

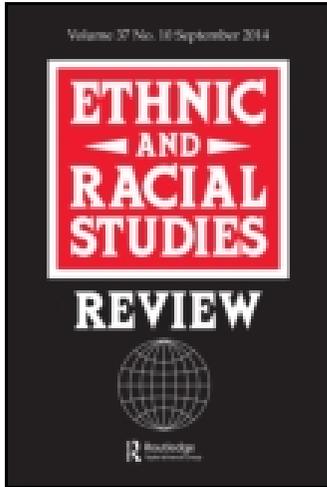
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The puzzling neglect of Hispanic Americans in research on police–citizen relations

Ronald Weitzer

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Most studies of police–minority relations in America focus on blacks, usually in comparison with whites. This pattern is particularly puzzling in light of the growing population of Hispanic Americans throughout the US, now outnumbering blacks and consisting of the majority in some major cities. Aside from the need for more empirical research on the policing of Hispanics per se, comparing Hispanics' relations with the police to other racial and ethnic groups offers some important insights into both the dimensions that are shared across groups and those that are distinctive to Hispanics. This article critically evaluates the small body of empirical research literature on this topic – highlighting both deficiencies in this literature as well as suggestive findings – and concludes by identifying a set of issues that should be addressed in future studies. The available evidence largely supports a racial-hierarchy perspective with regard to the policing of different racial and ethnic groups in the US.

Keywords: Police–minority relations; police misconduct; racial hierarchy; Latino immigrants

Introduction

Relations between the police and minority groups in the US have long been troubled, but the vast majority of studies neglect Hispanic or Latino Americans.¹ Since the publication of the groundbreaking 1969 book *Minorities and the Police* by David Bayley and Harold Mendelsohn (which analysed police relations with Hispanics, blacks and whites in Denver, Colorado), most research on race/ethnicity and policing in America has been confined to whites and blacks (Martínez 2010). This is especially problematic in light of the growing Hispanic population, now 17 per cent of the US population and projected to increase steadily in the future. Moreover, several cities now have sizeable or majority-Hispanic populations and some have majority-Hispanic police departments as

well – raising the question of whether ethnic composition at the local level makes a difference in police–citizen relations. This article examines findings from the thin existing literature and highlights important issues that have yet to be explored and the ways in which future research may advance understanding of Hispanic Americans’ relations with the police in the US. The available evidence largely supports a racial-hierarchy paradigm with regard to the policing of different racial and ethnic groups in the US.

Framing Hispanics’ relations with the police

Surveys show that Hispanics in the US are less satisfied with the police than are whites. The Hispanic–African American pattern is less clear, however. Although it is often assumed that both blacks and Hispanics have lower opinions of the police than whites due to their shared minority-group status, this picture seems monolithic. Some studies find no significant difference between the two groups, but most find that Hispanics are more satisfied with police than blacks, sometimes substantially so. (These mixed findings may reflect differences in the samples or in the specific issues investigated.) The evidence *overall*, however, points to a white/Hispanic/black ‘racial hierarchy’ rather than a more cohesive black/Hispanic ‘minority-group orientation’ (Weitzer and Tuch 2006).²

The racial-hierarchy pattern in group relations with the police can be explained by differences in the historical and contemporary stratification and experiences of each group separately and in relation to other racial groups. One way of theorizing this is to identify an ethnic or racial group’s *mode of incorporation* into a society (Alexander 2001). Minority groups can differ substantially in the degree to which they are integrated (initially and subsequently) into any given society and in their historical treatment by major institutions. In the aggregate, groups

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 [from major social institutions] than members of long-term and involuntarily incorporated minority groups (Bobo 1999, 461).

Groups, especially African Americans, that have experienced severe inequality (economic, social, political) over many generations and were initially incorporated into American society by force will differ significantly from groups that have faced a lesser degree of inequality and were largely incorporated voluntarily – most Asians and Hispanics in the US – in their general orientation to social and political institutions. This thesis

has been applied to group relations with the criminal justice system: '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' (Hagan, Shedd, and Payne 2005, 384). This is not to minimize the history of Latino tensions with both white citizens and agencies of control in the US (see Mirande 1987; Escobar 1999; Portes and Rumbaut 2006), but does distinguish this legacy from that of African Americans. Asian Americans generally have a less contentious relationship with the criminal justice system than blacks and Hispanics, which is consistent with their largely voluntary mode of incorporation into American society.

