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Race and Policing in Different Ecological Contexts

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A recent trend in policing research is its focus on ecological context. Demographic factors continue to be studied, but the literature is no longer confined to assessing the influence of individual-level variables on either officer behavior or citizens' perceptions of the police. Scholars are increasingly realizing that place matters. This chapter examines current knowledge regarding the effects of three different contexts—neighborhoods, cities, and nations. But before proceeding to that discussion, I briefly summarize findings on selected individual-level predictors.

Demographic Factors

Race/ethnicity is one of the strongest predictors of citizen attitudes and experiences with the police. Blacks and Latinos are more likely than whites to believe that the police mistreat people, are racially biased, lack accountability, and need reform. At the same time, most studies document significant differences between Latinos and African Americans. Latinos tend to take an intermediate position between whites and blacks, more critical of the police than whites but less critical than blacks. This pattern has been described as a “racial hierarchy” in contrast to a more cohesive “minority-group orientation.”¹ At the same time, although racial hierarchy is evident on many specific policing issues, there are some areas where the two minority groups are largely in agreement.²

One problem with the category “Latino” or “Hispanic” is that it masks internal differences between subgroups along the lines of ancestry and immigrant versus native-born status. One might expect immigrants to differ from native-born citizens in their frame of reference: that is, conceptions of police in immigrants' home countries (often corrupt and repressive) may be imported into the new country, in contrast to more indigenous influences among the native-born population. Yet the immigrant-native variable has almost never been examined.³ Similarly neglected is the impact of national origin.⁴ A couple of surveys reported that Puerto Ricans were more critical of the police than other Hispanic groups. Puerto Ricans were significantly more dissatisfied with the police working in their community⁵ and more likely than other

Hispanic groups to believe that the police often abuse people verbally and physically, stop people without good reason, and engage in corruption.⁶ Why? Puerto Ricans have lower incomes and higher poverty rates than other Hispanic groups (except Dominicans), and this level of deprivation likely contributes to their more critical views of the police. But these findings only scratch the surface: much more research is needed comparing Hispanic subgroups' orientations toward the police.

How can we explain differences between minority groups in their relations with the police? Surprisingly, this question has not been addressed by scholars, for the simple reason that so much of the literature has centered on black-white differences and neglected differences between minority groups. I argue that the *mode of incorporation* into a society affects how a particular group is treated by, and reacts to, the police.⁷ Minorities differ considerably in the degree to which they are politically, culturally, and economically integrated in any given society and in their historical treatment by major institutions. The mode-of-incorporation perspective highlights key differences in the historical trajectory and contemporary stratification of different groups. As Lawrence Bobo writes: "Among racial minority groups, the level of alienation [from major social institutions] would vary based on differences in the persistence, pervasiveness across domains of life, and extremity of inequality of life chances. This argument implies that members of more recent and voluntarily incorporated minority groups will feel less alienation than members of long-term and involuntarily incorporated minority groups."⁸ This proposition can be applied to criminal justice institutions: "Latinos occupy a disadvantaged middle ground where they are a less comprehensive and intensive focus of criminalization efforts than African Americans, but more at risk than whites."⁹ Asian Americans' appear to have an even less contentious relationship with the police than the other minority groups, which is largely consistent with their mode of incorporation into American society. But this conclusion must be regarded as tentative since there are so few studies including Asians and, again, we must be careful to disaggregate the Asian population by national origin and nativity.

The mode-of-incorporation thesis is situated at the macro-structural and historical level of analysis and, as such, is not intended as a complete explanation of police-minority relations, but it offers considerable insight into group-level patterns and is a useful counterbalance to micro-level, individual, and situational explanations. It can also be used to help explain cross-national differences in police relations with ethnic minorities, an argument developed in the final section of the chapter.

Age is a consistent predictor of both experiences with and attitudes toward the police. Young people are more likely than older cohorts to have contact, and more adversarial contact, with police officers,¹⁰ and to harbor critical opinions of the police.¹¹ While this age cleavage exists across racial and ethnic groups, minority youth are especially vulnerable to unwanted attention from the police. It is thus no surprise that they view the police more critically than white youth.¹²

Gender is typically not a predictor in its own right, but does play a role as it intersects with race and age. In the few studies that include race-age-gender interactions, young black males are significantly more likely to report bad experiences with officers and to hold negative opinions of the police than their counterparts—young

black women, young white men, and older black men.¹³ This *triple-jeopardy* pattern is also apparent among young Latino men.¹⁴

Social class is less consistent. Class position makes little difference among whites, whereas for African Americans the results are quite mixed. Some studies detect no significant class differences in blacks' attitudes toward the police; some find more favorable attitudes among middle-class blacks than among lower-class blacks; and others find that middle-class blacks are more critical than disadvantaged blacks. These mixed findings may be a function of the kinds of policing issues examined in various studies. It is possible that race trumps class on certain issues, while class significantly affects views on other issues. If so, it is not a question of race versus class in the abstract but is instead issue-specific.

