

Perceptions of Law Enforcement According to Age, Race, Gender, and Political Party

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Abstract

In recent years, the public has become increasingly concerned with interactions regarding law enforcement. This growing concern has fostered the development of various studies in which participants provide their sentiments pertaining to police officers. The current study aimed to analyze the perspectives of both college students and the general public by utilizing an identical survey in two separate pools. Participants were tasked with selecting adjectives they believed best represented their perceptions of law enforcement. In addition to this, participants were also asked to provide a percentage of officers they believed represented a single adjective presented. In general, Milligan students viewed officers more positively as opposed to the general public. A significant difference was found between political party and perception of officers. The current study elucidates the attitudes of individuals from multiple backgrounds in an attempt to encourage empathy from the perspectives of civilians and law enforcement alike.

Keywords: Law Enforcement, Police, Policing, Police Reform

Introduction

Public perception of law enforcement has increasingly become a matter of concern in the United States. Major events in the media have added to this concern by presenting viewers with uncensored footage of police behavior in situations involving civilians. Several studies pertaining to this topic have highlighted discrepancies in perception among those of various ages, races, and genders. Despite consistencies and inconsistencies, public discernment of law enforcement could indicate whether or not there are issues present in law enforcement training which directly impacts an officer's response to those suspected of committing a crime.

Gender

Hester and Gray (2018) acknowledge that while height is a beneficial characteristic for men in terms of obtaining higher salaries and success, they note that past studies have merely considered this generalization for white men. The authors believe, as it pertains to African-American men, that being tall increases threat stereotyping and police stops. This is a significant and relevant aspect of the current study because it encompasses the factors that might contribute to the discernment of law enforcement officers. There could be an implicit bias among some law enforcement officers which directly influences their behavior during encounters with black men or other male minorities. Hester and Gray present three studies examining stop and frisk encounters as well as a causal link between perceptions of height and perceptions of threat for black men. Study 1 analyzed about 1 million New York Police Department stop-and-frisk encounters. Within a specified dataset (only data for non-Hispanic Black and White males, only those between 5'4" and 6'4", and only including those between 100 and 400 lbs.), police officers' decisions to stop individuals was analyzed specifically. Their results suggested that black men face a greater risk of being stopped by law enforcement. Greater weight among

individuals stopped by police was also a significant factor. Studies 2 and 3 demonstrated that “for perceivers who endorse stereotypes that Black people are more threatening than white people, tall Black men seem especially threatening.” Study 2 involved the use of photographs of the same men, looking up and down. The men looking down were perceived as taller than the same men looking up.

A study by Pica et al., aimed to consider whether individuals believed that factors such as race and gender influenced police conduct toward someone under suspicion. The study included a sample of 137 undergraduate students (63.5% female) ranging in age from 18 to 51. 64.2% were White, 17.5% were Asian, 0.7% were Latino/Latina, 0.7% were Indigenous, 7.3% were Black, and 9.5% identified themselves as either mixed or other. Data was collected using a Qualtrics survey. Participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions in which a scenario was posed describing how two individuals were asked to leave after not ordering anything at a local coffee establishment for ten minutes. After deciding not to leave because they were waiting on a friend, the police were called and the two individuals were arrested for loitering (Pica, et al., 2019). Using a perceptions form, individuals were asked whether or not they agreed that the police were justified in their arrest and whether race and gender played a role in the manager and police officers' decisions. A police legitimacy scale was also utilized to measure lawfulness of the police, procedural fairness, distributive fairness, and police effectiveness. 71.5% of participants believed the call to law enforcement was justified and 38.7% of participants believed the arrest was warranted. Interestingly, participants were more likely to believe the call to the police was justified when the individuals were White within the scenario (.86). On the other hand, when individuals in the scenario were Black, participants were less likely to believe the call was justified (.58). With regard to gender, participants were more likely

to believe that gender played a role in the manager's and police officer's decisions when the individual within the scenario was male as opposed to female. The authors note that one major methodological limitation is the fact that their study did not include participant race or the race of the officer. Pica, et al. encourage researchers to consider this in future studies to investigate differences that might be present among White and Black participants and how they view White-Black and Black-White police encounters (Pica, et al., 2019).

