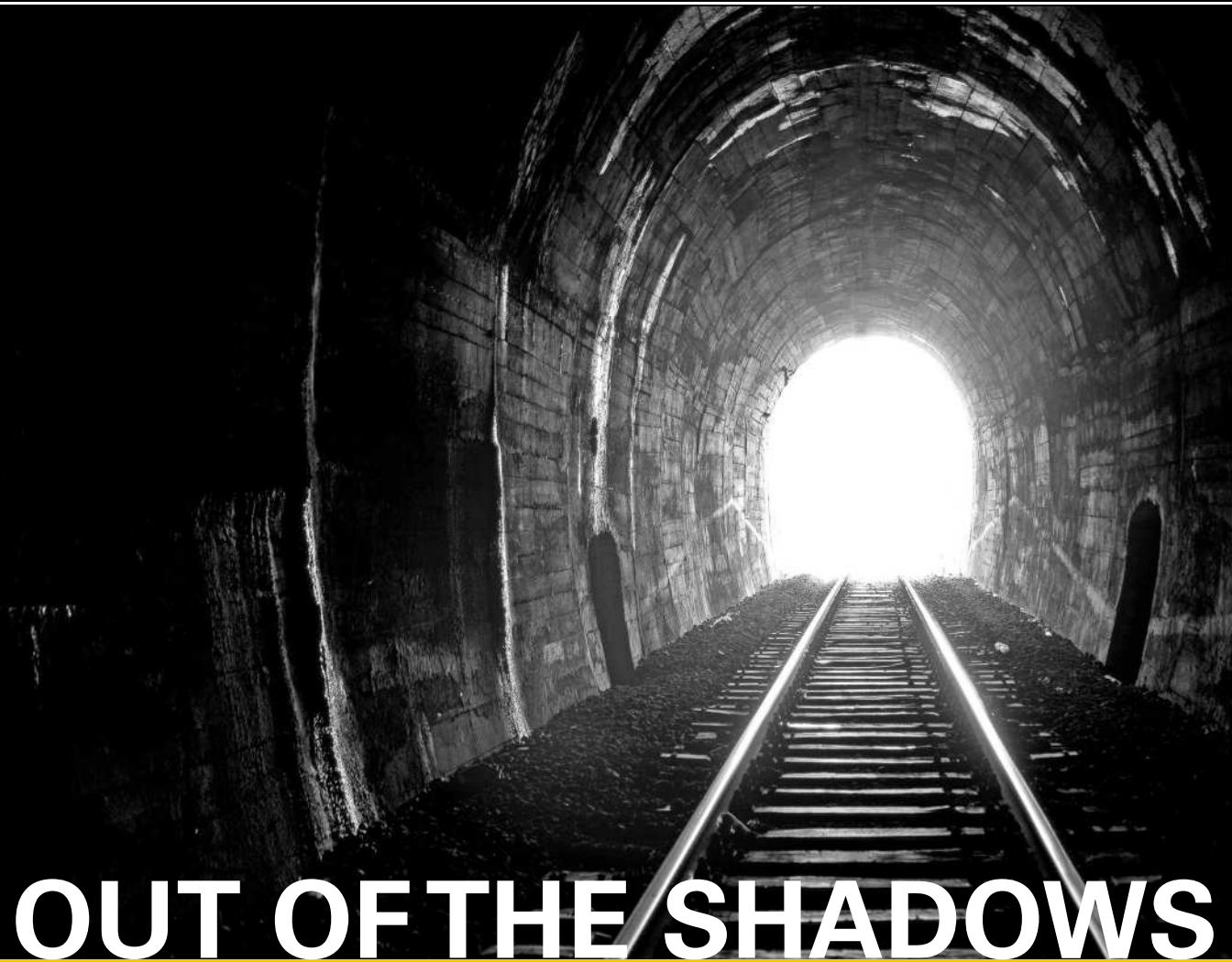


U.S. Department of Justice
Office of Community Oriented Policing Services



OUT OF THE SHADOWS

Policy Research for Midsize Law
Enforcement Agencies: A Call to Action



COPS
COMMUNITY ORIENTED POLICING SERVICES
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE



Out of the Shadows

Policy Research for Midsize Law Enforcement Agencies: A Call to Action

An Initiative by the Office of Community Oriented Policing
Services and The International Association of Chiefs of Police

March 2010

This project was supported by Grant Number 2005-HS-WK-K003 awarded by the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions contained herein are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice. References to specific agencies, companies, products, or services should not be considered an endorsement by the author or the U.S. Department of Justice. Rather, the references are illustrations to supplement discussion of the issues.



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Acknowledgements

The International Association of the Chiefs of Police (IACP) and the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services the COPS Office are indebted to a number of visionaries who lent their time and talent to the midsize cities initiative and helped to make this publication possible.

