

Abstract

Prior research has studied the responsiveness of local government and law enforcement agencies. This paper contributes to the literature by examining policy changes across the United States at the local level of government and testing the effect that ideology, social identity, and socialization of political and administrative officials has on police reform during and after the 2020 Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests. The theoretical frameworks used within this study are democratic representation, representative bureaucracy, political control of bureaucracy, and organizational socialization. Police reform is examined within a 4-year period (i.e., May 26, 2020 to May 25, 2024). Data is retrieved from cities/municipalities with a population of at least 200,000 residents. An event history analysis is employed to examine the timing of an initial policy change happening during and after the BLM protests, along with examining the effect of a mayor’s and police chief’s political affiliation, race/ethnicity, and tenure on timing to an initial reform. Probit regression models are also used to examine the effect that politics, social identity, and term in office of mayors and police chiefs has on local police departments having an initial reform or not during and after social unrest.

Introduction

Since the inception of law enforcement within the United States, relations between police officers and minority communities have been a complex issue which remains today, especially when it concerns Black/ African-American citizens and residents. This may be due to the plagued legacy and challenging past of policing being used as a vehicle to surveil, oppress, and control people and groups of African descent (Alexander 2012; Balto 2019; Rothstein 2017; Work 2001). In turn, this has created the assumption and belief that there is a lack of transparency, accountability, and equitable outcomes among social groups when it concerns justice provision by law enforcement officials (Gonzalez Van Cleve 2016; Gooden 2015; Stevenson 2014).

Police reform is a salient topic within the political environment of American society which has become more of a major concern after the death of George Floyd at the hands of a police officer in Minneapolis, Minnesota and the Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests across the U.S. and the world during the summer of 2020. This has led to an increase in the extant literature on policing (Headly 2022; Li 2024; Shoub 2022), the perception of policing (Carroll and Yu 2022; Dincer and Johnston 2021; Lee and Nicholson-Crotty 2022; Wright and Headley 2021; Wright, Gaozhao, Dukes, and Templeton 2022), and even the response to police reform (Monties and Gagnon 2022). On the contrary, the public administration literature is deficient in focusing on the drivers that may have led to police reform after the George Floyd incident and the Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests.

Objectives

- To examine the variation in timing of initial reform within local police departments during and after the Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests in the summer of 2020
- To test the effect that partisanship, race/ethnicity, gender, and tenure of mayors and police chiefs has on the time and the initiation of police reform
- To analyze the explanatory power of competing theories in public administration such as representative bureaucracy, political control of bureaucracy, and organizational socialization, along with democratic representation from the political science literature, and their ability to predict the outcome of police reform in local jurisdictions during and after a social movement

Research Questions

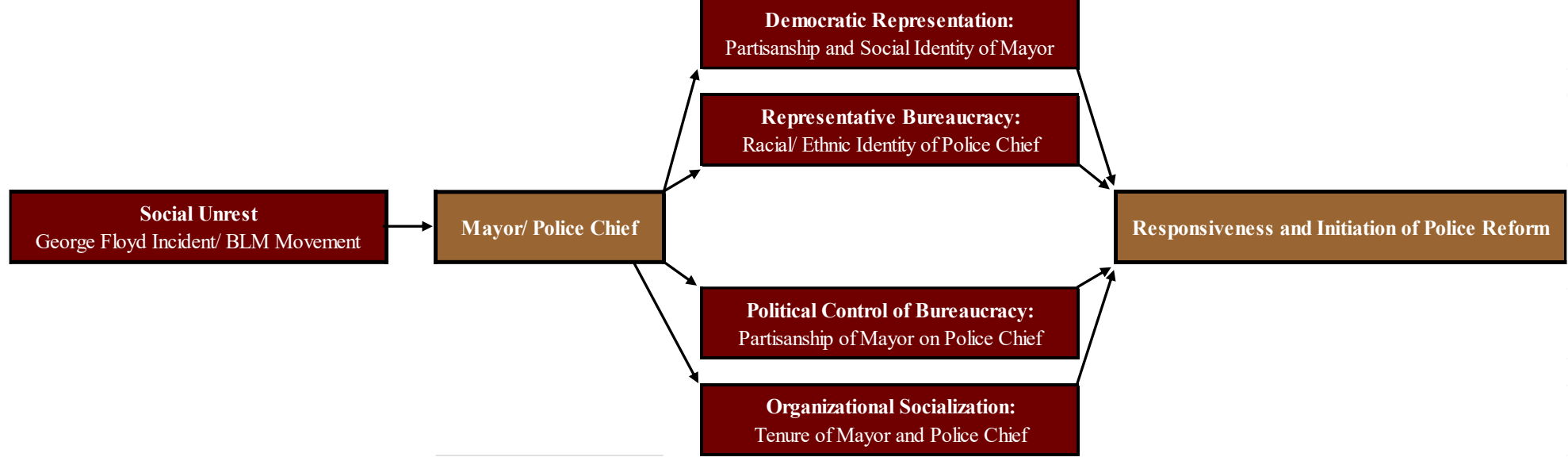
The research addresses three interrelated questions:

- First, do the timing of initial police reform within local governments vary in a systematic way?
- Second, what effect does partisanship, race/ ethnicity, gender, and tenure of top local officials have on the timing and initiation of police reform?
- Third, what theory holds the most explanatory power in determining the timing and initiation of police reform?

In other words, the study seeks to explain the timing and the likelihood of initial police reform being initiated by local governments based on police chiefs and mayors’ political affiliation, race/ ethnicity, gender, and tenure?

Theoretical Framework

Figure 1. Determinants of Local Governments’ Police Reform



Hypotheses

Democratic Representation

Hypothesis 1A1: Local governments with Republican mayors are less responsive in initiating police reform than local governments with non-Republican mayors.

Hypothesis 1A2: Local governments with Republican mayors are less likely to initiate police reform than local governments with non-Republican mayors.

Hypothesis 1B1: Local governments with minority mayors are more responsive in initiating police reform than local governments with non-minority mayors.

Hypothesis 1B2: Local governments with minority mayors are more likely to initiate police reform than local governments with non-minority mayors.

Hypothesis 1C1: Local governments with minority male mayors are more responsive in initiating police reform than local governments with non-minority male mayors.

Hypothesis 1C2: Local governments with minority male mayors are more likely to initiate police reform than local governments with non-minority male mayors.

Representative Bureaucracy

Hypothesis 2A1: Local governments with minority police chiefs are more responsive in initiating police reform than local governments with non-minority police chiefs.

Hypothesis 2A2: Local governments with minority police chiefs are more likely to initiate police reform than local governments with non-minority police chiefs.

Hypothesis 2B1: Local governments with minority male police chiefs are more responsive in initiating police reform than local governments with non-minority male police chiefs.

Hypothesis 2B2: Local governments with minority male police chiefs are more likely to initiate police reform than local governments with non-minority male police chiefs.

Political Control of Bureaucracy

Hypothesis 3A1: Local governments with Republican mayors are still less responsive in initiating police reform when the social identities of police chiefs are a factor than local governments with non-Republican mayors.

Hypothesis 3A2: Local governments with Republican mayors are still less likely to initiate police reform when the social identities of police chiefs are a factor than local governments with non-Republican mayors.

Organizational Socialization

Hypothesis 4A1: Local governments with mayors that have served less time in their respective role are more responsive in initiating police reform than local governments with more tenured mayors.

Hypothesis 4A2: Local governments with mayors that have served less time in their respective role are more likely to initiate police reform than local governments with more tenured mayors.

Hypothesis 4B1: Local governments with police chiefs that have served less time in their respective role are more responsive in initiating police reform than local governments with more tenured police chiefs.

Hypothesis 4B2: Local governments with police chiefs that have served less time in their respective role are more likely to initiate police reform than local governments with more tenured police chiefs.

