

Zero Tolerance: A Case Study of Police Policies and Practices in New York City

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The police reforms introduced in New York City by William Bratton are now hailed by Mayor Rudy Giuliani as the epitome of "zero-tolerance" policing, and he credits them for winning dramatic reductions in the city's crime rate. But the number of citizen complaints filed before the Civilian Complaint Review Board has jumped skyward, as has the number of lawsuits alleging police misconduct and abuse of force. Comparison of crime rates, arrest statistics, and citizen complaints in New York with those in San Diego—where a more problem-oriented community policing strategy has been implemented—gives strong evidence that effective crime control can be achieved while producing fewer negative impacts on urban neighborhoods.

The 1998 New York City Mayor's Management Report lists many concrete improvements in the quality of life in New York City, which Mayor Rudy Giuliani believes have been won directly through the New York Police Department's targeted approach to crime control—now held up by many observers as the epitome of "zero-tolerance" policing. During the first half of 1997, New York City was ranked 150th out of 189 U.S. cities with populations of more than 100,000 for its Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Index Crime rate.¹ In 1993, the year Giuliani was elected mayor, New York City had been ranked 87th on this list.

The Mayor's office reports that from 1993 to 1997 the number of felony complaints in New York City dropped by 44.3 percent: a 60.2 percent drop in murders and nonnegligent homicides, a 12.4 percent drop in forcible rape, a 48.4 percent drop in robbery, and a 45.7 drop in burglary. Mayor Giuliani points out that New York City is responsible for a large share of the overall crime reduction for the country as a whole. Comparing data from cities of more than 100,000 population for the first half of 1997 with data from these cities in the first half of 1993, the mayor's management report asserts that New York City accounted for 32 percent of the overall drop in FBI Index Crimes, 29

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percent of the drop in murders, and 44 percent of the drop in larceny/thefts (New York City Mayor's Office of Operations 1998).

The Mayor's office credits the New York Police Department's (NYPD's) "Compstat"² system for much of the progress made in reducing crime. Compstat was introduced by Police Commissioner William Bratton, who had served as commissioner for the first 27 months (from January 1994 to April 1996) of Giuliani's first term as mayor. The Compstat system puts up-to-date crime data into the hands of NYPD managers at all levels and bolsters a department-wide process for precinct-level accountability in meeting the department's crime-reduction goals.

As described in Bratton's recent book, *Turnaround: How America's Top Cop Reversed the Crime Epidemic* (Bratton 1998, p. 224), the Compstat system is built on four concepts: (1) accurate and timely intelligence, (2) rapid deployment of personnel and resources, (3) effective tactics, and (4) relentless follow-up and assessment. Compstat is the engine that drives "zero-tolerance" policing in New York City, and it is at the heart of the strategic organizational changes that Bratton introduced when he took command of the NYPD in 1994 (Silverman 1997a).

Bratton moved vigorously to transform the police department from top to bottom and to transfuse the department with a new mindset about what the police could and should do to attack the problem of crime and reduce its impact on the residents of the city. He directly confronted the common wisdom of many experts—and, perhaps, most New Yorkers—that the NYPD was too large, too rigid, too bureaucratic, and too parochial to be able to embrace the kinds of radical changes in policies and practices that would be required in a serious effort to win measurable reductions of the city's high crime rates. And he proved that they were wrong.

Zero-tolerance policing puts major emphasis on the kinds of "quality-of-life" issues that set the drumbeat rhythm for Giuliani's 1993 mayoral campaign. The "Squeegee Men" (beggars who accosted drivers in their cars to scrub their windshields and panhandle for cash), the petty drug dealers, the graffiti scribblers, and the prostitutes who ruled the sidewalks in certain high-crime neighborhoods all were targeted in candidate Giuliani's campaign promise to reclaim the streets of New York for law-abiding citizens.

Prior to his election, Giuliani's professional career had been spent in law enforcement. It is no coincidence that these types of disorderly persons and small-time criminals exactly fit the flesh-and-blood profile of the "broken windows" theory of policing—an approach first promoted in 1982 by James Q. Wilson and George Kelling. The broken windows theory holds that if not firmly suppressed, disorderly behavior in public will frighten citizens and attract predatory criminals, thus leading to more serious crime problems.³

Although “reclaiming the open spaces of New York” was but one of six specific crime strategies that Bratton designed and introduced to reshape the goals of the NYPD,⁴ it was moved quickly to the front of the line when city officials began to make the claim that the Giuliani administration’s police reforms were *causing* the decreases in crime. Cracking down hard on the most visible symbols of urban disorder proved to be a powerful political tool for bolstering Giuliani’s image as a highly effective mayor. The speed with which the city’s crime statistics have fallen has been taken by many to prove that Wilson and Kelling are correct and that serious crime problems can be quelled by mounting a large-scale attack on petty crime and disorderly behavior through a broken windows, zero-tolerance strategy.

