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# The Role of Police Officer Race/Ethnicity on Crime Rates in Immigrant Communities

Joselyne L. Chenane<sup>1</sup> and Emily M. Wright<sup>2</sup>

## Abstract

Few studies have examined the role of city police officer racial/ethnic representation on violent crime in immigrant neighborhoods. Yet police officer race/ethnicity might play a significant role in bolstering or weakening the relationship between immigration and violent crime rates. Researchers have posited that increasing the representation of minority officer would be an important avenue for making police departments more accountable to the communities they serve. The current study contributes to existing research by using national (i.e., 89 cities and 8,980 neighborhoods) data on violent crime from large U.S. cities. We examine the relationship between immigration, violent crime rates, and minority police officer representation using multilevel modeling techniques. Results indicate that neighborhood immigrant concentration is associated with lower robbery and homicide rates. Moreover, the negative relationship between immigrant concentration and violent crime rates is strengthened by city African American and Hispanic officer representation. Policy implications for law enforcement are discussed.

## Keywords

immigration, immigrant concentration, police representation, violent crimes, neighborhoods

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As gatekeepers of the criminal justice system, police officers play an important role as agents of social control (Rose & Clear, 1998; Sampson & Loeffler, 2010; Wildeman & Western, 2010). Social control refers to the ways in which society responds to crime and/or any other problematic behaviors (Clear, 2007; Janowitz, 1975; Kubrin & Weitzer, 2003; Sampson, 1986). In their social control role, police officers play several roles including law enforcement (crime prevention and reduction), peace-keeping, and service delivery. However, police officers cannot perform these duties without the help and cooperation of citizens. Thus, police behavior and their actions toward citizens are important because a primary antecedent of citizens' perceptions of police legitimacy is how they are treated during their encounters with the police. Tyler and Huo (2002) state that "legitimacy is the belief that legal authorities are entitled to be obeyed and that the individual ought to defer to their judgments" (p. xiv).

Perceptions of police legitimacy increase compliance with the law and willingness to cooperate with legal authorities. Some have suggested that increasing the representation of racial/ethnic minorities in police departments in order to better reflect the racial/ethnic composition of communities is an important step toward improving legitimacy and police-citizen relations (Greene, 2004; Kerner Commission, 1968; Lewis & Ramakrishnan, 2007; Marrow, 2009; Menjivar & Bejarano, 2004; Reiss, 1971; Sherman, 1983; Smith & Holmes, 2003; The President's Commission on 21st Century Policing, 2015; Theobald & Haider-Markel, 2009), and potentially reducing crime via increased citizen trust and cooperation (Kirk, Papachristos, Fagan, & Tyler, 2012; Sunshine & Tyler, 2003; Tyler, 1990, 2000). Although there is a growing literature on the role that police officers and/or policing practices play in increasing or decreasing crime rates across aggregates (Black, 1970; Braga, Papachristos, & Hureau, 2014; Kane, 2005; Levitt, 2004; Pyrooz, Decker, Wolfe, & Shjarback, 2016; Rosenfeld, Deckard, & Blackburn, 2014; Sampson & Cohen, 1988; Wilson & Boland, 1978; Wilson & Kelling, 1982), few studies have investigated this relationship in immigrant communities (Davies & Fagan, 2012; Kirk et al., 2012; Lyons, Ve'lez, & Santoro,

2013). Because racial/ethnic minorities are more likely to reside in socially disorganized areas that are also more likely to experience heightened police presence (over policing), and sometimes higher levels of perceived police misbehavior (Bjornstrom, 2015; Brunson & Weitzer, 2009; Carr, Napolitano, & Keating, 2007; Fagan & Davis, 2000), it is not surprising to find that these places are rife with animosity, distrust, and fear of the police (Anderson, 1999; Brunson & Gau, 2015; Sampson & Bartusch, 1998; Smith & Holmes, 2003). Consequently, such unfavorable perceptions of the police have been linked to loss of police legitimacy in many low-income minority communities (Kirk & Matsuda, 2011; Sampson & Bartusch, 1998). This potentially makes the importance of police officer racial representation even more important to crime control within these communities.

Surprisingly, even less attention has been paid to police officer racial/ethnic representation in *immigrant* neighborhoods<sup>1</sup> (Lyons et al., 2013), despite studies which suggest that different policing techniques or behaviors may be needed to more appropriately meet the concerns of these communities (Cox & Miles, 2013; Skogan, 2005; Solis, Portillos, & Brunson, 2009). For instance, researchers have suggested that police undergo cultural sensitivity trainings and hire bilingual officers who can help ease language barrier problems for non-English-speaking immigrants and that police officers may need to employ law enforcement tactics designed to earn immigrants' trust (Chu & Song, 2008; Chu, Song, & Dombrink, 2005; Lewis & Ramakrishnan, 2007; Menjivar & Bejarano, 2004). Additionally, to date, the bulk of studies on police officer racial/ethnic representation are at the individual level, with few studies using multilevel techniques to examine these effects, particularly in immigrant communities. Lyons, Ve'lez, and Santoro (2013) recently applied multilevel techniques to examine the influence of political incorporation (i.e., a 5-item measure of political inclusion, which includes city-level minority officer representation) on violent crime rates in immigrant neighborhoods. They suggested that favorable immigrant political opportunities could bolster social organization among immigrants and enhance formal social control within their communities. They found that city-level immigrant political opportunities strengthened the inverse relationship between

neighborhood immigrant concentration and violent crime rates, especially for neighborhood homicide rates. Similar to Lyons et al. (2013), we are interested in the moderating effect of city minority police officer representation on the relationship between immigrant concentration on violent crime rates. However, we approach our study from a police legitimacy standpoint and inquire whether African American and Hispanic police minority representation elicit unique effects in immigrant communities. It is thought that citizens believe police actions to be more legitimate—and thus citizens are more compliant—when police officers share common characteristics (e.g., race) with them (Greene, 2004; Smith & Holmes, 2003). That is, citizens will be more likely to trust police officers who are from their race/ethnicity rather than “outsiders.”

