

## **The National Police Research Platform: advancing knowledge and practice in American policing**

### *Background*

This special issue of the journal offers a new perspective on police research and police practice through the lens of the National Police Research Platform (hereafter “the Platform”). The research reported here is part of the first generation of studies to emerge from the Platform – a program of research that has been developing for more than a decade.

In November of 2006, the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) invited a handful of policing scholars and police executives to Washington to help develop a police research agenda for the next decade; specifically asking, what were the “knowledge needs” in American policing? Many topics were discussed, including police recruitment, training, supervision, leadership, early intervention, technology, diversity, innovation, and more. There was widespread agreement that police executives did not have the organizational data needed to effectively manage their agencies in the twenty-first century or evaluate new initiatives. For example, they lack reliable data about the knowledge, perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors of their own employees and the community members they serve.

To address this knowledge gap, I offered the group a framework for addressing this knowledge gap. Rather than continue to fund only single-agency, cross-sectional studies on specific topics, I suggested that NIJ invest in a large-scale “life course” project to collect new information from a national sample of police agencies. Such a project would begin the long process of developing, field testing, and implementing a new set of performance measures that attempt to be responsive to the needs of modern police organizations and the communities they serve. While some workshop participants felt that police agencies needed “immediate results,” most endorsed that idea of a long-term project to generate reliable knowledge; hence, the birth of the National Police Research Platform.

### **The platform phases 1 and 2**

In 2007 and 2008, I organized a team of leading policing scholars and police leaders to conceptualize the platform[1]. Our proposal was later funded by the NIJ, with the goal of advancing both knowledge and practice in American policing. The primary objective of the project was to develop and field test an innovative “platform-based” methodology that, when fully implemented, would provide much needed data on what police are doing within their organizations and within the communities they serve. Unlike other national databases, the platform shifted attention away from counting activities and incidents to developing knowledge about the quality of policing and management; away from a nearly exclusive focus on crime statistics to data on organizational performance, such as the quality of leadership and supervision, procedural fairness within the organization, procedural justice on the street, and public trust and confidence in the police. For policy makers and the public, the platform introduces new measures of police performance that, if institutionalized, would provide a tangible and scientifically rigorous structure for evaluating police organizations. The underlying theory of organizational change was simple: by “measuring what matters” and doing so repeatedly over time, the narrative about performance indicators, both inside and outside police organizations, would eventually change, thus allowing police innovation and reform to occur with more support and less resistance from employees.



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Although the platform was conceived six years before Ferguson, it is well suited to address the chronic challenge of organizational legitimacy and public trust in American policing. Complaints of excessive force, unconstitutional stops, and verbally abusive encounters have persisted for decades and are often linked to issues of race and inequality. Complaints about police culture – corruption, the code of silence and resistance to change – have also been heard for decades, but few attempts have been made to understand the contributing factors within the workplace or ways to minimize their effects on police reform efforts. In essence, researchers have identified these problems, but have rarely studied how organizations contribute to these problems or facilitate constructive change to prevent them. In recent years, the research community has focused mainly on evaluating the effectiveness of agencies' crime control strategies, giving little attention to organizational features that contribute to a professional, democratic, and fair police force. The research community has also given considerable attention to the study of procedural justice but has failed to evaluate how it can be improved "on the ground" both inside and outside of police agencies.

The platform was designed as a mechanism with potentially large payoffs for both science and practice. The assumptions underlying the Platform model are clear: first, knowledge of policing can be exponentially expanded with the collection of standardized data across a large and diverse set of jurisdictions. Also, the platform, once created with participating agencies, can provide a framework for conducting large-scale randomized trials or quasi-experiments to test the impact of new policies and programs, as well as examining how longitudinal trends are affected by changes in leadership, training, supervision, accountability and technology. Second, the practice of policing could be significantly enhanced when such knowledge is shared and translated into meaningful agency change. The platform is expected to serve as an important tool for supporting evidence-based police organizations that seek to evaluate their performance in new ways, experiment with innovation, and use evidence more effectively to shape the management of police organizations and their interactions with the community. Hopefully, this logic model will be tested in the years ahead.

