



# The Impact of Foot Patrol on Black and White Perceptions of Policing

Robert C. Trojanowicz  
Dennis W. Banas

National Center for Community Policing  
School of Criminal Justice  
Michigan State University

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(#) denotes endnote number

## Introduction

Social scientists have agonized over the relationship between minorities and the police for decades. There is compelling objective evidence that police do not systematically victimize minority group members,<sup>(1)</sup> yet research has found that racial minorities perceive police more negatively than whites. The National Crime Surveys of 1972/73 and 1975 found that although citizens viewed police performance positively, minorities were significantly more dissatisfied with the performance of law enforcement agencies.<sup>(2)</sup> (See Table 1.)

The disparity between minority and majority opinions of the police has resisted the manipulations of research design. No matter how social scientists construct comparisons, minorities articulate relative discontent with police performance.<sup>(3)</sup> So consistent have been the research results that the causes of minority attitudes have become an item of exploration.

Of the variables which have emerged as significant in determining minority perceptions of the police, "neighborhood culture" predominates.(4) In effect, minority neighborhoods generate and reinforce negative attitudes based, in part, on the persistence of involuntary interactions with police. Such interactions are less a function of police aggression than a residual of preventive patrol, with its emphasis on professional aloofness, and a symptom of alienation from the normative behaviors of those being policed.(5) Within the context of the neighborhood ". . . personal contact with police is a more significant determinant of general satisfaction than all other variables (race, gender, age, socio-economic status, etc.) combined."(6) It would seem that "broad-based programs which bring together citizens and police officers acting in an official capacity would seem to have more positive impact than generally assumed."(7)

The present research explores the impact of community policing on minority and white perceptions of police performance. It uses the Neighborhood Foot Patrol Program of Flint, Michigan, as its data base. The Flint program is unique in that it consciously attempted to integrate police into neighborhoods and to incorporate citizens into police decision-making processes.

## Community Policing:

### The Flint Experiment

The Flint Police Department operated solely with motorized or preventive patrols until January, 1979, at which point the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation provided funding for the implementation of experimental community-based foot patrols.

Flint's Neighborhood Foot Patrol Program was unique in a variety of ways. It emerged from an initiative which integrated citizens into the planning and implementation process through citywide neighborhood meetings in 1977 and 1978. It attempted to ameliorate three distinct problems: (1) the absence of comprehensive neighborhood organizations and services, (2) the lack of citizen involvement in crime prevention, and (3) the depersonalization of interactions between officers and residents. The program began in 1979 with 22 foot patrol officers assigned to 14 experimental areas which included about 20 percent of the city's population. The activity and efforts of the foot officers addressed seven basic goals:(8)

1. To decrease the amount of actual or perceived criminal activity.
2. To increase the citizen's perception of personal safety.
3. To deliver to Flint residents a type of law enforcement service consistent with the community needs and the ideals of modern police practice.
4. To create a community awareness of crime problems and methods of increasing law enforcement's ability to deal with actual or potential criminal activity effectively.
5. To develop citizen volunteer action in support of, and under the direction of, the police department, aimed at various target crimes.
6. To eliminate citizen apathy about crime reporting to police.
7. To increase protection for women, children, and the aged.

The Flint program's salient features were a radical departure from both preventive patrol and traditional foot patrol models. Flint's foot patrol officers did not limit their activities to downtown or business areas. They were based in and accessible to all types of socio-economic neighborhoods. Their crime prevention efforts went beyond organizing neighborhood watches. They attempted to serve as *catalysts* in the formation of neighborhood associations which articulated community expectations of the police, established foot patrol priorities, and initiated community programs. Foot patrol officers also worked in partnership with community organizations and individual citizens to deliver a comprehensive set of services through referrals, interventions, and *links* to governmental social agencies.

The foot patrol officers reconciled their role with the reality of policing; they not only provided full law enforcement services, as did their motorized counterparts, but they made a conscious effort to focus on the

social service aspects of their job, bringing problems to a resolution. Since they patrolled and interacted in the same areas day after day, week after week they developed a degree of intimacy with residents which translated into an effective cooperative relationship.

The Flint Police Department's two forms of patrol operated on the basis of relatively distinct organizational objectives and managerial patterns. Foot officers mobilized citizens in order to provide a matrix within which communities could identify and deal with many of their own problems, including -- but not exclusively -- crime. With the advice, consent, and direction of citizens, foot officers targeted, addressed, and resolved specific community-level concerns -- juvenile alienation, victimization of the aged, neighborhood safety and security, and so on. By comparison, motor officers continued to adhere to the narrowly oriented preventive patrol strategy of "crime control," reacting to events after they occurred.