The ecological frame of reference seems to play a role with regard to the relative impact of race and class. If the context is policing in one's neighborhood, the evidence indicates that residents of disadvantaged areas are more likely to negatively evaluate police services (e.g., response time, crime prevention, treatment of crime victims, police misconduct) than residents of middle-class communities.¹⁵ But if the frame of reference is broader, say, citizens' views of general policing patterns throughout the nation, middle-class blacks tend to hold more critical views than their disadvantaged counterparts.¹⁶ Why would middle-class African Americans hold more critical views on these issues? There are several possible explanations. First, better-educated persons have greater exposure to the media, including news coverage of instances of police misconduct. Greater media exposure appears to affect middle-class blacks' assessments of the scope of such problems to a much greater degree than their less-educated counterparts.¹⁷ Second, middle-class discontent with the police may be related to their experiences *outside* their residential neighborhoods, where they may be viewed by officers as "out of place"¹⁸ and treated more negatively than in their own residential neighborhoods.¹⁹ This may be coupled with a sense of relative deprivation for those whose class status is invisible to police officers and who are treated on the basis of their race instead.²⁰ Policing is not unique: middle-class blacks perceive greater racial discrimination in employment and housing as well.²¹

Much more research is needed regarding the intersection of race and class in relation to citizen views and experiences of the police. At present, relatively little is known about the policing of middle-class African Americans and Latinos, as well as poor whites. But there is one domain in which social class has received increasing attention—namely, the class configuration of residential neighborhoods.

Neighborhood Context

Important recent studies indicate that the effects of demographic characteristics are reduced, but not necessarily eliminated, once neighborhood context is factored into the equation.²² In other words, in terms of police treatment of citizens, where one lives matters as much or more than individual characteristics, and mobility outside one's neighborhood is also an important variable. Why is neighborhood an important unit of analysis?

Police practices vary, at least to some extent, from one locale to another.²³ Such variations are shaped, in part, by ecological conditions such as crime and socioeconomic status. Affluent neighborhoods tend to have low levels of crime and street disorder and the police tend to see such areas as hospitable, whereas inner-city neighborhoods are often the sites of multiple problems, including poverty, unemployment, dilapidation, street crime, one-parent families, and transience. The concentration of such conditions translates into severe community disorganization, marked by weak ties among neighbors and a low collective capacity to deal with local problems. This is social disorganization theory in a nutshell.

Social disorganization theory has been faulted for neglecting the possible impact of formal social control (e.g., police practices) and other external forces on intra-neighborhood arrangements.²⁴ A comprehensive social disorganization model would incorporate such external factors to more fully account for patterns of crime and disorder at the community level. At the same time, we can examine the effects of policing, in its own right, on the experiences and attitudes of community residents. A combination of *depolicing and harsh policing* is often characteristic of disorganized, poor neighborhoods. On the one hand, the police approach to these neighborhoods tends to be marked by unresponsiveness to calls from residents, poor service when they arrive at a call, or general underenforcement of the law.²⁵ On the other hand, residents of these communities are often the targets of overly aggressive police behavior. The National Research Council's comprehensive review concluded that "disadvantaged and higher crime neighborhoods are more likely to receive punitive or enforcement-oriented policing."²⁶ Such areas are marked by higher rates of police corruption, physical abuse of residents, and unjustified or questionable street stops.²⁷

If police practices vary across different types of communities, it is reasonable to expect residents' views of the police to reflect this, and the evidence shows that this is indeed the case.²⁸ First, residents of high-crime areas may blame the police for crime and disorder,²⁹ and demand more vigorous policing. A large number of blacks and Hispanics, especially those living in disadvantaged neighborhoods, feel that their communities receive insufficient police protection.³⁰ Weitzer and Tuch's national survey found that 85 percent of Hispanics and 88 percent of African Americans favored more police surveillance of high-crime areas, and a New York City poll reported that 66 percent of Hispanics and 72 percent of blacks supported the planned installation of four hundred surveillance cameras throughout the city to enhance crime control.³¹ Second, residents of such communities complain about harsh practices, including physical and verbal abuse and unwarranted stops of pedestrians and motorists.³² There is evidence that police who patrol such communities often behave indiscriminately in their treatment of people: this is the dynamic of "ecological contamination" whereby mere residence in a particular community becomes a liability for all residents.³³ In sum, residents of these communities are doubly frustrated with the police, resulting in demands for both *more robust and more sensitive* policing.

Aggressive or insensitive policing in high-crime, minority neighborhoods is not inevitable. Some areas are characterized by a very different policing style: community policing. Community policing can take several forms, including foot patrols, school programs, and meetings where residents and officers work collaboratively to identify

and devise solutions for local problems. Community policing may be considered an important part of neighborhood context, particularly in high-crime, disadvantaged areas, where it is more salient than in low-crime areas. If community policing lives up to its promise as trumpeted by advocates, we should expect it to have positive effects. Some studies show that sustained community policing and collaborative problem-solving mechanisms can enhance crime prevention and help build residents' confidence in the police.³⁴ It can backfire, however, if it is imposed in a way that residents find disingenuous, suspicious, or intrusive.³⁵

In addition to the style of policing in a neighborhood, police practices may also vary according to the racial composition and class position of an area. Some studies find that neighborhood socioeconomic status is a strong predictor of both police behavior and residents' attitudes toward the police. In a Chicago study, after controlling for neighborhood racial composition and violent crime, residents of impoverished areas were significantly more likely than residents of other areas to report that officers performed poorly in preventing crime and maintaining order on the streets, responded poorly to crime victims, and were not responsive to local issues.³⁶ Dissatisfaction with the amount or quality of police services was also found to be highest, net of other factors, in disadvantaged neighborhoods in other cities.³⁷ Findings from these studies, which measured objective neighborhood conditions, are mirrored in studies based on residents' perceptions of neighborhood conditions. Residents who perceive their community as disorderly or crime-ridden hold more negative views of the police.³⁸

Qualitative studies lend support to the quantitative findings describe above, confirming the impact of neighborhood context on police-community relations, but they also deepen our understanding by documenting the meanings residents attach to policing in their community, the reasoning people use in evaluating the police, and the kinds of changes they want to see in police practices. These studies highlight residents' lived experiences, illustrating what it feels like to be on the receiving end of verbal abuse, excessive force, and unwarranted or repeated stops.³⁹ Such research can also document neighborhood-level "multiplier effects" of instances of police actions that are conveyed within local social networks—that is, tapping into the neighborhood culture. It appears that residents of different kinds of neighborhoods operate with different universes of meaning regarding the police, at least on some issues—meanings born of personal and vicarious experiences and observations of police practices.

