

The BJA Executive Session on

# Police Leadership

2013

*The BJA Executive Session on Police Leadership* is a multi-year endeavor started in 2010 with the goal of developing innovative thinking that would help create police leaders uniquely qualified to meet the challenges of a changing public safety landscape.

In support of an integrated approach to creating safe and viable communities across America, the project directors recruited 20+ principals from a range of disciplines. The principals, in turn, led national field teams of practitioners focused on the work of policing and the organization of the future.

To gain new insights on leadership, the *BJA Executive Session on Police Leadership* engaged police chiefs in documenting their own paths and invited leaders to participate in various audio and video forums to tell their stories and discuss the future of policing and police leadership.

Please visit our website, <http://bjaleader.org>, to learn more about this project and to access a broad array of interactive, multimedia resources.

The principals are supported in their work by a team that includes project co-directors Darrel W. Stephens and Bill Geller, project strategist Nancy McKeon, and BJA Senior Policy Advisor Steve Edwards.

## Policing in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Leadership Challenges and New Realities Immigration

by

Darrel W. Stephens

### Introduction

Police leaders have always faced difficult challenges in the effort to create and maintain safe communities. From the widespread civil disobedience of the 1960s and '70s to the Occupy Movement that began in 2011, and from gang warfare to Internet predators, the police have always needed to adapt to changing political, social and economic circumstances.

Some changes have been transformative in shaping contemporary policing strategies. Advances in technology, improved education and training, and increasingly sophisticated analytical modeling have all had significant positive impacts on the profession. Other changes have presented daunting challenges for police leaders. Managing communication in the hyper-connected world of social media is testing most agencies' abilities to balance transparency and investigative integrity. And, as departments wrestle with the most significant funding cuts that current leaders have ever seen, a growing

number of police observers suggest that current policing strategies in America are simply not sustainable because of the cost (Gascon and Foglesong 2010). As the police grapple with a diminished ability to deliver services, communities and businesses have turned to private security to improve their sense of safety. This trend leaves high-poverty neighborhoods, where crime is concentrated, even more vulnerable because police cannot be as attentive and cannot afford to fill the gaps.

The leadership challenges these issues present led the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) to create the Executive Session on Police Leadership. Its focus is on developing the quality police leaders that America’s communities need in the 21st century. One way of developing policing leaders is to identify the challenges they are likely to encounter and provide them with insight that might help address these challenges more effectively. The Executive Session has developed a series of brief white papers to describe the challenges and realities. This paper addresses immigration.

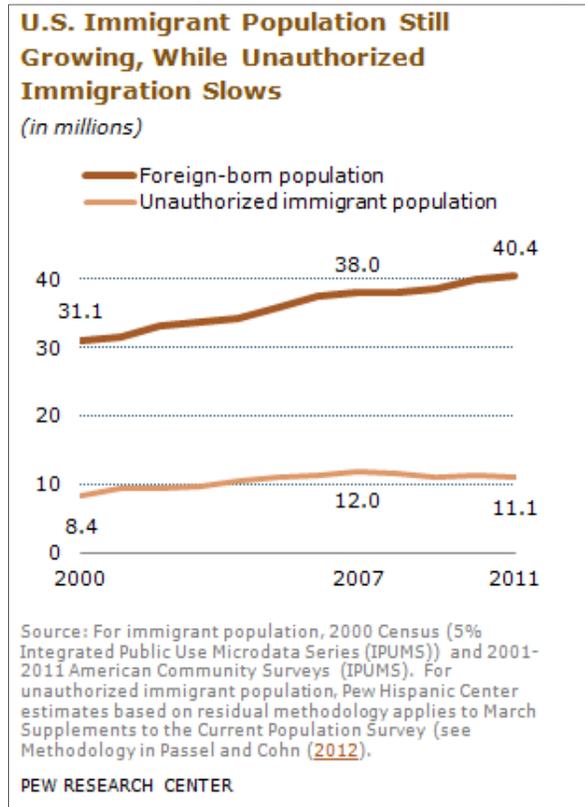
### Immigration Policy Divisiveness

Immigration policy is a hotly debated issue throughout America. State and local governments have established very different policies. Some cities have adopted policies that have caused them to be labeled by some as sanctuaries for illegal immigrants. Some states (Arizona and five others) have enacted policies that, among other things, require law enforcement officers to determine the immigration status of anyone they stop or arrest if they have reason to believe that person to be in the country illegally (Liptak 2012).

The police have been caught in the middle of the illegal immigration debate. There are those who believe the police should aggressively seek out people who are in the country illegally and turn them over to the federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agency (ICE) for deportation. Others think the role of state and local police in immigration enforcement should be limited to supporting ICE in situations involving criminal offenses. They also argue that immigration is a federal law enforcement issue and local police do not have the authority or training to address this complex area of law.