There is also a relational dimension to the racial hierarchy model, consistent with Herbert Blumer's (1958) 'group position' model. Just as African Americans have a longer, fractious history with the police than is true for Hispanic Americans, they also have a profound sense of their collective group position vis-à-vis Hispanics and whites – namely, a position of greater and more extensive subordination relative to other groups. One dimension of this is that the criminal justice system will be perceived, at least to some degree, as an instrument of the dominant racial group in a society. In other words, it is not just individual experiences but also a racial group's *societal position* and *vicarious group experiences* that shape relations between citizens and the police. Bayley and Mendelsohn (1969, 141) argue that:

the position the police occupy in the minority world is only partly a result of what the police do in that world; more importantly, their position is a function of fundamental emotional judgments made by people subjected to pervasive deprivation and inequality.

This means that African Americans and, to a lesser extent, Hispanics will tend to see the police as a 'visible sign of [white] majority domination' (Bayley and Mendelsohn 1969, 195; cf. Mirande 1987; Escobar 1999) and view many enforcement operations as targeting their group for especially robust control. Whites, by contrast, are more likely to see the police as allies (Smith, Graham, and Adams 1991).

This compound historical legacy and ongoing intergroup relationship helps to explain why blacks' opinions of the police are usually found to be more negative than Hispanics'. There may, however, be some exceptions to this general rule. In cities where the Hispanic population has grown rapidly in recent years, it is possible that this has led to changes in intergroup relations, with local whites, blacks and/or police perceiving Latinos as a growing threat. This, in turn, may shape local Hispanics' treatment by and assessments of the police. One study posited this Hispanic-threat explanation to account for the increased likelihood of

incidents of police misconduct in neighbourhoods with a growing Hispanic population (Kane 2003). But an analysis of 237 cities found no relationship between the proportion of Hispanics or immigrants in the population and whether the local police were involved in aggressive immigration enforcement (Lewis et al. 2013). Additional studies are needed in order to draw firm conclusions regarding the salience of the Hispanic-threat hypothesis with respect to police practices.³

The argument, then, is that the mode of incorporation and its legacy help to explain the racial-hierarchy pattern in racial and ethnic groups' contemporary, differential relations with the police. More proximate factors are obviously involved as well – including one's personal experiences, socio-economic status, neighbourhood context and exposure to media reports on police actions – but the initial mode of incorporation remains salient as it constitutes the historical bedrock of a group's relations with social institutions and the state.⁴ With this theoretical backdrop, I now turn to the empirical record. The following two sections (1) outline some problems with the existing literature and (2) examine how extant findings illuminate certain dimensions of the Latino–police relationship and point to other dimensions that require much more investigation.

A thin and deficient empirical literature

Not only is research on Hispanic Americans' relations with the police rather scarce, it also suffers from some important deficiencies:

- Most surveys of public opinion on policing in the US sample too few Hispanics to permit any statistical analysis. Some make the mistake of lumping Hispanics and blacks together into a 'nonwhite' category, masking what should be a core variable. Only a handful of surveys systematically compare sufficiently large numbers of blacks, whites and Hispanics (e.g. Bayley and Mendelsohn 1969; Webb and Marshall 1995; Reitzel, Rice, and Piquero 2004; Weitzer and Tuch 2006).
- Another glaring problem in the quantitative survey literature is a failure to disaggregate the pan-ethnic Hispanic population by ancestry and nativity – thus eclipsing potentially significant differences along the axes of foreign – native-born and ethnicity or national origin. As a result, the limited data available homogenize Hispanics' attitudes and experiences, thus masking possibly important intra-Hispanic differences.
- Most qualitative studies to date are limited by their narrow scope: they focus on Hispanics alone (Mirande 1981; Carter 1985; Menjivar and Bejarano 2004; Durán 2009; Solis, Portillos, and

