# PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS OF POLICE EFFICACY AND IMAGE:
## The "Fuzziness" of Support for the Police†

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**ABSTRACT:** *Most studies concerning police-community relations have operationalized support for law enforcement agencies in unidimensional terms. The present study dissects the notion of support for the police into two distinct dimensions: efficacy and image. Efficacy includes perceptions of the police ability to protect citizens, solve crime, and prevent crime. Image includes perceptions of friendliness and fairness of the police. A series of conventional individual-level and contextual variables are modeled in an effort to explore their relative influence on citizen perceptions of police efficacy and image. Data gathered from a national telephone survey of 1,005 citizens reveal that support for local police is both complex and multidimensional. Moreover, the results demonstrate that efficacy and image are independent dimensions, and that each is susceptible to quite different ratings depending upon which independent and dependent variables are modeled.*

## INTRODUCTION

O'Brien (1978, p. 304) has observed that "the multiple duties of the police at all times and in all areas of the community dictate that they must influence the daily life of each citizen." This point is important because the police have a vested interest in maintaining positive relationships with members of society. If the police are to serve the public effectively and acceptably, a constructive working relationship must exist between law enforcement officials and citizens. Reflecting the importance of this area in criminal justice, an extensive literature on public attitudes toward and perceptions of the police has emerged since the 1960s.

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Unfortunately, most studies concerning police-community relations have operationalized law enforcement support in rather unidimensional terms. For example, Gallup asked citizens, "how much confidence do you, yourself, have in the police?" (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1995, p. 133). Similarly, Correia, Reisig, and Lovrich (1996, p. 20) have analyzed responses to a statement that the police do "a good job at performing their mission." The tendency has been to neglect the possibility of some conceptual ambiguity, or "fuzziness," in citizen support for local law enforcement.

The literature shows that the public is divided over satisfaction with the police by such independent variables as geographic location, race, gender, age, social class, respect for the law, encounters with criminal justice officials, and criminal versus noncriminal backgrounds (e.g., Cox & Wade, 1989). However, "these different publics [also] have unique interests and concerns that separate them from one another in many ways" (Cox, 1996, p. 208). Some citizens may express a priority concern for safety and order maintenance. Other people may stress the importance of maintaining a supportive, amicable, and nondiscriminatory law enforcement apparatus. These diverse "interests" and "concerns" need more attention than they have received previously. Employing a statistical analog requires one to operationalize the dependent variable, support for the police, in multidimensional terms.

The study reported here dissects the notion of support for the police. The term "support," as it appears in the literature, is a catch-all. Support has included such notions as attitudes (e.g., Brandl, Frank, Worden, & Bynum, 1994; Jesilow, Meyer, & Namazzi, 1995), satisfaction (e.g., Garafolo, 1977), confidence (e.g., Cao, Frank, & Cullen, 1996), beliefs about the quality of service (Ressig & Correia, 1997), and so forth. This study breaks support into two distinct dimensions. The first dimension, *efficacy*, refers to the perceived power to produce an effect. The second dimension, *image*, reflects diffuse support for law enforcement authorities.

The oft-cited catch phrase, "to protect and serve," implies that the police perform more than simple crime control. The police are also charged with the duties of "enforcing the laws, . . . preventing crime, and protecting the innocent" (Peak, 1997, p. 57). Public perceptions of the efficacy of the police, therefore, need to reflect this diversity of roles.

The image dimension has dominated the literature on public perceptions of the police. Image variables reflect concerns over whether or not police officers "treat all citizens equally," are "courteous," or provide "quality service" (e.g., Reisig & Correia, 1997, p. 315). One must

distinguish image from efficacy to understand the dynamics behind citizen perceptions of law enforcement agencies.

This article begins with a brief review of the literature, calling specific attention to the extensive research on individual-level and contextual independent variables which affect public perceptions of the police. A methods section explains how the present study was conducted. The results of the present study buttress the presumption that support for the police is complex and multidimensional, and that efficacy and image are largely independent dimensions. Conclusions are drawn and commentary is offered on the implications of the principal finding that support for the police is multidimensional.

# PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Early studies confirm that most citizens view the police positively (Black, 1970). Despite some suspicions about state power and authority (e.g., Bayley, 1976; Lipset & Schneider, 1983), civilians tend to look upon law enforcement officers with relative favor (Apple & O'Brien, 1983; Dean, 1980, Erez, 1984). However, these sentiments are not equally distributed across all levels of American society. Many minorities, for example, tend to display contempt for police officers (e.g., Albrecht & Green, 1977; Jefferson & Walker, 1993; Parks, 1984).

