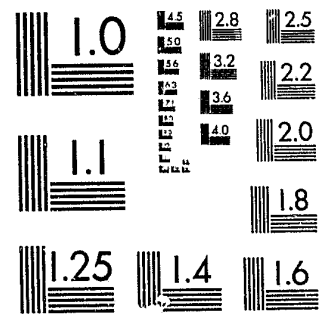


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The Administration of Deterrence:
Bureaucratic Structure and "Aggressive" Policing

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THE ADMINISTRATION OF DETERRENCE:
BUREAUCRATIC STRUCTURE AND "AGGRESSIVE" POLICING

The crime problem is often defined as one that is properly addressed by law enforcement agencies. While we may believe (correctly or not) that the "root causes" of crime lie in more fundamental social ills, we look to the local police to treat the symptom of these maladies. This is not to deny that a cure is possible, although there are those who doubt that it is; but insofar as the cure is forthcoming only, if at all, in the long run, we are compelled to seek short run relief.

While there is no consensus concerning whether and how the police can affect the rate of crime, recent research suggests that crime can be deterred by an "aggressive" patrol strategy. James Q. Wilson and Barbara Boland, the principal academic proponents of aggressive patrol, describe aggressiveness in terms of the frequency with which patrol officers intervene, on their own initiative, in the day-to-day affairs of the community, primarily by stopping to question suspicious persons and to investigate suspicious circumstances.¹ Their research is purported to show that such aggressiveness deters crime (cf., Jacob and Rich, 1980), and other studies have testified to the deterrent effect of conducting field interrogations, or "suspect stops" (Boydston,

¹ Like Wilson and Boland, we do not mean to imply that "aggressive" patrolmen are "hostile or harsh" (1978:370).

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1975; Whitaker, et al., 1983).

This body of literature represents a departure from previous research, insofar as it directs attention to the technology of policing (i.e., how patrol officers behave) rather than to the level of police resources (police expenditures or, what amounts to the same thing, police personnel). This line of inquiry also poses what is perhaps a greater challenge for police administrators, since public agencies are better able to manipulate resources than they are to manipulate behavior. How patrolmen can be induced to adopt an aggressive patrol style, by conducting field interrogations, for example, is a question for which extant research offers no definitive answer, and the one to which our analysis is addressed. Our findings should be of interest to organization theorists concerned with the relationship between structure and performance, and to police administrators interested in adopting an approach to crime reduction that is, according to its advocates, costless.

We empirically assess the effect of organizational arrangements and policies on two distinct forms of aggressive patrol: the enforcement of traffic laws and the interrogation of suspicious persons. Field interrogations, or suspect stops, are the core of an aggressive patrol strategy but, because of the cost of gathering observational data, they have not heretofore been the subject of rigorous quantitative analysis as organizational outputs. We do not suppose that traffic stops deter crime, but previous research

(Wilson and Boland, 1978) assumed that they are indicative of a broader set of aggressive behaviors, including suspect stops. Although our research indicates that these behaviors are not of a single piece, our examination of traffic enforcement serves as a point of departure from earlier analysis.

Bureaucratic Structure and Police Aggressiveness

Wilson and Boland maintain that an aggressive strategy is a deliberate choice made by police executives. They argue that "to achieve an aggressive patrol strategy a police executive will recruit certain kinds of officers, train them in certain ways, and devise requirements and reward systems ... to encourage them to follow the intended strategy" (1978:371). On the basis of Wilson's earlier research, notably Varieties of Police Behavior, they further maintain that aggressiveness is but one element of a "legalistic" style of policing. A legalistic style entails an enforcement-oriented approach to the problems with which police deal: police action is commonly of a formal nature; arrests are more frequently made and traffic citations more frequently issued. According to Wilson, a legalistic style has roots in the political culture of a community. Cities with a "public-regarding" culture are more likely to employ police executives with a commitment to the doctrines of police professionalism, a code that accords the highest priority to the crime control function (Brown, 1981). A professional

chief manipulates features of the organization in such a way that presumably induces officers to be legalistic: he strengthens formal authority by requiring written records of officers' activities; he creates specialized units (eg., traffic, juvenile, planning) that offer attractive working conditions to patrolmen as well as increased promotional opportunities; and he places a premium on technical efficiency, i.e., officers' "vigor in imposing rules and efficiency in completing reports about incidents" (Wilson, 1968:184), and makes promotions contingent on performance defined accordingly.

