



## Crime and Policing Revisited

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### Executive Session on Policing and Public Safety

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Can the police reduce crime? In 1991, when the first Executive Session on Policing concluded, the answer to that question was generally described as being in the eye of the beholder (Sherman, 1992). Based on the scientific and practical knowledge available at the time, some well-respected criminologists and police scholars concluded that the police were not able to reduce crime (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990; Bayley, 1994). **Promising evidence, however, suggested that if the police changed their approach to crime control and prevention, then they might be able to reduce crime** (Goldstein, 1990; Wilson and Kelling, 1982; Sherman, Gartin and Buerger, 1989). In a key Executive Session paper that examined crime and policing, Moore, Trojanowicz and Kelling (1988) highlighted the prospect of improved crime prevention as an explicit goal of community policing by developing problem-solving initiatives to address crime-producing situations and dynamics, stimulating informal social control among residents in high-crime neighborhoods, and apprehending repeat offenders through improved information sharing with the community. Because admittedly little rigorous evidence existed to back their claims,

Moore, Trojanowicz and Kelling's argument was largely regarded as theoretical at the time. As such, the view that tended to dominate most academic and policy discussions at the time was that the police could not reduce crime.

Much has changed since then. A growing body of experiential knowledge and scientific evidence now exists that largely supports many of the key ideas informing innovative crime prevention strategies being discussed in policing circles at the close of the first Executive Session (Skogan and Frydl, 2004; Weisburd and Eck, 2004; Braga, 2008). **A review of the available evidence would lead most observers to conclude that the police can reduce crime if they take a focused approach to addressing recurring crime problems, engage the community and a diversity of partners, and implement tactics and strategies appropriately tailored to the conditions that give rise to crime problems.** Indeed, when the second Executive Session commenced in 2008, crime control discussions among the participants did not center on the issue of whether the police could reduce crime or not. Rather, conversations focused on how the policing profession could continue effective crime prevention practices by strengthening their commitments to community problem solving and by remaining flexible and adaptable when addressing evolving crime problems.

The stark differences in the nature of the police crime control conversations between the first and second Executive Sessions were the result of an unprecedented period of police innovation and concomitant growth in rigorous evaluation research on what works in police crime prevention. This essay begins by providing a brief historical overview of what was known about the police and crime prevention at the time of the first Executive Session and what were proposed then as promising new ways for the police to reduce crime. Between the 1990s and 2000s, researchers explored the efficacy of these new ideas for crime reduction. Challenges to the notion that innovative policing strategies generate crime reduction gains are then reviewed. The essay concludes by offering two central ideas on continuing effective police crime prevention policies and practices suggested by participants of the second Executive Session and supported by existing research evidence.

### **What Was Known Prior to the First Executive Session on Policing**

When the first Executive Session on Policing commenced in 1985, there was a crisis of confidence in American policing and a strong sense that fundamental changes were needed in the way policing services were delivered (Bayley and Nixon, 2010). The "professional" policing model was firmly entrenched as the dominant paradigm. And, as U.S. crime rates steadily increased over the course of the 1970s and into the 1980s, it seemed that the police could do little to control crime. Many citizens, especially minorities living in inner city neighborhoods,

were not satisfied with the policing services they received. In some cities, however, there was a “quiet revolution” as police departments became more focused on engaging communities and experimented with new crime prevention ideas (Kelling, 1988). The practical experiences of these progressive police chiefs, many of whom were Executive Session participants, fit well within a growing body of research evidence that both identified the flaws in existing police strategies and suggested new crime prevention ideas. This research is summarized here.

The police developed as a mechanism to administer justice by apprehending offenders and holding them accountable (Wilson and McLaren, 1977). Because their primary practical goal was to reduce crime victimization, police long believed that they were in the business of crime prevention (President’s Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice, 1967a). **Police strategists relied upon two ideas to prevent crimes: deterrence and incapacitation. The imminent threat of arrest was their main strategy to deter the general public from contemplating or committing crimes.** The police attempted to deter criminals specifically by apprehending them and attempting to discourage them from committing crimes in the future. The police also believed that arrests would prevent crime by incapacitating criminals by removing them from the streets and subsequently placing them in jail or prison. In particular, the police sought to prevent repeat offenders from continuing their careers through specific deterrence, incapacitation and, to some degree, rehabilitation (as part of their subsequent incarceration or

community supervision). The police relied on the other parts of the criminal justice system to pursue these goals, but they could at least start the process by arresting offenders and building credible cases against them.

In some policing circles prior to the first Executive Session, the subject of crime prevention also pointed to the work of police units that handle juvenile cases (often referred to as “crime prevention units”) or to units of officers who conduct educational outreach programs in the schools. **Officers formed crime prevention units to encourage people to lock their doors, identify their property, and engage in other target-hardening activities.** These programs were neither departmentwide nor large in size, but they were a significant presence; however, the programs were often seen as segregating and compartmentalizing the “prevention” work of the police.

The professional model of policing represented an important series of reforms of corrupt and ineffective policing practices of the pre-1930s “political era” of policing (Kelling and Moore, 1988). The professional model emphasized military discipline and structure, higher education for police officers, adoption of professional standards by police agencies, separating the police from political influence, and the adoption of technological innovations ranging from strategic management techniques to scientific advances such as two-way radios and fingerprinting. Police departments slowly adopted the professional model over the course of the 1940s and 1950s. During the post-World War II period, the police role as “crime

fighter” was solidified (Walker, 1992). Policing focused itself on preventing serious crimes and advanced three operational strategies to achieve this goal: preventive patrol, rapid response and investigation of more serious cases by specialized detective units (Kelling and Moore, 1988).

