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## CHAPTER 20

# USING COMMUNITY SURVEYS TO STUDY POLICING

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SURVEYS of the community have become a key police research tool. Police form the “front line” of the criminal justice system. During the course of the day they primarily interface with the general public rather than with hard-core offenders or other system professionals, and they draw more attention from voters and taxpayers than any other aspect of local government. Some of what they do and many of the consequences of their actions are best examined from the point of view of the public rather than via agencies’ internal records, and these issues shape the content of police-community surveys.

A few early studies established topics which remain a staple of survey research on the police. The first major national study of the police-public interface was conducted for the Presidential Crime Commission in 1966, and Richard Block (1974) used this survey to examine decisions by crime victims to report their experiences to the police. The possibility that changes in victim reporting rather than true changes in its volume produce spikes in crime that influence public opinion and policy has kept this topic on the research agenda ever since. Charles Bahn’s (1974) influential dissection of what he dubbed “the reassurance factor” in policing argued that visible patrolling signals the strength of authoritative control in an area and increases citizens’ confidence that they will be protected as they navigate through public space. Ever since, questions such as whether this reassurance is best provided by officers on foot rather than by motorized patrols have been addressed using police-community surveys. Smith and Hawkins (1973) were the first to report on the impact of fear of crime on views of the police, and the relationship between the quality of service rendered to victims and their global satisfaction with the police. As the section below on police encounters with the public illustrates, this is today one of the most active topics on the police research agenda. Herbert Jacob (1971) showed readers the world of policing through the lens of race, a perspective that has had as much staying power as any in the policing field (see, for example, Weitzer and Tuch 2006). Finally, David Bordua and Larry Tift (1971) pioneered thinking about the routine use of surveys by police departments themselves in order to gather

“customer feedback,” rather than just using them to provide an outsider’s one-time peek into the world of police-community relations. Monitoring trust and confidence in the police remains the rationale for many local survey projects because the views of voters and taxpayers matter.

Section 20.1 of this essay reviews briefly the purposes of police-community surveys, which include assessing public concerns, monitoring the routine delivery of police services, evaluating innovative programs, and deepening our understanding of the relationship between police and the community in democratic societies. Section 20.2 then addresses the substance of the surveys. This section reviews the key concepts that have been examined using police-community surveys, how they have been measured, and some of what the surveys have found. Section 20.3 discusses selected methodological issues that need to be considered when planning a survey. These include how respondents will be selected and interviews conducted, the size of the survey samples that are required, and whether cross-sectional or longitudinal surveys are more appropriate for the task at hand. Section 20.4 concludes with a few practical recommendations for addressing the key issues raised in the essay.

Several observations and conclusions emerge from this review:

- Research suggests that there is a long list of potential benefits for the police where they are seen as effective and legitimate, and a great deal of new research is focusing on how they can build that support.
- Surveys are an effective tool for monitoring the quality of police-citizen contacts. This is particularly appropriate when crime victims’ experiences are in question, because they are one of the core customers of the police. However, there are methodological problems in identifying crime victims that need to be considered carefully. A full-fledged victimization survey is probably beyond the range of most police-community research efforts.
- Many of the most important determinants of people’s views of the police and fear of crime are not strongly influenced by what the police do. Negative contacts do have a great deal of influence on global attitudes toward police, but positive ones do not have much of an effect. Perceptions of neighborhood conditions have a much stronger influence on both fear and ratings of police effectiveness.
- Neighborhood-oriented policing calls for opening new channels of communication between police and the public, but many in the community may not get this message, and fewer still will actually get involved with them. Ironically, research indicates that those who do get involved may be the least likely to actually need better communication, and the most likely to already be satisfied with the service they are receiving.
- The issue of how respondents can be selected and interviews conducted is perhaps the biggest hurdle to conducting a quality police-community survey; the collapse of traditional survey methodologies near the end of the twentieth century presents daunting challenges to the twenty-first-century police researcher.

## 20.1 THE USES AND USERS OF POLICE-COMMUNITY SURVEYS

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Police-community surveys can be used by planners and practitioners to identify public concerns and to monitor the quality of service that their organizations are delivering. When new programs are developed, surveys can be among the tools that can be used to monitor their implementation and evaluate their effectiveness.

Public satisfaction surveys are conducted by police departments across the United States, most on an occasional basis. The latest national survey of agencies conducted by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) found 15 percent of local police departments reporting they had carried out “a survey of citizens on crime, fear of crime, or satisfaction with the police.” In the BJS survey these projects were more common in larger agencies. Only 9 percent of agencies serving cities less than 10,000 in size had conducted a survey in the past 12 months, but that figure was 60 percent for agencies in cities over 250,000. About 30 percent of the largest sheriff’s offices also reported conducting surveys. Among both local departments and sheriff’s offices, surveys were more common in the West and least common in the Northeast.

While one-time studies of public satisfaction and concern can be informative, a long-term commitment to monitoring trends in service quality and satisfaction is more likely to influence routine operations. The longest-running big city survey in the United States may be that conducted by the Boston Police Department, which has been reporting figures for fear of crime and public satisfaction with police services since 1999 (Boston Police Department 1999). However, the Metropolitan Police Service, the agency serving London, England, conducts the most impressive service monitoring survey. Each month their interviewers question 3,200 residents selected to represent their local boroughs. Police headquarters reports quarterly trends in confidence among residents of each borough. The surveys also monitor the quality of encounters between police and the public, questioning those who contact the police or are stopped by them about what took place. (For a discussion of the origins and purposes of this project, see Stanko et al. 2012.)

