

Why Are Some Officers More Supportive of Community Policing with Minorities than Others?¹

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Forthcoming in *Justice Quarterly*

¹ This research was supported by the American University Dissertation Research Award. I would like to thank Katie Hail-Jares, Gary LaFree, Belen Lowrey-Kinberg, Ed Maguire, Natalie Todak, Joseph K. Young, and Thomas Zeitzoff for providing feedback on this project at various stages. Emma Ashooh provided valuable research assistance.

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Abstract

Officers are not equally supportive of community policing despite its potential for improving police-citizen relationships. Research has yet to identify and explain variations in officer support for community policing with racial minorities. Using roll-call surveys with 741 officers in three departments, this project addressed two questions: Do officers differ in their support for community policing across racial groups? And, if so, why? Officers are less supportive of community policing with racial minorities and perceive greater social distance from minority groups. General support for community policing and lower perceived social distance from a minority community are linked with greater support for community policing with that group. Community policing experience is not related to support for the practice across racial groups. By understanding differences at the officer-level, departments can build support for community policing—particularly with minority communities—through reducing perceived social distance. Additionally, department-level differences highlight the importance of comparative research.

Keywords: community-policing; minorities; relationship-building; surveys

Word Count: 9,153

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National attention to police use of force against members of racial minority groups has fostered current concerns about best practices in policing. Minority community relationships with the police are fractured (Weitzer, 2015). In response to high profile instances of police brutality and officer-involved killings, President Obama convened the Task Force on 21st Century Policing. One of the Task Force's main recommendations was to improve minority-police relationships through community engagement (Ramsey & Robinson, 2015). Community policing—which focuses on partnerships, fair treatment (Tyler, 2011), and respect for cultural values and priorities (Kelling, 2011)—is a promising avenue to strengthen police-citizen relationships. At its core, community policing is a proactive problem-solving approach to address underlying conditions that threaten public safety through community partnerships and build mutual trust and respect between law enforcement and the public (DOJ, 2017). Community policing has many benefits, including reducing public perception of disorder (Gill, Weisburd, Telep, Vitter, & Bennett, 2014) and increasing public support for law enforcement (Gill et al., 2014; Weisburd & Eck, 2004).

The vast majority of US police departments state that they engage in community policing (Weine, Younis & Polutnik, 2017). While police departments around the country are adopting community policing as a guiding philosophy, individual officers are not equally enthusiastic about it (Lurigio & Skogan, 1994). Demographic factors like an officer's race, gender, age, and education influence support for community policing (Lasley, Larson, Kelso & Brown, 2011; Lewis, Rosenberg & Sigler, 1999; Lurigio & Skogan, 1994; Novak, Alarid & Lucas, 2003; Skogan & Hartnett, 1997; Smith, Novak, Frank, & Lowenkamp, 2005).

Given the promise of relationship-building between police and minority communities, it is important to understand how officers view community policing in this context. Research has yet to identify variations in officer support for community policing with racial minorities. This

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project addresses two questions: First, does officer-level support for community policing vary by the race of community members? Second, if differences do exist, what factors explain why some police officers are more supportive of community policing with racial minorities than others?

This paper examines differences in support for community policing—specifically with racial minority groups—across departments and between officers in the same department. The next section identifies gaps in the literature related to community policing with racial minority groups establishing hypotheses. I then outline the design, analytic strategy, and results. I conclude with the implications of these findings and avenues for future research.

Community Policing

Department Policy versus Officer Attitudes and Behavior

In recent years, many departments have adopted community policing practices (Weine et al., 2017), but what actually happens on the ground varies dramatically. In some cases, variance in practice results from the myriad behaviors that fall under the community policing label (Cordner, 2014). Other times, departments state that they engage in community policing but cannot support this in their actual programs (Ortiz, Hendricks & Sugie, 2007). In short, there is a disparity between a popular objective in public discourse on policing and actual policing practice.

Community policing is necessarily more decentralized and gives greater autonomy to individual officers than more traditional policing practices. Accordingly, there can be considerable variation in practices both within and between departments (Mastrofski, Worden & Snipes, 1995) as well as between departmental policy and individual-officer action (Paoline & Terrill, 2005; Terrill & Mastrofski, 2002). Decentralization allows officers to dynamically respond to issues that arise (Skogan & Frydl, 2004). Yet, decentralization also allows for principle-agent problems, whereby officers ignore, undermine, or inconsistently apply the

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department's directives. Officers may resist changes in policing practice (Cordner, 1995) and there are fewer mechanisms in place to mitigate non-compliance with community policing. In the context of procedurally just interactions like those inherent in community policing, Worden and McLean (2017) found that officers' views on appropriate practices impact policy implementation. Thus, to increase community policing practice, it is necessary to measure officer support for community policing in general and across different contexts to identify and explain variation in support.

Measures for community policing practices have largely focused on department-level metrics (Alpert, Flynn & Piquero, 2001; DOJ, 2013; Fisher-Stewart, 2007) and community surveys (DOJ, 2013; Fisher-Stewart, 2007), rather than on individual-level behaviors among officers. Aggregate measures are useful for assessing community policing at the department-level, but cannot assess officer-level differences within or across departments. Lack of support for community policing at the officer-level may explain the divergence between department policies and evidence of programs. Officers are not equally supportive of community policing (Lurigio & Skogan, 1994). Research has generally found that minority officers are more supportive of community policing (Lurigio & Skogan, 1994; Novak et al., 2003; Skogan & Hartnett, 1997). Other factors like higher rank and more education increase support for community policing in some studies (Lewis et al., 1999; Lurigio & Skogan, 1994; Skogan & Hartnett, 1997) but not others (Novak et al., 2003; Winfree, Bartku & Seibel, 1996). Beyond individual-level differences, O'Shea (1999) found that officers in a rural department were more supportive of community policing than urban officers. While these factors have influenced overall support for community policing, to date, we do not understand how these factors impact officer's support for community policing across racial minority communities.

