

The Organizational Determinants of Police Arrest Decisions

Allison T. Chappell
John M. MacDonald
Patrick W. Manz

A limited amount of research has examined the relationship between characteristics of police organizations and policing styles. In particular, few studies have examined the link between organizational structures and police officer arrest decisions. Wilson's (1968) pioneering case study of police organizations suggested that individual police behavior is a function of departmental goals that occur within the broader political climate of a community. Wilson suggested that agencies could be classified into three typologies: the watchman style, the legalistic style, and the service style. The present study examines the influence of organizational characteristics associated with these styles on individual officers' arrest rates using nationally representative data from large police agencies. Findings suggest that police officer arrest decisions are partially explained by variations in police organizational structures. The implications of these findings for contemporary organizational explanations of police behavior are discussed.

Keywords: *policing; police organizations; arrests*

Research on police decision making has long recognized the role of discretion (Walker, 1993). Systematic social observation research has examined the influence of situational and environmental factors, including suspect demeanor, seriousness of offense, victim requests, race of suspect and victim, and neighborhood composition on the decision that officers arrest a suspect (Black, 1971; Brooks, 1986; Klinger, 1997; Lundman, 1994; Mastrofski, Snipes, & Parks, 2000; Mastrofski, Snipes, & Supina, 1996; Smith, 1986; Smith & Visher, 1981; Worden, 1989). Although scholars have debated about the relative importance of demeanor and race (Friedrich, 1977; Klinger, 1994; Riksheim & Chermak, 1993; Worden & Shepard, 1996), research is clear in noting that discretionary behavior is a core function of police work. The role of discretion in police work is also one of the first

ALLISON T. CHAPPELL: Department of Sociology and Criminal Justice, Old Dominion University. **JOHN M. MACDONALD:** RAND Corporation. **PATRICK W. MANZ:** American Prosecutors Research Institute, VA.

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aspects of the administration of justice that was systematically studied by social scientists (Reiss, 1971).

Early work on police decision making suggests that organizational contexts explain officer arrest decisions (Wilson, 1968). A few studies have empirically examined the influence of organizational context on aspects of legal control, typically focusing on comparisons of a limited number of agencies (Mastrofski, Ritti, & Hoffmaster, 1987; Smith, 1984). These studies suggest that variations in departmental management styles and culture explain a significant amount of variation in the proclivity of police officers to exercise their arrest powers. Research on the organizational context of discretionary decision making by the police, however, has relied primarily on limited sample sizes of what can now be considered historical data sets. Thus, generalizations about the contextual influence of organizations are questionable for present-day decision-making models. In fact, as police agencies have reformed in the 1980s and 1990s and adopted community and problem-oriented models, a question arises: To what extent do these organizational transformations influence police officers' decisions to arrest suspects?

In the present study, we explore this question by analyzing the influence of organizational characteristics on police arrest decisions using nationally representative data from large police agencies. We build on early work by Wilson (1968) and Smith (1984) and investigate empirically whether variations in organizational characteristics of police agencies result in different rates at which officers arrest suspects. Therefore, this study attempts to explain police officer arrest decisions within the context of contemporary organizational structures.

ORGANIZATIONAL THEORY OF POLICE BEHAVIOR

Though police researchers have long studied the organizational and administrative characteristics of police departments (Friedrich, 1977; Langworthy, 1986; Maguire, 1997; Wilson, 1968), few have tied these characteristics to police arrest decisions (see Mastrofski et al., 1987; Mastrofski, 1981; Smith, 1984). According to this research, police may respond to similar circumstances differently depending on organizational constraints and demands on police work (Smith, 1984). Organizational values may affect individual officer decision making to the extent that they reflect an acceptance of occupational norms and practices regarding decisions to arrests civilians. Wilson's (1968) pioneering case study of police organizational

styles and officer behavior suggested that individual police behavior and ideas about the police role are a function of departmental goals, which occur within the broader political climate of a community. Accordingly, police agencies are distinguishable from each other by their level of administrative complexity and professionalism. Furthermore, Wilson (1968) suggested that agencies could be classified into three typologies: the watchman style, the legalistic style, and the service style.

