

The NYPD Success Story: Crime Reduction and Narcotics Enforcement

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Abstract

After many years of failing to take control of violence and serious crime in New York City, the New York City Police Department in 1990 implemented a comprehensive version of community policing and increased the agency manpower by almost 30% (between 1991 and 2001). The initial version of the community policing concept relied on the neighborhood foot patrol officer acting as the primary problem solver who was to seek a long term solution to crime trends. Since many of the patrol officers were newly hired with little experience, their ability to design long term solutions to serious crime problems was not very effective. However, the mere presence of thousands of uniformed police officers in every neighborhood in New York City, and even more deployed to high crime police stations, stabilized the crime rate. In 1994, NYPD Police Commissioner William Bratton radically revised law enforcement efforts and many new initiatives were commenced. As a result of these strategies, violent and serious crime has declined more than 80 % since 1993. New York City is now the safest large city in the United States of America. This remarkable crime reduction continues through 2011, even given the overwhelming counter-terrorism responsibilities implemented since September 2001. Other factors that contributed to this impressive accomplishment will be outlined in detail.

Keywords

Community Policing, Broken Windows, Zero Tolerance, Compstat

Community Policing in New York City: The First Efforts 1983 - 1993

Crime rates in the USA had climbed steadily since the 1960s and Americans responded by asking local politicians and police executives to respond accordingly. The reactive form of policing clearly had not been effective. Residents of large cities no longer felt safe and the introduction of an inexpensive drug option, crack cocaine, resulted in violence by both users and dealers. Law enforcement leaders under political, media and public pressure were forced to respond. Early research by two criminologists, Goldstien (1990) and Trojanowicz (1988), caught their attention as their findings about a “new” concept called community policing appeared to improve citizen satisfaction in police, job satisfaction of patrol officers and the problem solving goal appeared to advocate a long term solution to crime trends. Forced to make ideological changes, police executives in large cities like New York City and Chicago, among others, implemented small community policing pilot programs. The NYPD in 1983 instituted the Community Policing Orientation

Program, nicknamed “CPOP,” in some select police stations. Receiving strong public accolades, the NYPD through 1985 expanded the CPOP program to all 75 police stations throughout New York City. Each police station was divided into 10 police beats, some only 4 square city blocks and others up to 40 square city blocks. Each neighborhood was patrolled by a community policing “beat cop,” who was tasked to patrol that community on foot patrol, attend all community meetings within their jurisdiction, and incorporate a problem solving approach to crime trends. The problem oriented strategy was foreseen as a mechanism to lower crime rates and the increased uniform police presence in every neighborhood was to reduce fear of crime. The Chicago Police Department and other law enforcement agencies also selected community policing as their predominant ideology (Skogan and Hartnett 1999). Soon community policing became the predominant buzzword of police professionals nationally.

Ultimately though, the concept did not impact soaring crime rates. One apparent lapse was the failure of police agency leaders to promote the concept agency wide, and what arose were philosophical differences between the “beat cop” and the ordinary patrol officer. After achieving record murder levels in 1988 and 1989, the new mayor of New York City David Dinkins quickly hired community policing advocate, police executive and academic Lee Brown to implement community policing as the NYPD's agency philosophy (City of New York 1990). This was joined by a dramatic hiring in police personnel and a drastic increase in community policing beat cops from 10 in each police station to between 33 and 70 in each police precinct, which ranged in size from 4 square miles/7 square kilometers to 50 square miles/80 square kilometers (New York City Police Department 1990). While it is more likely that the increased uniformed police presence in all neighborhoods was of more relevance, the crime rate in New York City stabilized in 1991 and thereafter commenced a continual decline in violent and serious crime rates.