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Community Policing with Racial Minority Groups

Race conditions police-community relationships. From a community perspective, racial minorities are over-policed as suspects and under-policed as victims, leading to longstanding tension between these communities and law enforcement (Ben-Porat, 2008). Racial minorities express that they are more distrustful of law enforcement, feel more alienated by police, and largely rely on self-policing to handle disputes (Gaskew, 2009). Negative views of police also reduce compliance with legal authorities (McCluskey, Mastrofski & Parks, 1999). Damaged relationships between police and minority communities has serious implications for crime control and support for law enforcement.

Individual officers, as well, vary in their beliefs about racial minority communities. Highly publicized incidents of police brutality and use of force within black communities have further stressed officer-community relationships and undermined officers' desire to build or improve community relationships (Wolfe & Nix, 2016). Amidst community tensions, command-level officers who believe more strongly that there is a "war on cops" also think that depolicing—where officers engage in fewer proactive stops—is more common (Nix, Wolfe & Campbell, 2017). The vast majority of police officers are more fearful for their own safety and think tensions between police and black communities specifically have increased. Furthermore, black officers are less likely than their white and Hispanic counterparts to think police have positive relationships with black communities (Pew, 2017). Beyond police responses to current community-law enforcement tensions, the racial composition of a neighborhood impacts officer perceptions of it. Officers tend to view white neighborhoods more favorable than minority neighborhoods, even when the neighborhoods have similarly high crime rates and low social

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cohesion (Stein & Griffith, 2017). In short, race impacts both officers' and community members' perceptions of police-citizen relationships.

Hypotheses

In light of recent events and research, it is particularly important to build and repair minority-police relationships—a task that community policing may be especially effective in addressing. For effective community policing with minority groups, research suggests law enforcement must take care to respect cultural values and priorities (Kelling, 2011). Minority groups need reassurances about security and privacy concerns, and that they are not the subject of police investigation (Greene, 2011). Community policing practices can be critical in this regard.

In part, an officer's decision to build relationships with minority communities is due to how he or she engages with the community in general. For community policing to be successful, police officers must change their attitudes toward the practice (Lurigio & Skogan, 1994). Drawing from the notion of path dependency,³ an officer's decision to engage in community policing with racial minority groups should be easier if that officer already engages in more community policing practices. For officers who do not engage in community policing more broadly, it is likely more difficult to implement these practices with members of minority communities. Based on this discussion, I derive the following hypothesis:

H1: Police officers who engage in more community policing practices generally will have more positive views about community policing with minorities.

The decision to build relationships with minority communities is due in part to characteristics of the officers themselves. Among the public, general views of law enforcement and specific views of police officers differ in meaningful ways (Author, 2016). From a law enforcement perspective, officers differ in their support for procedurally just engagement across

³ Path dependency refers to the notion that once a policy is set into motion, it is more difficult and sometimes impossible to change course (Schneider & Ingram, 2005).

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context and communities (Worden & McLean, 2017). Thus, it is not safe to assume that general support for community policing implies that an officer is equally supportive of the practice with different racial groups. Mastrofski et al. (1995) found that officers who were more supportive of community policing were more selective in their interactions with the community. When police officers buy into the benefits of community policing in general, they may be more likely to build relationships with community members, and be more restrained in their interactions. In sum, police officers who see the value in community policing are more likely to have buy-in for this policy choice overall, which increases the likelihood that it is actually implemented in practice. This leads to the next hypothesis:

H2: Police officers who are more supportive of community policing in general will have more positive views about community policing with minorities.

The decision to build relationships with minority communities is also due to characteristics of the community itself. Partnerships may be difficult to achieve if officers view racial minorities as distinct “others” (Sherif et al. 1961). Social identity theory posits that people have greater affinity for members of their in-group versus members of an out-group. In-group members are viewed as having shared values, goals, and characteristics. In contrast, out-group members are perceived to have less commonality (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Building from this, police officers who view racial minority groups as more of an “other” may be less likely to engage in community policing with them. Data from Israel shows a strong, negative correlation between officers’ acceptance of community policing and views toward Israeli-Arab citizens (Harpaz & Herzog, 2013). Officers may prefer to let minority communities police themselves or do what is termed *in-group policing* (Fearon & Laitin, 1996). When officers view that there is

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greater social distance⁴ between themselves and a minority community, they may be less incentivized to develop relationships with members of that community (Black, 1976). This discussion suggests:

H3: Police officers who perceive greater social distance between themselves and a minority community will have more negative views of community policing with that group.

In sum, I expect that an officer's support for community policing with minority groups is impacted by three factors: experience with community policing, general support for community policing, and perceptions of minority groups.

Alternative Explanation

It is possible that department-level policies are the key driving force for supporting community policing with minorities. Policies are set by the department leaders and can become part of department culture. In fact, each of the police chiefs that I spoke with as part of this project stated that their department engaged in robust community policing efforts and directed me to materials supporting this in their newsletters and websites. If department policy is the main driving force for practice, then we should see variation in the predictor and outcome variables between departments, but these should be fairly stable for officers within the same department. I compare my argument to this alternative.

Methodology

Sample

Data come from police officers in three departments around the Washington D.C. metropolitan area that all emphasize community policing.⁵ Departments vary in size, square miles covered,

⁴ In his work on categorical terrorism, Goodwin (2006, p. 2041) describes social distance as “the weakness or absence of political alliances between revolutionaries and their presumed constituents and complicitous civilians.” In this paper, I refer to these alliances between law enforcement and community members.

⁵ Six departments were contacted and asked to participate: three agreed, two declined, and one did not respond.

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population in their jurisdiction, and population density, but are all within the same geographic area to control for environmental factors as well as possible. Department 1 is mostly suburban. Department 2 is urban and suburban. Department 3 is suburban and rural.

