

## Implementing Community Policing in Different Countries and Cultures<sup>1</sup>

*John Casey*

### **Abstract**

Community policing is touted throughout the world as a key strategy for current police operations and future reforms. This article examines how the community policing paradigm is interpreted in different countries and policing cultures, and analyses the similarities and differences in its application. A common element is the aspiration that policing becomes more embedded in the population and that it responds to the needs of the “community”, however defined. The article identifies the factors that impact on attempts to implement community policing.

### **Keywords**

Community Policing, Neighbourhood Policing, Democratic Policing, Comparative Studies

### **Introduction**

Community policing is arguably the single most extended paradigm in policing worldwide. Its use as the descriptor of either current operations or of the goal of reforms is almost universal; at the 2007 International Police Executives Symposium in Dubai, representatives from countries as diverse as Australia, Belgium, China, Russia, India, Ukraine, and Zimbabwe all indicated that community policing was core to their future operating philosophy. Yet, an analysis of what is actually happening on the ground in the name of community policing reveals very different practices.

This article examines how the concept of community policing is applied in different policing cultures and suggests that, although the term is often grossly misused and the effectiveness of the strategy is often questioned, it continues to be a useful descriptor that embodies a collective yearning for fair, reliable, and impartial criminal justice institutions. Consequently, we need to understand the differences in interpretation of community policing, as well as the factors that are likely to impact on attempts to implement its principles in new settings. Differences in how the term is used will be examined in more depth below, but first we start with a general introduction to the community policing paradigm.

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<sup>1</sup>This article is adapted from sections of Chapters 1 and 3 of: Casey, John (2009), *Policing the World: The Practice of International and Transnational Policing*. Carolina Academic Press, Durham.

## Defining Community Policing

Community policing focuses on police engagement with the “community” (which can equally be described as the “local population,” “residents,” or “public”), through the restructuring of police organizations, as well as through altering the daily activities of operational police officers (Segrave and Ratcliffe 2004). It is both a philosophy of policing and an operational strategy predicated on the basic notion that policing should have a closer connection with the public it serves. The militarized “occupying force” model of policing in which police maintain a distance from citizens is increasingly being rejected in favour of a model in which officers work in collaboration with the public, and State-centred authority is giving way to the idea of policing with the consent of the populations they serve. Community policing requires a localized element to policing and close interactions between the police and public with regard to policing priorities. While community policing is the catch-all term for this type of approach, other descriptors currently associated with policing that focus on social and preventative strategies are based on similar principles of close association and interaction with the public these include “partnership,” “problem-solving,” “problem-oriented,” “proactive,” “responsive,” and “reassurance”. Community policing philosophies are also part of the background framework for discussions about whether policing should be considered a “force” or a “service”.

While there may be differences in how this approach to policing is implemented, the common elements to all claims to community policing are the encouragement of community trust in policing and the creation of mutually beneficial ties between police and citizens to help ensure that they can work collaboratively to prevent and solve crime, and to address disorder. While the rationale most often cited for embracing a community policing approach is operational effectiveness, its implementation is equally concerned with ensuring the legitimacy of police, with providing local-level accountability, and with addressing not only crime itself but also the less tangible fear of crime and citizens' perception of their security and safety.

The communities served by community policing are loosely defined and may include communities based on a geographic area such as a neighbourhood, or on a community of interest such as an ethnic minority group, business sector, or the elderly. Communities may be represented by the individual citizens or by civil society organizations that act on their behalf. Moreover, there is often a considerable overlap with inter-agency or inter-governmental coordination processes and so community policing programs often include collaborations with other government departments or levels of governments that also work with the public on issues that may impact on crime.

At the centre of community policing are five complementary core component dynamics (Davis, Henderson, and Merrick 2003; Segrave and Ratcliffe 2004, Murray 2005, Skogan 2006):

- Decentralization of authority to provide local flexibility in policing operations.
- Commitment to a problem-solving approach that seeks to find more localized solutions to security and safety threats.
- Encouraging the public, civil organizations, and other government entities to work collaboratively with the police in setting priorities and in developing and implementing local crime strategies.
- Changing the ideal of the police officers from aloof paramilitary “hard man,” to communicators from diverse backgrounds, who are able to develop rapport with the community.
- Empowering communities to help solve their own crime and disorder problems through a range of crime prevention programs.

