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Center for New Racial Studies
 A MULTI-CAMPUS RESEARCH PROGRAM



(Mis)Trusting the Police:

Gauging Levels of Confidence between the Latina/o Community and the Santa Barbara Police

By Greg Prieto, Chandra Russo and Howard Winant

About the Authors:

Greg Prieto is a doctoral candidate and Chandra Russo is a doctoral student in the Sociology Department at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Howard Winant is Director of Center for New Racial Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

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Executive Summary and Recommendations

This pilot survey research project, conducted in the summer of 2011 by a collaborative of PUEBLO and the University of California Center for New Racial Studies, explores the relationship between the Santa Barbara Latina/o community and local police. Bilingual teams of student researchers and community members went door-to-door soliciting respondents' perceptions of police, levels of civic engagement, and general comfort living in the city. A brief summary of our findings follows.

Data collected during the survey indicate that although there is not an acute crisis of trust between the Latina/o community and police, some patterns of interaction with police have eroded the Latina/o community's willingness to interact with law enforcement. The community relies, as before, on the police to respond in emergencies and to keep them safe. Still, under certain conditions, people are much less likely to trust police. Respondents who have had a direct experience with police in the past or perceive themselves as likely to interact with the police in the future are less likely to express trust in police. These members of the Latino community are less likely to turn to police in times of need.

Santa Barbara is at a crossroads. While everyone in Santa Barbara relies on effective policing, there are marked instances of Latina/o mistrust, misgivings, and confusion about the police and police practices in the city. Both respondents and researchers recognize that the police have made efforts toward establishing a more trusting relationship with the community. Yet we recommend that further steps be taken to cultivate trusting relationships with the Santa Barbara Latino/a community.

Based on this research, we suggest that the Santa Barbara Police Department implement the following changes in order to increase Latino/a trust of police:

1. The Police Department should augment funding for community policing and beat patrols. Increased familiarity with the communities in which they work will give police the opportunity to hear the needs of the community, form stronger relationships with community members, and respond to emergencies and crime in a productive fashion.
2. The Police Department should abandon heightened enforcement measures that capture Latina/os in dragnet schemes. These include immigration measures like Secure Communities as well as the regular practice of impounding the vehicles of unlicensed drivers.
3. Police leadership should hire officers who understand the particular needs of Latina/o residents and whose backgrounds reflect the racial and linguistic diversity of the Santa Barbara community. Further, officers should undergo training in cultural sensitivity and the merits of community policing.

Background:

With the recent advent of Secure Communities (S-Comm), a program in which local law enforcement collaborates with federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), supposedly to target the worst of undocumented criminals, the number of deportations is rising across the country. Studies have shown the devastating effects that programs like S-Comm have on police relations with local communities.¹ Such programs have been demonstrated to lead to "pretext policing" – for example the use of DUI checkpoints in efforts to identify and detain undocumented persons – and generally increased instances of racial profiling.¹ The Latina/o community, both immigrant and non-immigrant, has borne the brunt of the S-Comm program.¹

S-Comm has hit Santa Barbara County, California, particularly hard. To date, the county is deporting, percentage-wise, more non-criminals than Maricopa County in Arizona, renowned for being one of the most anti-immigrant regions in the nation.¹ Given this local situation, immigrant advocates from the Santa Barbara community and researchers based in the UC Santa Barbara Department of Sociology decided to collaborate on a study of the impact of S-Comm on the local Latina/o community. This partnership, it was felt, would combine the strengths of a well-established community organization with the methodological rigor of a respected research institution.

People United for Economic Justice/Building Leadership Through Organizing (PUEBLO) is a Santa Barbara immigrant and workers' rights organization that has established a trusting relationship with local Latina/os. PUEBLO has long been concerned about the impact of local police collaborations with federal immigration authorities on Santa Barbara residents. Since 2008 PUEBLO has been collecting data on Santa Barbara City Police DUI checkpoints designed to identify undocumented immigrants and impound their vehicles.

With the implementation of S-Comm in 2010, PUEBLO decided to work with the UCSB Center for New Racial Studies (CNRS) to assess how the program has affected Santa Barbara Latina/os. The CNRS is a research hub located in UCSB's Institute for Social, Behavioral, and Economic Research (ISBER), the University's organized research unit in the social sciences.