During the 1970s, researchers sought to determine how effective these policing strategies were in controlling crime. Most police executives thought that preventive patrol in radio cars served as a deterrent to criminal behavior. Contrary to this consensus, an early British experiment concluded that crime increases when police patrol is completely removed from beats; however, the level of patrolling in beats makes little difference in crime rates (Bright, 1969). The Kansas City Preventive Patrol Experiment further examined the effectiveness of varying levels of random preventive patrol in reducing crime. The study revealed that crime rates and citizen satisfaction remained the same, no matter what the level of radio car patrol — whether it was absent, doubled or tripled (Kelling et al., 1974). Replications followed and obtained similar results. In Nashville, Tenn., a level of 30 times the normal amount of patrol for selected districts was successful in reducing crime at night but not during the day (Schnelle et al., 1977). However, permanent, long-term increased preventive patrol of an entire district is not cost-effective, economically feasible or practical for a department’s operations. Other studies revealed that preventive patrol’s inefficiency might be due to the fact that many serious crimes occur in locations (homes, alleys, businesses) not easily

visible from a passing radio car (see Eck and Spelman, 1987; Skogan and Antunes, 1979).

In addition, police departments have placed a great emphasis on reducing response time in the belief that it would increase the probability of arrest. However, several studies found that rapid response has little effect on clearance rates (e.g., Spelman and Brown, 1984; Kansas City Police Department, 1978). Only about 3 percent of crimes are arrests that were influenced by police response time, suggesting that rapid response to most calls does not increase the probability of arrest (Spelman and Brown, 1984). The problem is that police departments have no control over two key elements between the time a crime is committed and the time a police officer arrives on the scene: the interval between the commission of a crime and the time it is discovered, and the interval between discovery and the time the citizen calls the police (Walker, 1992). Most crimes are discovered after the fact, and for most “involvement” crimes — where the victim is present (e.g., assault) — there is some delay between victimization and the subsequent call to the police.

The third component of the professional “crime fighter” model — successful investigations — rests on the reputation of detectives as possessing special skills and crime-solving abilities. However, this image is largely perpetuated and romanticized by the media. Several researchers have described the reality that criminal investigations largely consist of routine, unspecialized work that is often

unfruitful (Walker, 1992). Studies by the RAND Corporation (Greenwood, Chaiken and Petersilia, 1977) and the Police Executive Research Forum (Eck, 1983) documented that investigations involve mostly paperwork, phone calls and the interviewing of victims and witnesses. Only 21 percent of all “index crimes” are cleared and patrol officers at the scene of the crime usually make these arrests. **In fact, most crimes are solved through the random circumstances of the crime scene (and how this scene is handled by the initial responding officer), such as availability of witnesses or the presence of evidence, such as fingerprints, rather than by any special follow-up investigations by detectives.**

This series of studies, conducted in the 1970s and 1980s, challenged the three basic tenets of the professional model and raised many questions about proper crime control methods. An even more powerful harbinger of change was the growing community dissatisfaction with the activities of the police departments that served them. During the 1960s and early 1970s, the police officers were called on to quell many conflicts that revolved around larger social issues, such as the civil rights movement and the Vietnam War. College students, minorities and disenfranchised communities clashed with police departments, which symbolized and enforced the norms of a society that did not represent these groups. The police were viewed as part of the problem and not a solution (Weisburd and Uchida, 1993; National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, 1968; President’s Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Criminal Justice, 1967a, 1967b).

**The responding tactics of the police were viewed as draconian and there was public outcry over a force that resembled and acted like “occupying armies” rather than civil servants** (Kelling and Moore, 1988).

Other research in the 1970s and 1980s pointed the police in promising directions. Frustrated by the shortcomings of the professional model, police administrators tested different strategies designed both to control crime and to bring the police and the public closer together. The Newark Foot Patrol Experiment revealed that although foot patrol did not affect the rate of serious crime, citizens perceived their environments as safer and their opinions about the police improved (Police Foundation, 1981). In Houston, Texas, a multifaceted fear reduction project was implemented. The components of this project included community stations, citizen contact foot patrol, community organizing teams, and a victim re-contact program. The evaluation of the program found generally positive results. Although serious crime did not decrease, communication between police and citizens increased and fear of crime was reduced (Pate et al., 1986).

Another important finding of these projects was that a large gap existed between the serious crime problems that professional departments attacked and the day-to-day concerns of citizens. Frequently, the police officers who staffed these programs were called upon to deal with less serious complaints, such as abandoned cars, raucous neighborhood youth and barking dogs (Trojanowicz, 1983). Disorder in the community



was more of an ongoing concern for the average citizen than the risk of being the victim of a serious crime. Police agencies soon learned that social incivilities (such as unsavory loiterers, loud music, public drinking and public urination) and physical incivilities (such as trash, vacant lots, graffiti and abandoned buildings) had a definite impact on the quality of life in communities (Skogan, 1990).

A police focus on controlling disorder has been hypothesized to be an important way to reduce more serious crimes in neighborhoods. Wilson and Kelling's (1982) "broken windows" thesis suggests the link between disorder and serious crime. Signs of deterioration in a community indicate that no one in authority cares and that rules no longer apply. Disorder signals potential or active criminals that offenses will be tolerated; thus, serious crime rates increase (Wilson and Kelling, 1982). Research suggests that incivilities generate fear (LaGrange, Ferraro and Supancic, 1992; Ferraro, 1995) and are correlated with serious crime (Skogan, 1990).<sup>1</sup> Collectively, this body of research argued that if the police wanted to be more efficient at controlling crime, police departments should redefine their role to become more involved in communities and improve the neighborhood environment.

The general consensus among many academics then, however, was that the police did not matter in crime prevention and control. Respected criminologists Michael Gottfredson and Travis Hirschi (1990: 270) reviewed the research described above and concluded, "No evidence

exists that augmentation of patrol forces or equipment, differential patrol strategies, or differential intensities of surveillance have an effect on crime rates." Police scholar David Bayley (1994: 3) more definitively stated:

The police do not prevent crime. This is one of the best kept secrets of modern life. Experts know it, the police know it, but the public does not know it. Yet the police pretend that they are society's best defense against crime. ... This is a myth.

Beyond academic criticisms, soaring crime rates — especially violent crime rates in cities — suggested to the general public that the police were not effective in controlling crime. Between 1973 and 1990, violent crime rates in U.S. cities doubled (Reiss and Roth, 1993). The late 1980s and early 1990s were further characterized by an epidemic of youth gun violence that had its roots in the introduction of crack cocaine in disadvantaged neighborhoods in many U.S. cities (Blumstein, 1995; Braga, 2003).

