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## African American and White perceptions of police services: Within- and between-group variation

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### Abstract

Existing research on attitudes toward the police identified demographic variables predicting citizen satisfaction with police services and performance. Common themes in this literature were the disparate rates of satisfaction reported by African American and Caucasian citizens. While it is generally understood that African American citizens express lower levels of satisfaction, the degree to which this reduced satisfaction is consistent among African Americans and the factors causing such variation are unclear. In addition, variation in levels of citizen satisfaction across diverse measures of police services has yet to be considered by race. This study used data from a medium-sized Midwestern community to contrast samples of White and African American citizens to better understand how demographic, experiential, and neighborhood contextual factors shape perceptions of global, traditional, and community police services. Results from this study indicate that there is significant variation in the importance of certain exogenous factors in predicting satisfaction with police services. The differences between perceptions and race are most prominent in the community policing services model.

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### Introduction

For more than thirty years researchers have been examining the causes and correlates of citizen perceptions of the police and police services. In the 1960s, social and political movements sparked an interest in how the public viewed issues of crime and justice, including attitudes toward the police (Bayley & Mendelsohn, 1969; Brandl, Frank, Worden, & Bynum, 1994; Campbell & Schuman, 1972). Early research found that minority citizens viewed the police in a more negative fashion than White citizens (Winslow, 1968), a finding that remained stable

during the intervening decades. Subsequent investigative efforts attempted to expand the understanding of factors shaping attitudes toward the police and police services. While a race effect was frequently observed, other factors (e.g., neighborhood conditions) might trump this effect in shaping citizens' attitudes (Apple & O'Brien, 1983; Cao, Frank, & Cullen, 1996).

Based on both common sense and empirical evidence, it is accepted that the public does not share a homogeneous view of the police (Waddington & Braddock, 1991). Many studies, however, had implicitly treated various racial groups as if they had uniform views of the police and police services. While generalizations were made about attitudinal and perceptual differences between racial groups, little consideration was given to variation within

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racial groups. This study examined perceptions of police services among residents of a Midwestern community. Separate analytical models were estimated for White and African American samples to better understand within and between group variation. Early scholarship considering perceptions of the police was criticized for viewing this phenomenon as a one-dimensional construct (Webb & Marshall, 1995; Worrall, 1999). To compensate, three outcome measures (global, traditional, and community policing) were used to reflect citizen perceptions of policing services within the study community (Brandl et al., 1994). Results hold important policy implications, particularly in light of community policing. Understanding the factors influencing perceptions of the police within various racial groups allows the police to understand the challenges and opportunities they have in collaborating with the public.

### Literature review

Overall, the American public expressed positive perceptions of the police on a wide range of outcome measures (Apple & O'Brien, 1983; Black, 1970; Dean, 1980; Dunham & Alpert, 1993; Huang & Vaughn, 1996; Thomas & Human, 1977; Zamble & Annesley, 1987). Within existing research, there was notable variation in the extent to which different variables predicted citizens' views of the police and police services. Some argued that this variation was a function of the considerable discrepancies witnessed in the definition and measurement of dependent measures (Brandl et al., 1994; Webb & Marshall, 1995; Worrall, 1999). As a result, it was difficult to compare studies considering attitudes toward the police because there were differences in both the concepts (e.g., attitudes toward the police, views of police services, views of police efficacy, perceptions of officer characteristics, etc.) and referents (views of a specific agency, that agency's officers, the respondents' "local police," the police as a social institution, or the police whom respondents encountered) (Brandl, Frank, Wooldredge, & Watkins, 1997) under consideration. The present study compensated for this problem by considering three specific dimensions of perceptions of police service (global, traditional, and community policing) in the context of the sample's local police (a single agency). This broader view provides insight into multiple dimensions of the study concept (perceptions of police services).

While prior research found that positive views of the police were the norm, this trend was not equal across members of the public. Research consistently found that race was significantly related to perceptions of the police. Although most minority citizens

hold positive views of the police, their perceptions tend to lag behind those expressed by White citizens (Bayley & Mendelsohn, 1969; Campbell & Schuman, 1972; Cheurprakobkit, 2000; Garafolo, 1977; Hinde-lang, 1974; Huang & Vaughn, 1996; Jacob, 1971; Scaglione & Condon, 1980; Smith & Hawkins, 1973; Smith, Steadman, Minton, & Townsend, 1999). With a few notable exceptions (Apple & O'Brien, 1983; Jacob, 1971; Murty, Roebuck, & Smith, 1990; Parker, Onyekwuluje, & Komanduri, 1995; Weitzer, 1999, 2000a, 2000b; Weitzer & Tuch, 1999) research viewed race as an independent variable in analyzing attitudes toward the police. Although race is a consistent and powerful predictor, seeing it as the sole force that shapes attitudes toward the police obfuscates the considerable variation not only between, but also within racial groups.