One illustration of clashing meanings is the following finding: When asked whether being African American "usually makes a difference" in how a person is treated by the police in Washington DC, large percentages of blacks and whites living in three neighborhoods agreed. Yet, when asked *why* race made a difference, black respondents tended to cite police racism whereas four-fifths of whites invoked blacks' involvement in crime, which they believed justified police bias—that is, "rational discrimination." Whites concede that differential treatment exists but place the onus on blacks, whereas African Americans blame the police. This important difference would have been masked had only the quantitative finding been presented, that 71 percent of white respondents believed police treat members of different races differently.⁴⁰

Compared to residents of disadvantaged areas, minorities who reside in middle-

class communities appear to have better relations with the police. Although the literature is scarce, it appears that blacks and Hispanics who live in predominantly white, middle-class neighborhoods, in cities as well as suburbs, report more favorable personal experiences with and attitudes toward the police than do their counterparts living in disadvantaged neighborhoods. A study comparing a Midwestern city with its surrounding suburbs documented this pattern: both whites and blacks living in the suburbs viewed the police more favorably than whites and blacks in the city, and suburban blacks had higher opinions of the police than urban whites. The researchers conclude that “it is residential location rather than racial attributes that can best explain satisfaction with [police] performance.”⁴¹ Recent research on other cities reaches similar conclusions: In El Paso, Texas, both Hispanics and whites residing in poor neighborhoods were more likely than people living in middle-class neighborhoods to report having observed a range of police abuses.⁴² In Chicago, middle-class blacks and Hispanics who resided in disadvantaged neighborhoods held more negative views of the police than their middle-class counterparts in advantaged communities.⁴³ Holding individual race and class constant, neighborhood socioeconomic context was a predictor. And in Lexington and Louisville, Kentucky, whites and blacks living in disadvantaged neighborhoods expressed similar levels of dissatisfaction with the police, whereas in economically advantaged areas, blacks were less likely than whites to hold favorable attitudes toward the police.⁴⁴ In each of these studies, neighborhood-class position trumps individual-race or -class status for at least one of the racial or ethnic groups studied.

In my Washington DC study, police-community relations in a black middle-class neighborhood were at least as positive as they were for residents of a white middle-class neighborhood.⁴⁵ But when residents of the black middle-class community traveled outside their neighborhood, they received much more negative treatment from officers. For one thing, they were 3.4 times more likely to be stopped outside their neighborhood than inside, whereas the difference was much narrower for middle-class whites and for lower-class blacks in the study. And when they were stopped outside their community, their class status was relatively invisible to officers. As a twenty-three-year old woman from the middle-class neighborhood (Merrifield) compared her treatment inside the neighborhood and outside it while driving through a poor area:

I’ve seen police on 14th Street [a poor area] with this attitude. They come out hard at you, but they really don’t know what you’re about. They stopped me on 14th Street and they were talking horrible. Once I started talking to them, they was like, “Oh, okay. It’s not another person off the street.” . . . I think they see [Merrifield] as a middle-class neighborhood . . . middle-class nuclear families, so they’re more apt to be calmer. . . . If I lived on 14th Street they would deal with me harshly. . . . Not knowing me, just seeing me over there, I’d be treated differently until they got to [speak with] me.⁴⁶

Similarly, Merrifield residents who had experienced or witnessed verbal or physical abuse by police officers reported that this largely occurred outside Merrifield in other parts of Washington DC.

These studies suggest that—in addition to crime rates and policing styles—a neighborhood’s socioeconomic position may be a critical variable in terms of both police practices and police-community relations, perhaps trumping racial composition. Further research will help to clarify the role of neighborhood class versus racial configuration in relation to policing. What the existing literature does show is that neighborhood conditions are important predictors, over and above individual-level characteristics.

City Context

Do police-citizen relations also vary across cities? Surprisingly little comparative research has been done on policing at the city level. By this, I mean analysis of either variation *among cities* or variation on *city-level factors* that might affect policing. Most research is confined to a single-city or the nation as a whole. Yet there remain good reasons to expect cities to vary and to expect city-level variables to shape citizen assessments of the police. The question is twofold: Do city-level conditions affect (1) police practices and (2) residents’ experiences and perceptions of the police—net of the effects of other variables? As it turns out, it is much easier to pose this question than to answer it, because of the tricky issue of identifying the proper variables to be measured. Below, I highlight some potentially important predictors.

Some classic studies by James Q. Wilson, Lawrence Sherman, and others demonstrate that policing policies, styles, and practices differ by city. Cities have distinctive historical legacies of policing, unique records of contentious events involving the police (e.g., riots, police killings, corruption scandals), and at least somewhat different police organization, policies, and leadership styles.⁴⁷ Such variables arguably affect differences in overall police-citizen relations from city to city. Yet surprisingly few comparative, multi-city studies examine these relations.⁴⁸

There are additional city-level variables that may influence popular evaluations of the police. Conflict theory highlights certain macro-level conditions in shaping both social control practices and citizen evaluation of state institutions. In terms of social control, class-based conflict theory holds that “the more economically stratified a society becomes, the more it becomes necessary for dominant groups in society to enforce through coercion the norms of conduct which guarantee their supremacy.”⁴⁹ The police are the premier institution in this coercive enterprise. At the city level, both absolute deprivation (poverty, unemployment, etc.) and relative deprivation (income inequality) may play a role in structuring residents’ relations with the police. Economic distress may generate (1) an unstable situation conducive to intensified police control and (2) strains in police relations with disadvantaged residents. With regard to the first potential outcome, economic inequality in a city does appear to condition enhanced formal control, based on studies identifying inequality as a predictor of police force size⁵⁰ and killings of civilians.⁵¹ Higher levels of inequality within a population are associated with a higher per capita number of police officers and a higher incidence of police killings.

