

CHAPTER 2

The Police Effect on Crime

Learning Objectives

- Characterize our state of knowledge of police impact upon crime.
- Describe why there has been pessimism regarding the potential of police impact upon crime.
- Identify the strategic approach with the most evidence for effectiveness.
- Identify the two cities where considerable drops in crime were likely produced by dramatically increased enforcement activity.
- Identify the city where cessation of police enforcement immediately resulted in a surge in crime.
- Describe the conclusions that can be drawn from the Kansas City Preventive Patrol Experiment.
- Describe the conclusions that can be drawn from the San Diego Field Interrogation Experiment.
- Identify the intervention suggested by the Minneapolis Domestic Violence Experiment. Cite the evidence for the clustering of crime in hot spots.
- Explain why the results of the Indianapolis Directed Patrol Program are perplexing.
- List what we do *not* know regarding place-based extra patrol deployment (hot spot saturation).

Key Terms

CPTED

General deterrence

Incapacitation

Random routine preventative patrol

Reintegration

Specific deterrence

Chapter Outline

Do the Police Make a Difference?

Crime Rates Since 1992

The Police and the Drop in Crime

Our Research Legacy: A Brief Synopsis Pre-2000

Kansas City Preventive Patrol Experiment

San Diego Field Interrogation Experiment

Directed Patrol in New Haven and Pontiac

Split-Force Patrol in Wilmington

Minneapolis Domestic Violence

Newark and Flint Foot Patrol

Problem-Oriented Policing in Newport News

Minneapolis Repeat Call Address Policing (RECAP)

Minneapolis Hot Spots

Kansas City Gun Experiment
Indianapolis Directed Patrol
Conclusions from Our Research Legacy
Confirming the Legacy: Post-2000 Research
“Macro-Analyses”
Focused Approaches
Implications for Strategy

Summary

- Police can impact crime rates. What we do not know is specificity in this respect—what interventions work best for particular types of offenses and the degree of difference a particular intervention makes.
- It took the development of Compstat in New York City to “seal the case” that the police can indeed have a substantial effect on crime rates. Until that event there was considerable pessimism regarding the potential of police impact. That pessimism was caused by the lack of correlation between police/citizen ratios and crime rates (a higher ratio did not correlate with lower crime rates), and the “nothing works” research of the early 1970s. The substantial impact on crime in both Houston and New York City with the revitalization of those agencies in the early 1990s engendered a new era of optimism regarding the potential police effect on crime. Reinforcement came from Cincinnati, Ohio, where criticism of the police department led to cessation of enforcement, immediately resulting in a surge of serious crime.
- The first true experimental design measuring the effectiveness of police strategic approach was the Kansas City Preventive Patrol Experiment conducted in 1971–1972. Although the results indicated that random routine patrol did not affect crime, the experiment did not indicate that police presence made no difference or indicate whether alternative strategic approaches might make a difference. The San Diego Field Interrogation Experiment conducted three years later indeed indicated that proactive police intervention does reduce suppressible street crime. The fact that focused police interventions are effective was reinforced by the Minneapolis Domestic Violence Experiment, which indicated that arrest of an aggressor reduced subsequent violence incidents.
- The “broken windows” conceptual framework originated from qualitative assessment of the Newark Foot Patrol Experiment. Broken windows is a metaphor referring to the fact that if all of the windows in an abandoned building are intact, they tend to remain intact. However, if one window is broken at the same site, soon all will be broken. The extension is that if obnoxious behavior and nuisance offenses are tolerated in a neighborhood, soon serious crime will follow—“all of the windows will soon get broken.” Evidence for the efficacy of broken windows approaches is mixed. It appears to be an effective strategy in densely populated areas, but is less relevant as density decreases.
- There is overwhelming evidence that crime clusters in so called “hot spots.” A hot spot is defined as a location or an area of a jurisdiction where the crime rate is substantially above the norm. Police agencies have attempted various approaches to reducing crime in hot spots, but most frequently employ saturation patrol with intense field interviews. Evidence tends to support the efficacy of hot spot saturation patrol, but there are mixed results, illustrated by the Indianapolis Directed Patrol Program, in which one targeted beat experienced crime reduction while a parallel targeted beat actually saw crime increases. What we don’t know about effective saturation patrol exceeds by a considerable margin what we do know. We don’t know the optimum level of saturation for a given hot spot zone; we don’t know the optimal zone size—definitions of a hot spot vary from a single address to a city block to a square mile to an entire four- to five-square-mile police beat; we do not know what the optimal duration of saturation patrol is; related to this issue we don’t know what the residual effect of a saturation might be.