Brunson 2009) or compare them only to whites (Holmes 1998). A study that included both Latino and black youths was conducted by Rios (2011) in Oakland, California. Unfortunately, Rios failed to examine differences in the two groups' experiences with the police, lumping them together throughout his book. And his portrayal of the police is simplistic and one-dimensional: they are caricatured as oppressors who routinely victimize innocent youths (what Rios calls the 'youth control complex'), and the youths are denied any semblance of agency despite their involvement in delinquency (which Rios fails to factor into his analysis). As such, this study is hardly a model of sophisticated qualitative research on this topic.⁵

- A few qualitative studies have compared predominantly black and predominantly white *neighbourhoods* in relation to the police (Jacob 1971; Weitzer 1999, 2000a), but almost no study compares Hispanic neighbourhoods to others. Carr, Napolitano, and Keating (2007) interviewed youths living in three high-crime Philadelphia neighbourhoods (predominantly black, white or Hispanic) and unexpectedly found that neighbourhood context did not make a difference in youths' attitudes towards the police, with negative dispositions common across all three neighbourhoods. Carr's research design was flawed, however, by the fact that a convenience sample was used, more than a third of residents of the 'Hispanic' neighbourhood were not Hispanic, and the three neighbourhoods differed substantially in population size, median household income, educational attainment, poverty rates and violent crime rates. What is needed is research using better-matched neighbourhoods and representative samples of residents.
- Both national-level and neighbourhood-level research is valuable, but limited in certain respects. National-level studies risk masking important differences between cities. The literature on policing indicates that cities vary, at least to some extent, in police policies or practices – as a result of unique histories of contentious events involving the police (riots, corruption scandals, police killings, etc.) and variations in departments' organization and leadership. Cities also differ in their socio-economic profile and ethnic composition. These differences arguably have at least some effect on city-level relationships between residents and the police, but the scholarship documenting such differences is thin. With regard to racial and ethnic composition, how do majority-Hispanic populations and/or police departments compare to cities where Hispanics constitute the minority? At present, we do not know if Hispanic composition in a city or police department makes a difference in how residents perceive and experience the police.

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- Almost all of the literature focuses on citizens' *attitudes* towards or *reported experiences* with the police. Two major pillars are missing: police officers' own attitudes towards citizens and officer behaviour while on patrol, interacting with Latino members of the public. A few studies examine white and/or black officers' attitudes or behaviour towards the public (Alex 1969; Bayley and Mendelsohn 1969; Leinen 1978; Weisburd and Greenspan 2000; Moskos 2008), but research is lacking on officers' interactions with or views of Hispanic civilians and on Hispanic officers' behaviour and attitudes per se. An exception is Culver (2004), who interviewed and observed police officers on patrol in three US cities. The officers identified a set of problems in their interactions with Hispanic residents: immigration fears, language problems, distrust of police, and the involuntary nature of most contacts, which occurred during traffic stops (Culver 2004; cf. Irlbeck 2008).

Using what little empirical evidence exists, the following section addresses some of these issues in more depth.

The empirical evidence thus far

Racial-hierarchy patterns

I noted above that the available evidence shows that Hispanic Americans tend to take an intermediate position between whites and blacks, being more critical of the police than whites but less critical than blacks. On a wide variety of issues – citizen confidence and trust in the local police department or 'the police' in general, perceptions of racially biased policing, and assessments of corruption, excessive force, verbal abuse and unwarranted stops – the data clearly point to a racial hierarchy, with Hispanics intermediate between blacks and whites in their attitudes (Brown and Benedict 2002; Weitzer and Tuch 2006). On some other issues – for example, support for various reforms in policing – the three groups are in more agreement. The vast majority endorse, for example, community policing, civilian review boards, video cameras in police cars to record officer–citizen interactions, early warning systems to identify problem officers, and stronger punishment for officers guilty of misconduct against civilians (Weitzer and Tuch 2006). But although a majority of all three groups subscribes to these reforms, African Americans were found to be somewhat more supportive of many of them than Hispanics, followed by whites. Thus, even where there is general agreement across groups, we see evidence of a racial hierarchy.

