Perceptions and Policing: How Perceptions of Racial Inequalities Impact One's Tolerance of Police Violence and/or Misconduct

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By

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Abstract

Racial inequality is often studied in relation to American policing and police violence, but little research explores how one's perceptions of racial inequality relate to views on policing. Several studies have identified important predictors of how individuals perceive racial inequality, including political ideology, race, and age. The author adds to this literature by examining how one's perceptions of racial inequality are correlated with one's tolerance of police violence and misconduct. He discusses differing perceptions of racial inequality contextualized as a spectrum between structural and individualist perceptions. Using data from the 2022 General Social Survey (GSS), the author investigates the relationships between these perceptions and one's degree of tolerance of police use of force. He uses two different indicators to measure perceptions of racial inequality are used. The first is how individualist or how structural one's perceptions are based on one's position on an inequality index. The second indicator examines opinions on affirmative action policies in hiring, which are often viewed as a solution to racialized structural inequalities. Support for police use of force is operationalized based on examining whether respondents approve of an officer striking a citizen in five different scenarios. Results from binary logistic regressions reveal that more individualistic perceptions of racial inequality are positively correlated with approving of an officer's use of force when dealing with citizens in several scenarios. This result holds true even when potentially spurious variables such as gender, race, income, education, and political views are controlled.

Keywords: Racial Inequality, Structural and Individualistic Perceptions, Affirmative Action, Perceptions of Police Behavior

Introduction

Racial inequality exists in various areas of American society and is accepted by most American adults. Wealth, academic achievement, and home ownership are a few examples of where significant gaps corresponding to race can be observed, with Whites faring much better than Black and Latino Americans (Asante-Muhammed et al. 2016; Bonilla-Silva 2021; Morris & Perry 2016). Despite the near-unanimous acknowledgement that these disparities do in fact exist, much divergence occurs when speaking of the origins of these disparities and why they persist. For the most part, when Americans are questioned about racial inequalities, explanations are based on either structural or individualist assumptions. Structural theories cite issues of systemic discrimination, while individualist ones give reasons such as a lack of work ethic or inadequate religious devotion. Much research has been dedicated to these differing perceptions and how they impact views on areas such as criminal justice and politics (Saperstein, Penner, Kizer 2014; Kim 2015). However, few studies have addressed how these perceptions may be related to respondents' views on the police's use of violence and physical force. This is despite racialized conversations surrounding police misconduct and violence surfacing to a mainstream level, with social media videos showing unarmed Black Americans like Oscar Grant II and George Floyd dying at the hands of White police officers (Bonilla-Silva 2021).

To address the lack of literature on this aspect, this research examines how one's perceptions of racial

disparities correlate with their degree of tolerance to police striking a citizen. It investigates what relationships exist between holding more individualistic perceptions of inequality and an individual's tolerance to police use of force, and if statistically significant correlations exist between the variables. The study also explores if and how these relationships differ from those of respondents who hold that racial differences are due to structural causes, not to individual variations. It discusses the implications of the findings for potential police reforms and structural changes. The data on which this research is based comes from the 2022 General Social Survey (GSS). The GSS is a biannual survey distributed to a sample of respondents calculated to be representative of the American population. The GSS survey aims to determine the views of the American population on general social characteristics and trends.

Discussing Perceptions of Racial Inequalities in the United States

Racial disparities in America exist in social institutions (Bonilla-Silva 2021; Morris & Perry 2016), educational attainment, economic outcomes (Asante-Muhammad et al. 2016), and the criminal justice system (Saperstein et al. 2014). In a 2021 study of racial inequalities in college enrollment, Holtzman et al. (2021) identify many racial gaps in crucial steps to enrollment, including in ACT taking and differences in the scores of White and Black students. The gaps in standardized test taking are among the biggest factors in college enrollment inequalities between Whites and Blacks (Holzman et al. 2021). Other research shows that disciplinary actions, such as suspensions, taken by schools against students *disproportionately affect* nonwhite students and their academic achievement because Black students are three times more likely to be suspended than their White counterparts. (Morris & Perry 2016).