Altogether, 741 officers from the three departments had the opportunity to participate in this study and 713 completed the surveys between March and May 2016: 417 officers from Department 1, 135 officers from Department 2, and 161 officers from Department 3. Twenty-eight officers either declined to participate or turned in incomplete surveys.⁶ The overall response rate was 96.22%.⁷ All patrol officers in each department theoretically would have had the opportunity to participate. While some officers were absent due to vacation, illness, or being out on a call, this should be random and was unavoidable.⁸

Procedure

Using a roll-call survey, I examined officer-level support for community policing with racial minorities. I obtained permission from each chief to survey their officers. Beyond granting permission, the chiefs were not involved in the study. A few days prior to each roll-call, a designated departmental contact sent out an email to shift supervisors to let officers know that I would be there to collect data and that participation was voluntary. At each roll-call, I briefly introduced myself and the study.⁹ I reiterated that participation was anonymous and voluntary. If anyone did not want to participate, they could either refuse a survey or take a survey and return it

⁶ At the time of data collection, 69.8% of patrol officers in Department 1, 84.4% of patrol officers in Department 2, and 71.7% of patrol officers in Department 3 were given the opportunity to participate.

⁷ Response rate by department: 94.9% in Department 1, 98.5% Department 2, and 97.6% in Department 3.

⁸ Paoline and Terrill (2013) had a list of officers in each department and reached out to officers who were absent from roll-call to increase participation. Unfortunately, the police chiefs in these three departments would not give me access to their personnel information to employ this same method.

⁹ My survey asked officers for an honest assessment of what they do at their jobs, how they feel about it, and how they perceive various minority communities in their jurisdiction. These are sensitive topics that can increase dishonesty. To build rapport with officers and show that questioning authority is okay, the first question in the survey asks participants' gender and gives the following response options: male, female, and other. As expected, the "other" option got a reaction out of officers in every roll-call. I responded that the research ethics board made me phrase the responses this way and made a joke about bureaucracy. By starting with a critical statement of authority, I hoped this would help participants be less suspicious of my intentions and increase honesty in responses.

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blank. I made it clear that nobody else would know whether or not they had participated. I also emphasized that only aggregate responses would be shared. Following this, I then asked for officers' consent to participate.

Survey Design

The first block of warm up questions asked participants about their gender, age, and levels of satisfaction in their life, where they live, and where they work. Participants then answered question about their experience with and support for community policing. Next, participants indicated the appropriateness of community policing to address a list of crimes and control crime in different communities. Participants were then asked about their experience with and perceptions of various racial groups within the jurisdiction where they work. Lastly, participants answered additional demographic questions. See Appendix for full survey.

The outcome variable for all hypotheses is support for community policing with minority groups. Community policing is frequently discussed yet under conceptualized due to the myriad actions that can fall under its umbrella (Fielding, 2005). Without a way to reliably measure community policing, it is difficult to compare practices across departments and between officers. To avoid confusion, I used the language of “relationship building” rather than “community policing.” Participants were asked to consider the degree to which “[r]elationship building with _____ residents in your jurisdiction is effective for crime control.” Participants evaluated this question for average members of five racial groups in their jurisdiction: Caucasian/White, African American/Black, Asian/Asian American, Hispanic, and Middle Eastern/Arab.¹⁰ Responses were measured on a 7-point scale where higher scores indicate more support for community policing with each group. By adding scores for the four minority groups, I created a

¹⁰ Racial groups were chosen to reflect the population in the Washington DC metropolitan area. The correlation among these variables ranges from 0.79 to 0.91.

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score for *support for community policing with minorities*.¹¹ Observed scores ranged from 8 to 28 ($N=707$, $M=23.26$, $SD=4.62$, $\alpha=0.97$).

The independent variables in this study are: *community policing experience*, general *support for community policing*,¹² and *perceived social distance* from minority groups.¹³ The measures for all three were created through building an additive index. Hypotheses 1 and 2 were reverse coded, where appropriate, so that a higher score was indicative of more experience with or support for community policing. For Hypothesis 3, the opposite approach was used—a higher score indicates more perceived social distance.

For Hypothesis 1, I use past literature as a guide to measure experience with community policing practices.¹⁴ Employing Goertz's (2006) framework to build concepts, I measure community policing using four key factors: *police functions*, *operational adaptations*, *problem orientation*, and *community engagement*.¹⁵ Police functions was measured with seven indicators, operational adaptations were measured with eight indicators, and problem orientation and

¹¹ Averaging these scores generates a variable with decimal points so ordered logistic regression would not be an option. Since the variable is not normally distributed, OLS could produce biased estimates. To address these concerns, I added scores together. As robustness checks, I estimated all models using OLS and results were fundamentally unchanged. Ordered logistic regression models are reported for consistency across tables.

¹² There are often differences between a person's general and specific views across a range of topics. The correlation between general support for community policing and group-specific support ranges from 0.50 to 0.53. This demonstrates a positive relationship between general support and group-specific support for community, but also shows that these variables are not measuring the same thing.

¹³ Correlations among these variables range from -0.37 to 0.48.

¹⁴ Cordner (1995) summarized the common elements of community policing into three dimensions: philosophical, strategic, and programmatic. Skogan and Frydl (2004) built on Cordner's conceptualization to argue that community policing has four main elements: police functions, decentralization, community engagement, and problem orientation. Maguire and Wells (2009) focused on the organizational element for implementation and argue that community policing has three main facets: problem solving, community engagement and partnerships, and organizational adaptation. The Community Policing Self-Assessment Tool (CP-SAT) uses these three overarching elements. Cordner (2014) later split the programmatic dimension of his original conceptualization into two parts: tactical and organizations.

¹⁵ Ideally, community policing experience would be measured through direct observation. Unfortunately, it is infeasible to systematically monitor officers across departments over time. Additionally, officers may behave differently when they know they are being watched (the Hawthorne effect). Rather, survey methods are necessary to measure community policing experience for individual officers across a department. Since surveys have space constraints, I was not able to ask about all behaviors or actions that could fall under the community policing framework. I winnowed the items to measure fundamental elements of community policing practices.