Motor patrol officers still perceived social service as an annoying interlude between periods of "real" police activity -- pursuit, investigation, arrest; foot officers enjoyed a comprehensive, integrated and realistic sense of their role in their emphasis on social service as part of community-based crime control.(9) Whereas motor officers were subject to alternating bouts of inactivity and intense, frenzied periods, foot officers were able to maintain a consistent level of activity. During "down" periods, motor officers did not utilize their skills on a proactive basis; foot officers not only exercised their proactive skills continuously, but they developed and nurtured new talents in their community organizer, linkage and catalyst capacities.

The results of the Flint experiment have been reported elsewhere(10) Briefly, the Neighborhood Foot Patrol Program reduced crime rates by 8.7 percent. More dramatic were the reductions in calls for service, which decreased by 42 percent over the period 1979-1982. Citizens began handling minor problems themselves or the foot officer acted as mediator on an informal basis, negating the need for a formal complaint.

Although the impact on calls for service alone was significant, additional evidence indicated that citizens felt safer, were satisfied with the program, felt that it had impacted the crime rates, and that it had improved police/community relations. There was much closer interaction between the foot officers and citizens. Over 33 percent of neighborhood residents knew their foot patrol officers by name, and 50 percent of the rest could provide accurate descriptions of foot officers. Citizens also felt that foot officers were more effective than motor officers in encouraging crime reporting, in involving citizens in neighborhood crime prevention efforts, in working with juveniles, in encouraging citizen self-protection, and in following up on complaints.(11) The foot patrol officers themselves felt well integrated into the communities they served, minimizing their sense of isolation, alienation, and fear. The foot patrol experiment was so successful that 22 foot areas were added to the original 14 in 1981 (total of 36), and the citizens of Flint passed a tax millage increase in August 1982 which extended the program to the entire city. Presently there are 64 foot beats.

## Research Design and Methods

The present research is based upon interviews conducted in 1979, 1981, 1982 and 1983. It attempts to describe the differences (and similarities) between black and white perceptions of policing within foot patrol areas. It also attempts to illustrate the impact of foot patrol on such perceptions.(12)

The 1979 data are based upon a sample of residents drawn from the original 14 patrol areas, as are the 1981 data. The 1982 data are based upon a sample drawn from 36 foot patrol areas; the 1983 data, from 64 areas. As the foot patrol program expanded, the sample size also changed. The successive samples were drawn randomly.

Eighty-four (84) residents constituted the original 1979 sample. Forty-seven were white; 34, black; and 3, Hispanic. Because the Hispanic population of Flint is relatively small and does not possess identifiable neighborhood boundaries, Hispanics and blacks were collapsed into one group for analytical purposes in subsequent years.

In 1979 the researchers posed many questions to the interviewees. Two were particularly relevant to the present research: (1) In your neighborhood, how well does the motor patrol perform its duties? (2) To what extent does the Flint Police Department need improvement? Residents responded to these questions on a Likert-type scale. On the first question, a response of *very well* received a 5; *average*, 3; *not at all well*, 1. On the second question, a response of a *great extent* received a 5; *some extent*, 3; *not at all*, 1.

In 1979 questions were designed to measure the extent to which the residents of Flint exhibited perceptual patterns similar to those found in the national Crime Surveys (Table 1). They were posed at the point at which foot patrol was originally being experimentally implemented in order to provide a comparative longitudinal perspective in evaluating the impact of the new program. Responses in 1979 reflected the community's perception of policing prior to the foot patrol experiment.

Hypothesizing that since foot patrol integrates police into neighborhoods and involves citizens in the development of the officers' role and function in a formal, official context, black and white perceptions of foot officers would be more consistent with one another than they traditionally were where preventive patrol predominated. In effect, the researchers expected to see blacks become as favorably disposed to the police as whites within the context of the foot patrol program.

The interview questions posed to residents in 1981, 1982 and 1983 were designed to measure the community's assessment of foot patrol in order to discern differences (or similarities) between blacks and whites. The relevant questions were:

- Are you satisfied with foot patrol in your area?
- Has foot patrol lowered the crime rate in your area?
- Has foot patrol increased the safety of women, the elderly, and young people?
- Do you feel safer due to foot patrol?
- Which is more effective, foot or motor patrol in the following?
  - preventing crime?
  - encouraging citizen protection of themselves?
  - responding to complaints?
  - investigating the circumstances of crime?
  - working with juveniles:
  - following up on complaints?

