

Are Hispanics who have negative attitudes toward law enforcement more likely to have lower levels of trust toward the government?

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Abstract

In the past decade, new policies have caused the U.S immigration and customs enforcement to adopt stricter techniques towards undocumented people. These stricter immigration policies have profoundly affected Hispanics' attitudes toward law enforcement. As a result, it is important to understand the current perceptions in the Latino community towards certain institutions in the U.S. This paper examines whether Hispanics who have negative attitudes toward law enforcement are also more likely to have lower levels of trust toward the government.

Hispanics and Latinos tend to hold negative perceptions towards law enforcement

Group Position Model

Hispanics and Latinos tend to hold negative perceptions towards law enforcement. Nationally, minorities as a whole, such as African Americans and Hispanics, have demonstrated similar perceptions of police (Weitzer, R., and Tuch A. 2004). Race has been determined to be a key factor in such negative attitudes. Since not many studies have been conducted on Hispanics and their attitudes toward law enforcement, they tend to be lumped together with African Americans, in a term commonly referred to as "minority-group" perspectives (Weitzer, R. J and Tuch, S A. 2004). Thus, a group-position model has been used to understand minority perceptions of police. This model is closely associated with the conflict theory model. In a study, police were seen more favorable by white Americans and less favorable by racial minorities. White Americans tend to hold positive perspectives of law enforcement, tend to agree with aggressive tactics law enforcement may utilize, and seemed to be more skeptical of criticisms received by the public toward law enforcement (Weitzer, R and Tush, S. A., 2004). Thus, the group position model may

also be applied when explaining the more positive attitudes by white Americans toward law enforcement. The model's position believes the dominant group in society is entitled to receive valuable resources and be better served by institutions, which includes law enforcement. Thus, the model suggests the dominant group in America, white Americans perception toward law enforcement and perspectives of minorities can be linked to the model. Thus, to accept that minorities are mistreated by law enforcement, white Americans would perceive their dominant group as being directly threatened. Within the model white's position are more inclined to perceive law enforcement as a "visible sign of majority domain" (Barboza, 2012). The model contributes to an understanding of the negative perceptions among minority groups and their sense of distrust (Barboza, 2012).

Hispanic Attitude of Fear

Research has revealed a prominent notion of how fear has been a dominant attitude within the Hispanic community. An increase of anti-immigration legislation at both the federal and state level have caused fear in the Hispanic community (Ayón and Becerra, 2013). This is because anti-immigration policies and the threat of being deported by ICE has created fear of deportation (Arbona, 2010 and Becerra 2016). Many direct consequences have been proven apparent among Hispanic individuals because of fear towards ICE. A study associated "negative social, emotional, and mental health outcomes, stress, anxiety, and depression" as some of the implications Hispanic individuals experience (Arbona, 2010; Becerra 2016). Because of worksite immigration raids, undocumented immigrants also face exploitation from employers and are scared of reporting such crimes due to continual fear of deportation. Brennan, Cleveland, Fussell, found that some employers demand longer work hours, and pay less or no money to undocumented immigrants. Latino women also documented receiving sexual harassment from

employers but did not report such incidents due to fear of deportation (Fusel 2011). The study also reported that Latinas were less likely to report any other crimes, because of the continual fear of deportation (Fussell 2011). Menjivar and Bejarano (2004) found that Latino women were also less likely to report domestic abuse or violent crimes.

A study by David Becerra (2016) revealed that the overwhelming attitude of fear in the Hispanic community had negative impacts on many spheres of life including keeping a job, spending time with family, confidence in the justice system, and uncertainty that their children “will have a better future”. The study found that participants with greater fear of deportation also were more likely to believe that law enforcement would treat them unfairly (Becerra, 2016). Thus, research shows the apparent negative relationship that exists between the Hispanic community and fear of deportations conducted primarily by ICE. The Hispanic community perceives deportation as a clear threat to their “futures [and] to their family members, or their friends” because deportations continue to take place often (Becerra, 2016). However, Becerra believes that Latino undocumented individuals are subject to not only be deported but face discrimination and negative consequences.

