

Role of politics in police decision making



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Should politics play a role in police administration decision making? This question has evolved over the years. Both concepts are interrelated but separate entities and yet they overlap in purpose. The term politics can mean a range of things depending on perspective and the situation. In terms of police politics the meaning of politics depends on the particular law enforcement organization or the size of the administration. In general, the term politics refers to the processes involved in governing a country or organization.

Police administration “ administration activities that control, direct, and coordinate police personnel, resources and activities in the service of crime prevention, apprehension of criminals, the recovery of stolen property and the performance of a variety of regulatory and helping services”

(Schmallegger 97). Police administration is the delicate management and ethical leadership of a law enforcement organization. Administration involves selection and hire of officers and support staff, policy's, relationships with the community, stress and health management, working with fellow agencies, and dealing with the political aspects of each.

Politics and policing have evolved over the past century and a half from four main era's in American Policing. The Political Era, reform Era, Community Era, and the New Era. The Political Era occurred between 1840 and 1930 and was marked by a drastic changes in social order and by law enforcement doing the bidding of politicians. The Reform Era occurred between 1930 and the 1970's was known for traditional crime fighting and the removal of politics from law enforcement and from police being the lap dogs of the political elite. The Community Era occurred between 1970s and present day

and it focused on community involvement in law enforcement. Finally the New Era overlaps with the Community Era between 2001 and present day focuses on large scale threats involving terrorism and political campaigns on mass surveillance (Schmallegger 100-101).

Decision making is a main component of being an elected official or police chief and understanding the politics of the community is part of making the correct decisions. This due mainly to the how the leadership of city's are structured. Society elects congressman, mayors and other political figures to create and put in place laws and policy's to maintain order and make sure that public money is well spent in the process. One of the purposes of the law enforcement is to make sure those laws and policy's are followed. Harold Lasswell defined politics as " who gets what, when and how" (Schaefer 196). Politics involves the controlling of power and with that power comes control and influence over people and organizations. Society often debates the approach of more police or less police. The deployment of more officers into high crime areas is a common political move.

There are two main divisions of police politics personal politics and community politics. Personal politics deals mainly with internal influences in the law enforcement organization such as who gets promoted and why. The second is community politics which deals directly with the external control and delegation of the department. " A fundamental value of our society is that policing should be subject to and under some control of the public." (Alpert, Dunham 96). Since the management above the Police Chief is generally the Mayor and city council both are involved in making decisions. The mayor of a city or town is elected by the community. The mayor then

<https://assignbuster.com/role-of-politics-in-police-decision-making/>

hires an impartial, outside firm, to interview and then hire the Chief of Police when the position is vacant. Below the Chief of Police in the chain of command is a deputy chief and various captains, in charge of patrol officers. A Police Chief's actions are directly scrutinized by the mayor.

Modern policing combines the local community and police officers into community policing. The purpose is to combine resources to combat and prevent crime and increase the level of everyday life. Many of these changes are in response to community's greater involvement in the political arena and the louder voicing of concerns (Carter 7). The internet has played a large part in these movements largely in part due to social media. People are able to voice a concern, spread an agenda, and even display police brutality throughout the world. A witness to a crime or abuse of power that can upload a video to Youtube for the whole world to see, brings a lot of attention to issues in the past might have been kept quiet or covered up.

Most non-specific crimes occur without regard to "race, ethnicity, age, gender or lifestyle" and because crime is one political factor that everyone can agree on, many cities will spend money for crime prevention and incarceration even with tight budgets (Carter 8). If the mayor or campaigning politician of a city says that taxes need to be raised to hire more officers, or pay for equipment, it's an easier sell than saying taxes need to be raised to decorate a city, or build a new stadium. In such a situation the tax raise would gain support, even if after the fact the money is used elsewhere, often the pockets of the political elite.

Society is more likely to pay attention to a car accident or shooting as opposed to a rare bird flying over head. Violent crimes stand out, and that leads to more media exposure and curiosity. This also gives politicians more speaking ammunition for various political initiatives that are supposed to modify crime rates in some fashion. Politicians use community policing as another means to relate to their constituents, because by supporting various anti crime initiatives they are able to bond with the community, whether they actually are apart of the community or not. Its simply another measure to become elected and gain power.

Political campaigns often use the guise of a new approach(s) on crime to gain support by promising to “ provide better services to the public... increasing the quality of life” (Carter 10). This is not to say that a politicians proposal isn't valid, but certainly if the approach doesn't succeed, their support will drop, and all that will be achieved is a politicians appointment, and subsequent battle for reelection against someone with similar promises.