Therefore, we expect that the more a police department is representative of its citizenry (e.g., in terms of race/ethnicity), the more legitimate they may be viewed by citizens and perhaps the lower crime and/or better police–citizen relations will be. Accordingly, we use separate measures of African American and Hispanic police officer representation because there is reason to believe that officer race/ethnicity may have different effects on citizens (Smith & Holmes, 2003; Theobald & Haider-Markel, 2009). Our study contributes to and builds upon existing research in this area by examining violent crime in a *national* (i.e., 89 cities and 8,980 neighborhoods) sample of large U.S. cities. We examine the link between immigration, violent crime rates, and minority (i.e., African American and Hispanic) police officer representation across these 89 cities using multilevel modeling techniques.

## **Immigrant Communities and Crime**

The “immigrant paradox” (Martínez, Stowell, & Lee, 2010; Sampson, 2008; Sampson & Bean, 2006) refers to recent findings that, despite exposure to conditions which have traditionally been thought to be crime producing (e.g., economic deprivation), areas characterized by high proportions of immigrants or Latinos tend to enjoy *lower* levels of crime and violence (Lee, Martínez, & Rosenfeld, 2001; Martínez, Stowell, & Cancino, 2008; Ve’lez, 2009; Wright & Benson, 2010). As originally formulated, social disorganization theory (Shaw &

McKay, 1942) identified ethnic heterogeneity as a community-level criminogenic factor, one that increased aggregate crime likely by reducing social ties and effective communication between residents (Bursik & Grasmik, 1993; Kornhauser, 1978). Yet, as noted by several scholars who have recently put forward an “immigrant revitalization theory” (Feldmeyer, 2009; Lee et al., 2001), immigrants may bring a number of economic and social *benefits* to their communities, which in turn inhibits crime and deviance. Immigration, they note, may be related to reduced crime levels for several reasons.

First, Sampson (2008) has suggested a cultural importation model, whereby immigrant residents “import” their cultural identities to America—of particular importance is that many immigrant groups today (e.g., Latinos, Asians) have less tolerance for violence, crime, and deviance than their American-born counterparts (Chiswick & Miller, 2005; Desmond & Kubrin, 2009; Granovetter, 1973; Portes, 1998; Sampson, 2008; Sampson & Bartusch, 1998; Sampson & Bean, 2006; Wellman & Wortley, 1990). Thus, their cultural beliefs may protect immigrant communities from experiencing high levels of crime and violence. Second, scholars have suggested that the strong social ties between immigrants’ family members and friends may bolster informal social control within immigrant communities, which can also inhibit crime (Chiswick & Miller, 2005; Desmond & Kubrin, 2009). New immigrants tend to settle in areas with an immigrant establishment—that is, they move to places where their family members and friends have settled (Lee et al., 2001; Nielsen, Lee, & Mart’inez, 2005). These ties provide support and can offer opportunities for integration into the community (Granovetter, 1973; Portes, 1998; Wellman & Wortley, 1990). Indeed, immigrant influxes into communities can help to reinvigorate the economy in the community, promote economic growth, and strengthen the labor market (Lyons et al., 2013; Ramey, 2013). These interactions tend to strengthen the social institutions of the area such as churches, schools, and community centers (Lyons et al., 2013; Ramey, 2013; Ve’lez, 2009). As sources of “parochial” control (Bursik & Grasmick, 1993), strengthening these community features can also lead to lower crime levels in the area.

Thus, although immigrants tend to settle into areas

traditionally thought of as crime producing, such as disadvantaged and low-income areas, their residence in these communities may actually reduce, rather than increase, the crime levels of the neighborhood. Additionally, their tendency to settle in areas where there is already an immigrant community establishment has facilitated research which has focused on “immigrant destination” cities and border cities, such as Miami, El Paso, and San Diego. Research in these cities demonstrates that immigrant communities do in fact have lower levels of crime and violence (e.g., Lee et al., 2001); however, the robustness of this effect to other cities across the nation is less certain. Further, more research is needed to determine whether the effect of neighborhood-level immigration on violent crime rates is influenced by city-level police force racial/ethnic representation.

## **Immigrant Communities and Policing**

Although many scholars believe that police–citizen relations have come a long way (Brown & Reed Benedict, 2002; Cao, Frank, & Cullen, 1996; Decker, 1981; Erez, 1984; Ren, Cao, Lovrich, & Gaffney, 2005), many others hold the view that significant improvements are still needed (Anderson, 1999; Epp, Maynard-Moody, & Haider-Markel, 2014; Gau & Brunson, 2015; Jones-Brown, 2000; Kane, 2005; Mazerolle & Wickes, 2015). The 2014 events in Ferguson, MO, made national headlines when a Caucasian police officer shot and killed an African American teen. This was followed by other high-profile police use of lethal force cases in Minnesota and Louisiana in 2016 and culminated in deadly shootings of police officers in Dallas, TX. Although recent examples, they are not the only cases to highlight racial tensions between police and communities. To be sure, police departments across the country have increasingly moved toward better “representing” their communities in terms of the demographic and background characteristics of their police officers (e.g., race, sex) in order to reflect the citizenry they serve. This move has been intentional and evidence based (Decker & Smith, 1980; Greene, 2004; Kerner Commission, 1968; Reiss, 1971; Smith & Holmes, 2003).

In fact, a key recommendation of the Kerner Commission was greater recruitment of minority police officers in order to foster

more impartial policing, defuse tension between the police and citizens, and improve the image of police in minority communities (Weitzer, 2000). And more recently, the President's Task Force on 21st- Century Policing stressed the importance of creating law enforcement agencies that encompass a broad range of diversity—including, race, gender, language, life experience, and cultural background—to foster understanding and effectiveness in dealing with all communities. Further, according to the “community accountability” model, increasing minority officer representation would improve police–minority citizen relationships because minority citizens would more easily identify and relate with minority officers and vice versa (Brunson & Gau, 2015, p. 216; Smith & Holmes, 2003). It has been argued that citizens believe police actions to be more legitimate when police officers share common characteristics (e.g., race) with them (Anderson, 1999; Kerner Commission, 1968; Lundman & Kaufman, 2003; Theobald & Haider- Markel, 2009; Tyler & Huo, 2002). Indeed, Theobald and Haider-Marker (2009) proposed that “symbolic representation” (p. 410) is important for minority citizens. Specifically, they found that African Americans were more likely to perceive police actions as being legitimate if there were African American officers present during police–citizen encounters. It is possible to argue that because most police officers are Caucasian, minority citizens may feel alienated and become reluctant to extend deference and compliance to Caucasian officers (Lundman & Kaufman, 2003).