The racial-hierarchy pattern is evident not only in public perceptions and reform preferences, but also when citizens have direct personal contacts with police officers. Recent studies comparing stop rates for black, white and Latino drivers and pedestrians generally (but not always) find higher stop rates for blacks, followed by Hispanics and whites. What happens during a stop, however, is arguably more important than the decision to stop per se, given the importance that citizens attach to procedural justice in their interactions with police officers (Tyler and Huo 2002; Engel 2005). A study of 732 African American and Hispanic high-school students in Chicago found that, while the two groups were about equally likely to say that they had been stopped by the police (55 and 60 per cent, respectively), black students were more likely to report that they had been treated disrespectfully during the encounter (62 and 45 per cent, respectively). Moreover, being stopped and disrespected lowered the general level of respect for the police among blacks but not Hispanics (Lurigio, Greenleaf, and Flexon 2009). A recent national survey of citizen contacts with the police reports that whites, blacks and Hispanics were about equally likely to be stopped by the police in 2008 (8.4, 8.8 and 9.1 per cent, respectively), but were searched at different rates: black drivers were three times more likely than whites (12.3 and 3.9 per cent, respectively) and twice as likely as Hispanics (5.8 per cent) to be searched during a traffic stop (BJS 2011). Of those who had a face-to-face contact with a police officer in 2008, blacks were also more likely than Hispanics or whites to be the recipients of force or threatened force (3.4, 1.6 and 1.2 per cent, respectively (BJS 2011)). The type of force ranged along a continuum from the officer shouting to hitting to pointing a gun at the citizen. Racial background thus seems to shape what happens during a stop.

Disaggregating 'Hispanic'

As noted above, a major problem with the pan-ethnic Hispanic construct is that it masks internal differences by nativity and ancestry. Research incorporating these factors is crucial in order to determine whether, and in what ways, they influence Hispanics' views of and experiences with the police. Are some subgroups closer than others to blacks or to whites in their relations with the police?

Regarding nativity, fully 40 per cent of Hispanics currently residing in the US were foreign-born. Many of these immigrants face unique challenges when interacting with the police – especially language and cultural barriers and a fear of deportation if illegally residing in the country (Herbst and Walker 2001; Solis, Portillos, and Brunson 2009).

In addition, the very image of the police may be radically different for an immigrant than for the native-born: for recent Latino immigrants, the reputation of the police in their home countries – as being inept, corrupt or abusive (Goldsmith 2005; Campesi 2010) – may continue to be salient in the new country, contributing to a lingering, ingrained aversion to and avoidance of American police. Negative views of the police back home can also ‘set such a low standard of expectation that it affects what they will tolerate in the United States’ (Martínez 2010, 443). This stands in contrast to proximate, domestic influences on the opinions of the native-born population. A survey of 2,015 Hispanics in the US reported that the foreign-born were less favourably disposed towards the police than the native-born: 40 per cent and 51 per cent, respectively, expressed confidence that the police in their community ‘will treat Hispanics fairly’, and 42 per cent and 50 per cent believed that the police in their community ‘will not use excessive force on suspects’ (Lopez and Livingston 2009, 2). Setting aside these differences, it is noteworthy how large the *lack of confidence* is among both groups regarding police impartiality and proper use of force.

But there is also evidence supporting an alternative hypothesis. Instead of the conflation-of-police pattern, this hypothesis predicts that immigrants have a dual frame of reference and draw distinctions between police in the two countries (Menjivar and Bejarano 2004), possibly viewing police in the destination country as superior to their counterparts back home and thus elevating the level of trust in the police among first-generation immigrants, if not subsequent generations. This pattern has been documented in Europe (Röder and Mühlau 2012), and in the US one study found that Latino immigrants had more positive views of the police than native-born Latinos (Correia 2010). Further research is needed to test the two hypothesized attitudinal relationships between immigrants and police in the destination country: conflation with vs distinct from police back home.