### What the First Executive Session on Policing Proposed

The first Executive Session on Policing ended in 1991 and produced a series of 17 papers that covered a range of topics. Many of these papers touched on how the police could better address crime and disorder problems by engaging community policing and problem-oriented policing strategies (see, e.g., Kelling, 1988; Moore and Trojanowicz, 1988; Moore and Kleiman, 1989). However, in the second paper of the series,

simply titled *Crime and Policing*, Mark Moore, Robert Trojanowicz and George Kelling (1988) closely examined crime control as the core mission of policing.

The first part of their essay explored what constitutes serious crime and argued that the police should be responsible for a broader set of crime and disorder concerns. Moore, Trojanowicz and Kelling (1988) suggested that the usual view of serious crime emphasizes three components: violence, significant losses to victims, and predatory strangers. This conventional view on crime missed that the police should and could do more than simply deal with street crime. They suggested an alternate view. The police should not only acknowledge violence as a key component of serious crime but also attend to issues of safety within relationships, the importance of fear, and the extent to which offenses destroy individual lives and social institutions as well as inflicting individual losses. Police should be called upon to deal with recurring problems such as the ongoing terror felt by abused spouses and molested children, the flight of neighborhood businesses driven out by flourishing street drug markets, and the paralyzing fear caused by urban blight and disorderly groups of youth.

The second part of Moore and his colleagues' essay turned to the question of *how* the police should be oriented toward controlling and preventing serious crime. Moore, Trojanowicz and Kelling (1988) suggested the police needed to focus on identifying and addressing the precipitating causes of crime. These were not

the so-called "root causes" of crime (e.g., social injustice, unequal economic opportunity, poor schooling, weak family structures, or mental illness). Although police officers are important entry points to social services for many people, Moore, Trojanowicz and Kelling (1988) argued that the police are best positioned to prevent crimes by focusing on situational opportunities for offending, toxic relationships, vulnerable victims and high-rate offenders involved in recurring crimes. Community policing and problem-solving approaches were recommended as potentially powerful enhancements to traditional police crime reduction strategies. Their proposition was framed as a practical theory (1988: 8) grounded in a handful of promising experiences and very limited research evidence, yet to be tested:

The theory is that the effectiveness of existing tactics can be enhanced if the police increase the quantity and quality of their contacts with citizens (both individuals and neighborhood groups), and include in their responses to crime problems thoughtful analyses of the precipitating causes of the offenses. The expectation is that this will both enhance the direct effectiveness of the police department and also enable the police department to leverage the resources of citizen groups and other public agencies to control crime.

It is important to note here that Moore, Trojanowicz and Kelling (1988) were not the

only scholars who drew upon developing practical police experiences and new research findings to make an argument for alternative police crime prevention strategies (e.g., see Skolnick and Bayley, 1986; Goldstein, 1979, 1990; Greene and Mastrofski, 1988; Skogan, 1990). The papers from the first Executive Session, however, were widely disseminated and read by police executives, public officials and others throughout the United States (Bammer, 2006). As the papers were published, the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) mailed them to some 30,000 organizations and individuals. A survey administered to a representative sample of U.S. police organizations serving jurisdictions with 50,000 or more residents found that 84 percent of responding police chiefs (or their designees) were familiar with the *Perspectives on Policing* series (Hartmann, Michaelson and Chen, 1994). For those respondents who were familiar with the series, 82 percent rated the papers as excellent or very good, 65 percent reported using the papers in discussions with community members and city officials, and 52 percent used the papers for training and promotional materials.

### **What Has Been Learned Since the Completion of the First Executive Session on Policing**

As the first Executive Session ended its formal meetings, community policing was increasingly heralded as a revolutionary alternative to the professional model. Community policing programs became immensely popular in the United States (as well as in the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada and other countries) over the

course of the 1990s. **The creation of the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, and the availability of funding to hire additional police officers to implement community policing programs, greatly assisted in the spread of community policing in the United States.** By 1999, over 90 percent of police departments in large urban areas reported that they employed fully trained community-oriented policing officers (Hickman and Reaves, 2001). More generally, the 1990s became known as an unprecedented period of police innovation as police departments experimented with and adopted a wide range of complementary crime prevention strategies, such as problem-oriented policing, focused deterrence, disorder policing and hot spots policing (Weisburd and Braga, 2006).

### **Police Innovation and the 1990s Crime Drop**

**After decades of increasing crime rates, the United States experienced a surprising crime drop during the 1990s.** According to Uniform Crime Report data, violent crime decreased about 33 percent between 1991 (the decade high point) and 2000, and property crime declined about 29 percent in the same time period.<sup>2</sup> Policymakers, academics and journalists attempted to sort out the various explanations for the puzzling crime decrease, such as a strong economy, improved policing, high imprisonment rates, stabilizing crack markets, immigration, new gun policies and demographic shifts (e.g., see Blumstein and Wallman, 2006; Levitt, 2004; Zimring, 2007). A careful read of the available scientific evidence suggests that no single factor can be invoked as the cause of the 1990s crime decline; rather,



the explanation appears to lie with a number of mutually supportive, reinforcing factors (Wallman and Blumstein, 2006).

Even though it is difficult to specify their exact contributions, innovative police strategies are commonly credited as plausibly being among the influential factors in the 1990s crime drop (Skogan and Frydl, 2004; Blumstein and Wallman, 2006; Weisburd and Braga, 2006; Zimring, 2012).

However, this view on the role of innovative police strategies in reducing crime has been challenged in two ways. First, there are those observers who suggest that police innovations did not contribute much to the unexpected crime reduction of the 1990s.<sup>3</sup> For instance, a recent review concluded that the many and diverse changes in policing strategies and tactics in the United States during the 1990s probably contributed little to the national crime drop (Eck and Maguire, 2006). However, their conclusion seemed to reflect the thinness and quality of the underlying research on the effectiveness of the policing innovations at the time of their review (Rosenfeld, Fornango and Baumer, 2005). As will be discussed later, a number of rigorous evaluations of innovative policing strategies completed during this time period (e.g., Sherman and Weisburd, 1995; Sherman and Rogan, 1995; Braga et al., 1999, 2001) suggest that, at the very least, new police crime control strategies could be associated with crime declines in specific U.S. cities (see also Blumstein and Wallman, 2006; Behn, 2014).

