
Improving Police Effectiveness and Transparency: National Information Needs on Law Enforcement

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If, as I believe, our ultimate task is to cooperate in bringing about the reduction of a crime rate that far exceeds that of other developed countries, then the presently available crime and law enforcement statistics are almost useless.

~ Hans Zeisel

Introduction

I have some good news and some bad news. First the good news: The 21st century finds the police more capable and effective than ever before. Police operations are also more transparent, along with the operations of most other public agencies. The law enforcement community is subjected to more scrutiny than was imaginable a few decades ago due to advances in information and communication technologies, a more aggressive and intrusive media, and elevated standards of public accountability.

The media attention on policing has been mostly sensational and exceptional. The Rodney King case in Los Angeles and the Amado Diallo and Abner Louima cases in New York exemplify the extremes of episodically intense probes into police operations. Video technology in the hands of private citizens has mushroomed beyond anyone's imagining of just 20 years ago, and the police have learned painfully that if they misbehave, their families may watch the event on the evening news.

But police transparency has advanced as well due to systematic information. Thanks largely to the work of the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS)—created not long after the President's Commission on Federal Statistics recommended the creation of such an agency¹—and that of the National Institute of Justice (NIJ), we know much more today about run-of-the-mill law enforcement practices that are of little interest to our hyperactive, attention-seeking media. We have much more comprehensive and reliable information about what works in policing now than we did 35 years ago,

¹BJS was established officially in its current form in 1979, but a precursor agency, the National Criminal Justice Information and Statistics Service, had been created in the early 1970s as the statistical arm of the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration. The research arm was the National Institute of Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice, precursor to the National Institute of Justice.

when James Q. Wilson asked us to think about crime more scientifically. As the media have fed the public's voyeuristic instincts, so have BJS and NIJ served our enlightened interests by providing reliable and valid knowledge about law enforcement.

Professor Egon Bittner, a 20th century giant on the study of policing, must be pleased that more light now shines on law enforcement, revealing both the sensational and the ordinary. He observed in 1970 that the law enforcement function is, itself, extraordinary: the police have a monopoly on the authority to use non-negotiably coercive force.² Given such power, scrutiny is essential to making the police more accountable and effective, and to giving it legitimacy. Transparency serves the political interests of democratic society, but Bittner made clear that in a democracy more police transparency makes for a more vibrant and just society too. (Bittner; Brodeur)

Now for the bad news: Over the past 20 years or so, gains in knowledge about what works in policing have not kept pace with gains in information technology. Contemporary textbooks on policing reflect the generation of substantially greater knowledge about how to make the police more effective in the 1970s and 1980s, in the early days of the information explosion, than in the past 20 years. In the 1970s and 1980s, we learned that:

- What the police do is much more important than how many are on the street.
- Purposeful activities aimed both at identifying and resolving problems before they blossom into full-blown crimes and at building working relationships with members of the community are more productive than random patrols and speedy responses to calls for service.
- Two-officer patrols are more likely than one to make problems for the police in many situations, with no offsetting benefit in the reduction or solution of crimes.

²Bittner's observation follows that of Max Weber, who asserted in a 1919 lecture, "Politics as a Vocation," that the state had a monopoly on legitimate violence ("Gewaltmonopol des Staates"). (See Warner.)

- The police play a critical role in determining whether an arrest ends in conviction, based on the witnesses and evidence they manage to bring to the prosecutor and the extent and quality of their follow-up work.

Much of this research was done at the Police Foundation and the Institute for Law and Social Research, nearly all of it under support from NIJ and BJS. The RAND Corporation, meanwhile, was doing ground breaking research on offenders and corrections, also with substantial support from the federal Department of Justice.

Since 1990, laptop and squad car computers with precise information about the distribution of crime by place and time—instantly available to the police for tactical uses—have made police operations more information-driven and effective than ever before, with sophisticated analyses of crime mapping data and in-house crime analysis.

Although we do not know the precise extent, we can be fairly sure that these tactical uses of advanced information technology have contributed significantly to the decline in serious crimes since 1990. But the widespread, systematic dissemination of this information and uses of the data for research and policy assessment purposes—to permit a more thorough understanding of relationships between the inputs of policing and police performance in various settings nationwide—have been exceedingly limited.

