A TARGETED EXPERIENCE: HOW PRESIDENTIAL RHETORIC INFLUENCES RELATIONS BETWEEN POLICE AND PEOPLE OF COLOR

An Undergraduate Research Scholars Thesis

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ABSTRACT

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People of Color

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The current political administration has been deemed one of the most racially charged administrations in history. President Trump has been accused of "pushing an anti-immigrant hate into the mainstream" and using rhetoric to "fuel white supremacism" (Beirich 2019). He has been criticized for using Twitter as a "bully pulpit," which is used to emphasize the national salience a president puts on an issue to shift attitudes of the public (Tedin, Rottinghaus, and Rodgers 2011). The bully pulpit, in turn has shaped the attitudes of certain groups, and may have elevated negative attitudes towards people of color (Hopkins 2010). The question is whether the attitudes of people of color are also changing. The key is whether the use of the bully pulpit is affecting attitudes, not just toward the president, but toward other government officials. Through the use of a survey experiment, this project aims to measure the effect presidential rhetoric can have on attitudes of people of color towards police in particular. I argue that presidential rhetoric can have a negative effect on relations between people of color and police and in turn bring tension into future encounters between the two parties.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

INTRODUCTION

The Trump administration has been criticized for focusing more on political polarization than performing its executive duties. President Trump has a history of speech and action that has been met with controversy by racial and ethnic minorities. He has been criticized for fueling white supremacy and using it as a platform for his campaign. (Inwood 2018). Because of the current political climate, it is important to analyze the effects that rhetoric can have on society, specifically people of color. In this paper, I argue that presidential rhetoric can have a negative effect on relations between people of color and lower levels of government, specifically, the police.

Numerous scholars have researched the way presidential rhetoric shapes policy and affects citizens both at the national and local levels. Studies conclude that presidential rhetoric is one of the most effective leadership tools for a president (Yates and Whitford 2009). The president uses the power of his/her rhetoric to prime certain issues to evoke certain reactions from different groups of people. Previous studies have addressed the idea of priming (Druckman and Holmes 2004). One issue the president can prime is race (Valentino 2018). Valentino (2018) suggests that "the way politicians talk about race affects the power of racial attitudes in political judgements."

My theory is that the president uses the "bully pulpit" to directly influence relations between the public and law enforcement officials. Specifically, I claim that rhetoric taking a side on the issue of policing and police brutality will have different effects on different racial groups. For Black and Hispanic individuals, pro-police rhetoric and rhetoric down playing police

brutality will have a negative effect on attitudes toward the police and heighten feelings of mistreatment by police.

For years, the United States has seen a racial disparity in how the police use force. Since the 2012 shooting death of Trayvon Martin, what started as a hashtag has spread, as deaths of unarmed African Americans were amplified, especially those that were killed at the hands of police. The Black Lives Matter movement sparked a discussion on how people view police brutality and inequality in our criminal justice system. (Sidner 2015). The way recent presidents have addressed this movement has varied, from Barack Obama acknowledging the specific vulnerability of African Americans in this country, to President Trump's praising of police. When the president takes a position to the public, it has the effect of amplifying a divide. On the issue of policing, this divide is between police and communities of color.

The president has made use of the bully pulpit to construe certain groups as threatening. For example, in August 12, 2017, a car was driven into a crowd of people who were protesting the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia. This horrendous attack killed one and injured 28. The rally, which was composed of far-right members who identified as white nationalists, neo-Nazis and Klansmen, was met with peaceful protests. However, due to Governor McAuliffe declaring a state of emergency, the rally was declared to be an unlawful assembly, causing James Alex Fields to run his car onto protestors. Subsequently, President Donald Trump was met with controversy for his comments on the events in Charlottesville. President Trump stated, "I think there is blame on both sides. You had some very bad people in that group (white nationalist group) but you also had people that were very fine people, on both sides." (Klein 2018) President Trump's comments were met with backlash from the country. A statement from a Southern Poverty Law Center Spokesperson Lecia Brooks states, "it is

indefensible for President Trump to revive his horrendous claim that there were very fine people marching on both sides during the deadly events that took place in Charlottesville, the president continues to use his position to send dog whistle and promote a revisionists history. This continues to embolden people with white nationalist views by justifying their inexcusable and violent actions." President Trump's rhetoric on the events in Charlottesville increased tensions between citizens and the current administration, leading several White House officials to resign from their positions. Trump was met with opposition from both sides, with several Republican Congressmen admitting that he "messed up" (Rascoe 2018).

The events that unfolded in Charlottesville, Virginia in August 12, 2017 serve as an example of the dangerous effects that presidential rhetoric can have on relations between people of color and the president.

In my effort to assess these relations, I first draw on existing literature to develop a theory of the trickle-down effects of presidential rhetoric on local communities. To test my theory, I conducted a survey experiment via Lucid to assess how specific presidential statements affect attitudes. Respondents were randomly assigned to either a treatment or control group. The treatment set of participants received quotes from President Trump on policing while the control group received quotes on a non-policing/non-race related issue, such as public education. After the treatment, respondents were asked a serious of question to examine if the treatment had a positive or negative effect on their attitudes toward police.

