Exploring the Relationship between Citizens' Belief to Defund Police Budgets and their Knowledge of Police Training: Does Place of Residence Mediate the Relationship?

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Abstract: The actions of the police have been scrutinized for many years and recently there have been calls to reform the police with suggestions to defund police budgets while also enhancing their training. This study surveys citizens in a southern state in the United States to explore the relationship among citizens' perception to divert police budgetary dollars to social service agencies, their knowledge of police training in relation to resolving hostile encounters with members of the public, and whether living in a metropolitan area compared to a nonmetropolitan area mediates the relationship. Using structural equation modeling (SEM), the results suggested that those favoring diverting police budgetary dollars to social service agencies are less knowledgeable about the type of training the police have in efforts to defuse hostile interactions with members of the public, while place of residence had a minimal effect on the relationship.

Keywords: police, defunding, police training, use of force

For over the past 50 years, police behavior has received intense scrutiny, especially regarding their use of force against members of the public. The public response has been to suggest the police receive better (or more) training. Reflecting back to the 1960s, President Johnson's Blue Ribbon Commission on Policing recommended the need for the police to receive enhanced training (United States, 1967). These calls for enhanced police training were the result of perceptions regarding how police interacted with individuals during the Civil Rights protests, Vietnam protests, and their response

during the 1968 Democratic Convention. The police also have a history of aggressive policing toward Black Americans that dates back to the 1700s (Vitale, 2017; Williams & Murphy, 1990). Furthermore, increases in national media attention centered on the death of unarmed minorities and perceived abuses of power by law enforcement has bolstered anti-police sentiment and rhetoric by the public spawning renewed calls for police reform (Blumberg et al, 2019; Lee, Weitzer, & Martinez, 2018; Weitzer, 2015), including enhanced training to better ensure police actions align with public expectations for policing in a democratic society (Blumberg et al, 2019; President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing, 2015).

Policing in the United States is complex due to the nature of its role and evolving public expectations. Police are the state's primary agent for social control and are authorized to use coercive force. Also, police officers are often required to respond to and resolve situations that do not fall traditionally under enforcing laws and maintaining social control (Herbert, 2006; Vitale, 2017). Given that police must be available 24 hours a day, everyday; the police are often requested to address situations when no other agency is available or service exists (e.g., mental health-related incidents). The police are emergency first responders and the point of first contact, which often results in temporary solutions to resolve problems (Horwitz et al., 2011; Wood et al., 2017). However, one could argue that the police are better trainined today than they have been at any time in history. For example, in Texas, new officers receive over 640 hours of training in a myriad of topics compared to 140 hours in 1972 (Texas Commission on Law Enforcement, 2019). Whereas, a national study on police academies' training revealed officers are required to complete 837 contact hours (on average) that far exceeds recommendations put forth by the President's Commission in 1967 (Sloan & Paoline, 2021, p. 24). Regardless of the increased amount of training provided to officers, the topic of police training is at the forefront of police reform discussions. A primary reason is that there is a strongly held belief that additional training for the police will resolve the ills that have been plaguing the police in regard to their actions as an avenue to increase community trust and promote police legitimacy (Blumberg et al, 2019; President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing, 2015).

In terms of police funding, police budgets in the United States (US) have nearly tripled since the late 1970s (Urban Institute, n.d.). The increased budgetary dollars have resulted in more officers on the street throughout communities along with increases in police training requirements. Due to the events involving the use of police force over the past decade, which have been reminiscent of police actions during the 1960s, societal members are questioning if any substantial change or reform has occurred in terms of policing practices directed against minority and low-income communities (President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing, 2015; Robinson, 2020). Therefore, some segments

of society have argued that police budgetary dollars should be redirected to other agencies that may better serve the needs of communities such as social service agencies or community programs equipped toward addressing the needs of the homeless and mentally ill, among others that the police are not equipped to adequately assist (Robinson, 2020; Updegrove et al., 2020).

The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between public support for diverting police budgetary dollars and citizens' knowledge of current police training curriculum in a southern state. In addition, we examine whether living in a metropolitian area versus a non-metropolitan area mediates that relationship.