Gabbidon, Higgins, and Potter examine race and gender using a national poll that only included African-Americans who reported unfair treatment by the police. The authors investigated discrepancies between the experiences of African-American men and African-American women and how their unique experiences with the police might yield different insights (Gabbidon, Higgins, and Potter). Along with gender, demographic information was also examined including age, education, income, political ideology, and region. Data was obtained from 854 African-American respondents of a 2004 poll that included 2,000 randomly selected Americans. The poll conducted by the Gallup Organization analyzes the perceptions of Whites and minority groups regarding social issues every few years (Gabbidon, Higgins, and Potter). Respondents were asked to consider whether or not they had been treated fairly or less fairly in their encounter with the police. Other questions were posed involving the same subject in which respondents indicated being treated fairly with a 0 or being treated less fairly with a 1 (Gabbidon, Higgins, and Potter). Gender, income, education, age, and geographical region were all independent variables measured in the same way the dependent variable was measured; using a single-item measure range with codes indicating specific responses. 24% of respondents felt that they were treated unfairly by the police within the last 30 days. 30% of African-American men specifically within the sample felt that they had been unfairly treated by the police within the last

30 days. About 20% of African-American women specifically within the sample had the same sentiments. The researchers also found a negative correlation between age and unfair treatment by the police. Interestingly, African-Americans from the south were less likely to believe they had been treated unfairly by law enforcement within the last 30 days. Men were more than 1.5 times more likely to report being treated unfairly by the police. Black women within the south specifically were less likely to report unfair treatment. The researcher also found a negative correlation between income level and unfair treatment by police. The authors note that their study advances the suggestion that stereotypes regarding Black men are “typically reserved” for young Black men (Gabbidon, Higgins, and Potter). This is a major strength of the study presented. A limitation of the study, however, is the lack of differences between Black men and women with region being the only significant variable for Black women. This study is relevant to the current study because of its negative correlation findings regarding age, income and feelings of unfair treatment.

Senreich and Williams-Gray note that the number of studies investigating perceptions of college students towards law enforcement are few in number with merely two that include diverse urban college students as part of the samples (Senreich and Williams-Gray, 2021). The authors mention that gaps are present with regard to prior studies. These gaps include both a lack of racial diversity in the sample and a lack of students’ perceptions in large cities. Senreich and Williams-Gray utilized a sample of 1,103 students who completed a 66-item survey including scales which measured the participants’ confidence in and their attitudes towards law enforcement. The survey inquired about demographical information as well as students “involuntary encounters with the police.” 743 participants were from a public college and 360 participants were from a private Roman Catholic college. Students were surveyed in the cafeteria

at both colleges. A \$3 cash incentive was given for completion of the survey. The surveys were collected over the course of five days at the public college and two days at the private college. Independent variables such as personal encounters with police, family encounters with police, friends' encounters with police, calling police for help, employment by police (whether self, family, and/or friends, neighborhood safety, commitment to education, confidence in the police, and attitudes towards the police, were measured using survey instruments including but not limited to yes/no choices, numerical responses, and Likert scales. The researchers found that for both "confidence in the police" and "attitudes towards the police," there were statistically significant differences according to race, sexual orientation, age, socioeconomic status, and commitment to education (Senreich and Williams-Gray, 2021). The largest effect size pertained to racial differences. White students reported more confidence in the police than Black, Latino, East Asian, Black+Latino, and mixed or other participants. On the other hand, both South Asian and Middle Eastern respondents had higher confidence in police scores than Black and Black+Latino participants. White participants reported more positive attitudes towards law enforcement than any other race group while Latinos, South Asians, White+Latino, and Middle Eastern participants all had more positive attitudes towards police scored than black respondents at statistically significant levels. While the researchers recognize that no study pertaining to the topic has included a random sample of students from several different colleges within the US, they recommend that such a study be done to verify the findings of their study (Senreich and Williams-Gray, 2021). They acknowledge that obtaining data from only two colleges in one city poses a major limitation.

Researchers, such as Armstrong, et al., recognize that there are lack of studies that measure the attitudes of college students with regard to law enforcement. In light if this,

Armstrong, et al. attempt to investigate how social and demographic factors might contribute to negative perceptions of police. The authors examined three factors that could be attributed to the legitimacy of law enforcement including favorable views, effectiveness, and professionalism (Armstrong, et al., 2021). Using a questionnaire style survey, data were collected from college students at a mid-sized school in a southwestern state (Armstrong, et al., 2021). Age, race, and gender were factors that were considered in the data collection. Likert-type questions were used to obtain responses from participants. The sample consisted of 323 individuals. 98 males and 225 females. 183 students were White, 68 were African-American, 69 were Hispanic/Latino, and 3 were either Asian, Native American, or other. All participants were between the ages of 18 to 29. Compared to other races analyzed within the study, African American strongly disagreed with the favorableness of police by 3.04 times that of other races (Armstrong, et al., 2021). Another variable analyzed that was found to be statistically significant was relationship status. Participants who were single strongly disagreed with favorableness of the police by about 1.5 times that of other relationship statuses. African Americans were also 5.4 times more likely to hold negative views with regard to police effectiveness. Single individuals were 1.4 times more likely than other relationship statuses to report negative attitudes regarding police effectiveness (Armstrong, et al, 2021). African-Americans were 5.2 time more likely to disagree with the professionalism of law enforcement in comparison with other races that participated in the study. The authors assert that using a sample of college students for such a study could pose limitations. Though they do not describe reasons as to why they formulate this conjecture, one can assume that this might be due to the fact that college students are not the best representative sample of the United States at large.