The aim of this collaborative research was to assess whether new policing practices, such as S-Comm, have created heightened insecurity among Latina/os in Santa Barbara, regardless of immigration status. The PUEBLO-CNRS study investigates whether there is increased insecurity among Latina/os as a result of pretext policing and what forms those insecurities may be taking in terms of trust toward police, civic engagement, and general comfort in the community.

PUEBLO will use the data collected in the summer of 2011 to launch an action campaign, educating the broader community and policy makers about current Latina/o sentiment towards police and possibilities for building greater trust. CNRS views the study as a "pilot," setting the stage for more comprehensive and detailed work on immigration, policing, profiling and civic engagement issues.

Research Methodology:

This pilot survey research project was conducted in July of 2011. The goal was to reach a sample of 100 low-income, Latina/o respondents living in one neighborhood in the city of Santa Barbara. To do this, we paired ten UCSB undergraduate survey researchers with seven long-time community members who are intimately familiar with the neighborhood in which we conducted the survey. These bilingual teams visited approximately 200 homes over the course of three Saturdays. By sending researchers into the field on three separate occasions, we saturated one neighborhood, yielding a sample of over 100 responses ($n=106$).

In implementing the survey, our team used “block panel” sampling (BPS).¹ This sampling procedure is helpful in cases when respondents may feel vulnerable and therefore reluctant to participate in a survey. Since the Latino/a community in Santa Barbara is estimated to contain approximately 12% undocumented people (roughly the same as the national average among Latinos/as), and since questions involved police practices, it was logical to expect some reluctance. BPS allows researchers to identify geographic areas in a city, such as city blocks or neighborhoods, and select blocks to sample based on characteristics of interest to the study. However the study is still a “pilot” with a relatively small *n*. We cannot claim to have drawn a fully randomized sample of Santa Barbara Latinos/as. The door-to-door interview method may have generated less candid answers and complete stories than a deeper ethnographic study might.

Largely segregated, Santa Barbara’s working class Latina/o community is broadly divided into two parts of the city: Eastside and Westside. For this study, we chose a majority Latina/o neighborhood on the Westside of Santa Barbara. We chose this Westside neighborhood; bounded by the 101 freeway, West Carrillo Street, Chino Street and West Micheltorena Street; for three reasons. First, a large concentration of working class Latina/os (between 71.3%-74.5%) live in this neighborhood.¹ Second, this neighborhood, distinct from the Eastside in several respects, makes it one of the more disadvantaged Latina/o communities in the city, and perhaps the most vulnerable to police abuse. According to a recent community report:

It is the most densely populated area in Santa Barbara, it is often not seen as a ‘contributing’ part of the city, with little commercial infrastructure compared to the city’s main downtown and Eastside corridors. Opportunities for school age children are limited, and the only sizeable park is a local congregation area for gang members.¹

Finally, this neighborhood was identified with the help of several community leaders born and raised in Santa Barbara. With their local and organic input, we identified this Westside neighborhood because it represents an underserved, marginalized, and segregated population of low-income Latina/o families. This is the population we were interested in surveying about police relations.

Of those surveyed, approximately 55% were between the ages of 31 and 49, just over half had completed high school, and approximately 35% had lived in Santa Barbara for over 20 years (while the next largest category, 30% of respondents, had lived in Santa Barbara for 11-20 years). The majority of our sample was also comprised of women (~65%). While the sample contains additional variations not detailed here, the bulk of our sample is high school-educated women in their 30s and 40s who have lived in Santa Barbara for a long time.

The survey used closed ended questions with a Likert scale to assess several different dimensions of community life amongst Santa Barbara Latina/os. The central focus was relations with local police. The first half of the survey addressed this emphasis, while the second half addressed civic engagement, mobility and comfort about driving, and general ease of being a Latina/o in Santa Barbara.

Questions in the first half of the survey included: “Do you think the Santa Barbara police treat you the same as other residents?” as well as “How willing are you to call the police if you had an emergency?”

Civic engagement was measured using questions like “How willing are you to talk to healthcare or hospital workers (e.g. nurses, doctors, etc.) about your own health or your family’s?”

Mobility and willingness to drive were gauged through a series of questions about when people are willing to travel by car.

This section included questions like, “How willing are you to drive to pick up your children from school?”