A legalistic department, then, is bureaucratic. The converse is not true, however; a bureaucratic department is not necessarily legalistic. "Service" departments, as Wilson calls them, are also bureaucratic but, because of their sensitivity to the demands of the body politic, they adopt "many practices that ... institutionalize the service rather than the legalistic style" (Wilson, 1968:202). Unlike service departments, legalistic departments are largely immune to community pressures; a laissez-faire posture vis-a-vis public agencies is an integral part of a public-regarding culture. Police chiefs are given sufficient latitude to put their conception of the police role into practice.

Wilson and Boland's statement must be regarded as conjectural in view of the structural impediments to managerial control in police agencies. Effective control rests on the

viability of an enforcement sequence (Prottas, 1978:294-306): the organization must (1) unambiguously define proper behavior, (2) compare actual behavior with prescribed behavior, and (3) structure an incentive system that encourages compliance (or discourages deviance).

This sequence is fragile indeed in police departments. Police administrators are rarely able to explicitly describe what officers should do; usually, policy statements define what an officer should not do. Proactive behaviors, including traffic stops and field interrogations, are subject to relatively tight organizational control, but not all such actions are equally amenable to clear and precise guidelines. Violations of the motor vehicle code can be clearly identified, but the conditions under which a person or circumstance should be considered suspicious are more ambiguous. One list includes as potential subjects of field interrogations people who are "visibly 'rattled' when near the policeman" and "unescorted women or young girls in public places" (quoted in Skolnick, 1975:46). The rate at which field interrogations are conducted may be less manipulable, for this reason, than is the rate at which traffic citations are issued.

The enforcement sequence may be interrupted elsewhere as well. Statistical controls, according to Michael Brown (1981), exert only mild pressure on patrolmen: "Low production may lead to some negative comments, but for an experi-

enced patrolman whose longevity is assured by his civil service status this is rather meaningless" (1981:124). Wilson concurs: "In a legalistic department, there is likely to be a sizable number of patrolmen with comparatively little zeal--typically older officers, or officers 'left over' from a previous administration, or officers of any age who do not regard the benefits (in terms of promotions, official recognition, or good duty assignments) of zealousness as worth the costs in effort and possibly adverse citizen relations" (1968:173; see also Friedrich, 1977). The efficacy of the formal incentive system may be further undermined by the occupational culture. "The police culture demands of a patrolman unstinting loyalty to his fellow officers, and he receives, in return, protection and honor: a place to assuage real and imagined wrongs inflicted by a (presumably) hostile public; safety from aggressive administrators and supervisors; and the emotional support required to perform a difficult task" (Brown, 1981:83). Organizational incentives compete with those of the police culture. And the norms of the police culture--loyalty and individualism--mean that so long as he fulfills his obligations to the work group, an officer is granted wide latitude to do his job as he sees fit.

These observations draw attention to the significance of individual officers' characteristics, not only as objects of academic interest but, practically, as factors that delimit

the influence of formal administrative structure. A number of studies reveal, if not a causal relationship, then at least an association between individual characteristics and aggressive patrol. Friedrich (1977), for example, found that less experienced officers initiate more citizen contacts (not to be confused with suspect stops) and engage in more active preventive patrol than do their more experienced colleagues. He also found that aggressiveness was positively related to morale and to minority status. Education is positively correlated with aggressiveness: McGreevy (1964) found that college-educated officers stopped more vehicles and checked more doors. Boydston and Sherry's (1975) results suggest that officers' familiarity with their assigned area is negatively related to aggressiveness; situations which might otherwise appear suspicious are "normal" to a patrolman who has come to know the day-to-day patterns of his clientele. William K. Muir's (1977) and Brown's (1981) analyses testify to the explanatory power of officers' orientations to their role; Muir's "enforcer" is far more likely to be aggressive than is an "avoider."

