

## POLICING FOR PEACE: INSTITUTIONS, EXPECTATIONS, AND SECURITY IN DIVIDED SOCIETIES

In communities plagued by conflict along ethnic, racial, and religious lines, how does the representation of previously-marginalized groups in the police affect crime and security? Drawing on new evidence from policing in Iraq and Israel, *Policing for Peace* shows that an inclusive police force provides better services and reduces conflict, but not in the ways we might assume. Including members of marginalized groups in the police improves civilians' expectations of how the police and government will treat them, both now and in the future. These expectations are enhanced when officers are organized into mixed rather than homogeneous patrols. Iraqis indicate feeling most secure when policed by mixed officers, even more secure than they feel when policed by members of their own group. In Israel, increases in police officer diversity are associated with lower crime victimization for both Arab and Jewish citizens. In many cases, inclusive policing benefits all citizens, not just those from marginalized groups.

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POLICING FOR PEACE  
*Institutions, Expectations, and Security  
in Divided Societies*

**Matthew Nanes**

*Saint Louis University, Missouri*



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## PREFACE

As I finalize this manuscript in summer 2020, the role of identity in policing is at the forefront of the news. From my apartment in St. Louis, I can hear protesters marching and demanding justice for victims of police violence. The incidents in Minneapolis, Louisville, and elsewhere that sparked these protests reignited a collective consciousness that arguably began six years earlier, just eight miles from where I now sit, when a White police officer in Ferguson, Missouri, shot and killed an African American civilian. It was certainly not the first African American death under questionable circumstances at the hands of the police, but it sparked riots, protests, and a national conversation about the relationship between racial minorities and the police.

This is not a book about law enforcement in the United States. Yet, it is impossible to ignore the similarities between the experiences of citizens in Oakland, Baltimore, and New York and those of citizens in Jerusalem, Baghdad, and Mosul. The levels of violence vary, but the underlying mistrust between minority citizens and the police is familiar. It is therefore not unreasonable to ask whether the demographic makeup of the police in the United States impacts our society in the same ways, as I show in this book, that it affects the citizens of Israel and Iraq. Are there common mechanisms that might allow us to draw conclusions about the United States from evidence in the Middle East, or are these different worlds where identity affects policing in different ways?

Throughout this book, I show that perceptions link demographics with security. Integration is more than just a tally of officers by religion or skin color; it is the perceived empowerment of a group within an institution. In societies where group identity and political fortunes are deeply intertwined, integration of the police creates the perception that the government is committed to certain treatment of vulnerable groups and the expectation that this treatment will continue into the future.

Negative perceptions certainly characterize police–citizen relations in the United States. Large swaths of society perceive the police as an

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occupying force designed to subjugate them. The US Department of Justice's report on the shooting in Ferguson pointed to institutionalized structures "shaped by the City's focus on revenue rather than by public safety needs," leading to "clear racial disparities that adversely impact African Americans."<sup>1</sup> This summer, militarized police responses to protests in dozens of cities prompted perceptions among citizens that the police themselves had antagonized the situation. "The tone that we felt from the police is: This is their rally . . . They are going to control it from the beginning. They are going to dictate what happens. It's a very offensive type of approach."<sup>2</sup> While there is no evidence that militarized policing protects officers or citizens, it appears to diminish the public's perceptions of the police (Mummolo 2018). These negative perceptions become magnified when a community is simultaneously under- and over-policed, causing dual problems of insecurity at the hands of both criminals and officers.

Negative perceptions and mistrust between citizens and law enforcement run in both directions. Speaking at the University of Chicago Law School in 2015, FBI director James Comey said, "I imagine two lines: one line is law enforcement and the other line is the folks we serve and protect, especially in communities of color. I think those two lines are arcing away from each other, at an increasing rate." Later in the speech, Comey attributes this divergence between police and society to officers' perceptions that the public has turned against them.

In today's YouTube world, are officers reluctant to get out of their cars and do the work that controls violent crime? Are officers answering 911 calls but avoiding the informal contact that keeps bad guys from standing around, especially with guns? I spoke to officers privately in one big city precinct who described being surrounded by young people with mobile phone cameras held high, taunting them the moment they get out of their cars. They told me, "We feel like we're under siege and we don't feel much like getting out of our cars."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> United States Department of Justice Civil Rights Division. *Investigation of the Ferguson Police Department*, March 4, 2015. p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Dewan, Shaila and Baker, Mike. "Facing protests over use of force, police respond with more force." *The New York Times*, June 2, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/31/us/police-tactics-floyd-protests.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Comey, James B. "Law enforcement and the communities we serve: Bending the lines toward safety and justice." *Remarks delivered at the University of Chicago Law*

Former NYPD Commissioner Howard Safir called it a “war on police,” and the president of the Federal Law Enforcement Officers Association described a “contagion of anti-cop rhetoric.”<sup>4</sup>