Thus, it is theorized that positive police–citizen relationships can reduce crime primarily via increasing citizens' trust in police and perceptions of police legitimacy, as these are expected to increase citizens' compliance and cooperation with the police (Sunshine & Tyler, 2003; Tyler, 2006; Tyler & Fagan, 2008; Tyler & Huo, 2002). However, if citizens feel that police officers are in some way illegitimate, they will be less likely to trust in and cooperate with the police (Theobald & Haider-Markel, 2009); in some cases, these citizens may take the law into their hands (e.g., they may develop a code of the street orientation; Anderson, 1999), or they may be less likely to initiate calls to the police for service or intervention (Carr et al., 2007; Gibson, Walker, Jennings, & Miller, 2009; Rose & Clear, 1998; Sampson



& Bartusch, 1998; Skogan, 2005), or to cooperate with the police in open investigations (Sunshine & Tyler, 2003; Tyler & Wakslak, 2004). Therefore, the need to maintain legitimacy is particularly important to police officers seeking to leverage citizen trust and cooperation in minority communities.

Legitimacy is especially key for low-income minority communities because minorities have been found to have lower levels of trust in criminal justice officials relative to their Caucasian counterparts (Brown & Reed Benedict, 2002; Carr et al., 2007; Stoutland, 2001; Weitzer & Tuch, 2002, 2005). Unfortunately, however, most of the current research on how legitimacy is manifested in communities focuses predominantly on low-income inner city African American communities (e.g., Anderson, 1999; Carr et al., 2007) and therefore less is known about police behaviors within *immigrant* communities. There is a need to examine this relationship, given that nationally, immigration rates have been increasing (Ramey, 2013). Thus, the increased growth of the foreign-born population may pose a unique set of challenges to policing in America. Many immigrants lack much experience with the American law enforcement system and many are not fluent in English (Lewis & Ramakrishnan, 2007; Pryce, Johnson, & Maguire, 2017). Moreover, some immigrants might have experienced corrupt police officers or police brutality in their home countries and these experiences might impact how they view American police officers (i.e., with little or no trust, or even fear; Lewis & Ramakrishnan, 2007).

Going by the recommendations of the Kerner Commission (1968), the President's Task Force on 21st-Century Policing, and findings from studies which examine policing in immigrant communities (e.g., Lewis & Ramakrishnan, 2007; Lyons et al., 2013; Menjivar & Bejarano, 2004; Solis et al., 2009), it can be argued that increasing minority officer representativeness (African American or Hispanic) in these communities may be beneficial because having more officers who share background characteristics (e.g., race/ethnicity, language, minority status) with immigrant citizens might help alleviate some problems that immigrants can present to policing, such as lack of trust in the police, due to their negative experiences with police officers from their home countries. It is plausible that officers who share characteristics such as race/ethnicity, language, religion, birth

place/country of origin, or certain experiences (e.g., wartime in home countries) may be seen as more legitimate and trustworthy by immigrants. To demonstrate, if immigrants' "master status" is that of a minority—regardless of race or ethnicity—then either African American or Hispanic police officer representation might help to reduce crime in these areas, as these officers may be viewed positively and trusted within immigrant communities. If, however, immigrants' master status is that of a foreigner based on ethnicity, language, and/or birthplace/origin, Hispanic police representation might be particularly influential in these areas relative to African American officers. Thus, it seems important to examine police officer representation using separate measures of African American and Hispanic officers to tease out possible subtle differences between these two racial/ethnic categories.

We consider some of these possibilities in the current article by examining the distribution of police officers' racial and ethnic backgrounds (African American and Hispanic) within city police forces. Therefore, we address the following research questions: First, what is the effect of neighborhood immigrant concentration on violent crime (homicide and robbery) rates? Second, what is the direct effect of city-level police officer racial/ethnic representation (i.e., ratio of African American officers and ratio of Hispanic officers) on violent crime rates, controlling for neighborhood characteristics? Third, does city-level police racial/ethnic representation moderate the relationship between neighborhood immigrant concentration and neighborhood violent crime rates?

## **Method**

### *Data and Sample*

This study focuses on the neighborhood-level effects of immigrant concentration on violent crime rates and the city-level effects of police racial/ethnicity representation (i.e., the ratio of African American and Hispanic police officers) on violent crime rates across cities. To accomplish these goals, we rely on data from the National Neighborhood Crime Study (NNCS). The NNCS compiled Uniform Crime Report (UCR) data for violent and property crime at the census-tract level for a representative sample of U.S. cities with populations over 100,000. In 2000,

crime data were reported for 9,563 census tracts (henceforth referred to as neighborhoods) nested within 91 cities (for further discussion of the NNCS, see Peterson & Krivo, 2009). The analyses for this study are restricted to 8,980 tracts nested within 89 cities for which complete information was available on the outcomes of homicide and robbery. The NNCS data have been used to examine the effect of immigrant concentration and racial and ethnic inequality on crime rates (e.g., Lyons et al., 2013; Peterson & Krivo, 2008; Ramey, 2013). No study has used the measures of city-level officer representation within the data set to examine its effect on crime rates.

### *Measures*

*Dependent variables.* All measures included in the analyses are presented in Table 1. We examined two types of violent crimes: the rate (per 1,000 people) of *robberies* (natural log) and *homicides* reported to the police between 1999 and 2001. Consistent with previous research (Peterson & Krivo, 2008, 2009), multiyear (i.e., 1999–2001) rates were examined for the two outcomes to minimize the impact of annual fluctuations, especially for smaller units.

