Abstract

The use of volunteer officers provides numerous benefits for law enforcement agencies, including the ability to increase trust between police and the community, to reduce the workload of a department, and to maintain or extend services without further depleting a budget. The United States and the United Kingdom both employ the use of volunteer officers. However, there has been little comparative work on these two areas of the policing system. This research first discusses the volunteer system of policing in both the United States and United Kingdom, followed by findings on the confidence of officers from both areas as they relate to police duties.

While Britain’s form of policing greatly influenced American policing, the two do not have the same policing system. There are a few major differences between these aspects of the policing system for both countries. First, the decentralized system in the United States does not have a standardized recruitment or training procedure. However, there are minimum requirements set forth by the individual state or federal agencies (e.g., the FBI, CIA, DEA, etc.). Within the United Kingdom, the centralized nature sets forth a standardized recruitment and training procedure that, for every department, is overseen by the government. Aside from the nature of the policing system, when compared to reserve deputies in Florida, special constables (who are similar in function and power to reserve deputies) receive much less training. Further, special constables echo this reality in their self-reporting, where far fewer special constables believed their training to be adequate in preparation for police duties compared to reserve deputies in Florida (3.2% vs. 37.5%). Additionally, special constables were less confident in their ability to conduct interviews and administrative tasks. Policy implications and limitations of the present study are also discussed.

[Keywords] Volunteer Officers, Sworn Officers, Policing System, Community Policing, Law Enforcement

1. Introduction

The use of volunteer officers provides numerous benefits for law enforcement agencies, including the ability to increase trust between police and the community, to reduce the workload of a department, and to maintain or extend services without further depleting a budget [1]. The justification for volunteers falls into one of four reasons. First, because volunteers may help influence how a community views police, they may serve as a liaison between both entities, increasing the relationship between the police and the community in which they serve. Second, those who volunteer may feel a sense of pride for both their community and the position to which they will take. This will also help community relations. Third, when the demand for police service puts strain on full-time officers, volunteers are in a unique position to mitigate any harm, increasing the effectiveness of
Lastly, volunteers increase this effectiveness while not increasing a monetary cost to society. Therefore, it makes financial sense to use volunteers[2]. The United States and the United Kingdom both employ the use of volunteer officers. However, there has been little comparative work on these two areas of the policing system[1][3]. This research first discusses the volunteer system of policing in both the United States and United Kingdom, followed by findings on the confidence of officers from both areas as they relate to police duties.

2. Volunteer Officers in the United States

Throughout the United States, many police departments and sheriff’s offices employ the services of volunteers in order to make use of a tight budget, supplement full-time personnel, or a combination of both. According to Greenberg(2005), sheriffs in the mid-1600s would ask for assistance from community locals in order to help with certain tasks, such as peace keeping. Further, volunteers emerged from “civil defense units” during World War II, which ended up creating reserve and auxiliary police officers shortly thereafter in order to satisfy the differing needs of departments. While the term “volunteer” may feed the notion of free, this is not entirely accurate, as there is still a cost to recruit, train, and manage. Additionally, equipment may need to be provided for the volunteer, though this can vary between agencies[4]. Furthermore, there is usually a reimbursement(however nominal) for certain items including travel expenses, attending additional training, and other expenses incurred by the volunteer. There is no actual pay, however.

The exact number of volunteer police officers in the United States is largely unknow, though recent estimates by Dobrin and Wolf (2016) put the number around 77,500 for all volunteer officers. Out of this number, approximately 29,500 are sworn reserve or auxiliary officers, 29,000 sworn volunteer deputy sheriffs, and around 19,000 non-sworn volunteer officers. Dobrin and Wolf(2016) further state that this number of volunteers is roughly 20% of the nearly 400,000 full-time officers. The meaning behind the use of “reserve” and “auxiliary” varies from agency to agency, but there is agreement that those terms refer to officers that have a certain amount of police power but lack a full-time status. For example, Britton et al.(2018) describe that auxiliary officers in the northeastern states wear identical uniforms as their full-time colleagues, but have very limited powers, whereas in Florida, volunteer officers are classified in one of two distinct manners. First, reserve officers in Florida are essentially trained in the same manner as full time officers and can operate on their own after their field training is complete. The second type is an auxiliary officer, who receives about half the training of a reserve officer, has limited police powers, must work under a “fully certified” officer, and cannot work by themselves in any official capacity[3].