Age

Through two analyses, Flexon, et al. study factors that contribute to the number of police stops involving youth and adolescents' feelings of being disrespected by the police. The researchers hypothesized that the more frequently a youth was stopped by the police, the more likely it would be that youth would feel disrespected. Youths' overall attitude with regard to the police is also considered among the analyses. A 131 item questionnaire was utilized to obtain data from a sample of 18 Chicago public high schools (Flexon, et al., 2016). Schools were specifically chosen because of their size and location. Rating scales were also used to obtain certain information, such as demographics, perceptions of the police as well as attitude towards them, personal experience with law enforcement, and student opinion regarding what they believed to be "delinquent behavior (Flexon, et al., 2016)." 943 students were asked to complete the survey. 55% of students were African-American, 27% were Latino, and 7% were White. 55% of respondents were female, while 46% were male. 58% of participants reported having been stopped by police in the past year. 50% of those stopped comprised of African-American students while 7.5% consisted of White students. The authors note that the average age of the youth who experienced being stopped by law enforcement was about 15. More males were stopped than females with Black males being stopped the most frequent (Flexon, et al., 2016). With regard to the officers, "White officer made up more than 50% of officers making a stop, whereas African American officers represented approximately 11%. Latino officers made up about 3% of the officers.

In a qualitative phenomenological study, Hightower and Esmail investigated how perception of law enforcement would be influenced if police officers returned to the communities they served to mentor at-risk youth (Hightower and Esmail, 2015). Using a sample of police officers and citizens within Dallas County, Texas, the researchers. Police officers within the

sample had to have served for a minimum of 5 years, whereas citizens were required to be of African-American or Hispanic descent. Participants were all over the age of 18. 5 African-American females, 5 African-American males, 5 Hispanic males, and 5 Hispanic females were included. Police participants consisted of 15% African American females, 8% African American males, 30% Hispanic males, 10% White males, and 5% White females. 60% of officers had at least 15 years of service. Four themes were revealed throughout the study among police participants including, race, communication, parental influence, and prior contacts with police (Hightower and Esmail, 2015). 60% of police participants believed that minority communities hold negative perceptions towards police while 25% believed they were viewed positively. 15% were unsure. Race was cited as the most significant factor in how law enforcement is viewed by minority communities (55%). 35% of police participants cited communication as a key factor in how minority communities viewed police. Law enforcement participants reported “effective communication has much to do with respect and compassion (Hightower and Esmail, 2015).” Another 35% of police officer participants noted that parental influence was a significant factor. Past experiences with police were cited by 25% of the police sample. Citizens, in contrast, cited past experience with the police as the major factor contributing to their perception of them (55%). 55% of citizens reported having a positive perception of police while 35% held a negative perception and 10% were neutral (Hightower and Esmail, 2015). Of Hispanic participants, 60% reported having positive perceptions, while 50% of African-American participants reported having positive perceptions. 40% of African-American participants reported having negative perceptions. 85% of citizen participants believed that police returning to communities to mentor at-risk minority youth would aid in changing negative perceptions (Hightower and Esmail, 2015). A major strength of Hightower and Esmail’s study was highlighting the discrepancy

between what officers believed contributed to perceptions of police and what citizens believed contributed to perceptions of police. The authors explain this by stating that the findings of their study indicate a “disconnect” between police comprehending factors that influence citizen perception and the actual views of citizens.

