The Policing Machine: Enforcement, Endorsements, and the Illusion Of Public Input. By Tony Cheng. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2024

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Five years since the summer of 2020, when millions of people worldwide took to the streets calling for an end to police violence, law enforcement budgets and surveillance capacities continue to expand. How do police departments resist massive public pressures for institutional change? This question motivates Tony Cheng's new book, *The Policing Machine*, which takes readers through his two-year-long ethnography examining how the New York Police Department (NYPD) engaged community councils, clergy councils, and a network of activists in two Brooklyn precincts to manage their organizational legitimacy. Cheng's analysis marshals an extraordinary array of public sources including, for instance, Twitter data and records he obtained through Freedom of Information Law requests for sound permits and police complaints to triangulate his observations and interviews from meetings and events.

Across 200 pages, Cheng develops his concept of the Policing Machine, a system of public input channels that law enforcement agencies use to cultivate political capital by censoring and distorting who can and cannot hold the police accountable and in what ways. The NYPD's Policing Machine is made up of internally administered department channels and external community partner channels. This system amplifies favorable appraisals of the police and stifles criticism stemming from independently formed community input channels. Cheng argues that the Policing Machine selectively distributes public resources and regulatory leniency to department and partner channels that endorse their services, which contrasts with the coercive force the NYPD extends towards independent channels that demand police transformation. After describing what the Policing Machine apparatus is and how it works in the first half of the book, Cheng uses the second half to discuss its implications for change in policing.

Chapter 1 describes how the NYPD used its department channels to control public input. Local precincts held meetings to respond to community members' complaints. Yet, they most often formally recorded input from community members who sought to improve the administration of policing and ignored complaints from those who demanded police transformation. Even when residents explicitly requested nonpunitive solutions for neighborhood problems like noise complaints, officers formally interpreted their input as demands for more policing.

Chapter 2 explains how police mobilize support from nonprofit partner channels to affirm public demand for their services. The NYPD organized community and clergy councils to receive and distribute information. When a clergy council member invited the NYPD commissioner to speak at a mass held not long after a member of his agency murdered Eric Garner, the commissioner thanked parishioners "for their support during this difficult time" (80). By providing officers public platforms to reposition themselves as victims rather than aggressors, the clergy served as a crucial ally for police. Indeed, Cheng argues, the NYPD actively seeks partnerships with established community members such as the clergy whose priorities align with theirs and who have access to and influence over large public audiences.

Chapter 3 shows how police unevenly distribute public resources to amplify supportive voices and stifle dissenting ones. This strategy is brought into sharp focus at two events Cheng attended. At the community council's annual event, National Night Out, the NYPD supported the event by rerouting bus traffic, towing parked cars, and helping to set up and distribute food. In contrast, they were coercive and securitizing – erecting metal barricades, equipping themselves with zip ties, and recruiting backup – when policing an anniversary memorial for Sandra Bland and several other Black women killed by law enforcement. These starkly disparate policing practices underscore how the NYPD strategically allocates resources to bolster its legitimacy and contain delegitimizing opposition.

In Chapter 4, Cheng describes how the NYPD explicitly and implicitly induced public endorsements. Police *received* explicit public endorsements by regularly presenting awards to officers and community members and publicizing positive testimonials from community leaders. In contrast, police used social media to *claim* implicit endorsements by, for instance, tweeting photos of every community meeting Cheng attended. When crowd sizes were small, the photos displayed "officers pointing, lecturing, and even just smiling before an audience outside the frame" (149). In one poorly attended meeting, officers recruited passersby on the street who then voiced complaints about the NYPD. Yet, in a tweet, the officers later summarized the meeting as a discussion about crime prevention and used the hashtag #NYPDislistening. In short, the NYPD engaged in the kind of media spin we tend to associate with advertising and marketing.

The Policing Machine fiercely competes with, and often succeeds against, alternative systems of service provision. In Chapter 5, Cheng typologizes four strategies neighborhood residents employed to reduce their reliance on the NYPD: infusing scarce resources with community significance; pursuing services from nonpolice providers; reestablishing democratic oversight; and forming nonstate protective services. One community council used nonpolice volunteers for event resources and presented these volunteers with awards to build support networks they could later mobilize in the absence of police resources. Residents also called on neighbors and nonpolice service providers to resolve local issues. These strategies, Cheng notes, "can be tailored to advance community goals of safety without sacrificing justice" (180).

As police departments across the globe increasingly come under fire, they devise new strategies to garner public legitimacy while maintaining extant institutional priorities. Cheng's book illuminates how police enact these strategies by empowering constituents by whom they want to be held accountable and disempowering others.

In doing so, *The Policing Machine* makes an exceptionally crucial contribution to the scholarship and practice of law and society.

Cheng pushes readers to rethink the ways community nonprofits reinforce rather than undermine state sanctioned forms of violence institutionalized in urban policing infrastructures. He shows us how the politics of community policing may transform processes of democratic accountability in unexpected ways. Cheng's concept of the Policing Machine also advances carceral abolitionist projects by unveiling the NYPD's institutional reproduction mechanisms. The final chapters offer activists guidance on how to effectively compete with and undermine the troubling and selective police-community relations project that underwrites US law enforcement's institutional persistence.

For its wide-ranging and pioneering contributions, *The Policing Machine* should be mandatory reading for activists and city officials, as well as scholars studying cities, law, organizations, politics, and punishment.