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Policy Responsiveness in the American States With Respect to LEAA Block Grants

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Introduction

This paper examines the extent to which the American states spend LEAA (Law Enforcement Assistance Administration) block grants in response to growing crime rates and/or the public's desire to halt the increasing number of criminal violations. Our principal concern is whether or not states, as block grant recipients, are allocating this federal aid in a way that could be characterized as responsive to either public opinion or the targeted problem, i.e., crime.

The federal government established the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration block grant program under Title I of the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968 (Public Law 90-351).¹ This law, to a great extent, was a response to the public concern with crime manifested in the late 1960's. Not only were citizens inundated with rhetoric by the FBI and others indicating such occurrences were increasing, but the civil disorders of 1967 and 1968, as well as the assassinations of President John Kennedy, Senator Robert Kennedy, and Dr. Martin Luther King, caused many people to fear for their personal safety, even in localities where evidence indicated persons were only rarely the victims of violent acts.² Thus, it is not too surprising that in 1968 crime was viewed by Americans as being the number one domestic problem.³ This public attitude is credited with having significant political consequences, including its effect upon the outcome of several elections, such as the 1968 presidential contest.⁴

* We wish to thank Harvey Marshall for his helpful comments on the methodology employed in this paper.

¹ Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968, *Statutes at Large*, Vol. 82 (1968), pp. 191-209.

² Fred P. Graham, "A Contemporary History of American Crime," in Hugh Davis Graham and Ted Robert Gurr, *The History of Violence in America* (New York: Bantam Books, 1969), pp. 495-496.

³ American Institute for Public Opinion, *The Gallup Poll—1935-1971* (New York: Random House, 1972), p. 2107.

⁴ Richard Scammon and Ben J. Wattenberg, *The Real Majority* (New York: Coward, McCann and Geoghegan, Inc., 1970).

Evidence indicates the fears of individuals were not merely the result of proclamations made by J. Edgar Hoover and several candidates for elective office, however. The level of violent crimes began increasing drastically, especially robbery which nearly always involves a confrontation between persons not known to each other, and includes the threat of bodily harm, if not the actual use of force. Moreover, the number of persons being injured during robberies has also grown. In short, the fear of being victimized not only is greater than it was 10 or 15 years ago, the probability of becoming a crime statistic also is higher than in the past, particularly in major metropolitan areas.⁵

Under the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration program, money is apportioned among the states on a per capita basis for the general purpose of alleviating crime by improving the processes of criminal justice.⁶ States are to spend their grants for individual projects intended to improve the effectiveness of various criminal justice agencies. In order to qualify for these monies, a state must establish a state planning agency (SPA) under the control of the governor. States receive each year's grant when the LEAA approves the comprehensive plan which has been prepared and adopted by that agency. This unit then is authorized to make "subgrants" to state and local law enforcement agencies.⁷

⁵ Graham, *op. cit.*, 502-504; and Marvin Wolfgang, "Urban Crime," in James Q. Wilson, *The Metropolitan Enigma* (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1970), pp. 292-296.

⁶ *Statutes at Large, op. cit.*, 197-199. For a discussion of the regulations governing the operation of this block grant program see Edward J. Clynych, *Law Enforcement Assistance Administration Block Grants: A Policy Analysis* (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Purdue University, 1974), chapter 2. The law establishes block grants: one for planning purposes (planning grants) and one for funding criminal justice projects (action grants). This work deals exclusively with the action grants and all references to block grants refer to this type of allocation.

⁷ Clynych, *op. cit.*, *Statutes at Large, op. cit.* The requirement that subgrants be awarded on the basis of a comprehensive plan, approved by the LEAA, gives federal administrators some potential control over how these resources are utilized. LEAA officials, however, have imposed very few programmatic controls on state planning agencies. States are free to determine how block grants are divided among different parts of the criminal justice system, provided some resources are channeled to each segment. LEAA oversight is mostly concerned with operating procedures rather than substantive spending decisions. However, the federal agency does monitor state spending to insure funds are utilized in accordance with the comprehensive plan developed by the SPA. In essence, states may decide how they wish to distribute block grant resources, but a plan must be submitted to the LEAA and accepted by that agency. Furthermore, actual spending is expected to be guided by this document.