Within the limited body of literature exploring variations within and between racial groups there are inconsistencies in the extent to which views of the police are shaped by other variables. For example, race and class are linked in American society (Franklin, 1991), therefore it might be expected that class would shape views of the police. Although class was found to play a role in shaping attitudes toward the police, the contrary was also observed (Alpert & Dunham, 1988; Frank, Brandl, Worden, & Bynum, 1996; Henderson, Cullen, Cao, Browning, & Kopache, 1997; Ostrom & Whitaker, 1974; Sims, Hooper, & Peterson, 2002). Even among studies contrasting the views of racial groups, class remained an inconsistent predictor (Weitzer, 1999, 2000a, 2000b; Weitzer & Tuch, 1999, 2002). This variation might be explained, in part, by inconsistencies in operationalizing both research questions and measures (Weitzer, 2000a). Given this situation, it remains unclear whether, and how, other variables shape views of the police within racial groups.

This analysis examined how common groups of predictors shaped perceptions of police service. In particular, consideration was given to variation within and between groups of African-American and White citizens. Multiple dimensions of a specific attitude toward police concept (perceptions of police services) were employed to provide a more robust perspective on race-based dissimilarity and the effects of predictor variables. Aside from finding that race shaped how citizens viewed the police, prior research evaluated the influence of other citizen level factors (gender, age, marital status, socioeconomic status, etc.), contact with the police (nature of contact, satisfaction with contact, etc.), and the context of a respondent's neighborhood (crime rate, disorder, perceptions of crime and safety, etc.), (Brandl et al., 1994; Cao et al., 1996; Huang & Vaughn, 1996; Reisig & Parks, 2000). The following sections con-

sider the role these three groups of factors were found to play in shaping views of the police.

#### *Citizen level factors*

Variations in perceptions of the police and police services were observed based upon a number of demographic characteristics. Race is commonly associated with perceptions of the police, with research finding that African Americans express positive views, although at a rate below that observed among Whites (Bayley & Mendelsohn, 1969; Campbell & Schuman, 1972; Hindelang, 1974; Huang & Vaughn, 1996; Jacob, 1971; Scaglione & Condon, 1980; Smith & Hawkins, 1973). Hispanic perceptions of the police were found to fall between African Americans and Whites on the negative-to-positive continuum (Carter, 1985), although there might be fluctuations based upon region and ethnic affiliation (Alpert & Dunham, 1988).

Age, gender, and education were also identified as strong predictors of perceptions of the police, with the assumption that lower perceptions would be expressed among younger, male, less educated citizens. These assertions were predicated on the belief that younger, male, and less educated citizens had more frequent and more negative (e.g., resulting in formal sanctions) contact with the police. Presumably, this situation results in the formation of negative perceptions (Campbell & Schuman, 1972; Decker, 1981; Escholz, Blackwell, Gertz, & Chiricos, 2002; Henderson et al., 1997; Hogan, 1978; Sullivan, Alpert, & Dunham, 1987; Wortely, MacMillan, & Hagan, 1997). Empirical studies yielded inconsistent results on the significance and direction of association for all three predictors. Studies accounting for age both supported (Garafolo, 1977; Jesilow, Meyer, & Namazzi, 1995; Smith & Hawkins, 1973) and failed to support (Bayley & Mendelsohn, 1969; Cao et al., 1996; Correia, Reisig, & Lovrich, 1996; Hindelang, 1974; Jacob, 1971; Worrall, 1999) the age-perception relationship. Studies of the gender-perception relationship yielded divergent results, with some researchers finding little relationship (Campbell & Schuman, 1972; Garafolo, 1977; Hindelang, 1974), while others found more positive perceptions among both females (Cao et al., 1996; Wilson, 1973) and males (Correia et al., 1996). Similarly, while significant in some studies (Brandl et al., 1994; Jesilow et al., 1995), the education-perception relationship was inconclusive in others (Cao et al., 1996; Correia et al., 1996; Hindelang, 1974).

When evaluating perceptions of police services from a community policing perspective, it is necessary to consider a respondent's attachment to their community. Factors such as a citizen's marital status

and whether they own their residence can reflect their "stake" or "investment" in their community (Correia, 2000). Those who have a higher stake in their neighborhood would be expected to be more concerned with the social integrity and cohesion of their neighborhood. By extension, citizens who are invested in their neighborhood should be more supportive of community policing efforts designed to improve their quality of life (Frank et al., 1996). According to the theory of community policing, if this philosophy is carried out in an effective manner, those with a greater stake in their neighborhood should be more likely to provide positive ratings of police behaviors intended to enhance the quality of life and diminish crime and disorder.

#### *Contact influences*

Although the nature (voluntary versus involuntary) (Bordua & Tift, 1971; Cheurprakobkit, 2000; Coleman, 1986; Schwartz & Clarren, 1978) and frequency of contact with the police (Carter, 1985) are important issues to consider, a citizen's satisfaction with police contacts was found to be a key in shaping perceptions. Citizens reporting low levels of satisfaction with police contacts tend to express less favorable perceptions of the police in general (Campbell & Schuman, 1972; Jacob, 1971; Smith & Hawkins, 1973; Tuch & Weitzer, 1997; Wortely et al., 1997; Zamble & Annesley, 1987). Scaglione and Condon (1980) found that among citizens reporting contact with the police, evaluations of such contacts were more powerful in shaping overall perceptions than were all other sociodemographics factors. Importantly, while having a negatively rated contact with the police diminished overall perceptions, citizens who provide positive ratings of their contact typically do not express more positive overall perceptions (Dean, 1980). Having a negatively rated impression of specific contacts with the police reduced a citizen's overall perception of the police, however, positively rated contacts did not enhance overall perceptions.

