A comparison of Latino and White citizen satisfaction with police

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A R T I C L E   I N F O

LATINOS represent the fastest growing racial/ethnic population in the United States, yet paradoxically, are one of the least studied groups in the field of criminal justice (Schuck, Lersch, & Verrill, 2004). This study aimed to fill this gap by comparing citizen satisfaction with police among Latinos and Whites in the majority-minority city of San Antonio, Texas. Drawing upon prior research as a guide, the study modeled citizen satisfaction with police from a sample of 592 survey respondents that were contacted by telephone in the fall of 2005. Models across the two groups indicated that neighborhood disorder strongly influenced satisfaction and Latinos had slightly higher satisfaction levels when compared with Whites. Implications for future research are discussed regarding the enhancement of knowledge about ethnic differences in perceptions of police and the larger criminal justice system.

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Introduction

The history of American police has regularly been a torch that has illuminated the racial and ethnic divides that exist in society. Black and White citizens of Watts in 1965 and Detroit in 1967 experienced a very different “police” and public records such as photos, films, news accounts, and The Algiers Motel Incident have etched the memories of a generation. Subsequent research has, not surprisingly, found a significant gap between Black and White citizens’ satisfaction with police. Maltreatment, perceptions of maltreatment, racial profiling, and bias are also frequently studied within the framework of understanding Black and White responses to police (Tuch & Weitzer, 1997). Recently, efforts have been turned toward understanding Latino citizens’ attitudes toward the police. The gap in criminal justice knowledge regarding Latinos is neither new nor surprising (Schuck, et al., 2004) as the commissions of the 1960s largely considered the topic through the lens of Black citizens and White police officers. The dearth of research regarding Latinos and criminal justice must be addressed as this group is now the largest minority group in the United States, and represents swiftly growing civilian populations across the nation and within police departments as employees (McCluskey & McCluskey, 2004).

Goal of the current research

Given the current state of affairs, the present study attempted to fill the gap in criminal justice research with regard to Latino views of the police. Although studies have begun to include Latino samples in research on race and attitudes toward police, the literature has traditionally focused on comparisons between African Americans and Whites, with the assumption that the Latino experience mirrors that of African Americans (Cheuprakobkit, 2000; Garcia & Cao, 2005). Recent studies that examined ratings of police by race and ethnicity suggest that the Latino experience with police “may be different in important ways from the experience of other racial and ethnic groups” (Reitzel, Rice, & Piquero, 2004, p. 610). Differences between Latinos and other racial groups highlight the need for additional research on Latino views of police and police/Latino relations (McCluskey & Villarruel, 2007). The present study examined ethnic differences in police satisfaction within the context of a majority-minority city, with the goal of further developing this line of inquiry and ultimately enhancing the understanding of cooperation among police and Latinos.

Latinos in the United States

Since the 2000 census, Latinos emerged as the largest minority population in the United States, surpassing the size of the African American population (Guzmán, 2001). Nationally, the Latino population is characterized by rapid growth, residence in metropolitan areas, poverty, and youthfulness, all of which are associated with a higher likelihood of contact with police. Overall, Latinos are more than twice as likely to live in poverty than non-Latino Whites (Therrien & Rodriguez, 2001). Additionally, the rate of unemployment in Latino communities is two times that of non-Latino Whites. Latinos are more likely to live in poverty (23 percent compared to 8 percent poverty for non-Latino Whites).
Compared with the national age distribution, Latinos are also younger than non-Latino Whites. Approximately one-third of the Latino population is under eighteen years of age, compared with one-fourth of the total U.S. population (Bernstein, 2005).

As of July 2006, the Current Population Survey estimated Latinos to number over forty-four million and comprise nearly 15 percent of the total U.S. population (Bernstein, 2006). Latinos represent 50 percent of the growth in the U.S. population since the year 2000 (compared to 18 percent White, non-Hispanic). In an analysis of Latino growth rates in the one hundred largest U.S. metropolitan areas between 1980 and 2000, Suro and Singer (2002) found that the “growth of the Latino population is no longer limited to just a few regions” (p. 2). While the number of Latinos increased in established Latino cities such as Los Angeles, New York, and Miami, “new Latino destinations” were identified, which included Atlanta, Las Vegas, and Charlotte, North Carolina (Suro & Singer, 2002, p. 5). Such shifts in the geographic distribution of Latinos are likely to provide challenges with regard to police service delivery.