We have witnessed other important reforms in policing since 1985, especially with the development of community- and problem-oriented policing and the widespread use of new systems of police accountability, such as COMPSTAT—all of which have contributed to police transparency and, by most accounts, to effectiveness—but we really don't know much more about what works in policing today than we did in the mid-1980s. The words of Hans Zeisel that open this essay still resonate nearly 40 years later.

Police and the Criminal Justice Sieve

Consider, in particular, the fundamental role of the police as the official front-line agents to protect society against crime. Most of us are familiar with elaborate diagrams of the criminal justice “funnel” depicting the channeling of crimes through the criminal justice system. But when numbers are attached to the diagram, it becomes clear that this is more of a sieve than a funnel. About 8 to 10 million felonies are reported to the police each year, and the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) tells us that about as many go unreported. So we have something like 15 to 20 million felony victimizations annually in the United States, and fewer than 1 million of these cases end in conviction. The police are precisely in the middle of this extraordinarily leaky sieve. Yet, we have little by way of reliable empirical evidence on the relationships between police operations, tactics, and policies on the one hand, and the leakages at each stage, on the other—from victimization to reporting to recording to arrest to conviction—which the police could conceivably do much more to close.

Thanks again to BJS, we do know a good deal more from the NCVS than we used to about why so many serious crimes still go unreported, but we stand to learn much more still about what the police could do to reduce victimization levels and to further increase the reporting rate. With reliable information about the characteristics of the cases that end in arrest and those that do not, together with reliable information about what the police do—and fail to do—in each case, we could also learn more about why so many reported felonies fail to end in arrest, and what law enforcement officials could do to help the prosecutor convict more culpable felony offenders, with stronger evidence and witnesses. Some of these relationships are likely to hold more generally across the major offense categories and the various stages from victimization to conviction than others, and it is extremely important to know how these factors interact.

In today's world of information and the ready availability of statistical tools to analyze it, one can only marvel at how little we know about what the police could do to raise the rate at which victimizations end in conviction from well below 10% to perhaps 20% or more.³ We rarely bother even to consider the prospect. It seems somehow negligent that we have failed to seize opportunities to learn what the police can do at each stage to reduce the enormous social costs associated with this vast, largely ignored sequence of justice lapses between crimes and convictions. BJS can help by providing statistical indicators of lapses at each of these stages, and its data sets can be exploited creatively for another purpose: to permit in-depth research about what works to reduce the leakages. (While research is more clearly within the domain of NIJ rather than that of BJS, the roles do occasionally overlap, and BJS should encourage research uses of the data it produces for other purposes. A modest degree of competition between these two agencies in this domain of natural overlap is probably a good thing.)

These are not just leaks; they are lapses of justice. They are costly, and they demand more attention. Police lose legitimacy when they engage in brutality and corruption, but they lose legitimacy as well when they fail to bring the vast majority of serious offenders to justice. And following Blackstone's rule (“better that ten guilty persons escape than one innocent person suffer”), the police lose even more legitimacy when they arrest the wrong people, while the real offenders remain at large. (Forst) Lapses in justice of both kinds—wrongful arrests and failures to arrest—are surely more pervasive in the neighborhoods and communities plagued with chronically high crime rates, if only because the concentration of crimes is so much greater in those places. Affluent communities not only can lavish more resources on their police departments, but they can and

³Of course, many offenders who fail to get arrested and convicted for a given crime eventually get convicted for another crime, but that is likely to provide little consolation to the victim in a given case. This explanation, moreover, does little to contribute to the legitimacy of the police and courts. It is an exceedingly low standard. Imagine the flip side of the same logic: Suppose we awarded degrees to students who failed most of their courses but eventually passed one.

often do supplement those resources with private security services. (Forst and Manning) The media tend to focus more these days on coeds missing in the Caribbean than on inner-city crime, but inner-city victims are all too familiar with lapses of justice in their neighborhoods, in terms of both wrongful arrests and failures to arrest and convict.

This is not a criticism of the police. The law enforcement community generally does the best it can with what it has, and it does so usually with commitment and professionalism, often against great odds and in the face of peril. Moreover, we would not be better off if all victimizations ended in conviction. Some victimizations—even felony crimes—are better resolved through informal social control mechanisms than through formal criminal punishment. But I have yet to hear a compelling explanation for how justice is done in a system in which just 5 to 10% of all felony victimizations end in conviction.⁴

It is a criticism of the sharp, avoidable disparity between how little we know about relationships between aspects of police operations and case leakages and how much we stand to learn, given today's advanced information and analytic technologies. Do affluent areas experience the same levels of leakages at each stage as poor ones? How different are they? Do the leakages tend to vary with variation in policing practices? Which ones and under what circumstances? The opportunities are vast for federal, state, and local officials to learn more about the leakages at each stage and how they vary across communities. Much greater efforts are made today to understand service lapses elsewhere, especially in the private sector, typically in settings where the stakes and social costs are considerably smaller.