The final aspect of the survey examined understandings of police collaboration with immigration enforcement and general comfort living in the community as a Latina/o. Here we asked, “Do you think Santa Barbara police are cooperating with Immigration and Customs Enforcement?” and “Living here, are there times when you worry about being identified as Latina/o?”

While the survey was formally a quantitative tool, researchers were encouraged to make qualitative notes when possible. These notes included respondents’ explanations for answers given as well as surveyors’ impressions of respondents’ candor while responding to survey questions.

Findings

The results of the survey were decidedly mixed. On first review of the close-ended responses, the contradictory nature of the data was immediately evident. A majority of respondents did not feel the police treat Latina/os the same as other residents, even while most residents would call the police in an emergency.

Moreover, using certain analytic procedures such as cross-tabulation of quantitative measures and comparison of qualitative results, we find additional, significant inconsistencies in Latina/os responses.

For instance, only 43% of respondents believe the police treat them the same as other residents of Santa Barbara. At the same time, 95% are willing to call the police if they had an emergency.

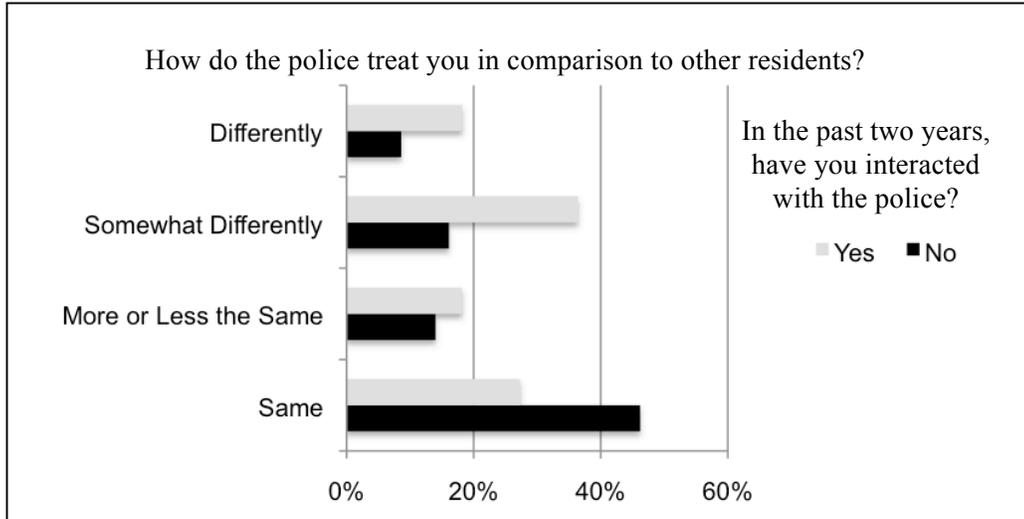
Similarly, Latina/os express comfort participating in community life, even while they feel they are sometimes targeted as Latina/os. For instance, 87% are willing or very willing to talk to their boss about their work situation.

However, a third are hesitant or unwilling to drive if they know there is a DUI checkpoint: widely regarded as ploys by the police department to impound the vehicles of undocumented and unlicensed drivers. Moreover, one third responded that there are times they worry about being identified as Latina/o.

Furthermore when we cross-tabulate the data, interesting dynamics begin to emerge. When we focus on whether or not the respondent had, in fact, interacted with police, there were notable changes. This shift was obvious in response to the question, “Do you think the Santa Barbara police treat you the same as other residents?” While 46% of those who had not interacted with the police believe they were treated the same, only 27% of those who had interacted with the police concurred.