These are translated into a range of operational practices that typically include the following:

- The appointment of officers to specific positions that focus on community liaison and problem-solving activities.
- Patrol systems that promote more personalized contact between police and the public, which may include foot patrols and the establishment of storefronts or other forms of mini-police stations that are more accessible to the public.
- Consultation and engagement processes that promote dialogue between the police, other government departments, civil society organizations and the public.
- Public outreach and education programs that inform the public about police operations and assists citizens to improve their own security.
- Crime analysis and mapping that identifies local hot spots and collaboration with local organizations and citizens to address them.
- The creation of local crime alertness programs such as Neighbourhood Watch.
- Activities that establish closer relations between police and those segments of the community considered most at-risk of committing crime.

The advent of community policing should be understood not only as a quest for more effective and accountable policing, but also as part of a wider public sector reform movement. Public sector organizations around the world have sought to improve both accountability and outcomes, and have adopted reforms that

championed collaborations between the public, private, and civil society as part of a wider, consumer-based approach to the provision of public services. Community policing may focus on more local based initiatives, but it is also directly related to higher level accountability and dialogue mechanisms such as civilian police boards or watchdog agencies.

In Western industrialized democracies, community policing is seen as a relatively new approach, but it can also be understood as an attempt to recover of earlier traditions of policing. The police officer on the beat who knows the locals and their problems a typical community policing strategy is also the symbol of an earlier, supposedly golden, age of policing and programs such as Neighbourhood Watch can be seen as a partial return to the more informal civilian policing that was the norm before the emergence of modern bureaucratic policing in industrialized countries.

Despite its popularity, community policing continues to be controversial in almost all jurisdictions, with seemingly as many detractors as supporters. In academic analyses and popular discourse, community policing is presented as a paradigm at odds with “law and order” approaches community policing is seen as the “soft-on-crime” end of the continuing debate on operational strategies, while “tough-on-crime” approaches are associated with the more paramilitary, “hard man” view of policing. Even in jurisdictions where it has been officially adopted and apparently functions well, critics argue that the reality is very different from the official rhetoric. The Japanese *koban* (neighbourhood police substations), for example, are often touted as a model of community policing and are credited with inspiring the development of shopfront substations in other industrialized countries, but they have also been criticized for being repositories of less competent officers, and their “big brother” practices in pursuit of order and compliance would be considered contrary to contemporary conceptions of privacy and civil liberties in Western countries (Brogden and Nijhar 2005).

Moreover, as the following sections illustrate, politicians and senior police officers in a wide range of settings can claim that their operational strategies, even those seemingly at odds with the core community philosophies, are community policing without fear of contradiction because its essence is so vague.

## **The Spread of Community Policing**

The above discussion of community policing has been deliberately expressed in generic terms, but it is important to recognize its uneven application around the world. It is seen first and foremost as a strategy that has been more successfully implemented in industrialized democracies. Moreover, it is often characterized as an Anglo-American model of policing, with its contemporary form being developed in

the U.K. and U.S. in the 1960s and 1970s (Brogden and Nijhar 2005, Emsley 2007, Kempa 2007), and it was first widely adopted as a stated policing philosophy in the English-speaking industrialized countries.

At the same time, other non-Anglo industrialized countries have adopted similar approaches and implemented programs based on almost identical philosophies and operational strategies. The French *police de proximité* and the

Spanish *policia de proximidad* (which can be translated as “proximity” or “neighbourhood” policing) are in effect community policing, even though they use a somewhat different label and are grafted onto very different policing systems. As Dupont (2007) notes, the French term for this style of policing was preferred to the direct translation of the English word community for reasons related to the French model of social integration. There are significant differences between the English and French styles of community policing, but the fundamental principles that underpin *police de proxmité* are essentially the same as those of community policing. Moreover, the U.K. has also adopted the language of neighbourhood policing. A recent U.K. Home Office publication stated that “[*neighbourhood policing*] is about fighting crime more intelligently and building a new relationship between the police and the public one based on active cooperation rather than simple consent. It is about local people being truly part of the solution to the kind of local crime and disorder problems that can blight their lives and their neighbourhoods” (Home Office 2005: 5).

