



The Science of Training

with [David Blake](#)

Survey: Is proactive policing slowing down?

Survey of officers provides insight into today's environment for LE

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President Barack Obama says there's no evidence it exists and Attorney General Loretta Lynch agrees. James Comey — the director of the F.B.I. — believes it does exist. Chuck Rosenberg, the director of the Drug Enforcement Administration, thinks it's for real. Ronald Davis, Director of the DOJ Community Oriented Policing Services, testified at a Senate hearing that the suggestion of it "insults the nation's police officers."

So, just what is "it" that has some of the highest powers in the nation at odds?

"It" is the "Ferguson Effect."

The Ferguson Effect is a widely-debated hypothesis that law enforcement officers are slowing down enforcement efforts due to the social outrage concerning perceived rampant police brutality. The theorized slow-down has been anecdotally linked to an increase in crime and criminal activity in some areas (disagreement exists here as well).

However, the FBI crime statistics show an uptick — albeit small — within the first six months of 2015 compared to the same period in 2014 (1.7 percent nationally). Is this an indicator of things to come? Only time will tell.

Given this debate, it appeared prudent for an exploratory national survey to be conducted to garner empirical evidence on whether officers are slowing down on proactive enforcement. Also relevant, if a work slow-down was found to exist, was to attempt to correlate potential causal factors.

To that end, [Blake Consulting and Training](#) requested input from national law enforcement (patrol level only) in the form of a short survey. A statistical review of the results are partially analyzed here.

When analysis is complete, the study will be submitted for peer-reviewed publication.

Method

Officers were contacted through law enforcement related social media and cooperating law enforcement executives. The survey was restricted to law enforcement patrol level officers who were requested to answer 19 questions ([Likert Scale](#)). We received 489 responses from small suburban (25 officers) to large metropolitan departments (3,000+) across the nation. The officer's ages ranged from 21-65 years, with anywhere between less than five to 30 plus years of employment.

Results

The first clear answer was whether patrol level officers believed proactive patrol efforts made a difference in regards to criminal activity:

1. Proactive Policing

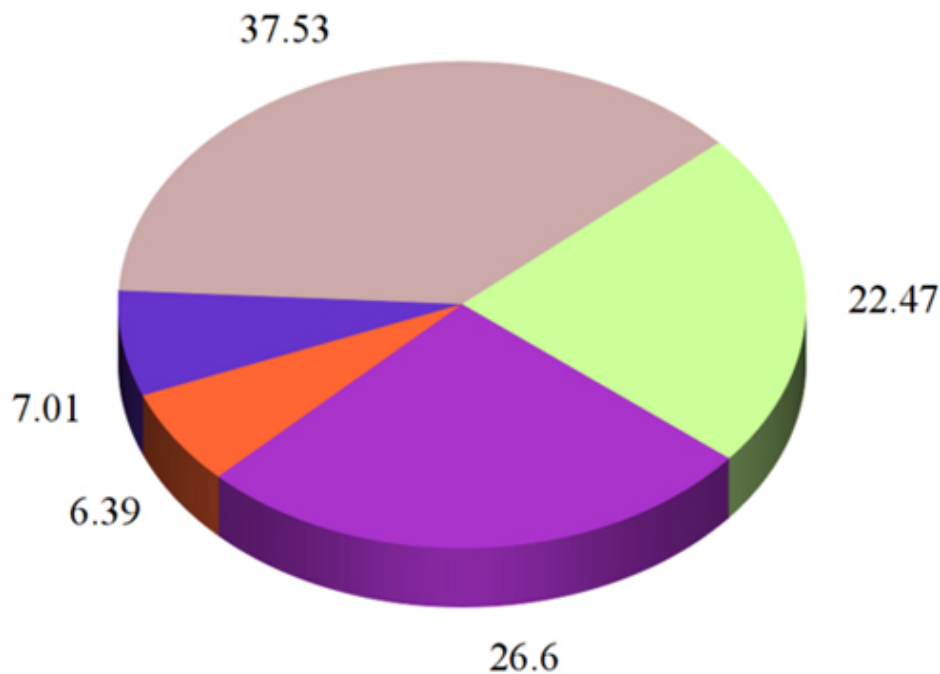
- 97.4% believe proactive policing greatly decreases crime or decreases crime to some degree.

