

COMPREHENSIVE POLICE REFORM? MORE THAN POLICING!¹

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Recent anti-police protests have brought to the forefront calls and demands for changes in policing. Some demand abolishing the police, defunding the police, redirecting its budget to social services, eliminating over-policing, or going “beyond policing.” Others demand changing “police culture,” improving training, and instituting better supervision. Lists of demands have been posted on the web, submitted as petitions, circulated among a coalition of ad-hoc groups, and appeared on signs carried in numerous protests around the country. These demands originate from a mixture of anger, sense of vulnerability, accumulation of grievances, egregious and repeated police brutality, and emotions that are supported by large segments of the community and have become an integral part of a growing social movement.

Yet, these terms lack a definition, an operational meaning and a cogent measurable approach, that clearly outlines what the problem is, what the solution intends to achieve, how will it do so, and how will it be measured. There is also a lack of consistency in the demands: does defunding mean abolishing police departments, fully shutting them down? That demand is out there. Does it mean redirection of budgets? On June 30th, New York’s Mayor announced a \$1 billion reduction in NYPD’s budget comprised of savings and shifting responsibilities to other agencies. On July 1st, the Los Angeles City Council slashed \$150 million from LAPD’s budget. Two thirds of NYPD’s cut are overtime reduction and moving school policing to the Department of Education. It is safe to maintain that such a significant cut into overtime will also cut into NYPD’s capability to provide adequate police services.

Policing is likely the most misunderstood profession by service recipients and service providers alike. Any social service, such as health and education, is measured based on the service provided -- not the problem that calls for the service. Police are measured on crime figures -- not on the service provided in connection with crime. Police are also (still) assessed based on the number of tickets and arrests. Yet, police are only custodians of crime statistics -- not the producers of crime. It is important to clarify the role of policing and the implications it has for a meaningful comprehensive police reform, or better say: reform government social services.

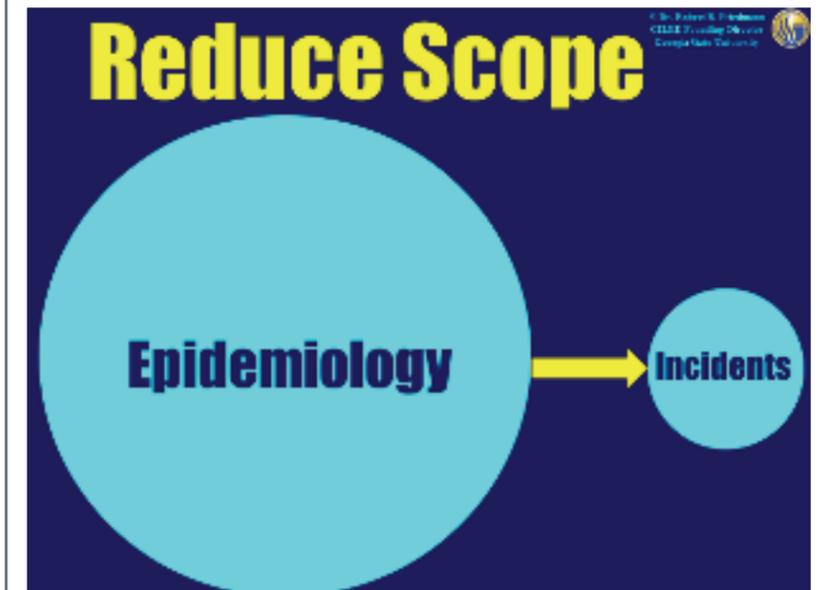
A very apt description of the role of police in democratic society is to guarantee freedom of movement of people and merchandise (Alderson, 1979). The 180 years of the modern policing movement have seen several distinct phases: political phase (1840-1930), reform phase (1930-1970), community oriented or problems solving phase (1970 and on), community policing phase (1985 and on), homeland security phase (2001 and on) and the current phase is the one at a crossroads of demands for new police reform (2020).

It is important to look at crime not only as a legal concept but also as a behavioral concept. The latter can lead to a better understanding of why crimes are committed. To illustrate: if all criminal laws are abolished there will be no crime. Yet, there will still be behavior that is considered harmful to society. Part I crimes certainly are meant to address such behavior. Therefore, it is necessary to look at the community as the producer of crime and as the controller of crime. Doctors in hospitals are assessed on the quality of the medical service they provide --



not on the epidemiology of a disease (i.e., viral infections, cardiovascular disease). While medical service at the ER is essential, it will do little to impact the epidemiology of a disease; that must be done at the community level. It is the community’s behavior that will impact the flow of individual cases to the ER. The wider the epidemiology of a disease, the larger the number of incidents that will require hospital (ER) treatment. It is not different for crime. Police can arrest criminals, but the impact on the overall number of crimes committed lies within the community; its magnitude or scope will determine the case load for police.

This was understood by police leaders who in the mid-1980s recommended to stop the revolving door of criminality by promoting community policing. Until the early 1990s there were sets of guidelines as to what community policing was supposed to offer (Alderson – 1979; Trojanowicz and Bucqueroux – 1990) but there was no definition.



