

FALL 2025

Translational Criminology

Promoting knowledge exchange
to shape criminal justice research,
practice, and policy

FEATURING

Reimagining American Policing:
Making Communities Safer and Stronger

Ten Benchmarks for Evidence-Based Policing

The National Case Closed Project:
Translating Effective Change in Fatal
and Nonfatal Shooting Investigations

Victim Surveys Can Shape New Policies
and Provide a More Complete Understanding
of Crime Trends

“Come on in, the Water’s Fine,
Just Remember Your Life Vest.”

Policing Can Be Evidence-Based and
Make a Difference

In Memoriam: Ronald V. Clarke

CEBCP MISSION STATEMENT

The Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy (CEBCP), housed within the Department of Criminology, Law and Society at George Mason University, seeks to make scientific research a key component in decisions about crime and justice policies by advancing rigorous studies in criminal justice and criminology through research–practice collaborations and proactively serving as an informational link to practitioners and the policy community. *Translational Criminology* advances this mission by illustrating examples of how research is converted into criminal justice practice.

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From the Editor in Chief

I did not want to begin my letter to all of you on a negative note, but there is no way to avoid it: this is a tough year for evidence-based anything. The core ideal that the Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy (CEBCP), home to *Translational Criminology* Magazine, was founded on — “to make scientific research a key component in decisions about crime and justice policies” — is being challenged in many ways today. Most fundamentally, to achieve CEBCP’s core ideal requires substantial investment from government, non-governmental, and educational sectors to generate high-quality research and then translate and institutionalize findings into practice. Yet, this year, we all share the experience of entering an uncertain environment for both science and translation. The reductions in funding, the halting of several projects, and the rapidly changing requirements from governmental units have impacted all of us, and many of our colleagues and friends have lost their jobs and livelihoods. These events serve as a sober reminder that while we all certainly believe in what we do, research is not a voluntary, “just for fun” endeavor. It is a serious activity with significant consequences, requiring a substantial amount of effort, investment, and long-term commitment.

Given the current funding environment, the executive team at the CEBCP has decided not to hold a Symposium in 2026. For those who may not be aware, the CEBCP symposium is a substantial investment of time and funds, as the symposium is a highly curated free event, and we cover all speakers’ travel costs. The reason we do this is that we strongly believe research knowledge should be freely available and that we should support other researchers and practitioners working to advance evidence-based crime policy. Although I have not counted, I suspect that since our inception in 2008, we have supported hundreds of individuals as speakers or researchers in some capacity to come to George Mason University and the Washington, DC area to share their expertise with others. Through our symposia, congressional briefings, summer schools, workshops, seminars, and webinars, we have worked to develop synergies among those who share a passion for not only generating the supply of science but also figuring out how to apply and institutionalize it into practice.

Let me say that our decision about the 2026 symposium is a strategic one. The CEBCP is unique in the field, and the team is incredibly proud of what we have accomplished. Thus, we will continue to invest in more targeted activities, including our congressional briefings, the next International Summer School for Policing Scholarship, *Translational Criminology* Magazine, and more targeted workshops and events. We continue, as always, to train new scholars in the field (you can see all of our graduate research assistants on our team

member page here: <https://cebcp.org/team/>). Thanks to the support of our college, we will continue to invest in our research projects and activities, even when they are not funded by external sources. We will continue to be committed to CEBCP’s ideals.

Each of the features in this issue of *Translational Criminology* exemplifies these ideals. Projects in Baltimore City (see Nolan et al.), New York City (see Xie et al.), and across the nation (see Strom et al.) showcase the excellent work of everyday research-practice teams in action and the impacts these teams are having in reducing violence, improving services to victims, and enhancing justice system effectiveness. Two police chiefs (James Gerace and Brendan Forte) describe how they continue the hard work of achieving evidence-based policing. Relatedly, Chris Koper and I, in support of local efforts, present a guide for police agencies on how to benchmark their successes in becoming more evidence-based. CEBCP’s Executive Director, David Weisburd, in his *In Memoriam* for Ronald Clarke, personifies CEBCP’s ideal in Clarke’s vision for the field, reminding us all of this important lifelong pursuit.

No amount of negativity can diminish the value that all of us here at CEBCP and all of you reading our magazine share: that science is not only fundamentally important but also essential to advancing the well-being of our society. Bravo to all of you who, in your own ways, try to keep this endeavor moving along.

Cynthia Lum

Editor-In-Chief, *Translational Criminology*
& Director, Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy



Reimagining American Policing: Making Communities Safer and Stronger

By James J. Nolan, Natasha C. Pratt-Harris, Kevin Daniels, Paul C. Archibald, Henry H. Brownstein, Kimberly Glanville, and Raiana Davis

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The American police are in crisis. Here, we use the term *crisis* as Thomas Kuhn did in his influential book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.¹ It refers to a necessary stage in the process of revolutionary reform. According to Kuhn, “normal” practice—in science or institutions—occurs within a paradigm. The paradigm is the conceptual framework that unites a profession. It helps the community of practitioners identify problems or “puzzles” worthy of the profession’s attention. And it provides exemplars of good practice. Over time, insoluble problems and anomalies arise. Attempts to resolve them within the paradigm fail, and a stage of crisis occurs. The crisis, then, is the crucible from which speculations about new paradigms emerge.

For more than a century, the paradigm that has united the American police has centered on controlling crime and maintaining social order through law enforcement. In fact, the FBI’s Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program was established in the late 1920s to provide a scorecard for this work, which in turn reinforced this paradigm. Today, the terms *police* and *law enforcement* are used interchangeably, conflating the profession with a single authoritarian task and preventing us from envisioning the police in a more effective public safety role.

For more than 60 years, the American police have faced allegations of abuse, including over-enforcement (leading to mass incarceration), excessive force, and racial discrimination. The profession has also struggled to find comprehensive solutions to crime and to significantly improve crime clearance rates.² Since the 1960s, nearly all police reform efforts in the United States, including presidential commissions, U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) pattern-or-practice investigations, court-ordered consent decrees, law enforcement accreditation, and civilian oversight, have sought to address these issues without fundamentally shifting the underlying paradigm. This has led to the current crisis and speculations about new ways forward, including defunding or abolishing the police.

The revolutionary reforms we envision and are currently testing in Baltimore do not eliminate the police or the law enforcement function of the police. Instead, it identifies a desired outcome for all police activity—i.e., strong, safe neighborhoods. The enforcement of laws becomes one of many tools in the police toolbox for officers to use judiciously and strategically in furtherance of this desired end.

Speculating about Paradigms

Over the past three decades, social scientists have examined the

relationship between collective efficacy—defined as “cohesion among residents combined with shared expectations for social control in public space”—and the presence of disorder and crime.³ Many of these studies demonstrate that, among neighborhoods with similar characteristics, those with higher levels of collective efficacy exhibit significantly lower crime rates.⁴ In his 2012 Presidential address to the American Society of Criminology, Robert Sampson, a leading figure in the study of collective efficacy, asked the question “...what role can the police play in building collective efficacy?”⁵ This is an interesting question, because building neighborhood-level collective efficacy is not closely aligned with the logic of law enforcement.

A concrete example of this occurred in Baltimore, where in 2017 the federal government issued a consent decree after finding that the Baltimore Police Department had engaged in a pattern of discriminatory practices against African Americans.⁶ By invitation from the city, Morgan State University faculty designed the Police and Community Engagement (PACE) program. It was grounded in an epidemiological criminology framework,⁷ and involved the police and community members in sustained dialogue on issues of procedural justice, perceived legitimacy of the law, perceived legitimacy of the police, and self-reported willingness to cooperate with the police. Despite positive feedback from participants regarding PACE’s contributions to community safety, the program was not sustained. This is the fate of many non-law enforcement programs in police agencies. They simply do not align with the priorities of the law enforcement paradigm.

We wondered if PACE—and collective-efficacy building programs like it—would be prioritized if the role of the police shifted *from* law enforcement *to* helping communities remain safe and strong. So, we changed the typical evidence-based research question from “what works in policing” to “what makes neighborhoods and communities safer, and how can the police help make that happen?”

Neighborhood Dynamics and the Neighborhood Atmosphere

The concept of collective efficacy is tied to a belief in human agency, i.e., the capacity of individuals and groups to intentionally exercise control over the nature and quality of their lives.⁸ The two modes of human agency relevant to policing are *collective* and *proxy* (column 1 of Figure 1). This is where the expectations the police and community have of each other are rooted.

For our purposes, collective *agency* refers to the police and residents viewing themselves as collaborative partners in public safety. Collective *efficacy*, then, refers to the shared belief in their collective power to keep a neighborhood safe. On the other hand, proxy agency means the police are expected to control crime and maintain order on behalf of the community. Proxy efficacy refers to shared beliefs about the competence of the police in achieving this task. These dynamic processes are depicted in (1) and (2) of Figure 1. This creates an atmosphere (3) in local neighborhoods that is associated with crime, violence, and many other social problems.

The neighborhood atmosphere is depicted as a receptacle containing varying levels of three substances: interdependence, frustration/conflict, and dependence. *Interdependence* refers to residents knowing and trusting each other, along with a willingness to work together and with the police to resolve community problems. *Frustration/conflict* is the degree to which residents avoid each other, do not work well together, or do not trust or like the police. *Dependence* is the degree to which residents trust the police to act effectively on their behalf. High collective efficacy beliefs create interdependence. High proxy efficacy beliefs create dependence. And low collective or proxy efficacy beliefs create frustration/conflict. The three barrels in Figure 1 represent the varying nature of these three components.

