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Proper Crime Recording as an Effective Feedback Tool in Articulating a Crime Policy

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***Abstract:** Crime policy is subject to the policy process just like other governmental policies. An effective crime policy is one that reduces the amount of crime in a police department's jurisdiction, e.g., the city. Accordingly, crime policy consists of the same policy components – agenda setting, formulation, implementation, and feedback. The implementation of any crime policy depends on the information collected by police departments, often through crimes reported to the department via 9-1-1 calls or brought to a police officer's attention through proactive police work. The success of that police work relative to the reported crime first depends on whether the type of crime is recorded correctly so that investigative follow-up, if necessary, can be conducted efficiently and properly. Accordingly, police departments that have appropriate internal controls to assess the quality of their crime recording efforts can provide relevant feedback to the command staff and political leaders responsible for setting the agenda and reformulating policy when necessary. This paper will examine the Atlanta Police Department's efforts in improving its crime recording procedures in 2002-2003 and the changes that led to sustained crime reductions following 2002.*

Crime Policy

At its basic level, crime policy can be defined as those governmental laws and rules created to respond to and reduce the amount of crime in a jurisdiction. Persons who violate the criminal law are subject to arrest by police, prosecution by the local district attorney's office, and incarceration in the local jail or state prison. The three former organizations compose the criminal justice "system."

The criminal justice system exists to deal with those who commit crimes – the police response to them and the punitive measures for addressing the offenders – and there exists differences of opinion on how to best address and limit the number of incidences in which people are victimized. On one side of the policy argument, at its broadest level, putting convicted criminals in jail and thus removing them from society ought to be a sufficient deterrent to committing crime. On the other side, again at its broadest level, crime can be prevented by improving the socio-economic standing of individuals such that committing crimes will be viewed as a negative option. Regardless which direction is chosen, the policymaking starts with the same premise of what works best to control crime.

Reducing or limiting crime is one function of the criminal justice system that falls in part to the police department. And as recent evidence suggests, police departments have become more effective and efficient and doing just that. According to the FBI's *Crime in the United States*, total crime in the United States as measured by the FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting System (UCR) has been generally falling since 2000, and especially in the last three years (FBI, 2010). This has led researchers to question what exactly is driving the crime decline – changes in policing or changes in other sociological variables. Unfortunately, research into this question has yielded mixed results¹.

Crime in Atlanta

One such city that has experienced dramatic decreases in crime is the city of Atlanta, Georgia. Atlanta, a city that has prided itself on being the face of the "new South," had a reputation for violence for a long time. In 2000, 2001 and 2002, according to FBI comparative data, Atlanta was the most violent city in America. The aggregate rate of murder, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault was 7.8 percent higher than the second most violent city during the same period, St. Louis, and 462.8 percent higher than the average of the 237 cities in the nation with a population over 100,000.² In fact, crime in Atlanta had reached its highest in 1996 and despite decreasing 29.6 percent by 2002, Atlanta had ranked among the top three cities for worst overall crime rate in cities with a population of 100,000 or more during this entire period. For comparison purposes, the corresponding violent crime ranking is also included for each of these years.

¹ Johnson, Golub and Dunlap, 2000; Eck and Maguire, 2000; Karmen, 2000; Unter, 2009

² Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Crime in the United States, 2000-2002*.

	Total Crime Incidents	Crime Rate	Total Crime Ranking	Violent Crime Ranking
1996	70,251	17,001.2	1	3
1997	58,591	13,921.6	1	2
1998	58,129	14,031.9	2	2
1999	55,477	13,488.5	3	2
2000	55,468	13,135.8	2	1
2001	52,195	12,237.7	3	1
2002	49,451	11,355.2	2	1

Source: FBI, Crime in the United States, 1996-2002.