Regarding wealth and economics, Black and Latino home ownership rates are as much as 30 percent lower than that of Whites. The median income for employed Black Americans is around $20,000 *less* per year than that for White Americans (Asante-Muhammad et al. 2016). When it comes to criminal justice and policing, there are many manifestations of racial inequalities. Racial disparities plague all phases of the criminal justice system. For example, annual incarceration rates among Black Americans are consistently higher than for White Americans-- with Black men being eight times more likely to be incarcerated than White men (Saperstein, Penner, Kizer 2014; Bonilla-Silva 2021).

Black men also serve longer sentences than White men for similar, if not identical, crimes (Bonilla-Silva 2021). Black and Latino Americans are more likely than Whites to report a greater frequency of experiences with police misconduct in their neighborhood or city (Weitzer & Tuch 2004). This outcome held true for all observed facets of police misconduct in the study, including use of excessive force, insulting language, stops without good reason, and instances of corruption.

These well-documented racial disparities have been shown to racialize American perceptions on many issues, best exemplified by views of crime and policing. Contact with the criminal justice system (i.e., being arrested or convicted) has become synonymous with being non-white in America. Saperstein et al. (2014) conducted a study that asked participants to racially identify a subject based solely on their criminal record. They concluded that participants were 13 percent less likely to identify the subject as white with each additional instance of contact with the criminal justice system. According to Ghandnoosh (2014) even racially diverse groups of respondents *overestimate* the total percentage of violent crimes committed by Black Americans as 40 percent compared to the true 29 percent. Furthermore, White participants *overestimated* the number of burglaries, illegal drug sales, and juvenile crimes committed by African Americans by 20 to 30 percent (Ghandnoosh 2014).

Individualistic and Structural Perceptions

Many studies explore how individuals perceive the causes of these racial inequalities. Perceptions of racial inequality can be thought of as mostly within a spectrum between two ends represented by the two common types of inequality: individual inequality and structural inequality (Liao 2009; Park et al 2015; Bonilla-Silva 2021; Jencks 1980). Structural theories of racial inequality maintain that racist practices and policies are woven into the fabric of our society that disadvantage racial minorities. In a recent study on how perceptions of racial inequality impact teaching, Legette et al. (2021) describe structural perceivers as viewing inequality as embedded in our society at the institutional level, with both the institutions and its agents simultaneously causing each other to either maintain or change the current social standing. On this end of the spectrum are those who reject "status-legitimizing beliefs" (SLBs) that affirm the current social and economic standing of societal groups (Wilkins & Kaiser 2014). *Structural* perceivers likely view racial gaps as a product of larger, systemic issues

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(Wilkins & Kaiser 2014). For example, racial inequalities in housing and home ownership would be explained by widespread discriminatory practices like redlining. In other words, structural perceptions of inequality emphasize the role of institutional and systemic level discrimination as the catalysts for inequalities between social groups, as opposed to the differences between the individual members of these groups. Proponents of the structural model view the presence of different social standings and groups to represent a response to society's normative functions and structures that privilege whiteness at the expense of racial minority populations (Liao 2009; Legette et al. 2021).

On the other hand, *individualist* perceivers of inequality cite variations in behavior between individual members of different racial groups as an explanation for racial inequality (Liao 2009). Those adhering to this viewpoint see racial disparities as a product of personal choices, attributes, or attitudes that members of racial groups possess. Wilkins & Kaiser (2014) similarly explain that *individualist* perceivers cite differing talents or efforts that individual members of a group possess as the reason for differences in social status between groups. These individuals endorse SLBs (status legitimizing beliefs) and follow more meritocratic thinking, thus approving of the current racial inequalities in access to societal goods. They argue that inequality is *not* created by factors outside the control of individuals, such as race, gender, or the class one is born into. In a study on commonly held theories for economic inequality, Roex et al. (2018) explain that advocates of individualist logic believe that effort and individual ability determine the allocation of income and social position. Legette's et al. (2021) study describes *individualist* perceivers as sympathetic to explanations that view racial inequities as a product of individual or cultural faults. They often promote ideals such as the "American Dream" and are unsympathetic to those whose circumstances challenge the validity of these ideals-- such as those born into poverty or facing systemic prejudice (Bonilla-Silva 2021).