The existence of regional planning units (RPU) within each state also raises questions about the state being the appropriate unit of analysis. To date, SPA willingness to accept RPU spending recommendations without alteration has not been clarified by a comprehensive cross-state analysis. Studies of individual or a few states seem to indicate that the decision-making role of RPU's varies. In any case,

LEAA block grants provide states not only with money, but also with the flexibility to fund projects intended to alleviate criminal activity of concern to their citizens. This research, it should be emphasized, does not evaluate the impact of block grant spending on the incidence of crime. Rather, it assesses whether or not allocation decisions are based on public sentiment and/or crime rates, the available measure of the targeted problem.

Dependent Variables

Statewide expenditure data are the measures of policy output utilized in this study. The LEAA requires states to classify expenditures by a number of functional categories. From these data we have selected two specific indicators for inclusion as dependent variables in our analysis: (1) the percentage of LEAA funds spent on crime prevention, and (2) the proportion of this aid allocated for detection and apprehension of alleged criminals. We have chosen these indicators because they primarily represent spending for projects intended to reduce crime through improving police effectiveness. Crime increases could lead to states favoring projects for any of the parts of law enforcement, but we believe an important question to be answered is whether or not the level of support for police-related undertakings are affected by the targeted problems. The police, among all segments of the criminal justice system, are ". . . viewed as the prime actors for reducing crime . . ." ⁸ Demands for more "law and order," moreover, usually

it appears that the state remains a relevant actor. All projects funded must have the approval of the state planning agency. This unit must, at a minimum, co-ordinate RPU spending requests on the basis of the state's plan. See *Law and Disorder III*, (Washington, D. C.: Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, April 1972), pp. 13-15; U. S. Congress, House, *Block Grant Programs of the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration*, 92nd Congress, 2nd sess., 1972, pp. 48-60; and Malcolm Feeley, Austin Sarat and Susan White, "Implementation of the Safe Streets Act: The Role of State Planning in the Development of Criminal Justice Federalism, paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago, Illinois, May 1976, pp. 14-15.

⁸ Police anti-crime task forces, for example, have been established with the objective of deterring potential offenders from committing violations of the law. In addition, projects are being financed with LEAA resources to eliminate obvious opportunities for infractions, such as efforts to upgrade street lighting in high crime areas. The police are also introducing programs intended to encourage individuals to take steps having the likelihood of reducing the chances of an illegal entry. Door-to-door inspections of homes and businesses are conducted by trained officers and campaigns are being undertaken to encourage persons to mark their possessions with an identification number which is registered with law enforcement officials. See National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals, *A National Strategy to Reduce Crime* (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Department of Justice, 1973), pp. 94-96 and 108; and John McKay of the National League of Cities, private interview with Edward J. Clynych, February 25, 1975.

are accompanied by hard-line solutions such as increasing the ability of the police to detect and apprehend criminals.

These categories, at the same time, involve two very different strategies for reducing crime through police actions. Items included under crime prevention are "proactive," referring to steps taken to minimize the likelihood of illegal acts ever occurring. Detection and apprehension expenditures, by comparison, reflect a "reactive" approach to "crime in the streets." Here the focus is upon reducing the incidence of illegal activities by increasing police effectiveness in arresting individuals, who may have committed a crime. By incorporating both types of measures in our analysis, we should be able to assess policy responses which have been "proactive" or "reactive" in nature. The total number of states included in the present research is 43, since seven states did not report their expenditures on the form suggested by the LEAA.⁹ The data employed were for the year 1970, the first year a substantial amount of federal money was transferred to the states under this program.¹⁰ Most of the 1970 allocation was completely expended at the time these data were gathered.¹¹

Independent Variables

The notion of responsiveness will be conceptualized in two different ways as indicated in the introductory section. First, we may impart an interpretation derived from democratic philosophy. That is to say, states implementing policies consistent with public opinion can be labelled "responsive." Congruence with mass preferences, then, becomes the relevant assessment criterion. Second, states and local communities can respond to the specific policy problems under consideration, rather than what the citizenry believe is an appropriate course of action. In this instance, policies would be determined directly by the increases in criminal activity, and not by public opinion.