Given the rapid growth of the Latino population in recent decades, Latino presence in metropolitan areas, and growing Latino population in areas without a historical Latino presence, the opportunity for Latino contact with police has increased substantially. Underlying the relationship between Latinos and police is a history of conflict, mistrust, and misunderstanding (Escobar, 1999). Given the limited research on policing in Latino communities, criminal justice researchers and administrators would benefit greatly from examining this ethnic group more closely, especially with regard to police who serve as gatekeepers to the criminal justice system.

**Literature review**

In assessing attitudes toward law enforcement, a number of studies have found that minorities are more likely than Whites to view the police negatively because of the experience of unfair treatment, racial discrimination, verbal abuse, and excessive use of physical force by police officers (Carter, 1985; Huo & Tyler, 2000; Morales, 1972; Samora, Bernal, & Pena, 1979). In examinations of police ratings, Latinos reported less favorable attitudes toward police than their White counterparts, but more favorable attitudes than African Americans (Schuck & Rosenbaum, 2005; Skogan, Steiner, DuBois, Gudell, & Fagan, 2002; Webb & Marshall, 1995). In other studies, neighborhood characteristics have been found to mediate the relationship between race/ethnicity and perceptions of police (Jesilow, Meyer, & Namazzi, 1995; Reisig & Parks, 2000; Sampson & Bartusch, 1998).

Research in Chicago by Schuck and Rosenbaum (2005) suggested that both global and neighborhood specific ratings of police were essential factors in the assessment of police among Whites, African Americans, and Latinos. In community surveys of 344 Chicago residents, greater similarities were found between global and specific attitudes toward police among African Americans and Latinos compared to Whites (Schuck & Rosenbaum, 2005). Encounters with police inside and outside minority neighborhoods are thought to shape both types of police evaluations among African Americans and Latinos.

Literature on minority attitudes toward police suggested that ethnic differences in police interactions were important for understanding ratings of law enforcement (Herbst & Walker, 2001; Holmes, 1998). The frequency and nature of police contacts with Latinos may have shaped attitudes toward law enforcement officials and the law generally (Cheurprakobkit, 2000; Langan, Greenfield, Smith, Durose, & Levin, 2001). In addition to the number of contacts, diversity in the type of contact may also be important to examine, particularly within one’s own neighborhood (Schuck & Rosenbaum, 2005).

**Perceptions of police misconduct**

Weitzer and Tuch (2004) examined perceptions of police misconduct as a potential source of racial differences in general evaluations of police. The authors systematically examined Latino, White, and African American perceptions of four types of misconduct, including unwarranted stops, verbal abuse, excessive force, and police corruption. Weitzer and Tuch (2004) tested the hypothesis that the dominant group was more likely than minority groups to identify with police and perceive them as protecting their interests, while minority groups viewed police as an institution of domination and police practices as inappropriate. General support was found for the group-position thesis, in that Whites were less likely to report police misconduct than African Americans and Latinos, who were more likely to report personal experiences of police misconduct. In addition, minority groups in the study perceived police misconduct as occurring very often or fairly often.

While the group-position thesis was generally supported, differences in experiences and perceptions within minority groups were also found, as African Americans were more likely to cite police misconduct than Latinos (Weitzer & Tuch, 2004). In addition, Puerto Ricans were the most likely of any Latino group to report police misconduct, suggesting the relevance of nativity in estimating Latino attitudes toward police. Generally, the study by Weitzer and Tuch (2004) highlighted the importance of examining experiences across racial and ethnic groups, and moving away from more general conclusions about White versus minority groups.

In a similar study of Hispanic and White residents in El Paso, Texas, Holmes (1998) also found higher levels of perceived police abuse among Hispanics living in the barrio and Hispanics living outside the barrio. In addition, White barrio residents also perceived higher levels of police abuse than their counterparts living outside of the barrio. Holmes’ (1998) study suggested that residential location and ethnicity are important in shaping attitudes toward police.

**Sociocultural characteristics and attitudes toward police**

Studies on cultural value systems and communication identified sociocultural characteristics which set Latinos apart from non-Latinos, ultimately influencing the use of police services and attitudes toward police (Carter, 1983; Herbst & Walker, 2001; Jesilow et al., 1995). Carter (1983) has suggested that cross-cultural differences served as a source of misunderstanding among police and Latino citizens and potentially impacted the relationship between police and Latino community members. In a study of five hundred licensed Latinos in Texas, he found that Hispanics in the study felt less safe, perceived inadequate police protection, and did not believe that police were effective in reducing crime when compared to the general population in the National Crime Survey.

