

Law Enforcement Executive Views: Results from the Conference Survey

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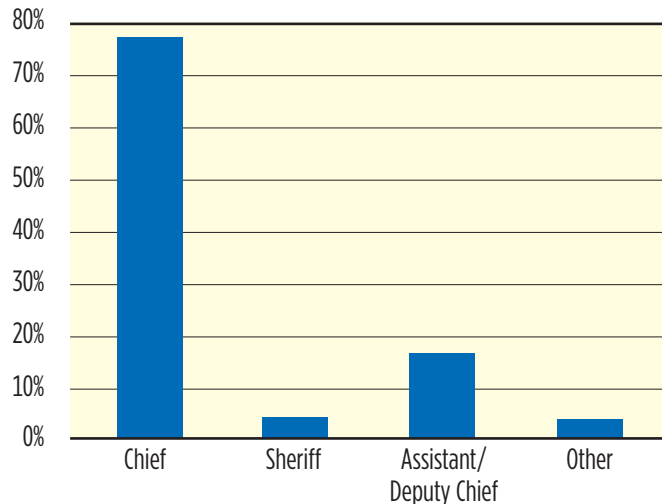
Survey Respondents

The Police Foundation conducted a survey of law enforcement executives who attended the August 2008 national conference, *The Role of Local Police: Striking a Balance Between Immigration Enforcement and Civil Liberties*. Only those who were the top executive or his/her designee were asked to complete the survey. This report shows the findings for the surveys returned at the conclusion of the conference.

Respondents' Roles

A total of 54 attendees of the conference completed the survey as senior leaders in their respective agencies. As demonstrated in Figure 1 below, the majority of survey respondents (40) were police chiefs. The other respondents were deputy chiefs or assistant chiefs (9), sheriffs (2), a police superintendent (1), and two others (a major and one who indicated he/she was both a sheriff and a chief).

Figure 1: Survey respondents by agency role



Respondents' Jurisdictions and Agency Types

Most of the participants were from urban agencies (n=29), while many were from urban/suburban areas (n=19). The remaining six claimed to be from rural type areas. The size of the jurisdictions ranged from just under 15,000 to more than 4 million. Also, the majority of respondents (n=47) were from municipal or local law enforcement agencies while one was from a county police department, four were from sheriffs' offices, one was from an urban county met-

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ropolitan area, and one was from both a sheriff's office and a municipal department. The sizes of the respondents' agencies ranged from very small (<10 officers) to very large (>20,000 officers).

Agency Concerns

Respondents were asked to list the five most critical issues facing them and their agencies. As Table 1 (below) shows, resource concerns topped the list, with violent crime and gangs following. Also among the top seven were community relations, drugs, and property crime, followed by immigration issues.

Impact of Immigration Issues

Almost three-fourths (74%) of respondents agreed that they were facing new demands and changing expectations as leaders as a result of the growing emphasis on immigration law enforcement, and almost half (44%) said they are responding to increasing political pressure in their communities as a result of this issue.

While just 26% of these leaders felt that their resources were being diverted from activities that would better serve the community as a result of immigration enforcement, over three-fourths (78%) said that they were engaging the immigrant community more as a result of the growing emphasis on immigration law enforcement. They also expressed a high level of confidence in their understanding of immigration issues pertinent to their communities (76%).

Very few agencies were in favor of adopting a sanctuary policy (9%), whereas half (50%) were not supportive of sanctuary policies in their communities. At the same time, the remaining 41% had no opinion on that issue, perhaps indicating that they have not yet decided.

It is important to note that participants generally did not believe that *local* law enforcement should be even partially responsible for enforcement of immigration law (54%), whereas just 24% said they should. The remaining 22% neither agreed nor disagreed that local law enforcement had at least partial responsibility. However, the majority (62%) of law enforcement leaders believed that officers should ask for documentation of citizenship status when in contact with those who break the law (including those violating traffic laws), whereas only 17% agreed they should do so when in contact with crime witnesses, and even fewer (15%) when in contact with crime victims. While 13% of respondents felt such decisions should be at the discretion of officers, just 7% said that officers should *never* ask for proof of citizenship.

Strategies for Engaging the Immigrant Community

Respondents were asked to describe the strategies they have developed or would develop to engage the immigrant community. The most frequently cited strategies in the forty-five received

TABLE 1. HIGHEST RANKED AGENCY CONCERNS

In general, what do you consider to be the most critical issues facing you and your agency? Please list them in priority order, from highest to lowest.

1. Resources
2. Staffing
3. Violent Crime
4. Gangs
5. Community Relations; Drugs (tie)
6. Property Crime
7. Immigration Issues

Rankings were based on a weighted scoring system. Those ranked first were given a score of 5, second scored 4, third scored 3, and so forth.

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responses were: organizing and/or attending community meetings, events, and forums (n=19), establishing community outreach programs or using community liaisons (n=17), attempting to educate the community through the media and bilingual pamphlets (n=13), or creating specialized department positions or programs to focus on the immigrant community (n=13).

