

Investments in Policing and Community Safety

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Keywords

police, law enforcement, public safety

Abstract

I review the empirical literature on the effects of police staffing, police deployment, and styles of police enforcement. When cities put more police officers on the street, crime and violence have declined without a corresponding increase in arrests for the types of serious offenses that are most likely to lead to imprisonment. Investments in police therefore have the potential to generate a double dividend for society, reducing serious crime without driving up incarceration rates. At the same time, when cities have hired more police, those officers have ended up making many more quality-of-life arrests for minor crimes, thus widening the net of the justice system. The benefits of policing can be maximized and the costs can be minimized when police eschew strategies that revolve explicitly around making large numbers of stops and arrests and instead focus their efforts on more precise and problem-oriented approaches.