Figure 1. Neighborhood Dynamics and the Neighborhood Atmosphere

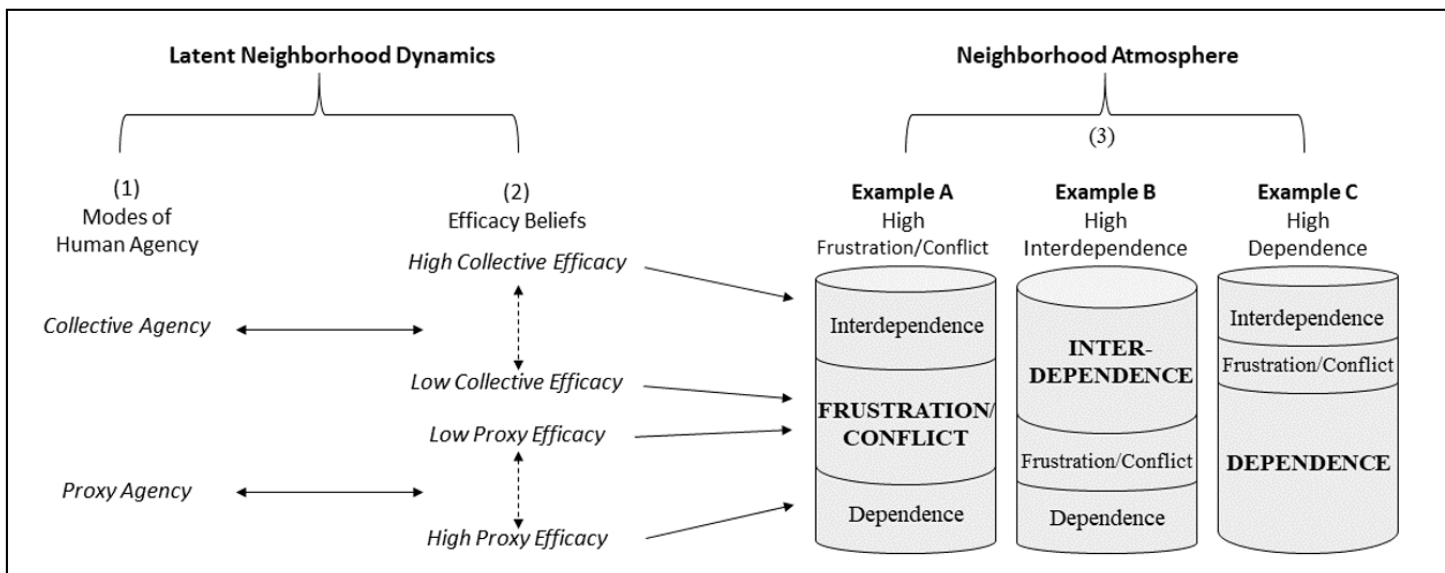


Table 1 illustrates the importance of these ideas, using data from the 2021 West Virginia Social Survey (WVSS).⁹ The WVSS is a mail survey of households in West Virginia randomly selected from each of the state's fifty-five counties that asks various questions about community bonds, trust in police and government, and experiences with social, physical, and emotional problems. Using this data, we computed¹⁰ for each of the three neighborhood examples from Figure 1 the probabilities of crime victimization within the past year, the expectations of neighbors for informal social control (i.e., responding to break up a fight in the street), and the expectation that neighbors would assist a person returning from prison.

atmosphere on a vertical axis and levels of crime on a horizontal axis. By doing this, four neighborhood types emerge: anomic, responsive, vulnerable, and strong.¹¹ Each of these neighborhood types provides a context for tailoring policing strategies with an eye toward the strong-neighborhood ideal. For example, if the starting place for a police intervention is an *anomic* neighborhood, a successful policing strategy might include police-community dialogue to discuss ways to secure the area and then mobilize more people and resources. If successful, this would move the neighborhood toward the *responsive* quadrant. Once there, and with more people and resources involved, comprehensive plans could be developed to reduce crime levels. If

Table 1. Neighborhood Atmosphere: Crime, Informal Social Control, & Prison Reintegration

	Example A	Example B	Example C
Probability of reporting a physical or verbal assault victimization that occurred in the past 12 months.	62 %	<1%	4%
Probability of reporting a theft victimization at home that occurred in the past 12 months.	77%	<1%	5%
Probability of expecting neighbors to break up a fight in the street in front of their house.	<1%	99%	17%
Probability of expecting neighbors to assist a person returning to the neighborhood from prison.	2%	57%	21%

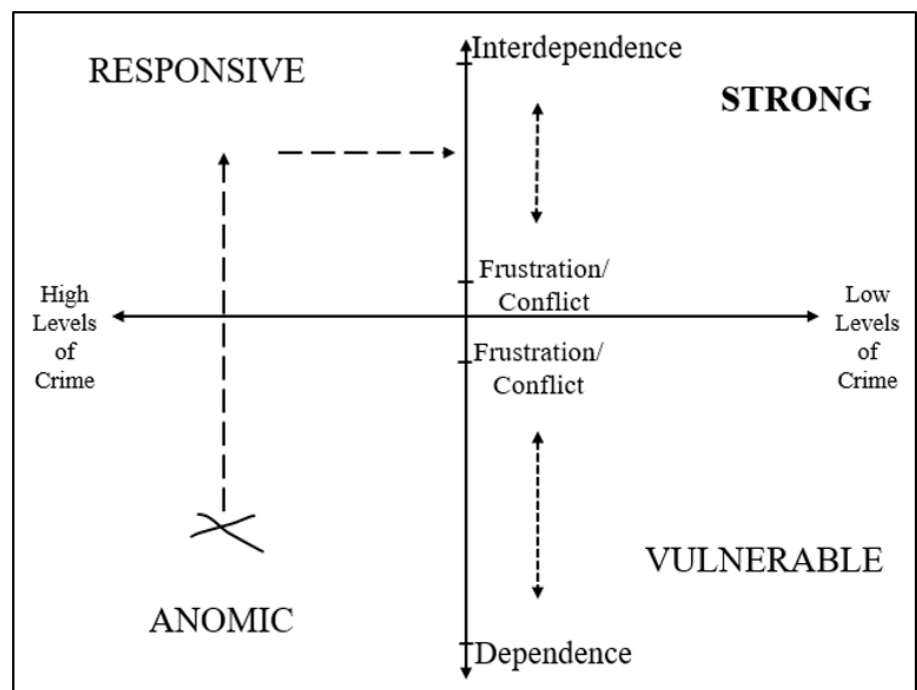
The analysis reveals the importance of neighborhood atmosphere for public safety. Neighborhoods with high levels of frustration and conflict (example A) are the most dangerous of the three examples. These are places where the risk of crime is high and where residents are least expected to intervene to stop a fight or help someone return to the neighborhood from prison. The opposite is true in interdependent neighborhoods. This is where the risk of crime is lowest, and where neighbors are most expected to act to prevent harm or assist a reintegrating offender (example B). And dependent neighborhoods (example C) are mixed. The risk of crime in these neighborhoods is low, but the expectation of neighbors to break up a fight in the street or help returning offenders is also low.

Situational Policing

By broadening our gaze to include both levels of crime and the neighborhood atmosphere, we can envision a new approach to policing, as shown in Figure 2.

In Figure 2, we represent the neighborhood

Figure 2. Situational Policing



successful, this would move the neighborhood toward the *strong* neighborhood type. This is the desired outcome of police action in a situational policing framework.

A Test in Baltimore

With funding from the National Science Foundation (NSF),¹² our team from Morgan State University and West Virginia University is conducting a randomized control trial in four anomic neighborhoods in Baltimore. Two will receive the PACE treatment and two will not. We want to know 1) the impact of the neighborhood atmosphere on crime in Baltimore, and 2) if PACE—cast within a situational policing frame—could successfully change a neighborhood from anomic to responsive. To do so, we employ participatory action research (PAR) methods in our survey work, recruiting and compensating residents as co-researchers. These community members help collect, analyze, and interpret data, and collaboratively generate hypotheses about what might improve local conditions. In this way, the research process itself becomes an integral component of the intervention in the treatment neighborhoods.

At the time of writing, nearly half of the neighborhood surveys are now completed, and the PACE intervention is underway in two neighborhoods. Preliminary findings are consistent with the data in Table 2, showing that neighborhood atmosphere has a significant effect on the risk of crime in our four project neighborhoods. As levels of interdependence increase in these Baltimore neighborhoods, the odds of having been the victim of a violent assault in the neighborhood decrease by 31%, and the odds of having had something stolen at home decrease by 37%. Moreover, as frustration and conflict increase by one standard deviation, the odds of having recently been assaulted with a weapon increase by 231%, and the odds of having experienced a recent theft increase by 58%.

While earlier analysis provides evidence of the importance of neighborhood atmosphere for public safety, it is still too early to tell whether PACE will create higher levels of interdependence and transform neighborhoods from anomic to responsive. We expect to gain more insight in the coming year as we begin the second round of surveys.

Implications for Police Reform

Solutions to contemporary problems in American policing are limited by the law enforcement paradigm itself. By expanding our view of crime control to include neighborhood dynamics, atmosphere, and community outcomes, a different framework emerges that offers new ways to think strategically about police work. Programs like PACE, as well as other community- and problem-oriented initiatives, become useful tools in doing “real police work.” Finally, a framework like this can also help evidence-based police researchers by enabling new research questions within varying neighborhood types. It also provides an opportunity to retest the law enforcement programs deemed successful to assess their impact on the neighborhood atmosphere.

Endnotes

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- 12 NSF Award Number 2222511.

Ten Benchmarks for Evidence-Based Policing

By Cynthia Lum and Christopher S. Koper

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Cynthia Lum



Christopher Koper

As first defined and promoted by Lawrence Sherman, evidence-based policing is a philosophy and operational approach in which strategies, tactics, and decision-making in policing are shaped, guided, and evaluated by knowledge derived from systematic and empirical science, analysis, research, and problem-solving.¹ More broadly, as we detail in our book, *Evidence-Based Policing: Translating Research into Practice*,² evidence-based policing encompasses efforts to generate and improve the supply, demand for, and utilization of scientific knowledge in policing, as well as the processes and techniques that connect the supply of research with its implementation. We argue that these implementation efforts involve: (1) translating research knowledge into digestible and usable forms, (2) fostering receptivity towards science within police agencies and the communities in which they operate, and (3) determining how to institutionalize knowledge and scientific processes into everyday police practices and decision-making.

More than four decades of rigorous research in policing now provide significant guidance on evidence-based practices. Many police leaders and organizations have rightly endeavored to incorporate this evidence into their daily operations, with two of these efforts featured in this issue (see the articles by James Gerace and Brendan Forte). Excellent examples of these efforts are also showcased in CEBCP's *Evidence-Based Policing Hall of Fame*.³ However, these leaders and many others also recognize that evidence-based policing is a challenging endeavor, often requiring the re-engineering of decades of ingrained organizational infrastructure, policies, practices, habits, and traditions. While this is hard work for any organization, it is particularly so for those committed to public service, where incentives to adjust are weaker than in the private sector.

Given the challenges of evidence-based policing, law enforcement leaders often ask us: "How do I know when my agency has achieved evidence-based policing?" In response, we provide ten benchmarks. We present each in no particular order, and offer them as questions rather than directives, as they are intended to prompt assessment and inquiry. Our advice to those interested in pursuing an

evidence-based policing approach is to first gauge and assess your agency's alignment with these benchmarks, leveraging the assistance of researchers and practitioners experienced in *implementing* evidence-based policing. Then, choose a few to work on—it really doesn't matter which or in what order. Since all systems within policing are intricately connected and linked, practicing evidence-based policing in any area is a worthwhile exercise in advancing an evidence-based approach.