To at least some extent, rhetorical emphasis on the broken windows theory has served to obscure the truly phenomenal record that William Bratton set in managing organizational change within the NYPD. As chief executive officer of one of the world’s largest police agencies, he introduced new management tools, techniques, and technology at lightning speed and moved quickly to decentralize authority and to wrest decision-making power away from headquarters brass and move it out to the precinct and borough commands. He broke down a maze of bureaucratic barriers—pushing, prodding, and (when necessary) replacing personnel. He was able to integrate many of the police functions previously held by specialized units so as to empower patrol officers to move directly to address drug and gun crimes in the neighborhoods they serve (Silverman 1997a).

But Bratton’s concept and style of police management has driven the NYPD a distinct and substantial distance apart from the community policing concepts that have been used to reshape and redirect police services in many other American cities. Moreover, some of these cities are closely rivaling the crime-reduction record set in New York City.

Ironically, Bratton has broad knowledge of and deep experience with community policing. He was a leading innovator in the development of the neighborhood policing concept while serving as a young officer in the Boston Police Department. He has often publicly expressed solid confidence in the basic tenets of the community policing movement—forging close working partnerships with the community, problem solving to address the causes of crime, and a fundamental commitment to crime prevention. He has also expressed a positive view of Lee Brown’s role as a community policing pioneer. Brown had served as Police Commissioner under David Dinkins, Giuliani’s predecessor as mayor.

Dinkins and Brown were the architects of New York City’s “Safe Streets” program, which has since added thousands of new police officers to the force. In 1991, their successful campaign for passage of the Safe Streets Law pro-

vided revenue from a city income tax surcharge to finance a balanced program of crime prevention programs and to expand the police force by 6,000 patrol officers. Safe Streets funding for crime prevention laid a neighborhood-based foundation of prevention programs, including the Beacon Schools and a network of other vital services targeted on high-risk youth.

An ambitious gun interdiction program was initiated during the Dinkins administration by Assistant Police Commissioner Jeremy Travis, who now heads the National Institute of Justice. This effort was spurred forward in 1993 by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms—then under the leadership of Ronald Noble at the Department of Justice. The well-publicized 1993 interdiction campaign predated the Bratton/Giuliani gun strategy and involved capture of several large stores of weapons before they reached the hands of teenagers on New York City streets.

The early foundation for community policing in New York had been laid in the mid 1980s—during the Koch administration—through a joint NYPD/Vera Institute of Justice pilot effort. Once the Safe Streets program was in place, Commissioner Brown was able to design and build a citywide community policing program. Yet, in his book, *Turnaround*, Bratton abruptly dismissed this community-policing effort (already in place when he was named Police Commissioner) in three brief paragraphs.

In *Turnaround*, Bratton maintained (1998, p. 198) that the program—although focused on the beat cop—had no real focus on crime, and he complained that the young officers assigned to community-policing beats were unprepared and ill equipped to handle the complex issues that underlie the crime problem in New York City. Moreover, he charged, even those few capable of winning significant results were never given the necessary authority to follow through under the NYPD's system of centralized decision making.

In a 1996 lecture sponsored by the Heritage Foundation, Bratton discussed the flaws that he perceives in the community policing initiatives of the early 1990s. He argued that community policing in New York was hampered by a lack of attention to those quality-of-life issues that cause widespread fear of crime among the public and by an unwieldy and highly centralized, over-specialized police bureaucracy. Bratton had served from 1990 to 1992 as chief of the New York Transit Police (the agency then responsible for patrolling the city's vast subway system), and he had observed the NYPD's community policing effort up close. At Transit, he pursued a successful quality-of-life policing campaign that consisted of large-scale arrests of young New Yorkers for fare evasion, which he credits with greatly reducing more serious subway crime (Bratton 1996).