Key advocates and contributors from the COPS Office include Senior Policy Analyst Albert Anthony Pearsall III, Senior Policy Analyst Katherine McQuay, Senior Social Science Analyst Mora Fielder, and COPS Office Contractor/Editor Judith Beres.

From the IACP, President Mike Carroll, Executive Director Dan Rosenblatt, and Deputy Director James McMahon inspired the idea to focus on midsize agencies and worked to drive the project forward.

The following midsize city chiefs of police were involved in, and championed, the project from the beginning. They continue to serve as active contributors, and their vast experience and knowledge helped frame our approach.

John Douglas
Overland Park, Kansas

Richard Melton
Napa, California

Dan Oates
Aurora, Colorado

Doug Scott
Arlington, Virginia

Craig Steckler
Fremont, California

Frank Straub
Indianapolis, Indiana

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Sumter, South Carolina

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Letter from the Director

Dear Colleague,

Addressing the interests and needs of midsize police agencies is a priority for the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) and the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office). With encouragement and financial support from the COPS Office, the IACP held “A Mid-Size Department Initiative: Design Meeting One.” This report, *Out of the Shadows. Policy Research for Midsize Law Enforcement Agencies: A Call to Action*, is a product of this initiative and is an interesting look at the challenges facing a significant sector of the law enforcement community.

The COPS Office understands the importance of information sharing and is pleased to share this resource with you. We hope you will find this publication helpful in your local efforts, and we encourage you to share this publication, as well as your successes, with other law enforcement practitioners.

Sincerely,



Bernard Melekian
Director



Introduction

Large cities benefit from problem- and issue-oriented research, conferences, and forums sponsored by academic institutions, think tanks, and national organizations. Smaller communities benefit from problem- and issue-focused work by rural development institutions. The challenges facing midsize city governments and communities tend to be overlooked, however. Organizations and associations that champion the interests of cities, including the National League of Cities, the United States Conference of Mayors, and the International City/County Management Association, are almost silent regarding information for understanding the nature and needs of midsize cities.

The single item of direct value discovered in general literature pertained to the Rochester Conversation on Mid-Size Cities (2002). Sponsored by Cornell University, the Ford Foundation, Eastman Kodak, and several nongovernmental organizations in the Rochester, New York area, this Conversation discussed “. . .whether being mid-size calls for developing a new awareness of the importance. . .of these special places.”¹ Not surprisingly, their answer was “Yes.” It is contextually useful, as well as logical, to recognize that midsize city governments confront issues and needs that parallel those of midsize city police departments, none more evident than a search for identity and definition. This issue is taken up later in the report.

¹*The Mid-Size City: Exploring Its Unique Place in Urban Policy: A Summary of the Rochester Conversation on Mid-Size Cities, City of Rochester, New York, November 2002.*

The Law Enforcement Parallel

Like government associations and the urban policy community, the police community (including practitioners, academics, and government-funding entities) has ignored midsize police agencies as a distinct focus of research, development, and evaluation. Investment occurs only as part of comprehensive, classification-free initiatives. The police community has concentrated on two ends of the spectrum, with the largest urban departments on one end and the smaller/rural agencies on the other, each with its own leadership and advocates. Large agencies have the Major Cities Chiefs Association, Major County Sheriffs' Association, and the FBI's National Executive Institute, while smaller agencies have a variety of targeted training and technical assistance programs.

Foremost among these is the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center's Rural Policing Institute (RPI), a tuition-free, specialized, and advanced training for city, county, and tribal law enforcement officers from rural areas. Rural, incidentally, is defined as an area not located in a metropolitan statistical area. The RPI portfolio currently features 22 courses and more are on the drawing board. Current funding is \$35 million for 6 years.

Additionally, a series of recent Bureau of Justice Assistance awards include a number of initiatives designed for, or restricted to, small cities for training, mentoring, technical assistance, and homicide investigations. This includes \$124 million for the Assistance to Rural Law Enforcement to Combat Crime and Drugs program of the FY 2009 Recovery Act. Even the IACP, following the federal government's lead, has emphasized smaller city advocacy and service, particularly through its Smaller Law Enforcement Agency Technical Assistance Program.



An IACP-COPS Office Response

Concentrating on the interests and needs of midsize police agencies is a priority for the IACP. Brought forward by an informal network of motivated and forward-looking midsize city chiefs, the Executive Committee has directed that work begin to explore options to address the concerns of this underserved segment of its membership. With encouragement and financial support from the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services the COPS Office , “A Mid-Size Department Initiative: Design Meeting One” was held at IACP headquarters in May 2009. The cities and departments represented at the table were the following:


- ♦ Albany Police Department
Albany, New York
Population: 90,382²
- ♦ Algonquin Police Department
Algonquin, Illinois
Population: 29,828
- ♦ Allentown Police Department
Allentown, Pennsylvania
Population: 108,900
- ♦ Arlington County Police Department
Arlington, Virginia
Population: 201,798
- ♦ Aurora Police Department
Aurora, Colorado
Population: 296,999

²Source for these figures: U.S. Census Bureau, 2005–2007 American Community Survey.