Literature Review

Historical Calls for Police Training

Concerns over police training and the need for additional training have persisted for decades (Blumberg et al., 2019; Robinson, 2020; Walker, 1975). These debates often focus on whether more training is needed and if so, what type of training is required to meet the changing roles of policing (Sloan & Paoline, 2021). Police officers serve as the initial point of contact in the criminal justice system, wielding significant influence over incident outcomes and individuals' entry into the system due to their discretionary powers. For this reason, scrutiny has historically centered on police use of force and other discriminating policing practices, particularly regarding Blacks and Hispanics (Weitzer, 2015), with roots tracing back to slave patrols in the 1700s, through reconstruction after the Civil War, the Jim Crow era, Civil Rights era, and beyond (Williams & Murphy, 1990).

Efforts to enhance police training and professionalism began during the progressive era under the leadership of August Vollmer and others, leading to the establishment of the Wickersham Commission in 1929 by President Hoover (Oliver, 2017). Excessive use of force against minorities persisted for years fostering increased civil unrest, leading to the Kerner Commission's report that recommended improved training (The National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, 2016). Furthermore, the civil unrest of the 1960s prompted the prioritization of managing officers' discretion and use of force (Smith, 2022).

The Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1965 created the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA) to enhance police professionalism (Hochstein, 2016). Since then, police training has expanded to cover constitutional practices, community policing, racial profiling, use of advanced equipment, interactions with the mentally ill, and de-escalation techniques (Benedict et al., 2000; Carter, 2018; Geis, 1990; Glaser, 2010; Helfers et al., 2021; Hochstein, 2016)), all of which have

been intended to improve relationships with the community; particularly Blacks and Hispanics. However, instances of police exceeding their authority continued to occur leading to other incidents of civil unrest. For example, Rodney King's arrest in 1991 exposed excessive force and accountability concerns (Gooding-Williams, 2013), leading to the formation of the Christopher Commission (Reese, 2003).

Police in Crisis

Beginning in the summer of 2014, scrutiny on police actions directed toward minorities, particularly Blacks began to increase (Deuchar et al., 2019; MacDonald, 2017). Since the emergence of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement after the non-police fatal shooting of Trayvon Martin and the resulting not guilty verdict in 2013 (Chase, 2018), there has been increased societal attention devoted to police use of force. The BLM movement originated as a social media campaign for society to recognize violence against Blacks and to value their lives in the same way as whites lives are valued (Chase, 2018). The movement gained momentum after the police related deaths of Eric Garner by the NYPD and Michael Brown by the Ferguson, MO PD during the summer of 2014 (Lee et al., 2018, Wietzer, 2015).

The deaths of Eric Garner and Michael Brown were the first of several highly publicized police use of force incidents that drew society's attention to how Blacks were being treated by the police (Helfers et al., 2022; Lee et al., 2018). The repetitive incidents (e.g.; Laquan McDonald, Anthony Hill, Eric Harris, Walter Scott, Sandra Bland, Alton Sterling, Philando Castille, Breonna Taylor, Atatiana Jefferson, among others) have sparked protests in cities across the US as people perceived the police not being held accountable for their behavior. There has also been pressure for the police to reform their practices. The public outrage culminated on May 25, 2020 with the murder of George Floyd. Protests not only occurred throughout cities in the US, but also in numerous countries across the globe (NBC News, 2020). And then again, in January 2023 in Memphis, TN, police used excessive force to arrest Tyre Nichols. After this incident, there were calls for police reform at the national level (Eaglin, 2021; Jefferson-Bullock, 2021), while just prior to the incident, the Police Executive Research Forum (2022) highlighted shortfalls in police training as being outdated and not meeting the expectations of society. However, Congressman Jordan (R-Ohio) is convinced that federal police reform is not the answer and believes that a lack of training was the issue in Nichols' death (Wallace, 2023).

