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PERCEPTIONS OF THE POLICE AMONG MEMBERS OF

SIX ETHNIC COMMUNITIES IN CENTRAL QUEENS, NY

Executive Summary

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ABSTRACT

Previous research has established that race plays an important part in shaping people's attitudes toward the police. However, race is a variable that has less and less explanatory power as the U.S. becomes an increasingly multi-ethnic society. Our investigation examined the effects that one's local ethnic community plays in conditioning attitudes toward the police. From a multi-ethnic neighborhood in Queens, New York with a high proportion of foreign-born residents, we surveyed representative samples of 200 residents from six different ethnic groups. The groups included African-Americans, Italians, Indians, Colombians, Eduadoreans, and Dominicans. Respondents were asked about voluntary and involuntary contacts with the police, about perceptions of police effectiveness and misconduct, and about crime reporting.

Contrary to expectations, we found no significant differences among the six ethnic groups in police-initiated contacts. On the other hand, we noted large differences between ethnic communities in voluntary contacts with the police. The ethnic communities that were the longest-established and best-integrated into the local political structure (African-Americans and Italian-Americans) were far more likely to use the police in instrumental ways than communites that were less well-established (the three Latino communities).

We found that respondents held contradictory attitudes about police behavior. A majority believed that the police were effective in addressing local crime concerns. But a majority also believed that the police were guilty of engaging in misconduct.

As expected, experience with the police played a role in shaping people's attitudes. Individuals who had been stopped by the police within the past year were more likely to believe that the police engaged in misconduct and were less willing to report crimes than other survey respondents. However, group membership played a much larger role in how people felt about the police: The most powerful determinant of opinions about the police and willingness to report crimes was membership in particular local ethnic communities: Respondents who were from communities that were less efficacious and less well-intergrated into the local political structure held less favorable views of the police than respondents from more powerful communities. Also important in conditioning attitudes toward the police was whether respondents were native citizens. Respondents who were born in the U.S. held morer positive attitudes toward the police than respondents who had been born abroad. The pattern of results suggests that confidence in the police is gernerated less by direct experience than by the attitudes of one's peers and by prejudices about law enforcement formed in immigrants' countries of origin.

INTRODUCTION

A recent Harris poll (Changing Attitudes Toward the Police, April 7, 1999) highlighted

serious concerns about relations between police and ethnic minorities. For example:

o Most Americans (55%) believe that local police are guilty of brutality against
Blacks or Hispanics at least occasionally. Among Black Americans, this figure rises
to 79%.

o While only 16% of Whites say that they are sometimes afraid that the police will
stop and arrest them even when they are completely innocent, fully 43% of Blacks
express this fear.

A newly-released study by the Bureau of Justice Statistics found justification for these

perceptions. The study found that police were more likely to use force against Blacks or Hispanics

than against Whites they came into contact with (Greenfeld, Langan, and Smith, 1999).

Our work examines the nature of the relationship between police and immigrant

communities. While a number of investigators have examined experiences with and attitudes toward

the police among racial minorities, ours is the first work we know of which looks at specific ethnic

groups, some of which contained large numbers of recent immigrants. Our work sought to look at

contacts with the police -- both voluntary and involuntary -- of six ethnic groups residing in central

Queens, NY. We then look at how these groups view the police -- both positive attitudes

(perceptions of police effectiveness) and negative attitudes (police misconduct). Next, we examine

the extent to which perceptions of the police are conditioned by people's experiences, by their ethnic

communities, and by demographic factors.

Another section of the report examines victimization experiences of the ethnic communities, including family violence and hate crimes. Finally, we examine crime reporting behavior of the six communities and the factors that shape willingness to report, including contacts with the police, attitudes toward the police, and membership in their local ethnic community. The picture that emerges is an interesting one and one that we hope will help law enforcement administrators and policy-makers better understand issues of concern to ethnic communities, particularly whose with recently-arrived Americans.

The current work complements earlier work that we conducted for the National Institute of Justice (Davis and Erez, 1996). In the earlier study, we examined barriers to participation in the criminal justice system for victims who are recent immigrants. We found that, while immigrants did face some special problems, overall their experience in the criminal justice system was not unlike that of native-born victims. That is, most immigrant victims were satisfied with their treatment by criminal justice officials, and when they did have complaints, the complaints were similar in nature to those of native-born victims However, criminal justice officials we interviewed believed that many immigrant victims never used the criminal justice system because they were reluctant to report crimes to the police. The present work examines the nature of the relationship between immigrant victims and the police and assesses the extent to which members of each community report crimes.

Background on Police-Minority Relations

Relations between the police and ethnic minorities have experienced strains throughout U.S. history. Police officers, who are most often White, and minority residents perceive each other as different, often leading to mistrust and animosity (Vrij, 1991). It has been argued that police treat --

or are perceived to treat -- members of minority communities differently than White citizens (Shusta, et. al., 1994; Lumb, 1995). In 1968 the Kerner Commission noted the existence of hostility at various times between New York City police and Jews, Irish, Poles, Italians, Germans, and (later) Puerto Ricans. More recently, the riots of Blacks and Latinos following the trial of police officers accused of beating Rodney King and the anti-police verdict of the (predominantly) minority O.J. Simpson jury have placed in stark relief the tensions between police and minorities.