Academic researchers are routinely involved in monitoring and evaluation projects, as partners with police agencies. In addition, their research can push the envelope surrounding our understanding of modern policing by raising new questions and challenging old assumptions—sometimes in ways that make practitioners uncomfortable. These research projects may not have immediate operational utility, but they are fundamental to developing the field of crime science. For example, Weisburd et al. (2011) evaluated the impact of a crackdown on crime hotspots in three mid-sized California cities. What distinguished this from a routine evaluation was its focus on the possible “backfire” of intensive enforcement programs. While promising effective crime control, hot-spot policing threatens to alienate ordinary residents of the neighborhoods that are targeted for attention. Critics of hot-spot, zero-tolerance and other hard-nosed policing strategies have long feared that they undermine rather than build support for the police. In

this evaluation, community surveys were used to monitor perceived fairness and the public's respect for the police, as well as perceptions of crime and disorder. The authors found that support for police did not decline in the face of increased police activity. They interpreted this as welcome news that hot-spot policing may not badly damage police legitimacy in targeted communities.

## 20.2 POLICE-COMMUNITY SURVEY TOPICS

This section addresses the substantive content of police-community surveys. It reviews the key concepts that have been examined, how they have been measured, and some of what the surveys have found.

### 20.2.1 Confidence in Police

Assessing public confidence in the police has been a goal since the earliest days of police-community surveys, for having the support and confidence of the voters and taxpayers is important to any segment of democratic government. In an evaluation of community policing in Chicago, I focused on several confidence dimensions (Skogan 2006b). The first was police *demeanor*, or views of how police treat people in the community. The specific elements of police demeanor examined were fairness, helpfulness, and expressions of concern about people's problems. Other studies have asked if police "treat people professionally and respectfully," and looked at the perceived extent of police use of force and verbal abuse. In a national survey, Weitzer and Tuch (2004) asked, "How often do you think police officers, when talking to people in your neighborhood, use insulting language against them?"

The Chicago surveys also assayed popular views of police *effectiveness*, in this case how good a job they were doing in preventing crime, keeping order and "helping people out after they have been victims of crime. Other research has added questions about how promptly police responded when called for assistance. Some studies rely on very general questions about the quality of service; for example, one could choose to respond, "Overall I am satisfied with the service provided by the police in my community" (Kochel, Parks and Mastrofski 2011). The British Crime Survey (BCS) asks ten of thousands of Britons each year, "How good a job do you think the police are doing in their local area?" However, neither of these questions seems very promising for the purpose of improving police operations, given their very nonspecific character.

Finally, because it was a study of community policing, the Chicago surveys included several measures of perceived police *responsiveness* to community concerns; for example, residents were asked "how good a job" police were doing "working together with residents in your neighborhood to solve local problems?" In London, the Metropolitan Police Service asks residents, "Do you agree that the police in this area can be relied on

to be there when you need them,” and if the police “understand the issues that matter to people in the community” (Stanko and Bradford 2009).

Measures of confidence have also proven to be effective in tracking changes in public opinion that are associated with innovative programs. For example, before community policing began, Chicagoans were most negative in their views of police effectiveness. But over the course of a decade, the index measuring this aspect of confidence in police improved significantly, with the percentage of respondents averaging in the positive range rising from 36 to 50 percent (Skogan, 2006b).

However, it is important to note that many of the most important determinants of people’s views of the police are not on the list of policy levers that police managers can directly pull. Race, age, and social standing are among the personal characteristics that most strongly color views of the police (Weitzer and Tuch 2006). Neighborhood-level factors such as concentrated poverty and social disorganization are also important. The views of family members and friends affect people’s attitudes as well. Reisig and Parks (2000) found that assessments of the quality of life and neighborhood disadvantage far outweighed other determinants of general satisfaction with police. Finally, there is doubtless a strong effect of the mass media on popular images of the police, and this is yet another factor that the police can do little about (Rosenbaum et al. 2005). As a result, analyses of the findings of police-community surveys usually need to take this long list of factors into account. In the Chicago study, it was an important finding that all major racial groups in the city grew more positive about the police. The opinions of whites grew more positive by about 10 percentage points, while among African Americans and Latinos support rose by about 15 percentage points. On the other hand, after a decade of community policing the gulf between whites and others was almost as great as it was near the beginning.

As this illustrates, one approach to the deeply rooted nature of opinions about the police is to shift the focus from levels of confidence to changes in confidence over time, leaving the effects of all of the confounding factors listed above in the initial, benchmark level of confidence. In particular, focusing on changes in confidence reflects the logic of evaluations of innovations in policing, which typically gather “before” measures that provide benchmarks for assessing shifts in “after” measures, because the first-wave measures incorporate the many potentially confounding causes of confidence. Note that this recommendation is not low-cost. It has implications for sample size, which need to be large enough to reliably identify over-time change (see the section below, “Sampling and Surveying”). For example, the BCS tracks area-level changes in confidence in police for each of that nation’s 42 police forces. However, the BCS involves more than 50,000 respondents each year, with at least 1,000 sampled from each policing area.

### 20.2.2 Police Legitimacy

Among academic researchers, studies of confidence in the police have been superseded by a somewhat broader and theoretically important line of inquiry into police legitimacy. Legitimacy is a topic of great interest, and news of the findings is beginning (in the 2010s)

to percolate among criminal justice practitioners. The National Research Council's review of police research (Skogan and Frydl 2004) described legitimacy as one of the most socially and politically important outcomes of policing. Legitimacy is typically defined as the perceived obligation to obey police and the law. People may choose to go along because they calculate from the expected costs and benefits of doing so that there would be a net benefit from compliance with the law or cooperation with the police. On the other hand, following the dictates of the law and its representatives is not simply instrumental in nature. People also comply because of a sense of obligation toward authority and institutions. Democratic societies depend upon this latter, voluntary source of compliance with the law and the authorities. Among other things, this allows the police to do their jobs while applying coercion sparingly and respecting people's liberty and privacy. Voluntary compliance is driven by a belief in the legitimacy of police actions.

