Demonstrations, Demoralization, and De-policing

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Abstract

Research Summary

This study examined relationships between public antipathy toward the police, demoralization, and de-policing using pooled time-series cross-sections of 18,413 surveys from law enforcement officers in 87 U.S. agencies both before and after Ferguson and contemporaneous demonstrations. The results do not provide strong support for Ferguson Effects. Post-Ferguson changes to job satisfaction, burnout, and cynicism (reciprocated distrust) were negligible. While Post-Ferguson officers issued fewer citations and conducted less foot patrol, effect sizes were minimal in magnitude. Cynicism, which was widespread both before and after Ferguson, was associated with reduced officer activity.

Policy Implications

Post-Ferguson protests in 2014 did not appreciably worsen police morale nor lead to substantial withdrawal from most police work, suggesting that the police institution is resilient to exogenous shocks. However, low job satisfaction was associated with fewer citations, and cynicism was negatively associated with both citations issued and community meeting attendance, suggesting that agencies may need to address officer attitudes—irrespective of legitimacy crises—in order to promote proactive policing and community engagement.

Keywords

police morale, de-policing, police legitimacy, public attitudes, Ferguson Effect

Introduction

Does increased public criticism of police demoralize police and lead to de-policing? St. Louis Police Chief Sam Dotson answered in the affirmative when he suggested that public outcries following controversial police killings of citizens led to lower police morale, causing officers to withdraw form proactive policing and thereby encouraging criminals to act with impunity. He termed this the "Ferguson Effect" (Byers, 2014).

Others quickly seized on this claim. An influential op-ed in the *Wall Street Journal* written by journalist Heather MacDonald passionately argued that "agitation against American police" produced low morale and fear of discipline, which, in turn, led to a withdrawal from proactive strategies such as Broken Windows policing. The result, the op-ed claimed, was a "surge in lawlessness" (MacDonald, 2015a). When FBI statistics for the first quarter of 2016 suggested a dramatic increase in violence in many cities, FBI director James Comey, referring to videos of alleged police misconduct, suggested that a "viral video effect" led officers to engage less frequently in proactive police work for fear of being scrutinized (Lichtblau, 2016). More recently, Attorney General William Barr argued that if communities don't show the police "support and respect, they might find themselves without the police protection they need" (Elfrink, 2019).

"Ferguson Effect" is a new term but its argument is not. The subtitle of MacDonald's (2017) book—"How the new attack on law and order makes everyone less safe"—echoes the back cover of police psychologist Lawrence Blum's book *Stoning the Keepers at the Gate* (2002) which, fifteen years earlier, argued that "blanket condemnation of the police threatens the very

liberties that make such condemnation possible, as well as the safety of the American public in their homes and lives." Consistent with these claims, policing researchers have identified several plausible consequences of strained police-public relations, including cynicism (Niederhoffer, 1967), emotional withdrawal (Skolnick, 2011), and a "lay-low" approach to police work (Reuss-Ianni, 2011; Van Maanen, 1974).

The Ferguson Effect, as it is described, consists of a multistep causal process wherein criticism of the police contributes to higher crime through its effect on police attitudes (morale) and behaviors (de-policing). The argument suggests that: (1) widespread criticism and protest of police demoralizes officers, (2) low morale leads to de-policing, and (3) de-policing leads to higher crime rates. Prior research suggests that, although crime rates rose in many cities in the year following the events in Ferguson, it did not rise uniformly across the U.S. and it was not related to de-policing (Pyrooz, Decker, Wolfe, & Shjarback, 2016; Rosenfeld, 2015; Shjarback, Pyrooz, Wolfe, & Decker, 2017). The purpose of the current study is to assess related hypotheses central to the Ferguson Effect: whether widespread antipathy toward police following the police-related deaths of black men during late 2014 and early 2015 reduced police morale and led to de-policing, and whether low morale was associated with de-policing. The data come from two waves of completed surveys from 18,413 officers from 87 departments across the nation. The first wave was administered before the events associated with the Ferguson Effect and the second was administered in the midst of the rancorous discussion in this country wherein police were accused of excessive and biased use of force.

Literature Review

This section provides historical context by describing the widespread rise in public criticism and protest that occurred after the deaths. The subsequent sections provide background information on the claims that (1) the widespread public antipathy led to lowered police morale and (2) the low police morale produced de-policing. In both sections, the Ferguson-Effect claims set forth by police officials and other commentators (mostly in media accounts) are documented, followed by a discussion of empirical literature supporting that claim.

Public Antipathy

A series of policing-related deaths of men of color during 2014 and 2015 led to a renewed and passionate national discussion of race and police use of force. On July 17th, 2014, in New York, police attempted to arrest Eric Garner, an unarmed black man, for selling loose cigarettes on the street. The incident was captured in a video, which was published by the *New York Daily News* (Murray, 2015). Despite the fact that he was unarmed, and despite a 20-year old NYPD policy banning the use of chokeholds, Officer Daniel Pantaleo put his arm around Garner's neck, pulling him to the ground and maintaining the chokehold. Garner died at the scene. On August 9th, 2014 in Ferguson, Missouri, Michael Brown, a black 18-year-old, was shot and killed by Darren Wilson, a white police officer (Bosman & Fitzsimmons, 2014). Although the police and the community agreed that Michael Brown originally had been unarmed, the police report stated that Michael Brown was trying to arm himself with the officer's weapon when he was shot. In Cleveland, Ohio, on November 22, 2014, Tamir Rice, a black 12-year-old, was shot by police while playing with a toy gun in a public park, after a person in the park called police. Although the caller said the gun was "probably fake," the

information was not relayed to responding officers. One of the officers shot Tamir within two

seconds of arriving at the park. He died the following day (Fitzsimmons, 2014). On October 21,

2014, Chicago police shot and killed 17-year-old Laquan McDonald after responding to reports

that he was vandalizing and burglarizing vehicles in Chicago's Southwest Side. Officers were

following McDonald, who was armed with a pocket knife and refused orders to stop and drop the

knife. One officer eventually opened fire, alleging that McDonald lunged at him; a

subsequently-released video of the encounter showed McDonald walking away from the officer.

Each of these events produced strong public reactions locally and nationally. Some of the

events produced local and national demonstrations against police and some of those

demonstrations turned into riots. Tensions were exacerbated in some jurisdictions by the initial

police response to the protests, including SWAT teams, snipers, and the tear-gassing and arrest of

journalists and clergy (Balko, 2014). This attracted the attention of journalists across the country.

Night after night, television news programs featured the protests. Op-eds questioned not only the

response to protests in Missouri, but the heavy-handed tactics of police more generally (Dansky,

2014; Douthat, 2014; *The Los Angeles Times* Editorial Board, 2014).

The most powerful protests came after the death of Michael Brown. The claim by the

officer that Michael Brown was going for his weapon was met with disbelief and indignation by

the predominantly black community, owing in part to mounting tensions over racially-biased

criminal justice practices in Ferguson, later confirmed in a Department of Justice investigation

(USDOJ, 2015). The outrage was exacerbated by the initial accounts given by Brown's friend,

Dorian Johnson, who described an execution in the street while Brown's hands were raised

(Bosman & Goode, 2014). Ferguson and the greater St. Louis area erupted into demonstrations,

protests, and eventually riots (Bever, 2014) which soon spread nationwide (Bacon, 2014; Holpuch, 2014).