Once these results were reported nationally, it did not take long for other law enforcement executives to take notice. Thereafter, community policing, with its problem solving approach, was accepted as the leading crime fighting practice both domestically and abroad. Community participation was advocated, and the final aspects of the community policing equation, namely fixed neighborhood patrol, the problem solving approach and strong partnership with the community became the norm. These efforts crossed the globe and similar initiatives have been commenced in Israel (Weisburd et al. 2001), South Africa (South Africa 1995; South African Department of Safety and Security 1997; 1998), Sweden (Swedish Police 2005a; 2005b), Norway (Norwegian Police 2005; 2006), and elsewhere (Davis et al. 2003).

The New Era of Policing: NYPD 1994 - 2001

In January 1994, Republican candidate Rudolph W. Giuliani was sworn in as New York City's Mayor. His platform promoted a hard stance against crime and the improvement of quality of life throughout the city. To spearhead these efforts, Mayor Giuliani appointed former Boston Police Chief William Bratton as the New York City Police Commissioner. His first month in office saw the total restructuring of the upper executive corps with highly motivated “young blood” administrators taking over the top executive positions.

Under the supervision and guidance of the (former) NYPD Chief of Department Louis Anemone, a number of initiatives have been undertaken since 1994. Since their implementation and continuing through 2011, a dramatic reduction of more than 80% in violent crime and a notable improvement in quality of life has resulted. The following initiatives represent some of the more significant and successful programs instituted by the NYPD:

1. “Zero Tolerance” Proactive Policing
2. The COMPSTAT (Crime Analysis) Process
3. Twelve New Police Strategies
4. Crime Reduction Principles
5. Vehicle Safety Check Points
6. Truancy Sweeps
7. Surveillance Cameras
8. Enhanced Intelligence Gathering
9. Suspect Background Identification

1. “Zero Tolerance” Proactive Policing

The NYPD crime reduction strategists theorized that individuals who committed lower level offenses may later be responsible for participating in more violent criminal activity. By targeting and detaining offenders for less serious infractions, the police may be preventing a more tragic incident from occurring. While this concept may sound like a recent innovation, it was first introduced by Patrick Colquhoun (1795) in the 1790s, when he advocated targeting non-violent unlawful activity, e.g., gambling, public intoxication, etc., to deter more serious illegal activity. The NYPD quickly initiated a “zero

tolerance” policy and began proactively enforcing lower level offenses including panhandling, public intoxication, excessive noise and disorderly conduct. All NYPD patrol personnel were supplied with pocket sized cards outlining legal references and procedural guidelines involving the lower level infractions. An additional goal of this strategy was to improve the quality of life in public areas. In line with George Kelling's and James Q. Wilson's “Broken Windows,” both sociologists and practitioners believed that addressing the quality of life concerns of the community should improve public confidence in the police and reduce the level of fear in the traditionally higher crime neighborhoods in the city (Wilson and Kelling 1982).

Since its inception in January 1994, this initiative has been highly effective and has greatly contributed to the impressive 80+% decrease in FBI Index Crime (serious and violent crimes against people and property) levels in New York City through 2010 (US Department of Justice 2009). As a result, New York City is now regarded as the safest city in the United States of America among cities with a population exceeding one million residents, and the remarkable improvement in quality of life has dramatically increased tourism and investment in the city.

2) The “COMPSTAT” Crime Analysis Process

Since his appointment in 1994, (former) NYPD Chief Anemone advocated holding police executives completely accountable for the operation of their commands. Police Commanders have now been granted the discretion to assign their personnel as they deem necessary and no longer as per pre-designated staffing percentage guidelines. In order to be best informed and to appropriately deploy manpower, it is clear that police commanders must have information regarding *current* crime trends and productivity indicators readily available. Due to the archaic hand written fashion in which criminal incidents were recorded in the past, statistical information regarding index crimes, arrests and summary activity was routinely available 90 days to six months after the fact. In order to remedy this situation, the NYPD undertook the task of inputting all crime incident reports and arrest information into a computerized database. Precinct commanders and police executives now receive a weekly report that outlines summary statistics involving command demographics, precinct/unit staffing levels, civilian complaints, overtime, summons activity, sick rate, radio runs and response time with comparisons to prior year and city-wide data. Of even more importance is the weekly comparison report that documents criminal incident, arrest and summons activity on a week-, month- and year-to-date basis. Each commander must prepare a weekly response delineating efforts being made by their respective units to further improve the statistics and reduce serious crime.