1. Are officers being trained on evidence-based strategies and tactics?

An evidence-based agency is one that regularly trains its officers, detectives, supervisors, and command staff in evidence-based strategies and tactics across all its training modalities.⁴ Aligning training with the evidence base requires a meticulous examination of every lesson in an agency's training curriculum, including questioning whether the specifics of each lesson are aligned (or at least closely related) to the evidence. For example, teaching new officers about preventive patrol can be either evidence-based or not, depending on what is exactly taught (e.g., random "omnipresent" patrols versus targeted problem-solving patrols at crime hotspots, with the latter being more evidence-based). The same is true with the idea of broken windows. Officers can be taught to practice high-quality problem-solving (a more evidence-based interpretation of broken windows), or they can be taught arrest-based zero-tolerance strategies (a less evidence-based interpretation). Agencies that incorporate evidence-based policing into their training also intentionally track whether the training is being effectively implemented in the field.

2. Is your agency optimizing proactive patrols for prevention and deterrence?

Research consistently shows that officers are more effective in achieving public safety and police legitimacy when they engage in proactive, place-based, targeted, problem-solving, and community-engaged patrol activities.⁵ However, the bread and butter of traditional patrol and investigations continue to be reactive responses, generalized area

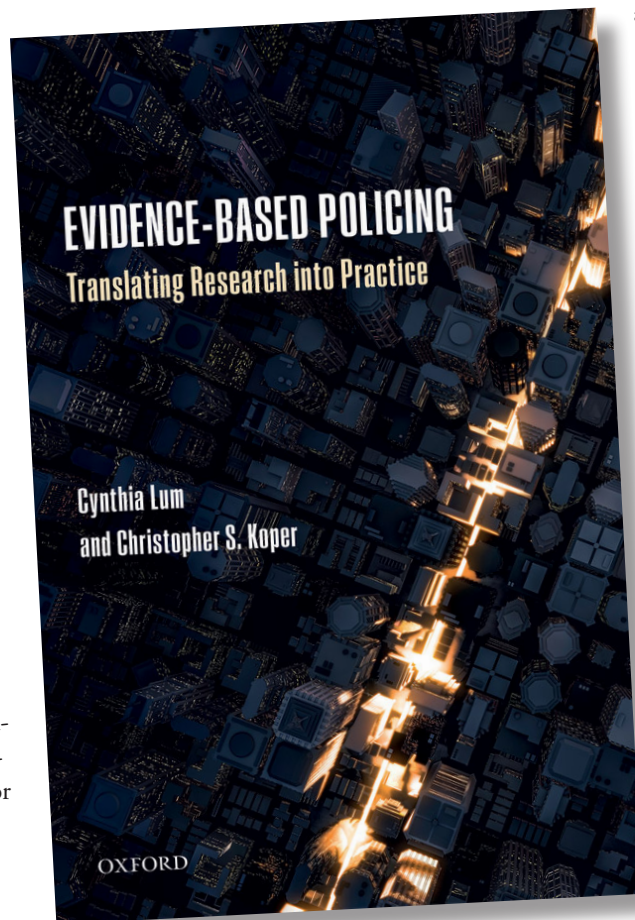
patrols, and a limited proactive toolkit focused on traffic and pedestrian stops.⁶ Understanding and then correcting for this proactive-reactive imbalance, including assessing the dosages, activities, and tool kits of proactive patrol, is essential in aligning patrol deployment with the patrol tactics and strategies that we know can reduce crime and improve community satisfaction.

3. Are investigative practices aligned with the evidence?

A growing body of research on investigations questions the traditional belief that solvability factors should drive resource allocation for investigations. We now know that the efforts of detectives and investigative support services, as well as the organizational systems that strengthen and support these efforts, matter in terms of case clearance and arrest rates.⁷ Evidence-based agencies not only care about whether officers conduct thorough investigations, but also how the organization supports that work through effective training, onboarding, supervision, accountability, strategic planning, and analytical infrastructure. Additionally, given what we know about the efficacy of focusing on places rather than just people to reduce crime, building investigative cases around places is a worthwhile endeavor.⁸

4. Does your agency track patrol and investigative activities?

Agencies that succeed in implementing evidence-based policing have the ability to track their activities. This is one of the most important “Ts” of Sherman’s Triple Ts (for targeting, tracking, and testing) of evidence-based policing.⁹ Agency leaders can’t have command and control over deployment or other organizational processes without actually knowing what the inputs and outputs are (and also how they are linked). For example, to achieve evidence-based proactive approaches, agencies must have the ability to track the types and dosages of patrol activities being carried out. Tracking also involves creating institutional records of successful initiatives, allowing them to be replicated. Furthermore, if commanders can’t track, they can’t deploy strategically, supervise well, analyze interventions against outcomes, or reward officers (more on this to come shortly).



5. Are your crime analysts effectively integrated into deployment and strategic planning for the agency?

Crime analysis is often a basic requirement for evidence-based strategies, given that many focus on preventing, rather than reacting to, crime problems. In agencies that do not regularly practice evidence-based policing, crime analysts primarily operate as reactive recorders of crime statistics or are heavily used in reactive investigations. However, agencies that are succeeding in evidence-based policing proactively and meaningfully incorporate and engage crime analysts in tracking, assessing, evaluating, and adjusting operations. Analysts’ strength and power have always been in supporting strategic prevention and proactivity, especially as they pertain to place-based strategies. The integration of crime analysts also means that they are valued and treated as professional equals to other sworn and non-sworn personnel.

6. Is there receptivity for evidence-based policing?

Are employees across the organization receptive to the core values of evidence-based policing? The most significant core value in evidence-based policing is that actions and decisions should be linked to outcomes through systematic approaches grounded in empirical knowledge, rather than relying solely on clinical experience, tradition, intuition, or consensus. There are many other core values of evidence-based policing that can also be gauged, including attitudes toward problem-solving, proactivity, and dynamic learning. Excessive incongruence in these beliefs across ranks, officers, units, and leadership undermines the achievement of evidence-based policing (and, more generally, the functioning of an agency). Skillful leadership is particularly effective in fostering congruence and promoting receptivity to the shared values of evidence-based policing.

7. Is the practice of evidence-based policing rewarded and incentivized?

Related to #6 above, rewards, incentives, and promotions reflect the values of an agency. Agencies that are on the path to evidence-based policing, therefore, have institutionalized rewards, incentives, and promotional or transfer requirements that reflect the core values of evidence-based policing. For example, sergeants’ exams and interviews might incorporate assessments of an individual’s proactive, place-based, targeted, and community-engaged activities in the field. Promotions to lieutenant might assess critical thinking and strategic



Members of the Evidence-Based Policing Hall of Fame with the 2024 Inductees at the CEBCP Symposium.

skills around building supervisory or support system infrastructure for evidence-based approaches. There might also be a requirement for those seeking promotion to demonstrate how they have integrated crime analysis knowledge into their operational portfolio.

8. Is supervision transformational?

Agencies that are on the right path to evidence-based policing have supervisors who are transformational, not transactional. Transformational supervisors prioritize mentorship, proactive and positive exchanges, and a problem-solving and dynamic learning mentality. They are knowledgeable about research and the value of crime analysis, practice organizational justice, are empathetic, coach-like, and innovative, and provide specific guidance on how officers can carry out effective patrol and investigative tactics. Transformational supervisors are a crucial component of evidence-based policing, as they facilitate change and the implementation of practices shown to be effective.

9. Are support systems evidence-based, or at least open for tracking and evaluation?

Police organizations are beginning to catch up with other organizations that have long recognized that employee success is linked to their satisfaction, wellness, skill advancement, compensation, and success with the various technologies they use. A key benchmark for an advanced, evidence-based policing agency is whether its support systems (e.g., health and wellness, technologies, training, support units, human resources) are also evidence-based. For example, if the agency is using yoga, exercise, or therapy to improve employee wellness, do these things actually enhance wellness, and in what ways? If a new records management or body-worn camera system is adopted, does it meet the expectations of its intended purpose, and can officers utilize these technologies to achieve evidence-based goals? Are the support systems for investigations and patrol (including crime analysis, victim services, forensics, and community groups) being utilized and integrated in ways that are meaningful and effective in promoting evidence-based strategies? In other words, evidence-based

agencies don't just focus on their core systems of deployment or supervision, but also on whether all the support systems for those operations are effectively serving their intended purposes.

10. Is the agency a dynamic learning organization?

Evidence-based agencies must be committed to seeking out evidence on best practices and know where to find this ever-growing body of knowledge. Dynamic learning organizations are those that welcome this knowledge, challenge the status quo, and have internal systems that encourage learning. Detecting whether an agency is a dynamic learning organization requires introspection about how the agency manages change. For example, command staff and chiefs might objectively assess their CompStat meetings or other similar processes in terms of the tone and communication transfer at these meetings. Are these problem-solving strategic sessions (more aligned with dynamic learning), or one-way theatrics (more traditional and anchored in the status quo)? Another way to assess dynamism is to ask how easy it would be to add and remove modules in your academy training curricula and adjust patrol deployment accordingly. How easy would it be for your organization to transition first-line supervisors from being reactive responders to more proactive transformational coaches? How would you grade your agency on its ability to adapt and change to new information?

What does success look like?

Agencies pursuing an evidence-based approach often gauge their success against the two essential mandates of modern, democratic policing—public safety and police legitimacy. However, we note that becoming a more evidence-based organization is often an uphill process that requires time, effort, determination, and commitment. Agencies may seek to achieve more modest successes, such as temporary reductions in crime at targeted problem locations or improvements in victim services for specific types of crimes. Through these efforts, officers can enhance their ability to recognize, process, and address complex problems, thereby engaging in prevention rather than continuing to focus primarily on reacting to individual calls. These smaller wins are essential, as they serve as footholds for institutionalizing evidence-based policing practices over the long term. We encourage agencies not only to measure success by final outcomes, but also to track incremental wins in infrastructure building that can be sustained over time.

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The National Case Closed Project: Translating Effective Change in Fatal and Nonfatal Shooting Investigations

By Kevin J. Strom, Tom Scott, and Amanda Young

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In jurisdictions across the country, law enforcement agencies are grappling with the persistent challenge of solving or “clearing” violent crimes. Clearance rates remain stubbornly low in many cities and towns, and the ripple effects of unsolved violence are felt not just by victims and their families, but by entire communities.