The antipathy on the part of the public in response to the series of police-related in-custody deaths is indicated not just by the protests and riots described above, but also by surveys showing more negative attitudes toward the police. The results of Ferguson-era local surveys and national polls were consistent with academic research over the years that has documented the erosion in satisfaction with police following high-profile incidents involving perceived excessive force (Jefferis, Kaminski, Holmes, & Hanley, 1997; Kaminski & Jefferis, 1998; Sigelman, Welch, Bledsoe, & Combs, 1997; Tuch & Weitzer, 1997; Weitzer, 2002). As reported by Tuch & Weitzer (1997: 647): "…attitudes (toward police) are strongly affected by celebrated, well-publicized incidents of police brutality. Such events are followed by an erosion of support for the police at both the local level … and the national level."[1]

Kochel (2015; 2019) measured the views about police on the part of St. Louis County residents in high crime areas two years before and immediately after the events in Ferguson (which is in St. Louis County). She documented a 25 percent decline in "trust and a sense of procedural justice in policing" and a 10 percent decline in the perceived legitimacy of the police. Post-Ferguson, St. Louis residents also perceived a greater frequency of police misconduct. These changes were primarily among African American residents.

At the national level, Gallup has been collecting data about respondents' levels of confidence in police since 1993. In June 2015 (Jones, 2015), Gallup reported that the percentage

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[1] Studies documenting impact at the local level include those by Kochel (2015; 2019), Lasley (1994), Sigelman, et al. (1997), Tuch and Weitzer (1997), and Weitzer (Weitzer, 2002); studies documenting impact at the national level include those by Sigelman, et al. (1997) and Tuch and Weitzer (1997).

of poll respondents (18%) who reported "little or no confidence in police" was the highest since 1993. (The first survey was conducted while the four officers involved in the Rodney King beating were being tried the second time.) The Pew Research Center reported on changes in views related to police bias between 2009 and late 2014 and stated, "the share of blacks saying they have 'very little' confidence in their local police to treat blacks and whites equally has increased, from 34% five years ago to 46% currently" (Stepler, 2017)(Mueller & Baker, 2014).

Police Attitudes: Low Police Morale

Pursuant to the Ferguson Effect argument, widespread public antipathy toward police lowers police morale. Consistent with this demoralization hypothesis, as protests against the police expanded, there were a number of press reports that morale in U.S. policing had plummeted. The Dallas police chief reported the results of an internal survey of his officers: "72 percent of respondents rated morale as 'low' or the 'lowest it's ever been'" (Martin, 2015). Officers' growing dissatisfaction with their work was linked to their leaving the profession in record numbers (Martin, 2015). Other news media reported increases in police departures in various departments around the nation, including St. Louis, San Diego, Camden, and Savannah (Boren & Wood, 2015; Byers, 2015; Coleman, 2015; Mento, n.d.). In the years following Ferguson, many departments faced challenges recruiting applicants to fill officer vacancies (Jackman, 2018; Police Executive Research Forum, 2019).

Journalist Sappenfield (2015) interviewed law enforcement personnel around the country on the heels of several deadly attacks on police—that were attributed by some observers to increased public antipathy—and reported that police feel "under siege." Brian Luciano, president of the Virginia Beach Police Benevolent Association, told a local paper, "When you see officers

in Baltimore going through what they're going through–and in Ferguson and New York–that affects morale here" (Sappenfield, 2015). Conservative-leaning news outlets cited comments from numerous current and former law enforcement officers who reported plummeting morale (Picket, 2015). A "Blue Lives Matter" mantra emerged, competing with the Black Lives Matter movement, arguing that criticism of the police was as dehumanizing for the police as racism was for African Americans, and was leading to demoralization of police (Brownfeld, 2015).

As reported above, there is research going back decades that has suggested that police attitudes are substantially influenced by the quality of their relationship with the public. Research indicates that officers' perceptions of public antipathy are associated with several dimensions of police culture (Marier & Moule, 2018). Studies conducted in the aftermath of the Ferguson events confirm an impact of public criticism on police attitudes. Deuchar, Fallik and Chrichlow (2018) conducted "in-depth semi-structured interviews" with twenty law enforcement professionals in two counties who reported lowered morale that they attributed to the Ferguson aftermath. Nix and Wolfe (2017) surveyed 567 sworn deputies in a single agency and report finding, "a sizable portion of the sample indicated they have become less motivated over the previous 6 months" as a result of negative publicity for law enforcement (2017: 94). In the aftermath of Ferguson, a Pew Research survey of police officers found that many officers reported frustration and anger, and a majority felt misunderstood by the public (Morin, Parker, Stepler, & Mercer, 2017). In 2017, Torres, Reling and Hawdon conducted a survey of over 2600 officers from all over the U.S. and reported that the "post-Ferguson psychological impacts continued to affect current levels of cynicism, motivation, and apprehensiveness" (2018: 358).

Police Behavior: De-policing

The Ferguson Effect further suggests that low morale leads to de-policing, which has been defined broadly as withdrawal from proactive police work (Shjarback, Pyrooz, Wolfe, & Decker, 2017). In the seminal formulation of this de-policing hypothesis, St. Louis Police Chief Sam Dotson described the "Ferguson Effect" as the fatigue and withdrawal officers experienced after demoralizing public demonstrations against them (Byers, 2014).

There were a number of media-reported claims of reductions in police activity following the shooting of Michael Brown (Hosko, 2018). A few months after the shooting of Michael Brown, National Public Radio published an article titled "When morale dips, some cops walk the beat—but do the minimum" (Kaste, 2015). As previously noted, James Comey warned that there was a "viral video effect"—that is, an avoidance of police work for fear of being recorded and criticized on social media (Lichtblau, 2016). In Chicago, a decline in arrests was attributed to the widespread condemnation that followed the release of a video of the LaQuan McDonald shooting (Arthur & Asher, 2016). Critics suggested that police in New York were retreating from their duties following controversy in the wake of Eric Garner's chokehold death (MacDonald, 2015b).

A body of human resources literature suggests that job performance is frequently determined by work-related attitudes such as job satisfaction (Judge, Thoresen, Bono, & Patton, 2001), burnout (Taris, 2006), and perceptions of disciplinary fairness (Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, 2001). Examining police specifically, Brown in his book "Working the Street" (1981) reported that in the context of "a sometimes hostile community and a maze of departmental regulations" officers feel underappreciated and mistreated by both their department

and community. According to Brown, these attitudes produce disengagement from police work, especially proactive community-based policing.

