Public Pressure or Peer Influence: What Shapes Police Executives' Views on Civilian Oversight?*

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Abstract

Demand for democratic accountability in policing is accelerating, yet little is understood about how law enforcement executives engage in policy learning around civilian oversight. This paper shares the results of a novel survey experiment administered to all U.S. police chiefs and sheriffs. We assess whether police executives' attitudes towards civilian oversight are responsive to 1) state-level public opinion (drawing on an n=16,840 survey) and 2) prior adoption of civilian review boards in large agencies. Results from over 1,300 police executives reveal that law enforcement leaders are responsive to peer adoption but much less to public opinion, despite overwhelming support amongst voters. Further, we find that agencies with an established oversight board are highly supportive of their existence, while elected sheriffs are much less likely to support civilian oversight. Our results indicate that policy learning and reform around civilian oversight are possible, though sources of reform are not themselves primarily democratic.

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Keywords: democratic policing, civilian review boards, policing, survey experiment, elite attitudes, public attitudes, public oversight

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There is a legitimacy crisis in law enforcement today, resulting partly from highly-publicized use of force incidents and arguably inadequate institutional responses to them[1]. In response, attention has turned to identifying reforms that might shed light on and ultimately reduce police officers' use of force and potential misconduct. In line with core principles of democratic policing, such as accountability and transparency[2,3], one commonly-proposed reform is the creation of civilian review boards (CRBs) to enhance civilian oversight of law enforcement activities[4–6]. A central motivation for the adoption of CRBs is a concern that police-led investigations into misconduct complaints are neither fair nor effective, whether in fact or in the eye of the public[7]. While the dominant view within law enforcement is that police-led investigations are sufficient, reformers have argued that CRBs are necessary to promote fair and transparent investigations, ensure accessible complaint processes, improve public trust and perceptions of procedural justice, and ultimately deter police misconduct through public accountability[2,4,8–10]. While we lack empirical evidence showing the real-world impact of CRBs on police conduct[11], CRBs are "based on the premise that although the public has relinquished to the police the authority to enforce the law, the public retains the right to control the police bureaucracy externally, if the need arises"[12] (p. 199).

Despite these ostensible benefits and frequent public calls for the establishment of CRBs, uptake in law enforcement has been slow and scattered, confined to only the largest agencies[6,13–15]. Among approximately 18,000 policing agencies in the United States, there are currently fewer than 200 with active CRBs[14], heavily concentrated amongst the largest metropolitan police agencies[6]. Notably, this lackluster adoption cannot be attributed to the novelty of the proposal, as calls for CRBs significantly predate the current reform efforts by over 70 years. Indeed, the first civilian-led police oversight body in the U.S. was established in 1948[1] to oversee the Metropolitan Police in Washington, D.C.[16], and calls for CRB-style bodies have been echoed every decade since[12,15]. In light of this sizable history of calls for reform, what accounts for the mismatch between demand for reform and the supply of CRBs?

While various actors (e.g., unions, municipal government leaders) may influence reform efforts, it is police executives—chiefs and sheriffs—who arguably play the most critical role in determining whether a CRB will be established or discouraged in a given community: their decisions set the priorities, culture, and behavior of their agency and the employees within[17]. Indeed, twentieth-century police reforms were most successful when they were spearheaded by cohorts of police executives rather than by Progressive reformers[18].[2] Baseline preferences amongst police executives thus present significant obstacles to CRB adoption; however, these barriers may not be insurmountable.

[1]Some authors take an expanded definition of civilian review, and put the earliest iterations as far back as 1861 in St. Louis, MO, and 1865 in Milwaukee, WI[6].

[2]Historically, unions have been more skeptical of CRBs than police executives, and inviting civilians to reviewing departmental policy and outcomes has instead been driven by chiefs and sheriffs[19].

For example, while resistance to CRBs from police executives stretches back to the earliest reform proposals[20], professional organizations for executives such as the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) have softened their opposition. Similar evolution in the preferences of police executives may have occurred in recent years in the case of body-worn cameras[21,22]. Thus, while scholars have suggested that chiefs and sheriffs might be initially opposed to CRBs due to concerns over power-sharing and the risk that external oversight could impede effective management[3,6,9,23], these attitudes may similarly be movable. In turn, this paper devotes attention to the significantly under-studied concept of policy learning in the context of policing, focusing on the public- and peer-based mechanisms driving support for CRB implementation, or lack thereof, amongst police chiefs and sheriffs.

When police executives make determinations about reform, they are responsible for weighing considerations such as pressures from political elites, policy advocates, peers, and the public; evidence of policy effectiveness[24]; and technical feasibility and financial constraints. Yet the research literature around policing executives is the least developed among police studies, lagging behind line officer and supervisor research[25] despite nearly thirty years of scholarly complaints that "Not much is known about police chiefs"[26] p.3.[3] That is, although we know that policy beliefs among elites generally shift in response to changes in the institutional environments[28], little is known about how police executives in particular make sense of their institutional environment and which "sovereign influences" gain their attention[25]. Thus more research is needed to understand how policy learning, transfer, and diffusion of policy innovations, such as those surrounding CRBs, occur in the context of policing, especially given potentially competing influences[29,30].

Of special importance, as public officials, police executives—whether elected directly or appointed by an elected politician—have a special responsibility to incorporate public input and public needs in their decision-making. Decades of research indicate that the attitudes and behaviors of elites in the criminal justice system generally are responsive to public opinion, and that public opinion is a determinant of key outcomes such as the incarceration rate, sentencing in criminal trials, capital punishment, and expenditures[31,32]. For example, research has linked changes in elected judges' behavior to public views as retention elections draw closer[33], and shown that judges and prosecutors are sensitive to public preferences when making decisions in death penalty cases[34,35]. Thus, while there are both theoretical and normative reasons to expect police executives to act in a similar fashion, more research is needed to understand the role and salience of public opinion for police chiefs and sheriffs[36], for example whether the nature of their selection (appointed or elected), political ideology, or agency size condition their attention to public concern[37,38].

Further, even where public opinion matters, we do not know how it might be weighed in comparison

[3]Bittner[27] famously claimed police were the "best known and least understood" (p. 285) of governmental institutions, and this remains even more true for those at the elite levels of the institution.

to other sources of influence for police executives. Another such key influence is elite-level peer influence, namely socially-oriented policy learning that occurs through participation in epistemic communities, known to function as a powerful conduit for policy learning generally[39,40]. While peer influence is known to have a significant effect on line officers[41,42], less is known about how (or whether) that influence operates at the executive level. Relatedly, police executives typically belong to strong and active professional organizations including the Major Cities Chiefs Association (MCCA), which collects and distributes information for police executives, such as how many of the largest policing agencies have adopted specific policies[43]. Evidence indicates that professional networks marked by high levels of interpersonal trust, hierarchy, and homogeneity may foster heightened policy learning[44,45], and these features may accurately characterize policing networks, deriving from the nature of the profession itself. That is, in addition to the reliance on hierarchy in policing, shared experiences of external scrutiny and job difficulties foster high levels of in-group trust and homophily[46]. Thus, attitudes toward CRBs may be shaped as police executives in these networks learn from early adopters or imitate police agencies in larger cities, mechanisms known to matter for government entities such as transportation and health care agencies[47].

