Police Violence and Public Perceptions: An Experimental Study of How Information and Endorsements Affect Support for Law Enforcement

Cheryl Boudreau, University of California, Davis
Scott A. MacKenzie, University of California, Davis
Daniel J. Simmons, University of California, Davis

Incidents of police violence can undermine trust in legal authorities. Whether such incidents have this effect will depend on how citizens evaluate victims, the police, and public officials. Citizens' evaluations may be shaped by information about (1) a pattern of police violence and (2) government responses. We study citizens' reactions to police violence by randomly assigning these two types of information in the context of the Stephon Clark shooting in Sacramento. We find that information influences levels of blame for and trust in the police, but the effects depend on citizens' race and whether they live in the community where the violence occurred. In contrast, information does not alter citizens' perceptions of local police officer organizations and, in turn, their willingness to follow police endorsements in elections. These results suggest a catch-22 whereby police violence can diminish the standing of police personnel, but favorable local opinion preserves their political influence.

I n recent years, episodes of police violence against unarmed citizens have inspired a contentious national debate about race and policing. In 2012, for example, the shooting of 17-year-old Trayvon Martin by a neighborhood watch coordinator was the most followed story in the United States for several weeks (Desmond, Papachristos, and Kirk 2016), including by President Obama, who spoke at length about the incident. Subsequent episodes of police officers killing unarmed black men (e.g., Michael Brown in Ferguson, MO, in 2014, Freddie Gray in Baltimore, MD, in 2015, and Stephon Clark in Sacramento, CA, in 2018) have received intensive media coverage followed by large protests.

Such episodes of police violence can undermine trust in law enforcement institutions. The use of deadly force against civilians has long been a source of conflict between minority groups and the police, with studies showing racial disparities in the use of deadly force and rate of questionable shootings (Fyfe 2002). Research also suggests that negative interactions with the police and high-profile instances of police misconduct can induce cynicism among black citizens (Kirk and Papachristos 2011; see also Desmond et al. 2016). Equally important, episodes of police violence can threaten public safety if they cause citizens to withhold information or not report crimes. One study found that police-related 911 calls in Milwaukee dropped precipitously after the beating of an unarmed black man by the police (Desmond et al. 2016).

Whether episodes of police violence have these effects will depend on how citizens evaluate victims, the police, and public

Cheryl Boudreau (clboudreau@ucdavis.edu) is a professor at the University of California, Davis, Davis, CA 95616. Scott A. MacKenzie (samackenzie@ucdavis.edu) is an associate professor at the University of California, Davis, Davis, CA 95616. Daniel J. Simmons (dansimmons@ucdavis.edu) is a PhD student at the University of California, Davis, Davis, CA 95616.

officials. Whom do citizens blame for police violence? Does police violence erode citizens' trust in the police and, as a result, undermine the political influence of law enforcement organizations? The answers to these questions are likely to be shaped by the information citizens receive after events like the Stephon Clark shooting. Media coverage, statements by public officials, and communications from others bombard normally inattentive citizens with details about the police officers and victims, accounts of other episodes involving the same or other police departments, and the actions that the police and public officials took in response. Whether and how such information affects citizens' perceptions of law enforcement organizations and their various political activities are open empirical questions.

To address these questions, we conduct two survey experiments that examine attitudes toward the police. In the first experiment, all respondents receive a description of the Stephon Clark shooting. In the treatment groups, respondents also receive information frequently disseminated after episodes of police violence: either (1) statistics about the use of deadly force and a description of another episode of police violence or (2) a summary of reforms implemented by the police and public officials in response to police violence. We assess the effects of this information on citizens' attributions of blame and their trust in the police. Later in the survey, we embed a second experiment in which respondents express their preferences about candidates running for sheriff and district attorney. In the control group, respondents do so after receiving only the candidates' official ballot descriptions. In the treatment group, respondents also receive information about endorsements from organizations representing police officers.

By randomly assigning information about police violence, as well as police endorsements, we make several contributions. First, the Clark shooting is a unique context in which to examine how citizens assign blame to those physically involved in police shootings (police officers, victims) and a range of actors who might respond to them (mayors, district attorneys, legislators). Our study also extends the focus of recent attribution research beyond areas of economic performance and disaster response (Arceneaux and Stein 2006; Malhotra and Kuo 2008; Rudolph 2003). Second, we examine perceptions of the Clark shooting in Sacramento and three California counties outside of it. This allows us to assess any differences between local and nonlocal reactions to police violence. Third, we conduct the first systematic study of the effects of information about police violence, including the existence, or not, of a pattern of police violence and what government is doing about it. Finally, we examine the effects of police endorsements in actual elections for sheriff and district attorney. This extends research on "information shortcuts," which has examined endorsements from political parties (Arceneaux 2008; Bullock 2011), news-

papers (Boudreau, Elmendorf, and MacKenzie 2015), and ethnic groups (Boudreau, Elmendorf, and MacKenzie 2019).