Once recruited by Mayor-elect Giuliani to serve as commissioner of the NYPD, Bratton used his prior experience combating subway crime as a

springboard into a citywide campaign to aggressively apprehend the perpetrators of quality-of-life crimes on the streets. Bratton's managerial reforms were brilliantly innovative, using up-to-the-minute technology. But at the neighborhood level, his crime-fighting strategies were grounded in traditional law enforcement methods and in relentless crackdown campaigns to arrest and jail low-level drug offenders and other petty perpetrators. His efforts to decentralize and devolve decision-making authority downward have relocated power at the precinct command level rather than empowering patrol officers to plan and implement crime prevention efforts in partnership with the communities they serve.

Bratton's crime-prevention concepts are more often cloaked in military campaign metaphors—"in New York City, we now know where the enemy is" (Bratton 1996)—than in the public-health/epidemiological images now more common in community-focused prevention efforts elsewhere. And his quality-of-life law-enforcement style was hyperaggressive. In *Turnaround*, Bratton (1998) describes how his school truancy program grabbed so many school-age kids off the streets that "we had to set up 'catchment' areas in school auditoriums and gymnasiums" (p. 225). He retooled New York City's drug enforcement effort to target more muscle toward low- and middle-level dealers, and he lifted a longstanding police policy that discouraged drug enforcement arrests by patrol officers—freeing them to seek warrants, make narcotics arrests, and go after those they suspected of drug dealing for quality-of-life violations to sweep them off the streets and into the jails (Bratton 1998, p. 227).

Bratton attacked the legal restrictions that had impeded aggressive enforcement against those deemed disorderly. He "took the handcuffs off" the police department and unleashed patrol officers to stop and search citizens who were violating the most minor laws on the books (e.g., drinking a beer or urinating in public), to run warrant checks on them, or just to pull them in for questioning about criminal activity in their neighborhood. If, in the course of such an incident, a weapon was found and confiscated, Bratton asserts that it was lawful prevention of crime "before it happened" (Bratton 1998, p. 229).

If, as its keystone crime-prevention strategy, New York City has turned away from community policing and chosen instead a zero-tolerance campaign that is heavily reliant on traditional methods of law enforcement to eradicate quality-of-life problems, what negative consequences have resulted from this choice? And which New Yorkers have borne the brunt of these negative consequences?

Joel Berger—a prominent New York City civil rights attorney who represents alleged victims of police misconduct and abuse in New York City—

reports that legal filings of new civil rights claims against the police for abusive conduct have increased by 75 percent in the city over the last four years.⁵ Berger says that the largest increase in new claims of this type occurred during the most recent fiscal year, indicating that the problem of police brutality is getting worse, not better (interview with Joel Berger, May 4, 1998).

Amnesty International has reported that police brutality and unjustifiable use of force is a widespread problem in New York City (Amnesty International 1996). There is a wealth of documentation to support the charge that police misconduct and abuse have increased under the Giuliani administration's zero-tolerance regime. The total number of citizen complaints filed annually with the Civilian Complaint Review Board (CCRB) increased more than 60 percent between 1992 and 1996, and Mark Green—the elected New York City public advocate—has charged that the police torture of Abner Louima in a precinct station house in the Borough of Brooklyn in the summer of 1997 was part of a larger “pattern of police abuse, brutality, and misconduct” in New York City that the Giuliani administration has failed to address (Green 1997).⁶

Joel Berger says that during the first year of the Giuliani administration, the number of complaints filed by citizens before the CCRB that involved incidents where no arrest was made or summons issued showed a sudden and sharp increase. The proportion of “general patrol incidents”—that is, civilian complaints associated simply with routine police contacts (involving no suspicion of criminal activity, no hot pursuit, no arrest or summons)—among all complaints increased from 29 percent for the last year of the Dinkins administration to 58 percent under Mayor Giuliani. After 1994, the CCRB stopped distinguishing this particular type of complaint from others (interview with Joel Berger, May 4, 1998).

