

# 1 CONSIDERING POLICE WORK



Police monitor rival protests by right-wing and anti-fascist groups, Quebec City, 2017.

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES | After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

- Describe what is meant by critical thinking.
- Define police and policing.
- Describe what is meant by the pluralization of policing.
- Compare and contrast the social contract and critical perspectives on the role of the police.
- Discuss the legislative framework in which the police carry out their mandate.
- Discuss the issues that surround police work in a democratic society.
- Identify some of the complexities of the police role.
- Discuss what is meant by the mandated and assumed responsibilities of the police and their implication for police work.
- Discuss the mandated and assumed responsibilities of the police.

- Discuss the warrior versus guardian role of the police.
- Identify and discuss the environments in which policing takes place.
- Identify and discuss the dimensions of policing.
- Identify and discuss key themes in the study of Canadian police work.
- Identify and discuss key questions to be kept in mind in the study of Canadian police work.

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#### DIG DEEPER

Day in the Life: What It's Like to Work the Night Shift as a VPD Officer

## DAY IN THE LIFE: WHAT IT'S LIKE TO WORK THE NIGHT SHIFT AS A VANCOUVER POLICE OFFICER

March 22, 2023

*A man is threatening to jump off the Lions Gate Bridge.*

*A man near the train station at Main Street and National Avenue has been robbed at knifepoint of his electric scooter.*

*Police are on alert for protestors outside a west side restaurant where a diplomat from India is dining.*

*These are some of the calls Vancouver police officers were dealing with Wednesday night as Insp. Marco Veronesi rolled through the city in his Ford Explorer, his laptop lit up with maps, statistics, and details on each file.*

*The calls came in when Veronesi—the department's duty officer for the night—was a few hours into his 12-hour shift, which began at 4:30 p.m.*

*By shift change in the morning, the call load will have topped 251.*

*Some will be serious (a woman in her 60s stabbed in the back several times in the Downtown Eastside), some not (providing a blanket for a young homeless man on Granville Street).*

*None of the calls will make the six o'clock news.*

*"A lot of us joined policing to go to those emergency calls, where the adrenaline gets going and you're flying across the city to go do this or go do that—save a life, that kind of thing—but that's probably 10 to 20 per cent of the job," said Veronesi, whose laptop screen was dominated at the time by calls for suicidal and missing persons.*

*Others in the queue included a parent worried about her son being bullied at school, a possible break-and-enter, a suspicious person report, a car accident, an alarm call to a restaurant, a check on the well-being of a person and a request for police to provide assistance to firefighters and paramedics.*

If you are interested, you can access the rest of this story at the *Dig Deeper* link in the margin.

The police are perhaps the most high-profile, dynamic, and—oftentimes—controversial component of the Canadian criminal justice system. It is police officers who respond to criminal offences, disorder, and conflict in the community. How police services and police officers respond to the multifaceted demands that are placed on them affects individual citizens and their neighbourhoods and communities, as well as officers and the police services within which they work. Police are the only agents of the criminal justice system with whom most Canadians ever have contact.

In contrast to personnel in other components of the justice system, police officers work in environments that are always changing. Technological developments, most

notably the prevalence of mobile phone cameras, Internet-based platforms such as YouTube, and social networking sites like “X” and Facebook, have significantly increased the visibility of police actions (Goldsmith, 2010).

The pervasiveness of the media and social media ensure that critical incidents involving the police receive extensive coverage, and this has contributed to the Canadian public being more demanding and less forgiving of issues related to police misconduct.

## WHAT ARE THE POLICE? DEFINING POLICE AND POLICING

Let’s begin with a thought exercise. Imagine a scenario in which you encounter an alien from a far-away galaxy that has found its way to your neighbourhood. Naturally, the alien is curious about Canada and has many questions for you. One thing the alien is particularly interested in is learning about these individuals they see wearing strange uniforms and driving around in cars with bright flashing lights on top. You explain to the alien that they are the police. The alien, still curious, asks you, “What are the police and what do they do?” Take a moment to think about how you would answer this question. If you’re having a hard time thinking of good answer, you’re not alone. This is a question that policing scholars have been struggling to answer for decades.

It has been noted that the term “**police**” “refers to a particular kind of social institution,” while the term “**policing**” “implies a set of processes with specific social functions” (Reiner, 2010, p. 145). However, while some social institutions are easy to define, police are not (Huey & Johnston, 2023). Throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, various policing scholars have attempted to define the police. Some of these include:

- “agents authorized to use diverse means prohibited to the rest of policed society in order to uphold a particular kind of sociopolitical order” (Brodeur, 2010, p. 139);
- “the efficient, apolitical, and professional enforcement of the law” (Manning, cited in Huey et al., 2022);
- “nothing else than a mechanism for the distribution of situationally justified force in society” (Bittner, 1970, p. 39);
- “knowledge workers” (Ericson & Haggerty, 1997); and
- “unf@ckers” of people’s problems (Huey & Johnston, 2023).

For this textbook, we will use the following definition of “police”: “agents authorized to act to undertake one part of the state’s duty to govern, that is, to secure public order and otherwise to protect the public and enforce the (public) law” (Miller, 2023, p. 574). “Policing” will be defined as the activities of any individual or organization acting legally on behalf of public or private organizations or persons to maintain security or social order while empowered by either public or private contract, regulations, or policies, written or verbal. This definition includes both public and private police (Law Commission of Canada, 2002).

Though we have adopted working definitions, it is important to note that there is no consensus on how police and policing are defined because, as you will learn throughout this textbook, the role of police is both complex and nebulous. Part of the issue is that many definitions of police focus on their role as law enforcers or crime fighters, when the reality is that police spend much of their time responding to non-criminal events. For example, the esteemed policing scholar Egon Bittner noted that policing is less about pursuing criminals and making arrests and more about order maintenance, peace-keeping, and social work (Huey & Johnston, 2023).

A further complication is that policing is no longer the sole domain of the police. That is, policing services are now being delivered in the public, semi-public, and private domains (Terpstra & van Stokkom, 2015). Police scholars have referred to this as the

### police

agents authorized to undertake part of the state’s duty to govern to secure public order and otherwise protect the public and enforce the public law

### policing

the activities of any individual or organization acting legally on behalf of public or private organizations or persons to maintain security or social order while empowered by either public or private contract, regulations, or policies, written or verbal



**pluralization of policing**

the expansion of policing  
beyond the public police  
to include para-police and  
private security

**pluralization of policing.** This has not only occurred in Canada and the United States but in other countries as well (Bonnet et al., 2015).

There are a variety of factors that have contributed to the pluralization of policing, including fiscal considerations and the increasing cost for traditional police services, increased public demands for safety and security, and the expansion of the surveillance state (Ogasawara, 2022; Perrin, 2024; Terpstra & van Stokkom, 2015).

A network can include initiatives taken by private citizens, private security, tiered policing (including para-police such as community safety officers), reserves, and by-law officers, as well as security intelligence agencies. Within this framework, formal police agencies are but one component of security and governance (Boels & Verhage, 2016). It has been argued that “policing is no longer monopolized by the public police, that is, the police created by government” (Newburn, 2005, p. 714, reprinting Bayley & Shearing, 1996).

The pluralization of policing raises several issues, including the accountability and oversight of various security actors in the network, the coordination and cooperation of diverse policing efforts, and human rights (Boels & Verhage, 2016, p. 4). These issues are discussed throughout the text.

## PERSPECTIVES ON THE POLICE

How one defines the police and policing may be influenced by their ideological perspective. There are two overarching perspectives on the role of the police: the social contract perspective and the critical perspective.

### The Social Contract Perspective

**social contract perspective**

perspective that the police  
are a politically neutral  
force that acts primarily to  
enforce the law and protect  
the public

The **social contract perspective** views the police as a politically neutral force that acts primarily to enforce the law and protect the public. The power of police and their mandate to use force against citizens is justified under the social contract vision of society. The police use of force is necessary to maintain order and maximize collective good by maintaining a safe and workable society. Under social contract theory, citizens are understood to voluntarily surrender some of their power and rights and delegate them to the state and to the police force. The social contract theory of policing informs mainstream views of policing, which see police as a protective force against crime and social disorder.

### The Critical Perspective

**critical perspective**

perspective that the police  
are an instrument used by  
governments and powerful  
interests to suppress dissent,  
stifle protest, and help  
maintain the status quo

While the social contract perspective depicts the police as a neutral agent of the state providing for the safety and security of citizens, the proponents of the **critical perspective** point out that since the police support the government, which, in turn, supports the interests of the ruling class, the police are never politically neutral (“The Police,” 2012). The critical perspective on the police is captured in the following narrative:

Policing is part of the complex technologies, or methods of control (such as corrections institutions, public health administration, public education administration and corporate management) whose primary function in history has been to consolidate the social power of the capitalist class and administer the working class and poor. [T]he police are integral to the manner in which the state controls and contains civil society in general and people in particular. (Jochelson et al., 2014, p. 10)

The critical perspective considers police as a repressive force that is instrumental in the maintenance of an unjust social system: “The police are primarily utilized by the

government to maintain the status quo and to protect the powerful against any perceived threats” (Activist Rights, n.d.). This includes conducting surveillance on individuals and groups deemed to be a threat to national security and suppressing public protests. An example of the use of the critical perspective is in the debates surrounding racism and discrimination by police toward vulnerable, at-risk, and visible minority persons. This is illustrated in racial profiling and street checks by police officers, discussed in Chapter 6. It is argued that “racial profiling is a way in which racism manifests in policing” (Sealy-Harrington, 2020, p. 1).