Race-based conflict theory focuses on racial structures rather than aggregate eco-

conomic patterns. A city's racial composition is one dimension of this structure. According to the "minority threat" thesis, the magnitude of formal control is related to the perceived threat that minority groups present to the dominant group in the city:⁵² a large minority population elevates whites' fear of crime,⁵³ which generates more robust control over the minority. Although some studies report that black population size is not a predictor of formal control,⁵⁴ support for this thesis is found in several other studies. The larger the percentage of blacks in a city, the higher the per capita size of the police force,⁵⁵ expenditure on the police,⁵⁶ arrest rates,⁵⁷ and frequency of police killings of blacks.⁵⁸ These outcomes have been interpreted as indicators of heightened control over the black population.

A large or growing Hispanic population in a city might also be viewed as a threat by the dominant, white population, though the racial hierarchy thesis (described above) would predict that a sizeable Hispanic population would be perceived as less threatening than a large African American population. One study advanced this Hispanic-threat explanation for the association between police misconduct incidents and neighborhoods with large numbers of Hispanics, and this relationship can plausibly be extrapolated to the city level as well.⁵⁹ Another study, of 245 cities, reported an intriguing finding: An increase in the Hispanic population resulted in a decrease in the level of arrests of blacks, though the authors did not examine whether this was also associated with higher arrest rates for Hispanics.⁶⁰

An assumption in the minority-threat literature is that demands for law and order emanate from the white majority population. An alternative and quite plausible explanation, not tested in these studies, is that the minority population itself may demand intensified social control. Data presented above show that a substantial majority of blacks and Hispanics desire robust law enforcement and crime control, so this interest is hardly unique to whites. At police-community meetings that I have attended in Washington DC, African Americans have been the most vocal in demanding more police patrols and proactive measures to fight crime, and this appears to be the case in other cities as well.⁶¹ Especially in places where the minority population is sizeable, it may have significant political clout and capacity to pressure the authorities for changes, resulting in additional police resources or interventions in high-crime neighborhoods.⁶² This minority-demand explanation stands in contrast to the minority-threat thesis, although the two are not mutually exclusive: the white majority may perceive a sizeable minority population as a threat, while both the majority and minority population call for intensified policing.

In cities with a large proportion of minority residents, this may also influence minority views of criminal justice institutions. A large minority population may increase members' exposure to others' (often critical) narratives about the police. A city where, say, two-thirds of the population is Hispanic (e.g., Miami, Florida) or African American (e.g., Albany, Georgia) might be expected to have a higher net level of in-group dialogue regarding the police than a city with a small minority population and perhaps lacking a critical mass of residents who have had bad or cumulative experiences with local police officers. One study found that "an increase in the number of blacks in the neighborhood increases the opportunity for blacks to associate with others who have negative attitudes toward the police, and this results in an overall

increase in their negative sentiment toward the police.”⁶³ The study focused on neighborhood-level patterns, but the composition → association → discontent pattern may also operate, and even be magnified, at the city level.

To complicate matters, the effect of a city’s racial composition may be affected by patterns of racial segregation. In other words, it may not be simply a matter of the size of the minority population but also its spatial proximity to or isolation from the white population that affects the amount of police control over the minority population. The segregation of minorities into urban ghettos may function as an informal mechanism of control, limiting their mobility and insulating whites from black crime.⁶⁴ Some studies report that residential segregation increased rates of intra-racial victimization but decreased inter-racial victimization.⁶⁵ Insulation from black crime may, in turn, reduce whites’ demands for intensified formal control citywide. In cities with high racial segregation, “declines in white victimization [by blacks] should alleviate white pressure on political authorities to do something about crimes committed by blacks.”⁶⁶ Relatively low racial segregation, by contrast, may increase whites’ threat perception, thus generating more robust crime control. Support for this argument is reported in studies finding an association between higher levels of racial segregation and smaller police forces per capita⁶⁷ and lower arrest rates of blacks,⁶⁸ independent of crime rates.

Racial segregation may generate institutionalized police practices but may also indirectly influence residents’ opinions of the police. If residential segregation decreases mobility and helps to contain crime in African American neighborhoods, and if police are evaluated in terms of their record in crime control, whites’ approval of the police may be elevated in cities with high residential segregation. The effect of segregation on African Americans’ opinions of the police may be more complex, however. If police under-enforce the law in residentially isolated black neighborhoods because crimes in such communities do not threaten those living elsewhere in the city (as suggested in the studies cited above), this may have *either* a positive or negative effect on the residents’ attitudes toward the police: For those who want more intensive police patrolling and crime control, the depolicing associated with higher segregation would increase dissatisfaction with the city’s police. For those who feel that officers frequently mistreat local residents or who have a generally unfavorable view of the police department, a diminished police presence in their neighborhood may be greeted with relief. The under-policing associated with segregation may not improve these residents’ views of the police but it may temper their disapproval. The presence of *both* of these perspectives has been documented among residents of disadvantaged black neighborhoods.⁶⁹ In the context of these dual orientations, segregation (and its potential corollary, depolicing) may have a mixed effect on residents’ opinions of the police. The dual orientations may cancel out and erase any discernable aggregate effect of high segregation on residents’ attitudes toward the police. Researchers have yet to explore this question.