As an example, in a New York City study, Tyler and Fagan (2008) measured legitimacy of the police by multi-item scales representing three of its dimensions: the obligation to defer to police directives and to the law, trust and confidence in the police, and identification with the police. Obligation was assessed by responses to ten questions probing how much respondents agreed with the idea that they *ought* to obey the police (e.g., "You should accept the decisions made by police, even if you think they are wrong"). *Trust* in the police was scored from responses to seven questions (e.g., "I trust the leaders of the NYPD to make decisions that are good for everyone in the city"). Respondents were classified as *identifying* with the police when they responded affirmatively to ten items asking if they shared values with the police and respected them as people (e.g., "You can usually understand why the police who work in your neighborhood are acting as they are in a particular situation").

The "policy propositions" in the research literature—many of which are credible but the evidence for them is still thin—assert that enhancing their legitimacy will have a long list of benefits for the police. Increasing legitimacy should reduce unwarranted fear of crime; build support for the police among taxpayers and voters; encourage reporting crime and stepping forward as witnesses; spark participation in community-policing and crime-prevention projects; encourage compliance with police directives and willingness to obey the law; and increase confidence in the legitimacy of governmental institutions more generally. Many of these assertions are described in more detail in Hough et al. (2010), and they are the subject of a number of recent and ongoing research projects.

### 20.2.3 Satisfaction with Encounters

A presumption that is shared by police researchers and practitioners alike is that satisfactory personal experiences with the police are one of the foundations of legitimacy. As Tom Tyler notes:

The perceived fairness of police procedures depends, for example, on the manner in which street stops are conducted, whether the police are neutral and transparent

in their application of legal rules, whether they explain their actions and seek input from community members before making decisions, and whether they treat people with dignity and respect. (Tyler, Schulhofer, and Huq 2010, 367)

Importantly, the work of Tyler and others has provided both a theoretical and empirical basis for evaluating the character of police encounters with the public, in order to assess how effectively they are being conducted. As the checklist enumerated by Tyler in the quotation above indicates, there is an emerging inventory of the features of encounters that have been demonstrated to deliver “procedural justice” in the eyes of the community, even among those judged to have done wrong.

Identifying encounters and assessing their character is a fairly straightforward survey procedure. It is a “recall task.” That is, the questioning sequence first jogs respondent’s memories with a series of “yes-no” screening items asking about possible recent contacts they may have had with the police. The best strategy is to provide them with a broad variety of cues that will expand the scope of their memory scan. For example, the BCS asks about seventeen possible reasons why respondents might contact the police, and fourteen different situations in which they may have been stopped by them. After completing each of these screening sequences, interviewers return to the contacts that respondents recalled and ask follow-up questions about what happened and their perceptions of how they were treated.

In my surveys respondents were presented with nine screening questions to establish whether they had contacted the police during the twelve months preceding the interview. This included calling the police to report a crime (26 percent of all respondents did so), followed in frequency by reporting an accident or some other emergency (19 percent) (Skogan 2006b). Other frequent types of contact were to report suspicious persons, suspicious noises, or “things that might lead to a crime.” Twelve percent of the respondents called to give the police information, and 15 percent asked for advice or information. Taking into account overlap among contacts, 52 percent of Chicagoans recalled initiating contact with the police. The survey also asked respondents about their involvement in police-initiated encounters using several questions. Almost 20 percent of those who were interviewed recalled having been stopped by police during the past year, either while driving or while they were on foot. These are interestingly large percentages of the population, and they indicate that encounters are capable of affecting public opinion in short order.

Having identified survey respondents with recent contact with the police, the next step is to find out what happened. In the BCS, respondents who recall contacting the police are asked if the length of time they had to wait for them to arrive seemed reasonable; how polite the police were; how much interest police showed in what they had to say; and how much effort they felt the police put into dealing with the matter. The London police also ask if callers received any follow-up information about their case. BCS respondents who are stopped are questioned about police politeness and interest in what they had to say. In addition, they are asked how fairly they were treated, if they were given a reason for being stopped, and if they thought this was a good enough

reason. Research also indicates that contact satisfaction plummets when officers make unproductive and apparently uncalled-for searches, a rationale for economy in police aggressiveness (Myhill and Quinton 2010). A promising line of research emphasizes the gap between what the public *expects* of the police and the service members of the public believe they actually *received*, treating both as empirical questions rather than making assumptions about what the targets of police efforts think they will encounter (Reisig and Chandek 2001).

A focus on encounters seems promising because they are to a significant degree in the hands of police themselves. As noted above, a great deal of scholarly research on attitudes toward the police does not focus on factors that police managers can directly influence, including race, concentrated poverty, and stories told by family members and friends. The actual experiences that people have with the police are another matter. Through recruitment, training, supervision, and even separation, agencies can hope to ensure professionalism in their dealings with the public. To the extent to which this makes a difference in popular confidence in the police, they can hope to profit from the policy propositions outlined above.

#### 20.2.4 Awareness and Involvement in Programs

Police-community surveys are also commonly used to evaluate the effectiveness of police efforts to engage with the public in community policing and related programs. Two broad issues are important in this regard. The first is the extent to which police effectively get their message out. That is, does the public know it is being invited to participate? Modern policing is defined in part by its efforts to develop partnerships with groups and individual community members. These are intended to help the police better listen to the community, enhance constructive information sharing, build trust with the public, and involve them in setting public safety priorities. To accomplish this, departments hold community meetings and form advisory committees, establish storefront offices, survey the public, and create interactive websites. Awareness of such opportunities for participation is the key first step in building citizen involvement. However, it is a goal that will not be attained easily. To succeed, these programs require aggressive marketing on a variety of fronts, from mass media campaigns to appearances by the chief of police before church congregations. It is necessary to broaden awareness of new opportunities for participation that are being created and to actively encourage residents to get involved (Skogan 2006b).