To examine the impact of these potential public and peer influences on police executive preferences for CRBs, we conducted a pre-registered experiment embedded in a survey distributed to 13,287 U.S. police chiefs and sheriffs via email between February 1 and March 7, 2022. 1,331 individuals completed the survey (a 9.98% response rate), and as shown in SI Table A2, respondents are representative of the broader population of chiefs and sheriffs in the United States. As part of the experimental design, we provided respondents with current evidence regarding either state-level public attitudes or peer adoption of CRBs in major policing agencies. To provide state-level public opinion data, we partnered with a national polling firm, Data for Progress, to survey 16,840 individuals about their support for CRBs both with and without independent disciplinary power, an essential distinction in the scope of CRB powers[5,48].[4] To provide data on peer adoption, we drew on information curated by the MCCA.

Police executives were then randomly assigned to a control condition or one of three informational treatments: 1) state-specific public support for CRBs without disciplinary power, 2) state-specific public support for CRBs with disciplinary power (firing), and 3) MCCA information about peer adoption of CRBs. We measure impacts on general feelings toward CRBs, willingness to adopt CRBs, and preferences regarding appropriate powers for CRBs. We also explore whether their support for CRBs is conditioned on other factors such as police executive position (chief versus sheriff), prior implementation and experience with a CRB, and political ideology.[5] In sum, through comparison to a control group, experimentally providing

[4]Figure A2 in SI Section A.5 displays the state-level public support rates for CRBs without disciplinary power provided to respondents in the associated treatment group. CRBs without disciplinary power garner majority support in all states.

[5]Additional details about our sample, treatments, outcomes, national polling on CRBs, and analysis strategy are provided

respondents with accurate and up-to-date public and peer information allows us to investigate how police chiefs and sheriffs engage in policy learning regarding this critical question of civilian oversight.

Results

Police Executive Responsiveness to Public Support and Peer Diffusion of CRBs

We find that police chiefs and sheriffs are highly responsive to information about peer adoption of CRBs but much less responsive to public support regarding CRBs. Table 1 reports the results of regressing standardized versions of our outcomes of interest—feelings toward CRBs, willingness to establish a CRB, and number of powers deemed appropriate for a CRB— on individual treatment indicators and covariates.[6] With standardized outcome measures, coefficients can be interpreted as standard deviation changes, and treatment effects can be more easily compared across outcomes. Across outcomes, we find that information about the diffusion of CRBs across peer law enforcement agencies—the Peer CRB Adoption treatment—increases police executives' feelings toward CRBs, willingness to establish a CRB, and support of more expansive CRB powers (such as the right to subpoena officers or review disciplinary actions). In particular, the Peer CRB Adoption treatment increased feelings toward CRBs by 0.18 standard deviations, perceptions of appropriate powers by a sizable 0.24 standard deviations, and willingness to establish a CRB by 0.16 standard deviations. These treatment effects are all statistically significant, except for the impact on CRB establishment, which is borderline significant at the 0.1 level. This suggests that police executives' opinions on CRBs can be meaningfully shaped by the practices of peers.

As for the public support treatments, effects are much more modest. Information about public support in chiefs' and sheriffs' own states for CRBs with merely investigatory and with disciplinary power—the Public CRB Support and Public CRB Support w/ Firing treatments—*does not increase police executives' feelings toward CRBs nor willingness to establish a CRB.*[7] However, public support does increase perceptions of appropriate CRB powers by 0.18 standard deviations (0.34 powers) and 0.30 standard deviations (0.56 powers) in the support and disciplinary treatments respectively. The fact that this signal of public support

in the Methods section. Details about each pre-registered hypothesis are included in Appendix A.4.

[6]SI Section A.3 presents alternative modeling specifications, including results using non-standardized outcome measures, without covariates, and with only the pre-registered covariates. Results do not differ substantively from what is presented in Table 1.

[7]With at least 50% of members of the public in support of CRBs with investigatory powers in all states, the Public CRB Support treatment serves as a consistent positive signal of public support for CRBs. Also, we find that higher levels of state-level public support do not produce significantly different responses from police executives, as presented in SI Table A9. As public support for CRBs with disciplinary power is more varied, the Public CRB Support w/ Firing treatment is not a consistent positive signal. Nonetheless, we again find that higher levels of support do not produce significantly different effects, as seen in SI Table A9.

for particularly empowered ("disciplinary") CRBs substantially and significantly increased the number of powers that police chiefs and sheriffs deem appropriate for CRBs is striking. This suggests that, while perhaps unyielding in their general affect and overall support of CRBs, police chiefs and sheriffs may be movable on some policy dimensions, constituting some evidence of policy bargaining or moderation of preferences in line with public opinion. (The next section devotes attention to the question of *which* individual powers police executives supported at greater rates following treatment.)

Table 1 also reveals a few noteworthy associations between police executive characteristics and attitudes toward CRBs. Of interest, sheriffs are marginally less willing to establish a CRB and are significantly and substantially less supportive of ceding power to CRBs. Additionally, police executives in areas *with an existing CRB* are much more positive in their feelings toward CRBs—by nearly one standard deviation—and are more supportive of granting power to CRBs by about half a standard deviation. However, we caution that these results are not causal and may instead reflect underlying police executive characteristics associated with the establishment of the CRB in the first place. Finally, Republicans hold consistently less positive and supportive attitudes toward CRBs.[8]

Individual Powers Deemed Appropriate for CRBs

Given the sizable increases in the number of powers that police executives deemed appropriate to grant to CRBs following treatment, we explored *which individual powers* experienced the greatest movement in support. Table 2 reports treatment effects on each proposed CRB power—powers to investigate complaints, subpoena witnesses, subpoena records, recommend discipline, impose discipline, review discipline, hear citizen appeals, and hear officer appeals.[9] The coefficients in the first nine columns of Table 2 can be interpreted as percentage point changes in support for the appropriateness of CRBs holding the associated power. The last column reports effects on the total number of powers deemed appropriate, corresponding to the last column of Table 1, although unstandardized here.

We find heterogeneous effects of the treatments on individual powers.[10] The Peer CRB Adoption treatment increased support for CRB powers to: investigate complaints (12 percentage points), hear citizen appeals (17 percentage points), and hear officer appeals (12 percentage points). Similarly, the Public CRB Support treatment increased support for CRBs to: investigate complaints (8 percentage points), hear citizen appeals (13 percentage points), and hear officer appeals (10 percentage points). Note that treatment effects

[8] We return to these characteristics in a subsequent section in when we discuss results for our pre-registered hypotheses regarding treatment heterogeneity.

[9] These powers included in our study design are based on the list of CRB powers identified and investigated in a study by the Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) within the U.S. Department of Justice [43].

[10] Note that we did not pre-register hypotheses regarding the effects of our treatments on particular powers. Therefore, the results presented in this section should be considered exploratory.