Another city-level variable that might be salient is the racial composition of a police department. Since the 1960s, a consensus has emerged among political leaders and police executives that racial diversification will lead to more impartial law enforcement and improved police relations with minority citizens, and a majority

TABLE 5.1
Percent African American, Selected Cities and Police Departments, 2000

	City	Police Department
Gary, IN	84%	59%
Detroit, MI	81	63
Birmingham, AL	73	55
Jackson, MS	70	70
Albany, GA	65	51
Atlanta, GA	61	57
Washington, DC	59	66

Percent Hispanic, Selected Cities and Police Departments, 2000

	City	Police Department
Laredo, TX	94%	98%
Brownsville, TX	91	82
El Paso, TX	77	72
Miami, FL	66	54

Sources: U.S. Census, 2000; Bureau of Justice Statistics, Law Enforcement Management, and Administrative Statistics, 2000.

of the American public agrees that diversification is a laudable goal.⁷⁰ Sherman hypothesized that “a department with more black officers behaves differently from a department with fewer black officers. As blacks comprise a larger portion of a police department, they may become less isolated and more influential in shaping the values and culture of the entire police department,”⁷¹ potentially improving both police behavior and citizen perceptions of the police. If this hypothesis is true, we might expect majority-black, and majority-Hispanic, police departments to have a different orientation to the public than majority-white departments, all else being constant. Table 5.1 lists a number of cities where the majority of the population and police department is black or Hispanic. Police-citizen relations in these kinds of cities have only rarely been studied.⁷²

Some older multicity studies explored the police composition question. Research on fourteen cities in 1968⁷³ and thirteen cities in 1975⁷⁴ found that cities with higher black representation on the police force were somewhat more likely to be associated with more positive views of the police among African Americans than in cities with lower black representation. However, the two studies were limited in several respects (1) all of the police departments were majority-white in composition, (2) the samples of cities were not designed to incorporate or control for other potentially important variables, and (3) the dependent variable was limited to a single item: police job performance or overall satisfaction with the police department. A recent multicity study found that police killings of civilians were not related to the ratio of Hispanic citizens to Hispanic officers or black citizens to black officers, but this study also neglected to include several potentially key city-level variables.⁷⁵ While the three studies are suggestive, more comparative research of this kind is needed to determine whether police diversification is a predictor.

Does the race of the mayor and police chief make a difference? It is possible that African American or Latino mayors and police chiefs have a positive symbolic effect

on public opinion and/or constraining effect on police misconduct. Two multicity studies found that cities with black mayors featured greater institutional control over police officers⁷⁶ and lower rates of police killings of blacks⁷⁷ than cities with white mayors, and similar patterns may be associated with black police chiefs.

Highly publicized incidents of police misconduct that attract media coverage can dramatically shake citizens' confidence in a city's police department. This has been documented after controversial beatings and killings in New York City (involving Abner Louima, Amadou Diallo, and Patrick Dorismond) and in Los Angeles (after a 1979 killing of Eula Love and the 1991 Rodney King beating). Each incident was followed by a spike in unfavorable ratings of the police department.⁷⁸ After the Rodney King beating, for example, African American and Latino approval of the LAPD dropped a stunning fifty percentage points—from 64 to 14 percent among blacks, and from 80 to 31 percent among Latinos—and forty-three percentage points among white residents of Los Angeles.⁷⁹ Post-incident erosion of public confidence has been documented in other cities as well.⁸⁰ Following a videotaped and televised brutality incident in Cincinnati, the public was less likely to express favorable attitudes regarding both police use of force and other aspects of their job performance.⁸¹

In addition to specific incidents, public trust in the police may be affected by problems that receive protracted media coverage, such as an unfolding corruption scandal. This was evident during the successive revelations of widespread corruption in the Rampart Division of the Los Angeles Police Department in 1999–2000. Officers were accused of stealing drugs from suspects, falsifying reports, framing people for crimes, perjury in court, and shooting unarmed suspects. Given that about seventy officers were implicated in these crimes, it is not surprising that fully 79 percent of blacks, 52 percent of Hispanics, and 42 percent of whites in Los Angeles thought that this wrongdoing was “symptomatic of a larger problem within the police department,” while only a small minority of blacks and Hispanics believed that the offenses were “isolated incidents and not representative of the LAPD as a whole.” The poll, taken at the height of the scandal, also reported that 90 percent of the city's residents thought that the scandal had “damaged the reputation” of the LAPD.⁸² Overall approval of the LAPD fell dramatically between March 1999 (just prior to the story breaking) and April 2000—a full twenty-three percentage points for Latinos, and thirty points for African Americans.⁸³

The effect of protracted media coverage was also examined in an Indianapolis study. Residents who reported high media consumption—during the course of a trial of officers accused of beating two citizens—were more likely to believe the officers were guilty, net of other factors.⁸⁴ A national survey tapped even longer-term exposure to media reporting on controversial policing events. Respondents were asked how often they “hear or read about (on the radio, television, or in the newspapers) incidents of police misconduct, such as police use of excessive force, verbal abuse, corruption, and so on.” The greater the exposure to such reports, the lower the satisfaction with the police on a variety of issues (i.e., perceptions of four types of misconduct and four types of racially biased policing) and the greater the demand for a host of reforms in policing.⁸⁵ This finding suggests that public confidence in a police department is shaken not just by isolated incidents but also by long-term exposure to reports concerning misconduct.

It goes without saying that media coverage of events is not the sole predictor of post-incident changes in public opinion, yet the often-dramatic surge in unfavorable opinion in the wake of highly publicized events suggests that such incidents do indeed shake public confidence in the police. This factor should be included in city-level models. Research on the impact of urban contextual conditions would be limited if focused exclusively on socioeconomic and racial structures without also incorporating measures related to police practices that attract media coverage and are likely to independently affect popular confidence in the authorities.