*Neighborhood-level independent variables.* All of our neighborhood-level (Level 1) predictors were derived from the 2000 Census. Given the focus of the study, the key variable of interest is an indicator of immigrant concentration. We created a 2-item weighted index of *immigrant concentration* (a  $\frac{1}{4}$  .91), which is comprised of linguistic isolation (the percentage of households where no one aged 14 years or older speaks English well) and percent new immigrant (the percentage of the total population that is foreign born and entered the United States in 1990 or later). Also included in the analyses are well-established covariates of neighborhood violence. *Disadvantage* is a scale (weighted index; a  $\frac{1}{4}$  .92) of 6 items: poverty rate, percentage of joblessness (extent of joblessness—percentage of persons aged 16–64 years who were unemployed or out of the labor force),

**Table 1.** Descriptive Statistics for Dependent and Independent Variables.

		Mean	SD	Min.–Max.
Dependent variables				
Robbery	Three-year (i.e., 1999–2001) log of neighborhood robbery rate <sup>a</sup>	1.37	0.82	0 to 4.84
Homicide	Three-year (i.e., 1999–2001) neighborhood homicide rate <sup>a</sup>	0.16	0.31	0 to 6.60
Neighborhood-level variables				
Immigrant concentration	Weighted index of percent new immigrants and percent linguistic isolation (a ¼ .91)	–0.00	1.93	–1.61 to 11.63
Disadvantage	Weighted index of poverty rate, jobless rate for working age, percent professionals and managers, percent female-headed households, percent high school graduates, percent secondary sector low-wage jobs (a ¼ .92)	0.00	0.86	–1.66 to 3.72
Residential instability	Weighted index of percent renters and percent movers (a ¼ .62)	0.02	0.87	–2.13 to 2.69
Percent young males	Percent of males 15–34 years old	15.86	5.71	0 to 55.92
Population	Neighborhood population (not logged)	3,946.90	2,104.47	301 to 23,960.00
White neighborhoods	Seventy percent or more of neighborhood population was White in 2000 (reference group)	0.35	0.48	0 to 1.00
African American neighborhoods	Seventy percent or more of neighborhood population was African American in 2000	0.16	0.37	0 to 1.00
Latino neighborhoods	Seventy percent or more of neighborhood population was Latino in 2000	0.08	0.27	0 to 1.00
Minority neighborhoods	Seventy percent or more of neighborhood population was African American and Hispanic, but neither constituted ≥ 70%	0.07	0.26	0 to 1.00
Integrated neighborhoods	Any other racial/ethnic combination	0.33	0.47	0 to
1.00 City-level variables				
Ratio of African American officers	Ratio of city African American officers on the police force to percentage of city African American population	0.92	1.04	0 to 9.28
Ratio of Hispanic officers	Ratio of city Hispanic officers on the police force to percent of city Hispanic population	0.51	.29	0 to 1.24
Foreign born	Percentage of the population that is foreign born	15.54	12.28	1.58 to 72.11
Percent Hispanic	Percentage of the population that is Hispanic	18.73	18.46	1.09 to 90.46
Percent African American	Percentage of the population that is African American	18.46	16.55	0.53 to 81.02
City disadvantage	Weighted index of poverty rate, percent jobless rate for working age, percent professionals and managers, percent female-headed households, percent high school graduates, and percent secondary sector low-wage jobs (a¼ .91)	–0.34	1.17	–2.82 to 2.77
City residential instability	Percentage of population aged 5 years and older who lived in a different residence in 1995	52.81	5.86	31.93 to 66.52

*Note.* Based on 8,980 neighborhood clusters across 89 cities.

<sup>a</sup>Rates per 1,000 people.

low-wage jobs (percentage of workers in the six occupations with the lowest average income, see Krivo, Peterson, & Kuhl, 2009), professional jobs (percentage of employed civilian population aged 16 years and older in management, professional and related occupations [reverse coded]), high school graduates (percentage of adults aged 25 years and older with at least a high school degree [reverse coded]), and percentage of households that were single-mother families (e.g., Lyons et al., 2013; Peterson & Krivo, 2008, 2009). We tested whether the effect of disadvantage levels off at higher levels (e.g., Krivo & Peterson, 2000; Krivo et al., 2009) and found this to be the case. Thus, we include a quadratic term (squared term) for neighborhood disadvantage. *Residential instability* reflects the percentage of renter-occupied units and percentage of residents aged 5 years and older who lived in a different dwelling in 1995 (weighted index; a  $\frac{1}{4}$  .62).

Additionally, we control for the crime-prone population size by including the *percent young male* between 15 and 34 years of age (e.g., Krivo et al., 2009; Peterson & Krivo, 2009). We included neighborhood *population* to account for over dispersion of the homicide rate measure (Osgood, 2000). Lastly, we controlled for the racial/ethnic composition of neighborhoods using a set of dichotomous variables that contrast predominantly (70% or more of the neighborhood population in 2000) *White neighborhoods* (reference category), from *African American neighborhoods*, *Latino neighborhoods*, *minority neighborhoods*, and *integrated neighborhoods* (Peterson & Krivo, 2008). Minority neighborhoods represent communities where African Americans and Hispanics made up 70% or more of the population, but neither group alone constituted 70%. All other neighborhoods represent integrated areas (i.e., neighborhoods where none of the racial/ethnic categories met or exceeded 70%). The 70% threshold is an established measure that has been used extensively by previous researchers (e.g., Krivo et al., 2009; Peterson & Krivo, 2008).

*City-level independent variables.* Drawing from research on minority incorporation into the police force, we constructed the *ratio of African American officers* and the *ratio of Hispanic officers*; these measures provide the ratio of sworn officers who were African American or Hispanic relative to the percentage of the city population that was African American or Hispanic. Some scholars have suggested that ratios (as opposed to the raw

percentages) are better indicators of “representation” (e.g., Lyons et al., 2013). Values below one indicate underrepresentation in the police force relative to the African American and/or Hispanic population in the city, and values above one indicate overrepresentation. We include African American officers in our analyses because research on this topic suggests that representation of African American police officers and chiefs sets the stage for tolerance toward other racial and ethnic minorities (Lewis & Ramakrishnan, 2007; Lyons et al., 2013). Additionally, we controlled for several variables at this city level. *City disadvantage* (weighted index of the poverty rate, extent of joblessness, low-wage jobs, professional jobs [reverse coded], high school graduates [reverse coded], and percentage of households that were single-mother families; a  $\frac{1}{4}$ .91) from the 2000 Census. We also included a quadratic (squared term) term to account for the curvilinear relationship between disadvantage and violent crime rates. *City residential instability* is the percentage of population aged 5 years and older who lived in a different residence in 1995.

