Police in America

Chapter Twelve
Police-Community Relations
Definition of Police-Community Relations

- Refers primarily to the relations between the police and racial and ethnic minority communities.
- From PCR to Legitimacy
  - Police need to establish trust and cooperation with all segments of the community they serve
- Policing a Multicultural Society
- Definitions of Race and Ethnicity
  - Race – refers to the major biological divisions of the people of the world
  - Ethnicity- refers to cultural differences such as language, religion, family patterns, and foodways
The Major Racial and Ethnic Minority Groups

- African Americans
- Hispanics/Latinos
  - More likely to experience police-initiated contact
  - Largest racial or ethnic minority group by 2010
    - Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Haiti, Dominican Republic, Central and South America
- Arabs
  - Very diverse group
  - Majority trace background to Lebanon
  - Most are native-born Americans
  - Muslim religion
- Native American
  - Higher crime rate on reservation
  - Tribal police
- Asian Americans
  - Vietnamese, Cambodians are newest immigrants
- Immigrants
  - Primary language is not English
  - Report crimes at lower rates than other Americans
  - Calls for bilingual officers to accommodate immigrants
Police-community relations problems also exist with the following groups:

- Women
- Gay men
- Lesbians
- Transgendered persons

Problems of sexual harassment, disrespect, and physical abuse
Discrimination versus Disparity

- Discrimination: differential treatment based on some extralegal category such as race, ethnicity or gender.

- Disparity: different outcomes that are not necessarily caused by differential treatment.
A Contextual Approach to Police-Citizen Interactions

Experiences with police vary according to department, type of police action, the departmental unit involved, etc.

- Some departments have better relations with people of color minority communities

- Interactions are different according to location, police unit, and enforcement activity
The vast majority of Americans have a positive attitude toward the police. 
Racial and ethnic minorities consistently rate the police less favorably than whites. 
A majority of African Americans (76%) and Hispanics give the police a generally favorable rating. 
Young people rate the police less favorably than older people. 
Poor people, less educated people, and crime victims tend to rate the police lower than others. 
There are significant differences in opinions about the police in different cities.
Race and Ethnicity

- 2008 survey showed that 25% of African Americans had little to no confidence in police (compared to 9% of whites)
- Attitudes about police roles can vary according to social class, as well as race and ethnicity
  - Thus, middle-class and lower-class African Americans do not share identical attitudes
Attitudes about Police Use of Force

- Hispanics and African Americans are twice as likely to believe the police will use excessive force in their communities.
- In a survey of Cincinnati residents, 46.6% of African Americans indicated they had been personally “hassled” by the police.
  – Compared to only 9.6% of whites.
Social Class

- In 2008, 23% of people with incomes lower than $20,000 had little to no confidence in police.

- Compared to 6-7% of people with incomes above $50,000.
Age: Young People and the Police

- Age consistently ranks second to race and ethnicity as a factor in public attitudes toward police.
- A 2008 survey found that 17% of people between the ages of 18-29 had little to no confidence in the police.
  - Compared with only 8% of people between 30-49.
Other Demographic Factors

1. Where You Live: Neighborhood Quality of Life

2. Crime Victimization

3. Gender

4. Level of Education
Community Policing

Community policing has a positive impact on citizens’ attitudes toward the police

– A study by Weitzer and Tuch found that people who believe their police department engages in community policing in their neighborhood are less likely to believe that the police use excessive force
Intercity Variations

The Case of Detroit

- More African Americans indicated they were satisfied with the police than whites.
- African Americans dominated the local political establishment.
- Thus, in Detroit, African Americans are more likely than whites to identify positively with the police and other parts of the political system.
The Impact of Controversial Incidents

- Specific cases or controversial incidents (ex: Rodney King beating in LA) can have short or long term affect on people’s attitudes toward police officers and police departments.
Complex Dimensions of Trust and Confidence in the Police

1. **Priorities**: Whether people feel that the police share their concerns about the neighborhood
2. **Competence**: Whether people feel that the police have the knowledge and skills necessary to achieve their objectives
3. **Dependability**: Whether people feel that the police can be counted on to fulfill their promises
4. **Respect**: Whether people feel that the police treat them with respect

**Theory of Procedural Justice**: People distinguish between the outcomes and the process

- Ex: People are more likely to be satisfied if the officer explains the basis for his action, even if the outcome is unfavorable
Three Perspectives on Attitudes Toward Police

- The Police and the Larger Society
- The Police and Other Occupations
- The Police in Other Countries
- Summary of attitudes:
  - Majority of Americans have positive attitude toward police
  - Racial and ethnic minorities consistently rate police less favorably
  - African Americans and Hispanics generally give a favorable rating
  - Young people rate less favorably
  - Poor people, less educated people and crime victims rate less favorably
  - People who view their neighborhood as safe view police favorably
  - Community policing has a positive effect on citizens’ attitudes
  - There are significant differences in attitudes in different cities
  - People make important distinctions regarding police actions
  - Attitudes toward police reflect attitudes toward society as a whole
Police Perceptions of Citizens

Sources of Police Attitudes

- Selective Contact
  - Officers do not have regular contact with a cross section of the community
  - Low-income and minorities have a disproportionate level of contact with the police

- Selective Perception
  - Officers are more likely to remember traumatic or unpleasant events
  - Officers tend to stereotype African Americans since they tend to show the most hostility toward officers
Sources of Police-Community Relations Problems

Question: How do we explain the apparent contradiction between the generally favorable ratings given the police by racial and ethnic minority communities and the persistence of public conflict between the police and these groups?