Second, some crime policy scholars suggested that it was an increase in the number of police rather than new police crime control strategies

that explained the police role in the 1990s crime decline. Increased staffing is argued to support police departments in reducing crime through an augmented presence to deter crime and enhance the capacity to apprehend offenders. University of Chicago economist Steven Levitt (2004) found that innovative policing was not related to the crime decline; the increase in the number of police in the 1990s contributed between 10 and 20 percent of the crime drop. In his analysis of crime trends in U.S. cities between 1980 and 2004, Florida State University criminologist Eric Baumer (2006) reported inconsistent findings for policing variables. His measure of innovative policing strategies, arrests for public order and weapons offenses, was unrelated to crime rates, but increases in police force size and the certainty of arrest (the ratio of arrests for serious crimes to the number of serious crimes known to the police) were associated with crime reductions.

In general, however, there is little evidence that simply increasing police numbers leads to reductions in crime. The National Research Council's Committee to Review Research on Police Policy and Practices (hereafter, NRC Panel on Police) concluded that the research in this area is ambiguous and, as such, it is difficult to reach a conclusion on the matter (Skogan and Frydl, 2004). More recently, methodologically rigorous analyses of the relationship between numbers of police and crime rates have not shown evidence that more police reduce crime (Evans and Owens, 2007; Kleck and Barnes, 2014). Continued crime declines after recent decreases in the number of police, especially after the deep

recession beginning in 2008, further challenged the purported direct relationship between police numbers and crime reductions. Some observers proposed that we may now be in an era of police “doing more with less” in their crime prevention and control efforts (Weisburd, Telep and Lawton, 2014); this suggests that what the police do to prevent crime may be more salient than how many police officers are available. Of course, police departments face the persistent dilemma of having enough police officers to handle basic functions while staffing innovative crime prevention programs. However, there seems to be little support for the idea that increasing the size of police departments alone translates into decreased crime rates.

### **Current Evaluation Evidence on the Impact of Innovative Policing on Crime**

The number of rigorous evaluation studies examining the impact of police strategies on crime increased dramatically since the end of the first Executive Session. This growth was especially pronounced in the 1990s and 2000s, which included the completion of some 54 randomized experiments in policing (Braga et al., 2014). A much stronger knowledge base now exists to appraise whether innovative police strategies do indeed prevent and control crime. The NRC Panel on Police reviewed this growing body of research evidence (Skogan and Frydl, 2004: 5) and concluded:

**There is strong evidence that the more focused and specific the strategies of the police, the more they are tailored to**

**the problems they seek to address, [and] the more effective the police will be in controlling crime and disorder.**

Police seem to be effective in controlling crime when their strategies focus on identifiable risks and, in addition to increased law enforcement attention, engage a wider spectrum of partners to develop appropriate strategies that address recurring crime and disorder problems.

The available empirical and theoretical evidence suggests that crime is concentrated at a small number of high-risk places during high-risk times and generated by a small number of very risky people (Sherman, 1992; Braga, 2012). The existing research also points to important place-level dynamics and situational factors, and the daily activities and behaviors of people in the offender and victim populations, to understand the concentration of crime at specific small places during specific months of the year, days of the week, and hours of the day (Eck and Weisburd, 1995; Clarke, 1997; Clarke and Felson, 1993; Felson and Poulsen, 2003). **Similarly, for high-crime offenders, research documents the salience of co-offending patterns and the central role of group-based dynamics and norms in persistent violent crime problems in urban settings** (Papachristos, Braga and Hureau, 2012; Papachristos, Hureau and Braga, 2013). **Although these patterns are very concerning, they also represent important opportunities for more effective police crime prevention and control. If police departments could organize themselves to control the small number of risky places, risky**

times and risky people that generate the bulk of their crime problems, they could more effectively manage citywide crime trends.

The remainder of this section briefly reviews the available evidence evaluating the effectiveness of four major innovations in police strategy for crime prevention: community policing, problem-oriented policing, hot spots policing and focused deterrence strategies. These innovations have generated a great deal of attention in public policy, practice and academic circles. And, as will be discussed further, these strategic innovations overlap and complement each other in important ways. Readers interested in a more comprehensive assessment of a wider range of innovative police strategies should consult the Evidence-Based Policing Matrix,<sup>4</sup> maintained by George Mason University's Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy (Lum, Koper and Telep, 2011).

Much of the evaluation evidence summarized here was gleaned from systematic reviews of policing programs managed by the Campbell Collaboration. Formed in 2000, the Campbell Collaboration Crime and Justice Group aims to prepare and maintain systematic reviews of criminological interventions and to make them electronically accessible to scholars, practitioners, policymakers and the general public ([www.campbellcollaboration.org](http://www.campbellcollaboration.org)). In systematic reviews, researchers attempt to gather relevant evaluative studies in a specific area, critically appraise them, and make judgments about what works, "using explicit, transparent, state-of-the-art methods" (Petrosino et al., 2001: 21). Rigorous

methods are used to summarize, analyze and combine study findings.

### Community Policing

Community policing has been described as both a philosophy of policing and an organizational strategy (Skogan and Frydl, 2004; Greene, 2000). Community policing departments tend to embrace a larger vision of the police function (Skogan and Hartnett, 1997). As Kelling and Moore argue, "During the 1950s and 1960s, police thought they were law enforcement agencies primarily fighting crime" (1988: 4). In departments adopting a community policing philosophy, the police function broadens and includes "order maintenance, conflict resolution, provision of services through problem solving, as well as other activities" (Kelling and Moore, 1988: 2). The justification for this expanded view of police responsibilities was drawn either from the fact that, historically, the police had indeed carried such functions or that the community from which the police gained legitimacy saw these as important functions of the police (Weisburd and Braga, 2006).

Community policing is not a specific set of programs. Rather, communities have different problems and bring to bear a variety of resources against them, so police will implement different strategies. However, as an organizational strategy, the community policing process leaves setting priorities and the means of achieving them largely to residents and the police that serve in their neighborhoods. The three core, and densely interrelated, elements of community policing are

citizen involvement in identifying and addressing public safety concerns, the decentralization of decision-making down the police organizational hierarchy to encourage development of local responses to locally defined problems, and *problem solving* to respond to community crime and disorder concerns (Skogan, 2006). The iterative problem-oriented policing process described here is commonly used as an important framework when dealing with local community concerns proactively.

