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The continuing decline in crime during Mayor Michael Bloomberg's term in office ranks first among the accomplishments listed on his campaign Web site: "2004 was the third year in a row with fewer than 600 homicides and brought the murder rate to its lowest level since 1963. According to FBI statistics, NYC is America's Safest Big City."

There is some evidence, though, that New Yorkers remain concerned about different kinds of public safety, especially the threat of terrorism. In a recent poll , done shortly after the July 7th terrorist attacks in London, half of the registered New York City voters surveyed said they believed the city was not adequately prepared for another terrorist attack. The poll was a mixed bag for Bloomberg's Democratic challengers, however: 62 percent of those surveyed nevertheless approved of the way Bloomberg has handled terrorism.

The major candidates may focus on security when discussing public safety, but there are other issues as well. They offer different ideas about how to make New York a safer city, and each of them has put forth at least a few details about what changes might take place should they be elected.

Anti-terrorism Efforts

Anti-terrorism efforts are handled by the New York Police Department. To be sure, the police have had their critics. An official from the New York Fire Department, Chief of Department Peter Hayden, spoke before the City Council in May against giving the police primary authority when handling incidents involving hazardous materials; the standard protocol in most cities is to have the fire department in charge. And the police department has also at times angered the F.B.I. and other federal officials with its aggressiveness.

But there has not been another terrorist attack in New York since 9/11, and while the reasons may not be clear, some say
good police work
may be a major factor. The department, under Commissioner Ray Kelly,
has reportedly worked to build up
a strong network of informants, as well as build closer links with federal intelligence.

This has come at a steep price tag, however; the police reportedly have been spending about
$200 million a year on anti-terrorism initiatives

. Neither Bloomberg nor any federal legislators representing New York have had much luck wrangling substantially more federal funds for general anti-terrorism security efforts, though Bloomberg did raise the issue in a speech at the Republican National Convention last year.

Bloomberg's opponents say he hasn't been doing enough. They particularly criticize the Metropolitan Transportation Authority for spending only $30 million out of $600 million earmarked for security improvements in the subways, and say the mayor bears some responsibility for that lapse.

City Council Speaker Gifford Miller has proposed creating a new Office of Homeland Security to make sure the MTA and other organizations, like hospitals, are on the same page when making plans against terrorism. He wants improved communications for first responders.

Former Bronx Borough President Fernando Ferrer has called for the creation of a new Advisory Council on Best Practices to review security ideas, as well as a renewed focus on security in subways, including a greater police presence, better training for MTA employees and improved communications technology. He also called for better leadership in securing federal money.

Congressman Anthony Weiner also has talked about the need for more federal money, and suggested the federal Transportation Security Agency should screen passengers entering New York by train or boat. Weiner also says that the federal government should pay for the 2,000 intelligence officers currently part of the police budget.

C. Virginia Fields, the Manhattan borough president, said that she also wants to revamp subway security, with more security cameras and announcements made in different languages.

More Police, Better Paid?

The Democratic candidates share a desire to hire more police officers. Miller wants 1,000 more officers, Ferrer 1,900, Fields 2,000 and Weiner 3,000.

The police department has decreased from about 41,000 in 2001 to 37,000. A protracted labor dispute between the city and the largest police union was finally resolved in June, with state

arbitrators awarding the police a substantial raise, although starting salaries were reduced to $25,100 for the first six months on the job (after six months, salary is increased to $32,700 for the next 18 months).

Acrimony remains between the city and the police union, with Bloomberg blaming the union for the reduction in starting pay. Kelly said the low salary will make it harder to recruit, although that remains to be seen.

Are more officers a luxury or a necessity? Even as the department has shrunk, the murder rate has reached historically low levels, and Operation Impact, which floods high-crime areas with officers, continues to be trumpeted as a success by Bloomberg and the police department.

Beyond the crime statistics, though, there remain causes for concern. A July Newsday article reported how some police felt that a lack of resources and an unwillingness by the department to pay overtime was leading to fewer murder cases being solved.

Police Misconduct?

With low morale can come police misconduct, an issue that never seems far from the headlines. The March indictment of two former police detectives on murder charges for allegedly participating in mob hits in the early 1990s is, if true, an extreme example of how the department has historically struggled to police itself.

The outside agencies assigned to check into corruption charges are struggling for support. The Commission to Combat Police Corruption in April weathered the resignation of its chairman, Mark Pomerantz, who became frustrated with the committee's lack of power to access police records. Early in his administration Bloomberg completely ignored the commission before appointing Pomerantz, but in June Bloomberg did appoint a new chair, Michael F. Armstrong, a former Queens District Attorney who also served as chief counsel to the Knapp Commission in the 1970s.

The Civilian Complaint Review Board continues to struggle to handle the increase in complaints about police misconduct. At a recent meeting, officials noted that complaints increased by six percent so far this year

compared to the previous year, but that fewer were being substantiated— nine percent so far compared to 16 percent in all of 2004. Officials called it good news that they received $1 million in funding, but worried that they did not receive a long-term commitment, noting that they have to continue to lobby the city for more money.

Fernando Ferrer helped found the Civilian Complaint Review Board. In the past he has spoken about the importance of good relations between the police and the community.

In the past, Virginia Fields has been critical of so-called no-knock warrants, setting up a hotline for people to call to complain after such a raid led to the death of a Harlem woman, Alberta Spruill, in 2003.

Hate Crimes

Two high-profile, white-on-black attacks that have been characterized as bias attacks occurred this summer in Queens and Brooklyn, raising the public's perception of hate crimes. Police statistics suggest, however, that, overall, bias crimes involving physical attacks have decreased by nearly fifty percent since 2000.

Fields has called for greater attention to hate crimes, as well as a focus on domestic violence issues, both by police and the courts Anthony Weiner also called for more attention to hate crimes.

Quality-Of-Life, Etc.

Weiner also wants a greater focus on quality-of-life crimes such as graffiti. He also wants to expand the use of DNA matching technology. The law requiring certain violent felons to provide a DNA sample went in effect in 1994. Weiner wants to order former convicts who completed their sentence before 1994 to also give a DNA sample.

Gifford Miller has called for more money to go to District Attorney's offices, as well as the creation of more Community Courts, which handle less serious crimes. Miller also wants to include crimes committed in city parks in the precinct-by-precinct CompStat crime tracking system.

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