According to data from the FBI’s Crime Data Explorer, law enforcement agencies cleared 58% of murders, 27% of rapes, 28% of robberies, and 46% of aggravated assaults reported to law enforcement in 2023. These relatively low rates are not an anomaly; over the last several decades, violent crime clearance rates have either remained stable or declined (Asher, 2023). Moreover, nonfatal shooting clearance rates, which are not tracked by many law enforcement agencies, are likely even lower, with some larger police departments reporting nonfatal shooting clearance rates near 10% (Grimm, Schuba, & Boyle, 2025).

There are many explanations for stagnant clearance rates, including those related to situational factors of the crime (e.g., lack of evidence), law enforcement staffing and resources (e.g., high investigator caseloads), community factors (e.g., lack of trust in the police), and poor investigative practices (e.g., insufficient investigator supervision) (Prince et al., 2021). Some have argued that since clearance rates nationally have not improved, this means that advancements in the field of policing, including expanded capabilities in forensics and technology, have had a limited impact on investigations or investigative outcomes. Yet others have shown that clearance rate trends vary widely across law enforcement agencies (Scott et al., 2019; Worrall, 2019). Furthermore, studies comparing agencies with high and low clearance rates for violent crime over time have identified important differences in agency practices that are tied to investigative success. These factors include the level of internal communication and coordination, the structure of an agency’s investigator supervision and oversight, and the degree of involvement from leadership (Lum et al., 2024; Wellford, 2018). This research, along with other research such



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as an evaluation of the changes that the Boston Police Department made in how they investigate homicides (Braga & Dusseault, 2018; Braga et al., 2019), supports the premise that law enforcement agencies can make meaningful changes in clearance rates by addressing how they respond to and investigate violent crime incidents.

The National Case Closed Project

The National Case Closed Project (NCCP) was launched to help law enforcement agencies improve their violent crime clearance rates, with a particular focus on fatal and nonfatal shooting cases.¹ At its core, NCCP is about turning knowledge into action. The project is designed to identify and support law enforcement agencies in implementing effective investigative practices that improve case outcomes, foster positive relationships with community members, and support lasting improvements to how law enforcement agencies respond to and investigate violent crime.

Engagement with NCCP sites begins with a comprehensive assessment of how an agency investigates violent crime. The process includes interviews within the law enforcement agency, as well as with community partners, prosecutors, forensic scientists, and other stakeholders. Additionally, it involves reviewing and coding a sample of investigative case files for fatal and nonfatal shooting incidents, along with a review of all relevant departmental policies. These inputs are used to identify agency strengths and areas for improvement. The assessment process draws on national best practices, scientific evidence, subject matter expertise, and local context to generate actionable recommendations. These recommendations are then used to guide the direct support and implementation phases of the project.

The NCCP includes training and technical assistance (TTA) to support each site in implementing assessment recommendations. TTA includes monthly check-in calls, on-site workshops, peer exchanges, and resource development. The goal is to provide direction and guidance to agencies and track their success as they

implement changes—whether that means reorganizing investigative units, launching new training initiatives, or improving engagement with victims and witnesses.

Translation in Action: How NCCP Is Driving Change

The NCCP not only identifies areas for improvement within partnering agencies but also supports the implementation of best practices to enhance case clearance rates. Across the country, law enforcement agencies that have participated in NCCP assessments are making meaningful changes to how they investigate fatal and nonfatal shootings. These changes reflect a growing commitment to evidence-informed practice, cross-disciplinary collaboration, and community-centered policing.

Organizational Change: Breaking Down Silos.

The NCCP team conducted an analysis of data drawn from 960 fatal and nonfatal shooting case files supplied by 12 agencies, including the 10 designated NCCP sites. The findings indicate that, although incident characteristics, suspect demographics, and victim-offender relationships are largely consistent between fatal and nonfatal shooting cases, fatal shootings are cleared at a significantly higher rate. The analysis further demonstrates that fatal shootings typically receive a much more robust initial response than nonfatal shootings, involving a greater deployment of officers, detectives, and supervisors, swifter detective arrival times, increased evidence collection on scene, greater utilization of support units, and a higher volume of victim and witness leads.

To bridge the disparity in clearance rates between fatal and nonfatal shootings, many agencies have reorganized their investigative units as a primary strategy. Multiple organizations have created units dedicated to nonfatal shootings or integrated their homicide and nonfatal shooting investigators into unified teams, acknowledging the frequent overlap of suspects, witnesses, and investigative methods across these cases. This structural reform facilitates enhanced information sharing, minimizes redundant efforts, and ensures that nonfatal shooting investigations receive attention and resources equivalent to those allocated to homicide cases.

Crime Scene Response: Closing the Gaps. NCCP case file analyses have revealed a troubling pattern: while homicide scenes typically receive a full-court press from investigators, supervisors, and crime scene technicians, nonfatal shootings often do not. Based on the case file analysis, 92% of fatal shootings had two or more detectives respond to the scene, whereas only 42% of nonfatal shootings had two or more detectives respond. In 31% of the nonfatal shooting cases, no detective responded to the crime scene at all.

When key personnel, such as investigators, fail to respond to the scene, critical evidence may be missed entirely or collected too late to be useful. In response, agencies such as the Greensboro Police Department (NC) and Milwaukee Police Department (WI) have implemented new protocols that require investigator presence at shooting scenes and mandate standardized documentation procedures. Additionally, the Salt Lake City Police Department (UT) is working to educate all Patrol Watch Commanders that a detective should be called to respond to each non-fatal shooting scene, including those that occur during off-duty hours. NCCP sites in Greensboro, Milwaukee, Salt Lake City, and Riviera Beach (FL) introduced a major crimes response checklist to outline expectations for responding officers and their supervisors.



Case Prioritization: Identifying Ways to Prioritize Nonfatal Shootings.

Police departments that experience high rates of nonfatal shootings frequently do not have the staff or resources sufficient to prioritize these investigations. To compensate, agencies often prioritize nonfatal shootings based on how likely they are to lead to an arrest (i.e., how “solvable” the case is). How staff determine which cases have higher solvability can vary by agency and individuals, making the solvability determination inconsistent and potentially

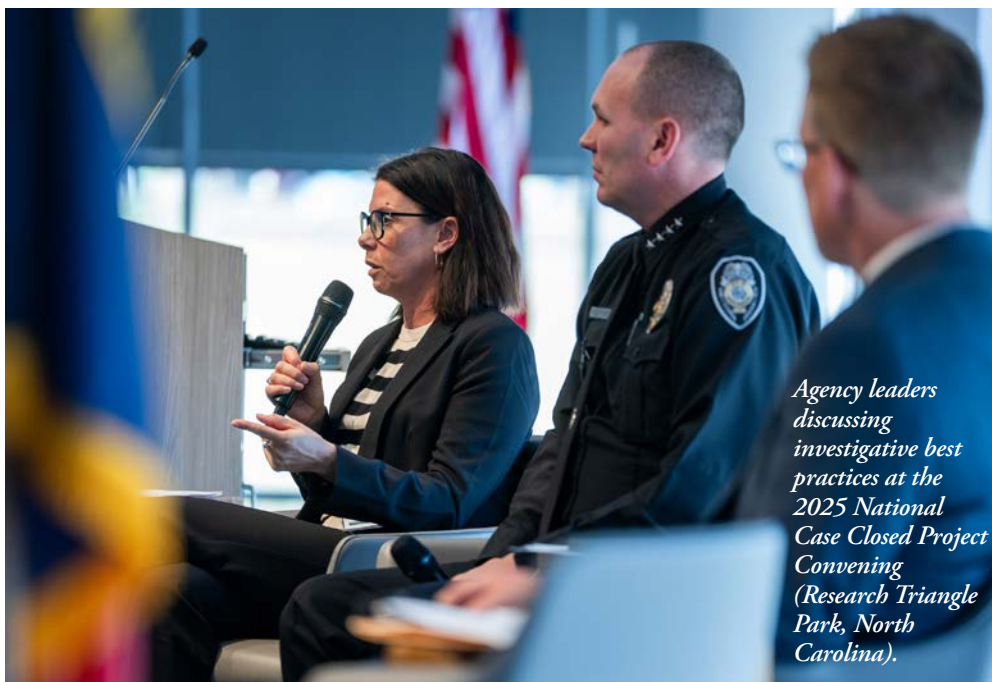
inaccurate. To address this issue, the NCCP developed a solvability calculator for use in nonfatal shooting investigations.² The NCCP is currently working with law enforcement agencies to evaluate and improve this tool.

Specialized Units: Tapping Into Multidisciplinary Expertise.

Another area of focus has been the integration of specialized units into shooting investigations. The review of case file data revealed that 47% of nonfatal shootings and 43% of fatal shooting cases did not report leveraging any specialized units. Digital evidence teams, crime analysts, forensic scientists, and victim advocates all bring unique skills that can strengthen a case—but too often, they’re brought in late or not at all. Interviews conducted as part of the NCCP assessments confirmed that support personnel feel underutilized and are eager to contribute more to investigations. Following their NCCP assessment, the Columbia Police Department (SC) embedded a crime analyst in its shooting response team, ensuring that surveillance footage and phone data are collected and analyzed in real-time. Victim services have also taken on a more prominent role, with agencies such as the Roanoke Police Department (VA), Greensboro Police Department (NC), and Milwaukee Police Department (WI) taking steps to expand their advocacy staff to non-domestic homicides and nonfatal shootings. Agencies are increasingly recognizing

that advocates are not just support staff—they're essential partners in building trust, encouraging victim participation, and reducing the risk of retaliation. As one chief put it during the 2025 NCCP convening, "We can't solve these cases without the community, and we can't reach the community without our advocates."

Training and Supervision: Building Capacity. A common recommendation for NCCP sites was to provide their violent crime investigators and investigative supervisors with additional training in investigative techniques. This was based on the finding that many agencies have investigators who have not received advanced training in investigations. Moreover, there is often no standardized training program. Instead, investigators take specific opportunities when they



Agency leaders discussing investigative best practices at the 2025 National Case Closed Project Convening (Research Triangle Park, North Carolina).

arise. Additionally, in some agencies, investigators and even investigative supervisors lack previous experience in crime investigations, making the need for training more acute. Several NCCP sites have made changes to improve training in their investigative units. For example, the Salt Lake City Police Department mandated that detectives investigating homicides and nonfatal shootings, as well as their supervisors, receive advanced training in these types of cases. Additionally, several NCCP sites have launched or strengthened detective academies, with curricula that include trauma-informed interviewing, case management, and the use of technology in investigations. Supervisors are receiving training on case review standards and are expected to conduct regular audits to ensure quality and consistency. NCCP sites are also taking investigator supervision more seriously by replacing informal case check-ins with formal case reviews to help ensure cases receive a thorough investigation and leads are not missed.