Despite such convergence, it is still an open question as to what impact the linguistic differences might have when English-speaking police compare notes with their colleagues in French and Spanish-speaking countries or with speakers of other languages that don't use the translation of the word “community” to describe this style of policing. What, for example, happens to all the English-language debates about “what is community?” Moreover, there are legitimate doubts about how such strategies can be applied in countries where *community* may be defined primarily by social class or ethnic affiliation, or where there is significant lack of *proximité*, social and physical, between the police and the population.

Nonetheless, community policing has also become the buzzword for police reforms in developing countries, partly as a result of its importation through aid programs, but also because the local police have picked up the aspirations and language of community policing through their own education and professional exchanges with police from other jurisdictions. International donor organizations, civil society organizations, and policing consultants working on criminal justice issues in the developing world have adopted community policing as an article of faith and an ideal for the desired outcomes of democratic reforms. But, perhaps somewhat surprisingly, even centralized and authoritarian regimes use the language of community policing. The following sections provide a short review of community policing in four distinct policing cultures.

## Anglo-Industrialized

The development of community policing in the U.K. and U.S. and its extension to other English-speaking industrialized democracies was in response to a number of interrelated factors (Brogden and Nijhar 2005, Segrave and Ratcliffe 2004, Murray 2005):

- The style of expert, reactive policing that had developed in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century was no longer seen as responding effectively to the changing conditions of crime and disorder.
- Communities were diversifying and required a more localized response.
- Under emerging consumerist approaches to public services, citizens' support was critical to police effectiveness and the police were required to be more accountable to the citizens they served.
- Given the limitations on expansion of the welfare State, the community was being asked to share more of the responsibility for addressing crime and disorder.
- Policing was becoming more proactive in preventing crime and disorder and the stronger educational background of police meant they could perform a wider range of prevention functions and collaborate with other agencies.

Community policing was not necessarily new. Many commentators note that the ideal of community involvement in crime prevention and solving crimes had been an integral part of the development of modern policing in industrialized societies, and that the move away from this model in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century, as the police were seduced by the reactive possibilities offered by motor vehicles, new technologies, and their role as the expert crime fighters, had in fact been an historical accident (Kempa 2007). Moreover, in the 1980s and 1990s, debates about police operational effectiveness were merged with wider discussions about public service reform, and so the discovery or recovery of community policing cannot be separated from counterpart public sector reforms that ushered in New Public Management and governance approaches.

While there is no shortage of rhetoric about the success of community policing, its true impact has been difficult to evaluate. In what is widely accepted as the most comprehensive analysis of community policing outcomes in the U.S., Skogan (2006) found that community engagement structures had been successful with some communities in Chicago in terms of responding to crime and fear of crime and helping heal the breach between the police and public, but less successful in others. Community engagement tended to be more successful in those communities that perhaps needed them less (i.e. areas which had lower crime rates and existing community networks) and conversely less successful in communities where it is

most needed (i.e. areas with high crime rates and fragmented networks). There is no definitive data that establishes direct links between community policing and reduced crime, and meta-reviews of numerous evaluations tend to conclude that there is little demonstrable relationship between community policing and levels of crime. However, Fleming (2005) questions the widely reported findings that programs such as Neighbourhood Watch are of little value, precisely because such evaluations only focus on a narrow crime reduction perspective. By re-framing the criteria for evaluation in terms of relationship building, citizen participation, and the reassurance they provide that something is being done, then their impact can be seen as more significant.

By the late 1990s the purported successes of the “zero tolerance” philosophy and the COMPSTAT-style computer crime data analysis had taken some of the gloss away from community policing, and now the post-9/11 homeland security emphasis on counter-terrorism measures and intelligence-gathering have put it under further pressure. These recent shifts in apparent operational priorities have also been reflected in funding availability, as government grants for counter-terrorism flourish while community policing funds shrink. Some commentators go as far as to argue that community policing has been swept away by homeland security, but others maintain that the two tendencies are compatible as intelligence gathering, however defined, still requires close relationships with the public (Murray 2005). Operational approaches which favour professional analysis and computer-generated statistics should combine hard statistical data with the soft data of local knowledge. Moreover, at the front-line, the reality is that despite the availability of new technologies, most crimes are still solved through information from the community. In the past it was argued that community policing strategies promote the flow of information needed to solve and prevent crime, and that claim is equally valid for addressing terrorist threats.