Subsequent research supports Brown's early findings. Wolfe and Nix (2016a) found evidence of a link between public criticism of police and de-policing, reporting that officers whose motivation was lessened due to negative publicity about police were less willing to engage in community partnerships (see also Oliver, 2017). Mourtgos and colleagues found that officers' trust in the public predicts their proactive activity and number of arrests (Mourtgos, Mayer, Wise, & O'Rourke, 2019). Shi (2009) examined police activity in the Cincinnati Police Department following a 2001 riot linked to an officer-involved shooting that led, in turn, to department oversight. The author reported reduced arrests in the post-riot/oversight period, stating, "the decrease was greater for offenses where police officers had more discretion and greater chance for errors, and in communities with a higher percentage of African Americans" (2009: 111).

Shjarback et al. (2017), too, found de-policing effects were greatest in areas with high percentages of minority residents. The team used data from 118 (of the 121) police departments in the State of Missouri that served populations of over 5,000 to compare police activity before (2014) and after (2015) the events in Ferguson. They reported "clear reductions in the number of [vehicle/traffic] stops performed by Missouri police departments" (2017: 46).

Morgan and Pally (2016) examined the arrest rate in Baltimore after the Michael Brown and Freddie Gray incidents compared to the previous year and found the Baltimore Police Department made 19 percent fewer arrests in the Ferguson Era period, which could not be

explained by reduced crime. As with previous research, the impact was greatest for high-discretion crimes; in fact, arrests for the more-serious crimes were unchanged.

At the national level, the Pew Research Center reported on the results of surveys of over 1,700 officers from departments all over the U.S. (Stepler, 2017). Eighty-six percent of the responding officers reported that "high profile incidents between blacks and police have made their jobs harder" and three-fourths claimed that their colleagues were now more reluctant to use force and conduct detentions. The Police Foundation (n.d.) surveyed officers nationally in the post-Ferguson era and found that the "increased scrutiny and attention from the media and the public" made them less willing to detain suspicious persons (see also Nix & Wolfe, 2016).

Current Study

The police-related deaths of several black men during 2014 and 2015 produced substantial antipathy for police. Some police leaders and editorialists expressed concern that this antipathy would reduce police morale and lead to de-policing, and researchers have reported a degree of support for these phenomena. There are several reasons these claims warrant further study, including (1) evidence that the events and consequences associated with the Ferguson Effect are not unique in history and could manifest in the future and (2) the need to establish temporal order in the causal process, and (3) the generalizability of these phenomena to all law enforcement officers.

It is important to continue the examination of the Ferguson Effect claims because the events and consequences are not historically unique. Controversial and highly publicized deaths at the hands of police in 2014 and 2015 contributed to nationwide riots and demonstrations,

highly critical coverage on news media and social media, and erosion of public trust, according

to public opinion polling. If this was unique historically, then there might be little need for

in-depth study. However, the nationwide criticism of police appearing after the aforementioned

incidents is *not* historically unique. U.S. history has been marked by other periods of widespread

public demonstrations against the police, especially in response to controversial use-of-force

incidents and claims of systemic racial disparities. Prominent examples of nationwide protests

include those in the context of the 1960's Civil Rights movement, as well as those following the

acquittal of officers involved in the Rodney King beating in 1992. More isolated, localized

examples include the Cincinnati riots of 2001 and the St. Petersburg riots of 1996. Proliferation

of body-worn cameras and smartphones in the 21st century have led to widely disseminated

video footage of police-related incidents, and have therefore created national controversies from

local events; these developments facilitate and amplify criticism toward the police, and presage

similar controversies in the future. Given the periodicity of public demonstrations against the

police, it is important to study its influence on police attitudes and behaviors, because the

implications are likely to apply to other events in the future. In short, the core propositions of the

Ferguson Effect are almost certainly implied in other periods of civil unrest, warranting further

study.

Other justifications for the continued study of the Ferguson Effect claims include

establishing the causal ordering of the multi-step causal processes, and assessment of

generalizability. One of these core propositions includes the demoralization hypothesis—that

antipathy toward the police reduces officer morale. As mentioned earlier, some research

documents negative officer attitudes after exposure to widespread criticism in 2014 and 2015.

However, one challenge to existing Ferguson Effect research is a lack of systematic before-and-after comparisons. Extant studies of officer attitudes have been cross-sectional and retrospective—for instance, asking officers how their attitudes have changed since Ferguson, rather than comparing pre-Ferguson attitudes to post-Ferguson attitudes. While they all support the demoralization hypothesis—that police morale has worsened—it is also plausible that police attitudes have always been quite negative, or that officers' reports of their past attitudes are tainted by their current sentiments. Furthermore, research on police morale in the Ferguson era has mostly been limited to surveys within one or a few agencies, limiting generalizability. The present study remedies these deficiencies through the use of pooled time-series data and the use of a large, nationally representative sample of law enforcement officers.

A second core proposition linked to the Ferguson Effect concerns the relationship between low morale and de-policing. Specifically, some argued that demoralized officers were at risk of withdrawing from more discretionary, proactive police work, reverting to a purely reactionary approach instead. While some research supports these claims, the research on de-policing suffers from at least four limitations. First, studies that use temporal measures of activity (e.g., traffic stops, arrests) have been limited to one agency or state, raising the issue of generalizability. Second, these examinations of temporal change in activity do not simultaneously capture changes in officer attitudes, precluding any understanding of their covariation. Put differently, temporal changes in officer attitudes have yet to be established, precluding their ability to predict changes in police activity (if any). Third, studies that have examined the relationships between officer attitudes and activity have used retrospective surveys and/or used convenience samples. Fourth, de-policing research has been limited to stops and

arrests, a narrow range of police work that neglects other important discretionary activities. For instance, foot patrol and community engagement are cornerstones of modern community policing, but de-policing research has yet to consider whether they also suffered reductions in the Ferguson era. This study addresses the issues of causal ordering and generalizability through the use of pooled time-series data and large, nationwide surveys that measure covariation of attitudes *and* behavior over time, and considers additional types of police activity that could plausibly fall victim to de-policing.

This study expands our understanding of the ways police officers respond to widespread public antipathy, which is significant for several reasons related to public policy and theory. First, as previewed above, periods of intense criticism seem to occur with some regularity, suggesting that such processes have broader historical relevance and are likely to recur in the future. Second, processes of attitudinal and behavioral adaptation in response to substantial external pressures are highly relevant to theories of police culture and occupational adaptation. Third, the relationship between police and the public is inherently a reciprocal exchange, and an understanding of police responses to the public is just as important as an understanding of public responses to the police. Fourth, and perhaps most important, an evaluation of officers' responses to criticism is of foremost social import. If protest and criticism are healthy features of American governance, then the reaction of public servants to such antipathy must be understood. The Ferguson Effect suggestion that officers may withdraw in response to widespread criticism—emotionally via demoralization, physically via de-policing—is a troublesome claim, and deserves thorough study.

The current study builds and improves upon prior research by examining whether claims associated with the Ferguson Effect hold up empirically, using a large, representative sample and measuring changes over time. The research questions are as follows:

RQ #1: Did police morale worsen following widespread public dissent?

RQ #2: Did de-policing occur following widespread public dissent?

RQ #3: Is low police morale associated with de-policing?

Method

This study draws on large, longitudinal samples of police officer surveys in order to explore several core claims of the Ferguson Effect. The following sections describe the data, sample, measures, and analytic techniques in detail.

