MODERN POLICING REQUIRES MORE THAN JUST HIGHER NUMBERS OF OFFICERS

Centre for Economic Performance election analysis discusses the legacy of austerity and budget cuts in UK police forces, the return of violent crime – and the need for evidence-based policing

A long period of austerity and budget cuts in UK policing has had a considerable negative impact on the size of police forces, hitting those outside London particularly hard, a new election analysis from the Centre for Economic Performance at LSE reported today.

Violent crime has risen in England and Wales after decades of falls, just as austerity hit police forces. This could explain why crime is moving up the list of voters’ priorities, now ranked the third most important issue.

“All parties have pledged to recruit tens of thousands of new officers. But given the recent hiring freeze, as well as 23,000 officers expected to retire or leave the police force over the next three years, it is not clear whether this target is achievable,” said the report’s author Professor Tom Kirchmaier.

He added “A simple focus on officers might not be enough to address the additional resources needed by the entire policing ‘ecosystem’.

The report further finds:

- Policing and crime have quickly moved up the list of electoral concerns, with crime being ranked the third most important issue behind Brexit and the NHS in a recent public survey.

- All three main parties have pledged to invest in policing, promising to hire around 20,000 additional police officers. This will be difficult to achieve and is likely to put considerable strain on police forces to deliver on that target.

- If this recruitment occurs, it will end a long period of austerity including budget cuts in policing that has considerably reduced the size of UK police forces, hitting those outside London particularly hard.

- As austerity bit and budget cuts were implemented, violent crime rose in England and Wales after decades of falls. Rising knife crime is particularly prominent.

- If deployed efficiently, there is scope for the additional officers to reduce crime. The effect may vary across places, as larger cities are more difficult to police.

- Consideration needs to be given to the overall operations of the criminal justice system, in particular if and how it would be able to deal with the extra workload generated by additional police officers.
Notes for editors:

Tom Kirchmaier is director of the Policing and Crime research group at the Centre for Economic Performance at the London School of Economics, and Professor of Risk and Regulation at the Copenhagen Business School.

CEP election analysis: Policing and crime is one in a series of election briefings produced by the Centre for Economic Performance, LSE. The series aims to provide an impartial, evidence-based analysis of the key issues in the 2019 UK general election including education, health and social care, social mobility, immigration, the labour market and regional policy.

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