Similarly, others have pointed out that Black, Indigenous, and persons of colour (BIPOC) are the most overrepresented groups in the criminal justice system and that “the legacy of slavery, colonialism, and ongoing practices arising from structural racism has resulted in the marginalization of BIPOC including susceptibility to police violence” (Rao, 2022, p. 2; see also Gilbert & Ray, 2016).

Studies and discussions of police work from a critical perspective often take place within the framework of **critical race theory (CRT)**, defined as

a way of thinking and being in the world that promotes a structural approach to addressing the problems of a diverse society; centering on the interplay of race, law, and power to examine the role of racism ... CRT is a commitment to the pursuit of social justice for those encountering oppression and aims to transform the structures that are the source of the original problem for BIPOC. (Rao, 2022, p. 3)

### critical race theory (CRT)

intellectual and legal framework that examines how laws, policies, and institutions perpetuate racial inequalities and systemic racism

From this perspective, “racism is an ordinary everyday experience for people of colour ... It challenges ... the assumption that racism no longer exists, and therefore no decisions in society or by government are based on race” (Bundy, 2019, pp. 324–325).

Critical race theory has been applied to many areas of policing, such as police training (discussed in Chapter 4), as some argue that the use of algorithms in analyses such as predictive policing are racially biased (DaViera et al., 2024). Other areas of concern include the police response to persons with mental illness (Rao, 2022), police street checks or “carding” (Sealy-Harrington, 2020), as well as other areas of police work that are discussed throughout the text. Issues surrounding the police use of sophisticated analytical techniques for preventing and responding to crime are discussed in Chapter 11.

In the wake of several high-profile incidents in which Black people died in interactions with the police, there were calls to abolish the police.

Proponents of this perspective on the police and on Canadian society as a “police state” cite as evidence the historical record. There are numerous historical and contemporary examples presented in Chapter 2 wherein the police were used by the government to “pacify” the Canadian West so that it could be settled and developed, to break strikes and suppress citizen protests, and to monitor the activities of Canadians who were/are deemed to be a threat to the state. Tensions have surrounded the police presence at protests by Indigenous Peoples over pipelines to be constructed through their traditional territories (Marquis, 2024). Critical criminologists have documented the surveillance of Indigenous Peoples, wherein these peoples “are constructed as potential insurgents, terrorists and criminals collectively or individually threatening the security of the Canadian oligarchic state” (Proulx, 2014, p. 83).



Protesters holding “defund” signs outside Toronto Police headquarters in August 2020 during demonstrations over police violence that took place across the country.

THE CANADIAN PRESS/Nathan Denette

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Into the Fire (Canada Is a Police State)

For a critical perspective on the role of police in Canada, access the documentary film *Into the Fire* (Canada Is a Police State) at the *Dig Deeper* link in the margin.

The persons and groups most often the subject of government and police interest have been those involved in various political activities and/or those who had beliefs or engaged in behaviour (including sexual) that were viewed as a threat to the stability and status quo of the state. Continuing to the present, the police have spied on citizens and have engaged in activities that violated citizens' rights. Police services, particularly the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) and the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, have maintained extensive secret data files on citizens and engaged in activities that have often been determined to be illegal.

The discussion in Chapter 2 reveals that Canadian police services have been used by governments to conduct surveillance on groups that were deemed to pose a threat to the country and to enforce laws against persons in communities of diversity. The Canadian scholars Reg Whitaker, Gregory Kealey, and Andrew Parnaby have labelled this phenomenon “political policing” (Whitaker et al., 2012). There are numerous examples of this in Canadian history and in contemporary times. Several of these are discussed in Chapter 2 and throughout the text.

## THE LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK OF POLICE WORK

Police officers carry out their tasks within several legislative frameworks that define their roles, powers, and responsibilities. These are generally set out in provincial legislation and—in the case of the RCMP—in the federal *Royal Canadian Mounted Police Act* (RSC 1985, c R-10). When new legislation is enacted, it may result in increased demands on the police and extend the role and activities of the police. The following are among the more significant pieces of legislation:

#### **Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms**

component of the *Constitution Act, 1982* that guarantees basic rights and freedoms

**Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms** (the Charter). This is the primary law of the land in Canada and guarantees basic rights and freedoms for citizens. The Charter contains specific sections on fundamental freedoms, legal rights, equality rights, and enforcement. The courts may use the Charter to strike down legislation and criminal laws as unconstitutional. No other piece of legislation has had as strong an impact on the powers and activities of the police as the Charter, specifically sections 7 to 14, the Legal Rights section. This topic is discussed in Chapter 7.

#### **Constitution Act, 1867**

legislation that includes provisions defining the responsibilities of the federal and provincial governments in criminal justice

**Constitution Act, 1867.** This Act sets out the responsibilities of the federal and provincial governments in criminal justice. The federal government has the sole authority to enact criminal laws and to establish the procedures to be followed in criminal cases (s. 91(27)), while the provinces are assigned responsibility for administering justice (s. 92(14)). If the *Constitution Act* were followed to the letter, the federal government would be limited to passing laws, with the provinces and territories given the task of policing and justice administration. It's much more complex than that. The RCMP is a national police force involved in federal, provincial, and municipal policing. The federal government operates a corrections system for individuals who receive sentences of two years or more.

Also, provincial and municipal governments enact their own laws; however, provincial laws and municipal by-laws are generally for less serious types of offences and are most often punished by fines. Even though by-laws are relatively minor in the overall scheme of laws, they can be the source of considerable controversy. This was illustrated when municipalities began passing by-laws that severely restricted where persons could smoke.

#### **Criminal Code**

federal legislation that sets out criminal law, procedures for prosecuting federal offences, and sentences and procedures for the administration of justice

**Criminal Code** (RSC 1985, c C-46). This Act sets out the criminal laws as well as the procedures for administering justice.

Other federal statutes. These acts include the *Anti-terrorism Act* (SC 2001, c 41), the *Controlled Drugs and Substances Act* (SC 1996, c 19), the *Youth Criminal Justice Act* (SC 2002, c 1), the *Canada Evidence Act* (RSC 1985, c C-5; pertains to evidentiary matters in the courts), the *Access to Information Act* (RSC 1985, c A-1), and various privacy acts.

Provincial and municipal legislation. This includes a wide range of statutes such as motor vehicle administration acts, highway traffic acts, liquor acts, and provincial/municipal police acts. These laws and by-laws provide the framework within which police services are structured and delivered. As well, the various police acts set out the principles of policing, processes for filing complaints against police officers, and disciplinary procedures for police officers, besides providing for and defining the activities of police commissions and municipal police boards.

**Royal Canadian Mounted Police Act.** This Act provides the legislative framework for the operations of the RCMP. It also contains provisions relating to the operations of the RCMP External Review Committee and the Civilian Review and Complaints Commission for the RCMP, as well as the handling of officer grievances, discipline, discharge, and demotion.

**Royal Canadian Mounted Police Act**  
federal legislation that provides the framework for the operation of the RCMP

## POLICE WORK IN A DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY

The Law Commission of Canada (2006) identified four key values that form the framework for understanding police work in Canadian society.

- *Justice.* The police are to maintain peace and security in the community while ensuring that individuals are treated fairly and that human rights are respected.
- *Equality.* All citizens are entitled to policing services that contribute to their feelings of safety and security.
- *Accountability.* The actions of police services and police officers are subject to review.
- *Efficiency.* Policing services must be cost-effective.

These are the ideal values that should underpin policing. In actuality, there are often conflicts between the role of the police in ensuring safety and security and ensuring that the rights of Canadian citizens are protected.

The separation of powers between the police and government is considered an important tenet of liberal democracy. The separation of powers helps ensure that the police are not used in a partisan political way to harass and punish political opponents and dissidents.

There is also a separation of roles and powers between the courts and the police. It is the police's role to bring suspected offenders before the court; it is the court's role to decide on guilt or innocence and, in the case of conviction, decide on punishment. Among all the institutions and organizations in society, it is the police that can have a direct impact on the rights and freedoms of individual citizens. This is due to the powers that police officers are given under the law.

Both our governments and the public rely on the police to prevent and respond to crime and to apprehend offenders; yet at the same time, our governments are committed to the principles of democracy and due process. It is not surprising, then, that police officers often experience conflict in carrying out their duties and that the police are often "caught in the middle." Proponents of the critical perspective of the police would contend that there is no conflict in the police role; rather, the activities of the police are primarily directed toward supporting the state at the expense of citizens' rights.

The police mandate is at its heart contradictory: The police are expected to protect both public order *and* individual rights. There are natural tensions between the power

and authority of the police and their legal mandate to maintain order, on the one hand, and the values and processes that exist in a democratic society, on the other. This tension is inevitable and may seem irreconcilable. As a judicial authority has stated, “There is a critical balance to be struck between the interests of community safety and the protection of civil liberties and human rights” (Tulloch, 2018, p. 30).

Police services are also required to monitor and control protest demonstrations involving opposing groups who support different sides in conflicts in other regions of the world. Given these circumstances, it is impossible for the police to avoid becoming involved in and affected by politics and other outside influences. A key issue is the extent to which this involvement or influence affects the police’s ability to carry out their mandate in a fair and impartial manner. There are numerous instances in which Canadian police have failed to do this.