According to Wilson's (1968) typology, order maintenance is the operating philosophy of departments exhibiting the watchman style. Officers in these departments are encouraged to ignore certain types of criminal behavior, such as minor traffic violations and juvenile indiscretions, and to invoke laws only deemed important by citizens and local politicians. Not surprisingly, officers in these departments are subject to corruption and allegations of excessive force by minorities. Because of a lack of emphasis on professionalism, officers in watchman-style agencies tend to be working class, locally recruited, and low paid. They are poorly trained and seldom rewarded for seeking further education. These departments have flat bureaucratic structures, low budgets, little specialization (e.g., they are generalists), and few rules. The penal law is but a device that empowers police to maintain order and protect citizens.

In contrast to watchman-style departments, legalistic-style and service-style agencies are highly professional but vary in their level of administrative complexity. Enforcing the law is the main strategy in legalistic organizations. Officers will issue a high rate of traffic citations, arrest a high proportion of juvenile offenders, and act vigorously against illicit enterprise (Wilson, 1968). They act as if there is a single standard of acceptable behavior based on the law. Officers operate autonomously from the communities they serve, and all citizens are treated equally and impersonally. Legalistic departments are highly complex bureaucratic agencies that rely on central administrative authority and extensive rules and procedures. Administrators in legalistic departments see discretion as the opportunity for corruption and see high arrest rates as evidence that officers are doing their job. These police organizations have stiff entrance requirements and incentives for continuing education and training. Officers are encouraged to compete vigorously for the many opportunities for promotions and advancement. Tasks and roles are specialized (e.g., there are often separate gang units and vice units), and there are strict evaluation processes.

In contrast, service-style agencies are highly professional but have less hierarchical structure and control. Service organizations are decentralized in command structure with many station houses or precincts presiding over

individual beats. They are specialized, formalized, and professional. They employ civilians and embrace diversity. The emphasis on community relations is reflected in officer training and evaluations. The main goal of service-style agencies is to protect the common definition of public order. Service departments usually exist in more affluent and homogeneous communities, and they are concerned with public relations, problem solving, and deferral to community needs. Therefore, these agencies, through their professional orientation, place importance on training, record keeping, and education. Officers tend to make higher salaries than do officers in other police organizations, and they are encouraged to compete for promotions and advancement. Decisions whether to deal with offenders formally rest on assumptions about peace and order in the community and the future conduct of the offender. As a result, formal use of arrest powers is reserved only for serious crimes.

Wilson's theory of management styles of police behavior suggests that the organizational context of police behavior is tied to the political climate of the community, the selection of elected officials, and the choice of police administrators. At the same time, however, Wilson acknowledges that there are limits to the influence of organizational characteristics and that often police behavior results from the situational exigencies that police officers encounter in the street. This theory of police behavior provides a basis from which to argue that specific efforts at organizational and departmental control will influence the extent to which police exercise their use of arrest powers.

ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXT AND POLICE OFFICER BEHAVIOR

Historically, police administrators have managed agencies under the assumption that organizational and departmental factors related to hiring, training, and operations influence police officer behavior. For example, police reforms almost universally suggest that increased training and education will promote more effective policing (Goldstein, 1977; King & Lab, 2000; Roberg, 1978). Although Wilson's typology provides a framework for examining the role of organizational context on police officer behavior, few studies have looked at the influence of interdepartmental administrative factors on police officer behavior. Mastrofski et al. (1987) examined the impact of formal and informal organizational characteristics on police officer discretion to make arrests in cases of drinking and driving (driving under the influence; DUI). Their survey data found that departments exhibiting legalistic

characteristics had fewer DUI arrests than those in smaller departments (Mastrofski et al., 1987). They also found that informal aspects of organizations, such as the peer culture and environment, were better predictors of police behavior in larger departments. Where small departments exhibited high congruence between written policy and actual street practices, officers in larger police agencies based their discretionary decisions on the informal departmental or political culture. A potential explanation is that officers in larger departments have a higher workload (more calls for service), compared to smaller departments, and therefore have limited availability for time-consuming discretionary activities (such as DUI enforcement). Mastrofski (1981) also examined the impact of organizational scale on patrol officer activity. He found that small-scale departments were more likely to be service-oriented and less aggressive in low violent-crime neighborhoods but not in high-violence neighborhoods. This is consistent with Wilson because service-style departments are usually in smaller, homogenous areas with little violence.

