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Policing on demand: An observational study of mobilization and citizen encounters across communities

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Abstract
Police scholars generally accept that officers behave differently across communities and that those differences are influenced by specific community-level measures. This consensus is based on surprisingly scant empirical support, however. Studies designed to identify and explain community variation in police behavior have thus far largely ignored the issue of mobilization, or the various ways in which communities demand police services. This study provides information on how communities influence police using data collected through the systematic social observation of police officers. The study includes measures designed to capture the specific manner in which the police were mobilized, including instances where the police were dispatched through calls-for-service as well as non-dispatched activities. Findings demonstrate that communities vary in regard to both the types of problems handled by the police and the manner in which the police are mobilized. These differences are correlated with specific community-level measures.

Keywords
Community variation, citizen mobilization, police behavior

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Introduction

Recent estimates show that over 31 million Americans mobilize or solicit activity from the police on at least one occasion every year (Durose and Langston, 2013). The requests reflect a seemingly endless variety of community concerns, including reports of criminal and/or suspicious activity, traffic accidents, medical crises, interpersonal disputes and a wide range of non-emergencies. These issues delineate the manner in which communities across the globe demand police services through citizens. Goldstein (1977) in his iconic exposition demonstrates the degree to which police work depends upon citizen demands with his observation that the police are primarily an apparatus of government, wherein 'each community has the opportunity to make its own judgments as to what its police force should do'. This view recognizes the contextual influence of communities on the police and the more direct role of citizens in shaping the content of street-level policing through various modes of mobilization.

Most observers of the police accept that officers behave differently across communities, and scholars have put forth theories on the linkage between communities and the activities of the police who patrol them (Banton, 1964; Sherman, 1980, Wilson, 1968). The ideas suggest that differences in police activities should be apparent when one community is

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compared with another. This scholarly consensus is based upon surprisingly scant empirical support, however. Some research shows that disadvantaged areas receive more 'punitive or enforcement-oriented policing', but these studies focus on the operation of situational discretion rather than the content of police activities or workload (Klinger, 1997; Frydl and Skogan, 2004; Terrill and Reisig, 2003). Studies designed to examine differences in policing across jurisdictions have generally followed the line of inquiry initiated by Wilson (1968), whereby police 'styles' in terms of arrest rates for selected crimes are correlated with measures of local political culture and a limited number of community variables (Hassell et al., 2003; Langworthy, 1985; Zhao et al., 2006). Other studies that utilize large-scale observational methods to more inclusively measure officer workload employ purely descriptive schemes to categorize communities (Liederbach, 2005) or a variant of Wilson's conceptualization of police style to examine community influence (Liederbach and Travis, 2008). These lines of research have failed to provide clear evidence on how community-level variables influence police activities across jurisdictions.

Certain methodological issues have thus far limited understanding in regard to how communities influence the police. One issue concerns the measurement of street-level activities or workload. Studies have most often used official records including dispatch logs and data on arrests as indicators of police activities. These data do not include information on many citizens who interact with the police, including criminal suspects and disputants who are not arrested and/or cited, witnesses, victims and service recipients. The second issue involves the measurement of variation in policing across communities. Observational research has sometimes been used to more inclusively measure police activities, but most of these studies cannot measure community variation simply because they are single-site studies or occur within a small number of jurisdictions.

The third problem – and perhaps the most substantive – involves the issue of mobilization, or the various ways in which communities demand police services. Mobilization is an important concept within the context of studies in this line of research because: (1) communities are likely to vary in terms of how they mobilize the police, and (2) police workload is likely to depend in part on the manner of mobilization. Thus, mobilization is a key construct in understanding the relationship between communities and police activities. Studies derived from agency records including dispatch logs include only those police–citizen interactions that stem from official calls-for-service. These designs measure mobilizations that are commonly referred to within the police scholarship as 'reactive', however, they cannot account for more 'proactive' types of mobilization including occasions on which officers act on their own, or on the basis of requests from supervisors or other officers; or interactions with citizens on the scene; or direct telephone contacts from citizens.

The purpose of our research is to provide information on how communities influence the police using data collected through the systematic social observation (SSO) of police officers. Specifically, we examine whether and how police behavior varies across communities, and how community-level factors and type of mobilization are associated with these differences. The direct observations of the police encompassed 4183 hours, or the equivalent of 522 eight-hour shifts. The methodology provides a detailed breakdown of police activities including the specific types of problems they address. The data include observations conducted within 17 different agencies so that comparisons of their activities can be made across jurisdictions that vary in terms of 13 measures of community structure. The study includes measures designed to capture the specific manner in which the police were mobilized, including instances where the police were dispatched through a call-for-service as well as non-dispatched activities. The methodology allows for an examination of how communities vary in terms of mobilization and to what extent mobilization influences variations in police activity or workload. We are aware of no existing observational studies of the police that specifically examine the issue of mobilization. The next section presents an overview of the relevant research in two parts, including scholarship on: (1) police workload, and (2) the relationship between communities and police behavior.