Whether English or Spanish is spoken at home can be considered a rough proxy of native- or foreign-born status. In a Chicago study, Spanish-speaking Hispanics were more likely than English-speaking Hispanics (as well as blacks) to believe that excessive force was a big problem in their neighbourhood and were twice as likely to think that Chicago police officers were corrupt (Skogan 2006). This may be due to Spanish-speaking immigrants’ greater suspicion of police in their home country (in Chicago, mostly Mexico) which is grafted on to their views of American police. Similarly, in San Antonio, Texas, Spanishspeaking and foreign-born Hispanics were less satisfied with the police officers who work in their neighbourhoods than Hispanics who were more acculturated (McCluskey, McCluskey, and Enriquez 2008).

Hispanics are especially vulnerable when the police are involved in immigration control. Enforcement of harsh immigration laws may have

the unintended consequence of alienating Hispanics from the criminal justice system, reducing their willingness to report crimes or cooperate with police in investigations. Four-fifths of Hispanics disapprove of the 2010 Arizona law that instructs police to check the legal status of persons they stop, detain or arrest if they have reasonable suspicion that the person is in the country illegally (Lopez, Morin, and Taylor 2010). And a survey of 1,375 Hispanics conducted by the Pew Hispanic Center reported that 5 per cent had been stopped by police in the past year and asked about their immigration status (Lopez, Morin, and Taylor 2010). It is likely that few whites and African Americans are asked about their immigration status when stopped by police simply because this is not considered particularly salient for these populations. It should also be noted that, unlike some other cities with sizeable Latino populations, Arizona's two largest cities have police departments that substantially under-represent each city's Latino population (see Table 1).

The effects of police involvement in the immigration arena are documented in a study of a crackdown in Chandler, Arizona, during a five-day series of immigration raids conducted by local police (Romero 2006). According to the study, many of the stops of Hispanic residents lacked reasonable suspicion and were instead based on an individual's physical appearance or presence in a Latino neighbourhood or at construction sites known to employ Latinos. In some apartment complexes and trailer courts populated by low-income Latinos, searches were conducted house to house, obviously departing from probable-cause requirements. During such inspections, police routinely 'demeaned, humiliated, and embarrassed' the individuals they encountered, according to the study (Romero 2006, 468).

A similar study was conducted in California, using longitudinal data collected before and after a city's criminal justice system began to

Table 1. Hispanic composition: selected cities and police departments.

| | City% | Police department% |
|-------------------------|-------|--------------------|
| Laredo, Texas | 96 | 98 |
| Hialeah, Florida | 95 | 63 |
| Brownsville, Texas | 93 | 82 |
| El Paso, Texas | 81 | 72 |
| Miami, Florida | 70 | 54 |
| San Antonio, Texas | 63 | 42 |
| Santa Fe, New Mexico | 49 | 55 |
| Los Angeles, California | 49 | 33 |
| Tucson, Arizona | 42 | 21 |
| Phoenix, Arizona | 41 | 12 |

Source: BJS 2004; US Census Bureau 2010.

notify immigration authorities regarding suspected undocumented immigrants (Vidales, Day, and Powe 2009). In the 2001 ‘before’ survey, Hispanics living in Costa Mesa, California, generally held positive views of the local police (as fair, responsive, doing a good job, etc.). But in the period after a 2005 policy change – which required the reporting of detained individuals to the immigration service – confidence in the local police had eroded.⁶ In the 2007 ‘after’ survey, Hispanics’ opinions had become significantly less favourable on almost all of the fifteen questions in the survey related to policing. In addition, whereas 13 per cent of Hispanics reported being stopped by the police while driving during the year prior to 2001, the proportion tripled in 2007 (39 per cent), just as stops of non-Hispanics dropped (from 20 to 8 per cent). The substantial spike in the number of involuntary contacts with police, coupled with the reporting requirement, meant that a growing number of local Hispanics risked having adverse experiences with the criminal justice system (Vidales, Day, and Powe 2009).

Another case study is unique in examining the views of police officers themselves, those assigned to immigration-control duties. The study, in Nashville, Tennessee, documented differences among the officers attached to the immigration squad, with some expressing reluctance at having to process immigrants for deportation, especially those who had been arrested for minor offences (e.g. driving without a licence); but most of the officers were proud of working in what they considered ‘cutting-edge law enforcement’ and had a ‘strong sense of identity’ as upholding immigration law or combating what they considered threats to the public (Armenta 2012, 199).