Our results show that information influences citizens' reactions to police violence, but the effects depend on citizens' race (i.e., black vs. nonblack) and whether they live in the community where the violence occurred. Overall, information describing a pattern of police violence leads respondents to blame the police and public officials more and to trust the police less. The exception is Sacramento respondents, who appear to resist negative information about "their" police. Information summarizing reforms reduces blame for the police and can increase trust, except among black respondents. However, neither type of information changes how respondents view local police officer organizations. In fact, endorsements from these organizations mostly increase support for sheriff and district attorney candidates, particularly among those who believe that the organization is knowledgeable and shares their interests. Taken together, these results suggest a catch-22 whereby episodes of police violence can diminish the standing of police personnel, but favorable local opinion might preserve their political influence.

THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

The theoretical framework that guides our study is attribution theory. This theory predicts that citizens' explanations of an event will depend on whether it is predominantly described as an individual incident (i.e., with an episodic frame) or as part of a broader context with more general evidence (i.e., with a thematic frame). Iyengar (1991), for example, demonstrates that citizens tend to explain poverty as an individual-level problem when the news media uses an episodic frame to describe it (e.g., focuses on people living in poverty). However, when the news media uses a thematic frame (e.g., presents poverty in terms of broader trends), citizens tend to explain poverty as a societal problem that implicates government responsibility.

Incidents of police violence are presented in both episodic and thematic ways. Media coverage and statements by public officials frequently provide extensive information about the police officers and/or victims involved. Citizens, for example, might learn about a victim's history, if any, of legal infractions or an officer's past misconduct or commendations. Citizens who receive such episodic information should be more likely to conclude that an incident of police violence, while tragic, reflects the actions of fallible individuals.

Communications about police violence can also contain thematic content that links a particular incident of violence to more general evidence. For example, media coverage might connect a current incident to other episodes of police violence.

Alternatively, news stories might provide statistical information, such as the number of officer-involved shootings and whether they are increasing. Such thematic information can establish a pattern of police violence in a particular community. Citizens who receive such information should be more likely to conclude that an incident of police violence is not isolated and, by implication, indicates a problem whose causes go beyond the victims' actions. Consequently, they may attribute blame more broadly to the police and local officials who oversee them. Conversely, they may be less likely to blame state and federal officials who are further removed from the local context. Our first hypothesis reflects this expectation.

H1. Citizens who receive thematic information describing a pattern of police violence will place less blame on the victim, state, and federal officials and more blame on the police and local officials who oversee them than citizens who receive only episodic information about police violence.

Alternatively, media coverage might contain thematic information that connects a particular incident of police violence to broader evidence about what, if anything, police and public officials are doing in response. For example, a police department might change how it engages with the community or revise its tactics for pursuing and detaining suspects. Local governments overseeing the police might hold hearings or impose reforms to reduce police violence in the future. Such activities are likely to be highlighted by local officials seeking to deflect blame for a single episode or pattern of police violence. Like information describing a pattern of police violence, such communications place a particular incident of police violence in a broader context and imply that government intervention is both necessary and appropriate. Unlike the pattern of violence information, however, information about police reforms may lead citizens to conclude that the police and local officials are doing what they can to prevent episodes of police violence and shift their blame to higher-level public officials. Our second hypothesis reflects this expectation.

H2. Citizens who receive thematic information summarizing reforms will place less blame on the victim, the police, and local officials and more blame on state and federal officials than citizens who receive only episodic information about police violence.

While attribution theory offers reason to expect that information will shape whom citizens blame for police violence, such effects could depend on whether citizens consider the police whose conduct is being questioned as part of their in-group or out-group. Monin, Sawyer, and Marquez (2008) find that blaming a person's in-group can cause him or her to become morally defensive (see also Malhotra and Margalit 2010). Rather than lead citizens to blame the police, thematic information (particularly information describing a pattern of police violence that questions the motives of the police) might trigger in-group bias among citizens who reside in the community where the police violence occurred. Thus, these citizens may shift responsibility away from "their" police in order to maintain a positive self-image. Conversely, black citizens may be more likely to blame the police (both in general and in response to thematic information) given long-standing tensions between black communities and the police and the tendency of highly policed black communities to view the police as an out-group (Weaver, Prowse, and Piston 2019).