Although research has shown that people generally hold favorable views of the police (e.g., Mastrofski, et. al., 1998, 1999), it has also consistently demonstrated that members of minority communities are more hostile toward and fearful of the police than Whites. For example, Webb and Marshall (1985) found that Latinos and Blacks were less likely than Whites to agree with positive statements about the personal and professional characteristics of police officers. Jefferson and Walker (1993) reported that two-thirds of people surveyed believed that the police discriminated against non-Whites. In fact, the most consistent of all predictors identified to date of citizen attitudes toward the police is race. Although the results from many surveys have shown that most people are generally supportive of the police and satisfied with the way they perform their duties (see Homant, Kennedy, & Fleming, 1984; Benson, 1981; O'Brien, 1978; Thomas & Hyman, 1977; Lundman, 1974; Radelet, 1980; Wilson, 1975), studies reaching back to the 1960s concur that Black citizens evaluate the police more negatively than White citizens (Hahn, 1969; McCord and Howard, 1968; Jacob, 1971; Campbell and Schuman, 1972; Skogan, 1978; Scaglion and Condon, 1980; Browning, Cullen, Cao, Kopache, and Stevenson, 1994). Moreover, such negative attitudes toward the police are not confined only to African-Americans. Hadum and Snortum (1975) reported that Mexican-Americans as well as Blacks gave the police lower ratings than Whites.

The lower confidence in the police among minorities seems to be attributable, at least in part, to differential experience with the police (Jacob, 1971). Winfree and Griffiths (1971) reported that most of the variation in assessments of police performance were attributable to respondents' experience with the police. Scaglion and Condon (1980) found that the way that people perceive their treatment at the hands of the police is a more important determinant of their attitudes than demography. Campbell and Schuman (1972) found that lower evaluations of the police among Blacks was attributable to Blacks experiencing more insulting language, unnecessary frisks, and police brutality than Whites. Friedman and Hott (1995) found that youths who were stopped by the police were far more likely than those not stopped to fear the police: Indeed, fully 61% of those stopped felt they had been verbally disrespected, threatened, or shoved.

Thus, Blacks and other minorities are more likely than Whites to have unpleasant involuntary contacts with the police, and these contacts color their perceptions of law enforcement officials (Feagin, 1970; Walker, et. al., 1972; Parks, 1976; Winfree and Griffiths, 1971). Over a quarter century ago, Piliavin and Briar (1964) noted in an observational study of police in a large city that officers exercised a good deal of discretion in deciding whom to stop, and that youths were often stopped even when evidence of wrongdoing was absent. Race was an important factor in the decision to detain, with Black youths being targeted more often than Whites. Black and Reiss (1970) conducted a similar investigation of police interactions with juveniles in several major metropolitan areas and found that the likelihood of arrest for Black juveniles was higher than for Whites. Sykes and Clark (1981) analyzed data from 200 police-citizen encounters in a large city. They found that officers failed to show respect in most encounters, but especially those involving minority youth. Officers' behavior toward minorities was occasioned, in part, by failure of minority youth to show

deference to officers.

Decker (1981) distinguished between voluntary and involuntary contacts with the police. He defined voluntary contacts as being initiated by citizens to report crimes, requests for information, and so forth. Involuntary contacts were police-initiated contacts such as stops for questioning on the streets or arrests. Decker reasoned that involuntary contacts would generate more negative reactions by citizens than voluntary contacts. However, evidence suggests that any form of contact with the police -- voluntary or involuntary -- push attitudes in a more negative direction (Smith and Hawkins, 1973). For example, several studies have suggested that persons who are victimized by crime hold more negative attitudes toward the police than those not victimized (Block, 1971; Homant, Kennedy, and Fleming, 1984). It has been suggested that the higher rate of victimization among minorities may partially account for their more negative attitudes toward the police (Gaines, Kappeler, and Vaughan, 1994). Southgate and Eckblom, 1984).

It has also been suggested that minorities hold the police in lower regard because they are more sensitive to mistreatment by the police than Whites. Friedman and Hott (1995) concluded that Latinos were the ethnic group most likely to feel disrespected by the police even though they were less likely to be stopped by the police than White or Blacks. Browning, et. al. (1994) interpreted their results to indicate that Blacks were more likely than Whites to interpret police behavior toward them as being "hassling" and or indicative of suspicion.

There is some evidence that community policing can help to improve police-minority relations. Trojanowicz (1991) found that improvement in police-community relations were seen when foot patrols were begun as part of a community policing strategy. However, there also is evidence that awareness of community policing and benefits of community policing are not shared

equally by all segments of the community. For example, Pate (1986) reported that awareness of and contact with community policing programs in Houston were lower in poor and minority neighborhoods, Whites were more likely than Blacks to report that they were aware of community policing meetings, to recall that police had paid courtesy calls, and/or to state that they had called or visited the local community policing storefront precinct. Differences were even more striking between Whites and Latinos: In each of the program penetration categories, Whites reported at least three times more involvement than Latinos.

Such differences have not been universally noted. Skogan (1990) reported few subgroup differences in an evaluation of Newark's community policing experiment. Skogan and Hartnett (1997) reported higher turnout for community meetings among Black and poor residents in the current Chicago community policing experiment. However, differences in subgroup awareness and participation long have been reported in studies of community organizing (e.g., Greenberg, Rohe, and Williams, 1982; see Rosenbaum, 1987 for an extended discussion).

The lesser impact of community policing that has been observed on minority communities may be most pronounced in communities which contain large numbers of recent immigrants. It is telling, for example, that in the Houston community policing experiment Latinos scored even lower on measures of awareness, participation, and effectiveness of community policing than Blacks. The Latino communities presumably contained many more foreign-born residents than the Black communities studied. Similarly, Skogan and Hartnett (1997) found lower participation in community meetings among Latinos than among Whites or Blacks.