After conducting the survey experiment, the results from this study indicate that presidential rhetoric does not have a substantial effect on relations between people of color and police. However, partisanship and race of participants do. Though participants in the treatment group were exposed to quotes by President Trump glorifying police brutality, the quotes seemed

to have no real effect on their responses regarding how serious a problem police brutality is in the United States. However, results indicate that people of color were typically more concerned with police brutality than white respondents. Furthermore, the study also found that Republicans tend to perceive violence against police to be more serious problem that Democrats do.

CHAPTER I

LITERATURE REVIEW

While assessing how political rhetoric influences the relations between people of color and the police, we must first understand the impact that political rhetoric can have on public attitudes in general. Existing literature gives insight into how a president may utilize rhetoric to affect relations between government officials and the public. These methods include the use of the bully pulpit to "prime" an issue and capture the public interest, particularly to sway public opinion to fit his political agenda.

Going Public

Scholars have long analyzed how direct messages of the president influence public opinion. Tedin, Rottinghaus, and Rodgers (2011) used a panel survey experiment with exposure to three types of presidential speech formats: President Bush's speeches on Iraq (including his State of the Union, his Oval Office Address and a press conference). When analyzing these different instances, scholars sought to understand whether this direct communication between the president and the nation had any effect on the public's perception of certain issues. They assumed that when focusing on "mass communication", i.e. direct contact between the president and the nation, "if the mass of the public is not moved, presidential leadership is not assumed (Tedin, Rottinghaus, and Rodgers 2011, 13). This study touches on the "bully pulpit" which is a term first coined by President Theodore Roosevelt to emphasize the national salience the president puts on an issue to shift attitudes of the public. Researchers found that in a "controlled experimental setting, presidents find success in leading public opinion among both their core groups and noncore groups (Tedin, Rottinghaus, and Rodgers 2011, 4)." Furthermore, they state

that the president can "move a sizeable number of people" when it comes to personal perceptions (Tedin, Rottinghaus, and Rodgers 2011). This experiment aimed to analyze what the presidential effectiveness is like in a country, without accounting for outside sources such as a "media spin" or "instantaneous criticism that follows any major presidential address" (Tedin, Rottinghaus, and Rodgers 2011, 10). Based on these findings, the researchers concluded that a "president can occasionally move political opinions by going public." (Tedin, Rottinghaus, and Rodgers 2011).

The President's Use of Priming

Another study by Druckman and Holmes (2004) found that public approval plays a big role in a president's power and in determining the effectiveness of policy. Druckman and Holmes (2004) sought to understand if presidential rhetoric has an effect on their overall presidential approval. To demonstrate how presidents can use rhetoric to shape their own approval, these researchers used a content analysis of a presidential speech, followed up with a laboratory experiment. They used a nationally representative survey to test their hypothesis that what the president says matters in determining what the public thinks of them. To understand how presidential rhetoric affects approval, they argue that "presidential rhetoric shapes approval via priming" (Druckman and Holmes 2004). Taking from Iyengar (1984), Druckman and Holmes present the idea of priming, citing that "priming occurs when media attention to an issue causes people to place special weight on it when constructing evaluations of over-all presidential job performance" (Iyengar et al. 1984). They also introduce the idea of image priming, described as "evaluating presidential candidates, citizens focus not only on issues but also leadership effectiveness, integrity, and empathy" (Iyengar et al. 1984). When the public is repeatedly exposed to certain issues such as immigration or defense policy, they "tend to base their overall approval of the president on their assessment of the president's performance on these issues"

(Druckman and Holmes 2004, 5). They argue that priming occurs because people are typically too lazy to consider every relevant issue when evaluating their overall approval of a president, thus this leads them to judge and formulate their opinion based on the issue that is nationally salient. The priming theory presented by scholars suggests that issues that "receive the most relative attention are most likely to serve as the basis for overall evaluations of presidential leadership." (Krosnick and Brannon 1993, 964). To test whether or not the president can prime their own approval, researchers opted to identify the rhetoric first and then find out how to study the effect of the aforementioned rhetoric. They used a previous study conducted by Cohen and Hill to analyze the State of the Union address by the president. By using the State of the Union address, researchers are able to identify which issue was at the top of the president's agenda. After identifying the issue that the president attempted to prime, they used a laboratory experiment to test for the success of presidential priming and then added a survey to measure the impact of the address. The study found clear evidence that the president can indeed use rhetoric to "influence approval by priming the issues that underlie approval evaluation." Perhaps the most important finding of this study is the fact that "the president can influence their own approval" (Druckman and Holmes 2004). Furthermore, the results of this study lead researchers to ask about accountability. Typically, government officials respond to the preferences of their citizens. However, what happens when the same officials influence those preferences? Researchers in this study question the idea of elite manipulation and whether or not presidential rhetoric is used to enlighten or manipulate the masses. This study concluded that the president has the ability to shape the criteria he is judged on and held accountable for as well as influence priming, more specifically image priming. (Druckman and Holmes 2004). The study identifies limits to the influence of a president via their rhetoric, citing that only in certain conditions can the president

truly shape public opinion. However, the study concludes that "when it comes to his own approval, the president can have an impact via priming."