Many of these findings may be spurious, however: "professional" departments are thought to consist preponderantly of patrolmen who are young and well-educated; their personnel may well have higher morale than officers in other departments; and because professional practice dictates that officers rotate from beat to beat they may be relatively un-

familiar with their assigned areas. If a legalistic department is more aggressive, it could be attributable to its formal structure or to the composition of its personnel. Whether it is the former or the latter is not irrelevant, because recruitment policies are not a promising avenue of organizational change for most American cities. Wilson's admonition still rings true today: "...police administrators and mayors are going to have to work with the human material they now have, or something very like it" (1968:281).

The failure of previous research to separate the individual and organizational sources of aggressiveness has guided the development of our research design. Our analysis proceeds in two steps. First, we estimate the parameters of a regression model that expresses aggressiveness as a function of individual characteristics, such as education, race, experience, ambition, etc. We give particular attention to the conditions under which some individual characteristics affect aggressiveness. The foregoing discussion suggests that several relationships are conditional:

- (1) Officers in legalistic departments who are highly motivated or who aspire to higher ranks are more aggressive than officers who do not; in other departments ambition is unrelated to aggressiveness (because aggressive patrol is not rewarded).
- (2) More experienced officers are less aggressive, because their tenure is secure and time has tempered

their zeal. Insofar as experience is a buffer against organizational sanction, the effect of experience is expected to be greater in legalistic departments.

- (3) Officers whose conception of the police role emphasizes enforcement of the law are more aggressive than officers whose role orientation acknowledges the legitimacy of the service function, organizational context notwithstanding. The effect of role orientation should, however, be greater in politically sensitive departments, because aggressiveness is correspondingly more risky.

We posit that the impact of other individual characteristics is not influenced by organizational structure. We hypothesize that officers with high morale are, ceteris paribus, more aggressive. And on the basis of previous research, we hypothesize that black officers are more aggressive. We also control for the amount of discretionary or uncommitted time available to officers. At a minimum, patrolmen whose time is occupied with calls for service and administrative duties are quite obviously unlikely to initiate much activity. Richard Ericson suggests that aggressiveness is a "residual activity--what the officer does when he has nothing else to occupy him" (1982:84).

The regression model also includes specific organizational policies, namely, the closeness of supervision in the

field, the deployment of patrols in one- or two-officer units, and the scale of patrol. Close supervision should increase aggressiveness in legalistic departments; we would expect it to have no bearing on either suspect or traffic stops in other departments. The relationship of one- and two-officer units with forms of aggressiveness has been examined before; Boydston, *et al.* (1977), found that patrolmen in two-officer units are more likely to issue traffic citations, but not to conduct field interrogations. The scale of patrol hypothetically affects the familiarity and identification of a patrolman with his beat. The effect of scale is, *a priori*, ambiguous: the smaller the scale, the more familiar an officer becomes with his beat and hence the less aggressive he is; but small scale also fosters a psychological attachment to the area, which increases aggressiveness. Mastrofski's (1981) research supports the latter view.

The second stage of our analysis begins with the results of the first, and consists of an analysis of the regression residuals. We thereby examine another device by which patrol officers can be controlled: "instilling in them a shared outlook or ethos that provides for them a common definition of the situations they are likely to encounter" (Wilson, 1968:139). We compare the variance of the residuals both within and across departments to assess the impact of organizational context; other things (namely, officers' characteristics) being equal, we would expect legalistic departments to be more aggressive.