There are several prerequisites for the police to be a democratic institution, including to be integrated into the legal system and bound to the law, to be politically neutral but astute, to be transparent in operations, to be subject to rigorous oversight, and to focus on both the prevention of and response to crime (Salzborn, 2014).

## WHAT DO THE POLICE DO AND WHAT DO WE WANT THEM TO DO? EXPLORING THE COMPLEX ROLE OF THE POLICE

As challenging as it is to define what the police are, it is equally difficult to describe what the police do. Much of what the police do is not well understood by the public because how they view the police is heavily influenced by media. The media—both print and electronic—have been a major contributor to the distorted images of the police that are presented to Canadians. For example, a Canada-wide survey ( $N = 4,200$ ) found that one in four respondents cited television and movies as a key source of information about the criminal justice system, including the police (EKOS Research Associates, 2018). Most of the participants did not know where to find information on the criminal justice system and indicated that they knew very little about it.

Part of the issue is that media representations of police emphasize their role as “crime fighters” rather than as service providers. Television and movies typically emphasize the more intriguing or exciting aspects of policing such as criminal investigation, the use of force, and pursuing criminals. Though news media focuses on real-life policing stories, those stories are disproportionately focused on the crime control aspect of policing. The same can be said about more recent forms of media, including so-called true crime podcasts and documentaries that generally focus on criminal investigations. As such, so much of how the public comes to understand the police is through the lens of crime control and investigation. While crime prevention and response are a central component of the police mandate, much of what police do on a day-to-day basis has little nexus to crime.

### Not Just “Crime Fighters”

The police officer is no longer the suppressor of crime alone, but the social service worker of the community as well. (Brereton, 1935, p. 249)

Policing is an increasingly complex profession, with officers on the front line dealing with the current overdose epidemic, mental illness, homelessness, and other difficult societal issues. Police officers are expected to respond with sensitivity and restraint. There is an expectation that they will have the knowledge, skills, and tools available to provide the very best possible outcome, while minimizing the risk to the public. (German & Rolls, 2018, p. 5)



These two observations, written over 80 years apart, suggest that the role of the police has always extended beyond law enforcement. To understand why this is the case, let us return to the description of police provided by Egon Bittner that “the police are nothing else than a mechanism for the distribution of situationally justified force in society” (1970, p. 39). Bittner also noted that “the common element in police work is that it deals with situations in which there is some problem that ‘ought not to be happening and about which someone had better do something now’” (cited in Terpstra, 2011, p. 3). Both of Bittner’s characterizations help to clarify why so much of what police do goes beyond enforcing the law.

What makes police unique is that is not that they are responsible for crime control, but that they have the authority to compel people to do things they refuse to do voluntarily—either by using force or by issuing “non-negotiable demands” under the threat of physical force, arrest, or citation (Thacher, 2022, p. 66). The police are one of the only social institutions that can say “or else” and mean it, so the public and other institutions turn to them in situations where they need someone to do something that they do not want to do. Thus, for many, police have become the agency of both first and last resort, and they are called upon to respond to wide range of issues, many of which have very little to do with crime.

## Police Are a 24/7 Enterprise

A key factor in the growth and complexity of the police’s role is that they are one of the few public services that operate 24/7. Citizens know that they can call on police at any hour and receive a response. This invariably puts the police in a position of having to respond to a diverse range of issues. In certain, more remote parts of the country, police may be the only social institution, which only serves to expand the police role even further. As the chief of a small, rural police service stated, “[I]n my town, the only things that are open 24/7 are the 7-Eleven and the Police Department” (personal communication with co-author).

A large portion of police work involves officers restoring order in situations of conflict without resorting to the criminal law. Patrol officers, for example, are involved in myriad activities that are not directly related to law enforcement yet play a critical role in reassuring community residents and ensuring that communities are safe and secure. Two Canadian criminologists characterized the role of the police as “unf@cking” people’s problems. “What the police do, and what citizens clearly want them to do, is to unf@ck our problems” (Huey & Johnston, 2023). It has been noted that crafting a theory of policing that accurately captures “who the police are, what they do, and what they [the public wants] them to do are tricky tasks, both descriptively and prescriptively” (Huey & Johnston, 2023).

In some police services, officers are involved in a more holistic approach to problem solving that has the potential to effectively address the underlying issues that contribute to crime and disorder, rather than merely responding to the symptoms of these issues. Officers are involved in developing and sustaining partnerships with the community; taking initiatives to improve the quality of life in communities and neighbourhoods; providing reassurance to community residents and reducing the fear of crimes; and conducting outreach to communities of diversity, including Indigenous persons, newcomers, visible and cultural minorities, and persons who are marginalized and vulnerable.

The traditional conceptualization of the role of the police no longer accurately captures the diversity and complexity of contemporary policing. The police officer in the early 21st century is a psychologist, mediator, and problem-solver, and they have near-continuous contact with community residents (Griffiths, 2020). Two descriptions of the police mandate are provided in Police File 1.1.

## POLICE FILE 1.1

### Two Perspectives on the Role of the Police

The role of the police in society is complex and unique. Though they are commonly looked to for crime response and control, their mandate is far broader. Here, two police scholars discuss the fact that police spend much of their time on duties that fall outside the traditional police mandate. One discusses how the unique authority of police has created a situation in which they have become a “catch-all” for a variety of non-criminal issues. The other notes how much of the work of police is addressing citizens’ day-to-day challenges—both serious and mundane.

In this respect, the police mandate is a residual: It is that part of any substantive problem (not just “crime”) that may require coercive authority. ... If a suicidal man insists that he will run headlong into traffic despite the best efforts by a mental health counselor to persuade him otherwise, only the police have the authority to physically restrain him. If a social worker reaches the horrible conclusion that a woman’s daughter is no longer safe in her home but she refuses to relinquish custody voluntarily, the social worker has to call the police. It is tempting in cases like these to ask why police are doing the work of building

officials, psychiatrists, and social workers, particularly when our knowledge about each case comes from the condensed summary in police records (“unsafe building,” “suicidal ideation,” “child welfare”). But in fact, they are doing no such thing. They are doing the distinctive work of policing, making situational judgments about their own responsibility to manage difficult problems that they share with other professionals who sometimes need their support when all else fails. (Thacher, 2022, p. 67)

The police “sort out” situations by listening patiently to endless stories about fancied slights, old grievances, new insults, mismatched expectations, indifference, infidelity, dishonesty, and abuse. They hear about all the petty, mundane, tedious, hapless, sordid details of individual lives. None of it is earthshaking, or worthy of a line in a newspaper—not the stuff that government policy can address, not even especially spicy; just the begrimed reality of the lives of people who have no one else to take their problems to. Patient listening and gentle counselling are undoubtedly what patrol officers do most of their time. (Bayley, 1994, p. 20)

Increasingly, police services are being required to fill gaps in services that are the mandated responsibility of other agencies and organizations. For example, when governments cut the numbers of social workers and mental health workers or funding for shelter beds and specialized facilities for the mentally ill, there is a direct impact on the demands placed on the police resources (Cotton & Coleman, 2010; Griffiths & Sopow, 2022; Griffiths et al., 2022). Police have become front-line responders to various social crises including homelessness, mental illness, and addiction.

It has been stated that “the increase in the demand for police services is not expected to diminish in the foreseeable future, which means that police agencies must be prepared to reorganize their structures and their resources to meeting the increase in demand” (den Heyer, 2016, p. 6). It has been noted that “the constrained environment offers an opportunity for police to innovate and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery” (den Heyer, 2016, p. 4). This includes considering consolidation, regionalization, and organizational centralization/decentralization. Additionally, these methods form the basis of new, open-minded approaches, and it is acknowledged that the status quo is not sustainable (Stenström, 2023; van Felijs et al., 2023).

To effectively carry out their mandate, police officers in the early 21st century must be highly trained and have the core competencies, including cultural competencies, to effectively respond to the broad range of demands placed on them. This includes training to effectively interact with at-risk and vulnerable groups, cultural and ethnic minorities, newcomers, and Indigenous Peoples. Many of the people they encounter are marginalized and vulnerable or suffering from addiction and mental health issues. Some of them are in crisis, in need of urgent care within the mental health system, or are otherwise experiencing a mental or emotional crisis involving erratic, threatening, or dangerous behaviour (Iacobucci, 2014). Police officers in the early 21st century are highly trained, multi-skilled professionals who have a broad range of demands placed on them. They must be able to deal with at-risk and vulnerable groups, cultural and ethnic minorities, newcomers, and Indigenous Peoples in a broad range of contexts.

This expansion of roles has also been accompanied by an increase in the structures of governance and accountability, discussed in Chapter 9, although there are ongoing controversies as to whether these processes are sufficient to ensure that the rights of citizens are protected from the misuse of police powers and authority.

## The Mandated Responsibilities of the Police

The **mandated responsibilities** of the police include the tasks assigned to them by legislation, including the RCMP Act and the various provincial and territorial police acts, as well as regulations and policies formulated by government. For example, section 11(1) of Ontario's *Community Safety and Policing Act, 2019* (SO 2019, c 1, Schedule 1) sets out the requirements for "adequate and effective policing," which includes the following functions:

1. crime prevention,
2. law enforcement,
3. maintaining the public peace,
4. emergency response,
5. assistance to victims of crime, and
6. any other prescribed policing functions.

There are similar mandated responsibilities of police officers in other jurisdictions.

Police services are also responsible for adhering to provincial policing standards and regulations. One example is the Ontario provincial regulation that sets out the protocol that officers must follow when conducting street checks. This is discussed in Chapter 6.