The potential impact of language barriers on service provision was another issue examined among law enforcement agencies in Latino communities (Herbst & Walker, 2001). Findings from a study of calls for service suggested that language barriers did not pose significant problems in police and Latino interactions. In a similar study, attitudes of White and African American citizens, as well as English-speaking and Spanish-speaking Latinos in Midland and Odessa, Texas were examined. Overall, the study revealed that Latinos had positive attitudes toward police work, were willing to cooperate with police, and integrated police into neighborhood activities. In addition, they found that Spanish-speaking Latinos demonstrated a greater understanding of and cooperation with police work. Ethnic differences in the study led to the conclusion that “attitudinal differences exist not only between Hispanics and other ethnic groups, but also among Hispanics themselves” (Cheurprakobkit & Bartusch, 1999, p. 99). Geographic location may have also influenced outcomes, particularly with respect to cultural norms and regional efforts toward developing a community policing philosophy in West Texas (Cheurprakobkit, 2000).
Attitudes toward police in a majority-minority context

Another contextual factor relevant to community and police relations is the social-political landscape. In a survey of 560 residents in Detroit, Michigan, Frank, Brandl, Cullen, and Stichman (1996) found that African Americans held more favorable attitudes toward police than Whites. This finding diverged from other research that consistently revealed attitudes of Whites as more favorable than Blacks. In examining the relationship between race and citizen satisfaction with police, Frank et al. suggested that the social context of police and community relations was important to consider. They noted that “considerable changes have occurred in policing and in the social context in which urban police agencies operate,” thus improving ratings of police among African Americans (p. 321). Frank et al. described changes in Detroit since the early 1970s that were likely to have impacted police satisfaction. During the 1970s, Detroit experienced growth in the African American population and movement of Whites out of the city, thus becoming a majority-minority city. In 1973, Detroit elected its first African American mayor, Coleman Young. This led to additional changes including the appointment of an African American police chief and an increase in Black law enforcement representation.

The study assessed global and specific attitudes toward police in four areas of Detroit. General satisfaction was measured along with ratings of police in maintaining order and controlling drugs. An overall police attitudes scale was created by combining measures. A comparison of attitudes across racial groups revealed significantly higher ratings of police satisfaction on all measures. In addition, multivariate regression analysis yielded a significant impact of race after controlling for other demographic characteristics, such as age, education, income, and gender, and prior contact with police (Frank et al., 1996).

In a similar examination of police ratings in majority-Black and majority-White cities, Howell, Perry, and Vile (2004) found that negative evaluations of police typically found among Blacks in majority cities disappeared in cities where the majority of police officers and mayor were African American. Howell et al. (2004) examined evaluations of police in the Black majority cities of Detroit and New Orleans, and the White majority cities of Chicago and Charlotte, North Carolina. Racial context was determined to influence racial differences in evaluations of police, as evaluations varied across racial contexts. This finding was attributed primarily to White evaluations of police as less positive in Black cities compared to White majority cities. The authors concluded that White ratings of police appeared to be more racialized than African American attitudes, which remained relatively constant across racial contexts.

Racial differences in attitudes in majority-Black cities and majority-White cities were attributed to what Frank et al. (1996) described as the “ethnoracial political transition” in Detroit. They speculated that “as control and power shifted in the city and as the institutional character of the city changed from White-dominated to Black-dominated, citizens’ attitudes toward the police might have changed correspondingly” (p. 332). Howell et al. (2004) offered social dominance theory as an explanation for their findings, suggesting that in a majority-Black city where social order has been altered, anxiety may result from such a change, leading White citizens to become sensitive to their new minority status (p. 61). The social political change may have led to more negative assessments of police among Whites.