In addition to ranking as the most violent city in America, Atlanta also ranked at or near the top of the individual crime rates that compose the violent crime index. In 2002, Atlanta had:

- the 7th worst homicide rate, 520 percent higher than the national average;
- the 41st worst rape rate, 92 percent higher than the national average (it was well-known however that the APD has had a history of underreporting rapes over the past several years);³
- the worst robbery rate, 556 percent higher than the national average;
- the 7th worst aggravated assault rate, 298 percent higher than the national average;
- the 7th worst property crime rate (the combination of burglary, larceny-theft, and auto theft), 150 percent higher than the national average;
- the 11th worst burglary rate, 163 percent higher than the national average;
- the 19th worst larceny-theft rate, 123 percent higher than the national average; and
- the 9th worst auto theft rate, 284 percent higher than the national average.

In 2001, former New Orleans Police Department Superintendent Richard J. Pennington took command as the new Chief of Police of the Atlanta Police Department. Chief Pennington resolved to cut Atlanta’s crime rates rapidly and dramatically. Towards that end, he initiated COBRA (Command Operations Briefings to Revitalize Atlanta) meetings modeled off of COMSTAT, the crime fighting process he successfully deployed in New Orleans to improve crime intelligence and exact accountability through its police department.⁴ One component of the COBRA system’s successful implementation is accurate data as manifested through feedback to the organization.

³ “Chief starts Inquiry on procedures in sex cases,” *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 12/3/02

⁴ It should be noted that COMSTAT was based off the Compstat system created by the New York Police Department in 1994.

Accurate Crime Reporting as Feedback to Guide Implementation

When concepts are envisioned as a “system,” especially within political science, it automatically brings to mind Easton’s systems theory (1953) that relates such systems as part of a policy process. Kingdon (1984) expounds on this policy process further by conceiving it as cyclical in nature. That is, the process starts with policy formulation; once formulated, the policy is adopted; once adopted, the policy is implemented; once implemented, the policy is evaluated for impact; once evaluated, this information is “fed back” to policy makers to formulate improvements to the existing policy. Ideally, this process involves all political actors – including police officers – and perhaps most importantly, gives due credit to police officers as the policy implementers, with discretion and latitude in their performance.

The utilization of such a heuristic allows for detailed examination of crime policy, especially changes in the policy itself. As stated by Scheingold, “what is true of policy in general is likely to be particularly true of crime control policies” (1991, 5). The vagaries of street crime necessitate immediate assessment and follow-up of police performance, among other political actors. When police performance is unsatisfactory or ineffective, crime can increase and the need for change manifested via public outcry can become more intense.

Much of the work done by a police department is the result of citizens reporting the crime, either currently occurring or having occurred, to the police via the 9-1-1 emergency system. These are coded via the Computer-Aided Dispatch (CAD) system as “calls for service” or CFS. A much smaller percentage of the crime reported is either observed by the police officers themselves or when a citizen sees an officer and reports the crime directly to the officer.

In the former situation, the emergency operator receives the emergency call and assigns the incident both an incident number and a crime code based on the type of call. This crime code, dictated by the police department and in accordance with state law, is based primarily on the information presented to the dispatcher by the emergency call. This information gives the responding officer an understanding of what situation he will face upon arrival at the potential crime scene. In the latter, the officer will record the crime code on the incident report directly. Once the officer reports the crime to dispatch, the dispatcher will assign an incident number for the officer.

Upon arrival at the crime scene, several options are available to an officer depending on the situation: if there is clear evidence that a crime has occurred, the officer will indicate to dispatch that an incident or crime report is being completed, such as “report to follow” or RTF; if there is no evidence that a crime has occurred, the officer will indicate to dispatch that the call was “unfounded” or UNF. However, there are two other options available to the responding officer depending on the situation: the officer may indicate to dispatch that the offenders were “gone on arrival” or GOA; or that the officer took care of the situation without effectuating an arrest, or “necessary action taken” or NAT. An example of an officer responding with the code GOA would be a 9-1-1 call of someone dealing drugs in a visible location but leaves before the officer arrives. An example of an officer responding with the code NAT would be an officer responding to a low-level disturbance or fight and getting the offenders to disperse without having to arrest anybody. Regardless of how the officer responds, the incident is coded into the police department’s record management system, or RMS.