The Difficulty of Policing Immigrant Communities

While the literature has made clear that there are special problems policing racial minorities, problems are likely to be exacerbated when communities contain large numbers of recent immigrants. There are strong reasons to expect that efforts to recruit citizens into the fight against crime would be less successful in communities of foreign-born minorities. The most obvious hindrance is language. Many recent immigrants know little English and most police officers are not fluid in other languages (Pogrebin and Poole, 1989). Thus recent immigrants may not receive messages about community policing from mass media, advertisements or officers themselves to nearly the same extent as English-speakers.

Immigrants' participation in police-sponsored activities may be diminished by negative expectations about authorities. Many immigrants come here carrying the baggage of bad experiences with authorities in their country of origin (Pogrebin and Poole, 1990b). These perceptions of authorities are transferred to officials in the U.S. in the absence of any direct experience with authorities here. When they do have contact with police here, the contact may be negative because of misunderstandings arising from cultural or language differences.

Immigrants may also avoid involvement with police because of concern about their immigration status (e.g. Meeker and Dombrink, 1988). Official estimates place the influx of undocumented immigrants at 5-10 million over the past ten years (Nelan, 1993). In a recent study for NIJ, we reported that undocumented immigrants were perceived by criminal justice officials and by leaders of their own communities as likely to avoid involvement with the criminal justice system out of fear of deportation (Davis and Erez, 1996).

But gaining the cooperation of recent immigrants in crime reporting and police activities is

important because their numbers are large and growing. For example, in 1980, just over 14,000,000 foreign - born individuals were living in the United States (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1980) and by 1990, the number of foreign - born people had nearly risen to 20,000,000 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1990). In some metropolitan areas, including Miami FL, Union City NJ, and Santa Ana CA, more than half of the population is foreign-born (Chaste, 1995).

Motivation for the Present Study

We set out to examine the state of police-community relations in neighborhoods composed largely of recent immigrants, and to identify ways in which the police can better engage and mobilize these communities. We examined the nature of police-citizen interactions among six ethnic communities -- four composed largely of recent immigrants and two composed largely of native-born residents. We examined the frequency of both voluntary interactions with the police (e.g., asking a police officer for directions) as well as involuntary contacts such as being stopped and questioned by the police.

We also assessed resident perceptions of the police -- both perceptions of competence and perceptions of mistreatment. We examined the extent to which people's opinions were linked to personal experience with their local police, to where they were born (in the U.S. or abroad), and to the influences of their local ethnic communities.

Our study also picks up where our previous one left off on the issue of crime reporting by recent immigrants. In the Davis and Erez (1996) report, the consensus of criminal justice officials whom we interviewed was that crime under reporting is a serious issue in immigrant communities. Field work in two multi-ethnic neighborhoods (Jackson Heights, New York and Logan, Philadelphia)

led us to conclude that under reporting was especially acute in ethnic communities that were poorly organized and disenfranchised from the local power structure. Such communities were also characterized by mistrust of authorities. Other authors as well have suggested that under reporting among immigrants is commonplace, although no study to date has based this conclusion upon solid empirical research (Junger, 1990; Pogrebin and Poole, 1990 & 1990a; Meeker and Dombrink, 1991; Sorenson and Telles, 1991).

In the current study, we asked immigrants directly whether they had been victims of a recent crime and whether they reported it. We also asked whether they would be willing to report various crimes if they were to witness them. Using this information, we develop a model of crime reporting behavior based loosely on the work of Kidd and Chayet (1984). They proposed a model of crime reporting that represents one of the only attempts to bring theory to bear upon this behavior. Kidd and Chayet argued that the decision to report crimes is a function of fear of retaliation from the offender, feelings of helplessness or powerlessness, confidence in the ability of the police to apprehend the offender, and mistrust of authorities. Our work tests the extent to which people's failure to report crimes is rooted in factors related to Kidd and Chayet's model, including a sense that their ethnic community is not politically powerful or efficacious, through confidence in police abilities, through perceptions of police misconduct. In addition, we also relate crime reporting to contacts with the police, to membership in local ethnic communities, and to demographic factors.

METHOD

Sampling

The research sample was drawn from communities in central Queens, New York. With assistance of staff of the University of Baltimore's Schaffer Center for Public Policy, a sampling plan was constructed which would provide representative samples of each of the six ethnic communities. Telephone interviews were conducted with approximately 200 persons from each of the six ethnic communities (total N=1,123). The six sommunities included African Americans, Italians, Indians, and three Latino communities -- Ecuadorians, Colombians, and Dominicans. Details of sampling are included in the full report.

Subjects

The study included 201 Colombians, 200 Ecuadorians, 200 Dominicans, 176 African Americans, 176 Indians, and 170 Italians. Twenty-seven percent of the sample was born in the U.S. and 73% in other countries. Respondents had been in the U.S. for an average of 16 years and had been in their present neighborhood for an average of 11 years. An overwhelming majority (94%) claimed to be legal residents of the U.S.

Fifty-six percent of respondents were women and 44% men. The median age of the sample was 37 years. Most respondents (77%) lived in family units of 2-4 persons. But seventeen percent lived alone and 6% lived in households of 5 or more persons. Fifty-eight percent of households had children living in them.