How might the Bureau of Justice Statistics work to reduce these lapses of justice and the associated social costs? How should BJS weigh its contributions to the control of crime against other responsibilities of the law enforcement community: "all hazards" policing requirements, quality of life issues under police control, and fear of crime? What information, if any, should BJS collect, organize and analyze to deal with emerging problems such as terrorism, human trafficking, identity theft, and cybercrime? How much should it allocate to the collection and maintenance of data bases, data series, special reports, and for on-line and print media? How should it apportion its spending on data collection and organization, descriptive analysis, the identification of key indicators, explanatory and evaluation analysis of law enforcement policy, and the dissemination of information and findings? At what levels of aggregation and disaggregation should it report each series? Might data sets that emerge from new systems, such as COMPSTAT, provide useful information if collected and organized on a nationwide basis? What if many jurisdictions either cannot participate or choose not to? How do the answers to these

⁴Perhaps the most compelling explanation is that some 25% of all felony arrests involve juvenile offenders, and few of these should end in conviction. But even removing all the juvenile cases, we still end up with fewer than 10% of felony victimizations committed by adult offenders ending in conviction.

questions vary by type of user: practitioner, policy maker, researcher, and so on? These questions warrant more serious attention and better answers than we have provided.

Many of the questions have been addressed before, but not much movement has been made to improve the availability of the data needed to address them more systematically and coherently. Private individuals and institutions have, in some cases, taken the lead in organizing data to provide a basis for this work. Richard Rosenfeld, for one, has identified police agencies that post useful summary data on their websites. (Rosenfeld, 2006) The data are organized not only to make the work of the departments more accessible, but to allow the departments to avoid having to answer the same questions from reporters, representatives of public interest groups, and others over and over. Some of the data elements and structures are uniform and comparable because they are developed to comply with the Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) requirements. They are comparable also because departments often look over their shoulders to see what their counterparts are doing elsewhere, and they often adopt what they regard as best practices. The data that are available from these voluntary efforts may not be fully representative of the universe of police departments, but many of these biases can be assessed using other data. The police department data, in any case, could provide a key ingredient for the development of a "policy evaluation infrastructure that would support the continuous monitoring of crime rates, generate knowledge of crime-producing conditions, and link evaluation research findings to one another and to expected policy outcomes, notably crime reduction." (Rosenfeld, 2006, p. 309)

In the remainder of this essay, we consider first what information BJS currently collects, organizes, and makes available about law enforcement operations and outcomes, and then we examine how it might improve on its current program.

BJS Data on Law Enforcement

The Bureau of Justice Statistics supports the law enforcement community by acquiring, organizing, updating, and disseminating information with the aim of serving policy makers, practitioners, and researchers. This is consistent with the larger BJS mission statement:

To collect, analyze, publish, and disseminate information on crime, criminal offenders, victims of crime, and the operation of justice systems at all levels of government. These data are critical to Federal, State, and local policymakers in combating crime and ensuring that justice is both efficient and evenhanded.

There is some overlap with what the National Institute of Justice does in the production and analysis of data, but in law enforcement as in other aspects of the criminal justice system, the primary division of labor is that BJS focuses more on the data and on the Nation as an entity, while NIJ emphasizes the research, most of which is not conducted on the U.S. as a whole. BJS serves the law enforcement community in two broad areas: federal law enforcement and state and local policing.

Federal Law Enforcement

The BJS federal law enforcement series includes information on suspects in initiated investigations (by federal investigative department, offense category, month and year the matter was received, and most serious charge), persons arrested and booked (by age of arrestee, citizenship, sex, race, arresting agency, offense category and most serious charge, and federal district and circuit), and suspects in concluded investigations (by federal investigative department, offense category, case outcome, and number of days in the process). Aggregate statistics of these series are reported in the Compendium of Federal Justice Statistics. The Compendium is available online from 1992 through 2004, and in hard copy for selected years prior to 1991. These data have been reorganized in a 10-year time series in the Federal Criminal Justice Trends for 1994-2003. The report summarizes the activities of agencies at each stage of the federal criminal case process, including the number of persons arrested (with details on drug offenses) and the number and dispositions of suspects investigated by U.S. attorneys.

