Summer 1998

Volunteerism and the Decline of Violent Crime

Warren Friedman

VOLUNTEERISM AND THE DECLINE OF VIOLENT CRIME

BY WARREN FRIEDMAN*

I. INTRODUCTION

This paper makes four general points. There are organized community anti-crime activities going on across the country. Neighborhood residents, acting together through community organizations, have made a serious contribution to the decline in violent crime nationally. If we invest in and support the work of these citizens and their organizations, their activity can become more widespread, more sustained and can have a larger impact on violent crime. As an anti-crime strategy, this is the most effective, democratic, and humane path available to America—the one most likely to make communities safer and friendlier places to live.

II. DECLINING CRIME

Violent crime reached its peak in the U.S. in 1993. That year, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, there were 4.2 million violent crimes in this country.[1] In 1994, there were 75,000 fewer.[2] By 1996, there were nearly 930,000 fewer violent crimes than in 1993.[3] Although rape, robbery, assault, and homicide have declined at different rates, they are all down.[4]

---

* Director of the Chicago Alliance for Neighborhood Safety (CANS).

[1] Violent crime is measured by the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) conducted by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS). Data on murder is collected in the FBI's Uniform Crime Reports (UCR). The information is available at the BJS web site at *National Crime Victim Survey* (revised April 28, 1998) <http://www.OJP.USDOJ.Gov/bjs/glance/4meastbl.txt>. [hereinafter BJS].

[2] *Id.*

[3] *Id.*

[4] <http://www.OJP.USDOJ.Gov/bjs/glance>.

When looked at as a group, violent crimes are at a twenty-three year low, the lowest since the agency has been collecting data.[5]

This encouraging national trend does not mean that violent crime is down everywhere nor that Americans are relaxed and feeling confident in their ability to solve the problem of crime. According to Roper organization polling:

> crime still tops the list of concerns about the nation's welfare, and crime worries are well above the levels of the 1980s or 1970s. . . . The share of adults who name crime among their top two or three [concerns] rose sharply in the early 1990s. . . . Between 1991 and 1995, the percentage almost doubled, from 29 percent to a record high of 54 percent. Although the current share is 5 percentage points lower than the peak, crime still ranks much higher than other issues . . . .[6]

America's unease with the good news about crime is not paranoia. The trend is fairly recent and there have been other promising declines that have lasted a few years before the violence began increasing once again. The tentativeness of the news about violent crime has stimulated at least two significant discussions, partly captured in these *Chicago Tribune* headlines: "Is the Crime Drop a Blip, For Real, or a Ticking Bomb?" and "Violent Crime Takes a Tumble, Though Reasons are Murky."[7]

One question raised here: is this decline part of a long term trend, like the decrease in property crime, which has been evident since 1975, or just a temporary dip that will reverse itself?[8] A second question: what is causing this decline? This causal issue, not so much murky as multi-faceted, is related to the first. If we can figure out what is responsible for the good news, we can, perhaps, do more of what works and increase the likelihood that the trend towards a less violent society is long term. We can also apply our understanding of what is working to some locations where the news is not so good.

---

[5] <http://www.OJP.USDOJ.Gov/bjs/glance/4meastbl.txt>.

[6] Editors of Roper Reports, *The Big Picture: Crime Fears*, AM. DEMOGRAPHICS, July 1997, at 35.

[7] Steve Mills, *Is the Crime Drop a Blip, for Real, or a Ticking Bomb*, CHICAGO TRIBUNE, Apr. 19, 1998, at P1; Steve Mills, *Violent Crime Takes a Tumble, Though Reasons are Murky*, CHICAGO TRIBUNE, Apr. 21, 1998, at N1.

[8] The property crime data is also available at the BJS web site. *See* BJS, *supra* note 1.

III. WHY THE DECLINE?

There are a host of reasons suggested for the decline: low unemployment, fewer young men in the crime-prone age group, stable and less violent drug markets, fewer handguns on the street, reduced alcohol and drug consumption, more people serving longer prison sentences, smarter policing, community policing, and community participation in anti-crime efforts.

Most of these explanations have policy implications that beckon elected officials to invest tax dollars in particular strategies. As Roper's findings indicate, though the public is not yet convinced by the good news, the public is hungry for safer communities and seems receptive to solutions. So it is proper that there should be public debate about why crime is declining. It is critical that we invest energy and tax dollars to achieve this public good.

But it is also clear that data are subject to varying interpretations, causation is hard to identify with certainty and the debate is complicated by a significant amount of individual and institutional self-interest in one argument or another.[9] In fact, the nation is presently engaged in a fateful discussion about what is driving this decline. In part, the outcome of this discussion will help determine where resources go and what cities, neighborhoods, and the criminal justice system will look like in the twenty-first century.