The platform must be practical and cost-effective. The platform's technology-based methodologies were designed to be parsimonious: standardized online surveys that are delivered quickly, easily, and at minimal cost to the organization. This approach should encourage widespread adoption, which then allows for the creation of local, regional and national benchmarks of organizational performance that help to define professional policing for individual agencies.

The first phase of the platform was a field test of these methods with a purposive sample of 28 police organizations that varied in size, type and region of the country. Phase 1 taught us that electronic and web-based methods are feasible, can produce valid information, and can be implemented efficiently on a large scale with the proper management structure. After this successful "proof of concept," the Platform was rolled out to 100 agencies in Phase 2, including both sheriffs' offices and municipal police. This sample included 88 randomly selected agencies between 100 and 3,000 sworn personnel and 12 agencies carried over from Phase 1, including three of the four largest departments in the USA. More than 55,000 different surveys were completed by police and community members over two years. The articles reported here offer the reader a small taste of the work that can be produced from platform data.

The platform incorporated a wide range of surveys, including surveys of new recruits, new supervisors, chief executive officers (CEOs) (chiefs and sheriffs), all employees, community members with recent police contacts, and a department characteristics survey. The longitudinal studies of new recruits and supervisors were only funded during Phase 1, but they represent a critically important methodology for understanding how individual predispositions and critical events influence the life course of police officers, so I encourage future work in this area. Policing scholars in Australia are using the Platform instruments

as a springboard for longitudinal work on recruits and in this special issue you will find two studies using US recruit data.

The surveys of employees (called the Law Enforcement Organizational (LEO) Surveys) provide a fertile ground for scholarly analysis of police culture and management, as reflected in the many of the articles in this issue. The LEO surveys address multiple aspects of police work, including job satisfaction, job stress and burnout, leadership and supervision, agency policies and practices, job and home life balance, the perceived fairness of the organization, police culture, race and gender diversity, union representation, and officer's views of the communities they serve, among other topics.

The platform team developed and field tested a contact survey (called the Police-Community Interaction Survey (PCIS)) to provide external measures of organizational performance. Built on procedural justice and victimology research, the survey provides standardized indicators of the quality of police-community encounters and general perceptions of the police at the local level. The survey measures the officer's use of procedural justice (voice, respect, neutrality, and trust), competency, empathy, social etiquette, assistance to victims, and use of force, as well as the respondents' overall satisfaction with the encounter, willingness to cooperate with the police, and evaluations of the agency's effectiveness and legitimacy.

The platform methodology in Phase 2 was expanded to include two new surveys: an online survey of chiefs and sheriffs (called the CEO survey); and the Department Characteristics Survey. The CEO survey provided a close-up look at leadership within each agency and covered a broad range of topics, including leadership style, approaches to organizational change and innovation, relations with unions, internal communications, integrity, public perceptions of the organization, value of scientific evidence, fairness of press coverage, views on new technology, the impact of budget cutbacks, employee hiring priorities, the adequacy of departments' educational and promotions systems, and other topics.

The Department Characteristics Survey was introduced to learn more about the agency's practices and gather contextual information to help explain organizational performance. Similar in ways to the Law Enforcement Management and Administration Survey, the Department Characteristics Survey questionnaire asked knowledgeable persons within the organization about a wide variety of topics that characterize key features of the organization: population served; allocation of staff; patrol-division structure; pay, benefits, and incentives; recruitment, hiring, performance appraisal, and promotions; training; technology use; use of social media; presence of unions; use of force and disciplinary processes; tallies on crime, arrests, stops, citations, and calls for service; firearm use and other uses of force; officer injuries, accidents, and deaths; accreditation; judicial/administrative rulings against the department; and adoption of policing innovations, among others. These new surveys provided additional context for understanding the views of both officers and community members. In sum, Phase 2 of the platform was successful at generating a sustainable set of standardized metrics on organizational performance.