- ♦ Fremont Police Department
Fremont, California
Population: 208,455
- ♦ Overland Park Police Department
Overland Park, Kansas
Population: 165,314
- ♦ Shreveport Police Department
Shreveport, Louisiana
Population: 200,528
- ♦ Sumter Police Department
Sumter, South Carolina
Population: 44,510
- ♦ White Plains Police Department
White Plains, New York
Population: 52,802

The group, which became the Mid-Size City Chiefs Advisory Committee, reconvened at the IACP annual conference in Denver in October 2009 to refine and hone its discussions. The objectives of these meetings were as follows:

- ♦ To better understand current community environments and operating cultures of midsize cities and police agencies.
- ♦ To sharpen focus on policing issues and needs of greatest contemporary significance to midsize cities, communities, and police agencies.
- ♦ To prioritize and fashion an action agenda to address issues and needs that surface.



This report summarizes the “conversation” — what was discussed, observations, and agreements from both the initial meeting at IACP headquarters and at the annual conference. In a limited way, it also touches on some of what was learned about midsize city policing in preparation for these meetings.

Defining Midsize: Searching for the Target

³Ibid.

Staff research for a definition of midsize cities, or even for a softer, less-precise description of characteristics, yielded very little in volume or value.

For working purposes, the Rochester group began with an “assumption” that any city with a population between 100,000 and 300,000 located in a Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) of 1,000,000 persons or more could qualify as midsize. In his keynote remarks, William Goldsmith of Cornell University postulated that there are at least four different elements in defining a midsize city³:

1. *The Forgotten Middle*: Cities that get little attention.
2. *Hub of a Midsize Metro*: Serves as the cultural, economic, and government center for a larger region of many other communities.
3. *The Thinning City*: Stagnant or declining population.
4. *The Divided City*: Divided by race, class, income.

⁴From *Melting Pot Cities to Boomtowns: Redefining How We Talk about America's Cities*. Washington, D.C.: National League of Cities, December 2005.


The National League of Cities, also striving for useful definition or classification for its CityFutures Program, used the following typology for cities ranging in population from 25,000 to 500,000⁴:

- ◆ *Spread cities* are midsize core metropolitan cities characterized by low density, few families, and few immigrant residents.
- ◆ *Gold coast cities* are suburban areas with older, wealthier, educated populations.
- ◆ *Metro cities* are large core cities with a diverse population and older housing.
- ◆ *Melting-pot cities* are dense and diverse, with young families.
- ◆ *Boomtowns* are characterized by rapid growth, new housing, and affluent families.
- ◆ *Centervilles* are micropolitan areas with low density, performing urban functions with a rural feel.

The characteristics of each city type focus heavily on population density, housing stock, and educational levels. While the report frequently references midsize cities, it never defines the term.

The U.S. Census differentiates city types, providing one more unusable construct for our purposes:

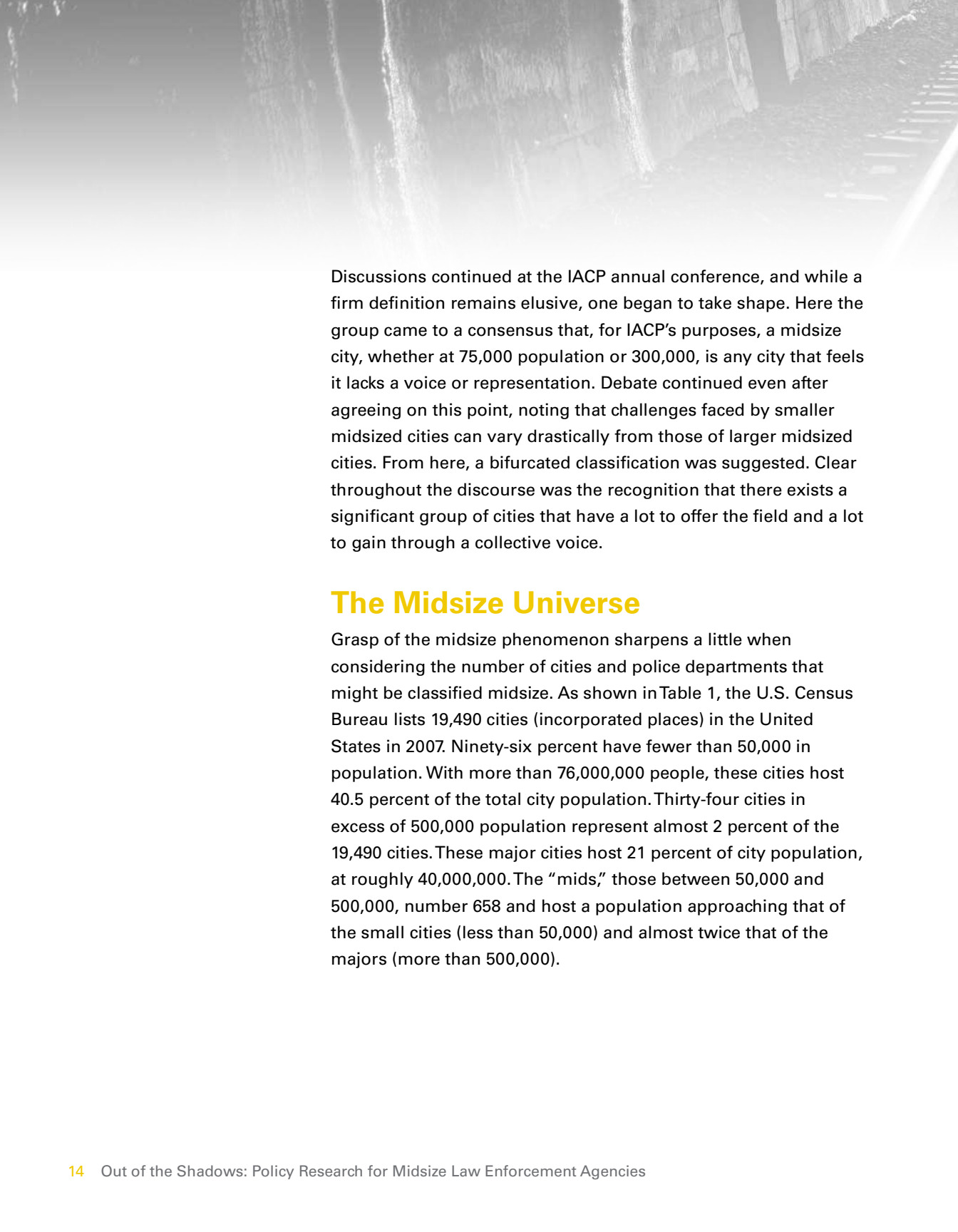
- ◆ *Metropolitan* areas are contiguous counties with an urban core and are defined by population size and community patterns. The cores of metropolitan areas have at least 50,000 people.
- ◆ *Micropolitan* areas are similarly defined, except their core areas range in population between 10,000 and 50,000.



Adding to the list of considerations, and perhaps furthering the complexity and confusion, is the concept of the “boomburg,” a new type of large, fast-growing suburb. Attributed to Lang and Simmons, a boomburg is defined as “an incorporated place with more than 100,000 residents that is not the largest city in the metropolitan area and has maintained double-digit growth in recent decades.” They are distinct from traditional cities because of their low density, a loose spatial configuration, and often lack large downtowns. Boomburgs are urban but not in feel. The 53 boomburgs in the United States include Plano, Texas; Anaheim, California; Coral Springs, Florida; North Las Vegas, Nevada; and Mesa, Arizona.⁵

⁵Lang, Robert E. and Patrick A. Simmons. “Boomburgs: The Emergence of Large, Fast-Growing Suburban Cities in the United States.” *Fannie Mae Foundation Census Note Series* 01:05, June 2003.

At the IACP headquarters meeting, discussions among practitioners to define “midsize” were interesting and enlightening but ultimately unsuccessful. The group considered population from a variety of perspectives: seasonal versus daytime versus nighttime; police department size, defined by staff complement; officer ratios and population ratios; proximity to core cities; organizational/structural considerations; “breaking points” that define differences in cities and departments such as 100,000 compared to 40,000 to 50,000; and geography (such as a city in Los Angeles county compared to a city of similar size in Kansas apart from a major core city.) The group even worked at alternative/preferable labels such as “midmajors.” Nothing seemed to capture what they were after. Some suggest that a hard definition is not useful, but one that is “inclusive” could be. It seems evident that a definition, better yet a taxonomy, is a challenge that should be met to make progress, academically and practically.



Discussions continued at the IACP annual conference, and while a firm definition remains elusive, one began to take shape. Here the group came to a consensus that, for IACP's purposes, a midsize city, whether at 75,000 population or 300,000, is any city that feels it lacks a voice or representation. Debate continued even after agreeing on this point, noting that challenges faced by smaller midsize cities can vary drastically from those of larger midsize cities. From here, a bifurcated classification was suggested. Clear throughout the discourse was the recognition that there exists a significant group of cities that have a lot to offer the field and a lot to gain through a collective voice.