#### *Neighborhood context influences*

Variation in assessments of the police and police services was found both between (Campbell & Schuman, 1972) and within (Reisig & Parks, 2000; Sampson & Jégum-Bartusch, 1998; Thurman & Reisig, 1996) communities. This variation suggests aspects of a neighborhood's context, such as crime rates, perceptions of crime, neighborhood quality, and collective efficacy, influence citizen perceptions of the police. Residents of high crime neighborhoods were found to express more negative evaluations of

the police (Parker et al., 1995; Reisig & Parks, 2000; Sampson & Jeglum-Bartusch, 1998). Jesilow et al. (1995) found that citizens who disliked a characteristic of their neighborhood that fell under the purview of the police (e.g., vandalism) rated the police in a more negative fashion. Analyses incorporating neighborhood conditions, such as perceived crime rates, into predictive models found the effects of other individual and experiential characteristics were often reduced or eliminated (Apple & O'Brien, 1983; Cao et al., 1996; Kusow, Wilson, & Martin, 1997; Reisig & Parks, 2000; Sampson & Jeglum-Bartusch, 1998; Weitzer, 1999), suggesting that neighborhoods and associated perceptions matter in forming citizen perceptions.

The collective cultural beliefs and norms within a citizen's neighborhood may be powerful forces in shaping and maintaining their perceptions of the police (Jacob, 1971). When residents express a measure of mutual trust and confidence, most often deemed as collective efficacy, it is thought that neighbors and neighborhood may have a greater capacity to informally regulate circumstances and conditions (Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997). If the norm within a neighborhood is to trust and cooperate with the police, individual citizens might mirror these values. The issues of trust, cooperation, and collective efficacy are of particular conceptual salience in assessing perceptions of community policing services. Furthermore, because the police are expected to provide safe and secure communities, citizens who provide low ratings of their neighborhood as a place to live could be expected to offer lower ratings of policing services (Jesilow et al., 1995). Prior studies were criticized for failing to control "for the confounding effects of race and residential location on attitudes toward the police" (Kusow et al., 1997, p. 658). This study used measures of neighborhood context to better understand not only their general influence, but also to examine variation within and between White and African American citizens.

### Research objective

This analysis was designed to accomplish two primary objectives. First, the relationships between demographic characteristics, contact with the police, neighborhood context, and citizen perceptions of the police was assessed. A growing body of research suggested that neighborhood context shaped citizens views of the police. Multivariate analysis was used to control for the interactions between these three sets of predictors and to understand how they influenced perceptions of the police. Separate models were

estimated for African American and White citizens in order to understand differences between and within these two racial groups.

Second, the utility of these predictors were explored in relationship to three different outcome measures relating to policing services: global perceptions, traditional perceptions and community policing perceptions. Although prior studies considered citizen perceptions of community policing, few examined the specific issues of citizen perceptions of the quality of the community policing services in their neighborhood. As community policing becomes increasingly prevalent, researchers need to evaluate public perceptions of police services in a manner that accounts for community policing-specific measures.

### Data and methods

The data for the study were drawn from a larger research project examining attitudes toward crime, public safety, and the police in a Midwestern community.<sup>1</sup> The data file consisted of structured telephone interviews conducted with 2,058 community residents. All residential telephone numbers within the community were stratified based upon patrol beats; telephone numbers were then randomly selected within each patrol beat. At least one hundred interviews were completed with randomly selected residents over the age of eighteen within each of the city's twenty police patrol beats. Due to missing data on the dependent variables, it was necessary to select a subset of the original sample data using listwise deletion. This subset also excluded respondents who did not report their racial classification as either White or African American.<sup>2</sup> The project sample included 1,166 citizens (1,031 White, 135 African American) within the twenty patrol beats.<sup>3</sup> General descriptive statistics for the two sub samples are presented in Table 1.

### Dependent variables

The goal of this study was to examine the association between citizen level factors, contact influences, and neighborhood context measures in relationship to citizens' perceptions of policing services. Separate models were estimated for White and African American citizens to explore differences in the relationships between independent and dependent variables. Three outcome measures reflecting citizen perceptions of the police were used in this study including perceptions of global, traditional, and community policing services. Utilizing three outcome measures allowed for consideration of the multidimensional nature of the phenomenon and facilitated

Table 1  
Descriptive statistics

Variable	African American (n = 1,031)		White (n = 135)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
<i>Outcome variable</i>				
Perceptions of global police services	2.85	0.77	3.13	0.78
Perceptions of traditional police services	-0.19	1.04	0.05	0.98
Perceptions of community policing services	-0.39	0.95	0.09	0.97
<i>Demographic influences</i>				
Homeowner	0.46	0.50	0.75	0.44
Post high school education	0.49	0.50	0.62	0.49
Age	3.57	0.41	3.76	0.39
Married	0.42	0.50	0.52	0.50
Male	0.54	0.50	0.50	0.50
<i>Contact influences</i>				
Voluntary dissatisfied	0.11	0.31	0.09	0.30
Involuntary dissatisfied	0.13	0.33	0.03	0.17
<i>Neighborhood context influences</i>				
Perceptions of major crime	0.04	0.95	-0.03	0.98
Collective efficacy	-0.19	1.16	0.04	0.97
Neighborhood assessment	0.63	0.49	0.68	0.47
Personal crime rate	0.23	0.43	0.26	0.44

the testing of the predictive validity of the exogenous variables. The composition and coding for the dependent and independent measures is discussed below.