Study location

San Antonio has been a majority-Latino city since the mid-1970s. In the official census of 1980, Latinos comprised 53.7 percent of the city’s population. With the rise in population came a rise in power. In 1981, the city elected Henry Cisneros as the first Latino mayor. In 1983, the city appointed its first Latino police chief, Charles Rodriguez, who served as chief until 1986. Political scientists credit the creation of single-member districts in 1977 for the rise of Latino political power (Munoz & Henry, 1986). In the years preceding the change, San Antonio utilized an at-large election. The at-large system was an effective tool for keeping power in the hands of elites. From 1955 to 1971, much of the political power remained in the hands of the White community primarily because of political groups like the Good Government League (GGL). The GGL was organized by Whites from the business and professional ranks. With every election, the GGL would offer a slate of candidates and between 1955 and 1971 the GGL only lost three races. In April of 1977, the first election after the creation of single-member districts, Latinos won five races and Blacks won one race thereby creating a majority-minority city council for the first time in the history of San Antonio (Munoz & Henry, 1986). The rise in representation extended to the police force, where Latino representation has grown from 38 percent of the force in 1987 to 47 percent of the sworn officers in 2007.

Thus this study aimed to fill a unique niche in the literature by examining citizen satisfaction with police in a majority-Latino city. In addition to neighborhood disorder and other factors, the background of the political landscape may be important to consider in assessing satisfaction with police (Frank et al., 1996; Howell et al., 2004; Saltzstein, 1989). In San Antonio, where Latinos were the majority, it was expected that there would be greater minority community support for and less conflict with the police. The last thirty years of San Antonio’s political history point to the possibility that, in a Latino majority city, a different police-citizen dynamic may have taken root. The potential influence of acculturation on attitudes toward police was also examined to observe differences between Latinos of different generations. It was expected that less acculturated Latinos would benefit less from political representation than those citizens with higher levels of acculturation. Finally, neighborhood disorganization was examined to assess attitudes toward police within the local social environment with the expectation that those locations with higher disorder would yield lower levels of satisfaction with police.

Hypotheses

Three explicit hypotheses derived from existing literature on race/ethnicity and ratings of police were considered for testing:

**Hypothesis 1.** Latinos in San Antonio, a majority-Latino city, have higher levels of satisfaction with police when compared with Whites.

**Hypothesis 2.** Latinos with lower levels of acculturation have lower levels of satisfaction with police.

**Hypothesis 3.** Respondents from areas with greater levels of social and physical disorder have lower levels of satisfaction with police compared to those in areas with less disorder.
Culture and Policy Institute under the supervision of professors in sociology, criminal justice, and public administration. Surveys were conducted during the period of October 7–23, 2005. The data were based on random probability sampling of individuals with telephones. The total respondents consisted of 592 citizens from the Bexar County metropolitan area. The standard error of the sample (95 percent confidence interval) was +/- 4.2 percent (Firestone, Harris, & Vega, 2005). The SAS survey from 2005 yielded 454 (76 percent) usable surveys for the current analysis.

Non-response in phone surveys is a growing problem (Curtin, Presser, & Singer, 2005), and the participation rate of the current survey included 54 percent hang ups and refusals. Prior research indicated that extremely disadvantaged and extremely affluent areas exhibit higher non-response rates than areas without such extremes (Johnson, Cho, Campbell, & Holbrook, 2006). Additionally, there was concern with non-telephone households associated with the poorer areas of San Antonio, which may also work against strong generalization from this sample. Survey methodologists have noted that non-telephone households were directly associated with minority status and education levels, with national estimates of approximately 10 percent of Latino and 12 percent of non-high school graduates lacking phone service, thereby biasing participation in telephone surveys (Tucker, Brick, & Meekins, 2007). These two concerns, which represent problems for all currently fielded telephone surveys, may have reduced the participation of Hispanics and the impoverished, which could have biased results.

Conducting telephone survey research in San Antonio was, nevertheless, particularly attractive because of the large Latino population and represented a unique opportunity for studying Latino and White attitudes toward the police in a majority-Latino city. San Antonio has become the eighth largest U.S. city with a population of 1.2 million and is ranked fifth in terms of Latino population (Guzmán, 2001). Sylvester and Castillo (2003) reported that San Antonio’s growth in Latino population is also accompanied by increased acculturation (measured in terms of English language spoken at home) and a decline in foreign-born Latino residents. In 1990 San Antonio had a foreign-born Latino population of 11.7 percent, which declined to 9.4 percent in 2000 (Sylvester & Castillo, 2003). Overall, the 2000 census indicated that approximately 59 percent of residents were Hispanic and 7 percent were Black.