The interviewees were asked for *yes* or *no* responses for the first four questions. In some cases the respondents *did not know*. In those cases the responses were not counted. The difference in the number of respondents for the questions relates to the variations in *do not know* answers.

## Results

As mentioned earlier, the National Crime Surveys found that, although citizens were generally satisfied with police performance, blacks consistently rated the police less favorably than whites. Table 1 illustrates the differences between black and white perceptions of policing found in the surveys.

**Table 1**  
**Evaluation of Police Performance in the 1972/73 and in the 1975 Surveys of**  
**the Eight Impact Cities and the Nation's Five Largest Cities**

Estimated Answer					
	Good Number	Average	Poor	Don't Know	No
1972/73 Surveys (14,621,640)	42%	37%	13%	7%	0%
1975 Surveys (15,386,335)	40%	41%	12%	7%	0%
1975 Surveys					
Race:					
White (10,872,109)	47%	37%	9%	7%	0%
Black/other (4,514,226)	24%	50%	19%	7%	0%

The 1979 interviews revealed that the Flint residents did not deviate from the national patterns. The mean for whites assessing the performance of motor patrol was 3.77; for blacks, 2.76. The difference between the two groups was 20.2 percent. Relative to the extent to which the Flint Police Department needed improvement, the mean for whites was 2.83 and blacks 3.49, resulting in a 13.2 percent difference between the two groups. The results of the two underlined the fact that whites perceived police more favorably than blacks at the point at which foot patrol was being implemented.

The interviews conducted in 1981, 1982 and 1983 showed a dramatic decrease in the differences between black and white perceptions of one form of policing, foot patrol. On the first question -- Are you satisfied with foot patrol in your area? -- the variations between blacks and whites over the three-year period range from .7 percent in 1982 to 3.5 percent in 1981 (Table 2). The great majority of all respondents was satisfied over the three-year period with the most positive evaluation being in 1981.

**Table 2**  
**Are you satisfied with foot patrol in your area?**

VARIATION	BASED ON:	YES	NO
1981 (176) 3.5%	67 Blacks	53 (79.1%)	14 (20.9%)
	109 Whites	90 (82.6%)	19 (17.4%)

1982 (592) .7%	269 Blacks	178 (66.2%)	91 (33.8%)
	323 Whites	216 (66.9%)	107 (33.1%)
1983 (368) 2.2%	155 Blacks	122 (78.7%)	33 (21.3%)
	213 Whites	163 (76.5%)	50 (23.5%)

On the second question -- Has the foot patrol program lowered the crime rate in your neighborhood?--the variations between blacks and whites range from .6 percent in 1983 to 3.2 percent in 1982 (Table 3). Again the great majority of all respondents answered in the affirmative with 1981 again receiving the most positive evaluations.

**Table 3**  
**Has the foot patrol program lowered the crime rate in your neighborhood?**

VARIATION	BASED ON:	YES	NO
1981 (140) 2.7%	54 Blacks	40 (74.0%)	14 (26.0%)
	86 Whites	66 (76.7%)	20 (23.3%)
1982 (487) 3.2%	238 Blacks	148 (62.2%)	90 (37.8%)
	249 Whites	147 (59.0%)	102 (41.0%)
1983 (274) .6%	132 Blacks	91 (68.9%)	41 (31.1%)
	142 Whites	97 (68.3%)	45 (31.7%)

On the third question -- Has the foot patrol program increased the safety of women, the elderly, and young people? -- the variations between blacks and whites range from 2.8 percent in 1982 to 4.9 percent in 1983 (Table 4). The great majority of all respondents answered in the affirmative with over 80 percent yes responses for both groups in 1981.

**Table 4**  
**Has the foot patrol program increased the safety of women, the elderly, and young people?**

VARIATION	BASED ON:	YES	NO
1981 (132) 4.6%	51 Blacks	43 (84.3%)	8 (15.7%)
	81 Whites	72 (88.9%)	9 (11.1%)
1982 (553) 2.8%	261 Blacks	191 (73.2%)	70 (26.8%)
	292 Whites	222 (76.0%)	70 (24.0%)
1983 (372) 4.9%	165 Blacks	126 (76.4%)	39 (23.6%)
	207 Whites	148 (71.5%)	59 (28.5%)

On the fourth question -- Do you feel safer because of the foot patrol program? -- the variations between blacks and whites range from 1.8 percent in 1981 to 8.5 percent in 1983 (Table 5). Although the majority of the two groups responded positively, the 8.5 percent was the largest percentage difference of all the items.