Community Engagement: Developing Trust. Community engagement remains a cornerstone of sustainable change in investigations, as authentic engagement builds relationships and trust between the community and the agency. One component of the NCCP assessment method includes interviews with representatives of community organizations in the area to understand their working relationship with the agency and their understanding of resident attitudes about the department. These interviews revealed the value that law enforcement partnerships with community-based organizations have in reducing crime, improving investigations, and building resident trust. Both law enforcement and community perspectives across NCCP sites were that for community engagement to be effective, there must be a strong commitment from law enforcement leader-

ship. Partnering with organizations trusted by residents provides opportunities for those organizations to vouch for law enforcement and assist with information sharing between the community and the police. Community-based organizations were also leveraged as messengers about available crime reporting options and for initiatives that engaged youth with the goal of reframing the anti-snitching culture.

Implications for Policy & Practice

The NCCP incorporates a collaborative process to assess the strengths and needs of agencies and works with agency leaders to translate these findings and recommendations into real changes in policy and practice. For this translational process to work effectively, several factors should be in place, including leadership buy-in from the law enforcement agency,

mutual trust and a two-way street for collaboration, and the commitment to a multi-disciplinary approach.

A key part of NCCP is also building a broader community of practice and helping to connect the dots between research, practice, and policy through national convenings, shared tools, and an online toolkit of resources (www.nationalcaseclosed.org). The project's toolkit includes self-assessment guides³ and resources that agencies across the country can use to improve their own investigative practices.

The NCCP is about more than just closing cases. It is about closing the gap between what we know works and what is happening on the ground and giving agencies the tools, support, and space to reflect, adapt, and improve.

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- 2 See <https://nationalcaseclosed.org/products/solvability-calculator.cfm>
- 3 See National Case Closed Project: Self-Assessment Guide for Improving Agency Investigative Outcomes <https://nationalcaseclosed.org/toolkit/docs/14876NCCP-AgencySelfAssessGuide.pdf>

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Victim Surveys Can Shape New Policies and Provide a More Complete Understanding of Crime Trends

By Min Xie, Michael Rempel, Jeremy Travis, Stephen Koppel, and Preeti Chauhan

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New York City (NYC) is often at the forefront of national trends in criminal justice policy. After transforming from a city notorious for its dangerousness in the 1970s to one with the lowest crime rate among the nation's 20 largest cities in 2014, its policing practices became a national model.¹ However, since the pandemic, NYC has struggled with an increase in serious crime, mirroring broader nationwide trends.² While crime rates mostly fell from 2023 through the first half of 2025, NYC's post-pandemic recovery has lagged behind that of other large U.S. cities.³

During its historic three-decade crime decline, NYC's enforcement history followed a complicated trajectory. While crime fell steadily, the city drove down its daily jail population from over 20,000 in 1991 to under 6,000 at the pandemic's onset in early 2020.⁴ By contrast, policing trends saw multiple reversals. For most of the period from 1990 to the early 2010s, the city saw increases in aggressive stop-question-and-frisk practices and "broken windows" policing of low-level offenses.⁵ Partly in recognition of the unintended effects of these practices on public trust—particularly among young men of color—NYC then adopted a lighter-touch policing approach until 2022, when post-pandemic enforcement priorities changed.⁶

In May 2025, John Jay College of Criminal Justice convened a two-day conference, *Justice at the Crossroads*, to explore the future of criminal justice policy at what may be a crossroads for NYC.⁷ To set the stage for this convening, we published two reports.⁸ The first report documented trends in enforcement, incarceration, and racial



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disparities in NYC over several decades, using *officially reported* "index" crimes as defined by the Uniform Crime Report (UCR). The report showed steep declines in index crimes and shootings from 1990 until the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, followed by increases in most offense categories (especially in 2020 and 2021).⁹ Despite these increases, NYC remains one of the safest cities in the U.S. (e.g., second lowest for murder, lowest for robbery).¹⁰

We also conducted a novel analysis of *crime victimization* in NYC with data from the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS).¹¹ As prior analysis of the NCVS has shown, reported crime data offers only a partial view of actual victimization, with roughly 50% of crimes going unreported.¹² To better understand the phenomenon of non-reporting, this second study allowed us to examine trends using a measure of crime taken directly from victims, compare NYC to other cities and the rest of the nation, and explore the reasons why some crimes may not be reported. Here we highlight several key findings from the analysis of NCVS data and consider their implications for criminal justice policy debates.

NCVS Confirms Broader Trends in Crime but Highlights Underreporting

Victimization trends from the NCVS broadly mirrored trends in reported index crimes (see above). From 1996 to 2022, the violent

crime victimization rate in NYC dropped by 61% (from 38 to 15 per 1,000), while the property crime victimization rate fell by 38% (161 to 100 per 1,000). Just before and after the pandemic, NYC showed modest increases in violent victimization from 2019 to 2021, with increases starting several years earlier for property crimes. Compared to other large U.S. cities, NYC has consistently had lower rates of both violent and property crime victimization. The difference in crime rates between NYC and other large cities has changed over time. NYC's violent crime victimization rates were 28% lower than those of other large cities in the late 1990s and 32% lower in the early 2020s. NYC's property crime victimization rates were 49% lower than those of other large cities in the late 1990s and 36% lower in the early 2020s.

While the trends observed in the NCVS and UCR were similar, a major limitation of the UCR is its reliance on crimes reported to the police. In NYC, more than 50% of violent crimes and 70% of property crimes are not reported to the police, with reporting rates declining over time. During the late 1990s, 49% of all violent crimes were reported to the police, but by the early 2020s, the rate had dropped to 35%. Reporting rates for property crimes were even lower, falling from 31% in the late 1990s to 21% by the early 2020s. In the early 2020s, the reporting rates for crimes in NYC were lower compared to other large U.S. cities for both violent crimes (35% vs. 42%) and property crimes (21% vs. 29%).

Why Victims are Not Reporting Crime to the Police

The NCVS data revealed several key reasons why victims chose not to report crimes to the police. Seriousness of the crime was an important factor. When the data were pooled from 1996 to 2022, 18% of victims nationwide (and in NYC) indicated that they did not call the police because the crime was minor (e.g., “small or no loss,” “kid stuff”). Other frequently mentioned reasons were that “the police couldn't do anything” (9% nationwide; 11% in NYC), or “wouldn't help” (10% nationwide; 11% in NYC). This latter reason includes perceptions that “police wouldn't think it was important enough,” “wouldn't want to be bothered or get involved,” “police would be inefficient, ineffective,” “police would be biased, would harass/insult respondent, cause respondent trouble, etc.,” and in more rare cases, “offender was police officer.”

Besides showing the mistrust of police among many victims, the NCVS data revealed a steep increase over time in the percentage of victims who did not report crime because the “police wouldn't help.” In the late 1990s, 7% of victims of violent crimes in NYC provided this reason for not reporting. By the early 2020s, this more than doubled, with 16% of victims of violent crimes giving this reason for not reporting. A similar trend was observed in other large cities, where the rate that victims answered “police wouldn't help” to explain their decision not to report a violent crime rose from 8% in the late 1990s to 16% in the early 2020s. While the NCVS data do not directly address the reason for non-reporting or why this reason has increased,

this finding has implications for how policymakers think about policing practices and their impact on public trust.

In contrast to declining reports of crime to the police, the use of victim services increased sharply in NYC among people victimized by serious violence (rape/sexual assault, robbery, and aggravated assault). From 1997 to 2021, the percentage of victims of serious violent crime who reported using such services doubled from 15% to 30%—a rate that was seven times higher than in other large cities. One possible explanation for NYC's higher level of victim service utilization is its extensive network of nonprofit organizations, which provide services in multiple platforms and languages. Another is the city's Crime Victim Assistance Program (CVAP). Launched in 2016, CVAP proactively contacts all victims who report a crime to offer support and services. Other jurisdictions may consider removing barriers to services and adopting proactive approaches to ensure that victims receive the help they need in the aftermath of crime.



Victim Surveys Can Inform Justice Policy and Practice

The NCVS data for NYC emphasize important findings for policy and practice that official reports miss, including prevalence and changes in crime reporting, reasons for not reporting crimes, and use of victim services. These findings highlight the value of victim surveys in informing policies and practices for criminal justice agencies. Based on the findings, we offer several recommendations to better identify and address ongoing challenges in crime reporting and the use of victim services.

Most profoundly, the decline in police reporting raises concerns about the possibility of a criminal justice system losing its legitimacy. The role of the police as the protector of the community is harder to defend when a substantial number of victims choose not to report to the police because of a lack of trust. The problem is not just with NYC—many jurisdictions face similar crises in victim reporting and inadequate police response to calls for services.¹³

This trend of reduced police reporting may reflect a broader socioeconomic context in which many changes have led to a decline in trust in government, including the post-9/11 prioritization of homeland security and reduced resources devoted to community policing, the 2008 financial crisis, the adoption of smartphones and social media, and intense public attention and protests regarding police use of violence and systemic injustice.¹⁴ As the decline in reporting and trust in the police may have many sources, it could be challenging to address police legitimacy. Prior research has suggested that the field may benefit from greater investments in social services and stronger collaborations between the police and alternative service providers.¹⁵ Our analysis of the NCVS data is in line with these recommendations.

Understanding complex questions about crime reporting and why

people often do not report is especially crucial among subgroups of the population, such as communities of color and communities with high numbers of immigrants. Black and Hispanic youth have experienced historically high rates of over-policing. These groups also report lower trust in policing, as recent research in NYC has shown.¹⁶ In immigrant communities, examining experiences of reporting crimes and perceptions of police is particularly important amid increasing Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) enforcement. A robust victimization survey, with sufficient statistical power, could shed light on these important community dynamics.

The NCVS is limited in its capacity to provide sub-national, local data beyond the analysis of NYC and other large populous areas. NYC, Chicago, and a few large metropolitan areas are presently the only jurisdictions in the country whose NCVS results can be broken out in the public-use NCVS data. Absent an easily accessible national resource, local governments, foundations, or nonprofits could be innovative and invest in local victimization surveys to better understand victimization and reporting rates, why many crimes are not reported, and how victims are dealing with the aftermath of crime. Most of the media and public discourse on crime trends in the United States is currently based on crime reports to the police. This is understandable, as official crime reports based mainly on reported crimes are typically the only metrics available. However, this reliance on reported crime data means that the discourse on whether crime is increasing often presents an incomplete picture.