Studies on public perceptions of the police have examined virtually all levels of policing. Most researchers have focused primarily on municipal police (e.g., Decker, 1981; Reisig & Correia, 1997), with some attention paid to county sheriff departments (e.g., Weisheit, Wells, & Falcone, 1995; Falcone & Wells, 1995) and state police agencies (Hedgepeth, 1970; Carter, 1985; Correia et al., 1996). Scant attention has gone to federal law enforcement agencies, perhaps because of their relative dispersion.

## Individual-Level Variables

Researchers have discovered that public perceptions of the police vary in terms of such individual-level variables as race, age, sex, education, and income. Overwhelmingly, race has proven to be a powerful indicator of support (or lack of) for the police (e.g., Furstenberg & Wellford, 1973; Hadar & Snortum, 1975) and for criminal justice institutions in general (e.g., Hahn, 1971). Smith and Hawkins (1973), for example, found that Caucasians regarded the police far more favorably than non-Caucasians. Similarly, Carter's (1985) study of Hispanics in Texas revealed that minorities often expressed dissatisfaction with law enforcement officials. Some evidence also suggests that ethnic minori-

ties hold different views of the police depending on which police actions (e.g., use of force) are considered (e.g., Scaglion & Condon, 1980).

Numerous studies have called attention to the dynamic interrelationships and interactions between race and other conventional independent variables. Such factors as prior experience with the police, perceived levels of crime, and perceived levels of disorder tend to interact with ethnicity to influence minority perceptions of the police (Cao et al., 1996; Decker, 1981).

Age also emerges as a strong indicator. The elderly are more inclined to view the police favorably (Hadar & Snortum, 1975; Walker, Richardson, Williams, Denyer, & McGaughey, 1972). Preiss and Ehrlich (1958, p. 130), for example, found "a direct, almost linear relationship between age" and perceptions of state police. Older persons, especially senior citizens, exhibit higher fear levels and are more inclined to rely on the police for assistance (Zevitz & Rettammel, 1990). Conversely, Gaines, Kappeler, and Vaughn (1997, p. 323) have suggested younger individuals value their freedom, which may be partially responsible for their disproportionately negative attitudes toward the police. Research also connotes that because young people tend to commit more crime and come into adverse contact with the police more often (e.g., Sagi & Wellford, 1968; Wellford, 1973), they are more inclined to harbor unfavorable sentiments toward criminal justice officials.

While race and age are powerful predictors of support for the police, the relationship between sex and support for the police is somewhat unclear. For example, Hadar and Snortum (1975) argued that male and female perceptions of the police are highly similar. Empirical studies, however, have revealed some contradictory findings. Preiss and Ehrlich (1958) found minor sex differences, presumably because women hold a more "idealized" image of the police. Further substantiating the apparent sex difference, Wilson (1985) reported that younger males tend to hold more negative attitudes toward the police than women do. While Winfree and Griffiths (1977) could find no differences between sex and perceptions of the police, the Correia et al. (1996) study uncovered substantial differences.

The relationship between education and perceptions of the police is inconclusive (e.g., Correia et al., 1996; Cao et al., 1996). Controlling for age diminishes the effects of education on perceptions of the police. However, education is an important sociodemographic control variable and appears in a host of recent studies concerning public attitudes toward the police (e.g., Brandl et al., 1994). Finally, Marenin (1983b) has linked income to perceptions of the police.

# Contextual Variables

Several scholars have examined the effects attributable to contextual factors, including prevailing perceptions about police presence and community conditions, the legacy of prior police-citizen contacts, victimization, and fear of crime (Carter, 1985; Mastrofski, 1981; Wycoff & Skogan, 1993). Generally, research on contextual variables has indicated that the number and nature of prior police contacts influence citizen attitudes toward criminal justice officials (e.g., Wirths, 1958). Bercal (1970) has distinguished between voluntary and involuntary contacts. Subsequent research has revealed that citizens who live in areas where involuntary contacts predominate are less inclined to support the police (Bordua & Tifft, 1971; Schwartz & Clarren, 1978). Similarly, Carter (1985) found that as the number of contacts with the police increased in an area, regardless of whether such contacts were voluntary or involuntary, satisfaction with law enforcement decreased.