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community engagement were each measured with three indicators. Departments and their officers may also act in ways that undermine community policing. *Countervailing forces*, which hinder community policing, were measured with six items. In total, twenty-seven items measured experience with community policing. Each dimension was added together to create a composite score for community policing experience for each officer.¹⁶ Scores ranged from 63 to 173 ($N=668$, $M=130.32$, $SD=16.53$, $\alpha=0.81$).

For Hypotheses 2, participants answered eight questions about their general support for community policing. Scores on each indicator were then added together to create a composite support for community policing for each officer. Scores ranged from 25 to 56 ($N=711$, $M=42.50$, $SD=6.16$, $\alpha=0.72$).

For Hypothesis 3, participants were asked a series of questions to assess their perceived social distance from five groups in their jurisdiction: Caucasian/White, African American/Black, Asian/Asian American, Hispanic, and Middle Eastern/Arab.¹⁷ Given current social and political tensions about police relationships with minorities, asking this question directly would be unlikely to yield honest responses. Some researchers use implicit bias tests to circumvent social desirability bias; however, this was not possible in a roll-call setting. Rather, participants were asked a series of questions to assess each racial group on: size within the community, receptivity toward policing practices, frequency of interaction, general tone of relationships with police, degree of caring about the community, and degree to which they help police. First, participants were asked if each group made up at least 33% of the population in their jurisdiction. People tend

¹⁶ Correlations among the dimensions of community policing experience range from 0.13 to 0.63. All models are reported using an additive index of community policing experience. Models were also estimated with each dimension of community policing included separately rather than as an additive index. The results were fundamentally unchanged and none of the dimensions of community policing had a significant impact on support for community policing across racial groups.

¹⁷ Correlations among perceived social distance from each racial group range from 0.31 to 0.62.

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to overestimate the size of groups that they perceive to be more dissimilar from themselves (McCarthy, 2016). Doing so here is a proxy measure of social distance. Second, participants were asked which groups are most and least receptive to policing efforts.¹⁸ Third, participants were asked how often they interact with members of each group. Fourth, participants assessed the tone of relations between police and each group. Fifth, participants indicated the degree to which members of each group care about the community. Finally, participants indicated the degree to which members of each group help the police do their job. I added scores for each racial group to create an additive index for perceived social distance by race. I then averaged each minority group's score to create a score for perceived social distance from minorities. Scores ranged from 4.25 to 17.5 ($N=625$, $M=9.18$, $SD=2.10$, $\alpha=0.77$).

Results

Descriptive Statistics

The first question this paper asks is whether or not there are officer-level differences in support for community policing across racial groups. To answer this, I compared officer support for community policing with racial minorities and white community members. Officers are significantly more supportive of community policing with white communities ($M=5.96$, $SD=1.06$) than with racial minorities¹⁹ ($M=5.81$, $SD=1.15$); $t(707)=6.52$, $p<0.001$.²⁰ Looking at departments individually, results hold for officers in Department 1 ($t(413)=6.37$, $p<0.001$) and Department 3 ($t(159)=2.68$, $p=0.004$), but not for officers in Department 2 ($p=0.24$).

¹⁸ I coded the first and second items as 1 if the response suggests more social distance and -1 if the response suggests less social distance so that each question would carry weight more equivalent to that of the other measures.

¹⁹ Results are reported using average support across minority groups, but are the same when comparing support for community policing with Caucasians to each minority group individually. Results also hold across departments.

²⁰ Support for community policing with Caucasians does not vary across departments, $F(2, 705)=1.38$, $p=0.25$. In contrast, support for community policing with minorities does vary: officers in Department 3 are the most supportive ($M=5.98$, $SD=1.09$), followed by Department 2 ($M=5.89$, $SD=1.13$), then Department 1 ($M=5.72$, $SD=1.18$); $F(2, 704)=3.25$, $p=0.04$.

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Community policing experience varies across departments, $F(2, 665)=6.05, p=0.003$. On average, officers in Department 1 reported less experience with community policing than officers in the other two departments ($p<0.001$). There are no differences in either general support for community policing or perceived social distance from minority groups *across departments*. Yet, there are systematic differences in perceived social distance *across racial groups*. Officers perceive greater social distance from minorities than from white communities, ($t(624)=51.07, p<0.001$). This finding holds across racial groups and across departments.

There is a good deal of variation on the dependent variable and on all independent variables within each department. This is evidence to refute the alternative argument that department policies on community policing are the driving force for engagement with and support for community policing. Table 1 summarizes these descriptive statistics and includes additional demographic information by department.

[Table 1 about here]

In sum, officers are generally more supportive of community policing with white communities than their non-white counterparts. Across departments, officers also report greater perceived social distance from minorities. After establishing that there are differences in officer-level views of racial groups and support for community policing with these groups, I turn to the next question: why are some officers more supportive of community policing with minority communities than others?

Analyses

Data for this project were collected from officers in three departments.²¹ As discussed, department culture impacts individual experiences and views. Due to the small number of

²¹ Honesty in responding is a concern, particularly when asking officers about sensitive topics in the workplace. It is possible that some participants provide the same responses across all racial groups due to social desirability bias or

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participating departments, however, hierarchical modeling is not ideal (see Gelman & Hill, 2006). Instead, to control for department-level effects across the whole sample, I include a dummy variable for two of the three departments in each model. To test whether the same mechanisms are at play across departments, I then estimate models for each department to examine differences between officers in the same agency²² and across agencies.

The dependent variables are measured on ordinal scales, so models are estimated with ordered logistic regression.²³ To allow for comparison, I estimated models for support of community policing with minorities in general and with each racial group specifically. Individual-level variables such as gender, age, education, and race impact support for community policing in general (Lewis et al., 1999; Lurigio & Skogan, 1994; Novak et al., 2003; Skogan & Hartnett, 1997), so I estimated all models to include these variables.²⁴ Table 2 shows the results for the overall sample.