Data and Methods

Cross-Sectional Data Set

- Quantitative Data – Various News Articles and Press Releases, U.S. Census Bureau, Municipal Websites, Ballotpedia, USA Today, The New York Times, D. J. Elazar-American Federalism: A View from the States, and NeighborhoodScout

Unit of Analysis

- U.S. Cities/ Municipalities — Population of at least 200,000 residents

Estimation Routine

- Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) for Multicollinearity
- Event History Analysis/ Cox Hazard Model
- Probit Regression with Robust Variance-Covariance Estimation (VCE) for Heteroscedasticity

Dependent Variables

To test for the timing of police reform and the effect on different types of police reform, the study uses the following dependent variable:

- Reform Month** — Month of initial police reform starting on May 26, 2020 to May 25, 2024 (i.e., 48 Months)
*49th Month (Represents reform after 48 months (4 years) or no reform initiated)

And to test the identities of mayors and police chiefs on the likelihood of police reform being initiated, the dependent variable(s) are:

- Police Reform** — i.e., Police Reform, Use of Force, Body-Worn Cameras (BWCs), and Civilian Oversight

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics					
Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. dev.	Min	Max
Dependent Variables					
Police Reform	113	0.91	0.29	0	1
Reform Month	113	7.99	14.26	1	49
Use of Force	113	0.61	0.49	0	1
Chokeholds	113	0.48	0.50	0	1
De-escalation	113	0.12	0.33	0	1
Body Cameras	113	0.11	0.31	0	1
Civilian Oversight	113	0.13	0.34	0	1
Main Explanatory Variables					
Republican Mayor	113	0.27	0.45	0	1
Minority Mayor	113	0.34	0.47	0	1
Minority Male Mayor	113	0.21	0.41	0	1
Young Mayor	113	0.52	0.50	0	1
Minority Police Chief	113	0.45	0.50	0	1
Minority Male Police Chief	113	0.38	0.49	0	1
Young Police Chief	113	0.72	0.45	0	1
Control Variables					
Female Mayor	113	0.30	0.46	0	1
Female Police Chief	113	0.14	0.35	0	1
Population	113	591,684	907,754	200,252	8,419,316
Black Population	113	0.19	0.17	0.00	0.78
Hispanic Population	113	0.26	0.22	0.03	0.96
Strong Mayor	113	0.48	0.50	0	1
Moralistic Political Culture	113	0.35	0.49	0	1
Traditionalistic Political Culture	113	0.42	0.50	0	1
Trump Vote	113	0.37	0.12	0.04	0.66
Crime	113	40.59	16.32	11.25	81.30

Table 2. Time to Police Reform: Local Governments		
Time (Months)	Yet to Initiate Reform	Initiated Reform
1	113	0
2	46	9
3	37	1
4	36	3
5	33	4
6	29	2
7	27	2
8	25	2
9	23	2
10	21	1
11	20	1
12	19	1
13	18	1
14	17	1
15	16	1
16	15	2
17	13	1
18	12	1
19	11	1
20	10	0

Table 3. Predicting Mayors' Partisanship and Social Identity on Timing of Police Reform						
VARIABLES	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Republican Mayor					-0.769***	-0.770***
					(0.243)	(0.240)
Minority Mayor			-0.050		-0.174	
			(0.146)		(0.151)	
Minority Male Mayor			-0.166		-0.220	
			(0.179)		(0.185)	
Female Mayor			0.169	0.180		
			(0.129)	(0.134)		
Young Mayor			-0.061	-0.066	-0.028	
			(0.159)	(0.156)	(0.148)	
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
N	113	113	113	113	113	113

Note: The table contains the coefficients from a Cox hazard estimation, robust standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table 3. Predicting Mayor's Partisanship and Social Identity on Initial Police Reform						
VARIABLES	Racial Identity			Race & Gender Identities		
	Police Reform Use of Force	BWCs	Civilian Oversight	Police Reform Use of Force	BWCs	Civilian Oversight
Republican Mayor	-2.566***	-0.086	-0.284	-2.759***	-0.075	-0.332
	(0.826)	(0.138)	(0.462)	(0.824)	(0.133)	(0.458)
Minority Mayor	-0.699*	-0.220	1.623***	0.868*	0.333	0.355
	(0.342)	(0.299)	(0.559)	(0.310)	(0.286)	(0.330)
Minority Male Mayor				-0.610	-0.366	1.010*
				(0.558)	(0.330)	(0.356)
Female Mayor	1.200*	0.109	-0.297	0.121		
	(0.726)	(0.296)	(0.448)	(0.344)		
Young Mayor	-0.251	-0.077	0.235	0.281	-0.019	0.281
	(0.609)	(0.279)	(0.478)	(0.360)	(0.271)	(0.375)
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
N	113	113	113	113	113	113