Some researchers have argued traffic stops are the most damaging police-citizen encounter from a public relations perspective (Vedder & Keller, 1965). Moreover, others have shown that favorable perceptions of the police are likely to be expressed only when the police are viewed as having treated detained motorists fairly (e.g., Bordua & Tifft, 1971; Correia et al., 1996). This finding implies that the nature of involuntary contacts is an important ingredient.

The relationship between victimization and support for the police is not entirely clear. Hadar and Snortum (1975) and Garofalo (1977) found that crime victims tended to report unsatisfactory experiences with the police. However, Smith and Hawkins (1973) and Zamble and Annesley (1987) concluded that victims may be more fearful of crime but not necessarily more inclined to give the police an unfavorable evaluation. Some recent evidence indicates that citizen empowerment may improve perceptions of satisfaction with city police officers (Jesilow et al., 1995; Thurman & Reisig, 1996).

Others have suggested confidence in the police is undermined when crime is salient in one's life (e.g., Larsen, 1968). Specifically, researchers have explored the impact of perceptions of disorder (Cao et al., 1996; Lewis & Salem, 1986; Skogan, 1987) and "informal collective security" (e.g., Cao et al., 1996; McDowall & Loftin, 1983; Smith & Uchida, 1988) on attitudes toward the police. There is also evidence that individuals who "dislike the characteristics of their neighborhoods" are likely to have negative feelings about the police (Jesilow et al., 1995).

Research also has shown that attitudes toward the police are simply products of deeply ingrained beliefs and are not directly affected by

more or less objective individual-level variables (e.g., age or income). Albrecht and Green (1977) and Chackerian (1974) have argued that perceptions are influenced by political structure. Others have reasoned that global attitudes and/or political ideology may influence perceptions of the police (Larsen, 1968; Zamble & Annesley, 1987).

The area in which one lives (urban versus rural setting) may impact attitudes toward the police. Albrecht and Green (1977), for instance, found minorities from poor urban areas hold the least favorable views of the police. Jacob (1971) has questioned such a conception but has conceded that neighborhood may be an important determinant of support for the police. Mirande (1980) also has acknowledged that public perception of the police differs across urban neighborhoods.

Finally, researchers have explored a variety of contextual variables that arise from agency policy. For example, Murphy and Worrall (1998) found that police officer residency requirements are likely to influence public perceptions of the ability of police officers to protect citizens from crime.

## Limitations of Previous Research

Despite the merits of the foregoing contributions, at least two substantial limitations exist in the literature concerning public attitudes toward the police. The first involves the oversimplification of the dependent variable support for the police. The second emerges from the problems associated with contextual data restriction.

### The Oversimplification of Support

A unidimensional portrayal of support for the police implies that the duties of police officers are equally unidimensional. The reality is that the police perform a host of functions, some related to crime control and others to service. Police agencies, at the very least, are charged with reducing crime (e.g., Peak, 1997) and providing quality service (e.g., Cox, 1996). A unidimensional conception of support fails to distinguish between these quite separate police activities.

Brandl et al. (1994) made an attempt to portray support as multidimensional. They distinguished between global and specific perceptions of the police. Unfortunately, that study revealed neither dimension was independent. Global attitudes (e.g., satisfaction with police) correlated almost perfectly with specific attitudes (e.g., satisfaction when requesting assistance from police).

Jesilow et al. (1995) attacked the presumption that one can categorize attitudes toward the police neatly. These scholars interviewed a large sample of citizens and asked the open-ended question, "What do

you like best about the police?" Their multivariate analysis, however, simply dichotomized responses to that question into nonrespondents (coded 0) and a group of participants who had one or more responses to the question (coded 1). The authors mistakenly assumed that respondents who did not answer their question viewed the police unfavorably.

Researchers have yet to analyze support for the police in multidimensional terms. This article argues that one cannot understand support without empirically distinguishing between efficacy and image. Both dimensions must be reduced to their constituent elements. However, one would be remiss to say that researchers have ignored the complexity of support altogether. Most analysts have just failed to confront the issue directly.