## The Assumed Responsibilities of the Police

**Assumed responsibilities** are those that are the result of community expectations, the expansion of police activities due to downloading, recommendations from task forces and commissions of inquiry, and the policies of individual police agencies as set out in strategic plans and documented in annual reports, among others. Police services are often required to fill gaps in services that are the mandated responsibility of other agencies and organization agencies. For example, government funding cuts for social workers and mental health workers, shelter beds, and specialized facilities for the mentally ill directly affect the demands placed on police resources (Cotton & Coleman, 2010).

The assumed responsibilities of the police include the following:

- developing and sustaining partnerships with the community;
- taking initiatives to improve the quality of life in communities and neighbourhoods;

### **mandated responsibilities**

the tasks assigned to the police by legislation, including the RCMP Act, various provincial and territorial police acts, and regulations and policies formulated by governments

### **assumed responsibilities**

police tasks that result from community expectations, downloading, third-party recommendations, and departmental strategic plans and policies

- providing reassurance to community residents and reducing the fear of crime;
- conducting outreach to newcomer groups, Indigenous Peoples, and at-risk and vulnerable groups;
- engaging in collaborative partnerships and integrated teams with agencies and organizations, including operating specialized patrol units; and
- partnering with agencies and organizations to address the needs of vulnerable and at-risk persons and groups (Griffiths & Stamatakis, 2012, p. 23; Montgomery & Griffiths, 2017).

The police role has become more multi-dimensional in recent years, often referred to as diversification. Increasingly, police services are being asked to respond to and address non-law enforcement issues. Most police services have developed an extensive network of collaborative partnerships with agencies and community organizations to address issues that affect the quality of life in the community.

The diversification of the police role has also been affected by the downloading of responsibilities by provincial governments onto municipalities. A review of cuts in federal and provincial funding found that “local governments are finding themselves picking up the slack in housing, mental health, [and] addiction,” responding to persons who are addicted, who are experiencing mental health issues, and who are housing challenged (Beresford, 2014). The role of police in filling the gaps left by other services prompted one policing scholar to refer to them as having developed “expertise” in institutional failure (Thacher, 2022, p. 74).

One example is the increasing amount of police time and resources that are expended in responding to persons with behavioural health issues (Luigi et al., 2024). It has been said that police have become de facto gatekeepers of the mental health system. The deinstitutionalization of mental health patients in the 1960s and 1970s resulted in a growing number of persons with behavioural health issues, many of whom had serious mental health issues, being released into the community without timely access to treatment programs and services. The concept of deinstitutionalization was primarily accepted on the premise that psychiatric units and community care facilities would be developed in all the large communities (Higenbottam, 2014).

This situation did not materialize, however, which resulted in persons with behavioural health issues becoming homeless, destitute, and without the necessary support to manage their mental health challenges. A review of police encounters with these people in Toronto, for example, found that there had been a failure of the provincial mental health system to provide adequate community-based treatment resources. The report also concluded that police alone could not effectively address the needs of these people and that a robust response was required by the provincial mental health system (Marcoux & Nicholson, 2018).

It is estimated that Canadian police services have about one million encounters each year with persons who are mentally ill or who are suffering from substance abuse, or both (Marcoux & Nicholson, 2018). In some police services, up to 40 percent of calls involve a person with behavioural health issues, some of whom have hundreds of contacts with the police annually (Thompson, 2010; Wilson-Bates, 2008). The challenges have become even greater in cases of persons who are severely addicted and mentally ill and have complex treatment needs.

The challenges for patrol officers and the strategies used by police services to respond to people with behavioural health issues are discussed in Chapters 6 and 11, respectively.

Police observers have argued that many of the difficulties the police have in fulfilling their mandate result from having assumed responsibility for a broad social domain in society. This has led to unrealistic expectations on the part of the public as to what the



police can realistically accomplish in terms of crime prevention and response. And it has challenged police services to document the effectiveness and efficiency of their operations.

## De-Tasking the Police: AKA Reducing the Police Footprint

In recent years, there has been a growing sentiment among political leaders, activists, academics, and citizens to reduce the role of the police in responding to social issues involving vulnerable persons, particularly persons in crises and those suffering from mental health issues, with some advocating for the police to be removed completely. Much of this sentiment stems from high-profile deaths of people with behavioural health issues and persons in crises during encounters with police.

Proponents of “de-tasking” the police advocate sending paramedics and counsellors rather than armed police officers to mental health crises and to send outreach workers to the homeless and people struggling with drug and alcohol addiction, for example. They believe that these trained professionals have the necessary skills and training to resolve these encounters more peacefully while providing people with helpful resources and diverting them from the criminal justice system.

Interestingly, police have expressed concerns about their role as mental health responders for most of the 21st century, often facing reluctance from policymakers (Huey et al., 2022). As noted above, the police made efforts to improve their response to these persons by developing multi-agency partnerships with other social service providers, including the development of specialized mental health teams made up of police and psychiatric nurses.

One challenge is that because of their unique role and authority, much of the work that police do cannot be easily assigned to other agencies. However, cities across Canada are beginning to pilot so-called alternative response models comprising non-police professionals, including social workers, paramedics, and outreach workers. The question of de-tasking the police and alternative responses will be discussed further in Chapters 6 and 11.

## THE UNIQUE ROLE OF THE POLICE IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

The police are only one component of the criminal justice system. While police officers have much in common with their professional counterparts in that system (e.g., they exercise considerable discretion in making decisions), they are also unique in many ways, including the following:

- Police work is carried out in diverse environments (Chapter 6).
- Police work takes place in a wide variety of situations and circumstances, many of which may involve personal conflict, crises and chaos, biohazards, blood, and sometimes death (Chapter 5).
- There are moral and ethical issues that surround police work (Chapter 9).
- Police officers have the authority to detain people and to use force, including lethal force (Chapter 7).
- Police work presents officers with situations in which they must make split-second decisions or decisions based on a limited amount of information, often involving the use of force (Chapter 8).
- Police work—especially community police work—involves extensive personal contact with the public and (increasingly) the development of partnerships with

communities, non-governmental organizations, the private sector, and even international partners (Chapter 10).

- Police work involves much more than law enforcement; it includes order maintenance, service, crime prevention, conflict mediation and dispute resolution, and public relations (Chapters 10 and 11).

## THE POLICE AS WARRIORS VERSUS THE POLICE AS GUARDIANS

Discussions of the roles and responsibilities of the police often include the issues of whether the police and police officers are “warriors” or “guardians”—that is, whether the primary role of the police is to enforce the law through the exercise of authority and a focus on law enforcement (**warrior role of the police**) or one that emphasizes service to, engagement with, and relationships with the community (**guardian role of the police**) (Schuck, 2024, p. 82).

The guardian orientation has been found to promote positive relationships with the community and increase the trust in and legitimacy of the police (Schuck, 2024, p. 89):

People tell good cops what is going on in their neighbourhoods and work with them to keep it safe. They view good cops as part of their community . . . The behaviour of the warrior cop, on the other hand, leads to the perception of an occupying force, detached, and separated from the community, missing opportunities to build trust and confidence based on positive interactions. (Rahr & Rice, 2015, pp. 3–4)

An emphasis on the guardian role has also been found to promote perceptions of legitimacy among community residents (Cross & Fine, 2024).

Ideally, police officers should incorporate both roles in their work, although police scholars have described this as an “impossible mandate”: the requirement that police officers be proactive in preventing and responding to crime while at the same time protecting residents and treating them fairly and with respect (Owens et al., 2018). How the role of the police is conceptualized and practised will affect recruitment, training, policies, and operations.

Research studies have found that the two concepts are not mutually exclusive and that police officers may adopt one role or the other depending upon the situation. It is possible (McLean et al., 2020, p. 1112; Owens et al., 2018; Schuck, 2024, p. 88).

How we understand the role of police affects all aspects of police functions. Access the video *Guardians of the Galaxy—What is Good Policing?* at the *Dig Deeper* link in the margin.

The concern over the militarization of the police (discussed in Chapter 2), for example, reflects a view that the police are trending toward the warrior end of the end of the spectrum. This may have significant impacts on police–community relations, particularly police relations with communities of diversity and racialized groups.

Equally important is the perspective of the senior leadership team in a police service on what the priorities of the agency should be, such as how to deploy resources and what activities police efforts should focus on. The organizational culture of a police service, which is heavily influenced by the senior leadership, may determine whether the emphasis is on one role or the other. Thus, “it is possible that particular cultures are more likely to produce officers with warrior guardian mindsets” (McLean et al., 2020, p. 1113).

**warrior role of the police**  
view of the police’s role that emphasizes enforcement and the exercise of authority

**guardian role of the police**  
view of the police’s role that emphasizes peacekeeping and protecting the community

[www.emond.ca/CPW6/links](http://www.emond.ca/CPW6/links)

### DIG DEEPER

Guardians of the Galaxy—  
What is Good Policing?