Research on police workload

Methodologies used to study police workload have evolved over time. Studies that involve the direct observation of the police – in particular those utilizing SSO – are generally regarded as the most appropriate for determining workload. Observational studies focused on workload commonly divide shift time into 'activities' performed in the absence of citizens and 'encounters' that involve direct interactions with citizens. Recent large-scale observations have found that activities performed by the police in the absence of citizens are fairly consistent across study sites; these 'core' activities are motorized patrol, report writing and other administrative tasks, time spent traveling to and from calls for service, and non-duty personal tasks (Frank et al., 2001; Mastrofski et al., 1998; Whitaker, 1982). This line of research also confirms the existence of large blocks of unassigned patrol time that provides officers discretion on what activities to perform while on patrol (Cordner, 1979; Greene and Klockars, 1991).

There appears to be no significant variation in police time spent alone on shift; however, research demonstrates

some significant variation in the degree to which officers spend time in direct contact with citizens, as well as the types of problems officers confront within the context of their street-level interactions with citizens. Cordner (1979), for example, reports that time spent in direct contact with citizens ranged from 18% to 40% of total shift time across sampled communities. Likewise, Liederbach and Frank (2003) find a large degree of variability in officer time spent in direct contact with citizens, which ranged from 11% to 21% of total shift time. Police agencies have also been found to vary considerably in regard to the types of problems that the police handle while they encounter citizens (Liederbach, 2005; Liederbach and Frank, 2003; B Smith et al., 2001). In sum, the line of research on workload indicates that the investigation of variability in police behavior across communities needs to focus on the portion of shift time spent in direct contact with citizens commonly referred to as encounters.

Research on the relationship between communities and police

A number of studies designed to examine the relationship between communities and police focus on variation in the situational exercise of discretion. The bulk of what is known about how community characteristics influence police–citizen interactions is based on the study of coercive behaviors (Sun et al., 2008; Warner, 1997). These studies find that police behavior differs according to context, with an increased likelihood of citations, arrests and other coercive actions within neighborhoods that are socially disadvantaged (DA Smith, 1986; DA Smith and Klein, 1984; Sun et al., 2008; Terrill and Reisig, 2003).

The focus on coercive behavior provides one avenue toward understanding the relationship between communities and the police, but scholars have long recognized that the overwhelming majority of these encounters do not relate to crime or specifically involve coercive behaviors. Studies that involve the direct observation of police through SSO describe the non-coercive nature of encounters with citizens who are victims, witnesses and/or service recipients rather than criminal suspects (Liederbach, 2007; Liederbach and Frank, 2003). Thus, the potential range of variation in police behavior across communities cannot be explained based solely on the examination of coercion.

The primary focus of research on community variation in police behavior has been based on Wilson's (1968) iconic study. Wilson (1968) observed that police behavior, or what he defined as police 'operational styles', appeared to be related to the characteristics of the local community including the form of local government. He argued that police activities were constrained by what he called the 'local political culture' (Wilson, 1968). Wilson found support for the notion that police style was a function of local political culture using city and arrest statistics from 1960 for 146 cities. Early tests of Wilson found some support for the theory (Crank, 1990; Langworthy, 1985); however, there a string of studies have failed to identify significant relationships between local political culture and styles of policing (Crank, 1990; Hassell et al., 2003; Langworthy, 1985; Liederbach and Travis, 2008; Zhao and Hassell 2005; Zhao et al., 2006). Some scholarship suggests that variations in police behavior may be attributable to community demographics rather than local political culture (Liederbach and Travis, 2008; Zhao and Hassell, 2005; Zhao et al., 2006).

The issue of mobilization represents another, albeit largely untapped, means to determine how communities influence police behavior. Mobilization involves an examination of variations in how communities demand police services. Research in regard to mobilization has thus far been negligible. There seems to have been a concerted effort during the 1970s among some political scientists to understand how communities exert demands on the various facets of local government, or 'who gets what' in terms of municipal services including those derived through the local police (Lineberry, 1976, 1977; Mladenka, 1977). This line of research was eventually abandoned, however. The role of citizen demands has more recently been discussed in regard to how citizens mobilize the police through neighborhood associations (Mastrofski and Willis, 2010), and also in terms of the relationship between criminal justice policies and wide-scale civic participation (Lehrman and Weaver, 2014). Johnson and Rhodes (2009) utilized published media accounts to examine citizen demand across ecological units and identified distinctions based on community size. Specifically, levels of law enforcement-related calls were similar across cities and small towns; however, urban areas received more calls for order maintenance and serious crime.

Taken together, the research on workload and the influence of communities presents a muddled view. Policing clearly varies across communities. Studies designed to identify precisely how communities may influence variation provide some evidence on how place characteristics seem to impact levels of coerciveness and reports of crime, but many studies fail to identify much, if anything, on the influence of community factors. Our goal is to build on this line of inquiry. This study uses SSO to more comprehensively measure how police–citizen interactions vary across communities. We also include measures on mobilization – a variable that has been largely ignored but has potential to indicate more clearly the contextual influence of communities on police.