Harsh immigration-policing measures threaten to undermine the otherwise cooperative inclination of most residents of immigrant communities. Recent research comparing neighbourhoods in New York City found cooperation to be the norm in immigrant communities, especially those that were fairly homogeneously immigrant in composition: ‘Contrary to some political portrayals of immigrants as being less cooperative with authorities, our findings clearly indicate that residents of immigrant neighborhoods are actually *more* cooperative with the police than are residents of native-born neighborhoods’ (Kirk et al. 2012, 94). Yet, as both this study and those discussed above indicate, amiable relations between police and immigrant communities can deteriorate quickly if the police become involved in immigration enforcement. And this erosion of trust in the police can contaminate broader citizen perceptions of the fairness and legitimacy of the entire criminal justice system. It should be noted that involvement in aggressive immigration enforcement is not currently the dominant policy across American police departments. As indicated above, police departments differ in their policies and institutionalized practices. A survey of 237 police departments found considerable variation across cities in the involvement of local police in immigration

enforcement – from robust enforcement to no enforcement. Importantly, less aggressive enforcement was associated with the presence of at least one Latino elected official in city government, a Hispanic police chief and/or a formal policy curbing the racial profiling of city residents (Lewis et al. 2013).

Just as research that disaggregates the Latino population by nativity is rather sparse, the same is true for research on the impact of national origin or ancestry. Do Puerto Ricans, Cubans, Mexicans and other Hispanic American subgroups differ in their relations with the police? One national survey reported that Puerto Ricans are more dissatisfied with the police who work in their community than other Hispanic subgroups (Kaiser 2000). Another national survey reported that Puerto Ricans were more likely to believe that police engage in four types of misconduct (in their city or neighbourhood) than people whose ancestry is Cuban, Central American, Mexican or South American (Weitzer and Tuch 2006, 52). This may be due, at least in part, to the fact that Puerto Ricans have a higher incidence of poverty and lower incomes than any other Hispanic group except Dominicans. Such socio-economic disadvantage may help to explain their more negative perceptions of the police. However, no subgroup differences were detected on two other issues: perceived racial bias in police practices and support for a set of reforms in policing (Weitzer and Tuch 2006). An interview-based study with thirty Puerto Ricans and Dominicans in New York City confirmed their generally negative views of the city's police (Solis, Portillos, and Brunson 2009).

There are reasons to expect Cuban Americans to have a qualitatively different relationship with the police (due to their privileged legal status) than Latinos whose immigration status is more open to question (e.g. those of Mexican ancestry). One study found that Cubans living in Phoenix, Arizona, did 'not experience immigration officials in the same way as do Mexicans and Central Americans, among whom immigration authorities are the most feared public officials' (Menjívar and Bejarano 2004, 134). A Miami study found that Cubans who arrived in the city in the 1960s were fairly supportive of the police, more so than Cubans who arrived in the 1980s (Alpert and Dunham 1988). But, aside from these few findings, little is known about the impact of ancestry on Hispanic subgroups' orientations toward and personal experiences with the police. Much more research is needed in order to document patterns by national origin and to identify the factors that account for both similarities and differences between the subgroups.

Does local context matter?

As noted earlier, several US cities are majority-Hispanic in population (e.g. Miami, San Antonio, El Paso). Some also have majority-Hispanic

police departments (see Table 1) – as high as 82 per cent in Brownsville and 98 per cent in Laredo, Texas. Although the conventional wisdom is that racial diversity in a police department – particularly a rough proportional representation of groups in the local population – has a beneficial effect on public opinion of the department (Zauberman and Lévy 2003; NRC 2004), this hypothesis has rarely been tested. A few studies of whites, blacks and Latinos suggest that there is a good deal of variation in how citizens evaluate same-race vs different-race officers, with many taking a ‘blue cops’ position that an officer’s racial background does not influence how they behave (Bayley and Mendelsohn 1969; Weitzer 2000b; Weitzer and Tuch 2006). When it comes to the image of a department, however, the vast majority of Americans believe that a department that is representative of the local population is beneficial (Weitzer and Tuch 2006, 139). Even if most officers, across race, operate similarly in their interactions with citizens (NRC 2004), a force that is representative of the local population can pay significant symbolic dividends in increasing public confidence in the police.