We encourage law enforcement, practitioners, and other stakeholders to be sensitive to the limitations of official records and the value of victim surveys when considering crime trends. Two NYC nonprofits recently joined forces to fund a citywide crime victimization survey—adapting questions from the NCVS and adding others. This was a one-time effort, not an annual survey, but it still provides a helpful model for jurisdictions nationwide.¹⁷ To gain a much-needed understanding of the public's level of trust and confidence in the police, it is especially important to find ways of hearing from those with direct experience—victims of crime.

Tying the two reports mentioned above, crime control policy cannot be understood without understanding the perceptions of victims and people accused of crimes or otherwise subject to enforcement activities.¹⁸ It is notable that, in light of the NCVS results showing declining rates of reporting and declining levels of confidence in police, the policies of NYC in the most recent post-pandemic years have been to increase street stops, summonses, arrests, and pretrial incarceration, which has been accompanied by increases in racial disparities. It remains to be seen whether these recent policing changes reduce crime, improve victims' views toward police, or contribute to a perception of over-policing and racially disproportionate treatment.

Overall, the NCVS results underscore the need for national, state, and city governments to collect data beyond official records to allow for a more nuanced understanding of crime and its consequences. This understanding could lead to greater support for crime victims

and a new focus on improving public trust in government by improving society's response to crime.

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“Come on in, the Water’s Fine, *Just Remember Your Life Vest.*”

By James J. Gerace

James J. Gerace serves as Police Chief for the Town of Colonie, New York, Police Department.

Imagine yourself standing on a beach, gazing toward the horizon, overlooking a vast expanse of ocean. If you stare out far enough, the scene tends to get a little blurry. As you stand on that patch of hard wet sand with the cold waves splashing over your toes, you hear a voice say, “just jump in, it’s not that bad, best to get it over with.” While that advice may work if the only trepidation you have is the chilly sea, what if you have never swum in open water? Is it still best to take the plunge? There is a reason why lifeguards who know these waters put up beach flags for the uninitiated. Similarly, evidence-based policing (EBP) strategies can feel like a vast unknown and often remain out of reach of practitioners. As such, careful attention to warning flags is advised.

Develop a Plan

Benjamin Franklin is known to have said: *“If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail.”* A core responsibility of a police chief is to provide strategic direction for the organization. No navigational tool provides a police leader with the opportunity to offer clear direction more effectively than the strategic planning process. You must ensure your organization addresses critical questions, such as: Who are we? Where are we going? And how will we achieve our goals?¹

Before plunging headfirst into dictating your vision, however, it would be beneficial for a Chief to gather some swim buddies. Policing is big on tradition, and while it is the most adaptable of professions, early-stage resistance to change is a formidable barrier. Do not underestimate the strength of the tide you will be up against. As Machiavelli warned over 500 years ago, *“There is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success, than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things.”*² Implementation challenges abound with evidence-based policing, and what a Chief needs at the outset are shipmates that will help bail water out of the boat when your strategies spring a leak. That’s where intentionally building receptivity and a shared vision within a trusted coalition comes in.

Building Command Staff Receptivity

If you’re a police executive and find yourself hooked on implementing research into everyday police practices, a sound implementation plan is needed.³ Your command staff will be your swim buddies, and



James Gerace

an assessment of their deeply held beliefs and mental models is in order. What do they consider good policing? Shared vision and team knowledge are necessary components of a learning organization.⁴ If you find these skills missing and your team’s understanding of EBP and problem-oriented strategies to be lacking, you will need to prepare for a glacial, not a volcanic, execution.

Colonie Police Department’s Voyage

My exploration of improving police practices within my organization began several years ago as Deputy Chief overseeing Administrative and Training functions. Moving away from instructor whims, we successfully (though sometimes painfully) integrated research into our training curriculum. Literature on human performance, use of force, and effective communications now informs our lesson plans. Moreover, we have successfully institutionalized the science of learning into our course deliveries. Each module is continuously interleaved with other “core” material, making critical concepts “stick” and more transferable. This experience provided the backdrop and belief that we could attempt a department-wide change, incorporating the science of crime prevention into everyday patrol activities. I spent the last couple of years engaged in self-directed study, reading the relevant articles and engaging directly with researchers who were more than willing to discuss their work with an interested practitioner. When I was appointed Chief of Police in January of 2024, I decided to “dive in” and integrate evidence-based strategies throughout our department.

Take a Field Trip (Build a Shared Vision)

Changing a police department is a process, not an event. Those who study change management document clearly that when organizations seek to make fundamental changes in how they conduct business, failure often results.⁵ I wanted to ensure positive feelings toward our new direction with a small group of influential leaders. What better way to instill an upbeat attitude than a field trip? In June 2024, key leaders and I traveled to George Mason University to attend the Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy’s symposium, “Hard Questions for Evidence-Based Crime Policy.” The symposium’s value for us was less about the presentations and more about the anchor it held for our conversations during our 3-day out-of-office excursion.



Chief Gerace with members of his command staff during their visit to Washington, DC.

A shared vision and positive feelings began to develop as we talked during the long road trip and networked while sightseeing our nation's capital. It was a great experience that not only helped cement a vision, but it also allowed this group to begin to believe change was possible and they were empowered to help bring it about.

Hire a Coach (Team Knowledge by Design)

The sports world is full of stories that showcase the idea that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. From the *Miracle on Ice* to Danny O'Shea's (Rick Moranis) *Little Giants*, we have seen what can be accomplished when a group is well-led, shares a vision, and deliberately builds team knowledge by design and not default. Unfortunately, policing frequently lacks intentionality in building team knowledge after the police academy. Rare is the department that brings in expert trainers or external subject matter experts to address a large enough number of employees to reach a tipping point for change.

Special thanks are in order for the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services (DJCS) who for the past several years have hosted the Public Safety Symposium where academics, crime analysts, and police executives come together to share innovative ideas, best practices, lessons learned, and evidence-based strategies for improving public safety and advancing criminal justice. It was at this event a few years ago that I met Dr. Cory Haberman, an Associate Professor and Director of the Institute of Crime Science in the School of Criminal Justice at the University of Cincinnati. Dr. Haberman was contracted to deliver a week-long training on Community Problem-Oriented Policing (CPOP) for the Colonie Police Department in

August 2024. Under his direction, nearly 30 attendees spent the week examining our own specific crime and disorder issues. As the week progressed, we began to develop clarity and the skills to bring the latest academic research to our crime prevention strategies. We ended with a crystallized list of projects to embark on. Lieutenants who participated in the training were given the autonomy to serve as project leaders and began building their focus groups to address the identified problems. Dr. Haberman continued to provide remote guidance during the early stages of our project execution.

Patrol Deployment Strategy

With our long-term CPOP projects addressing chronic issues getting underway, our leadership team also concluded that our patrol deploy-

ments needed adjustment. For decades, our patrol officers were assigned to geographically large zones with no consideration of crime and calls for service concentration. Daily patrol activities were in line with the standard model of policing, emphasizing random patrol and response to calls for service. Further, officers assigned to these zones were given little direction and a wide latitude on their choice of activity during their non-committed time.

Our study of crime prevention research had convinced us to analyze our data and map out our citizen demands for service, but with little internal capacity for analysis we once again turned to DCJS, a tremendous public safety partner. In New York's Capital Region, our department is supported by the Capital Region Crime Analysis Center (CRCAC) which is one of a network of DCJS supported crime analysis centers created to provide analysis and investigative support to local police agencies. The CRCAC was able to provide us with hot spot maps showing in clear detail that our problems were exceedingly concentrated in our major retail shopping centers, budget motels, and with a small number of individual "high utilizers" who struggle with mental health and substance use issues.

With this data, our patrol deployments are becoming more intelligence led. Officers are being directed to prioritize hot spot areas, understanding that while they will still respond to calls across town, the "magnet" effect of these areas should draw them back during their non-committed time. Community Services officers are tasked with addressing the needs of our "high utilizers" who consume large amounts of police and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) resources. Our analysis found that two of these individuals alone generated

more than 70 calls per month for nearly a year. At the time of this article, Community Services officers have managed to reduce their calls to zero for the past two months.

Develop a Stop Doing List

“Sounds great Chief, but we don’t have time for that,” is the typical refrain from many police officers who have been introduced to evidence-based policing. Police executives owe it to their teams not just to add new programs and procedures, but also help them abandon the tasks of yesterday. Every police activity should be put on trial for its effectiveness, and if it doesn’t produce results, resources can be directed elsewhere.⁶ Our department, like most others I have seen, suffers from an “addition” bias, in which we tend to hoard duties more than a Great Aunt collects Beanie Babies. Our agency is actively addressing this by ruthlessly pruning wasteful activities to dedicate resources to more impactful work.

One clear example from our experience was burglar alarms. We found that during normal weekday business hours, our officers were being dispatched to thousands of nuisance burglar alarms every year. These alarms were diverting police officers from proactive crime prevention and community engagement activities and contributed to the officers’ attitudes about “not having time” for proactive policing. We analyzed the data and found that every alarm was false during standard opening and closing mid-week hours. Knowing this allowed us to confidently hold these alarms in a pending queue and reprioritize our patrol activity to focus on hot spot checks and roadway safety initiatives. These activities were deemed more important to public safety during our strategic planning process.

Striking a Reef - Unintended Consequences

After overcoming early-stage resistance, our officers largely bought in, perhaps a little too much. We ended up steering our ship directly into a reef and felt some jarring consequences. The first indications of trouble surfaced with a few citizen complaints about our response times. Initially, we chalked these issues up to high call volumes and minimal staffing, but when they continued to roll in, we had to take a deeper dive. What we found was that our proactive initiatives and hot spot checks became the sole focus of our patrols, occupying our time continuously, rather than just during non-committed periods. This discovery forced us to make our executive intent more clear to patrol supervisors and adjust our dispatch protocols so that we could find a balanced approach (see Sherman’s “just right policing”⁷) between proactive strategies and the duty to maintain a responsive police service to citizen calls.