### *Statistical Analysis*

Because of the hierarchical structure of the data (neighborhoods nested within cities), we used multilevel modeling techniques. Bilevel data sets were created with neighborhoods as Level 1 units and cities as Level 2 units. Robbery rates were examined using linear models and homicide rates were examined using nonlinear Poisson models in Hierarchical Linear Modeling (HLM) 7 (Raudenbush, Bryk, Cheong, Congdon, & du Toit, 2011) with a correction for overdispersion.<sup>2</sup> We computed the natural log<sup>3</sup> of robbery rates to address the problem of nonnormal distribution of the variable; therefore, we were able to run linear models for robbery rates. However, homicide is a rare occurrence, hence the decision to use nonlinear Poisson models. Given Poisson model assumptions, we tested whether the mean and standard deviation (*SD*) of the dependent variables were equal and found that the *SD* for homicide was larger than the means, indicating overdispersion. Hence, we accounted for over- dispersion in the Level-1 variance. A Poisson model with overdispersion is analogous to a negative binomial model (Raudenbush & Bryk 2002; Snijders & Bosker,

1999). We specified that homicide rate had variable exposure by tract population and thereby transformed the outcome to violent crimes per capita rates (Osgood, 2000).

The analyses proceeded in several stages for each of the outcomes. First, unconditional models revealed that each outcome varied significantly ( $p < .001$ ) across cities (Intraclass Correlation [ICC]) for robbery rate  $\frac{1}{4}$  .353185; ICC for homicide rate  $\frac{1}{4}$  .599682). Next, random coefficient models were estimated for each of the neighborhood (Level 1) predictors, with those predictors whose effects did not vary across aggregates treated as fixed effects. These models revealed whether the neighborhood- level effects on violent crime varied significantly across cities ( $p \leq .05$ ), which would suggest stronger effects in some cities versus others. Establishing such differences is a necessary prerequisite for estimating cross-level interaction effects (i.e., to examine whether differences in the Level 1 effects across cities might correspond with differences in the characteristics of those cities). Third, the direct effects of city-level variables were estimated, controlling for neighborhood covariates. Finally, cross-level interactions were examined between neighborhood-level immigrant concentration and city-level ratio of African American and Hispanic police officers. Multicollinearity was not a problem in any of the models presented. We group mean centered our Level 1 predictors and grand mean centered Level 2 predictors.

## Findings

### *Neighborhood-Level Main Effects on Robbery and Homicide Rates*

The first set of analyses depicted in Table 2 examined the direct effects of neighborhood-level variables (e.g., immigrant concentration, neighborhood disadvantage) on robbery and homicide rates. The findings revealed that neighborhood immigrant concentration had an inverse association with both robbery and homicide rates; neighborhoods with high levels of immigrant concentration had lower levels of violent crime rates. As expected, neighborhood disadvantage was associated with high robbery

**Table 2.** Neighborhood-Level Direct Effects on Violent Crime Rates.

	Robbery Coefficient (SE)	Homicide Coefficient (SE)
Intercept	1.10** (.05)	-2.53** (.09)
Immigrant concentration	-0.07** (.02)	-0.19** (.06)
Disadvantage	0.43** (.02)	0.83** (.06)
Residential instability	0.20** (.02)	0.15** (.04)
Percent young male	-0.001 (.003)	-0.001 (.01)
Population	—	-0.00** (.000)
African American neighborhoods	0.20** (.05)	0.73** (.12)
Latino neighborhoods	-0.01 (.06)	0.43* (.17)
Minority neighborhoods	0.14** (.05)	0.72** (.13)
Integrated neighborhoods	0.12** (.03)	0.42** (.09)
Proportion of variation within neighborhoods	64.69	41.13
Proportion of variation within neighborhoods explained	46.00	40.39
$N_1$	8,980	8,980

*Note.* Hierarchical linear models were used to predict robbery rates, and hierarchical Poisson models were used to predict homicide rates.

\* $p \leq .05$ . \*\* $p \leq .01$ .

and homicide rates; however, the effect of neighborhood disadvantage on violent crime rates was not linear. Said differently, disadvantage was associated with high levels of violent crime, but the effect did not continue to hold in areas of high disadvantage, suggesting a curvilinear effect. Additionally, residential instability was associated with increases in neighborhood violent crime rates. There was an inverse association between neighborhood population and the rate of homicide—that is, the rate of homicide decreased as the population increased. Percent young males (15–34 years) did not predict neighborhood violent crime rates in this sample. The racial and ethnic composition measures revealed a few differences between the two outcomes. Predominantly, African American, minority, and integrated neighborhoods were associated with higher robbery and homicide rates compared to predominantly White neighborhoods. Latino neighborhoods on the other hand had a null effect on robbery rates but had higher homicide rates relative to White neighborhoods.



**Table 3.** City-Level Direct and Cross-Level Effects on Neighborhood Robbery and Homicide Rates.

	Model 1 <sup>a</sup>		Model 2 <sup>b</sup>	
	Robbery Coefficient (SE)	Homicide Coefficient (SE)	Robbery Coefficient (SE)	Homicide Coefficient (SE)
Level 2 intercept	1.11** (.03)	-2.77** (.04)	1.22** (.03)	-2.77** (.04)
City level				
Ratio of African American officers	-.04y (.02)	-.11** (.03)	-.04y (.02)	-.10** (.03)
Ratio of Hispanic officers	.07 (.06)	-.09 (.14)	.07 (.06)	-.11 (.14)
Percentage of foreign born	.01y (.003)	-.00 (.01)	.01y (.004)	-.002 (.006)
Percentage of Latino	-.001 (.003)	.01* (.004)	.002 (.003)	.01* (.005)
Percentage of African American	.02** (.002)	.03** (.003)	.02** (.007)	.03** (.003)
Disadvantage	.13** (.03)	.25** (.05)	.13** (.04)	.24** (.05)
Residential instability	.004 (.004)	.01 (.01)	.004 (.004)	.01 (.008)
w <sup>2</sup>	656.85	98.35	—	—
Cross-level interactions				
Neighborhood immigrant concentration intercept			-.07** (.02)	-.17** (.04)
x City Ratio of African American officers	-.01* (.01)			-.01 (.03)
x City Ratio of Hispanic officers	-.01 (.07)			-.27* (.011)
w <sup>2</sup>	650.25**			106.11**

*Note.* Hierarchical linear models were used to predict robbery, and hierarchical Poisson models were used for homicide rates and were based on 8,980 neighborhoods in 89 cities.