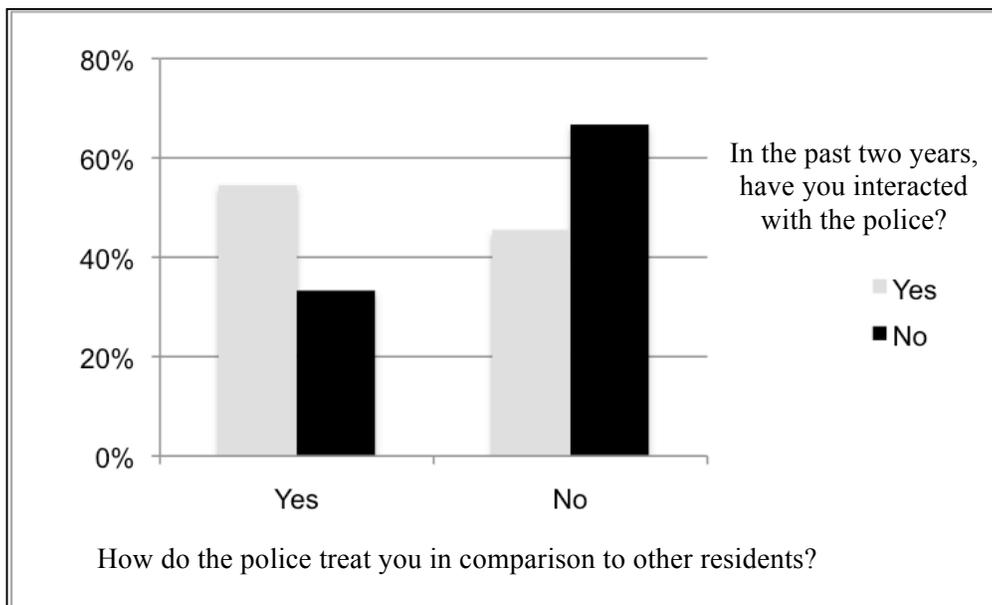
In addition, while only eight percent of those who had not interacted with the police believed they were treated differently, that percentage more than doubled to 18% for those who had interacted with the police.

Figure 1 How does interaction with police impact Latina/o residents belief that the Santa Barbara police treat them the same as other residents?



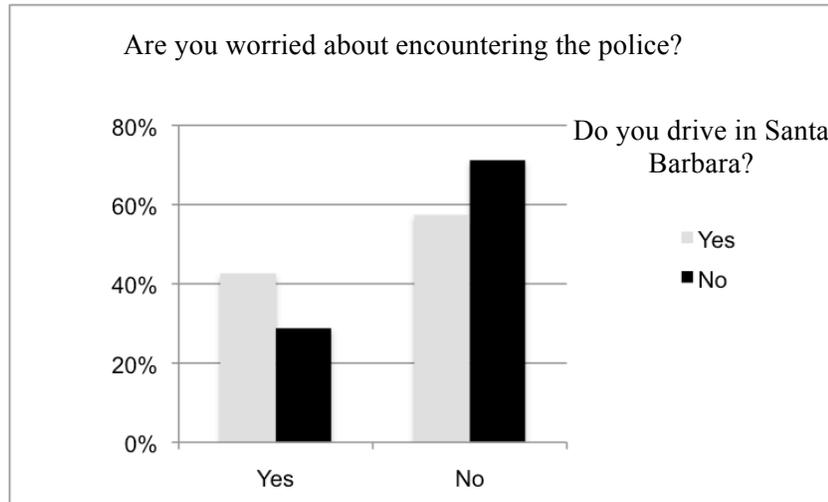
A similar pattern emerges when a history of having interacted with Santa Barbara police is taken into consideration when assessing worry about encountering police in daily life. While only one third of respondents who had not interacted with the police expressed concern about encountering law enforcement, more than half of those who had interacted with police responded that they were worried about encountering law enforcement.

Figure 2 How does interaction with police impact Latina/o residents' concern about encountering the police?



Being a driver also had a significant impact on anxiety toward Santa Barbara law enforcement.⁹ While 28% of non-drivers expressed concern about encountering police, 42% of drivers said they did worry about such an encounter.

Figure 3 How does driving impact Latina/o residents' concern about encountering police?



The qualitative data reveal further inconsistencies in 24 of 106, or just less than one quarter of all cases. For instance, one respondent noted that he thought the Santa Barbara police treated him “somewhat differently” than other residents. He went on to respond that he was “unwilling” to contact the police “if [he] witnessed a crime,” but “willing” to call if he were the “victim of a crime” or if he “had an emergency.” This respondent’s willingness to contact the police is highly situational, as the fieldnotes document: “depending on the situation, he will call the cops.” This respondent’s impression that the police treat Latinos differently than other residents impacts his willingness to contact the police.