*Global support for police services* was operationalized using a single measure. Respondents were asked to rate, "Overall, how satisfied are you with the quality of police services in your neighborhood?" Citizens were asked if they were 1 = very dissatisfied, 2 = dissatisfied, 3 = satisfied, and 4 = very satisfied.<sup>4</sup> The majority of citizens (83.1 percent) indicated that they were very satisfied or satisfied with the overall quality of police services.

The *satisfaction with traditional policing services* variable was constructed using a two-item weighted factor score. The weighted factor score (eigenvalue 1.59, factor loadings >0.808) was based on responses to questions about the department's ability to respond to traditional calls for service and included: (1) "police officers are easy to contact," and (2) "police officers respond to citizens calls for service in

a timely manner." For both questions, citizens were asked if they, 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = agree, or 4 = strongly agree.

The *citizen perceptions of community policing services* was also operationalized using a two-item weighted factor score (eigenvalue 1.61, factor loadings >0.898) that included: (1) "How would you rate the job the police are doing in terms of working with people in your neighborhood to solve neighborhood problems?" (1 = poor job, 2 = fair job, 3 = good job, 4 = excellent job); and (2) "Citizens in this community are not comfortable working closely with the police" (1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = disagree, 4 = strongly disagree). The factor score used in this analysis represented a portion of the many functions associated with providing community policing services within a community. This measure was not intended to encompass all aspects of community policing services, but rather to reflect the most salient dimensions of this concept. The composition of the community policing services measure should be considered as a foundation upon which future research efforts might build in order to strengthen the content validity of efforts to operationalize satisfaction with the police.

#### *Independent variables*

##### *Demographic influences*

Based on their salience in prior research, a number of variables were included in the models as individual level controls. Three general demographic variables were constructed including: *gender* (female as the reference category), *post high school education* (no post high school education as the reference category), and *age* (natural log).<sup>5</sup> Two other variables were included as a proxy for the citizen's "stake" in their community, including *homeowner* (renter as the reference category) and *married* (single, separated, and widowed as the reference category).<sup>6</sup>

##### *Contact influences*

Previous research established the importance of accounting for citizens' recent experiences with the police. Specifically, researchers indicated that the nature of the contact (voluntary versus involuntary) and perception of that contact had a strong influence on citizen perceptions of the police. Four dummy variables were constructed to account for the nature and perception of contact a citizen had with the department. Citizens who had voluntary contact with the police for any reason in the eight months prior to the survey were dichotomized based upon their reported satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the interaction. Thirty-six percent of the citizens reported that they had voluntary contact. Among citizens reporting

voluntary contact with police, nearly three-quarter (72 percent) indicated that they were satisfied with the interaction. Citizens who were stopped by the police in the last eight months (involuntary contact) were also dichotomized based upon reported satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the interaction. Only 12 percent of the sample had involuntary contact with the police; however, of those reporting involuntary contact, two-thirds (67 percent) stated that they were satisfied with the interaction.<sup>7</sup> The present analysis only incorporated the two dichotomous measures of contact with the police in which the citizen reported being dissatisfied including *voluntary dissatisfied* and *involuntary dissatisfied*. Dichotomous variables reflecting satisfaction with voluntary and involuntary contact were included in initial analyses, but were never found to be significant across models; hence, they were omitted to provide final models that were parsimonious. The role of dissatisfaction among African American respondents should be interpreted with care, as there are few respondents who had contact with the police and expressed dissatisfaction with that encounter.<sup>8</sup>

#### *Neighborhood context influences*

Recent research exploring citizen attitudes toward the police was given consideration to the relationship between neighborhood context and perceptions of police services. In this study, neighborhood effects were separated into two categories, cultural influences and contextual issues. Two measures were designed to reflect cultural influences. The first measure, *collective efficacy*, was operationalized using a three-item weighted factor score (eigenvalue 1.734, factor loadings 0.69, alpha 0.76) including: (1) "Residents are willing to take responsibility for the safety of their own neighborhoods," (2) "Residents will share what they are learning about working on local problems in their neighborhoods," and (3) "Citizens would be willing to work with the police to solve neighborhood issues." Citizens were asked to indicate if they 1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = disagree, or 4 = strongly disagree with the three assessments of collective efficacy. An additional single-item measure, *neighborhood assessment*, was also included as an indicator of neighborhood culture. Citizens were asked if their neighborhood was an excellent, good, fair, or poor place to live. Neighborhood assessment was dichotomized with those individuals that perceived their neighborhood as an excellent or good place to live and those that indicated that their neighborhood was a fair or poor place to live (reference category).