Table 1: Effects of Informational Treatments on Police Executive Attitudes Toward CRBs

	Feeling	Establish	Appropriate Powers
Treatment			
Public CRB Support	0.114	−0.043	0.181*
	(0.082)	(0.093)	(0.084)
Public CRB Support w/ Firing	−0.094	0.033	0.297***
	(0.082)	(0.093)	(0.084)
Peer CRB Adoption	0.181*	0.164+	0.240**
	(0.081)	(0.092)	(0.084)
Controls			
Sheriff	−0.063	−0.193*	−0.253**
	(0.078)	(0.088)	(0.080)
Current CRB	0.960***		0.549***
	(0.083)		(0.086)
Independent	−0.448***	−0.117	−0.388***
	(0.104)	(0.120)	(0.107)
Republican	−0.433***	−0.282*	−0.419***
	(0.095)	(0.110)	(0.099)
FTE 25-49	−0.056	0.099	−0.210**
	(0.075)	(0.084)	(0.077)
FTE 50-99	−0.022	0.447***	−0.102
	(0.087)	(0.100)	(0.090)
FTE 100-499	−0.243*	0.490***	−0.257*
	(0.110)	(0.131)	(0.113)
FTE 500-999	0.238	1.053+	−0.195
	(0.338)	(0.574)	(0.349)
FTE 1000+	0.025	1.785***	0.035
	(0.360)	(0.495)	(0.371)
Years in Position	0.000	0.002	−0.001
	(0.005)	(0.006)	(0.005)
N	1071	905	1069
R2	0.15	0.06	0.09
R2 Adj.	0.136	0.052	0.077
F	13.984	5.136	7.817

Survey February 1 to March 7, 2022.

Reference categories: Chief; Democrat; Sworn Personnel < 25

+ p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

are concentrated on the more modest exercises of power, i.e., involving investigating and hearing complaints.

However, results are more striking for the Public CRB Support with Firing treatment, which again emphasized public support for CRBs with investigatory *and* disciplinary power. While this treatment did not increase support for granting CRBs the power to impose or review discipline, it did significantly increase support for granting CRBs the power to *recommend* discipline (14 percentage points) and to subpoena witnesses (6 percentage points). Movement on these especially controversial powers may again constitute evidence of policy bargaining wherein police chiefs and sheriffs update their policy preferences more forcefully when responding to especially *distant* public opinion. We return to this intriguing possibility in the Discussion.

Heterogeneity by Position, Current CRB Status, and Partisanship

Finally, drawing on interactive model specifications, we ask whether different characteristics of police executives and their agencies are associated with different responses to information about public support for and peer adoption of CRBs. We first hypothesized that sheriffs, who are almost all elected, would respond more strongly to information about public support for CRBs than appointed police chiefs. That is, we expected that sheriffs' greater electoral concerns[37,49,50] would lead them to update more strongly in favor of CRBs when presented with information about public support. Surprisingly, we find no support for this hypothesis. As depicted in Figure 1, police chiefs and sheriffs responded similarly to the informational treatments: neither public CRB support treatment produced differences in chiefs' and sheriffs' feelings toward CRBs, willingness to establish a CRB, and number of powers deemed appropriate.[11]

Next, we conducted an exploratory investigation into whether police executives in areas with existing CRBs respond differently to the treatments about public support and peer adoption than police executives in areas without CRBs. Figure 2 presents results. We find that our informational treatments do not differently affect the feelings of police executives with and without current CRBs ($p = 0.28$ for Public CRB Support, $p = 0.67$ for Public CRB Support with Firing, and $p = 0.52$ for Peer CRB Adoption). However, police executives with current CRBs *do* deem more powers appropriate for CRBs as a result of treatment than police executives without CRBs. In particular, the Public CRB Support treatment increased the powers deemed appropriate by police executives with current CRBs by a sizable 0.57 standard deviations more than police executives without CRBs ($p = 0.02$). Additionally, the Peer CRB Adoption treatment increased the powers deemed appropriate by police executives with current CRBs by 0.52 standard deviations ($p = 0.04$). However, the Public CRB Support w/ Firing treatment had no differential effect ($p = 0.14$). Overall, these results raise the possibility that feed-forward effects may play a role in police accountability

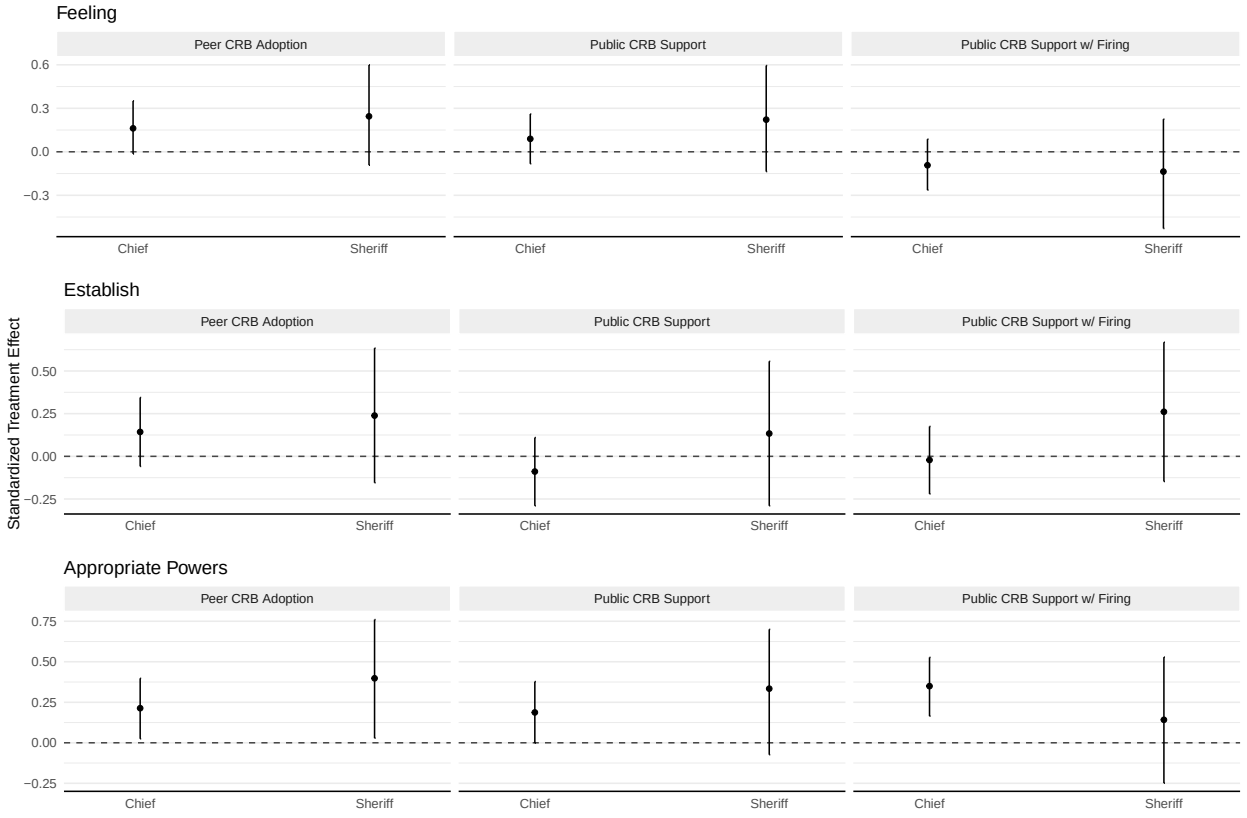
[11] Although not directly the topic of interest for this hypothesis, we also find no difference in the responses of police chiefs and sheriffs to information about peer adoption of CRBs ($p = 0.66$, $p = 0.66$, and $p = 0.27$, respectively).