Data and Operationalizations

We test these hypotheses with data provided by the Police Services Study, part of which consisted of intensive data collection in twenty-four departments in three metropolitan areas: Rochester, New York; St. Louis, Missouri; and Tampa-St. Petersburg, Florida. The sample was designed to reflect a rough cross-section of organizational arrangements and service conditions for urban policing in the United States. The sample is therefore not representative of the entire population of police departments in this country. Three data sets from the Police Services Study are used in our analysis. The first consists of information coded in 7200 hours of observation by trained researchers of patrol officers during a sample of shifts. The second is a set of responses to a questionnaire administered to a sample of officers (including all of the observed officers) in each department. The third data set includes narrative accounts of in-depth interviews with police administrators. For each officer we assemble the information coded during the one or more shifts during which he was observed, excluding the twenty-one officers who, for one reason or another, were observed for less than four hours. Some data for an additional forty-five officers is missing; our sample includes 445 officers.

We define as legalistic those departments whose chief subscribes to the canons of police professionalism. Each chief (and in some departments other top- and mid-level man-

agers as well) was asked if he would "characterize the department's emphasis as being one of primarily providing service to residents, as primarily trying to suppress crime, or as something in between." Interviewers also inquired whether there were "any specific department policies regarding patrol style or emphasis." No chief made explicit reference to anything that could be regarded as an aggressive patrol style; many chiefs were also unwilling to admit that they considered the service function to fall outside the rubric of police business. But several revealed a decided emphasis on crime control. One chief, for example, "stressed the importance of patrol to the police function." He told our interviewer that "the department's first priority was the suppression and prevention of crime, and its second priority was responding to calls for service." [The chief] felt that the department receives many trivial or 'bullshit' calls for service ... [and it] does what it can to respond to all calls, but such calls as these take low priority." Seven departments, of whose patrolmen 138 were observed, were classified as legalistic.

By politically sensitive we refer to departments that are subject to close oversight by local officials. Such oversight is characterized by observation of the day-to-day administration of police affairs and, when necessary, direct, authoritative intervention in police operations. Eleven of the departments in our sample have been so classified (Mastrofski, 1982).

We examine two forms of aggressiveness: the rate at which patrolmen stop vehicles for traffic infractions, and the rate at which they stop suspicious persons and autos. Both measures are expressed as a rate per forty hours of observation. Traffic stops include encounters with operators whose vehicles are missing proper license plates, registration, or inspection, or who have committed any violation of the traffic laws for which one may receive a ticket. Suspect stops include officer-initiated activity relating to suspicious persons, suspected violators, or suspicious circumstances (eg., a motor vehicle that "doesn't belong in the area" or a door that is unexplainably ajar). The typical officer makes about two suspect stops and five traffic stops during each forty-hour period (see Table 1).

Wilson and Bland's analysis is predicated on the assumption that the rate at which patrolmen issue traffic citations is indicative of a department's style of policing. They thus imply that those departments that emphasize the enforcement of traffic laws also adopt the other elements of an aggressive patrol style, and that those that are relatively lax in citing violations of the motor vehicle code are also relatively "passive" in, say, stopping suspicious persons. If legalistic modes of police behavior do indeed cohere, then this assumption is a reasonable one. But Wilson himself notes that "the police administrator can obtain almost any level of ticketing he wishes without necessarily

altering the way police conceive their function" (1968:174; emphasis added). Herbert Jacob and Michael Rich (1980) present evidence that is, if not convincing, at least consistent with the view that the number of moving violations is not a reliable indicator of aggressiveness. Our measures are, in principal if not empirically, superior to Wilson and Boland's. That these behaviors are manifestations of an underlying legalistic ethos is questionable; the correlation at the officer level is .18, and at the department level it is .53.

Information on officers' characteristics was obtained from the PSS officer questionnaire. Patrolmen who indicated that they expected to hold a higher rank upon retirement were considered to be ambitious. Nearly eighty percent of the officers in our sample can be so classified. We caution the reader that this measure may introduce something of a tautology: officers who are aggressive, for whatever reason, may reasonably expect to advance in an organization that rewards such behavior; the causal direction, in this case, would be reversed. Our operationalization may temper one's confidence in our findings.

