

TABLE 3.1 (Continued)

Name of Department	Population Served	Full-Time Sworn Personnel		Total Full-Time Employees	
		Number	Per 10,000 Residents	Number	Per 10,000 Residents
Newark (NJ) Police	280,158	1,229	44	1,429	51
Montgomery County (MD) Police	911,528	1,199	13	1,563	17
Louisville (KY) Metro Police	624,030	1,184	19	1,411	23
Metropolitan Nashville (TN) Police	564,169	1,180	21	1,499	27
El Paso (TX) Police	616,029	1,095	18	1,455	24
Cincinnati (OH) Police	332,388	1,062	32	1,309	39
Miami (FL) Police	410,252	1,054	26	1,770	43
Tucson (AZ) Police	523,299	1,052	20	1,456	28
Oklahoma City (OK) Police	542,199	999	18	1,251	23
Tampa (FL) Police	337,220	992	29	1,352	40
Long Beach (CA) Police	473,959	972	21	1,485	31
Albuquerque (NM) Police	513,124	963	19	1,455	28

Source: Brian A. Reaves, *Local Police Departments*, 2007 (Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2010), p. 34, Table 1.

impression that police are unable to reduce crimes that are inherently more visible. To say otherwise is to question the need for a police presence at all. It is necessary to move away from assumptions and anecdotes, focusing instead on what the research shows. The following sections do just that.

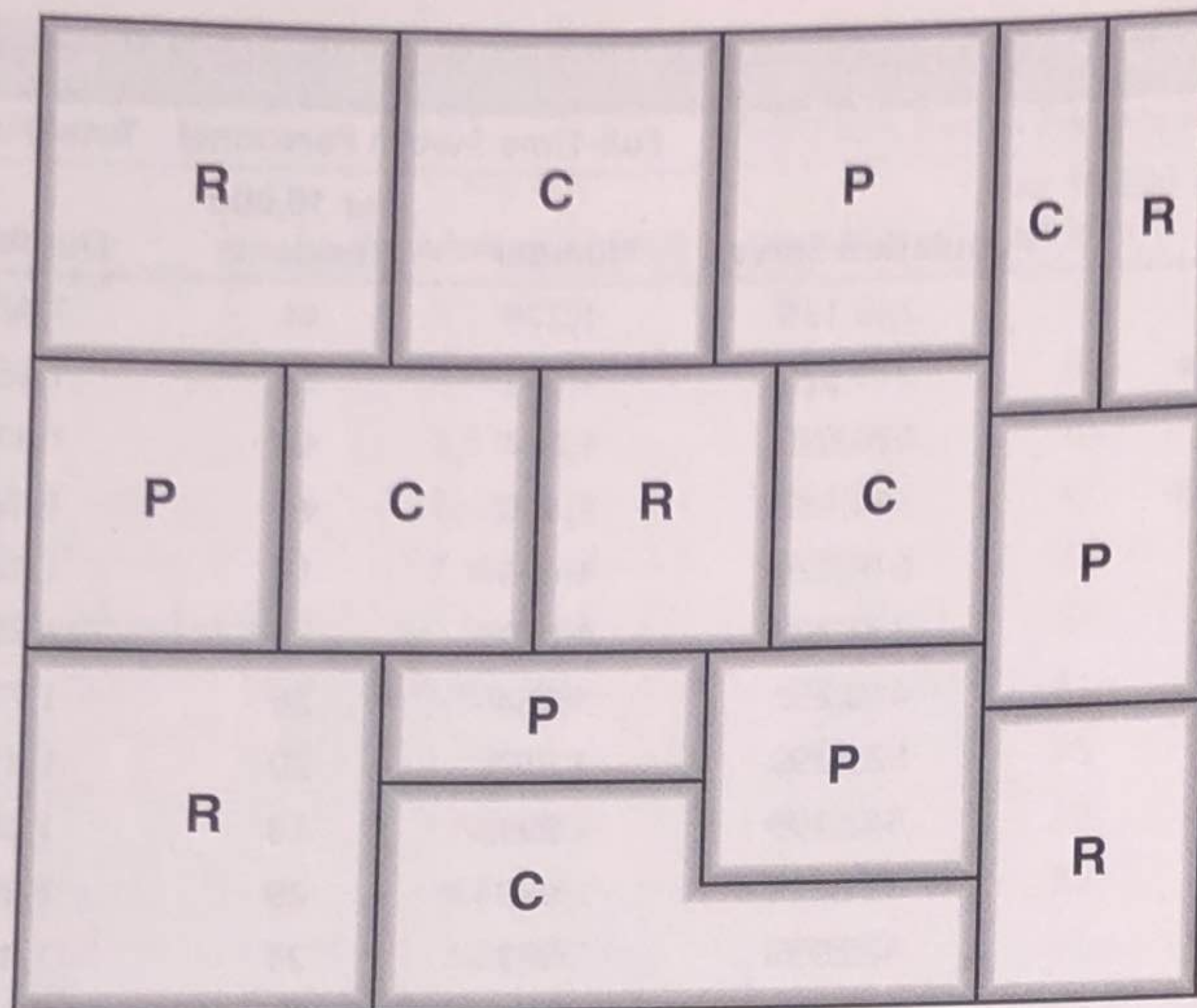
Lessons from Kansas City

One of the most important policing studies relevant to police hiring is the now-famous **Kansas City (MO) Preventive Patrol Experiment**.⁵ Conducted during 1972 and 1973, the experiment divided the South Patrol District of Kansas City into three groups of patrol beats. *Proactive beats* received two to three times the normal level of patrol. *Reactive beats* received no patrol, only responses to calls for service. *Control beats* kept police patrol levels to normal. Figure 3.1 depicts the various proactive, control, and reactive beats in Kansas City.

