

1958

The Mobility of Chiefs of Police

Walter A. Lunden

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarlycommons.law.northwestern.edu/jclc>

 Part of the [Criminal Law Commons](#), [Criminology Commons](#), and the [Criminology and Criminal Justice Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Walter A. Lunden, The Mobility of Chiefs of Police, 49 J. Crim. L. Criminology & Police Sci. 178 (1958-1959)

This Criminology is brought to you for free and open access by Northwestern University School of Law Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology by an authorized editor of Northwestern University School of Law Scholarly Commons.

THE MOBILITY OF CHIEFS OF POLICE

WALTER A. LUNDEN

The author is a Professor of Sociology at Iowa State College, Ames, Iowa and has carried out a number of research studies in the field of social science relating to the administration of criminal justice. In his present article he discussed the rapid turnover of chiefs of police based upon a study made of representative Iowa departments.—EDITOR.

Because public sentiment maintains that the police system must be responsive to local conditions and because the power of appointment rests with the executive authority in city government, the tenure of chiefs of police in the United States is relatively short, and the turnover is rapid. Very few police administrators hold their positions for more than three or four years before they are removed by changes in a city administration. This short tenure and rapid turn over at the will of the executive authority has created serious problems in police work throughout the nation. Constant and rapid change in chiefs of police creates a certain lack of uniformity and continuity in law enforcement. In spite of the beneficial element of public control the rapid mobility of chiefs of police has brought about "confused thinking and certain official practices which are nothing less than outrageous. From it we get ill equipped and untrained political birds-of-passage for the command of our police forces."¹

METHOD OF ANALYSIS

Because Bruce Smith raised the question of short tenure of police administrators in 1940, and many others have since then, we set about to determine just how long chiefs of police hold office in a number of cities. In addition, we calculated the rate of turnover of chiefs for a given number of years and found the reasons for the changes which had been made. Through the cooperation of 60 police chiefs in Iowa it has been possible to determine the service period for 407 chiefs in cities ranging in size from about 100,000 inhabitants to

¹BRUCE SMITH, *POLICE SYSTEMS IN THE UNITED STATES*, 1940, p. 242. Smith points out that El Paso, Texas, had 7 chiefs of police in 7 years from 1915 to 1923; whereas St. Paul, Minnesota, had 8 chiefs in 6 years from 1930 to 1936. In Detroit, Michigan, there were 4 police commissioners in one year, 1930. Also during the administration of Mayor Walker of New York City there were 5 police commissioners in six and one-half years.

those with less than 10,000 citizens. The time span covered for each city varied, but some reported information as far back as 1899. Data for the reporting cities are shown in Table 1 for 59 cities in Iowa indicating the time span, the number of chiefs of police, and the average time in office.

LENGTH OF SERVICE FOR 407 CHIEFS OF POLICE IN CITIES IN IOWA

The length of time each of the 407 chiefs of police held office has been tabulated and the results are shown graphically in chart 1. The service periods ranged from 33 years to less than one year with an average of 4.3 years. Of the 407 chiefs of police 320 or 78.7 percent held office for 5 years or less. Furthermore, 190 or 46.6 percent held their position for 2 years or less before they were replaced. There were 52 (12.6 percent) who held office for 6 to 10 years, 18 (4.4 percent) for 11 to 15 years, 10 (2.5 percent) for 16 to 20 years, and 2 (0.5 percent) for 21 to 25 years. There were 5 chiefs who held office continuously for more than 25 years.

These data reveal the relatively short tenure of chiefs of police in cities in a mid-western state. More than three-fourths (78.7 percent) held office for 5 years or less before they were replaced. The generalization may be made, with some reservations, that what is typical for Iowa is also true for other cities in the region.

THE RATE OF TURNOVER

The relative short tenure for chiefs of police leads to the next problem of turnover or rate of change. In order to determine the rate or percentage of change, new appointment of chiefs of police were tabulated year by year from 1931 through 1955, a period of 26 years. Not all cities reported data for years earlier than 1931; therefore, the analysis has been limited to the 26 years covering the appointments of 303 chiefs of police in 56 cities.

