

Chapter 3

Improving Police–Community Relations in the USA

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ABSTRACT

To prevent and control crime using the community-oriented policing model, law enforcement agencies must develop positive relationships and partnerships with the communities they serve. Unfortunately, several obstacles impede the development and maintenance of police–community partnerships, particularly excessive force and other forms of misconduct, and negative coverage of law enforcement by the media. To restore public trust in the police, agencies must implement competency-based interviews and assessments during the hiring process; develop a recruitment plan to attract more diverse applicants; provide regular crisis intervention, de-escalation, and implicit bias training to all officers; and evaluate and make any necessary improvements to existing use-of-force and disciplinary policies. Future research should continue to evaluate the impact of community policing on crime rates, the impact of body-worn cameras on misconduct, and the correlation between higher education and misconduct.

INTRODUCTION

Because traditional, reactive policing strategies and policies have been relatively unsuccessful at preventing and controlling criminal behavior, criminal justice practitioners, researchers, and policymakers have developed and implemented a variety of innovative policing models, including community-oriented policing. The community-oriented policing model asserts that the development and maintenance of positive relationships and partnerships between the police and the communities they serve is the key to effective policing. Unfortunately, several factors often negatively affect police–community relations and impede the development of such partnerships.

There are five primary purposes of this chapter. First, the chapter provides a brief history of law enforcement in the U.S. Second, it highlights the specific components of the community-oriented policing model; its benefits, limitations, and challenges; and theoretical perspectives of community policing. Third, the chapter discusses the potential benefits of positive police–community relations, as well as the

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factors that impede the development of partnerships between law enforcement agencies and community members and organizations. Fourth, the chapter recommends solutions that may assist police agencies in reducing excessive force and other types of misconduct, which may ultimately aid in the restoration of the community's trust and willingness to partner with police. Finally, the chapter provides recommendations for future research regarding police misconduct.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF LAW ENFORCEMENT

One of the earliest formal policing models can be traced to London in 1829 (Walsh & Vito, 2019). The English Parliament introduced and passed the Metropolitan Police Act, creating the first full-time, uniformed law enforcement agency consisting of approximately 3,000 officers (Walsh & Vito, 2019). Sir Robert Peel, who was serving as the Home Secretary of England during this time, was responsible for the administration and oversight of the new agency (Walsh & Vito, 2019). The mission and operational standards of the new agency were outlined in Peel's *Principles of Law Enforcement*, which were issued to all incoming police officers (Walsh & Vito, 2019). Several of these principles focused on the relationship between police officers and the communities they served. For example, Peel argued that the ability of police officers to successfully perform their jobs was dependent upon public approval of their actions and behaviors (Walsh & Vito, 2019). Similarly, Peel asserted that law enforcement agencies must secure and maintain the trust of community members to maintain public safety (Walsh & Vito, 2019). Furthermore, officers must constantly demonstrate absolute impartiality when enforcing the law and dealing with the public to secure public approval, respect, and cooperation (Walsh & Vito, 2019).

In the early 19th century, several factors created social disorder and fear among citizens, prompting the creation of America's earliest police agencies in New York City, Chicago, Cincinnati, New Orleans, Philadelphia, Boston, Baltimore, Kansas City, and St. Louis (Walsh & Vito, 2019). Policing in the U.S. can be broken into four primary phases. The first phase, known as the political era of policing, began in the 1840s and lasted until the beginning of the 20th century (Walsh & Vito, 2019). During the political era, police departments were controlled by local political entities and focused heavily on maintaining public order through a watchman style of policing (Walsh & Vito, 2019). However, beginning in the early 20th century, police administrators sought to increase the professionalization of the police by eliminating political control and corruption (Walsh & Vito, 2019). This marked the beginning of the reform era of policing. During this period, reformers and administrators advocated for: 1) the elimination of political interference; 2) clearly defined duties and responsibilities; 3) constant supervision of officers and administrators; 4) strong executive leadership; 5) comprehensive training for officers; and 6) selection of officers based on merit and qualifications (Walsh & Vito, 2019). Police tactics during the reform era focused heavily on random motorized patrols, response to calls for service, after-the-occurrence crime investigations, and other reactive measures. In addition, a hierarchical structure defined by rank, policy, standards, and the specialization of tasks was introduced (Walsh & Vito, 2019). This hierarchy is still prevalent in most contemporary law enforcement agencies.

The 1980s marked the beginning of the community problem-solving policing era. Under this paradigm, police officers focused on community safety, stabilization, and problem-solving, which was facilitated by the creation of a positive relationship between law enforcement and the communities they serve (Walsh & Vito, 2019). The basic premise of community policing is that law enforcement agencies must understand community members to identify and develop responses to their problems (Walsh & Vito, 2019).

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