Complaints by citizens in New York City about police misconduct and abuse, and the response to these complaints by the New York City CCRB and the NYPD, have been the subject of hot debate between some resistant city officials and those who advocate for a more effective process to increase police accountability for abuse of citizens. From the start, Mayor Giuliani resisted the effort to establish an independent CCRB. By the time it was set up, its budget had been slashed by 17 percent (about a million dollars) as compared with the police department-based civilian complaint unit it had replaced (Siegel and Perry 1997, p. 2).⁷

According to New York City Public Advocate Mark Green, recent CCRB complaint data suggest that the problem of police misconduct is disproportionately concentrated in New York City's high-crime minority neighborhoods. Nine out of 76 precincts account for more than 50 percent of the

increase in CCRB complaints since 1992; 21 precincts account for more than 80 percent. Mark Green charges that those precincts with the highest incidence of misconduct “appear to have disproportionately higher percentages of African American and Latino residents” (Green 1997, p. 4). Norman Siegel—director of the New York Civil Liberties Union (NYCLU) and a harsh critic of the mayor on these issues—has presented data showing that three quarters of all CCRB complaints are filed by African Americans and Latinos. He reports that African Americans (who make up 29 percent of the city’s population) filed 53 percent of all complaints in 1996 (Siegel and Perry 1997, p. 13).

Moreover, the vast majority of complaints filed with the CCRB are never substantiated, and the small portion that are substantiated usually do not result in proper disciplinary actions. In the first eight months of last year, only 8 percent of the 3,991 cases filed with the CCRB were substantiated. Furthermore, Public Advocate Mark Green has complained that so few substantiated cases ever result in charges brought or disciplinary actions taken by the police department that the civilian complaint process is a sham (Green 1997).

This brief review of the downside *costs* that many New Yorkers argue have been incurred through the city’s reliance on a highly aggressive, traditional law-enforcement style of policing begs the *benefits* question: Is there hard evidence that this strategy has been truly effective in reducing crime? How valid are the claims made by Mayor Giuliani that his police policies are responsible for the city’s remarkable crime reduction record?

The declining crime rate that New Yorkers are enjoying has not happened in a vacuum, nor is it as exceptional as some New York officials suggest. Many urban communities across America have experienced reductions in crime during the same time period, and it is highly likely that there are numerous factors—beyond zero-tolerance policing—that might be contributing to these remarkable declines in some of the nation’s largest cities.

Serious violent crime rates have been falling for the nation as a whole. The National Crime Victimization Survey crime-trends data (1973-1996) published by the Bureau of Justice Statistics indicate that rapes declined 60 percent from 1991 to 1996, whereas robberies began to decline more recently; Robberies were down 17 percent from 1994 to 1996. Aggravated assaults declined by 27 percent from 1993 to 1996. The victimization data show that total violent crime was down 19 percent from 1994 to 1996. Data from the National Center for Health Statistics indicate that the nation’s homicide rate fell by 10 percent from 1991 to 1995.⁸ Property crimes are also on the decline for the nation as a whole, according to the National Crime Victimization Survey. The rates reported for total property crime show a 25 percent decline from 1991 to 1996 (National Center for Health Statistics 1998; National Crime Victimization Survey 1998).

It has been argued by many that widespread innovations in police practices have made a major contribution to reducing crime—from the zero-tolerance campaign in New York City to community-policing strategies involving problem solving and police/community partnerships elsewhere. Yet, crime has fallen substantially in some locales where these reforms have not been embraced.

The huge increase in the incarceration rate resulting from mandatory minimum drug laws, “three strikes, you’re out” laws, and other policy shifts producing longer prison terms are claimed by almost all proponents of these “get tough” approaches to be the force driving crime rates downward. But increased incarceration doesn’t seem to explain many of the differences found when states are compared. New York City has experienced one of the sharpest declines in violent crime, but its jail population is down, and the New York state prison population growth rate slowed to less than one percent in 1997. The state’s prison population growth rate has been relatively modest during the 1990s compared to states such as Texas and California. Crime rates were already beginning to fall before the state of Washington became the first to pass three-strikes legislation in 1993. Most states are enjoying declining crime rates regardless of whether they have such laws.

American researchers, law-enforcement officials, and journalists have already generated a huge stack of books, reports, and articles to explain what is driving these cheering trends—as yet, no clear consensus about the reasons has emerged, even among those who most closely study American crime trends. It is probably fair to say that those who hold either of the traditional competing theories about the etiology of crime in America—the liberal belief that economic inequity and racial injustice are prime contributing factors or the conservative view that blames an erosion of social values—have so far failed to offer any coherent, convincing explanations of recent national crime trends.

If there is an ascendant theory among American criminologists, it may be simply stated: No single factor, cause, policy, or strategy has produced the drop in crime rates.