TABLE 1
LENGTH OF SERVICE OF CHIEFS OF POLICE IN 59 CITIES IN IOWA, 1899-1956

City	Period	Years	Number of Chiefs	Average Years Served
Class I—Over 100,000 inhabitants				
Des Moines (176)*	1928-52	24	10	2.4
Class II—50,000 to 100,000				
Cedar Rapids (86)	1923-57	34	8	4.3
Davenport (75)	1900-57	57	17	3.3
Sioux City (94)	1930-53	23	13	1.7
Waterloo (61)	1906-46	40	14	2.8
Class III—25,000 to 50,000				
Burlington (34)	1933-52	19	8	2.4
Clinton (26)	1930-55	25	13	1.8
Council Bluffs (38)	1900-49	49	18	2.7
Dubuque (39)	1900-52	52	7	7.6
Mason City (33)	1929-55	26	4	6.5
Ottumwa (31)	1929-51	22	6	3.7
Class IV—10,000 to 25,000				
Ames (16)	1919-48	29	2	14.5
Boone (15)	1918-49	31	3	10.3
Fort Dodge (22)	1919-51	32	10	3.2
Fort Madison (13)	1930-56	26	10	2.6
Iowa City (21)	1929-52	23	8	3.4
Keokuk (19)	1899-58	59	22	2.7
Marshalltown (18)	1927-57	30	7	4.3
Class V—2,500 to 10,000				
Albia (3)	1930-51	21	2	10.5
Algona (5)	1930-55	25	5	5.0
Atlantic (4)	1931-51	20	12	1.6
Bettendorf (8)	1944-51	7	2	3.5
Bloomfield (3)	1930-58	28	3	9.3
Carroll (5)	1930-55	25	4	6.2
Cedar Falls (11)	1903-56	53	5	10.6
Chariton (4)	1930-53	23	6	4.0
Charles City (10)	1932-51	19	1	19.0
Cherokee (5)	1930-52	22	9	2.3
Clarinda (4)	1927-55	28	6	4.7
Cleark Lake (5)	1930-55	25	4	6.2
Cresco (3)	1937-54	17	5	3.4
Decorah (5)	1900-42	42	7	6.0
Denison (4)	1942-52	10	2	5.0
DeWitt (3)	1930-57	27	1	27.0
Eagle Grove (4)	1929-35	6	1	6.0
Estherville (6)	1929-57	27	8	3.4
Evansdale (4)	1949-57	8	3	2.7
Fairfield (5)	1899-56	57	17	3.3

TABLE 1—Continued
Class V—continued

Grinnell (5).....	1921-55	34	5	7.0
Hampton (3).....	1901-57	56	15	3.7
Hawarden (3).....	1901-56	55	16	3.4
Humboldt (3).....	1899-56	57	4	14.2
Independence (5).....	1927-58	31	8	4.2
Iowa Falls (6).....	1929-57	28	5	5.6
Le Mars (4).....	1923-38	15	1	15.0
Manchester (4).....	1920-49	29	2	14.5
Missouri Valley (3).....	1929-54	25	6	4.1
Mt. Pleasant (8).....	1930-56	26	6	4.3
New Hampton (4).....	1926-52	26	3	9.0
Oelwein (6).....	1930-53	23	5	4.5
Osage (3).....	1930-54	24	2	12.0
Red Oak.....	1900-54	54	13	4.1
Rock Rapids (3).....	1921-57	36	2	18.0
Sheldon (3).....	1929-54	25	3	8.3
Shenandoah (5).....	1929-51	22	6	3.7
Spencer (8).....	1930-48	18	5	3.6
Storm Lake (6).....	1930-56	26	6	4.3
Vinton (4).....	1929-56	27	8	3.4
Waverly (4).....	1926-55	29	6	5.0

* The number after each city is the size of the police force as reported in *Uniform Crime Reports*, F.B.I., U.S. Dept. of Justice, Vol. XX, No. 1, 1949