Presidential priming has been a subject of interest for many political scientists. In 2018, scholars at the University of Michigan published a study on racial priming. The study intended to understand how the rhetoric of politicians on a given issue, in this case race, will affect the power of "racial attitudes in political judgements" (Valentino 2018). Moreover, this study also acknowledges the special power of the implicit racial cues that are utilized in a political context. They conclude that "as public discourse around issues of social welfare, immigration, national security, etc. becomes highly racialized and explicitly hostile, the potential for open racial conflict may rise." In other words, the relevance a politician gives to an issue combined with the way he/she conveys his/her thoughts on it will leave room for conflict between different groups to rise (Valentino 2018, 13).

Bully Pulpit

Scholars have deemed political rhetoric to be one of "the president's main leadership tools for influencing the direction of U.S. legal policy" (Yates and Whitford 2009, 3). Yates and Whitford (2009) analyze the impact political rhetoric has on public agencies while making policy as well as the consequences that stem from that influence. These scholars cite the "going public strategy" first coined by Samuel Kernell (1997). Kernell (1997) describes this as, "the president signaling his policy preferences through his use of rhetoric changes how those agents implement policy" (9). The main approach in the Yates and Whitford article is to focus "on how the use of this strategy affects the way agencies implement their policy, shifting from "what they can do" to "what they ought to do." The president's rhetoric is said to "accentuate and build on the social construction of the problem" which influences the behavior of state agencies immensely (Yates

and Whitford 2009, 7). Findings of this study indicate that "rhetoric transmits policy signals and offers an opportunity to lead policy implementation agents to help them make sense of their role in government." In this study, researchers used the context of narcotics. They focus on the "disproportionate impact of presidential rhetoric on different target populations." They find that in the context of narcotics, a president's rhetoric leads to changed behavior in state agencies, which in turn leads to greater state arrest rates for African Americans than whites (Yates and Whitford 2009). They go on to conclude that "presidents use the bully pulpit to influence how state agencies perceive the importance of a social problem and what they can do about it" (Yates and Whitford 2009, 10). Furthermore, they conclude that the president's rhetoric can have multiple audiences, which in turn influences the behavior of state agencies. In short, if the president places national saliency on certain issues, in this context, narcotics, state agencies will act accordingly and subsequently place more importance on this issue, according to presidential rhetoric.

Previous studies have found that when used correctly, sometimes president can make use of the bully pulpit to influence the behavior of state agencies. However, George Edward's "On Deaf Ears" analyzes the limits of the bully pulpit. Edward analyzes hundreds of public opinion polls from previous presidential administrations to assess the success rate of the bully pulpit. George Edwards argues that presidents are not typically able to change public opinion, contrary to popular belief. He states that "efforts to do may be counterproductive." Edwards argues that "staying private" as opposed to the "going public" strategy (proposed by Tedin, Rottinghaus, and Rodgers) may "be more conducive to a president's legislative success" (Edwards 2003, 130). Therefore, while the bully pulpit may be effective in some case, it is typically not and there are

other methods that a president can use to shift public opinion to meet his political agenda.

Influencing Attitudes and Behavior

It is also important to analyze how we construe target populations to be threatening. In other words, what must the political climate be and what fuels hate and rejection of protected groups? A study conducted by Daniel J. Hopkins presents us with the politicized places hypothesis to understand how "national and local conditions interact to construe immigrants as threatening" (Hopkins 2010, 2). The politicized places hypothesis expands on the idea that salient national rhetoric reinforces a threat, stating that "the people living in changing communities will have more negative attitudes on immigration provided that immigration in nationally salient" (Hopkins 2010, 4). The data from this study came from twelve geocoded surveys ranging from the year 1992-2009, which analyzed the claim that influxes of immigrants combined with salient national rhetoric work together to construe the politicized places hypothesis. Participants were asked questions about current immigration policies and political events. In addition to the geocoded surveys, Hopkins takes from several other sources such as time-serious cross-sectional and panel data to analyze the shift in salient national issues and how that shift explains the interaction of local and national conditions. In this study, Hopkins concludes that an American's ethnic and racial surroundings "influence their attitudes and political behavior" (Hopkins 2010, 5). In other words, if "salient national rhetoric politicizes demographic changes, people's views turn anti-immigrant." According to Hopkins, "as far as immigrants are concerned, the reason for the "threatened responses" are because of the exceptional times," meaning that the current rhetoric at the national level is what is construing immigrants as threatening. (Hopkins 2010, 4)