Implications of Perceptions of Racial Inequality

Research on differing perceptions of racial inequality reveals similar implications and trends. Kim (2015) uses a national random sample to examine how White American's perceptions of minority socioeconomic status and opportunity affects their view of race relations, affirmative action, and minority representation in Congress. The study found that all four racial groups

approached in the study tend to agree that minorities still face major problems in the United States, including Whites (Kim 2015). Where members of these racial groups diverged was when asked about the socioeconomic status and opportunity for minorities. White Americans who believe that socioeconomic status and opportunity for Black Americans is the same or better than for Whites are less likely to perceive that racial problems exist, less likely to support policies of affirmative action, and are less likely to believe in increasing minority representation in Congress (Kim 2015). This demonstrates the differentiation of White American's perceptions of minorities' socioeconomic status and opportunity, and how these perceptions form their opinions on racial issues (Kim 2015; Bonilla-Silva 2021). Further research suggests certain individualist frames on racial inequality allow for the justification of instances of racial prejudice as hypersensitivity or overreaction by the affected population (Bonilla-Silva 2021). As it pertains to educational institutions, teachers with individualist explanations of inequality are more likely to perceive Black students' behavior negatively compared to similar behaviors of White students (Legette et al. 2021). The same study concluded that teachers with these individualist beliefs often issue harsher punishments to Black students and perceive a shorter ceiling for potential success for Black students (Legette et al. 2021). Structural perceptions may justify these types of overarching assumptions as well, with Black Americans perceiving the police as much more negative than Whites due to beliefs that police misconduct occurs more often in their neighborhoods and always targets racial minorities (Bonilla-Silva 2021).

Opinions on Solutions to Inequality: Affirmative Action

The wide range of perceptions of racial inequality is also reflected in opinions on proposed solutions to inequality, such as affirmative action. Affirmative action is viewed as a solution to structural inequality, as it addresses White and Black disparities at institutional and systemic levels. Given this view, individuals who support affirmative action policies likely believe in the presence of structural inequality in some capacity. Reyna et al. (2014) found that opinions on affirmative action are tied to one's ideological perspective among other factors. Those with more meritocratic beliefs, or who maintain more individualistic perceptions of inequality, are likely to view affirmative action as flawed because it undermines the principles of merit in favor of group membership (Reyna et al. 2014). On the other

hand, those who support affirmative action are in favor of such solutions because they believe that there are super-individual factors creating an uneven playing field that privileges White Americans at the expense of racial minorities (Reyna et al. 2014).

Public Tolerance of Police Use of Force

Police violence and use of force occurs disproportionately among groups of different class, gender, familial structure, and other dimensions of social stratification. Findings from a 1998 study determine that police killings are more common in cities where economic disparities between Blacks and Whites are greatest, and in neighborhoods where there are greater concentrations of low-income residents (Jacobs 1998; Feldman et al. 2019). Regarding gender and familial structure, many of the same trends hold true. Police killings are also more common in cities with higher divorce rates. Among Black Americans only, the percentage of female-led Black families is positively correlated with the number of Black murders committed by police, and Black Americans are killed more often by police in large cities where there are higher broken family rates (Jacobs 1998). Across different generations, police violence and use of force has steadily risen. Acts involving deadly force by the police increased throughout the 1980s, and the implementation of stand your ground laws in twenty states since the late 1990s has failed to prevent murder rates from rising by eight percent in these states (Bonilla-Silva 2021).