The Midsize Universe

Grasp of the midsize phenomenon sharpens a little when considering the number of cities and police departments that might be classified midsize. As shown in Table 1, the U.S. Census Bureau lists 19,490 cities (incorporated places) in the United States in 2007. Ninety-six percent have fewer than 50,000 in population. With more than 76,000,000 people, these cities host 40.5 percent of the total city population. Thirty-four cities in excess of 500,000 population represent almost 2 percent of the 19,490 cities. These major cities host 21 percent of city population, at roughly 40,000,000. The "mids," those between 50,000 and 500,000, number 658 and host a population approaching that of the small cities (less than 50,000) and almost twice that of the majors (more than 500,000).



The geographic distribution of midsize cities (see Figure 1) is also interesting, illustrating the dominance of mids in some states and regions, while others lack them entirely.

Within the 658 midsize city universe are subgroupings that differ materially in community and police capacity and law enforcement needs and issues. These could include, for example, the following:

- ♦ **Struggling Cities.** These cities include many formerly thriving industrial cities in the Rust Belt. They are characterized by persistent crime and disorder, fueled and nurtured by the basic causes of urban decay, including population flight, eroding economic bases, entrenched poverty, minority concentrations, and disparity of wealth with neighboring or regional suburbs. The current economic climate is especially damaging to these cities. Flint, Michigan, a city marked by a declining population, falling per capita incomes, and increasing crime, is a good example.
- ♦ **Burgeoning Suburbs.** Wealthier suburban cities constitute another distinct class of mids. Crime and service issues and demands, police style, the service mix, and public expectations certainly differ in these cities from what is required to police cities in the foregoing class. IACP experience suggests that cities in this class, often characterized by a strong, progressive, and community-based professional government (city managers and county executives) often foster innovation and serve as excellent lab settings to implement and study promising practices.

City Population Range	Count of Cities	Sum of Population for Range	% Range of Total City Population (188,248,963)	% Range of Total U.S. Population, 2007 ⁶
< 50,000	18,798	76,154,289	40.5%	25.2%
50,000 - 60,000	152	8,320,523	4.4%	2.8%
60,001 - 70,000	89	5,735,621	3.0%	1.9%
70,001 - 80,000	84	6,256,267	3.3%	2.1%
80,001 - 90,000	51	4,328,038	2.3%	1.4%
90,001 - 100,000	54	5,104,166	2.7%	1.7%
100,001 - 150,000	108	12,950,891	6.9%	4.3%
150,001 - 200,000	49	8,595,248	4.6%	2.8%
200,001 - 250,000	34	7,508,520	4.0%	2.5%
250,001 - 300,000	12	3,316,146	1.8%	1.1%
300,001 - 350,000	8	2,631,693	1.4%	0.9%
350,001 - 400,000	7	2,621,691	1.4%	0.9%
400,001 - 450,000	5	2,108,475	1.1%	0.7%
450,001 - 500,000	5	2,300,578	1.2%	0.8%
> 500,000	34	40,317,817	21.4%	13.4%
Total	19,490	188,249,963	100.0%	62.4%
Total 50k to 500k	658	71,777,857	38.1%	23.8%

Figure 1. Midsize Cities⁷ Number and Population, 2007.

⁶Estimated total U.S. population (2007) = 301,621,157

⁷Incorporated Places, defined by the U.S. Census as legally recognized cities, towns, boroughs, and villages

Source: Population Estimates for Incorporated Places, U.S. Census Bureau, 2007

www.census.gov/popest/cities/cities.html



Population Category (Count)

- 50000-100000 (N=430)
 - 100001-150000 (N=108)
 - 150001-200000 (N=49)
 - 200001-250000 (N=34)
 - 250001-300000 (N=12)
 - 300001-350000 (N=8)
 - 350001-400000 (N=7)
 - 400001-450000 (N=5)
 - 450001-500000 (N=5)
- Total N Cities 50k-500k=658**

Figure 2. Midsize Cities by Population Grouping - 50,000 to 500,000, 2007.

Source: Population Estimates for Incorporated Places, U.S. Census Bureau, 2007

These cities are also typically characterized by growth. As an example, Plano, Texas, an affluent suburb of Dallas, has seen its population more than double in the past 20 years, while its crime rates have steadily declined.

- ♦ **Older Suburban Cities.** Urbanologists contend that many older “inner ring” cities, those in between the inner city and the outer suburbs, are undergoing changes and challenges that must be addressed in special ways. While not facing the crises of failing cities, they are no longer flourishing or growing. In an analysis of the Philadelphia region, Leigh and Lee confirmed “inner-ring suburbs are increasingly vulnerable to socioeconomic decline and exhibit symptoms of decline similar to those found in inner cities (white flight, population loss, and increased poverty).”⁸ The nature of policing required in these cities does not seem to have been isolated for examination.

