

# Chapter 14

## Future Perspectives in Policing: A Crisis or a Perfect Storm: The Trouble with Public Policing?

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In the early years of the twenty-first century, public policing in the developed world has been going through a very rough patch. Whether it be riots in London, riots in Ferguson, Missouri resulting from a police shooting, a series of scandals in the UK both historic and current (May 2014) or just the deep impact of financial austerity following recession, policing and police leaders have tended to be making the news for the wrong reasons. For one UK commentator the institutional crisis was so deep-rooted that nothing short of abolition would cure the problem. Professor Tim Hope (2014) stated his case based on the harms caused by public policing, such as the discriminatory impacts of policies such as stop and search, the culture of policing, which he suggested is insular and self-serving and on the lack of police effectiveness in their main mission of crime control.

Hope could also have pointed out that, alongside his arguments, there was a “perfect storm” affecting public policing across the developed world (Neyroud and Weisburd 2014). Firstly, most countries have experienced a level of financial austerity not seen since the oil crisis of the 1970’s. Policing budgets have been cut in the UK, Europe and the USA. Long-term projections of the impact of demographic changes suggest that, although debt and falling tax revenues caused the immediate cuts, the future looks very challenging (Gascon and Fogelsong 2010): a future that public policing must face with an institutional structure with embedded inefficiencies (Van Reenen 1999). Despite technological changes, police budgets the world over show that around 80% of expenditure remains committed to the cost of the workforce, a figure that has not changed in 30 years. Proportionate to other public sector agencies, policing has become more expensive just at the time when it needs to reduce costs (Gascon and Fogelsong 2010).

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Given the costs of policing, it is, therefore, particularly problematic that the second dimension of the “storm” is the challenge of demonstrating the effectiveness of the police as crime falls and its patterns change. In an international debate about the reasons for the crime drop, few analyses of the causes have accorded police a central role. The most convincing explanations advanced have suggested that situational crime prevention—engine immobilisers, better home security and surveillance technologies - has been more effective (Van Dijk 2014). Furthermore, as police numbers have fallen, there has, as yet, been no consequent uplift in recorded crime figures.

One reason why official figures are not rising is that those figures increasingly fail to reflect the changes in crime patterns. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) has estimated that more than 3 million fraud and Internet based crimes go unrecognized by both official figures and the Crime Survey of England and Wales (ONS 2014). Added to the official tally, these crimes would provide an increase of around 50% in the UK. The police are simply failing to cope, because they remain locked into a geographic model of policing with physical boundaries and nationally defined legal reimits. The police are also struggling to cope with crimes such as people trafficking, child sexual exploitation and domestic violence, which cross the boundaries of countries, agencies or public and private space. The solutions are too often posed as structural reorganization of the existing organisation rather than a more fundamental realignment (Curtis 2014). Ultimately, this existential crisis of policing is challenging the legitimacy of the police as an institution. Far from enjoying a “Cold War” dividend from the crime drop, the public police have faced renewed scrutiny about their mission, purpose and contribution (Neyroud and Weisburd 2014).

In the past the police would, no doubt, have fallen back on experience and traditional law and order rhetoric. With increasingly tough choices between funding health, education, defence and other public services, such an approach is unlikely to win many arguments. Police leaders need a much more radical strategy to sustain their services and prevent what George Kelling has called the “retreat to the core” (Police Executive Research Forum PERF 2012), which would push public policing more and more to an unattractive future as an emergency service of last resort for struggling communities. Indeed, Brogden and Ellison (2013) have argued that the piecemeal responses of police leaders to austerity have already started the slide in such a dystopic direction.

There is an alternative approach. Even those commentators who have minimized the contribution of the police and focused on the impact of the wider safety and security web in encouraging changes in behaviour (by victims and offenders) through regulation, prevention and rehabilitation, have found room for better policing as a driver of past and continued reductions (Waller 2014). In doing so, Waller (2014) and other key authors have argued that a reliance on experience and traditional tactics are not sufficient. Instead, Laycock and Tilley (2002) have proposed a renewed attention to “professional” problem-solving”, Waller (2014) advocated a “smarter crime control” focusing on “problem places and problem people” (p. 52) and Sherman (2013) a “Triple T” strategy—targeting, testing and tracking—using the best

evidence available. The common strand to each of these is a conception of the future of policing as a new profession, using knowledge to support delivery and innovation and research to test, learn and develop effective practices (Neyroud and Sherman 2013).

Reforming the police service along these lines is not an easy proposition. Police education remains stubbornly rooted in a model largely defined in the nineteenth century in which law and procedure combined with the passing on of experience are given preference over evidence based practice (Neyroud 2011; Weisburd and Neyroud 2011). Furthermore, the old police professional model, based around O.W. Wilson's scientific management (Wilson 1950), was condemned for placing too much reliance on the three R's—random patrol, rapid response and reactive investigation –, which were all shown to be relatively ineffective by the research in the 1970's and 1980's (Skogan and Frydl 2004). A new professionalism would have to pay more attention to public engagement, evidence and strategies focused on enhancing legitimacy (Travis and Stone 2011).

For police leaders confronting the challenges of the “perfect storm”, Neyroud and Weisburd (2014) and Neyroud and Sherman (2013) have argued that the essential task is for police to own, deploy and develop the science of policing. Ownership in this context includes the police embracing science (in its widest sense of knowledge) as the key building of practice and investing in partnership with scientists (the academic community) to build and enhance that knowledge. For this to happen, police officers and police leaders will need to value science as a key determinant of their choice of tactics and strategy and a vital part of the qualification framework for any applicant to or practitioner in policing.

An example of how such an approach changes the police is presented by the debate about the use and deployment of Body Worn Video (BWV). The idea that police should extend surveillance of their operations from the interview room into the wider operational environment is not a new one. The Royal Commission on Criminal Justice (1993) oversaw a test of operational tape recording as early as 1992. New technologies mean that more 20 years on, many of the physical constraints have been overcome. Too often such technologies have then been introduced without proper testing and evaluation and with more attention paid to the operation of the technology than to the social and societal impacts of their use. Instead, a serving Chief supported by an academic partner led a randomised controlled trial into BWV (Ariel and Farrar 2014). The RCT involved all the officers in Rialto Police Department being randomly assigned to wear or not wear BWV. The outcomes demonstrated a significant reduction in assaults on officers and complaints of misconduct by officers where the equipment was being worn. The study has encouraged a wider debate and further studies to replicate and broaden the profession's understanding (PERF 2014).

The growing body of research and systematic reviews of research in policing now provide the profession of policing with an agenda, which is very different from the 3 R's model of the 1950's (Rapid response, reactive investigation and random patrol). The police can be effective if they focus their efforts on high crime places or hot-spots, on highly recidivist and harmful offenders and on protecting the most

vulnerable victims (Sherman 2013). By paying attention to the impact of each approach or the combination of approaches on their perceived legitimacy, the police should be able to avoid the backfire effects of over-intensive deterrence based approaches (The Crime Report 2014). By extending the science to prevention and deterrence challenges such as cybercrime and organised crime, police could start to reframe their role at the heart of the state's duty to protect the citizen from preventable harms. Retreating to the core, on the other hand, could threaten the institutional extinction provocatively laid out by Hope (2014).

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