

Police crackdowns and different crackdown strategies

Law



An article by David Kennedy titled " Pulling Levers: Getting Deterrence Right", reports on case studies from Boston and elsewhere on the tactics used by various law enforcement agencies to put pressure on gangs to reduce the violence.

Police crackdowns can target specific crimes, individuals, or geographic areas. They can involve an increased police presence, a commitment to more severe punishment, or other forms of legal sanctions. In Boston, Kennedy reported on how the local authorities would reach out to the gangs and communicate their intention to reduce violence by bringing every available legal tool to bear on them. This process of 'pulling levers' would dramatically increase the cost to a gang for committing acts of violence. Instead of just one member being arrested and prosecuted for murder, the system would up the enforcement level of probation, outstanding warrants, and illegal street activities on all the gang members.

Sherman reported that similar results were shown in regard to a variety of other settings and crimes. Sherman noted that increased enforcement and greater sanctions can reduce crime. However, the strategy needs to be flexible, because as the crackdown continues it may lose its effectiveness. It may be more effective to move geographical locations and targets on an ongoing basis.

Reducing Crime: Where the Rubber Meets the Road

Reducing crime in New York City is a never-ending task, as officers put pressure on the streets and target selected criminals and criminal activities. While many times it seems as though the police are on a random raid,

catching whatever criminals they can, there is a science behind their methods. In fact, Karmen refers to the rise in crime and its study as the "anatomy of a crime wave" and argues that "Crime waves are the product of the interaction of a wide array of forces and conditions" (257, 259). Fighting crime requires a flexible approach that challenges all these forces and conditions. Bratton reports that a successful campaign against crime included working with precinct commanders, using civil lawsuits, and enforcing existing laws that addressed even minor offenses (229). The bottom line was that action was taken against crime in a concerted and ongoing fashion.

According to Bratton, there are four elements of a successful crime control campaign; intelligence, deployment, tactics, and follow-up (224). The New York crime wave of the 1990s motivated the police department to begin to keep detailed records and follow-up assessments. The use of computational statistics, known as Compstat, gave law enforcement agencies new tools and specific targets. Detailed records can indicate where the crime is occurring, and what type of crime is spiking. Involving several agencies can target the correct crime and the correct geographical area. Bratton states that this approach is useful "in all organizations, whether its 38, 000 New York cops or Mayberry RFD" (239). Still, Karmen warns that increased enforcement efforts such as "zero tolerance, aggressive stop-and-frisk practices, and mass imprisonment" may not be worth the social cost of the perceived public pressure (266).