To build a body of knowledge and a tailored portfolio of best practices it is necessary to isolate the characteristics and conditions that define and differentiate the policing environments of subgroups (classes) of cities. Accordingly, while urbanologists, economists, and special-issue social scientists struggle with a typology for midsize cities, those in criminal justice need to produce a typology built with and from policing requirements.

⁸Leigh, Nancey Green, and Sugie Lee. “Philadelphia’s Space In Between: Inner-Ring Suburb Evolution.” *Opolis: An International Journal of Suburban and Metropolitan Studies*: Vol. 1: No.1, Article 4, 2005.



Differentiating Midsize Police Departments

The ways in which midsize police agencies are similar to and different from agencies of other classes and sizes is another line of inquiry that seems to have been ignored. Meeting participants attempted to break ground on this subject, as well. It is instructive for future inquiry that, during the meeting, the chiefs frequently referenced major city agencies as the compass point from which to compare and contrast their own situations. Small police department characteristics and conditions were rarely referenced for comparison. It may have utility going forward to think about midsize agencies as “smaller major agencies” rather than “larger small agencies.”


Midsize agencies confront a range of contemporary issues that, for the most part, mirror those of larger agencies. The experiences midsize cities have with these “big city” problems often go overlooked by researchers and funding agencies. Those mentioned most frequently by network chiefs are these:

- ♦ Servicing and adapting to diverse racial and ethnic cultures, usually multiple cultures, simultaneously and within cultures, generational differences.
- ♦ In-migration of gangs and/or gang members.
- ♦ Terrorism and critical incidents. Urban core cities may be primary targets, but surrounding and especially adjacent cities cannot be separated.
- ♦ Illegal immigration. Immigration is viewed as a federal problem dealt with, or not, locally.

- ◆ Recruitment, especially minorities, from among a more limited local employment base. Reciprocally, attractive housing stocks and superior school systems are assets that help.
- ◆ Improper or unwanted political intervention from governing authorities.
- ◆ Unfunded or underfunded annexation-driven service demands.
- ◆ Under-resourced or unavailable social, medical, and victim support services.
- ◆ Faltering municipal, state, and county revenues that are forcing cutbacks and paralyzing programs and personnel.

Conversely, midsize police departments also possess a combination of characteristics, some positive and some not, which in the view of the chiefs serve to differentiate them from big city police agencies. Midsize departments characteristics are as follows:

- ◆ Tend to be lost in the shadow of big cities; are “tweeners” with the needs and demands of larger departments; ignored in favor of the dominant department in a region; challenged just to get (positive) media attention.
- ◆ Have resource/operating limitations that big cities do not; cannot easily (or as easily) send a problem employee to another area (geographically) or unit; try to build full-time specialty units like those in major departments but must assign, add on, mix in collateral duties.
- ◆ Are very close to the ground, very involved (more involved) in the city and especially the city government.

- 
- ♦ Are more nimble, lacking the layers of hierarchy evident in big cities, thereby giving them flexibility advantages and the ability to effect change and innovate.
 - ♦ Have developed some of the best policing innovations; have great potential for future and continued contributions; for example, of the 12 stateside agencies designated as finalists for the IACP/Motorola Webber-Seavey Award for Quality in Law Enforcement during the past 2 years, nine (75 percent) were from midsize cities.
 - ♦ Fall through the federal/justice funding gaps.
 - ♦ Have fewer and less frequently available promotional opportunities, which translate to retention stresses and require greater concentration on motivational skills and strategies.
 - ♦ Enjoy government/community perceptions that are positive (perhaps more positive than of majors; generally).

⁹Eichenthal, David. *Murder in Midsize Cities*. Chattanooga, Tennessee: Community Research Council, August 2006.

A Special Characteristic: The Pattern of Violent Crime

A case for concentrating attention on midsize cities need not rest on generalized inattention or any other factor introduced to this point. Indeed, there is a far more compelling reason: the pattern of violent crime in America may be shifting, in relative dimension.