In addition, two measures of perceived and officially reported criminal behavior were also included

in the models. Previous research linked both the crime rate of a neighborhood and a citizen's perceptions of that crime to perceptions of the police; hence, it is important to consider neighborhood criminal activity as a contextual issue. The first measure, *perceptions of major crime*, was included in the model as an individual assessment of the criminal activity in the neighborhood. The perceptions of major crime measure was constructed using a six-item weighted factor score (eigenvalue 3.128, factor loadings >0.68, alpha 0.82) based upon respondents' assessments of the following crime problems as, 1 = a big problem, 2 = somewhat of a problem, or 3 = not a problem, in their neighborhood: drug dealing, gangs, assaults in public, domestic violence, shootings and other public violence, and violent attacks on neighborhood residents. Second, a measure of the official crime rate was included. In order to minimize aggregation bias, the official crime rate for each police beat was not included as a predictor. Instead the *personal crime rate* for each police beat was ranked into quartiles. Personal crime rate was then dichotomized with those individuals living in police beats who had a personal crime rate in the top quartile and those citizens who inhabited police beats in the lowest three quartiles (reference category).

#### **Findings**

For each of the three outcome measures, ordinary least squares regression models were estimated separately for the African American and White subsamples. In addition, Z scores were calculated for each of the exogenous predictors in the models according to the formula presented by Paternoster, Brame, Mazerolle, and Piquero (1998). The results provided a richer understanding of possible differential effects of neighborhood culture, police contact, and citizen level factors on satisfaction with the police for African American and White respondents. Tests for multicollinearity were also conducted for each dependent measure; no variance inflation factor (VIF) or tolerance scores were high enough to suggest the presence of multicollinearity.

#### *Citizen perceptions of global police services*

Both African American and White respondents expressed a high overall satisfaction with police services in a global context. Eighty-five percent of Whites and 79 percent of African Americans were satisfied or very satisfied by the quality of police services in their neighborhood. Although both groups expressed general satisfaction with police services, the factors associated with global satisfaction varied

between groups. White respondents were more influenced by negative police contact and neighborhood context influences, whereas, positive satisfaction was associated with a diverse range of predictors for African American respondents (see Table 2). Older African American respondents and individuals who reported a positive assessment of their neighborhood were the most likely to report positive views of global police services. For White respondents, all of the neighborhood context influences were significant for the global services outcome. For both groups, dissatisfaction with a voluntary police contact was a significant, negative predictor of global satisfaction. As evidenced by the standardized regression coefficients, dissatisfaction with voluntary police contact offered the largest contribution of any of the exogenous variables to the overall model for both groups. The composite model explains a moderate amount of variation in the global police services outcome with a  $R^2$  of 0.270 for the African American model and a  $R^2$  of 0.334 for the White model.

Although there were differences in the variables significantly associated with global satisfaction for the African American and White models, none of the Z scores comparisons were significant. The findings from the analysis suggest that there are subtle differences in the predictive power of the variables across models of race, but, despite the apparent differences, the contrasts cannot be distinguished from zero. In short, the effect of demographic, contact, and neighborhood context variables on global satisfaction with police services was not statistically different for African Americans and Whites. The results from the global perceptions analyses suggest that there may be small race differences in the perceptions of global policing services, but that the variation is not such to achieve a level of statistical significance. This finding is not altogether surprising in that the majority of research conducted to date confirms that citizens in general indicate general satisfaction with global police services.

#### *Citizen perceptions of traditional police services*

As with the global police services model, African American perceptions of the police were most affected by demographic and contact influences; whereas, White perceptions were most influenced by neighborhood context predictors. As displayed in Table 3, perceptions of major crime, collective efficacy, and the personal crime rate were all significantly associated with positive perceptions of traditional police services for White respondents, but only collective efficacy was significant among African Americans. For both White and African American respondents, dissatisfaction with voluntary contact was associated with lower perceptions of traditional policing services. Dissatisfaction with involuntary contact predicted lower perceptions among White respondents only. Taken as a whole, the predictive measures explained the least amount of variation in the traditional policing services outcomes when compared with the global and community services outcomes. The  $R^2$  for the White model was 0.285 and 0.259 for the African American subsample.

Similar to the global services model, there was little statistical difference between the coefficients for the African American and White models. The only significant Z score across the two groups was observed on the education measure. This outcome suggests that education has a disparate impact on perceptions of traditional policing services across racial groups. For African American respondents, lower levels of education were associated with positive perceptions of traditional police services. This finding may also indicate that African American citizens with a post high school education

Table 2  
Citizen perceptions of global police services

	African American (n = 1,031)		White (n = 135)		Comparison Z score
	b	B	b	B	
Intercept	1.57*		2.84		
<i>Demographic influences</i>					
Homeowner	-0.34	-0.02	-0.03	-0.02	0.00
Post high school education	0.01	0.01	0.02	0.01	-0.08
Age	0.35*	0.17	0.07	0.03	1.55
Married	-0.09	-0.06	-0.02	-0.01	-0.44
Male	0.03	0.02	-0.12*	-0.07	1.05
<i>Contact influences</i>					
Voluntary dissatisfied	-0.79*	-0.33	-0.80*	-0.30	0.04
Involuntary dissatisfied	-0.21	-0.10	-0.53*	-0.11	1.26
<i>Neighborhood context influences</i>					
Perceptions of major crime	0.00	0.03	-0.13*	-0.15	0.43
Collective efficacy	-0.04	-0.07	0.21*	0.25	-0.94
Neighborhood assessment	0.46*	0.30	0.20*	0.12	1.43
Personal crime rate	-0.10	-0.06	0.23*	0.13	-1.85
<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>0.270</b>		<b>0.334</b>		

\*  $p < .05$ .

