

Essay summary of police corruption

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Police corruption is the misuse of police authority for personal gain. Examples include extortion (for example, demanding money for not writing traffic tickets) and bribery (for example, accepting money in exchange for not enforcing the law).

The costs of police corruption

Police corruption carries high costs. First, a corrupt act is a crime. Second, police corruption detracts from the integrity of the police and tarnishes the public image of law enforcement. Third, corruption protects other criminal activity such as drug dealing and prostitution. Protected criminal activities are often lucrative sources of income for organized crime. The causes of police corruption

According to the rotten apple theory, corruption is the work of a few, dishonest, immoral police officers. Experts dismiss this theory because it fails to explain why so many corrupt officers become concentrated in some police organizations but not others. Another explanation pinpoints U. S. society's use of the criminal law to enforce morality.

Unenforceable laws governing moral standards promote corruption because they provide criminal organizations with a financial interest in undermining law enforcement. Narcotic corruption, for example, is an inevitable consequence of drug enforcement. Providers of these illegal goods and service use part of their profits to bribe the police in order to ensure the continuation of criminal enterprises. Rooting out police corruption

When police controls break down and a scandal occurs, special investigating commissions can mobilize public opinion and rally public support for

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anticorruption and antiviolenre reforms. Commissions get information from the police department, pinpoint where the internal controls of the police have failed, and recommend changes in policy. The problem with these commissions is that they usually disappear after finishing their reports. Paul Chevigny asserts that continuing independent auditors would be more effective than commissions. He envisions the function of such auditors as investigating a range of police problems, including corruption and brutality.

Prosecuting corrupt police officers

Since corruption involves criminal behavior, prosecution of corrupt police officers is possible. Since prosecutors depend on the police to gather evidence and develop cases, however, they often don't want to “bite the hand that feeds them.”

Legislative control

Legislators could reevaluate laws that create the potential for corruption. Such a reassessment would be based on the recognition that a major portion of police corruption is an outgrowth of laws that criminalize drug use, prostitution, and gambling. Any serious attempt to fight police corruption must wrestle with the decriminalization issue. Decriminalization involves removing the criminal label from victimless crimes by legalizing and regulating them. Decriminalization would contribute significantly to improving the police corruption problem. It is doubtful, however, that Congress or any state legislature will seriously consider legalizing drugs or any other prohibited goods and services in the near future.