The second question is, do neighborhood residents actually turn out, or get involved in the programs on offer? Police can measure their own successes with regard to this question by counting heads at meetings or signatures on sign-up sheets. However, surveys can reveal important aspects of the dynamics of participation. Unlike headcounts, they can identify who attends and why, giving police a clearer picture of the representativeness of participants and the issues that they are hoping to bring to the table. Importantly, surveys can also identify who did not participate, and why. Knowing why residents choose not to get involved when they could be should be a topic of particular interest.

Police-community surveys routinely include measures of program awareness and participation. If police have opened a new office, residents can be asked if they know about it and if they have had an occasion to drop by. In two of my projects, awareness of a storefront office in their area stood at 65 percent in Houston, Texas, and 90 percent in Newark, New Jersey. In Newark, police working out of their storefront distributed newsletters door-to-door in one targeted area, and 40 percent of area residents interviewed remembered receiving one (Skogan 1990a). In Chicago, after a decade of aggressive marketing and community organizing efforts, 80 percent of residents knew of their city's community policing program, and 62 percent were aware that police-community meetings were being held regularly in their neighborhood. However, as a reminder that participation is not automatic, only 16 percent reported that they or someone from their household had actually attended a meeting (Skogan 2006b). Nonparticipants who knew about the program were different from those who attended on a number of dimensions. They were younger, less rooted in the community, and tended to be less educated than their immediate neighbors. Importantly, they were less likely than participants to have a positive view of the police.

Note that the relevant analytic unit for program participation is the household, not the individual. Some members will attend, while others will be represented. In Chicago, attendance at the city's monthly public beat meetings was greatly affected by household dynamics. Few residents of one-adult households participated, but members of two- (or more) adult households showed up regularly. Households with children living at home were very thinly represented, as were families in which all the adults were working. Instead, the meetings were dominated by retired home owners (Skogan 2006b).

It is wise generally to expect a strong establishment bias in involvement in police-community projects. A key issue that surveys can monitor is the *distribution* of involvement. There has been a great deal of research on government programs that rely on voluntary participation by the public, and these studies typically find that the opportunities for involvement they create advantage better-off neighborhood residents and those who may need the program the least. Voluntary programs disproportionately attract better educated and informed people and households already well connected to public agencies and institutions. They prosper in neighborhoods that are already well organized and politically connected, where residents are already favorable toward the police, and in neighborhoods where residents do not fear retaliation for associating with police. Many of the benefits of these programs flow disproportionately to better-off home owners, long-term residents, and racial majorities. My evaluation of community policing projects in Houston during the 1980s found that the way in which programs in various areas were run favored whites, homeowners, and established interests in the community. Police worked well with members of those groups, but less affluent residents did not hear about the programs and did not participate in them. The positive effects of community policing also turned out to be confined to whites and homeowners; across two waves of neighborhood surveys, African Americans, Latinos, and renters reported no visible changes in their lives (Skogan 1990a).

### 20.2.5 Victimization

Police-community surveys can also be used to monitor the extent and change in criminal victimization over time. There are important reasons for doing so, including the sensitivity of officially recorded crime to changes in both victims' reporting practices and how police record the information the public supplies. However, survey measures of victimization are equally fragile, and are subject to a range of methodological problems that present their own challenges to gathering and interpreting the data.

The independent measurement provided by surveys is important because of the possibility that a program will influence the rate at which neighborhood residents report crimes to the police, as well as affecting the crime rate itself. In my experience police can be quick to argue that an unexpected increase in crime reflects well on them, because—they claim—it signals that the community has more confidence in them, and is therefore reporting more crime! (Of course, when crime goes down police never argue the opposite case, which is that their standing in the community is going down.) Only one study has directly addressed and documented this community effect (Schneider 1976), so it is certainly handy if an evaluator can introduce an independently-measured crime number into this discussion. A potentially darker problem would be deliberate manipulation on the police side of the crime-reporting-and-recording process, with the goal of making a department initiative look better than it really is. Because many critical community activists will anticipate this possibility, an independent measure of victimization is doubly handy.

However, the methodological problems associated with properly assessing the extent of victimization in a community are legion. They are documented in Skogan (1990b), which describes how the National Crime Victimization Survey tries to accommodate them. The key is that victims are people. They may forget, make mistakes, or lie about their experiences. They can be highly selective about what they tell interviewers, failing to report incidents that are embarrassing, when they might themselves be seen as at fault, or which are “none of the interviewer's business.” Victims significantly under-report rape, domestic violence, and incidents of all kinds when there is a kin or continuing relationship between the parties, although reporting of sexual assault has been rising (Baumer and Lauritsen 2010; Tarling and Morris 2010). They are also very incomplete when it comes to reporting the victimization experiences of others in their household, so surveys must focus just on the respondent. Victims tend to forget incidents from the past; research indicates that victim recall is most accurate when they are asked only about events that occurred during the previous three months (Skogan 1990b). At the same time, there is a strong tendency to bring serious crimes which occurred in the more distant past into the conversation, and erroneously describe them as recent events. Comparing police and victims' reports of crimes reveals that, in later interviews, victims describe crimes as being more serious and their losses greater than they did at the time of the incident. They also describe the police as arriving on the scene much more slowly than was originally recorded.

In addition, victimization surveys typically report the counterintuitive result that personal assaults are more frequent among better-educated respondents. This is because more educated respondents are more “productive”—they are generally more at ease in an interview, they readily recall less serious incidents, and they are more able to recall the details of events (Skogan 1986, 1990b). This strong methodological regularity can be very hard to explain to policy makers and the media.