<sup>a</sup>Models assessing city direct effects control for all neighborhood-level covariates. <sup>b</sup>Models assessing cross-level effects also control for all neighborhood covariates and city direct effects covariates.

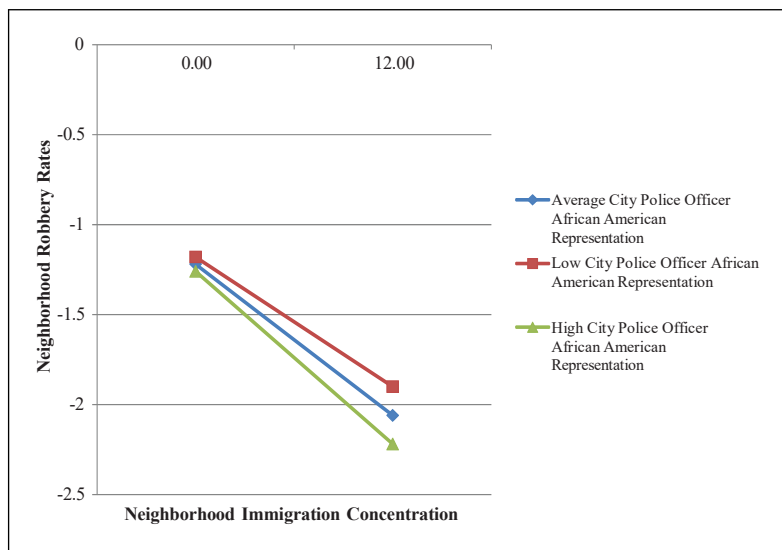
yp ≤ .10. \*p ≤ .05. \*\*p ≤ .01.

*City-Level Main Effects on Neighborhood Violent Crime Rates and Cross-Level Interactions Between Officer Race and Immigrant Concentration*

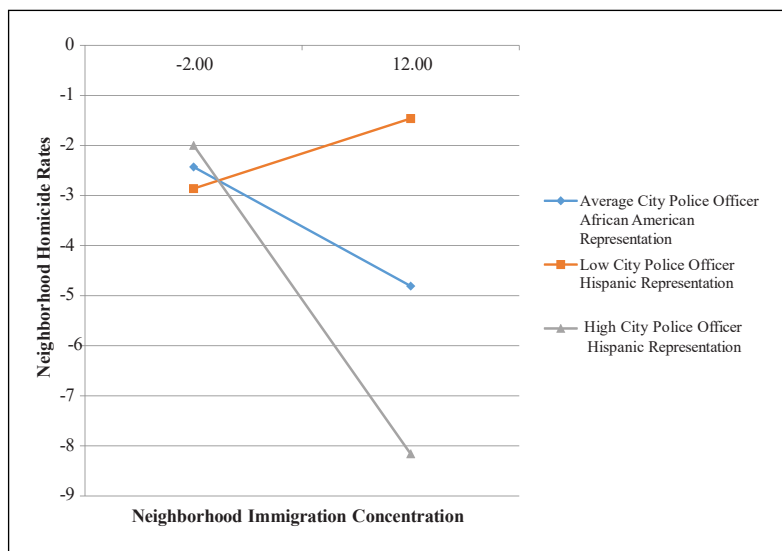
Table 3 displays direct effects of city-level characteristics on violent crime rates (Model 1) and the cross-level interaction between city-level police officer racial/ ethnic representation and neighborhood immigrant concentration (Model 2). Regarding the direct effects shown in Model 1, the ratio of African American officers at the city was marginally associated with lower neighborhood robbery rates and significantly associated with lower homicide rates. That is, cities where the ratio of African

American officers was high had lower violent crime rates, and neighborhood robbery rates were slightly higher in cities with a high percentage of foreign-born population. Conversely, cities with high percentages of African Americans were associated with high levels of neighborhood violent crime rates. Lastly, Model 1 in Table 2 reveals that cities with high levels of disadvantage had higher robbery and homicide rates and once again, this effect was reversed in areas of extreme disadvantage. The remaining city-level variables were not significantly associated with violent crime rates.

Finally, we examined cross-level interactions to determine whether the effect of neighborhood immigration on neighborhood crime rates was moderated by city-level police officer race/ethnicity representation. These results are provided in the bottom half of Model 2 in Table 3 and they reveal significant interactions ( $p < .001$ ) between neighborhood-level immigrant concentration and the city-level ratio of African American officers as well as Hispanic officers. The interactions suggest that the protective effect of immigrant concentration on neighborhood robbery rates and homicide rates became *stronger* in cities where the ratio of African American and Hispanic officers was higher relative to cities with lower ratios of African American and Hispanic officers. The cross-level interactions (moderating effects) are depicted graphically in Figures 1 and 2. As shown, Figure 1 reveals that the negative relationship between immigrant concentration and robbery rates became stronger in cities with high (1 *SD* above the mean) African American police officer representation (as indicated by the steeper, negative slope of immigrant concentration in these cities). The interaction between neighborhood immigrant concentration and city-level African American officer representation was not significant for homicide rates.



**Figure 1.** The effect of neighborhood immigration concentration on robbery rates in cities with high, average, and low African American police officer representation.



**Figure 2.** Effect of neighborhood immigration concentration on homicide rates in cities with high, average, and low Hispanic police officer representation.

Figure 2 reveals a significant cross-level interaction between neighborhood immigrant concentration and the ratio of Hispanic police officers in cities. The inverse association between immigrant concentration and homicide rate was much steeper (1 *SD* above the mean) in cities with high versus low Hispanic

officer representation. Nonetheless, the interaction between neighborhood immigrant concentration and city- level Hispanic officer representation was not statistically significant for neighborhood robbery rates.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

Our study sought to advance the understanding of the *immigrant paradox* framework by focusing on the influence of city-level police officer racial/ethnic representation in immigrant neighborhoods. The current study contributes to the knowledge of “policing in context” because the effect of city police officer racial/ethnic representation has rarely been assessed in immigrant neighborhoods (but see Lyons et al., 2013), and our study examined the separate effects of African American and Hispanic minority officers across cities. We believe it is important to distinguish between the effects of African American and Hispanic officers rather than combine them (e.g., minority officer incorporation) due to the possibility that African American and Hispanic officers may have different effects on violent crime rates in immigrant communities. We highlight our three main findings below.