Officers' morale was measured on the basis of two items on the questionnaire. Those who said that their department was a "much better place to work" than other departments in the same Metropolitan area, or who in the opinion of the interviewer had high morale, were so defined for our analysis. Almost half of our sample has high morale.

Education was defined in terms of a college degree. We feel that this indicator better reflects both the high level of motivation that compels an officer to seek an education as well as the benefits of educational experiences than does the simple number of years of formal schooling. Approximately one-third of our sample holds a college degree. Experience is the length of service beyond the fourth year on any police force. We assume that experience has no effect on aggressiveness until that time. Race is a dummy variable: black or non-black. Twelve percent of our sample is black. By role orientation we refer to the priority that officers attach to crime-fighting. Previous research based on these data (Worden and Pollitz, 1983) revealed a scale that plausibly distinguishes officers on such a basis, and which we adopt for this analysis.

Discretionary time is expressed as a proportion of time observed. The typical patrolman was free--unoccupied with administrative tasks or calls for service--two-thirds of the time, or roughly five and one-half hours during each eight-hour shift. Closeness of supervision is measured in terms of the frequency with which a department's supervisors contact (in person or by radio) patrolmen in the field. Our indicator is expressed as a rate per eight-hour shift. Our indicator of patrol scale was developed by Stephen Mastroski (1981). The "primary assignment area," or PAA, is the population of the "geographic area in which officers normal-

ly assigned to that area spend most of their work time over the course of the year" (Mastrofski, 1981:347). Thus, it reflects not only the department's beat assignment policies but also the informal practices of dispatchers and of the officers themselves.

Findings

Table 2 reports OLS estimates of the parameters of the regression model. Three variables have a statistically significant and interpretable effect on both forms of aggressiveness. Ambition, in the context of an organization that rewards a legalistic style of policing, appears to lead officers to conduct suspect stops more frequently and to make more traffic stops; upwardly mobile patrolmen in other departments are neither more nor less prone to be aggressive. Experience, as hypothesized, depresses these proactive behaviors. The magnitude of the effect is not, however, greater in legalistic departments. Insofar as legalistic departments alone impose penalties for a failure to be sufficiently proactive, we interpret this effect as one of waning enthusiasm rather than one of immunity to organizational sanction. Finally, the amount of discretionary time available to an officer has a large effect on aggressiveness; during a typical week, an officer with an additional eight hours of uncommitted time would make one more suspect stop

² We caution the reader that, at this preliminary stage of analysis, our results are only suggestive. The magnitudes of the coefficients should not (and cannot) be interpreted

and almost two additional traffic stops.²

Three other individual characteristics have a significant effect on suspect stops but not on traffic stops. Officers with high morale make suspect stops more frequently. Black officers also make more suspect stops; vigor in stopping suspicious persons (but not traffic violators) may be one way to demonstrate one's identification with fellow (white) officers. Education has a peculiar effect on the propensity to make suspect stops. Officers with a college education make suspect stops more frequently, as one would expect, but only if they work in a nonlegalistic organizational context. College-educated patrolmen in legalistic departments are less inclined to conduct suspect stops. If a college education is in fact indicative of a high level of motivation, then this result is anomalous indeed.

The effects of specific organizational policies are not all in the expected direction. The deployment of patrols in two-officer units appears to promote suspicion stops (but not traffic stops); officers who enjoy the (actual or imaginary) security of a partner may be more inclined to investigate suspicious circumstances on their own initiative. Curiously (at least on its face), close supervision by departments whose chief is committed to professional doct-

literally. For example, a white officer with no college degree, less than four years experience, etc., would according to our best estimate, make a negative number of suspect stops (approximately -1.1) during a forty-hour work week in which twelve hours were uncommitted.

rine inhibits aggressiveness. A substantive interpretation of this result is that legalistic departments may send conflicting signals to patrolmen by basing promotions (if only in part) on personnel complaints (see Brown, 1981). This coefficient could also be an artifact of an outlying department; it may vanish under further scrutiny. The size of the PAA has no effect on suspect stops, but a small effect on traffic enforcement.