Table 2: Impacts on Individual CRB Powers Deemed Appropriate

	Investigate Complaints	Subpoena Witnesses	Subpoena Records	Recommend Discipline	Impose Discipline	Review Discipline	Hear Citizen Appeals	Hear Officer Appeals	No Powers	Total Appropriate Powers
Public CRB Support	0.078*	0.019	0.011	0.010	0.003	-0.006	0.130**	0.095*	-0.074+	0.341*
	(0.036)	(0.025)	(0.026)	(0.036)	(0.014)	(0.042)	(0.042)	(0.041)	(0.041)	(0.159)
Public CRB Support w/ Firing	0.091*	0.055*	0.038	0.142***	0.006	0.012	0.108*	0.107**	-0.078+	0.559***
	(0.036)	(0.025)	(0.026)	(0.036)	(0.014)	(0.042)	(0.042)	(0.041)	(0.041)	(0.159)
Peer CRB Adoption	0.122***	0.040	0.017	0.022	-0.019	-0.020	0.166***	0.123**	-0.109**	0.452**
	(0.036)	(0.025)	(0.025)	(0.036)	(0.014)	(0.042)	(0.042)	(0.040)	(0.040)	(0.158)
Sheriff	-0.089**	-0.049*	-0.058*	-0.051	-0.005	-0.086*	-0.085*	-0.054	0.093*	-0.478**
	(0.034)	(0.024)	(0.024)	(0.034)	(0.013)	(0.040)	(0.040)	(0.039)	(0.039)	(0.151)
Current CRB	0.018	0.092***	0.095***	0.130***	0.104***	0.217***	0.137**	0.243***	-0.227***	1.035***
	(0.036)	(0.026)	(0.026)	(0.037)	(0.014)	(0.043)	(0.043)	(0.041)	(0.041)	(0.161)
Independent	-0.140**	-0.095**	-0.076*	-0.149**	-0.031+	-0.056	-0.112*	-0.073	0.134**	-0.732***
	(0.046)	(0.032)	(0.033)	(0.046)	(0.018)	(0.054)	(0.054)	(0.052)	(0.052)	(0.202)
Republican	-0.096*	-0.112***	-0.087**	-0.172***	-0.041*	-0.089+	-0.099*	-0.094*	0.142**	-0.789***
	(0.042)	(0.029)	(0.030)	(0.042)	(0.016)	(0.050)	(0.050)	(0.048)	(0.048)	(0.186)
FTE 25-49	-0.084*	-0.051*	-0.044+	-0.052	-0.015	-0.021	-0.050	-0.079*	0.071+	-0.396**
	(0.033)	(0.023)	(0.023)	(0.033)	(0.013)	(0.039)	(0.039)	(0.037)	(0.037)	(0.145)
FTE 50-99	-0.080*	0.026	0.022	-0.058	-0.019	0.064	-0.045	-0.101*	-0.029	-0.192
	(0.038)	(0.027)	(0.027)	(0.039)	(0.015)	(0.045)	(0.045)	(0.043)	(0.043)	(0.170)
FTE 100-499	-0.128**	-0.049	-0.049	-0.022	0.014	0.025	-0.144*	-0.132*	0.154**	-0.484*
	(0.048)	(0.034)	(0.034)	(0.049)	(0.019)	(0.057)	(0.057)	(0.054)	(0.054)	(0.213)
FTE 500-999	0.116	-0.023	-0.032	0.039	-0.101+	-0.030	-0.100	-0.237	-0.088	-0.368
	(0.149)	(0.104)	(0.106)	(0.150)	(0.058)	(0.175)	(0.175)	(0.168)	(0.168)	(0.657)
FTE 1000+	0.051	0.176	0.180	0.298+	-0.058	-0.420*	-0.010	-0.151	0.124	0.066
	(0.158)	(0.111)	(0.113)	(0.160)	(0.062)	(0.187)	(0.186)	(0.179)	(0.179)	(0.699)
Intercept	0.311***	0.153***	0.153***	0.355***	0.063**	0.470***	0.430***	0.370***	0.258***	2.305***
	(0.050)	(0.035)	(0.036)	(0.050)	(0.020)	(0.059)	(0.059)	(0.057)	(0.057)	(0.221)
N	1069	1069	1069	1069	1069	1069	1069	1069	1069	1069
R2	0.04	0.05	0.04	0.06	0.07	0.04	0.04	0.06	0.07	0.09
R2 Adj.	0.029	0.035	0.027	0.045	0.054	0.029	0.030	0.049	0.055	0.077
F	3.467	4.013	3.254	4.899	5.731	3.443	3.560	5.246	5.769	7.817

Survey February 1 to March 7, 2022.
Reference categories: Chief; No Current CRB; Democrat; Agency Size < 25
+ p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

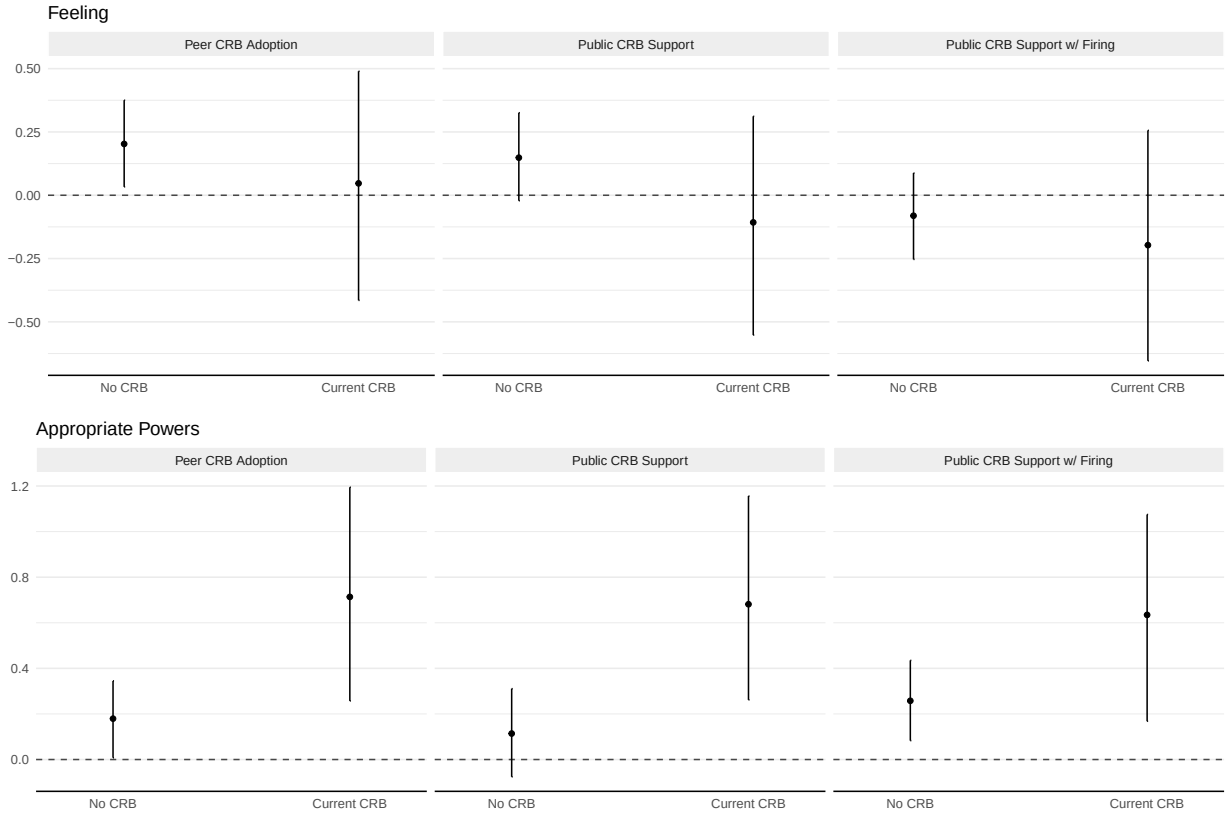
Figure 1: Police Chief and Sheriff Responses to Informational Treatments