**The NRC Panel on Police concluded that broad-based community policing programs generally do not produce crime reduction gains but do seem to improve other important outcomes such as citizen views of the police** (Skogan and Frydl, 2004; Weisburd and Eck, 2004). Any observed crime prevention impacts were more directly associated with specific strategies — such as distinct problem-oriented policing initiatives — implemented within community policing programs. More recently, a Campbell systematic review, sponsored by the United Kingdom’s National Policing Improvement Agency, identified 25 evaluation reports containing 65 controlled tests of community policing programs (Gill et al., 2014). Their meta-analysis of 37 tests suggested that these programs generated positive effects on citizen satisfaction, perceptions of disorder and police legitimacy, but the programs had limited effects on crime and fear of crime.

### **Problem-Oriented Policing**

In 1979, Herman Goldstein, a respected University of Wisconsin law professor and former aide to

Chicago police superintendent O.W. Wilson, made a simple and straightforward proposition that challenged police officers to address problems rather than simply respond to incidents. According to Goldstein (1979, 1990), behind every recurring problem there are underlying conditions that create it. Incident-driven policing never addresses these conditions; therefore, incidents are likely to recur. Answering calls for service is an important task and still must be done, but police officers should respond systematically to recurring calls for the same problem. In order for the police to be more efficient and effective, they must gather information about incidents and design an appropriate response based on the nature of the underlying conditions that caused the problem(s) (Goldstein, 1990).

**Problem-oriented policing seeks to identify the underlying causes of crime problems and to frame appropriate responses tailored to problems based on the results of analysis (Goldstein, 1979).**

Using a basic iterative approach of problem identification, analysis, response, assessment, and adjustment of the response, this adaptable and dynamic analytic approach provides an appropriate framework to uncover the complex mechanisms at play in crime problems and to develop tailor-made interventions that engage a wider range of community, social service and criminal justice partners to address criminogenic situations, dynamics and characteristics that cause crime problems to recur (Eck and Spelman, 1987; Goldstein, 1990; Braga, 2008). Several published volumes on problem-oriented policing case studies provide a good sense for

the work being done as well as the strengths and weaknesses of some of the better problem-oriented efforts (see, e.g., Eck and Spelman, 1987; O'Connor and Grant, 1998; Sole Brito and Allan, 1999; Sole Brito and Gratto, 2000; Scott, 2000). Indeed, the widespread use of problem-oriented policing as a central crime prevention and control strategy in police agencies around the world is a strong indicator of the practical value of the approach.

There is a growing body of evaluation evidence that problem-oriented policing generates noteworthy crime control gains. The NRC Panel on Police concluded that problem-oriented policing is a promising approach to deal with crime, disorder and fear. The panel recommended that additional research be conducted to understand the organizational arrangements that foster effective problem solving (Skogan and Frydl, 2004; Weisburd and Eck, 2004). This conclusion contrasts with an earlier review by Sherman (1991) that suggested there was little rigorous evaluation evidence in support of Herman Goldstein's (1990) contention that problem-oriented policing was privileged over traditional policing methods in preventing crime. More recently, David Weisburd and his colleagues (2010) completed a Campbell Collaboration systematic review of the crime prevention effects of problem-oriented policing on crime and disorder. Their meta-analysis of 10 controlled evaluations revealed that problem-oriented policing programs generated a modest but statistically significant impact on crime and disorder outcomes. The Campbell

problem-oriented policing review also reported the crime prevention effects of 45 simple pre- and post-comparison evaluation studies. Although these studies did not include a comparison group and were less methodologically rigorous, Weisburd and colleagues (2010) found that 43 of the 45 evaluations reported that the problem-oriented policing approach generated beneficial crime prevention effects.

### Hot Spots Policing

Over the past 30 years, research has demonstrated that crime is not evenly distributed across urban areas; rather, it is concentrated in very small places, or hot spots, that generate half of all criminal events (Pierce, Spaar and Briggs, 1988; Sherman, Gartin and Buerger, 1989). Hot spots policing is not simply the application of police strategies to units of geography (Weisburd, 2008; Braga and Weisburd, 2010). Traditional policing in this sense can be seen as place-based. Police have routinely defined their units of operation in terms of large areas, such as police precincts and beats. In hot spots policing, place refers to a very different level of geographic aggregation than has traditionally interested police executives and planners. Places in this context are very small micro-units of analysis, such as buildings or addresses, block faces or street segments, or clusters of addresses, block faces and street segments (Eck and Weisburd, 1995). When crime is concentrated in such places, they are commonly referred to as hot spots. A majority of U.S. police departments currently use hot spots policing strategies to reduce crime (Police



Executive Research Forum, 2008; Weisburd et al., 2003).

The crime control effectiveness of hot spots policing is supported by two complementary theoretical perspectives: general deterrence and criminal opportunity reduction (Nagin, 2013). Evaluation evidence has found support for both theoretical perspectives. For instance, in the Minneapolis hot spots patrol experiment, Sherman and Weisburd (1995) claimed evidence of place-specific general deterrence associated with increased police presence in hot spot areas. Moreover, in Lowell, Mass., Braga and Bond (2008) suggested that the crime reduction impacts observed in their randomized experiment were primarily generated by problem-oriented policing strategies that modified criminal opportunity structures at crime hot spots. Indeed, as suggested by early experiences in Newport News, Va. (Eck and Spelman, 1987), **problem-oriented policing, with its emphasis on using analysis to understand recurring crime problems, is a natural complement to hot spots policing programs in framing strategies to control persistently problematic places.**

Drawing on studies from an ongoing Campbell review of hot spots policing evaluations (Braga, 2001), the NRC Panel on Police concluded that “a strong body of evidence suggests that taking a focused geographic approach to crime problems can increase policing effectiveness in reducing crime and disorder” (Skogan and Frydl, 2004: 247). The most recent iteration of the Campbell hot spots policing review identified 19 rigorous

evaluations involving 25 tests of hot spots policing programs (Braga, Papachristos and Hureau, 2014). Meta-analyses of these controlled evaluations found that these programs produced significant crime reductions in the targeted hot spots areas and tended to generate “spillover” crime prevention effects in surrounding areas that did not receive focused police attention. Moreover, the meta-analyses suggested that problem-oriented policing strategies, designed to change underlying conditions at crime hot spots, generated stronger crime control gains relative to programs that simply increased traditional police activities, such as patrol, in crime hot spots (Braga, Papachristos and Hureau, 2014).