CHART 1

LENGTH OF SERVICE FOR 407 CHIEFS OF POLICE IN 59 CITIES IN IOWA, 1899 TO 1956

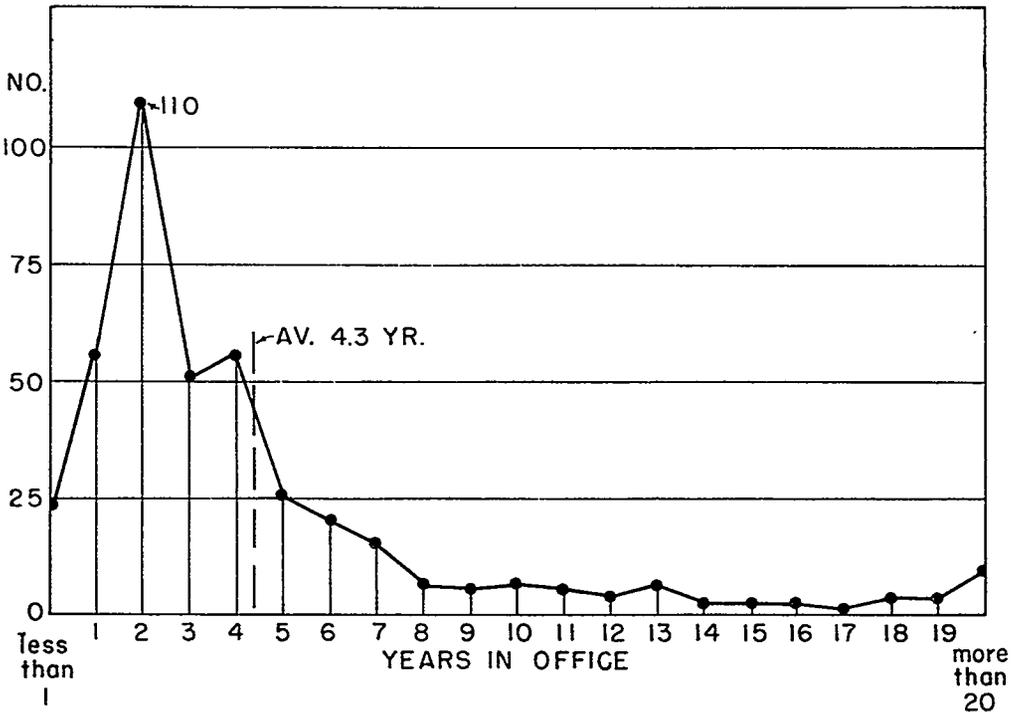
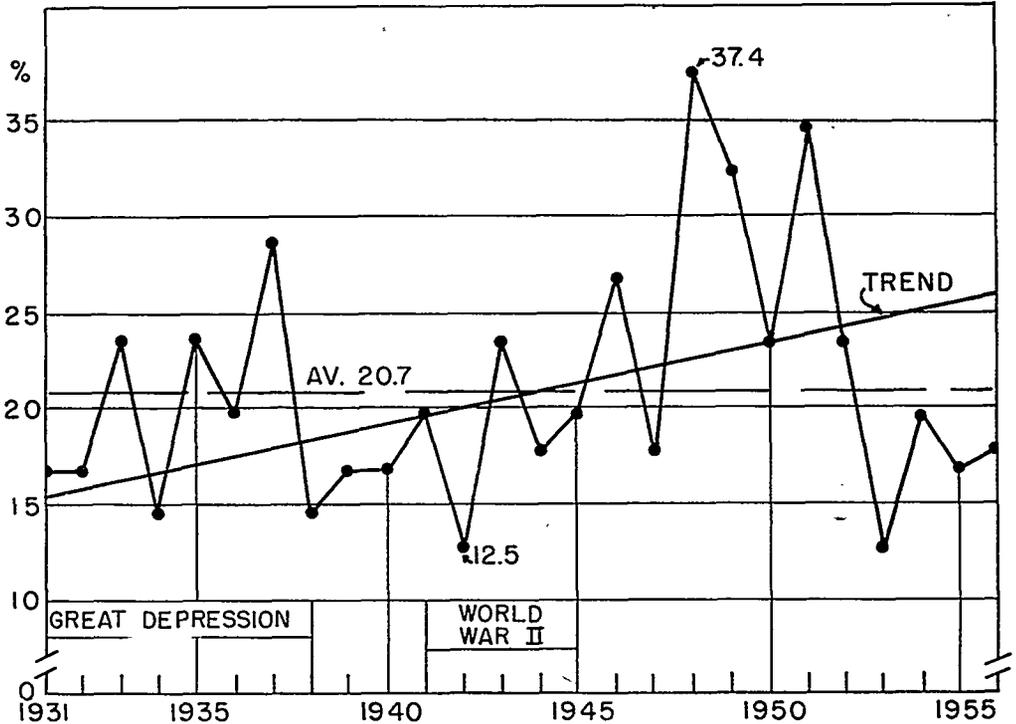