A variety of structural changes in high-crime urban neighborhoods are cited by many experts as plausibly combining to produce declining crime rates. Many academic experts have long held that demographic factors are the most significant contributors to crime rates. Overall crime rates (as distinct from violent street crime) have been drifting downward for many years, as has alcohol consumption—a factor strongly associated with a broad range of criminal activity. America’s healthy economy has produced low unemployment rates, another factor generally associated with lower crime rates.

Overall shifts in public attitudes regarding the problem of crime and increased public intolerance for various types of disorderly conduct that are believed to be criminogenic have stimulated moves toward the policing reforms and the "get tough" measures cited above, but they have also led to a raft of community organizing activities that may be paying off in reduced levels of crime. As discussed below, block watches, citizen patrols, neighborhood cleanups, and harassment of slumlords who allow drug dealers to use their properties are increasingly being coordinated with community-oriented police techniques.

The binge of drug and/or gang-related violence in the 1980s left many dead, disabled, or in prison. Some argue that these casualties are now shaping marked shifts in values and attitudes among urban youth. Demand for crack cocaine has waned and—stimulated by tougher police enforcement against handguns—minor confrontations are said to be less likely to erupt into deadly shootouts.

Street-level drug markets in America generate violence in a variety of ways, including internal organizational disputes, contract uncertainty, and territorial conflicts. Changes in the characteristics of drug markets or of participants in them may have contributed to the decline in violent crime rates over recent years. Those who entered this volatile, violence-prone, illegal labor market in the mid-1980s and who have survived are now a decade or more older, more experienced—and perhaps wiser—in their business practices and enforcement methods.

Recently, much social science research attention has turned to the declining homicide rates in many cities across the country. A team of researchers led by Pamela Lattimore (Lattimore, Trudeau, Riley, Leiter, and Edwards 1997) at the National Institute of Justice has discovered a strong correlation between cocaine use levels within the urban criminal population and changes in homicide rates. Alfred Blumstein (1995) has studied handgun murders involving urban street youth. He has pointed out that the surge in this type of gun violence in the late 1980s has drawn attention away from the more long-term and steady trend of declining homicides for adults age 25 and older since 1980. The surprising decline in homicides since 1991 is driven largely by the falling incidence of gun homicides among the younger group.

The decline in homicides among *older* Americans cited by Blumstein includes a steady decline in national rates of intimate-partner homicide over the past two decades. Laura Dugan (Dugan, Nagin, and Rosenfeld, forthcoming) has traced the effects of three significant social developments on this type of homicide: changes in patterns of domesticity (exposure reduction), in the status of women, and in increased provision of domestic violence resources. Her research highlights the importance of legal advocacy efforts to

expand the effective use and enforcement of restraining orders, although these measures are shown to favorably affect homicide rates solely for married male victims. Susan Wilt (1998; Wilt, Illman, and BrodyField 1997) has been tracking homicides in New York City using data from the public health system. She has found that homicides of female victims have fallen far more slowly since 1990 than the decline for male victims (a 20 percent decline for females compared to a 51 percent decline for males). Wilt was able to obtain data to classify homicides by type, and she found that over this period, intimate partner homicides of women have not declined in New York City.

Jeffrey Fagan is conducting an important study of homicides in New York City geared specifically to documenting the effects of criminal justice policies on this problem. Fagan, along with Franklin Zimring and June Kim (1999), has just completed a report that examines homicide patterns in the city back to the 1950s and compares the recent decline with homicide patterns in other American cities. By tracking homicide trends by type since 1985, they have determined that patterns in New York City for gun and non-gun killings differ sharply. The trend data for non-gun homicides show a fairly steady decline through the whole period, whereas gun homicides doubled between 1985 and 1991, returning to the 1985 level by 1995.

Examining trends in drug use and demographics, Fagan et al. (1999) believed them to be important factors but could not say to what extent they have influenced the decline. They have concluded that both the increase in patrol strength begun under Mayor Dinkins and the aggressive enforcement strategies introduced by William Bratton have had positive effects in reducing gun homicides—as distinct from the non-gun homicides, which began a long, steady decline many years before these tactics were introduced. They posited that the NYPD gun strategy may be the most salient factor. At the same time, they cautioned that it is not possible to unequivocally establish the strength of these policing strategies relative to the other factors that are interacting with the shifts in police practices. Moreover, they warned that simple regression (i.e., the tendency of crime problems to shift continuously, up and down, drawing cyclical patterns over time) cannot yet be ruled out as the cause of the recent decline in gun homicides.