The survey used a Likert scale to provide officers the ability to discuss their increase or decrease in proactive policing over the last year. The results are concerning:

2. Proactive Traffic Stops

PROACTIVE TRAFFIC STOPS

- Increased T stops (10 monthly)
- Increased T stops (5 monthly)
- No Change
- Decreased T stops (5 monthly)
- Decreased T stops (10 monthly)

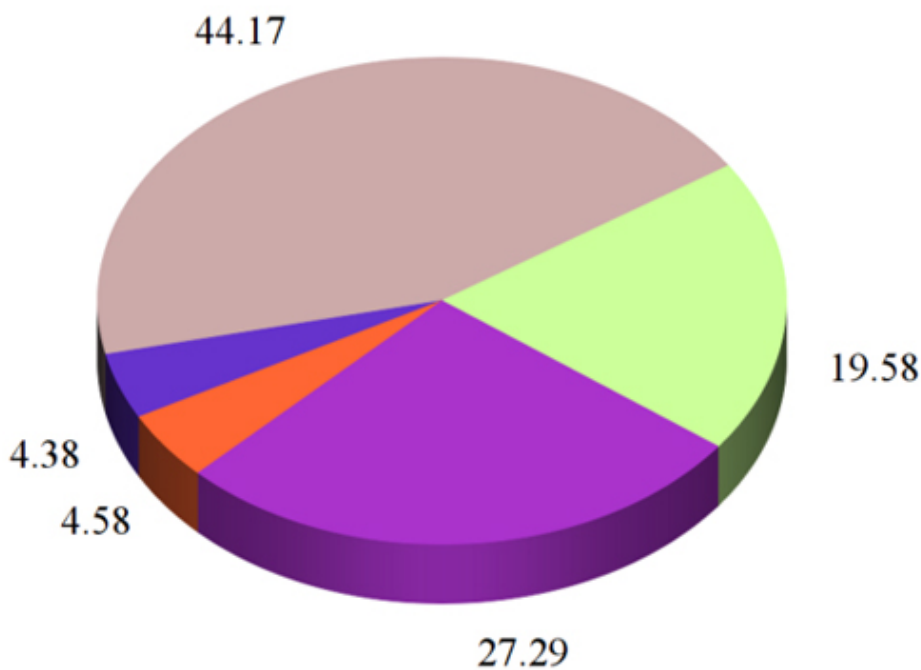


- 49.1% said they decreased proactive T-stops between 5 and 10 a month.
- 37.5% said they had not changed the level of proactive traffic stops.
- 13.4% said they increased proactive T-stops by 5 or 10 a month.

3. Proactive Pedestrian Stops

PROACTIVE PEDESTRIAN STOPS

- Increased P stops (10 monthly)
- Increased P stops (5 monthly)
- No Change
- Decreased P stops (5 monthly)
- Decreased P stops (10 monthly)



- 46.9% said they decreased proactive ped. stops between 5 and 10 a month.
- 44.1% said they had not changed the level of proactive ped. stops.
- 8.9% said they increased proactive ped. stops.

Officers were asked their opinions as to whether or not they believed crime had increased or decreased in their jurisdiction. Again, the results should cause some concern:

4. Increase of Criminal Activity

- 61.1% believe criminal activity has increased in their jurisdiction (in the last year).
- 29.5% believe crime has remained the same.

- 9.2% believe crime has gone down.
- 55% believe the crime rate has increased in their jurisdiction due to less proactive enforcement.

In the event of a trend in work increase or work decrease presented itself, the survey asked several other questions in regards to potential influences on performance. The results are as follows:

5. Leadership*

- 40.7% have slowed down / stopped proactive policing due to negative executive level influence.
- 50.1% feel the negative executive level leadership response to current trends have left them feeling unsupported.
- 38.9% said executive management had increased discipline against officers.
- 62.5% said executive management had created more restrictive policies.

6. Media*

- 58.1% have slowed down / stopped proactive policing due to media influence.
- 94% of officers believe the media is somewhat or completely biased toward a negative representation of law enforcement.