As expected in Hypothesis 2, officers who are more supportive of community policing in general have consistently more favorable views of community policing across racial groups. As expected in Hypothesis 3, officers who perceive greater social distance between themselves and minorities are less supportive of community policing with minority groups. This finding holds for minorities overall, and for each racial group individually. Findings suggest that the same two mechanisms—general support for community policing and perceived social distance—impact officer-level support for community policing across all racial groups. Following Allison's (1999)

fear of retaliation if their true views were made public. To account for this explanation, I estimated the models removing officers who “straight-lined” responses in one of two ways. I excluded participants who a) straight-lined responses across the majority of questions about minority communities, and b) straight-lined the dependent variable. Across all models, the statistical or substantive results were unchanged. Models reported include all observations.

²² An alternative would be to estimate models with interaction effects between the department dummy variables and each predictor. The main drawback with this approach is that one department is necessarily excluded as the reference category. Estimating models by department and comparing the coefficients bypasses this concern.

²³ As robustness checks, I treated the dependent variables as continuous and estimated models with OLS. I also transformed the dependent variables to improve homoscedasticity. Results were unchanged across models.

²⁴ Models were also estimated without officer demographics included and the results are unchanged.

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guidelines, the coefficients for the key, significant independent variables in the white model are not significantly different from the coefficients in the minorities model. This demonstrates that general support for community policing and perceived social distance have a similar impact on support for community policing within both white and non-white communities. Yet, officers have systematically greater perceived social distance from minority communities, which may explain why officers are also generally less supportive of community policing with minorities.

Hypothesis 1 is not supported: community policing experience does not impact group-specific support for community policing in any of the models. This may suggest a principal-agent issue whereby individuals' preferences are stronger motivators than department-level initiatives. Given the level of variance in each predictor and outcome variable within departments and the non-significant impact of experience, it is clear that department policy on community policing is not the key determinant of support. Thus, merely comparing policies is insufficient to understand why some officers are more supportive of community policing across contexts.

[Table 2 about here]

To examine differences between officers in the same department, I estimated the same models reported in Table 2 for each department separately. As shown in Table 3, general support for community policing again impacts support for community policing across racial groups in each department. In Department 1, perceived social distance consistently impacts support for community policing across all of the racial groups in this study. Here, older officers are less supportive of community policing with minorities in general, and with Hispanic and Middle Eastern communities specifically. Since Department 1 was the largest in the sample, these responses may have been driving—at least partially—results in the overall models. In

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Department 3, officers who perceived greater social distance are less supportive of community policing with all groups except African-Americans. Conversely, in Department 2 perceived social distance only impacts support for community policing with Asians. Across departments, community policing experience is still not linked to group-specific support for community policing. It is possible that some officers who engage in community policing only do so because that is the department's policy. Alternatively, some of the participating officers may not engage in community policing practices, even though it is department policy. When looking at each department individually, the coefficients for the significant independent variables again do not differ between Caucasians and minorities (Allison, 1999). Disaggregated results provide further evidence to suggest that general support for community policing and—when significant—perceived social distance each have an equivalent impact on support for community policing with both Caucasians and minorities.

[Table 3 about here]

It is clear from the results that, in many cases, an officer's perceived social distance from a minority community is a strong predictor of his or her support for community policing with that group. What, then, explains perceived social distance? Since demographic factors impact general support for community policing in other studies (Lasley et al., 2011; Lewis et al., 1999; Lurigio & Skogan, 1994; Novak et al., 2003; Skogan & Hartnett, 1997), I estimated models to test whether these factors explain differences in perceptions of social distance. Table 4 shows that, surprisingly, minority police officers were *less* supportive of community policing with minorities in general and with African-Americans and Middle Easterners specifically. Further examination shows that minority officers also reported greater social distance from these

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groups.²⁵ None of the other officer-level factors nor the department-level dummy variables have a consistent impact on perceptions of social distance across racial groups

[Table 4 about here]

I then estimated the models in Table 4 for each department separately. As Table 5 demonstrates, the overall results for what explains perceived social distance are largely driven by Department 1. In the other two departments, none of the predictors—including officer race—are significantly related to perceived social distance from minorities. In sum, it is clear that social distance has an important impact on support for community policing across racial groups. Yet, it is not clear what impacts perceptions of social distance across departments.

[Table 5 about here]

Discussion

The motivating questions for this project were: are there differences in officer support for community policing across racial groups? And, if differences do exist, what explains why some officers are more supportive of community policing with minorities than others? This project shows that officers are less supportive of community policing with racial minorities compared to their white neighbors. Similarly, officers perceive significantly more social distance between themselves and non-white communities. After establishing that differences exist, I turned to the question of why. Overall, officers who are more supportive for community policing in general and who perceive less social distance from a racial group are more supportive of community policing with that group. Yet, these two mechanisms do not impact support for community policing across racial groups in all departments.

²⁵ Minority officers perceive greater social distance from minority communities in general, ($t(625)=-2.96, p=0.002$). This finding holds for perceived distance from African American ($t(634)=-2.73, p=0.003$) and Middle Eastern ($t(634)=-3.64, p=0.001$) communities specifically. There were no differences in experience with ($t(668)=0.96, p=0.17$) or general support for ($t(711)=0.90, p=0.18$) community policing between minority and Caucasian officers.

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When officers view racial minorities as more different from themselves, support for community policing with them dwindles. Regardless of its origination, this lack (or perceived lack) of commonality and understanding between officers and various communities can lead to more tension and distrust between police and communities (Gaskew, 2009). When officers feel more distanced from a particular community, they may be concerned about their own safety and sense that community policing would not be fruitful, leading to de-policing. Perceived social distance matters for supporting community policing with a group and officer demographics do not consistently explain perceived social distance.