Defund Movement

Reforming the police is a multifaceted and intricate concept, complicated by the police's public support and associated political challenges. There is no consensus on how

defunding should be approached. Some scholars propose redirecting police resources, such as budgetary funds, to social service agencies specializing in addressing education, healthcare, homelessness, mental health, and substance abuse issues (Cummins, 2022; Koziarski & Huey, 2021; Lum et al., 2022; Su et al., 2022), while popular media has presented varying interpretations of defunding, with some suggesting complete removal of funds from the police (Desai, 2020, p. 4). Another approach has been the call for abolishing the police, as Minneapolis, MN contemplated after the murder of George Floyd. This ongoing debate questions whether the police are burdened with excessive expectations and whether changes to their funding should be considered.

The defunding concept faces challenges, as cities that initially defunded their police departments later reversed decisions. For example, in July 2020, the New York City Council reduced the NYPD's budget by $1 billion from its annual budget, followed by increased shootings and homicides (Gagliano, 2020; Hico, 2020). Similarly, Los Angeles reduced the LAPD budget, leading to a decrease in officers and a 10 percent increase in homicides (CBS News, 2020; Hice, 2020). Atlanta saw a rise in the crime rate, prompting mayoral candidates to promise more police hiring (Elliot, 2021). Minneapolis proposed replacing the police department but settled for a small budget reduction, causing staffing and resource issues (Gagliano, 2020; Hice, 2020). Seattle's budget cuts led to the Chief's resignation and strained resources (Lum et al., 2022). Austin had to reinstate police budget funds due to legislative penalties when the Governor signed legislation penalizing municipalities for reducing police budgets (Office of the Texas Governor, 2022). These cases demonstrate the limitations of solely defunding police budgets as a solution to address citizens' concerns about police accountability.

Community Expectations and Support for Police

Policing in the US is complex, with no consensus on the precise responsibilities and roles of law enforcement. Additionally, the expectations regarding the performance of police officers in communities constantly evolve due to changes in case law, departmental directives, and public expectations. The US constitution, specifically the Bill of Rights, explicitly defines how citizens should be treated within the American judicial system. These rights serve as guiding principles for agency policies, officer training, and law enforcement practices in respective states or jurisdictions. However, interpretations of these rights may differ in local communities, both in metropolitan (urban) and nonmetropolitan (rural) areas, influenced by the unique characteristics of each community (Ball, 2001; Herbert, 2006). Operating budgets, community norms, and perceptions of police effectiveness also vary based on the specific community (Brown & Benedict, 2002). Municipal and county law enforcement agencies are accountable to the communities they serve, as they rely on voter-funded resources (Benedict et al.,

2000). To attract the most competent and dedicated individuals who seek increased departmental funding and support from the public, police officials must be attentive to the community's perception of their agency (Benedict et al., 2000). However, there is limited research comparing public perceptions of police between metropolitan and nonmetropolitan (rural) areas.

While some may assume that the policing model and training requirements are universally applied to all police organizations, there are no national police training standards. Instead, individual states typically establish minimum training expectations, with some agencies offering additional training (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2020; US Department of Justice, n.d.). In reality, there are differences in how policing is perceived in rural and metropolitan jurisdictions. Previous research has predominantly focused on crime rates and public attitudes toward the police in metropolitan areas, particularly concerning race, ethnicity, and fear of crime (Payne et al., 2005). Early studies in the 1970s comparing fear of crime in urban and rural areas found that rural areas generally exhibited lower levels of fear (Nofziger & Williams, 2005). Furthermore, in rural areas, police officers reported a closer quality of interaction with the community (Nofziger & Williams, 2005, p. 264). In regard to police style preferences, urban residents generally showed a stronger preference for community policing and community-oriented activities, while suburban or rural residents favored police professionalism and professional police activities to a greater extent (Jiao, 2001). Moreover, previous research has indicated that rural areas express lower satisfaction with police services and have less confidence in the police (Hu et al., 2020). Nonetheless, the challenge in both metropolitan and nonmetropolitan areas lies in understanding the purpose and limitations of the police in order to effectively serve the communities they are responsible for (Jiao, 2001; Nofziger, 2005; Pelfrey, 2007). Simply, practices that may be efficient in urban areas may not be practical or effective in rural areas (Payne et al., 2005). This understanding is crucial for police agencies to implement policies and adapt to changes according to the needs and priorities of the communities they serve, particularly since nearly half (48%) of local police organizations employ fewer than 10 sworn officers (Hyland & Davis, 2019).