Probably the most widespread explanations for the decline at present are that smarter policing, tougher laws, longer sentences, more cops, and a quadrupling of the prison population are the major causes of violent crime's decline. Getting smart and getting tough probably do make a contribution. After all, getting guns off the street is smart. Even if they are kept at home, this reduces the accessibility and decreases the likelihood of impulse shootings, serious injuries, and homicides.

And getting tough has put more violent offenders in prison and the more in prison at any time, the fewer there are in the

---

[9] My own self-interest in this debate is tied to community organizing and community building. I direct a coalition of community organizations, the Chicago Alliance for Neighborhood Safety, that would benefit from investment that supported this strategy as a serious crime and violence reduction policy.

community committing crimes. If you keep people in prison long enough, the argument goes, they grow out of the crime-prone age range. In the jargon, they "age-out." Whatever the effect of "incapacitation," of larger numbers of people in prison for longer times, we hear about these solutions not only because of their social scientific merit. We also hear about them because taking credit for the decline in crime is a major component in the strategies of powerful political, ideological, and law enforcement groups.

IV. ORDINARY PEOPLE

Though sometimes appended as an afterthought, discussion about what ordinary people are contributing to this decline in violence is rare. I argue that they are a major force for safer communities. This suggestion runs into what appears, from a community organizer's perspective, to be a dominant cultural attitude, one that is dismissive of collective, grassroots efforts.

Organized neighborhood activities are invisible on television's popular crime and police shows. Though there are sometimes helpful citizens in minor roles, for the most part non-police are portrayed as criminals, reluctant witnesses, or powerless victims in the story of America's criminal justice system. These shows never present an organized community as part of the solution. The few allusions to block watch or other neighborhood crime prevention activities are either accompanied by a sneer or depicted as a kind of vigilante effort.

Television programs do not capture the excitement of neighbors figuring out, through democratic discussion, what to do about a neighborhood crime problem. Missing from the nation's visuals are community meetings that are punctuated, as they are in reality, by laughter, anger, and the satisfaction of collective insight. Television does not depict the pride and feeling of empowerment shared by a group of residents who have taken action and forced the police to pay attention or who have freed a park from gang domination and made it once again accessible to neighborhood people.

Ironically, in an era that can't say enough about the virtues of shrinking government, on the topic of crime, officials and

opinion makers are most comfortable with praising and spending on the criminal justice system. This does not reflect only the power of lobbies and ideology—though they are influential—it also reflects the belief among large numbers of government officials, criminal justice researchers, and media workers that ordinary people's efforts don't make a difference. Even worse, organized volunteers are potentially threatening, so the less encouragement, the better. Organized volunteers have opinions. They have policy preferences. They can mobilize and make demands. Keeping them at a distance and portraying citizens, as "eyes and ears," isolated, apathetic, and only moved by law enforcement's prodding is within the comfort zone of those who fashion our cultural images and provide us with information and analysis.

The depiction of police, courts, and prisons, warts and all, as the major, if not sole, guardians of public safety, goes largely unchallenged. The community residents who do volunteer in their neighborhoods have no powerful lobby to call attention to the contribution they are making or provide them with a mechanism for participating in the national discussion.

V. THE IMPACT OF COMMUNITY RESIDENTS

But ordinary people do have an impact on the national crime and violence statistics that we are currently celebrating and debating. They have an impact directly and they have an impact indirectly, through the sheer accumulation of private individual decisions. For health and other reasons, for example, people have reduced their drug and alcohol consumption.[10] Because substance abuse, especially in the case of alcohol, is implicated in much violence, these individual decisions have an impact on violent crime.[11]

---

[10] Robert Nash Parker & Randi S. Cartmill, *Alcohol and Homicide in the United States: 1934-1995—or One Reason why U.S. Rates of Violence May be Going Down*, 88 J. CRIM. L. & CRIMINOLOGY 1369 (1998).

[11] According to *Alcohol and Crime*, a BJS analysis, Lawrence Greenfeld found that among the 11.1 million victims of violence each year, one in four were certain that the offender had been drinking before committing the crime. About one in 20 were certain the offender had been using other drugs. LAWRENCE A. GREENFELD, BUREAU OF JUSTICE STATISTICS, ALCOHOL AND CRIME: AN ANALYSIS OF NATIONAL DATA ON THE

People also decide that, with jobs available, they will work in a legal instead of an illegal sector of the economy, where they are less likely to be a victim of violence, or a victimizer. Or, as Richard Curtis' study of the Bushwick neighborhood in Brooklyn illustrates, young people, frightened by the activities of their older brothers and neighbors, forced to retreat from public spaces by drug dealing, violence, police harassment, and neighborhood decay, reject the culture that they see on their streets and choose other, less violence-prone life styles.[12]

Though they pay tens-of-billions of dollars each year to support the police, courts, and prisons, Americans have not delegated all public safety responsibility to the criminal justice system. In addition to private decisions by large numbers of individuals that have an indirect impact on crime and violence, many people decide to have a direct impact, to work together on shared problems. There are some case studies and some survey results on this topic, but the magnitude and impact of this organized activity is largely a missing part of the story of decreasing violence.[13]

To tell the story and assert that the organized efforts of neighborhood residents are a causal factor, an important one, in the decline in violent crime, several questions need to be answered. How massive is this phenomenon of organized grassroots effort? Is neighborhood-level activity really widespread enough to make a difference, especially at the level of national statistics? However large the number of volunteers, is there any evidence that their activity is likely to reduce crime in communities?