When it comes to perceptions of this misconduct and violence, over 50 percent of White Americans living in cities feel that their police engage in misconduct at least "on occasion" (on occasion, fairly often, or very often) for three of four categories of perceived police misconduct: stops without good reason, use of insulting language, and use of excessive force (Weitzer & Tuch 2004). This percentage increases drastically for Black and Latino Americans, as Black Americans perceive these same three misconducts as occurring very often in their city, four to five times more than Whites (Weitzer & Tuch 2004). This finding indicates that despite Whites reporting disproportionately fewer personal experiences of police misconduct in their city, the majority of White respondents still hold the perception in the presence of police misconduct, which has been proven to disparately impact Black and Latino Americans (Weitzer & Tuch 2004; Jacobs 1998; Bonilla-Silva 2021).

Despite this, polls conducted in Chicago in the twentieth century found that only 19 percent of respondents found the police guilty of using excessive force, with the remaining 81 percent either being satisfied or believing that the police were not forceful enough (Robinson 1970). Further research dating back to the mid-twentieth century shows that police violence in America does not seriously contradict American political norms and culture, which is possibly why substantial reform has been quite difficult to come by (Gamson & Mcevoy 1970; Galtung 1990). Similarly, Galtung (1990) finds that violence committed by police stems from structural violence within that society, which is upheld by cultural elements. In other words, a violent culture creates and justifies a societal structure that is inherently violent, which is reflected by violent policing that the public does not perceive as right or at the very least not wrong (Grabiner 2016; Galtung 1990). Thus, tolerance of and support for police violence may be explained by the characteristics of American political culture, and that few normative constraints to police violence are found within it (Gamson & Mcevoy 1970).

More recent studies offer different explanations for the lack of significant police reform even in the face of more outspoken opposition to police use of force in the last five to ten years. Political ideologies can also be an influential factor when it comes to tolerance of police violence. A 2017 study found that political legitimacy is often a normative constraint on police overstepping their power, so extra-legal reasons are often the justification for police violence and use of excessive force (Gerber & Jackson 2017). Political ideologies such as right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) and social dominance orientation (SDO) are associated with maintaining traditional social norms, being less sympathetic to social outgroups such as criminals, and favoring stratification of social groups among other characteristics (Altemeyer 1981; Sidanius & Pratto 1999). RWA and SDO beliefs were found to *increase tolerance and even support* for excessive police force and violence (Gerber & Jackson 2017). Hence, difficulties arise when it comes to enacting significant structural changes in policing at a legal level, as their use of violence and excessive force is either not perceived as excessive in the first place or justified using super-legal reasoning. In fact, political orientation was found to be one of the best predictors of attitudes on police use of force, supposing that there may be a link between perceptions of these two topics (Arthur 1993).

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Theorizing Perceptions of Racial Inequalities and Tolerance of Police Use of Force

As stated previously, explanations of racial inequality often fall into two categories: individualist and structural. This usually correlates to an individual's level of endorsement of status legitimizing beliefs. Those who use more individualistic reasoning to explain racial inequality are often proponents of SLBs (Wilkins & Kaiser 2014). For example, explaining racial wealth gaps by stating that people of color could simply develop a stronger "Protestant work-ethic" to achieve the same level of wealth as Whites would be considered an SLB, as it upholds the current socioeconomic standing of the racial groups in American society (Wilkins & Kaiser 2014).