This perception of society as the enemy is hardly a new phenomenon. William Westley writes that when it comes to people in lower-class neighborhoods, “the policeman sees them as lacking in morality, ready to commit a crime, ignorant of the law . . . if rough treatment is not used these people will get out of hand and take advantage of the police” (99). Of the 85 officers Westley surveyed, 62 (73 percent) perceived that the public is “against the police, hates the police” (93). One officer told him, “The use of force is necessary to protect yourself. You should always show that you are boss. Make them respect the uniform and not the man” (126). Westley began the research that sparked these words in 1949. While societal norms no longer permit the police to admit such attitudes publicly, their behavior suggests that a nontrivial subset of officers still view the public as a threat, and violence as the primary response to that threat. Indeed, an op-ed written in 2014 by a former St. Louis police officer claims that his colleagues “routinely called anyone of color a ‘thug,’ whether they were the victim or just a bystander.”<sup>5</sup>

If police officers view the entire civilian population as the enemy, it should not come as a surprise when they seize on any hint of disobedience as an excuse to exert their dominance. In perhaps the most blatant instance of turning “to serve and protect” on its head, dozens of St. Louis police officers took to the streets in September 2017 chanting, “Whose streets? Our streets!” at citizens protesting the acquittal of an officer accused of murdering a civilian. Shortly afterward, Interim Police Chief Lawrence O’Toole told reporters, “We’re in control. This is our city and we’re going to protect it.”<sup>6</sup> The police view the city as

*School*. Chicago, Illinois. October 23, 2015, [www.fbi.gov/news/speeches/law-enforcement-and-the-communities-we-serve-bending-the-lines-toward-safety-and-justice](http://www.fbi.gov/news/speeches/law-enforcement-and-the-communities-we-serve-bending-the-lines-toward-safety-and-justice)

<sup>4</sup> Chiamonte, Perry. “War on police’: Line-of-duty deaths rise amid racially-charged rhetoric, anti-cop climate.” FoxNews.com, January 12, 2017, [www.foxnews.com/us/war-on-police-line-of-duty-deaths-rise-amid-racially-charged-rhetoric-anti-cop-climate](http://www.foxnews.com/us/war-on-police-line-of-duty-deaths-rise-amid-racially-charged-rhetoric-anti-cop-climate)

<sup>5</sup> Hudson, Redditt. “Being a cop showed me just how racist and violent the police are. There’s only one fix.” *Washington Post*, December 6, 2014, [www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2014/12/06/i-was-a-st-louis-cop-my-peers-were-racist-and-violent-and-theres-only-one-fix/](http://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2014/12/06/i-was-a-st-louis-cop-my-peers-were-racist-and-violent-and-theres-only-one-fix/)

<sup>6</sup> Hogan, Susan. “St. Louis officers chant ‘whose streets, our streets’ while arresting protesters.” *Washington Post*, September 18, 2017, [www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/](http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/)

## PREFACE

“theirs,” to be protected *from* society, rather than a city society entrusts to them for protection.

So, can altering the demographic makeup of the police reduce this “us versus them” mentality by both citizens and police officers? The overwhelming majority of police officers are well-intentioned men and women who genuinely want to serve their communities. There is no reason to think that most officers, regardless of their race, are incapable of or unwilling to police African Americans fairly. Yet, good people operating in a flawed institutional context sometimes behave differently than they might otherwise behave. I explain in the pages that follow that integrating the police changes citizens’ perceptions of government. Though my evidence on officer behavior is limited, I suggest that integration changes the context in ways that should reshape officers’ perceptions of citizens as well. Under normal circumstances, a disproportionate share of officers’ interactions are with the individuals from whom society needs protecting. Add this skewed experience to centuries of institutionalized racism, and one begins to understand how the police acquire the impression that society is out to get them, that African Americans are “thugs,” and that the police are the last bastion of order in an otherwise chaotic society. Changing these perceptions and helping officers see that the vast majority of people are law-abiding citizens worthy of their respect and protection must be the goal of any reforms.

The police often talk about fellow officers as though they are family. These uniformed men and women work together toward a common cause in the face of danger, day in and day out, creating a sense of attachment. When the men and women in uniform overwhelmingly look and talk a certain way, a way that differs systematically from the rest of society, it is easy to view citizens as “others” worthy of mistrust. Creating a diverse police force in which officers from different groups work side by side might change officers’ perceptions of citizens who look different than they do, helping them see citizens worthy of protection rather than out-groups to be feared. As James Comey said in the very same speech quoted earlier, “It’s hard to hate up close. It’s hard to hate someone once you sit and stare into their eyes and start to understand where they’re coming from, and why they feel the way they do.” Generating positive interactions between police officers and citizens is

[wp/2017/09/18/st-louis-officers-chant-whose-streets-our-streets-while-arresting-protectors-against-police-killing/](http://wp/2017/09/18/st-louis-officers-chant-whose-streets-our-streets-while-arresting-protectors-against-police-killing/)

obviously an important part of making hate hard. Given the potential for structured, positive interactions between members of different groups to improve attitudes toward out-groups (Allport 1954), perhaps officers with police “family” of other races will find it easier to view civilians of other races as allies, not adversaries.

This book presents evidence on citizens’ behaviors and perceptions, but one can imagine a similarly powerful narrative about police officers’ perceptions of citizens like the one I described earlier. More than anything, I hope the research in this book helps to recognize and address some of the institutionalized causes of insecurity in divided societies and contributes to the peaceful coexistence of all people, regardless of race, religion, or uniform.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This is, at its heart, a book about people. The thousands of individuals who make up my “data points” are real people who have something important to say. I am grateful to them for lending their experiences and voices to my research. My ultimate hope for this work is that it contributes to the welfare of these individuals and others like them.

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