Methods

Data for the study were collected as part of a larger project funded by the National Institute of Justice (Grant# 98-IJ-CX-0063). The project examined workload in police agencies in the Cincinnati Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area (SMSA). Seventeen communities were included in the study (Table 1). Communities ranged in population from 899 to 19,463 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Median home values ranged from $66,200 to $298,600, and the median family income ranged from $25,625 to $104,250. The racial composition is overwhelmingly Caucasian (89.9%). Police departments employed a total of 323 sworn officers and served a total population of 115,791 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). The number of sworn officers per agency ranged from 2 to 56 (average 19).

The methodology used in the field was systematic social observation (SSO) (Mastrofski et al., 1998). The main procedures used in SSO include a preliminary selection of the activities to be observed, investigation of these activities through direct observation, and the development and utilization of instruments to collect and record observations systematically (Reiss, 1971). Observed officers were accompanied by trained observers who recorded everything the officer did on their shift, including the activities officers performed and information regarding the nature of their interactions with citizens. Specific coding instruments included: (1) the encounter/activity instrument, and (2) the citizen instrument. The encounter/activity instrument was used to record both 'activities' that did not include citizens (e.g. report writing, motor patrol) and 'encounters', or time spent in direct interaction with citizens. The citizen instrument provided information on the type of problem that was the basis of the police–citizen encounter. Data were collected over a 14-month period. The research team randomly selected shifts to be observed within the 17 agencies in order to complete 2.5 observations per month per department over the course of the 14-month project.[1] A total of 505 observations were conducted which equals 4183 hours of observation or the equivalent of 522 eight-hour shifts.

Observational data are especially appropriate for studies designed to investigate the influence of mobilization, because observers recorded the information source that led directly to every activity or police–citizen encounter. There are two ways in which the police are typically mobilized. Reactive mobilization occurs when the police are requested through dispatch. These calls represent concerns that citizens deem worthy of police intervention. Alternatively, proactive mobilizations represent those situations in which the police determine intervention is warranted. Proactive mobilizations can be captured through SSO, but they cannot be analyzed through designs based solely on dispatch logs.

Dependent variables

Data are presented as percentages for the following dependent variables: (1) types of mobilization specifically dispatched versus non-dispatched problems, (2) types of problems encountered by the police, and (3) types of problems by method of mobilization. These data provide an opportunity to examine the type of mobilization that led officers to the encounter. Dispatched problems represent those problems the public deems worthy of police attention. They involve the reactive mobilization of police. By contrast, non-dispatched problems include occasions on which officers acted on their own without an apparent request from others, or requests from supervisors or other officers; or interaction with citizens already on the scene. These calls involve the proactive mobilization of police.

Police–citizen encounters were coded using one of 260 problem codes.[2] These codes were collapsed into eight categories in order to more easily identify what types of problems were encountered, including problems with people (e.g. domestic arguments, drug violations, personal crimes), problems with property (e.g. stolen property, burglary, thefts), traffic-related problems, service problems (e.g. general service requests, transport), information problems (e.g. directions, crime tips), legal procedures (e.g. warrants, arrest processing) and informal encounters (e.g. casual conversations).

Independent variables

Community-level data were gathered from the 2000 U.S. Census and include: population, median family income, percent non-white, area in square miles, owner-occupied housing units, median age of residents, residential mobility, poverty and employment–residence (E–R) ratio. Voting and election data were obtained from the Boards of Elections in Hamilton and Clermont Counties (OH). Data on assessed valuation, land use and roads were obtained from the Auditor's and Engineer's office in each respective county. Form of government data were provided by The Municipal Year Book (International City/County Management Association, 2000). Specific independent variables in regard to community- and organizational-level factors were identified on the basis of prior research on communities and the relationship between community-level variables and police behavior.

Thomas and Melkers (1999), for example, found that age and home ownership were significant predictors of citizen-initiated police contacts. Other studies, however, have found that older age cohorts were less likely to initiate police contacts (Durose and Langston, 2013; Skogan, 2005). In the social disorganization tradition, measures of poverty, mobility and heterogeneity were included.

Table 1. Community characteristics.