Sample participants were primarily lower middle class. Seven in ten respondents in the

sample had graduated secondary school. About one-third (31%) owned their own homes. Most were in the work force: Forty-seven percent had worked full time during the previous week and another 12% had worked part-time. The sample also included 18% housekeepers, 10% retired, and 4% in school. Respondents who worked did so for an average of 45 weeks during the previous year.

Household income fell below $20,000 for 42% of the sample and above $20,000 for 58%. The most common source of income (reported by 50% of the sample) was employment by others. About 10% stated that their main income source was a business of their own. Sixteen percent of the sample was receiving social security or disability checks. Just 5% received public assistance checks. Smaller numbers received their main financial support from parents or child support.

Measurement

All potential respondents were asked questions to establish their ethnic group membership. Those eligible for the survey based upon those answers were asked questions in the following domains:

Experience with the police   We adapted a scale used by the Chicago Community Policing Evaluation Consortium (Johnson, 1993). The eleven item Chicago Experiences with Police Scale (Johnson, 1993) counts the number of different reasons why a person has had contact with the police during the past year. The scale has both citizen-initiated and police initiated components. The citizen-initiated items include calls to report crimes, emergencies, suspicious persons, odd noises and other events. Items also include questions on whether citizens contact the police in order to receive or give information about community concerns or other non-crime experiences. The police initiated items include questions about whether the police have stopped the individual on the street

while he or she was out walking or pulled him or her over while driving.

Perceptions of police misconduct   This scale measures the extent to which people are fearful and distrustful of the police. To measure this concept we used a modified version of Jefferson and Walker's (1993) Distrust of Police Measure. Jefferson and Walker's (1993) scale measures the extent to which people thought the police took part in various forms of misconduct, including: using threats when questioning people, unnecessary violence, maintain inaccurate records, and make up evidence. (For example, do you fear that the police will use violence against you?)

Perceptions of police competence   This scale measures the extent to which respondents feel that the police are doing a good job. Our measure was based on the ten-item Chicago Attitudes Toward Community Policing Scale (Johnson, 1993) designed to assess citizen evaluations of police in their neighborhoods. The items asked about police responsiveness to neighborhood concerns, and how good a job citizens believe the police are doing in their neighborhood.

Community efficacy   We adapted a scale developed by Chavis and Wandersman (1990) for research on block associations, and used in our previous work on community anti-drug organizations (Davis, Smith, Lurigio, and Skogan, 1991). Example: If there was a problem in receiving some service from the city, do you think that persons in your ethnic community could get the problem solved?

Political empowerment   We asked two questions that assessed the extent to which respondents perceived their ethnic communities to be integrated into the local political power structure. The first asked whether they felt that their ethnic group was well-represented in local politics. The other asked whether local politicians were responsive to the needs of their ethnic

community.

Community organization   We asked seven pairs of questions about participation in community organizations. The first item in each pair queried respondents about whether particular types of local organizations existed within their ethnic communities. The second item of the pair asked their opinions about the level of participation -- weak, moderate, or strong. The seven types of organizations included in the survey were block associations, church groups, anti-crime organizations, sports clubs, social clubs, merchant groups, and organizations to help recent immigrants adapt.

Willingness to report crimes   We used an approach to measuring this construct that proved successful in our earlier research on citizen reporting of drug crimes (Davis, Smith, and Hillenbrand 1993). We first asked respondents whether they believed that people in their ethnic community were likely to report various criminal situations to the police, adapted from the list used by Davis, et. al.). Respondents' beliefs were then ranked on a five-point scale.

Following the questions on beliefs about reporting in their community, we asked respondents whether they had witnessed the same list of criminal acts, whether they called the police, and, if not, why not. We also asked the respondents if they hypothetically would report various criminal situations to the police.

Victimization   A series of questions was asked to ascertain whether respondents had been victims of the following crimes within the past year: Robbery, assault, burglary, domestic violence, and ethnic hate crimes. Respondents who answered "yes" to any of these questions were further asked whether the incident had been reported to the police.

Strategies to encourage citizen cooperation   Respondents were asked their opinions

on how the police could enlist better participation in crime fighting from their ethnic group. Both open-ended and closed questions were used. Respondents were first asked to comment freely on the police might best seek to improve relations with their ethnic group. Next, they were asked their opinion of the effectiveness of existing strategies the police are using to relate to their group. Answers were ranked on a five point effectiveness scale.

Respondent characteristics   Previous studies on perceptions of the police have indicated the importance of respondent characteristics including SES (education, employment, household income, and income source), age, gender, and history of victimization (see Webb and Marshall, 1995 for a recent review). We included these variables as well as length of time that respondents have been in the U.S., time in the neighborhood, immigration status, and number of members of household.

RESULTS

Differences among the ethnic communities

The ethnic groups divided somewhat cleanly into two groups. Blacks and Italians had been in this country far longer than the three Latino groups and Indians. All ethnic communities seemed to have vibrant social organizations. And all respondents were equally likely to believe that their ethnic community was able to solve local problems such as crime and municipal services. But the longer-established ethnic communities were, in many respects, more successful than the relative newcomers. Blacks and Italians had higher incomes and better educations than Dominicans, Colombians, or Ecuadoreans. In addition, the former groups were more likely to own their own homes and to live under less crowded conditions. There were as well major differences in political empowerment, with the better-established groups being more likely to believe that they were well-represented in local politics and that local government was responsive.