Thematic information about police violence could also affect the extent to which citizens trust the police to make decisions that are good for the community. Information suggesting that an episode of police violence is part of a larger pattern can undermine citizens' beliefs that police personnel are acting in their best interest. In contrast, information indicating that the police have implemented reforms to prevent police violence can strengthen citizens' perceptions that the police are responsive to the needs of the public.

H3. Citizens who receive thematic information describing a pattern of police violence will express lower levels of trust in the police than citizens who receive only episodic information about police violence.

H4. Citizens who receive thematic information summarizing reforms will express higher levels of trust in the police than citizens who receive only episodic information about police violence.

Trust is an important outcome to examine because, in addition to affecting citizens' willingness to cooperate with the police (Desmond et al. 2016; Tyler and Fagan 2008), its erosion may compromise the political influence of law enforcement organizations, such as police officer associations (POAs). POAs are a ubiquitous presence in city halls, county administration buildings, and state capitols. In ordinary times, their legislative advocacy seeks to improve police pay and working conditions, as well as report on activities of interest to lawmakers. POAs testify before legislatures that are considering policy proposals affecting the police. POAs also spend vast sums to elect candidates friendly to their interests and frequently make endorsements.

We focus on POAs' efforts to elect county sheriffs and district attorneys. POAs endorse candidates running for these

offices because the stakes are high. Sheriffs exercise administrative control over tens of thousands of police deputies employed by county sheriff's departments. District attorneys work closely with the police and rely on police officers to investigate cases and testify at trials. They also decide whether to bring charges when officers are accused of misconduct. The effects of POA endorsements can be enhanced by sparse media coverage of local campaigns and, in states with nonpartisan elections, the lack of party labels on the ballot.

The persuasiveness of POA endorsements will likely depend upon whether citizens believe that their local POA is knowledgeable and shares common interests with them (Lupia and McCubbins 1998). By virtue of their close relationships with sheriffs and district attorneys, POAs are likely perceived as highly knowledgeable about candidates for these offices. Citizens might also perceive that they share common interests with POAs. However, episodes of police violence might reduce the extent to which citizens perceive that the police share common interests with them, thereby undermining the persuasiveness of POA endorsements. Whether they do so could depend on what citizens learn about these episodes, for example, whether a pattern of violence is evident and how the police and public officials are responding.

> **H5.** Citizens who receive POA endorsements will be more likely to support endorsed sheriff and district attorney candidates than citizens who do not receive POA endorsements. These effects will be larger among citizens with high levels of trust in the police.

EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN

The Stephon Clark shooting offers a unique context in which to test our hypotheses about how information affects citizens' reactions to police violence. In our first experiment, we give all respondents a brief description of the Clark shooting. The description states that on March 18, 2018, two Sacramento Police Department officers shot and killed Stephon Clark, a 22-year-old black man. The officers had been looking for a suspect who was breaking windows in the Meadowview neighborhood of Sacramento. They confronted Clark and ordered him to stop and show his hands, but Clark ran from the officers. According to the police, Clark then turned and held an object in front of him while he moved toward the officers. The officers believed that Clark was pointing a gun at them and, fearing their lives were in danger, shot and killed Clark. After the shooting, the police reported that Clark was only carrying a cell phone.

In the control group, respondents receive only this episodic information before expressing their opinions. Specifically, respondents are asked to rank order seven options from the most

to the least to blame for the death of Stephon Clark: Stephon Clark, the police officers involved in the shooting, Sacramento Police Chief Daniel Hahn, Mayor Darrell Steinberg, Sacramento County District Attorney Anne Marie Schubert, Governor Jerry Brown, or Senators Dianne Feinstein and Kamala Harris. Respondents also answer questions that measure their trust in Sacramento Police Department leaders and the extent to which they believe their local POA is knowledgeable about law enforcement issues and shares common interests with them.

In the "pattern of violence" treatment group, respondents receive not only episodic information but also thematic information that links the Clark shooting to other incidents of police violence in Sacramento. The information states that in 2017 there were 25 incidents of police violence in Sacramento that resulted in serious injury or death of the suspect, up from 20 in 2016. It also describes another incident in 2016 during which a black man not armed with a gun and posing no real imminent threat to officers or others was shot and killed by the Sacramento police. This enables us to test whether thematic information has its predicted effects even when paired with episodic information, as it often is in the real world (Iyengar 1991).

