



Transcript: Perspectives in Law Enforcement— The Concept of Predictive Policing: An Interview With Chief William Bratton

The Bureau of Justice Assistance Justice Podcast Series is designed to provide the latest information in justice innovations, practices, and perspectives from the field of criminal justice. In this edition, James H. Burch II, Acting Director of the Bureau of Justice Assistance, is joined by Kristina Rose, Acting Director for the National Institute of Justice, to talk with William Bratton, former Chief of Police of the Los Angeles Police Department and Police Commissioner of the New York City and Boston Police Departments, about his thoughts and concepts on predictive policing. This interview was conducted at the First Predictive Policing Symposium, held in Los Angeles, California on November 18–20, 2009. For more information on the symposium, please visit the National Institute of Justice’s web site.

Jim Burch: Hello friends and colleagues, I’m Jim Burch for the Bureau of Justice Assistance. We invite you to join our conversation with former chief and police commissioner Bill Bratton about the concept of predictive policing. In this edition, I’m joined by Kris Rose, Acting Director for the National Institute of Justice, as we talk to Chief Bratton about his thoughts and concepts on predictive policing.

Thank you both for taking the time to talk about this with us today. Kris, why don’t you start things off?

Kris Rose: At the meeting, the symposium on predictive policing, there was a lot of discussion, a lot of buzz around the definitional issues around predictive policing, and I was wondering in your view, if you could tell us how you think predictive policing is different from some of the other policing concepts that are already out there, such as intelligence- or information-led policing, data-driven policing, CompStat¹, etc.

Chief Bill Bratton: Well, actually, it is not different; it is part of the evolution of policing. And indeed, one of the purposes of this first predictive policing symposium, that the National Institute of Justice is sponsoring, is to see if we might be able to arrive at a definition of predictive policing

that all of the various players—academics, researchers, police, community—can agree on. Community policing was introduced now almost 20 years ago, and we still differ as to what is the actual definition of community policing. But, I think it has evolved into a recognition that community policing is about partnership; it’s about problem-solving; and it’s about prevention. And if you think of what you just described, in terms of what is the difference between predictive policing and intelligence-led policing or information-led policing, it is not that there is a difference, it is rather there is a building upon what came before. Community policing, with its emphasis on partnership—part of that partnership was to share information, so from that information we could create intelligence. Diffusion centers that were created after 9/11 with federal agencies, state agencies, and local agencies; it’s all about sharing of information, developing intelligence faster so that we can more quickly respond to it. Predictive policing is taking advantage of the evolution of that concept, where we can gather information more quickly than ever in the past, analyze it, and from that, actually begin to predict that certain actions, based on intelligence, are going to occur and seek to prevent them. And so this is not a stand-alone type of concept. It is very much a significant enhancement of what has come before and what is still actually evolving.

Jim Burch: Chief, when you talk about predictive policing, a lot of it almost sounds futuristic. But we know from our discussions here already today, and from talking to you, that there are predictive policing elements underway already, here in Los Angeles, and in other places. Can you give us a couple of examples of where that’s happening?

Chief Bill Bratton: In Los Angeles with a significant gang problem, we know that the gangs, many of them celebrate their anniversary dates, the anniversary of their creation, by having large get-togethers where gang members gather. Other gangs, being aware that on a specific date, at a specific time, at a specific location, there’s going to be a large target pool,

¹**CompStat** is a management philosophy or organizational management tool for police departments. It is a multilayered dynamic approach to crime reduction, quality-of-life improvement, and personnel and resource management. CompStat employs geographic information systems and was intended to map crime and identify problems. In weekly meetings, ranking NYPD executives meet with local precinct commanders from one of the eight patrol boroughs in New York City to discuss the problems. They devise strategies and tactics to solve problems, reduce crime, and ultimately improve the quality of life in their assigned areas. William J. Bratton, former chief of the New York City Transit Police, was later appointed Police Commissioner by Rudolph Giuliani, and brought CompStat with him. With a bit of a struggle, he made the NYPD adopt it and it was credited with bringing down crime by 60 percent. A year after CompStat was adopted, 1995, murder was down to 1,181 homicides. In 2003, there were 596 murders—the lowest numbers since 1964. Source: Wikipedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/CompStat>. Obtained December 15, 2009.

have historically in the past, oftentimes taken advantage of that to attack. Or, the very volatile nature of gangs themselves, even though they are all part of the same gang, you get them together and they've got guns, they've got tempers, and oftentimes there's flareups. So here in Los Angeles, we watch those birth dates very closely, and based on the past history that we have ever predicted—if we are not there, that there's apt to be significant levels of violence associated with that celebration, so we are usually there in very large numbers. That's a simple form of predictive policing.

A more recent experience, one that's taking advantage of the evolution of policing, the ability to gather information much more quickly and make intelligence out of it: crime mapping; computerized crime mapping; something that even the smallest departments in America can now acquire very cheaply, real-time crime mapping. *USA Today*, a couple of months ago, had a story about a department, a small department, 60- or 70-person department, that had just acquired a real-time crime mapping system. That is, police dispatchers were receiving reports of crime; they were to enter it, and it was going up on a map in their operations center. And it became very quickly apparent one morning, calls coming in, that there were a group of vandals moving through the city shooting out windows on cars. And with that real-time information, they saw a pattern, a trend evolving, and predicted where the vandals . . . what direction they were going, positioned their police resources, and sure enough, here come the vandals shooting out windows coming right into the police dragnet, if you will. There's a recent real-time predictive policing success story. And predictive policing isn't just about large departments like Los Angeles or New York, with the huge computer systems and resources we have to work with. The smallest departments in America today can basically, for relatively minimal money, have that type of capability.