What we know from these series is, first, that the federal law enforcement community is large and growing. Today there are over 100,000 sworn federal officers, the majority (63%) of whom are in four agencies: Customs, the Federal Bureau of Prisons, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the Immigration and Naturalization Service. We know also that drug cases represent the largest category of federal cases brought to U.S. attorneys. In 2003 there were 37,000 drug cases (29% of the total), followed by property (21%), public order (19%), immigration (16%), weapon (11%), and violent crimes (4%).

State and Local Law Enforcement

Two of the centerpieces of the state and local law enforcement data maintained by BJS are the Law Enforcement Management and Administrative Statistics (LEMAS) and the Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics—Arrests, Clearances and Seizures (Section 4). The LEMAS information, published every 3 or 4 years, provides statistics from over 3,000 state and local law enforcement agencies, including all employing at least 100 sworn officers, plus a representative sample of smaller agencies. It is organized along several dimensions: personnel; budgets, expenditures and pay; operations (patrol units by type, investigation units); equipment; computers and information systems (including information on vehicle-mounted computers, digital imaging systems); and policies and programs (including information about community policing, special operations and special unit programs, and training). LEMAS provides useful information about current operation norms for law enforcement agencies of particular sizes and settings, and data with which policy analysts and scholars can investigate relationships between the inputs of law enforcement and performance measures for agencies in various categories.

The Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics is organized in six sections: criminal justice system characteristics, public attitudes toward crime and justice, the nature and distribution of known offenses, characteristics and distribution of persons arrested and goods seized, judicial processing and sentencing of defendants, and persons under correctional supervision. Data are obtained on the organization and administration of police and sheriffs' departments including agency responsibilities, operating expenditures, job functions of sworn and civilian employees, officer salaries and special pay, demographic characteristics of officers, weapons and armor policies, education and training requirements, computers and information systems, vehicles, special units, and community policing activities.

BJS also provides numerous data sets and codebooks, including the Census of State and Local Law Enforcement Agencies and the Police-Public Contact Survey. The former has provided information every 4 years since 1992 on all state and local law enforcement agencies in the United States. The information collected and reported includes the number of sworn and civilian personnel by state and type of agency. The Police-Public Contact Survey, reported every 3 years since 1996, provides detailed information on salient aspects of face-to-face contacts between police and the public, including the reason for and outcome of the contact. Every 3 years, the PPCS interviews a nationally representative sample of over 60,000 residents (age 16 or older) as a supplement to the NCVS. The PPCS enables BJS to estimate the likelihood that a driver will be pulled over in a traffic stop and the percentage of all contacts that involved the use of force by police.

Until 2004, BJS regularly provided periodic bulletins and occasional special reports on law enforcement topics of interest, many based on LEMAS and Sourcebook data. Each bulletin and special report gave both summary statistics and narrative information to explain and interpret the data. I am told that the publication of these reports may be resumed. In the meantime, BJS makes much of its information available through its website. BJS also coordinates with other federal justice information agencies, including the Federal Bureau of Investigation in its maintenance of the UCR and the National Archive of Criminal Justice Data (ICPSR) in its development of the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS).

Could BJS Provide More Useful Information About Law Enforcement?

Could the law enforcement share of the Bureau of Justice Statistics budget be better spent? How?

The BJS knapsack problem

Historically, the law enforcement share of the annual BJS budget has run in the neighborhood of under 5% of the BJS budget, which today amounts to less than \$6 million. Most of us would prefer that it be much larger, and the existence

of a crime load costing the nation an estimated one trillion dollars annually (Anderson; Cohen) makes a strong case for a substantial increase. However, today's politics make this a dubious prospect, at least in the short term. In the meantime, we can think about how the funds might be spent. The problem of allocating a budget of any particular size to a set of competing demands is one that has been addressed by operations researchers and economists as a problem of constrained optimization, commonly known as "the knapsack problem," as it is confronted by anyone who has ever puzzled over how much to carry on a very long trek in the woods: Given a set of goods, each with a unique cost and a value, how much of each should be included in a collection so that the total cost is within a given budget and the total value of the benefits is maximized, accounting for complementarities among the goods?