This study aims to enhance our understanding of the interplay between citizen perceptions, specifically regarding support for reallocating police budgetary funds to social service agencies, their knowledge of police training for resolving hostile encounters, and the geographical location of their residence (metropolitan or non-metropolitan area). The research question consists of two parts. Firstly, what is the association between citizen perceptions of reallocating police budgetary funds to social service agencies and their awareness of police training in handling hostile encounters? Secondly, to what extent does the place of residence, whether metropolitan or non-

metropolitan, mediate this relationship? This area of research remains unexplored, and the findings will contribute to the understanding of this relationship, benefiting citizens, practitioners, and scholars in informing policy discussions. Furthermore, it may redirect the discourse from questioning the need for increased police training following highly publicized incidents involving the police.

Methods

This is the first study to the authors knowledge that examines the association between citizens' perceptions of supporting the diversion of police budgetary dollars toward social service agencies to address some non-police related actions and their knowledge of the training police officers receive to safely diffuse interactions with individuals they encounter, while also determining if living in a major metropolitan area compared to a non-metropolitan area mediates the aforementioned relationship. The hypotheses posed for this study were as follows: 1) those with higher beliefs that police budgets should be reduced (diverted) and redirected toward other entities, such as social workers, would be less knowledgeable on the training police officers undergo to resolve encounters with members of the public, and 2) the area, metropolitan vs non-metropolitan area, where a person resides would mediate the relationship of the level of support for diverting police budgetary dollars and their knowledge of the training police officers undergo to resolve hostile encounters.

The data for this study was obtained from surveying members of the public that live in a southern state in the US. Inquires were sent to organizations (e.g., Chambers of Commerce, regional Council of Governments, etc.) throughout the state in an effort to survey members of the public that did not have family or friends that were police officers. The survey was available for members of the public to complete between June 1, 2022 through September 15, 2022. Individuals that received the email survey were advised that their participation was voluntary and their responses would be anonymous. There were a total of 603 surveys that were submitted, although not all respondents answered all the questions.

The survey asked respondents to share their views about whether they know about certain types of training police officers complete, along with their level of agreement on the topic of diverting police budgetary dollars away from police agencies and toward other agencies that would handle non-police related calls for service.

Variables

There were three variables used to examine the research question in this study. Two were observed variables that were taken from items in the survey (level of agreement on diverting police budgetary dollars and the location where the respondent resided).

The third variable was a latent variable that tapped into the construct of training the police receive on options available for resolving situations with the public, this variable was named "Training." A latent variable is an unobserved variable that comprises two or more observed variables which measure an underlying construct (Lei & Wu, 2007). To identify the latent variable, the observed training variables were placed in an exploratory factor analysis. Once the variables were identified then a confirmatory factor analysis procedure was performed. Brown (2014) suggests performing a confirmatory factor analysis to empirically identify the underlying construct. This also allows for the co-variation of the error terms. This latent variable, along with the observed variable (metro) were endogenous variables in the model, while respondents' level of agreement to divert police budgetary dollars to social service type agencies was an exogenous variable.

Exogenous Variable

The exogenous variable was respondents' level of agreement to divert police budgetary dollars to social service type agenices. The survey item asked what the respondents level of agreement was to diverting police budgetary dollars. A Likert scale was used that ranged from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (6).

Endogenous Variables

The first endogenous variable was the latent variable mentioned above. To construct this variable, respondents were asked whether they knew if police officers were required to complete training on various topics (verbal options to resolve an incident, de-escalation strategies, and use of force options) in order to maintain their license to be police officers. Each variable was a dichotmous variable where respondents answered with No (=0) or Yes (=1). The CFA factor loadings ranged from 0.61 to 0.73 and indicated a respectable level of reliability (ɑ=0.70; DeVellis, 2017). And, the other endogenous variable asked respondents whether they lived in a large metropolitan area of the state (the major metropolitan areas were identified for the respondent to answer the question). This was a dichotomous variable, No (=0) or Yes (=1).