Experience with the Police

We found rates of involuntary contact with the police consistent with the literature: About one-quarter of our sample reported being stopped and/or arrested, a figure virtually identical with results reported out of the Chicago community policing study (e.g., Johnson, 1993). The literature would have led us to expect strongly that Blacks would have had more involuntary contacts with the police than members of other ethnic groups. While African-American respondents in our study did report a slightly higher rate of police contacts than other groups, the differences did not approach statistical significance (see Figure 1). Our data suggest that race in and of itself is not as important

Figure 1:
# # of Police-Initiated Contacts
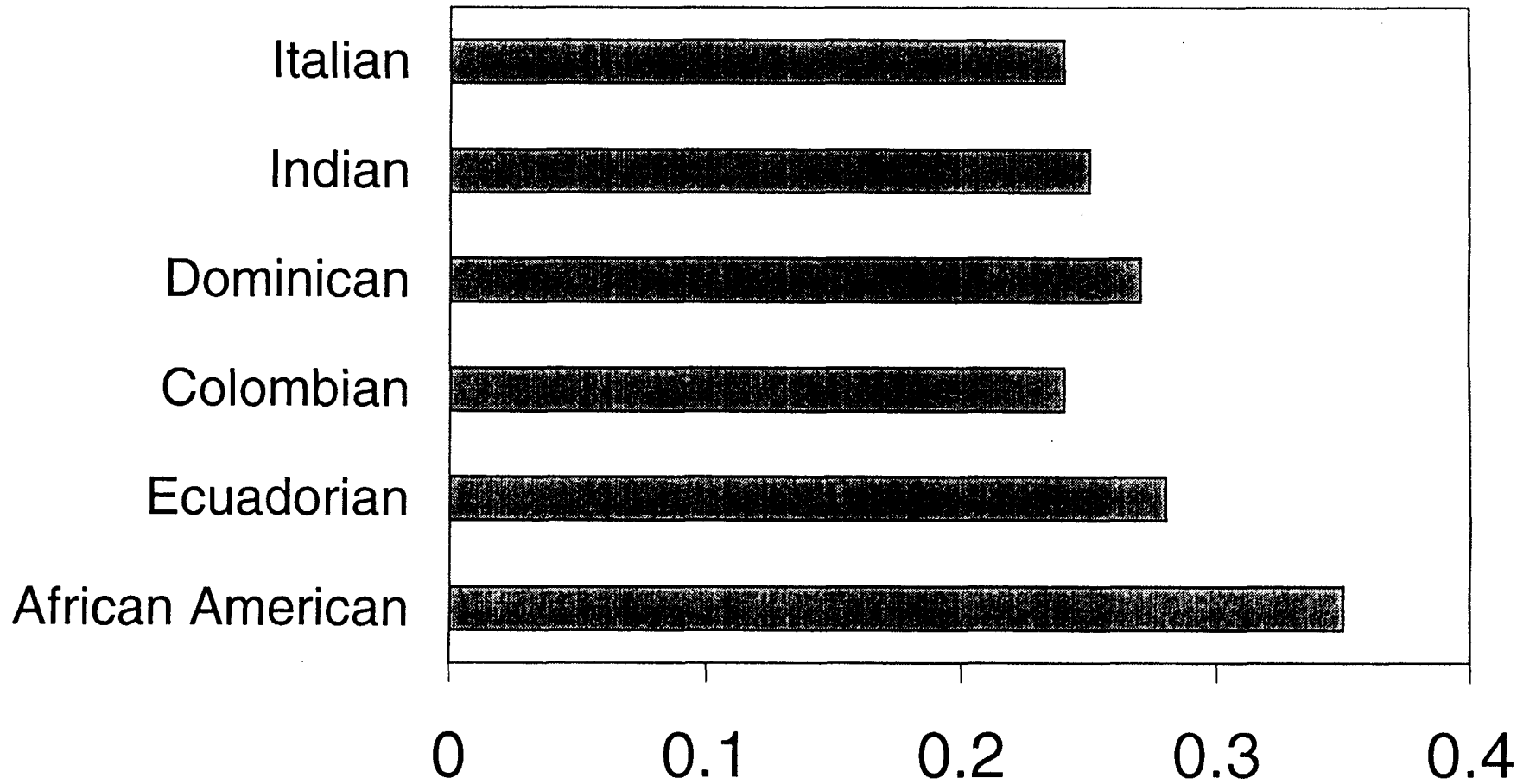
as the particular community that someone belongs to. The African-Americans in our study were largely middle-class and part of a community that was politically well-integrated. It also is worth noting that, even in the Chicago study, the relationship between race and involuntary police contacts is not a strong one: Other variables such as age, gender, and employment status were all found to be better predictors.

Citizen-initiated contacts were far more common than police-initiated contacts. We found substantially higher levels of voluntary contacts that those reported in the Chicago work. In our study, about three in four respondents initiated contact with the police compared to about one in two respondents in Chicago (Skogan and Hartnett, 1997). The reason for this is that we asked a more detailed series of questions. In particular, when we remove from our scale casual contacts (i.e., questions about whether respondents had stopped to talk to a beat officer or had asked an officer for directions) that were not asked by the Chicago researchers, our results become comparable to theirs. Whether such casual experiences with the police play an important a role in forming opinions about the police has not been studied, so it is not clear whether they are best included or excluded on scales measuring citizen-initiated contacts.