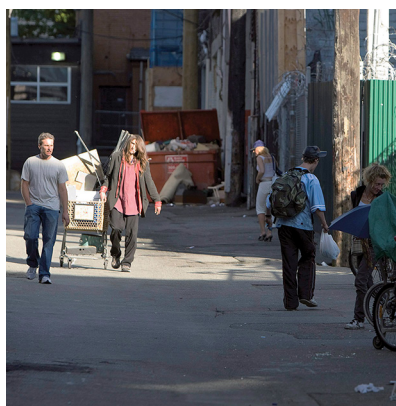
## THE ENVIRONMENTS OF POLICING

There are two primary environments that affect the activities of the police. The first is the internal environment of the police service itself, such as its organizational features. This includes its size and structure, as well as the activities and attitudes of its leaders, middle managers, civilian members, patrol officers, and investigative officers. It also includes the strategic planning and research capacities of the police service—that is, the organization's ability to develop strategic plans, evaluate its own performance, and implement reforms when required. The leadership of the police service is also important, as it contributes to the organizational climate in which officers work. The discussion in Chapter 6 will reveal that the dynamics inside the police service may have a significant impact on the morale, performance, and health and wellness of police officers.

The second environment of a police service is the external environment, or **task environment**, in which officers carry out their responsibilities. A task environment is the cultural, geographic, and community setting in which a police service operates and in which police officers make decisions. It also includes the types and patterns of crime that make demands on the police.

### task environment

the cultural, geographic, and community setting in which a police service operates



THE CANADIAN PRESS/Jonathan Hayward



Photononstop/Alamy Stock Photo



Ansgar Walk, CC BY-SA 2.5

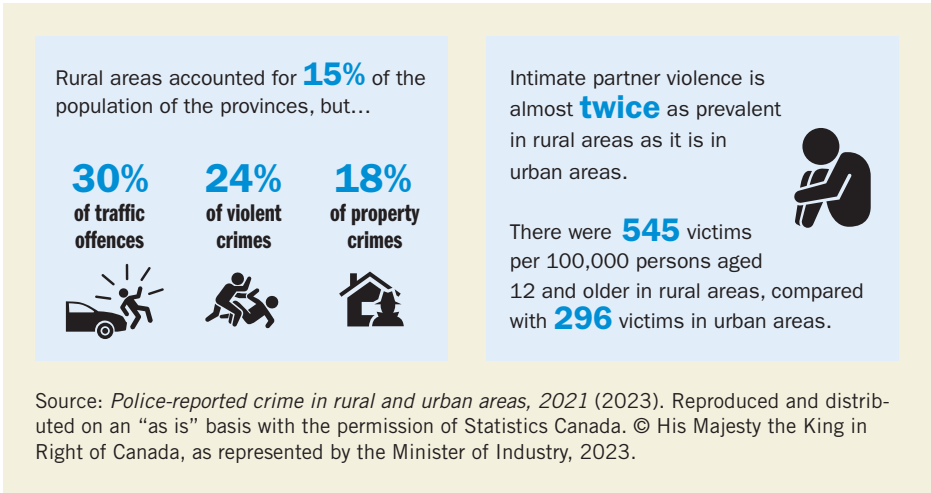
What does each image suggest to you about the task environment and the demands on and challenges for the criminal justice system?

Canada has a variety of policing environments, ranging from urban areas to remote communities in the Canadian North. The attributes of the community in which a police service operates strongly affect what police do and what is expected of them, as well as the administrative, operational, and investigative activities of the service.

Communities vary on several important dimensions, including their size; their socio-economic, ethnic, cultural, and religious composition; the types and patterns of crime and disorder; the attitudes toward and expectations of the police; the demands citizens make on the police; and the levels of citizen interest in becoming involved in police–community partnerships. For example, residents in neighbourhoods with higher levels of crime and social disorder generally place heavier demands on the police than those in quieter neighbourhoods. Police services must tailor their crime prevention and response strategies to the needs of specific neighbourhoods. See Figure 1.1 for crime in rural and urban areas in 2021.

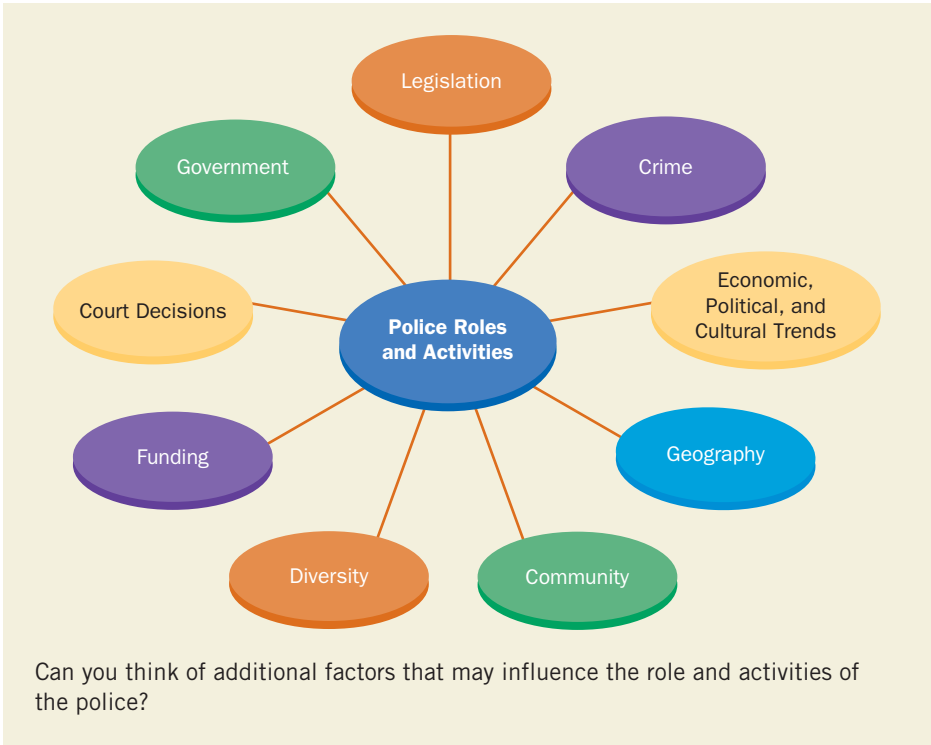
This external environment also includes the relations between the police service and communities; the impact of legislation, government policies, and court decisions; the fiscal decisions of governments and municipal councils; the media; and the specific incidents to which officers respond and what happens during those encounters, among other factors.

**FIGURE 1.1** Police-Reported Crime in Rural and Urban Areas, 2021



There are several factors that influence the role and activities of the police and the ability of the police to effectively respond to community expectations and to crime and disorder in any one jurisdiction. Several of these factors are depicted in Figure 1.2. Many of these same factors will influence the decision-making of patrol officers, discussed in Chapter 7.

**FIGURE 1.2** Influences on the Role and Activities of the Police





## THE DIMENSIONS OF POLICING

### Policing a Diverse Society

A key feature of Canada is diversity. This includes visible minorities, newcomers, Indigenous Peoples, people with a wide variety of religious beliefs, and members of the 2SLGBTQ2IA+ community, among others. Nearly one quarter of the Canadian population self-identifies as belonging to a visible minority, with the three largest groups being South Asian, Chinese, and Black. And one quarter of the population is either a landed immigrant or permanent resident (“Immigrants Make Up,” 2022). By 2036, it is estimated that between 31 percent and 36 percent of the Canadian population will be visible minorities. During 2022 and 2023, the Canadian population grew by more than one million people, including a 46 percent increase in temporary residents, the largest annual increase since 1957. It has been pointed out that these increases have put pressure on public services, including housing and medical care (Bayat Group, 2024). The extent to which police services have been affected by increased demands for service has yet to be documented.

Projections also suggest that the newcomer populations will continue to concentrate in Vancouver, Toronto, and Montreal; that more than one half of this group will come from Asia; and that more than 25 percent of the population will not have English or French as their first language.

Two thirds of newcomers to Canada settle in the urban centres of Vancouver, Toronto, and Montreal. Many of them have had negative experiences with, or hold less than favourable attitudes toward, the police in their countries of origin. Urban centres are also attracting increasing numbers of Indigenous persons from rural and remote areas. A study conducted in 2016 found that Toronto was the world’s most diverse city. Fifty-one percent of the city’s population is foreign-born, and there are 230 nationalities among its residents (Ngabo, 2016).

This diversity has significant implications for police work. Section 15(1) of the Charter guarantees equality rights: “Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability.” Section 3(1)(e) of the *Canadian Multiculturalism Act* (RSC 1985, c 24 (4th Supp)) states that it is the policy of the Government of Canada to “ensure that all individuals receive equal treatment and equal protection under the law, while respecting and valuing their diversity.”

The *Canadian Human Rights Act* (RSC 1985, c H-6) prohibits discrimination on the grounds of “race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, marital status, genetic characteristics, family status, disability and conviction for an offence for which a pardon has been granted or in respect of which a record suspension has been ordered” (s. 3(1)). Many provinces, including Ontario, British Columbia, Alberta, and Manitoba, have human rights codes that mirror the federal human rights code and contain sections creating human rights tribunals and proclaiming the right of residents to be free from discrimination. The debate over racial profiling by the police, discussed in Chapter 6, is illustrative of the human rights issues that surround police work in a diverse community.

Police services must strive to reflect the diversity of the communities they police, and officers must have the training to interact with a diverse population that may not have English or French as a first language. Recruiting diverse officers is discussed in Chapter 4.

Diversity also creates opportunities for the police to engage in innovative partnerships with the community and to collaborate in addressing problems of crime and social

disorder. It also requires police services to recruit officers that reflect the diversity of the community and to ensure that training provides the requisite competencies to be effective in interacting with communities of diversity. Community policing provides a framework for this and is discussed in Chapter 10.

Diversity also highlights human rights issues that are addressed by section 15(1) of the Charter and section 3(1)(e) of the *Canadian Multiculturalism Act*, discussed above.