Fine, et al. recognize that there is limited research pertaining to individuals’ development of perceptions toward police prior to adulthood. With respect to this fact, the authors believe that comprehension of how young adults perceive law enforcement is necessary since youth are more likely than adults to be arrested by law enforcement due to the age-crime curve (Steffensmeier et al., 1989; Sweeten et al., 2013, as cited in Fine et al., 2021). Fine et al.’s study evaluated perceptions of police legitimacy using a longitudinal study involving a sample of youth who were monitored from their first arrest through “the peak of the age-crime curve into early adulthood.” 1,216 male youth consisting of 46% Latino/Hispanic, 37% Black/African American, 15% White, and 2% self- identified other races. Individuals were between 13 and 17 years old and participated in 9 surveys over the course of 5 years. Measures including police legitimacy, police bias, and covariates were assessed. Participants were asked to describe the extent to which they agreed with several items pertaining to the legitimacy and bias of police. The researchers found that perceptions of police legitimacy decline during adolescence before improving in late adolescent and into young adulthood. In addition this, youth who committed a myriad of offenses and youth who were repeatedly arrested frequently tended to report more negative perceptions of police legitimacy. While White youths’ perceptions of police legitimacy declined until age 17, they improved later. Latino youth described worse perceptions with their perceptions declining to a smaller degree during adolescence before improving in young adulthood. Black youth statistically reported more negative perceptions of law enforcement legitimacy. Black youth’s

perceptions declined until around age 18 and showed only minor improvements afterwards (Fine et al., 2021). The authors note that their findings are consistent with those of prior studies done pertaining to youth who have committed felony level offenses; from adolescence through early adulthood, Black youth reported lower perceptions of law enforcement legitimacy than white youth. In addition to this, despite Black and Latino youth reporting similar perceptions of police legitimacy at age 13, and by age 14, Black youth reported considerably worse perceptions of police legitimacy and their perceptions remained lower through the shift to adulthood.

Race

Kule, Bumphus, and Lles assert that public perception of police is essential to the existence and prosperity of law enforcement institutions (Kule, Bumphus, and Lles, 2019). Due to this fact, obtaining data regarding attitudes and perceptions toward police is not only important for researchers, but criminological scholars and policymakers as well (Kule, Bumphus, and Lles, 2019). In an electronic survey, the researchers collected data from a convenience sample who contacted law enforcement in the last five years. 147 individuals responded to a mass email that originally consisted of 700 potential respondents, reflecting a 21% response rate. 27 items within the survey evaluated variables concerning income, gender, and racial attitudes towards the police from an intersectional perspective (Kule, Bumphus, and Lles, 2019). An ordinal scale was used to determine strong agreement or strong disagreement with items describing satisfaction with police. Majority of respondents were White (73%) with females making up 56% of the sample. 75% of participants agreed/strongly agreed that they were satisfied with law enforcement. Taking level of income into consideration, the researchers found that White males with incomes above \$40,000 were more satisfied with the police. It is possible that White males of a wealthier tax bracket are far less likely to experience negative encounters

with the police as opposed to minority groups. The authors note that their sample was limited in terms of a considerably low sample size. In addition to this, the sample was not diverse which resulted in responses that more than likely were not indicative of the United States in general.

Scaglione and Condon (1980) evaluate attitudes of citizens towards police utilizing a survey in which 273 individuals from 4 neighborhoods (a low income African-American neighborhood, a comparable low income White neighborhood, a racially heterogeneous but predominantly Black neighborhood, and a White upper-middle-class neighborhood (Scaglione and Condon, 1980)) in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania participated. Within the survey, the authors analyze determinants of attitude toward police and how these determinants might influence law enforcement-citizen relationships. A questionnaire was distributed among participants which evaluated participants' attitudes toward certain issues pertaining to police using a Likert-type scale. The survey also recorded encounters participants had with the police within the past two years. Citizens were asked to evaluate their encounters. The final section of the survey was designated for sociometric data of the participants. An SPSS Regression was used to analyze multivariate results. "Evaluation of service" was the most important determinant of attitude toward law enforcement, accounting for more than 30% of the variance (Scaglione and Condon, 1980). Race was also an important determinant accounting for 6% of the variance. Religion, income, sex, marital status, and education were not significant determinants, interestingly. Personal history/experience with police was closely associated with attitude toward police. The researchers assert that their study refutes the belief that different neighborhoods hold varying opinions of police. A major limitation of the study is a lack of individual findings based on evaluation of service based on race or the neighborhood from which the participants were from. The study does not go into detail regarding these findings.

Schuck, Rosenbaum, and Hawkins (2008) examine the relationship between race, social class, and neighborhood context with regard to citizens' attitudes towards the police. 479 participants were used from a prior telephone survey completed in 2002. Participants were asked questions about law enforcement and policing in their neighborhood as well as perceptual questions (Schuck, Rosenbaum, and Hawkins, 2008). African-Americans reported more negative attitudes towards police than that of White participants. The authors note that this was true for all dimensions including neighborhood, global, police services, and fear of the police. 34.9% of African-Americans were in the top quartile of negative perceptions of law enforcement in their communities while only 12.6% of Whites had a negative perception. With regard to fear, 67.2% of African-Americans reported negative attitudes while only 21.5% of Whites reported the same. The authors note that the attitudes of Hispanics fell between the results of Whites and African-Americans (Schuck, Rosenbaum, and Hawkins, 2008). In some instances however, results of Hispanic individuals resembled those of African-Americans (attitudes concerning policing in communities and fear of law enforcement) and Whites as well (global and police services) (Schuck, Rosenbaum, and Hawkins, 2008). The authors believe that their findings might highlight the differences in findings on race-by-social class interaction effects, while on the other hand, their findings raise questions regarding the influence of community issues on citizens' perceptions of law enforcement.