Jurisdiction	Population	Police per 1000	Median age	Population Δ 1970–2000 (%)	Population stability (%)	Median family income ($)	(%) Below poverty	(%)Non-white	(%) Owner occupied	(%) Voter turnout	Per capita valuation ($)	E–R ratio	Land use single family	Road lane miles	Political culture
Amberley	3,425	4.38	48.2	–39	75.5	92,684	3.5	12.6	98.0	82.8	42,576	0.23	.57	30	Prof.
Amelia	2,752	1.45	29.1	236	30.8	51,699	5.0	3.2	54.4	57.6	5,943	0.27	.39	7	Mixed
Arlington Hts.	899	14.46	34.6	–39	54.1	46,111	10.2	8.0	56.5	54.2	13,572	1.75	.30	4	Mixed
Blue Ash	12,513	2.72	39.4	50	59.3	69,494	3.8	12.9	74.3	68.0	53,139	4.99	.28	73	Prof.
Cheviot	9,015	2.55	35.5	–19	60.6	48,947	5.2	3.1	61.6	68.0	10,232	0.52	.60	22	Trad.
Deer Park	5,982	1.84	38.0	–19	62.9	45,585	3.7	3.5	71.9	66.8	12,476	0.40	.65	17	Trad.
Fairfax	1,938	6.19	36.3	–28	62.3	47,778	2.6	3.5	80.8	64.6	29,264	3.58	.22	13	Mixed
Felicity	922	2.17	31.1	16	50.4	25,625	29.2	2.3	44.8	44.0	4,141	0.42	.43	6	Mixed
Forest Park	19,463	2.06	33.9	29	55.4	55,618	5.1	63.3	62.5	62.5	14,700	0.95	.31	74	Prof.
Harrison	7,487	2.81	32.4	70	61.0	54,028	4.3	1.8	72.0	64.1	14,521	1.51	.21	43	Trad.
Lockland	3,707	4.86	35.8	–30	55.6	33,984	14.2	29.6	47.9	45.4	12,859	0.84	.20	19	Mixed
Loveland	11,677	1.97	35.8	63	54.9	63,535	5.7	4.3	74.6	64.8	15,507	0.74	.49	39	Prof.
Milford	6,284	2.23	39.1	52	44.4	51,919	4.1	4.9	49.8	57.7	13,459	1.21	.25	35	Prof.
Reading	11,292	1.59	37.6	–21	75.5	51,858	4.7	6.3	59.2	64.2	16,277	1.00	.44	38	Trad.
Sharonville	13,804	4.06	39.1	26	57.3	59,136	2.5	11.3	63.6	67.0	37,262	3.40	.16	87	Trad.
Terrace Park	2,273	6.16	38.7	0	64.2	104,250	1.7	1.1	95.0	78.3	26,409	0.29	.51	15	Mixed
Williamsburg	2,358	2.12	33.4	15	48.5	46,528	8.0	1.3	60.0	54.6	7,890	3.40	.21	13	Mixed
Average	6,811	3.74	36.4	21	57.2	55,811	6.7	10.2	66.3	62.6	19,425	1.50	.37	31	

Population stability is measured as the percent of residents who lived at the same residence during the previous five years. Police agency size has been significantly correlated with levels of patrol deployment (Langworthy and Hindelang, 1983) as well as arrest rates and patterns of coerciveness (Brown, 1981; Mastrofski, 1981). The study also incorporates measures of local political culture in the tradition of Wilson (1968) including communities with 'traditional', 'professional' and 'mixed' forms of local government.

Community environment variables indicate the physical features of places that promote or inhibit opportunities for police–citizen encounters. These types of variables also indicate social aspects that influence the likelihood of police–citizen encounters. Road networks, for example, may affect encounters in two ways. The total number of lane miles influences in part the frequency of traffic stops. Traffic volume contributes to the number of motor vehicle accidents. The likelihood of police–citizen interaction is also influenced by the classification of land use and the production of uneven distributions of people and activities across geographic spaces (BW Smith et al., 2005). Measures including population and the E–R ratio[3] demonstrate how fluctuations in population over geographic spaces and times influence the likelihood of police–citizen interactions. Collective efficacy (Sampson et al., 1997) represents a mediating factor between community structural characteristics and crime and delinquency rates. The variable is relevant to the current analysis because communities that exhibit higher rates of collective efficacy may be less likely to mobilize formal social control including police. Collective efficacy in the current study is measured as the percentage of registered voters (Weisburd et al., 2012). The current study also includes a measure of resource capacity/tax base since police agencies are fiscally dependent upon the larger government structure (Davenport 1999; Wells et al., 2003). In the case that resources are constrained, there may be less police funding, fewer officers, and a reduced number of police–citizen interactions. Resource capacity/tax base is measured in the current study as the total per capita assessed valuation (dollar) of real and personal property by political jurisdiction.

Findings

This section presents findings in regard to our research questions including determining whether and how police behavior varies across the sampled communities, and how community-level factors and the types of police mobilization are associated with these differences. There were a total of 2753 occasions on which the police were mobilized to address a problem involving a citizen. Findings in regard to these police–citizen encounters are presented in four relevant parts, including: (1) types of police mobilization, (2) types of problems encountered by police, (3) types of problems by method of mobilization, and (4) correlates of dispatched problems encountered by police.

Table 2. Dispatched and non-dispatched problems.[a]

Jurisdiction	(%) Dispatched	(%) Non-dispatched
Amberley	37.63	62.37
Amelia	29.27	70.73
Arlington	20.16	79.84
Blue Ash	37.50	62.50
Cheviot	37.74	62.26
Deer Park	42.17	57.83
Fairfax	24.22	75.78
Felicity	7.05	92.95
Forest Park	55.49	44.51
Harrison	42.57	57.43
Lockland	41.03	58.97
Loveland	34.50	65.50
Milford	40.76	59.24
Reading	35.75	64.25
Sharonville	52.43	47.57
Terrace Park	20.67	79.33
Williamsburg	16.08	83.92
Average	33.83	66.17

[a]Percentage of all dispatched problems and percent of all non-dispatched problems respectively for each agency.