Further, violent assaults and household burglary are two crimes for which a relatively small number of victims often are involved in many repeated incidents. There is thus a potential disjuncture between the prevalence of victimization in an area (the percent of survey respondents victimized) and the rate of victimization there, which is based on the number of crimes they recall. Reports of repeat victimization easily drive up an area’s crime rate, hopefully accurately because this small group weighs heavily in the findings. A final, ironic, point is that the prevalence of some crimes that are the focus of public concern and police programs is simply low for conventional data analysis, even in “high crime” neighborhoods. Often special statistics are required to analyze them, and it can be hard to document a reliable program effect when the pre-intervention base rate turns out to be low. In practice, self-reported victims of various sorts of crimes end up being combined together into a few generic categories. Otherwise, they are often too few in number to be analyzed in any detail.

Crime victims are among the primary “customers” of the police; as we have seen, victimization is the number one reason why people contact the police. Follow-up questions concerning how their case was handled are thus of particular importance. Thirty years of research on the views of crime victims have documented the importance of satisfaction with police demeanor at the scene. Satisfaction is higher when officers take adequate time to inform victims how they are going to handle their complaint and what could be expected to come of their case. It is higher when investigating officers are courteous, businesslike, and friendly (Reisig and Chandek 2001). Victims who later receive a follow-up contact from police are more favorable as a result, regardless of the news they receive. Highly-rated officers are those who are thought to have made a thorough examination of the scene, informed victims about their situation, offered advice, listened to the parties involved, and showed concern for their plight (Chandek and Porter 1998). Satisfaction is very consistently linked to perceived response time as well, although we have seen that this can be recalled inaccurately. The more of these details that can be included in monitoring surveys, the more easily police managers can make use of the data to identify areas of practice which may be engendering dissatisfaction with the quality of police service.

### 20.2.6 Neighborhood Disorder and Crime Problems

A key role for many police-community surveys is to gauge the extent of social disorder and physical decay problems. A survey is a good instrument for doing so, for many of the problems that concern neighborhood residents are not captured by official

record-keeping system or are very poorly recorded when they are. For example, street drug dealing appears in official statistics only when arrests are made, and arrest numbers sometimes do not reflect the wide-open street drug markets that plague troubled neighborhoods. Graffiti is only rarely reported to police, and many people probably do not connect it with making an emergency 911 call. In addition to drugs and graffiti, the list of disorder problems relevant to a neighborhood or study could include public drinking, street prostitution, rowdy teenagers, verbal harassment of women passing on the street, abandoned cars, and trash on the streets and sidewalks.

These problems and more are of great interest to policy makers and researchers because they have a long list of documented consequences for individuals, communities, and cities. These include undermining the stability of urban neighborhoods, undercutting natural processes of informal social control, discouraging investment and commercial development, and stimulating fear of crime (Skogan 2012). Also, the survey evidence from Britain is that concern about neighborhood disorder and the inability of police and local residents to counter neighborhood decline are more important drivers of public confidence in the police than is fear of crime (Jackson et al. 2009).

In a neighborhood-focused survey, respondents typically are asked “how much of a problem” they consider each on a list of events or conditions. The response categories could include “a big problem” and other seriousness categories. A few studies have asked instead if respondents have observed or experienced the problems on the list, or for their estimates of the volume or frequency of each, rather than calling for an assessment of their impact. However, exactly how these questions are asked seems to have little practical effect on the findings (Sampson and Raudenbush 2004).

In any study the lists should be tailored to the issues and communities being examined; there is no standard list of disorders. Some appear in very situational contexts; an example would be squatters living in abandoned buildings. Graffiti appears disproportionately on schools or other public buildings and on untended and anonymous surfaces, and much less frequently on private residences (Skogan 1990a). Researchers conventionally subdivide the list, distinguishing between “social” and “physical” disorders. Social disorders are unsettling or potentially threatening and perhaps unlawful public behaviors. To measure the effectiveness of its antimonial behavior initiative, the British Home Office focuses on a list of sixty such activities. They add to the inventory presented above behaviors like making false calls to the fire service and setting cars on fire (Home Office 2004). Physical disorders include the overt signs of negligence or unchecked decay as well as the visible consequences of malevolent misconduct. In addition to the examples listed above, these could also include collapsing garages, loose syringes and condoms lying on the pavement, and illegal dumping of construction rubble.

Measures like these would be appropriate for evaluating community-oriented programs that take a wide view of the problems police can help to take responsibility for. When officers meet with neighborhood residents in park buildings and church basements to discuss neighborhood problems, residents bring up all manner of problems, for they don’t make fine bureaucratic distinctions. When I surveyed residents of one

of Chicago's highest-crime neighborhoods, one of the most highly ranked problems there was abandoned buildings; in another rough area, two of the top four problems were graffiti and vandalism of parked cars (Skogan and Hartnett 1997). Successful community policing takes seriously the public's definition of its problems, and this inevitably leads departments to get involved in a wide range of problem-solving efforts. This does not mean that they are going to do it all themselves. Rather, police need to form partnerships with other public and private agencies that can join them in responding to residents' priorities. These could include the schools and agencies responsible for health and housing codes, as well as the "housekeeping" agencies that tow cars, clear trash, and clean up graffiti.

Disorder is also important because it engenders fear of crime. A long list of studies indicates that the impact of disorder on fear is large. Unlike many crimes, disorder is visible to all, and can be observed on a frequent, even daily basis. In surveys, residents of disorderly areas are more likely to fear that they or other family members will be victimized, they more frequently report being afraid to leave their home, and they worry that their home will be broken into. Where people report high levels of disorder, they also are more likely to perceive higher levels of crime and increasing neighborhood crime. There is also evidence that perceived disorder has a special effect on fear in less affluent areas, where residents appear to take them more seriously than most as signs of danger. (For a detailed review of disorder issues, see Skogan 2012.) If police plan to confront the issue of fear, they have to take ownership of disorder as well.