In the "reform" treatment group, respondents receive the episodic information plus thematic information that connects the Clark shooting to reforms adopted by the Sacramento police to prevent incidents like the Clark shooting. These include the creation of a citizen oversight commission to review police actions, a video-release policy that requires the department to release footage in officer-involved shootings within 30 days, and a requirement that officers undergo a 40-hour crisis intervention course (which trains police to de-escalate encounters).

After attributing blame and expressing their level of trust in the police, respondents are randomized into a second experiment. In this experiment, respondents express their preferences about candidates running for sheriff and district attorney in their county. In the control group, respondents are given only the official descriptions that appear on the ballot for each candidate before expressing which candidate they prefer. In the "police endorsement" treatment group, respondents receive the same official ballot descriptions and are also given the endorsements each candidate received from their local POA (see the online appendix for the survey text).

METHODS

The survey was administered online by Qualtrics in October and November 2018. We recruited respondents from four California counties (Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, and Sacramento) holding sheriff and district attorney elections. To

enhance our ability to assess local and nonlocal reactions to the Clark shooting, we oversampled Sacramento respondents ($N = 1{,}143$) relative to the other counties (Los Angeles $N = 439$; Orange $N = 440$; Riverside $N = 443$).

To test our hypotheses about the effects of information on blame attribution, we use a rank-ordered logit model (Allison and Christakis 1994). The rank-ordered logit model is a generalization of the conditional and multinomial logit models and helps explain how the characteristics of items and respondents affect the likelihood of each item being ranked higher (see Malhotra and Kuo 2008). Our dependent variable, Blame$_{ij}$, indicates the ranking respondent i assigns to item j. We use four dummy variables to categorize the items, including Police$_j$ (1 for the police officers and Police Chief Hahn, 0 otherwise), Local Officials$_j$ (1 for Mayor Steinberg and District Attorney Schubert), State/Federal Officials$_j$ (1 for Governor Brown and Senators Feinstein and Harris), and Victim$_j$ (1 for Clark, the omitted category). The variables, Pattern Info$_i$ and Reform Info$_i$, identify respondents assigned to our treatment groups. We interact these variables with the item categories and dummy variables for Sacramento and black respondents. Using this model, we can calculate blame coefficients (log odds) that enable us to compare the effects of our treatments against our control group for Sacramento, non-Sacramento, and black respondents (see the online appendix for more details).

To assess the effects of information on trust in Sacramento Police Department leaders and local POAs, we estimate two logit models. The first dependent variable, Trust SPD$_i$, is a dummy variable that takes the value 1 for respondents who "strongly" or "somewhat" agree that they trust the leaders of the Sacramento Police Department to make decisions that are good for everyone in the city, and 0 otherwise. The second dependent variable, Trust POA$_i$, is a dummy variable that indicates whether a respondent believes that his or her local POA is knowledgeable and shares common interests. This variable takes the value 1 for respondents who agree with their local POA "all of the time" or "most of the time" about law enforcement issues and believe the local POA knows "a lot" or "some" about those issues. In both models, we include the treatment predictors, Pattern Info$_i$ and Reform Info$_i$, and interact these with the dummy variables identifying Sacramento and black respondents. We test our hypotheses by converting the coefficients of both models to predicted probabilities of trust in our treatment and control groups for Sacramento, non-Sacramento, and black respondents.

To assess the effects of police endorsements, we analyze support for sheriff and district attorney candidates. Our dependent variable, Prefer Police Candidate$_i$, is a trichotomous variable that indicates whether a respondent prefers a candidate endorsed by their local POA. It takes the value 3 for respondents who prefer the endorsed candidate, 2 for those who say "don't know," and 1 for those who prefer the opponent.[1] The dummy variable, Police Endorsement$_i$, indicates whether a respondent received information about POA endorsements. We interact this variable with the dummy variables identifying Sacramento and black respondents and estimate ordered logit models for sheriff and district attorney elections. To assess whether the effects of POA endorsements depend on whether respondents perceive their local POA as knowledgeable and sharing their interests, we also estimate models that include Trust POA$_i$ and its interaction with our endorsement treatment, Police Endorsement$_i$ · Trust POA$_i$. This allows us to compare probabilities of support among respondents with low versus high levels of trust in their local POA for Sacramento, non-Sacramento, and black respondents.