First, we examined the effect of neighborhood immigrant concentration on violent crime in a national sample of large U.S. cities. Consistent with prior research (e.g., Kubrin & Ishizawa, 2012; Lyons et al., 2013; Ramey, 2013; Ve´lez, 2009), we found that neighborhood immigrant concentration was associated with decreases in levels of both our outcomes (i.e., homicide and robbery rates). Thus, our results lend support for the “immigrant paradox” across a *national* sample of U.S. cities. Further, our findings suggest that neighborhoods with higher concentrations of immigrants enjoy lower robbery and homicide rates—and this effect is not limited to destination cities where immigrants tend to settle. It is interesting to note that although we used different analytical techniques (linear for robbery rates and Poisson for homicide rates), our results mirror those of recent studies that have utilized multilevel modeling techniques to examine the effect of immigrant concentration on crime rates (see Lyons et al., 2013; Ramey, 2013). This finding suggests the robustness of the inverse association between immigrant

concentration and violent crime rates.

Second, we examined the direct effects of the ratio of African American and Hispanic officers on neighborhood violent crime rates prior to examining their moderating effects on the immigrant concentration–crime relationship. Recall that our second research question examined the influence of city-level police officer racial/ ethnic representation (e.g., ratio of African American officers and ratio of Hispanic officers' representation) on violent crime, controlling for neighborhood characteristics. Our results suggest that cities with higher representations of African American officers had lower neighborhood violent crime rates (both robbery and homicide). It is also likely that increasing African American representation at the police force actually represents the city's reaction to high crime. That is, minority police officers may be recruited and employed to these cities *in reaction to* high levels of violent crime in the city (Levitt, 2004). This explanation is plausible given the move toward better minority representation within police forces across the nation (Weitzer, 2000). Unfortunately, we were unable to determine the temporal ordering between city police racial/ethnic representation and violent crime rates in this study due to the cross- sectional nature of the data set. While we did not find a significant association between Hispanic officer representation and violent crime rates, we strongly believe that it is because many cities have a very low representation of Hispanic officers; therefore, the effect may be masked as a result of being underrepresented. It would be interesting to examine the representation of other minority officers (such as Asian, Caribbean, and African); however, we suspect that the effect would also be minimal given the underrepresentation of African, Asian, and other recent immigrant groups in the police force. Unfortunately, we were unable to examine this with the data here but encourage future researchers to do so.

Third, the results of our third research question (the moderating effect of city police officer representation and neighborhood immigrant concentration) suggest that city- level police officer racial/ethnic representation is in fact important in curbing crime within immigrant neighborhoods. Specifically, our results indicate that the protective effect of immigrant concentration on robbery rates was stronger in cities with higher

representation of African American officers, as was the protective effect of immigrant concentration on homicide rates in cities that had a high representation of Hispanic officers. These findings are consistent with the notion that minority citizens (including immigrants) may relate better with minority officers (Greene, 2004; Lewis & Ramakrishnan, 2007; Menjivar & Bejarano, 2004). Police officers can influence crime rates via several mechanisms with legitimacy being one such avenue. Here, we have argued that when citizens feel like they can relate with the officers, they may be more likely to show deference to them by cooperating with them to fight crime in their communities (Davies & Fagan, 2012; Pryce et al., 2017). African American officers may be viewed as allies in immigrant communities, and therefore, the likelihood of reporting crime to the police may be higher in cities with higher African American representation.

It is interesting that the effect of officer representation manifested differently for neighborhood-level robbery and homicide rates. In cities with high representations of African American officers, the significant negative effect of immigrant concentration on robbery was further strengthened. But, in cities with high Hispanic officer representation, the effect of immigrant concentration on homicide was bolstered. According to the UCR, homicides have a higher clearance rate relative to robbery rates (Roberts, 2007). Our results suggest that perhaps city-level African American officer representation is protective of lesser forms of crime in immigrant neighborhoods, whereas city-level Hispanic officer representation is protective of more serious crimes in these neighborhoods. It is possible that cultural representation is important in this regard, in that cities whose police forces are better culturally represented (e.g., by a higher Hispanic officer ratio) are better able to respond to and control crime in certain neighborhoods, but this is only speculation on our part. Because the moderating effect of city-level officer representation on the relationship between neighborhood immigrant concentration and violent crime has rarely been examined in existing research, we can only provide speculation at this point as to why African American and Hispanic officer representation exerted a differential effect on the outcomes; we encourage future

research to understand why different officer race/ ethnicities would be related to different forms of crime in certain types of contexts. The finding regarding the moderating effect of city Hispanic police officer representation on the relationship between immigrant concentration and homicide rates is noteworthy. Recall that city-level Hispanic officer representation did not have a direct effect on either robbery rate or homicide rate. This finding highlights the importance of moving beyond examining main effects to including an examination of interaction effects. We suggested at the outset of this study that officers who shared background characteristics such as race, ethnicity, and/or language with immigrants might be most effective in these communities. We considered African American police officers separately from Hispanic officers within city police forces in an effort to understand whether police racial and cultural<sup>4</sup> backgrounds were important within immigrant neighborhoods. Given the diversity of Hispanic ethnicity (for instance, Mexicans, Cubans, and Puerto Rican often fall into the general “Hispanic” category), it is possible that some Hispanic officers are likely to be identified as White rather than Hispanic by citizens.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, Hispanics are not necessarily a visible minority (i.e., such as being African American), so the public may not readily identify them as such. It is also possible that immigrant’s “master status” is that of a minority—a status also shared with African American officers. Thus, because of this shared attribute (minority status), African American police officers may be viewed positively by immigrant communities (Bjornstrom, 2015), which may in turn lead to better police– citizen relations and lower crime rates in such communities.