Given the wide variety of explanations offered by the experts and the difficult challenges entailed in sifting and weighing their relative merits, a broad, overarching theory or model into which the entire range of plausible alternatives could be scooped together would have great appeal. Malcolm Gladwell (1996), a writer for *The New Yorker* magazine, has carefully considered the phenomenon of dropping crime rates in New York City. He offers an interesting theory—drawn from the annals of public health—that provides some

clues about how distinctly divergent factors in disparate locales might result in similar patterns of falling crime.

In his 1996 *The New Yorker* article, "The Tipping-Point," Gladwell defines this public health expression as "the point at which an ordinary and stable phenomenon—a low-level flu outbreak—can turn into a public health crisis" (p. 34). Applied to the phenomenon of crime, this epidemiological argument means that once crime reaches a certain level or critical point, it spreads in a "non-linear" fashion—that is, at some point in time a small incremental increase in criminal activity can fuel a dramatic upturn in crime rates. One example that Gladwell gives involves drive-by shootings in Los Angeles, which, after seven years of fluctuating up and down between 22 and 51, rose steadily from 57 in 1987 to 211 in 1992.

Happily, the tipping-point phenomenon may also apply in reverse. When the level of crime in a community reaches a tipping point, any strategy that can effect even a small decrease may be able to trigger dramatic drops in crime rates. But the tipping-point theory also implies layers of subtle complexity that must be carefully assessed in the development of crime control policies because when the level of crime is not at or near the tipping point, large investments in crime-fighting activities may yield very small effects if any (Gladwell 1996).

Although the social scientists cited above do not offer much evidence that clearly supports Mayor Giuliani's assertion that his zero-tolerance policies alone have directly produced the crime reductions reported by the NYPD, other questions remain to be addressed. Expert opinion notwithstanding, suppose it is true that a new policing strategy can turn the tide of crime and produce a dramatic ebb in its volume? Is a New York City zero-tolerance campaign the only possible approach? Is it the best approach? What other options should be considered? Are there other theories about effective crime control that can help us answer these questions?

Tracey Meares (1998), a law professor at the University of Chicago, has been studying the role of community social organization in reducing crime. She points out that certain critical mediating factors can produce differential crime rates in communities with similar socioeconomic conditions. If stronger elements of social organization—cohesive friendship networks, shared cultural values, supervision of teens, participation in church groups, parent-teacher associations, community policing organizations, and so forth—are present in a given neighborhood, crime will be less common than in neighborhoods where these elements have eroded.

Meares (1998) has applied this framework to critique the efficacy of various law enforcement strategies—especially drug enforcement efforts—to enhance or hinder crime control in communities. She argues that whereas

"get tough" measures that lead to lengthy incarceration of a large number of young drug offenders may offer a measure of short-term relief for law-abiding residents of a drug-ravaged community, in the long run, the negative consequences may wash out the short-term positives. This is because the deterrent effects of such a strategy are weak at best, whereas its damaging effects—disruption of family ties, stigmatizing barriers to labor market participation, increased levels of alienation and distrust—may prove criminogenic in themselves.

This may be especially true in African American communities, where the asymmetry of current drug-enforcement policies has exacerbated longstanding attitudes of distrust between residents and police that are grounded in both negative stereotypes and historical events. On the other hand, Meares (1998) argues, community policing efforts geared to support increased social organization in communities can yield important gains in crime control. Within this context, she endorses some specific, targeted disorder-reducing law enforcement measures: curfews, enforcement of loitering ordinances, and "reverse drug stings" to dampen market demand.

One city located at the opposite end of the country from New York has taken a distinctly different path in pursuit of crime prevention and effective policing, which in some respects may more closely follow the principles that Tracey Meares (1998) commends to us. Whereas New York City's index crime rate ranks 150th in a list of 189 American cities with populations of more than 100,000, San Diego ranks nearby at 145th (New York City Mayor's Office of Operations 1998). San Diego and New York City have enjoyed virtually equal reductions in rates of serious crime over the first half of the 1990s. From 1990 to 1995, a period when the NYPD gained a 39.5 percent increase in the number of sworn officers, New York City's reduction in crime was 37.4 percent, whereas San Diego's was 36.8 percent, but during this same period the increase in sworn officers on the San Diego police force was *only 6.2 percent*. According to San Diego police officials, this is a far more favorable "yield" in terms of crimes reduced per each additional officer (San Diego Police Department 1998).

