AmericasBarometer: Topical Brief – February 9, 2015

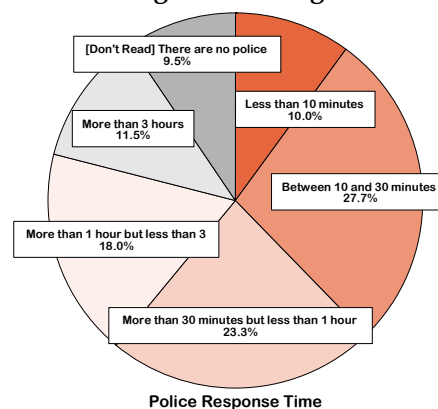## *Those with Darker Skin Report Slower Police Response*

By Mollie J. Cohen, Elizabeth J. Zechmeister, and Mitchell A. Seligson, Vanderbilt University

From riots in Ferguson, Missouri to street protests in New York to the Twitter hashtag, #blacklivesmatter, and more, race relations and policing have captured national attention in the United States. Many voices are discussing the fact that African Americans trust the police less and give poorer evaluations of various aspects of police performance, compared to white North Americans (e.g., Brown and Coulter 1983, Van Ryzin et al. 2004, Newport 2014). What about the rest of the Americas? As Edward Telles and colleagues have convincingly demonstrated in the new book *Pigmentocracies* (2014), skin tone is associated with unequal opportunity and discrimination across the Americas. In this *Topical Brief,*[1] we report on perceptions of police responsiveness in the Latin America and Caribbean region, with a particular focus on its relationship to skin tone.[2]

Figure 1. Perceived Police Response Time, Regional Averages

[Don't Read] There are no police 9.5%
Less than 10 minutes 10.0%
More than 3 hours 11.5%
Between 10 and 30 minutes 27.7%
More than 1 hour but less than 3 18.0%
More than 30 minutes but less than 1 hour 23.3%

Police Response Time

Source: © AmericasBarometer, LAPOP, 2014; Draft0912

The 2014 AmericasBarometer[3] asked thousands of individuals in national surveys across the Americas the following question:

INFRAX: Suppose someone enters your home to burglarize it and you call the police. How long do you think it would take the police to arrive at your house on a typical day around noon?

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[1] Prior issues of the *Insights* Series can be found at: http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/insights.php. The data on which this report is based can be found at http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/survey-data.php.

[2] In measuring police performance, studies from the United States have frequently used citizen perceptions of police response times as predictors of citizen confidence in the police. We note that citizen perceptions of police performance do not always align perfectly with "objective" (official) measures of police performance (see Brown and Coulter 1983), though further research on this is warranted.

(1)Less than 10 minutes
(2)Between 10 and 30 minutes
(3)More than 30 minutes and up to an hour
(4)More than an hour and up to three hours
(5)More than three hours
(6)There are no police/they would never arrive[4]

Figure 1 displays the regional average results for this question based on survey data from Latin America and the Caribbean.[5] Striking is the fact that only 10 percent of respondents, on average across the region, indicate that the police would arrive in "less than 10 minutes." *More than 3 out of every 5 individuals believe that the police would take more than thirty minutes to arrive, if they would get there at all.*

Perceptions of police response time in Latin America and the Caribbean closely correspond with respondents' views of police performance. Figure 2 compares reported *diss*atisfaction with police performance[6] and respondents' beliefs about police response time.
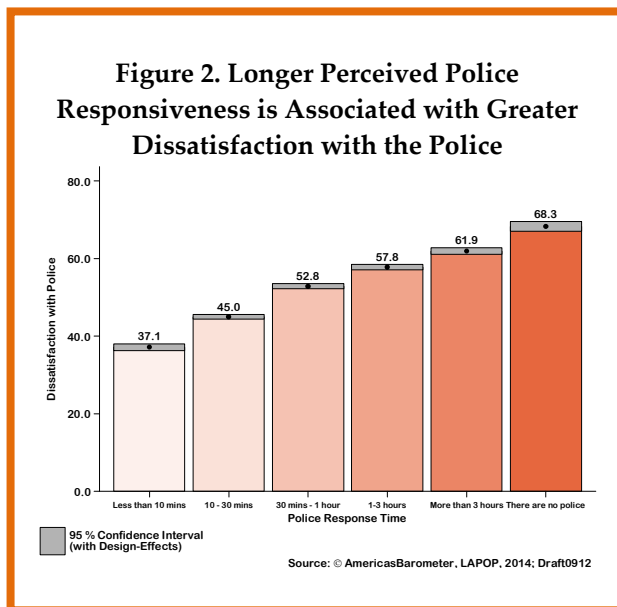
As the figure shows, those who believe that the police would take more time to arrive to the scene of the crime (or not arrive at all) report greater dissatisfaction with the police.[7]