Analysis Plan

This study used structural equation modeling (SEM) to examine the relationship between the exogenous and endogenous variables. Using SEM is a recognized statistical technique because of the latent variable in the model. SEM also allows the partialling out of measurement error (Brown, 2014). Furthermore, this type of model allows the sharing of variances while also having a direct effect of the two endogenous variables (Brown, 2014). The researchers were not only interested in the association between respondents perceptions of diverting police budgetary dollars to social service type

agencies and their awareness of the training police experience to resolve interactions with the public, but also whether living in a large metropolitan area compared to a non-metropolitan area mediates the relationship.

Results

All of the above mentioned variables were placed in the model (See Figure 1). The first step when considering SEM is to ensure the model fit is acceptable. The goal for a satisfactory SEM model is for two of three critical indicators (X^2, RMSEA, and CFI) to meet acceptable standards. Acock (2013) suggest the X^2 statistic should not be statistically significant, the RMSEA value should be 0.05 or less, and the CFI to be 0.95 or higher. An analysis of our model revealed all three indicators met the criteria for a good model fit ($X^2_{(4)}$ = 7.147; $p > 0.05$; RMSEA = 0.036; CFI = 0.989).

The results indicated that respondents' level of agreement/disagreement on diverting police budgetary dollars to social service type agencies for non-police required calls for service had a statistically significant negative effect (b = -0.25, $p < 0.001$) on their knowledge of the training police officers are required to have in regard to their options in resolving interactions with the public. This can be interpreted to be the more a person supports diverting police budgetary dollars by redirecting those resources to other entities, such as social workers, the lower their awareness is on the type of training officers have in an effort to successfully resolve an encounter with a member of the public, while controlling for whether they live in a metropolitan area or not. This confirms the first hypothesis.
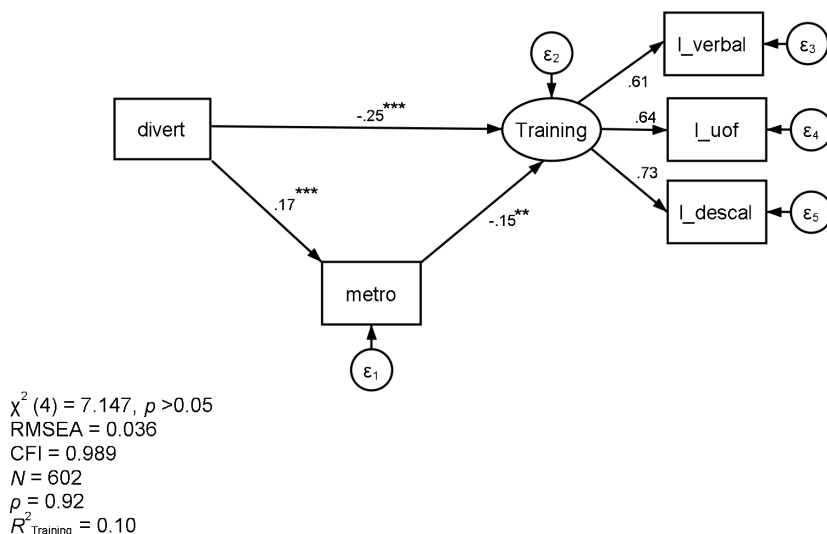

χ^2 (4) = 7.147, p >0.05
RMSEA = 0.036
CFI = 0.989
N = 602
ρ = 0.92
$R^2_{Training}$ = 0.10

Figure 1: SEM Results

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and CFA estimates

Variables	M	SD	Range	CFA estimate
Endogenous variables				
Options training perception (α=0.70)				
Are you aware the police engage in training concerning:				
Verbal skills	0.88	0.33	0-1	0.61***
Ways to de- escalate a situation	0.85	0.36	0-1	0.73***
Use of force options	0.88	0.32	0-1	0.64***
Mediating variable				
Respondent lives in a metropolitan area	0.30	0.46	0-1	
Exogenous variable				
Believe the police budgets should be diverted to social service agencies	2.43	1.99	1-7	