Interestingly, in all the literature and discussions I conducted regarding EBP implementation, this specific pitfall—the **over-application of proactive strategies**—was never flagged. This experience served as a stark reminder: a Chief must always “go and see the work.”⁸ Leadership in EBP cannot be a distant, high-level exercise; it demands constant engagement, especially during the early phases of

implementation and within daily operations. By regularly observing how new directives are implemented on the ground, listening to front-line officers, and being sensitive to early warning signs, police leaders can anticipate and mitigate unintended consequences, transforming setbacks into pivotal learning experiences. This active vigilance is the ultimate life vest, ensuring that the challenging yet rewarding journey of EBP implementation remains on a safe and productive course.

Overall, the journey into evidence-based policing has proven immensely rewarding, leaving me hopeful that this process will be fundamental for the future advancement of public safety. While the implementation process inevitably encountered challenges and required significant organizational adaptation, these experiences proved crucial for learning and growth. Colonie Police Department’s experience underscores that successful integration of evidence-based policing demands not only rigorous strategic planning and internal coalition-building, but also dynamic leadership that fosters continuous learning and responsive adjustment when academic theories meet translational realities. Ultimately, by consistently embracing these methodologies and working toward building an evidence-informed culture, police agencies can achieve sustainable improvements in operational effectiveness and significantly enhance community well-being.

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Policing Can Be Evidence-Based and Make a Difference

By Brendan Forte

Brendan Forte is Inspector of the First Precinct in the Suffolk County, New York, Police Department and has served with the agency since 1995.

To me, evidence-based policing focuses on using the best available information to address when and where crime and disorder occur, and includes a deeper understanding of what attracts crime to those areas and what can be done to solve the issues. This includes identifying factors within law enforcement's control and also how and when to incorporate the community to help co-produce public safety. Before learning about evidence-based policing, I felt that while my Suffolk County Police Department (SCPD) was awash in data and information, it was less obvious how to use data and analysis to create positive impacts to prevent and reduce crime. We weren't actively looking into patterns or problems and trying to find sustainable solutions. Instead, we just reacted when crimes occurred or when hot spots flared up.

In late 2022, I was fortunate to take a ten-week course on evidence-based policing, taught by Cynthia Lum and Christopher Koper through the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services. The timing of this class was excellent as my precinct was facing rising crime, several retirements, and a relatively younger and less experienced police force. Combined with my agency's interest in implementing a program called "precision policing" (a more precise, place-based, and targeted approach to crime prevention for patrol), I felt the lessons learned from that class were particularly relevant and applicable. In particular, the research on why places can become problem hot spots and what studies have found to effectively mitigate those problems was especially meaningful. The concept of evidence-based policing just seemed like common sense.

Problem Places, Problem-Oriented Solutions

In the SCPD precinct I command, we face common long-term challenges that many other suburbs and counties next to large metropolitan areas face. These problems often occur in very specific hot spots, typically less than a quarter-mile wide, and have persisted for multiple decades. Additionally, it seemed that the broader justice system wasn't doing much about the individuals we were arresting at these places, leading to low confidence in the justice system by both the police and community members. Three places were constant challenges for the First Precinct. One area had especially high pedestrian and vehicular traffic, numerous strip malls (with some empty



Brendan Forte

storefronts), and convenience stores selling single-serve alcohol and cigarettes. This environment led to people hanging out and committing various crimes and disorders, including drug use, drug sales, prostitution, gambling, and public drinking. A second location encompassed a large shopping outlet with high levels of retail theft (sometimes organized, sometimes not). A third location included a train station with commercial areas nearby, also leading to drug use, homeless encampments, community complaints, and public fear.

Before understanding problem-solving and evidence-based policing, inspectors like me and our patrol divisions tended to address these issues in reactive, arrest-focused, and call-by-call ways. However, when thinking through how to be more evidence-based in these areas, I employed several strategies:

1. Data analysis: Whether at the transportation hub, strip mall area, or outlet mall, I tasked my team with examining the types of crimes and problems being reported and when they occurred. This included figuring out exactly what types of merchandise were being taken from big box stores and from which areas within the store. Sometimes in the outlet mall, officers thought a particular store was being hit, but this was not supported by the data. At other times, we would randomly visit certain areas without knowing precisely when problems occurred most frequently. Developing better intelligence and crime analysis about who, what, where, when, and how has been key to implementing more effective approaches.

2. Targeted patrols and officer engagement in specific hot spots: Providing specific directives to officers about where to target their patrols, how long they should spend at hot spots (using the Koper Curve principle¹), and what peak times to patrol these places are essential elements of deployment within an evidence-based approach. Ensuring that officers were using their non-committed time wisely at these locations was also key. Officers were also directed to not only go to the hot spots but to get out of their vehicles, walk into stores, and engage with customers and employees, practicing what Lum and Koper call the "4Gs" of patrol: go, get out, go up to, and go in.² This helped officers become familiar with the area and its people, and vice

1 For a brief summary of the Koper Curve Principle, see <https://cebcp.org/wp-content/onepagers/KoperHotSpots.pdf>

2 See Lum, C. & Koper, C.S. (2024). Operational Guidance for Enhancing Hot Spot "Koper" Patrols. *Translational Criminology Magazine*, Spring 2024, 4-6.

versa. Officers also began enforcing laws at hot spots, including issuing summonses or making arrests for gambling, drug use, or other illicit activities.

3. Community engagement and collaboration with other municipalities: In addition to targeted patrols and officer engagement, I also attended civic group meetings in the neighborhoods to discuss the problems and ask for community support for these targeted hot spots approaches. For example, I specifically asked residents and business owners if they were okay with the police “cleaning up” areas by removing furniture left outside that people congregated on. We also collaborated with the local town to send sanitation trucks and workers to clear away the unwanted items. In retail stores, our collaborations with loss prevention units and store managers became a critical part of the process. These activities have included reviewing CCTV placement and usability, store design, the strategic placement of loss prevention employees, and reviewing traffic flow patterns in and out of the area. Many of these collaborations also revealed insights into what might motivate businesses to do their part to prevent crime. All of these elements have been shown in problem-solving research to be important to preventing, deterring, and reducing crime.

4. Environmental improvements: Place-based criminology teaches us that environmental aspects of places also provide opportunities for offending. These might include poor lighting, overgrown shrubbery, and blind spots. These environmental problems require collaboration with transportation authorities or public works departments to help clear away obstacles to improve visibility or to add lighting. For retail areas, sometimes environmental obstacles are needed to block getaway cars from pulling up to store exits. Encouraging other responsible parties to help with environmental improvements became a significant component of addressing crime hot spots in the Precinct.

5. Command orders with detailed plans: One important lesson that I took away from the initial training on evidence-based policing was that we need to document, track, and provide written orders and instructions on implementing evidence-based approaches at crime hot spots. This became a cornerstone of my approach, and it also served as a way to create an institutional record of what the precinct was doing at a particular hot spot. These orders clearly described what was needed at each hot spot as well as my expectations for supervisors, officers, and specialized units.

Motivating and Empowering Supervisors and Officers

Half the battle with evidence-based policing is motivating officers to carry out these approaches, some of which may be unfamiliar to newer officers or not often used by seasoned officers. One significant challenge I faced was that the majority of patrol officers when I started these adjustments had very little time on the job, requiring more detailed direction and support. Additionally, I was faced with several retirements in the precinct, many of whom were experienced supervisors.

To motivate officers, having a clear direction and vision, and then following through with detailed plans and clear command orders, is essential. Simply stating what needed to be done wasn’t enough. Rather, ensuring that officers under my command not only knew my expectations, but also providing specific actions tailored to specific problems at specific locations was essential for both newer officers and supervisors. This also required consistently asking for officer feedback to confirm that officers understood what I was asking for and to give them the opportunity to suggest better ideas. This detailed approach with consistent feedback and communication was key to motivating officers and ensuring that evidence-based policing strategies were implemented effectively. I believe this approach also empowered officers and supervisors to take ownership of the plans rather than just blindly following directions.

However, it’s also important to recognize that officers face significant challenges, including administrative burdens and time constraints. For example, officers are responding to 911 calls and are briefly fixing issues, which then get bad again once they leave. I felt that this cycle of intermittent enforcement without any permanent results was less than our potential. I want my officers to focus on what they *can do* to solve problems rather than waste effort on short-lived solutions. At the location described above, where people were hanging out on discarded furniture in a lot, the officers called local sanitation to remove the furniture completely. They also enlisted store owners to clean other trash and brush, and increase lighting to improve their storefronts. I wanted officers to experience and be motivated by how their actions could solve problems more permanently. Not only were they practicing evidence-based policing, but it was also important to integrate these processes into their regular work.

More generally, promoting a forward-thinking and problem-solving mindset is a crucial element of an evidence-based policing approach. I want officers to work toward their full potential by utilizing the resources available to them, rather than asking them to start from scratch. Additionally, I found it is helpful to stress the importance of getting things done, rather than just talking about problems or dragging our feet without taking any action. Most importantly, making officers feel that this is personal to them and giving them ownership and responsibility for completing meaningful tasks makes a difference.

Observing Change

The Suffolk County Police Department is still developing its broader capacity to evaluate and assess changes from these efforts. Our agency has been partnering with George Mason University’s Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy in a Smart Policing Initiative³ to help sustain these efforts in our agency and assess effects. However, so far, the efforts in the First Precinct have been shown to have a positive impact on crime and disorder at these hot spots. But

3 See <https://bja.ojp.gov/program/smart-policing-initiative-spi/overview>

as a Precinct commander, I often don't have the luxury of waiting for a formal evaluation to take place. Instead, I believe there are several ways that commanders can stay on top of gauging the effectiveness of evidence-based approaches.

One important way is for leaders to pay close attention to how well our officers are learning and getting to know the areas, people, and routines of problematic locations. Understanding whether detectives and officers are becoming more knowledgeable about the how, where, when, who, and why of problem places can also be gauged by observing officers' interactions with people, store managers, and each other. These observations can help a commander see improvements in officer knowledge and skills in patrol. Officers also notice when the physical environments they patrol change, such as when places are cleaner and have fewer obstacles to visibility. Getting their feedback and learning how they learn is important.

The community also provides valuable feedback all the time. Store managers and their staff will tell you if they feel like things are improving with regard to theft, and community members can give you a sense of whether people are less fearful and more confident in using public places (like a train station). Ultimately, increased cooperation from victims and more reporting of crimes and community problems can also lead to better data to inform future prevention efforts. More formalized community, city council, or Chamber of Commerce meetings can also provide feedback about whether police presence in hot spots is being felt and whether that presence has a positive (or negative) impact on the community. Sometimes when I attend these meetings, specific officers are mentioned for the good they are doing at these places, and that is incredibly meaningful to me.



