



Racial Equity Strengthens Communities And Makes Police More Effective

FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS is a national, nonpartisan anti-crime organization made up of more than 5,000 law enforcement leaders and crime survivors nationwide. These sheriffs, police chiefs, prosecutors and crime victims promote greater public investments in programs proven to direct kids to a better path in life, leading them away from crime and towards success.

Introduction

America's law enforcement officials have a unique privilege and responsibility. They are tasked with enforcing the law, maintaining order and providing services in communities that vary widely in ethnic make-up, income levels and employment status. Our police officers are expected to understand these communities 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Clearly, police forces that reflect the diversity of their communities can improve communications and foster cultural understandings that lead to both safer neighborhoods and stronger police-community relationships. There is more opportunity for trust and transparency when the community sees a police force that includes members of their community. Trust in the police can improve effectiveness, strengthen communities and result in safer neighborhoods.

Community Policing and the Impact of Racism

When crime escalated from the 1960s to the early 1990s, law enforcement agencies were obliged to re-examine the strategies and methods they employed. Out of that need, community policing was born – a shift away from police models that were reactive to crime to strategies that were more proactive and responsive to the needs of the community.¹ As defined by the Community Oriented Police Services (COPS) office at the U.S. Department of Justice, community policing is:

A philosophy that promotes organizational strategies, which support the systematic use of partnerships and problem-solving techniques, to proactively address the immediate conditions that give rise to public safety issues such as crime, social disorder, and fear of crime.²



Community policing seeks to reduce crime, but also improve the quality of life in communities, reduce fear of crime and improve police-citizen relations. It does so by having police actively engage in the community, working together with residents in problem-solving, crime prevention and addressing threats to safety. To accomplish these objectives, there needs to be diversity within the law enforcement agency. The agency has to understand the community.

Community policing recognizes that the police cannot control crime and promote public safety alone, and that community engagement is crucial. Developing relationships and a familiarity with residents of a particular neighborhood or other geographic areas is accomplished through long-term foot and bike patrols, satellite stations, open community meetings and additional outreach efforts at schools and places of worship.

Yet, these tactics are only a small part of the big picture. Collaborative problem-solving, and involving citizens and other public and private agencies on policies and practices (e.g., Advisory Councils to the Chief, reviewing complaints, etc.), empower the community as stakeholders with law enforcement, and improve relationships between the two groups.

With a community policing approach, residents in a community are able to quickly and accurately identify crime and quality of life issues, gather information, and assist police with prioritizing them so that the most important issues are addressed. Some issues may lie outside the scope of duties performed by police, requiring external sources to fully implement solutions and address concerns (e.g., apartment complex managers trained on crime control efforts, etc.). Community members who are engaged in problem solving efforts ensure that those external sources are prepared to assist in and promote crime prevention efforts with police.

Organizational transformations occur in effective community policing agencies, from the decentralization of personnel for long-term assignments from precincts to neighborhood satellite offices, to the pushing of power downward in an agency. By doing this, street patrol officers are given power and discretion to make decisions regarding investigation, arrest and search. Success in this approach requires police organizations to hire officers with characteristics that enable them to exercise this discretion as they engage the community and solve problems. As these organizations grow, they must attract more applicants with college degrees and train more cadets in community policing tactics, problem solving, community interactions and crime analysis and mapping. To effectively implement the best practices, police departments need the best candidates and the most well-trained cadets possible.

A consistent theme can be found throughout the ways in which police agencies effectively implement community policing practices: *community trust*. Without trust, citizens will not actively participate in community information-sharing meetings, welcome foot patrol officers into their neighborhoods, or freely speak to law enforcement and share their true concerns or real problems regarding crime and disorder in their communities.

A racially diverse group of officers can build that trust, implement community policing strategies, and increase police legitimacy and ultimately police effectiveness.³ U.S. Census data

in 2011 estimates that black persons constitute 13.1 percent of our population, Hispanic or Latino 16.7 percent, Asian American 5 percent, and American Indian/Alaska Native 1.2 percent. According to the U.S. Census, by 2042, the majority of Americans will be non-white.

Diverse officers who are from the neighborhoods in which they serve are better able to “put potentially suspicious activity into context with the cultural norms of their community”.⁶ They have a shared set of experiences in the context of their ethnicity and culture that allows for open dialogue and better problem solving, often because they have experienced the same problems themselves (profiling, discrimination, racism, etc.).