reform and institution-building. Once structures and procedures for civilian oversight such as CRBs are established, police executives may be more likely to support and invest additional power into such institutions in the future. However, we again caution that these results are not causal and may instead reflect different underlying predispositions of police executives with and without current CRBs.

Finally, we investigated whether there were partisan differences in the impacts of the public opinion and peer adoption treatments on police executives. Figure 3 reports results. Compared to Independents, we find that Democratic police executives were more responsive to information about public support for CRBs: the Public CRB Support treatment increased Democratic executives' feelings by 0.60 standard deviations more ($p = 0.04$) and support for appropriate powers by 0.59 standard deviations more ($p = 0.05$) than for Independents. We do not find any differences between Republicans and Independents in responses to the public support treatments, nor do we find statistically significant partisan differences in response to the peer adoption treatment.

Figure 2: Treatment Effects for Police Executives with and without Current CRBs



Discussion

Our experimental results demonstrate that police executives are willing to shift their policy beliefs, even on a contentious issue marked by low levels of executive support historically and in the present. Yet how and why these important decision makers shift their policy beliefs depends on which information they are exposed to, and critically, which actors are the source of that information. Overall, police executives are closely attentive to the behavior of large peer agencies adopting CRBs, but much less moved by public attitudes. Ironically then, chiefs' and sheriffs' preferences on democratic oversight in policing are not themselves especially shaped through the democratic mechanism of public opinion.

Regarding peer influence, we found that when presented with information on major city police agency adoption of CRBs, chiefs and sheriffs were more positive in their feelings about CRBs, more willing to establish a CRB in their own agency, and more willing to support granting CRBs independent powers, such as the ability to investigate complaints and hear appeals from citizens and officers. We also found that police executives who already had a CRB in their agency were significantly more likely to support CRBs and to recommend more power for CRBs following treatment. In agencies with a CRB in place, respondents were

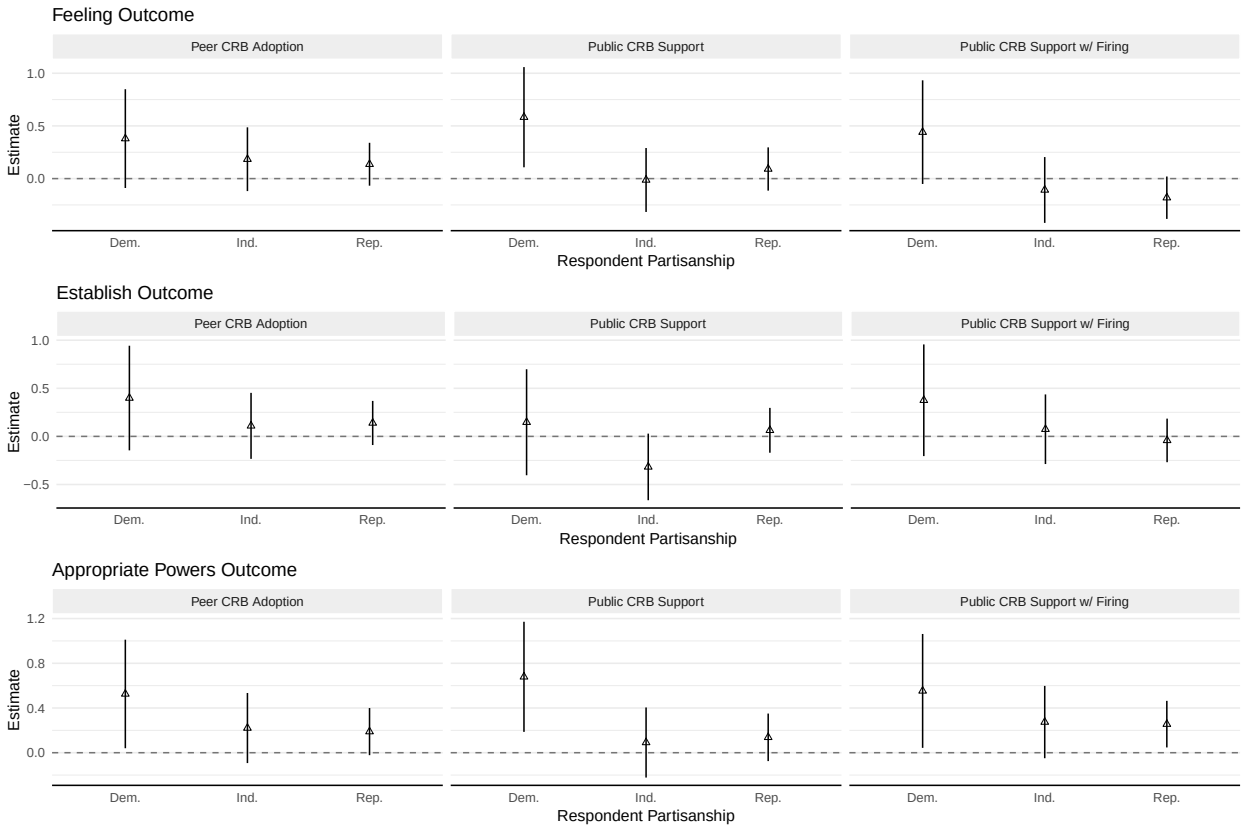


Figure 3: Interaction Plot of Treatment and Partisan Identification

much more likely to increase the CRBs authority (7.1%) then to decrease its authority (1.7%).

Taken together, these results suggest that the shortest path to policy reform may involve concentrated attention to the largest agencies (such as those who make up the Major Cities Chiefs Association). The prospect of enacting national policy change through influencing the largest agencies may be good news for reformers who are frustrated by the fractured federalist nature of law enforcement in a country with 18,000 independent police departments.[12] As such, advocacy through professional associations and policy diffusion through major cities may serve as viable inroads for reform, as well as easier to influence than the many thousands of independent police departments. As large agencies continue to lead these policy shifts, reformers could then concentrate on extending those reforms to smaller and nearby agencies. Potential avenues for this work include trade publications from professional organizations, such as *Police Chief*, and practitioner conferences such as the annual conference of the International Association of Chiefs of Police.