CHART 2

PERCENTAGE OF CHANGES IN CHIEFS OF POLICE IN 56 CITIES IN IOWA, 1931 TO 1956



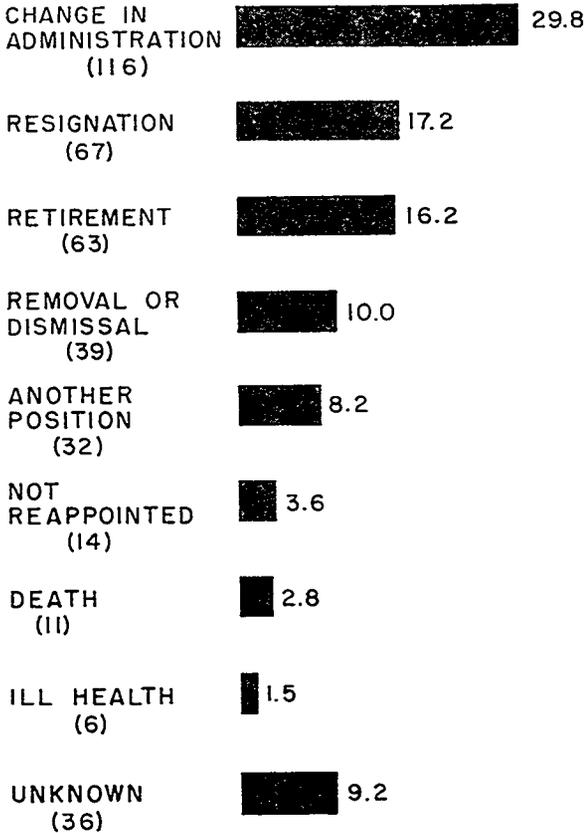
In 1931, new appointments occurred in 9 of the 56 cities making a change of 16.7 percent or a rate of 16.7 per 100 positions. During the 26 year period the average change amounted to 11.6 chiefs or 20.7 percent for the 56 cities. Thus in about one-fifth of the cities there had been a change in chiefs of police each year. The lowest percentage of turnover in the 26 years occurred in 1942 (12.5 percent) and in 1953 (12.5 percent); whereas the highest appeared in 1948 with 37.4 percent. In order to show the annual variations in the changes the percentages have been plotted on Chart 2. Turnover rates were high in 1936 and in 1948 through 1952. In spite of the decline in percentage of changes in the past four years the overall rate has increased during the 26 year period. The trend line on the chart shows the rise. The percentage in the first half (1931 to 1943) was 17.8 whereas it increased to 23.2 in the second half (1944 to 1956). Whether the trend will continue to increase depends on conditions in the local government of these cities.

REASONS FOR TURNOVER

Not all the reports from the various cities gave "the reason" for the termination of the duties of

the chiefs of police in the respective cities, but a given number did list causes where they were known. In some reports all reasons were listed as "unknown" whereas others gave reasons for some changes. In cases where all were indicated as "unknown" the city was omitted from the tabulation, but where some reasons were given the "unknowns" were listed. From the reports it has been possible to summarize the causes into 8 main reasons for the termination of service in 390 cases. Of the total number, 116 or 29.8 percent of the removals were made because of "changes in city administration" or for "political" reasons. The next highest number was due to "resignation" with 67 or 17.2 percent of the total. "Retirement" ranked third with 63 or 16.2 percent "removal" or "dismissal" accounted for 39 or 10 percent whereas 32 or 8.2 percent were due to the fact that the incumbent moved to "another position". Of the total, 14 or 3.6 percent were "not reappointed". It is possible that this reason may be included in the "changes in administration", but they are listed separately. Eleven (11) or 2.8 percent of the changes were due to "death" (i.e., natural and not killed in action). Six of the shifts were caused by "ill health", and the same number