### 20.2.7 Fear of Crime

Fear is a frequent topic of police-community surveys. However, although fear is an important term in everyday discourse, in research terms it can mean a number of different things. A "concern" definition of fear focuses on people's assessments of the extent to which *crime is a serious problem* for their community or society. Concern is a judgment about the seriousness of events and conditions in one's environment. To measure this aspect of fear, surveys sometimes ask whether respondents would place crime on their list of their community's most important problems. More frequently, researchers ask "how big a problem" respondents think that each of a list of conditions are in the immediate area and include various crimes as well as disorders on it. A second common meaning of fear is the perception that one is *likely to be victimized*. Respondents may be asked to rate "how likely" they are to be attacked or burglarized, on a scale ranging from not very likely to very likely. "Threat" definitions of fear emphasize the *potential* for harm that people feel crime holds for them *if they exposed themselves to risk*. The concept of threat of crime is distinct from risk and concern, for people frequently adopt routine tactics that reduce their vulnerability to victimization, and as a result they may not rate their risk as particularly high. However, they might rate the threat of crime as high if they were exposed to it. Threat is measured by questions that ask, "How safe would you feel if you were out alone on the street of your neighborhood at night?" or "How

would you feel if you were approached by a stranger on the street or heard footsteps in the night?” Finally, fear of crime can be measured by *what people do* in response to perceived threat. From this perspective, fear is manifested in the frequency with which people fortify their homes, refrain from going out after dark, restrict their shopping to safer commercial areas, and avoid contact with strangers. (For a recent review of conceptualizations of fear, see Gray, Jackson, and Farrall 2011).

In addition to its differing meanings, there are important limits to the utility of fear in assessing (for example) the effectiveness of policing programs. The vast majority of variation in fear—perhaps 90 percent of the total—is attributable to differences between people rather than due to their immediate environment (Whitworth 2012). Age and gender are the two most important individual factors, followed by race. As a result, in practical terms, fear changes in response to changes in the environment only at the margin. It is firmly rooted in personal vulnerabilities which do not change and which profoundly affect people’s views. A further implication of this is that the demographic distribution of the sample of people actually interviewed in a survey is a major determinant of its aggregate level of fear, so when it is off the mark (say, for example, because the survey has too many female respondents) so are the results. This also means that any analysis of the data will have to control for such personal factors (and the actual list is a longer one), which in turn means that the survey sample needs to be large enough to support a great deal of subgroup analysis. Fear is a politically and socially important phenomenon, and it is responsive to policing interventions. Many people (but not all racial and age groups) feel safer when they see police on patrol in their neighborhood; visible foot patrol reduces fear; and more responsive, community-oriented policing reduces fear. It is, however, a survey topic that needs to be considered carefully.

## 20.3 SAMPLING AND SURVEYING

This section considers some of the procedural issues involved in fielding a police-community survey. One of the most difficult issues facing the research community today is that of how to conduct a survey. This has become an issue because the traditional ways in which they have been carried out—personal interviews at sample addresses and phone interviews at sample telephone numbers—are no longer feasible in many circumstances. This section also reviews some of the sample requirements that police-community surveys face, and it addresses the issue of cross-sectional versus longitudinal surveys.

### 20.3.1 Interview Mode and Respondent Selection

Well into the 1980s, it was feasible to conduct police-community surveys in person. Interviewers knocked on the doors of randomly selected households and requested

to meet with a randomly selected adult inside. The resulting data had a number of very valuable features. With repeated visits to catch selected respondents who were not often at home, the surveys could be highly representative. Interviewers could show respondents visual aides, including printed material they may have seen, and lists of questions and response categories answers for complicated questions. For example, in my study of community policing in Houston, interviewers presented respondents with a map of the area we were calling “your neighborhood” in the survey, and made clear its scope and boundaries. Establishing these personal contacts at sample addresses helped to make it quite feasible to return to the same households in the future for follow-up interviews, resulting in multi-wave or longitudinal data on the same individuals or households (see the section below on survey design). Finally, these interviews could be lengthy; it was not unusual for them to last 60 minutes or more, for many respondents felt uncomfortable showing their interviewer the door before they were able to complete the survey.

But by the end of the 1980s, the halcyon days of the address-sample personal interview survey were over. They had become too expensive for routine use, and surveys in this mold are now largely confined to a few lavishly-funded federal projects. In cities, crime and fear were driving down response rates as well. Residents were becoming wary of letting strangers into their home, and it could be dangerous to dispatch interviewers to doorsteps during the evening hours when people could more reliably be found at home. Households were getting smaller, most adults by then were in the labor force, and finding anyone at home and willing to be interviewed was getting harder.

This led to the widespread adoption of a new survey approach, the random digit dialing (RDD) telephone survey. Calling people on the phone was decidedly more cost-effective than driving to their home, and it could be done safely well into the nighttime hours. Because many Americans unlisted their telephone numbers in order to avoid unwanted calls (another growing trend), researchers generated pseudo telephone numbers that incorporated the prefixes and early digits of ranges of numbers known to be in active use by telephone companies. Their computers then added a final, random component to the number and passed the result to the call center. These numbers did not all work, but those that did reached both listed and unlisted households in the correct proportion, and the result could be treated as a random sample of the population. Telephone survey data quality could be good. Interviewers could actually be more closely supervised and their response rates verified more easily than they ever were out in the field. The data had some liabilities as well. The interviews had to be short, because people could easily hang up if the survey became too burdensome. The questions had to be simple, offering only a few response categories, because respondents had to keep it all in their head. But the data were relatively cheap, and telephone numbers that rang but were not answered could be called again and again until someone did so, because call-backs were easy. Like in-person surveys, telephone-based studies could recontact households later, although it can be difficult to be completely sure that you were talking to the same respondent, and recontact rates by telephone tended to be lower than those based on earlier personal home visits.