Huang and Vaughn (1996) recently analyzed the same data used in the current study and, on the surface, it appears their study is similar to this one. The independent variables they included are reported here (they also added "marital status" and "political ideology"), as are the dependent variables (they added a "promptness" rating and a "use of force" rating). But, the similarities end there. With respect to the goals of the present study, Huang and Vaughn's (1996) analysis suffers from at least four limitations. First, their research is primarily descriptive, as it basically reports on differences between groups. However, they use multivariate regression at one point in their study. Unfortunately, their analysis falls victim to the "contextual data restriction" described below. Second, they apply an inappropriate statistical test for analyzing categorical data. One should analyze ordinal categorical data with such techniques as logistic, multinomial, or ordered logistic regression. Third, Huang and Vaughn do not distinguish between specific dimensions of support. They do not confront or discuss the implications of a multidimensional conception of support for the police. Their study, like most of the articles in the book where their analysis appears (Flanagan & Longmire, 1996), is primarily descriptive. Finally, Huang and Vaughn do not assess the extent to which the dependent variables in their study are statistically independent. This omission is expected given their research goals, but it is particularly relevant to the present study.

## The Contextual Data Restriction

The dominant contextual variable included in the literature on perception of the police has been the nature of the respondent's prior contact. Dean (1980), Carter (1985), and Bordua and Tifft (1971), among others, have found that frequent, involuntary, and/or negative contacts

are associated with unfavorable evaluations of the police. Unfortunately, the introduction of a contextual variable, such as the nature of prior contact, restricts sample size to only those individuals who have had an encounter with police officials. Consequently, inferences cannot be drawn about citizens who have not had any contacts with the police. Many studies incorporate contextual variables but avoid commenting on sample size once such restrictions are imposed (e.g., Brandl et al., 1994; Correia et al., 1996; Reisig & Correia, 1997). To avoid excluding individuals who have not had any contact with the police, the current study estimates separate multivariate models. There is one set for citizens who have not encountered the police and a separate model for civilians who have had prior contact.

# THE DATA

The data for the present study come from the "1995 Crime Poll: Texas and the Nation" telephone survey conducted by researchers at the George J. Beto Criminal Justice Center at Sam Houston State University. A nationwide sample of 1,005 citizens was asked about perceptions of crime and justice in America. A series of questions dealing with backgrounds was included for control purposes (e.g., race, age, income, education). Substantive questions concerned courts, corrections, policing, media coverage of crime, disorder, fear of victimization, the death penalty, and other issues. A number of authors have analyzed the data set and those reports were presented in the book, *Americans View Crime and Justice: A National Public Opinion Survey* (Flanagan & Longmire, 1996). Thus, the present study amounts to a secondary analysis of these data.

## Dependent Variables

The original 1995 survey employed three questions aimed at tapping police efficacy. Those items were:

1. "How much confidence do you have in the ability of the police to *protect* you from crime?";
2. "How much confidence do you have in the ability of the police to *solve* crime?"; and,
3. "How much confidence do you have in the ability of the police to *prevent* crime?"

The efficacy variables (labeled Protect, Solve, and Prevent) were measured originally on a four-point ordinal scale, ranging from "none at all" to "a great deal." The values "little" and "none" were condensed into the constructed category "no confidence" and took on a

# TABLE 1
# Variables, Coding, and Distributions

| Variable | Categories | Coding | Distribution |
|---|---|---|---|
| Efficacy: | | | |
| Protect | No Confidence | 0 | 228 |
| | Confidence | 1 | 761 |
| Solve | No Confidence | 0 | 216 |
| | Confidence | 1 | 743 |
| Prevent | No Confidence | 0 | 320 |
| | Confidence | 1 | 646 |
| Image: | | | |
| Friendliness | Unfriendly | 0 | 386 |
| | Friendly | 1 | 560 |
| Fairness | Unfair | 0 | 488 |
| | Fair | 1 | 437 |
| Income | Less Than $30K | 0 | 369 |
| | More Than $30K | 1 | 537 |
| Race | White | 0 | 817 |
| | Nonwhite | 1 | 157 |
| Sex | Male | 0 | 524 |
| | Female | 1 | 481 |
| Residency | Other | 0 | 833 |
| | Urban | 1 | 158 |
| Years in School | | Continuous | Mean = 13.0 |
| Age | | Continuous | Mean = 46.0 |
| Contact Rating | | Continuous | Mean =  3.74 |

code of zero to facilitate interpretation. The values "a great deal" and "some" were merged into the category of "confidence" represented by a value of one. "Don't know" and refusals to respond were treated as missing values.

The original survey included two questions pertaining to police image. They were:

1. "Please rate the *friendliness* of the police;" and,
2. "Please rate the *fairness* of the police."