Data

The data come from two waves of officer surveys—one of which was administered before the key incidents described above that produced widespread public dissent, and one of which was administered in the midst of the widespread dissent. This study examines a total of 18,413 surveys completed by officers from 87 U.S. law enforcement agencies. As described in more detail below, morale was measured with survey items reflecting job satisfaction, burnout and cynicism; de-policing was operationalized as a reduction in foot patrol, attendance at community meetings, and/or citations issued. The multi-wave surveys constitute a pooled time-series cross-section (Raffalovich & Chung, 2015).

Sample

The data used in this study come from survey responses from law enforcement employees in 87 of the 100 agencies participating in the National Police Research Platform (Rosenbaum et al., 2016). The 100 agencies reflect a random sample of agencies with 100 or more sworn officers that were drawn from Law Enforcement Management and Administrative Statistics (LEMAS). The set of agencies includes a mix of sheriff's offices (20%) and police departments (80%), closely resembling the national distribution of law enforcement agency types. To survey the officers within each of the agencies, the chief executive (e.g., sheriff, chief) distributed email invitations to complete the survey to the population of employees in the department. To promote response rate, recipients were assured anonymity on these web-based surveys that were delivered via Qualtrics. Researchers periodically followed up and/or visited with agency leaders to facilitate distribution and completion of the surveys (Rosenbaum et al., 2011).

Surveys were administered to all department employees, resulting in an initial sample of 32,308 surveys. However, for inclusion in this study, the respondent's assignment must involve sworn discretionary field activities that are theoretically relevant to the Ferguson Effect; therefore, officers assigned to patrol, traffic enforcement, community policing, and similar activities were included, whereas officers in non-field activities such as communications, courts, civil process, and similar assignments were not. As explained further in the "Analytic Techniques," section, each multivariate model was restricted to officers in assignments relevant to the outcome examined: for instance, only patrol officers and traffic officers are included in the model examining effects on ticket-writing. The inclusion criteria resulted in final pooled sample

sizes of between 12,119 to 18,413 for univariate analyses, and between 4,344 to 9,180 for multivariate analyses after listwise deletion.

Both attrition and selection bias are potential concerns. Officers could not be matched pre- and post-Ferguson due to anonymization of officer surveys to encourage high response rates and honest answers, so the samples could systematically differ. Attrition is likely to substantially underestimate temporal variation if Ferguson led to demoralization and demoralized officers are less inclined to respond. Selection bias is likely to substantially overestimate temporal changes if demoralized officers are more likely to respond. Nonetheless, cross tabulation of department responses by wave indicates that the number of responses in each agency were generally similar pre- and post-Ferguson. While this does not guarantee that the same or similar officers responded to both waves, it does provide some reassurance that participation was not substantially biased by exposure to post-Ferguson dissent. The mean agency-level response rate of sworn officers exceeded 37%, which is among the highest reported for web-based officer surveys (Nix, Pickett, Baek, & Alpert, 2017).

Two waves of surveys were collected within these 100 departments, except that 13 agencies participated in just the first or second wave (but not both); single-wave agencies are not included in the analysis. The first survey used in this study was administered between September 9, 2013 and January 1, 2014. The second survey was administered between October 20, 2014, and February 14, 2015. Thus, many of the flashpoints for police protests—including the police-related deaths of Eric Garner, Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, and Laquan McDonald—occurred between the waves of surveys. Because of the timing of the two waves, the data are particularly well suited for addressing issues related to the Ferguson Effect.

Measures

Although the surveys were not prospectively designed to measure Ferguson Effect variables related to demoralization and de-policing, they nonetheless contain a multitude of measures directly related to police attitudes and self-reported discretionary activities. The measures used in this study fall into one of four general categories: measures of morale, measures of police activity, control variables, and a temporal indicator. Further details are provided in the following sections, organized by research question.

Research question 1: Demoralization.

Question 1 examines whether police morale worsened following the widespread post-Ferguson public dissent. The independent variable for this question is a temporal dummy variable indicating whether the officer is a pre-Ferguson (0) or post-Ferguson (1) survey respondent (although the surveys used in this study spanned several other legitimacy crises as well).

Morale is not a unidimensional or psychological construct *per se*, but the term is used colloquially by both police and commentators to describe several related occupational attitudes. The dependent measures of morale used in this study encompass *job satisfaction, burnout*, and *cynicism*. *Job satisfaction* is measured via two items. The first item asks officers to indicate whether they are satisfied or dissatisfied "with the department as a place to work." The second item asks officers to indicate whether they are satisfied or dissatisfied with their present job assignment. For each item, responses are coded on a 4-point Likert scale, where 1 = very dissatisfied, 2 = dissatisfied, 3 = satisfied, and 4 = very satisfied.

Burnout encompasses work-related symptoms of exhaustion and inefficacy (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). Officers are asked four questions to capture how often they experienced the following:

- I feel burned out from my work.

- I feel emotionally drained from my work.

- I feel frustrated by my job.

- I feel used up at the end of the day.

Responses are captured with a 7-point Likert scale, where 1 indicates "never," 4 indicates "2-3 times a month," and 7 represents "daily." Thus, higher scores on these items indicate higher levels of *burnout*. These scores are collapsed into a composite scale given high inter-item reliability ($\alpha = .9172$).

Cynicism has been described as an officer's "contemptuous distrust of human nature and motives" (Graves, 1996). *Cynicism* is measured via five items that assess the officers' sense of mutual or reciprocated dislike or distrust of the public, which some said was high following Ferguson and other police controversies of 2014 (Deuchar, Crichlow, & Fallik, 2019; Deuchar, Fallik, & Crichlow, 2018; Nix & Pickett, 2017). Officers are asked to indicate their level of agreement with the following five statements:

- Officers have reason to be distrustful of most citizens.

- The public doesn't understand what it means to be an officer.

- The media treat the police unfairly.

- Most people respect the police (reversed).

- The relationship between police and the people of this city is very good (reversed).

Each item was measured using the same 4-point Likert scale used for job satisfaction..

Research questions 2 and 3: De-policing.

Research question 2 examines whether de-policing occurred following the widespread public dissent and question 3 examines whether low police morale is associated with de-policing. De-policing refers to police withdrawal from proactive and self-initiated police activities. This study measures three such forms of police activity as outcome variables: *foot patrol*, attendance at community *meetings*, and *citations* issued.

Foot patrol is measured by a survey item asking respondents "How often do you engage in Foot Patrol (for at least 30 minutes)?" Responses are captured via a 5-point ordinal scale where 1 = never, 2 = one to five times per year, 3 = one to two times per month, 4 = one to two times per week, and 5 = once per day. Officers who indicate that the question is not applicable are coded as missing, rather than "never."

Meetings refers to the frequency with which an officer attends meetings with community members. Officers are asked "How often do you engage in/attend community meetings?" Responses are captured using the same 5-point ordinal scale as the preceding *foot patrol* measure.

The *citations* variable indicates the number of citations officers report issuing in the previous 40 hours/one week of work. Responses are measured with a 5-point ordinal scale, where the lowest value represents no citations written, and the highest value represents 4 or more citations issued in the past week. We would expect that more proactive officers would generally write more citations than officers choosing to "lay-low" by avoiding police-citizen interactions and supervisor scrutiny.