### Realities

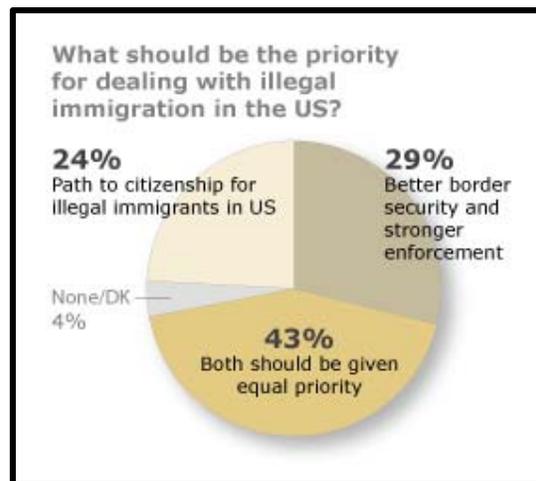
Over the past 10-15 years, national policy as expressed through legislation has not been adequate to deal with the influx of illegal immigrants, a population that has increased to a currently estimated 11.1 million people. The majority of these immigrants come from Mexico and Central America and have crossed the southern border to enter the United



States. The numbers of illegal immigrants have overwhelmed ICE’s ability to effectively deal with them.

While states and local governments pass statutes and ordinances they believe will help fill the gaps in federal law, President Obama has proposed legislation that contains four parts:

1. Continue to strengthen U.S. borders.
2. Hold companies that hire undocumented workers accountable.
3. Hold undocumented immigrants accountable before they can earn citizenship.
4. Streamline the legal immigration system. (Slack 2013)



Congress will weigh these proposals along with their own ideas about how to address America’s immigration challenges. In the meantime, police executives will continue to wrestle with conflicting laws, varying expectations, and a public that is deeply divided over what should be done, as reflected in a 2013 poll by the Pew Research Center (see the above figures).

## Challenges for Police Leaders

Regardless of what happens in Washington, these immigration realities present a number of challenges for police leaders. All of them require thoughtful solutions, and leadership is key to successful implementation.

- **Navigating the political ideology on immigration.** Immigration evokes strong emotions for political leaders and members of the community. The same emotions are also present in police organizations. Police leaders must be able to weigh all of these complexities as they form and defend their policies.
- **Helping political leaders and the community understand the limits of local police authority.** There is considerable confusion around the authority of state and local police officers to enforce federal immigration laws. Police authority in dealing with civil immigration offenses is not clear. Police leaders face a significant task in explaining to the public what they can and cannot do in immigration enforcement.
- **Dealing with undocumented immigrants as victims of crime.** Illegal immigrants believe they risk deportation by reporting a crime. Consequently, most crime against these individuals goes unreported. Police agencies have struggled for years to help immigrants understand that if they are reporting a crime they will

not be questioned about their immigration status. It is a community that is difficult to reach because of language and literacy barriers along with a lack of trust.

- **Addressing the potential for officer misconduct against a population that is afraid of deportation.** Police leaders frequently first learn of officer misconduct from complaints filed. Just as immigrants are fearful of reporting a crime, they are also afraid that any contact with the police will bring them to the attention of immigration authorities.
- **Crafting and communicating organizational policy and guidelines** in an environment with conflicting federal, state, and local laws. Police leaders always have to be concerned with how officers on the streets understand and carry out expectations that have been communicated through policy, training, and supervision.
- **Developing the resource base** (language and communications skills) to effectively serve non-English speaking populations. Many urban centers have hundreds of different languages spoken in their communities, and police leaders need ways to create systems that facilitate communication, from the 911 call center to the officer on the street.

The police cannot be put in a position where they are feared by their community, and immigrants are part of that community. In Los Angeles and New York, [the police department has] stayed away from that image of immigration enforcement, preferring to leave that to federal authorities. When we talk about immigrants, this is a population that is largely law abiding. And they've been prevented from working fully with the police in keeping their communities safe.

Williams Bratton – Commissioner NYPD

## Developing Police Leaders

Developing future leaders in policing is a joint responsibility of the organization, professional associations, educational institutions, and the individual. It involves training, education, challenging assignments, and experience with working on important issues. Immigration is an important issue for policing, and the opportunities for developing leaders include:

- Developing the organization's policies to guide officers' actions in their encounters with undocumented immigrants.
- Serving as an instructor in training sessions on the organization's policy.
- Auditing and assessing instruction on the organization's policies to identify the effectiveness of trainings and to recommend improvements.
- Representing the organization in community meetings on immigration issues.
- Representing the organization in discussions with political leaders on immigration issues.

- Participating in discussions and activities to more fully understand the different views people hold on immigration issues.
- Writing opinion pieces for local news or for professional publications.

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This paper was developed by the “World of the Future” initiative of the BJA Executive Session on Police Leadership.

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