### **Disorder Policing**

**Dealing with physical and social disorder, or “fixing broken windows,” has become a central element of crime prevention strategies adopted by many American police departments** (Sousa and Kelling, 2006; Kelling and Coles, 1996). The general idea of dealing with disorderly conditions to prevent crime is present in myriad police strategies. These range from “order maintenance” and “zero-tolerance” policing, where the police attempt to impose order through strict enforcement, to community and problem-oriented policing, where police attempt to produce order and reduce crime through cooperation with community members and by addressing specific recurring problems (Cordner, 1998; Eck and Maguire, 2006; Skogan, 2006). Although its application can vary within and across police departments, disorder policing is now a common crime control strategy.

More than 30 years of evaluation research on the impact of disorder policing strategies on crime has produced a large body of studies characterized by an array of positive, null and negative effects (Braga, Welsh and Schnell, 2015).

Until recently, scholars and policy analysts have not attempted to synthesize the findings of these empirical studies in a systematic way. Prior narrative reviews of this body of research privileged the findings of particular studies over others and, as a result, produced divergent conclusions on the crime control efficacy of disorder policing. For instance, in a published debate, University of Chicago law professor Bernard Harcourt concluded that there was “no good evidence that broken windows policing reduces serious crime,” whereas University of Michigan public policy professor David Thacher suggested that there were some indications that disorder policing may positively impact crime rates (Harcourt and Thacher, 2005: 15).

The preliminary results of an ongoing Campbell systematic review and meta-analysis suggest that disorder policing strategies do generate crime control gains (Braga, Welsh and Schnell, 2015). Importantly, these strategies yielded consistent crime reduction effects across a variety of violence, property, drug and disorder outcome measures. These findings provide support for police paying attention to social and physical disorder when seeking to reduce more serious crimes in neighborhoods. Indeed, beyond disorder policing, these general ideas support key strategies and tactics employed by a wide range of recent police innovations, such as community

policing, problem-oriented policing and hot spots policing (see Weisburd and Braga, 2006). Police departments should continue to engage policing disorder tactics as part of their portfolio of strategies to reduce crime.

Perhaps of greatest interest, to police leaders and policymakers alike, was the preliminary Campbell review finding that the types of strategies used by police departments to control disorder seemed to matter the most (Braga, Welsh and Schnell, 2015). Aggressive order maintenance strategies that targeted individual disorderly behaviors did not generate significant crime reductions. In contrast, community problem-solving approaches designed to change social and physical disorder conditions at particular places, such as crime hot spots, produced significant crime reductions.

### **Focused Deterrence**

A recent innovation in policing that capitalizes on the growing evidence of the effectiveness of police crime prevention strategies is the “focused deterrence” framework, which is often referred to as “pulling-levers policing” (Kennedy, 1997, 2008). Pioneered in Boston as a problem-oriented policing project to halt serious gang violence during the 1990s (Braga et al., 2001), the focused deterrence framework has been applied in many U.S. cities through federally sponsored violence prevention programs such as the Strategic Alternatives to Community Safety Initiative and Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN) (Dalton, 2002). Focused deterrence strategies honor core deterrence ideas, such as increasing risks faced

by offenders, while finding new and creative ways of deploying traditional and nontraditional law enforcement tools to do so, such as communicating incentives and disincentives directly to targeted offenders (Kennedy, 2008).

In its simplest form, the focused deterrence approach consists of selecting a particular crime problem, such as gang homicide; convening an interagency working group of law enforcement, social service and community-based practitioners; conducting research to identify key offenders, groups and behavior patterns; framing a response to offenders and groups of offenders that uses a varied menu of sanctions (“pulling levers”) to stop them from continuing their violent behavior; focusing social services and community resources on targeted offenders and groups to match law enforcement prevention efforts; and directly and repeatedly communicating with offenders to make them understand why they are receiving this special attention (Kennedy, 1997, 2008). These new strategic approaches have been applied to a range of crime problems, such as overt drug markets and individual repeat offenders. The ultimate targets of focused deterrence strategies are the pro-violence norms and dynamics that drive offending and victimization for high-risk individuals.

In response to conflicting reports on the crime control efficacy of these new prevention strategies (see, e.g., Braga et al., 2001; Rosenfeld, Fornango and Baumer, 2005; Wellford, Pepper and Petrie, 2005), the United Kingdom’s National Policing

Improvement Agency provided funds to support a Campbell Collaboration systematic review of the available evaluation evidence on the crime control efficacy of focused deterrence strategies. The Campbell review found that focused deterrence strategies were associated with significant reductions in targeted crime problems, particularly gang homicide (Braga and Weisburd, 2012). More recent research suggests that focused deterrence strategies not only reduce serious violence by targeted gangs but also deter serious violence by socially connected gangs not directly subjected to the program (Braga, Hureau and Papachristos, 2014; Braga, Apel and Welsh, 2013).

### **The Work of the Second Executive Session on Policing and Public Safety**

The second Executive Session on Policing and Public Safety commenced in 2008 and ended in 2014. During this second series of meetings, the author believes there was a consensus among the academic and police executive participants that the police were performing well in controlling crime. Crime had decreased steadily over the previous 18 years and there were many success stories. Although dealing with crime remained an important topic, it certainly was not the main topic of conversation. The participants considered a variety of new challenges to the policing profession, including dealing with terrorist threats and homeland security in a post-9/11 world (Bayley and Nixon, 2010), making policing more affordable in light of the 2008 recession (Gascón and Foglesong, 2010), addressing wrongful convictions (Batts, deLone and Stephens, 2014), promoting better

relationships between the police and minority communities (Meares, 2015; Bayley, Davis and Davis, 2015), managing the boundaries between private and public policing (Sparrow, 2014), and other pressing concerns.

