



Private security services play a significant role in the safety and security web; however, their effectiveness and efficiency are seldom publicly measured.

BACKGROUND

Over a decade ago, the Law Reform Commission of Canada (2002) opened a dialogue on the trend in the growth of private policing in Canada. A continued rise in police expenditures, combined with economic downturns, have contributed to pressure being placed on police services around the world to become more effective and efficient. This has resulted in a growing interest in discussing the value of privatizing or civilianizing functions of public police services (Public Safety Canada, 2012).

This study examines the intersections between private security and public policing, with an emphasis on those functions that private security are now performing that have traditionally been performed by the public police, as well as cooperative efforts between public police and private security.

METHOD

The research included a literature review of the roles and responsibilities of private security and public police in the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Australia, New Zealand and Canada, a review of relevant Canadian legislation, and interviews with key individuals in Canadian government, private security, policing, and police governance organizations.

FINDINGS

There is the potential for private security to play an important role in community safety and addressing issues of crime and social disorder.

Research evidence as to the effectiveness of police-private security initiatives in preventing crime and reducing disorder is mixed. A key factor in the success of these initiatives is management; that is, ensuring there

is open communication among the parties, the integrity of the initiative, effective supervision of police and private security officers, and protocols for evaluation.

In all of the jurisdictions reviewed, a major challenge is that the core functions of the police have not been defined. This makes it difficult to identify the parameters of the role and responsibilities of the public police, and to determine the niche for private security, working in partnership either with the police, or in an outsourcing or privatization arrangement.

There are a number of key factors that are important to the success of police-private security partnerships: 1) a common interest in reducing a specific crime or crime set; 2) effective leadership, with personnel with authority from each partner organization driving participation; 3) mutual respect; 4) information sharing based on high levels of trust in confidentiality; 5) formal meetings of consultation and communication; and, 6) a willingness to experiment and consider all ideas. These processes seem to be in their infancy in Canada. The tiered policing system in Alberta is perhaps the best current example of a system-wide framework for police-private security collaboration.

Ideally, police-private security partnerships would be a component of strategic plans that identify areas where collaboration between public police and other groups in the community can be undertaken, monitored, and evaluated. Cost should be one of only several metrics that are used to evaluate the effectiveness of these collaborative partnerships and of outsourcing. Given the unique role of the police in society, other metrics including the legitimacy of the police, the community's view of the various initiatives, and the sustainability of collaborative partnerships must be examined.

It is evident that the size and scope of activities of new private security services is expanding. Despite this, there are few, if any, protocols in place to ensure communication and information sharing between these units, many of which are staffed by ex-police and security officers, and the public police. Similarly, there is no information on the size of these units, their budgets, and their activities. At present, these firms seem to inhabit a parallel universe to both public police and traditional private security firms.

It is often assumed that privatizing and outsourcing traditional police tasks will result in reductions in the numbers of sworn police officers. Public police-private security collaboration may, on the other hand, result in innovative initiatives that previously did not exist.

Little attention has been given to the legal framework within which private security firms operate. There has been little attention given to developing compliance standards and structures for a regulatory regimen. There is also considerable variability across jurisdictions in provisions for enforcement where regulations do exist. Most often, sanctions involve revoking operating licenses.

In the absence of a national, provincial or territorial strategic plan for private security, there has also been a failure to develop mechanisms to ensure effective oversight of private security. This has a number of consequences, including an inability to ensure that private security companies are not vulnerable to organized crime, unethical and/or illegal behaviour.

The movement to expand the role of private security is occurring in the absence of empirical research studies that would reveal the nature and extent of cost savings, the effectiveness, and the sustainability of police-private sector partnerships, outsourcing, and privatization. Cost savings are most often assumed rather than demonstrated. Within the larger context of the economics of policing, there is no published data on the relative cost-effectiveness of private versus public police.

The absence of evaluation research on private policing in Canada precludes an informed discussion on proposals for expanding the activities of private policing companies. As well, it is difficult to assess the proposals that are made by private security companies

to assume responsibilities currently managed by public police, or to evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies that are being proposed by private security firms. There is a need to know more about what private security personnel are doing, the rationale for their activities, and whether these rationales are supported by empirical data. There is no information on the ethics of private security, the values of private security officers, and the private security subculture – all key facets in the study of public police.

SOURCE

Montgomery, Ruth and Curt Griffiths (2015). *The Use of Private Security for Policing*. Ottawa: Public Safety Canada

OTHER SOURCES

Law Reform Commission of Canada. 2006. *In Search of Security: The Future of Policing in Canada*, Ottawa: Minister of Public Works and Government Services.

Public Safety Canada. 2012. *The Continuum of Canadian Policing: An Overview of Civilianization and Privatization in Canadian Law Enforcement*. Ottawa. Unpublished.

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