Finally, if volunteerism is both massive enough and some significant portion of it is effective, can participation be expanded? Can what President Clinton, in his May, 1997, com-

---

PREVALENCE OF ALCOHOL INVOLVEMENT IN CRIME 2-3 (1998). *See also* Parker & Cartmill, *supra* note 10, at 1359.

[12] Richard Curtis, *The Improbable Transformation of Inner-City Neighborhoods: Crime, Violence, Drugs, and Youth in the 1990s*, 88 J. CRIM. L. & CRIMINOLOGY 1233 (1998).

[13] Bibliographies of the literature on community crime prevention are available in: ROBERT C. DAVIS & ARTHUR J. LURIGIO, FIGHTING BACK: NEIGHBORHOOD ANTIDRUG STRATEGIES 133-43 (1996); Tim Hope, *Community Crime Prevention, in* BUILDING A SAFER SOCIETY 21, 78-89 (Michael Tonry & David P. Farrington eds., 1995).

mencement address at Pennsylvania State University called a "citizen force," be expanded by the million volunteers he suggests as a goal?[14] Can its impact deliberately be intensified and broadened so that it can contribute further to a decline in criminal violence?

VI. THE MAGNITUDE OF VOLUNTEERISM

The Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) has been conducting a crime survey each year since 1973.[15] One-hundred thousand Americans, twelve years-of-age and older, are asked whether they or anyone in their household were victims of crime in the past year, the nature of the crime, whether they reported it to the police, and if not, why not. With the exclusion of homicide and commercial crime statistics, criminal justice professionals consider this survey the best measure of the actual level of crime or victimization in our country.

Beginning in 1992, in a tiny departure from its focus on Americans' individual experience as victims, BJS added two questions to the more than 160 about victimization and reporting. Interviewers asked people if they knew of neighborhood watches or other anti-crime activities in their communities and, if they did, did anyone in their household participate in these activities.[16]

Over the five-year period, answers to the first question indicate that, depending on the year, between thirty-nine and forty-seven million Americans have known about these activities in their neighborhoods.[17] Answers to the second question indicate that millions of Americans are actively working for safer communities. Despite the absence of adequate resources or support from the popular media, community resident participation in

---

[14] <http://www.pub.whitehouse.gov/urires/12R?urn:pdi://oma.eop.gov.us?1996/5/10/3.txt.1>.

[15] In 1992, with a series of methodological changes, the survey title was changed from the National Crime Survey (NCS) to the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS).

[16] The actual questions are: "Is there an organized neighborhood watch or citizens' protection group for your area?" and "Do you, or does anyone in your household, take part?"

[17] *See* BJS, *supra* note 1.

neighborhood crime reduction activities, has ranged between eighteen million and 19.1 million volunteers.[18] In 1996 (the most recent year for which data are available), participation was down about 4% from the previous year.[19] Nevertheless, over 18.3 million people volunteered in block watches and other organized neighborhood safety activities.[20] Roughly one in twelve Americans, twelve years-of-age and over, participated in neighborhood efforts aimed at improving public safety and the general well-being of their neighbors.[21]

To help put these numbers in perspective, there is a semiannual Gallup survey of philanthropic and volunteer activities in America. It is commissioned by Independent Sector, a Washington based organization that studies and promotes volunteer participation and philanthropic giving. In the latest figures available, Gallup estimated that in 1995, ninety-three million people gave their time to various causes and organizations.[22] These volunteers represented over 40% of the respondents over eighteen years old.[23] They reported volunteering 4.2 hours per week for a total of over twenty billion volunteer hours during the year.[24]

Though the Gallup survey provides respondents with choices as to the kind of volunteer activity they participate in, community work in general and community anti-crime work specifically are not among the possible responses.[25] So there is no exact match between these two sources of data on volunteerism. Nevertheless, in the absence of a more precise source of information, if we want an idea of the magnitude of volunteer impact, we can cautiously infer that roughly one in five of America's volunteers invest some time in neighborhood safety issues. If the time invested by these volunteers is anywhere near that

---

[18] *Id.*

[19] *Id.*

[20] *Id.*

[21] *Id.*

[22] VIRGINIA A. HODGKINSON ET AL., INDEPENDENT SECTOR, GIVING AND VOLUNTEERING IN THE UNITED STATES 3 (1996).