Previous research has found that officer demographics like race, gender, age, and education impact support for community policing in general (Lewis et al., 1999; Lurigio & Skogan, 1994; Novak et al, 2003; Skogan & Hartnett, 1997). Here, older officers are less supportive of group-specific community policing, though other demographics factors are not significant. Interestingly, non-white police officers have lower levels of support for community policing with racial minorities and indicated greater perceived social distance between themselves and racial minority communities in their jurisdictions. These findings contrast with previous criminological research that minority officers are more supportive of community policing (Lasley et al., 2011; Skogan & Hartnett, 1997), feel closer to minority communities (Paoline, Myers, & Worden, 2000), and are more likely to engage in community policing with minorities (Smith et al., 2005). Public administration researchers, however, find that a higher proportion of black (Wilkins & Williams, 2008) or Latino (Wilkins & Williams, 2009) officers in a division can actually increase racial profiling. These findings suggest that a minority officer's identity as police supersedes his or her racial identity. It is possible that the present study's findings result from a small number of minority officers in the sample, or it may indicate

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overcompensation in social identification. Given the push toward recruiting officers that are more demographically representative of the communities they serve and the contradictory findings so far in the literature, this is an avenue for further exploration.

Past experience with community policing is not related to support for it with minority communities. There are a few possible explanations for this finding. Individual preferences and perspectives are a stronger motivator for action than the department policy. Additionally, some officers may engage in community policing practices because they are told to, but lack the belief that it is the best policy, which can undermine action (Lurigio & Skogan, 1994).

The aggregate story is straightforward: officers who are more supportive of community policing in general and who perceive less social distance from a racial group are more likely to support community policing with that group. Yet, when we turn to the disaggregated results, there are meaningful differences in the impact of perceived social distance across departments. These differences may be a function of department-level culture, and will be explored in future research. Variation between the overall results and the department-level results demonstrate the importance of comparative research in policing. With over 18,000 police agencies in the United States, it is not safe to assume that what explains officer-level views in one jurisdiction will apply to another department.

Conclusions

Future Directions

While data are from officers in departments that cover geographically and politically broad areas, all departments were still the same metropolitan region. The Washington D.C. area population is diverse, so community policing across racial groups is salient to officers. In regions that are either less diverse or where minority-police relationships are more strained, officers may be

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likely to be less supportive of relationship-building. Additionally, it is possible that the principal-agent issues shown in the departments in this study are more common in larger departments where the distance between officers and the chief is greater. Future research on officer views of community policing and racial groups should focus on police departments of varying size in other regions of the country.

The disaggregated results show department-level differences in the impact of perceived social distance and demographic factors. Essentially, overall results tell a story that is not applicable to each department. Yet, much of policing research focuses on a single department. Department-level differences, such as those found in this study, may be commonplace. To improve department-specific policy recommendations across issues in policing, comparative research can help to identify whether findings are generalizable or department-specific.

Since the present data is cross-sectional, the conclusions reached in this study are not definitive. Conducting this research over time would allow for comparison of how changes in department policies impact officers' engagement in community policing and views toward those actions across contexts. Time-series data also provide the opportunity to examine how current events impact police policies and practices. While relationships between police and many minority communities have long been tense, concerns about police brutality have dominated public discourse over the past few years. Collecting data from officers in a few years when the most pertinent public issues may shift can provide insight into the impact of public discourse on policing practice.

Lastly, results show that an officer's perceived social distance from minorities impacts support for community policing with them. Yet, it is not clear what factors impact perceptions of social distance. Of the demographic factors tested, only officer race (counterintuitively) impacts

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perception of distance from minorities. Officer-level perceptions of social distance is an area ripe for better theorizing and research.

Policy Recommendations

This project's most consistent finding is that general support for community policing is positively associated with group-specific support for the practice. Thus, departments should focus on efforts to increase officer buy-in for community policing. Two tangible ways to achieve this are to reward officers who already engage strongly in community policing practices and to demonstrate the benefits of community policing to all officers. Specifically, departments can incentivize officers to engage in community policing by integrating measures of these efforts into performance reviews, as was recommended by the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing. Additionally, community policing has many positive downstream implications. When officers treat people respectfully and fairly, this should increase both compliance with the law and cooperation with law enforcement from the public. By showing officers that relationship-building efforts can make their jobs easier, this can help change attitudes about community policing within police departments.

Results show that greater perceived social distance often decreases support for community policing with a group. Efforts to reduce officer perceptions of social distance from minorities should increase support for community policing across racial groups. Events that bring officers and the public together in a positive way can help to counter narratives about tensions between police and communities by humanizing each group. While training alone will not change practice, increasing awareness of implicit bias and the impact that these views have on actions can help to mitigate negative outcomes. This could be particularly helpful in the hiring process if it could be used as a tool to weed out applicants with the strongest racial biases.

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The intuitive policy prescription to reduce perceived social distance between police and minority communities is to increase diversity on the force. Indeed, many police departments have focused on racial diversity in recruiting. Minority officers in this study perceived greater distance from minority groups and were less supportive of community policing with them. Results here suggest that efforts to diversify law enforcement may not have the intended benefits and may actually be counterproductive in some cases. Minority officer perceptions of and engagement with minority communities is an area for further exploration before clear policy recommendations about racial diversity in hiring can be drawn.