Value to whom? For BJS, as with other federal statistics agencies, the knapsack problem is complicated by several factors. The first of these is the identification of users, each of whom might perceive different values and incur different costs for each item in the knapsack. These perceptions are likely to vary both across various classes of users and within each class. The 1971 President's Commission on Federal Statistics identified the following classes of users of federal statistics:

- Policy makers
- Program managers
- Evaluators of government programs
- Researchers
- State and local governments
- Industry and trade associations
- The public

These different groups tend to have different data needs and goals—and often have interests at different levels of aggregation—so it is no trivial matter to establish how much weight to assign to each user and to various levels of detail in establishing values for prospective items to be included in the knapsack. Practitioners tend to be more interested in the process issues and aspects of service delivery—inputs—while politicians and the general public tend to be more interested in outcomes. Evaluators and researchers tend to be interested in relationships between inputs and outcomes. All users should be interested in transparency. Sorting out these issues can begin with surveys of each class of user to establish their information priorities and the worth of each item to each user.

Determining costs and values of each item

Establishing the true cost of each item in the BJS information portfolio is no trivial matter, since the amounts BJS pays to federal, state and local information providers do not always fully compensate the providing agencies for

the costs they incur in the transaction. The providers do get "public good" benefits in the end that would not otherwise manifest, but those benefits are often offset by political costs of a jurisdiction turning up with numbers perceived—often correctly—as failures. Some information is "bundled in" as an inexpensive by-product of essential information that is more expensive to produce, and it is no trivial exercise to establish the precise cost of each item of information given such complications.

But it is vastly more difficult to establish the value of each item in the BJS knapsack, given the range of stakeholders who make use of the information and the array of other providers of relevant information. Of course, the ultimate recipient is the general public, but citizens are rarely aware that they derive benefits from better policing practices that are based on BJS information. Even the police may be unaware of the connection when it is real. Others who serve the public derive value from different items of information in varying amounts: those who set law enforcement policies and procedures and researchers who analyze the data—ultimately in the public service, but immediately to contribute to our collective body of knowledge and in service to the police, students, and others. Much as a fiscal stimulus has a multiplier effect on the economy, so can information and its production have a multiplier effect through the academic, policy making, and practitioner communities as they serve the public.

There is also the problem of accounting for complementarities and redundancies among items in the BJS law enforcement information knapsack. Some of this is basic, like the need for a can opener in the knapsack only if there are cans to be opened. For example, information about computer software used in policing is dependent on information about the hardware requirements. Some of the variation in value of information derives from the principle of diminishing marginal benefits: The marginal value of data on any particular aspect of law enforcement or any particular offense category declines as more and more of such information is provided. The usual solution to this problem is to select, at the margin and across all available options, the item that maximizes the marginal benefit. But this cannot be done explicitly due to the prohibitive costs of assessing the incomprehensibly large number of values of marginal benefits for each combination of items already in the knapsack.

If this all seems a bit technical and abstract, it is nonetheless pertinent. We may not be able to find a formula with the accurate weights to establish precisely which items of information belong in the BJS portfolio, but to the extent that we can identify the primary stakeholders and obtain rough estimates of the value of each major item of information about the police and policing to each stakeholder, we can begin to make more systematic assessments to determine what should be in the BJS knapsack.

Candidate items for the BJS knapsack. Just as we have categories of items to put in a knapsack to support a 5-day trek in the woods—food, clothing, tent, sleeping bag, tools, and so on—so do we have categories of items that are candidates for the BJS law enforcement portfolio. Here is a list of some of the major candidate categories:

- Federal versus state and local operations
- Crime versus noncrime aspects of policing
- Crime prevention versus response activities
- Public versus private security personnel, expenditures, and applications
- Patrol operations versus investigative operations
- The effects of police practices on levels and leakages from victimization to conviction
- Police administration, organization, management, and resources
- Police accountability systems (e.g., COMPSTAT) and data
- Comparative U.S. and cross-national data (e.g., European Sourcebook on policing)⁵
- Miscellaneous topics:
 - . Special interest offenses: drugs, guns, domestic violence, gang crimes, hate crimes
 - . Homicide clearances, cold cases
 - . Homeland security and terrorism
 - . Police misbehavior: administrative actions against use of force, searches, corruption
 - . Issues of race: profiling, minority employment in law enforcement
 - . Use of technology for crime prevention and investigation
 - . Emerging issues: human trafficking, identity theft, cybercrime

Several of these items are already in the BJS knapsack. Some are available in BJS data bases, but not readily accessible to prospective users. One solution might be to permit users to drill down from aggregates they see in BJS reports to more finely tuned categories of interest on their own, i.e. online access, to better accommodate the needs of individual users.