The study by Wilkins and Kaiser (2014) also examines the degree to which White Americans endorse these SLBs and how this impacts their perception of anti-white bias in American society and of racial progress for minorities. The authors found, in multiple different tests, that greater endorsement of SLBs among White Americans is correlated with greater perceptions of growing anti-white bias (Wilkins & Kaiser 2014). In addition, endorsement of SLBs is correlated with perceiving progress towards racial equality as a threat to one's social standing. This finding indicates a lack of receptiveness among White respondents to bridging racial gaps in American society and could explain why many are tolerant to police use of force-- especially when it is perceived to uphold the current social order (Wilkins & Kaiser 2014). In fact, excessive force by police against unpopular or low-standing groups in society, such as racial minorities or proponents of movements that disrupt social order, is *unlikely* to be opposed by other members of the society (Gamson & Mcevoy 1970). On the other hand, those who do not endorse SLBs appear to be more supportive of policies that attempt to level disparities. This polarization is reflected in efforts for police reform as well. Even in the post-George Floyd years, where there is more bipartisan support for police reform, information regarding organizations like BLM and their relationship to police reform efforts often polarizes opinion on these issues (Boudreau et al. 2022).

Again, differing perceptions on racial inequality, opportunity, and mobility are impacting areas such as race relations (Wilkins & Kaiser 2014) and racial politics (Kim 2015); therefore, it should be relevant to research how such perceptions impact how Americans view police use of force within their society. In fact, other research has similarly found that opinions on police use of force are linked closely to factors such as perceptions of the way courts treat criminals and experience of criminal victimization, two variables highly based on perceptions of racial inequality (Arthur 1993).

With perceptions of racial inequality dividing opinions on such issues, it is likely that they have some impact on how individuals tolerate and, at times, even support police use of force. Thus, this article proposes the following hypothesis: ***Holding more individualistic views of racial inequality is positively correlated with having a higher degree of tolerance of police use of physical force***.

GSS Data and Methods

The GSS is administered in partnership with the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) and addresses social attitudes and trends among Americans. The survey poses questions and hypothetical scenarios regarding crime and violence, civil liberties, and social mobility among other social topics. These questions are asked of a random sample that is calculated to be representative of the entire American population.

Tolerance of Police Use of Physical Force

This research operationalized tolerance of police use of physical force as: Under what circumstances an individual approves of a police officer striking a citizen. There are five hypothetical scenarios the GSS poses in which the respondent is asked whether they approve of a police officer hitting a citizen. The responses are coded as 0 = disapprove, and 1 = approve. The scenarios are as follows: "Are there any situations you can imagine in which you would approve of a police officer striking: 1) an adult male citizen; 2) a citizen who... Had said vulgar and obscene things to the police officer; 3) a citizen who... Was being questioned as a suspect in a murder case? 4) Was attempting to escape from custody? 5) Was attacking the police officer with his fists?"

Perceptions of Racial Inequality

Perceptions of racial inequality are operationalized as how much respondents believe racial gaps are rooted in individualist or structural causes. The study used three statements from the GSS pertaining to socioeconomic opportunity and mobility for Black-Americans and the degree to which respondents agree or disagree with these statements.

The three statements ask respondents to what extent they agree with certain opinions on Black socioeconomic mobility. The first two statements read "Generations of slavery and discrimination have created conditions that make it difficult for Black people to work their way out of the lower class" and "Over the past few years, Black people have gotten less than they deserve." They are coded as 1 = strongly agree, 2 = somewhat agree, 3 = neutral, 4 = somewhat disagree, 5 = strongly disagree. This coding follows the trend of higher numerical responses reflecting more individualistic perceptions of racial inequality and lower numbers reflecting more structural perceptions. The third statement is "It's really a matter of some people not trying hard enough; if Black people would only try harder they could be just as well off as Whites." The five-point scale was reversely recoded to follow the same numerical trend regarding individualist and structural reasoning and is as follows: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = somewhat disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = somewhat agree, 5 = strongly agree. These three statements all measure the same underlying construct quite consistently (Cronbach's alpha = 0.826), and so were combined to create an additive index. This number ranges from 0 (most structural reasoning) to 12 (most individualistic reasoning).