An analysis of the regression residuals shows that officers in legalistic departments are not significantly more aggressive--they neither make more suspect stops nor do they make more traffic stops--than officers in other departments, once the effects of individual characteristics and formal structure are removed. Thus, we can offer no empirical evidence to support the notion that an "ethos" that permeates legalistic departments has an effect on street-level behavior. And to the extent that our regression analysis fails to capture the mechanisms by which police departments can influence the exercise of officers' discretion, their effect is small or mitigated by other factors.

Conclusions

Taken together, these results tentatively suggest that organizational arrangements can affect the two forms of aggressive patrol that we have examined. Departments that are, so far as we can determine, "legalistic," i.e., departments that stress the crime control function and that struc-

ture organizational incentives accordingly, effectively encourage their officers to patrol aggressively by making suspect stops and by making traffic stops. In addition, the policy of deploying the patrol force in two-officer units appears to encourage individual aggressiveness, although the net increment of aggressiveness (suspect stops per unit) may not be worth the cost.

These results also indicate, however, that pressure to enforce traffic violations has a greater impact than does pressure to "produce" suspect stops. The police administrator interested in implementing an aggressive patrol strategy should be cognizant of his limitations: the discretionary nature of patrol work cannot be transformed. Moreover, such an approach to crime control is not without its costs. Any discussion of aggressive patrol includes a warning that stopping suspicious persons may have adverse consequences for police-community relations. But neither should the costs of organizational change be ignored: the institution of an incentive system that offers sufficiently attractive "carrots" (or sufficiently large "sticks") might necessitate financial outlays that many communities may be unwilling to bear. Unfortunately, our analysis, as it is presently designed, fails to identify the structural features that have the greatest impact on aggressiveness; neither does it indicate the point below which the organization's incentives cease to influence behavior. These are the directions in which our subsequent analysis will turn.

Table 1
Means of Variables in the Analysis

Variable	Mean
Suspect stops	1.98
Traffic stops	5.06
Ambition	0.79
Ambition X legalistic department	0.24
Morale	0.46
Education	0.32
Education X legalistic department	0.09
Experience	2.40
Experience X legalistic department	0.64
Race	0.12
Role orientation	0.33
Role orientation X politically sensitive department	0.09
Discretionary time	0.67
Two-officer car	0.11
Permanent assignment area (10,000s)	5.79
Contacts with supervisors	2.38
Contacts with supervisors X legalistic department	0.72

Table 2. Regression Results

	Suspect stops	Traffic stops
Constant	-2.68 (-2.24)	-3.38 (-1.80)
Ambition	-0.25 (-0.49)	-0.43 (-0.53)
Ambition X legalistic department	2.15* (2.73)	3.97* (3.20)
Morale	0.54** (1.53)	0.25 (0.45)
Education	0.72 ^b (1.64)	0.17 (0.25)
Education X legalistic department	-1.76 ^a (-2.22)	-0.20 (-0.16)
Experience	-0.11* (-1.81)	-0.12** (-1.32)
Experience X legalistic department	-0.00 (-0.03)	0.07 (0.41)
Race	0.79** (1.44)	-0.04 (-0.05)
Role orientation	0.03 (0.06)	-0.00 (-0.01)
Role orientation X politically sensitive department	-0.09 (-0.12)	-0.21 (-0.18)
Discretionary time	4.95* (4.56)	8.71* (5.12)
Two-officer car	0.72** (1.26)	0.75 (0.84)
Permanent assignment area (10,000)	0.02 (0.62)	0.15* (2.99)
Contacts with supervisors	0.09 (0.42)	0.42** (1.32)
Contacts with supervisors X legalistic departments	-0.37** (-1.26)	-0.89* (-1.95)
R ²	.094	.122

*p < .05; one-tailed test
**p < .10; one-tailed test

^ap < .05; two-tailed test
^bp < .10; two-tailed test

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