In a study examining attitudes associated with police misconduct, Weitzer and Tuch closely assess the factors which influence these attitudes. Using data obtained from a national survey, participants included 1,792 White, Hispanic, and African American citizens from metropolitan areas consisting of populations of at least 100,000 (Weitzer and Tuch, 2004). The authors note that their study includes a substantial sample of African Americans and Hispanics,

an uncommon aspect of previous studies; a major strength. Participants received free internet hardware, connectivity, and on-site installation in exchange for completion of 3-4 surveys monthly (Weitzer and Tuch, 2004). The authors incorporated independent variables such as race, experiences with police misconduct, media exposure, neighborhood conditions, and controls (such as household income, education gender, age, region, and place of residence) to examine how the dependent variable, perceptions of misconduct, was influenced. The survey included a series of questions relative to each of the variables. Regarding questions about perceptions of police misconduct, African-Americans were more likely to have negative perceptions. On the other hand, White participants were least likely to have negative perceptions of police misconduct, while Hispanic participants fell between the two (Weitzer and Tuch, 2004). The authors mention that in addition to experiencing police misconduct, participants who reported repeated abuse by police differed from Whites. In comparison with Hispanics and African-Americans, Whites differed in terms of vulnerability to repeated abuses. 3% of Whites compared to 8% of African-Americans and Hispanics reported verbal abuse by law enforcement three or more times. 16% of African Americans and 12% of Hispanics reported being stopped unjustifiably by police three or more times, while merely 4% of Whites reported the same. The authors found results to be consistent with their hypothesis that frequent media exposure of police misconduct increases perceptions of misconduct for each racial group at the city and neighborhood level (with Whites being the exception at the neighborhood level) (Weitzer and Tuch, 2004).

Nadal and Davidoff (2015) constructed an empirical measurement that considered public perception of police. The researchers formulated a group of items that measured individuals' perceptions of police. This group of items is known as the Perceptions of Police Scale (POPS); a

12 item lit. Participants included 229 females and 93 males. 101 participants identified as Latino/Latina, 78 identified as White, 69 identified as Asian-American/Pacific Islander, 48 identified as African-American, 23 identified as multi-racial, and 7 individuals did not indicate a race. Using a convenience sample, data was obtained from undergraduate college students enrolled in introductory psychology courses. Students were given credit for their participation. Participants were also recruited by emails to different organizations throughout the community (for example, college clubs and professional organizations). Three measures were employed including a demographic questionnaire, the Perceptions of Police Survey (POPS), and POPS evaluation. The POPS scale utilized 12 different statements that measured perception of law enforcement. Using a Likert type scale, participants were asked to rate the extent to which they agreed with each statement (i.e., “Police protect me” or “police are friendly”) (Nadal and Davidoff, 2015). After the survey was completed, the researchers found that 12 participants described the POPS as a survey that attempted to measure race, racism, or racial profiling. 11 participants said that the measure was a means of describing racial biases of officers or racial profiling. The authors suggest that there are several ways in which the POPS may be used for future research endeavors. While this is a significant aspect of the study, the authors assert that their method of analysis (a Principal Components Analysis instead of an Exploratory Factor Analysis). The authors believe an EPA could have been more appropriate, yet justify their use of a PCA due to the fact that they didn’t intend to yield many results. It is possible that this method of measurement could be replicated in the current study to assess variables pertaining to perception of police.