Types of police mobilization

Table 2 presents the problems encountered by the police in terms of whether the police were reactively mobilized through dispatch or proactively mobilized through non-dispatched means. Two-thirds of all the encounters across the 17 communities involved mobilizations that were non-dispatched or proactive, and non-dispatched mobilizations were more prevalent than dispatch mobilizations within every community. Clearly, the police are most commonly mobilized through means other than dispatched assignments, including occasions on which officers act on their own, or on the basis of requests from supervisors or other officers. There was, however, wide variation in the ways in which communities mobilized the police across the 17 communities. For example, the percentage of problems dispatched ranged from a low 7.05% in Felicity to a high of 55.49% in Forest Park. Police mobilization via dispatch was more prevalent among the sampled communities that had larger populations, larger percentages of non-white residents, more lane miles and lower levels of poverty.

Types of problems encountered by police

Table 3 identifies the categories of problems encountered by the police regardless of the method of mobilization. This

Table 3. Types of problems encountered by police.[a]

Jurisdiction	Person	Property	Traffic	Service	Info	Legal	Informal	Other
Amberley	8.60	16.13	37.63	5.38	5.38	0.00	19.35	7.53
Amelia	16.26	11.38	39.84	0.81	4.07	3.25	15.45	8.94
Arlington	8.87	5.65	33.87	4.84	7.26	0.81	31.45	7.26
Blue Ash	10.71	11.31	54.17	1.79	10.12	2.98	4.76	4.17
Cheviot	23.27	11.95	31.45	5.66	5.66	5.66	10.06	6.29
Deer Park	20.48	12.05	33.73	4.82	7.83	6.02	8.43	6.63
Fairfax	13.04	13.04	50.31	3.11	5.59	4.97	6.83	3.11
Felicity	22.44	8.33	11.54	7.69	14.74	5.77	11.54	17.95
Forest Park	25.82	18.68	30.77	3.30	6.04	5.49	4.40	5.49
Harrison	18.81	4.95	46.53	5.94	2.48	5.94	5.94	9.41
Lockland	29.49	9.62	27.56	3.21	8.33	8.33	8.97	4.49
Loveland	22.50	10.00	36.00	9.50	4.00	7.50	5.50	5.00
Milford	25.48	13.38	33.12	5.10	3.82	1.91	11.46	5.73
Reading	29.47	12.08	27.05	6.76	2.90	5.31	12.08	4.35
Sharonville	17.48	13.11	50.97	2.43	2.91	5.34	4.85	2.91
Terrace Park	11.33	5.33	46.00	8.00	7.33	2.00	10.00	10.00
Williamsburg	25.87	13.29	28.67	4.90	10.49	4.20	4.90	7.69
Average	19.41	11.19	36.42	4.89	6.41	4.44	10.35	6.88

[a]Percentage of total police-citizen encounters by problem type.

table more specifically provides data on the nature and character of police–citizen interactions across the sampled communities in terms of the eight collapsed problem categories. The table indicates a wide degree of variation in terms of the types of problems encountered by police across the sampled communities. Traffic problems were the most prevalent problem category in 14 communities. The percentage of traffic problems in these communities ranged from a high of 54.17% in Blue Ash and a low of 28.67% in Williamsburg. Problems with people were the most prevalent type of problem in the three remaining communities. Problems with people as a percentage of all problems also varied widely, and ranged from 29.47% in Reading to 8.87% in Arlington.

The encounters were examined further in terms of the 260 original (non-collapsed) problem codes.[4] The most prevalent problems involving people were domestic arguments (2.4%) and requests for medical assistance (1.9%). Response to alarms (not fire) was the most common property problem (1.5%). Traffic problems included excess speed (10.1%), broken down vehicles (5.4%) and moving violations (4.9%). The most frequent legal procedure was serving warrants (1.7%). Informal conversations comprised the second largest problem category (9.6%). Overwhelmingly, the most frequent encounters with citizens were related to traffic and informal conversations with citizens.

Types of problems by method of mobilization

Table 4 distinguishes the problem categories by method of mobilization showing the difference between problem categories initiated by citizens versus officers. Across all categories, citizens most frequently sought police assistance for problems with people (10 communities), followed by traffic (five communities) and problems with property (two communities). Police initiated contact most frequently in matters of traffic (in 15 of the 17 communities). Informal and people problems were found most frequently in the remaining two communities. Clearly, there is variation in police behavior as measured by citizen encounters across these communities. It appears that the types of problems addressed depend on who initiated the encounter. Citizens call the police primarily to help deal with people, traffic and property, whereas the police initiate encounters with citizens through traffic encounters and informal conversations.