While the Hopkins study analyzes the conditions that interact to construe immigrants as threatening, the Zhao and Ren study analyzes the conditions that interact to shape public attitudes of police. In a study published by Jihong Solomon Zhao and Ling Ren, they make use of Easton's theory of public support, in order to determine whether or not there exists a "neighborhood-conditioning effect" when it comes to analyzing the factors that affect the public attitudes of police. (Solomon-Zhao and Ren 2014). Researchers sought to understand whether public attitudes of police differ based on different neighborhoods. They attempted to analyze the different dimensions of public attitudes toward police. Their findings show that the "concept of public attitudes toward police is not unitary, but rather multidimensional in nature" (Solomon-Zhao and Ren 2014 18). They found that when measuring public attitudes on police, the importance of "geographic location should be highlighted." Citizens make distinctions between police in general and the police in their neighborhood. There is a neighborhood specific dimension in regard to measuring public attitudes toward police. Scholars concluded that when measuring the attitudes of public towards police, it is important to consider the different kinds of dimensions to those attitudes.

Limits of the Literature

As mentioned above, while the studies find a significant relationship between presidential rhetoric, public opinion and the behavior of state agencies, they remain limited. While the Yates and Whitford study acknowledges that presidential rhetoric can influence the behavior of state agencies, they are not assessing a causal relationship between presidential rhetoric and attitudes toward police. The relevant literature plays exclusive attention to how presidential rhetoric shift public agency's behavior and influences public perception, but how do the shifted behavior of agencies and the public's perception interact together? In other words, if both parties, in this

case, the public and state agencies are manipulated by rhetoric, how does this affect their interactions? Through my research, I plan to analyze how presidential rhetoric affects citizens at the local level, specifically with law enforcement officials. To analyze the effect of rhetoric, I used a survey experiment to assess the causal relationship between presidential rhetoric and attitudes toward police across different racial groups.

CHAPTER II

THEORY

Drawing from Yates and Whitford arguments on how the president can prime the public, I theorize that what the president says can affect public perceptions toward local officials and issues. With the power of the bully pulpit, the president's rhetoric has "trickle down" effects which can heighten divides across local communities. Specifically, I argue that rhetoric that takes a side on the issue of policing and police brutality will have significant effects on how the racial groups in particular will perceive law enforcement officials.

Drawing from Hopkins and Zhao and Ren, it can be argued that in our current, polarized political climate, when the president takes a side on the issue, this further drives a wedge between groups. On the issue of policing, this wedge is driven between people of color and Whites. The racialized nature of supporting police has escalated over time. The events of April 1992 in Los Angeles serve as an example. In April 1992, the city of Los Angeles faced a time of civil unrest when a serious of riots and protests started in response to the acquittal of four police officers who were accused of beating Rodney King and using excessive force. The 1992 Los Angeles Riots left 63 dead and over 2,000 injured. Similar to the events of 1992, the 2015 Baltimore protests serve as another example of why supporting police is met with backlash. The arrest of Freddie Gray, a 25-year-old African American, resulted in injuries to both his neck and spine while being transported in a police vehicle. This prompted subsequent protests from Baltimore residents. Citizens demanded Governor Larry Hogan to address the issues of police brutality. The backlash from the community to Baltimore police department prompted government officials to declare a state of emergency. Subsequently, the police officers involved

in the arrest of Freddie Gray were acquitted, much to the dismay of the public. The 1992 Los Angeles Riots and the 2015 Baltimore protests serve as prime examples of why there is a racial wedge between communities and people of color. The president can prime such racial division by utilizing the bully pulpit. I hypothesize that presidential rhetoric supporting police and downplaying brutality will cause people to have more negative perceptions of the police. I also hypothesize that compared to Whites, people of color will be more likely to have negative views of police and be less inclined to say the police treat all groups equally. Furthermore, I hypothesize that presidential rhetoric supporting police and downplaying police brutality will cause people of color to have more negative views of police.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

In order to test my hypothesis, I decided to use a survey experiment. A survey experiment is a survey research technique in which the interviewing process includes experimental randomization in the survey stimulus (Kellstedt and Whitten 102). The survey experiment was designed via Qualtrics and published on Lucid, (IRB2020-0066D). The sample size of this survey consisted of 1,700 respondents, with at least 30% of respondents being people of color. The questions at the beginning of the survey asked participants basic demographic questions. Questions included the age, gender, partisanship, education level, ethnicity and citizenship. In addition to basic demographic questions, participants were asked about their feelings toward police and about any past experiences they have had with police. Participants were also asked questions about healthcare. For this particular project, the healthcare questions served as "palate cleansers" and were used to distract respondents from the experiment. After participants completed the aforementioned questions on demographics, attitudes on policing and healthcare, they were randomly assigned to either the treatment or control group.

Treatment and Control Groups

This survey experiment randomized participants into two groups: treatment and control. The treatment group were given statements made by President Donald Trump during a speech to New York City law enforcement in July 2017. They were then asked to state the degree to which they agree or disagree with the statement. Figures I and II show the questions/quotes shown to participants who were assigned to the treatment group.

Please read the following statement made by President Trump during a speech **to NYC law enforcement** in July 2017. Select the degree to which you agree or disagree.