Review Questions

- 1. What most likely explains the precipitous drop in crime in the 1990s, as well as its continued gradual decline since then? Why is a definitive explanation so difficult to come by?**

A quality response should build upon the discussion in Chapter 1, noting that the most likely causes of the crime decline are incarceration rates and police programs. The response should then continue with discussion of the police effect on crime, noting that most scholars attribute at least some of the crime drop since 1992 to innovative, crime-focused police strategies. The question is not whether the police make a difference, but how much difference. The reason that a definitive explanation is so difficult to come by is that it is possible that crime leads communities to hire more police, making it difficult to statistically establish that more police will cause less crime. The reverse is also true—as crime decreases, communities may decrease the size of their police departments.

- 2. Contrast the findings of the Kansas City Preventive Patrol Experiment and the San Diego Field Interrogation Experiment. What explains the dramatically different results?**

It should be noted that the Kansas City Preventive Patrol Experiment indicated that police intervention in the form of random routine patrol made no difference in crime rates. In contrast, the San Diego Field Interrogation Experiment indicated that proactive efforts, in this case in the form of field interrogations, made a dramatic difference. The results are explained by the fact that the Kansas City experiment measured a passive police strategy, whereas the San Diego experiment involved proactive intervention.

- 3. What characteristics of foot patrol might explain why two significant strategies—community policing and broken windows enforcement—emerged from evaluations of foot patrol experiments?**

A quality response should indicate that foot patrol engenders closer interaction between police officers and citizens. Close community interaction engagement is the core of community policing. Foot patrol also entails officer intervention in minor offenses or disruptive behavior. That type of intervention is the core of broken windows enforcement.

- 4. The most perplexing of the hot spot deployment assessments are the contradictory results of the Indianapolis Directed Patrol program. What might explain the contrasting crime trends in the two beats? What is implied?**

The contrast in findings between the two beats in Indianapolis may be attributable to the nature of traffic stops targeting suspicious persons. In the East beat there were twice as many traffic stops, and more citations written. In the North Beat there were fewer stops, but more citations, weapons seized, and arrests per stop. The strategy employed by the North Beat officers—fewer stops but more intrusive during the stops they did make—may have been the more effective approach.

- 5. What don't we know about the characteristics of hot spot deployment that might increase its cost-effectiveness?**

We do not know the relative effect of the number of patrol units, or in research language, how high the dosage must be. We do not know what the appropriate focus of concentrated patrol should be—that is, what mix of offenses, offenders, or targets. We do not know the appropriate duration for concentrated patrol, whether in hours, days, weeks, or months.

Real-World Scenarios

- 1. You are a district police commander in a large agency. Within your district is a one-mile strip of largely entertainment businesses, anchored by three large night clubs. The one-mile strip is a classic “hot spot” of crime. You decide to launch a saturation patrol effort focused on the evening hours. What decisions do you have to make regarding the characteristics of the intervention?**

A quality response should indicate that the primary decision is how many patrol units will be assigned. Second, there should be guidelines regarding the focus of the concentrated patrol—what offenses, offenders, or targets. Officers should be given some guidelines regarding strategies. The hours of the day and days of the week will need to be determined. Finally, the duration of the concentrated patrol will need to be ascertained—whether in weeks or months.