Other items on the above list not currently available might be unearthed through an expansion of the NCVS. We have learned, for example, that positive prior contacts with the police are more influential than is the seriousness of the offense in inducing victims to report crimes to the police. (Xie, et al.) More could be learned about distinctions

⁵Tavares and Barclay describe the European Sourcebook of Crime and Criminal Justice Statistics (3rd edition, 2006) as the largest collection of crime and criminal justice data covering Europe. Its statistics on policing include crimes reported by the police (homicides, assaults, thefts, and drug offenses), suspected offenders, and police personnel. The European Sourcebook also has sections on prosecutions, convictions, and correctional statistics.

between repeat victimizations by the same and by different offenders and relationships between these various types of repeat victimizations, whether the victim reports to the police, and victims' and nonvictims' attitudes about the police. We could learn more, as well, about special interest offenses, police misbehavior, fear of crime, fear of terrorism, and perceptions of police performance and responsiveness through the NCVS, if funding were made available. Information about reporting rates and public opinions about the police would be especially valuable at the jurisdiction level, if still more funding were to come forth. Regional variation in victimization and related factors are already reported periodically in Great Britain and Holland. Analyses of variation in reporting rates and levels of citizen cooperation with the police and prosecutors across jurisdictions in the United States are likely to produce important insights into police practices.⁶

A 1993 BJS monograph, Performance Measures for the Criminal Justice System, considered several of the issues related to the BJS portfolio on law enforcement, noting that the criminal justice system had been moving away from conventional measures of performance to measures that corresponded more closely to other legitimate public interests. In the chapter on police, Geoffrey Alpert and Mark Moore argued that the traditional emphasis on crime and arrest rates had been excessive, and that the police could serve the public more effectively by assigning greater weight to such indicators as the use of force, incidence of complaints about brutality, rudeness, corruption, and fear of crime. They suggested that more attention be given as well to police activities that aim to improve the quality of life, such as foot patrols, bikes, ministations, door-to-door contacts, and so on. Documentation on these activities could be complemented with files on problems identified and solutions attempted, and what the outcomes were. Alpert and Moore identified specific goals for this "new" paradigm of policing: doing justice, promoting secure communities, restoring crime victims, and promoting noncriminal options.

Organizing the information

One can easily be put to sleep by long lists and details, however useful and important they may be. The no-dose antidote is to stay focused on the basics. The fundamental mission of the police is to protect and serve. The law enforcement community can be supported both to protect and serve if we give them indicators that reveal how the police, both locally and nationwide:

⁶Consider the prospective return on investment from such an expansion of the NCVS, toward a better understanding of effective policing practices and resource allocations. It seems entirely conceivable that a \$100 million investment in the expansion of the NCVS to accomplish these information goals would yield a one percent reduction in the victimization rate through increases in reporting, arrest, and conviction rates. A one percent reduction in the costs of crime amounts to well over a billion dollars of benefit to crime victims. (Anderson; Cohen.)

- Contribute to public safety, the overarching concern of law enforcement, and do so:
- Effectively (measures of crime, public order, satisfaction)
- Fairly (measures of equity, by neighborhood, income, race/ethnicity)
- Efficiently (measures of effectiveness adjusted for cost)
- Exercise discretion prudently and equitably (in cases of domestic violence, traffic stops, gang disturbances, etc., based on variation by officer, neighborhood, SES)
- Serve the unique needs of the community (surveys of the community and the police); and
- Contribute to perceived legitimacy (survey data on satisfaction, lapses).

BJS could make a considerable contribution to the law enforcement community by selecting and organizing the contents of its information portfolio—and providing indicators of police performance and trends—by categories that speak to the overarching themes of law enforcement. The ones shown here strike me as worthy candidates.

Dealing with change. The perceived importance of each prospective item of information is likely to continue to change as the world continues to turn. In the meantime, assigning precise costs and values to each of these information items, accounting for complementarities among them, will always seem to be out of practical reach. Yet, if the choices are to be made in a systematic and fairly comprehensive way, some amount of such assessment is unavoidable.