7. Citizen Support*

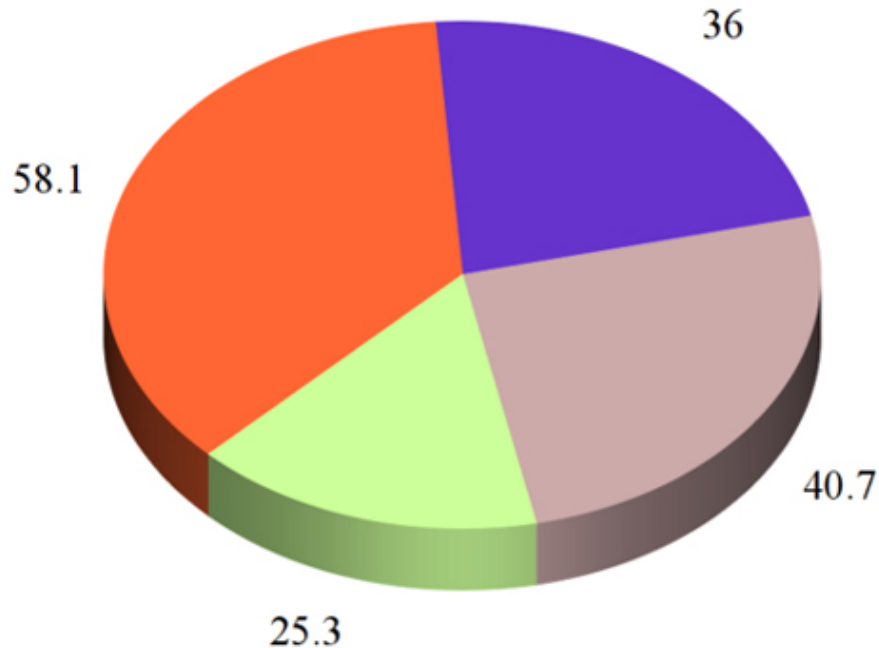
- 36% have slowed down / stopped proactive policing due to low citizen support.
- 45.9% reported they had a negative (11.7%) or an increasingly negative (34.2%) relationship with the community.
- 54.1% reported they had a positive (36.81%) or an increasingly positive (17.38%) relationship with the community.

8. Training*

- 25.3% said that new training caused them to slow down or stop proactive policing.
- 19.7% said the training was not evidence based (proven to be successful).
- 73.8% said the new training was not beneficial or made no impact at all.
- 36% believed training had no influence on proactive policing.

NEGATIVE INFLUENCES ON PROACTIVE POLICING

Media Citizen Support Leadership Training



*Chart equals over 100 percent as these are overlapping causal factors.

Conclusion

The data from this study provides significant evidence of a decrease of proactive policing across the nation. Study data also provides significant correlations between leadership, media, community relations, and training to their individual effects upon decreased proactivity. It can only be anecdotally derived from the results that the effects of the causal factors are overlapping in part or in whole.

Discussion

This exploratory study provides data that should be concerning to police executives as well as society based on the potential long term effects of decreasing proactive policing. [According to a U.S. Department of Justice scientific review](#) of more than 500 crime prevention programs, proactive policing in the form of hot spots, specialized units, and continued incarceration of repeat offenders has an evidence-based foundation for what works in decreasing crime. Proportionally, [according to a New South Wales Justice Department document](#), increases in crime are partially caused by; crime prone places, criminal opportunity, and lax / insufficient law enforcement. These facts provide the foundation of belief that a slow-down or stoppage of proactive policing may have long term effects. Those effects may be becoming visible (1.7% increase in crime nationally).

Recommendation

The Department of Justice, research organizations (IACP / PERF), and individual law enforcement

agencies across the nation should evaluate whether law enforcement officers in individual jurisdictions are decreasing proactive policing and determine through statistical analysis of crime rates (e.g.: change from year one to year two) whether correlations exist. Further, if there is a correlated finding between the decreases in proactive policing and increased crime rates, the next step would be to determine the causal factors and create a plan of corrective action circumscribing evidence based methodology.

About the author

David Blake is a retired California peace officer and certified Ca-POST instructor in DT, firearms, force options simulator and reality-based training. His experience includes SWAT, force option unit, field training, gangs/narcotics and patrol. He is a certified Force Science Analyst and teaches the Ca-POST certified courses entitled Force Encounters Analysis and Human Factors: Threat & Error Management for the California Training Institute. He also facilitates the Ca-POST Force Options Simulator training to tenured officers from multiple jurisdictions. Dave is an expert witness/consultant in human performance and use of force.

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