In order to ensure that police commanders are continually analyzing this information and addressing necessary concerns, they are summoned to unannounced “COMPSTAT” (COMPUter STATistic) meetings at police headquarters, at least once each month. These commanders are subjected to direct questioning by the Police Commissioner, the Chief of Department and other higher ranking executives regarding the efforts being conducted to address recent violent crimes in their respective jurisdictions and to ensure that crime reduction strategies, as instituted, are effective (New York City Police Department 1994).

3) Twelve New Police Strategies

In order to give precinct commanders and police executives direction in their crime reduction endeavors, the NYPD has outlined 12 department-wide strategies that address important issues such as: gun control, youth violence, drug dealing, domestic violence, quality of life concerns, auto theft, police corruption, traffic problems, professional and courteous public interaction and the apprehension of fugitives. Each strategy outlined the roots of the issue in detail and comprehensively delineated strategies to eradicate crime related to each specific concern.

4) Crime Reduction Principles

The NYPD has outlined four (4) crime reduction principles that apply the problem-solving philosophy (specifically: accurate and timely intelligence; effective tactics; rapid deployment of personnel and resources; and relentless follow-up and assessment) to the crime reduction strategies. In line with this initiative, each precinct now has a Special Operations Lieutenant whose responsibility is to assist the precinct commander in analyzing crime patterns and quality of life conditions and to design a customized strategic response. The Special Operations Lieutenant additionally establishes and maintains liaison with other NYPD units, e.g., Narcotics Division, Vice Enforcement Division, Emergency Services Division, etc., and government and public agencies that can assist in the suppression of crime and the improvement of the quality of life in the neighborhood concerned.

5) Vehicle Safety Checkpoints

Each precinct and uniformed enforcement unit has been directed to conduct regularly scheduled vehicle safety checkpoints (utilizing the constitutionally permitted non-arbitrary method which allows police personnel to stop vehicles in a systematic fashion, e.g., every vehicle, every fifth vehicle, every green vehicle, every vehicle with Pennsylvania registration plates, every taxi, etc.).

Police officers are directed to conduct driver license and criminal warrant checks on all individuals stopped and to arrest or summons violators. While this may appear at face value to be purely an income generating operation, it has led to a dramatic reduction in auto thefts and a decrease in both vehicle accidents and pedestrian fatalities throughout the city. In order to obtain a greater benefit, the checkpoints are regularly conducted at accident-prone intersections, in higher crime areas or on streets where a crime pattern has been identified. The checkpoints are normally conducted for one to three hour periods and the increased uniform presence will act as a deterrent to violent crime in the surrounding public areas. The checkpoints may also be used to facilitate the exchange of information whereby wanted person bulletins and crime prevention information are distributed to vehicle occupants who may reside in, drive through or frequent the area.

6) Truancy Enforcement

It is widely recognized that juveniles and adolescents are responsible for a significant portion of violent crime and community complaints, particularly during school hours. The New York City Education Law allows police officers to detain individuals during school hours who appear to be 17 years of age or younger. The pedigree information is recorded, criminal warrant checks are conducted, parents/guardians are notified, and the truants are returned to their respective schools, if within the precinct boundary, or to truant drop-off locations designated by the New York City Board of Education. School personnel also conduct truant debriefings and make additional parental notifications. NYPD guidelines also allow police officers to frisk and/or handcuff the truants as the situation dictates for safety reasons as per *Terry v. Ohio* guidelines (U.S. Supreme Court 1968). Countless weapons have been discovered and removed as a result of this initiative, and those responsible have been further charged as juvenile delinquents or youthful offenders in both Family and Criminal Courts. Locations that have been found to routinely “harbor” truants, e.g., billiard halls, bars, small convenience stores that sell alcohol and cigarettes, etc., have also been targeted for increased enforcement activity to deter catering to underage or truant teenagers.