"For years and years, [laws have] been made to protect the criminal...Totally protect the criminal, not the officers. You do something wrong, you're in more jeopardy than they are. These laws are stacked against you. We're changing those laws."

○ Strongly agree

○ Agree

○ Somewhat agree

○ Neither agree nor disagree

○ Somewhat disagree

○ Disagree

○ Strongly disagree

Figure I. Treatment Group Quote #1

In the same July 2017 speech, President Trump stated the following **regarding treatment of persons under arrest**. Select the degree to which you agree or disagree.

"Now we're getting them [criminals] out anyway, but we'd like to get them out a lot faster, and when you see these towns and when you see these thugs being thrown into the back of a paddy wagon, you just see them thrown in, rough, I said, please don't be too nice."

○ Strongly agree

○ Agree

○ Somewhat agree

○ Neither agree nor disagree

○ Somewhat disagree

○ Disagree

○ Strongly disagree

Figure II. Treatment Group Quote #2

Participants who were assigned to the control group were given quotes from Bill Gates in 2010 on public education in America and then asked to select the degree to which they agree or disagree. The non-partisan discussion of this topic, especially coming from Bill Gates, made it a viable option to use for the control group. Figures III and IV show the two different quotes given to participants who were assigned to the control group.

Please read the following statement made by Bill Gates in 2010 regarding **public education in America**. Select the degree to which you agree or disagree.

"Schools aren't developing the potential of our kids, and you see that in the dropout rates….The education system is the only reason the dream of equal opportunity has a chance of being delivered—and we're not running a good education system."

○ Strongly agree

○ Agree

○ Somewhat agree

○ Neither agree nor disagree

○ Somewhat disagree

○ Disagree

○ Strongly disagree

Figure III. Control Group Quote #1

In the same 2010 interview, Gates discusses the **evaluation systems for public school teachers**. Select the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following assessment:

"We've ended up with a personnel system that essentially does no evaluation. It doesn't identify whether teachers are weak or strong and gives them no incentives for improving their weak points."

○ Strongly agree

○ Agree

○ Somewhat agree

○ Neither agree nor disagree

○ Somewhat disagree

○ Disagree

○ Strongly disagree

Figure IV: Control Group Quote #2

Dependent Variables and Feeling Thermometers

In addition to the treatment and control variables, there are three dependent variables used to examine the effect of the treatment group on attitudes towards police. In addition to the

outcome variables, participants were again asked for opinions on healthcare in an effort to decrease feelings of manipulation. In the key outcome variable, participants were asked to rate how serious they think violence against police is in the United States on a five-point scale. In addition, they were asked to rate how serious a problem they think police brutality is in the United States. For the third outcome variable, participants were asked how they would rate the job that the police in their community are doing when it comes to treating racial and ethnic groups scale. Please see Appendix A for a list of questions for the outcome variables.

Finally, through the use of a feeling thermometer, participants were asked to rate their feelings towards various institutions in American society. These feeling thermometers asked about Congress, the Supreme Court, presidential administration, healthcare system, public school system, media and the police. For the purposes of this study, it was important to observe the rating of the treatment group towards police in this feeling thermometer.

CHAPTER IV

DATA ANALYSIS

The data for this study was analyzed through Stata, a data analytics software program. In addition to my main independent and dependent variables (the treatment/control and attitudes on police) I also assess the effects of race and ethnicity. Given the current political climate described earlier, for the purpose of this study, it was important to take partisanship into account as well.

Descriptive Statistics

Since this study sought to measure the effect presidential rhetoric has on relations between people of color and police, participants identifying as White were coded into one value while those of other races/ethnicities were encoded into another value. Therefore, if a person identified as white, they were assigned to the "0" value and people who identified with anything other than white, such as Hispanic/Latino, Black/African American, Native American, American Indian or Asian/Pacific Islander were categorized into the "1" value. In addition to ethnicity, participants were also asked to identify their partisanship. For the purpose of this study, partisanship was divided into two variables, each with two different numeric values. The Democrat variable sorted people into two different groups. If a person identified as Democrat, they were assigned to the numeric value "1" while if they identified as Independent, they were sorted into the "0" value. Moreover, for the separate Republican variable, if a person identified as Republican, they were assigned to the "1" value while Independents were assigned to "0". Figures V and Table I show the descriptive statistics for the ethnicity variable and the partisanship variables, respectively.
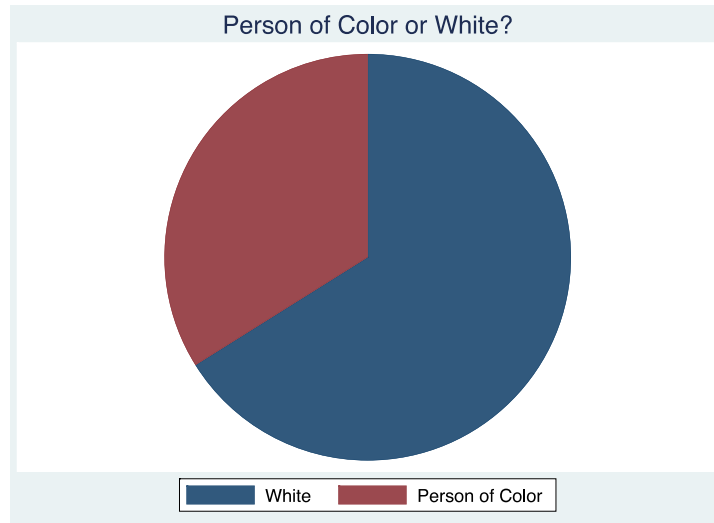
Figure V: Frequency of Participants identifying as either a person of color or white.