We encounter significant difficulty in attempting to operationalize our first definition of responsiveness. Essentially, we must construct indices of mass preferences regarding responses to increased crime in

⁹ During 1970, Hawaii, Illinois, Massachusetts, Tennessee, Utah, Virginia, and Wyoming did not use the budgetary form suggested by the LEAA. Therefore our analysis was performed on an N of 43.

¹⁰ The dollar amounts of federal money allocated during the first three years of the program are as follows: 1969—\$24 million; 1970—\$183 million; and 1971—\$340 million. See Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, *5th Annual Report*, (Washington, D. C.: Department of Justice, May 1973), p. 2.

¹¹ At the time the data were collected in May 1973, the average proportion of the LEAA funds which had been spent by the states was 98.6 percent for 1969; 90.9 percent for 1970; and 70.4 percent for 1971.

the streets. More precisely, we would like to know how the public would wish to see the LEAA funds distributed across the functional categories of expenditure. Regrettably, we do not have state-by-state public opinion polls accurately measuring the policy preferences of the citizenry with respect to this block grant program.

We can calculate, however, a very general, crude indicator of public attitude regarding the "law and order" problem by a computer simulation methodology developed by the M.I.T. Simulmatics Project,¹² and elaborated upon by Ronald E. Weber.¹³ This technique allows the researcher to translate national survey results into state-by-state estimates of the preferences of eligible electorates.¹⁴ For any item included in a national opinion poll, one can compute the distribution of attitudes for each state, even though representative samples were not drawn for all states included in the analysis.

We, therefore, can estimate the extent to which there is a general belief or desire to increase police protection in order to deal with "crime in the streets." To do so, we relied upon the following question which appeared on a Gallup Poll administered in 1968:

In recent years there has been a sharp increase in the nation's crime rate. What steps do you think should be taken to reduce crime?¹⁵

This was an open-ended question, permitting a myriad of responses. Consequently, we selected the type of answer which expressed a preference for "more law enforcement," "more police," "more police protection," "more power for the police," or "less restrictions on the police" as most reflective of the public's desire to do something about crime in the streets, the very purpose for which the LEAA block grant system was instituted. The percentage of each state's eligible electorate who felt the answer to mounting street crimes was an increase in police protection and law

¹² See Ithiel de Sola Pool, Robert P. Abelson and Samuel Popkin, *Candidates, Issues, & Strategies: A Computer Simulation of the 1960 and 1964 Presidential Elections* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The M.I.T. Press, 1965).

¹³ See Ronald E. Weber, *Public Policy Preferences in the States* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Institute of Public Administration, 1971); and Ronald E. Weber, Anne H. Hopkins, Michael L. Mezey and Frank J. Munger, "Computer Simulation of State Electorates," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 36 (Winter, 1972-73), pp. 549-565.

¹⁴ This methodology generates estimates of statewide opinion on the basis of national survey data by (1) using an additive model to compute the attitudes of regional voter-types, (2) attributing the regional voter-type preferences to the voter-types in each state within the region, (3) multiplying the attributed opinion to the frequency of the voter-type in each state, and (4) calculating a weighted average of the products over all voter-types in each state.

¹⁵ AIPO 757, January 30, 1968.

enforcement is estimated by subjecting this survey item to the simulation methodology cited above.

The second notion of responsiveness focuses upon the ability to devote money and effort to the problem, namely crime in the streets, rather than public opinion regarding the allocation of funds. The utilization of the LEAA block grants may indicate the extent to which states are responding directly to the growth in criminal infractions.