In addition, based on the evidence available to the officer when he responds to the scene, the officer also has the ability to reclassify the original crime code assigned by the emergency dispatcher. For example, a woman sexually attacked could be initially coded as a Rape by the dispatcher only to have the responding officer investigate and reclassify the crime as an Indecent Assault; property stolen from a person could be initially coded as a Robbery by the dispatcher but recoded as a Purse Snatching or Shoplifting; property stolen from inside a structure could be initially coded as a Burglary only to be recoded as a Theft; damage to a window or door of a vehicle could initially be coded as an Attempted Theft, but recoded as Vandalism. This is because each crime has a series of lesser crimes beneath it depending on the elements of the crime that are met.

The above description serves two purposes for this discussion – it highlights how much discretion police have in coding a crime reported to them based on the evidence available and it also dictates what additional investigative efforts will be undertaken by the police department to solve the crime. This latter point is extremely important as any attempt to implement an articulated crime policy – any attempt to make that policy effective – is completely dependent on the accuracy of the information on which implementation decisions are being made.

Crime Reporting

The above-referenced crime reports are then categorized according to crime type and then summed to reflect the amount of crime in the jurisdiction. The primary repository for capturing these statistics is the FBI's *Uniform Crime Reporting* system, or UCRs. The FBI's Uniform Crime Reports were invented by the International Association of the Chiefs of Police (IACP) in 1929. Although technically there are eight categories that compose Part I crimes (arson was added in 1979), the seven original categories and their definitions are (Department of Justice 1995):

- Murder and non-negligent manslaughter – the willful (i.e. non-negligent) killing of one human being by another (traffic fatalities are excluded).
- Forcible rape – the carnal knowledge of a female forcibly and against her will. Rapes by force and attempts or assaults to rape regardless of the age of the victim are included (statutory offenses, or rape where no force was used, i.e. the victim was under the age of consent, are excluded).
- Robbery – the taking or attempting to take anything of value from the care, custody, or control of a person or persons by force or threat of force or violence and/or by putting the victim in fear.
- Aggravated assault (aggravated battery in most jurisdictions) – an unlawful attack by one person upon another for the purpose of inflicting severe or aggravated bodily injury. This type of assault usually is accompanied by the use of a weapon or by means likely to produce death or great bodily harm (simple assaults are excluded).

- Burglary – the unlawful entry of a structure to commit a felony or theft (attempted forcible entry is included).
- Larceny-theft (except motor vehicle theft) – the unlawful taking, carrying, leading, or riding away of property from the possession or constructive possession of another. Examples are thefts of bicycles or automobile accessories, shoplifting, pocket-picking, or the stealing of any property or article which is not taken by force and violence or by fraud. Attempted larcenies are included; embezzlement, confidence games, forgery, worthless checks, etc. are considered UCR Part II crimes and categorized accordingly.⁵
- Motor vehicle theft – the theft or attempted theft of a motor vehicle. A motor vehicle is self-propelled and runs on the surface and not on rails (motorboats, construction equipment, airplanes, and farming equipment are specifically excluded from this category).

The totals for each of the first four crime categories are summed to compose the Violent Crime Index; the totals for each of the last three crime categories are summed to compose the Property Crime Index. The UCR data is compiled from monthly law enforcement reports or individual crime incident reports transmitted directly to the FBI or to centralized state agencies that then report to the FBI. The UCR Program then provides crime counts for the nation as a whole, as well as for regions, states, counties, cities and towns. This allows for studies of various comparisons – among neighboring jurisdictions and among those with similar populations throughout the country, and other common characteristics. The UCR Program represents over 96 percent of the total population of the United States (Department of Justice 1995).

It is important to note that the UCR program only counts those offenses “known to law enforcement.” This means incidents and occurrences that are brought to the attention of the police by victims, witnesses, or by direct observations by police officers themselves as discussed earlier. As such, they represent the “official” level of crime in a community (Stephens 1999). Also, other offenses that citizens consider “serious” or cares deeply about are not counted, such as narcotics offenses or other vice crimes.