In contrast to the small differences among ethnic groups in police-initiated contacts, we noted large differences among the six communities in citizen-initiated interactions with the police. (See Figure 2). The better-established African-American and Italian-American communities were far more likely than the Latino communities or the Indian community to report initiating contact with the police. This pattern held across the range of questions we asked on this topic. But the pattern is particularly disturbing because differences were most pronounced on the more substantive forms of contact such as reporting crimes, suspicious persons, or neighborhood problems. The lesser

Figure 2:
of Citizen-Initiated Contacts
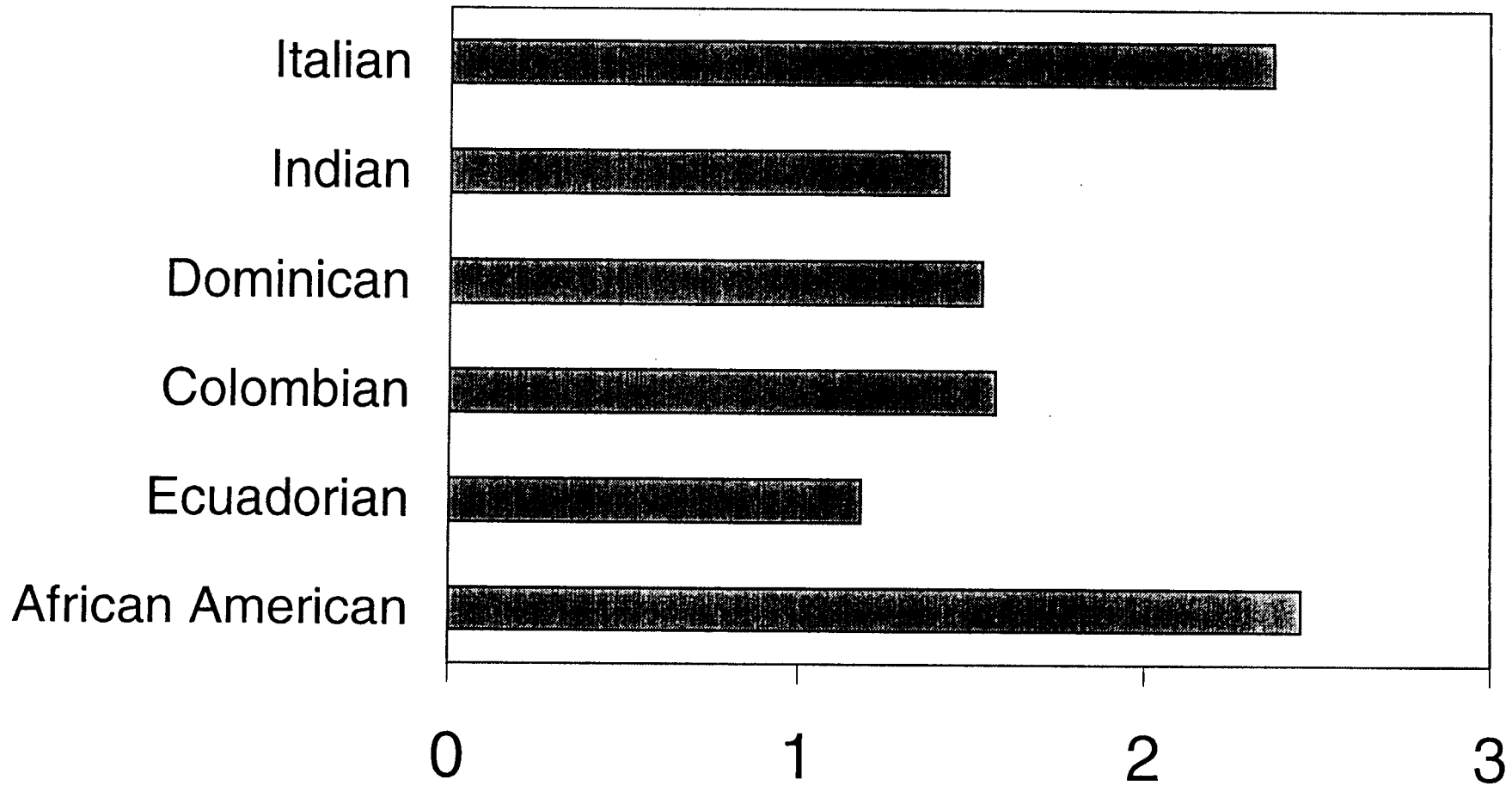
willingness by Latino and Indian communities to use the police in instrumental ways means that they are not getting the level of police services that they are entitled to and that better-established communities take advantage of. Since we did not anticipate this finding, we did not probe for reasons respondents would not initiate contact with the police. We can only speculate, therefore, that the reluctance may be attributable to attitudes about law enforcement brought here from people's native cultures or to the lack of connection people in the Latino and Indian communities in Queens felt to the local political establishment.

Our findings of major differences among ethnic communities in the number of voluntary contacts with the police differ substantially from findings in Chicago, where differences by race were minor. This is a good illustration of why it is important to examine effects by local ethnic communities rather than by global racial categories.

Perception of Police Effectiveness

In agreement with the literature (e.g., Mastrofski, et. al., 1998, 1999), respondents held quite favorable opinions about the effectiveness of their local police. On measures from crime prevention to working together with residents to solve neighborhood problems, the number of residents holding favorable opinions outweighed those holding negative opinions. Only in the area of response time did the police receive lower marks.