Figure 2. Longer Perceived Police Responsiveness is Associated with Greater Dissatisfaction with the Police

Source: © AmericasBarometer, LAPOP, 2014; Draft0912

Police Responsiveness and Skin Tone

What predicts beliefs about response time? The scholarly literature (focused mainly on the U.S. case) suggests a number of individual characteristics that predict evaluations of the police, including demographic features and socioeconomic factors, such as age, education, income, and place of residence (urban/rural). For example, younger people frequently report less trust in the police, as do individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds (Brown and Benedict 2002). We also expect that those who reside in urban communities are likely to evaluate police response times as faster than those in rural communities for two reasons. First, urban areas should be more easily accessible for the police because of better roads and, second, urban neighborhoods are more likely to house a local police precinct while rural residents might have to wait for the police from the county or state.

But what if there is a relationship between respondents' skin tone and reported police

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[4] This option (6) was not read out loud, but interviewers were instructed to record if the respondent offered it. Respondents could also offer that they "don't know" or simply choose not to answer; these individuals (fewer than 4 percent of those surveyed) are not included.

[5] The 2014 AmericasBarometer is based on 28 countries, including the U.S. and Canada, which are not included in this report. At the time of writing, data for Suriname, the Bahamas, and Barbados was not available for analysis. Therefore, the LAC region represented in this report constitutes 23 countries.

[6] **POLE2N**: In general, are you very satisfied, satisfied, dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied with the performance of the police in your neighborhood? [If respondent says there is no police, mark 4 "Very dissatisfied"] (1) Very satisfied (2) Satisfied (3) Dissatisfied (4) Very dissatisfied. For this report, this variable has been rescaled from 0 to 100.

[7] Of those who report that the police would never come, 74.88 percent report that they are dissatisfied

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or very dissatisfied with police performance, while only 18.8 percent of those who report that the police would arrive in less than ten minutes report the same levels of dissatisfaction.

response time, independent of urban/rural residence and socio-economic status? We next examine the possibility that, even when controlling for individual socio-economic and demographic characteristics, darker skin tone relates to slower perceived police response times.

We assess the relevance of skin tone as a predictor of perceived police response time by constructing a multivariate model in which we include respondents' place of residence (urban vs. rural), gender, education, wealth,[8] age, and skin tone. To capture skin tone, we use a measure based on the interviewer's coding of the respondent's facial skin tone on an eleven-point scale, with higher values indicating a darker complexion. The analysis controls for country fixed effects, which enables us to rule out the impact of a variety of nation-specific factors, such as national wealth and development that might be associated with skin tone. The results of the OLS analysis are depicted in Figure 3.[9]
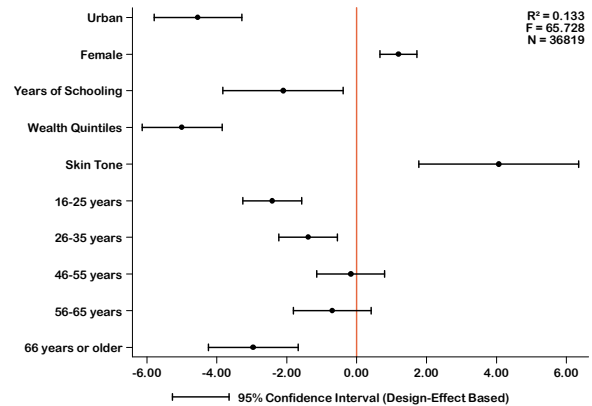
The dependent variable, perceived police response, has been rescaled from 0 to 100 with lower values indicating slower response times. Dots indicate non-standardized regression coefficients; if these are located to the left of the vertical line, the relationship is estimated to be negative and the reverse if the dot is to the right of the vertical line.[10] In other words,

Figure 3. Determinants of Longer Perceived Police Response Times

$R^2 = 0.133$
$F = 65.728$
$N = 36819$

95% Confidence Interval (Design-Effect Based)

Source: © AmericasBarometer by LAPOP, 2014; Draft0912

positive coefficients mean the independent variable is predicting longer response times, and the reverse for negative coefficients. The horizontal lines indicate confidence intervals, indicating we can be 95% confident that a result is statistically distinguishable from 0 if the lines do not cross the vertical line at 0.

As expected, perceived response times in urban areas are quicker than they are for rural areas. Women report longer response times. This could be because they perceive that the police will not take their reports as seriously; further investigation of this finding is warranted, since it may reveal systematic patterns of discrimination against women. Age[11] predicts perceptions of police response time, but not in the expected direction: in contrast to research

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[8] Wealth is measured based on an assessment of respondents' household possessions. See http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/insights/I0806en.pdf for more details on this measure.