I offered it in my [1992 book](#):

Community policing is a comprehensive philosophy that guides \ policy and strategy aimed at achieving more effective and efficient crime control, reduced fear of crime, improved quality of life, and improved police services and police legitimacy through a proactive reliance on community resources that seeks to change crime causing conditions. This assumes a need for greater accountability of police, elected community leaders, and the community in general, along with greater public share in decision-making through the identification of service needs and priorities and a greater concern for civil rights and liberties (Friedmann 1992).

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That definition was adopted (with minor modification) by the [IACP in 2019](#):

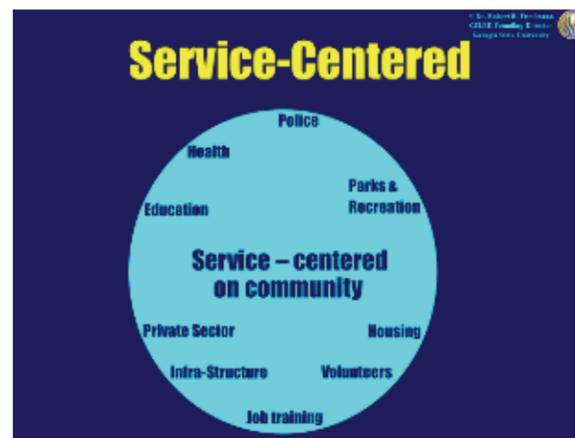
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There are three explicit principles evident in community policing: it is comprehensive, it encourages partnerships, and it is proactive (in addition to, not instead of, reactive policing). A fourth is the focus on crime causing conditions. But when it comes to crime production, perhaps the most critical principle is the shift from a society that is police-centered, to a society that is service-centered.



Here police are on the periphery of service provision along with other service providers such as health, education, housing, job training, welfare,

infrastructure, parks and recreation, voluntary associations, and the private sector. Local government services have as much to do with the production of crime as the police and typically they are absent from any press conference on crime. Therefore, it behooves local government to offer a comprehensive approach to crime issues and not leave it to police alone (Friedmann 2015). This is not meant to marginalize police. Rather it is meant to bring the other service agencies to play a role alongside the police. If a community wants to minimize police case load it needs to produce less crime. And that is why it is so important to involve all other service providers to take part in this effort.



Therefore, any police reform needs to consider a far wider reform. Any industry and any service need a measure of quality control. The quality of police services has been typically assessed by crime statistics, arrests and tickets. Crime goes down? Police are doing a great job. Crime goes up? Police are criticized. This is an erroneous approach because it focuses on the wrong diagnosis and it misplaces causal relationships. To change this, there are certainly things police must do internally. For example, recruit officers who fit expectations, deploy personnel based on data, and promote department-wide practice of community policing including de-escalation techniques. Externally, police need to work better with other social service agencies, learn how to coordinate activi-

ties better and gain public trust. They also need to better understand the community they serve. For example, what is there to know about the community beyond crime numbers? Things like demographic characteristics, voluntary associations, economic changes, in-out migration, school dropout, citizens' expectations, working with private security, and how to identify civic force multipliers (Friedmann, 2017).

Initiatives for police reform are not new and the best ones came from within police circles, not from politicians. This is certainly an opportunity for police reform but one that emphasizes trust-building and partnerships, moving away from silo-type disconnected services, and is based on an overall approach that has a departure point of service to the community -- not of penalizing police. Hence any funding of any effort by local government must be guided by a comprehensive data-driven approach that is formulated into clear policy and consistent overall strategies to include all municipal services, not only police. That is what should determine the funding level of police (and other services).

Any discussion of funding should also consider raising the salaries of police officers who are disproportionately paid for what is expected of them, for what they do, and the risk they take. It is important to recognize that there are serious crimes and that the police are the social agents -- public servants -- who are uniquely qualified and trained to deal with such perpetrators. No other services are prepared to deal with this segment of society, and it wouldn't be safe to expect them to do so on their own.

It is a historical time that requires shifting from sloganeering to rational, careful, thoughtful, grounded policy formulation that is data driven. It is imperative to understand what the problem is, as that will determine the policy of how to best address it. This is an opportunity for meaningful

police reform that aims at more than reforming the police. The goal should be a reform of the entire range of social services to result in improving the lives of individuals and communities. This reform should rely on community input that takes into account needs, expectations, experience, identification of problems and a genuine seat at the planning effort.

The road does not end there as it is also important to consider the prospects of unintended consequences. This is a very demanding challenge that requires painstaking perseverance, long-term commitment and buy-in from all involved. It will not yield the desired results in the very immediate future, but it is a road worth taking as it is most likely to achieve the desired results.

Once on that road, consider that in addition to buy-in, it is imperative to invest in nurturing relations, maintaining relations, and understanding organizational and community dynamics. Chiefs, officers, mayors, city managers, city council members, community leaders, and social service personnel change. Conditions in the community change, economies change, and political realities change. If we want this comprehensive reform to succeed, it is necessary to also maintain commitment to long-term program continuity.

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