The police administration can't just make decisions that they feel are best without the taking into account the political views of the community. When or if they do they are either overridden by powers higher up, or state attorneys refuse to prosecute or simply override their decisions. Since political views and police administration are directly intertwined one will have an affect on the other. If a police administration failed to act or respond to a crime or issue under their purview, there would be a backlash from the community. Without political support, law enforcement decisions would fall flat. Decision making in police organizations is a tedious, often politically motivated and a very complicated process. The reasoning behind decisions

<https://assignbuster.com/role-of-politics-in-police-decision-making/>

must be sound and rational and free of bias. Whenever a decision in law enforcement administration is made, the chief or top level management has to be aware of different points of view, if the choice being made intuition or emotional feelings, what the ramifications will be, what will be accomplished. (Morreale 2)

One of the most politically polarizing issues in recent years, and best examples of politics and police administration clashing, has been the New York City's "Stop and Frisk" policy. The stop and frisk policy involves randomly detaining individuals, the majority of which are of non-Caucasian ethnic descent, on the street while police search them for contraband such as drugs and weapons. The NYC police department engages in the stop and frisk tactics without any legal motivation, such as genuine suspicion of committing a crime, but that is part of the problem (Peltz). The law allows police to engage in these tactics simply by believing someone has or will commit a crime, but that doesn't meet probable cause standards and "88 percent of the stops resulted in neither arrests nor tickets" (Peltz). Even if the political reason behind the crime was well intended, it has been used to racial profile people that haven't committed crimes. This is an example of policing and politics that don't mix because the practice was encouraged and set up by the mayor and carried out by police and in this particular case both sides were wrong since it's an abuse of power on both sides.

Generally it is against the code of a city or town to advertise or do campaign work of any type while on duty. Take a patrol officer for example, if he was campaigning while on duty, he wouldn't be serving or protecting. He'd be using city taxes which pay for his salary to promote or bash a particular

<https://assignbuster.com/role-of-politics-in-police-decision-making/>

campaign. This behavior would should a bias for or against a candidate and would look as if the city supported that officers political views. An officer is certainly allowed to campaign while off duty, on his or her own time, as long as it does not breach a code of professionalism.

Even when political campaigning is carried out while off duty there can be professional repercussions for an individuals beliefs and objectives. A couple examples of political campaigns and the retaliation suffered is apparent in the following stories. In Missoula County located in Montana, a \$120, 000 settlement was reached in favor of sheriff's deputies who alleged retaliation because of their plans to run for sheriff and under sheriff. Detective Sgt. T. J. McDermott and running mate Detective Jason Johnson were subjected to a "hostile" working environment simply because of their campaign objectives (Haake). In another case in Cook County, Illinois, a \$2. 4 million lawsuit was settled between 21 deputies. The 21 deputies brought the lawsuit against Tom Dart because they were unfairly treated and even denied promotions when " they backed his political opponent when he was running [for] sheriff in 2006" (Sun Times Media).

Ideally politics shouldn't play a roll in police administration, but more often than not they do because its simply unavoidable. You can't really ever separate an elected or appointed official from the political machine because part of their position requires the taking of sides and support of an agenda. The sensitive nature of balancing the needs and values of a small community, city or large metropolis are always in flux. What was needed five, ten, or fifteen years ago may not work in today's society. What's needed in a particular area of the community or by a particular culture may

<https://assignbuster.com/role-of-politics-in-police-decision-making/>

be different than what is required by others. Society evolves and changes and so do the types of crimes committed within them. The political landscape and the police administration must adapt to meet the needs of the ever changing people for which they serve.

Works Cited

Schmallegger, Frank. *Criminal Justice: A Brief Introduction* . 9th ed. Boston: Prentice Hall, 2012. Print.

Schaefer, Richard T. *Sociology Matters* . Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2004. Print.

Reed, Wilson Edward. *The Politics of Community Policing: The Case of Seattle*. New York: Garland Pub., 1999. Print.

Alpert, Geoffrey P., Roger G. Dunham, and Meghan S. Stroschine. *Policing: Continuity and Change*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland, 2006. Print.

Haake, Kathryn. " Missoula County Pays \$120K to 2 Deputies in Discrimination Settlement." *Missoulian. com* . [Http://missoulian.com/](http://missoulian.com/), 14 Feb. 2014. Web. 27 Feb. 2014. .

" Cook County to Settle Deputies' Suit vs. Sheriff Tom Dart for \$2. 4M." *89 WLS, Chicago's Talk Leader* . Sun-Times Media, LLC, 14 Feb. 2014. Web. 26 Feb. 2014. .

Mahr, Joe, and Christy Gutowski. " 7 DuPage Deputies Sue Sheriff, Alleging Retaliation." *Chicago Tribune* . N. p., 22 Nov. 2013. Web. 27 Feb. 2014.

CARTER, DAVID L. " POLITICS AND COMMUNITY POLICING: VARIABLES OF CHANGE THE POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT." *JSTOR* . Southern Public <https://assignbuster.com/role-of-politics-in-police-decision-making/>

Administration Education Foundation, Inc. (SPAEF), 1995. Web. 01 Mar. 2014.

.

Morreale, Stephen A. “ Join Academia. edu & Share Your Research with the World.” *Elements of Decision-making in Police Organizations* . Stephen A. Morreale, n. d. Web. 28 Feb. 2014. .

Peltz, Jennifer. “ NYC Stop-And-Frisk Controversy.” *The Huffington Post* . TheHuffingtonPost. com, 16 Oct. 2012. Web. 28 Feb. 2014. .