RESULTS
Our results show that information influences reactions to episodes of police violence, but the effects depend on respondents' race (i.e., black or nonblack) and whether they live in the community where the violence took place. Overall, information describing a pattern of police violence leads respondents to blame the police and public officials more and to trust the police less. The exception is Sacramento respondents, who appear to resist negative information about "their" police. Information summarizing reforms reduces blame for the police and can increase trust, except among black respondents. In contrast, information about a pattern of violence or summarizing reforms does not change how respondents view their local POA. Moreover, POA endorsements mostly increase support for sheriff and district attorney candidates, especially among those who believe that the POA is knowledgeable and shares their interests.

Attributions of blame for the Stephon Clark shooting
Our analysis of respondents' blame rankings shows the powerful effects of information, as well as different reactions to it among local versus nonlocal and black versus nonblack respondents. Table 1 presents blame coefficients calculated from our rank-ordered logit model. Large positive (negative) numbers correspond to greater (lesser) blame, relative to the victim. For example, non-Sacramento respondents in the control group are significantly more likely to blame police (1.06) and less likely to blame state/federal officials (-0.60), relative to the victim. In the control group, the blame coefficients for non-

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1. We interpret "don't know" responses as indifference between the candidates. We find similar results when we exclude "don't know" responses and examine support via a logit model.

Table 1. Attributions of Blame by Treatment/Control and Respondent Characteristics

Object of Blame	Control Group	Pattern Information	Reform Information	Pattern − Control	Reform − Control
Sacramento respondents:					
Victim	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00
Police	**.26**	.03	−**.19**	−**.22**	−**.45**
Local officials	−**.60**	−**.80**	−**1.13**	−**.20**	−**.53**
State/federal officials	−**1.28**	−**1.47**	−**1.85**	−**.20**	−**.57**
Non-Sacramento respondents:					
Victim	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00
Police	**1.06**	**1.52**	**.79**	**.46**	−**.27**
Local officials	.02	.37	−.05	**.35**	−.07
State/federal officials	−**.60**	−**.33**	−**.53**	**.27**	.07
Black respondents:					
Victim	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00
Police	**2.61**	**3.44**	**3.33**	**.82**	**.71**
Local officials	**1.47**	**2.04**	**1.88**	**.57**	.42
State/federal officials	**.64**	**1.41**	**1.36**	**.77**	**.72**

Note. Numbers in the left three columns are parameter estimates calculated from the rank-ordered logit model in table A2. Numbers in the right two columns are differences in the estimates between each treatment group and the control group. Boldface = $p < .05$, one-tailed.

Sacramento respondents exceed those of Sacramento respondents, indicating that non-Sacramento respondents find the police and public officials to be more blameworthy. The blame coefficients for black respondents in the control group are greater still. Even before respondents receive information, the gaps in their blame attributions are already large and statistically significant.

The column labeled "Pattern − Control" shows the difference in coefficients between our pattern of violence treatment and the control group for each object of blame. The results indicate that the pattern of violence treatment significantly increases blame for the police, as well as local and state/federal officials, among non-Sacramento respondents. This is consistent with hypothesis 1. Substantively, these differences have an odds interpretation. The difference in coefficients for the police among non-Sacramento respondents in the pattern of violence treatment group (1.52) and the control group (1.06) is 0.46. Exponentiating, we get $e^{0.46} = 1.58$, which means that the odds of blaming the police officers and Police Chief Hahn in the pattern of violence treatment are 1.58 times the odds in the control group for non-Sacramento respondents.

The column labeled "Reform − Control" shows the difference in coefficients between our reform information treatment and the control group for each object of blame. The results show that reform information significantly reduces blame for the police among non-Sacramento respondents. Indeed, the odds of blaming the police officers and Police Chief Hahn in the reform treatment group are 0.76 times the odds for the

control group. Reform information also reduces blame for Mayor Steinberg and District Attorney Schubert (local officials) and increases blame for Governor Brown and California's senators (state/federal officials), though these differences are not statistically significant. Together, these results are consistent with hypothesis 2.

Sacramento respondents react quite differently to information. In particular, the pattern of violence treatment significantly reduces blame for the police, relative to the control group, among Sacramento respondents. Indeed, the odds of blaming the police officers and Police Chief Hahn in the pattern of violence treatment group are 0.80 times the odds in the control group. Information about a pattern of violence also significantly reduces blame for local officials. These differences support our expectations about in-group bias muting blame for the police and local officials in communities where police violence occurs. We also find that information summarizing reforms significantly reduces blame for the police, local officials, and state/federal officials among Sacramento respondents.[2]

Black respondents react still differently to information. In response to information showing a pattern of violence, they place significantly greater blame on the police, local, and state/federal officials. The odds that black respondents in the pattern of violence treatment group blame the police are 2.27 times

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2. If pretreatment explained the different responses among Sacramento respondents, they would simply be less likely to react to the information, relative to the control group.

those in the control group. For local and state/federal officials, the odds are 1.77 and 2.16 times those in the control group, respectively. Interestingly, reform information also led black respondents to place significantly greater blame on the police and public officials. Whereas information summarizing reforms helps mitigate blame among nonblack respondents, black respondents appear to interpret it as confirmation that the police and public officials bear greater responsibility for the Clark shooting. These effects are remarkable given that black respondents in the control group are already more likely to blame the police and public officials than nonblack respondents in Sacramento and the other counties.