San Diego's police executives began to experiment with a form of community policing—the Neighborhood Policing Philosophy as they term it—in the late 1980s. In 1993, they laid the groundwork for a department-wide restructuring process coupled with an effort to retrain the entire force in problem-oriented (as opposed to incident-based) policing methods. Two key concepts of neighborhood policing in San Diego—as described by San Diego Police Department (SDPD) officials—are that police and citizens share responsibility for identifying and solving crime problems and that law enforcement is one important tool for addressing crime, but it is not an end in itself.

The emphasis of the San Diego neighborhood-policing approach is on creating problem-solving partnerships and fostering connections between police and community for sharing information, working with citizens to address crime and disorder problems, and tapping other public and private agencies for resources to help solve them. The types of activities fostered by the neighborhood policing strategy in San Diego resemble many that are common elements of community policing elsewhere, such as the following:

- support for “neighborhood watch” and citizen patrol groups that look for suspicious activity, identify community problems, and work on crime prevention projects;
- use of civil remedies and strict building code enforcement to abate nuisance properties and close down “drug houses”; and
- collaboration with community organizations and local business groups to clean up, close down, or redesign specific locations and properties that repeatedly attract prostitution, drug, and gang problems.

The role of organized neighborhood volunteers in efforts to impact local crime problems—and thus national crime patterns—is too often overlooked or misunderstood. There are important differences between community *policing* and community *participation*,⁹ yet San Diego seems to be striving to integrate these distinct, semiautonomous crime prevention tools. The SDPD has recruited and trained a pool of more than 1,000 citizen volunteers who perform a broad array of crime prevention and victim assistance services.

The restructuring of police services in San Diego has involved a geographic consolidation of 68 existing patrol sectors and a reconfiguration of their boundaries to correspond to 99 distinct neighborhoods defined by community residents. Laptop computers equipped with mapping software are now being introduced to automate field reporting and to put up-to-date crime and calls-for-service data into the hands of patrol officers (San Diego Police Department 1997).

Descriptions of the neighborhood policing approaches given by police executives in San Diego are different in tone and texture from the terms in which Giuliani and Bratton have described New York City’s policing strategies. A comparison of arrest patterns in recent years offers concrete evidence that these two approaches differ markedly in fact. New York City’s data show increases in arrests both for felonies and misdemeanors from 1993 to 1996, whereas San Diego arrest data show declines.

Data from the New York State Department of Criminal Justice Services from 1993 through 1996 show that arrests in New York City rose by 23 percent across the board. Reflecting the broken windows, zero-tolerance policing

TABLE 1: Adult Arrests in New York City

	1993	1994	1995	1996
Total arrests	255,087	307,802	316,690	314,292
Total felony arrests	125,684	138,043	135,141	132,601
Felony drug arrests	39,298	44,442	43,698	45,312
Total misdemeanor arrests	129,403	169,759	181,549	181,691
Misdemeanor drug arrests	27,446	42,546	52,891	54,133
Misdemeanor DWI arrests	5,621	5,628	5,763	4,624
Other misdemeanor arrests	96,335	121,585	122,895	122,934

NOTE: DWI = driving while intoxicated.

TABLE 2: Adult Arrests in San Diego

	1993	1994	1995	1996
Total arrests	56,631	55,887	55,909	48,264
Total felony arrests	17,007	17,135	16,854	13,825
Felony drug arrests	5,808	6,432	6,685	5,034
Total misdemeanor arrests	39,624	38,752	39,055	34,439
Misdemeanor drug arrests	7,099	8,313	7,965	6,352
Misdemeanor DWI arrests	3,782	3,649	3,749	3,545
Other misdemeanor arrests	28,743	26,790	27,341	24,542

NOTE: DWI = driving while intoxicated.

strategy introduced by Bratton, misdemeanor arrests rose by 40 percent—led by drug arrests, which were increased by 97 percent over this period.

Arrest statistics provided by the SDPD for this same period show a marked contrast, reflecting the contrasting philosophy of neighborhood policing adopted in that city.