Correlates of dispatched problems encountered by the police

Encounters that were the result of a dispatched assignment were analyzed further because these assignments serve as a primary conduit of community and citizen demands on police. Table 5 examines the relationships between dispatched encounters and community characteristics across the problem categories. There were fewer problems with people ($r = -.642$; $p < .01$) in communities with more police per capita home ownership and resource capacity were also negatively correlated with problems with people, $r = -.493$ ($p < .05$) and $r = -.631$ ($p < .01$), respectively. Problems in the property category were positively correlated with median age ($r = .486$; $p < .05$). Likewise, as the

Table 4. Dispatched and non-dispatched problems encountered by police.[a]

	People		Property		Traffic		Service		Information		Legal		Informal		Other	
Jurisdiction	Dispatched	Non-dispatched	Dispatched	Non- dispatched	Dispatched	Non-dispatched	Dispatched	Non-dispatched	Dispatched	Non-dispatched	Dispatched	Non-dispatched	Dispatched	Non-dispatched	Dispatched	Non-dispatched
Amberley	20.00	1.72	40.00	1.72	28.57	43.10	5.71	5.17	5.71	5.17	0.00	0.00	0.00	31.03	0.00	12.07
Amelia	44.44	4.60	22.22	6.90	27.78	44.83	2.78	0.00	0.00	5.75	0.00	4.60	0.00	21.84	2.78	11.49
Arlington	12.00	8.08	24.00	1.01	36.00	33.33	8.00	4.04	4.00	8.08	4.00	0.00	0.00	39.39	12.00	6.06
Blue Ash	20.63	4.76	23.81	3.81	50.79	56.19	0.00	2.86	3.17	14.29	0.00	4.76	0.00	7.62	1.59	5.71
Cheviot	38.33	14.14	20.00	7.07	26.67	34.34	10.00	3.03	1.67	8.08	3.33	7.07	0.00	16.16	0.00	10.10
Deer Park	32.86	11.46	18.57	7.29	25.71	39.58	11.43	0.00	1.43	12.50	2.86	8.33	0.00	14.58	7.14	6.25
Fairfax	23.08	9.84	33.33	6.56	30.77	56.56	5.13	2.46	2.56	6.56	5.13	4.92	0.00	9.01	0.00	4.10
Felicity	45.45	20.69	18.18	7.59	9.09	11.72	18.18	6.90	0.00	15.86	0.00	6.21	0.00	12.41	9.09	18.62
Forest Park	31.68	18.52	27.72	7.41	24.75	38.27	3.96	2.47	1.98	11.11	5.94	4.94	0.00	9.87	3.96	7.41
Harrison	29.07	11.21	6.98	3.45	48.84	44.83	8.14	4.31	1.16	3.45	2.33	8.62	0.00	10.35	3.49	13.79
Lockland	46.88	17.39	17.19	4.35	20.31	32.61	1.56	4.35	6.25	9.78	7.81	8.70	0.00	15.22	0.00	7.61
Loveland	49.28	8.40	13.04	8.40	20.29	44.27	5.80	11.45	1.45	5.34	4.35	9.16	0.00	8.40	5.80	4.58
Milford	39.06	16.13	18.75	9.68	21.88	40.86	7.81	3.23	4.69	3.23	4.69	0.00	0.00	19.35	3.13	7.53
Reading	50.00	18.05	22.97	6.02	17.57	32.33	2.70	9.02	0.00	4.51	6.76	4.51	0.00	18.79	0.00	6.77
Sharonville	25.93	8.16	22.22	3.06	43.52	59.18	2.78	2.04	2.78	3.06	2.78	8.16	0.00	10.21	0.00	6.12
Terrace Park	29.03	6.72	22.58	0.84	32.26	49.58	9.68	7.56	6.45	7.56	0.00	2.52	0.00	12.61	0.00	12.61
Williamsburg	52.17	20.83	30.43	10.00	4.35	33.33	8.70	4.17	0.00	12.50	0.00	5.00	0.00	5.83	4.35	8.34
Average	34.70	11.81	22.47	5.60	27.60	40.88	6.61	4.30	2.55	8.05	2.94	5.15	0.00	15.45	3.14	8.77

[a]Percentage of all dispatched problems and percent of all non-dispatched problems, respectively, for each agency.

Table 5. Correlations: types of dispatched problems encountered by police.