Opinions on Affirmative Action

Given the relationship between opinions on affirmative action and ideological perceptions concerning racial inequality (Reyna et al. 2014), a second independent variable was included measuring approval for affirmative action in hiring to further operationalize how individualistic or structural one's perceptions are. A statement from the GSS regarding approval of affirmative action policies in hiring is included and is as follows: "Some people say that because of past discrimination, Blacks should be given preference in hiring and promotion. Others say that such preference in hiring, and promotion of Blacks is wrong because it discriminates against Whites. What about your opinion? Are you for or against preferential hiring and promotion of Blacks?" This is evaluated on a four-point scale that is as follows: 1 = strongly favor, 2 = somewhat favor, 3 = somewhat oppose, 4 = strongly oppose. Again, higher numerical responses reflect more individualist views on inequality (opposing affirmative action) and lower numerical responses reflect more structural views (approving of affirmative action).

Control Variables

This study tested several potentially spurious factors: political identification, religiosity, and the standard demographic controls of age, gender, socioeconomic status, and race. **Political identification** is evaluated using a seven-point scale ranging from 1 = extremely liberal to 7 = extremely conservative. Political identification is included because of the highly politicized nature of issues such as police use of force (Boudreau, MacKenzie & Simmons 2022). Thus, perceptions of issues such as police violence and racial disparities may be affected by political orientation. **Religiosity** is operationalized using two measures, a subjective measure of their own religion and a measure of their religious behavior. Subjectively, respondents were asked about the extent to which they consider themselves a religious person using a four-point scale: 1 = not religious at all, 2 = moderately religious, 3 = slightly religious, 4 = very religious. **Church attendance** is also measured for this variable using an eight-point scale ranging from 0 = never to 8 = several times a week. Self-identified religiosity often correlates to an individual's tolerance levels for violence, such as utilizing corporal punishment (Ellison & Bradshaw 2009; Martinez et al. 2018). Conversely, at the macro-level, studies have demonstrated that the religiosity of a society has a negative relationship with the number of violent crimes committed in that society (Pettersson 1991). It is important to control for the social networks implicit with church attendance because this may impact views on racial inequality and police violence given that they impact views on issues such as mental health, drug use, immigration policy, and domestic violence (Ellison & Anderson 2001; Martinez et al. 2022). **Gender** is measured as the self-identified response provided by the respondent, either 0 = male, or 1 = female, as is **Race** (0 = nonwhite, 1 = White). **Socioeconomic status** is operationalized using annual family income and education levels. The respondent's family income is coded using a six-point scale that is as follows: 1 = $0-$29,999, 2 = $30,000-$59,999, 3 = $60,000-$89,999, 4 = $90,000-$129,999, 5 = $130,000-$169,999, 6 = $170,000 or more. To evaluate **education levels**, the highest degree obtained by the respondent is measured, and coded as less than high school = 0, high school = 1, associate/junior college = 2, bachelors = 3, graduate = 4.

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Results

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for the sample of respondents surveyed.

The average respondent tends to have more structural explanations for understanding disparities between White and Black Americans, as the mean of 4.94 on the inequality index shows. Regarding the control variables, the mean age of respondents is 49.18 years old; 53.8 percent of respondents are female, and 61.9 percent are White non-Hispanic. As for political views, the mean score for respondents is 4.0, indicating a moderate/middle of the road political stance. The mean annual income value is 2.843, which indicates that the average respondent earns close to $90,000 per year. The mean for degree obtained is 1.81, meaning that the average respondent has completed between a high school and an associate degree. The mean religious service score of 2.68 indicates that the average respondent reports attending religious services between once or twice to several times a year. Finally, for religiosity the average respondent identifies as somewhere being between moderately and slightly religious.