CHART 3
REASONS FOR CHANGES IN CHIEFS OF POLICE IN IOWA CITIES
PERCENT



(The figures shown under reasons for change represent the number of changes reported for the particular cause.)

for "miscellaneous" reasons. One such was indicated as "he did not want to serve under a woman mayor". The remaining number, 36 (9.2 percent), were classified as "unknown". The data appear on the Chart 3. From this it is evident that "changes in administration" or "politics" accounted for almost one-third (29.8 percent) of all the changes out of the 390 chiefs of police.

"IN-AND-OUT" CHIEFS

In addition to the short tenure and the rapid turnover there have been a number of chiefs who have been in and out of office with a given time between each service period. One chief held office at three different periods, and 14 held office during two different periods. In Waterloo, Iowa, one chief held office from 1908 to 1909, from 1912 to 1915, and then was returned to office again in

1924 to 1925. In Davenport one chief served from 1916 to 1918 and from 1920 to 1922. Another chief held office from 1948 to 1949, and then was returned to office again in 1957. Council Bluffs has had three chiefs who have been in and out of office twice. One held office from 1918 to 1921 and then again from 1933 to 1934, a second chief held office from 1925 to 1926 and again from 1931 to 1932; whereas a third man held office from 1944 to 1945 and again from 1950 to 1957. Other cities with "in and out" chiefs were Atlantic, Clinton, Cedar Falls, Clear Lake, Dubuque, Ft. Madison, Hampton, Iowa Falls, Keokuk, Marshalltown and Missouri Valley, Iowa.

CHIEFS WITH LONG TENURE

Quite apart from most of the chiefs of police there were eight men out of the more than 400 who

had unusually long periods of continuous service in office. The man with the longest service record for those reporting was Chief J. Sheldon of Humboldt, Iowa, who held office for 33 years from 1899 to 1932. There may be other men with equally long tenure, but Chief Sheldon ranks first for longevity in office. Two men ranked second in length of tenure. Chief D. A. Woodburn of Rock Rapids, Iowa, served continuously for 29 years from 1921 to 1950 and Chief N. Enlow of Cedar Falls, Iowa, from 1903 to 1932. Chief F. L. Moore of De Witt, Iowa, ranked in third place with 27 years of service from 1930 to 1957. The other chiefs with long service records are the following:

Chief W. J. Cure of Ames, Iowa, 26 years from 1919 to 1945;

Chief L. L. Speedling of Clarion, Iowa, 21 years from 1936 to 1957;

Chief G. Baker of Eagle Grove, Iowa, 22 years from 1935 to 1957; and

Chief J. Mulder of Sheldon, Iowa, 20 years from 1929 to 1949.

There are, no doubt, other men in the state with records as long as these men, but none were reported by the cooperating cities.

SUMMARY

The basic problem inherent in short tenure and rapid turnover of chiefs of police is directly related to efficiency in administration of police depart-

ments and law enforcement. Do cities find they have a more effective police system by short tenure and rapid turnover, or could greater effectiveness be gained by fewer changes with longer tenure? Ultimately the question rests upon standards. In the minds of some persons long tenure may have the appearance of a "dictator" or "czarism"; whereas at the same time short tenure may be the end result of political patronage or "bossism" by the group in control in a city. At some point in time the American people may need to arrive at a solution of the problem. If rigid standards can be maintained, rapid mobility of chiefs of police need have no ill effects on law enforcement, but if the selection is based on "political debts" paid with each change, undesirable men may be placed in the important office as chief of police.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author is indebted to the sixty chiefs of police in Iowa who cooperated in supplying the basic schedules from which this study has been based. Miss Gayle Proctor, a student at Iowa State College, assisted in collecting some of the schedules in the early part of the program. The necessary funds for carrying out the work of the survey have been made possible by the Industrial Science Research Institute of Iowa State College.