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Table 1. Demographics and Descriptive Variables by Department

Variable	Department 1	Department 2	Department 3
Gender: Male	88.19%	82.96%	88.68%
Gender: Female	11.81%	17.04%	11.32%
Age: 18-24	10.92%	6.82%	10.69%
Age: 25-34	41.44%	56.82%	45.28%
Age: 35-44	30.27%	20.45%	28.30%
Age: 45+	17.37%	15.91%	15.72%
Education: College degree	67.87%	91.11%	79.50%
Race: Caucasian	81.14%	81.34%	84.28%
Race: African-American	6.95%	11.19%	6.92%
Race: Asian	5.96%	2.99%	3.77%
Race: Hispanic	7.69%	11.94%	10.05%
Race: Middle Eastern	0.50%	1.52%	1.89%
Politics: Liberal	3.76%	9.30%	10.90%
Politics: Moderate	37.84%	30.23%	32.69%
Politics: Conservative	58.40%	60.47%	56.41%
Foreign Born	11.41%	8.96%	11.18%
Bilingual	22.87%	22.39%	24.84%
Supervisor	9.23%	16.67%	14.19%
DV (Support for COP with minority communities)	Mean: 22.89 SD: 4.72 Var: 22.32 α : 0.97	Mean: 23.59 SD: 4.50 Var: 20.26 α : 0.97	Mean: 23.91 SD: 4.37 Var: 19.07 α : 0.96
IV1 (Experience with COP in general)	Mean: 128.46 SD: 17.10 Var: 292.50 α : 0.82	Mean: 133.37 SD: 14.46 Var: 209.19 α : 0.80	Mean: 132.51 SD: 16.13 Var: 260.06 α : 0.80
IV2 (Support for COP in general)	Mean: 42.20 SD: 6.04 Var: 36.49 α : 0.71	Mean: 42.88 SD: 6.35 Var: 40.36 α : 0.76	Mean: 42.96 SD: 6.28 Var: 39.45 α : 0.73
IV3 (Perceived social distance from minority communities)	Mean: 9.38 SD: 2.08 Var: 4.32 α : 0.78	Mean: 9.07 SD: 1.98 Var: 3.91 α : 0.77	Mean: 8.86 SD: 2.20 Var: 4.86 α : 0.73

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Table 2. Support for Community Policing with Minority Communities

	Minorities (Combined)	African– Americans	Asian	Hispanic	Middle Eastern	Caucasian
CP Experience	-0.005 (0.006)	0.002 (0.006)	-0.001 (0.006)	-0.004 (0.006)	-0.005 (0.006)	0.003 (0.006)
Support for CP	0.20*** (0.02)	0.20*** (0.02)	0.18*** (0.02)	0.19*** (0.02)	0.19*** (0.02)	0.18*** (0.02)
Social Distance	-0.29*** (0.05)	-0.10** (0.04)	-0.22*** (0.04)	-0.18*** (0.04)	-0.21*** (0.04)	-0.33*** (0.04)
Male	0.20 (0.24)	0.31 (0.25)	0.20 (0.24)	0.27 (0.23)	0.07 (0.23)	0.20 (0.24)
Age	-0.26** (0.10)	-0.21* (0.09)	-0.21* (0.09)	-0.28** (0.10)	-0.25** (0.09)	-0.20* (0.09)
College Degree	-0.15 (0.19)	0.03 (0.20)	0.003 (0.20)	0.06 (0.20)	0.02 (0.20)	-0.07 (0.20)
Minority	0.21 (0.22)	0.16 (0.23)	0.10 (0.23)	0.31 (0.22)	0.11 (0.23)	0.04 (0.22)
Department 1 (dummy)	-0.21 (0.22)	-0.30 (0.23)	-0.20 (0.22)	-0.24 (0.21)	-0.08 (0.22)	0.11 (0.24)
Department 3 (dummy)	-0.13 (0.25)	-0.08 (0.25)	-0.06 (0.25)	-0.12 (0.24)	0.01 (0.25)	0.16 (0.27)
Observations	577	586	584	591	587	590

Ordered logistic regression models. Constants not reported.

Note: Coefficients are presented with robust standard errors in parentheses.

†p < 0.10. *p < 0.05. **p < 0.01. ***p < 0.001.

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Table 3. Support for Community Policing with Minority Communities by Department

	Minorities (overall)	African - American	Asian	Hispanic	Middle Eastern	Caucasian
DEPARTMENT 1						
CP Experience	-0.002 (0.009)	0.006 (0.008)	0.002 (0.01)	-0.001 (0.008)	-0.002 (0.009)	0.008 (0.009)
Support for CP	0.18*** (0.02)	0.19*** (0.02)	0.17*** (0.02)	0.18*** (0.02)	0.18*** (0.02)	0.16*** (0.03)
Social Distance	-0.38*** (0.07)	-0.17*** (0.05)	-0.22*** (0.05)	-0.24*** (0.05)	-0.25*** (0.05)	-0.43*** (0.06)
Male	0.16 (0.31)	0.23 (0.33)	0.37 (0.32)	0.24 (0.30)	0.07 (0.29)	0.46 (0.33)
Age	-0.30* (0.14)	-0.20 (0.13)	-0.24 (0.14)	-0.30* (0.14)	-0.26* (0.13)	-0.22 (0.13)
College Degree	-0.09 (0.25)	-0.15 (0.24)	-0.10 (0.25)	-0.03 (0.25)	-0.08 (0.24)	0.08 (0.24)
Minority	-0.11 (0.34)	-0.18 (0.34)	-0.23 (0.33)	0.07 (0.33)	-0.23 (0.33)	-0.37 (0.33)
Observations	322	328	328	333	331	331
DEPARTMENT 2						
CP Experience	-0.0006 (0.02)	-0.009 (0.02)	0.002 (0.02)	-0.004 (0.02)	0.001 (0.02)	-0.003 (0.02)
Support for CP	0.21*** (0.05)	0.24*** (0.05)	0.18*** (0.05)	0.22*** (0.05)	0.20*** (0.04)	0.22*** (0.04)
Social Distance	-0.13 (0.11)	0.06 (0.09)	-0.19* (0.09)	-0.03 (0.09)	-0.17 (0.12)	-0.18 (0.11)
Male	0.27 (0.61)	0.27 (0.50)	0.26 (0.60)	0.26 (0.55)	0.12 (0.68)	-0.05 (0.54)
Age	-0.28 (0.20)	-0.42* (0.20)	-0.22 (0.21)	-0.35 [†] (0.21)	-0.26 (0.20)	-0.27 (0.18)
College Degree	-0.18 (0.83)	-0.05 (0.83)	-0.25 (0.91)	0.18 (0.70)	0.26 (0.90)	0.12 (0.76)
Minority	0.59 (0.40)	0.91* (0.40)	0.66 (0.47)	0.72 (0.46)	0.39 (0.42)	0.38 (0.44)
Observations	117	117	117	117	117	117