Conversely and of equal importance, our results caution against reformers relying solely on appeals based on public opinion. Neither of our public opinion treatments were successful in moving chief or sheriff feeling

[12]Indeed, while just 3% of US police agencies serve jurisdictions of more than 100,000 people, these agencies employ 52% of the officers in the country [51].

towards CRBs, nor in their willingness to establish a CRB in their own agency. This finding is concerning because a movement towards democratic accountability in policing should be responsive to democratic means of influence, such as public opinion. Yet, accurate state-specific public opinion information successfully shifted respondents' willingness to grant CRBs independent powers. Interestingly, the "strong" version of the public opinion treatment, which recommended more controversial disciplinary powers for CRBs, had a greater effect on policing executives than the weaker version of public opinion. Specifically, the weak version of public opinion shifted support for the same powers as the peer influence treatment. This similarity suggests that CRBs' powers to investigate complaints and hear appeals from citizens and officers are the most generally palatable to chiefs and sheriffs, another important note for researchers and advocates. Yet, the strong version of public opinion pushed chiefs and sheriffs even further, even leading them to support granting CRBs the power to recommend discipline. This suggests that, despite general reluctance to simply follow public opinion, exposing police executives to topics with *greater* distance between their preferences and public attitudes can generate windows for potential policy reform. However, understanding the role of bargaining and spatially-distant of preferences among police executives is a topic for further investigation.

Importantly, in no case did any treatment arm successfully encourage police executives to support a CRB power to *impose* discipline on officers. This finding—and open-ended responses of police chiefs and sheriffs in our study—suggest that there are limits to executive support of public oversight, even though this expansive power is a key focus of reformers worried about ineffectual CRBs. Further, it is important to note that increased civilian oversight does not necessarily correspond with specific policy outcomes, such as reformers' expectations regarding additional officer discipline. For example, a recent report points out that in cases where Los Angeles Police Chief Michel Moore fired officers for misconduct, a CRB overruled his decisions more than 70% of the time[52]. In doing so, the CRB effectively led to 11 officers remaining active despite a highly respected executive with over 40 years of experience arguing they were not fit to continue serving. The relationship between oversight, accountability, and specific reform goals is not necessarily linear, an important fact for reformers and critics of CRBs to consider.

Beyond our primary results, our study also draws attention to a lack of electoral influence where theory would expect it. We find no evidence that (elected) sheriffs are more attentive to public opinion compared to (appointed) chiefs. This may suggest that both chiefs and sheriffs act as trustees rather than delegates, despite their very different paths to position. This contradicts previous studies that find the elected status of sheriffs results in different policy choices[50], but aligns with other scholarship showing that sheriffs from different political parties make broadly similar policy choices despite their partisan leanings[49]. Indeed, notwithstanding growing scholarly attention to the differences between police chiefs and sheriffs, our results point to a more nuanced picture. For the most part, both groups demonstrate similar responses regarding

their feelings about CRBs and willingness to establish one in their own agency. However, when it comes to increased measures of power sharing with a CRB, sheriffs are significantly less likely than chiefs to support granting that shared power. When and why chiefs and sheriffs attend to public opinion and when they are willing to relinquish power are important and rich research questions that we continue to pursue in parallel research.

Finally, our study contributes by providing some of the most robust demographic data on policing executive and agencies. While policing agencies in the United States are famously heterogeneous, we find the people who lead them are homogeneous demographically and politically. In the aggregate, the typical police executive is a white male with 30 years of experience, a graduate degree, and self-defines as a Republican. We report full demographic descriptions in Appendix Table A2. This finding around executive homogeneity may explain previous research showing individual-level demographic variables have no relationship to how police executives perceive institutional influences (or sovereigns)[25]. Also of note, our descriptive results indicate that there has been substantial progress in increasing the number of women-led agencies. In our sample, approximately 4.3% of respondents were women, compared to just 2.7% reported in a recent study using 2013 LEMAS data[53]. Finally, the fact that policing executives are a far more homogeneous group than the line officers they lead[54] lends support to calls from scholars to seek the participation of line officers when innovating and implementing policing reforms[55].

Overall, this study provides key insights into the composition of police executives, characteristics that affect their views of policy reform, and which actors they are—or are not—responsive to. We find police executives are willing to adjust their preferences around democratic oversight and bargain when necessary. Yet it is equally clear that much remains to be understood about how law enforcement leaders engage in policy learning, respond to external pressures, and facilitate democratic reforms.

Methods

Sample

Our data come from an experiment embedded in a survey distributed to 13,287 U.S. police chiefs and sheriffs via email between February 1 and March 7, 2022.[13] Our sampling frame was drawn from a database containing the individual contact details of law enforcement leaders in the U.S. across all levels of government. We created a subset of that larger dataset to include only police chiefs and sheriffs with agencies larger than one officer, and those with a listed email address. Respondents who agreed to participate in the survey were

[13]The survey was fielded using Qualtrics for approximately five weeks, and three reminder emails were sent each week after the original recruitment email.

randomly assigned to one of four treatment groups, with a control condition and three treatment conditions providing varying information about public support for or peer adoption of CRBs. In total, 1,331 respondents completed the survey, providing a 9.98% response rate. For information on power, see SI Section A.1.4.

While police agencies take on many varied forms, they are headed by a fairly homogeneous group. Among the surveyed sample, the average police executive is a White, male chief with 30 years of total law enforcement experience and has held his current position for just over seven years. This average respondent is likely to have at least a bachelor's (33%) or master's degree (30%) and oversees an agency with fewer than 25 sworn officers (56%). Descriptive statistics for the sample are reported in SI Table A1, and SI Section A.1.2 discusses the sample's representativeness. As the sample was randomly assigned to different treatment conditions, we report balance across the treatment groups for key covariates of interest in SI Table A4.

Public Support Estimates from a National Poll

From August 25 to October 11, 2021, we worked with the polling firm Data for Progress to conduct a national survey of over 16,840 US adults and polled them on their support for CRBs. Within the survey, we asked two questions. First, we asked about support for establishing CRBs with the "power to independently investigate police officers accused of inappropriate use of force or other misconduct." We found that, on average, 68% of the public support, and 24% oppose, creation of a CRB with these powers. In the second question, we ask about support for adding additional disciplinary power to the CRB: "with the power to independently investigate and discipline (such as firing) officers." The addition of disciplinary powers caused a drop in overall expressed support, with 60% supporting, and 32% opposing, the formation of CRBs with independent powers to both investigate officers and impose discipline. With a large number of respondents across the United States, we constructed pooled state-level estimates of public support and opposition to CRBs.

Chiefs and sheriffs are unlikely to have access to quality public polling for their jurisdictions generally, let alone on specific policy options they may be weighing. We provide accurate state-level public opinion in regard to CRBs. We believe the related treatments form a conservative lower-bound for the impact of public opinion on shifts in policing executives' policy beliefs. In other words, if we had local opinion data, it is likely it would have a stronger impact on local officials, if such data were available. There are substantial financial and methodological challenges to obtaining such local estimates, and we provide the first state-level estimates.

There is some reason to believe state-level estimates may be *more* appropriate than local ones in the context of US policing. This is because police powers are derived at the state level and evaluations

must therefore account for state-level differences[56]. The chiefs and sheriffs in our sample all maintain their legitimate police power through their respective states, enforce state laws passed by state legislatures, and interact in state-level professional organizations. For these reasons, we are confident in our decision to seek out and build state-level public opinion estimates in every state in the US, and use them as informational treatments.