Jim Burch: That's great. And in both of those examples we notice that in both cases using that information resulted in a reduced number of victims. The first being violent crime, the second, property crime.

Chief Bill Bratton: And going back to our earlier discussion about this not being something new but rather the evolution of what's already been—community policing, with its focus on prevention, partnership-problem-solving prevention—the idea is not to measure success by arrests that occur after the fact, but measure success by what you're preventing. The officers that morning prevented a lot more vehicles from having their windows shot out. Our gang officers in Los Angeles, we know for certain based on past history, prevent serious acts of violence when we get there on those gang anniversary dates and basically are there in a very visible way.

There's also another concept, the idea of victimization. The Chicago school system has identified, through use of intelligence that's been made out of information, a number of young people in that school system, who they predict, that without some type of intercession on behalf of the school department, will likely experience victimization, will likely be victims of shootings in the school system. And that system is up and running, and will be very interesting to watch as it evolves, but there's a, really a very creative use of a lot

of intelligence information that's being used to focus not on perpetrators of crime but potential victims, who based on their demographic trending and characteristics, we can predict with some degree of certainty, some number of them will be the victims of crime. But we can prevent that by basically interceding or getting engaged in their life in some way; intervening.

Kris Rose: Chief, you mentioned the smaller departments getting involved in predictive policing as well; not just limiting it to the larger departments. Can you tell us a little bit about if a law enforcement executive or chief from a smaller department came to you and said, 'You know, I don't have the resources to do this predictive policing thing; can I still do it?' Is it possible to do it without that kind of financial . . .

Chief Bill Bratton: Basically I would say they're just making excuses. There's no reason that any department can't do this. Thirty years ago as a young lieutenant in the Boston Police Department, I had maps on my wall and little push pins where each morning I would track all the crime reports of the day before and put them up on the map, and very quickly, within several days you could see hotspots developing. That was well before the existence of computers and all the ability that we now have to see these beautiful colorized maps on our computer screens. Indeed, the creation of CompStat in the NYPD began with initially maps on flip charts with plastic acetate that we had to borrow \$10,000 from the police foundation to buy the plastic acetate in the largest police department in America; that's how crime mapping and hotspot policing began. And, so, what did that cost us, \$10,000 in a 40,000-person department. So, any chief that gives you the idea that we can't afford it, I'm sorry, a small department has smaller amounts of crime to report; to track on the map and this, this is not rocket science; this is Basic Policing 101.

Kris Rose: Let's talk a little bit about the other partner in this: the community. How do we prepare a community for this predictive policing evolution, if you will?

Chief Bill Bratton: A concern of the community and rightfully so, is this issue of civil liberties. As we seek to use more and more data and information that are available through computer analysis, there's a concern of privacy, there is a concern of civil liberties. And, that is something that needs to be discussed, needs to be discussed openly, needs to be researched, needs to be reviewed. I am comfortable that if we do that in a transparent way; if we admit up front that there are these fears and concerns, and potential issues; that we should not use that as an excuse to dismiss moving forward, but rather, find a way to ensure that the public is kept informed of everything we're doing—[that it] is legal, is constitutional, and ultimately, will be for their benefit.

Case in point: a great deal of concern about the increasing use of cameras in public spaces. Well, police will tell you what a valuable tool that is now; whether it's public cameras or private cameras, how frequently those help us to solve crime. And the Supreme Court of this country has indicated that there is not an expectation of privacy in a public place. And while organizations, say like the American Civil Liberties Union, continue to voice concerns about that, we have the

constitutional ability to use those systems for the betterment of the public, the prevention of crime. But we always have to be reminded that this is a tool that is available to us that cannot be abused. As predictive policing moves forward, as community policing did, as problem-solving policing did, as broken windows policing did, we need to be mindful of legal issues, constitutional safeguards, and to discuss openly, the concerns of the public, of the media, of civil liberties groups, and be prepared to address it. And if in fact we find that we are going outside the guardrails, then we need to very quickly get back within the guardrails and not risk overturning what is an extraordinarily useful tool for policing to prevent crime.

Jim Burch: Chief, the conversation that we've started here today I think is a very beneficial one and one that we're all going to look forward to using in the coming months and

weeks. I know that the Bureau of Justice Assistance and National Institute of Justice are both planning to work together to continue to hold this dialogue and to continue to bring in new perspectives so that we can take it as far as the concept will allow.

Thank you for taking the time to join us for this conversation. If you found the discussion interesting, we encourage you to visit the BJA web site for more innovative ideas and best practices at www.ojp.gov/BJA. To learn more about predictive policing and the topics discussed at the First Predictive Policing Symposium held in Los Angeles, please visit the National Institute of Justice web site at www.ojp.usdoj.gov/nij. Please note NIJ is in all lowercase. From all of us here at BJA, thank you for tuning in to today's podcast. We hope you will join us again for another edition of BJA's Justice Podcast Series.

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