Smith's (1984) analysis of observational data on more than 1,000 police-citizen encounters in three cities also found that organizational context affected arrest decisions. Specifically, this study found that police officers in legalistic departments were two to three times more likely than officers in other types of departments to arrest juveniles. Officers in legalistic departments were also more likely to make arrests in disputes compared to officers in service agencies. Smith's (1984) analysis suggests that the extent of legal control that individual officers exercise is partially a function of the organizational style of their police department.

In contrast to the literature on organizational characteristics, some studies indicate that departmental policies have a minimal effect on a variety of indicators of police officer behavior (Worden, 1990). Research, for example, suggests that college-educated officers are less likely to be the recipients of citizen complaints (Cascio, 1977), but other studies have offered little evidence for the positive effect of a college education on police behavior (Bennett, 1978; Kedia, 1985; Murrell, 1982). Prior research on professionalism has failed to provide any support for its impact on police officer job performance. Smith's (1986) analysis of citizen levels of victimization and evaluations of police service in their neighborhoods, for example, suggested that higher levels of education and police training were not associated with reduced victimization and increased satisfaction with the police. Agyapong's (1988) analysis of supervisors' ratings of more than 100 police officers in a Florida city also indicated little relationship between education and police performance and attitudes.

Research is inconclusive on the role of administrative specialization on police officer behavior (Lewis, Green, & Edwards, 1979). One study indicates, however, that the presence of collective bargaining unions in large police departments is associated with lower rates of arrests (Byrne, Dezhbakhsh, & King, 1996). Together, research on the role of interdepartmental variations in departmental administration offers little guidance for explaining police officer arrest behavior. Therefore, the extent to which departmental policies and organizational characteristics affect policing style is an empirical question that remains unanswered.

COMMUNITY POLICING

Traditionally, the primary focus of modern policing has been through reactive responses to crime, rapid response times, and preventive patrol. However, research has questioned the effectiveness of this reactive approach for controlling crime (Goldstein, 1990). In response to this criticism, police agencies during the past 20 years have increasingly moved toward adopting a proactive community-oriented policing (COP) and problem-oriented policing (POP) focus (Goldstein, 1990).

Community and problem-solving methods of policing suggest that agencies release officers from strict centralized bureaucratic control and, through training, allow officers to expand their role beyond the traditional narrow focus on enforcing the law. Instead, officers should concentrate on building community partnerships, preventing crime, and solving underlying problems that generate criminal incidents (Cordner, 2001; Goldstein, 1990). Despite this relatively monumental shift in policing, only a modest amount of research has been conducted that empirically examines the relationship between the administration of COP and POP and police officer behavior (see Maguire & Uchida, 2000; Mastrofski, Worden, & Snipes, 1995; Novak, Frank, & Smith, 2002; Zhao, Lovrich, & Robinson, 2001). The majority of this research has focused on detailed information about how community-policing officers spend their time in a few select cities (Parks, Mastrofski, & DeJong, 1999; Rosenbaum, 1994). Although these studies are extremely valuable for assessing the microlevel relationship between community policing and police officer behavior, they do not examine police arrest decisions within the broader organizational context of community policing. A contemporary macrolevel model of police arrest decisions should take into account the role of community policing, given the organizational changes and resources in police agencies that have been devoted to it (Roth et al, 2000).

PRESENT STUDY

In the current study, we focus on arrests as an indicator of policing style (Crank, 1990; Slovak, 1986). Organizational output and policing style is most frequently operationalized as aggregate arrest rates (Crank, 1990; Slovak, 1986). Some policing scholars have called for behavioral measures of policing that gauge the full spectrum of police officer activities, such as those associated with COP (Alpert, Flynn, & Piquero, 2001; Maguire, 1997; Zhao, 1996). Arrest patterns, however, remain a key component of police work because they represent a conceptually simple and available measure of police officer behavior. Additionally, arrest patterns are important to the extent that they are related to the level of crime, fear of crime, and beliefs about justice in a particular area. Several hypotheses can be derived from prior work on the management of police agencies.

According to Wilson's typology, watchman-style departments should have lower rates of arrest because they recruit officers from within their community, have less educational requirements, lack specialization (i.e., are generalists) and other forms of professionalism, and allow officers greater freedom from which to exercise the use of legal control. In contrast, legalistic departments should have greater rates of arrest because they have more administrative complexity (i.e., higher ratio of administrative to field officers), a greater emphasis on education and specialization (i.e., separate units), and a strict focus on enforcing the law. Finally, contemporary service-style agencies, compared to legalistic-style agencies, place a greater emphasis on service to the community and diversity and have officers engage in community policing and problem-solving functions. As a result, service-style agencies should place greater emphasis on discretionary decision making and produce lower rates of arrest per officer compared to legalistic-style agencies. To test these propositions, we employ the following data and methods.