This is not the only problem with using UCR data. Although the UCR program captures those crimes reported to police, it does have a unique crime classifying and scoring procedure that can artificially deflate the actual number of crimes committed and reported to police. This occurs when multiple crimes are committed simultaneously (FBI 1984). Under this “hierarchy rule” only the highest or most serious offense is counted. For example, assume that during the commission of an armed robbery of a commercial eatery the offender strikes an employee with the gun; after the robbery the offender runs from the eatery and steals an automobile at the curb for a getaway vehicle. By law, three Part I UCR crimes have been committed – robbery,

⁵ The FBI does not provide a clear reason as to why certain crimes are classified Part I and others Part II other than this blanket statement: “The Part II Offenses encompass all other crime classifications outside those defined as Part I [earlier in this publication]. In November, 1932, the UCR Program adopted a Standard Classification of Offenses for the compilation of criminal statistics. This classification was devised and adopted in order that law enforcement, judicial, and penal statistics might be uniformly compiled in terms of a single classification of offenses” (FBI 1984, 79).

aggravated assault and auto theft – but on the UCR report only the robbery will be counted because it is the most serious crime. This is not to say that the other two crimes will not be counted by the local police department nor will the perpetrator not be charged by the district attorney's office for those crimes; the hierarchy rule counts only the most serious crime in a multiple offense situation. As stated by the Department of Justice, the primary reason for the hierarchy rule is to “prevent the double-counting of crime” (Maltz 1999, 14). The hierarchy rule also allows for direct comparison across jurisdictions by putting crime rates onto the same classification scale.

The hierarchy rule and classification scheme can also lead to a final problem noted with using UCR data. Crimes are reported to the police who classify them, score them, tabulate them, and send them to the state or directly to the UCR program. This can provide the opportunity for intentional manipulation of the statistics themselves, or “downgrading,” to make the city appear safer than it really is. As Stephens notes, in some cases “the careers of police chiefs and sheriffs have been affected in either positive or negative ways by these statistics” (1999, 56). Downgrading occurs when police classify the crime that is reported to them as a Part II UCR crime, or a less severe crime, instead of the proper Part I UCR crime.

These two purposes are important relative to the crime policy process. The measure of public safety – and the effectiveness of any crime policy – continues to be based on whether crime is up or down, with the adequacy or effectiveness of police performance inversely related to that measure: if crime is down, then the police are thought to be doing a good job and vice-versa (Brady 1996). Indeed, the presence or absence of crime is the occupational standard against which police programs are measured (Trojanowicz et al 1998). Thus, the impression is formed in the public's mind that it is the police officers who are responsible for reducing crime. In fact, the police are perhaps the only actors in the criminal justice system whose performance can be measured so simply by the public (underscoring these perceptions are the ever-present television shows in which the perpetrators are caught through good police work and the public is spared any future menace, conveniently all within a one-hour time frame.)

Thus the accuracy of crime reporting serves as the feedback loop inherent to effective implementation in the crime policy process. Inaccurate coding of crime, for whatever reason, will give police executives improper understanding of the total amount of crime in their jurisdiction and thus affect changes to existing policy. If the problem is sufficient enough it can result in incorrect shifts in crime strategies or not implementing needed crime strategies altogether. Accordingly, it is incumbent on police executives and those responsible for formulating crime policy and strategies to have as accurate as information as possible regarding the crime occurrences in their jurisdiction to ensure the city's residents are as safe as possible. One such way of doing just that is to regularly audit their crime reporting and recording procedures to ensure the validity and reliability of the crime reporting and coding process.

The Need for an Audit to Ensure Accuracy

Since COBRA's successful implementation was dependent on accurate crime data – and progress in reducing crime can be gauged only against a reliable crime data benchmark – Chief Pennington in mid-2003 also authorized an audit of crime reports and other crime records for 2002, the most recent full year. The purposes of the audit were:

- to assess the quality of criminal incident reports with respect to their conformance with the FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) rules and regulations in both classifying incidents and in clearing cases;
- to determine whether the number of Part I crimes reported by the APD to the FBI for the year 2002 was truly indicative of the number of Part I crimes reported by citizens of Atlanta to the APD; and
- to recommend changes, if warranted, that would eliminate the need for audits of this type in the future.