[9] Multinomial logistic regression as well as ordered probit analysis yielded results that are substantively similar to those reported here. We report OLS coefficients because they are more readily interpretable (see also the appendix). All independent variables are scaled from 0 to 1, while the dependent variable is the 6-point response set recoded to a 0 to 100 scale.

[10] This *Topical Brief* breaks with past LAPOP reports by presenting non-standardized coefficients. Each independent variable (represented on the Y-axis) can be interpreted in terms of the predicted impact a

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one-unit change has on the dependent variable (on the horizontal axis). All independent variables have been rescaled from 0 to 1; coefficients in Figure 3 should be interpreted as the maximum effect of each independent variable on the dependent variable (perceived response time).

[11]Age is measured in cohorts. The first category includes those 18-25 years old, while the second category includes 26-35 year olds. The third category (the baseline for this analysis) captures 36-45 year olds, while the last three groups include 46-55 year olds, 56-65 year olds, and those 65 years of age or older.

on the U.S. case, in the Latin America and Caribbean region it is the youngest and oldest citizens who tend to rate police response time the fastest. More educated respondents, as well as wealthier respondents, report faster response times, perhaps because they tend to live in neighborhoods with better infrastructure than poorer respondents. We did not control for neighborhood infrastructure, but we did control for rural/urban residence.

We draw attention here to the finding for skin tone: *individuals with darker skin across the Americas believe that it would take significantly longer for the police to respond to a call reporting a burglary than do lighter skinned respondents.* The positive, significant effect that we find for skin tone comes even after controlling for other core factors that are associated with skin tone in the Americas as well as differences in the characteristics of the nations of the hemisphere.[12]

Skin tone matters in the Americas, not only in outcomes associated with socioeconomic status, but also with respect to the way that respondents perceive they are treated by the state. While current dialogue in the U.S. is focused on race relations and policing in U.S. cities, we highlight here the fact that – across the Latin America and Caribbean region, on average – those with darker skin tones tend to perceive the police to be less responsive than those with lighter skin tones.[13]

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[12] Calculating the difference in perceived response time in minutes for those with lighter or darker skin is complex because of the way the dependent variable was coded in the questionnaire. However, the results shown here suggest, and multinomial and ordinal logistic regression analyses further confirm, that those with darker skin are more likely to respond that the police will take more time than lighter skinned respondents.

[13] These results are not statistically significant in all countries. The effect of skin tone on perceived police response time is significant at the 90 percent confidence threshold in El Salvador, Costa Rica, Chile, Bolivia, Panama, Honduras, and Uruguay, and is marginally significant (p<.15) in Guatemala,

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Mexico, Venezuela, Haiti, and Guyana. In Uruguay and Guyana, the estimated effect runs counter to expectations, with darker skinned individuals reporting *lower* wait times than lighter skinned individuals. In the 11 other countries where at least marginally statistically significant relationships were found, the effect is as described in this report, with those with darker skin reporting longer wait times.

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Full results of the 2014 AmericasBarometer and previous rounds can be consulted on-line at www.LapopSurveys.org. The full data set is available for on-line analysis or download (in SPSS and Stata formats) at no cost.

Appendix: Full OLS Regression Output

VARIABLES	Police Response Time (0-100)
65+	-2.958***
	(0.653)
56-65 years old	-0.695
	(0.566)
46-55 years old	-0.170
	(0.497)
26-35 years old	-1.385***
	(0.426)
16-25 years old	-2.412***
	(0.429)
Skin Tone	4.067***
	(1.167)
Quintiles of wealth	-4.995***
	(0.583)
Education	-2.102**
	(0.877)
Female	1.195***
	(0.270)
Urban	-4.538***
	(0.641)
Guatemala	5.357***
	(1.725)
El Salvador	-2.039
	(1.570)
Honduras	10.04***
	(1.814)
Nicaragua	13.55***
	(1.656)
Costa Rica	-9.466***
	(1.603)
Panama	-8.437***
	(1.888)
Colombia	-2.476
	(1.797)
Ecuador	-12.40***
	(1.807)
Bolivia	11.56***
	(2.056)
Peru	8.355***
	(2.114)
Paraguay	-6.143***
	(1.697)
Chile	-4.636**
	(1.890)
Uruguay	-15.91***
	(1.578)
Brazil	4.088**
	(1.716)
Venezuela	20.19***
	(2.103)
Argentina	-13.34***
	(2.063)
Dominican Republic	8.651***
	(1.771)
Haiti	12.15***
	(2.309)
Jamaica	-2.308
	(1.788)
Guyana	10.91***
	(1.859)
Trinidad & Tobago	-4.068**
	(1.733)
Belize	7.023***
	(2.133)
Constant	48.76***
	(1.647)
Observations	36,819
R-squared	0.133

Standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1