Note: The table contains the coefficients from a Probit regression with robust variance-covariance estimation (VCE), standard errors in parentheses.
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table 7. Predicting Police Chief's Social Identity on Initial Police Reform while Controlling for Mayor's Partisanship						
VARIABLES	Racial Identity			Race & Gender Identities		
	Police Reform Use of Force	BWCs	Civilian Oversight	Police Reform Use of Force	BWCs	Civilian Oversight
Minority Police Chief	1.321***	0.503*	-0.062	-0.716**		
	(0.556)	(0.304)	(0.407)	(0.352)		
Minority Male Police Chief				1.229**	0.664**	-0.702**
				(0.566)	(0.293)	(0.401)
Female Police Chief	0.581	-0.204	-0.377	0.348		
	(0.646)	(0.419)	(0.512)	(0.447)		
Young Police Chief	0.331	0.173	0.064	-0.027	0.335	0.180
	(0.395)	(0.263)	(0.381)	(0.387)	(0.404)	(0.277)
Republican Mayor	-2.429***	-0.012	-0.280	-0.500	-2.862***	-0.089
	(0.807)	(0.241)	(0.421)	(0.258)	(0.978)	(0.415)
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
N	113	113	113	113	113	113

Note: The table contains the coefficients from a Probit regression with robust variance-covariance estimation (VCE), standard errors in parentheses.
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table 4. Predicting Police Chiefs' Social Identity on Timing of Police Reform						
VARIABLES	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Minority Police Chief			0.242*		0.188	
			(0.142)		(0.137)	
Minority Male Police Chief			0.134		0.107	
			(0.141)		(0.136)	
Female Police Chief			0.186	0.121		
			(0.172)	(0.178)		
Young Police Chief			-0.088	-0.083		
			(0.174)	(0.172)		
Republican Mayor			-0.704***	-0.743***		
			(0.240)	(0.244)		
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
N	113	113	113	113	113	113

Note: The table contains the coefficients from a Cox hazard estimation, robust standard errors in parentheses.
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table 6. Predicting Police Chief's Social Identity on Initial Police Reform						
VARIABLES	Racial Identity			Race & Gender Identities		
	Police Reform Use of Force	BWCs	Civilian Oversight	Police Reform Use of Force	BWCs	Civilian Oversight
Minority Police Chief	1.179**	0.530*	-0.051	-0.674**		
	(0.569)	(0.298)	(0.379)	(0.349)		
Minority Male Police Chief				0.800*	0.665**	-0.069
				(0.472)	(0.295)	(0.395)
Female Police Chief	1.272*	-0.302	-0.350	0.426		
	(0.717)	(0.404)	(0.515)	(0.457)		
Young Police Chief	0.667	0.173	0.052	-0.642*	0.629	0.179
	(0.476)	(0.283)	(0.394)	(0.388)	(0.452)	(0.277)
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
N	113	113	113	113	113	113

Note: The table contains the coefficients from a Probit regression with robust variance-covariance estimation (VCE), standard errors in parentheses.
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Discussion and Conclusion

- Results show that local governments’ response time to initial police reform vary in a systematic way
- Findings also reveal that local governments with Republican mayors are less responsive in timing and less likely to initiate police reform
- In addition, localities with a minority mayor are more likely to initiate reforms when it pertains to body-worn cameras and civilian oversight which highlights the need for more transparency and accountability
- Local governments with minority police chiefs are more responsive in timing to initiate police reform, however, this is not the case when the partisanship of mayor is a factor
- Moreover, minority police chiefs and minority male police chiefs are more likely to initiate police reform, especially when it concerns the use of force
- On the contrary, local governments with minority police chiefs and minority male police chiefs are less likely to initiate police reform for civilian oversight which should be further examined in future research
- A limitation to this study is that it focuses on U.S. cities/ municipalities with a population of at least 200,000 residents, which means that future research should also examine police reforms in less populated localities
- ❖ Overall, findings show how partisanship, bureaucratic representation, and political control of bureaucracy holds more explanatory power than the theory of organizational socialization. This reveals the power dynamics of polarization and the importance of representation when it concerns addressing a highly salient issue such as police reform within American society.

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