Weitzer and Tuch (2002) analyze racial profiling using factors such as race, class and personal experience. Similar to Gabbidon, Higgins, and Potter’s study, the researchers obtained

data from a survey conducted by the Gallup organization over the course of nearly 2 months. The random-digit-dialing survey consisted of 2,006 respondents and served as a representative sample of adults in a telephone household in the continental US (Weitzer and Tuch, 2002). 903 Whites and 961 African-Americans. "Attitudes toward the police" was measured using questions such as "Just your impression are black in your community treated less fairly" or "Do you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of the state police or state troopers in your area?" among other questions. Social class was measured using education on an 8 point scale and household income on an 8 point scale as well. Three indicators were used to measure participants attitudes toward racial profiling. The researchers found that 94.3% of African-Americans and 84.4% of Whites expressed disapproval of profiling. The authors note that White women specifically tended to be more disapproving than that of White men. There was no significant difference in gender/age responses by African-Americans. 7 in 10 African-Americans believed police treat African-Americans in their community less fairly than Whites in vehicle stops. Similar to other studies, the researchers found that African-Americans were 3 times more likely than Whites to have negative perceptions about the local police and four times more likely to have negative perceptions about the state police. Interestingly, the authors found a positive correlation between age of respondents and perception of police. As age increases, positive perceptions of police increased. This is consistent with the study conducted by Gabbidon, Higgins, and Potter. In their study, there was a negative correlation between age and feelings of unfair treatment by the police. A significant aspect of Weitzer and Tuch's study is their incorporation of profiling in a study involving perceptions of law enforcement. The authors note that people who believed they were stopped because of their race were "significantly more likely" to express dissatisfaction with the police and to perceive profiling as a widespread strategy among officers (Weitzer and

Tuch, 2002). The authors suggest that future research should explore whether attitudes toward other aspects of policing shape citizens perceptions differently with regard to race and class. This serves as motivation to examine different aspects in the current study.

Simpson assesses the influence of attire and patrol techniques on participants' attitudes about law enforcement. Participants were randomly assigned to examine pictures associated with one of four careers including policing, nursing, teaching, or engineering (Simpson, 2017). Participants were then asked to rate the pictures according to a series of dichotomous variables and to complete a memory test to assess their memory of the pictures they rated. After completion of the aforementioned tasks, participants were asked to blindly select a career, and read it aloud. The author notes that all of the pieces of paper regardless of the one picked by the participant read "policing" to guarantee that each participant was exposed to police-related images (Simpson, 2017). A perception task was then given using a set of 64 various images of police and participants were asked to rate each picture on five dichotomous outcome variables including: aggressive vs. not aggressive, approachable vs. not approachable, friendly vs. not friendly, respectful vs. not respectful, and accountable vs. not accountable (Simpson, 2017). Each image included one of four different officers either on bicycle, foot, or vehicle and either in police uniform or normal civilian clothing. The researcher found a negative correlation between aggressiveness and friendliness and approachability, but positively correlated with respectability and accountability. Approachability was positively correlated with friendliness, respectability, and accountability. Accountability was "highly" correlated with respectability yet uncorrelated with friendliness. A logistic regression model revealed that the likelihood of an officer being rated as aggressive was about 30% lower when officers were presented in civilian clothing. The author notes that participants only consisted of university students from a university with a

selective admissions process. This would not be representative of the United States in general. However, the author does collect evidence from their study that observation of law enforcement in a different attire generates a considerable variation in perceptions of officers.

Olivett and March (2021) assert that there is a gap between civilians' associations with police and danger and the way in which the associations influence behavior and views of the police. Their studies aimed to measure White civilians' implicit threat and valence evaluations in addition to their implicit perceptions of police. Both studies examined the extent to which people associated police, civilians, and uniformed non-police with danger and valence, whether those associations differed between prime types, and the degree to which those associations predicted explicit perceptions of police. The first study utilized two misattribution procedures (MPs). These procedures are "implicit measures that capture the strength of automatically activated affective or semantic content elicited by categories of prime stimuli (Imhoff et al., 2011; Payne et al., 2005; Payne & Lundberg, 2014, as cited in Olivett and March, 2021)." White participants completed two misattribution procedures that noted associations between divergent categories of prime "(i.e., police, civilians, uniformed non-police) and (a) safe versus dangerous or (b) good versus bad." Study 1 indicated an evaluation of police as "more safe than dangerous and more good than bad." Despite this, police were also implicitly evaluated as more dangerous and more bad than other civilians and uniformed non-police. Danger evaluations may have posed a limitation within the study due to some degree of negative associations. The authors attribute this limitation with their supposition that danger is always "negative." Study 2 involved 81 white American undergraduates (67 female) who participated in a study similar to Study 1, but only a single MP was employed in which they were to judge whether characters meant something "Negative" or "Dangerous" prior to completing a Perceptions of Police Scale (POPS). The

authors note that Study 2 replicated results from Study 1 in supporting the main hypothesis: stronger police-danger versus negative association predicted more negative explicit views of the police; the more police evoked danger relative to negativity, the more negative were self-reported views.