The independent variable for Question 2 is the survey-wave (temporal dummy) variable; the independent variables for question 3 are the 8 morale variables used for answering Question 1 (measuring *job satisfaction*, *burnout*, and *cynicism*).

Because several Ferguson Effect studies have indicated that perceptions of organizational justice and support are relevant to officers' sensitivity to Ferguson Effects (Nix & Wolfe, 2016; Wolfe & Nix, 2016), this study controls for *organizational justice* and *supervisor support*. To measure *organizational justice*, officers were asked whether they agreed that "the disciplinary process is fair" and "officers who do a good job are rewarded," using the same 4-point Likert scale used for *job satisfaction*. To measure *supervisor support*, officers were asked how often their supervisor:

- "works with people to develop their abilities"

- "treats employees with respect"

- "recognizes when employees are having problems on the job"

- "listens to employees' concerns"

These four items were measured using 5-point Likert scales where 1=never and 5=always.

Several demographic variables are also included as control variables, including a continuous age measure, a dichotomous race indicator (where white=1 and non-white=0), gender (where male=1), and an ordinal educational level, which ranges from 0 to 5 (where 0 indicates no college and 5 indicates a graduate or professional degree).

Analytic Techniques

Analysis proceeds in three stages. Stage 1 evaluates whether officers' attitudes and behaviors changed after Ferguson. Descriptive statistics are presented, and two-sample t-tests are

performed in order to evaluate whether significant differences are observed between

pre-Ferguson and post-Ferguson respondents.[2] To aid in the interpretation of meaningful

differences, rather than mere statistical differences, Cohen's *d* is calculated to estimate effect

sizes.[3]

Stage 2 uses confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to present a measurement model of latent

constructs. The measurement model establishes how well three demoralization constructs—*job*

satisfaction, burnout, and *cynicism*—are predicted by twelve survey items. It also establishes

whether six additional survey items measure the latent constructs *organizational justice* and

supervisor support, two relevant control variables.

Stage 3 examines whether morale predicts de-policing—more specifically, whether *job*

satisfaction, *burnout*, and *cynicism* predict *foot patrol*, attendance at community *meetings*, and

citations written. A series of structural equation models are presented using five latent constructs

and six observed variables to predict police behavior. Because the outcome variables are

measured on 5-point ordinal scales, ordinal logistic regression is conducted using the WLSMV

estimator (Muthén, Muthén, & Asparouhov, 2015).[4] Analysis is performed using Mplus version

6. To account for nonindependence due to clustering within agencies, a robust sandwich

estimator is used to correct standard errors (Muthen & Satorra, 1995). A temporal dummy

variable predictor is included to control for post-Ferguson differences in activity (however

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[2] In order to ensure high response rates, as well as encourage honest survey responses, individual officers are not identified in the surveys, precluding repeated-samples t-tests.

[3] Furthermore, Wilcoxon-Mann-Whitney rank-sum tests and corresponding effect sizes were evaluated because most variables were measured using Likert scales, but because the patterns of significance were the same and nonparametric effect sizes were similarly negligible, the more familiar and interpretable t-tests and Cohen's *d* are reported in this study.

[4] Mplus does not allow for a Brant test for the parallel odds assumption of ordinal logistic regression. Nonetheless, a series of binary logistic regression models were examined for each outcome and threshold on the 5-point scales, and the overall pattern of significance, as well as the size of coefficients, suggests that the results are unbiased.

small). Because officers in different assignments are likely to differ with regard to the type of

police activity they conduct—for instance, a patrol officer may not be expected to attend

community meetings, whereas a community policing officer may not be expected to issue

citations—each model sample is restricted only to those officers whose assignments are relevant

to the outcome. Specifically, *foot patrol* is only examined among officers in Patrol,

Juvenile/Youth Crime, Community Policing, and Other Field Assignment; *meetings* are only

examined among officers in Juvenile/Youth Crime, Community Policing, Central Admin,

Command Staff, Community & Victim Services, Other Field Assignment, and Other Non-Field

Assignment; and *citations* are only examined among Patrol and Traffic officers.[5]

Results

Table 1 reports both descriptive statistics and t-tests for all study variables. Table 1

indicates that the average respondent was white, male, about 42 years of age, and held between

an associate's degree or bachelor's degree. About half of all respondents were surveyed

post-Ferguson (52.6%). The following sections report the results of t-tests and logistic regression

in more detail.

[INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Research Question 1: Demoralization

Table 2 presents a comparison of morale-related attitudes between the pre-Ferguson and

post-Ferguson samples. All morale-related items—reflecting job satisfaction, burnout and

cynicism—demonstrate statistically significant differences before and after Ferguson. Although

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[5] Crosstabulation of assignment and activity indicates that these were the assignments with the highest rates of activity for each respective outcome.

all but two of these items are significant at the p < .001 level, the magnitude of change is very

small in each case, drawing attention to the distinction between *statistically* significant

differences and *substantively* significant differences. Furthermore, and importantly, two of these

relationships are significant in a direction *opposite* expectations.

The two job satisfaction items show a slight decline post-Ferguson, but the differences

are negligible. Post-Ferguson officers are significantly, but only slightly less satisfied with their

agency as a place to work (2.820 vs 2.750, p < .001). They are also significantly, but only

slightly less satisfied with their present job assignment (3.238 vs. 3.197, p < .001). A clear

majority of officers are satisfied with the work they do, and this is true both before and after

Ferguson. An examination of Cohen's *d* provides further evidence that the changes are

negligible; the observed values of .083 and .057 fall well below the effect size of .20 that is

considered the threshold between "negligible" and "small" (Cohen, 2013). The results present

rather underwhelming evidence that the dissent and protests following several police

controversies had any appreciable effect on officers' *job satisfaction*.

Post-Ferguson officers demonstrate significantly more *burnout* than pre-Ferguson officers

on two of four burnout measures, though the differences are once again negligible in size.

Post-Ferguson officers report slightly more frequently feeling that they "feel burned out from

work" (3.096 vs. 3.212, p < .001), "feel emotionally drained from work" (3.173 vs. 3.299, p <

.001), "feel frustrated by my job" (3.481 vs. 3.564, p < .01), and feel "used up at the end of the

day" (3.426 vs. 3.504, p < .01). While statistically significant, Cohen's *d* never exceeds .069

among burnout measures. That officers report very small increases in the frequency of *burnout*

symptoms challenges the claim that nationwide protests are associated with substantial or

widespread *burnout*.

