

THE EFFECTS OF THE POLICE ON CRIME: A REJOINDER

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At the very least, Wilson and Boland and we agree on the complexity of the relationship between governmental actions and social effects. Thus we believe as they do that it is not an easy task to disentangle the effects of policing on crime. We do differ on analytic strategy. We believe that time-series analyses tell us more than cross-sectional analyses do about causal patterns.

Wilson and Boland, however, have apparently changed their minds about the utility of time-series analysis. Originally they wrote:

If it could be shown, however, that in several cities the arrest rate changed over a five- or ten-year period and that this was associated with changes in the crime rate (controlling for population change), then we could be more confident both that the correlation between crime and arrests is real and that we can change the former by changing the latter (Wilson and Boland, 1978: 382).

Wilson and Boland now argue that arrest policies do not change much over time and that when they do they are related to step-level structural changes that occur only over long periods of time (they specify ten or twenty years). That is a significant revision of their original thesis. The implication is that policing activity can be changed only by making basic structural changes in the city and that only such basic changes will have an effect on crime. If true, that provides little hope for reducing crime short of an overall reform of municipal government.

We believe, however, that our analysis indicates that robbery rates are not sensitive to changes in policing. No matter what the lag structure (whether robbery arrests lead robbery offenses or vice versa) the association between robbery arrests and the robbery rate is positive, not negative, except in Oakland where we had a very short (and therefore unreliable) time series. Similar positive relationships were found both in "reformed" cities such as Phoenix and San Jose and in "unreformed" cities such as Boston, Newark, and

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Philadelphia. All of these cities underwent several changes in police chiefs and many reorganizations of their police departments during the 31-year period of study.

Wilson and Boland are correct in pointing out that we do not offer an effective counter-theory. We only suggest that increased expenditures did not reduce the robbery rate, and that when police made more robbery arrests, they also recorded more robbery offenses. That adds to the puzzle and complexity of the problem that the four of us are addressing.

We think Wilson and Boland were correct in the first instance in calling for longitudinal analyses. If ours does not satisfy, we hope others will try their hand at it. Our data are available to any who wish to explore this complex but important question.

REFERENCES

- JACOB, Herbert and Michael J. RICH (1981) "The Effects of the Police on Crime: A Second Look," 15 *Law and Society Review* 109.
- WILSON, James Q. and Barbara BOLAND (1978) "The Effect of the Police on Crime," 12 *Law and Society Review* 367.