Out of the 1,702 participants surveyed, only 34% of participants identified as a person of color, while 66% of participants identified as white.

Table I below denotes the partisanship of participants. Of the 1,610 participants who answered this question, 31% of them identified as Republican, 41% identified as Democrat and 28% identified as Independent or with another party.

Table I: Partisanship of Participants

Party Identification	Frequency	Percent
Republican	491	30.5
Democrat	666	41.4
Independent	453	28.14

Because this was a survey experiment, participants were randomly assigned to either a treatment or control group. The treatment/control variable was given two values. Value "0" meant participants were assigned to the control group while value "1" meant participants were assigned to the treatment group. The purpose for coding both the treatment and control groups into one variable was to analyze the effect of the treatment/control on outcome variables. Table II below shows descriptive statistics of the treatment/control variable. The table below illustrates how many participants were assigned to the treatment and control groups, respectively.

Table II: Descriptive Statistics of Random Assignments to Treatment/Control Groups

Treatment/Control	Freq.	Percent
0 (Control)	904	53.11%
1 (Treatment)	798	46.89%
Total	1,702	100.00

In order to measure the effect the treatment group had on attitudes toward policing, participants were asked three questions to measure the outcomes. Again, these questions included feelings on the job police does on treating all ethnic populations equally, how serious a problem police brutality is in the United States and how serious a problem violence is against police.

In addition to these variables, participants were given a feeling thermometer. On a scale from 1 – 100, participants were asked to express their attitudes about police by applying a numeric rating of their feelings, with ratings from 0 to 50 degrees meaning unfavorable feelings

while 50 to 100 degrees means favorable and warm. Figure VI shows the ratings of participants on a 100-point scale.
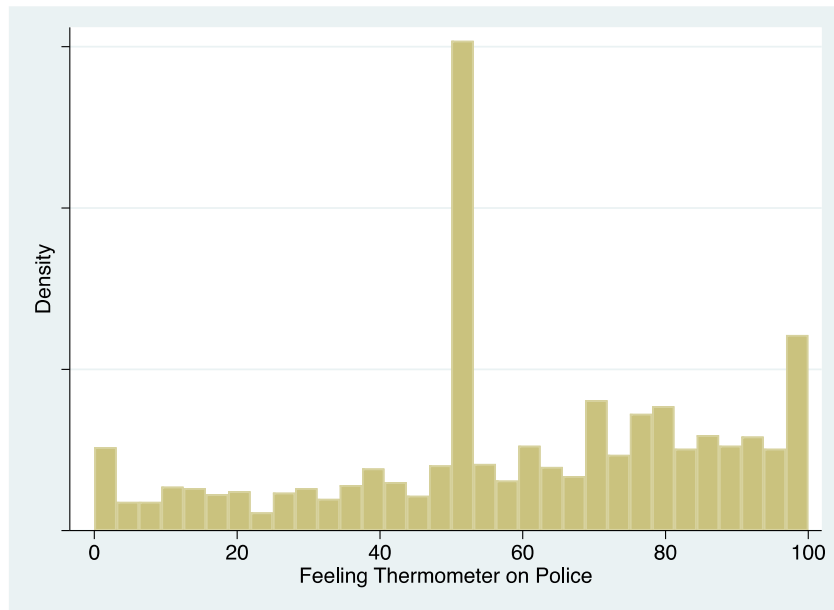

Figure VI: Histogram of Feeling Thermometer

The histogram above shows the "feelings" of participants on police. The feeling thermometer showed a mean of 59.54. The standard deviation of the feeling thermometer was 26.6. Therefore, on average, participants felt "favorable and warm" toward the police.

Results

To measure the effect the treatment had on outcome variables, I ran regressions with my outcome variables, treatment variable and control variables (people of color and partisanship). The first regression I ran included the treatment variable and the first outcome variable: police brutality along with people of color for a control variable. Table III below shows the results for the first regression.

Table III: Regression Results with treatment variable (x) police brutality variable (y) with control variable (people of color).