[23] *Id.*

[24] *Id.*

[25] *Id.* at 192-93.

invested by volunteers in general, then Americans devote nearly four billion hours to organized neighborhood safety activity each year.

VII. WHO PARTICIPATES?

Who is putting in these hours? The level of participation varies at different times among different groups. Participants are racially and ethnically diverse. While people are at work all over the country, community safety volunteers have tended to be more active in cities with populations over 50,000.[26] In 1996, 63% of the population lived in cities over 50,000,[27] while 66% of the volunteers lived in these cities;[28] 10.7% of the population lived in cities over 500,000,[29] while 11.4% of the volunteers lived in these cities.[30]

In the same year, over nine million people from households headed by men or women with less than a college education were participating.[31] But households with higher levels of education tended to be represented at a greater rate than the less educated.[32] Half of the participants came from households headed by someone with a twelfth grade education or less, while nearly 57% of the population came from such households.[33] Similarly, though millions of less affluent people participated, more affluent households were more likely to have a member participating than were lower income households.[34] Half of the volunteers came from households earning more than $50,000 a year, while only 39% of the population lived in such households.[35]

Except for African-Americans, who were 14% of the participants, but only 12% of the population, all ethnic and racial

---

[26] *See* BJS, *supra* note 1.
[27] *Id.*
[28] *Id.*
[29] *Id.*
[30] *Id.*
[31] *Id.*
[32] *Id.*
[33] *Id.*
[34] HODGKINSON ET AL, *supra* note 22, at 30.
[35] *See* BJS, *supra* note 1.

groups participated at a level lower than their proportion of the population.[36] Whites, for instance, accounted for 84% of the population and 82% of the participants.[37] Hispanics made up 9.5% and 7.8% and Asians and Pacific Islanders 3.3% and 2.9% respectively.[38] But the differences were small. And when one considers the great likelihood of victimization among Blacks and Hispanics, the less-educated, and those who live in low-income neighborhoods, it is clear that there is significant under-participation by these groups in relation to the need.

VIII. EFFECTIVENESS

But even growing numbers of volunteers in low-income and at-risk neighborhoods will not reduce crime unless the activity in which they are engaged is effective. Unfortunately, the Bureau of Justice Statistics survey reveals nothing more than the bare demographics of this diverse movement. It tells us about the households from which participants come, but the survey provides no information about who the actual participants are or about what they do to make their neighborhoods safer. It offers no window into the decision-making process, the tactics, strategy, or longevity of the activities in particular communities. It is also silent about how the anti-crime activities of these volunteers relate to other community efforts in which they may be involved. We do, however, have some idea of what these activities are from direct experience, case studies, evaluations, and media coverage.[39]

We know that neighborhood safety volunteers serve in traditional roles as "eyes and ears" of the police by organizing citizen patrols and working to restore business strips that are threaten-

---

[36] *Id.*

[37] *Id.*

[38] *Id.* Hispanics participated above their proportion of the population in the $30,000-$40,000 income range.

[39] BJS needs to add a series of questions on participation to its surveys so that researchers and practitioners can get a better picture of who in the household is actually participating and how long they have been doing so. There need to be questions that allow us to understand what they are doing and whether they are working with and getting cooperation from the police.

ing to area residents.[40] They agitate for after-school and recreation programs.[41] They problem solve, targeting drug houses and other problem buildings to force landlords to come up to code.[42] They march to dramatize their concerns. They take on gangs.[43] They fill courtrooms as "watchers."[44] They agitate for the rehabilitation, boarding-up, or tearing down of abandoned buildings that are often dangerous eyesores in their neighborhoods.[45] They hold public officials accountable for some level of community maintenance and insist that police treat the neighborhood's residents respectfully.[46] They work to reduce liquor store concentration and the loitering it attracts.[47] They conduct positive loitering in open drug markets to disrupt them.[48]

Early findings from the Harvard School of Public Health's ambitious ten year study, the "Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods" (PHDCN), suggest that these and other community efforts not directly focused on crime, do matter.[49] Conducted in 343 "'neighborhood clusters'" of about 8,000 people, nearly 8,800 people were interviewed.[50] The researchers found that "social cohesion among neighbors combined with their willingness to intervene on behalf of the public good, is linked to reduced violence."[51]

---

[40] WESLEY G. SKOGAN & SUSAN HARTNETT, COMMUNITY POLICING: CHICAGO STYLE 173 (1997).

[41] *Id.* at 177.

[42] *See* Warren Friedman, *The Community Role in Community Policing, in* THE CHALLENGE OF COMMUNITY POLICING: TESTING THE PROMISE 267 (Dennis P. Rosenbaum, ed. 1994).

[43] SKOGAN & HARTNETT, *supra* note 40, at 180.

[44] WESLEY G. SKOGAN & SUSAN HARTNETT, COMMUNITY POLICING IN CHICAGO, YEAR THREE, 82 (1996).