A 2006 report from the Community Research Council in Chattanooga, Tennessee, noted that “between 2000 and 2005, murder and nonnegligent homicide in midsize cities (cities with a 2000 population between 100,000 and 300,000) has increased by 22.2 percent. The rate was two and a half times the rate of increase for the nation as a whole (8.5 percent) and more than 50 percent higher than that of large cities.”⁹

The 25 most violent MSAs, measured by rates per 100,000 population, distributed as follows in 2008:

Population Class	MSAs in Class
♦ Less than 50,000	1
♦ 50,000 – 100,000	0
♦ 100,000 – 150,000	5
♦ 150,000 – 200,000	1
♦ 200,000 – 250,000	1
♦ 250,000 – 300,000	3
♦ 300,000 – 350,000	1
♦ 350,000 – 400,000	2
♦ 400,000 – 450,000	1
♦ 450,000 – 500,000	0
♦ 500,000 –1,000,000	3
♦ 1,000,000+	7
Total	25

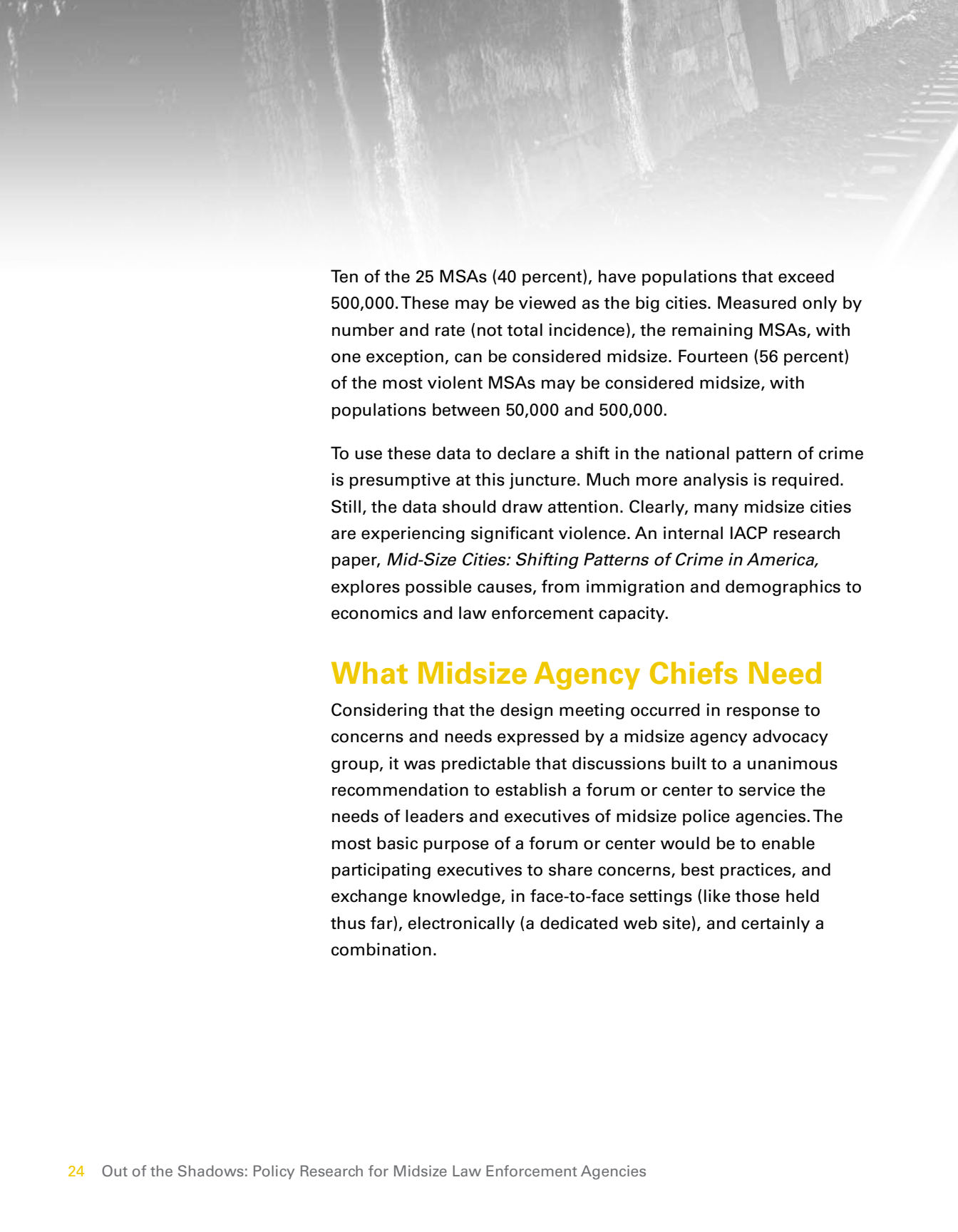
(See Figure 3)



