in which they are organized that place upper bounds on what can be expected of them? If there are, two issues emerge. First, realistic evaluations of policy in policing should be conducted in light of those limitations. The denominator for many measures of police productivity should be the number of problems which are solvable or crimes which potentially could be cleared up. Second, the question prompts us to ask about alternatives to policing. If there are things which the police cannot do, where can we turn?

Let me make three assertions:

- 1) Some crimes are more deterrable than others, and many crimes are insoluble.
- 2) There is no strong linkage between police resources or performance and deterrence; the best bet is that the police largely displace crime, rather than deter it.
- 3) Citizen perceptions of their "safety and security" (two major police goals) are only tenuously linked to what the police do.

If true, these suggest some serious limits to policing. They should affect both how we evaluate what the police do, and our willingness to pay for them to do more of the same.

The fundamental problem is that crime is a furtive activity. Criminals do their best to keep the police from finding out who they are or what they are doing. Under certain circumstances this is relatively easy, and many crimes have a low official clearance rate. In addition, many criminal incidents are not reported to the police in the first place. Those escape the attention of the authorities, further decreasing the certainty of arrest in the deterrence equation. Many crimes in some major categories also take place in locations invisible to passing police patrols, reducing the ability of the criminal justice system to discover them independently of citizen reporting practices, and limiting their ability to interrupt crimes in progress. The result is that "true" arrest rates are extraordinarily low.

Table I presents some illustrative data on these points, drawn from the Census Bureau's National Crime Panel data for 1973. Organized by crime incident, it presents the percentage of victims in each crime category who

have some information to supply the police about "whodunnit," along with the percentage of cases which occurred out-of-doors, *potentially* within sight of passing police patrols.

TABLE I  
Information about offenders<sup>a</sup>

Information	Type of crime					
	Interpersonal violence	Robbery	Personal theft	Household burglary	Larceny	Vehicle theft
Victim able to identify offender's: (%)						
sex	97	96	53	5	4	8
race	96	94	52	5	4	7
age	90	92	51	5	4	7
Percent able to make some positive identification	43	18	5	1	2	2
Percent occurring "on street"	54	65	39	0	60	95
(N)	(3777)	(1023)	(512)	(5789)	(19601)	(1198)

<sup>a</sup> Based on all regular and series incidents from the National Household Survey for reference year 1973. Source: Skogan and Antunes, 1977.

Table I indicates that crimes in which there is personal contact between victim and offender are more likely than property crimes to leave behind some residue of information useful in making an apprehension. Most property crimes leave behind so little information that it is not surprising that clearance rates for those events are quite low.

However, even in the personal crime category, victims are able to *identify* their assailants only in a minority of cases. In practice, relatively few crimes are solved unless there is a name or some more specific piece of information attached to the description of a perpetrator. Only assault cases, which frequently involve relatives, neighbors, school students, and others who know one-another, lend themselves to solution in anything approaching a majority of cases.

Table I suggests that there are some upper limits on the number of crimes which we could expect the police to solve, even if they were acting in the most productive manner. In many cases, they simply have nothing to go on. Good police work might be expected to clear most of the cases in which positive identifications could be made, and some unknown (but probably

small) proportion of the "stranger" crimes. However, if the police respond to citizen complaints, and those victims cannot give them any useful information on those who committed the offense, we cannot expect them to effect many arrests. Further, Table I indicates that a number of crimes occur in homes or buildings, or in other locations where they cannot be observed by passing patrols. Even if we "put a policeman on every streetcorner," perhaps one-half of all assaults, one-third of robberies, and 60% of all purse snatchings and pocket-pickings would remain invisible to the authorities.<sup>†</sup>

These data suggest some serious limitations on the promise of policing. The furtive nature of crime means that they *cannot* solve many of the cases which come to their attention. And, as the victimization surveys also have revealed, many of those crimes do not come to their attention in the first place. In 1973, reporting rates for individual robbery and household burglary hovered around 50%, while they shrank to only 30% for personal thefts and 22% for petty larceny. Together, these two factors may explain why it is so difficult to tease evidence of deterrent effects from data on crime and punishment. We have so little of the latter that the certainty with which criminals are punished is extraordinarily low.

TABLE II  
Official and survey arrest rates

Crime	UCR total incidents	UCR <sup>a</sup> arrests	Survey <sup>b</sup> (U.S. estimate)	Apprehension <sup>c</sup> rate	
				UCR	survey
Rape	51,000	25,720	153,000	0.50	0.17
Aggravated assault	416,270	208,100	1,313,180	0.50	0.16
Robbery	382,680	127,530	1,214,884	0.33	0.10
Vehicle theft	923,600	155,800	1,330,470	0.17	0.12
Burglary	2,540,000	434,000	7,818,026	0.17	0.06

<sup>a</sup> Source: Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1974.

<sup>b</sup> Source: Unpublished Census Bureau incident tabulations.

<sup>c</sup> Computed by dividing UCR arrests by UCR and Survey incident total estimates for 1973.

This is illustrated in Table II, which presents estimates of "apprehension rates" (arrests divided by crimes in the same category) for selected Part I crimes using both survey and official estimates as the denominator. The data

<sup>†</sup> Most of the purse-snatches and picked-pockets take place "in buildings," including commercial, office, and school buildings.

indicate that "true" apprehension rates—arrests over the total number of victimizations for the same year—are substantially lower than previously we suspected. The 7,820,000 household and commercial burglaries recorded by the victim surveys for 1973 were matched by only 434,000 arrests, a ratio of 1 to 18. As long as crimes are not reported to the police in large numbers and as long as they are unable to solve many of those which do come to their attention, deterrence processes will never have a very powerful effect.

