FOCUSED DETERRENCE IN NEW ORLEANS

Focused Deterrence and Improved Police–Community Relations

Unpacking the Proverbial "Black Box"

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Since Boston's Operation Ceasefire was widely heralded as an effective youth violence-reduction strategy (Braga, Kennedy, Waring, and Piehl, 2001; Kennedy, 1997), numerous scholars have attempted to implement and evaluate subsequent deterrence-based models. This rapidly growing body of scholarship has resulted in improved understandings regarding how best to address a wide range of persistent crime and disorder problems (e.g., drug trafficking, gun violence, and youth gangs). We stand to learn considerably more, however, regarding exactly how notable crime reduction is achieved and whether focused deterrence strategies yield other important societal benefits.

Unfortunately, serious crime problems tend to cluster in places where people of color disproportionately reside—highly disadvantaged, urban settings. In these ecological contexts, police–community relations tend to be most strained and characterized by deeply rooted mutual suspicion. An emerging body of research reveals that seemingly indiscriminate and heavy-handed policing tactics erode minority citizen trust of and confidence in the police (Brunson, 2007; Carr, Napolitano, and Keating, 2007; Gau and Brunson, 2010). In contrast, focused deterrence policing efforts, consistent with the problem-oriented policing framework, rely on data-driven intelligence gathering to identify carefully and target repeat, high-risk offenders (for increased interagency law enforcement attention and individualized social service programming).

Directing intensive crime-prevention efforts at specific individuals and groups, who are disproportionately involved in problem behaviors, distinguishes focused deterrence from extremely controversial policing strategies (e.g., stop, question, and frisk). Furthermore, as a consequence of Tyler and colleagues' (Sunshine and Tyler, 2003; Tyler, 1990, 2004;

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DOI:10.1111/1745-9133.12141

Tyler and Wakslak, 2004) innovative work, policing scholars better understand that officers have the potential to improve legitimacy by performing their duties in ways that reflect the guiding principles of procedural justice—fairness and respectfulness. Research has shown that citizens who view the police as being legitimate are more willing to support officers' crime-fighting mission (Brunson, Braga, Hureau, and Pegram, 2013; Decker, 1981). For instance, a recent randomized control trial of traffic stops in Australia found improved citizen views of the specific encounter and officers overall after motorists were exposed to procedurally just practices (Mazerolle, Antrobus, Bennett, and Tyler, 2013). Finally, although improving police–community relations might not be the primary goal of most focused deterrence models, these strategies seem to hold considerable promise for increasing police legitimacy in the eyes of community residents.

Procedural Justice and Police Legitimacy

Offender notification meetings are a critical component of the focused deterrence framework. For example, research has demonstrated that the gangs called into the sessions were less likely to be involved in gun violence afterward, both as offenders and as victims, when compared with matched-control samples (Braga, Hureau, and Papachristos, 2014). This is also the case concerning recidivism among high-risk individuals (Wallace, Papachristos, Meares, and Fagan, in press). Corsaro and Engel (2015, this issue) note that "an emerging body of research has framed the use of offender notification meetings as a way to enhance the perceived legitimacy of the criminal justice system by providing an unbiased and procedurally just response to violence." However, the empirical evidence is limited about whether offenders, members of their criminal networks, family, and communities view the police as having the moral, not just legal, authority to promote and enforce the deterrence message.[1]

Call-in meetings are open to the public, held in familiar neighborhood settings (e.g., community centers, churches, and recreational facilities), and typically receive substantial local media attention. Thus, news coverage depicting multiple arrests and intensified law enforcement activities could help assure citizens that the police are genuinely working to curtail neighborhood crime. Moreover, learning of concentrated crime-prevention efforts might improve citizen willingness to cooperate with the police, providing crucial information about active criminal investigations.