DATA AND METHOD

Data Sources

The data from the present study come from two primary sources: the 1997 Law Enforcement Management and Administrative Statistics (LEMAS) survey (Reaves & Goldberg, 1999) conducted by the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics and the Federal Bureau of Investigation's uniform crime reports (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1997). We rely on a sample of larger agencies in

the LEMAS because we are interested in examining the role of organizational variation on police officer arrest decisions. As a result, our sample consists of the 182 municipal agencies serving populations of 100,000 or more in LEMAS.¹ We linked data from the LEMAS survey to arrest data taken from the 1997 uniform crime reports.

Dependent Variables

We used the rate of arrests per officer for all index offenses and violent offenses as dependent variables because they reflect the most accurate aggregate measure of police officer arrest behavior (see Maguire & Uchida, 2000). Specifically, data were taken from the uniform crime reports on the number of total index offenses and total violent offenses per agency and divided by the number of sworn (field) personnel to create a measure of the rate of arrest per officer. We recognize that more discretion is available in making arrests for nonviolent compared to violent encounters. For example, officers generally have more discretion when making the decision to arrest a suspect in a trespassing incident compared to a robbery (see Langworthy & Travis, 2003). However, for many violent offenses (e.g., assaults), officers are still granted wide discretion across departments in determining whether an offense warrants an arrest.

Organizational Context

Because the main theoretical focus of this article is on the role of interagency differences in organizational context on police arrest decisions, we include a number of measures derived from the LEMAS survey. To capture the level of specialization (or functional differentiation; see Langworthy, 1986) of police functions, we include a special enforcement index. The special enforcement index is a summated index comprised of four special enforcement factors in the LEMAS survey. The special enforcement index is a count of the number of special enforcement activities related to traffic, vice, drug, and drug task-force activities in which each agency is involved. Each item is a dichotomized measure that captures whether these police agencies are responsible for traffic enforcement and vice enforcement, have a special drug unit, and participate in a drug task force (0 = no; 1 = yes). Agencies with higher index scores engage in more special enforcement activity (or have more functional differentiation).

To capture interagency differences in the use of COP and POP concepts, we created a multiple-item index. The index counts the extent to which agencies encourage the use of the scanning, analysis, response, and assessment

model of policing (0 = no, 1 = yes); whether police agencies require problem solving in their evaluations of officers (0 = no, 1 = yes); whether agencies engage in problem-solving partnerships with the community (0 = no, 1 = yes); whether agencies routinely use foot patrol (0 = no, 1 = yes) or bike patrols (0 = no, 1 = yes); have a formal community policing plan (0 = no, 1 = yes); train all new recruits in community policing (0 = no, 1 = yes); train all in-service personnel in community policing (0 = no, 1 = yes); assign patrol responsibility according to geographic areas (0 = no, 1 = yes); and assign detectives based on geographic areas (0 = no, 1 = yes). All indicators are dummy scored 1 if the agency does engage in these COP or POP activities and 0 otherwise. Agencies rating higher on this index report more COP and POP training and operations.

Our last measure of community policing represents the number of community policing officers in the community (COP ratio) and is the ratio of the number of full-time sworn community-policing officers divided by the number of sworn police officers for each jurisdiction. The ratio represents the share of sworn personnel whose full-time duty involves community policing. Higher scores represent a greater COP manpower.

We also include measures of the administrative complexity of agencies. Arguably, more professional and administratively complex (legalistic) agencies will place greater emphasis on expanding upper management in an effort to make central authority and regulations run more efficiently. To capture the relative amount of administrative complexity in each agency, we calculate a ratio of the number of sworn field officers to administrative personnel. Higher scores reflect agencies with fewer administrative personnel relative to officers assigned to the street. Additionally, as professionalism in agencies has increased, so have demands to encourage diversity in hiring (Reiss, 1992). To capture this diversity, we include a measure of the ratio of male to female officers. Higher scores indicate agencies that place a greater emphasis on hiring male officers.