It is important for officers to understand the lived experiences of people in communities of diversity. A project focusing on youth in the Jane-Finch community in Toronto gathered the perceptions of young people ( $N = 50$ ). One youth commented on the negative stereotypes that are often held of young Black men:

People automatically see you as a black young person and they feel that you being black, you would never amount to nothing. Especially coming from the Jane-Finch community, automatically number one what they think is that you being black, you're never going to be nothing good. But that's not always true. (Ollner et al., 2011, p. 5)

The controversy over racial profiling and biased policing by the police, discussed in Chapter 6, is illustrative of the human rights issues that surround policing a diverse community. The historical and contemporary relations between the police and Indigenous Peoples is discussed in Chapter 2.

## Geography

Canada is a huge but sparsely populated country. A unique feature of Canadian police work is that Ontario Provincial Police (OPP), Sûreté du Québec (SQ), and RCMP officers are posted to northern and remote communities. RCMP officers, often working in detachments as small as three members, are responsible for policing Indigenous and Inuit communities in Yukon, the Northwest Territories, and Nunavut. The challenges of policing in northern and remote communities, many of which are afflicted by high rates of crime and social disorder, have remained largely unexplored by Canadian police scholars (Griffiths, 2024). The discussion in Chapter 7 will reveal that the officers in these communities must be highly adaptable and, in the absence of the supportive infrastructure found in larger police services, self-sufficient.

## The Police Organization

Police services engage in a wide variety of activities, including establishing policies and procedures that officers must follow, setting priorities, determining how resources will be allocated, and setting standards for assessing officers' performance and career advancement, among others.

Police services also differ regarding the expectations of the communities they police, the number of officers in the department, and the perspectives of senior management.

However, all police services include a senior executive, middle management officers, patrol officers, investigative divisions (including specialty units), and various support services. General-duty policing is discussed in Chapter 6, and the work of specialty units and police investigators in Chapter 12.

Police officers in Canada work in departments and detachments that vary greatly in terms of size, structure, demands for service, and their organizational work culture. For example, although an RCMP officer may be posted to a three-officer detachment in a remote area, the officer is still accountable to an organizational hierarchy that stretches

many kilometres from the detachment to the subdivision, to the division headquarters, and to RCMP headquarters in Ottawa. RCMP policies and procedures are formulated in Ottawa and then transmitted regularly to the detachments through the division headquarters.

The discussion throughout this text will also highlight the importance of the police organization in understanding police ethics and professionalism (Chapter 9), the occupational experience of police officers (Chapter 6), and police use of force (Chapter 8), among others.

## Legislation

New laws and amendments to existing legislation can have a sharp impact on police powers, on the demands placed on police services, and on how police services set (and try to achieve) their operational priorities. Literally overnight, behaviour that was once criminal can become legal, and behaviour that was once legal can become criminalized. The *Anti-terrorism Act*, for example, gives police expanded powers to deal with individuals identified as posing a threat to safety and security and has also established a new crime—“terrorist activity.” Increasing police resources are being directed toward identifying and monitoring persons who have been deemed at risk of engaging in terrorist activities.

Another piece of legislation that has affected police resources is the *Access to Information Act*. This allows the public to request information from the police on a variety of matters, and there are extensive requirements for the police to obtain search warrants and DNA warrants. The expectation is that the police have the capacity to fulfill these requirements.

Before the legalization of cannabis in October 2018, the new law’s effects on the police were uncertain but were expected to increase pressure on police resources. Police services were concerned about increasing demands on forensic labs due to new impaired driving laws (Tunney & Cullen, 2018).

Bill C-46, in effect since Parliament passed it in June 2018, introduced three new drug-related offences for drivers who have consumed drugs within two hours of driving. It was estimated that requests for blood work would increase 12-fold between 2018 and 2021-2022. This, in turn, was expected to lead to more court delays. Shortly after cannabis was legalized on October 17, the Toronto Police Service issued a public notice telling the public not to call the police to report on neighbours who were growing marijuana.

Mothers Against Drunk Driving Canada conducted a scan of police services to assess the impact of this legislation, including police requests for blood work. They found that few police services (6 of 38 surveyed) regularly required a blood sample as the evidentiary follow-up to a drug recognition evaluation, while a larger proportion (15 of 38) occasionally required a blood sample, stating that they preferred urine testing instead (Dumschat, 2023).

## Court Decisions

Court decisions may affect not only the powers of the police but also policing costs. The decisions of the Supreme Court of Canada (SCC) have also been identified as a major reason that policing costs have increased (Easton et al., 2014).

One case that has significantly affected police resources is *R v Stinchcombe* (1991), which established the right to full disclosure of Crown evidence. Previously, police were only required to submit information sufficient for the Crown to make a case. Now the

police are required to provide the following information to Crown counsel and for dissemination to the defence lawyers:

all audio and video tapes; notebook entries from all officers; reports; all source debriefings; all tips (and outcomes of tips); all connected cases; all affiant material; all wiretap information; all operational plans; all surveillance notes; medical records; all analyses of telephone records or other documents; undercover operation information; information relating investigative techniques considered, whether they were actually used or not; and, investigative team minutes of meetings or debriefings. (Easton et al., 2014, p. 62)

These requirements may be particularly onerous in cases that have involved a lengthy and complex investigation. Significant police resources may be required to assemble this information (Jones et al., 2014).

Subsequent decisions of the SCC expanded the right to full disclosure. This included the decisions in *R v McNeil* (2009), where the Court held that disclosure extended to providing information on the arresting officer, and *R v O'Connor* (1995), relating to the disclosure of medical records of the complainant under certain circumstances.

The SCC's ruling in *R v Jordan* (2016) established strict timelines for hearing trials. This ruling has significantly affected police investigations, and its impacts will be explored in Chapter 12.

The expansion of legal regulations and levels of accountability have also affected all facets of policing, from the conduct of officers to case investigation. The procedural requirements for investigating and processing offences have resulted in a dramatic increase in the time and resources required to complete procedural requirements.

## Crime and Disorder

The amount and types of crime and social disorder in a community have a significant impact on the demands made on the police service and its officers.

The characteristics of a particular task environment influence the types of crime that justice system personnel are confronted with, the decision-making options that are available, the effectiveness of justice policies and programs, and the potential for developing community-based programs and services. In addition, the same urban area may contain a variety of task environments, ranging from neighbourhoods with a high concentration of services for vulnerable persons, to neighbourhoods with large populations of recently arrived immigrants, to exclusive, high-income neighbourhoods. Moreover, criminal justice personnel in remote and northern areas of the country face unique challenges as these communities may have access to few resources and community-based programs for victims and offenders.

Crime manifests itself differently in remote Arctic communities than in Vancouver's skid row or in a wealthy suburban Montreal neighbourhood (the highest rates of violent crime are in Canada's North). Likewise, the underlying factors that drive crime and disorder in communities can vary widely. For example, the legacy of colonialism and intergenerational trauma have a significant impact on crime and victimization in many Indigenous communities in rural and remote parts of the country. As these factors vary, so too may community expectations of the justice system and the relationship between the police and the community. See Police File 1.2 for a discussion of crime in rural areas.

Depending upon the given task environment, non-law enforcement issues may make as much, or more, demand on a police service as addressing criminal matters. These may include the challenges of assumed responsibilities discussed earlier in the chapter, such as maintaining order at political protests, responding to persons experiencing personal



crises, and responding to behaviour that place persons at risk (e.g., the consumption of illicit substances such as fentanyl).

## POLICE FILE 1.2

### Crime in Rural Canada

Though most of the Canadian population lives in or near urban areas, people living in rural areas are more likely to be affected by crime. There is a rural/urban split in terms of crime rates, which are higher in rural and northern communities than in urban centres.

In 2021, the Crime Severity Index (CSI), which measures the volume and the seriousness of crimes, was 33 percent higher in rural areas (91.9) than in urban areas (69.3). The gap was even greater for the Violent CSI. In 2021, the Violent CSI was 124.1 in rural areas and 85.2 in urban areas. Rates of crime are highest in northern parts of the country.

From 2011 to 2021, rural police services reported a total of 1,400 homicides, which translates to an average annual rate of 2.22 homicides per 100,000 population. By comparison, urban police departments reported 5,471 homicides during this period, which represents a rate of 1.64 homicides per 100,000 population.

These are communities where there may be the fewest resources and where officers are challenged to meet the demands made on them (see Chapter 7). In 2021, 15 percent of Canada's population was served by rural police services. However, 24 percent of violent crimes, 18 percent of property crimes, 30 percent of *Criminal Code* traffic offences, and 23 percent of other *Criminal Code* violations were reported by rural police.

The type of crime that officers posted in rural communities respond to can be very challenging. For example, violent firearm-related offences, sexual offences against children, uttering threats, criminal harassment, and indecent or harassing communications were among the violent crimes overrepresented in rural areas in 2021.

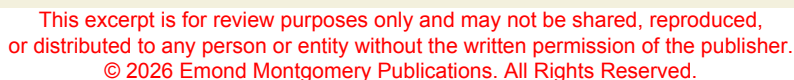
Source: Perreault (2023).

Besides the more traditional types of crime (i.e., robberies, assaults, property crimes), police services are now being confronted with increasingly sophisticated criminal activities, such as cybercrime, money laundering, and human trafficking, that often involve complex international or transcontinental organized criminal networks.

Data on police-reported crime in Canada in 2023 is presented in Figure 1.3.