Informational Treatments

Our survey experiment randomly assigned participants to either a control condition or one of three treatment conditions. Respondents assigned to the control condition received no information about public support for or peer adoption of CRBs. Responses from the control group thus represent baseline preferences for CRBs among chiefs and sheriffs. One treatment condition, which we call "Public Support CRB", provides respondent with accurate, state-specific public support and opposition data, drawn from our national survey described earlier. Prior to responding to any of the outcome questions, respondents assigned to this condition were provided with the informational vignette below, with the relevant bracketed information representing a coded field that automatically populated the relevant state-level data:

> "Civilian review boards (CRBs) can take many potential forms, with varying powers. In late 2021, we conducted a survey of 16,840 Americans on their support for various forms of CRBs. In your state, [STATE CODE], we found that [CRB SUPPORT PERCENT] of residents support, and [CRB OPPOSE PERCENT] oppose, the formation of a CRB with the power to independently investigate, but not impose discipline (such as firing), in cases where police officers are accused of inappropriate use of force or other misconduct."

In the next treatment condition, which we call "Public Support CRB + Firing", we provide similar public opinion information, but for CRBs with additional disciplinary powers. We include this condition because independent powers of discipline are often considered the most threatening to police executives, in terms of their own perceptions of appropriate power sharing and ability to manage their agencies. Moreover, CRBs with disciplinary power also represent a distinct, although less frequent, type of CRB structure[6,48]. The informational vignette for this condition mirrors that of the previous treatment condition, replacing the phrase " but not impose discipline" with "and impose discipline (such as firing)."

Finally, the last treatment condition, which we call "Peer CRB Adoption", tests the impact of information about elite peer practices. We provide respondents with information regarding how CRBs have diffused throughout other policing agencies, using data collected from the Major Cities Chiefs Association (MCCA) by the Community Oriented Policing program at the Department of Justice (DOJ). The MCCA, COPS,

and DOJ are all well-regarded professional organizations that collect and distribute peer-level information to police executives, such as how many of the largest policing agencies have adopted certain policies. The informational vignette for this condition is similar to the Public Support CRB condition in that it references CRBs without the independent power to discipline. The informational vignette for this condition reads:

> "Civilian review boards (CRBs) can take many potential forms, with varying powers. The Community Oriented Policing Services (DOJ) recently surveyed members of the Major Cities Chiefs Association. They found that over 60% of U.S. law enforcement agencies surveyed have CRBs with the power to independently investigate complaints, but not impose discipline (such as firing), on officers."

Outcome Measures

We use three outcome measures to identify three dimensions of police executive support for CRBS: generalized feelings, support for implementation, and powers deemed appropriate. To measure generalized feelings, we asked respondents, "In general, what is your feeling towards civilian review boards?" measured using a five-point Likert scale from "Extremely negative" to "Extremely positive". While police executives' general perceptions of CRBs are valuable, chiefs and sheriffs sometimes implement policies that run against their personal preferences. To measure support for implementation, we asked respondents about their willingness to establish a CRB in their own agency: "Would you support the creation of a CRB for your agency?".

The creation of a CRB inherently demands power sharing. The contours of which powers are shared, and how they are shared, define the relationship between the police executive and the CRB. Our third outcome measure explores police executives' preferences regarding that power-sharing relationship. The outcome question asks respondents to advise a hypothetical peer police executive: "Imagine you have been contacted by the chief or sheriff of a neighboring jurisdiction currently establishing a CRB. They are seeking advice. In providing advice, which of the following (if any) do you think are appropriate powers for the CRB? (Select as many or as few as you believe apply)". Respondents selected as many or as few powers as they deemed appropriate from the following list: Conduct independent investigations of complaints, Subpoena witnesses, Subpoena records, Recommend disciplinary actions, Impose disciplinary actions, Review disciplinary actions, Hear citizen appeals, Hear officer appeals, or None of these powers are appropriate. This outcome measure allows us to conduct two distinct types of analysis. First, we identify treatment effects on support for granting CRBs each individual power, based on the idea that different powers present differing degrees of power-sharing concern. Second, we identify treatment effects on the total number of powers that participating chiefs and sheriffs were willing to grant CRBs.

Identification of Treatment Effects

We use the following general model specification to identify treatment effects of interest:

$$Outcome = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Public\ Support\ CRB + \beta_2 Public\ Support\ CRB\ +\ Firing + \beta_3 Peer\ CRB\ Adoption + \gamma \mathbf{X} + \epsilon$$

where *Public Support CRB*, *Public Support CRB + Firing*, and *Peer CRB Adoption* correspond to the three treatments providing public opinion data on support for CRBs with investigatory powers, public opinion data on support for CRBs with investigatory and disciplinary powers, and data on CRB implementation across MCCA agencies, respectively.[14] We identify treatment effects on the three outcome variables of interest described above, and $\mathbf{X}$ refers to the vector of covariates that we include, namely whether respondents are chiefs or sheriffs, whether respondents currently have a CRB for their agency, police executive partisanship, and police agency size.[15]

Data Availability

Code Availability

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[14] For non-fully-specified models (i.e., models testing pooled conditions), the treatment indicator variables shown above are replaced with indicators for the corresponding pooled treatments.

[15] For all models, the reference category represented by the intercept corresponds to chiefs without a current CRB in the control condition who are Democrats, new to their position, and serve an agency with fewer than 25 officers.

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Author Contributions

I.T.A. contributed to the development of the research idea, experimental design, analysis, and writing.
J.M. contributed to the development of the research idea, experimental design, analysis, and writing.
D.S.S. contributed to the development of the research idea, experimental design, analysis, and writing.
K.J.S. contributed to the development of the research idea, experimental design, analysis, and writing.
S.M.M. contributed to the development of the research idea, experimental design, and writing.

Competing Interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

A Supplementary Information for "Arrested (Policy) Development: Explaining Change in Police Executives' Support for Civilian Review Boards"

Contents

A.1 Additional Information about the Sample

A.1.1 Descriptive Statistics

Table A1: Descriptive Statistics

Characteristic	**N = 1,279**
Treatment Condition	
Control	307 / 1,279 (24%)
Support CRB	324 / 1,279 (25%)
Support Firing	325 / 1,279 (25%)
Peer CRB Support	323 / 1,279 (25%)
Support/Oppose CRBs	
Extremely Negative	188 / 1,261 (15%)
Somewhat Negative	259 / 1,261 (21%)
Mixed	596 / 1,261 (47%)
Somewhat Positive	169 / 1,261 (13%)
Extremely Negative	49 / 1,261 (3.9%)
Would Establish CRB	78 / 1,015 (7.7%)
Appropriate Powers (sum)	
0	500 / 1,279 (39%)
1	203 / 1,279 (16%)
2	165 / 1,279 (13%)
3	180 / 1,279 (14%)
4	121 / 1,279 (9.5%)
5	52 / 1,279 (4.1%)
6	31 / 1,279 (2.4%)
7	17 / 1,279 (1.3%)
8	10 / 1,279 (0.8%)

A.1.2 Representativeness

In Table A2 we report the sample descriptive statistics for our sample. We compare our sample description against select other nationally representative data, such as that from the Law Enforcement Management and Administrative Statistics (LEMAS)[51], and the Police Executive Research Council (PERF)[57]. In addition, we provide sample information from other survey research on the police executive population[28,58,59]. We also include a working paper[54] that examines the demographic description of approximately 220,000 police officers from the 100 largest US agencies. While that study does not directly look at police executives, it is helpful in that it provides an estimate of the population of non-executive officers to contrast with our sample of policing executives.