Political Trust as the Evaluation of Process and Procedures

The trust as evolution theory can be used to predict that the negative attitudes of police can result in less trust in the government. It examines whether people’s trust of federal representatives and political figures in the government is dependent on the performance and procedures of such figures and the manner people perceive them (Becerra, 2016). The research determines that political trust is effected by actual policy performance and procedures. Thus, good performance in terms of substantive policy seems to correlate with high levels of political trust with their

countries (Meer, 2016). The countries with the most corruption are the countries less trusted by their citizens. The research implies that corruption seems to play a role in how citizens perceive political figures which determines the level of trust they place on them.

Assessing the Causes and Effects of Political Trust Among U.S. Latinos

Abrajano's and Alvarez's research (2009), determined that Latinos seem to be more trusting of the federal government than African Americans or Anglos, but racial discrimination plays a key role in Latino's trust or distrust towards the government. Since as noted above, Latinos have negative experiences with the government, one would expect that Latinos would have negative views of the government, but that does not appear to be the case. According to a Pew National Hispanic Survey, 15% of Latinos report always trusting the government compared to 9.2 % of blacks, and 13.4 % of whites (Abrajano, M. A., & Alvarez, R. M. (2009). The research suggests that if generally Latinos were assimilating at normal or predicted rates, then their rates of political trust should also be similar to the levels of trust among Anglos and African Americans. The theory of assimilation may explain the differences in one's trust in the government, but the research fails to offer an explanation as to why Latino's are more trusting of government than African Americans or Anglo's. Thus, Alvarez's research rests on two theories of why Latino's tend to be more trusting of the U.S. government than Blacks or Anglos. The first theory is that generational status plays a key role in assessing how trusting Latino's are of the government. As a result, first generation Latino's are more trusting of the U.S. government than older generations of Latino's. The second theory is that Latino's levels of political trust may be overrepresented by the opinions and attitudes of foreign-born populations (Abrajano, M. A., & Alvarez, R. M. (2009).

A possible solution to this puzzle of high levels of trust and negative experiences with the government is the segmented assimilation theory. This reveals that immigrants who experience racial discrimination or any form of mistreatment in the U.S. are less likely to assimilate to the American culture or be trusting of the U.S. government than immigrants with no experience of racial or ethnic discrimination (Abrajano, M. A., & Alvarez, R. M. (2009). Thus, encounters with racial discrimination tend to make Latinos less trusting of the government (Abrajano, M. A., & Alvarez, R. M., 2009). As a result, immigrants who report experiences of discrimination are less likely to trust the government than those with no prior experiences of discrimination.

Research Design

To examine whether Latinos experience lower levels of trust toward the government, I relied on surveys I conducted in Southwest Oklahoma City, an area highly populated by Hispanics. The participants were chosen outside of two grocery stores in Oklahoma City and the data consisted of 100 surveys, half which were women and half men, of Latino background. The participants were 18 years and older. The two-page survey was adopted from Rosenstone & Hansen (1993) and a National Elections Study (2012) and it was administered on January 2019.

The key independent variable in the research is the degree to which Hispanics hold negative views toward law enforcement. The variable was based on responses to a set of four questions as to whether respondents believe that local police develop relationships with community members, whether Oklahoma City (OKC) police practices community policing, and whether police treat people fairly. From these items, I created a 13-point ordinal scale. The items fit together well (Alpha= .71). Two questions were “to what extent does local OKC police

develop relationships with community members”, and “to what extent do you think OKC police practices community policing”. These were coded “not at all” (coded 0), “a little” (coded 1), “somewhat” (coded 2), “a lot” (coded 3), and “to a great extent” (coded 4). The other two questions were “to what extent do officers in your OKC police treat people fairly” and “to what extent do you trust your OKC police enforcement”. These variables were coded such as “not at all” (coded 0), “a little” (coded 1), “a lot” (coded 2) and “to a great extent” (coded 3).