Even if we could all agree that the BJS portfolio should be changed in a particular way, it is no trivial matter to establish something that resembles an optimal path from where BJS is now to the new place. And there is no guarantee that today's assessment will hold up over the long term or even the intermediate term. Some flexibility should be built in to the BJS portfolio to accommodate a changing set of demands.

Dealing with politics

One of the great challenges we face is to protect the integrity of the process of determining what to report about law enforcement and how to report it against the backdrop of political influences. One such political problem is the result of territorial boundaries at the federal level. We have noted the existence of some tension in the slightly overlapping roles of BJS and NIJ. A much greater tension is that between the FBI and every other justice information gathering and generating arm of the federal government, especially BJS and ICPSR, in its development of NIBRS. The FBI has been responsible for the collection, organization, and dissemination of the UCR for three quarters of a century, and while much good has come from this monopoly of independent control (some would argue that “little good” is a more accurate description) the arrangement is not healthy. We might all be better off if the UCR were transferred to BJS, as others have argued, so that

the FBI could focus on matters more central to their mission and expertise. Richard Rosenfeld observed recently (2007) that the sophisticated approaches used by social scientists to identify patterns in the UCR would permit more powerful and timely projections of emerging crime trends than are presently available under the FBI's glacial stewardship of the UCR—other federal agencies have demonstrated a facility for making reliable data publicly available much more quickly than the FBI does. Rosenfeld contrasts the FBI's nearly year-long delay in making crime data available with the Bureau of Labor Statistics' (BLS) making detailed data on unemployment for one month available the next month on the BLS website, concluding: “The nation's crime monitoring patchwork lags by decades in the sophistication, coherence, and capacity for rapid response of the information infrastructure that supports economic policy making.” (p. 829)

The UCR is not as comprehensive as it could be, either. Rosenfeld observes that the FBI created its Supplementary Homicide Report in the 1970s to provide richer information about homicides than was available in the UCR, but did not do so for other important crime categories, which gave rise to NIBRS in the 1980s. After two decades, however, NIBRS covers just 20% of the U.S. population, a fact that some have attributed to the FBI's resistance to sample-based implementation.

Another, perhaps more serious, political conflict is that between federal and state or local authorities. We might expect our federal system to be uniquely effective in providing a check against local partisan pressures. Yet, other countries have been much more effective in using victimization surveys to hold their local police accountable for protecting the public against crime.⁷ The Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice has been a shining exception to this general rule, especially with its successful use of the victimization survey to hold local law enforcement agencies accountable for the problem of discrimination in the exercise of discretion in making routine traffic stops. This sort of independence to insulate the collection, analysis, and reporting of federal statistics against intrusions—typically, by local officials calling or paying visits to influential friends in Washington—should apply to everything BJS does, to ensure that the needs of the nation's law enforcement community and the general public are served legitimately and professionally. This integrity is likely to be maintained when everyone realizes that attempts to breach the insulation of federal statistics against political pressure are always more newsworthy than the items of information that trouble some local official in the first place.

⁷I thank Jim Lynch for making this point.

Conclusion

James Q. Wilson, a critic of many programs of the federal government, has argued that the provision of statistics and research on crime and justice is an important exception: the production of information needed to improve the public's safety is an essential federal function. In 2002, for example, he observed that local criminal justice authorities do not do research very well because they are too attached to the results, and they do not do enough of it because individual jurisdictions that derive the benefits of such collective efforts would not adequately fund them if the participation were voluntary. He concludes that in matters pertaining to the criminal justice system, there is simply "... something wrong with not trying to find out what works ... The chief federal role in domestic law enforcement should be to encourage and fund such research. No one else will do it." (pp. 556-7)

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- Wilson's words should provide some assurance as we move ahead to determine what information is most needed and why it is needed. If we can arrive at a consensus that certain changes are bound to improve policing, it will be more difficult for partisan politics to interfere. Political debate these days is preoccupied with tax policy and the economy, terrorism and Middle East policy, health care policy, oil prices and energy policy, abortion and the meaning of marriage. With crime off of the political radar screen, this could be the perfect moment to make substantive improvements in the production of information about crime and justice, to return to the knowledge-building trajectory of the 1970s and '80s, taking advantage of new information and communication technologies. It is to the credit of Jeff Sedgwick and the other organizers of this workshop that we are here today pursuing such a prospect. Policing could become even more transparent in the process.
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