The effects of information on trust in the police

Our results also demonstrate that information affects trust in police personnel. Figure 1A plots predicted probabilities from our logit model of trust in leaders of the Sacramento Police Department (SPD). Consistent with hypothesis 3, information about a pattern of violence leads non-Sacramento respondents to reduce their trust in SPD leaders. The probability that a non-Sacramento respondent agrees that they trust SPD leaders to make decisions that are good for everyone in the city significantly decreases from 0.61 in the control group to 0.49 in the pattern of violence treatment group. Trust in SPD leaders also decreases from already low levels of trust among black respondents in response to the pattern of violence information (from 0.27 to 0.21), though the difference is not significant. In contrast, information about a pattern of violence has no effect on trust among Sacramento respondents. These respondents

also exhibit higher levels of trust in the SPD overall. We find less support for hypothesis 4, which predicts increased trust in response to information summarizing reforms. While trust increases slightly among non-Sacramento and Sacramento respondents, neither effect is statistically significant.

We also find little evidence that information alters respondents' willingness to trust their local POA, a necessary condition for the political influence of such organizations. Figure 1B plots predicted probabilities from our second logit model that examines whether respondents perceive that their local POA is knowledgeable and shares their interests. We find no significant differences in respondents' perceptions of their local POA in the pattern of violence and control groups. Consistent with hypothesis 4, the probability that respondents believe their POA is knowledgeable and shares their interests is higher in the reform information treatment group among both non-Sacramento and Sacramento respondents, but neither difference is significant. Black respondents are less likely than others to believe their local POA is knowledgeable and shares their interests and, if anything, information summarizing reforms only weakens this belief.

Police endorsements and preferences for sheriff and district attorney candidates

Consistent with respondents' stable levels of trust in their local POA, we observe strong effects of POA endorsements on support for sheriff and district attorney candidates. Figure 2 plots predicted probabilities from our ordered logit models of respondents' preferences for these candidates among Sac-
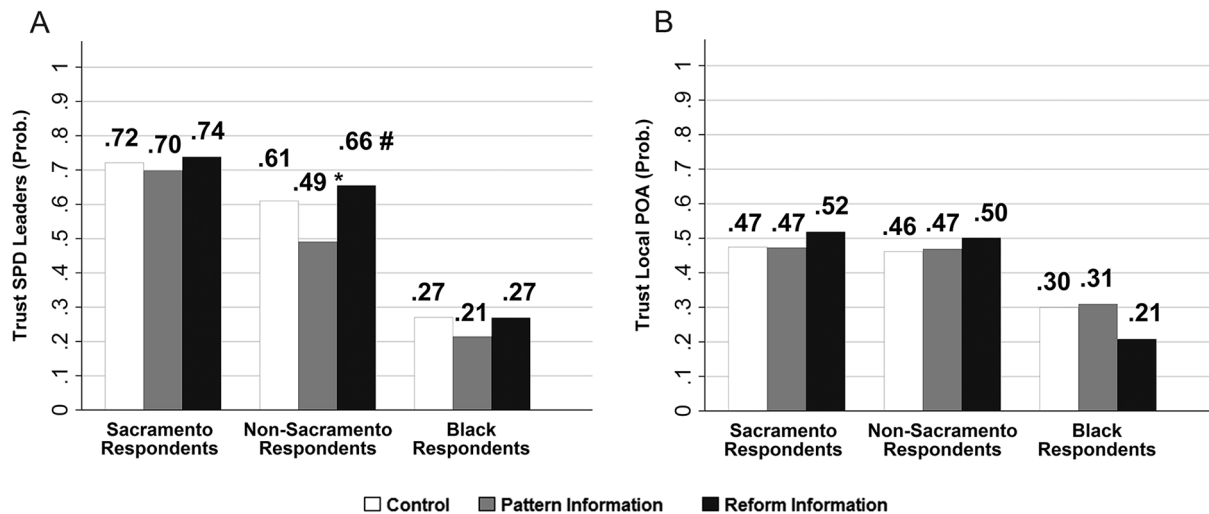