The image questions (dubbed Friendliness and Fairness) were measured on a five-point ordinal scale, ranging from "very high" to "very low." The responses to these questions were dichotomized, with "very high" and "high" condensed into a positive valence and the responses "average," "low," and "very low" reflecting a negative outlook. The

top portion of Table 1 displays the distributions for the dependent variables.

## Independent Variables

Table 1 shows the independent variables divided into a set of individual-level variables (income, race, sex, residency, years in school, sex, age) and one contextual variable (contact rating). "Income," originally measured on a four-point ordinal scale (less than $15K, between $15K and $30K, between $30K and $60K, and over $60K), is dichotomized as "less than $30K" (coded as zero) and "more than $30K" (coded as one). Race distinguishes white from nonwhite respondents (black and Hispanic). Education and age are continuous variables and are modeled accordingly. Sex is a dummy variable, with "male" serving as the reference category.

The original "Residency" question asks whether the respondent lives in a rural setting, a small town, a small city, the suburbs, or an urban area. Since the author's primary concern is to distinguish between the perceptions of urban dwellers and those who live outside an urban setting, the constructed variable groups these responses into "other" (the amalgam of all categories with the exception of urban) and "urban."

The contextual variable, "Contact Rating," is based on a question which asked respondents whether they were "very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied" with their contact with the police. The analysis treats "Contact Rating" as a continuous variable. The mean value of 3.74 displayed in Table 1 suggests most respondents are inclined to give their prior contact a fairly high rating.

## RESULTS

The first step is to demonstrate whether efficacy and image are empirically separate dimensions. Pairwise correlations between all five police efficacy and image variables are presented in Table 2. Some of the correlations between Protect, Solve, Prevent, Friendliness, and Fairness are statistically significant given the sample size. However, most of the bivariate associations are quite modest. Friendliness and Fairness correlate the highest (.58), while the cross-dimensional correlations are the smallest (e.g., .03 between Prevent and Fairness). The analysis treats both dimensions and all five dependent variables as independent. Although not shown here, the author also calculated a series of two-way chi-square tests for independence among the dependent variables. Those results determined the pairs of dependent variables are all signif-

icantly independent. Furthermore, even the high pairwise image corre-
lation (.58) reveals that nearly 66% of the variation between the two
remained unaccounted. Thus, these data support the notion that effi-
cacy and image constitute separate dimensions.

## TABLE 2
## Pairwise Correlation Matrix of Efficacy and Image Variables

|              | Protect | Solve | Prevent | Friendliness | Fairness |
|--------------|---------|-------|---------|--------------|----------|
| Protect      |         |       |         |              |          |
| Solve        | .17     |       |         |              |          |
| Prevent      | .18     | .39   |         |              |          |
| Friendliness | .26     | .10   | .04     |              |          |
| Fairness     | .24     | .09   | .03     | .58          |          |

The dependent variables which comprised both the efficacy and
image dimensions are dichotomized. Therefore, the statistical method
used is dummy variable logistic regression (e.g., Hamilton, 1992).
Dummy variable logistic regression models include both continuous
and categorical independent variables. Two sets of noncontextual mod-
els (without the contact rating variable) and two sets of contextual mod-
els (including the contact rating variable) are estimated, for a total of
ten separate models. Table 3 reports noncontextual logistic regression
models for police efficacy (Protect, Solve, and Prevent).

The bottom portion of Table 3 reveals the likelihood ratio statistic
($-2 \ln L \chi^2$ or $G^2$) for the Protect model is nonsignificant ($p > \chi^2 = .099$),
meaning one cannot reject the null hypothesis that the coefficients in-
cluded in this model all equal zero. The equations for Solve and Pre-
vent do attain significance. The likelihood ratio and goodness-of-fit
statistics demonstrate that the Solve and Prevent efficacy models both
fit the data well. That is, they explain reality better than no models at
all.

Table 3 reports both logits and odds ratios, along with their stan-
dard errors in parentheses. Income, race, and age are all significant
additions in the Solve model. Respondents with incomes over $30K are
more likely to believe the police can solve crime. The odds ratio means
that having an income over $30K multiplies the odds favoring confi-
dence in the ability of the police to solve crime by 1.640. Nonwhites are
approximately half as likely to have confidence in the ability of the po-
lice to solve crime, while older people are more likely to be confident
that the police can solve crime.

