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TECHNICAL REPORT

Police-Community Relations in Cincinnati Year Three Evaluation Report

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Sponsored by the City of Cincinnati



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The research described in this report was sponsored by the City of Cincinnati and was conducted under the auspices of the Safety and Justice Program within RAND Infrastructure, Safety, and Environment (ISE).

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Published 2007 by the RAND Corporation
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Summary

Introduction

In 2002, the Cincinnati Police Department (CPD), the Fraternal Order of Police, and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) joined together in a collaborative agreement to resolve social conflict, improve community relations, and avoid litigation in Cincinnati. The collaborative agreement requires the parties (that is, the participants in the agreement) to undertake collective efforts to achieve these goals. Specifically, the agreement requires CPD to implement a variety of changes in pursuit of five primary goals:

- Ensure that police officers and community members become proactive partners in community problem solving.
- Build relationships of respect, cooperation, and trust within and between police and communities.
- Improve education, oversight, monitoring, hiring practices, and accountability of CPD.
- Ensure fair, equitable, and courteous treatment for all.
- Create methods to establish the public's understanding of police policies and procedures and recognition of exceptional service in an effort to foster support for the police (*In re Cincinnati Policing*, S.D. Ohio, 2003, pp. 3–4).

Evaluation is a stipulated component of the agreement. RAND was chosen as the evaluator in 2004 to aid the parties in understanding progress toward the agreement's goals. RAND will conduct the evaluation for five years, with the results published annually in a report available to the public. The evaluation has used a variety of methods, including the following:

- a survey of citizen satisfaction with CPD
- a survey of citizens who have interacted with the police through arrest, reporting a crime or victimization, or being stopped for a traffic violation
- a survey of CPD officers about their perceptions of support from the community, working conditions, and other factors related to job satisfaction and performance
- a survey of officers and citizens involved in a sample of citizen complaints against the officers and the department
- an analysis of motor-vehicle stops for patterns of racial disparity in various aspects of the stop
- periodic observations of structured meetings between citizens and representatives of CPD
- a review of CPD statistical compilations

- analysis of a sample of videotaped interactions between citizens and officers during motor-vehicle stops
- analysis of CPD staffing, recruitment, retention, and promotion patterns.

Under the terms of the evaluation protocol, this year-three report addresses only the statistical compilations, motor-vehicle stops, and videotaped citizen-police interactions during vehicle stops. Many of these tasks will reoccur in subsequent years, including all of the tasks included in this year's report. As such, this is necessarily an interim report and will not provide a final or comprehensive evaluation of progress toward the goals of the collaborative agreement.

The Context of Policing in Cincinnati

A critical component of the evaluation is to understand the context of policing in Cincinnati. To that end, CPD provides RAND with statistical compilations that detail arrest and citation activity, calls for service, and crime patterns. These compilations provide insight into how crime, and thus the allocation of law-enforcement resources, varies across neighborhoods. The compilations also feed in to other analyses conducted as part of the evaluation.

Crime and Calls for Service

Overall, crime, the associated enforcement activities, and calls for service remained highly clustered in specific portions of the city. Overall crime rates were nearly unchanged between 2005 and 2006. There were changes within neighborhoods. Downtown and Over-the-Rhine had large reductions in crime, but increased crime in other neighborhoods, such as East Price Hill and Walnut Hills, offset these gains.

Crime rates in Over-the-Rhine dropped after April 2006 by 13 percent more than would be expected, given the trends elsewhere in the city and the trend in Over-the-Rhine prior to April 2006.

Arrests and Citations

The number of arrests in the Over-the-Rhine neighborhood increased by 9 percent between 2005 and 2006, on top of a 25 percent jump between 2004 and 2005. The increase in arrests coincides with the implementation of the Over-the-Rhine task force in April 2006.

Use of Force

The rate of use-of-force incidents per arrest remained the same as in 2005, approximately 14 uses of force per 1,000 arrests. As in previous years, there was no relationship between the type of force used and the subject's race. Black residents were the subjects of use of force in 75 percent of the incidents, approximately the same percentage as their percentage of persons arrested in Cincinnati. These rates are similar to the rates of arrest and use of force from 2004 and 2005.

Analysis of Vehicle Stops

RAND's analysis of vehicle stops assessed whether there is a departmentwide pattern of bias against black drivers in the decision to stop a vehicle; determined the fraction of CPD officers who disproportionately stop black drivers compared to other officers patrolling the same neighborhoods at the same time; and investigated whether there are racial biases in post-stop outcomes, including citation rates, stop duration, and search rates.

Department-Level Stop Patterns

We did not find evidence of departmentwide racial bias in the decision to stop certain vehicles in 2006. Similarly, when we examined data from the entire evaluation period (the first-year report included data from 2003), we did not find evidence of departmentwide bias in the decision to stop.

Individual-Level Stop Patterns

At the individual officer level, a total of five officers (out of 294 in frequent contact with the public through vehicle stops) have stop activity patterns that may be consistent with racially biased policing.¹ At a minimum, these officers' patterns should be investigated more carefully. Three officers out of 294 officers stopped black drivers at substantially higher rates when compared with other officers' stops of similarly situated individuals. Two officers appeared to be stopping more nonblack drivers than did similar officers.