*** p<0.001

As for the mediating effect (and to address our second hypothesis), we examined whether a respondent lived in a major metropolitan area in the state. We found the level of diverting funds from police budgets had a statistically signficant positive direct effect ($b = 0.17$, $p < 0.001$) on living in a major metropolitan area. Thus, those with higher belief in diverting police budget dollars to social service type agencies are more likely to live in a major metropolitan area compared to a non-metropolitan area of the state. Also, living in a major metropolitan area of the state had a statitiscally significant negative direct effect on knowledge of the training police are required to complete in regard to their interactions with the public. The total effect of respondents that want to divert police budgets on knowledge about the type of training police officers are required to complete to successfully resolve interactions with the public is -0.27. Thus the direct effect, after controlling for where an individual lives, is 90.1% for wanting to divert police budgets on the training police officers have to resolve public confrontations, while 9.5% of the effect is indirect. Therefore, the second hypothesis is also confirmed since the relationship between citizens' perceptions of diverting police budgetary dollars and their knowledge concerning required police training to have options in resolving confrontrations with the public is mediated by a respondent's place of residence is 9.5%.

Discussion

This study sheds light on the correlation between support for diverting police budgetary funds and knowledge of police training, suggesting that calls for increased training

may not be justified. The findings imply that individuals who favor reallocating funds may lack awareness of the training police officers undergo to handle their duties and manage hostile encounters. Consequently, the issue may not solely lie in the need for more training, but rather in the quality and effectiveness of the training provided. Law enforcement agencies should assess their training programs to ensure that allocated funds yield desirable outcomes. Future research should therefore focus on evaluating the effectiveness of police training in achieving its intended objectives. Finally, future research should examine differences in public perceptions of police between metropolitan and nonmetropolitan (rural) areas.

As noted prior, police receive more training today than at any point in history. Police training today involves a myriad of courses that extends beyond police tactics (i.e.; arrest procedures; search and seizure; criminal and traffic law knowledge; mechanics of arrest, use of force options, etc.) to include courses in professional policing, ethics, wellness and stress management, communication and problem solving, racial profiling, among others (TCOLE, 2019). However, the large majority is still focused on traditional crime fighting aspects of policing (policy, firearms and defensive tactics). Thus, the focus of training may be more of an issue than the quantity of the training received (Sloan & Paoline, 2021).

This study suggests that members of the public that desire for police budgets to be reduced (i.e. diverting police budgetary dollars to social service agencies) may not be knowledgeable about the type of training the police receive toward resolving hostile interactions with members to the public. This may also be an indictor police may not adequately inform the public of the required training the police receive to obtain and maintain a license to be a police officer. Thus, there may be a disconnect in the aftermath of a highly publicized police-related use of force event to claim more police training is necessary.

The police continue to experience a legitimacy crisis due to the repetitive high profile incidents involving use of force, particularly against Blacks and Hispanics (Blumberg et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2018; Weitzer, 2015). An interesting proposition is aligned with the claim that the police are being asked to do too much for society and they are not properly trained to adapt to the changing demands and expectations. This has spawned the idea that police budgets should be reduced and the monies redirected to agencies that are better equipped to address situations involving correlates of criminality, such as poverty and the mentally ill. This study was an attempt to gain a better understanding of the association between citizens' perceptions to divert funding from police budgets and knowledge about police training. We found that those that have higher support to divert police funding are less knowledgeable about the type of training the police receive to resolve interactions with members of the public. Most of the hype surrounding disagreement with police actions is perceived to occur in metropolitan and more politically liberal

areas, as demonstrated by protests against the police However, we also found that the relationship is minimally mediated by where someone lives. Thus, support for diverting police budgets and knowledge of police training is basically universal----and it does not matter where someone resides. This is not suprising as previous research supports that political affiliation and ideology is strongly associated with one's perception of the police and police practices (Greene, 2000; Updegrove et al., 2020).