Figure 1. The effect of information on trust in the police. *A*, Trust SPD leaders to make decisions that are good for everyone in the city. *B*, Believe POA knows about law enforcement issues and agree with it most or all of the time. Numbers are predicted probabilities respondents (*a*) "strongly" or "somewhat" agree that "I trust the leaders of the Sacramento Police Department to make decisions that are good for everyone in the city" and (*b*) believe their local police officer association knows "a lot" or "some" about law enforcement issues and also agree "all of the time" or "most of the time" with their local POA on these issues from the models in table A3 (tables A1–A16 are available online). *Difference with control is significant ($p < .05$, one-tailed). #Difference with pattern information is significant ($p < .05$, one-tailed).
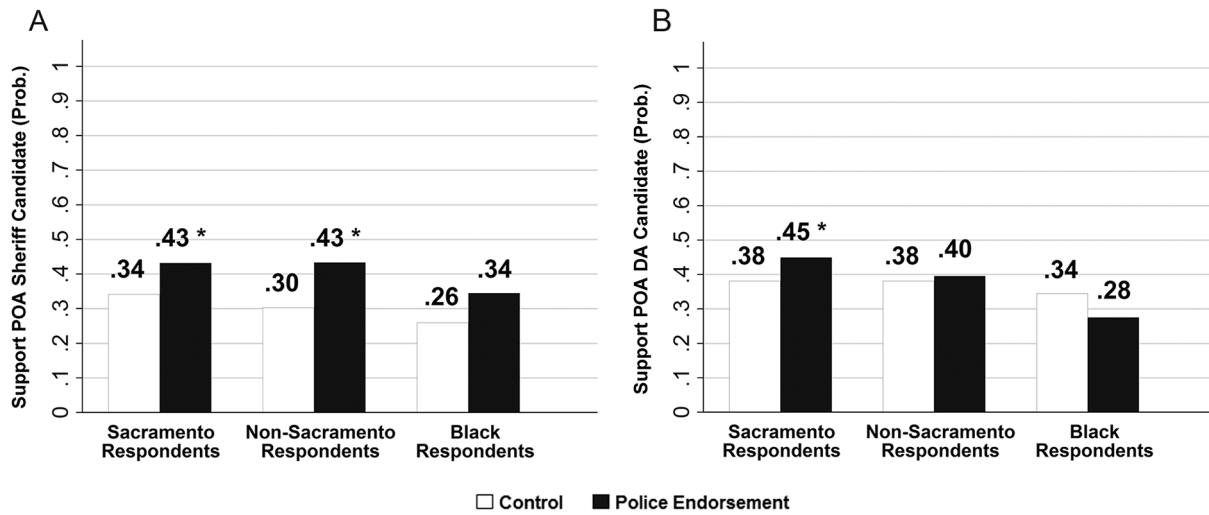
A

B

Figure 2. The effect of police endorsements on support for the endorsed candidate. *A*, Sheriff. *B*, District attorney. Numbers are predicted probabilities of support for candidates endorsed by police officer associations from the models in table A6. *Difference with control is significant ($p < .05$, one-tailed).

ramento, non-Sacramento, and black respondents. For all three types of respondents, POA endorsements lead to substantively large increases in support for sheriff candidates, with significant effects among Sacramento and non-Sacramento respondents. These results are consistent with hypothesis 5. Whether respondents received the pattern of violence or reform information did not significantly alter these effects, consistent with the small impact we find for thematic information on respondents' trust in their local POA.

We find more modest effects of POA endorsements on support for district attorney candidates. The POA endorsements significantly increase support for the endorsed candidate among Sacramento respondents (from 0.38 to 0.45) but

not among non-Sacramento respondents. Among blacks, the endorsements actually decrease support. These weaker effects may stem from respondents seeing less of a connection between POAs and district attorneys and/or considering POAs to be less knowledgeable about district attorney candidates.