We do not know, however, whether a department that is majority-black or majority-Hispanic *operates* differently than one that is majority-white. Does the police culture change, even slightly, when the majority of officers are non-white? Years ago, Lawrence Sherman (1983, 221) hypothesized that this might indeed happen – that, as a racial group begins to ‘comprise a larger portion [or the majority] of a police department, they may become less isolated and more influential in shaping the values and culture of the entire police department.’ The group-position framework is relevant here: in cities where the formerly subordinate racial group gains political power and control over the police department and where the formerly dominant racial group experiences diminished power, ‘the racial polarization we normally observe in evaluations of the police should disappear or reverse’ (Howell, Perry, and Vile 2004, 50). In other words, the group position thesis would predict that when racial groups in a city trade places, their former orientation to the local police may be inverted, with either blacks or Hispanics being more inclined towards favourable views of the police in cities where the department and power structure are dominated by members of their group and perhaps with disempowered whites being less favourably disposed (Howell, Perry, and Vile 2004). If a group’s position in the racial hierarchy shapes its orientation to the police, then changes in the relative positions of racial groups may lead to changes in their opinion of the police department.

This hypothesis has not been rigorously tested for residents of majority-Hispanic cities. Research in San Antonio, Texas, found that Hispanics were slightly more satisfied with the city’s police than white residents (McCluskey, McCluskey, and Enriquez 2008). The researchers posit that this may be due to the fact that San Antonio is a majority-Hispanic city, that Hispanic officers comprise two-fifths of the police department, and

that the police chief at the time of the study was Hispanic. In El Paso, Texas – a majority-Hispanic city with a majority-Hispanic police department – neighbourhood context was incorporated into the analysis in another study (Holmes 1998). Hispanics living in a middle-class community were more likely than similarly situated whites, but about as likely as poor Hispanics, to believe that the police engaged in misconduct towards city residents (abusive language, excessive force, warrantless searches), while whites living in a poor neighbourhood were more likely than middle-class whites to perceive police misconduct. The El Paso findings suggest that the majority-Hispanic composition of this city and police department did little to improve Hispanic residents' opinion of the police, and this was the case regardless of social class. Class was a predictor, however, for white residents of El Paso. A citywide poll conducted in El Paso in 1998 essentially reflected the traditional racial-hierarchy pattern. When asked whether blacks, whites and Hispanics were treated fairly by the police in El Paso, 87 per cent of respondents thought that whites were treated fairly, whereas 73 per cent thought the same for Hispanics and 65 per cent for blacks (K Associates of El Paso 1998). The intriguing difference between the El Paso and San Antonio findings, with regard to the composition variable, suggests that much more research is needed in order to understand if and in what ways changes in the racial or ethnic complexion of a city and police department affects residents' opinions and/or personal experiences with the police.

Conclusion

The need for research on Hispanic Americans' relations with the police is particularly acute in light of their growing presence in the US, now 17 per cent of the population and comprising the majority in some cities and police departments. Situating Hispanics within a racial hierarchy of group relations, the article identified a number of key areas in which research is desperately needed, and it is expected that the findings of future studies will contribute to a more sophisticated and multifaceted understanding of relationships between the police and Latino citizens and immigrants. Such studies should include subgroup disaggregation in accordance with Hispanics' diverse ancestries and nativity status.

I argue that there are theoretically based historical and contemporary explanations for the racial-hierarchy pattern regarding the police and other state authorities in the US. A racial or ethnic group's initial mode of incorporation plays a key role, especially if that history is actively reproduced in a manner that structures group-level opportunities and constraints over time. This kind of continuity is abundantly evident with regard to African Americans, who continue to face blocked economic opportunities as well as amplified social control in comparison with other

racial and ethnic groups. For Latinos the picture is more complicated. As a group, they encounter prejudice and discrimination in many spheres of American life and they are also subject to higher levels of formal control than white Americans (O'Conner, Tilly, and Bobo 2001). But Hispanics differ from African Americans in 'the persistence, pervasiveness across domains of life, and extremity of inequality of life chances' (Bobo 1999, 461), which positions Hispanics in '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' (Hagan, Shedd, and Payne 2005, 384). I argue that this helps explain why Hispanic Americans are generally less alienated from or critical of the police than blacks but more so than whites and Asians.