[45] *Id.*

[46] SKOGAN & HARTNETT, *supra* note 40, at 123.

[47] ANN MAXWELL & DAVID IMMERGLUCK, LIQUORLINING: LIQUOR STORE CONCENTRATION AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN LOWER INCOME COOK COUNTY NEIGHBORHOODS 1 (1997); COMMUNITY ALLIANCE FOR NEIGHBORHOOD SAFETY, TALES FROM THE BEAT: THE COMMUNITY/POLICE PARTNERSHIP IN ACTION 5 (1996) [hereinafter CANS].

[48] SKOGAN & HARTNETT, *supra* note 44 at 53; CANS, *supra* note 47, at 15.

[49] Robert J. Sampson et al., *Neighborhoods and Violent Crime: A Multilevel Study of Collective Efficacy,* 277 *Science* 918, 919 (1997).

[50] *Id.*

[51] *Id.* at 920.

When people take responsibility for behavior in the neighborhood, even communities with "concentrated disadvantage" develop what the authors characterize as "collective efficacy," the "informal mechanisms by which residents themselves achieve public order."[52] Among similarly disadvantaged neighborhoods, there are some with higher levels of collective efficacy. This is because people were more likely to intervene, for instance, if a fight breaks out in front of their home, if they saw children spray painting, or if the city threatened to close the fire station closest to their home. Communities where individuals or groups are likely to intervene in these and other ways have a greater likelihood of being safer, less violent places to live. The authors found that neighborhoods with high levels of collective efficacy had, in fact, a 40% "reduction in the expected homicide rate."[53]

If we could increase collective efficacy and achieve that kind of reduction in poor, high crime communities around the country, we would truly be in for a long decline in violent crime. But we need to be clear. Saying that, all other things being equal, the homicide rate was 40% lower than expected is not the same as saying we can intervene in low efficacy neighborhoods and bring their level of violence down the same amount. Part of the reason that these neighborhoods were cohesive and thus had conditions necessary for the effective expression of collective efficacy was that they also had a high level of residential stability.[54] People had time, the reasoning goes, to get to know and trust each other, and this knowledge and trust provide the basis for individual and group interventions on behalf of the community's well-being.[55]

The hypothesis that residential stability is related to intervention and thus to collective efficacy is supported by the Bureau of Justice Statistics survey. Homeowners and long-time

---

[52] "Concentrated disadvantage" consisted mainly of the presence of high levels of poverty, public assistance, unemployment, female headed households and density of children. *Id.* at 919.

[53] *Id.* at 922.

[54] Sampson et al., *supra* note 49, at 919.

[55] *Id.*

residents were more likely to participate in community safety activities than were renters or newcomers.[56] Eighty-two percent of those participants were from households that owned homes, considerably more than the 69% of the population who owned their own homes.[57]

Beyond the contribution of residential stability, the authors report that "collective efficacy was significantly . . . and positively related to friendship and kinship ties (r=0.49), organizational participation (r=0.45) and neighborhood services (r=0.21)."[58] Nevertheless, when they controlled for these related neighborhood characteristics, they found that "by far the largest predictor of the violent crime rate was collective efficacy."[59]

According to the authors, "collective efficacy thus retained discriminant validity when compared to theoretically relevant, competing social processes. "Moreover," they continue, "these results suggested that dense personal ties, organizations, and local services by themselves are not sufficient; reductions in violence appear to be more directly attributable to informal social control and cohesion among residents."[60]

Put differently, a community can have many people who know each other, but friendship and family networks can be passive and rarely confront threats to the public good. A community can also have many organizations that are inert and inward gazing, that rarely intervene for the neighborhood's well-being. Based on their experience, community organizers would assert that, given an issue or a shared need, collective efficacy (they would not use the term) will be generated if there is a culture and tradition open to activism in these neighborhood networks and if there are leaders or organizers who act as catalysts

---

[56] Community organizers would acknowledge that organizing in more transient neighborhoods and encouraging residents to take leadership is a challenge. But they would add that it is often hard to separate residential transience as a barrier to cohesion from separate barriers created by the transience of resources for organizing in these communities and the strings attached to the resources available.

[57] *See* BJS, *supra* note 1. This pattern, however, was different for Hispanics who, in their first three years tended to participate at a rate higher than their proportion of the population.

[58] Sampson et al., *supra* note 49, at 923.

[59] *Id.*

[60] *Id.*

and move others to intervene. Action for the public good by informal or formal groups, the reasoning goes, takes initiators—people who start the activity, urge others on, set an example. When this exercise of will results in collective action, the person or persons who have initiated the action have exercised leadership. Key to generating collective efficacy from personal networks or community-based organizations are volunteer leaders and community organizers who are willing to stimulate action on behalf of the public good.