At Chief Pennington's request and under the direction of an outside auditor, the APD audited a random sample of crime reports from five of the seven Part I UCR categories⁶ and from selected Part II UCR categories⁷ utilizing methods recommended by the FBI for reviewing and auditing criminal incident reports. The audit was ordered to ascertain two things: first, whether a criminal incident report is being correctly coded based upon the information that is contained in the report; and second, whether the criminal incident report truly reflects what the complainant stated or believes to have occurred (i.e. is it a true record of the crime reported to have occurred). If a report contains inaccurate information or is incomplete, an accurate crime classification becomes impossible. Incomplete reports that lack critical information also affect the development and identification of crime patterns and trends that can assist investigators in their investigations.

Audit Results

In 2002, the APD processed over 100,000 incident reports. Using methodology recommended by the FBI,⁸ 2,332 incident reports with a UCR Part I crime index classification were reviewed, and 2,728 UCR Part II classified reports were reviewed. A random sample of 451 complainants was then re-interviewed, via telephone, to further assess the completeness of the incident report and its accuracy. Those chosen for a call-back were selected from reports determined to be correctly completed and classified to verify their accuracy i.e., to determine whether or not the

⁶ Murder reports, Rape reports, and Domestic Violence reports already classified as Part I crimes were not reviewed because of the sensitive nature of the crime.

⁷ UCR Part II index offenses are criminal offenses other those classified as t Part I detailed in the beginning of this Chapter. Crimes such as Malicious Destruction of Property, Simple Assault, Vandalism, etc. account for Part II offenses.

⁸ All findings using the FBI's *Klaus* formula for statistical reliability are at the 95 percent confidence level, the minimum level of confidence allowed.

police officer captured *all* of the relevant crime information as reported by the complainant. Using statistical sampling methods provided by the FBI, the total number of reports found to be incorrectly classified was projected for all of 2002.

The projected results of the audit revealed that 3,337 crime reports that should have been coded as Part I were not coded as such. In addition, 1,767 reports coded as Part I should not have been. After proper reclassification, this yielded a net increase of 1,570 Part I crime reports. In all, for 2002, UCR Part I crime – the FBI’s nationally accepted measure of crime – was underreported in Atlanta by 3.2 percent. Table 2 shows the increases in Part I UCR crime by category for 2002.

	Totals Pre-Audit	Totals Post-Audit	% Change
Murder	152	152	0
Rape	276	325	+ 17.8%
Robbery	4,168	4,251	+ 2.0%
Aggravated Assault	5,373	5,915	+ 10.1%
<i>Violent Crime Totals</i>	<i>9,969</i>	<i>10,643</i>	<i>+6.8%</i>
Burglary	8,554	9,637	+12.7%
Larceny-Theft	23,706	23,667	- 0.2%
Auto Theft	7,222	7,074	- 2.0%
<i>Property Crime Totals</i>	<i>39,482</i>	<i>40,378</i>	<i>+2.3%</i>
<i>Overall Crime Totals</i>	<i>49,451</i>	<i>51,021</i>	<i>+3.2%</i>

Source: APD

Missing Reports

While conducting the audit, numerous incident reports could not be accounted for in the APD’s Record Management System (RMS). In these instances, the system reported that an officer had responded to the 9-1-1 call and had transmitted a “Code 17” to the dispatcher, indicating that an incident report would be forthcoming. A review comparing “Code 17” dispatch code records with reports existing in the system identified 22,256 incident reports that were unaccounted for – incident reports that APD officers had said were written but in fact could not be located. Despite attempts to locate these missing incident reports, the APD could not produce any copies and could not provide any explanation as to why the reports could not be found.

Despite not having the reports, the auditor reviewed the 22,256 original dispatch codes – the code which is transmitted by the dispatcher to the responding officer that indicates the nature of the call – and determined that 13,005 of these dispatched calls were likely to be criminal incidents based on the dispatch code. Of these, 4,281 may have been UCR Part I crimes.

Again, it should be noted, however, that the final crime classification assigned to an incident may be entirely different from the initial dispatch code, and in some instances may not be a crime at all. The fact remains, however, that the APD could not locate the corresponding incident reports for 22,256 calls to 9-1-1 in which the officer indicated to the dispatcher that an incident report was generated as a result of the call.