Table 3  
Citizen perceptions of traditional police services

	African American (n = 1,031)		White (n = 135)		Comparison <i>Z score</i>
	<i>b</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>B</i>	
Intercept	0.06		0.373		
<i>Demographic influences</i>					
Homeowner	0.19	0.10	-0.02	-0.01	1.07
Post high school education	-0.43*	-0.21	0.06	0.03	-2.53*
Age	0.08	0.03	-0.08	-0.03	0.62
Married	-0.02	-0.01	-0.11	-0.05	0.13
Male	-0.15	-0.07	-0.12*	-0.06	-0.16
<i>Contact influences</i>					
Voluntary dissatisfied	-1.03*	-0.31	-0.87*	-0.26	-0.48
Involuntary dissatisfied	-0.14	-0.04	-0.61*	-0.10	1.38
<i>Neighborhood context influences</i>					
Perceptions of major crime	-0.10	-0.08	-0.19*	-0.19	0.86
Collective efficacy	0.23*	0.26	0.29*	0.27	-0.60
Neighborhood assessment	-0.22	-0.10	0.08	0.04	-1.25
Personal crime rate	0.07	0.03	0.27*	0.12	-0.84
<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>0.259</b>		<b>0.285</b>		

\*  $p < .05$ .

were less likely to be satisfied with more traditional approaches to providing policing services. The lack of significance for the remaining *Z* score comparisons highlights the lack of statistical differences between predictive models. This finding suggests a need for additional research to further explore the nature and presence of differences in perceptions of traditional policing services across racial groups.

#### *Citizen perceptions of community policing services*

Of the three outcome models, the citizen perceptions of community policing services model most differentiated between African American and White respondents. African American respondents were largely influenced by demographic and contact measures, while the perceptions of White respondents were most effected by neighborhood context and contact influences. Older and female African American respondents had the most favorable perceptions

of community policing services. In addition, African American homeowners and those that did not have a post high school education reported positive perceptions. Older and female White residents also held more favorable views. Based on the significant *Z* scores for the homeowner and post high school education measures, there was also significant differences in the effect that homeownership and education had on perceptions of community policing services for African American and White respondents. This was an important finding in that stake in the community appeared to have disparate effects for African Americans and Whites.

Individuals of both racial groups who had negative contact with the police, both voluntary and involuntary, were significantly less likely to report satisfaction with community policing services. Based on the standardized regression coefficients, dissatisfaction with a voluntary police contact had the largest effect on perceptions of the police for both African Americans and Whites. The *Z* scores for both contact predictors were not significant; hence, the effect of voluntary and involuntary contact did not vary significantly for White and African American respondents (Table 4).

The effect of the neighborhood context variables on satisfaction with community policing services varied both within and across racial categories. Perceptions of major crime, collective efficacy, and neighborhood assessment were all significant predictors of satisfaction for White respondents. Although only one community context predictor (neighborhood assessment) was significant for the African American group, based on the standardized regression coefficient, community context did have a substantial effect on citizens' perceptions of community policing services. Not only did the predictive power of the contextual variables vary within groups, but the effect of neighborhood context also varied across race groups. Based on the *Z* scores, the impact of perceptions of major crime, collective efficacy, and neighborhood assessment on perceptions of community policing services was different for African American and White citizens. This was an important finding in that it indicated that the effect of each of the neighborhood context influences on perceptions of community policing services varied by racial category.

In addition to the differences in the predictive power of the exogenous variables in the African American and White models, the total model fit was substantially different for the African American model when compared to the White model. The demographic, contact, and neighborhood context influences accounted for half of the total variation in the dependent variable among African Americans ( $R^2 = 0.503$ ). The  $R^2$  for the White model accounted



Table 4  
Citizen perceptions of community policing services

	African American (n = 1,031)		White (n = 135)		Comparison <i>Z score</i>
	<i>b</i>	B	<i>b</i>	B	
Intercept	-2.04*		-0.62*		
<i>Demographic influences</i>					
Homeowner	0.48*	0.26	-0.09	0.04	2.49*
Post high school education	-0.59*	0.32	-0.05	-0.02	-3.61*
Age	0.46*	0.20	0.19*	0.08	1.38
Married	-0.07	-0.04	-0.03	-0.02	-0.20
Male	-0.28*	-0.15	-0.15*	-0.07	-0.92
<i>Contact influences</i>					
Voluntary dissatisfied	-0.53*	-0.18	-0.78*	-0.23	1.01
Involuntary dissatisfied	-0.45*	-0.16	-0.57*	-0.10	0.42
<i>Neighborhood context influences</i>					
Perceptions of major crime	0.11	0.11	-0.12*	-0.12	2.56*
Collective efficacy	0.07	0.09	0.26*	0.25	-2.48*
Neighborhood assessment	0.70*	0.37	0.15*	0.07	2.93*
Personal crime rate	-0.16	-0.07	0.09	0.04	-1.34
<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>0.503</b>		<b>0.261</b>		