The broader scope of challenges to the policing industry considered during the second Executive Session does not suggest that the participants thought crime wasn't an ongoing concern to police executives throughout the world. Indeed, conversations were dedicated to considering the persistent problem of serious gun violence in disadvantaged minority communities (Braga and Brunson, 2015), the burgeoning problem of prisoner reentry in an era of mass incarceration (Travis, Davis and Lawrence, 2012), and how to get detectives more focused on crime prevention work (Braga et al., 2011). **However, there was a sense among participants that a general crime control "game plan" existed and it needed to be protected by advancing two broad ideas: (1) strengthening existing commitments to community problem-solving efforts, and (2) remaining flexible and adaptable in the crime control task environment.**

### **Strengthening Existing Commitments to Community Problem-Solving Efforts**

Even though community problem-solving policing concepts are now ubiquitous in the policing profession, the experiences of the police executives in the session, coupled with the available literature on implementation, suggest that many police departments are not embracing these approaches with fidelity to the original ideas.

For instance, the available research suggests that community policing has been unevenly implemented within police departments, with responsibility for community-based initiatives sometimes relegated to specialized units composed of a small number of officers rather than spread across police departments (Skogan and Frydl, 2004; Skogan, 2006). Police officers also often find it difficult to implement problem-oriented policing properly with deficiencies in all stages of the process, resulting in an overreliance on traditional policing tactics (Braga and Weisburd, 2006; Cordner and Biebel, 2005). Too many police departments seem to rely on oversimplistic tactics, such as "putting cops on dots" or launching indiscriminate zero-tolerance initiatives rather than engaging a coherent crime prevention strategy.

Community policing should be the foundation of any general crime prevention approach. Simply engaging the community doesn't seem to translate directly into crime reduction gains. However, community engagement can provide important inputs to help focus crime reduction strategies such as problem-oriented policing, hot spots policing and focused deterrence approaches, which do seem to reduce crime. Developing close relationships with community members helps the police gather information about crime and disorder problems, understand the nature of these problems, and solve specific crimes. Community members can also help with key components of strategies tailored to specific problems by making improvements to the physical environment and through informal

social control of high-risk people. Indeed, a central idea in community policing is to engage residents so they can exert more control over situations and dynamics that contribute to their own potential for victimization and, by doing so, influence neighborhood levels of crime. Police departments should also strive to develop similar working relationships with local businesses, social service agencies and other criminal justice organizations.

Problem-oriented policing seems well-positioned to be a central crime prevention strategy implemented within a broader community policing approach. Eck (2006: 118–119) summarized problem-oriented policing as having three core principles:

- (1) The *empirical principle* is that the public demands that police handle a wide range of problems.
- (2) The *normative principle* is that police are supposed to reduce problems rather than simply responding to incidents and applying the relevant criminal law.
- (3) The *scientific principle* asserts that police should take a scientific approach to crime problems and apply analytical approaches and interventions based on sound theory and evaluation evidence.

Although knowledge and practice will continue to evolve, the core principles of the approach that drive its popularity seem likely to remain constant. There seems to be consensus among

police leaders, scholars and the public that police agencies should be focused on problem reduction — that is, ensuring fewer, less serious and less harmful crime and disorder problems (Eck, 2006).

Hot spots policing, disorder policing and focused deterrence strategies are evidence-based crime prevention strategies that fit well within a community problem-solving framework. Community members will undoubtedly expect police departments to address high-crime locations, disorderly conditions and repeat offenders within their neighborhoods. Relative to increased traditional policing actions, problem-oriented policing seems to generate stronger crime reduction impacts when applied to control crime hot spot locations (Braga and Weisburd, 2010; Braga, Papachristos and Hureau, 2014). Community problem-solving efforts have long been recommended as desirable ways to control social and physical disorder associated with more serious crime problems (Wilson and Kelling, 1989; Kelling and Coles, 1996). Focused deterrence strategies developed from a problem-oriented approach to gang violence (Kennedy, Piehl and Braga, 1996) and involve community engagement in changing pro-violence norms and behaviors by criminally active groups and high-rate offenders.

Other Executive Session papers address the issue of police legitimacy, especially in minority communities (Meares, 2015; Braga and Brunson, 2015; Bayley, Davis and Davis, 2015). Throughout these papers, the authors acknowledge in varying ways that it is extremely important to balance the



implementation of effective crime prevention strategies with maintaining positive community perceptions of the quality and appropriateness of police services. Certainly, much has been learned about enhancing police legitimacy. **Community policing has been found to improve police-community relationships and enhance police legitimacy in white and non-white communities** (Skogan, 2006). Handling police-citizen encounters in a respectful, procedurally just manner also seems to enhance police legitimacy (Tyler, 2006; Mazerolle et al., 2013). It is also important to note here that the composition of police departments has changed notably over the past 30 years (Sklansky, 2005; Batts, Smoot and Scrivner, 2012). Today's police departments have better educated officers and more closely resemble the communities they police — with larger shares of female and minority officers.

**Engaging a focused and analytical approach to crime control and prevention also seems well-positioned to improve police legitimacy with the public they serve.** First, communities expect the police to control crime. Ineffective strategies that lead to unnecessarily high crime rates will undoubtedly undermine police legitimacy. Second, community engagement in developing appropriately focused strategies helps to safeguard against indiscriminate and overly aggressive enforcement tactics and other inappropriate policing activities, which in turn erode the community's trust and confidence in the police and inhibit cooperation. Third, preventing crimes from happening by addressing underlying crime-producing situations and

dynamics reduces harm to potential victims as well as harm to would-be offenders by not relying solely on arrest and prosecution actions.

