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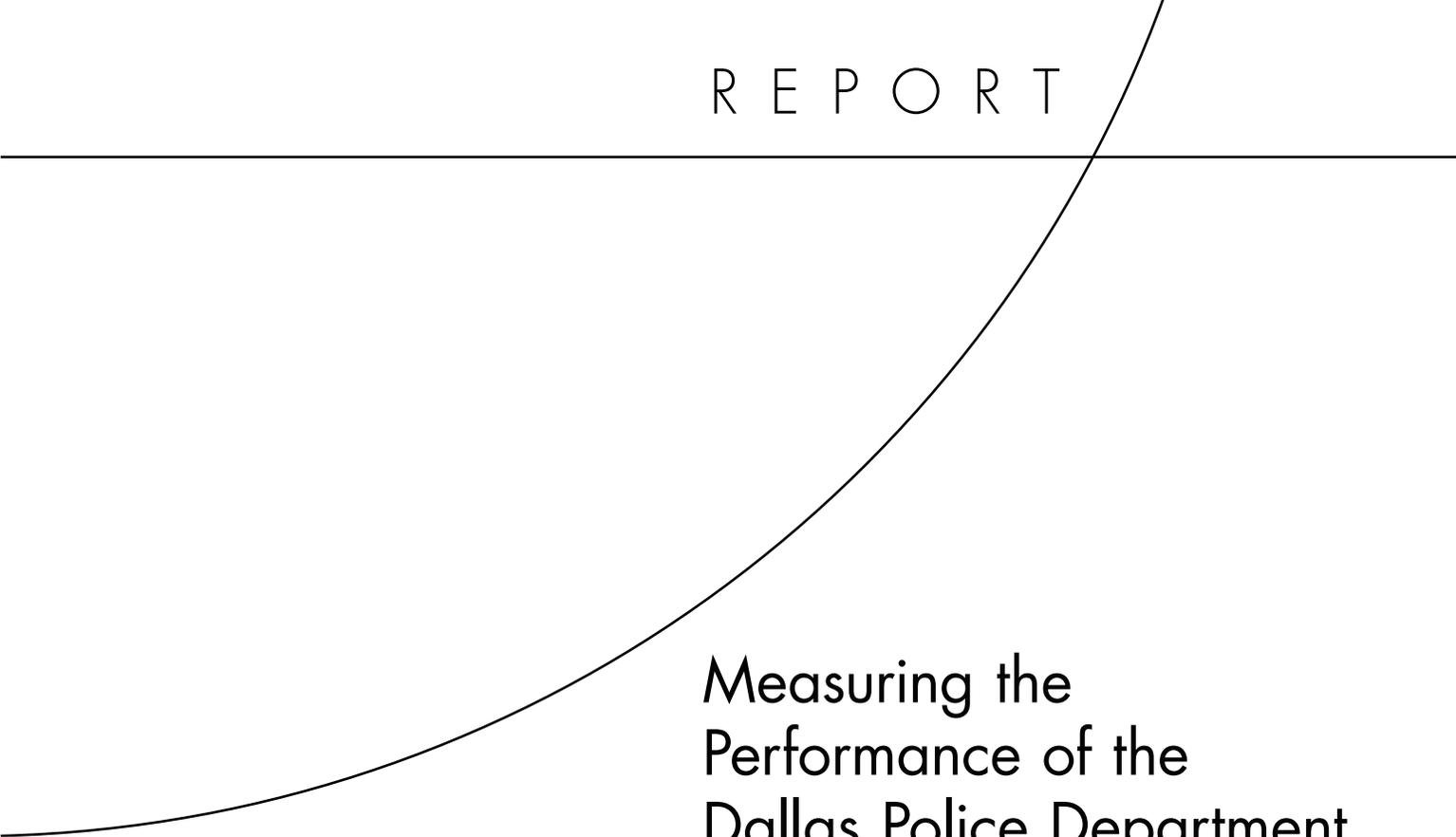
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R E P O R T



Measuring the
Performance of the
Dallas Police Department
2008–2009 Results

Robert C. Davis

Sponsored by the Communities Foundation of Texas, as administered through
the University of North Texas



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Summary

This report describes the state of policing in Dallas, Texas, based on the results of four surveys carried out in 2008–2009. The surveys included a community survey of randomly selected Dallas residents; a survey of persons who had a recent voluntary or involuntary contact with an officer of the Dallas Police Department (DPD); a survey of police officers to assess job satisfaction, integrity, and perceptions of leadership; and a survey of retail business owners.

The surveys are part of an evaluation of the Caruth Police Institute at Dallas, an initiative to improve the quality of policing in the DPD by promoting staff development, bringing together community and national resources to solve DPD problems, and instituting effective police strategies and practices. The evaluation of the Caruth Institute will examine immediate effects of the institute on developing staff and researching new programs, as well as the global indicators of police services measured, in part, by these surveys. The wave of surveys reported here will act as a benchmark against which to assess the success of the Caruth Police Institute in enhancing the capacity of the DPD to better serve the citizens of Dallas.