In contrast to professionalism, some agencies have historically hired officers from within their own communities in an effort to provide a stronger homogeneity with the community and as a means of building political patronage (Wilson, 1968). To capture this factor, we include a dummy variable scored 1 if the agency requires its officers to live within the jurisdiction. Additionally, to capture the weight to which education plays a role in the organizational structure of the agency, we include a dummy variable scored 1 if the agency requires at least 2 years of college for its officers. Finally, folk wisdom suggests that nonprofessional agencies place a greater degree of emphasis on political patronage and solidarity to the unit over individualism and professionalism. Police unions are often credited for maintaining the

blue wall that hampers individualism and professional standards in agencies. To capture this factor, we include a dummy variable scored 1 if an agency has collective bargaining for sworn personnel.

Control Measures

Prior research indicates that police officer arrest decisions are a function of the level of and seriousness of reported crime in the community as well as the presence of minorities and the relative deployment of police strength (Bayley & Mendelson, 1969; Brooks, 1986; Crank, 1992; Smith, 1986). Therefore, to control for the potential influence of these factors, we include a measure of the overall crime rate, violent crime rate, percentage of Black residents, and the rate of officers per 100,000 residents in each municipality.

Predicted Relationships

If our propositions about the influence of organizational context are correct, then agencies that place a greater emphasis on professionalism and specialization and have more administrative personnel will be more legalistic and have higher rates of arrest for both total and violent crime. In contrast, agencies that place an emphasis on political patronage, have a police union, and require residency will have lower rates of arrests per officer because they mirror watchman-style agencies. Agencies that have more COP officers relative to other officers, more diversity, COP or POP, and more sworn officers compared to administrative personnel should have lower rates of arrest per officer because these departments mirror the idea of service-style agencies. The expectations for each predictor variable are displayed in Table 1.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Table 2 describes the characteristics of our sample of 182 municipal agencies. On average, there were approximately 7.4 arrests per officer across these large city agencies during 1997. Police officers across agencies made an average of 2.0 violent arrests. There was substantial variation across agencies in the frequency that police officers exercised their powers of arrest. For example, in the Hialeah, Florida, Police Department, officers made an average of only 1.33 arrests compared to 17.96 arrests per officer in Bakersfield, California. In terms of organizational factors, the data also indicate substantial variation across police departments. On average, police departments had 3.7 special enforcement programs. Of the departments, 27% required offi-

TABLE 1: Predictions of the Relationship Between Organizational Variables and Police Arrest Rates

| | <i>Arrests per Officer for Overall Crime</i> | <i>Arrests per Officer for Violent Crime</i> |
|--|--|--|
| Special enforcement index (more functional differentiation) | + | + |
| POP or COP index | - | - |
| COP ratio (COP officers relative to non-COP officers) | - | - |
| Field to administrative ratio (as it increases, less administrative complexity) | - | - |
| Male to female ratio (more males, less diversity) | + | + |
| Officers live in jurisdiction | - | - |
| College education | + | + |
| Police union | - | - |

NOTE: POP = Problem-oriented policing; COP = Community-oriented policing.

cers to live within the jurisdiction. Only 10% of these agencies required 2 or more years of college education. Approximately 68% of agencies had collective bargaining in the form of a police union. The descriptive data from this sample indicate substantial variation across police departments in organizational factors related to hiring and administration and in the rate to which officers used their discretionary powers to exercise legal control.

The correlation between arrest rates and the variables used in the multivariate analysis are presented in Table 3. The correlation between total arrests per officer and violent arrests per officer is fairly strong ($r = .61$; $p < .05$) and indicates that in departments with high levels of officer productivity, arrest rates are high for both overall crimes and violent offenses. The total index crime rate is not significantly associated with the arrest rate for overall offenses, suggesting that police officer arrest productivity is not driven by overall reported crimes in cities. The violent crime rate, however, is significantly related to arrest rates for violent offenses, but the strength of the relationship is modest ($r = .19$; $p < .05$). The percentage of Blacks in each city is significantly associated with the overall and violent crime rate but is associated with fewer arrests per officer for overall crimes ($r = -.36$; $p < .05$). The number of police per 100,000 residents is also significantly associated with lower rates of overall arrests and violent arrests per officer. Together, these bivariate associations suggest that arrest activity is only partially related to the crime rate and is lower in areas of high minority presence and where there is a greater deployment of sworn police officers. In terms of organizational variables, the bivariate correlations suggest few relationships with officer arrest activity. Police departments with a higher presence of males relative to