In the future, we expect that the platform can be used to look at policing issues from multiple levels. For instance, the CEO data can illuminate the CEO's priorities for innovation and change. The DC survey can measure whether and when innovations were translated into formal agency policy, and the LEO and PCIS surveys can track employee and community reactions to these reform efforts. This sort of integrated tracking system would allow police leaders and policy makers at all levels of government to assess not only how innovations are dispersed across agencies, but how they are implemented, and the conditions under which they work well and not so well.

In the meantime, Phase 3 will focus on the institutionalization of the platform and the translation of research findings for practitioners and community members. With support

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from the NIJ, the Police Foundation will become the new headquarters for the platform in 2017. The platform research team is working with the Police Foundation to expand the sample of participating agencies and build a strong bridge between research and practice. This work is discussed briefly in the final article.

### **Contributions to this special issue**

The articles in this special issue provide a sampling of the types of studies that are possible with platform data. Many of these studies are able, for the first time, to test ideas about police culture, supervision, leadership, and procedural justice, among other topics, using a sizeable and diverse national sample of police agencies, thus strengthening the external validity of the conclusions. We hope that these early studies will inspire others to drill deeper into the forces that shape officers' perceptions and behavior regarding their peers, management, and the communities they serve.

### **The work environment: culture, supervision, and diversity**

Many of the articles in this special issue are responsive to the call for a closer look at the social and administrative dynamics at work within police organizations. For those of us who have devoted a lifetime to understanding and reforming the police, no topic provokes more debate than police culture. Underscoring its importance to police reform, the President's Task Force noted that "Culture eats policy for lunch." But the opening article by Cordner challenges the view that all police culture is negative and resistant, showing, for example, that most officers hold positive views of the community and their immediate supervisors. More importantly, the platform data have allowed Cordner to look at police culture across 89 agencies and 13,000 police officers, rather than the typical single-agency study. In the final analysis, he concludes that the biggest differences are not between individuals but between agencies, suggesting that police culture is largely a local phenomenon, shaped by local factors rather than the result of a uniform occupation that has a monolithic effect on all police officers nationwide.

Granted, Cordner did find some individual differences due to age gender, race/ethnicity, and rank (e.g. younger officers were more likely to endorse physical toughness on the job and view the community as less supportive of the police), but these differences were not as large as the differences between agencies. Cordner is not arguing that there are no common elements to police culture across agencies, but rather that more attention should be given to the organizational and environmental factors within jurisdictions that account for differences in culture from one location to the next. With the availability of national data, future researchers should attend to factors such as the characteristics of the agency (e.g. size, type, presence of union), type of government (e.g. city manager vs mayor), and community factors (e.g. demographic composition, level of crime and disorder) as possible determinants of local police culture. This research is also encouraging because it leaves open the door that local police culture may be shaped by local police leadership and styles of management.

Styles of management include different approaches to supervising employees, which can vary enormously. Good frontline supervision is widely considered the linchpin of organizations that are innovative, productive, effective, fair, and operate within the confines of agency policy and the constitution of the USA. The article by Cronin, McDevitt, and Cordner provides an in-depth look at the factors associated with good supervision from the officers' perspective. Through factor analysis, the authors identified three distinct components of officers' ratings of their immediate supervisor: direction (supervisor inspires and sets expectations), fairness (supervisor is respectful and fair), and support (supervisor helps with problems and career development). Contrary to some prior research, supervisors received relatively high marks on all of these dimensions, with direction being the most

important determinant of overall satisfaction with one's immediate supervisor, followed by fairness and support. Clearly, officers want clear direction at work, but they also want to be treated with dignity and respect and know that someone is there to help them if problems develop. Individual officer characteristics were less predictive of satisfaction with supervisors, although some noteworthy differences did appear. More negative views of one's supervisor were expressed by female, older, and African American officers. Gender and race differences were more associated with supervisory fairness, while age differences were more associated with supervisory direction and support. With increased diversity in today's police force, supervisors will need to be more attentive to issues of organizational justice and provide a supportive and fair environment for all employees.

