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Proposal for a Presentation

Civilian Confidence in Law Enforcement is Driven More by Perceptions of Procedural Justice and Less by Racial Representativeness on Police Forces

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The author’s online 2019 survey of African-Americans across the country has revealed that – at the macro scale – African-American confidence in law enforcement is driven by civilian perceptions of procedural justice rendered by local police officers almost without regard to whether the racial makeup on the local police force matches the racial makeup of the served communities.

Using Principal Axis Factoring, Logistic Regression, and a number of correlation statistics, the degree of racial representativeness on the force never became a significant independent variable in any model that included measures of police effectiveness and procedural justice. That is, African-Americans were much more interested in a procedurally fair and effective local police force than whether the sworn officers on the local force matched their community’s racial makeup.

Of course, these findings cut against the grain of several subjective schools of thought that simply having more African-American officers will commensurately lead to improved African-American confidence in the police. It is critically important that we challenge that common but mistaken belief and redirect our recruitment and hiring approaches to favor recruits with high predispositions to procedural justice and due process and not merely to focus on new recruits’ membership in a particular racial group.

This study was conducted at the macro scale. That is, this study compares civilians in American cities of all sizes, all geographic areas, and with high, moderate, and low levels of racial representativeness, and found that cities with greater degrees of African-American representativeness exhibited no more African-American civilian confidence in law enforcement than where African-Americans were dramatically underrepresented among sworn officers on the local police force. Of course, that macro focus admittedly may mask the potential micro reality that a single force, by increasing its racial representativeness over time, may experience improved minority civilian confidence.

This presentation is timely now expressing as it does a counterpoint to accepted but unsupported and largely illusory beliefs that city police forces with greater African-American representativeness among sworn officers necessarily enjoy greater confidence among the African-American civilians served.

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