

# Blues in Colors: Racialized Police and Racial Divide on Policing

Chaoyue Wang\*

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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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\*Chaoyue Wang ([chyrwang@gmail.com](mailto:chyrwang@gmail.com), 86-177-2387-5369) is a senior student of political science and economics at Yuanpei College of Peking University, Beijing, China 100871.

# 1 Introduction

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 legacies<sup>1</sup>. 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).

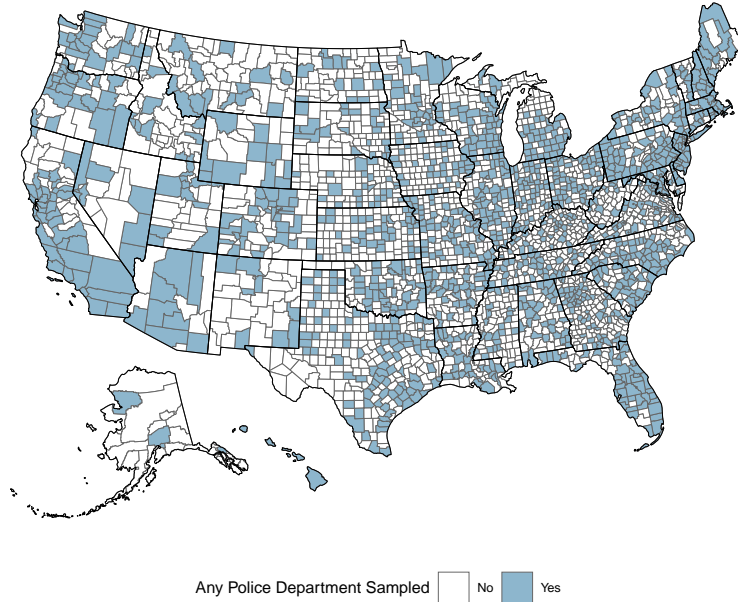
## 1.1 Cultural Persistence

But how exactly do past experiences and events come to impact political beliefs and actions of the people who are separated from them over such a long time (Haffert 2022). Despite this productive emergence of historical persistence literature in recent years, specific mechanisms through which

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

**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.

historical legacies are communicated over time remains empirically unsettled. On the one hand, past institutions could be subtly preserved through the path dependence of other social, political, and economic infrastructures that were closely connected to these institutions in history. Even when the institutions of interest themselves vanished as time went by, the greater network of socioeconomic structures into which it was embedded can bring their presence well into today. On the other hand, historical persistence may also take root in profound experiences that were culturally or psychologically accumulated by people at the presence of past institutions. These cultural and psychological exposures are so intensive and transforming that they were eventually transmitted across generations through family or community socialization. For instance, in U.S. counties that witnessed frequent occurrences of anti-Black lynchings, African American voter still has a substantial lower turnout than national average, largely due to inter-generational inheritance of the fear of being lynched for daring to vote.

	Police Felt as Safe	Increase Police	Decrease Police
White Imagery of Police	-0.168*** (0.049)	0.003 (0.048)	0.018 (0.048)
Num.Obs.	39551	39597	39589
R2	0.076	0.002	0.007

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**Table 1: Moderation Effect of Racial Imagery Contingent on Police Violence Victims**

	Police Felt as Safe	Increase Police	Decrease Police
White Imagery of Police	-0.168*** (0.049)	0.003 (0.048)	0.018 (0.048)
Num.Obs.	39551	39597	39589
R2	0.076	0.002	0.007

This is the note of your regression table.

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

These two theoretically distinct mechanism, however, are hard to differentiate in an observational setting. As in most places where intensive migrations were rare in history, contemporary residents who are impressionable to intergenerational transmission of cultural experiences are also intensely influenced by present socioeconomic institutions that reflect path dependence of historical legacies, thus rendering the two difficult to tell apart especially when past and present culture are tricky to measure. Though adding socioeconomic covariates may help to clarify the problem by shutting down path-dependence channels based on the measurable, it is still plausible that cultural experiences from past institutions have been mingling with path-dependent socioeconomic infrastructure to produce a persistence impact.

Ideally speaking, a quasi-experimental setting is needed to isolate cultural persistence from institutional path dependence of historical legacies, where socioeconomic systems of a locality are kept as the same while its indigenous residents were replaced with migrants that have no generational connections with its cultural experiences in history. Then later, political behavior of this locality can be compared with another sharing similar history. Since the "replaced" locality is largely cut off from across-generation transmission of cultural and psychological experiences

while its social and economic systems were well preserved, the difference between the two could be interpreted as the role of cultural persistence in preserving historical legacies. As will be explained in the following, Poland's history of Prussian rule before WWI and territory transfer after WWII , where millions of eastern Poles fled their homes to newly gained western territories that were previously ruled by Prussia, provides an exceptionally excellent situation that is much similar to the aforementioned ideal framework.

## 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.