The Caruth Police Institute is a partnership of the DPD with the University of North Texas. Both the institute and the evaluation of it are funded by the Communities Foundation of Texas.

Community Opinions of the Police

The community survey was administered to a randomly selected sample of 1,362 Dallas residents between June 25 and November 25, 2008. The survey included sections on police effectiveness, professionalism, fairness, and management. It also included items about neighborhood crime and disorder, as well as victimization. Survey responses were reported for the entire city and also broken down by police division.

Overall, opinions of the police were favorable: Between 70 and 80 percent of respondents expressed positive opinions in response to questions about both police effectiveness and police professionalism. More than 75 percent of Dallas respondents were very or somewhat satisfied with the quality of police services, about 90 percent rated police services as good or better than other city agencies. Only about 20 percent of respondents said that it is common for the police to use excessive force, use offensive language, or break the law or police rules. A larger proportion (roughly one-third) said that it is common for the police to stop people without good reason, and a similar proportion said that the police treat people differently according to gender, ethnic background, religion, or sexual orientation.

Comparisons by division indicated that residents of the Northeast and North Central divisions were more likely to believe that the police are effective, relative to the citywide average. Residents of the Southeast and South Central divisions were less likely than other Dallas residents to rate the police as effective, and residents of the South Central division also rated the police as less professional than other residents did. These differences held even after controlling statistically for effects of age, gender, and race of respondent.

Although there are many problems in making comparisons with other municipalities, Dallas is perceived to be as good or better than other municipalities in which surveys using similar questions have been conducted.

Satisfaction with Police Encounters

Surveys were conducted in early 2009 with 577 persons who had recently reported a property crime and 532 persons who were issued a traffic or Class C summons. The brief surveys measured satisfaction with the way the encounter was handled by the responding police officer(s).

Satisfaction among residents who had a voluntary contact with the police was high. Between 70 and 90 percent of those who had recently called the police to report a victimization were satisfied or very satisfied with how the responding officers handled the incident. Respondents were most satisfied with how respectfully they were treated by the officer(s) and less satisfied with how quickly police responded to the incident. Respondents who had a recent involuntary contact with the police (i.e., received a summons) were somewhat less satisfied with the interaction than residents who had a recent voluntary contact with the police. Still, approximately two-thirds of involuntary-contact respondents were somewhat or very satisfied with all aspects of the encounter.

There were no significant differences between divisions in satisfaction with voluntary police contacts. Residents of one division (South Central) were less satisfied with involuntary contacts than were residents of the other divisions.

Satisfaction rates for Dallas residents who had either a voluntary or involuntary contact with the police were similar to rates for other agencies for which similar surveys have been conducted.

Officer Job Satisfaction, Opinions of Leadership, and Integrity

Web-based surveys were conducted with 688 sworn officers of the DPD in the spring of 2009. The surveys had three parts: questions about job satisfaction, questions about perceptions of leadership in the DPD, and questions about the culture of integrity.

Job satisfaction was mixed. Respondents were most likely to agree that they know what is expected of them on the job (87 percent), that their supervisor cares about them (65 percent), and that their co-workers are committed to doing quality work (64 percent). Officers were least likely to agree that they receive praise for doing good work (30 percent), that their opinions at work count (40 percent), and that someone at work encourages their development (41 percent).

Overall job satisfaction among DPD officers was somewhere between “somewhat satisfied” and “somewhat dissatisfied”—lower than three other law enforcement agencies for which

a similar survey was conducted. However, Dallas is the only major city agency among the four.

On items relating to perceptions of leadership in the DPD, there was split in how officers perceived their immediate supervisor and how they perceived leadership at higher levels of the department. Eighty-three percent of DPD officers felt that their immediate supervisor was available to them. However, just one-third or fewer officers believed that departmental leaders communicated to officers what is expected of them (36 percent), were consistent in their expectations (14 percent), articulated a compelling vision of the work of the DPD (25 percent), motivate officers to perform exceptionally (13 percent), or hold themselves to high standards (23 percent).

Dallas officers consistently rated hypothetical ethics infractions as more serious than the average from a national study, suggesting that the DPD has a better than average climate of integrity.

Opinions of the Police Among Retail Business Owners

In December 2008, a mail survey was conducted with owners of retail businesses contained in a database of the Dallas Chamber of Commerce. Twenty-six responses were received. The survey contained seven items, and was modeled after the community survey administered to private citizens described above.

More than 70 percent of respondents gave the DPD a positive rating for crime-fighting effectiveness and working with local businesses. For most other items (prompt response to calls, preventing crimes, maintaining a visible presence, and dealing with problems that concern businesses), the proportion of positive responses fell between 40 and 60 percent.