Our results also indicate that the influence of POA endorsements is conditioned by respondents' trust in their local POA. Figure 3 plots predicted probabilities of support for sheriff and district attorney candidates in the control and treatment groups by levels of trust. Among Sacramento, non-Sacramento, and black respondents who believe their local POA is knowledgeable and shares their interests, police endorsements have large and significant effects on support for sheriff candidates.
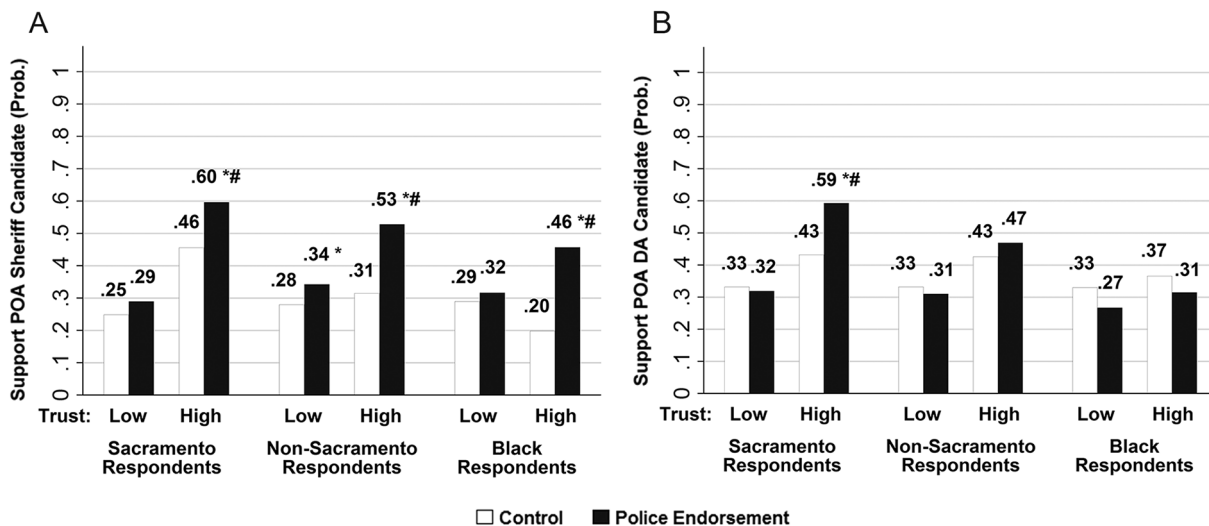
A

B

Figure 3. The effect of police endorsements by levels of trust in the police. *A*, Sheriff. *B*, District attorney. Numbers are predicted probabilities of support for candidates endorsed by police officer associations from the models in table A8. *Difference with control is significant ($p < .05$, one-tailed). #Difference in effect of endorsement between respondents with low and high perceptions of trustworthiness is significant ($p < .05$, one-tailed).

We observe smaller effects on respondents with low levels of trust. As figure 3*A* shows, the difference in support for sheriff candidates between treatment and control groups is significantly larger among respondents with high levels of trust. We observe similar, though more modest, effects of trust on support for district attorney candidates. These results lend further support to hypothesis 5.

CONCLUSION

In this study, we sought to advance scholarship on blame attribution, trust in the police, and the political influence of law enforcement organizations, as well as provide a substantive account of citizens' reactions to police violence. We found evidence for several hypotheses, showing that thematic information about a pattern of violence leads citizens to blame the police and public officials more and reassess their trust in the police department involved. This is particularly true among black respondents, reflecting long-standing tensions between black communities and the police. Further, we demonstrate that information affects those who live in the community where police violence occurs differently, perhaps due to in-group bias. Finally, we demonstrate the large effects of police endorsements and the importance of citizens' perceptions of common interests with the police in conditioning these effects.

We hope this study will stimulate future research on the political consequences of police violence. Previous research has focused on the antecedents of police legitimacy and the effects of police performance on citizen compliance with the law and cooperation with the police (Tyler and Fagan 2008). Important as these subjects are, they reveal little about how citizens will react to episodes of police violence and, in turn, how governments will respond to them. Our study shows the value of experimentally manipulating information about police violence and assessing its local and nonlocal effects, including consequences for police organizations' political activities. Our study, based on a single incident in Sacramento, leaves many open questions. These include the generalizability of our results to other communities, episodes, and participants, and how long-lasting the effects of police violence and information about it are likely to be.

Practically speaking, our results suggest a catch-22 for efforts to reduce police violence. On the positive side, evidence that information about a pattern of police violence leads many citizens to blame the police and reassess their trust implies that there are benefits to avoiding police violence. That information about reforms can mitigate such adverse public reaction suggests that when such episodes occur, law enforcement officials do better by reevaluating their practices and publicizing efforts to do so. On the negative side, the weak effects of information

we find in Sacramento suggest that local voters may not punish the police or public officials for police violence. Further, the large effects of endorsements give public officials a reason to avoid taking positions at odds with POAs. While popular accounts of efforts to reduce police violence cite institutional opposition by law enforcement, our study suggests that resistance to change may be undergirded by a reservoir of positive local public opinion favoring the police.

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