The measure of crime for this study is a factor score which reflects changes in robbery during the 1965 to 1968 period.¹⁶ We are hypothesizing that policy outputs would most likely be linked to *increases* in violations, rather than *levels* of recorded offenses, since the growing crime rate prompted the LEAA block grant program. An indicator reflecting increases in robbery has been selected because this is the stranger-related offense causing the most concern about "crime in the streets."¹⁷ Increases in this infraction, almost always involving a confrontation between a victim and an unknown assailant, are viewed as being responsible for much of the fear about crime expressed by many citizens. In short, although the monetary loss to society from these actions is only a small fraction of the total cost of crime, the psychic damage created by these acts appears to be substantial.¹⁸

In order to assess the impact of increases in crime and public opinion upon LEAA expenditures, we shall apply path analysis to the model depicted in Figure 1.

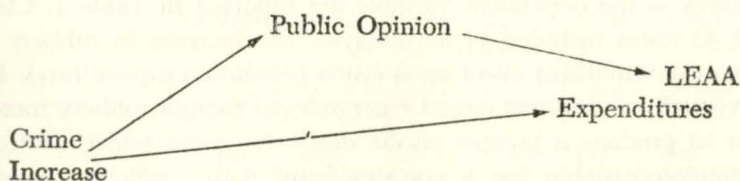


FIGURE 1

Simple Path Model

¹⁶ This indicator has been created by the factor analysis of a number of crime statistics. See Clync, *op. cit.*, pp. 109-119. The use of crime statistics as a measure of criminal activity is the subject of continuing controversy. However, if officials are going to spend LEAA resources in response to crime, crime statistics are the only hard measure of these happenings at their disposal. For a discussion of the use of crime statistics in social science research see Wesley G. Skogan, "The Validity of Official Crime Statistics: An Empirical Investigation," *Social Science Quarterly*, 55 (June, 1974).

¹⁷ *A National Strategy to Reduce Crime, op. cit.*, pp. 7-8.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 8-11.

In the ensuing analysis, we shall partition the impact of crime increase into its direct and indirect effects. For public opinion we shall compute both direct and spurious effects. In both cases, the direct effects are equivalent to the path coefficients or beta weights.

Furthermore, we anticipate certain environmental or political factors to foster or impede responsiveness in the expenditure of LEAA funds. For example, the extent to which a state is heterogeneous with respect to community size and income ("Development Heterogeneity") might encourage greater sensitivity to increased crime rates and public demand for solutions.¹⁹ Likewise, a political factor which may be of special significance is the degree of innovativeness of a state. Presumably, more innovative systems can respond more readily to a newly-emerging or rapidly growing problem.²⁰ Finally, states which are highly professionalized and locally reliant may be able to react more directly to greater criminal activity and public opinion.²¹

To assess the effects of these socioeconomic and political variables, we shall compute path model results, while controlling for a social or political factor. For example, the model will be evaluated for above average development heterogeneity states, and then for below average development heterogeneity states. The same approach will be utilized for the political system variables.

Findings

The results for the path models employing crime prevention expenditures as the dependent variable are reported in Table 1. Clearly, for all 43 states included in the analysis, the increase in robbery does have a moderate direct effect upon crime prevention expenditures. However, virtually no indirect effects emerge, even though robbery increases appear to produce a greater public desire for more police protection. The opinion variable has a non-significant path coefficient which is, nevertheless, in the expected direction.

¹⁹ This socioeconomic characteristic is measured by a factor score labelled "Development Heterogeneity." For an explanation of the factor score, see Eric M. Uslaner and Ronald E. Weber, "The 'Politics' of Redistribution: Towards a Model of the Policy-Making Process in the American States," *American Politics Quarterly*, Vol. 3, (April 1975), pp. 142 and 169.

²⁰ We shall utilize Walker's innovation score. For a complete discussion of the index, see Jack L. Walker, "The Diffusion of Innovations Among the American States," *American Political Science Review*, 63 (September 1969), pp. 882-883.

²¹ For a description of the professionalism-local reliance measure we have employed in this study, see Ira Sharkansky and Richard Hofferbert, "Dimensions of State Politics, Economics, and Public Policy" *American Political Science Review*, 63 (September, 1969), pp. 867-879.

