

Approaches to the broken windows policy explained criminology essay



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1. Explain the Broken Windows theory of policing. Describe the advantages and disadvantages of this approach. Detail the two most important benefits and the two pitfalls of such an approach to policing.

Police departments, in the past twenty years, have adopted a theory that says by resolving minor disorders serious crimes can be reduced. It is called the broken windows theory, “ also known as “ order-maintenance,” “ zero-tolerance,” or “ quality-of-life” policing.” (Harcourt & Ludwig, Winter 2006, p. 282) It came to the forefront after a 1982 Atlantic Monthly article by James Q. Wilson and George Kelling. The article argued that when low-level quality-of-life offenses were tolerated in a community, more serious crime would follow. The broken windows theory says that “ the variation in disorder in neighborhoods that explains the variation in crime, holding structural disadvantage constant. The real trigger is disorderliness itself.” (Harcourt & Ludwig, p. 281) According to this view, broken windows, abandoned buildings, public drinking, litter and loitering cause good people to stay in their houses or move out of the neighborhood entirely. The theory argues “ that the minor events and incivilities that frightened people, far from being a distraction for police departments, should be identified as key targets of police action.” (Moore, 1992, p. 138) It leaves criminals free to roam and send a message that law violations are not taken seriously. “ The focus of the broken windows policing strategy is to address community anxiety about public safety. Broken windows advocates argue that the role of the police is fundamentally to maintain public order.” (Dammert & Malone, Winter 2006, p. 39) Some of the advantages of the broken windows policing are that it

reduces social and physical disorders, furthers joint safety endeavors, and bring communities together.

“ Broken windows theory assumes an essentialist notion both of disorder and its connection to perception: visual cues are unambiguous and natural in meaning” (Sampson & Raudenbush, Dec. 2004, p. 320). The theory’s biggest test has been in New York City, where a dramatic decline in crime has been attributed in large part to “ order maintenance.” Rundown parts of the city have been cleaned up, and police focus more on such problems as panhandling, turnstile jumping, and public drinking. Police have even cracked down on people who clean the windshields of cars at stoplights with squeegees (Parenti, 1999, p. 77). Among the first and hardest hit were the homeless, who travel, beg, and live in the political and physical basement of the class system: the city’s six-story-deep concrete bowels. Advocates of such tactics argued that in order to address these crimes, the police must be afforded wide discretion and should not be hamstrung by constitutional rules. Still “ broken windows” enforcement has won a proper place among trends in criminal-justice reform.

But in doing so, the police ignored the principal lesson of their own theory. If the toleration of minor law violations leads to more serious crime on the street, it would also follow that the toleration of minor law violations by the police will lead to more serious crime on the force. And that is precisely what has happened. “ The broken windows theory suggests that minor disorders, both physical...and social...is causally related to serious crime.” (Harcourt, 2001, p. 68) “ Broken windows gives rise to “ wars” on the poor, racism, and police brutality.” (Weisburd & Braga, 2007, p. 80) As mayor, Giuliani
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appeared to show his eagerness to impose law and order at all costs with the implementation of the zero tolerance policy. This led to a dramatic increase in arrests for such crimes as riding a bike on the sidewalk and playing loud music.

People who admit that crime is decreasing because of these policies are only being self-defeating because if they admit that crime is down because of these policies, then they can use the same policies on the cops to improve police conduct. Yes, broken windows does reduce crime, but if an uncivil society breeds criminals, certainly a belligerent police force breeds police brutality. “ To what extent can police brutality be explained by “ turning the police loose” with order maintenance tactics? Many civil libertarians and advocates for the homeless, for example, oppose order maintenance because they believe it infringes on the liberties of selected populations (the poor, minorities, the homeless, and youths) and opens the door to abusive police practices. The debates about these issues have been vigorous and often rancorous.” (Kelling, October 1999, p. 1)

“ Surveillance cameras are everywhere. They are in housing projects, at traffic intersections, and on subway platforms, with plans constantly announced to add more. There are undercover quality-of-life police squads who ride the subways, busting people for fare skipping or even for placing their bags on the seat next to them. The police sweep down on the homes of “ suspected drug dealers” and people they mistakenly think are dealing. A simple tip from a snitch can send cops to knock down the door and toss in a stun grenade.” (RW, October 18, 1998)

In conclusion, “ police officials need to focus on the substantive content of police work; find and delineate the means to conduct police work morally, legally, skillfully, and effectively; then structure and administer departments on the basis of this literal work and not a fictionalized view of police work.” (Kelling, October 1999, p. 2)

2. Under what circumstance in society would the broken windows approach work best? Give at least two specific circumstances and detail how the approach will work from start to finish.