The experiment found that the level of patrol had no effect on crimes that are suppressible by patrol. These included burglaries, auto thefts, larcenies involving auto accessories, robberies, and vandalism. That is, public safety neither improved nor decreased in any of the three beats. What's more, citizens were not even aware of the differences. Specifically, citizens' attitudes toward the police, their feelings of security, and their decisions to report crime did not vary noticeably from one beat to the next. The lessons of Kansas City, therefore, are often touted as evidence that having more police will not reduce crime.⁶

The Kansas City Experiment should not be interpreted as the gospel truth. For example, the authors of the experiment's final report pointed out that their findings might have been misinterpreted, because there was more to the experiment than just a look at whether additional hiring is necessary. Also, some academics have been highly critical of the experiment. Let us briefly consider some of these concerns.

Kansas City (MO) Preventive Patrol Experiment: a 1972/1973 experiment structured to understand the relationship between patrol and crime. Generally, the experiment found that the level of patrol had no clear effect on suppressible crimes.



P = Proactive C = Control R = Reactive

FIGURE 3.1 Kansas City Patrol Study Beat Configuration

Source: George L. Kelling, Tony Pate, Doane Dickman, and Charles E. Brown, *The Kansas City Preventive Patrol Experiment: Summary Report* (Washington, DC: Police Foundation, 1974).

MISINTERPRETATIONS. During the course of the Kansas City Experiment, a number of early findings were published in local newspapers. Among these were claims that hiring additional patrol officers was unnecessary. This claim was then reported on local television channels, causing a fair degree of outrage. However, the authors of the experiment's final report claimed that this and other misinterpretations diminished the importance of the study. They claimed that the experiment should have served as evidence that close attention to what the police do with their time is necessary for effective crime control. In their words:

Given the distinct possibility that the police may more effectively deal with the problems of crime if they work more closely and systematically with their communities, it may be that an increase rather than a decrease in the number of police is warranted. . . . Police serve a vital function in society, and their presence is of real and symbolic importance to citizens.⁷

CRITICISMS. In a significant critique of the Kansas City Experiment, one researcher claimed that patrol cars entered reactive beats to respond to calls, which means that they basically created a police presence.⁸ How, he claimed, could this have differed from business as usual in the eyes of the citizens of Kansas City? Another pair of researchers concluded that the statistical methods that were used in the Kansas City Experiment were not sophisticated enough to detect differences in crime that could be attributable to the program.⁹ In fairness, however, most social science studies can be criticized on similar grounds.

The Post-Kansas City Intellectual Debate

Since publication of the results of the Kansas City Experiment, multiple studies have examined the police-crime relationship.¹⁰ That is, they have sought to determine

whether there is a relationship between police presence and crime. Whether a police–crime relationship exists is actually one of the most significantly researched questions in criminal justice, though one of the most overlooked. Why have there been so many different studies? As was mentioned in one of the discussions in Chapter 1, researchers have used different data sources, researched different time periods, relied on different estimation techniques, focused on different units of analysis (e.g., cities versus counties), considered different types of crimes and measures of police presence, and so on. In short, they have sought to improve the generalizability of previous research.

Needless to say, it would be time-consuming and probably redundant to examine every police–crime study in exhaustive detail. Instead, let us briefly consider two important review studies that have concluded that there is virtually no relationship between police presence and crime. Let us also consider some recent studies that have brought the police–crime debate back to the research forefront, showing that, in fact, the police might be able to reduce crime and that having more cops might be desirable.

In 1998, a study was published wherein the author reviewed 22 previous studies of the police–crime relationship.¹¹ He concluded that 18 of the 22 studies found either no relationship between police and crime or a positive relationship. A positive relationship is not what one would expect because it suggests that as the police presence increases, so does crime. A similar review published in 1996 reviewed 36 previous studies.¹² The authors of that review reported that only 10 of the 36 previous studies found a relationship between police presence and crime, that is, a relationship showing a decrease in crime when the police presence increased. Most recently, a review study “could not support firm conclusions on the deterrent impact of increased police levels on crime rates. . . .”¹³ In short, these studies appear to show that there is very little research concluding that it is desirable to hire more police officers.

Methodological problems also abound in this area of research. Marvell and Moody have claimed that previous research in this area is plagued by **simultaneity bias**.¹⁴ More simply, previous researchers have failed to address the possibility that not only might an enhanced police presence affect crime, but crime might also affect police presence. We know, for example, that voters commonly express frustration when public safety is threatened, calling on politicians to give more resources to law enforcement. In a sophisticated analysis that controlled for this possibility, Marvell and Moody found that a heightened police presence does reduce crime to some extent: “Higher police levels reduce most types of crime, particularly at the city level.”¹⁵

These sentiments were echoed by another researcher, who, again using a sophisticated statistical analysis, found that police levels substantially reduced violent crime in a sample of large cities throughout the United States.¹⁶ Another pair of researchers who looked at counties in Florida found that “there was a relationship between police levels and crime rates, such that increased levels of crime caused small increases in police levels, while increased police levels caused sometimes substantial reductions in crime over time.”¹⁷ The most recent research suggests there is a “models inverse association between police levels and crime.”¹⁸

Why does all this matter? For one thing, the most recent research seems to fly in the face of traditional assumptions that the police presence is not related to the crime problem. Sophisticated statistical studies also seem to challenge the findings of the Kansas City Experiment. So where does the truth lie? The answer remains somewhat elusive, especially when one examines the relationship between police grant funding and crime.

simultaneity bias:
In the policing crime context, the problem that policing may affect crime and that crime may also affect the number of police. Disentangling the relationship is statistically complicated.