Police Brutality	Coefficient	p-value	R-squared value
Treatment(*n*=1702)	.0421305	0.455	0.0639
People of Color(*n*=1702)	.6263523	0.000	
Constant	3.162786	0.000	

Table III shows a regression with variables on feelings on police brutality (y) and treatment (x) and people of color (control). The R-squared value is 0.0639 %, meaning that only .0639% of the variance of police brutality (y) is accounted for by the treatment (x) and people of color (control). The coefficient result was 0.042 and the p-value was 0.455 for the treatment variable meaning that there is not a statistically significant relationship between the treatment variable and how serious a problem people perceive police brutality to be. In simpler terms, whether or not people were exposed to the treatment or control group made no difference on how serious a problem they perceive police brutality to be. On the other hand, the coefficient value for the people of color variable showed 0.626 with a p-value of 0.00. The p-value does not exceed the 0.05 significance level, meaning that a person of color will view the problem of police brutality to be more serious than a white person. The treatment had no significant effect on how participants perceives the severity of police brutality. This is called the pre-treatment effect, meaning that participants already have life experiences that will affect their responses despite the nature of the treatment in the experiment. The treatment will not shift their response in any way.

Table IV: Regression Results for treatment variable (x) police brutality variable (y) with Republican/Democrat variables (control).

Police Brutality	Coefficient	p-value	R-Squared Value
Treatment (*n*=1702)	.046231	0.401	0.1089%
Republican (*n*=1702)	-.6856459	0.000	
Democrat(*n*=1702)	.4986819	0.000	
Constant	3.28115	0.000	

Table IV above shows the regression results for the police brutality outcome variable, treatment variable and Republican/Democrat variables. The results show a .0462 coefficient for treatment with a p-value of 0.401. Because the p-value exceeds the 0.05 significance level, we cannot reject the null hypothesis and can conclude there is no significant effect of the treatment on attitudes on how serious a problem police brutality is in the United States. However, for the Republican variable, there is a negative coefficient of -0.68. The negative coefficient that there is a negative relationship between being a member of the Republican party and how serious a problem police brutality is. There is 0.00 p-value, meaning being a member of the Republican party makes one less likely to perceive police brutality as a problem. That is, .4 degrees less than Independents on the five-point scale. The coefficient for Democrat shows to be .498 with a p-value of 0.000, meaning that Democrats find police brutality to be more of a problem by almost .5 degrees on the five point scale, compared to Independents. There is an r-squared value of 10%, meaning that the responses on police brutality are more so accounted for by partisanship.

Table V: Regression Results with treatment variable (x) police equality (y) variable and people of color variable (control)

Police Equality	Coefficient	P-value	R-Squared
Treatment (*n*=1702)	-.0006443	0.991	0.0356
People of Color(*n*=1702)	-.455671	0.000	
Constant	3.294099	0.000	

Table V shows the regression results with variables police equality (y), the treatment variable (x and the people of color variable (control). The police equality variable asked participants to rate the job that police were doing when it came to treating ethnic groups equally. The R-squared value is very low, meaning that only 0.036% of the variance in the police equality variable is accounted for by the treatment variable and people of color variable. The coefficient of the treatment variable was -0.02730, meaning there is a negative relationship. There is no significant difference in variance between the treatment and control group when it came to responses in the police equality variable. This means that the treatment had little to no effect on the responses given in the outcome variables. The p-value was once again, not statistically significant because it exceeded the 0.05 significance level. For the people of color variable, the coefficient is -0.455671, which indicates a negative relationship between people of color and police equality. This means that there is a negative relationship meaning that it is less likely for people of color to agree that police are doing a good job at treating racial and ethnic groups equally. The p-value is 0.000, indicating a statistically significant relationship between the responses on police equality and the race of participants.

Table VI: Regression Results with treatment variable (x) police equality variable (y) and

Republican/Democrat variables (control)

Police Equality	Coefficient	p-value	R-Squared
Treatment (*n*=1702)	.0011027	0.984	0.0658%
Republican(*n*=1702)	.4528102	0.000	
Democrat(*n*=1702)	-.2196745	0.001	
Constant	3.110788	0.000	

Table VI shows the regression results with the treatment variable (x), police equality variable (y) and Republican/Democrat variables acting as control. The coefficient for the treatment is 0.001 with a p-value of 0.984. The relationship between treatment and police equality is not statistically significant because it exceeds the 0.05 significance level. The coefficient for the Republican party is .452 with a p-value of 0.00. This leads us to reject the null hypothesis and accept the claim that there is a statistically significant relationship between Republicans and how they perceive the job that police are doing when it comes to treating ethnic groups equally. The coefficient for Democrats is -0.219, indicating a negative relationship. The coefficient indicates a negative relationship between being a member of the Democratic party and how equally they believe the police are treating racial/ethnic groups. The p-value is 0.001, which is still below the significance level of 0.05. This means that being members of the Democratic party tend to rate the job of police treating racial/ethnic groups equally on a lower scale than Republicans. This relationship is statistically significant.

Table VII: Regression Results with treatment variable (x) police violence (y) variable and people of color variable (control).