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DEPARTMENT 3						
CP Experience	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.008 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.02 (0.01)	-0.001 (0.01)
Support for CP	0.25*** (0.04)	0.23*** (0.04)	0.23*** (0.04)	0.22*** (0.04)	0.24*** (0.04)	0.20*** (0.04)
Social Distance	-0.24** (0.09)	-0.02 (0.07)	-0.24*** (0.07)	-0.14* (0.06)	-0.19** (0.06)	-0.27** (0.10)
Male	0.37 (0.48)	0.75 (0.57)	-0.01 (0.48)	0.63 (0.53)	0.26 (0.45)	0.08 (0.44)
Age	-0.26 (0.20)	-0.16 (0.18)	-0.21 (0.18)	-0.28 (0.21)	-0.28 (0.18)	-0.24 (0.16)
College Degree	0.32 (0.41)	0.49 (0.42)	0.29 (0.42)	0.31 (0.43)	0.42 (0.45)	0.06 (0.46)
Minority	0.59 (0.44)	0.42 (0.46)	0.31 (0.42)	0.78 (0.46)	0.70 (0.50)	0.55 (0.44)
Observations	138	141	139	141	139	142

Ordered logistic regression models. Constants not reported.

Note: Coefficients are presented with robust standard errors in parentheses.

†p < 0.10. *p < 0.05. **p < 0.01. ***p < 0.001.

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Table 4. What Impacts Perceived Social Distance?

	Minorities (Combined)	African– Americans	Asian	Hispanic	Middle Eastern	Caucasian
Minority	0.56* (0.23)	0.70* (0.32)	0.48 (0.32)	-0.02 (0.31)	1.01** (0.33)	0.01 (0.20)
Supervisor	-0.30 (0.31)	-0.04 (0.40)	-0.75* (0.35)	-0.15 (0.38)	-0.29 (0.40)	-0.28 (0.28)
College Degree	-0.18 (0.19)	0.35 (0.27)	0.01 (0.25)	0.17 (0.26)	0.50 (0.28)	0.08 (0.16)
Politically Conservative	-0.08 (0.12)	0.03 (0.16)	-0.002 (0.14)	-0.32* (0.15)	-0.01 (0.15)	-0.02 (0.12)
Department 1 (dummy)	0.34 [†] (0.21)	0.23 (0.27)	-0.03 (0.26)	0.59* (0.29)	0.60* (0.27)	0.21 (0.19)
Department 3 (dummy)	-0.14 (0.25)	0.20 (0.33)	-0.47 (0.33)	0.04 (0.34)	-0.31 (0.35)	0.25 (0.23)
Observations	574	582	580	586	583	587

Ordinary least squares regression models. Constants not reported.

Note: Coefficients are presented with robust standard errors in parentheses.

[†]p < 0.10. *p < 0.05. **p < 0.01. ***p < 0.001.

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Table 5. What Impacts Perceived Social Distance by Department

	Minorities (overall)	African - American	Asian	Hispanic	Middle Eastern	Caucasian
DEPARTMENT 1						
Minority	0.72* (0.29)	1.20** (0.41)	0.24 (0.36)	0.51 (0.41)	0.91* (0.38)	-0.02 (0.25)
Supervisor	-0.27 (0.43)	0.01 (0.56)	-0.67 (0.47)	-0.06 (0.53)	-0.43 (0.55)	-0.34 (0.33)
College Degree	-0.19 (0.24)	-0.50 (0.34)	0.006 (0.28)	0.21 (0.32)	-0.41 (0.30)	0.08 (0.21)
Politically Conservative	-0.01 (0.16)	0.06 (0.21)	0.09 (0.19)	-0.30 (0.21)	0.08 (0.20)	0.04 (0.15)
Observations	323	328	329	333	332	333
DEPARTMENT 2						
Minority	0.07 (0.48)	0.18 (0.62)	0.90 (0.61)	-1.20 [†] (0.66)	0.38 (0.62)	0.13 (0.43)
Supervisor	-0.23 (0.49)	0.27 (0.76)	-1.25* (0.50)	-0.27 (0.68)	0.31 (0.60)	-0.50 (0.47)
College Degree	-0.20 (0.53)	-0.16 (0.80)	0.42 (0.73)	-0.32 (0.87)	-0.72 (1.22)	0.01 (0.48)
Politically Conservative	-0.07 (0.22)	0.20 (0.31)	-0.05 (0.26)	-0.37 (0.32)	-0.06 (0.28)	-0.02 (0.23)
Observations	117	117	117	117	117	117
DEPARTMENT 3						
Minority	0.63 (0.56)	-0.23 (0.74)	0.87 (0.98)	-0.35 (0.59)	1.99 [†] (1.05)	0.06 (0.46)
Supervisor	-0.38 (0.69)	-0.37 (0.76)	-0.55 (0.85)	-0.09 (0.78)	-0.53 (0.97)	-0.01 (0.74)
College Degree	-0.10 (0.42)	0.13 (0.55)	-0.16 (0.62)	0.32 (0.0)	-0.66 (0.68)	0.13 (0.35)
Politically Conservative	-0.18 (0.26)	-0.14 (0.35)	-0.13 (0.33)	-0.29 (0.30)	-0.14 (0.35)	-0.16 (0.30)
Observations	134	137	134	136	134	137

Ordinary least squares regression models. Constants not reported.

Note: Coefficients are presented with robust standard errors in parentheses.

[†]p < 0.10. *p < 0.05. **p < 0.01. ***p < 0.001.