National Context

There are very few systematic comparisons of police-minority relations in two or more nations.⁸⁶ Of course, comparing entire societies is fraught with problems, especially if there is significant internal variation within a society. But I would argue that it is nevertheless important to at least consider whether, and how, national context may impact the treatment of racial and ethnic minorities. Societies vary tremendously, and their police forces do as well. Examples of the kind of systematic, cross-national comparative analysis that I have in mind, though not centered on police-minority relations, would be David Bayley's study of Japan and America and Mercedes Hinton's study of Argentina and Brazil.⁸⁷

Almost all of the literature is devoted to case studies of a single nation. What is clear from the case studies is that some types of societies are characterized by *extreme discord* between the police and ethnic minority groups. In some, the rift is so great that the police enjoy little or no legitimacy from the subordinate ethnic groups, who are estranged from all state institutions. These patterns are evident in "deeply divided societies" distinguished by a high degree of polarization along ethnic, racial, or religious lines, and a social control apparatus that is an instrument of the dominant ethnic group.⁸⁸ In divided societies, citizens' orientations toward the police are heavily shaped by their *loyalty to or estrangement from the state*. Examples include contemporary Iraq, the former Yugoslavia, British-ruled Northern Ireland, and white-ruled South Africa, Rhodesia, and Namibia.⁸⁹ Some of these cases featured armed conflict along ethnic lines, but others experienced long periods of relative stability—such as Rhodesia, Namibia, and South Africa prior to the outbreak of armed insurgency in the 1970s. Israel fits into the divided society model in some respects, but Israeli-Arab citizens are less alienated from the police than their counterparts in the societies mentioned above as well as in Gaza and the West Bank.⁹⁰

In other words, what the police *represent politically* is important in shaping citizen orientations to the police. In divided societies, the symbolic status of the police, as a pillar of state domination over the subordinate ethnic group, is crucial. Insofar as the minority views the state and police as illegitimate and opposed to their interests, a substantial share of police resources will be devoted to preempting or repressing minority resistance. These cases demonstrate just how bad police-citizen relations can be, marked by a deep, unbridgeable gulf between state authorities and the subordinate ethnic population.⁹¹

The importance of the state is not confined to ethnically polarized societies. Citizens' orientations to the state are also crucial in nations where ethnic divisions are muted but where the entire population lacks confidence in the state. One study of nine nations in Latin America, for instance, found that citizens' trust in the political system (parliament, military, civil service, legal system, political parties) was the most robust predictor (among many other variables) of confidence in the police: the lower the level of trust in state institutions, the lower the confidence in the police.⁹² The state may play the opposite role in more integrated, democratic societies, where it enjoys diffuse legitimacy and is not an object of fundamental contention.⁹³ Diffuse popular support for these political systems appears to have a positive spillover effect on citizens' support for the police.

Earlier in this chapter I argued that the mode of incorporation into a society influences how different minority groups are treated by, and react to, the police. A mode-of-incorporation framework can be usefully applied cross-nationally as well. Types of incorporation include assimilation, ethnic segmentation, multiculturalism, and vertical integration.⁹⁴ There is no need to describe these modes at length here, but it is important to identify the key ingredients shaping the different types. For an ethnic minority, the central variables include both historical and contemporary arrangements: (1) voluntariness of initial incorporation, (2) socioeconomic status, (3) ethnocultural orientation, (4) population size, and (5) political power—each in relation to that of the dominant ethnic group. In other words, it is the *group's* position vis-à-vis the dominant group, over and above individual or situational factors, that plays an important role in citizen orientations to the police at the macro level.

Weitzer and Tuch have applied the group-position thesis to the United States,⁹⁵ but it is equally germane to other multiethnic societies. For example, Muslims and Africans in some Western nations typically experience greater structural and cultural marginality and more tenuous relations with the police than either the dominant group or other minority ethnic groups in these societies (e.g., southern Europeans in the Netherlands or Belgium). These patterns have been documented in research on Moroccans, Turks, Algerians, Albanians, Pakistanis, and other immigrant groups in Belgium, France, Holland, and Germany, but these studies are just the tip of the iceberg, and they are typically confined to single-case studies rather than multi-nation comparisons.⁹⁶ One of the few comparative studies found that the Roma minority in Bulgaria, Hungary, and Spain experienced ethnic profiling—being stopped by the police more often than members of the dominant ethnic population and reporting more negative treatment during stops.⁹⁷ Much more research is needed comparing, for instance, Moroccans in Belgium and the Netherlands, Algerians in France, and Pakistanis in Britain in terms of their views of the police and their deeper orientation to the state.

Space limitations prevent a full elaboration of the ways in which nations might differ in the relationship of the police and ethnic and racial minorities, but I have sketched a framework for doing so. As indicated above, systematic, comparative analyses of two or more nations are few and far between in the policing literature, and much remains to be learned about the national-level causes and consequences

of diverse patterns of police treatment of minority group members and the latter's perceptions of the police.