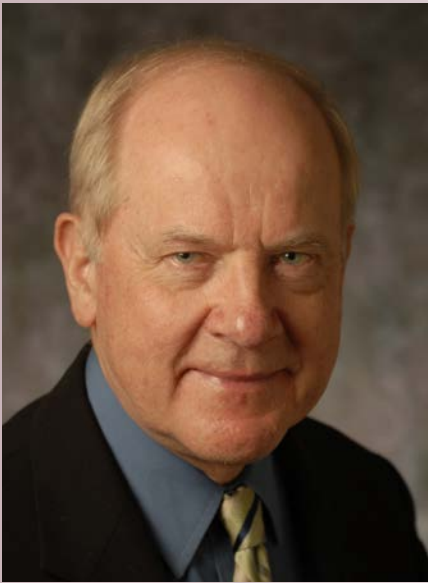
Inspector Forte discussing prevention strategies with First Precinct officers at a crime hot spot.

The Future of Policing

In my view, these approaches are the future of policing. Personnel allocation based on evidence is a better use of time and money. I see a future where data analysis is used more regularly and effectively at the precinct level to inform deployment strategies, with analysts working closely with officers and supervisors. The understanding and use of intelligence and crime analysis must start at the academy. But data is not the only answer. Leaders need to be clear, concise, and consistent in their expectations. This clarity (and the documentation of it) is important to institutionalize evidence-based practices so that they become ingrained in the culture and routines of the officers and supervisors, even if leadership changes. Being able to adapt strategies to changing circumstances, such as new waves of crime or different tactics employed by criminals, is necessary. This requires consistent and up-to-date training, as well as finding ways to eliminate unnecessary tasks and streamline administrative burdens so officers can focus on proactive policing and problem-solving. All these elements are necessary to empower officers and shift their

mindsets so that they can make better decisions every day.

The police also can't do this alone. Getting store owners, managers, and other community members to take ownership of their spaces and be responsible for their upkeep is crucial. Ultimately, sustaining improvements in crime and quality of life must include both community members and patrol officers taking ownership and collaborating to ensure that places remain clean, both environmentally and in terms of crime. We need community members to feel comfortable calling the police if problems start getting out of hand. More broadly, maintaining positive relationships with the community builds trust. This trust building doesn't happen simply by a commander attending community meetings or special events. When the community feels that the police are effectively addressing issues and improving quality of life, they are more likely to cooperate, report crimes, and support police efforts, which ultimately leads to better policing.



In Memoriam Ronald V. Clarke

By David Weisburd

Ronald V. Clarke was a giant in the development of modern criminology. In May 2025, he passed away after more than a half-century of influencing how we think about the crime problem, and especially what we think of as effective crime prevention approaches.

Ron always considered himself an outsider to mainstream criminology. At a time when sociologists and criminologists were fascinated with changing criminal motivation to address crime, Ron began to think that motivation was much less important than the opportunities that facilitated offending. His seminal study of suicide in 1988 with Patricia Mayhew showed this idea persuasively. Suicides declined precipitously when natural gas (which did not include carbon monoxide) replaced "town gas" in British homes. The fact that a highly motivated activity like suicide could be prevented simply by changing access to "town gas" challenged conventional ideas of criminal motivation, and was to be followed by scores of examples of the importance of opportunity in crime causation by Ron and many others. Ron told Malcolm Gladwell about the skeptical reactions to his work on suicide:

"They thought it was very superficial, that these people were so upset and demoralized that it was sort of insulting to think you could deal with it by simply making it harder to commit suicide. I got quite a lot of pushback here and there from people about that idea."¹

Ron was incredibly modest about his contributions, given the significant impact his work had on how we think about the crime problem. Ron coined the term "situational prevention" to describe how this new way of thinking affected crime prevention. Situational prevention was built under the theoretical foundations of rational

choice and opportunity theory. At its most radical, it posits that "opportunity makes the thief" (Felson & Clarke, 1998; originally noted by Sir Francis Bacon). It proceeded to focus on ways that opportunities (and thus crime) could be reduced. Ron proposed that criminal opportunities were not endless in the urban landscape, and indeed were constrained by the fact that the value of crime varied a great deal across targets. Following a series of critical studies around the turn of the last century that showed traditional offender-based prevention programs were ineffective, Ron saw situational prevention as a promising method for addressing the crime problem. Ron was right about this!

I first met Ron when I was an Assistant Professor at Rutgers University School of Criminal Justice. He had spent 15 years at the UK Home Office Research and Planning Unit, eventually becoming its Director. There, he conceptualized his theory of situational prevention. In 1984, he moved to Temple University and became Dean at Rutgers in 1987. Ron was a fantastic mentor and colleague. Immediately upon coming to Rutgers, he asked me to have tea with him once a week. I remember being a bit intimidated by this, and a bit embarrassed that at the time I didn't drink tea! But those weekly teas with Ron had a tremendous impact on my thinking about crime. I spent a year at the Vera Institute of Justice in 1984-1985, and during that time, I began to observe that crime was highly concentrated in crime hot spots. However, my sociological training did not provide much context for understanding that experience. My teas with Ron placed hot spots of crime within the context of opportunity theory and literally changed the trajectory of my scientific research. And I suspect that many others like me were equally influenced. Ron was intellectually persuasive and patient. And in a very subdued way, he was a radical, reorienting criminologist. He likely had more influence on redirecting criminology from people to places, and from motivation to opportunity, than any other scholar.

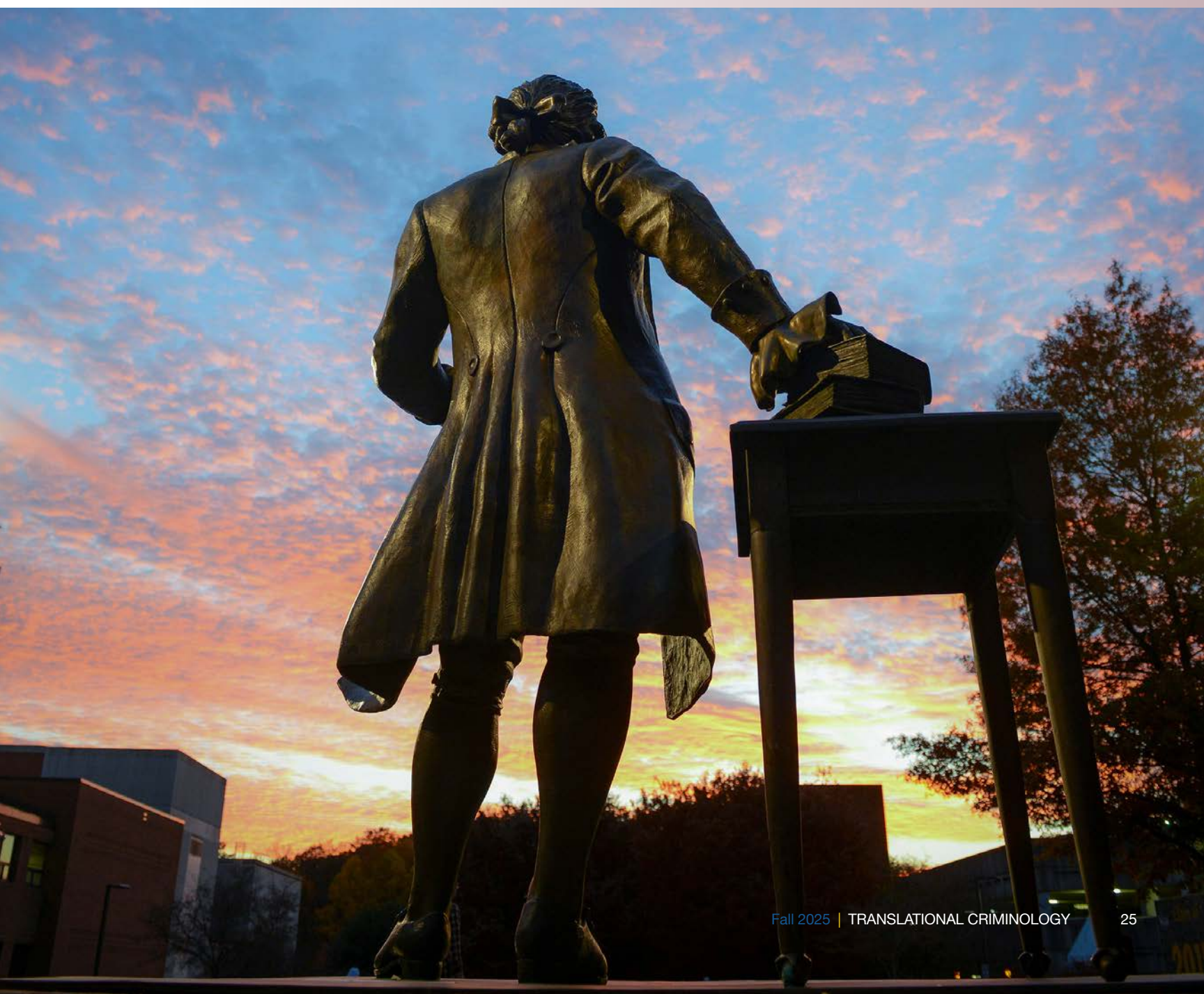
Besides our weekly teas, Ron was to make another decision that influenced the development of crime at place. At the time, Rutgers

¹ Gladwell, M. (2019). *Talking to Strangers: What We Should Know about the People We Don't Know*. Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company.

was hiring a distinguished visiting professor, and one of the applicants was Lawrence Sherman, who had begun to observe concentrations of crime at addresses in Minneapolis. Larry and I immediately found common ground in the idea of hot spots and the notion that if police focused on these areas, they could prevent crime—the conventional thinking at the time was that they could not. Ron thought this was all fascinating and important, and he tasked Larry and me with developing a large randomized trial of police patrol at crime hot spots. This study was to have tremendous influence on the idea of hot spots and on the potential influence of the police on crime.

Ron's influence on criminology was not limited to his theories and research, but also due to his ability to collaborate with other scholars

in advancing new ideas. He was a creator of opportunities for the advancement of science, and he did this not only with students and junior colleagues but also with other senior scholars. With Marcus Felson, Herman Goldstein, the Brantinghams' and others, he made connections across differing types of scholarship. He helped initiate the Environmental Criminology and Crime Analysis Association (ECCA), which became home to many scholars with similar ideas about opportunities and environmental criminology. Ron received the most important international recognition in criminology, the Stockholm Prize, in 2015. But perhaps most importantly, his influence on criminology lives on in the scores of scholars and researchers, like myself, who have been meaningfully influenced by Ron's "radical" ideas.





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