Another growing concern for police services is the rise in police-reported hate crimes. Since 2018, Canada has experienced spikes in the number of hate crimes reported to police. These spikes coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic and the rise of populist politics and inflammatory rhetoric directed toward immigrant, racialized, and religious minority groups (RCMP, 2024). The rate of police-reported hate crime more than doubled from 2019 to 2023 (+130 percent) ("Police-Reported Hate Crime in Canada, 2023," 2025).

Increasing attention is also being given to the victimization of persons in other communities of diversity, including the 2SLGBTQ2IA+ community. Persons in this community are more at risk of being victims of a violent crime than their heterosexual counterparts. Gay, lesbian, bisexual, and other sexual minority people in Canada were almost three times more likely than heterosexual Canadians to report that they had been physically or sexually assaulted in the previous 12 months in 2018 and more than twice as likely to report having been violently victimized since the age of 15. Sexual minority Canadians were also more than twice as likely as heterosexual Canadians to experience inappropriate sexual behaviours in public, online, or at work in the previous 12 months ("Sexual Minority People," 2020).



## Questions:

1. What are the distinctive features of crime in Canada?
2. What are the implications for policing of these patterns?

Source: “Police-Reported Crime Statistics in Canada, 2023” (2024). Reproduced and distributed on an “as is” basis with the permission of Statistics Canada. © His Majesty the King in Right of Canada, as represented by the Minister of Industry, 2024.

Caution should be exercised in any discussion of crime rates. There are several factors that may influence police-reported crime statistics, including legislative changes, the policies and procedures of individual police services, and public reporting rates, as well as the lack of awareness that a crime has occurred, among other factors. This creates a **dark figure of crime**—that is, the amount of crime that for whatever reason is not reported to the police. On the other hand, increased awareness that certain behaviours are criminal, such as incidents involving hate crimes, may result in statistical increases in crime rates.

Sexual assaults have traditionally been underreported by women and, even when reported to police, may be dismissed as “unfounded.” This is discussed in Chapter 12. Even homicides may be underreported, especially in cases involving organized crime or the deaths of individuals who live and/or work on the street. Non-violent crimes including theft and vandalism may also be underreported. This dark figure is a result of many factors, including the unwillingness of crime victims to report to the police, a lack of confidence in the police to resolve the matter, the fact that some crimes have no direct victim (e.g., pollution), and the fact that many of the conflicts to which police officers respond are resolved informally without any charges being laid. Persons or organizations may also not realize they have been victimized. Cybercrime and hacking attacks may never be discovered or only be discovered years after the crime has been committed.

**dark figure of crime**

the difference between how much crime occurs and how much crime is reported to or discovered by the police

## KEY THEMES IN THE STUDY OF CANADIAN POLICE WORK

The discussion in the following chapters is centred on several key themes, as discussed below.

### Police Ethics and Accountability

The powers of the police, including the authority to use lethal force, require that police officers adhere to a high ethical standard and be accountable for their actions. There is an increasing demand that police services be transparent in their activities and are accountable for the decisions they make and the resources they expend and that oversight structures be in place. Transparency and accountability are required at the community and government levels, and police services that employ best practices will have capacities to provide ongoing communication and information-sharing with their key stakeholders. There may also be situations in which officers act in accordance with their legal authorities but their actions still raise ethical issues. This often comes into play in the exercise of discretion, discussed in Chapters 6 and 7, as well as in ethical and accountability issues in policing, discussed in Chapter 9.

### The Importance of Police Legitimacy and Procedural Justice

Another theme in this text is **police legitimacy**. If police services are to be effective in carrying out their various roles and responsibilities, they must have the trust and

**police legitimacy**

the collective actions taken by the police to enhance citizens’ levels of trust and confidence in the police

**procedural justice**  
police behaviour that is  
marked by transparency  
and the fair, equitable,  
and respectful treatment  
of persons in encounter  
situations

confidence of citizens. To establish and maintain legitimacy, community notions of justice and fairness must be “enshrined in institutions and in the actions of authorities” (Tyler, 2006, p. 392). The ways in which police services can establish legitimacy in the community and gain public trust are discussed in Chapter 10.

One way that police agencies can increase their legitimacy in the view of the public is through engaging in **procedural justice** in encounters with persons. There is evidence that when citizens feel their interactions with police officers are procedurally just—that is, the police treat them with dignity, respect, and equitably—they are more likely to view the police as legitimate and, subsequently, are more likely to obey the law and cooperate with police to help address crime-related issues in the community (RCMP, 2024; White et al., 2023, citing Tyler). Procedural justice will be discussed further in Chapter 6.

## The Police and Communities

Police–community relationships are at the core of policing. The extent to which police services are successful in establishing partnerships with communities based on trust will have a significant impact on the effectiveness and efficacy of police service delivery.

Canada is a diverse, multicultural society that includes BIPOC and other racialized groups, the 2SLGBTQ2IA+ community, and religious and cultural minorities. Police relationships and encounters with people in communities of diversity are the focus of ongoing attention and controversy. It is important that police officers have the requisite skill sets to engage with persons in communities of diversity, including using the principles of procedural justice, which require specific listening and communication skills.

There are, for example, ongoing tensions between the police and communities of diversity over the issue as to whether police officers engage in biased policing and racial profiling. This is discussed in Chapter 6. Profiling can occur not only in policing but also at other stages of the criminal justice system as well. Black accused persons, for example, may be more likely to be denied bail due to an assumed higher level of risk and are disproportionately placed in segregation in correctional institutions (Griffiths, 2024). Similarly, racialized persons often face challenges in accessing justice (Go, 2014; Griffiths, 2024).

An online survey ( $N = 1,000$ ) in Vancouver found that 82 percent of visible minorities indicated they had been subjected to prejudice or other forms of discrimination (Merali, 2017). A 2024 poll revealed that three in ten Canadians stated that they had experienced hiring or workplace discrimination (“Three-in-Ten Canadians,” 2024).

## The Police and Vulnerable and At-Risk Persons and Groups

A high number of the persons with whom police officers come into contact are vulnerable and/or at risk. This includes persons with mental illness, persons with addiction issues, persons living in poverty, persons who are vulnerable to being victimized, and persons who are housing challenged. The frequency with which the police encounter vulnerable and at-risk persons has become more prevalent due to the intersecting crises of homelessness, addiction, and mental illness being experienced in urban and rural communities across the country.

Indigenous persons consistently experience higher rates of victimization, including crimes of violence, than non-Indigenous Canadians. Self-report surveys reveal:

- About 4 in 10 Indigenous people experienced sexual or physical violence by an adult before the age of 15. The proportion was about twice as high among Indigenous people aged 55 and older (54 percent) compared with those aged 15 to 34 (26 percent).



- More than one quarter (26 percent) of Indigenous women experienced sexual violence by an adult during their childhood, compared with 9.2 percent of non-Indigenous women, 5.8 percent of Indigenous men, and 2.8 percent of non-Indigenous men.
- In 2019, nearly one in ten (8.4 percent) Indigenous people were victims of sexual assault, robbery, or physical assault, about twice the proportion of non-Indigenous people (4.2 percent).
- There are, for example, high rates of victimization, particularly among Indigenous women, including a homicide rate for Indigenous women that is nearly six times higher than for non-Indigenous women—4.82 per 100,000 population versus 0.82 per 100,000 (Perreault, 2022; RCMP, 2014).

Indigenous persons are overrepresented in the criminal justice system, including in correctional institutions at a rate that is nine times their representation in the general population for adults and five times their representation for youth (Griffiths, 2024; Griffiths & Murdoch, 2023).

## Inequality

A key feature of Canadian society is inequality. In 2019, the top 1 percent of Canadian income earners earned an average of nearly \$294,000, while the bottom 99 percent earned an average of \$40,600, although income inequality has improved in recent years (Conference Board of Canada, 2022, pp. 3, 8). However, women, racialized groups, new Canadians, and Indigenous Peoples experience challenging economic circumstances. In contrast, more than 1 million children are living in low-income households (Young, 2017). Low income and poverty are associated with poor health, a lack of access to services, and a higher risk of becoming involved in the criminal justice system. Poverty, for example, has been found to be related to child anxiety, depression, and anti-social behaviour (Strohschein & Gauthier, 2018).

Despite higher income levels, poverty was more prevalent in large urban areas, reflecting higher costs of living. Among large urban centres, the poverty rate was highest in Vancouver (11.2%), Halifax (10.5%) and Toronto (10.0%), and lowest in Québec (4.8%), Saguenay (5.3%) and Oshawa (5.3%).

...

Among racialized groups, 10.8% of South Asian, 15.3% of Chinese and 12.4% of Black Canadians lived in poverty in 2020. The prevalence of poverty varied markedly between racialized groups and regions. For example, the poverty rate among Black Canadians was 15.8% in Winnipeg and 9.7% in Montréal. (*Disaggregated Trends*, 2022, “Highlights”)

Around 40 percent of children in Indigenous communities live below the poverty line. The rate of poverty for First Nations women is double that of non-Indigenous women (*Understanding Poverty*, 2022). In 2021, 16.5 percent of people with disabilities lived in poverty (more than 1.5 million people) compared with 8.6 percent of people without disabilities (*Disability Poverty in Canada*, 2024, p. 8).

Analyses using 2021 census data found:

1. Nearly one quarter of people living in one-parent families (OPFs) were below the poverty line in 2022.
2. Those in OPFs headed by a woman were almost four times more likely to live below the poverty line (23.8 percent) than those in couple families with children (6.3 percent).