Answer: We must examine specific areas of policing
- 1. The level of police protection received by different neighborhoods
- 2. Police officer field practices
- 3. Administrative practices
- 4. Employment practices
Too Much or Too Little Law Enforcement?

- African Americans have been victims of underenforcement of the law
- **Four Systems of Justice** in the South during institutionalized segregation
  - 1. Crimes by whites against whites handled as “normal” crimes
  - 2. Crimes by whites against African Americans rarely prosecuted
  - 3. Crimes by African Americans against whites received harshest response
  - 4. Crimes by African Americans against African Americans were ignored
Level of Police Protection
Continued

- Failures to enforce the law in minority communities has typically involved crimes of vice (gambling, prostitution, drugs)
  - This underenforcement breeds disrespect for the law and police
  - Exposes law-abiding citizens in minority neighborhoods to criminal activities and lower the quality of life

- Delay in Responding to Calls
  - Studies found that patrol officers often deliberately delayed responding to calls for service, especially involving family disturbances
  - Black citizens perceived greater delays than whites
Police Field Practices

Deadly Force
- Source of major conflict between minorities and police
- Changed significantly over last 40 years
  - Fleeing-felon rule unconstitutional
  - Trend toward defense-of-life standard
- Does current disparity between African Americans and whites shot and killed by police represent systematic discrimination?

Use of Physical Force
- Public Brutality: excessive use of physical force by the police
- Most common complaint by minorities
- Use of force continuum
- Police use force more often against
  - Criminal suspects
  - Male suspects
  - Black males
  - Drunk and antagonistic
  - Physical resistance
Use of Physical Force

- **Fleeing-Felon Rule:** Declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in 1985 (Tennessee v. Garner), allowed police the legal right to use deadly force in apprehending a felon attempting to escape.

- **Defense-of-Life Standard:** States that police officers are allowed to use deadly force only in situations where their own lives or the life of another person are in danger.
Use of Deadly Force

Defined and restrictive policies instituted in Memphis have eliminated police shootings of unarmed, nonassaultive citizens.

Nationwide, numbers of these shootings have dropped dramatically following removal of fleeing felon rule.

What does this suggest? Discretion (on deadly force) must be controlled to prevent officers from acting on prejudiced attitudes.
Use of Police Canine Units

- Being bitten by a police dog is a form of police use of force

- Minorities believe police dogs are used more often against them, and that they are bitten far more often than whites
African Americans are arrested more often than whites (relative to their numbers in the population).

Donald Black’s study found that officers’ decision to arrest is based on situational factors:
- The strength of the evidence
- The seriousness of the crime
- The preference of the victim
- The victim-suspect relationship
- The demeanor of the suspect
  - Extremely complex
  - There are no studies that have determined the extent to which suspect demeanor is provoked by officer actions.
Field Interrogations and Searches

Field Interrogations: Involve a crime control strategy of both identifying and apprehending offenders, and sending a message of deterrence to people on the street.

- Young racial and ethnic minority males regard this as harassment
- The President’s Crime Commission found that field interrogations were a “major cause of tensions between the police and minority communities”
Crime Fighting and Stereotyping

- Experts believe that a certain amount of racial profiling in traffic enforcement is the result of a police officer deciding that an African American or Hispanic driver is “out of place” in a white neighborhood.

- Stereotyping of citizens by gender, age, and race is a problem deeply rooted in policing.

- Racial stereotyping can affect a police officer’s likelihood of using deadly force.
Other Police Field Practices

- Verbal Abuse and Racial and Ethnic Slurs
  - LAPD Christopher Commission
- Language and Cultural Barriers
  - Police lack of cultural competence
- Discrimination Involving Women, Gays, Lesbians, and Transgendered People
  - “Driving While Female”
  - Abuse of sexual minorities
  - Bias against young African American women
Special Topic: Racial Profiling

- Racial profiling: the practice of police officers stopping drivers because of their race or ethnicity and not because of a legitimate law violation.
  - “Driving while black”
  - “Driving while brown”
Traffic Enforcement Practices

- 52% of all citizen-police contacts involve traffic stops

- Data on traffic enforcement patterns involve several different actions by police:
  - 1. Stopping a vehicle
  - 2. Resolving the stop through an arrest, citation, warning, or no action
  - 3. Searching the vehicle, driver, and/or passengers
Data on Traffic Enforcement Patterns

- **National data**
  - Males more likely to be stopped than females
  - Young people more likely than older people
  - African Americans and Hispanics more likely to be searched than whites

- **State and local data**
  - Meehan and Ponder study found that African Americans were more likely to be stopped and queried in predominately white neighborhoods
Interpreting Traffic-Stop Data

- **Benchmark** for interpreting data was the residential population.