We found significant differences among ethnic communities in perceptions of police effectiveness (see Table 1). In the Chicago study as well, ethnicity was found to be one of the strongest predictors of attitudes toward the police. Like most other studies, the Chicago evaluation found that Blacks held the police in lower esteem than others, while we found the opposite. In our

TABLE 1

MULTIVARIATE ANALYSIS OF PERCEIVED POLICE EFFECTIVENESS

Variable	Coefficient	Wald Statistic*	Significance
Ethnicity**		18.38	.003
African-American	-.56	6.27	.012
Ecuadorian	-.02	0.01	.941
Colombian	-.03	0.02	.889
Dominican	.32	3.44	.063
Italian	-.42	3.90	.048
Age	.01	2.35	.125
Education	-.17	6.99	.008
Own/rent home	-.03	0.02	.892
U.S. born	.47	3.93	.048
Gender	-.08	0.21	.644
Community efficacy	.57	18.88	.000
Comm empowerment	.74	28.08	.000
Victim past year	-.28	5.48	.019
Stopped by police	-.13	0.73	.394
Contacted police	.07	2.09	.148

* The larger the Wald statistic, the more explanatory power a variable has.
* Coefficients for ethnicity indicator variables are deviations from overall mean. One category (Indian) was omitted to avoid over determination of the model.

work, ethnic communities that were better-established rated the police more highly than those which were not as well-established, i.e., the newer Latino communities. The best predictor of perceived police effectiveness was political empowerment: Respondents who believed that their ethnic community was politically potent had higher opinions of police effectiveness than respondents who believed that their community was politically disenfranchised.

Surprisingly, we found that opinions about the effectiveness of the police have little to do with direct contact with the police. This is in sharp contrast to much of the literature, which suggests that much of the variation in attitudes toward the police is accounted for by people's experience with the police. (The Chicago investigation found only a slight inverse relationship between involuntary encounters with the police and attitudes.) Rather, attitudes about police effectiveness were part of people's global perceptions of how responsive the local political process was to their ethnic community and to prejudices about law enforcement brought with them from their native lands. Also important was whether respondents had been victims within the past year: Those who had held less favorable opinions of the police than those who had not.

Perceptions of Police Misconduct

While most respondents believed that the local police were effective, they also believed that they were guilty of misconduct toward members of their ethnic community. More than half of respondents believed that each of the five misconduct items -- from stopping people without a good reason to using force or abusive language -- were a problem. We were surprised to note that the proportion of people perceiving police misconduct to be a problem was far higher in our sample than that reported for Chicago by Skogan and Hartnett (1997: p.216). For example, they report that just

18% of their sample felt that too many unwarranted stops was a problem and that 19% thought that excessive force was a problem.

The observation that respondents perceived the police to be at the same time to be effective and abusive seems like a contradiction. But the data show only a very weak correlation between the two attitudinal scales. These seem to be separate dimensions of how people see the police.

There were substantial differences among the six ethnic groups on the misconduct measure. The three Latino communities all held more negative views of police behavior than others (see Table 2). In contrast to what one would expect from the literature, African-Americans were least likely to perceive the police as behaving badly. As past studies have found, persons who had had involuntary encounters with the police were likely to perceive the police as engaging in misconduct than those with no involuntary encounters. But the effect was not large. Other variables, such as whether respondents were foreign-born and socioeconomic status indicators had equally large effects on perceptions of police misconduct. And youthfulness and recent victimization led even more strongly to negative beliefs about police misconduct. Again, it seems that perceptions of the local police are conditioned more by group membership (i.e., ethnicity, country of origin, age) than by direct experience.

Victimization

In general, victimization rates for specific crimes tended to be higher in our sample than those reported by the NCVS for urban residents. Differences could well be due to the fact that our methodology was not nearly as sophisticated as that used by the NCVS. With this caution, we noted that our data did not confirm a high rate of family violence among immigrant communities, as some

TABLE 2

MULTIVARIATE ANALYSIS OF PERCEIVED POLICE MISCONDUCT

Variable	Coefficient	Wald Statistic*	Significance
Ethnicity**		26.74	.001
African-American	-.17	0.54	.463
Ecuadorian	-.15	0.67	.414
Colombian	.51	7.98	.005
Dominican	.40	5.38	.020
Italian	.21	0.96	.327
Age	-.03	26.47	.000
Education	.13	3.76	.053
Own/rent home	.40	4.32	.038
U.S. born	-.49	4.24	.040
Gender	-.01	0.00	.946
Community efficacy	.07	0.32	.574
Comm empowerment	-.04	0.06	.802
Victim past year	.48	16.33	.000
Stopped by police	.35	5.33	.021
Contacted police	-.09	3.07	.080

* The larger the Wald statistic, the more explanatory power a variable has.
** Coefficients for ethnicity indicator variables are deviations from overall mean. One category (Indian) was   omitted to avoid over determination of the model.

experts and journalists have predicted. Our 4% annual rate of respondents reporting attacks by a household member was well below the number who reported being victims of robberies, burglaries, or non-domestic assaults. Also surprising was that the rate of bias crimes reported by our sample was even lower (2% responded affirmatively), and did not vary significantly according to ethnic group.

Latinos reported higher rates of victimization than other respondents. However, when the data were analyzed controlling for demographic factors, the difference in victimization rates between ethnic groups disappeared (see Table 3). This suggests, not surprisingly, that it is not ethnicity per se that leads to differential victimization rates, but rather difference in age and socioeconomic status associated with the different ethnic communities we studied.

Crime Reporting

While there has been speculation in the literature about the willingness of immigrants to report criminal victimizations, ours is the first study to address this issue empirically. Large majorities of respondents said that they would report break-ins, muggings, and family violence. Respondents were less enthusiastic about reporting drug selling but, even here, a majority said that they would inform authorities.