While there might be some swing away from the community policing label, police agencies cannot retreat back into their organizational shells, stop dialoguing with citizens and civil organizations, or cease collaborating with other government entities. The mutilateralization of policing is a fact of contemporary society and the fundamentals of the community policing approach are what police need to work within this new reality.

## **Continental Europe**

Continental European countries such as France and Spain have also embraced community policing, but they have generally re-branded it as “*de proximité/proximidad*” or neighbourhood policing (Dupont 2007, Emsley 2007). Unlike English-speaking countries, where there is also significant emphasis on ethnic and racial communities, the focus in Continental countries is almost

exclusively on location and neighbourhoods. Equally significantly, community policing strategies in Continental countries have been implanted onto policing systems based on a more centralized, State-centred, and militarized tradition. The level of centralization in many Continental political and policing systems precludes any significant reform not decided in the capital city, and there is a distinct lack of a culture of local accountability and evaluation. Community policing has had further to travel and, while it has been embraced, the emphasis has been more on being operationally *in* the community, as opposed to being *part of* it.

*In France, police de proximité* is seen as the way ahead although it is hampered by the fact that police officers seldom live in the neighbourhood they are assigned to and *the national Gendarmerie*, with its militarized structure, live in barracks. Nonetheless, French officers now receive special training in neighbourhood policing. There has been less emphasis on ongoing community consultation, but the French police have sought to establish *Local Security Contracts* to encourage co-production of security through different institutional and civil society actors, such as local schools, businesses, town halls, and judges (Dupont 2007). The contracts are strengthened by an array of new crime-prevention concepts, including uncovering potential threats to the community and targeting them with intelligence-led policing (Lawday 2000).

## **Developing and Transitional Countries**

Community policing is generally considered a product of policing in industrialized countries, but it has also become part of the core discourse on law enforcement in the developing world. In many developing countries, it could be argued that policing has never really left the community in the sense that normal self-policing continues to be a fact of life in societies that cannot rely on, or are fearful of, public police, or where the police are still lacking the vehicles and other technology that would separate them from the community. Moreover, indigenous and traditional processes of justice may still be functioning. The contrast in community policing approaches in developed and developing countries may be that in Western democracies they are focused on the police searching for community, while in developing countries it is the community in search of policing (Wisler and Onwudiwe 2009).

Nevertheless, community policing models based on those functioning in industrialized countries are offered as the way forward for developing countries struggling to build on their economic growth or moving from authoritarian to democratic government and policing. Most internationally funded reform and capacity building programs are predicated on the introduction of community policing. However, efforts to introduce community policing in developing countries frequently run into serious difficulties. Policing in these countries is bedeviled by

economic and institutional contexts that result in considerable lack of resources for policing and a fundamental lack of trust by the population of the capacities and intentions of the government and the public police. Some developing countries are enmeshed in conflict situations, which may pit communities against each other.

There is a considerable industry of exporting community policing to developing countries, but it has not always been well received, and its philosophies and strategies have not always been successfully transported from the North to the South. Brogden and Nijhar (2005) document a litany of failures in attempts to export community policing to developing and transitional societies. Most of the attempts have floundered on a lack of commitment by politicians and the police hierarchy, a lack of resources for the police, scepticism from the community, and significant deficiencies of the economic and social conditions needed to support such reforms. Brogden and Nijhar (2005) vividly describe the ineptitude of many attempts that apply policing models from industrialized countries to developing countries, and of the absurdity of self-righteous Western policing experts haranguing police in developing countries with stories of the success of community policing in their home jurisdictions without either analyzing its shortcomings at home or demonstrating any familiarity with the context in which they are seeking to apply it.

Institutions and practices that support democratic policing in one country may not do so in another. Bayley (1999) indicates that community policing may produce a constructive partnership between police and the public in some countries, but in others it can be used for cooptation and top-down regimentation. Similarly, mobilizing neighbourhoods to share policing responsibilities with the police, which has become popular in established democracies, can be a dangerous prospect in countries polarized by race, language, religion, and ethnicity. In many cases the limitations are simply those that result from a lack of resources and the inadequate conditions that the police are expected to work in.