During call-ins, suspects are confronted with stacks of evidence that authorities have compiled in connection with their current criminal cases. Next, a cast of trusted community leaders (e.g., antiviolence activists, crime victims, and members of the clergy) explains to alleged offenders that the community honestly cares about them and their futures. Local

1. Research teams examining various focused deterrence strategies have administered short questionnaires to prior call-in participants regarding their impressions of the announcement and whether they had shared the antiviolence message with others. Most of these findings have not been published, however.

spokespersons express strong support for giving arrestees another chance to reform their lives versus incarceration; they also are adamant that the community will no longer tolerate their wrongdoing and that future law violations (by them or fellow group members) will result in swift, certain, and severe punishment for all.[2] Alternatively, individuals with the most serious criminal histories are not summoned to call-ins but are referred for immediate prosecution.[3] Finally, before leaving the call-in, arrestees meet with a team of social service providers, who determine their individual programmatic needs (e.g., job training, education, and substance abuse treatment).

It stands to reason that legal authorities' public displays of procedural justice and compassion for call-in participants might lead to greater police legitimacy and community support (see Papachristos, Meares, and Fagan, 2007). For example, academic studies of police–minority community relations have underscored the importance of learning of family members' and friends' police interactions for collectively shaping citizen perceptions of police legitimacy (Brunson, 2007; Gallagher, Maguire, Mastrofski, and Reisig, 2001; Rosenbaum, Schuck, Costello, Hawkins, and Ring, 2005; Weitzer and Tuch, 2005). These indirect police encounters have been described in the literature as vicarious experiences. The perceived longstanding unfairness of the criminal justice system toward people of color is a frequent and spirited topic of conversation within minority communities (Boyles, 2015; Solis, Portillos, and Brunson, 2009; Stewart, 2007; Wood and Brunson, 2011). In fact, Black parents consistently report sternly cautioning youth about how to negotiate unwelcome police encounters successfully (Brunson and Weitzer, 2011). Thus, it is essential that crime-reduction strategies not only are successful but also inspire citizen confidence—especially among those who have historically been on the receiving end of racially discriminatory policing practices (Brunson and Miller, 2006; Holmes and Smith, 2008).

Given that observed fairness and program effectiveness are equally important for strengthening police–community relations, Corsaro, Brunson, and McGarrell (2010, 2013) used mixed methodological approaches in their evaluations of two separate "pulling levers" focused deterrence strategies (aimed at disrupting persistent, open-air drug markets). Specifically, in addition to collecting various pre- and post-intervention official crime data, research team members conducted 44 face-to-face interviews in Nashville, Tennessee, and 34 in Rockford, Illinois, in an attempt to examine local residents' perceptions of the respective initiatives. Most study participants across both research settings expressed having considerable confidence in the police and a renewed interest in partnering with officers to address local crime problems. Furthermore, most respondents in each city articulated a strong preference for policing strategies after program implementation when compared

2. Call-in attendees are encouraged to circulate the warning of increased surveillance and heightened legal sanctions throughout their networks.

3. It is common for their images and potential lengthy prison sentences to be displayed at notification meetings in the hope of deterring attendees from engaging in future criminal activity.

with previously unsuccessful approaches to combat street-level drug dealing (e.g., arrests, crackdowns, and sweeps). Although the qualitative findings from these two distinct evaluations may not be widely generalizable, they suggest that beyond being effective at reducing crime, which was the case in both studies, focused deterrence models also have the capacity to enhance police–community relations in high-crime, disadvantaged areas.

Concluding Remarks

A string of recent, well-publicized deaths suffered by Black males at the hands of police, followed by episodes of civil unrest across several U.S. cities, are stark reminders of the sizeable rift between police departments and many communities of color. Although undeniably tragic, these events have also cast light on an issue that minority citizens have vigorously complained about for generations—perceived over-policing of their neighborhoods. Thus, there is growing recognition among police leaders that damaged police–minority community relations seriously threaten their ability to launch effective crime prevention strategies. Furthermore, several scholars have asserted that improved police legitimacy is a consequence of citizens holding favorable views of police after encounters where officers demonstrate procedural justice principles (Tyler, 2004).