Alas, those days are gone as well. Representative survey data are very difficult to obtain through RDD telephone surveys. Voicemail enable people to screen out unwanted calls, privacy concerns have heightened, and surveys of all kinds have ended up in the junk-call category. By the early 2000s, RDD response rates had dropped to 20 percent or less. More fundamentally, they were based on the assumption that virtually every household was served by a primary telephone number. Like the personal visit, a telephone survey began with selecting a single household respondent from the list of persons living there. Now the norm is increasingly—but very far from completely—one telephone per person, a growing number of households have no fixed-line phone at all, and the surveyor does not know in advance what is at the other end of any call (Messer and Dillman 2010). This proliferation is due to the widespread adoption of wireless telephones, but the rules regarding who pays for cellular calls has led to an effective ban on random calling. Now, it is virtually impossible to assemble a high-quality RDD survey sample.

The jury is still out on the question of what to do in the face of these developments. The Internet is an attractive mechanism for surveying individuals, but (a) no one has developed an adequate approach to developing representative Internet samples, and (b) Internet “locations” are completely divorced from the cities or neighborhoods where respondents live and their experiences with crime and the police are rooted (Couper and Miller 2008). The collapse of telephone surveys has led to renewed interest in mail surveys, and they present a number of advantages. For sampling, the U.S. Postal Service’s Delivery Sequence File can be purchased, and it lists every functioning residential delivery point in the county (Link et al. 2008). Each potential household can be reached cheaply, and as with telephone surveys, non-responding households can affordably be recontacted several times. Knowing exactly who fills out the questionnaire is a problem, because the process cannot control respondent selection very effectively. Paper questionnaires are a clumsy technology when it comes to asking respondents to skip across ensuing questions based on their responses to earlier ones, and it is impossible to keep them from going back to change earlier answers to questions. In the past, mail surveys were criticized for achieving only modest response rates, but as telephone survey response rates degraded, they began to look competitive (Messer and Dillman 2010).

### 20.3.2 Sample Size

A survey’s sample size sets an important limit on the kinds of conclusions that can be drawn from it. To evaluate the impact of an intervention, the survey must be large enough to confirm a program effect of realistic size. To conclude that two groups—say, non-victims and those relatively rare victims—are reliably different, the sizes of each group must be large enough relative to the magnitude of the difference between them and the variability within each. One way to kill a program is to measure its effects with a survey that is too small, and then conclude that it “has no significant effect.” Choosing

a sample size is in part a technical matter, but it also involves substantial criminological knowledge and seasoned judgment on the part of planners and evaluators.

Before an evaluation survey is fielded, statistical techniques (a “power analysis”) can be applied to calculate the minimum sample size required so that the analyst can reasonably expect to confirm that a program effect of a planned-for size is statistically significant. (Free power calculators can be found on the Internet.) However, sample size decisions are importantly substantive and involve criminological expertise. They are driven in part by an advance estimate of what the likely effect of a program (or a difference among groups of interest) will be. For example, if it seems likely that a program might actually produce a 10 percent decline in burglary, power calculations will reveal how large a survey needs to be in order to responsibly assess the planned intervention. To put this in obverse fashion, other things being equal, the smaller the sample size, the larger any changes in reports of, say, policing quality would need to be in order for them to be statistically reliable. Small samples can create an impossibly high bar for police to jump, so this is an important consideration in any study.

### 20.3.3 Cross-sectional or Longitudinal?

In contrast to the “one off” survey, multiple waves of interviews provide a much stronger basis for identifying causal processes and making plausible inferences about the impact of events and programs. Multiple waves of surveys can be organized in two different ways: as separate, “cross-sectional” snapshots of a community that are conducted independently, or as repeated “longitudinal” surveys of the same individuals over time. Each has advantages and disadvantages.

Among the advantages of longitudinal surveys is their ability to directly measure individual change. The analyst can control for each respondent’s earlier reports of his or her attitudes and experiences, in order to clearly highlight how these have shifted. Longitudinal surveys are commonly conducted as part of long-term evaluations of programs, because of this interest in change. In addition, it is also possible to examine the impact of events that affect respondents between the waves of a survey, using the analytic power of a longitudinal survey to tease out the effects of those experiences. Finally, when resources are tight, longitudinal surveys yield more statistical power for the same sample size, when compared to cross-sectional studies.

For example, as part of an extended evaluation of community policing in Chicago, I conducted a two-wave longitudinal survey designed to gauge before-after changes in program awareness and the impact of community policing on crime, fear, and neighborhood problems (Skogan and Hartnett 1997). The survey was conducted by telephone, using a mixed-mode sampling strategy that was driven by the fact that we had to reach residents of selected police districts. Half of the respondents were selected at random from telephone directory listings of households that fell in a targeted area, while the other half were contacted by calling randomly generated telephone numbers and determining where they lived. The second approach ensured that households that did

not have listed phone numbers would be included in the data. Fourteen months later we attempted to recontact respondents to the first wave of the survey. The re-interview rate was 59 percent. The 41 percent of respondents who were lost were far from a random group. Men, Hispanics, younger respondents, those with less education, and renters were less likely than others to be recontacted successfully. We responded by weighting the actual data so that the distribution of those key groups matched their numbers in the first wave. This was, of course, a stopgap measure, but a better choice than inferring from data with large known biases.