Dr. Avdi Avdija explored the impact of police behavior on citizens' attitudes towards the police and whether or not citizens' interactions with law enforcement (and demographical information) had a significant impact on attitudes towards police. Using a cross-sectional design survey, Avdija collected data from a sample of 304 undergraduate students (169 males and 135 females) ranging in age from 18 to 54 years old. 71.1% of participants were White, 21.4% were African American, 1.3% were Asian, another 1.3% were Hispanic/Latino, and the remaining 4.9% were of other races. Attitude toward the police, was measured using a 30 Likert scale questions/items composite measure which was constructed to measure 4 dimensions of attitudes toward the police including trust in the police, satisfaction with the police, confidence in the police, and fear in the police (Avdija, 2010). "Confidence in the police" and "satisfaction with the police" are recurring variables measured in studies involving the relationship between law enforcement and civilians. An additional 22 item Likert scale was used to measure police behavior designed to measure four types of police behavior (including police impoliteness or rudeness/ignorance, verbal abuse, tendency to use force, and police disrespect towards citizens). To eliminate potential biased responses from participants, Avdija employed the use of a 12 item personal reaction inventory to differentiate between participants who generally responded in socially desirable ways and those that did not. Avdija found that police misconduct, police behavior, has negative impacts on citizens' attitudes towards the police. An ordinary least square regression analysis confirmed this finding. Additionally, Avdija hypothesized that "citizen-

initiated contacts with the police are more likely to produce positive attitudes toward the police, whereas police initiated contacts are more likely to produce a negative effect on citizens' attitudes toward the police (Avdija, 2010).” The results from the study partially supported the hypothesis. While police initiated contacts had a negative effect on citizens attitudes toward the police, citizen initiated contacts produced a positive influence on attitudes toward the police (this was not statistically significant). With respect to the findings of the study, Avdija concludes that if society wants citizens to have more favorable attitudes towards law enforcement, it is suggested that police be respectful, polite and control their tendency to use force (Avdija, 2010).

Khan, et al (2017) explore the effects of perceived phenotypic racial stereotypicality and social identity threat on racial minorities' attitudes about police. The authors assert that racial minorities trust in police officers psychologically involves the experience of identity-related threat. More specifically, “when individuals feel that they will be treated differently or devalued based on their social identity (i.e. race, gender, sexual orientation), it can have negative behavioral, affective, and cognitive consequences, also known as social identity threat. The authors believe that this can lead to distrust with the police. In a representative sample of residents in Portland, Oregon, the authors hypothesized that for minorities whose groups have “negative stereotypes in the criminal justice domain (Blacks, Latinos, Native Americans, multi-racials), self-reported phenotypic racial stereotypicality will indirectly affect cooperation through race-based social identity threat and trust (Kahn, et al., 2017).” In a random sample of 1200, 168 minorities were included to test the hypothesis (57 males, 108, female, and 2 transgender (1 missing)). The sample also consisted of 376 white males, 534 white females, and 5 white transgender individuals. Individuals responded to a survey containing measures such as phenotypic racial stereotypicality, race-based social identity threat, trust in police, and likelihood

of cooperating with the police using a 5 point Likert scale ranging from 1(*Strongly disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly agree*). The results reported more race-based social identity threat than Whites. The authors note that this finding is consistent with past studies.

Methods

Participants

A total of 166 participants consented to participate in a survey regarding perceptions of law enforcement. Respondents were gathered from two separate data pools; a pool that consisted of Milligan University students and a pool generated from a social psychology website that hosts surveys pertaining to social psychology. Respondents from the latter included adults 18 and older from various locations within the United States. There were 33 Milligan survey respondents while the Social Psychology Network yielded 133 respondents. Of all respondents, 7 reported being Asian, 18 African-American, 108 White, and 33 Other.

Procedures

A Qualtrics survey was created in an effort to effectively collect data pertaining to individuals' perceptions concerning law enforcement. While there were two separate survey pools, all participants were exposed to the same survey. Milligan University students accessed the Qualtrics survey through a link provided by a professor. Participants from the Social Psychology Network accessed the survey via a link provided on the network's website. Although some Milligan students received extra credit for completion of the survey, the survey was otherwise voluntary in nature without any form of compensation. Participants were asked a number of demographical questions such as age, race, gender, political party, and the location in which they reside. Respondents were then asked to type 1-2 words that come to mind when they thought of law enforcement officers. The next set of questions asked participants to select 1 of 4 terms that best described their perception of law enforcement (i.e. safe, sneaky, polite, mean). Of

the five questions that asked this, each set contained two adjectives with a negative connotation and two adjectives that might positively describe law enforcement. This was done for the purpose of ensuring that there were an equal number of positive and negative adjectives for each of the five sets. Another question asked participants to read a statement and select the percentage of officers they believed best represented the statement (*i.e. police officers are fair, police officers are aggressive, police officers are trustworthy, police officers are cruel, police officers are honest*). A manipulation check was implemented to ensure participants were responding accurately and thoughtfully. Respondents were also asked about their relationship with those who work in law enforcement. This provided valuable information pertaining to the reason why participants might have responded a certain way (working as a law enforcement official, having a family member or acquaintance that works in law enforcement, etc.). The final questions involved encounters with law enforcement. If a participant answered “yes” to having an encounter with law enforcement, they were then asked how many times they had an encounter and whether or not the experience was positive or negative. Respondents were then invited to offer any other information they would like to share with the researcher.