Although we found that higher Hispanic officer representation moderated the immigrant concentration/homicide rate relationship, Hispanic officers are under- represented in most police departments within cities included in this study (about 97%). More research on this topic is badly needed to ascertain why officers from different minority groups can have different effects on different immigrant groups. While research on the effect of increasing minority officer representation in police departments has yielded mixed results (Brunson & Gau, 2015; Greene, 2004; Lyons et al., 2013; Reiss, 1971; Smith & Holmes,

2003; Weitzer, 2000; Wilkins & Williams, 2008), our study suggests officer race matters for violent crime reduction within immigrant neighborhoods. Prior research in this area by Lyons et al. (2013) revealed that minority officer incorporation enhanced the inverse relationship between neighborhood immigrant concentration and violent crime. Our results yielded more nuanced observations regarding the relationship between immigrant concentration, officer representation, and neighborhood violent crime rates—namely, African American police officer representation strengthened the effect of immigrant concentration on robbery rates and high Hispanic officer representation bolstered this effect for homicide rates. Our results, however, suggest that the effect of a combined indicator of police “minority” representation may be misleading. As shown, African American and Hispanic officer representation had unique effects on the immigrant concentration and violent crime association. It appears as though Hispanic officer representation had an effect on the more serious violent offense (homicide rates), possibly because citizens were more willing to cooperate with the police. Our analysis revealed that Hispanic officers were highly underrepresented across cities and this raises an important policy implication for police departments across the country and particularly in cities with large immigrant populations. That is, that police departments should continue efforts at enhancing their representation of Hispanic (and possibly other racial and ethnic minority groups) officers. We suggest future research examine the effect of Hispanic officer representation (and other underrepresented racial/ethnic minority groups) in immigrant neighborhoods, especially in cities with adequate numbers of Hispanic and or other racial/ethnic officers on the force.

Research on the effect of minority police officer representation on crime rates is scarce; however, procedural justice studies may provide support regarding the importance of officer representation in disadvantaged minority communities (see Tyler & Fagan, 2008). Most of policing work is reactive and not proactive (i.e., citizens call the police for help in most cases), and therefore, fostering better police–community relationships is necessary and important in the coproduction of security in communities (Davies & Fagan, 2012; Sampson &



Bartusch, 1998; Tyler & Huo, 2002). Some researchers have argued that when local police departments mirror the communities which they serve in terms of racial/ethnic representation, citizens tend to view such police department as legitimate relative to those which have predominantly Caucasian officers (Greene, 2004). Legitimacy is closely associated with citizen cooperation and compliance with the police (Davies & Fagan, 2012; Kirk et al., 2012; Wolfe, Nix, Kaminski, & Rojek, 2016). In other words, when citizens trust the police, they are more likely to support them and cooperate with them in fighting crime via calling to report crimes and cooperate with them in investigation. Moreover, police employ different policing styles and this can have an effect on crime rates (e.g., Sampson & Cohen, 1988). Therefore, it is possible that some cities will have low crime rates because of the policing practices employed in these cities. Future researchers should consider examining the role that policing styles play in moderating the effect of immigrant concentration on violent crime in immigrant communities.

The current study was limited in some ways. First, although we were interested in police legitimacy, we did not have a measure of legitimacy in the NNCS; instead, we used minority officer racial/ethnic representation as a potential proxy for legitimacy. Future research using a battery of items to measure police legitimacy, including racial and ethnic representation of officers, would be desirable. Second, we relied on officially reported crime data, and an enduring critique of official crime statistics is that many incidents are not reported to the police. Although this poses a potential threat to our study outcomes, we believe they are reliably reported for a couple of reasons. The problem of nonreporting is rarely the case with homicide because of the seriousness of the crime and the presence (in most cases) of a body (Wadsworth, 2010). Moreover, robbery is more likely to be viewed as a crime by the victim and to occur between strangers and is less likely to generate feelings of guilt or shame on the part of the victim. Thus, victims of robbery, more so than victims of other violent crime, such as rape or assault, will be more likely to alert the police (Wadsworth, 2010). Third, while it would have been interesting to observe the interaction between immigrant concentration and Asian and/or

Native American police officer representation, we did not have access to these data in the NNCS. We encourage future researchers to consider how officers from a variety of different racial groups, such as Asians and Native Americans, might affect individual- and community-level crime outcomes. Fourth, future researchers should consider examining whether country of origin (e.g., failed states or countries with high levels of police corruption) has an impact on police– immigrant interactions, particularly in communities with individuals from such countries. Country of origin is important because it might be a correlate of immigrants’ culture—a variable we were not able to include in our study. Fifth, we were unable to control for potential cultural influences that might have an influence on city- level officer representation, immigrant concentration, and violent crime rates.

In summary, the current study enhances our understanding of policing in context— in particular, the nexus between city police officer racial/ethnic representation and immigrant communities. We found support for the “immigrant paradox” across nearly 90 large cities in the United States and found that city African American and Hispanic police officer representation enhances this effect. Given the importance of police– citizen relations to crime reduction and the influx of immigrants in the United States, we encourage continued attention to racial, ethnic, and cultural issues in policing and community research. Future researchers should include measures of culture to assess whether culture plays a role in the relationship between minority police officer representation, immigrant concentration, and violent crime rates. Additionally, future analyses should examine the representation of other immigrant groups including Asians, Africans, and Middle Easterners to tease out the effect of officer representation in immigrant communities.

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### **Notes**

1. In this study, we examine the effect of police force officer race/ethnicity representation (the percentage of officers who are Hispanic and African American) in immigrant neighborhoods, with the expectation that Hispanic officer representation will be particularly important in immigrant neighborhoods. We recognize that while “Hispanic” does not necessarily equate to “immigrant” status (not all immigrants are Hispanic and not all Hispanics are immigrants), there is a high overlap of the two in contemporary America (see also Wright & Benson, 2010).
2. In order to account for over dispersion, Osgood (2000) recommended including tract population as an exposure variable (population at risk) and constraining the coefficient to 1. Controlling for population size in this way is comparable to analyzing rates.
3. Because the original variable contained a significant number of 0 s, we added a constant (1) prior to applying the log transformation.
4. This assumes that Hispanic officers represent Hispanic cultures in the eyes of immigrants.
5. Many second- and third-plus generation Hispanic (as well as other ethnic minority groups) do not speak their ethnic

language (language is a key dimension of culture), or associate with people of their ethnic group, or know much about their culture of origin. Indeed, for second- and third-plus generations, they are American, and it is fair to say that their culture is the American culture (depending on individual families, they may be more or less receptive to or influenced by their parents' culture of origin but that doesn't mean their cultural identity is not American; Alba, Logan, Lutz, & Stults, 2002).

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