While community policing may be a problematic import, the official rhetoric in many developing countries and arguably the genuine aspiration of significant sector of the political class, police, and the public is to attempt to bring their policing practices into line with a community policing philosophy.

### **Centralized Regimes**

Centralized and authoritarian regimes have also adopted the language of community policing. China, a rapidly developing country still functioning under a single-party regime, maintains a public discourse about community policing, but unlike the Western industrialized approach that emphasizes the police's

responsibility to dialogue with citizens, the emphasis in China is on the collective responsibility of citizens to the State and the maintenance of order. Safety and security is maintained through local social and political structures that demand conformity to the collective and to the State (Wong 2001). Policing in China is regarded as in the community, for the community, and by the community, and so crime control and social order structures work in concert with other organizations of mass participation and popular justice, such as neighbourhood committees. Equally important are the extensive powers of the State, which require all citizens to be registered with authorities at all times and account for their whereabouts. Somewhat paradoxically, the economic and social transformations of the last decades have meant that China is in fact moving away from collective responsibility for security to a more industrialized, professionalized model of policing. China is now priding itself on the increased capacity to provide more well-trained professional police that serve the community, and celebrates that Hong Kong, as a Special Administrative Region, has made the transition from a paramilitary colonial model of policing to a more service, community-oriented model.

A brazen example of the manipulation of community policing language is from the Mugabe regime in Zimbabwe, where freedom of expression, assembly, and association were curtailed, and the police were accused of torturing human rights advocates in custody (Amnesty International 2007). Contradicting such accusations were the words of the Zimbabwe Police Commissioner who in 2007 reported to an international policing forum that:

“The thrust of the Zimbabwe Republican Police has been law enforcement with the consent of the public and in cooperation with international agencies. This has found expression through community policing programs, interagency approach and cooperation with regional and international partners. ... In an endeavour to reach a wide cross section of people, Community Relations Officers have been seconded to every police station, district, province and national levels to market the idea of police working together with people” (Zimbabwe Police 2007).

Claims regarding community policing in centralized and authoritarian countries are a combination of the State's attempt to fabricate legitimacy, both internally and internationally, and the reality that in such regimes, the community does participate in security in the sense that many citizens become entrenched in the social control machinery of the State some people may consider them informers, but to the authorities they are loyal citizens. In the public statements of centralized and authoritarian regimes, particularly those intended for international dissemination, the local committees and commissar model of social and political control ends up sounding remarkably similar to community policing in other countries.

## **Conclusion: Understanding the Implementation of Community Policing**

As this brief review of community policing has demonstrated, it is an all-pervasive paradigm of policing that can be found in one form or other in the official discourse of a majority of policing agencies in the world. Yet the concepts of cooperation with, and the consent of, the community that are so central to community policing are highly subjective and politically malleable, and in the end all that we are left with is the localization of policing strategies and communication with residents. As a consequence, any police agency that has ever required officers to become more knowledgeable about crime in a specific neighbourhood or location can lay claim to practice community policing.

If the naysayers are to be believed, community policing has fallen out of favour in Anglo-Industrialized countries, has never quite been implemented in Continental European countries, is a dismal failure in developing countries, and is a farce in centralized and authoritarian countries. Yet around the world, almost every evaluation of policing operations whether by governments, civil society organizations, international bodies, or private consultants continues to recommend reforms based on community policing principles. Community policing has been called an ideological cult, with more slogans than substance and more followers than leaders, which is characterized by “similarity in spirit, differences in practices” (Wong 2001). But does this lack of consistency in approaches diminish the usefulness of the community policing concept? Perhaps part of the answer is that community policing may be a misnomer for what is trying to be achieved in many countries. Critics of community policing in both developed and developing countries tend to ignore the reality that it is as much about political realignment and not just a call for technical or operational changes. Its core philosophies are based on almost universal aspirations for fair, reliable, and impartial criminal justice institutions and for instituting democratic policing, the rule of law, accountability, good governance, civilian oversight, transparency, human rights and social justice (Goldsmith and Lewis 2000, Kempa 2007, Karstedt 2007).

