“Police Force Size and Civilian Race”

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Paper asks how police force size affects Black and White civilians differently

Weds two large literatures on policing

- First examines the impact of police on crime rates
  - Like this paper, much of the focus has been on variation in size of force, as measured by number of officers.
  - Address basic questions of whether (how much) police prevent crime
- Second focuses on racial biases and disparities in policing
  - That literature tends to focus on differential treatment of potential offenders by race, because of departmental policies/practices or choices of individual officers

- Timely set of questions for current debates about role of police

Methods

- Approach in the paper is drawn from the first literature on police for size and crime rates
  - Sidesteps long controversy in that literature about methods and debates about endogeneity of officer count by presenting a mix of results from prior approaches
- Observations are PD-year, models include rich FE, some basic controls, and two IV approaches
  - (explored by current authors in prior work) one focused on measurement error and another using COPS hiring grants

Outcomes: consider two types of civilians

- Potential crime victims
  - Outcome is homicides, available by race of victim
- Potential offenders or arrestees
  - Outcomes are arrests, available by race of arrestee
  - Separately consider low-level quality of life (QoL) crimes and more serious index crimes
- Results suggest these distinctions may be important

Overview of findings: impact of more officers

		All	By civilian race
Homicides		↓	Larger for Black in level and scaled
Homicide	clearance		No effects for either
QoL	arrests	↑	Larger for White in level, for Black scaled to population
Index	arrests	↓	Larger for Black in level and scaled
Index	crimes	↓	No data on race

Some questions and requests

Racial differences in impact on homicides

- Larger decease in count for Black victims is significant, even though Black pop share only 24%
  - Naturally, reduction relatively larger for Black victims, scaled to pop
- *Question*: Are you scaling to 1980 pop or to current year? (Does it matter?)
- *Also*: T1 also shows that Black victims greatly outnumber White victims (137 v. 63)
  - Suggests might not be larger proportionate reduction in Black victims
- This can be assessed empirically with current data by looking at Black share among homicide victims as an outcome

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Why look at racial share of homicides?

- This matters for understanding how police size affects relative attention to preventing homicides by victim race
- More directly gets to the question of “under” policing
- Test if police resource allocation is neutral with respect to victim race or if the incremental officers affect the racial distribution of victims
  - Are additional resources devoted more to crimes with White victims
  - Or do departments expand their “scope” of attention when staffing improves?

What about other crimes?

- Homicide is an extreme outcome.
- Declining index crime rate further supports idea more police reduces crime
- But moving away from homicide means that
  - Unreported crimes are an issue
  - Data doesn’t include race of the victim
- Could address both issues with additional data: National Crime Victimization Survey has MSA Data on ICPSR from 1979-2004.

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Why not measure arrests per crime?

- Arrests for index crimes drop by much less than rates of index crimes (factor of 15 to 18)
  - Most index crimes in data don't lead to arrest (T1), but factor there is 5.7 to 1.
  - If arrest rates are dropping for index crimes (why?), suggests that deterrence (and incapacitation) are declining for those crimes , conditional on happening
- What is the theory for why crimes are dropping? (Similar ? for homicides if clearance rates don't change)
- Paper doesn't report rates of QoL crimes, so unclear if increase in arrests is from more reported crime or more police intervention per QoL crime

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Time periods

- Not clear why the time periods differ between the two IVs.
  - COPS IV can still use data going back to 1980 for covariates and/or other IV can start in 1990
- Full panel is very long, nearly 40 years
  - Do we think the impact of police is unchanged over the period?
  - The differential impact by race?
  - Worth testing. If IV's underpowered, then use OLS
- Weights are by 1980 population, which is very far from 2018
  - Also: are Black pop. shares in 1980 stable for the quartile split?

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Split by Black population share

- Might be useful to report the full list of cities and how they were categorized
- For interpretation: I wondered if the cities with higher/lower Black pop shares had other distinguishing features that might mediate the effects – geography, income, crime rates by race, police "density" (per pop.), city size
- Especially curious about city size to determine what share of the Black population lives in each of the "quartiles" of cities

What else changes in the city?

- Aim of this empirical analysis is to isolate impact of shock to number of officers, *holding everything else constant*
- Analysis controls for city government "expenditures, revenues and tax receipts" though not for police budget
  - This means staffing changes could involve reallocation of resources *within* police (wages or OT, staff mix, capital/technology)
  - Could also involve reallocation *between* police and other departments
- Impact of "defund" police (overall, by race) depends crucially on how everything else changes to accommodate the "shock"
- Would be useful to characterize this in the data for predictions; also useful to report coefficients and *not* control for city budget

Conclusion

- Papers provides new and timely evidence on differential effects of police force size on civilians by race
- Shows that adding more officers has both expected benefits (less murder and index crime and fewer serious arrests) and costs (more minor arrests) to civilians
- The directions are the same for Black and White civilians, but (scaled to population) both are larger for Black civilians