Variable	People	Property	Traffic	Service	Info	Legal	Other
Police per 1000 population	–.642**	.205	.290	.014	.488*	.106	.333
Population size	.010	–.148	.270	–.456	–.178	.340	–.231
Median age	–.427	.486*	.221	–.229	.617**	–.036	–.420
Population stability	–.316	.255	.191	–.060	.261	.181	–.347
Median family income	–.400	.328	.383	–.225	.512*	–.388	–.423
Percentage below poverty	.332	–.202	–.492*	–.545*	–.201	–.064	.510*
Percentage non-white	–.091	.190	.005	–.386	.193	.444	–.074
Percentage owner occupied	–.493*	.387	.390	–.105	.375	–.336	–.362
Collective efficacy	–.461	.349	.451	–.195	.300	–.278	–.482
Resource capacity	–.631**	.428	.632**	–.497*	.457	–.227	–.465
E–R ratio	–.316	.226	.383	–.403	–.061	–.098	–.140
Land use: residential	.080	.047	–.215	.410	–.059	–.229	.075
Road lane miles	–.220	–.049	.492*	–.529*	.029	.142	–.327

**Correlation is significant at the .01 level (two-tailed). *Correlation is significant at the .05 level (two-tailed).

Table 6. Correlations: types of non-dispatched problems encountered by police.

Variable	People	Property	Traffic	Service	Info	Legal	Informal	Other
Police per 1000 population	–.299	.634**	.057	–.006	–.077	–.447	.611**	.476
Population size	.082	.134	.291	.022	–.108	.326	–.383	–.491*
Median age	–.432	–.395	.372	.115	–.240	–.384	.246	.132
Population stability	–.132	–.450	.122	.355	–.113	–.024	.062	.015
Median family income	–.660**	–.533*	.559*	.237	–.310	–.387	.083	.084
Percentage below poverty	.515*	.169	–.811**	.222	.577*	.130	.042	.245
Percentage non-white	.238	–.010	–.033	–.166	.196	.029	–.073	–.195
Percentage owner occupied	–.660**	–.477	.583*	.170	–.198	–.176	–.034	–.052
Collective efficacy	–.649**	–.416	.616**	.060	–.362	–.215	.043	–.002
Resource capacity	–.632**	–.539**	.703**	–.041	–.096	–.201	–.053	–.157
E–R ratio	–.088	–.026	.508*	–.236	.149	.041	–.384	–.528*
Land use: residential	–.209	–.001	–.246	.214	.127	–.034	.240	.307
Road lane miles	–.103	–.100	.495*	–.065	–.168	.216	–.376	–.462

**Correlation is significant at the .01 level (two-tailed). *Correlation is significant at the .05 level (two-tailed).

percentage of families below the poverty line decreased, the percentage of traffic problems increased ($r = –.492$; $p < .05$). Resource capacity was positively related to dispatched traffic problems ($r = .632$; $p < .01$). Not surprisingly, the number of lane miles was also positively correlated to traffic ($r = .492$; $p < .05$). Communities with less poverty ($r = –.545$; $p < .05$), less resource capacity ($r = –.497$; $p < .01$) and fewer lane miles ($r = –.529$; $p < .05$) had a higher percentage of citizens contacting the police for service problems. Information problems increased as median age and median family income of the community increased, $r = .617$ ($p < .01$) and $r = .512$ ($p < .05$), respectively. This suggests that communities with more police officers, older residents and higher incomes increasingly utilize dispatch for informational purposes.

Table 6 illustrates the relationships between non-dispatched problems and community characteristics. These encounters most closely represent the priorities of the officer and/or the police organization. Officers proactively encountered problems with people in communities with lower incomes ($r = –.660$; $p < .01$), higher poverty ($r = –.515$; $p < .05$), lower rates of home ownership ($r = –.660$; $p < .01$), lower rates of collective efficacy ($r = –.649$; $p < .01$) and resource capacity ($r = –.632$; $p < .01$). Overall, it appears that proactive 'people' interventions by the police occurred in poorer, less-organized communities.

Proactive property encounters occurred in communities with more police ($r = .634$; $p < .01$). These problems were negatively correlated with median family

income ($r = –.533$; $p < .05$) and resource capacity ($r = –.539$; $p < .01$). Several community characteristics were correlated with proactive traffic problems including median family income ($r = .559$; $p < .05$), percent of families below the poverty line ($r = –.811$; $p < .01$), percent owner-occupied housing units ($r = .583$; $p < .05$), collective efficacy ($r = .616$; $p < .01$), resource capacity ($r = .703$; $p < .01$), E–R ratio ($r = .508$; $p < .05$) and number of lane miles ($r = .495$; $p < .05$). Information problems were positively correlated with percentage of families below poverty ($r = .577$; $p < .05$). Informal encounters with citizens were positively correlated with the number of officers in a community ($r = .611$; $p < .05$).

Discussion

This study describes the demands placed on the police through an examination of various types of problems that come to police attention and the origination of those requests across multiple communities. In doing so, our research 'steps back' to consider the substantive issues involved in what the police do and the factors that impel those behaviors. The research originates within the community – the place where citizens determine their need for the police and other local government services. The approach in some ways represents a departure from earlier studies in this line of research in terms of the utilization of: (1) systematic social observation across 17 communities, (2) more encompassing measures of community, and (3) measures designed to capture the specific manner of police mobilization. The data collectively prompt some points of discussion.