Rank	City*	Population	Violent Crime Offenses	Violent Crime Rate (per 100,000 population)
1	Memphis, TN-MS-AR	1,290,901	15,585	1,207.3
2	Saginaw-Saginaw Township North, MI	199,649	2,381	1,192.6
3	Shreveport-Bossier City, LA	391,302	4,102	1,048.3
4	Florence, SC	200,297	2,008	1,002.5
5	Pine Bluff, AR	100,732	956	949.1
6	Anchorage, AK	301,010	2,778	922.9
7	Salisbury, MD	120,076	1,104	919.4
8	Stockton, CA	681,786	6,156	902.9
9	Tallahassee, FL	352,043	3,149	894.5
10	Lawton, OK	113,817	1,014	890.9
11	Texarkana, TX-Texarkana, AR	134,769	1,177	873.3
12	Lubbock, TX	269,446	2,266	841.0
13	Las Vegas-Paradise, NV	1,868,909	15,706	840.4
14	Jacksonville, FL	1,308,904	10,745	820.9
15	Orlando-Kissimmee, FL	2,060,706	16,910	820.6
16	Jackson, TN	113,254	924	815.9
17	Gainesville, FL	257,041	2,053	798.7
18	Albuquerque, NM	846,731	6,763	798.7
19	Nashville-Davidson—Murfreesboro—Franklin, TN	1,548,974	12,101	781.2
20	Fairbanks, AK	37,407	290	775.3
21	Miami-Fort Lauderdale-Pompano Beach, FL	5,395,910	41,301	765.4
22	Baltimore-Towson, MD	2,666,452	20,292	761.0
23	Lafayette, LA	260,236	1,946	747.8
24	Columbia, SC	728,119	5,443	747.5
25	Flint, MI	430,816	3,208	744.6

Figure 3. Highest Violent Crime Rates 2008: Top 25 Metropolitan Statistical Areas.

Source: *2008 Crime in the United States*, Federal Bureau of Investigation




Ten of the 25 MSAs (40 percent), have populations that exceed 500,000. These may be viewed as the big cities. Measured only by number and rate (not total incidence), the remaining MSAs, with one exception, can be considered midsize. Fourteen (56 percent) of the most violent MSAs may be considered midsize, with populations between 50,000 and 500,000.

To use these data to declare a shift in the national pattern of crime is presumptive at this juncture. Much more analysis is required. Still, the data should draw attention. Clearly, many midsize cities are experiencing significant violence. An internal IACP research paper, *Mid-Size Cities: Shifting Patterns of Crime in America*, explores possible causes, from immigration and demographics to economics and law enforcement capacity.

What Midsize Agency Chiefs Need

Considering that the design meeting occurred in response to concerns and needs expressed by a midsize agency advocacy group, it was predictable that discussions built to a unanimous recommendation to establish a forum or center to service the needs of leaders and executives of midsize police agencies. The most basic purpose of a forum or center would be to enable participating executives to share concerns, best practices, and exchange knowledge, in face-to-face settings (like those held thus far), electronically (a dedicated web site), and certainly a combination.



A midsize agency body of knowledge has to be fashioned. Inferring from discussions, work needs to proceed on several parallel and interactive paths:

- ◆ Knowledge and practices regarding subjects and issues common to all or most police agencies, regardless of size.
- ◆ Knowledge and practices regarding subjects and issues that are specific to or more specific to midsize departments and subgroupings.

Practitioners, researchers, police associations, and federal funding agencies will be instrumental in moving forward. Practitioners from midsize police agencies are likely to benefit by going forward in partnership with their host governments who are coping with many of the same definitional and concepts issues.

Midsize police agencies might also want to explore a possible role as the nexus of regional centers of excellence. Having, in many cases, resources and capacities that small agencies in their metro- or microplexes do not have, mids can serve as leaders and partners in innovations.



Going Forward: The IACP's Plans

The leaders and advocates who attended meetings on this topic, both at IACP headquarters and in Denver, are regarded by IACP management as an advisory body, or more formally, a work group. At the annual conference, group members agreed that a move should be made to take the initiative to the next level within the IACP. The group unanimously voted to move forward and explore formal creation of a Mid-Size City Section within IACP membership. The next step is to seek governing body authorization to create this section.

In service to IACP membership and the police profession as a whole, this initiative makes sense and already has garnered a great deal of excitement and support internally. Likewise, it appears to be in line with the interest areas of the COPS Office. The IACP is pleased to see the COPS Office affirm the IACP's belief that this is a critical area of need, and the IACP looks forward to future collaboration with the COPS Office.

With encouragement and financial support from the COPS Office, the IACP held “A Mid-Size Department Initiative: Design Meeting One.” This report, *Out of the Shadows. Policy Research for Midsize Law Enforcement Agencies: A Call to Action*, is a product of this initiative and is an interesting look at the challenges facing a significant sector of the law enforcement community. This publication is intended to assist law enforcement agencies in understanding important issues facing a significant sector of the law enforcement community.



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e041016267

ISBN: 978-1-935676-17-1