Post-Stop Patterns

When comparing all stops of black and nonblack drivers, the stops of black drivers take longer on average and black drivers are subject to searches at a higher rate. However, much of these differences appear to be driven by the location and time of the stop, the type of stop, whether the driver was a Cincinnati resident, and whether the driver had a valid driver's license. To assess whether race may play a role in officers' post-stop actions, we compared the stops of black drivers with the stops of similarly situated nonblack drivers—that is, white, Hispanic, or other nonblack drivers who were stopped in similar locations, at similar times, and for similar reasons as black drivers.

Black drivers and similarly situated nonblack drivers both had a 47 percent chance of having a stop lasting less than 10 minutes, and black drivers were significantly less likely than matched nonblack drivers to have a stop exceeding 30 minutes. In addition, black drivers received citations less frequently than did similarly situated nonblack drivers (63 percent compared with 67 percent). This difference may be due to officers' reluctance to cite black drivers, or it may be an indicator that officers are stopping black drivers for discretionary offenses for which citations are rarely given.

With respect to searches, officers searched black drivers less frequently than they searched similarly situated nonblack drivers when the officers had discretion (6.1 percent versus 6.7 percent). When officers searched a driver, they were equally likely to recover contraband from black and nonblack drivers.

¹ Federal regulations regarding the protection of human subjects prevent RAND from conducting research in a way that causes adverse effects to the subjects of, or participants in, the research. Thus, we cannot identify the specific officers. We have, however, provided CPD with the tools and methods to analyze the data and identify specific officers.

Operation Vortex

Operation Vortex is a “highly visible proactive unit that has a zero tolerance approach to street crimes, drug trafficking, and quality of life issues” (Green and Jerome, 2007). The crime-reduction strategy provides saturation patrols to areas with the greatest problems with crime.

A separate analysis of the Over-the-Rhine task force and Operation Vortex indicates that stops made by Vortex officers are more likely to involve black drivers than are stops made by other officers in the same place and at the same time (71 percent versus 65 percent). This racial disparity could not be explained by differences in the types of stops that Vortex officers make. Vortex officers made 33 percent of all vehicle stops at these times and places. Vortex officers were equally likely to issue citations to black drivers and white drivers. They were also equally likely to search black drivers and white drivers, though the rate of searches was twice that of similarly situated non-Vortex officers. Unlike non-Vortex officers, when conducting searches, Vortex officers were significantly more likely to recover contraband from white drivers than from black drivers.

Analysis of Videotaped Police-Motorist Interactions

We analyzed 318 randomly sampled video records of traffic stops from 2006 to analyze the objective characteristics of the stop (e.g., duration, infraction type, time of day) as well as measures of the communication between the driver and the police officer. The video analysis is not designed to determine whether racial inequalities are uniquely attributable to racial profiling. Instead, the analysis is designed to look for differences that community members are likely to perceive as evidence of racially biased policing, regardless of their cause. This approach highlights the factors that are barriers to improved police-community relations, but it cannot determine whether any differences occur because of race.

This analysis revealed three key differences associated with the officers’ and drivers’ races: (a) black drivers were more likely to experience proactive policing during the stop, resulting in longer stops that were significantly more likely to involve searches and inquiries, (b) white officers were more likely than black officers to use proactive police tactics, (c) the communication quality of white drivers was more positive than of the black drivers—specifically, it was more apologetic and less argumentative.

These results are largely consistent with the findings in the year-one and year-two reports. One difference from last year’s report is the significant evidence of greater proactive policing by white officers than by black officers. This could lead some black drivers to believe that they are treated with greater suspicion. However, the actual pattern of data is quite similar to last year, with the black driver–white officer combination having the highest rates of proactive policing behaviors, epitomized by such actions as requiring identification for passengers. As noted in earlier reports, these findings cannot answer whether racial bias does or does not exist, but they do help explain why black Cincinnati residents perceive that it does, which may lead to a more negative attitude in future interactions with the police. It is therefore critical to take efforts to ensure that white and black officers act similarly when stopping motorists, so that improvements in relations between CPD and the black community are possible.

Summary and Conclusions

Data Issues

Both data availability and quality have improved over the three years of the evaluation. Generally, remaining data issues, such as the quality of video and audio tapes, are largely a function of equipment limits or relatively infrequent human errors.

Progress Toward the Goals of the Collaborative Agreement

Blacks continue to bear a disproportionate share of the impact of policing services by virtue of the clustering of crime, calls for service, and policing in predominantly black neighborhoods. While there is no evidence that the police systematically or deliberately treat blacks differently, blacks nevertheless experience a different kind of policing from that experienced by whites. In particular, blacks experience more policing and particularly more of the proactive policing exemplified by Vortex. While it may not be possible to field a proactive enforcement strategy that is racially neutral, much of CPD's interaction with the citizenry comes through vehicle stops. The quality, tenor, and tone of such stops are largely under police control. The department should thus pay special attention to training to ensure that these interactions are conducted in a consistent, courteous, and professional manner. Without a concerted effort to ameliorate the disparate impact of these policies, it seems likely that black Cincinnati residents will remain less satisfied with policing services than will their white counterparts.