TABLE 2: Descriptive Characteristics of Sample (N = 182)

| | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Standard Deviation |
|--------------------------------------|----------|-----------|----------|--------------------|
| Arrests per officer total offenses | 1.33 | 17.96 | 7.42 | 3.27 |
| Arrests per officer violent offenses | 0.35 | 6.68 | 2.00 | 1.34 |
| Crime rate | 1,738.90 | 14,578.20 | 7,638.56 | 2,727.32 |
| Violent crime rate | 166.70 | 3,075.50 | 1,004.62 | 590.60 |
| Percentage Black | 0.40 | 84.0 | 19.94 | 18.94 |
| Officers per 100,000 | 104.37 | 666.04 | 217.12 | 89.58 |
| Special enforcement index | 2.00 | 6.00 | 3.70 | 0.53 |
| COP or POP index | 1.00 | 10.00 | 6.62 | 2.09 |
| COP ratio | 0.00 | 0.49 | 0.04 | 0.07 |
| Field to admin ratio | 1.65 | 174.67 | 29.82 | 23.01 |
| Male to female ratio | 2.41 | 37.43 | 10.37 | 5.92 |
| Residency requirement | 0.00 | 1.00 | 0.27 | 0.44 |
| Union | 0.00 | 1.00 | 0.68 | 0.46 |
| College | 0.00 | 1.00 | 0.10 | 0.30 |

NOTE: POP = Problem-oriented policing; COP = Community-oriented policing.

TABLE 3: Bivariate Associations for Study Variables (N = 182)

| | Y1 | Y2 | X1 | X2 | X3 | X4 | X5 | X6 | X7 | X8 | X9 | X10 | X11 | X12 |
|---------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|------|------|------|------|-----|
| Y1. Total arrests per officer | .61* | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Y2. Violent arrests per officer | -.03 | -.05 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| X1. Crime rate | -.15* | .19* | .71* | | | | | | | | | | | |
| X2. Violent crime rate | -.36* | -.05 | .48* | .60* | | | | | | | | | | |
| X3. Percentage Black | -.51* | -.23* | .50* | .64* | .66* | | | | | | | | | |
| X4. Officers per 100,000 | -.12 | .01 | .05 | .15 | .03 | .21* | | | | | | | | |
| X5. Special enforcement index | .04 | .17 | .09 | .12 | .05 | .09 | .05 | | | | | | | |
| X6. COP or POP index | .01 | .06 | .03 | .04 | -.06 | -.08 | -.18* | .10 | .02 | | | | | |
| X7. COP ratio | -.04 | -.09 | .08 | -.01 | -.01 | .02 | -.04 | .04 | -.08 | .01 | | | | |
| X8. Field to admin ratio | .22* | .06 | -.34* | -.37* | -.44* | -.35* | .06 | -.18* | -.21* | -.06 | .00 | | | |
| X9. Male to female ratio | -.12 | .00 | .03 | .06 | .02 | .05 | .06 | .03 | .02 | -.03 | .01 | -.08 | | |
| X10. Residency requirement | .04 | -.09 | .06 | -.05 | .03 | -.02 | .06 | .01 | .01 | .02 | -.02 | -.01 | -.09 | |
| X11. College | .11 | .20* | -.09 | .02 | -.30* | -.06 | .22* | .00 | -.05 | .01 | .02 | .11 | .00 | .01 |
| X12. Union | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

NOTE: POP = Problem-oriented policing; COP = Community-oriented policing.

* $p < .05$.

females (less diversity) are related to significantly higher arrest rates per officer for overall crimes ($r = .22$; $p < .05$) and less COP or POP activities. Departments with police unions are related to higher rates of arrest per officer for violent crime ($r = .20$; $p < .05$). COP or POP index is not significantly associated with higher rates of arrest per officer for overall or violent crimes. Thus far, the data suggest that there are modest relationships between community factors related to crime, organizational factors related to hiring practices and training, and variation between departments' use of arrest powers.

We now turn to the multivariate models to examine the extent to which organizational characteristics explain the variation across agencies in the use of arrest. Because the dependent variables, *total arrests per officer* and *violent arrests per officer* are ratio-level, ordinary least squares regression analysis is used. Case-wise diagnostics for outliers indicated 95% of residuals did not exceed two standard deviations. No variance inflation factors for these models exceeded a score of 2.5, indicating that multicollinearity was not a problem with these models. Two separate regression models are estimated to examine the influence of organizational structures on the total arrest rate and violent arrest rate.