This difference in both training(to be discussed in greater detail later) and execution of duty regarding volunteer officers in the United States deals primary with the structure of the government and the structure of the policing system. The more than 18,000 police agencies across the United States reflects this, as the policing system is highly decentralized, with local, state and federal agencies having their own rules and regulations. Further, this allows each agency to tailor these rules and regulations to the laws unique to that particular jurisdiction[5]. Notably, this allows for better community policing, as the areas in which they serve differ, sometimes dramatically.

2.1. Training

The training for reserve and auxiliary officers in the United States varies, sometimes considerably, from state to state. While training for full-time officers also varies, the average is roughly 760 hours of training, equating to roughly 19 weeks[5]. As mentioned previously, in Florida, auxiliary officers are less trained, and must complete a minimum of roughly 300 hours of training, which includes interview techniques, emergency vehicle op-
eration, firearms training, legal issues, mental illness awareness, and self-defense. Reserve officers must complete the same training as full-time officers, which, in Florida, is comprised of a minimum 770 hours of training. This includes a more in-depth training of the same topics for the auxiliary officers, and may include department specific training. Field training, often done after testing, is also varied. This training is often referred to as “on the job training” because the officer is out in the field with a supervising(training) officer. The Bureau of Justice Statistics(2016) states that, on average, field training consisted of roughly 500 hours in addition to the police academy.

2.2. Duties

Volunteer police officers in the United States may be used for a variety of reasons. Generally speaking, both reserve and auxiliary officers have some arrest power. However, to show the highly decentralized nature of American policing, Kang(2019) uses the example of a city on the eastern coast (New York City) and a city on the western coast (Los Angeles). New York City auxiliary officers may assist full-time officers but have extremely limited powers and are not permitted to carry firearms. In contrast, Los Angeles reserve officers carry out almost identical duties as their counterparts and carry the same equipment.

General duties, according to Dobrin and Wolf(2016) include patrolling neighborhoods, traffic and parking duties, crowd control, welfare checks, as well as specialized areas of law enforcement, to include drug taskforces, community education, narcotics, and serving of warrants. However, in addition to law enforcement duties, police departments may utilize their volunteers to match what the community needs, as well as to promote community policing and to show transparency.

3. Volunteer Officers in the United Kingdom

The United Kingdom utilizes volunteer officers in a similar fashion to police agencies in the United States. These volunteers are referred to as special constables and are not a new phenomenon either. The implementation of Peel’s Metropolitan Police Act of 1829 allowed citizens in the form of special constables, to be used. Shortly after in 1831, provisions were passed that clarified the duties of special constables. Similar to American volunteer officers, volunteers in the United Kingdom are not paid, but may be reimbursed for certain expenses.

Unlike their counterparts in the United States, special constables do not have varying levels of training or how that training is administered. Further, every special constable is fully warranted (essentially a “sworn” officer) and has the exact same police powers as “regulars.” As of March, 2018, there are 11,690 special constables. Policing services follow national guidelines in the England and Wales (in addition to supervising and inspecting each department), lending to the idea of a more centralized system.

However, chief constables may interpret these guidelines in a somewhat different fashion than other chief constables and the function of special constables may also vary to some extent.

3.1. Training

Due to the centralized nature of policing in the United Kingdom, the selection and training process is standardized, with a shorter process for special constables. The exact training for special constables is that of a program referred to as Initial Learning for Special Constables, or IL4SC. Special constable training includes courses on officer safety, values, first aid, human rights, diversity training, criminal law, and other courses. This initial training takes between three and four weeks (roughly 160 hours) and may be taught on weekends or evenings. After training, and similar to American officers, special constables undergo a tutoring of sorts while out on patrol. Once this is complete, they are assumed to be able to work in a safe and lawful manner but can continue training to achieve what is known as “independent patrol status”
This affords them the ability to work alone.