Survey respondents’ characteristics are reported in Table 1. The sample consisted of slightly more than one-third Latinos and approximately half reported as White. An additional dichotomous race variable was included to capture respondents who reported identification with a racial/ethnic group other than Latino or White (African American, Asian, American Indian, etc.). As the contrast of interest was among Latinos and Whites, and the numbers of other racial group members were small, the aggregation was computationally necessary.

# Measures

The dependent variable consisted of a factor score of three items with four ordinal Likert-type response options (in parentheses):

- How satisfied are you with the quality of police service in your neighborhood? (very satisfied, satisfied, dissatisfied, very dissatisfied)
- How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statement: “Police provide services that neighborhood residents want.” (strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree)
- How would you rate the job the police are doing in terms of working with people in your neighborhood to solve local problems? (excellent, good, fair, poor)

Reliability analyses of the three measures produced an alpha score of .75 indicating adequate reliability (Carmines & Zeller, 1979). Rather than create a summative index, a factor score was computed from the three items in order to weight their independent contributions to the underlying “satisfaction” concept. This approach yielded a single underlying factor based on typical criteria of scree plots, factors greater than one, and distances between extracted factors (Kim & Mueller, 1978). The loadings for the factor were all .75 or above for the three items. The factor score approach yielded a standardized dependent variable; consistent with expectations: the mean was near zero and the standard deviation was near 1.0.

With regard to independent variables, the essential race/ethnicity measures included three dichotomous measures mentioned above. To measure acculturation, a proxy measure of Spanish interviews was used, and comprised 4 percent of the sample. A second dichotomous measure of acculturation was created and coded as one for Spanish-speaking respondents and/or those reporting being foreign born (else coded zero), which comprised 6 percent of the sample. These were recognized as less than ideal measures and any results related to acculturation should be considered tentative. The third theoretically important variable captured perceived neighborhood incivilities, which measured social and physical disorder using a summative index of eight dichotomous items including the following problems: vandalism, abandoned buildings, vacant lots, gangs, safety, litter, drugs, and crime. The alpha coefficient for these items indicated a reliability of .81 for this index. Consistent with previous literature, it was expected that the increase in perceived incivilities would generate lower levels of satisfaction with the police in San Antonio.

Theoretically important control variables were also included in the analyses. Political conservatism, potentially linked with attitudes toward police, was measured by a dichotomous variable which captured respondents who labeled themselves as conservative or very conservative. Political culture might plausibly serve as an important filter for citizens’ perceptions of police and consequently affect individuals’ level of satisfaction and was therefore included as a control variable. Female gender was captured with a dichotomous measure which indicated that 60 percent of the respondents were female. Income was captured with a categorical measure of yearly income ($33,000 or less; $34,000–$62,000; and more than $62,000). Due to 107 non-responses, a zero category was added to capture the variance of non-respondents. A dummy variable for those not responding to the income question was included in the equation to limit the effect of missing income to that variable. The age of the respondents was captured in a four-category ordinal variable with the ranges of 18–35, 36–49, 50–64, and 65 and above.

# Results

Estimation of nested regression models in OLS is presented in Table 2. The models were estimated under the assumption that all groups had identical response patterns to satisfaction with the police. The dichotomous variables for Latino and other minority represented little departure from chance variation in the initial model. In Model 1, it was...
Table 2
Models of satisfaction with the police (n=454)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th></th>
<th>Model 2</th>
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<th>Model 3</th>
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<th>Model 4</th>
<th></th>
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<td>0.06</td>
<td>-0.58*</td>
<td>0.22</td>
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<td>-0.56*</td>
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<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.10</td>
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<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.17*</td>
<td>0.11</td>
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<td>Other minority</td>
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<td>-0.25*</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>-0.21</td>
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<td>-0.20</td>
<td>0.15</td>
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<td>0.02</td>
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<td>3(3)</td>
<td>13.18*</td>
<td>8(8)</td>
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<td>.19</td>
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<td>F-change (df)</td>
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<td>5.37*</td>
<td>5(5)</td>
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<td>1(1)</td>
<td>3.55*</td>
<td>1(1)</td>
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</table>

*p < .05 (two-tail test).
*α < .05 (one-tail test).
b Not significant.

apparent that ethnicity and race alone did little to predict satisfaction with the police. The model was marginally significant as indicated by the F-ratio (p = .086) and the R-squared statistic associated with this model indicated it was extremely weak. In the second model, perceived problems in the neighborhood contributed a significant amount of explained variance to the model. As perceptions of problems increased, satisfaction decreased. The F-ratio change indicates that the addition of perceived neighborhood problems, as hypothesized, reduces support for police. With regard to explained variance, this variable explains 13 percent of the variation in citizens’ satisfaction.