NOTES

1. Weitzer and Tuch, *Race and Policing in America*.
2. Weitzer and Tuch, *Race and Policing in America*.
3. An exception is Cheurprakobkit and Bartsch, "Police Work."
4. For a comparison of black Hispanics and white Hispanics, see Rice, Reitzel, and Piquero, "Shades of Brown."
5. Kaiser Foundation poll.
6. Weitzer and Tuch, *Race and Policing in America*, p. 52.
7. Alexander, "Theorizing the Modes of Incorporation."
8. Bobo, "Prejudice as Group Position," p. 461.
9. Hagan, Shedd, and Payne, "Race, Ethnicity, and Youth," p. 384.
10. Hurst, Frank, and Browning, "The Attitudes of Juveniles"; Leiber, Nalla, and Farnworth, "Explaining Juveniles' Attitudes."
11. Brown and Benedict, "Perceptions of the Police"; Brunson, "Police Don't Like Black People."
12. Taylor et al., "Coppin' an Attitude."
13. Skogan, "Asymmetry in the Impact"; Weitzer and Tuch, *Race and Policing in America*.
14. Weitzer and Tuch, *Race and Policing in America*.
15. Reisig and Parks, "Experience, Quality of Life"; Sampson and Bartusch, "Legal Cynicism"; Velez, "Role of Public Social Control"; Weitzer, "Citizens' Perceptions of Police Misconduct"; Weitzer, "Racialized Policing."
16. Weitzer and Tuch, "Race, Class, and Perceptions of Discrimination"; Weitzer and Tuch, "Perceptions of Racial Profiling"; Wortley, Hagan, and Macmillan, "Just Deserts?"
17. Wortley, Hagan, and Macmillan, "Just Deserts?"
18. Meehan and Ponder, "Race and Place"; Alpert, MacDonald, and Dunham, "Police Suspicion."
19. Weitzer, "Citizens' Perceptions of Police Misconduct."
20. Brooks and Jeon-Slaughter, "Race, Income, and Perceptions"; Weitzer and Tuch, "Perceptions of Racial Profiling."
21. Hochschild, *Facing Up to the American Dream*; Schuman et al., *Racial Attitudes in America*.
22. Reisig and Parks, "Experience, Quality of Life"; Sampson and Bartusch, "Legal Cynicism"; Schafer, Huebner, and Bynum, "Citizen Perceptions of Police Services"; MacDonald et al., "Race, Neighborhood Context, and Perceptions."
23. Klinger, "Negotiating Order in Police Work"; Smith, "Neighborhood Context of Police Behavior."
24. Kubrin and Weitzer, "New Directions in Social Disorganization Theory."
25. Klinger, "Negotiating Order in Police Work."
26. National Research Council, *Fairness and Effectiveness in Policing*, p. 189.
27. Alpert, MacDonald, and Dunham, "Police Suspicion"; Fagan and Davies, "Street Stops and Broken Windows"; Gelman, Fagan, and Kiss, "Analysis of the New York City"; Kane, "Social Ecology of Police Misconduct"; Mastrofski, Reisig, and McCluskey, "Police Disrespect Toward

the Public”; Mollen Commission, *Report of the Commission*; Smith, “Neighborhood Context of Police Behavior”; Terrill and Reisig, “Neighborhood Context and Police Use of Force.”

28. RAND, *Police-Community Relations in Cincinnati*; Reisig and Parks, “Experience, Quality of Life”; Sampson and Bartusch, “Legal Cynicism”; Velez, “Role of Public Social Control.”
29. Cao, Frank, and Cullen, “Race, Community Context, and Confidence,” p. 13.
30. Velez, “Role of Public Social Control”; Weitzer and Tuch, *Race and Policing in America*.
31. Weitzer and Tuch, *Race and Policing in America*, p. 14; Quinnipiac, “New Yorkers Approve of NYPD.”
32. Weitzer and Tuch, *Race and Policing in America*.
33. Smith, “Neighborhood Context of Police Behavior.”
34. Reisig and Parks, “Experience, Quality of Life”; Skogan, *Police and Community in Chicago*; Terrill and Mastrofski, “Working the Street”; Weitzer and Tuch, *Race and Policing in America*.
35. Grinc, “Angels in Marble”; Williams, *Citizen Perspectives on Community Policing*; Weitzer, *Policing Under Fire*.
36. Sampson and Bartusch, “Legal Cynicism.”
37. Reisig and Parks, “Experience, Quality of Life”; Schafer, Huebner, and Bynum, “Citizen Perceptions of Police Services”; Velez, “Role of Public Social Control.”
38. Cao, Frank, and Cullen, “Race, Community Context, and Confidence”; Jesilow, Meyer, and Namazzi, “Public Attitudes Toward the Police”; MacDonald et al., “Race, Neighborhood Context, and Perceptions”; Skogan, “Asymmetry in the Impact”; Xu, Fiedler, and Flaming, “Discovering the Impact of Community Policing.”
39. Brunson, “Police Don’t Like Black People”; Weitzer and Brunson, “Strategic Responses to the Police”; Sharp and Atherton, “To Serve and Protect?”; Weitzer, *Policing Under Fire*; Weitzer, “Citizens’ Perceptions of Police Misconduct”; Weitzer, “Racialized Policing”; Weitzer and Tuch, *Race and Policing in America*.
40. Weitzer, “Racialized Policing,” pp. 135–137.
41. Kusow, Wilson, and Martin, “Determinants of Citizen Satisfaction,” p. 663.
42. Holmes, “Perceptions of Abusive Police Practices.”
43. Schuck, Rosenbaum, and Hawkins, “Influence of Race/Ethnicity, Social Class, and Neighborhood.”
44. Wu, Sun, and Triplett, “Race, Class, or Neighborhood Context.”
45. Weitzer, “Citizens’ Perceptions of Police Misconduct”; Weitzer, “Racialized Policing.”
46. Quoted in Weitzer, “Citizens’ Perceptions of Police Misconduct,” p. 842.
47. Wilson, *Varieties of Police Behavior*; Sherman, *Scandal and Reform*; Skolnick and Bayley, *New Blue Line*; see also Human Rights Watch, *Shielded from Justice*.
48. An exception is Skogan, “Asymmetry in the Impact.”
49. Chambliss and Seidman, *Law, Order, and Power*, p. 33.
50. Jacobs, “Inequality and Police Strength.”
51. Jacobs and Britt, “Inequality and Police Use of Deadly Force”; Jacobs and O’Brien, “Determinants of Deadly Force”; Sorenson, Marquart, and Brock, “Factors Related to Killings of Felons.”
52. Blalock, *Theory of Minority-Group Relations*.
53. Jackson, *Minority Group Threat*; Chiricos, Hogan, and Gertz, “Racial Composition and Neighborhood Fear”; Liska, Lawrence, and Benson, “Perspectives on the Legal Order.”
54. Parker, Stults, and Rice, “Racial Threat.”
55. Liska, Lawrence, and Benson, “Perspectives on the Legal Order.”
56. Jackson, *Minority Group Threat*.