Finally, the evidence is not there that variations in policing affect much citizen perceptions of their own safety and security. The Kansas City Preventive Patrol experiment challenged the assumption that extensive street patrolling led citizens to feel safer using the streets; in fact, surveys indicated that they did not even *notice* variations in patrol intensity. Also, the linkage between direct personal victimization and fear cannot explain over-all levels of fear in a community, for so few individuals are victimized in the course of a year. While victims are more fearful than non-victims, there are so many non-victims that victimization cannot explain variations in aggregate fear levels (Skogan, 1977). Thus, programs to reduce individual victimization may have only limited payoffs. The problem is that the fear of crime is related to dissatisfaction with social change, racial fears, and a host of real and imaginary attributes of the human condition. As in the case of crime, the police are not the sole contributors to community security.

### ALTERNATIVES TO POLICING

If there are "natural limits" to policing in America, what could close up the gap? Are there potentially other institutional or non-institutional responses to unmet needs, both in crime-control and non-crime areas? Or, even if the police *are* performing certain functions, could other agencies or groups do the job more productively? All of these questions challenge some basic assumptions we have made about the best way to achieve security and order in the community. They inquire about alternatives to policing.

The basic crime-control functions which need to be performed are simple: cast a suspicious eye on suspect persons or activities, raise a hue and cry when crimes take place, identify suspects in the following minutes, and make it apparent to potential miscreants that they will be themselves in trouble if they start any. Many societies have carried out tasks successfully without an organized police. They were relatively small and homogeneous groups, however, communities in which everyone had a well-known place and in which norms about behavior were widely shared. The nearest thing we have to that these days is the neighborhood. Although many neighborhoods do not share those attributes, those which do may be able to get along effectively with limited back-up from the police.



This is the theory behind community-development approaches to crime control. Some programs in this tradition focus upon strengthening existing capabilities for performing the functions outlined above. "Street Watch" programs, "Whistle Stop" campaigns, citizen patrols, "buddy systems" for the elderly, and the like, all are designed to enhance community capacity for identifying suspects, raising a hue and cry, and making the streets unsafe for potential criminals.

In areas where these capabilities are weak, programs aimed at increasing community cohesion and neighborhood strength have been instituted. Environmental design experiments have been performed to discover how the physical character of an area can be manipulated to increase the ability of community members to identify and keep an eye on strangers, as well as to increase the range of territory in which they feel some responsibility for maintaining order. The Law Enforcement Assistance Administration also has a large fund reserved for supporting indigenous community groups in their efforts to increase order in their neighborhoods.

Other programs attempt to deter crime by making it more difficult to carry out. "Target hardening" programs attempt to limit property losses by securing doorways and windows, instituting standards for locks and bars, and in general nailing down loose articles presenting opportunities for theft. One of the most notable successes of these programs to date has been the war against automobile theft. In that case, ignition interlock systems and other simple target-hardening measures have greatly reduced theft rates for late model cars. These programs in particular call for *individual* investments in crime prevention. Effective locks and alarms are not cheap. These programs pass along to "consumers" some of the cost of crime-control. Careful analysis of victimization survey designed to evaluate the effectiveness of these activities could be the first step toward "costing out" the productivity of this particular alternative to policing.

It should be relatively simple to cost out the productivity of many non-crime services provided by agencies other than the police. Emergency ambulance services provided by fire departments, for example, do not draw upon the way in which they are organized to carry out their principle task (it is a "separable" service) and could provide a benchmark for the public provision of such a service. Data also could be obtained on private ambulance companies, although their reluctance to provide service to all persons at all times might lead them to appear cheaper than an alternative in the public sector.

It might be desirable to reduce the police role in many essentially regulatory or community-service tasks which consume police resources, if those activities could be performed more inexpensively, and more appropriately, by other public or private organizations. In many communities police officers carry

out inspections of various kinds, license bicycles and dogs, escort school children and guard school crossings, check the safety or emissions of automobiles, and report upon street lights which do not work. Perhaps most non-crime activities could be contracted to other organizations.

We might even experiment with contracting out particular services currently being performed by the police which lie closer to the crime control mandate. Much activity surrounding regulation of the automobile probably could be performed by other organizations at a reduced cost, including handing out parking tickets and directing traffic at intersections. Neither would require any more legal authority than that presently enjoyed by private security guards, who under many circumstances can shoot you.

The whole area of private security needs to be reassessed as well. When downtown businessmen demand foot patrolmen to increase commercial security, they essentially are asking for a publicly-paid-for private security guard. The city might be able to contract for them more inexpensively than providing a regular member of the force; better, the cost might be passed on to the direct beneficiaries of the service. Payment for use in general might lead to more cost-effective planning by big consumers of police services.

Private companies also might be able to provide many support services not maintained in-house by police departments. Fingerprinting, Laboratory investigation, manpower scheduling, statistical operations analysis, planning, recruitment and recruit testing, and even evidence-gathering and photography at crime scenes might be better performed by private contractors, who could do so for police agencies of all types in a metropolitan area. This would provide both a cost-effective centralization of specialized services and a bench-mark against which the productivity of the traditional way of organizing these tasks could be evaluated.

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