Another respondent identifies himself as “Chicano” and responds that he is “uncomfortable” in his “interactions with police,” thinks the Santa Barbara police treat him “differently,” and that his “appearance” “affect[s]...interactions with police officers.” He goes on to respond that he is

“willing” to call police “if he witnessed a crime” and is “very willing” to call the police if he “had an emergency.” In the interviewee’s qualitative fieldnotes, he affirms that “when the police [are] around, it creates an uncomfortable environment” and he is “treated different[ly] because [he is] a Chicano.” He also worries about “encountering the police depending on the situation.” His belief that the police treat Chicanos differently than other Santa Barbara residents worked against this respondent’s willingness to call the police if he witnessed a crime or in an emergency. Like the respondent above, his willingness to call police depends on the context.

In at least one instance, there is strong evidence that a respondent is not telling the truth. The respondent answers that she has never interacted with the police, but her son, standing at her side, says that the “police took [her] car away.” In her survey responses, she goes on to indicate that in most situations she would be comfortable calling the police, but she worries about encountering the police “in her daily life.”

The reticence we would expect to find conducting a survey in a vulnerable community is coupled with instances of false reporting.

Thus in survey responses, cross-tabulations and qualitative responses, respondents offer varied and sometimes contradictory answers. They often recognize police mistreatment but affirm their willingness to call on them in times of need or emergency. Moreover, we as researchers are confronted with the limitations of our methodology.

Evaluating the Findings

Our findings, while limited by methodological issues, demonstrate that respondents in this study hold mixed opinions regarding the police. Because of limits in the survey administration itself, we were unlikely to tap the most candid and authentic responses of those who participated in the survey. Nevertheless, using certain tools to cross-reference the data, there are patterned instances of mistrust towards police.

In terms of survey administration, the researchers were strangers to the respondents and did not have a trusting rapport with them. This is a clear hindrance when studying the experiences of marginalized groups, such as low-income Latina/o immigrants, who are likely to be suspicious of unknown survey researchers inquiring about their attitudes, feelings, and experiences.¹ In this way, the survey method was limited in its capacity to gauge the actual attitudes of the population in this study.

Even acknowledging limitations of the survey approach, the responses we obtained demonstrate a genuine ambivalence in the Santa Barbara Latina/o community's attitudes toward the police.

First, since respondents who had interacted with the police demonstrated greater mistrust of law enforcement, direct interaction is associated with increased anxiety towards police. Moreover, those who drove also expressed worry about encountering police. This suggests that whether or not one possesses a valid CA driver's license, the mere fact of driving under conditions of heightened police surveillance of Latinos/as may heighten anxiety towards law enforcement.

In other words, a direct experience with a police officer and driving in the city are associated with increased anxiety about encountering police, an increased perception that the police treat Latinos differently than other residents, and more consistently negative responses along other measures of police trust.

Finally, the inconsistencies found when looking to the qualitative data suggests that Latina/os remain unsure about the police, seeing law enforcement as essential at times and hostile at others. While our respondents often said they were willing to trust police, this willingness sometimes diverged from or directly contradicted their other responses. A willingness to call on police in emergencies is often situational, reflecting a limited trust regarding the police. This reluctance indicates that while Santa Barbara Latina/os may experience some genuine mistrust or fear toward police, that mistrust and fear may be overcome by the urgency or gravity of a particular situation. These results suggest an important need for the restoration of genuine trust between police and the Santa Barbara Latina/o community.

Recommendations

This research demonstrates that the Latina/o community relies on effective policing while struggling to trust the police in the ways necessary to allow for such efficacy. While the police have made efforts toward establishing a more trusting relationship with the community, we recommend that further steps be taken to cultivate trusting relationships with Santa Barbara Latino/as. These include:

1. *Augmenting funding for community policing and beat patrols*

Increased familiarity with the communities in which they work will give police the opportunity to hear the needs of the community, form stronger relationships with community members, and respond to emergencies and crime in a productive fashion.

2. *Abandoning heightened enforcement measures that capture Latina/os in dragnet schemes*

These include immigration measures like Secure Communities as well as the regular practice of impounding the vehicles of unlicensed drivers.

3. *Hiring officers who understand the particular needs of Latina/o residents*

Police officers' backgrounds should reflect the racial and linguistic diversity of Santa Barbara. Moreover, officers should undergo training in cultural sensitivity and community policing.

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