An examination of Boston's Operation Ceasefire provides community leaders, policymakers, and police administrators with keen insights regarding how to enhance police legitimacy and informal social control in high-crime, minority communities (Berrien and Winship, 2002; Winship, 2005; Winship and Berrien, 1999). Specifically, in the early 1990s, a group of activist Black clergy, frustrated by high rates of youth gang violence, founded the TenPoint Coalition (TPC).[4] The ministers later joined Ceasefire, quickly emerging as its principal community-based partner. Although TPC clergy did not play a role in establishing Ceasefire, they were integral in executing the overall gang violence-reduction initiative.

The extent to which community policing efforts are meaningful depends heavily on police executives' commitment to establishing and supporting mutually beneficial partnerships with local groups, especially those that can successfully broker trust between officers and neighborhood residents. Clearly, this is an enormous undertaking. For instance, the TenPoint–Boston Police Department (BPD) collaboration has endured several weighty challenges throughout its tenure. Furthermore, hardly any members of either organization define the relationship as continuously harmonious (see Brunson et al., 2013). In fact, early on, TPC ministers were antagonists of the BPD and routinely used local media outlets to denounce their crime control strategies (Winship and Berrien, 1999). As a result of faith leaders' efforts to engage at-risk youth on the streets, however, they repeatedly came into contact and established rapport with BPD officers assigned to the Youth Violence Strike Force. Interestingly, individuals from two vastly different organizations reached a shared

4. Originally, the TPC comprised approximately 40 local churches.

perspective of Boston's youth violence problem. Specifically, officers and ministers became acutely aware of three key features:

(1) Most disadvantaged neighborhood youth were not engaged in violence.
(2) Youth gang members were in need of targeted intervention and prevention programming.
(3) Only a handful of gang-involved youths warranted confinement.

The TPC's pivotal role in Ceasefire and considerable visibility within high-crime neighborhoods enabled them to deliver an antiviolence message to at-risk youth that reflected the communities' moral voice and consciousness.

Moreover, TPC leaders served as important liaisons to the BPD and worked tirelessly to enhance community residents' trust of them in the hope of extending it to police officers. During several potentially racially explosive incidents involving BPD officers (e.g., dubious use of force against unarmed minority suspects), ministers' public support provided the police department with an "umbrella of legitimacy" (Winship and Berrien, 1999) or a "moment of pause" (Brunson et al., 2013) to conduct appropriate investigations. Furthermore, BPD command staff frequently sought clergy leaders' advice prior to implementing crime control strategies that residents might perceive as needlessly aggressive. In their investigation of plural policing in England and Wales, Crawford, Lister, Blackburn, and Burnet (2005) observed that, "good community consultation at both strategic and operational levels was identified as important in establishing and maintaining community engagement and helping to build constructive and informed relationships" (p. x).

Although Ceasefire involved faith-based leaders, other organizations enjoying extraordinary levels of community support might also be capable of effectively partnering with the police. When forming collaborations, however, police commanders should resist the urge to dismiss hastily unconventional groups from consideration (e.g., those composed of prior offenders) and organizations that have previously openly challenged the department's crime control policies. In fact, groups causing traditional criminal justice organizations trepidation also might have huge credibility among neighborhood residents. Local activists who occasionally take on adversarial positions to public officials also understand that police officers play essential roles in maintaining public safety. Furthermore, most informal community leaders' ultimate goal is the implementation of policing innovations that are both effective and evenhanded. Corsaro and Engel's (2015, this issue) study joins an expanding body of research demonstrating the promise of focused deterrence strategies and is especially noteworthy given the multitude of disconcerting social problems plaguing New Orleans. Furthermore, Corsaro and Engel's findings contribute to current policy-relevant discussions centered on encouraging police contacts that improve citizens' sense of fairness and procedural justice (Tyler, 2004). This area of research has consistently demonstrated that effective crime control efforts do not have to result in weakened police legitimacy.

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