- 2. An organization concerned about the welfare of victims of domestic violence has publically criticized the police department for inadequate response. Among the organization’s assertions is that officers should be required to arrest a possible assailant when there is even the slightest suspicion of assaultive behavior—indeed even if the victim says a physical assault did not occur. Given what you know about evaluations of the relative effectiveness of domestic violence interdiction, how might you respond?**

The results of the Minneapolis Domestic Violence Experiment should first be discussed. The response should note that arrest generated the fewest instances of repeat violence in Minneapolis—supporting a philosophy of arrest “if at all possible.” However, response should then note that the replication of the Minneapolis Domestic Violence Experiment in four other cities produced contrasting results, and indeed in some instances arrest was the worst outcome—generating the most instances of repeat violence.

- 3. You are the chief of police of an agency for which a strong police association engages in collective bargaining for wages and benefits with the parent jurisdiction. An impasse in the process of reaching an agreement has occurred. The association leadership “grumbles” that perhaps officers should stop arresting except in the most grievous situations. Taking into account what you know about the effect of cessation of enforcement, how do you respond?**

A response by the chief of police should be forceful and assertive. It should be noted that in times of natural disaster when the police are unable to respond, widespread looting and disorder occurs. It should also be noted that evidence from Cincinnati, Ohio, indicated that when officers stop routine enforcement of even minor offenses, the number of serious felonies increases substantially.

Application Activities

- 1. It is asserted that it is absurd to believe that the police make no difference in crime rates. Review this issue in terms of what the Kansas City Preventive Patrol Experiment does and does not tell us about the effect of police presence. Distinguish between police presence and random routine patrol. Include discussion of the experimental conditions in Kansas City, including presence in the reactive beats and concentrated presence in adjoining proactive beats.**

A response should first review the findings of the Kansas City Preventive Patrol Experiment, emphasizing that the experiment did not test the effect of police presence, only a single strategy—random routine patrol. The experimental conditions in Kansas City should be reviewed, including the

division of the South Patrol District into three areas—proactive, reactive, and control. It should be noted that officers continued to respond to calls-for-service in the reactive beats, but then withdrew to adjoining proactive beats to engage in random routine patrol. This effectively eliminated random routine patrol from the reactive beats while doubling it in the proactive beats. A quality response would also note that citizens living in the South District would likely experience all three levels of random routine patrol over a given period of time. That is, they might live in a reactive beat, but work in a proactive beat and drive through a control beat between the two.

2. **The San Diego Field Interrogation Study has been called the “forgotten experiment.” Discuss the hypothetical import of this evaluation contrasted to the actual minimal import. Why the difference? What developments may have transcended the San Diego findings? What is the relevance of the findings to today’s deployment patterns?**

In theory, this evaluation should have had a substantial effect upon police strategy, but did not. Indeed it had minimal import. The difference might be attributable to the more dramatic results in the Kansas City Preventive Patrol Experiment. In addition, the Kansas City “nothing works” results were reinforced by the RAND Criminal Investigation Study. Concurrently, the conceptual frameworks of both community policing and problem-oriented policing were introduced in the same time frame. In this environment, the San Diego Field Interrogation Experiment found itself standing alone in suggesting that proactive enforcement strategies might work. The San Diego experiment is relevant to today’s concentrated patrol efforts focused upon hot spots of crime.

3. **The last strategy evaluation that entailed actual withdrawal of a police activity was the San Diego Field Interrogation Experiment in 1975. Although numerous studies since then have varied the “dosage” of a particular intervention, none have gone so far as to deliberately eliminate entirely a particular program or tactic. Discuss the issues involved in deliberately “manipulating” the degree of police effort, whether in total or in part and whether in general or a specific tactic. Consider diminution of service to either a geographical area, offense type, or citizen type.**

A response should note the relative risk of withdrawing completely any form of police service from an area, or differential enforcement of a particular type of offense, or even concentration of scarce resources only in certain neighborhoods. Even in instances when extended police effort varies, although not necessarily being entirely eliminated, care must be taken to assure that harm does not occur to segments of the population. It might be noted that the San Diego Field Interrogation Experiment was originally scheduled for one year, but was terminated at nine months precisely because it was perceived that citizens in the experimental areas were being placed at greater risk.