7) Surveillance Cameras

By monitoring television screens that are connected to video cameras placed in public areas, a single police officer can maintain observation of a widespread area that, in all likelihood, would require the assignment of a team of patrol officers. The NYPD has conducted a number of pilot programs to measure the crime reduction potential of video cameras strategically placed in problem

plagued public areas, such as city parks, school yards and the public areas surrounding socialized housing developments. Initial results have indicated a dramatic decline in reported criminal and community complaints and have resulted in an expansion of the program. It appears that the mere presence of the video camera itself acts as a deterrent to illegal activity. The operation is very cost effective in that a restricted duty (injured) police officer is assigned to monitor the television screens in lieu of the deployment of a squad of police officers to cover the same area, thus saving valuable man-hours and allowing the redeployment of these personnel to other initiatives and enforcement functions. Enhanced technology (e.g. facial recognition, vehicle registration plate readers, etc.) can be combined with surveillance cameras to counter drug dealing, crime and the threat of terrorism.

8) Enhanced Intelligence Gathering

In order to solve crimes and apprehend offenders, extensive effort has been applied to obtain as much intelligence information as is possible. After the police respond and gather information and evidence at a serious criminal event, or if it is determined that a pattern (serial) crime has occurred, the Precinct Commander or Precinct Detective Squad supervisor will direct a community policing beat officer or detective to respond to the incident location and conduct an investigative debriefing of area residents and business persons. This canvass may occur immediately after an incident, the next day at approximately the same time of occurrence, during evening hours when residents are more likely to be home, or if warranted, repeatedly at different times.

Another extremely effective initiative to obtain criminal intelligence is to have precinct detectives approach persons in police custody and thoroughly debrief them utilizing a list of prepared general questions, e.g., “Do you know anyone that sells drugs?” or “Do you know anyone that possesses illegal weapons?” and a list of relevant questions dealing with current ongoing investigations, e.g., “Last Thursday a homicide occurred at First Avenue and 55th Street not far from your residence. Do you know anything about this? Did you hear any rumors?” While there are apparent restrictions regarding the questioning of suspects (as per the *Miranda* guidelines), suspects often have no reservations about discussing criminal conduct that has been committed by others.

In addition, arrested individuals who have waived *Miranda* protections and have chosen to be questioned by investigators are thoroughly debriefed regarding other criminal participants (e.g., “Who sold you the narcotics? Who

offered to buy the stolen property from you? Who else participated in the planning of this crime?”). Detailed information should be obtained in an effort to procure arrest and search warrants with the assistance of the prosecutor's office. The ultimate goal is to remove as many violators from the streets as possible. The goal of narcotics enforcement should include targeting the “bigger fish” in an effort to arrest and prosecute the major drug dealers. The NYPD engages in cooperation with federal and international agencies (e.g. FBI, DEA, Interpol, etc.) in order to bring the major cases to fruition.

9) Suspect Background Identification

Many violators, when arrested, refuse to identify themselves, utilize a fictitious identity, or are released on their own recognizance without a thorough background investigation (e.g., parole/probation status, arrest warrant, recidivist status, suspended/revoked driver's license, bench warrant history, etc.). NYPD arresting officers can no longer release an individual by issuing a desk appearance ticket or universal summons without first positively identifying the suspect. Only certain select forms of identification (i.e., photo driver's license, valid passport, citizenship or naturalization papers, and resident alien card) are acceptable. Without proper identification, the individual will *not* be released and will be processed as an arrest and delivered directly to the court system. If the suspect does provide legitimate identification, a thorough background investigation will be conducted before the person may be issued a court appearance ticket. If a person fails any stage of the background check, they will be removed directly to court for a prompt arraignment before a judge.