3. Persons in OPFs headed by an immigrant woman (26.5 percent) were most likely to be in low-income brackets, followed by persons in OPFs headed by a non-immigrant woman (24.1 percent), an immigrant man (21.4 percent), and a non-immigrant man (18.5 percent).
4. Close to one in two persons (46 percent) in OPFs headed by a woman experienced food insecurity in 2022, compared with nearly one third (32.3 percent) of those in OPFs headed by a man and nearly one in four (22.9 percent) people in Canada overall (“Despite Progress,” 2024, “Poverty and food security”).

Inequality is also reflected in the gap in workplace wages between men and women. It is estimated that gender inequality in the workplace costs Canada \$150 billion a year (Devillard et al., 2017). Data indicate that women working full-time earn 74.2 cents for every dollar that full-time male workers make (Grant, 2017). This disparity is due, in part, to gender differences in industry and occupation (Schirle, 2015). Surveys have found that while a majority of Canadians feel that gender equality has progressed, the wage gap is viewed as a major obstacle to professionals in this area (Racco, 2017). Although the wage gap has decreased in recent years, there are still discrepancies that have a significant impact on women, their families, and the economy (Fox & Moyser, 2018). The Black population has lower rates of participation in the labour market (Houle, 2020, p. 31).

## Racism, Prejudice, and Discrimination

**racism**  
prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism directed against someone of a different race based on the belief that one's own race is superior

**systemic discrimination**  
treating persons or groups unfairly by imposing a burden on them or denying them a privilege, benefit, or opportunity enjoyed by others because of their race, citizenship, family status, disability, sex, or other personal characteristics

**prejudice**  
unsubstantiated negative pre-judgment of individuals or groups, generally on the basis of ethnicity, religion, or race

**Racism**, bias, and **systemic discrimination** have been long-standing features of Canadian society, and these may be generally manifested at times in the criminal justice system and, specifically, in the actions of police.

An analysis of data from the Canadian Social Survey found that between 2021 and 2024, just over half (51 percent) of racialized individuals aged 15 and older reported facing discrimination or unfair treatment in the previous five years—almost twice the rate reported by non-racialized individuals (27 percent). Among racialized groups, the overall rates of discrimination were similar.

However, experiences of discrimination differed based on intersecting identities, such as immigration status. Canadian-born racialized individuals were more likely to report discrimination (57 percent) compared to those who immigrated recently (48 percent) or more than a decade ago (49 percent). This gap was especially notable among Black Canadians: 71 percent of Canadian-born Black people reported discrimination, compared to 51 percent of recent Black immigrants and 59 percent of those who had been in Canada for over 10 years (“Half of Racialized People,” 2024).

Black people in Canada have experienced racism, **prejudice**, and discrimination historically and in contemporary times. Unbeknownst to many Canadians, there was slavery in Canada from the 1600s to the early 1800s, and segregation of Black people in public facilities and neighbourhoods occurred throughout the 20th century (Griffiths, 2024). Black people in Canada have been subjected to discrimination perpetrated by state-funded institutions, including the criminal justice system and, most notably, the police (Austin, 2021). A survey of legal problems experienced by Black people found that 48 percent of the respondents had experienced discrimination in public settings, 44 percent had difficulties with respect to housing, 40 percent had issues in encounters with police, and 36 percent experienced issues with employment (Brown et al., 2021, p. 6; Griffiths, 2024). Police relations with Black people and communities is a key focus of this text.

Indigenous Peoples in Canada have been subjected to colonialization, racism, and discrimination. Many Indigenous people live on the margins of Canadian society, a legacy of colonization and the residential school system. This is reflected in pervasive poverty, high rates of unemployment, low levels of formal education, and high death rates from accidents and violence. On nearly every measure of health and well-being,

Indigenous people are much worse off than non-Indigenous people (McNally & Martin, 2017).

Increasing concerns with the plight of Indigenous Peoples prompted the creation of the federally sponsored Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which issued its final report in 2015. The intergenerational impact of residential schools was identified by the Commission as a major factor in Indigenous people's conflict with the law. The Commission's final report contained 94 recommendations in its Calls to Action, several of which were directed toward the law and criminal justice system. The complete list of recommendations is available in the Commission's summary report (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015).

Discussions on how to address these issues in society and in the criminal justice system involve a distinction between **equality** and **equity**. Equality is giving the same opportunities, support, and resources to everyone. Equity is recognizing that a person's circumstances or life history require specific consideration and resources.

These dynamics may exist at any one point in the criminal justice system, including in the decision-making of police officers, in the courts at sentencing, and in institutional and community-based corrections. Recall the tenets of the critical perspective of policing wherein the police are viewed as an instrument of the powerful to be used against those who are vulnerable and at-risk.

The presence of racism and discrimination is not always overt but may be subconscious on the part of justice system personnel or may be subtle and not readily identifiable. Also, persons in conflict with the law may perceive that they are the victims of prejudice, discrimination, and racism even in instances where there is no substantial proof that it has occurred. Nevertheless, it is important to understand the basis of these perceptions.

The United Nations has raised questions about Canada's record on anti-racism, citing the continuing challenges facing Indigenous Peoples (Ontario Council on Agencies Serving Immigrants, 2017; Paradkar, 2017). There is evidence that racism and discrimination exist in Canada, particularly with respect to women, Indigenous persons, persons in racialized groups, and other marginalized persons. This is reflected in the increase in police-reported hate crimes related to religion, race, and ethnicity. See Figure 1.4.

### **equality**

ensuring everyone has the same opportunities, support, and resources

### **equity**

recognition that a person's circumstances or life history require specific consideration and resources

## **The Health and Wellness of Police Officers and Civilian Staff**

Historically, little attention has been given to the health and wellness of police officers and even less to civilian staff in police services. This has changed in recent years, with increasing concerns being voiced about the high rates of depression, anxiety, cynicism, and post-traumatic stress disorder among officers, as well as other first responders. These concerns, along with growing concerns about sexual harassment and bullying of police officers and civilian employees, has prompted scrutiny of the organizational culture of police services. These issues, which affect the professional and personal lives of officers, are discussed in Chapter 5.

## **KEY QUESTIONS TO KEEP IN MIND**

The study of policing must consider myriad questions, including:

1. What is policing?
2. Who is involved in policing?
3. What do the police actually do?
4. Do police services provide an adequate return on investment?
5. What are the means and powers of policing?
6. What social functions do they achieve?
7. How does policing affect different groups of citizens?

8. By whom are the police themselves policed, by what means, and to what ends?
  9. What limits should there be on police powers?
  10. What is the best way to measure the effectiveness and efficiency of the police?
  11. What is the best way to ensure accountability and transparency of police?
  12. How can the developing purposes and practices of policing be understood?
- (Adapted from Reiner, 2010, p. 145)

Can you think of additional questions that should be asked, and that you would ask, at the outset of your study of police work in Canada?

**FIGURE 1.4** Police-Reported Hate Crime in Canada, 2021



## SUMMARY

The discussion in this chapter has focused on some of the roles of the police in Canadian society and the challenges of doing police work in a democratic society that centre on protecting the community while ensuring the rights of citizens. The chapter provided a definition of policing and explained that the police carry out their activities within a legislative framework that defines their roles, powers, and responsibilities. The chapter also examined two different perspectives on the role of the police: the social contract perspective and the critical perspective.

Several influences on the role and activities of the police were discussed, including community diversity and expectations of the police; the nature and levels of crime occurring in the community; legislation; and court decisions. Key themes in the study of police work were identified, including ethics and accountability, legitimacy, leadership, police–community relations, dealings with vulnerable and at-risk persons, and the health and wellness of police officers.

## KEY POINTS REVIEW

1. The police occupy a unique and important place in the criminal justice system and in Canadian society.
2. There is often a disconnect between the image and the reality of policing.
3. Policing can be defined as the “activities of any individual or organization acting legally on behalf of public or private organizations or persons to maintain security or social order.”
4. Canadian police operate within a legislative framework that includes the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, the *Constitution Act, 1867*, the *Criminal Code*, various police acts, and other legislation.
5. There are two major perspectives on the role of the police, one of which views the police as a politically neutral force and the other that views the police as an instrument of government and powerful interests.
6. The warrior versus guardian role of the police highlights the tension between protecting the community and ensuring citizens’ rights.
7. The police have both mandated and assumed responsibilities.
8. There has been an expansion of the police role in recent years that has included increased collaboration with agencies and communities.
9. The use of authority and the authority to use force are two defining components of the police role.
10. There are a variety of influences on the role and activities of the police.
11. In studying policing, it is important to consider the challenges of policing a diverse society and the role and impact of geography, the police organization, legislation, court decisions, and crime patterns.
12. Key themes in the study of police work are police ethics and accountability, police legitimacy, police leadership, the police and communities of diversity, the police and vulnerable and at-risk persons, the mental health of police officers.

## KEY TERM QUESTIONS

1. What is the definition of “policing”?
2. Why are the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, the *Constitution Act, 1867*, and the *Criminal Code* important in any discussion of Canadian police work?
3. What is the RCMP Act?
4. Compare and contrast the social contract perspective on the role of the police with the critical perspective.
5. What is meant by the term “political policing” and how is this related to the study of police work?
6. Compare and contrast the warrior and guardian roles of the police.
7. What is meant by the mandated and assumed responsibilities of the police?
8. Discuss the concept of the task environment of the police and note its components.



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