## TABLE 3
## Noncontextual Logistic Regression
## Models of Police Efficacy

| Independent Variables | Protect (N = 864) | | Solve (N = 879) | | Prevent (N = 879) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Logit | Odds | Logit | Odds | Logit | Odds |
| Income | .037 | 1.038 | .494** | 1.640** | .098 | 1.103 |
| | (.184) | (.190) | (.187) | (.307) | (1.64) | (.181) |
| Race | -.306 | 0.737 | -.641** | 0.527** | -.053 | 0.948 |
| | (.224) | (.165) | (.220) | (.116) | (.207) | (.197) |
| Years in School | .059 | 1.061 | -.029 | 0.972 | -.040 | 0.961 |
| | (.071) | (.076) | (.073) | (.071) | (.063) | (.061) |
| Sex | .171 | 1.187 | .311 | 1.365 | .187 | 1.206 |
| | (.169) | (.201) | (.176) | (.240) | (.151) | (.185) |
| Age | .011** | 1.011* | .013** | 1.013** | .013** | 1.013** |
| | (.005) | (.005) | (.005) | (.005) | (.001) | (.005) |
| Residency | -.002 | 0.998 | -.046 | 0.955 | -.414* | 0.661* |
| | (.226) | (.225) | (.229) | (.218) | (.196) | (.129) |
| Constant | .431 | | .617 | | .326 | |
| Log Likelihood | | -453.584 | | -433.297 | | -542.560 |
| -2 ln $L$ $\chi^2$ | | 10.66 | | 30.03 | | 16.50 |
| Prob > $\chi^2$ | | .099 | | .000 | | .011 |
| Goodness of Fit $\chi^2$ | | 654.04 | | 666.92 | | 655.11 |
| Prob > $\chi^2$ | | .481 | | .428 | | .777 |

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

The effects of income and race drop out of the Prevent model, while age and residency achieve statistical significance. The odds favoring confidence in the ability of the police to prevent crime are multiplied by .661 for individuals residing in urban areas. Thus, urban residents are less confident in the ability of the police to prevent crime.

Table 4 presents the police efficacy contextual models, that is, the models including only respondents who had prior contact with the police. All three samples in the contextual models drop to nearly half the size of those used to estimate the noncontextual models. This analysis introduces an element of sampling error, a common problem associated with the contextual data restriction mentioned earlier.

The likelihood ratio statistics for all three contextual efficacy models are sufficient to reject the null hypothesis that the coefficients on all the variables in each model are zero. Moreover, the goodness-of-fit statistics demonstrate that the contextual efficacy models fit the data relatively well.

The most pervasive contextual predictor of perceptions of police efficacy is Contact Rating. Individuals who rate their police contact fa-

## TABLE 4
## Contextual Logistic Regression
## Models of Police Efficacy

| Independent Variables | Protect (N = 487) | | Solve (N = 489) | | Prevent (N = 489) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Logit | Odds | Logit | Odds | Logit | Odds |
| Income | -.195 | 0.823 | .489 | 1.631 | -.067 | 0.936 |
| | (.269) | (.221) | (.267) | (.436) | (.232) | (.217) |
| Race | -.326 | 0.722 | -.737* | 0.479* | -.288 | 0.750 |
| | (.330) | (.238) | (.320) | (.153) | (.294) | (.221) |
| Years in School | .076 | 1.079 | -.005 | 0.995 | .022 | 1.022 |
| | (.103) | (.111) | (.105) | (.105) | (.089) | (.091) |
| Sex | -.181 | 0.828 | .069 | 1.072 | .042 | 1.043 |
| | (.246) | (.204) | (.251) | (.269) | (.212) | (.221) |
| Age | -.006 | 0.994 | .001 | 1.000 | -.002 | 0.998 |
| | (.008) | (.008) | (.008) | (.008) | (.007) | (.007) |
| Residency | .002 | 1.002 | -.026 | 0.974 | -.425 | 0.653 |
| | (.305) | (.306) | (.307) | (.299) | (.258) | (.169) |
| Contact Rating | .774** | | 2.168** | | .644** | 1.904** |
| | | | | | | .544** |
| | | | | | | 1.723** |
| | (.088) | (.192) | (.087) | (.165) | (.079) | (.136) |
| Constant | -1.468 | | -1.163 | | -1.288 | |
| Log Likelihood | | -223.991 | | -217.087 | | -286.363 |
| -2 ln $L$ $\chi^2$ | | 95.85 | | 82.20 | | 62.74 |
| Prob > $\chi^2$ | | .000 | | .000 | | .000 |
| Goodness of Fit $\chi^2$ | | 460.52 | | 443.60 | | 473.58 |
| Prob > $\chi^2$ | | .356 | | .602 | | .233 |

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

vorably are more inclined to view the police in a positive light. For example, respondents who provide a high contact rating are more likely to have confidence in the ability of the police to solve crime. A unit increase in Contact Rating multiplies the odds favoring confidence in the ability of the police to solve crime by 1.904, other things being equal.