The third model introduced important control variables, and once again a significantly greater amount variance was explained, as indicated by the F-ratio associated with model change (p < .05) for Model 3. Among the added variables, it was apparent that satisfaction with police increased among older respondents and among female respondents. The fourth and fifth models reflected the persistence of the effects already discussed: perceptions of problems in one’s neighborhood, female sex, and age remained significant. The addition of Spanish language interview and the combined measure of acculturation were significant and in the theoretically predicted direction in those two models, though the second measure did not result in significant model improvement. The coefficient for Latino ethnicity was in the expected direction of the hypothesis derived from the literature on political context. More specifically, Latinos were more supportive of police than Whites, in the majority-Latino context of San Antonio, holding constant the effects of the remaining independent variables.

The second hypothesis argued that lower levels of acculturation (herein measured with the proxy of Spanish language survey completion and a second measure that also included whether the respondent was foreign born) would be negatively related to satisfaction with the police. Models 4 and 5 indicated that the coefficients associated with the proxy measures support this hypothesis; it should be noted that the more expansive measure of acculturation entered in Model 5 provided only a marginal increase in the explanatory power of the model, thus Model 4 would be the preferred model (Model 5, F-ratio change= 3.55, p = .06). Finally, with regard to the third research hypothesis, there was strong support as the models confirmed the prediction that neighborhood disorder or incivilities would be negatively related to satisfaction with police.

Given these findings, the consideration of model diagnostics was necessary to determine whether the statistical inferences were affected by violations of data assumptions within the OLS framework (Berry & Feldman, 1985). More specifically, the issues of collinearity and heteroscedastic errors were explored as potential problems affecting the added variables, it was apparent that satisfaction with police

inferences drawn from these models. Considering variance inflation factors generated for the independent measures, no evidence of a collinearity problem was found in the models.

Extreme levels of heteroscedastic error were not apparent from plots of the predicted values of satisfaction with the studentized residuals. Eyeballing the point cloud is, however, a suboptimal approach to the assessment of heteroscedastic errors. A Lagrange multiplier statistic (LM) was calculated to estimate whether more subtle forms of heteroscedastic error patterns existed (Wooldridge, 2006). The technique involved regressing the original independent variables on the squared residuals generated from Model 4 (as it indicated a significant improvement and Model 5 did not indicate a significant F-ratio change) as a diagnostic to detect whether the inferences in the model were incorrect and to ensure a robust model of citizen satisfaction. Calculation of the LM statistic in the full model generated an R-squared of .032, which when multiplied by the sample size, generated a value of 14.5. The LM statistic is chi-square distributed with degrees of freedom equal to the number of independent variables (nine in this case). The obtained LM statistic did not allow for the rejection of the null hypothesis that there was no heteroscedasticity, therefore the OLS models were accepted as adequately fitting with regard to heteroscedastic error. Separate models were estimated using Stata to allow for the estimation of the robust standard errors. The statistical inferences from that model were identical, with respect to sign and significance, with the model estimated using OLS standard errors.

The possibility of the adequacy of a single specification of police satisfaction across Whites and Latinos in San Antonio required further exploration (e.g., Schuck & Rosenbaum, 2005). To examine separate models, the sample was split across Whites and Latinos (the small number of other racial groups precluded estimating a third model) and models were compared using z-scores (see e.g., Paternoster, Brame, Mazerolle, & Piquero, 1998). This approach, presented in Table 3, allowed for the exploration of interactions between ethnicity and other important variables. In the context of this research, it was exploratory, and as such, attempted to answer the question of whether a unitary model adequately represents the two groups.

Split sample models indicated consistent strong effects of perceived neighborhood problems and age across the two groups; however, the coefficient for females showed that Latino females generally held strong positive attitudes toward police when compared with males; no similar distinction was apparent in the White model. The z-statistic comparison in the final column indicated, however, that there was no difference greater than chance between the coefficients obtained for the two groups. Model 4 in the combined group analysis...
could be considered an adequate general representation of citizen satisfaction in this sample.