The key dependent variable is the degree to which Hispanics trust the U.S government. The question used to measure trust was “do you think that quite a few of the people running the government are a little crooked, not very many are, or do you think hardly any of them are corrupt”. It was coded “yes, very” (coded 0), “yes” (coded 1), “not at all” (coded 2), “no” (coded 3), “prefer not to answer” (coded 9 and treated as missing). This is one of the four questions the American National Elections Studies uses to measure trust. The survey includes the other three questions but there were administrative problems with the questions.

I also used several control variables related to characteristics of Hispanics to understand their background. Such characteristics included age, gender, the years they lived in Oklahoma City, and whether they were born in the U.S. Their age was coded “18- 25 years old” (coded 1), “26-30 years old” (coded 2), “31-35 years old” (coded 3), “36-40 years old” (coded 4), “41-50 years old” (coded 5), “51-65 years old” (coded 6), and “over 66 years old” (coded 7). The question regarding the years they have lived in Oklahoma City was answered by utilizing numbers instead of following the coding system. The question regarding their gender used variables “female” (coded 1), “male” (coded 0), and “prefer not to answer” (coded 9). The question assessing whether they were born in the U.S. used the variables “yes” (coded 1), “no” (coded 0), and “prefer not to answer” (coded 9). The “prefer not to answer” options were treated

as missing, which means that I ended up with 89 surveys. To conduct the analysis, I use ordered logistic regression and report odds ratio. Table 1 reports the descriptive statistics for each variable.

Findings

The findings determined that there is no relationship (See Table 2) between the attitudes Hispanics hold toward law enforcement and their attitudes toward the government in Washington D.C. Age and gender are both significant in terms of corruptness. Thus, this means that both age and gender are factors that affect the manner in which people view the corruptness of the government. Women also scored higher than men in terms of how corrupt they view the government in Washington D.C to be. The level of significance is not high enough to be considered impactful, but still worth noting that older people are less likely to think government is corrupt. Hispanics born in the United States have views that are more negative than people not born in the U.S

Conclusion

This paper examines whether Hispanics who have negative attitudes toward law enforcement are also more likely to have lower levels of trust toward the government. The findings determined that there is no relationship between the attitudes Hispanics hold toward law enforcement and their attitudes toward the government in Washington D.C. The coefficients showed no significance between the independent and dependent variables. This leads me to conclude that other factors seem to be causing Hispanics to have lower views of the U.S.

government than the dependent variable that I measured. Thus, the attitudes they hold toward law enforcement is not the causation of such negative attitudes.

Much of the research conducted on Hispanic attitudes determine that many hold negative attitudes towards law enforcement however, such cause is not correlated with the attitudes they may hold toward the government in Washington D.C. Further research should be conducted on other areas aside from Oklahoma City to compare the views among Hispanics within different states and cities.

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Table 1: Mean and standard deviations

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Age	103	1.00	7.00	3.1553	1.71931
YearsOKC	103	.00	35.00	13.9029	10.12037
Gender	103	.00	1.00	.5049	.50242
BornU.S	103	.00	1.00	.2816	.45196
Realtionships	103	.00	4.00	2.1845	.95740
Involvement	103	.00	4.00	1.9903	1.27183
trustpolice	103	.00	4.00	1.6505	.98726
treatfairly	103	.00	4.00	1.4951	.92751
Corrupt	89	.00	3.00	.9663	.98222
independentscale	103	1.00	14.00	7.3204	3.21215
Valid N (listwise)	89				

Table 2 Effects on attitudes toward corruption

	Odds Ratio	Standard Error
Attitudes toward law enforcement	1.05	.07
Age	1.28	.16+
Years in OKC	1.00	.02
Gender	2.64	1.10***
Born US	.68	.32
Cut 1	.94	.82
Pseudo R2	.05	