Five survey items comparing *cynicism* in pre-Ferguson and post-Ferguson samples also

suggest modest effects, or contradict Ferguson Effect proponents entirely. For instance,

post-Ferguson officers are *less likely* to agree that officers have reason to be distrustful of most

citizens (2.241 vs. 2.197, p < .001). And while it is true that more post-Ferguson officers agree

that "the public doesn't understand what it means to be an officer" (3.263 vs. 3.357, p < .001), it

is noteworthy that more than nine in ten officers agree or strongly agree with this statement

before Ferguson and other controversial use of force incidents. Post-Ferguson respondents feel

more strongly that the police are treated unfairly by the media (3.026 vs. 3.120, p < .001). It is

worth emphasizing once again that the vast majority of officers felt victimized by the media well

before the nationally televised news of Eric Garner, Michael Brown, and other police-related

deaths: more than three-quarters of pre-Ferguson respondents agree or strongly disagree that

police are treated unfairly by the media.

The last two cynicism items present curious findings. Post-Ferguson officers are slightly

more likely to feel that the public does not generally respect police (2.437 vs. 2.508, p < .001).

However, post-Ferguson respondents are slightly less likely to say that the relationship between

their own department and community is not very good (2.456 vs. 2.405, p < .001). Thus, there is

some indication that officers' evaluation of police-community relations diverge post-Ferguson

when it comes to evaluations of their own agency versus the policing institution more generally;

that is, officers seem to evaluate their local relationship more favorably post-Ferguson than the

relationship between the police and public more generally. This inconsistency was even present

in St. Louis County. Supplemental analysis of this subset of officers (combined N=383) finds

that significantly more post-Ferguson officers report that people do not respect the police (2.425

vs. 2.506, p<.001), but are not more likely to say that the relationship between their own

department and community is not very good (2.816 vs. 2.726, p=.328). While space limitations

preclude a full analysis of these officers, we note that the pattern of results is remarkably

consistent with the overall sample, where effect sizes remain small or negligible. Even at ground

zero of BLM protests, officers did not feel that local police-public relations had deteriorated,

seriously undermining Ferguson Effect claims.

In sum, in answer to the first research question, "Did police morale worsen following

widespread public dissent?," we find statistically significant but negligible reductions on all

measures of police morale.

Research Questions 2 and 3: De-policing

Three variables in Table 2 measure pre- and post-Ferguson levels of police activity.

Post-Ferguson officers report slightly less *foot patrol* (1.322 vs. 1.327, p < .01), and they report

writing significantly fewer *tickets* (1.219 vs. .962, p < .001). However, their responses do not

indicate significant differences in attendance at community meetings (1.902 vs. 1.903, p=.832).

Therefore, there is evidence that foot patrol and citations fell slightly following Ferguson, but

that reductions in community meetings did not materialize. Once again, the observed changes are

substantively negligible: Cohen's d reaches just .053 for foot patrol and .161 for tickets. While

statistically significant, the drop in *foot patrol* was just five-thousandths of a point on a 5-point

scale, suggesting that significance belies any meaningful reduction in the frequency of foot

patrol. In response to Research Question 2, "Did de-policing occur following widespread public

dissent?," we conclude that there were negligible reductions in foot patrol and citations, and no differences in community meetings.

Putting temporal effects aside, it is possible that, at the officer level, demoralization is associated with de-policing. While the findings in the previous section established that attitudes did not substantially differ before and after Ferguson, it also revealed that officers expressed a good deal of cynicism even *before* widespread criticism. Such cynicism may be associated with a withdrawal from duties irrespective of protests. To support the claim that low morale is related to de-policing, we would expect statistically significant relationships between measures of morale and measures of activity in several structural equation models.

Before turning to structural models, we evaluate a measurement model using confirmatory factor analysis that evaluates how well seventeen survey items load on latent variables *job satisfaction, burnout, cynicism, organizational justice,* and *supervisor support*. The results are presented in Table 2. Fit indices suggest that the model fits the data well, where CFI=.968, TLI=.961, and RMSEA=.039 (Hu and Bentler 1999).

[TABLE 2 HERE]

The models presented in Table 3 explore the proposed relationship between demoralization and de-policing, after controlling for post-Ferguson exposure and demographic variables. *Job satisfaction* has no effect on frequency of *foot patrol* or *community meetings*, although it does predict significantly more *citations* (B = .340, p < .001). *Burnout* is associated with a reduction in *foot patrol* (B = -.073, p < .01), but paradoxically is associated with an increase in *meetings* (B = .079, p < .05) and *citations* (B = .067, p < .05), challenging the Ferguson Effect. More support is found for a relationship between cynicism and de-policing:

while unrelated to *foot patrol*, cynical officers report fewer *meetings* (B = -.126, p < .001) and

citations (B = -.086, p < .001). Contrary to other evidence (Nix & Wolfe, 2016; Wolfe & Nix,

2016), perceptions of *organizational justice* and *supervisor support* do not appear to translate to

higher levels of police engagement in our sample: *organizational justice* demonstrates no

influence on foot patrol and community meetings, and a *negative* effect on citations (B = -.219, p

< .001). Perceptions of *supervisor support* have no effect on any of the measures of police

activity. The post-Ferguson temporal indicator is significant for *tickets* only (B = -.233, p < .001),

consistent with the magnitude and significance of changes observed in the univariate mean

differences appearing in Table 1. The significance of the post-Ferguson temporal indicator after

accounting for various dimensions of morale suggests that demoralization does not mediate the

relationship between post-Ferguson dissent and a decline in citations.

[TABLE 3 HERE]

In response to Research Question 3, "Is low police morale associated with de-policing?,"

we find: (1) lower job satisfaction is associated with fewer citations, (2) burnout is associated

with less foot patrol, and (3) cynicism is associated with fewer meetings and citations.

Discussion

In 2014 and 2015, the deaths of several black men at the hands of police led to national

news and widespread criticism of police. These events contributed to the rise of an international

Black Lives Matter movement, drawing attention to racial disparities in police-related violence.

Thousands of protestors marched in St. Louis, Missouri following the death of Michael Brown

(Zeleny, 2014). Protests were not limited to St. Louis and Ferguson, but also spread nationwide

(Holpuch, 2014). Editorialists across the nation also turned a critical lens toward the police

(Gertner, 2014; Hawkins, 2014).

Several law enforcement defenders argued that public antipathy toward police had

consequences for police and society. St. Louis Police Chief Sam Dotson first coined the term

"Ferguson Effect" to describe the effect of protests on both officers and citizens (Byers, 2014).

In an infamous op-ed and, later, a book entitled *The War on Cops*, Heather MacDonald argued

that "agitation" against the police led to low morale and de-policing, and therefore threatened

increases in crime.

A limited body of empirical research has supported the demoralization hypothesis; some

studies have suggested that officers' morale worsened after Ferguson (Deuchar et al., 2019,

2018; Torres, Reling, & Hawdon, 2018). Another small body of research suggests that

post-Ferguson antipathy may have been associated with de-policing. But most research

examining the demoralization and de-policing propositions of the Ferguson Effect has been

limited by a lack of systematic before-and-after comparisons with large, representative samples.

Using 18,413 officer surveys from a sample of 87 law enforcement agencies, this study

compared measures of morale and police activity among officers surveyed pre-Ferguson and

officers surveyed post-Ferguson using before-and-after t-tests, as well as pooled time-series

cross-section regression analyses. The study tested the core Ferguson Effect claims that a "war

on cops" led to low morale, and that low morale contributed to de-policing.