### **Remaining Flexible and Adaptable in the Crime Control Task Environment**

The police crime control research summarized in the previous section carried out the important task of determining whether specific innovative policing programs had an impact on crime reduction. Rigorous evaluation research generally attempts to isolate causal relationships between programs and outcomes through the use of comparison groups and statistical controls (Shadish, Cook and Campbell, 2002). Clearly, conducting isolated tests of specific interventions is critically important in developing a body of knowledge on what works in police crime reduction (Weisburd and Neyroud, 2011). However, in practice, research findings should be used to inform a general approach to crime reduction that includes a diverse set of proven practices but can also be flexible enough to understand new crime problems and develop appropriate interventions to address the risky situations, dynamics and people that cause problems to recur (Sparrow, 2009, 2011). Police departments should be developing a strategic orientation to crime reduction rather than simply adopting specific programs and tactics that may stifle innovation. The existing research evidence suggests a police crime prevention approach that focuses on identifying and addressing “precipitating” causes of specific crime problems, engages the community and a broad range of governmental and nongovernmental partners,

and uses a diversity of tools and strategies including, but certainly not limited to, law enforcement actions.

Developing and maintaining a strong analytical capacity within police departments is clearly essential to strategic crime prevention in a community problem-solving framework. A focused approach to crime reduction requires identifying high-risk situations, people and places. It also requires developing an understanding of the underlying conditions that cause these identifiable risks to persist. **Measuring whether implemented crime prevention strategies are generating the desired impact on crime reduction is also important; ineffective police strategies can be discontinued and more appropriate interventions developed.** **This orientation obviously puts a premium on data collection and analysis systems, and on developing the human capital within police departments to carry out such analytic work.** By virtue of their representation as patterns within commonly available criminal justice databases (such as data on arrests, crime incidents, and calls for service), these risks are easily identifiable through simple analysis. Through the collection of other data (such as offender and victim interviews) and more sophisticated analysis (such as social network analysis and geo-temporal analytics), the underlying conditions and dynamics associated with the genesis and continuation of these recurring problems can be understood. Training police officers in crime analysis, hiring civilian crime analysts, and developing strategic partnerships with external researchers will better

position police departments to carry out problem identification, analysis and assessment.

Compstat, a key element of the NYPD's attack on crime during the 1990s (Silverman, 1999), has become a popular management accountability system used by most major police departments in the United States (Weisburd et al., 2003). Compstat can be viewed as an important administrative innovation that holds mid-level managers accountable for understanding and addressing crime trends and problems in the geographic areas (precincts, districts) they command. These administrative systems can be used to help drive the community problem-solving efforts described throughout this essay. However, police departments engaging Compstat processes must be careful to ensure that the process does not undermine the creativity and flexibility needed to launch more powerful responses to crime problems (Weisburd et al., 2003; Sparrow, 2015). Performance accountability systems, like Compstat, can be effective if leadership teams apply them creatively, analytically and persistently (Behn, 2014). Police managers should be held responsible for developing responses that go beyond simply increasing arrests and summons in problem areas.

## **Conclusion**

In his fictional case study on addressing crime in Heron City, Sparrow (2009) examines the relationships among a range of current policing strategies, and the nature of analytic support that modern operational policing requires. Sparrow (2009) advances the idea that police departments

engaging multiple crime control strategies need to safeguard against rigid adherence to any particular approach that could result in a diminished capacity to respond to new and evolving crime and disorder problems. **Police departments need to be creative and versatile rather than stagnant and inflexible. Crime problems need to be deconstructed through analysis, and responses need to be tailored to underlying conditions and local community needs.** Whereas Moore, Trojanowicz and Kelling (1988) focused more on how the community can be integrated into police crime prevention efforts, they similarly advocated for a flexible approach rooted in thoughtful analyses of crime problems and the development of responses tailored to proximate causes (see also Goldstein, 1979, 1990; Clarke, 1997).

This essay reviewed the available research on specific police crime prevention programs. Most of the available scientific evidence was conducted in the years between the first and second Executive Sessions on Policing. In the first paper of the second Executive Session, Sparrow (2009) drew some much-needed attention to these ideas. The available research suggests that the ideas that flowered after the first Executive Session were invaluable in advancing the police response to crime and disorder problems. And, although the evaluation evidence tended to cluster within specific types of police crime prevention programs, the study findings are actually quite complementary when aggregated into common themes. In essence, the police should adopt a flexible “community problem-solving” approach

to dealing with crime and disorder problems and draw upon specific kinds of programs when they fit local community needs. This approach should be rooted in community engagement, the analysis of crime problems, and the development of appropriate prevention responses.

### Endnotes

1. Although correlations between disorder and crime have been consistently observed, the available research evidence on the causal connections between disorder and more serious crime is mixed. For instance, using systematic social observation data to capture social and physical incivilities on the streets of Chicago, Sampson and Raudenbush (1999) found that, with the exception of robbery, public disorder did not lead to more serious crime when neighborhood characteristics such as poverty, stability, race and collective efficacy were considered. However, in the Netherlands, Keitzer, Lindenberg and Steg (2008) conducted six field experiments examining the links between disorder and more serious crime. **They concluded that dealing with disorderly conditions was an important intervention to halt the spread of further crime and disorder.**
2. Uniform Crime Report (UCR) data were gathered from the annual Crime in the United States report and from the FBI’s UCR website at <http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/ucr/ucr>.
3. Much of this debate has centered on whether the New York City Police Department (NYPD) can claim any credit for reductions in violent

crime in New York City. Many nonexperimental analyses have found statistically significant associations between the NYPD policing disorder strategy and decreased violent crime, with effects ranging from modest (Rosenfeld, Fornango and Rengifo, 2007; Messner et al., 2007; Cerda et al., 2009; Chauhan et al., 2011) to large (Kelling and Sousa, 2001; Corman and Mocan, 2002). However, Harcourt and Ludwig (2006) and Greenberg (2014) report no statistically significant violence reduction impacts associated with the NYPD strategy. Even though this body of evidence seems to suggest that the NYPD policing disorder strategy may have impacted violence reduction, the magnitude of effects remains unclear. Given the uncertainties associated with determining causal effects in nonexperimental research designs that use proxy measures (such as the number of misdemeanor arrests) to examine innovative police strategies, it is doubtful that a definitive conclusion will ever be reached by social scientists on the New York crime-drop puzzle (Braga and Bond, 2008; Braga, Welsh and Schnell, 2015).

4. <http://cebcp.org/evidence-based-policing/the-matrix>.

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