IX. CALLING ON PEOPLE TO INTERVENE AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

The evaluation of the Chicago Alternative Policing Strategy (CAPS), Chicago's version of community policing, supports the PHDCN finding that the presence of organizations is positively related to collective efficacy. The evaluation is the most thorough and sustained study of any city's attempt to implement community policing. Four annual reports have thus far been produced. The evaluation tracks the launching of an ambitious and high risk strategy to transform most of the department and to integrate the delivery of other city services with the delivery of police service.

Through a series of citywide surveys, interviews with officers and community residents, and observations of meetings and training, the study documents and analyzes many of the successes and failures in implementation within the department. It also probes the attitudes, involvement, and training of the community.

The philosophy that underlay much of CAPS encouraged community activism. Producing safety, the message went, required a partnership, a problem-solving partnership. Neighbors needed to work with neighbors, with the police, government, and other institutions. They needed to be organized, active, and informed. In a brief public partnership between the administration of Mayor Richard M. Daley, the Chicago Police Department, and the Chicago Alliance for Neighborhood Safety (CANS), the message of participation, partnership and problem solving was repeated frequently in the media, in the depart-

ment's communications with its officers, through the curriculum used to train police and in the training and outreach to residents.

Philosophy and communication are not sufficient, however, to explain the high level of energy invested by residents. An important factor was the timing of Chicago's community policing. Violent crime was rising and homicide was breaking records.[61] As participants in the campaign would testify, in the neighborhoods, where the mayhem was occurring and in at-risk neighborhoods that saw their future in the nearby high crime communities, there was a desperate feeling that something had to be done. As meeting after meeting made clear, this concern about crime corresponded to a deep dissatisfaction among residents with how they were being treated by the police. In their cars and out of touch, to residents, police seemed uncaring, unresponsive, and disrespectful of community anti-crime efforts.

Rising crime and dissatisfaction with police service were coupled with the presence of a citywide organization offering an alternative that spoke to people's concerns. CANS was willing to give leadership and to engage people in volunteer work both for the safety of their communities and for a different, more responsive and accountable kind of police service.[62]

For over two years, campaign participants said publicly to the police superintendent, city council members, and the mayor: we want to be policed differently; we want to work with the police; we want to take responsibility for our neighborhoods' safety; we want community policing.[63] When the mayor finally said yes, these volunteers felt some ownership.[64] They had brought this new policing to their fellow Chicagoans and

---

[61] Homicides had been rising since 1988, when 660 people were murdered. It peaked in 1992. Nine-hundred and forty people were murdered that year. Index crimes rose steadily from 1987 to 1991, from 281,030 to 323,909. *See* CHICAGO POLICE DEPT. BIENNIAL REPORT: 1993 & 1994, at 11, 13 (1995).

[62] For a more complete account of this campaign, see Warren Friedman, *Grassroots and Persistence: The Chicago Alliance for Neighborhood Safety*, NAT'L INST. JUST. J., Aug. 1996, at 8. The issue is entitled *Communities: Mobilizing Against Crime, Making Partnerships Work.*

[63] *Id.* at 9.

[64] *Id.* at 8.

their own communities, and they were determined to make it a success.[65]

Once its commitment to try community policing was in place, city officials made a series of smart moves. They commissioned a thorough management study from a team led by former head of the National Institute of Justice, James "Chip" Stewart of Boos, Allen & Hamilton. Following many of the report's recommendations, the City began to decentralize the department to make it possible for officers to be more responsive to the community.[66] It assigned stable patrol teams to each of the department's 279 police beats (areas with an average population of 10,000 residents). It established regular meetings in the neighborhoods where residents could count on meeting with the patrol officers assigned to their beat. And the officers were charged to work with the community. Initially, police department leadership and the mayor were unequivocal and very public in their support for community partnership. And they were willing to invest in training and mobilizing community residents.[67]

Called the Joint Community-Police Training Project (JCPT), the training and outreach organizing project was an often tense but creative effort by the police department, the city, and CANS. Its purpose was to reach out to people and train them for their role in solving neighborhood problems. Residents participated because they were invited by twenty-five outreach organizers and local organizations to come to an orientation conducted by sixteen teams of community and police trainers. Using adult learning techniques, the teams introduced Chicago's version of

---

[65] *Id.* at 11.

[66] City officials have been inconsistent in creating the conditions for partnership. They have failed to make the decentralizing meaningful by altering dispatch policy to free officer time to work with the community on crime and disorder problems and they have failed to establish a promotion process that evaluated officers on their community policing performance.

[67] In the first three months of the prototype stage, the Department, under internal pressure, began to back down from its plan to free patrol officers who served on the beat teams from a significant portion of 911 calls so they would have more time to work with residents. Once this happened, the department began expecting too much from the beat meetings.

community policing and a problem solving method residents could use with the police to make their neighborhoods safer.