As noted earlier, an advantage of longitudinal surveys is that they directly measure individual-level change. Analysis of the Chicago examined “before-and-after” data separately for the experimental districts in which the program was being fielded and matched comparison areas where policing was continuing as usual. When there was a change in an experimental area but no comparable shift in its comparison area—or vice versa—we took it as evidence that the program made a difference, when we could reasonably link it to specific elements of the program that was in place. Importantly, the fact that we questioned individuals twice also gave us the capacity to look at the impact of events or experiences that they had between the two waves of interviews. For example, we looked at the impact of being stopped by police during the period between the interviews on changes in people’s attitudes between the interviews.

But there are advantages in conducting pairs (or more) of separate, cross-sectional surveys instead. For example, it is quite likely that each independent wave of interviews will be more representative of the population. Despite attempts to recontact households, there is invariably a fair amount of attrition in longitudinal studies. These combine with biases in the representativeness of the first wave to produce second-wave samples which can be noticeably unlike the general population they are to represent. On the other hand, because each wave of a cross-sectional survey is a new sample survey, each is subject to separate sampling errors. In combination, in order to infer a reliable change from wave one to wave two requires many more survey interviews.

## 20.4 CONCLUSION

This essay reviewed the concepts and methods that have made community surveys a key police research tool. Surveys serve a number of purposes, such as assessing public concerns, monitoring the routine delivery of police services, evaluating innovative programs, and deepening our understanding of the relationship between police and the community in democratic societies. The essay reviewed the key concepts that make up the substance of this research. These included confidence in the police, perceptions of their legitimacy, satisfaction with encounters, public awareness and involvement in programs, victimization, neighborhood disorder problems and fear of crime.

In particular, surveys are an effective tool for monitoring the quality of police-citizen contacts. This is a determinant of the legitimacy of the police, and it is something that

is in the hands of the police themselves. It is a place to look for disparate treatment of individuals by race, class and—very importantly—neighborhood status. Neighborhood context affects how police view its residents, how many are assigned there, the aggressiveness of their patrolling strategies, and the opportunities that open up for corruption and abuse of power. These increase the frequency of police-citizen contacts and the potential for acrimonious encounters (Weitzer, Tuch, and Skogan 2008; Terrill and Reisig 2003; Reisig and Parks 2000). Research suggests a list of things police can do to counter this tendency. However, it also indicates that positively-rated encounters have only a small effect on overall satisfaction with the police. Poor performance, on the other hand, greatly affects people’s global assessments of the police (Skogan 2006a; Reisig and Parks 2000). Avoiding the downside of encounters that go awry is the best defense that police managers can mount against backfire from overly aggressive police actions.

I also recommend focusing on the quality of service that is delivered to crime victims. They are core customers of the police, albeit one group that is often not well served. In our Chicago surveys, “helping people out after they have been victims of crime” was the lowest-rated aspect of perceived police effectiveness, and public opinion was right. As I noted above, there are a raft of methodological problems in properly estimating the rate of victimization in the community. However, identifying crime victims who have been in contact with the police in order to question them about what happened at the time, and what the aftermath of their experience has been, is a far more straightforward matter.

Some daunting methodological issues were reviewed. How respondents should be selected and how the interviews should be conducted were the toughest of these. The collapse of traditional survey methodologies near the end of the twentieth century presents daunting challenges to the twenty-first-century police researcher. What is my advice? If a police-community survey is focused on a relatively small and densely built-up area, I would return to personal interviews. Interviewers can be turned loose for hours at a time in such areas, to knock on many preselected doors in rapid succession. They can easily return to unopened doors or unanswered buzzers while they work their sample list. In cities, the modal American household now includes only one adult resident, so respondent selection can often be conducted quickly (but this also means it is harder to find them at home). I would keep the interviews short, or have a brief fallback version, so they can be completed at the doorstep if respondents are unwilling to let the interviewer into their home. A prepaid mail questionnaire could be dropped at doors that never open; these will not pick up many respondents, but they would otherwise go completely unrepresented, and this is a cheap procedure. On the other hand, if targeted areas are relatively large and low-density, mail surveys are probably the only option today. With aggressive marketing supported by the police, repeated re-mailings, and a cash incentive for completing the questionnaire, a researcher can hope for a 45 percent response rate or so, which is now better than the alternatives (Dillman, Smyth, and Christian 2009; Messer and Dillman 2010).

How big should the sample be, taking response rates into consideration? As I noted, a responsible study—not one intent on killing a program—needs to be large enough

to reliably confirm a difference of reasonable size. For example, a sample of about 160 completed interviews in each of two waves of surveys should be sufficient for detecting a 10 percentage point shift in confidence in the police working in a targeted area. I picked a 10 percent shift in confidence over a multi-year timeframe as plausible based on prior knowledge: the average year-to-year (upward) shift in confidence in Chicago police during my study in the 1990s was about 5 percentage points. Of course, if analysts are interested in the views and experiences of population subgroups, the sample requirements would be the same at that level. In Chicago, the smallest subgroup that we needed to track closely was recent immigrants—Hispanics who could not speak English and had to be interviewed in Spanish. These non-English speakers constituted about 16 percent of the overall population. Based on the quality of service power analysis described above, to interview enough recent immigrants in the course of conducting a citywide random sample survey would require a general population sample of about 1,000 respondents. In any survey, subgroups that are targeted to be of analytic interest will have to be chosen judiciously.

As for longitudinal versus repeated cross-sectional surveys, if budgets are tight, do longitudinal surveys. They may be less representative, but they directly measure change, and realistic program effects or subgroup differences are more likely to be statistically significant with a more modest (but still large enough) longitudinal sample.

## NOTE

1. These findings are based on my analysis of data from the 2007 Law Enforcement Management and Administrative Statistics (LEMAS) survey (U.S. Department of Justice 2011).

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