Consequently, despite the concerns raised above about its application to developing countries, there continues to be a commitment to community policing initiatives around the globe, and continuing reports of positive impacts, even if they are modest (see Frühling 2007 for an evaluation of community policing in Latin America). Consequently, a more useful approach to understanding the possibilities of exporting the community policing model comes from those who have identified the conditions that are likely to impact on attempts to implement it in new settings. These conditions include (Groenewald and Peake 2004, Davis, Henderson and Merrick 2003, Brogden and Nijhar 2005, Casey and Mitchell 2007):

- Stability and community cohesion. The country or jurisdiction should have achieved some degree of political stability and shared values. Police outreach to and collaboration with community however defined will be difficult to achieve in periods of political turmoil and if the society is still riven by factionalism.
- Pay, motivation and morale of police. Police who are poorly paid and have low morale as a result of serious management problems and corruption are not likely to be motivated to cooperate with the community. Low pay may also mean that policing tends to attract poorly-educated police from more marginalized sectors of society, and there may be a general lack of respect for policing as an occupation and for the individual officers.
- Trust in the police. Trust in the police is a desired outcome of community policing, but there is a paradox that trust is also a pre-condition for such initiatives to be successful. The citizens must have some faith that efforts are genuine and that dialogue with police is possible before they will even consider participating in joint processes.
- Political will and commitment to change. There needs to be a clear commitment from the most senior levels of government and policing to community policing reform processes, to other measures that increase police accountability, and to firm action on key contextual issues such as corruption, human rights abuses, and excessive use of force by police.
- Sufficient resources for implementing change. Reform requires considerable resources for training, support, new equipment, and projects such as the redesign of police stations to make them more accessible to the public.
- Community policing “champions.” Evaluations of community policing highlight the need for key players at all levels to continue to champion its development the single most important determinant of its success in a locality is the commitment and interest of the local commander. When these people leave their post, reform often flounders.
- Capacity for the decentralization of police administration. Community policing requires local flexibility, so the police organization must have the willingness and capacity to confer authority to the appropriate command levels. Part of this capacity depends on the knowledge and skills of those who will assume the authority for community policing at local levels.
- Strong networks of community organizations. Many strategies associated with community policing can only be implemented if there are counterpart community organizations that can work collaboratively with police.

- Donor support and coordination. If the reform programs are being implemented in a context where there are multiple donors, there must be coordination between the different program activities and strategies. There must also be a commitment of donors to provide sufficient resources to stay the course of long-term reform processes

It is important to note that these conditions focus only on the policing institutions. However, the first recommendation on the future direction of policing in any country is that the reform of police agencies must take place in the context of wider reforms of the public sector, criminal justice system, and even the private sector. If corruption is endemic to the society, or if there is no culture of accountability or transparency in public or private organizations, it is unlikely that there will be meaningful police reform. At the same time, in order to address the disorder engendered by corruption it is necessary to have an efficient, effective, and accountable police and criminal justice system.

This list of conditions does not bode well for any reform process and clearly demonstrates why it requires a long-term commitment from all those involved to ensure that community policing becomes more than just rhetoric. It is crucial that reformers understand the current limitations they are facing and that they are able to anticipate the steps required to work towards community policing. There are legitimate concerns about the applicability of community policing to different jurisdictions and doubts about the possibility of transferring models from the North to the South. However, in the end the relevant question may not be “Has reform been successful?” but “What residue of reform has been left behind?” Attempts at reform under the community policing banner are perhaps better viewed from the perspective of their achievements in moving toward democratic ideals, however limited they might be, rather than castigated for their more considerable shortcomings. The most important message of this short analysis is that the aspirations of achieving some form of community policing are common to a wide range of countries, and that despite the acknowledged limitations, it continues to be a moral touchstone that will continue to determine the future of policing.

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The Author Dr. John Casey is an Associate Professor in the School of Public Affairs at Baruch College, City University of New York. From 1999 to 2007, he was a Senior Lecturer in management, leadership and governance at the Australian Graduate School of Policing, Charles Sturt University. Previous to his academic career, he worked as a public and community sector manager in Australia, Spain and the USA. He can be reached at [john.casey@baruch.cuny.edu](mailto:john.casey@baruch.cuny.edu)