One point involves problems encountered by the police and the issue of whether and how street-level behavior varies across communities: it does. Police encountered significantly different types of problems across these communities, a situation that is consistent with classic theories put forth on the linkage between communities and the activities of the police who patrol them (Table 3). The data also demonstrate in this regard the predominance of traffic problems for police. Some of the sampled communities – by design – provided more opportunities for interaction due to traffic infrastructure and land uses. These features promote an influx of persons and their vehicles. The prevalence of traffic-related problems presents both opportunities and potential concerns. Traffic encounters provide opportunities to create positive citizen perceptions of the police. These opportunities are important because negative experiences have far more impact than positive experiences in determining overall perceptions of the police (Skogan, 2005). Concerns in regard to procedural justice and legitimacy, however, may be heightened in areas in which opportunities for pretextual stops and other forms of discrimination abound.

Another point involves the specific data on mobilization. Roughly two-thirds of the total number of police–citizen encounters were not mobilized through dispatch (Table 2). The dispatch system serves as the primary conduit of direct citizen demands on the police, so the fact that only about one-third of the total number of police–citizen encounters were the result of a dispatched assignment presumably limits our ability to discern precisely how communities – through citizen-initiated calls for service – produce variations in street-level police behavior.

Police themselves determine the majority of their activities with little or no direct input from citizens, so it should not be surprising that studies often do not clearly identify how communities and their citizens influence varieties in police behavior. This study demonstrates the need to include measures designed to indicate the various ways in which the police are mobilized so that researchers can disaggregate activities in terms of the source of mobilization and focus on the ways in which communities make direct demands on the police through citizens

A third substantive point involves community variation in problems that were citizen initiated. These encounters demonstrate the importance of mobilization in discerning how communities and the direct demands of citizens influence police behavior. The majority of dispatched problems were associated with people, property and traffic. Citizens called the police for assistance with public nuisances, especially domestic arguments and requests for medical assistance. People problems occurred most frequently in communities with less resource capacity, fewer police and higher rates of property rental. Renters in the aggregate may rely on the police to settle domestic disputes more frequently than home owners because of presumed reductions in their levels of commitment or 'stake' in the community. Higher levels of home ownership and socio-economic status may also influence preferences among citizens to preserve privacy and reduce the number of domestic disturbance calls to police (Baumgartner, 1988).

The most common citizen demands in regard to property involved alarms and commercial or motor vehicle thefts. These problems occurred more frequently within communities with comparatively large percentages of older residents. Studies on fear of crime demonstrate elevated levels of fear among older adults that may increase the prevalence of alarm calls to police (Ferraro and LaGrange, 1988; McCoy et al., 1996). Adults of any age demand services in regard to commercial or motor vehicle thefts in order to initiate retrospective police investigations and/or property insurance claims. Motor vehicle accidents and citizen requests for assistance that involved a broken down vehicle were the most common property-related traffic problems. These types of encounters were more likely to

occur within communities that exhibited less poverty, more resource capacity and more roads. Communities of higher socio-economic status are more likely to offer direct police assistance in these situations as a courtesy to drivers, and traffic accidents become more likely as the number of road lane miles increases.

The contribution of our research in the broader view addresses the reality that much of policing research has 'examine(d) the effects *of* the police, not the effects of anything *on* the police' (Mastrofski, 2004: 106; emphasis in original). The comment underscores the importance of communities and the more direct demands of citizens in determining the content and quality of policing. Scholars and executives need to increasingly focus on factors that comprise the community context, including mobilization, in order to overcome obstacles to the improvement of police agency performance (Davenport, 1999). After nearly 50 years, perhaps it is time to step back and reflect on the changes in policing environments, communities and technologies and incorporate them into our understanding of how the police operate in communities.

Notes

1. The observation schedules were constructed on a monthly basis. Agencies that used a standard 8-hour shift were randomly assigned ride dates and shift times in order to complete the goal of 2.5 observations per month. Agencies that did not employ a standard 8-hour shift (e.g. 10- or 12-hour shifts) were randomly scheduled for either one or two observations per month on a rotating basis in order to obtain the 8-hour shift equivalent of 2.5 shifts per month. The choice randomly to select shifts to be observed (rather than officers) was primarily driven by practical concerns. The observed agencies routinely employed only a few officers on patrol during any given shift, and these assignments were often made no more than one week in advance. Thus, observations were conducted with officers who were assigned to patrol on randomly selected dates and shifts, and the research team reviewed the observation data on an ongoing basis to ensure that a representative sample of officers were observed within each sampled agency.
2. Not all encounters involved problems (e.g. informal encounters and miscellaneous categories especially) although for the purposes of discussion we use problem to designate encounter categories.
3. E–R ratio is a measure of the total number of workers working in a place, relative to the total number of workers living in the place. E–R ratios > 1.00 occur when there are more workers working in the place than living there. These places can be considered as net importers of labor. For example, an E–R ratio of 1.19 means that there are 19% more workers working in the place than living in the place. Values < 1.00 indicate places that send more workers to other areas than they receive, i.e. they are net exporters of labor.
4. Although these data are not presented here, they may be obtained by contacting the corresponding author.

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