**Table 5**  
**Do you feel safer because of the foot patrol program?**

VARIATION	BASED ON:	YES	NO
1981 (181) n the respondents were asked to rate the effectiveness of motor vs. foot patrol on six items, there were greater variations, with a low of .3 percent difference on subquestion C in 1983 to a high of 15.6 percent on subquestion A in 1983 (Table 6). Both groups, however, were consistent in their overall ratings, feeling foot patrol was more effective on items A, B, D, E, and F. Only on item D in 1983 did whites rate motor patrol as more effective.	66 Blacks	54 (81.8%)	12 (18.2%)

**On item C, responding to complaints, both groups rated motor patrol more effective all three years. This was because of the greater mobility of motor patrol.**

**Table 6**

**On the following items state which is more effective, motorized patrol or foot patrol?**

**A) Which is more effective in preventing crime, MP or FP?**

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<b>VARIATION</b>	<b>BASED ON:</b>	<b>FP</b>	<b>MP</b>
<b>1981 (192) 9.7%</b>	<b>62 Blacks</b>	<b>48 (77.4%)</b>	<b>14 (22.6%)</b>
	<b>130 Whites</b>	<b>88 (67.7%)</b>	<b>42 (32.3%)</b>
<b>1982 (643) 8.7%</b>	<b>285 Blacks</b>	<b>202 (70.9%)</b>	<b>83 (29.1%)</b>
	<b>362 Whites</b>	<b>225 (62.2%)</b>	<b>137 (37.8%)</b>
<b>1983 (509) 15.6%</b>	<b>222 Blacks</b>	<b>153 (68.9%)</b>	<b>69 (31.1%)</b>
	<b>287 Whites</b>	<b>153 (53.3%)</b>	<b>134 (46.7%)</b>

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**B) Which is more effective in encouraging citizen protection of themselves, MP or FP?**

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<b>VARIATION</b>	<b>BASED ON:</b>	<b>FP</b>	<b>MP</b>
<b>1981 (187) .9%</b>	<b>58 Blacks</b>	<b>54 (93.1%)</b>	<b>4 (6.9%)</b>
	<b>129 Whites</b>	<b>119 (92.2%)</b>	<b>10 (7.8%)</b>
<b>1982 (689) 2.4%</b>	<b>309 Blacks</b>	<b>269 (87.1%)</b>	<b>40 (12.9%)</b>
	<b>380 Whites</b>	<b>340 (89.5%)</b>	<b>40 (10.5%)</b>

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1983 (575) 8.4	226 Blacks	208 (92.0%)	18 (8.0%)
	299 Whites	250 (83.6%)	49 (16.4%)

**C) Which is more effective in responding to complaints, MP or FP?**

VARIATION	BASED ON:	FP	MP
1981 (188) .6%	58 Blacks	22 (37.9%)	36 (62.1%)
	130 Whites	50 (38.5%)	80 (61.5%)
1982 (678) 9.9%	306 Blacks	133 (43.5%)	173 (56.5%)
	372 Whites	125 (33.6%)	247 (66.4%)
1983 (538) .3%	229 Blacks	71 (31.0%)	158 (67.0%)
	309 Whites	95 (30.7%)	214 (69.3%)

**D) Which is more effective in investigating the circumstances of crime, MP or FP?**

VARIATION	BASED ON:	FP	MP
1981 (173) 7.5%	55 Blacks	29 (52.7%)	26 (47.3%)
	118 Whites	71 (60.2%)	47 (39.8%)

1982 (585) 5.1%	270 Blacks	167 (61.9%)	103 (38.1%)
	315 Whites	179 (56.8%)	136 (43.2%)

1983 (489) 11.7%	220 Blacks	123 (55.9%)	97 (44.1%)
	269 Whites	119 (44.2%)	150 (55.8%)

**E) Which is more effective in working with juveniles, MP or FP?**

VARIATION	BASED ON:	FP	MP
1981 (194) 8.3%	63 Blacks	53 (84.1%)	10 (15.9%)
	131 Whites	121 (92.4%)	10 (7.6%)
1982 (701) 4.1%	311 Blacks	279 (89.7%)	32 (10.3%)
	390 Whites	366 (93.8%)	24 (6.2%)
1983 (551) 1.5%	232 Blacks	210 (90.5%)	22 (9.5%)
	319 Whites	284 (89.0%)	35 (11.0%)