The events following the death of George Floyd were a call to action to critically review the funding and training of policing in America. The range of change that has been advocated in America has been from abolition of police agenices to defunding police budgets to retraining police officers (Bendict et al., 2000; Desai, 2020; Gagliano, 2020; Hice, 2020; Koziarski & Huey, 2021; Lum et al., 2022; McDowell & Fernandez, 2018; Robinson, 2020). Despite the outcries for reform in policing there has been no consensus on how to reform or divert funding that would meet the needs of all communities. This study highlighted that those that perceive a need to divert police budgetary dollars to other agencies are less knowledgeable about the training the police have to resolve hostile interactions with members of the public. Furthermore, there has been no consensus what defines the deficit in policing. Some advocate that the police have too many requests for non-police matters that monopolize their time (e.g.; civil matters, non-violent incidents involving the mentally ill, homeless, etc.) that detract from their law enforcement role (Lum et al., 2022). While others state that the problem(s) in policing is that there is not enough training on how to address and engage with the problems in contemporary society. These positions are not universally shared among all communities or all people in a community. Depending on where an individual resides (metropolitan, suburban, or rural) may influence his or her perception of policing. However, the findings from this study showed that geographic location only partially mediated (10%) one's perception. Therefore, the relationship between supporting diverting police budgetary dollars and knowledge of training is strong regardless of where people live. If rural areas/non-metropolitan areas are more supportive of the police, we would have expected the relationship between supporting diverting police budgetary dollars and knowledge of their training would have been mediated by a greater amount. Still, research suggests those in rural areas are more supportive of the police as they are often more politically conservative. For example, rural areas are often more consevative in their political stances than in urban counties (Ambrosius, 2016). This may provide some explanation as to the partial mediation.

Limitations

As with all social science research there are limitations for readers to acknowledge and this study is not an exception. First, this study only focused on responses in a southern

region of the US. Second, this was a convenience sample. Third, the survey captured a single point in time. Therefore, the results may not be generalized beyond the sample. However, it provides us insight into the relationship, which is important as society, policy makers, and practitioners struggle with avenues to reform the police. Fourth, we did not capture the political leanings of respondents. Research suggests those supportive of the police lean more conservative politically, while those less supportive have a more liberal ideology (Brown, 2017; Updegrove et al., 2020). The focus of this study provides information on how attitudes towards wanting to divert police budgetary dollars is associated with knowledge of police training. Training is important, but continued calls for more training may not be the answer. In the interest of transparency, police leaders may need to focus on better informing the public on how they prepare officers to address incidents in society.

Conclusion

Policing in the US is a complex task, as officers are responsible for maintaining social control and enforcing laws while also responding to a wide range of situations beyond traditional law enforcement that vary between metropolitan and rural areas. Over the past 50 years, there has been increasing scrutiny of police behavior, particularly regarding their use of force and interactions with the public in response to historical abuses of power, particularly against minority groups (Lee et al., 2018, Weitzer, 2015). The breakdown of trust and police legitimacy has led to calls for enhanced police training and other reforms. Yet, police receive more training hours today than ever before (Sloan & Paoline, 2021) suggesting that training may not be consistent with changing needs and expectations (Blumberg et al, 2019; Police Executive Research Forum, 2022). Similarly, police budgets in the US have also significantly increased, leading some to question the effectiveness of these allocations and suggesting redirecting funds to other agencies better equipped to address community needs (Eaglin, 2021; Jefferson-Bullock, 2021). However, reducing funds have led to perceived increases in crime rates and personnel shortages in many cases (Hico, 2020).

This study sheds light on the correlation between support for diverting police budgetary funds and knowledge of police training, suggesting that calls for increased training may not be justified. The findings imply that individuals who favor reallocating funds may lack awareness of the training police officers undergo to handle their duties and manage hostile encounters. Consequently, the issue may not solely lie in the need for more training, but rather in the quality and effectiveness of the training provided. Law enforcement agencies should assess their training programs to ensure that allocated funds yield desirable outcomes. Future research should therefore focus on evaluating the effectiveness of police training in achieving its intended objectives.

Finally, future research should examine differences in public perceptions of police between metropolitan and nonmetropolitan (rural) areas.

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