The demographic composition of the police workforce has been a topic of heated debate for many decades. The current crisis of legitimacy in American policing has focused on racial disparities in police behavior, which has drawn attention to the absence of diversity among sworn personnel. From the President's Commission in 1967 to the President's Task Force in 2015, police organizations have been asked to achieve greater diversity among the police ranks as one solution to the problem. Diversifying a police organization may improve relations with the community, but may be a hazardous course to navigate with a predominately white, male culture and leadership structure. Two articles in this issue use platform data to address organizational diversity and how it affects the internal work environment. These articles elevate individual characteristics to the agency level to examine the effects of workforce composition on factors such as job satisfaction, fairness, and deviance. First, Alderden, Farrell, and McCarty explore the impact of racial and gender diversity on job satisfaction and perceptions of fairness within the agency and find "neutral to positive" effects. On a positive note, increasing the percentage of African Americans, Latinos, and women in the sworn ranks had no adverse effects on workforce job satisfaction or perceived fairness. Furthermore, employees reported greater agency fairness when African Americans were better represented in leadership positions, challenging arguments that whites will be threatened by such promotions. The authors stress the importance of creating and retaining diverse leadership teams and not limiting diversity efforts to recruitment.

In a second article on agency demographics, Maskaly and his colleagues provide an interesting look at whether the demographic similarity between the CEO and his/her employees (what they call homophily) will produce a convergence of attitudes about police deviance or misconduct. Indeed, the two are linked in a positive way – when the CEO and the employees are similar in demographics (gender, age, race/ethnicity, tenure and education), they are more likely to hold similar views of what constitutes misconduct. The authors argue for greater diversity at all levels of the organization as a means to reduce the social distance between the ranks and give administrators greater control over police deviance on the streets.

### **Organizational justice within police organizations**

These analyses of police culture, diversity, and leadership share an underlying interest in officers' perceptions of how they are being treated by the people, policies, and practices that define their work environment. Rosenbaum and McCarty provide a more direct examination of these perceptions, which they define as organizational justice, and argue that without it, agencies will be hard pressed to obtain "buy in" from frontline officers that is essential for achieving sustained reforms. Using platform data from 88 agencies, the authors explore the nature and consequences of organizational justice in American policing. Using factor analysis, they confirm four dimensions of organizational justice: organization-wide justice (including fair discipline, assignments, and opportunities), leadership justice (agency head sets a good example and seeks input on decisions), supervisory justice (supervisor sets clear expectations, seeks input on decisions, is fair, and is supportive) and diversity justice

(the organization treats officers the same regardless of gender or race). The researchers found that as officers reported more organizational justice on these dimensions, they expressed greater commitment to organizational goals, greater job satisfaction, and (for most forms of justice), a greater willingness to obey the rules of the agency. Rosenbaum and McCarty conclude that the policing profession would be wise, especially during this period of external scrutiny where many officers feel demoralized, to invest in new approaches to leadership and management that reflect the core principles of organizational psychology. In other words, rather than continue to emphasize punitive approaches to behavior change, management should provide clear direction and pay closer attention to the social and psychological needs of employees, including voice, fairness, respect, and support.

We must be cognizant of the fact that officers' perception of organizational injustice can begin early in their career, as documented by Enciso, Maskaly and Donner in their article on police recruits. The researchers studied the development of "organizational cynicism" among 760 recruits from five different training academies, at three points in time (first day at the academy, just before graduation, and six months post-graduation). Nearly all of the survey items in their cynicism index focused on whether management was treating officers in a fair and supportive manner, i.e. organizational justice. Consistent with Niederhoffer's original conception, Enciso and her colleagues found that cynicism continued to grow during recruits' first year in a policing environment. Given that support for management is critically important for the adoption of change and that cynicism can have many adverse effects (e.g. loss of morale, productivity, and rule compliance), the early onset of cynicism is problematic. Interestingly, female recruits showed lower levels of baseline cynicism and then became more cynical about the organization over time. This may be due to unrealistic expectations or differential treatment by instructors, field training officers, or supervisors in a male-dominated environment. In any event, given the growing realization that female officers can significantly enhance police organizations and police-community relations, management and researchers should pay particular attention to this issue and ensure that female officers are retained and supported.