Following the pattern we have seen throughout the dataset, respondents from Latino communities were less likely to say that they would report crimes than respondents from better-established ethnic communities (see Table 4). Surprisingly, crime reporting was not strongly linked to attitudes toward the police. But it was linked to experience: Respondents who had had involuntary contacts with the police were less likely to say that they would report a crime, while

TABLE 3

MULTIVARIATE ANALYSIS OF VICTIMIZATION STATUS

Variable	Coefficient	Wald Statistic*	Significance
Ethnicity**		4.43	.489
African-American	-.29	1.63	.201
Ecuadorian	.28	2.73	.099
Colombian	.05	0.09	.770
Dominican	.21	1.73	.188
Indian	-.01	0.01	.941
Age	-.02	7.92	.005
Education	.10	2.65	.104
Own/rent home	.32	2.75	.097
Gender	-.04	0.05	.807

* The larger the Wald statistic, the more explanatory power a variable has.
** Coefficients for ethnicity indicator variables are deviations from overall mean. One category (Italian) was omitted to avoid over determination of the model.

TABLE 4

MULTIVARIATE ANALYSIS OF WILLINGNESS TO REPORT CRIMES

Variable	Coefficient	Wald Statistic*	Significance
Ethnicity**		1.57	.905
African-American	-.12	0.29	.589
Ecuadorian	.21	1.26	.263
Colombian	.05	0.07	.795
Dominican	-.08	0.22	.640
Italian	-.08	0.16	.686
Age	-.01	1.33	.248
Education	.06	0.84	.360
Own/rent home	-.26	1.82	.178
U.S. born	.05	0.05	.832
Gender	-.17	1.10	.293
Community efficacy	.63	21.45	.000
Comm empowerment	.44	9.65	.002
Victim past year	-.31	6.20	.013
Stopped by police	-.33	4.51	.034
Contacted police	.16	10.25	.001
Police misconduct	.21	2.96	.085
Police effectiveness	.09	0.75	.386

* The larger the Wald statistic, the more explanatory power a variable has.
** Coefficients for ethnicity indicator variables are deviations from overall mean. One category (Indian) was omitted to avoid over determination of the model.

those who had had voluntary contacts were more willing to report. The best predictors of crime reporting, however, were the measures of community empowerment: Persons who said that their ethnic community was likely to work together to solve local problems and those who believed that their community wielded political power were more likely than others to say that they would report crimes.

CONCLUSIONS

To the best of our knowledge, ours is the first study using scientific survey techniques to examine how experiences with the police, attitudes toward the police, and crime reporting vary across ethnic groups. Numerous other studies have examined variations in police-citizen interactions by race. Our premise was that race lumps people into gross categories that have less and less utility as the United States becomes an increasingly multi-ethnic society. It is no longer enough to ask about how public policy decisions affect minorities. It is important now numerically to consider that policies may affect Hispanic-Americans, African-Americans, and Asian-Americans in different ways. Moreover, it may be misleading as well to categorize together American-born Blacks with Jamaicans, Chinese with Indians, or Mexicans with Dominicans.

We found evidence that opinions about police misconduct are significantly affected by involuntary contacts with the police: Being stopped tends to turn people off. But, even more important in shaping attitudes is the role of community. Community exerts a powerful influence on how people perceive the police both through prejudices imported from people's countries of origin and through message communicated through the local culture. The most significant predictor overall of perceptions of the police was the extent to which people's ethnic communities have become integrated into the social and political fabric of the city. In our study, African-American and Italian-American respondents -- the best-established communities -- were virtually indistinguishable on several of the indices we used to examine police-citizen relations. At the other end of the spectrum were the three newcomer groups -- Dominicans, Colombians, and Ecuadoreans -- who had not yet

become well-integrated into the local political structure. Our results suggest that, to a significant degree, how people respond to the police is conditioned by norms and beliefs of the local ethnic community in which they reside and by global perceptions of that community's political empowerment and collective efficacy.

We would expect that the pattern of results we found by ethnic group would not be replicated elsewhere. For example, in parts of the Southwest, where they have been long-time residents, we would not be surprised to find that Latin-American communities were among the most positive in their attitudes toward the police. We believe that the effects of ethnic group membership that we observed in our data are not the effects of ethnicity group membership as much as they are the effects of the *local* ethnic community culture. That is, people's attitudes are conditioned more by neighborhood values and beliefs than they are by membership in larger social groups.

It is only logical that experience with the police play a major role in shaping people's responses to them. However, it may be that experience should be defined more broadly to include police encounters with respondents' family and/or friends as well as personal encounters. Researchers needs to ask respondents how they derived the information necessary to formulate good or bad opinions about the police. Were opinions derived from personal experiences? From experiences of family or friends? From hearsay about the experiences of others in the community? From media stories? Or from long-held opinions based on experience with law enforcement in other places?

Our research has suggested that there is a gap in understanding between the police and recent immigrants to this country. These communities do not have the same confidence as better-established residents that the police will deal with them fairly and they are reluctant to use the police

in instrumental ways to help to maintain order in their communities. It is up to the police to find ways to reach out to these new residents and find ways to build trust. Respondents in our study has suggested some ways that this might be done. They believed that the most effective ways to bridge the gap between the police and ethnic communities was to increase the number of foot patrol officers and to sponsor meetings with the community.

Our data show that recent immigrants hold contradictory opinions of their local police, believing them to be effective yet capable of being abusive. The good news is that those opinions may be subject to change through positive actions taken by law enforcement administrators.

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