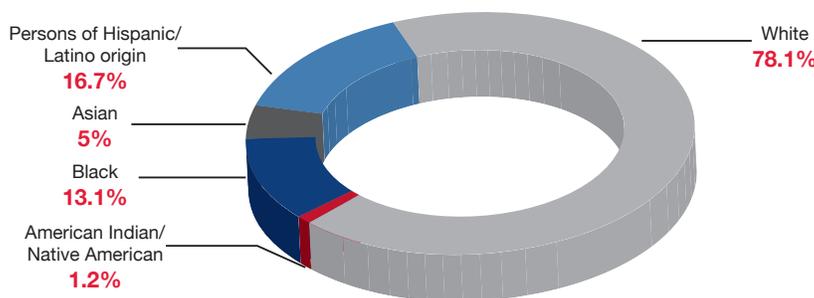
Dr. Tom Tyler of Yale Law School, an internationally recognized expert on criminal justice authorities and community legitimacy of those authorities, argues that when individuals believe the police are fair and reasonable, they are more likely to cooperate, both in terms of obeying the law and assisting police in their work (witness statements, reporting crimes, etc.). “Legitimacy of the police – the belief that the police are entitled to call upon the public to follow the law and help combat crime, and that members of the public have an obligation to engage in cooperative behaviors” is achieved when authority figures (e.g., police) are viewed as fair, and exercise their authority in such a way, Dr. Tyler asserted. That feeling of fairness is gained when citizens are allowed to participate and communicate with police, when they believe the police are neutral and treat them with respect and dignity, and perhaps most importantly, when they are able to trust the motives of the authority/decision makers.⁷ With a police force legitimized in the eyes of the public, the police are more effective at fighting crime.

Community Policing Played A Role In Crime Rates Dropping

Crime in America is measured by the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) system.⁸ Further information is available through the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS).

UCR data in our country reveals rising crime rates in America during the late 1960s, into the 1970s and 1980s, with violent crime spiking in 1991 with 758.2 incidents per 100,000 people. Then, from 1992 until the most recent year’s data (2011), despite substantial growth in population in the U.S. – from 255 million people to 312 million – both rates and absolute numbers of violent crime and property crime steadily went down. Similarly, the NCVS showed a steady and substantial reduction in violent victimization between 1993 and 2010, though there was an increase between 2010 and 2011. In fact, the rate of violent crime victimization per 1,000 persons age 12 and over has declined 72 percent since 1993.

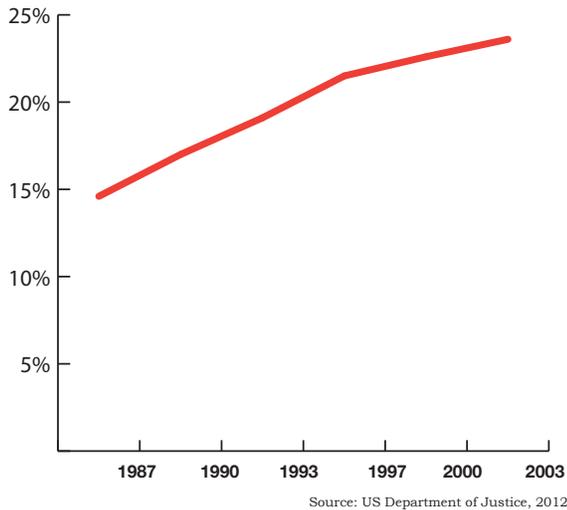
Race in the United States



Note: Percentages do not add up to 100 percent due to overlap in groups, particularly persons of Hispanic/Latino origin.

Source: US Census Bureau, 2012

Percent of Minority Law Enforcement



Scholars argue that the drop in crime rates through the 1990s is a product of many things, including community policing strategies. Other reasons for that drop include the decline of the crack cocaine epidemic, advances in medical care and treatment, and the rise of computer statistic-driven models for crime reduction and quality of life improvements.

Challenges to Achieving Diversity in Law Enforcement

As our nation becomes increasingly diverse, the need to build trust with diverse communities, and thus to diversify our police force, remains clear. Policing has been a traditionally White male dominated industry.⁹ There are challenges, though, to achieving true racial equity in the ranks of law enforcement that lie in recruiting, hiring, promoting and retaining diverse applicants, cadets and officers. Many scholars and practitioners assert whole-heartedly that there are qualified and interested candidates available, however insufficient efforts are made to find them. Others would argue that persistent disparities in opportunity, driven by persistent residential racial segregation and inequities in access to education, health care, and other programs, contribute to those who are interested being unable to qualify, due to past criminal activity or not passing the entrance exams. Some suggest that those who may be qualified simply do not have any interest because they do not know about the benefits of a career in law enforcement (pension plan, pay and benefits, housing and tuition assistance, etc.). More importantly though, and one that would require deeper discussion and exploration, is the idea that some qualified minority candidates may not pursue careers in law enforcement because they perceive they will be isolated from their friends and family of similar racial or ethnic background, and that by working in law enforcement they are forsaking their heritage.

FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS members have been involved in efforts to increase racial equity in the law enforcement profession.

- Retired Chief of Police Richard Pennington, who served as Chief of the New Orleans (LA) and the Atlanta (GA) Police Departments, increased efforts to recruit in minority communities across the country by advertising open positions in minority news outlets and on minority radio stations. These efforts, and others taken by Chief Pennington when he served in Atlanta, have resulted in larger minority pools of applicants for entry-level police officer positions.
- The San Diego Police Department, under the leadership of Police Chief William Lansdowne, in 2007 undertook efforts to increase the pool of applicants and to increase the diversity of the Department. To accomplish this, they worked to demystify the application process by providing sample written tests which, according to a RAND analysis, “can improve test scores, and there is some evidence that they are particularly effective in getting minority candidates to participate in the application process.” The Department also worked to make sure their written test was culturally unbiased. These steps resulted in an increase in the number of minority candidates who progressed further along in the application process and eventually on to employment.
- Baltimore City Police Commissioner Anthony Batts, who also served as the Police Chief of Oakland and Long Beach (CA), is a member and guest lecturer at Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government Executive Session on Policing and Public Safety, and a member of the Executive Session on Human Rights Commissions and Criminal Justice. Commissioner Batts partnered with other members of the Commissions in 2006 to author a key paper on ways to increase diversity in policing, citing its importance to equal treatment and effective policing. By taking a public stand with other academics and law enforcement officials, Commissioner Batts has advanced the conversation on diversity in policing further along than ever before, and significantly improved diversity in the profession for years to come.

SOURCE: Ridgaway, Greg, Lim, Nelson, Gifford, Brian, Koper, Christopher, Matthies, Carl, Hajjamiri, Sara, and Huynh, Alexis (2007). *Strategies for Improving Officer Recruitment in the San Diego Police Department*. RAND Center on Quality Policing.

Until these challenges are fully addressed across the nation, racial equity in law enforcement will continue to be an unrealized goal.

Solutions and Conclusion

The law enforcement community recognizes that achieving racial equity will not be easy, but we know that we are more effective when we look like the communities we serve. As law enforcement executives, we propose the following steps:

- Expand recruitment efforts to racial minority groups to increase the pool of qualified applicants. More racial minorities in law enforcement will promote diversity, improve the retention rate of minorities, and help eliminate whatever conscious and unconscious bias exists in law enforcement.
- Provide all children with access to high quality early care and education, child abuse and neglect programs, effective in-school and after school programs and interventions for at-risk youth. These will effectively reduce crime and give children a solid foundation for success both in school and in life, so they can qualify for a career in law enforcement or any other work they choose.
- Continue to educate law enforcement executives and the public at-large about the benefits of a diverse police force, and put conversations about race to the forefront so we can put racism behind us.

Our nation can be a safer and more pleasant place to live with a strong criminal justice system. Continued efforts to improve diversity in the ranks of law enforcement will ensure that our police are fully equipped and able to provide the best services possible to America's increasingly diverse population.



Endnotes

- 1 Fridell, Lorie and Wycoff, Mary Ann (2004). *Community Policing: The Past, Present and Future*. 3-13.
- 2 The Community Oriented Policing Services Office at the US Department of Justice. *COPS Office: What is Community Policing?* Retrieved November 6, 2012 from <http://www.cops.usdoj.gov/default.asp?item=36>.
- 3 Matthies, Carl F., Keller, Kirsten M., and Lim, Nelson (2012). *Issues in Policing: Identifying Barriers to Diversity in Law Enforcement Agencies*. RAND Center on Quality Policing.
- 4 The United States Census Bureau. *USA QuickFacts from the US Census Bureau*. Retrieved November 7, 2012 from <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/00000.html>.
- 5 The United States Census Bureau. Population by Race and Hispanic or Latino Origin for the United States: 1990 and 2000 (PHC-T-1). Table 1. Retrieved November 7, 2012 from <http://www.census.gov/population/www/cen2000/briefs/phc-t1/index.html>.
- 6 Wasserman, Robert (2010). *Guidance For Building Communities of Trust*. Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS).
- 7 Tyler, Tom (2004). *Enhancing Police Legitimacy*. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. 593(84).
- 8 The Federal Bureau of Investigations. *FBI UCR General FAQs*. Retrieved November 6, 2012 from http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/ucr/frequently-asked-questions/ucr_faqs.
- 9 Raganella, Anthony J. and White, Michael D. (2004). *Race, gender and motivation for becoming a police officer: Implications for building a representative police department*. *Journal of Criminal Justice*. 32 (501).