The key findings present mixed support for these predictions. The results of two-sample

t-tests (presented in Table 2) do not provide meaningful support for the demoralization

hypothesis. While the results indicate that post-Ferguson officers are significantly less satisfied

and significantly more burned out than pre-Ferguson officers, these statistically significant

differences are negligible in size. Furthermore, statistically significant differences appear

between pre- and post-Ferguson officers on several measures of cynicism—but two of five

measures demonstrate *improved* rather than worsened attitudes, and the magnitude of change is

insubstantial for each item. The combination of small effect sizes and opposing directions

suggests that statistical significance may have more to do with sample size than true "Ferguson

Effects." Even the most generous assessment—looking at the largest before-and-after difference

within 95% confidence intervals—suggests, *at most*, an increase of just .118 points on a 4-point

scale of officers who believe that "the media treat the police unfairly." The lack of evidence

found in these data for the demoralization hypothesis contradicts several retrospective studies

that asked officers to report how their attitudes changed after protests (Deuchar et al., 2019,

2018; Torres et al., 2018). The inconsistency between the present study and prior studies

suggests that findings may be related to study methods, an issue addressed in more detail in the

following section.

An evaluation of the de-policing hypothesis (Table 3) presents mixed findings as well.

T-tests suggest that post-Ferguson officers do report conducting slightly less *foot patrol* and

writing fewer *citations*. The finding of fewer citations is consistent with other research

identifying multifaceted reductions in traffic enforcement (stops, searches, and arrests) during

this time period (Shjarback et al., 2017). Nonetheless, in neither case does the difference ever

attain a magnitude of effect of .20, which is generally considered the threshold between

"negligible" and "small" (Cohen, 2013).

Although there was not strong evidence of de-policing following Ferguson, the results nonetheless indicate that poor morale is in some ways associated with reduced police activity at the officer level. For instance, officers who felt satisfied with their jobs issued more citations. Officers who experienced burnout conducted foot patrol less frequently. Cynical officers were significantly less likely to attend community meetings or issue citations. Thus, there is some evidence for the de-policing hypothesis, such that officer cynicism may contribute to a withdrawal from several forms of discretionary policing. Although the Ferguson-era events did not lead to substantially poorer morale, low morale is nonetheless salient to officer withdrawal from proactive policing.

Theoretical and Empirical Implications

The findings in this study present several theoretical and research implications. Theoretically, the Ferguson Effect makes several claims that are consistent with the classic police culture literature. The demoralization hypothesis, for instance, suggests that negative officer attitudes are substantially determined by a deteriorated police-public relationship. The seminal works on police culture make similar claims. Whitaker's 1964 ethnography, for instance, describes a reciprocated hostility that officers developed after periods of public antagonism toward the police. Skolnick (2011) similarly describes an emotional withdrawal and despondence that emerged as a result of alienation and acute cleavages between officers and citizens. Niederhoffer (1967) describes cynicism and distrust that result from officers' anomic experiences with the public. Reiner describes officers' cynicism as a self-perceived martyrdom emerging in response to an ungrateful, antagonistic, and hedonistic public (2010: 120–121).

Similar parallels exist between the classic literature and the Ferguson Effect claims with regard to the de-policing hypothesis, which suggests that officers withdraw from work in the face of scrutiny and an atmosphere of reciprocated distrust. In a classic study by John Van Maanen, officers described the need to avoid further attention with a "lay-low" approach. One veteran counseled a rookie:

> You gotta learn to take it easy. The department don't care about you and the public sure as hell ain't gonna cry over the fact that the patrolman always gets the shit end of the stick. The only people who care about you are your brother officers. So just lay back and take it easy here. Makes things a lot smoother for us as well as yourself (Van Maanen, 1974: 54).

Similarly, in a classic ethnography, Reuss-Ianni described cynical and highly dissatisfied street cops' tendency to avoid critical attention by eschewing unnecessarily proactive police work (Reuss-Ianni, 2011).

Given these parallels, the present study's implications extend beyond a mere test of the Ferguson Effect, applying also to a more general understanding of police culture during periods of substantial strain. The lack of support for the demoralization hypothesis challenges classic police ethnographers' claims that officers' cynicism is primarily a reciprocated distrust with the public or the product of periodic tensions. It is possible that these classic theories of police culture are anachronistic.

Alternatively, these results may illustrate that perceptions of public antipathy are a time-invariant constant of policing, developed early in the socialization process and relatively inure to temporal fluctuations in public sentiment. According to our findings, officers' perceptions of public attitudes did not appreciably change after demonstrations—officers *already* perceived a high degree of antagonism that the protests may have only reified. In one survey,

92% of officers reported the belief that recent protests were driven by longstanding anti-police

bias, rather than an earnest movement for police accountability and reform (Morin et al., 2017).

Findings regarding the de-policing hypothesis raise theoretical questions about the culture

of work-avoidance in the face of heightened scrutiny and demoralization. Cynicism was

associated with the "lay low" approach, at least insofar as it was associated with fewer meetings

and tickets. This seems to support theoretical depictions of work avoidance as a product of

reciprocated distrust with the community, even though such distrust did not appreciably change

after Ferguson, and may in fact be an enduring cultural element. In light of these findings, police

culture research ought to theoretically elaborate and empirically explore temporal constancy—in

addition to change—of police attitudes and activity in the midst of substantial external pressures.

There are research implications of these findings. This study appears to contradict

several previous studies of the Ferguson Effect, which suggested substantial worsening of

attitudes among post-Ferguson officers (Deuchar et al., 2019, 2018; Nix & Pickett, 2017; Nix,

Wolfe, & Campbell, 2018; Torres et al., 2018; Wolfe & Nix, 2016). This raises the possibility

that the contradictory findings are due to differences in research designs. Previous studies used

retrospective designs—for instance, by asking officers how their attitudes have changed since

Ferguson, rather than comparing pre-Ferguson attitudes to post-Ferguson attitudes. It is plausible

that police attitudes have always been quite negative, or that officers' evaluations of their past

attitudes are tainted by their current sentiments. This study suggests that the use of identical

survey items across time demonstrates much less variation than officers' recollection of their

sentiments at some time in the past.[6] Time-series designs in policing research are uncommon,

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[6] The problem of retrospective recall regarding workplace morale is humorously and hyperbolically
summed up by the character Peter Gibbons in the film *Office Space*, who recalls, "I realized, ever since I started
working, every single day of my life has been worse than the day before it. So that means that every single day that

and this study illustrates their potential. Although the multi-wave survey data collected in this

study were never designed to measure a phenomenon that did not exist at its inception—that is,

the Ferguson Effect—they nonetheless yield a fruitful examination of changes within police

officers during exogenous shocks to the police institution.

Unfortunately, officers' trust in the public has been given scant attention by researchers

(Mourtgos et al., 2019). Many seminal works on police culture treat cynicism toward the public

as a foregone conclusion—a natural and inevitable consequence of police work (Niederhoffer,

1967; Skolnick, 2011). Future studies ought to address how reduction of police cynicism and

distrust may be accomplished—especially given that it appears widespread and independent of

exogenous shocks such as Ferguson. The report of the President's Task Force on 21st Century

Policing (2015) acknowledged the need to address *mutual* trust, but unfortunately failed to

include actionable recommendations for improving police trust in the public (recommending

only ways to enhance community trust in the police). As this study indicates, addressing officers'

cynicism—reducing officers' contemptuous distrust of human motive and behavior—could

reduce withdrawal from proactive policing, making the management of officer cynicism a

much-needed area of future research with immediate practical significance.