Results

Data for the current study was collected via Qualtrics between October 2022 and January 2023. An independent t-test was used to analyze what percentage of officers participants believed were *fair, aggressive, trustworthy, cruel, honest, or lazy*. Using an alpha level of .05, Milligan students had significantly higher percentages for the adjectives *fair, trustworthy, and honest* (Mean = 61.19, SD = 18.63) $t(145) = 2.003, p = .025$, (Mean = 66.47, SD = 19.70), $t(145) = 2.130, p = .018$, (Mean = 59.81, SD = 18.53), $t(145) = 1.799, p = .038$) respectively. Overall Milligan viewed officers more positively than the Social Psychology Network pool.

A one-way between groups ANOVA was conducted to compare political party with the percentage of officers participants believed were *fair, aggressive, trustworthy, cruel, honest, and lazy*. A one-way ANOVA revealed that there was a statistically significant difference in percentages between political parties. Tukey's HSD Test of Multiple Comparisons found the mean value for the percentage of officers participants believed were "fair" was significantly different between democrats and republicans ($p = .001$, 95% C.I. = -35.03, - 12.33). The mean value for the percentage of officers participants believed were "aggressive" was also significant ($p = .001$, 95% C.I. = 9.14, 31.98). Republicans were more likely to select higher percentages for "fair" while Democrats were more likely to select higher percentages for "aggressive."

A one way anova was conducted to compare the percentage of officers participants believed were *fair, aggressive, trustworthy, cruel, honest, and lazy* with the participant's race. Race was found to be statistically significant in conjunction with respondents' percentages, specifically regarding percentages given for *fair, aggressive, and cruel* $F(3,142) = 2.843$, $p = .040$ (for fair), $F(3,142) = 8.787$, $p = .001$ (for aggressive), $F(3,142) = 4.755$, $p = .003$ (for cruel). Using Tukey's HSD Test of Multiple Comparisons, the percentages given by participants to describe law enforcement as fair and aggressive were analyzed among each race and compared among each other. African Americans produced significant differences in the percentages they provided for the aforementioned adjectives in comparison with White-Americans ($p = .048$, 95% C.I. = -31.36, -.09) (for fair), ($p = .001$, 95% C.I. = 11.12, 40.18) (for aggressive).

With regard to gender, a Tukey's HSD of Multiple Comparisons was conducted to compare the percentage of officers participants ascribed to certain adjectives (fair, aggressive, trustworthy, cruel, honest and lazy) and gender (male, female, prefer not to say). Results for this

variable were not found to be significant. Age was also not a statistically significant variable within the study.

Discussion

The current study's data suggests that political party has an overwhelming influence on individuals' perceptions of law enforcement. Several reasons for this might exist such as specific political values. Historically, Republicans have encouraged the philosophy of conservatism and place value on certain government institutions that they believe have been a traditional and vital asset to the government. Law enforcement serves as a longstanding government institution that is undoubtedly necessary for the functioning of society. There was a much bigger difference in perception of officers between the two pools (Milligan and the Social Psychology Network). Milligan University is a private, Christian, liberal-arts college in eastern Tennessee. Tennessee is largely a Republican state with most of its voters tending to be right-winged. In addition to this, the majority of Milligan's students are White. This is a limitation of the study because no minorities from Milligan participated, making the data pool for Milligan lack diversity. As a whole, the study was not as diverse as desired.

While age and gender were found to be insignificant overall, it is noteworthy that *prefer not to say* individuals within gender tended to have less favorable perceptions of law enforcement, even more so than that of race and political party. *Prefer not to say* might represent those individuals who do not identify as male or female. Their perceptions could have been based off of negative interactions with law enforcement in which gender was made a matter of concern. These findings may demonstrate a need for organized meetings between officers and civilians. It is imperative that an understanding is established pertaining to the perceptions of law

enforcement and the public. In doing so, both sides may reveal where and how their perspectives became established and work towards a greater understanding of each other.

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