2011 Statistics

At the start of the year 2011, New York City progressed through the new Millennium as the safest city in America with a population over 1 million people. While New York City had consistently ranked in the “Top 10” crime ridden cities in the USA through the early 1990s, NYC now ranks near the bottom of the more than 220 American cities with a population over 100,000 (U.S. Department of Justice 2009). The strategic deployment of NYPD personnel, coupled with the “Zero Tolerance” philosophy, has resulted in continuing reductions in serious crime through 2010, which continues the crime reduction trend that started in 1994. Since the COMPSTAT and Zero Tolerance initiatives have commenced, serious crime in New York City has decreased more than 80% and this trend continues, with the largest and most impressive reduction in the former bellwether crime of murder, which has declined almost 85% since 1994. The number of individuals injured by

gunfire in NYC in the last six years also declined approximately 75%. It is estimated that this dramatic reduction in murder since the inception of the new policing philosophy in NYC has spared over 22,000 lives from the murder rolls. While the costs of policing the streets of New York City can be concretely defined, there is no way to estimate the value on the lives of the thousands of people that are alive today because of the NYPD's successful endeavors.

The Effective and Professional NYPD

Not only have the 1994 reorganization of the NYPD and the institutionalization of the zero tolerance philosophy resulted in the dramatic 80+% reduction in serious crime in New York City since that time, but all indications are that the New York City Police Department has continued to evolve into a highly professional police agency. From 1994 through 2002, the sworn officer complement of the NYPD had increased by approximately 12,000 police officers (or more than 30%), yet the number of civilian complaints filed against the police, fatal police shootings, police shooting incidents, police brutality complaints, and corruption and misconduct allegations made against the NYPD have all drastically declined (New York City Civilian Complaint Review Board 2001; 2006; New York City Police Department 2001; 2002; 2006).

The Post - September 11, 2001 World: the NYPD from 2001 to 2011

Stating that the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on American soil has changed life in the United States and the role of law enforcement is an understatement. On September 11, 2001, over 3,000 innocent lives were lost in a surprise dramatic attack by extremist terrorists. The loss of 420 rescue personnel in New York City, including 72 law enforcement officers, coupled by extensive and exhausting counter-terrorism measures, has dramatically caused a drop in morale and the retirement and resignation of over 15,000 NYPD officers since 2001. The complement of officers has steadily declined from a high of almost 42,000 in 2001 to the current level of approximately 32,000 police personnel, a steep decline of almost 25%.

This terrible tragic attack did have one positive result. Public support for police and rescue personnel dramatically improved. This immense tragedy did not cause dissention, but actually drew Americans and the international community together. Unfortunately another intention of the perpetrators was to cause an economic decline in NYC and the United States, which did occur, but which has slowly improved. Not surprisingly, the NYPD, faced with extensive and new counter-terrorism responsibilities, continues the successful crime reduction trend to this day.

Conclusion

The New York City Police Department has attempted a number of new crime reduction strategies since the 1980s. The agency wide implementation of community policing after 1990 and the increase in NYPD manpower by more than 30% after 1991 resulted in the stabilization of a very high violent crime rate. In 1994, the New York City Police Department, guided by (former) Police Commissioner William Bratton and (former) Police Chief Louis Anemone, instituted new crime reduction policies which included crime mapping and a new “corporate management” system that directed that regional police commanders become effective long term crime reduction strategy experts. More importantly, the implementation of the “zero tolerance” enhanced enforcement strategy, which targeted not only serious and violent criminals, but street-level concerns like drug dealers and users, removed criminals from the street. Crime rates plummeted and this decline in serious and violent crime continues through 2011, with recorded crime declining more than 80% since 1994.

It is therefore apparent that the police must not only conduct comprehensive investigations following serious crimes, but should also target what many have labeled “quality of life” issues that tend to be of greater importance to neighborhood residents. Enhanced enforcement of crimes involving drug usage and the illicit sale of narcotics is a key element of these crime reduction endeavors.

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