
Introducing Policing: Challenges for Police and Australian Communities

By Mark Findlay

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Mark Findlay refers to his new book as the 'distillation' (p. vi) of his two decades of teaching police students. Anyone who has followed his career would certainly be excited by the prospect of a book that promises to synthesise his considerable experience. On many levels this wide ranging book does not disappoint. It squeezes into its relatively thin 175 pages of text an intelligent and knowledgeable discussion of most of the significant issues facing policing in Australia.

Findlay's first two chapters give a short history of policing in Australia and an introduction to the basic concepts of police and policing in contemporary society. The Australian police has emerged from its past as a series of colonial forces maintaining order in highly stratified penal colonies and also engaging in occasional violent clashes with indigenous communities on the outskirts of white settlement. In contrast, contemporary Australian policing 'has established relationships of accommodation across multicultural Australia and has selectively attempted to support ideologies of democracy in the face of rapid social transition and political change' (p. 27).

Findlay devotes an early chapter to community policing which he identifies as the prevailing ideology for police in contemporary Australia. It is an ideology based on a basic paradox that juxtaposes the role of police as agents of government with the aspiration to develop community-centred operational strategies. Community policing is currently at the core of police work in all Australian states but questions

continue to be asked about how these managerial strategies flow down through the organisation to the operational level. In particular, the alienation of police from the communities they focus on most directly often means that community policing is difficult to implement.

The book then focuses on police functions, including alternative modes of policing and the use of discretion. Police are influenced in their operations by internal cultures and constraints as well as by the pressures of political expediency, community expectations and their representation in the media. They balance crime-control and order-maintenance functions with prevention and welfare roles through an increasingly complex array of strategies, including partnerships with an expanding range of public and private providers. Moreover, there are pressures for police to use their discretion to work closely with alternative criminal justice strategies such as restorative justice at the same time that law-and-order politics continue to provide dividends to mainstream political parties.

The outcome of police functions and public perceptions of them are determined by a number of framing issues and Findlay devotes the latter part of the book to an overview of accountability and regulation, internal cultures, professionalism and the relationship between police and diversity in our society.

The final chapter, *Agendas for Reform*, surveys various reform approaches and probes whether they are possible. Reforms have sought to engender a shift to more accountable community policing and crime prevention. Successive waves of reform have sought to change the structure and ethics of policing and influence operational practice and procedures. While each round of reform has led to some significant changes, they are often followed soon after by new rounds of scandals and independent enquiries. As Findlay notes, '[p]olitical supports for change must go beyond the identification of a need for reform and a celebration of its success' (p. 172). He argues for the significant investment in changing police culture and the improvement of the service function, but also notes that such initiatives are usually sacrificed in the name of tougher crime-control programs. The outcome is the 'reinvention of feudal police organisations and the stratification of negative police cultures around the predominance of crime investigation and a crime-control function for policing' (p. 172).

The book has 12 chapters, each one with an average of only 14 pages. They tend to be written in a succinct, almost encyclopaedic, style with liberal use of dot points and lists. There is a tendency to the generic and there is little in-depth treatment at current framing events. The Fitzgerald and Wood enquiries receive relatively brief mentions and there is no mention or analysis of significant reform programs such as Project Beacon in Victoria, which sought to address the spate of police shooting, or the Delta Reform project in WA, which despite many apparent successes was not able to help the police there avoid the recent Kennedy Royal Commission. Individual commissioners and their initiatives are not named and there is only the occasional mention to specific events.

To be fair to Findlay, he makes no pretension at anything more than he delivers and declares at the beginning, 'this book is nothing more than the title suggests, an introduction' (p. vi), and refers to it later as 'a little project' (p. vi).

One detail I found curious was that Findlay repeats the furphy that NSW Police, with some 17,000 personnel, is among the largest single public policing organisation

in the world (p. 1). NSW Police is certainly larger than the thousands of small city-, town- and county-level police agencies so common in the USA, UK and elsewhere, but there are many larger police organisations in the world. National agencies such as the Chinese National Police (1.1 million officers), the French Gendarmerie (93,000) or the Italian Carabinieri (90,000) are much larger, as are the local police in large cities such as Mexico City (26,000) and London (30,000). NSW may be above the median among the police agencies in the world, but this information is only useful if it illustrates some pertinent point about the centralisation of policing in Australia or about the economies of scale.

This somewhat specious international comparison only ends up focusing attention on the fact that the book does not place Australian policing in the wider international context. While one chapter is devoted to alternative policing, this is only considered within the framework of current Australian models. There is no discussion of international debates on policing that might be worth analysing further for their applicability to Australia. For example, Findlay discusses civilianisation (p. 167), but doesn't look in depth at international models of civilian entry into police senior management. Many overseas jurisdictions treat the equivalent of our commissioners as professional-political posts that are open to civilian appointments, and it is common practice to have key positions such as director of the police academy filled by outsiders.

Comparative policing models and their application to Australia would also be worth analysing in a book such as this, as there is little discussion about whether our relatively unusual single-force-per-jurisdiction model best serves our law enforcement needs. The growth of private policing and of the use of public sector inspectors with public-order functions (e.g., health inspectors, work cover, local government) has meant that there are cogent arguments to be made for the redistribution of law enforcement, crime prevention and public safety functions in Australia.

Equally importantly, the book does not look at the emerging international role of Australian policing. Deployments for peace-keeping and international cooperation are an increasing feature of Australian police work and are likely to have major implications in issues ranging from the power of the Australian Federal Police in relation to the state police agencies to workforce capacity and preparation.

Workforce issues are the other area the book does not address to sufficient depth. In 2001, the first female police commissioner in Australia was appointed (Christine Nixon in Victoria) and since Findlay's book was published we now have a new commissioner who is probably the first one to have a PhD (Karl O'Callaghan in Western Australia). The demographics of Australian policing have changed considerably over the last decade and the changes are likely to be the primary influence on future shifts in policing styles, public accountability and the success of reform initiatives.

Despite such omissions, if you want an excellent introduction or overview of policing in Australia this is the book. It is, as Findlay claims, 'a straightforward and accessible treatment of policing' (p. ix) and can be seen as the primer that anyone who wants to study policing should digest before going into more depth through other readings. If you need a framing reader for the beginning of a course for police officers or for anyone studying law enforcement and criminal justice this is the perfect book. I would also recommend it to the general public who might want to gain some insight into policing. We can only hope that Findlay follows this book

Introducing Policing with a second book which dispenses with the introductory limitations and applies his knowledge of the field to a more in-depth analysis and to a more prescriptive attempt at pointing to future directions.

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