3.2. Duties

Similar to American volunteer officers, the duties of special constables may vary by the specific department in which they work but are generally related to supporting regular officers and supplement their ranks. Additionally, special constables add in a higher level of community representativeness, which helps to serve as a liaison between the community and regular officers. It is becoming more common for special constables to work in more focused areas of law enforcement, including cyber-crimes, public protection, and specialized response.

4. Differences Between Systems and Self-Reported Confidence of Volunteers

Immediately, the first noted difference between American volunteers and those from the United Kingdom stems from their respective policing systems. The highly decentralized nature of American policing does not have a national standard for training. Generally speaking, there is a state mandated minimum, though a department can exceed the minimum training as they see fit. In the United Kingdom, the much more centralized form of policing contains a standardized form of training for special constables, though the chief constables may vary the training to some extent. Because of this, one can be reasonably certain of how a special constable is to be trained, whereas uncertainty flourishes with how volunteers in America are trained. While this may sound like a negative, this decentralized policing system affords a greater opportunity to use community policing and prevent crime, as training and police services, and training, can be adjusted to fit the immediate area.

If, however, we are to associate the minimum, as it pertains to training of reserve deputies in Florida (which closely resemble special deputies in terms of full police powers), we would see that they must undergo at least 770 hours of training (roughly 19 weeks), not including any field training. When compared to the average training of special deputies in the United Kingdom of three to four weeks, the amount of training received by American volunteers is much more.

While, admittedly, there has been little comparative research on reserve deputies and special constables, some researchers have looked at the confidence of these officer [5]. Wolf et al. (2017) compared self-reported confidence of 41 reserve deputies from the Orange County Sheriff’s Office (Orange County, Florida) and 31 special constables from the Cleveland Police (comprised of four non-metropolitan police districts in the United Kingdom). Their findings show that only 3.2% of officers from the Cleveland police stated they received all of the training required in order to be prepared for operational policing, compared to 37.5% of reserve officers from Orange County. Furthermore, Cleveland special deputies reported lower confidence in the ability to manage paperwork and collecting information from victims. These findings show a distinct divide between reserve deputies from Orange County and special constables from Cleveland. These findings could very well reflect not only differences in training, but also differences in the policing systems as well. While reserve deputies in Florida must undergo a minimum of 770 hours of training, special deputies throughout the United Kingdom only undergo about 160 hours. While the United Kingdom has a standardized training platform, it is unlikely that every district throughout the United Kingdom has the same demographics, attitudes, beliefs, etc., let alone the individual residents. Because of this, a more decentralized approach, similar to that of the United States, in addition to added training, would appear to be beneficial to the confidence of special deputies.

5. Conclusion

Volunteers will continue to play an important role in policing for both the United States and United Kingdom. Unfortunately, comparative research on this topic remains
rather small[5]. However, the findings were significant contributions to the existing literature. There are a few major differences between these aspects of the policing system for both countries. First, the decentralized system in the United States does not have a standardized recruitment or training procedure. However, there are minimum requirements set forth by the individual state or federal agencies (e.g., the FBI, CIA, DEA, etc.). Within the United Kingdom, the centralized nature sets forth a standardized recruitment and training procedure that, for every department, is overseen by the government[5]. Aside from the nature of the policing system, when compared to reserve deputies in Florida, special constables (who are similar in function and power to reserve deputies) receive much less training. Further, special constables echo this reality in their self-reporting, where far fewer special constables believed their training to be adequate in preparation for police duties compared to reserve deputies in Florida (3.2% vs. 37.5%). Additionally, special constables were less confident in their ability to conduct interviews and administrative tasks[5].

While the lack of research on this topic is alarming, a few recommendations may still be made. First, while a centralized policing system may streamline the selection and training of its officers, it may be too rigid of a structure to adequately address the individual communities that are served. Relatedly, every special constable receives the same initial training. This training is hundreds of hours less than the minimum training for reserve deputies in Florida. While this is not necessarily causal in and of itself, one cannot help but wonder if the same outcome would be had if training was increased.

6. References

6.1. Journal articles


6.2. Books


6.3. In addition references

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