The broken windows approach to policing would work best in areas where there are a lot of untended behavior. It can be untended homes, untended yards, and even untended children. If left untended these can lead to a community that is out of control. A well kept home and community can quickly turn into a frightening place to live. “ One’s perception of incivilities in the neighborhood has a greater impact than the actual amount of incivilities in the neighborhood” (Weisburd & Braga, 2007, p. 83). Houses that are not cared for gives criminal miscreants the impression that the residents of the community do not care about the quality of life in their neighborhood. It signals to them that they are free to roam to neighborhood and steal, litter, and vandalize. The unkempt houses opens up the community for more disorders, such as public drunkenness and loitering, that if not dealt with will lead to more serious crimes. “ Neighborhood disorders influences honest people to move out of the neighborhood or lock themselves in their homes, but it influences the disorderly and especially criminals to move into the neighborhood and commit crimes.” (Harcourt, Nov. 1998, p. 297) Teenagers begin to gather in front of the local
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convenience store. Litter starts to accumulate on the side of streets. People start to drink alcohol in front of the corner store; in time, a drunk is left to sleep it off on the sidewalk. Pedestrians are being approached by very persistent panhandlers. All of this gives citizens the feeling that their neighborhood is no longer safe. The feeling of insecurity forces them to stay inside of their homes, or move away, which leads to further deterioration of the neighborhood. These types of crimes deteriorate the citizens' trust and confidence in police's ability to provide its first obligation, which is safety to the public.

In order to deter this type of catastrophe police should implement some form of broken windows policing. First, you have to determine what is the core or main problem that should be resolved. The panhandler that was left to harass the residents as they walk to the street is, in effect, the first broken window. This act is the one that opened the proverbial door for criminals to enter into the community. If the community can't keep a belligerent panhandler from harassing the citizens, a thief may believe, that the community is even less likely to notify officers of a mugging or step in while it is taking place.

By resolving the panhandling issue, the major issue, you can also start eliminating some of the smaller problems. Panhandlers are a serious problem because they prey on the sympathies of the residents. As more and more residents give the panhandlers money, more panhandlers move into the community seeking out these same opportunities. Eventually they are hanging out with signs at every freeway off-ramp, stop sign, and intersection light waiting for some naive motorist to give them money. " the appropriate <https://assignbuster.com/approaches-to-the-broken-windows-policy-explained-criminology-essay/>

and realistic goal is to find a means within an imperfect system for humane... treatment" (Hodulik, Summer 2001, p. 1075) of those that panhandle. The trick to getting rid of panhandlers is to stop giving them money. Police have to inform residents of the panhandling epidemic . To do this the police department should set up a community meeting. Residents should be informed that most panhandlers do not use the money that they are given for food and clothing. A lot of them use the money to purchase drugs and alcohol. Police should teach the residents how to ignore the panhandlers and how to avoid eye contact with them.

Also another way getting the churches, community leaders, and merchants together to establish a voucher distribution system as a way of making sure that the panhandlers are actually getting food and clothing. Vouchers would be sold to people in the community and they can give them to the panhandler instead of money. Panhandlers cash these vouchers in at some of the local merchants in exchange for food, no alcohol or tobacco, and clothing. This way the residents can still give knowing that the panhandler will not go purchase drugs or alcohol, but food and/or clothing. Knowing this will make the residents interact and give more to the panhandlers.

Another circumstance that can benefit from broken windows policing is the dilapidated and vacant homes in the community. " Ineffective neighbor networks might...be related to more physical-structural qualities of a community" (Wilcox et al., Spring 2004, p. 186). These homes can quickly turn into a breeding ground for illegal drug activities, temporary shelter for the homeless, and hideouts for those running from the police. One thing that police officers can do is meet with the residents so that they can voice their
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opinion about the rundown homes in the community. At this time they can also seek any suggestions on how to correct the problem. The first thing for officers to do is search these homes for squatters and criminal. They should be check to see if they have any warrants. If no warrants they are released and asked to leave the house. Those with warrants will be arrested and taken to jail for processing. Next, is a community renovation project. By removing these desolate properties can restore the health and safety to the community. It can also increase the value of the other homes in the neighborhood. If the home has an owner they can pay to get the house torn down. If there is no owner or the owner can not pay for a demolition the community has to come together to get the houses demolished. One way the community can do this is by getting a demolition grant for neighborhood stabilization. This way the federal government pays for the demolition of the homes. Once the funds have been secured then the next thing is to get an affordable demolition company. The main objective is to get the most out of the grant money, more houses demolished at the cheapest possible cost. After they have a demolition company, the dilapidated homes should be demolished and the land cleared. To help with the beautification of the community the land should be reseeded after the structure has been cleared. Some of the land could be turned into a community garden. The rest could be sold so that more houses could be built on it.

The most important thing is that once the houses have been cleared the criminal miscreants will no longer have areas within the community where they can dwell and commit devious acts. Also it gives the residents back a a sense of pride in their community. No longer will they fear walking out of

their front door because of the drug activity going on down the street. This one act can change the dynamics of the community from downtrodden and crime infested to viable. It lets the deviants know that the residents care for their community.