**F) Which is more effective in following up on complaints, MP or FP?**

VARIATION	BASED ON:	FP	MP
1981	52 Blacks	39 (75.0%)	13 (25.0%)

(161) 3.6%	119 Whites	85 (71.4%)	34 (28.6%)
1982 (634) 1.5%	290 Blacks	208 (71.7%)	82 (28.3%)
	344 Whites	252 (73.3%)	92 (26.7%)
1983 (494) 10.1%	222 Blacks	149 (67.1%)	73 (32.9%)
	272 Whites	155 (57.0%)	117 (43.0%)

Of the 18 cells for the 6 items, blacks were more positive than whites toward foot patrol in 12 cases. Even though foot patrol receives the higher rating from both groups, blacks are even more positive toward it.

## Conclusions

The community policing program in Flint, Michigan, improved police/community relations and reduced the disparity in perceptions of police performance between blacks and whites. In the national crime surveys of 1975, 47 percent of the whites rated police performance as good; only 24 percent of the blacks gave police the same rating, for a difference between the two groups of 23 percent. There was a 10 percent difference between the two groups in the poor performance rating with blacks being more negative. When Flint residents were used as the sample, the range of difference between the two groups in 1979 was from 13.2 percent to 20.2 percent, again with blacks more negative.

The greatest variation between blacks and whites in their perception of the performance of foot patrol was 8.5 percent with 11 of the 12 cells being under 5 percent, and 8 of the 12 cells under 3.6 percent.

Community policing, i.e., foot patrol in Flint, greatly reduced the black and white perceptual disparity of police performance. The residents were not only satisfied with the program, they felt they had input into the role of the officer and influence on both the priorities of policing and the behavior of the officer. In effect, they felt that they had increased their control over the direction and operation of the police department. The foot patrol officers themselves were responsive to community needs and sensitive to the "neighborhood culture." They were able to distinguish between the normative behavioral patterns prevalent in their beat areas and truly threatening, dangerous acts and people. As a consequence, the positive formal interactions between individual foot officers and individual citizens improved significantly. The foot officers, for example, became less prone than motor officers to conduct "pat-downs."

The success of the Neighborhood Foot Patrol Program in Flint was predicated entirely on its existence and integrity as a formal, concrete and genuine effort to address community problems. The program was least of all a public relations ploy. The degree to which blacks and whites perceived foot patrol in almost identical ways reflects the sincerity of the effort. It would be entirely safe to assume that if police administrators do not seriously value community policing, for whatever reason, blacks and whites would exhibit perceptual differences of policing once again.

There is some evidence that the positive impact of foot patrol is easily reversed. The 1982 millage which expanded foot patrol to the entire city of Flint called for the addition of 76 foot officers and supervisors to the Police Department's sworn officer ranks. There were 310 officers prior to the millage vote; there are now only 311. It would be expected that there would be at least 386 officers if the department received the same level of "regular" support in 1984 that it received in 1982, prior to the special millage. In effect, additional tax dollars did not purchase additional police services as intended. As a result, the Neighborhood Foot Patrol Program has not been able to continue the same intimate links with residents or to achieve its original articulated objectives. It may, understandably, be in jeopardy with voters when the millage is up for renewal in 1985.

## ENDNOTES

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6. Ibid., p. 493.
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8. For comparisons see: Robert C. Trojanowicz, *passim*; George Kelling, Tony Pate, Duane Dieckman, Charles E. Brown, *The Kansas City Preventive Patrol Experiment* (Washington, D.C.; The Police Foundation, 1974), *passim*; George L. Kelling, Anthony Pate, et al., *The Newark Foot Patrol Experiment* (Washington, D.C.: The Police Foundation, 1981), *passim*.
9. Ibid.
10. David Dugger and Kevin Radelet assisted in data collection and compilation.
11. Robert C. Trojanowicz and Dennis Banas, *Perceptions of Safety: A Comparison of Foot Patrol versus Motor Patrol Officers*, Community Policing Series No. 1, (East Lansing, MI: National Neighborhood Foot Patrol Center, Michigan State University, 1985), *passim*.

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School of Criminal Justice  
Michigan State University  
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