Advantages and Disadvantages of Local Immigration Enforcement

Respondents were asked to summarize the advantages and disadvantages of enforcing immigration law at the local level. Some indicated that local enforcement would help to fight crime in general (n=9) and would appease supporters in the community (n=9). A few suggested that there would be little or no advantage (n=3).

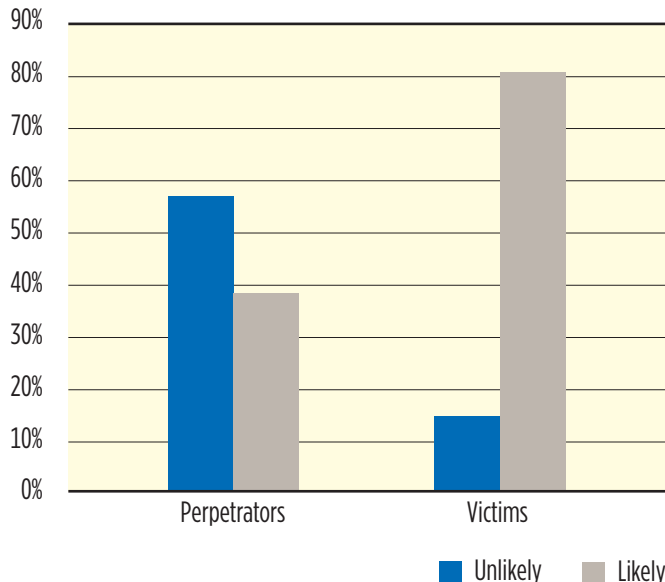
Over one-third (n=22) of the respondents suggested that a potential disadvantage to local enforcement would be the corrosion of trust in the community, while almost one-third (n=16) said that it would put a strain on their resources, result in civil liability, or constitutional issues (n=7), as well as racial profiling (n=6), and reduce witness cooperation (n=5). These responses indicate concerns by local law enforcement about the complexity associated with enforcing federal law.

Impact of Immigrant Population on Crime and Victimization

Respondents were asked to indicate the likelihood of undocumented immigrants being crime perpetrators and crime victims. As Figure 2 shows, respondents believed that undocumented immigrants were more likely to be crime victims (81%) than crime perpetrators (39%). It should be noted that two respondents said they were not sure about the likelihood of immigrants to be perpetrators or victims.

While the aforementioned indicates that law enforcement leaders do not believe by and large that undocumented immigrants perpetrate crime, they have mixed views on the impact that undocumented immigrants have on various offenses. While less than half (44%) indicated that

Figure 2: Likelihood of crime perpetration and victimization



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the presence of undocumented immigrants increases violent crime, youth crime (42%), or loitering (46%), half or more of the participants felt their presence increases traffic offenses (75%), drug-related crime (67%), gang-related crime (63%), and property crime (60%), followed by domestic assault and/or battery (52%) and public intoxication (50%).

Local Enforcement of Immigration Law

Nearly half (46%) of the survey respondents indicated that their department has decided not to enter into a partnership with the federal government to enforce immigration law, while almost a quarter (24%) of them considered such action. Conversely, 13% have implemented or are in the process of implementing this relationship, with another 2% planning on doing so. The remaining respondents indicated that their jurisdiction has done none of the above.

Fully 87% of respondents said that aggressive enforcement of immigration law would somewhat or significantly impact budgetary resources in their agencies.

The majority of respondents indicated that aggressive enforcement of immigration law would have a negative impact on community relationships by decreasing: the community trust of the police (74%), trust between community residents (70%), and reporting of both crime victimization (85%) and criminal activity (83%). These important findings underscore the problem local law enforcement would expect to face if they were to aggressively enforce immigration laws.

Adding to those concerns are beliefs that aggressive enforcement of immigration laws would weaken public trust initiatives (77%), community-policing efforts (77%), youth outreach (74%), intelligence/information gathering (63%), criminal investigations (67%), and even recruitment (31%), thereby impacting operations significantly.

At the same time, respondents felt that aggressive enforcement of immigration law would result in a *decrease* in various crimes (see Table 2). Crimes most likely to see a decrease according to the respondents were gang-related crimes (56.5%), while domestic assault and battery (21%) would be impacted the least.

The survey concluded with a request for policies that the respondents have developed or would develop for their agency in order to strike a balance between the enforcement of immigration laws and the protection of civil liberties. There were several respondents who said that they kept or would keep the local role to a minimum by only enforcing immigration law in the event of an arrest (n=11), by leaving the enforcement up to jail officials (n=2), or by not enforcing immigration law at all (n=3). Others offered a more general policy of ‘treating everyone fairly’ (n=6).

TABLE 2. IMPACT OF AGGRESSIVE ENFORCEMENT ON CRIME

	Expected to Decrease
a. Violent Crimes	37%
b. Property Crimes	37%
c. Gang-Related Crimes	56%
d. Drug-Related Crimes	45%
e. Loitering	46%
f. Domestic Assault/Battery	21%
g. Public Intoxication	38%
h. Traffic Offenses	46%
i. Youth Crime	25%