- However, *population data* do not indicate who is actually driving on the roads or who is violating traffic law.

- Best method is the **rolling survey** technique which utilizes direct observation.

- Another alternative is **internal benchmarking (IB)**.
  - Compares performance of individual officers with peer officers.
Explaining Disparities in Traffic Enforcement

- “Officers act on the basis of prejudicial attitudes” (Engel, Calnon and Bernard)

- Racial profiling occurs in three contexts
  1. War on drugs
     - Generally perceived to be carried out by minorities
  2. Citizens who are “out of place”
  3. General crackdown on crime
     - Usually in poor, high crime neighborhood
Police Justifications for Racial and Ethnic Disparities

- Major argument is that African Americans and minorities are more likely to be engaged in criminal activity.
- Some argue this involves circular reasoning.
  - Minorities stopped and arrested more than whites producing higher arrest rates and thus, justifying higher rates of stops and arrests.
The Legitimate Use of Race and Ethnicity in Police Work

- Police officer cannot arrest a person solely on the basis of race.
- The police cannot use race or ethnicity when it is one element in a general profile of criminal suspects.
- The police may use race or ethnicity when it is one element in the description of a specific criminal suspect.
Policies to Prevent Bias in Traffic Enforcement

- Specific written policy prohibiting racial or ethnic discrimination
- Improve police officer training
- Traffic-stop data collection and analysis
Can Policies Reduce Racial and Ethnic Disparities?

- The U.S. Customs Service developed new guidelines for searching foreigners entering the country
- Short list of observed behaviors (not a “hunch”)
- Reason for search articulated clearly by personnel
  - As a result, the number of persons being searched declined by 47%
  - The percentage of people found with contraband rose by 65%
  - Racial and ethnic disparities in persons searched also declined
Problem Solving on Racial Profiling

- Importance of developing community and police partnerships on racial profiling:
  - Partnerships foster trust
  - Partnerships are a valuable avenue for two-way communication
  - Partnerships can help police departments reduce the risk of engaging in unacceptable practices that might result in being sued
Improving Police-Community Relations

Several approaches:

- Maintaining a representative police force
  - Eliminating employment discrimination
- Improving the handling of citizen complaints
  - Civilian review boards
- Creating special police-community relations unit
  - For recent immigrants: “newcomer,” “foreign born,” and “non-natives”
- Improving training, cultural sensitivity, bi-lingualism
  - Assigning officers on the basis of race, ethnicity, language
Special Police-Community Relations Unit

- PCR Units operate programs designed to improve relations with minority communities.
- Ride-along programs: allow citizens to spend a few hours riding in a patrol car.
- Creation of neighborhood storefront offices to overcome isolation of the police.
- Special PCR programs tend to be more successful with groups of people who already have favorable attitudes toward the police.
  - Whites, homeowners, older people.
Outreach to Immigrant Communities

The variety of languages and cultures in American cities presents new issues for police departments

- Police departments developing new outreach programs designed to help establish closer relations with the police and new immigrant communities

- Largest number of programs are targeted toward Hispanic/Latino communities
Should Local Police Enforce Federal Immigration?

Many local police officials do not want to be involved in enforcing immigration laws because they argue that policing requires them to develop close relations with the communities they serve.

- The role of immigration enforcement might alienate them from communities with large numbers of immigrants.
- People will become reluctant to call the police to report crimes, etc.
Race Relations and Human Relations Training

- No research has established a direct connection between race relations training and improved police officer behavior or improved public attitudes.
- Experts question the value of classroom training.
  - On-the-street behavior and communication may be more effective.
- Training in Cultural Competence.
  - Information may help explain cultural differences that may lead to misunderstandings.
From PCR to Legitimacy: The New Paradigm

- Legitimacy: the belief that the police, as a social institution, are acting properly and effectively, and deserve public support

- Winning legitimacy is 2-dimensional
  - First dimension: involves substantive outcomes: controlling crime and disorder and providing services to the public
  - Second dimension: involves how police do their job: treating all people with respect, not engaging in misconduct or use of excessive force

- Key difference between PCR and Legitimacy
  - PCR programs are directed only toward one part of the community
“Best Practices”: Responsive Policing and Accountability

2001 DOJ report listed best policing practices as:

- A comprehensive policy requiring officers to report all uses of force
- An open and accessible citizen complaint procedure
- An early warning system to identify potential “problem” officers
- Improved police training
- Traffic-stop data collection
- Improved recruitment, hiring, and retention of officers
Community Policing and Improving PCR

- Community policing represents a comprehensive philosophy of policing and may better address on-the-street police behavior than traditional PCR programs.

- Community policing is directed toward the community as a whole, and not just racial and ethnic minority communities.