TABLE 1

*Path Analyses for Responsiveness Models With
Crime Prevention Expenditures as Dependent Variable
(Socio-Economic or Political System Control)*

<i>Controls</i> *	<i>Robbery Increases Effects</i>			<i>Crime to Opinion Path</i>	<i>Public Opinion Effects</i>		
	<i>Total</i>	<i>Direct</i>	<i>Indirect</i>		<i>Total</i>	<i>Direct</i>	<i>Spurious</i>
All States (43) . . . . .	.438	.352	.086	.348	.370	.247	.123
High Development							
Heterogeneity (26) . . . . .	.528	.397	.131	.419	.479	.313	.166
Low Development							
Heterogeneity (17) . . . . .	.202	.190	.012	.086	.158	.142	.016
High Innovation (21) . . . . .	.373	.343	.030	.114	.300	.261	.039
Low Innovation (22) . . . . .	.327	.323	.004	.414	.144	.010	.134
High Professionalism—							
Low Reliance (19) . . . . .	.622	.473	.149	.508	.533	.293	.240
Low Professionalism—							
Local Reliance (24) . . . . .	.160	.140	.020	.127	.172	.154	.018

* Number of states in parentheses.

TABLE 2

*Path Analyses for Responsiveness Models With
Detection/Apprehension Expenditures as Dependent Variable
(Socio-Economic or Political System Controls)*

<i>Controls</i> *	<i>Robbery Increases Effects</i>			<i>Crime to Opinion Path</i>	<i>Public Opinion Effects</i>		
	<i>Total</i>	<i>Direct</i>	<i>Indirect</i>		<i>Total</i>	<i>Direct</i>	<i>Spurious</i>
All States (43) . . . . .	.089	.045	.046	.348	.140	.124	.016
High Development							
Heterogeneity (26) . . . . .	.099	.052	.047	.419	.132	.110	.022
Low Development							
Heterogeneity (17) . . . . .	.344	.327	.017	.086	.232	.202	.029
High Innovation (21) . . . . .	.022	.011	.011	.114	.100	.099	.001
Low Innovation (22) . . . . .	.267	.174	.093	.414	.297	.225	.072
High Professionalism—							
Local Reliance (19) . . . . .	.060	-.096	.156	.508	.258	.307	-.049
Low Professionalism—							

* Number of states in parentheses.

Turning to the path models with controls employed, we find that in above average development heterogeneity states the proportion of LEAA funds devoted to crime prevention seems to be spent in direct response to robbery increases. Again, public opinion has a non-significant, but posi-

tive impact. By way of contrast, neither of the independent variables has a bearing upon crime prevention expenditures in low development heterogeneity states. Perhaps states which are less diverse with respect to community size and income do not have highly developed police departments which can focus more of their attention and money on preventive measures. As a result, no systematic response to increased robbery is forthcoming.

Although controls for innovativeness yield no significant effects for either growing crime rates or public opinion, in high professionalism—local reliance states, the amount of funds allocated for crime prevention measures is substantially determined by increases in robbery. Perhaps the more professionalized and locally reliant environments have the capabilities, expertise and skills to identify and react to problems confronting decision-makers.

Even a cursory inspection of Table 2 will indicate that the percentage of a state's LEAA funds devoted to detection and apprehension is responsive to neither increases in robbery nor the desire for more protection by the public. Clearly, decision-makers are responding to different cues when they allocate LEAA money for this type of police activity.

Summary and Conclusion

In general, we have found that increased robbery leads to greater proportions of LEAA money being allocated for crime prevention, but not for detection and apprehension. However, soaring crime rates do not indirectly determine either category of expenditure through public opinion. Overall, increased criminal activity has had a bearing upon the preferences of the citizenry, but these views, in turn, do not appear to have a direct effect on LEAA expenditures.

In a limited way, the path models computed with controls for selected socioeconomic and political factors may have some relevance for this area of public policy. We have observed for crime prevention activities that both high development heterogeneity and above average professionalism-local reliance states are quite responsive when allocating LEAA funds. From a pragmatic standpoint, the social and economic characteristics are not easily manipulated, but the degree of professionalization may be more readily controlled. Thus, if responsiveness is a high priority in criminal justice programs, then we would contend that states ought to seek to maximize professionalism and local initiative in the policy-making process.