\*  $p < .05$ .

for nearly half that of the African American model ( $R^2 = 0.261$ ). This was an interesting finding in that it suggested the importance of demographic factors, contact dissatisfaction, and neighborhood assessment in shaping African American perceptions of community policing services. Conversely, the results also implied the need for alternative models of explanation of perceptions of community policing services for White respondents.

## Discussion

The results of this analysis highlight several key disparities and similarities when the perceptions of African American and White citizens are compared. Across the three outcome measures, a more diverse range of factors influenced the perceptions of African American citizens. In contrast, perceptions of White citizens were more consistently the product of contact with the police and the respondent's

neighborhood context. Individual demographic factors were rarely significant, and when significance was noted, the standardized regression coefficients were small in comparison to contextual and contact influences.

Despite the differences in salient predictors observed in African American and White models, the explanatory power of the models did vary by outcome measure. The explanatory power was similar for the traditional and global services measures. In the traditional and global perceptions models, the perceptions of White citizens were predicted by a wider range of variables and yielded higher  $R^2$  values, but the differences were marginal and only one significant  $Z$ -score difference was noted on these two dependent variables. Although there was variation in the significance and strength of select predictors, the models appeared to be comparable in their ability to explain perceptions for the two race groups. In contrast, considerable variation was noted in the community policing services model. The  $R^2$  value for the African American model was nearly double the value computed for the White model. Nearly half (five of the eleven) of the independent variables produced significant  $Z$ -scores. There were also considerable differences in the weight of the significant predictors as reflected by the standardized regression coefficients. This finding is of particular significance for future studies of citizen perceptions of community policing services.

Based on these findings, research considering citizen perceptions of local police services needs to account for a range of independent variables, particularly when community policing services are being assessed and when it is a predominately African-American community that is being served. There appear to be meaningful differences in the beliefs and attitudes expressed by African American and White citizens; however, additional predictive models and dependent measures need to be considered to fully understand the subgroup variation.

Across all three dependent measures and for both races, dissatisfaction with police contact was crucial in shaping perceptions of police service. Despite this trend, there was some variation across racial groups based upon the nature of the contact (voluntary/involuntary). Dissatisfaction with the result of a call to police was significantly and negatively related to satisfaction with all three measures of police services for both Whites and African Americans. Dissatisfaction with involuntary police interaction was significant in all models for White respondents, but was only significant in the community police model for African American residents. While contact with the police was not common, when it occurred, a citizen's perception of that experience was crucial in shaping

broader perceptions of police service, especially when the interaction was voluntary.

For African Americans, age and education were strong predictors of perceptions. Both independent variables were significant in shaping perceptions of community policing services, with more positive views expressed by older African American respondents without a post high school education. More importantly, for the community policing measure and traditional police services model the effect of education on satisfaction was significantly different for African Americans than Whites. Age was also a significant predictor for African Americans on the global police services models, with older citizens offering more positive perceptions.

For White citizens, gender was pivotal in shaping perceptions of policing services. In all three models, White females were significantly more likely to report positive perceptions of police services when compared to males. Although gender was only significant in the community policing model for African Americans, the Z scores did not indicate a significant difference in the relationship between gender and perceptions across groups in any of the models.

Citizens' perceptual views of their neighborhood were often more important than actual neighborhood conditions. Police service perceptions reported by African Americans were never influenced by the actual crime rate, but they were influenced by respondents' assessments of their neighborhood in two models (community policing and global) and evaluations of collective efficacy in the third (traditional) model. The personal crime rate was a significant predictor for White respondents in the traditional and global models, but not the community policing model. Even for White citizens, when the actual crime rate was statistically significant, it lagged behind perceptions of major crime and collective efficacy as a factor influencing the dependent measure. This finding illuminated the symbolic nature of community policing. The *idea* of this philosophy (perceptions of safety and security within one's neighborhood, an integrated and cohesive community, general assessments of one's neighborhood) may be more important than the *reality* (actual crime rates) in shaping citizen perceptions.

In evaluating community policing issues, a citizen's "stake" in their neighborhood is of particular conceptual importance. It is expected that citizens who are more invested in the long-term well being of their neighborhood (e.g., homeowners and those who are married) will be more supportive of community policing and associated efforts aimed at improving neighborhood conditions. In the community policing

services model, a citizen's stake in their neighborhood was an important factor for African American respondents, but not for White respondents. Although the stake of White citizens did not directly influence perceptions of community policing services in the study agency, they might have operated indirectly through other citizen level or neighborhood context influences.