At the end of the two-hour orientation, the trainers offered short-term technical assistance to community volunteers who wanted to work on real problems in their neighborhood. Nearly 12,000 Chicagoans were trained before the mayor canceled the program.[68] The evaluation of JCPT during 1995-96, the height of the CAPS experiment, documents the dramatic contribution outreach, training, technical assistance, and organizations can make in community anti-crime and anti-disorder efforts.

Participants who attended training were surveyed at the training and then were re-contacted four months later and interviewed about the nature of their involvement since the training. These volunteers were divided into three categories according to organizational affiliation: those with no affiliations, those with one to three affiliations, and those affiliated with four or more community-based organizations.

According to Wesley G. Skogan and Susan M. Hartnett, the lead evaluators of Chicago's community policing program, by far the largest number of participants fell into the middle category: 66% had one to three affiliations; 19% had no affiliations; and 15% had four or more.[69] In terms of volunteers' willingness to contribute to neighborhood safety, to actually work on a drug market or a bad landlord, the researchers found:

- Participants with no community organization affiliation got involved in problem solving 48% of the time.

---

[68] The Chicago Alliance for Neighborhood Safety (CANS) contracted with the City to conduct the training in cooperation with the police department. CANS, a representative from the Mayor's office, and the department developed the curriculum cooperatively and all orientations were conducted by a police officer and a community trainer employed by CANS. When CANS, an advocacy and watchdog group that led the campaign for community policing, released *Young People and the Police*, a study it had been working for 18 months before the contract, the mayor moved to cancel the contract. He failed at his first attempt, but ultimately terminated the contract and made the outreach a function of his office. A much reduced community training unit was placed in the police academy.

[69] THE CHICAGO COMMUNITY POLICING EVALUATION CONSORTIUM, COMMUNITY POLICING IN CHICAGO, YEAR THREE 55 (1996) [hereinafter CCPEC].

- Participants with one to three community organization affiliations got involved in problem solving 63% of the time
- Participants with four or more community organization affiliations got involved in problem solving 80% of the time.[70]

Researchers found that people who participated in community-based organizations contributed most to the effort. This finding reinforces and deepens the PHDCN conclusion that organization is positively related to collective efficacy. Where there are community-based organizations committed to intervention, the evidence shows that they play a critical role in sustaining and stimulating activity on behalf of public well being.

X. WHAT DID THESE VOLUNTEERS DO?

What did these mostly community organization members, these residents disproportionately from high crime neighborhoods, do? For one thing, 37% of them talked with their neighbors more frequently about community problems than they had before.[71] They invited others to participate and passed on to them what they had learned: 63% of them tried to teach neighbors what they had learned at the training (the median was five other residents); 74% of them invited neighbors to other trainings and meetings.[72]

But they did more than talk. As a crime reduction strategy, problem solving requires active intervention. And the attendees responded to the invitations to participate and the offers of support from JCPT, CANS, the CPD, and the city. They worked at solving problems. They got together (60% attended one or more beat meetings, 40% attended one or more other crime related meetings) and intervened for the public good:[73]

---

[70] *Id.*

[71] *Id.* at 52.

[72] *Id.*

[73] *Id.* at 53. It is clear from these figures that at least 25% participated in these activities. Most likely it was not only the people who met with business people who rallied and milled in drug markets. I did not have access to figures that would clarify what percent participated in any activity; what percent participated in two, three, etc., but it seems clear that over 25% did participate.

- 14% of them participated in positive loitering, milling, prayer meetings, and lemonade stands in drug markets
- 13% participated in rallies or demonstrations
- 25% met with local business people to express concerns about crime or disorder problems.

Participants attempted to solve 63% of the problems they identified.[74] These problems included drug dealing (21%); social disorder, including, vandalism, public drinking, and loitering (19%); "conventional crime," including theft, rape, and homicide (18%); and gang problems, including violence, graffiti, and recruitment (17%).[75] Participants succeeded, partly or entirely, in solving 26% of the problems.[76]

It is clear from participants' willingness to reach out to neighbors, to talk to them about the community, and to teach others what they had learned, that networking was stimulated. It is clear from residents' willingness to join together to tackle often intimidating crime and disorder problems and to face their fears and actual threats of retaliation, that the process stimulated an outpouring of "collectively efficacious" behavior.

XI. VOLUNTEERING

It is important to remember that there are a host of motives for volunteering. Being safe is one reason, but people also give time in order to be of service to others, to belong and feel useful, to learn and grow, and to be part of a respected community.[77] Most of us would like to live in safe, friendly, organized communities that are dense with family and friendship networks and where intervention on behalf of the public good is habitual.

But people's desires, motives and perceived benefits are not sufficient to explain their participation. People give time because they are invited. Independent Sector's Gallup survey found that "over half of all volunteers reported they were asked by a friend; about one in three were asked by someone at their

---

[74] CCPEC, *supra* note 69, at 55.

[75] *Id.* at 29-30.

[76] *Id.* at 57.