Table 1 also shows that the proportion of respondents who approve of police use of force varies widely across the five different scenarios. Specifically, just over 65 percent of the sample agrees with the police striking a citizen *in any situation*, while only nine percent think it *is okay if the citizen is verbally abusing the officer*. Nearly 60 percent of the sample supports the *police striking a citizen trying to escape custody;* 77 percent if the citizen is attacking the officer with his fists; and only 19.5 percent *if the citizen is being questioned in a murder case*. Regarding perceptions of inequality, the average respondent leans toward slightly opposing preferential hiring and promotion of Blacks. (**See Table 1 in the Appendix.**)

Table 2 displays the binary logistic regressions predicting support for a police officer striking a citizen under the five scenarios. The variables in **Table 2** show positive relationships between scoring higher on the perceptions of inequality index (holding more individualistic perceptions of inequality) and approving of police striking the citizen in all five scenarios, with a significant positive correlation if the citizen being questioned is a murder suspect. Thus, holding more individualistic perceptions of inequality makes it *more likely* that the respondent approves of the officer striking the citizen if the citizen is being questioned in a murder case.

Other important statistics from **Table 2** are that the two measures of religiosity-- church attendance and self-identified religiosity, are correlated in opposite directions. That is, higher church attendance is related to *disapproval* of police use of force whereas higher self-identified religiosity is related to *approval* of police use of force. Political conservatism also shows that identifying as more conservative makes it more likely to approve of the police striking the citizen if the citizen is attempting to escape custody. (**See Table 2 in the Appendix.**)

Table 3 displays binary logistic regressions predicting the correlation between opinion on affirmative action in hiring and approval of an officer striking a citizen in each of the five posed scenarios, while controlling for potentially spurious factors. The results show a significant positive correlation between *disapproving* of affirmative action (indicative of individualistic perceptions of racial inequality) and *approving* of an officer striking a citizen *in any situation* and if the citizen is being questioned in a murder case. **Table 3** shows a moderately significant positive relationship between these variables when the citizen is saying vulgar things to the police officer. Therefore, *opposing* affirmative action in hiring is associated *with a respondent being more likely to approve* of an officer striking the citizen under these circumstances. **Table 3** also shows that race is significantly correlated with *approving* of the police striking the citizen in all five scenarios, positively or negatively, depending on the scenario. (**See Table 3 in the Appendix.**)

The data show support for the hypothesis proposed earlier in this article: That ***holding more individualistic views of racial inequality is positively correlated with having a higher degree of tolerance of police use of physical force***.

Discussion and CONCLUSION

Previous studies and related literature have suggested that there may a relationship between the ways people perceive racial inequality and their views on police violence and misconduct. After establishing the two common types of perceptions of inequality, structural and individualistic, the author examined how each view impacts an individual's tolerance to police use of physical force became of interest. Analyses of the 2022 GSS reveal several positive correlations between individualistic perceptions of racial inequality and tolerance to police use of force against citizens. In other words, those who perceive racial inequality as a product of individual behavior as opposed to structural are more

likely to approve of the police striking a citizen under various circumstances.

The data used in this survey were collected early in 2022, during a time of intense political polarization and more prevalent discussions about police violence following the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery in 2020. Future studies should work to replicate these findings to ensure they are not a product of the unique socio-political climate associated with all the events in 2020. This paper argues that one's perception of racial inequality has an impact on their acceptance of police use of force.

However, it is possible that the causal direction may be reversed: That one's perception of police use of force could impact one's perception of structural inequality. Although, in this article, the author has made the case for the causal direction of this relationship, longitudinal research is needed to ensure that reverse causality *is not* at play. In addition, while nonwhite participants were included in this study, designing future studies that over-sample nonwhite respondents may be useful to discover whether perceptions and results vary across different racial and ethnic groups.

Given the highly racialized and publicized nature of American policing in the contemporary age, it is vital to understand the ways in which racial perceptions impact views on police violence and police use of force. In working toward improving American policing and preventing incidents of violence, understanding such relationships is essential. By exploring why and from whom support and/or opposition to reforms may come from, we can better understand how to garner more support for them. We see from this study that those with individualistic perceptions of racial inequality are more tolerant to police violence in many scenarios. In theory, these individuals would be less likely to perceive a need for both policing reforms and/or structural changes aimed to support racial minorities. Consequently, policing and racial equity reforms would likely be met with opposition from like-minded individuals. For those working to alleviate racial gaps and decrease instances of police violence and misconduct that disproportionately affect racial minorities, studying these correlations is vital.