In the final article of this section, McCarty and Dewald apply the concept of organizational justice and other dimensions of policing to county sheriff's offices that provide services to households outside the reach of municipal government. Roughly 20 percent of the platform sample comprised full-service county sheriff's offices, so McCarty and Dewald conducted a comparative analysis with municipal police agencies, revealing some important differences on several dimensions. They found that deputy sheriffs hold significantly more favorable views of organizational justice, views of the community, and views of their agency head than do officers employed by municipal police departments. The authors encourage municipal police management to pay more attention to the fairness of job assignments, communication channels, and clarity of expectations. Consistent with many of the articles in this special issue, these differences between sheriff and municipal police agencies underscore the importance of unique organizational and community factors in shaping the work environment of sworn personnel. The fact that sheriffs are elected and chiefs are not may contribute to their responsiveness to employee concerns and heighten their awareness that a deputy's job satisfaction may affect his/her quality of service to the voters.

### **Procedural justice during interactions with the public**

As noted earlier, the platform focuses on the performance of the police both inside and outside the organization. As a public service agency, the police are ultimately judged by the quality of service they deliver to members of their community. The platform's PCIS does exactly that. Rosenbaum and his colleagues describe how the PCIS takes us far beyond performance metrics such as crime statistics to measure the dynamics of

police-community interactions that contribute to, or undermine, police legitimacy. The PCIS gives attention to whether the officer's actions are perceived as procedurally just by the community member, as well as many other aspects of the officer's behavior, such as aggressiveness, social etiquette, helpfulness, and competence in job performance. Each component of the PCIS is described in this article. The authors argue that while procedural justice is critically important, it gives insufficient attention to whether the officer exhibits empathy or compassion during interactions with the public – something highly valued in most human interactions. They also maintain that trustworthiness should be viewed as a summative consequence of procedural justice rather than one of its' four components. Testing the PCIS in 53 cities, Rosenbaum and his colleagues validate their measures and find support for their model, including the fact that officer trustworthiness mediates the effects of procedural justice on the community member's willingness to cooperate with the police. The PCIS methodology needs refinement, but with widespread complaints of race bias, excessive force, discourteous behavior, and aggressive policing, there is no more important time to systematically measure the factors that facilitate or restrict public trust and confidence in the police.

The concept of police empathy is further explored in the article by Posick and Hatfield, who also use the PCIS data in 53 cities. Consistent with Rosenbaum *et al*, the authors argue that the field of policing has failed to give adequate attention the concept of "relational empathy." They do a nice job of reviewing literature in other service fields to illustrate the beneficial effects of empathy in human interactions. Posick and Hatfield draw on the "HEART" model of medical care used to improve doctor-patient relations (Hear, Empathize, Apologize, Respond, and Thank) and test whether the presence of HEART in PCIs would affect the perceived fairness of the outcome. Their HEART index is a combination of the empathy and social etiquette items used by Rosenbaum and his colleagues. The results indicate when officers scored higher on the HEART index (i.e. showed more empathy and social etiquette) community members reported that the outcome they experienced was fairer than when officers received lower HEART scores. Also, fairness ratings were strongly associated with agency-level differences in HEART, suggesting there are organizational factors at work, consistent with other articles in this issue. Posick and Hatfield do find, however, that Blacks still report significantly lower perceptions of outcome fairness, even after controlling for HEART scores, confidence in the police, and other variables. The relationship between the police and the Black community is clearly more complex.