Table 4 displays the results from the ordinary least squares regression models examining the relationship between variations in organizational characteristics and the use of arrest powers. Model 1 displays the results for arrests per officer for all criminal offenses. This model explains 37% of the variation in the number of arrests per officer for all criminal offenses. Consistent with expectations, the overall crime rate is positively related to the number of arrests per officer ($B = .34$; $p < .05$). Interestingly, however, the rate of police officers per 100,000 residents is negatively related to officer arrest behavior ($B = -.59$; $p < .05$). It appears that police officers working in agencies with a greater number of officers relative to the residential population are less likely to use their powers of arrest. This finding is most likely because of the manpower limitations in agencies with fewer officers per capita. Theoretically, fewer officers in an agency result in a higher volume of cases per officer, which translates into more arrests made for each officer assigned to the street.

The model indicates few relationships between organizational aspects of agencies and the use of arrest powers. Inconsistent with our predictions, college education and the application of COP and POP strategies is not significantly related to arrests. Although not statistically significant, the ratio of community-policing officers is negatively associated with overall arrests. Similarly, fewer administrative personnel (relative to sworn) and required residency is associated with fewer arrests (but the relationships are not statistically significant). The findings from this model are only partially consistent

TABLE 4: Relationship Between Organizational Factors and Police Arrest Rates (n = 181)

| | Overall Crime | | Violent Crime | |
|---------------------------|---------------|---------|---------------|---------|
| | Model 1 | t Score | Model 2 | t Score |
| Crime rate ^a | .34* | 4.66 | .52* | 5.83 |
| Percentage Black | -.06 | -0.75 | .14 | 1.43 |
| Officers per 100,000 | -.59* | -6.73 | -.63* | -6.67 |
| Special enforcement index | -.05 | -0.81 | .01 | 0.13 |
| COP or POP index | .09 | 1.57 | .12 | 1.85 |
| COP ratio | -.06 | -1.01 | -.01 | -0.15 |
| Field to admin ratio | -.05 | -0.92 | -.07 | -1.12 |
| Male to female ratio | .09 | 1.37 | .09 | 1.35 |
| Residency requirement | -.08 | -1.40 | -.01 | -0.11 |
| Union | .09 | 1.35 | .18* | 2.59 |
| College | .01 | 0.16 | -.08 | -1.33 |
| Constant | | 5.24 | | 2.32 |
| <i>R</i> ² | .37 | | .31 | |

NOTE: POP = Problem-oriented policing; COP = Community-oriented policing.

a. Model 1 uses the overall crime rate. Model 2 uses the violent crime rate. Standardized (beta) regression coefficients displayed.

* $p < .05$.

with our expectations and suggest that aspects of organizations related to professionalism have a modest relationship with interagency variation in the use of arrest powers.

Model 2 displays the results for the number of violent arrests per officer. This model explains approximately 31% of the variation in the number of violent arrests per officer across police agencies. Consistent with the earlier model, these results indicate that the overall violent crime rate and the number of police per 100,000 residents are significantly related to the variation in violent arrests per officer. Not surprisingly, officers use their arrest powers more frequently for violent offenses in agencies with higher rates of violent crime ($B = .52$; $p < .05$). On average, officers in agencies with fewer officers per capita make more arrests of suspects for violent offenses ($B = -.63$; $p < .05$). The percentage of minority residents is not related to the average variation in which officers arrest suspects for violent offenses.

This model indicates few relationships between variations in organizational characteristics and the application of arrest powers for violent offenses. The COP and POP index approaches statistical significance and suggests that

officers in agencies with greater levels of engagement in these activities make a greater number of arrests for violent offenses. The ratio of community-policing officers is related to fewer arrests, but the relationship is not statistically significant. More field officers relative to administrative personnel (less bureaucracy) and required residency are related to few arrests but the relationships are not statistically significant. Inconsistent with our predictions, agencies with police unions make significantly more arrests per officer for violent offenses ($B = .18; p < .05$). These findings indicate that an organizational model of legal control provides a partial explanation for the extent to which officers exercise their powers of legal control for violent offenses.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The present study analyzed the influence of police organizational context on policing style. Building on previous research (Smith, 1986; Wilson, 1968), this study examined the extent to which variations in police organizational structures affected aggregate differences in police arrest decisions in large cities. Propositions regarding the relationship between organizational and departmental structures and police behavior were rooted in Wilson's (1968) typologies of policing styles. Several important findings emerged from our effort.

