

Blues in Colors: Police Violence, Racial Representation, and White Attitude Change

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Abstract

What drives legislators to emphasize local issues in a nationalized setting? Although the representation literature has highlighted incentives that may lead legislators to present themselves as district- or nationally-oriented towards constituents, research remains limited on which legislators choose to emphasize local issues within the halls of Congress. We leverage congressional speech to provide evidence on how electoral competitiveness, district demographics, and legislator characteristics influence a member's representational style during the committee stage, a critical step in policy-making. Using all available hearing transcripts from 1999–2018, we measure the degree of local orientation each member exhibits and examine what types of legislators are more likely to choose a local focus. We also investigate what leads legislators to emphasize their constituents as a justification for arguments. Results reveal heterogeneous effects by party: among Republicans, electoral factors play a role, while among Democrats, women legislators are significantly more likely to demonstrate a local orientation.

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1 Introduction

Political behavior has been structured along group identities, and a racial division emerges regarding attitudes toward law enforcement and actions on police brutality. Remarkable racial divides emerges in the aftermath of George Floyd’s murder in 2020 where white and African Americans diverge upon how to think about and what to do with the role of police. Across the political and ideological spectrum, whites are more likely than their black counterparts to view police favorably and thereby less willing to cut police funding in services of other community support exams, let alone to “defund the police”. Political and behavior are unevenly distributed along racial, religion, and geographic lines in the real world. In service of trying to disentangle the causes underlying such divides, a growing spotlight of research attention has recently turned to the lasting influence of historical legacies¹. Past institutions that profoundly structured social connections and economic organization at their time, like American slavery, slave trade in Africa, and forced labor system in colonies, were found to be significantly correlated with economic performance and political orientations of their localities even centuries later. Such promising potential of historical institutions in explaining out contemporary political divides encouraged a swelling amount of social science studies that specifically looks to history for descriptive insights. On the other hand, the proven power of historical legacies in producing long-term, continuous influence also spurs researchers to be historically attentive so that some coincidentally neat contexts in history can be exploited to provide new data and fresh estimations for old, big questions (Dell 2010).

1.1 Cultural Persistence

¹ In addition to quota sampling on the front-end, I built and applied a survey weight using the Current Population Survey to ensure representativeness on the back-end. This weight was constructed using population estimates on the dimensions of gender, age, education, income, geographic region, marital status, and race. Because my analysis focuses on only Black, White, and Latino respondents, and because of some missing cases on weight dimensions, my final analytical N is 1,482.

Table 1: Racial Imagery of Local Police Moderates Attitudinal Reaction to Police Violence.

	Police Felt as Safe	Increase Police	Decrease Police
White Imagery of Police	0.009 (0.027)	-0.009 (0.029)	-0.014 (0.029)
Any Police Violence in 2020	-0.070*** (0.012)	-0.057*** (0.013)	0.074*** (0.013)
Police Violence × White Imagery	0.130** (0.041)	0.078+ (0.045)	-0.142** (0.045)
Num.Obs.	26016	26039	26036
R2	0.004	0.002	0.003

This is the note of your regression table.

+ p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

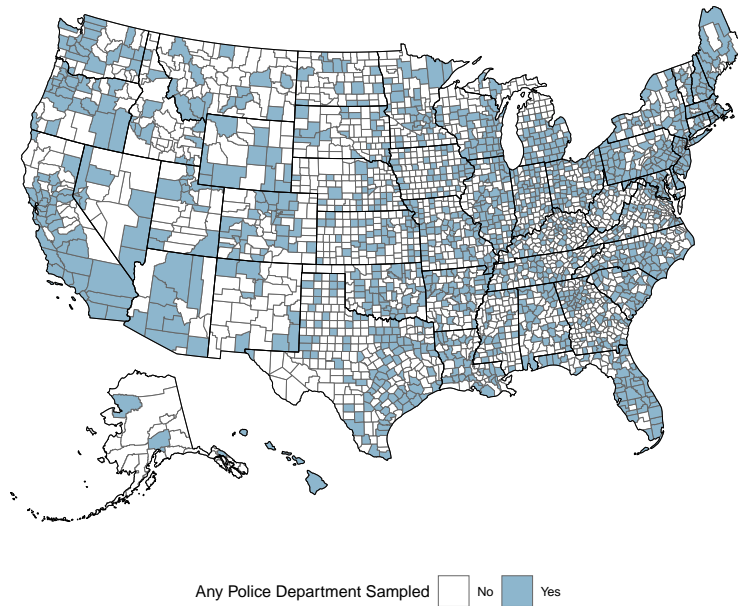
Table 2: White Imagery of Local Police Moderates Attitudinal Reaction to Police Violence, Contingent on Racial Group Impacted.

	Police Felt as Safe	Increase Police	Decrease Police
White Imagery of Police	0.007 (0.027)	-0.013 (0.029)	-0.010 (0.029)
PV Whites	-0.065*** (0.015)	-0.039* (0.016)	0.056*** (0.016)
PV POC	-0.076*** (0.015)	-0.077*** (0.016)	0.093*** (0.016)
White Imagery × PV Whites	0.098+ (0.053)	-0.003 (0.057)	-0.075 (0.057)
White Imagery × PV POC	0.164** (0.053)	0.162** (0.058)	-0.210*** (0.058)
Num.Obs.	26016	26039	26036
R2	0.004	0.002	0.003

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+ p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Figure 1: Examples for Local Landscapes of Political Alignment



Note: Respectively based on the exclusion and inclusion of Germany-occupied area in former Prussian territories, sub-graph A and B illustrate the discontinuities of local PiS support around the historical Prussia-Poland border. Solid and dashed lines plot a fitted relationship between to-border distance and PiS support around the border.

References

- Dell, Melissa (2010). The Persistent Effects of Peru's Mining *Mita*. *Econometrica* 78(6), 1863–1903.
- Haffert, Lukas (2022, May). The Long-Term Effects of Oppression: Prussia, Political Catholicism, and the *Alternative für Deutschland*. *American Political Science Review* 116(2), 595–614.