[77] HODGKINSON ET AL., *supra* note 22 at 112.

church or synagogue; and nearly one out of five were asked by a family member or relative."[78] It is critical to develop in communities the capacity to invite residents to join the effort to reduce crime and make their neighborhoods safer. It is also important to figure out how to keep residents inviting each other as crime declines so that their activity maintains the decrease and responds promptly if crime begins to rise again. To build and support a volunteer movement that reduces violent crime over the long-term, we need to take into account the complicated reasons people volunteer, figure out how to stimulate recruitment (systemic invitation) in high crime communities and ask the organizer's question of how to keep people involved.

As a public safety strategy, there is much to recommend mobilizing some of the more than twenty million people identified in the BJS survey who knew of their neighbors' efforts and did not participate. If just 10% of them could be moved to join the effort, America would gain about two million community safety volunteers, twice the number President Clinton hoped for in his Penn State speech.

XII. The Bigger Picture

Critical as it is, we should not romanticize or overstate the impact of local solutions. Despite the potential short and long-term effect dramatized by the PHDCN findings, there is a persistent difficulty with isolated grassroots activity. As the authors of the study indicate, the "image of local residents working collectively to solve their own problems is not the whole picture."[79] There are powerful forces beyond the neighborhood that cannot be addressed by community mobilization or local empowerment. "The paradox of community crime prevention," Tim Hope points out in his review of the literature on neighborhood anti-crime efforts, "stems from the problem of trying to build community institutions that control crime in the face of powerlessness to withstand the pressures toward crime in the

---

[78] *Id.* at 110.

[79] Sampson et al., *supra* note 49, at 923.

community, whose source[s] . . . derive from the wider social structure."[80]

A long term solution, one capable of driving down the number of violent crimes over a two-and-a-half decade period in a way that is comparable to the decline in property crime, undoubtedly requires attention to these larger issues also. But it is hard to imagine sustained attention being paid on the national level to the big problems affecting ordinary people at the local level, without first paying attention to and organizing communities that stand to benefit from these efforts.

XIII. NEXT STEPS

How do we shove the pendulum towards community building and a version of community policing in which residents have a strong partnership role? How do we make this widespread volunteer activity even more widespread and more effective in its efforts to build a more democratic, safer, less violent nation? It will be difficult, as tens-of-thousands of volunteers and professional organizers can testify.

There are a large number of people who have worked at building and maintaining volunteer organizations around the nation. Among the 1.4 million not-for-profits in this country, there are thousands of community-based organizations, civic associations, coalitions, and organizers that regularly mobilize volunteers to solve problems collectively.[81] There are also dozens of organizing schools around the country with the mission of training volunteers and organizers.

And if one knows how and where to look, most communities, even the poorest and apparently most disorganized, have a rich array of formal and informal associations (not counted among the 1.4 million not-for-profits). One rarely has to start from scratch. John Kretzman and John McKnight, for instance, found a wealth of citizen associations in the Grand Boulevard community of Chicago, a 99% African-American community of

---

[80] Hope, *supra* note 13, at 24.

[81] JEREMY RIFKIN, THE END OF WORK 241 (1995).

36,000 residents, with a 1989 median income of $8,371.[82] The 319 associations they identified included religious, social, cultural, neighborhood improvement, senior, youth, advocacy, and political groups.[83] Many of the leaders of these groups indicated that they were open to trying something new that would benefit the community. Most indicated they had never been asked before.[84]

There is an enormous volunteer movement out there and the possibility of its growth in numbers and self-consciousness is real. There are also millions of Americans dissatisfied with what one criminal justice scholar has called our "punishment and imprisonment orgy."[85] Those who are unhappy with the way things are going need to argue for the importance of grassroots efforts in the decline of violent crime.

Those who want an alternative to the growing emphasis on punishment, police, and prisons, need to make visible and honor the volunteers and their millions of acts on behalf of the public good. They need to focus on the work in high crime and at-risk neighborhoods, where considerable courage is required to be an anti-crime volunteer. These are the communities where organizations have the most acute need for staff, for training, technical assistance, and education.

Those who want an alternative to "getting tough" should advocate for an investment in community based organizations that have the mission of involving people to solve community problems. It is in these neighborhoods, where the need is greatest, that resources and visibility can have the largest impact. The possibility of growth in volunteerism is significant. With adequate investment, some of the predictable disasters of the "getting tough" strategy may be avoided. With adequate investment, the present decline in violent crime may be sustained and thousands of safer, friendlier communities may be created.

---

[82] JOHN P. KRETZMANN & JOHN L. MCKNIGHT, VOLUNTARY ASSOCIATIONS IN LOW-INCOME NEIGHBORHOODS: AN UNEXPLORED COMMUNITY RESOURCE 2 (1996).

[83] *Id.* at 4-16.

[84] *Id.* at 18.

[85] Arthur J. Lurigio, *Law and Order*, LOYOLA MAG. 13 (Spring 1998).