Alternative measurement strategies were also adopted to test the effect of income on satisfaction. These measures included using the log-transformed income reported by respondents, creating extreme wealth (rich/poor) dummy measures, and creating six groupings of income through equal subdivision of the sample. None of the alternative measures of socioeconomic status yielded a statistically significant relationship between income and satisfaction. Relying on mean substitution for missing values also yielded no change in significance regarding this variable.

Conclusions

The relationship between the police and Latinos is an area where there is a dearth of research findings. Observational research, for example, has generally occurred in cities with relatively large African American populations (cf. Bayley, 1986) and survey research has similarly focused on African American citizens and their relationship with police (e.g., Weitzer, 1999). Given this gap in the literature, the current research was timely and its findings diverged somewhat from findings of other studies on Latino attitudes toward police.

In the context of an established majority-Latino city, whose police, until recently were led by a Latino chief, Latino satisfaction with police was hypothesized to be greater when contrasted with White satisfaction. The research confirmed that Latinos were slightly more satisfied with the police than similarly situated Whites. Consistent with expectations, proxy measures of lower levels of acculturation confirmed the hypothesis that less acculturated Latinos were less satisfied with the police.

As hypothesized, the level of self-reported incivilities in the respondents’ neighborhood was the strongest predictor of satisfaction throughout the models estimated. This comport with recent research focusing on the context of attitude formation (Reisig & Parks, 2000; Sampson & Bartusch, 1998). Overall, little systematic difference between Whites and Latino models of police satisfaction, beyond acculturation, was apparent from the San Antonio sample.

Several important methodological caveats must be considered regarding this research. First, shared method variance was quite probable in a cross-sectional survey. Second, causal order was imposed on the models, not by empirical observation such as can be obtained with longitudinal data. Third, the sample contained a large amount of missing data, which may be systematically related to response patterns. Fourth, greater effort and methodological innovation, such as supplementing phone surveys with field interviews, may help enhance reaching portions of the Latino population that are most likely underrepresented in the current sample. Finally, the survey did not include respondent reports of recent contacts with the police which may have influenced the global level of satisfaction reported in the 2005 SAS.

The current research results yielded at least two clear policy implications with regard to public support for the police. First, Latinos do not represent a monolithic demographic category. Police agencies that serve relatively large populations of newly immigrating Latinos, who are less acculturated, are likely to be confronted with a somewhat less enthusiastic and less supportive population. This research, however, represents a clear indication that, in the context of Latinos’ extensive participation in the larger political milieu, support for police among those who are more acculturated is relatively robust. Thus, while language and cultural barriers may initially exist, the San Antonio survey results indicate the hurdles to positive police community relations are not insurmountable.

Second, the effect of neighborhood disorder on attitudes toward police is quite large. Police efforts to reduce incivilities would appear to directly increase public satisfaction with the services provided. In those areas with the most need for police intervention, that is neighborhoods with extensive disorder problems, the police are likely to find the least satisfied constituents. Other researchers have documented that residents of such neighborhoods are also generally reluctant to participate or partner in the co-production of order (e.g., Grin, 1994). Thus successful efforts at policing disorder may increase citizens’ overall satisfaction.

Future research on this topic should work to include at least three further improvements. First, measures of acculturation should be drawn from a larger body of research to further explore these preliminary results. The nature of the measure of acculturation used here, which only captures language of the interview, may be problematic. Acculturation is more appropriately conceived of as a continuous measure, and only for convenience necessitated language and birthplace as proxies. One could justifiably argue that delivery of the survey in Spanish, by a select number of bilingual interviewers, may be the mechanism whereby lower levels of satisfaction were obtained. In such a case, the finding would be a methodological artifact. Second, future research should involve longitudinal analyses of the shifting political landscape as well as changes in attitudes toward police over time, as suggested by Frank et al. (1996). Finally, additional research is needed on cities with established Latino populations and those that are considered new Latino destinations in the United States. It is quite possible that convergence in attitudes is unique to established Latino communities where police chiefs and politicians representative of that community are more commonplace. In emerging Latino communities, establishing acceptance and political power may be more tenuous, and therefore satisfaction with police and other government entities may be biased downward. These are open questions that must be considered in an ongoing research agenda that covers multiple cities. Multifaceted research is likely to identify the mechanism(s) by which ethnicity matters in forming global and specific attitudes toward law enforcement and the criminal justice system generally.

References