Race is a significant predictor of police efficacy (in this case, contextual efficacy). However, the effect is significant only in the Solve model. Nonwhites are less inclined to be confident that the police can solve crime. Referring back to Table 3, race is also significant in the Solve model. Race is the most pervasive predictor of confidence in the ability of the police to solve crime across both the noncontextual and contextual efficacy models.

Table 5 reports the noncontextual logistic regression models of police image. Again, the likelihood ratio statistics are sufficient for rejecting the null hypothesis that the coefficients included in both models are zero. The goodness-of-fit statistics show that the models fit the data well.

# TABLE 5
# Noncontextual Logistic Regression
# Models of Police Image

| Independent Variables | Friendliness (N = 834) | | Fairness (N = 823) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Logit | Odds | Logit | Odds |
| Income | .125 | 1.133 | .051 | 1.053 |
| | (.162) | (.183) | (.161) | (.170) |
| Race | -.602** | 0.548** | -.772** | 0.462** |
| | (.205) | (.112) | (.219) | (.101) |
| Years in School | .113 | 1.120 | .086 | 1.090 |
| | (.063) | (.070) | (.063) | (.068) |
| Sex | -.043 | 0.958 | -.085 | 0.919 |
| | (.149) | (.142) | (.147) | (.135) |
| Age | .016** | 1.016** | .017** | 1.017** |
| | (.005) | (.005) | (.004) | (.005) |
| Residency | -.223 | 0.800 | -.071 | 0.843 |
| | (.199) | (.159) | (.203) | (.171) |
| Constant | -.808 | | -1.106 | |
| Log Likelihood | | -544.444 | | -548.860 |
| -2 ln $L$ $\chi^2$ | | 37.93 | | 41.71 |
| Prob > $\chi^2$ | | .000 | | .000 |
| Goodness of Fit $\chi^2$ | | 638.78 | | 620.20 |
| Prob > $\chi^2$ | | .439 | | .524 |

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Race predicts perceptions of police image in the hypothesized direction. A nonwhite respondent, for example, multiplies the odds favoring a belief that the police are friendly by .548 and by .462 for Fairness. Age is also a significant predictor for both models.

The contextual logistic regression models shown in Table 6 indicate race is a consistent significant predictor of perceptions of police image. Nonwhites are less inclined to believe the police are friendly or fair, controlling for Contact Rating. The odds on race in the Fairness model, for example, demonstrate that nonwhites are .401 times as likely to believe the police are fair. The effects associated with age vanish when Contact Rating is included. The earlier contextual efficacy models (Ta-

ble 4) also show the effects of Contact Rating dominate perceptions of police image. The odds favoring the perception that the police are friendly increases by 2.227 for every unit increase in Contact Rating. The same effect is observed in the Fairness model.

## TABLE 6
## Contextual Logistic Regression
## Models of Police Image

| Independent Variables ⁻ | Friendliness (N = 479) | | Fairness (N = 474) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Logit | Odds | Logit | Odds |
| Income | -.163 | 0.850 | .051 | 1.053 |
| | (.248) | (.211) | (.161) | (.170) |
| Race | -.718* | 0.488* | -.772** | 0.462** |
| | (.316) | (.154) | (.219) | (.101) |
| Years in School | .131 | 1.140 | .086 | 1.090 |
| | (.096) | (.109) | (.063) | (.068) |
| Sex | -.377 | 0.686 | -.085 | 0.919 |
| | (.228) | (.156) | (.147) | (.135) |
| Age | .013 | 1.013 | .013 | 1.013 |
| | (.008) | (.008) | (.007) | (.007) |
| Residency | -.253 | 0.777 | -.071 | 0.843 |
| | (.282) | (.219) | (.203) | (.171) |
| Contact Rating | .801** | 2.227** | .770** | 2.159** |
| | (.092) | (.204) | (.096) | (.207) |
| Constant | -3.300 | | -3.769 | |
| Log Likelihood | | -254.702 | | -269.207 |
| -2 ln $L$ $\chi^2$ | | 128.67 | | 118.15 |
| Prob > $\chi^2$ | | .000 | | .000 |
| Goodness of Fit $\chi^2$ | | 463.03 | | 461.81 |
| Prob > $\chi^2$ | | .257 | | .208 |

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

The most important findings associated with these models are that race and contact rating are the most pervasive contextual predictors of perceptions of police image. These relationships are not present to the same extent in the contextual efficacy models.