9-1-1 Calls Reporting a Crime, But No Reports Filed

The audit also randomly sampled calls to 9-1-1 that resulted in an officer being dispatched and ultimately reporting back to the dispatcher that no incident report was required. There were 229,445 of these records in the APD's 2002 Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) database out of 808,687 total calls. Again, using the methodology recommended by the FBI, a random sample of calls to 9-1-1 of this type was selected according to the initial dispatch code. Using the information contained in the CAD database, and following the FBI's accepted statistical practices, 384 successful calls were placed to the original 9-1-1 caller who was asked to describe the reason why the original 9-1-1 call was made. In the callbacks, it was determined whether a crime may have occurred based on the information described. Based on the results of callbacks that indicated that an incident might have occurred, extrapolations were made as to the number of criminal incidents that were not recorded and investigated by the APD. Based on this projection, the audit estimates that an additional 38,760 incidents occurred that should have been documented by the APD in 2002 were not. Based on the initial dispatch code and the information provided via the callback, it was further estimated that 17,670 of these calls to 9-1-1 could be classified as UCR Part I crimes.

9-1-1 Calls Forwarded to Teleserve

Teleserve is a small unit within the APD's Communications Unit that is responsible for handling calls rerouted from 9-1-1 and taking incident reports over the phone for minor crimes and other incidents in lieu of dispatching an officer to the scene.⁹ If a caller to 9-1-1 is reporting such an incident, the 9-1-1 dispatcher forwards the call to the Teleserve operators who then handle the call. As a subsection of the crime report audit, the auditors identified more than 52,000 incidents assigned to Teleserve in 2002.

Based on the initial review of these more than 52,000 incidents, the auditors discovered that this number was over-representative of the total number of incidents handled by the Teleserve Unit. The audit revealed that there has been no consistent tracking of incidents that are assigned to the Unit, and in many instances, multiple incident numbers were assigned by this Unit to a single incident. Teleserve used manual logs to track call histories and reports taken, making the recreation of the Unit's activity for 2002 too labor intensive to undertake.

⁹ In 2003 at the time of the audit, Teleserve handles the following calls according to Department guidelines: most larcenies including larceny from auto and larceny of auto accessories, lost or stolen checks and credit cards, lost property, abandoned vehicles, harassing, obscene, or threatening phone calls, indecent exposures where the suspect is not on the scene and the time lapse is over one hour, vandalism, and other supplemental reports (example: additional stolen property).

As a result of the inconsistencies in Teleserve's record keeping, no accepted scientific methods could be applied to the audit of Teleserve's activity, and therefore, no reliable extrapolation of underreporting could be made. But there is certainty that hundreds, perhaps thousands, of Part I UCR incidents were not recorded by Teleserve and, therefore, investigated by the APD.

Crime Captured by Other Agencies Not Reported to the APD

There are 15 other law enforcement agencies with jurisdiction in the City of Atlanta that also respond to crimes and issue criminal incident reports. These agencies are:

- Clark-Atlanta University Police Department,
- DeKalb County Police Department,
- Fulton County Marshall's Office,
- Fulton County Police Department,
- Fulton County Sheriff's Department,
- Georgia State Capitol Police,
- Georgia State Troopers,
- Georgia Bureau of Investigations,
- Georgia State University Police Department,
- Georgia Technical Institute Police Department,
- Georgia World Congress Center Police Department,
- MARTA Police Department,
- Morehouse College Police Department,
- Morris Brown College Police Department, and
- Spelman College Police Department.

Criminal incidents handled by these agencies, however, *are not* being included in the APD's UCR statistics. Because there is not an established process for sharing this information, these additional crimes are not factored into the overall picture of crime in Atlanta. Equally as important is the fact that full crime patterns happening within the city limits are not being identified, delaying apprehension of potentially dangerous criminals.

Audit Conclusions

Because each section of the audit utilized different samples and different, although statistically reliable, techniques to determine if under-reporting and over-reporting occurred, the findings of each section are not cumulative and must be considered independent of each other statistically. However, because significant underreporting of crime incidence was uncovered in each section, the depth of this problem cannot be discounted.

- A review of criminal incident reports for correct crime classification yielded an additional 1,570 UCR Part I crimes that were underreported in 2002. From this review alone, UCR crime in Atlanta in 2002 was 3.2 percent higher than was reported to the FBI.