Police Violence	Coefficient	p-value	R-Squared
Treatment(*n*=1702)	.0282735	0.597	0.0076
People of Color(*n*=1702)	-.1993315	0.000	
Constant	3.58995	0.000	

Table VII depicts the regression results for the treatment variable, control variable and the last outcome variable: police violence. Once again, there seems to be little to no difference on the answers participants provide on the outcome variable questions based on their assignment to either the treatment or control group. The R-squared value is at .001%. There seems to be no statistical significance between these two variables, as the p-value is 0.752 which exceeds the 0.005 significance level. For people of color, there is a negative relationship with the coefficient being -0.199. The p-value is 0.000, meaning there is a statistically significant relationship between people of color and how serious a problem they think violence against police is in the United States.

Table VIII: Regression Results with treatment variable (x) police violence (y) and

Democrat/Republican (control)

Police Violence	Coefficient	p-value	R-Squared
Treatment(*n*=1702)	.0404487	0.441	0.0435
Democrat(*n*=1702)	-.0965524	0.132	
Republican(*n*=1702)	.4101881	0.000	
Constant	3.439394	0.000	

Table VIII shows the regression for treatment variable, police violence while taking into account partisanship. Treatment once again shows a 0.441 p-value, meaning there is no statistically significant relationship between treatment and outcomes on police violence. Similarly, there seems to also be no significant relationship between Democrats and how severe they perceive violence against police to be. However, there seems to be a relationship between Republicans and the police violence variable. The coefficient for Republicans is .410 with a p-value of 0.000. This means that Republicans tend to think perceive violence against police to be a bigger problem than Democrats. There is a strong correlation between being a member of the Republican party and thinking violence against police is a severe problem.

Table IX: Regression Results with treatment (x) and people of color (y)

People of Color	Coefficient	p-value	R-Squared
Treatment	-0.295	0.199	0.0010

Table IX shows the regression results with the treatment variable and people of color variable. This regression is intended to observe whether or not the treatment has an effect on this group. There is a coefficient of -0.295, indicating a negative relationship between people of color and the treatment group. There is a p-value of 0.199, indicating that there is no statistically significant relationship between the treatment variable and people of color variable.

All regressions showed little to no variance among answers participants provided on their outcome variable questions based on their assignments to treatment or control. However, when taking into account their race and partisanship, there were statistically significant relationships. Partisanship and race have significant effects on perceiving police brutality as a problem and on feelings on whether the police treat all groups equally. There is little evidence that presidential rhetoric has an effect on the attitudes of people of color about the police. When taking into account other factors, like race and partisanship, there is a much clearer relationship. This means that rhetoric does not play a big role in how people perceive their relationships with law enforcement. No matter the nature of the treatment, it is apparent that people already have preconceived ideas on law enforcement. These preconceived ideas possibly stem from their own previous experiences, whether as a person of color and certainly correlate with partisanship. The survey experiment treatment seemed to have no effect on how people perceive violence against police, police brutality and how good of a job police does when it comes to treating racial/ethnic groups equally. However, when taking into account race, it is apparent that people of color seem to have more concern in regard to these issues. Partisanship plays a significant role as well, due to the current political climate and the polarization between parties.

CONCLUSION

This research indicates a contribution to the study of presidential rhetoric and attitudes toward the police. Donald Trump's racially charged administration has caused a political uproar, especially among people of color. Because of this, it is important to study the effect rhetoric can have on society. The results of this study indicate that presidential rhetoric does not have a direct effect on relations between people of color. People of color are already concerned with relations between police, even before taking the survey. It is clear that a person's race and partisanship play a significant role in assessing relationships with law enforcement. When participants go into the survey, they have experiences that they bring in with them. There are other factors working behind the scenes that influence people's opinions on relations with police.

Although presidential rhetoric does not play a substantial role in relations between people of color and police, presidential rhetoric can play a significant role in how Americans perceive immigrants. President Trump's presidency has been heavily based on building a border wall to ensure the safety of the country from immigrants. Therefore, one way to expand this research would be to redesign the survey experiment to focus on immigration and then analyze the different attitudes of Democrats/Republicans and see if presidential rhetoric plays an effect on their stance on immigration.

The results from this study lead me to reject my initial hypothesis that presidential rhetoric that supports police and downplays brutality will cause people to have negative perceptions of police, specifically people of color. However, the study did find that compared to Whites, people of color are less inclined to say that police treat all groups equally. Although my hypothesis was rejected, this study highlights what George Edwards refers to as the "limits of the

bully pulpit" (Edwards 2003). The president cannot always shift public opinion purely on what

he says. There are other factors that contribute to public opinion thus concluding that the bully

pulpit is not always effective.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A: Outcome Variable Questions

How serious a problem do you think police brutality is in the United States?

○ Extremely serious

○ Very serious

○ Moderately serious

○ Not too serious

○ Not at all serious

How would you rate the job that police in your community are doing when it comes treating **racial and ethnic groups equally**?

○ Very poor

○ Below average

○ Average

○ Above average

○ Excellent

How serious a problem do you think violence against police is in the United States?

○ Extremely serious

○ Very serious

○ Moderately serious

○ Not too serious

○ Not at all serious