As with almost any study considering public perceptions of the police and police services, caution must be exercised in generalizing from these research findings. Except where studies consider broad views of the police as a social institution, research results in this vein of inquiry are linked with the quality and form of local police agencies and policing efforts. This research shared a limitation with the vast majority of prior studies in that the results were not just a product of the independent predictors, but also the nature and status of local policing. Variation noted from study to study could be a function of both operational discrepancies and actual differences in how different communities were policed. Thus, extant research expanded the understanding of perceptions of police services, but was also linked with the actual way in which the study community was serviced by the local police department and its employees. This limitation was particularly important in this study of community policing services and race. One would expect the level of community policing services to vary across neighborhoods. In light of this variation, members of separate racial groups may have had a more positive or negative view of community policing because they were receiving a different level of service when compared with members of other groups. Recent scholarship (Reisig & Parks, 2000) indicated that neighborhood-level factors could have a significant impact on perceptions of police. Although a sufficient amount of variation in perceptions of policing services was not found at the neighborhood level in this analysis, researchers should continue to examine neighborhood level variation in services as an important factor in predicting satisfaction.<sup>9</sup>

## Conclusions

Several key issues emerged from these research findings. First, the results of the community policing service model were of particular significance in an era of community policing. African American citizens were strongly influenced by their demographic attributes and the "stake" they held in their neighborhoods, while the perceptions of White citizens were more a product of their neighborhood context. As police organizations consider whom to align with in

pursuing community policing, these findings suggest that a uniform approach may not work for members of all racial groups. In particular, it may be easier to identify the characteristics of African American citizens who are more or less satisfied with the police. Such knowledge would allow the police to identify segments of the community where they need to cultivate stronger relations, while also identifying residents who may be more likely to serve as allies in problem solving and community improvement endeavors.

Second, the findings from this research demonstrated that dissatisfaction with a specific police contact played a consistent role in shaping perceptions of police services. This relationship made intuitive sense; if a citizen had what they believed was a negative encounter with an officer, it might be expected that the citizen would provide a lower evaluation of police services. This study reinforced an established body of research showing that while dissatisfaction breeds lower perceptions, the converse was not true. The significance of dissatisfaction should not be overstated because only modest proportions of the samples had contact with the police during the specified time frame.

Finally, taken as a whole, these research findings contributed to the understanding of the role various influences played in shaping citizens' perceptions of the police. Although the citizen level factors (e.g., race, gender, age) normally included in similar analysis were of importance, the way in which citizens perceived the police (including local policing services) was also a function of contact with the police and the context of the respondent's neighborhood of residence. Race was often treated as an independent variable: hence, variation within and between race groups could be masked. This study's use of African American and White subsamples illustrated that this variation existed and was, at times, statistically significant. For all three models, differences in the significance and magnitude of the independent predictors (especially for the community policing service model) suggest that future research efforts exploring race (and other) variations are warranted.

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### Notes

1. The study city was the largest community (with approximately 125,000 residents) located in a metropolitan area of over 300,000 citizens. Its primary economic base was the auto industry, government, and education. The police department employed more than 250 officers. All survey questions were set in the context of the study community and its police department. At the time of the survey, the agency was seeking to broaden its existing community policing efforts (a five-year old specialist program) to encompass all officers in the patrol division.

2. The small sizes of other minority groups precluded their inclusion in this analysis. In total, forty-nine individuals reported being of a race other than White or African American.

3. To ensure the validity of the project samples following listwise deletion, a series of t-tests were conducted for each of the exogenous and dependent variables included in the statistical models. Significant differences were not found between the original and project samples. The validity of the project sample was also maintained when t-tests were conducted separately by categories of race.

4. Use of ordinary least squares regression with ordinal-level data can lead to heteroscedastic errors that do not approach normality (Long, 1997). Conducting linear regression analyses with ordinal variables can increase the likelihood of errors and can substantially underestimate the predictive power of the exogenous variables. In order to address this problem in the current analysis, ordered probit models were estimated for the global satisfaction measure. No substantial differences in coefficients or levels of significance were found between the two models.

5. The natural log of the respondent's age was used in this analysis to account for skewness in the original age construct.

6. Although income (or a similar measure of social class) was commonly integrated as a demographic control in previous perceptions of the police research, it was not included in the final models of the current study. In preliminary models, the income measure was not found to be significantly related to any of the three police perceptions outcome measures. The income variable was insignificant for both the total sample and the two subsamples. In order to achieve parsimony and to maintain statistical power, income was not included in the final statistical models.

7. These rates were similar to what would be expected based upon recent national studies of contacts between the police and the public (Langan, Greenfield, Smith, Durose, & Levin, 2001; Schmitt, Langan, & Durose, 2002), although operational differences precluded making conclusive comparisons.

8. In total, seventeen African Americans were stopped by the police and reported dissatisfaction with the encounter, and an additional fifteen made voluntary contact with the police and were not satisfied with the response.

9. As part of the preliminary data analysis, a one-way ANOVA model with random effects was estimated by patrol beat for each of the outcome variables. The F-ratio indicated significant differences across patrol beats; however, the variation between patrol beats was so small that it was not possible to model using traditional hierarchical techniques.

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