A third article on procedural justice offers us an entirely different look at PCIS, taking us "upstream" to assess whether some new officers are better at exhibiting procedural justice behaviors than others. As noted earlier, the platform included a longitudinal component to identify factors that influence the professional development and career path of new officers, such as their background and personality characteristics, training experiences, and other variables. Lawrence, Christoff, and Escamilla tested the general hypothesis that communication styles and personality traits can affect the quality of officers' interactions with the public. This study provides an unprecedented link between a battery of tests completed by new recruits during the first week of basic training and the public's ratings of their encounter with these officers during their first two years on the job. The researchers found that many communication styles and personality traits did not predict subsequent treatment of the public, but several did: Community members gave higher procedural justice scores to new officers with higher levels of empathy, lower levels of neuroticism, and more emotional control. Specifically, empathy communication and lower neuroticism enhanced the public's perception of the officer's treatment (i.e. respectful, polite, and listened) and the officer's decision making (fairness), while the officer's emotional control enhanced perceived treatment. This study confirms the importance of officers' empathy and procedural justice as described elsewhere in this

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issue, and emotional control, as described in the national debate about use of force and de-escalation. Following the work of Ellen Scrivner and the current pressure to adopt community policing models, Lawrence and his colleagues argue that pre-employment screening tests should be revised to “screen in” applicants who manifest these communication skills and not simply “screen out” individuals who show signs of personality disorders or deviance on other dimensions.

### **Platform 2.0: translating knowledge and engaging the profession**

To date, the National Police Research Platform has been largely a test of “proof-of-concept.” Results from Phases 1 and 2 indicate that the Platform is a viable methodology for creating a standardized set of new performance metrics and advancing the science of policing. The platform was acknowledged as a model by the President’s Task Force on twenty-first century Policing and in 2015 was asked by the Pew Research Center to field a survey to capture the voices of police officers in this post-Ferguson world. The next big challenge is to figure out how the platform can be used to advance the practice of policing.

In addition to generating knowledge, the platform has sought to provide useful feedback to participating agencies. The platform produced customized confidential reports for each agency that allowed their CEOs to compare their agency’s performance to the ten other agencies most similar to them in terms of size, demography, and level of crime. At the conclusion of Phase 2, CEOs were asked what they thought of the platform and whether they found the results useful to their organizations. In the last chapter of this issue, Bueermann, Escamilla, and Hartnett report the findings from this CEO survey. A large majority of Chiefs and Sheriffs expressed positive evaluations of the platform. They found the results useful and provoking – causing them to rethink business as usual, identify problems, and make changes.

Importantly, the CEOs also wanted more guidance and direction with regard to the findings – how to interpret and respond to them. Clearly, much more can be done to encourage knowledge translation and utilization. In the final pages, Bueermann, President of the Police Foundation in Washington DC – the new headquarters for the platform – and his coauthors, begin to chart the future of the platform and a pathway for making the research findings useful to practitioners. Through feedback, engagement, dialogue, publication, education and technical assistance, the Platform of the future should be able to close the gap between police science and police practice. Interagency forums, conferences and virtual meetings can be used to interpret and discuss Platform findings, as well as to extend the benefits to nonparticipating agencies in the USA and in other countries.

Hopefully, standardized annual or biennial platform surveys will serve as diagnostic tools to assess internal and external environments for each participating agency and help police leaders make adjustments to police training, supervision, accountability, leadership and, ultimately, the quality of police service on the streets. Over the next few years, the Police Foundation, with the support of the NIJ and leading researchers, police executives, and community leaders, will develop and implement a plan for institutionalizing and growing the platform. As the pool of participating agencies grows, this should dramatically increase our ability to document and explain differences in the performance of American police organizations, including an assessment of the quality and equity of service delivery in different segments of the community. The platform should be able to produce reliable local, regional and national indicators of organizational performance and establish new definitions of professional policing in the twenty-first century.

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