Implications for Social Policy

One of the primary conclusions drawn from this study is that Ferguson did not

appreciably worsen police morale or lead to withdrawal from police work. Thus, perhaps the

most practically significant implication of this study is that criticism of the police is not

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you see me, that's on the worst day of my life." These sentiments echo the sense of fatalism that officers have
reported to ethnographic researchers since at least the 1960's (Banton, 1964; Skolnick, 2011; Whitaker, 1964). For
decades, officers have claimed things are "worse than ever."

detrimental to policing or public safety, despite the dire warnings issued in Ferguson Effect

op-eds (e.g., MacDonald, 2015a). Indeed, the implicit message that MacDonald and others

communicated was one of obedient acquiescence: police policy and practice is not to be

challenged or questioned, else officer wellbeing and public safety is at risk. The results of this

study reaffirm the fundamental stability of American democracy under the pressure of discord,

dissent, and demonstration: even intense hostility aimed directly at the agents of social

control—in a few cases violent—was not enough to substantially alter officer attitudes or

behaviors.

Nonetheless, cynicism was already quite high before Ferguson. This suggests that police

administrators must address officer distrust regardless of current public sentiment. Unfortunately,

as mentioned in the previous section, research is silent about how to reduce officers' cynicism

and improve officers' trust in the public. It is possible, however, that efforts to promote citizen

trust in the police may lead to police trust in the public. Trust involves a reciprocal, dialogic

exchange, and research on organizations and groups indicates that perceptions of distrust on one

side predict reciprocated distrust from the other (Ferrin, Bligh, & Kohles, 2008; Korsgaard,

Audrey Korsgaard, Brower, & Lester, 2015; Serva, Fuller, & Mayer, 2005). It therefore appears

necessary to address both parties' trust in the other. The phenomenon of reciprocated trust and

upward/downward spirals implies that improvements in citizens' trust of the police may, in turn,

contribute to an improvement in officers' trust in the public. Trust in the police is very much a

function of the perception that police treat citizens fairly—that is, in a respectful and

procedurally just manner (Tyler, 2005). Citizen trust in the police is a function of both direct and

vicarious experiences of procedural justice (Flexon, Lurigio, & Greenleaf, 2009). If research

regarding trust reciprocity is applicable to policing, then improving police legitimacy and citizens' trust in the police may lead to higher levels of officers' trust in the public, ultimately leading to more proactive policing and community engagement. Therefore, although there is admittedly a lack of research indicating how officer distrust can be reduced, it is possible that transparency, accountability, and procedurally just policing may contribute to citizen trust, which will in turn contribute to reciprocated trust from officers.

Contrary to prior evidence, this study did not find that perceptions of organizational justice or managerial support translated into higher officer productivity. Some research indicates that officers are more likely to proactively engage with community members to solve community problems when they perceive their agencies as fair (Wolfe & Nix, 2016), and that perceptions of fairness contribute to officers' overall commitment to agency goals, which frequently include modern democratic approaches such as problem-oriented policing, community policing, and procedurally just policing (Rosenbaum & McCarty, 2017). There may indeed be justifiable reasons to promote organizational justice, not the least of which involves an ethical duty to employees. Nonetheless, if the results of this study are replicated elsewhere, police administrators may need to recognize that the implementation of organizational justice may be unlikely to produce substantial increases in the types of police activity studied here. Of course, this also means that officers who feel their agencies are unfair are not withdrawing from police work, which may give administrators confidence that police services will be delivered even when officers feel that they are treated unfairly. This should provide some reassurance that police reforms—especially those related to accountability, which are often poorly received by the rank-and-file—are unlikely to compromise core police services.

On the whole, the results suggest the possibility that officer activity is less affected by officer attitudes than by policy. This study found that the decrease in citations in 2014 was not precipitated by worsening police attitudes. Reductions in ticket-writing may instead be related to policy changes, such Mack's Creek Law in Missouri, which reduced the amount of revenue departments could receive through traffic fines, and therefore reduced the pecuniary incentive to issue citations (Mann & Deere, 2015). Similarly, NYPD saw dramatic reductions in patterns of enforcement after Stop-and-Frisk policies were substantially reformed (Bostock & Fessenden, 2014). While this study cannot speak to the cause of the decline in tickets in 2014, it does suggest that police attitudes—feelings of being victimized by the public—have little to do with it. This reaffirms the strength of police institutions while challenging central Ferguson Effect claims.

Study Limitations and Future Research

Notwithstanding several important insights drawn regarding demoralization and de-policing, this study suffers from several limitations that may be remedied in future research. Officers who were most affected by post-Ferguson protests—those who experienced the most burnout, the biggest drop in job satisfaction, the greatest rise in cynicism, and the largest withdrawal from work—may have been those least likely to respond in the second survey wave, whether due to attrition from the study or attrition from the job. If this were the case, this study is likely to substantially underestimate temporal changes in morale and police activity. On the other hand, officers who felt most aggrieved may have been more likely to respond in order to express those grievances, in which case we may overestimate changes. Because this was not a panel

study, the current study is not able to identify patterns of attrition and other within-officer changes over time. If researchers can continue to earn officers' trust, studies should capitalize on panel designs modeled in other disciplines in order to track participants over time. Along those lines, it is also possible that responding officers provided the socially desirable responses to questions, perhaps avoiding responses that appear unprofessional or unappealing.

Future research might improve the measures of police activity. Officers may have relatively little control over the time spent on foot patrol or in community meetings, and measures of actual police activity would ideally be measured via objective indicators (such as time spent in meetings or on foot patrol) rather than categorical self-report measures. It is also important to note that this study exclusively examined individual-level measures, and future research ought to examine the contexts of workgroups, agencies, and neighborhoods that may impact both police morale and police activity. Finally, future studies of demoralization and de-policing in the context of legitimacy crises ought to explore targeted versus diffuse effects—whether the effect of protest against an officer's own agency differs from broad criticism of the policing institution.

Conclusion

This study presents compelling evidence that public demonstrations against the police are not as consequential for police attitudes and behaviors as some have threatened. Even during a time of intense public antipathy for the police—a period in which public attitudes toward the police were the lowest in decades—officers experienced only minor, and sometimes counterintuitive, changes in job satisfaction, burnout, and cynicism. Although officers wrote fewer tickets and attended fewer community meetings after nationwide demonstrations, the

changes were very small in magnitude, suggesting that the commitment to proactive community policing remained largely unchanged. High officer cynicism is significantly associated with withdrawal from police work, but cynicism on the part of police is high irrespective of periods of increased public antipathy. Thus, while public demonstrations against the police do not present threats to the police institution, some entrenched elements of police culture and morale may continue to challenge public administrators.

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