## DISCUSSION

Numerous relationships retain statistical significance across different models and/or dimensions. These findings cross-validate claims in the literature about the relationships between certain conventional in-

dependent variables and support for the police. These are the relationships which are significant several times or pervasive within one
dimension or across both dimensions. However, none of the relationships are as tidy as most research has assumed. This observation leads
to the assertion that support for the police is a "fuzzy," complicated,
and multidimensional concept.

Regardless of whether citizens are expressing their opinions about
the ability of the police to protect them, to solve crime, or to prevent
crime, age is positively related to confidence. This relationship confirms that age is a powerful predictor (Hadar & Snortum, 1975; Walker
et al., 1972). Specifically, the elderly have greater faith in the police
than do younger citizens. The contact variable introduced in the contextual models of police efficacy, however, minimizes the role of age.
Contact rating is the most pervasive and significant contextual predictor
for perceptions of the ability of the police to protect citizens, to solve
crime, and to prevent crime.

Race is not consistently significant across either the noncontextual
efficacy models or the contextual efficacy models. Yet, it is a significant
predictor of the ability of the police to solve crime, even when the contact rating variable is introduced. The implications are that race is not
the universally significant variable that the literature implies it is (e.g.,
Furstenberg & Wellford, 1973; Hadar & Snortum, 1975), especially
when considering perceptions of police efficacy.

The effects of race, however, dominate the image dimension. Race
retains significance across both the Friendliness and Fairness models in
both the noncontextual and contextual image models. These findings
imply that race is much more important when considering perceptions
of police image.

Several prior studies have deemed the relationships between some
independent variables (e.g., sex) and perceptions of the police as inconclusive. Inconclusive predictors of support for the police have included
sex (e.g., Correia et al., 1996; Winfree & Griffiths, 1977), education
(e.g., Correia et al., 1996; Cao et al., 1996), and location/residency (e.g.,
Albrecht & Green, 1977; Jacob, 1971). Analyzing these variables across
two dimensions and within ten different statistical models lends confidence to the finding that so-called "inconclusive" independent variables
have no bearing on perceptions of the police. Sex is not a significant
addition to any of the models in either the efficacy or image dimensions. Similarly, education is nonsignificant across both the efficacy and
image dimensions. The only exception to this trend is residency. Urban
residents are less inclined to believe the police could prevent crime.
However, location is not a significant predictor of support in either the

Solve or Protect models nor in the Friendliness or Fairness models. The residency effect drops out of the contextual models altogether.

# CONCLUSION

Critics of surveys addressing citizen perceptions of the police claim that knowing what the public thinks provides little guidance for policy (e.g., White & Menke, 1978). For example, some researchers argue that perceptions of police agencies are not determined by their performance, but rather by isolated experiences with law enforcement officials (e.g., Skogan, 1975). Moreover, some studies have revealed that support in attitude and support in action differ considerably, making it difficult for policymakers to respond to citizen concerns (Marenin, 1983a, 1983b). Unfortunately, these issues are not resolved here. However, this study does leave us one step closer to understanding the complexity of public attitudes toward the police.

This article has called attention to the multidimensionality of citizen support for the police. Previous attempts to portray support in unidimensional terms have neglected the complexity of public perceptions of police efficacy and image. The current study reveals that taken-for-granted independent variables, such as race and age, affect self-reported support for the police in a shifting manner. However, this relationship depends upon which dimension of police performance is considered. Furthermore, the effects vary intra-dimensionally (e.g., between the ability to prevent crime and solve crime).

Finally, a multidimensional portrayal of support for the police seeks to dispel the confusion surrounding so-called inconclusive independent variables and their relations to public perceptions of the police. Future researchers will need to dissect support even further as there probably are more than two dimensions to how citizens assess police work. Law enforcement officials clearly are charged with more than the duties of protecting citizens, preventing and solving crime, and portraying a positive image. Additionally, future researchers will need to confront the reality that not only is support multidimensional, but that citizen attitudes are complex, fluid, and contingent.

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