- A review of 9-1-1 calls where the responding officer took a report but that report was discovered to be “missing” from the system yielded the possibility of another 4,281 UCR Part I crimes in 2002 not captured by the APD.
- A review of those calls to 9-1-1 where the responding officer indicated to the dispatcher that no incident report was warranted, but where callbacks indicated a report should have been filed, yielded the possibility of an additional 17,670 UCR Part I crimes in 2002 not captured by the APD.
- A review of 9-1-1 calls transferred to Teleserve discovered that hundreds, and perhaps thousands, of UCR Part I crimes were not entered into the APD system in 2002 and, therefore, not included in UCR totals that year.

The combination of these problems – misclassified reports, crime reports simply not entering the system, calls to 9-1-1 reporting a crime but where no report was taken, calls being forwarded to Teleserve that were not dispatched to officers for investigation – represent collectively a serious breakdown in records management that severely handicaps development of effective crime strategies and tactics, and the establishment of a benchmark against which to measure crime reduction progress and exact accountability.

Post-Auditing Procedures

Based on the audit results, the consultants made recommendations to Chief Pennington:¹⁰

- effective June 1, 2004, a new Audit and Compliance Unit was established to conduct on-going internal audits of crime reporting and to instruct APD personnel in preparation of accurate and timely crime incident reports;
- standard operating procedures were established for the new unit to guide the practices of internal quality control checks and audit and coding of incident reports to FBI UCR standards;
- training was conducted of Audit and Compliance personnel in internal audits and quality control; and
- to ensure continuity in review and to maintain the highest standards of reporting, it was recommended that personnel be assigned to the Unit on a rotating basis.

¹⁰ Mayor Shirley Franklin and Chief Richard Pennington, *Fragile Momentum: A Plan of Action for Rebuilding the Atlanta Police Department to Help Secure Atlanta's Position as Capital of the New South*, February 20, 2004.

Audit as Feedback

As seen, auditing the crime reporting procedures within a police department can provide the police chief with an accurate baseline to begin developing effective crime reduction strategies that address the real problems. As Serpas and Morley (2008) point out, “aggressive, thorough, and multifaceted data analysis can provide the support chiefs need to show that crime has in fact been reduced by law enforcement efforts, or conversely, to ferret out illegal or unethical behavior of a department member.” The question remains then whether or not the audit led to reduced crime in Atlanta post-2003. Table 3 indicates that it did.

	<u>Total Crime Incidents</u>	<u>Crime Rate per 100,00 residents</u>
1996	70,251	17,001.2
1997	58,591	13,921.6
1998	58,129	14,031.9
1999	55,477	13,488.5
2000	55,468	13,135.8
2001	52,195	12,237.7
2002	49,451	11,355.2
2003	46,722	10,839.3
2004	41,107	9,558.3
2005	38,610	8,965.2
2006	39,779	8,188.3
2007	44,307	8,909.7
2008	46,381	8,701.6
2009*	40,708	7,362.6

Source: FBI, Crime in the United States, 1996-2009

**2009 are preliminary numbers*

As table 3 shows, not only did the number of incidents decline (after a brief increase) the corresponding crime rate is 57 percent lower than it was in 1996. This is despite an increase in population from 2005 to 2009 of 28 percent due in part to the influx of people fleeing Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Gustav.

Conclusion

It would be a mistake to say that the crime declines enjoyed in Atlanta are due entirely to the audit of the APD's crime reporting procedures conducted in 2003. However, relative to the implementation of crime strategies, accurate data gives to the police commanders and executives the ability to deploy their limited resources as best they can to reduce crime. Successful implementation of any policy requires that those the formulating the policy have accurate and timely information.

Clearly, further studies need to be conducted at a much more sophisticated level to test hypotheses as to what led to the sustained decreases in crime. In addition up-to-date audit results need to be examined to ensure that the crime numbers reported post-2003 are indeed accurate. Studies of this kind will add to the growing body of literature that policy implementers, in this case police officers, actually have a direct impact on the goal of crime policy – making Atlanta safe for its residents and visitors alike.

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