A variety of other factors shape citizens' perceptions of and experiences with the police in addition to the structural arrangements outlined above. Individuals' attitudes towards the police are influenced not only by their group position but also by their personal and vicarious experiences with police officers – 'vicarious' referring to what family members, friends or neighbours have told a person about the police regarding their personal encounters with officers or what people see and identify with in news media reports. Recent research finds that such indirect experiences – within social networks or via the media – shape individuals' opinions of the police (e.g. Rosenbaum et al. 2005; Weitzer and Tuch 2006; Brunson and Weitzer 2011). At the meso level, neighbourhood context is a significant predictor as well: the racial composition and socio-economic status of a neighbourhood correlates with residents' evaluations of the police, and in some studies this contextual factor is either as important or more so than a person's own racial or class background (e.g. Sampson and Bartusch 1998; Velez 2001; Kane 2003; Schafer, Huebner, and Bynum 2003). Most neighbourhood-level studies compare white and black communities, however; what is needed are studies that include Latino neighbourhoods as well. And the same deficiency pertains to the city level, with almost no studies comparing cities (and police departments) that vary by racial composition in order to document how this might affect residents' relations with the police.

The intersection between race, policing and immigration is also crucial, as most of the political debate and enforcement activity around immigration in America is specifically focused on the Latino population. The few existing studies of the policing-immigration nexus discussed in the article have broken new ground, but the topic has attracted much less academic research than what is needed. We do know that aggressive police involvement in immigration enforcement, where it exists, casts a rather broad net – applied fairly indiscriminately to Latino immigrants and non-immigrants alike simply on the basis of physical appearance. Research on the racial profiling of African Americans as well as ethnic minorities in Europe has documented the serious damage that such biased policing can

have on these populations – alienating them from the authorities and reducing their willingness to contact the police when needed (Weitzer 2000a; Webster 2004; Miller 2007; Goris, Jobard, and Lévy 2009; Bradford 2011; Röder and Mühlau 2012). This same dynamic is apparent with regard to Hispanic Americans, with the twist that such profiling has become increasingly prevalent in recent years. Further research will help clarify the ways in which the policing of Hispanic citizens and immigrants are both similar to and distinct from that experienced by other racial and ethnic groups.

Notes

1. I use the term ‘Hispanic’ interchangeably with ‘Latino,’ and ‘black’ interchangeably with ‘African American’.
2. A racial hierarchy also exists in Britain, with South Asians (i.e. Pakistanis, Indians, Bangladeshis) positioned in between whites and blacks in their attitudes and reported experiences with the police. However, the hierarchy appears to be more fluid in Britain than in the US, with British Asians sometimes reporting experiences quite similar to or even worse than those of blacks (Bradford 2011). Recurrent complaints in inner-city South Asian communities concern both inadequate police services and abusive treatment by officers (Webster 2004).
3. A study of immigration laws at the state level found no support for the threat hypothesis. In fact, US states with larger Hispanic and foreign-born populations as well as more liberal citizen and government attitudes were associated with more pro-immigrant laws (services, protections), whereas states characterized by conservative citizen ideology had more restrictive immigration laws (Chavez and Provine 2009).
4. Research documenting the impact of these factors is voluminous (e.g. Smith, Graham, and Adams 1991; Brown and Benedict 2002; NRC 2004; Weitzer and Tuch 2006), but little of it is specifically focused on Latino Americans.
5. A former gang member who grew up in the area of Oakland where he conducted his research and who strongly identified with his subjects, Rios (2011, 9, 169) acknowledges that his study may lack objectivity.
6. The policy was widely publicized and prompted street demonstrations and a boycott of local businesses.

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