57. Liska, Chamlin, and Reed, "Testing the Economic Production Model."
58. Jacobs and O'Brien, "The Determinants of Deadly Force"; Liska and Yu, "Specifying and Testing the Threat Hypothesis"; Smith, "Impact of Police Officer Diversity."
59. Kane, "Social Ecology of Police Misconduct."
60. Parker, Stults, and Rice, "Racial Threat."
61. For Chicago, see Skogan, *Police and Community in Chicago*.
62. Kane, "Social Control in the Metropolis."
63. Apple and O'Brien, "Neighborhood Racial Composition," p. 83.
64. Blalock, *Theory of Minority-Group Relations*. This effect is also evident in other highly segregated societies, such as Israel (Hasisi and Weitzer, "Police Relations with Arabs and Jews in Israel").
65. Messner and South, "Economic Deprivation, Opportunity Structure"; South and Felson, "Racial Patterning of Rape."
66. Kent and Jacobs, "Minority Threat and Police Strength," p. 736.
67. Liska, Lawrence, and Benson, "Perspectives on the Legal Order"; Kent and Jacobs, "Minority Threat and Police Strength." Some studies, however, report no segregation effect, such as Stults and Baumer, "Racial Context and Police Force Size."
68. Liska and Chamlin, "Social Structure and Crime Control"; Liska, Chamlin, and Reed, "Testing the Economic Production Model"; Stolzenberg, D'Allesio, and Eitle, "A Multilevel Test of Racial Threat Theory." A contrary finding is reported in Parker, Stults, and Rice, "Racial Threat."
69. Anderson, *Code of the Street*; Block, "Support for Civil Liberties"; Weitzer and Tuch, *Race and Policing in America*, p. 14.
70. Weitzer and Tuch, *Race and Policing in America*, chaps. 3 and 4.
71. Sherman, "After the Riots," p. 221.
72. Exceptions include Frank et al., "Reassessing the Impact of Race"; Howell, Perry, and Vile, "Black Cities, White Cities"; Murty, Roebuck, and Smith, "Image of the Police"; Weitzer, "White, Black, or Blue Cops?"; Weitzer, Tuch, and Skogan, "Police-Community Relations in a Majority-Black City"; Welch et al., *Race and Place*.
73. Decker and Smith, "Police Minority Recruitment."
74. Skogan, "Citizen Satisfaction with Police Services."
75. Smith, "Impact of Police Officer Diversity."
76. Saltzstein, "Black Mayors and Police Policies."
77. Jacobs and O'Brien, "Determinants of Deadly Force."
78. Weitzer, "Incidents of Police Misconduct."
79. Weitzer, "Incidents of Police Misconduct," p. 399.
80. Sigelman et al., "Police Brutality and Public Perceptions."
81. Kaminski and Jefferis, "Effect of a Violent Televised Arrest."
82. *Los Angeles Times* poll, unpublished, April 2000.
83. Weitzer, "Incidents of Police Misconduct," p. 400.
84. Chermak, McGarrell, and Gruenewald, "Media Coverage of Police Misconduct."
85. Weitzer and Tuch, *Race and Policing in America*.
86. Antonopoulos, "Ethnic and Racial Minorities and the Police"; Jackson and Lyon, "Policing After Ethnic Conflict."
87. Bayley, *Forces of Order*; Hinton, *The State on the Streets*.
88. Weitzer, "Policing a Divided Society"; Weitzer, *Policing Under Fire*.
89. Enloe, *Ethnic Soldiers*; Weitzer, *Transforming Settler States*; Ellison and Smyth, *The Crowned Harp*.

90. Hasisi and Weitzer, "Police Relations with Arabs and Jews in Israel"; Milton-Edwards, "Policing Palestinian Society."

91. Ethnically divided societies are not the only contexts where citizens are deeply alienated from the police. Estrangement is also evident in societies where the police have a predatory relationship with the public at large, as opposed to a particular ethnic or racial group. Such predatory policing is evident in many nations, including those with and without major ethnic or racial cleavages (Goldsmith, "Police Reform and the Problem of Trust"; Goldsmith, "Policing Weak States"; Hinton, *State on the Streets*; Marenin, "Police Performance and State Rule"; Gerber and Mendelson, "Public Experiences").

92. Cao and Zhao, "Confidence in the Police in Latin America."

93. Goldsmith, "Police Reform and the Problem of Trust"; Marenin, "Police Performance and State Rule."

94. Alexander, "Theorizing the Modes of Incorporation."

95. Weitzer and Tuch, *Race and Policing in America*.

96. Hebberecht, "Minorities, Crime, and Criminal Justice"; Hutterman, "Policing an Ethnically Divided Neighborhood"; Junger, "Studying Ethnic Minorities"; Vrij and Winkel, "Encounters Between Dutch Police and Minorities."

97. Miller, *I Can Stop and Search*.

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