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About the Author: Kyle C. Treacy is an undergraduate student in the Liberal Arts Honors Program at Providence College where he is majoring in Sociology (B.A.) and minoring in Business & Entrepreneurship. After graduation, he is planning to pursue a career in public relations in the sports entertainment industry.

Appendix: Tables 1-3

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics				
Variable	**Mean/ Proportion**	**Standard Deviation**	**Minimum**	**Maximum**
Agreement with an Officer Striking a Citizen...				
In Any Situation	0.652	0.477	0	1
Citizen is Verbally Abusing the Officer	0.09	0.286	0	1
Citizen is Trying to Escape	0.599	0.490	0	1
Citizen is Attacking the Officer with His Fists	0.772	0.419	0	1
Citizen is Being Questioned in a Murder Case	0.195	0.396	0	1
Perceptions of Racial Inequality				
Affirmative Action	2.95	1.109	1	4
Inequality Index	4.94	3.519	0	12
Controls				
Age	49.18	17.974	18	89
Political Conservatism	4.0	1.527	1	7
Female	0.538	0.499	0	1
Income	2.843	1.633	1	6
Degree Obtained	1.81	1.258	0	4
Religious Service Attendance	2.68	2.697	0	8
Religiosity	2.299	1.043	1	4
White non-Hispanic	0.619	0.486	0	1

		Said Vulgar Things	Attempted Escape	Questioned in a Murder Case	Attacking an Officer with Their Fists
Intercept	0.105	-0.374	-1.886***	-1.484*	-0.281
Female	-0.819**	-1.074*	-0.079	-0.109	-0.750*
White, non-Hispanic	0.425	-0.965+	0.327	-1.837***	0.797*
Age	0.001	0.001	0.015**	0.011	0.007
Income	-0.038	-0.362*	0.078	-0.156+	0.069
Degree Obtained	0.460***	-0.405+	-0.143+	-0.100	-0.001
Church Attendance	-0.135+	-0.127	-0.084+	-0.084	-0.247**
Religiosity	0.163	0.526+	0.317**	0.355*	0.562**
Political Conservatism	-0.103	-0.161	0.246**	-0.067	0.088
Perception of Inequality	0.80	0.121	0.022	0.151***	0.067
R-squared	0.139	0.217	0.141	0.240	0.145
N	383	384	714	717	384

Table 2. Binary Logistic Regressions Predicting Support for Police Striking a Citizen in the Following Scenarios

+ p < 0.10   **p < 0.01

*p < 0.05   ***p < 0.001

	Table 3. Binary Logistic Regressions Predicting Support for Police Striking a Citizen in the Following Scenarios				
	In Any Situation	**Said vulgar Things to the Officer**	**Attempted to Escape the Officer**	**Questioned in a Murder Case**	**Attacking the Officer with Their fists**
Intercept	-1.082+	-1.712*	-1.333***	-1.576***	-1.403*
Female	-0.197	-0.150	-0.363*	-0.068	-0.013
White, non-Hispanic	1.220***	-0.853*	0.629***	-1.198***	1.244***
Age	-0.013+	0.010	0.006	0.005	0.002
Income	0.023	-0.417**	-0.008	0.037	-0.038
Degree Obtained	0.140	-0.008	-0.004	-0.264**	0.121
Church Attendance	0.075	0.124+	0.036	-0.096*	0.085
Religiosity	-0.110	-0.137	-0.067	0.264*	0.101
Political Conservatism	0.167+	-0.014	0.270***	0.041	0.221*
Affirmative Action	0.293**	0.297+	0.053	0.194*	0.148
R-squared	0.179	0.116	0.112	0.137	0.165
N	482	486	916	923	481

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