Across the board, arrests have fallen in San Diego by 15 percent, whereas reductions for key indicators of crime (homicides and FBI Index Crimes) closely rival the crime reductions in New York City. Total complaints filed during this period with the SDPD regarding police misconduct fell from 552 in 1993 to 508 in 1996 (interview with John Welter, June 1998).

San Diego police executives are understandably pleased with the recent dramatic drop in crime in their city. However, they have been less inclined than their counterparts in New York City to estimate the extent to which these trends may be directly attributed to the department's neighborhood policing and community-involvement efforts.

At a recent workshop on crime policy sponsored by the Institute on Criminal Justice of the University of Minnesota law school, John Welter, the assistant chief of police responsible for managing neighborhood policing in San Diego, said simply that his department is working hard to build a solid foundation that can sustain these gains into the future, when—inevitably, in his view—various cyclical factors will drive crime upward again across the

nation. Welter believes that the San Diego neighborhood policing approach will offer more enduring public safety gains than more enforcement-oriented strategies that have been adopted elsewhere.

Twenty years ago, Herman Goldstein (1979) published an article in this journal that called for a more "problem-oriented approach" to policing. In his seminal article, Goldstein argued that internal police management reforms would yield limited returns in improving outcomes unless the police could develop "a more systematic process for examining and addressing the problems that the public expects them to handle" (p. 236). Zero-tolerance policing in New York City uses the Compstat system to direct hyperaggressive crime-control tactics toward high-crime "hot spots," and city officials have been quick to claim credit for a dramatic drop in crime. Yet, the sharp contrast in arrest patterns and citizen complaints between New York City and San Diego offers compelling evidence that cooperative police-community problem solving can provide effective crime control through more efficient and humane methods. Moreover, the San Diego strategy seems better designed to support and sustain vital elements of community social organization that can inhibit criminality and build safer neighborhoods over the long run.

NOTES

1. This is a crime indicator (the number of crimes per 100,000 persons) calculated from the Federal Bureau of Investigation's national crime data system, which is used to produce national reports on the number of selected offenses—murder and nonnegligent manslaughter, robbery, forcible rape, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny/theft, motor vehicle theft, and arson—known to the police.

2. "Compstat" is an abbreviation for "computer statistics" (Bratton 1998, p. 233).

3. Bratton (1998) presents a synopsis of the broken windows theory as follows: "Just as unrepaired broken windows can signal to people that nobody cares about a building and lead to more serious vandalism, untended disorderly behavior can also signal that nobody cares about the community and lead to more serious disorder and crime" (p. 152).

4. The other five strategies were "getting guns off the streets of New York," "curbing youth violence in the schools and on the streets," "driving drug dealers out of New York," "breaking the cycle of domestic violence," and "reducing auto-related crime in New York" (Silverman 1997b, p. 101).

5. Until 1996, Joel Berger served as senior litigator in New York City's Corporation Counsel's Office. He was responsible for monitoring police brutality cases and deciding which defendants would be represented by lawyers in his office.

6. William Bratton has attributed this increase in complaints of police misconduct to the increased number of police officers on the streets. His critics point out that the increase in complaints far exceeded the increase in personnel during this period.

7. The level of funding support for the independent Civilian Complaint Review Board (CCRB) continued to be a topic of contention between the Mayor's office and the New York City Council until recently, with the former continually proposing funding cuts and the latter continu-

ally restoring these cuts. When the Abner Louima incident erupted in headlines in the summer of 1997, however, the Mayor's office—in a complete reversal—requested two separate budget increases: approximately \$1.5 million in December 1997 and another \$.5 million in the Fiscal Year 1999 Executive Budget. Upon adoption of the Fiscal Year 1999 budget, the CCRB's authorized staffing level was increased to a total of 172 positions, an increase of 44 positions over the Fiscal Year 1998 budget (New York City Council Finance Division 1998).

8. These aggregate national statistics are by no means mirrored uniformly in all communities, however. For example, considerable variance among cities was found in a recent study of homicides in urban settings undertaken by an intramural team of researchers at the National Institute of Justice. The research team reported that of 78 cities with populations greater than 200,000, more than half showed a higher homicide rate in 1994 than in 1990 (Lattimore, Trudeau, Riley, Leiter, and Edwards 1997).

9. Whereas community policing engages neighborhood residents in identification of crime problems and in planning crime-control strategies, community participation entails residents becoming directly involved in crime prevention activities and in effecting structural solutions to the neighborhood problems that give rise to crime.

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