The overall crime rate is the strongest predictor of police arrest activity for both overall arrests and violent arrests in this sample. Organizational level variables failed to reveal statistically significant relationships. The COP or POP index approached significance, and it seems to be related to increased violent arrests per officer. We think this is most likely because of the wide variation in the implementation of COP and POP across departments, especially in light of more aggressive models, such as Compstat (McDonald, Greenberg, & Bratton, 2001).

We found that union membership is significantly related to higher violent arrests per officer. This is contrary to our hypotheses, as we predicted that union membership was an indicator of political patronage, which is typical of the watchman-style department and should therefore be related to fewer arrests. We failed to find a relationship between college education and policing style. This is consistent with other research in this area because scholars have yet to reach a conclusion on the effect of education on policing performance.

The findings from this study suggest that the policing literature and conventional wisdom on controlling police discretion may place too much emphasis on the influence of organizational context. Officers may be more

driven by the situational exigencies that vary from community to community—many of which are beyond the direct control of police bureaucrats. This is important for several reasons. First, in light of community policing, agencies are feeling great pressure to decentralize (or flatten) their authority structure (e.g., increase field to administrative ratio) in an effort to allow officers more autonomy to solve problems in communities. Many scholars believe that organizational decentralization is the missing link that will make community policing a success (Chappell & Lanza-Kaduce, 2004). However, our analysis shows that variation in organizational context has only a limited effect on officers' arrest patterns, and that these organizational changes may be less than critical to changing policing practices. This suggests that perhaps more attention needs to focus on other aspects of the police environment to refine community-policing efforts.

Theoretically, Wilson's (1968) typology is a useful framework for researchers and practitioners to think about police departmental structure and officer style. The results from this study, however, suggest that this typology may have limited use for contemporary practice and categorization of law enforcement organizations and their influence on police officer behavior. As helpful as typologies can be in shaping our thinking about the way police organizations operate, it seems to be true that real police agencies do not fall squarely within only one of Wilson's typologies. It is reasonable to presume that most police departments exhibit a cross-section of characteristics. An additional consideration is that during the time of a monumental shift toward community policing, many legalistic-style departments may be in the process of moving toward a service-style orientation. In this transition, agencies may be more likely to exhibit a variety of characteristics as they redefine themselves. Some modern community-policing departments also rely on some aspects of police work historically considered watchman-style activities (e.g., walking the beat). Finally, Wilson (1968) suggests that the political culture of a community was a better predictor of police officer activity than variations in organizational factors so future studies should concentrate on gathering data on community and political variables as well as organizational data (Hassell, Zhao, & McGuire, 2003).

This study has a number of limitations that suggest caution in interpreting the results. First, most police agencies have a financial incentive to report that they are doing community policing to obtain federal funding. This is especially true for large agencies. Therefore, many agencies that otherwise would be considered legalistic may appear to be engaged in service-style and watchman-style policing because they have administratively adopted community policing. However, these agencies may still practice traditional legalistic models of policing in reality (e.g., the city of Los Angeles; see Glenn

et al., 2003). Secondly, this study only looked at large agencies, and that could potentially mask greater variation in the policing style of agencies (e.g., Wilson, 1968, suggests that service-style agencies are more prevalent in smaller, homogeneous communities). Thus, a focus on smaller municipal police agencies would likely find a greater effect of variations in organizational structures. The large extent of missing data in the LEMAS on smaller agencies, however, makes this an open empirical question. Finally, some researchers (Mastrofski, 1981; Mastrofski et al., 1987) have found that informal characteristics of organizations are better predictors of police officer behavior in large agencies. Future research should attempt to collect measures of informal characteristics of organizations on a national level to provide a more complete picture of the relationship between variations in police cultures and police officer behavior. The current study provides a basis from which to develop more sophisticated measures of police organizational context and their relationship to police behavior.

NOTE

1. The original sample frame consisted of 207 large municipal agencies representing cities with populations more than 100,000. Of these cities, 25, however, were missing data on key independent variables and were eliminated from the analysis. There were not, however, any major geographic differences in the cities missing and the final sample of 182 included in the present study.

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