Note that our sample and reporting are robust enough to serve as the benchmark for future research on policing executives. For example, many of the national surveys are restricted to membership (as in the case of PERF), or only look at municipal policing (as in the case of LEMAS). The closest in terms of design comes from a dissertation[58], but in that survey respondents include non-chiefs and non-sheriffs (construing "police executive" more broadly than we do here). In terms of understanding the demographic description of chiefs and sheriffs in the US, we believe our sample is the most robust. We are able to report on partisan identification, for example, which other researchers have suggested should be associated with behavioral outcomes of interest[54].

Table A2: Comparison of Samples of Chiefs and Sheriffs

		Current Study (NDLEA Chiefs)	Current Study (NDLEA Sheriffs)	Current Study (NDLEA Combined)	Ba et al., 2022 (Largest 100 Police)	Nix 2015 (NDLEA combined)	LEMAS 2016 (Chiefs)	Matusiak, 2017 (TX Chiefs)	PERF 2021 (Chiefs)	Tregle et al., 2020 (NDLEA Chiefs)	Nix et al., 2020 (NDLEA Command)[16]	Seo et al. 2021 (PA Chiefs)
	Female %	4.26	4.35	4.28	16.8	5.8	2.9	3.3	9.3	3.7	–	1.6
	Tenure (Years)	6.84	8.77	7.2	–	–	–	–	4.8	–	–	9
	Experience (Years)	29.35	30.81	29.62	–	27	–	26	29.2	30	–	30
Race	White %	87.98	91.13	88.56	56	94.2	89.6	79	73.4	87.1	–	98.9
	Black %	3.86	5.42	4.14	16	–	4	–	14.3	3.3	1.3	0.5
	Hispanic %	3.42	2.46	3.24	21	–	3.1	–	6.4	3.1	1.8	0.5
	Asian/Pacific Islander	0.88	0	0.72	4.9	–	–	–	1.5	0.83	–	–
	Other %	3.86	0.99	3.33	–	–	2.4	–	4.4	1.6	–	–
Education	PhD/JD %	3.87	2.94	3.7	–	–	–	–	5.5	0.42	–	–
	Masters %	33.3	14.71	29.87	–	–	–	–	72.3	40.96	26.7	37.4
	Bachelors %	32.96	30.88	32.58	–	–	–	–	20.1	30.98	–	33.2
	Associate %	18.14	29.9	20.31	–	–	–	–	–	8.94	–	19.5
	High School %	11.73	21.57	13.54	–	–	–	42.6[17]	–	12.68	–	10
Age (years)		–	–	–	44	–	–	–	–	–	–	56
Age (bucket) %	25-34	0.77	0.49	0.72	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
	35-44	10.47	8.25	10.06	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
	45-54	48.07	40.29	46.63	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
	55-64	33.3	37.38	34.05	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
	65-74	7.17	12.62	8.18	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
	75+	0.22	0.97	0.36	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Partisan ID	Republican %	58.2	71.07	60.56	37	–	–	–	–	–	53.9[18]	–
	Democrat %	9.45	16.24	10.7	36	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
	Independent %	32.35	12.69	28.74	0.31	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
	n	1040	243	1331	218,041	643	2135	912	347	675		190

[16] Nix et al. (2020) Approximately 27 percent of respondents were not the chief of their department, but over 80% of non-chiefs were command level (lieutenant and above).
[17] Matusiak 2017 - education calculated from in-text statement that 57% of respondents had an associates degree or higher.
[18] Nix et al. (2020) Reported "Trump voter" which we include here as Republican partisan ID.

We also find that our sample of respondents is similar to and representative of those who did not respond to our survey request, as indicated in Table A3.

Table A3: Balance of response sample versus non-response sample

	Non-Response Sample	Response Sample
2020 Republican Vote	0.57	0.56
2020 Democratic Vote	0.41	0.42
log Total Population	11.52	11.68
Percent White	0.80	0.81
Percent Black	0.10	0.08
Percent with College Degree	0.37	0.38
Percent Income Below 50k	0.43	0.41
Percent Income Above 100k	0.27	0.28
Percent Employed	0.61	0.62
Square Miles	978	1082
Number of Officers	47.9	51.1

A.1.3 Balance

Table A4: Balance Table

		Control (N=307)		Support (N=324)		Support (firing) (N=325)		Peer Diffusion (N=323)	
		N	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*
Position	Chief	246	80.1	267	82.4	267	82.2	256	79.3
	Sheriff	61	19.9	57	17.6	58	17.8	67	20.7
Age	34	2	0.7	1	0.3	3	0.9	2	0.6
	35 - 44	21	6.8	25	7.7	27	8.3	39	12.1
	45 - 54	126	41.0	128	39.5	131	40.3	134	41.5
	55 - 64	96	31.3	102	31.5	93	28.6	88	27.2
	65 - 74	24	7.8	22	6.8	25	7.7	20	6.2
	75 +	1	0.3	0	0.0	2	0.6	1	0.3
Sex	Male	262	85.3	269	83.0	275	84.6	268	83.0
	Female	11	3.6	11	3.4	8	2.5	18	5.6
Race	Asian/Pacific Islander	1	0.3	1	0.3	3	0.9	3	0.9
	Black	13	4.2	12	3.7	7	2.2	14	4.3
	Hispanic	16	5.2	5	1.5	12	3.7	3	0.9
	Other	8	2.6	9	2.8	12	3.7	8	2.5
	White	233	75.9	251	77.5	246	75.7	253	78.3
Partisan	Strong Democrat	4	1.3	1	0.3	1	0.3	1	0.3
	Democrat	14	4.6	13	4.0	16	4.9	13	4.0
	Lean Democrat	14	4.6	14	4.3	8	2.5	16	5.0
	Independent	65	21.2	85	26.2	74	22.8	85	26.3
	Lean Republican	64	20.8	57	17.6	54	16.6	65	20.1
	Republican	77	25.1	78	24.1	88	27.1	74	22.9
	Strong Republican	26	8.5	21	6.5	26	8.0	21	6.5
Size	Fewer than 25	147	47.9	159	49.1	174	53.5	157	48.6
	Between 25 and 49	54	17.6	54	16.7	59	18.2	63	19.5
	Between 50 and 99	43	14.0	38	11.7	28	8.6	44	13.6
	Between 100 and 499	23	7.5	29	9.0	23	7.1	23	7.1
	Between 500 and 999	5	1.6	2	0.6	1	0.3	0	0.0
	More than 1000	2	0.7	0	0.0	2	0.6	3	0.9

Survey conducted February 1 to March 7, 2022.

A.1.4 Power

We used power simulations to estimate the sample size that we would need to evaluate our main hypothesis regarding differences between control and treatment conditions with 80% power. With possible standardized effect sizes of 0.1 and 0.2, we anticipated that we would need about 4,200 respondents (30% response rate) or 1,600 respondents (12% response rate), respectively. Figure A1 presents results from these simulations. We achieved a sample size of 1,331 (10% response rate) and thus may have been underpowered to evaluate some hypotheses.

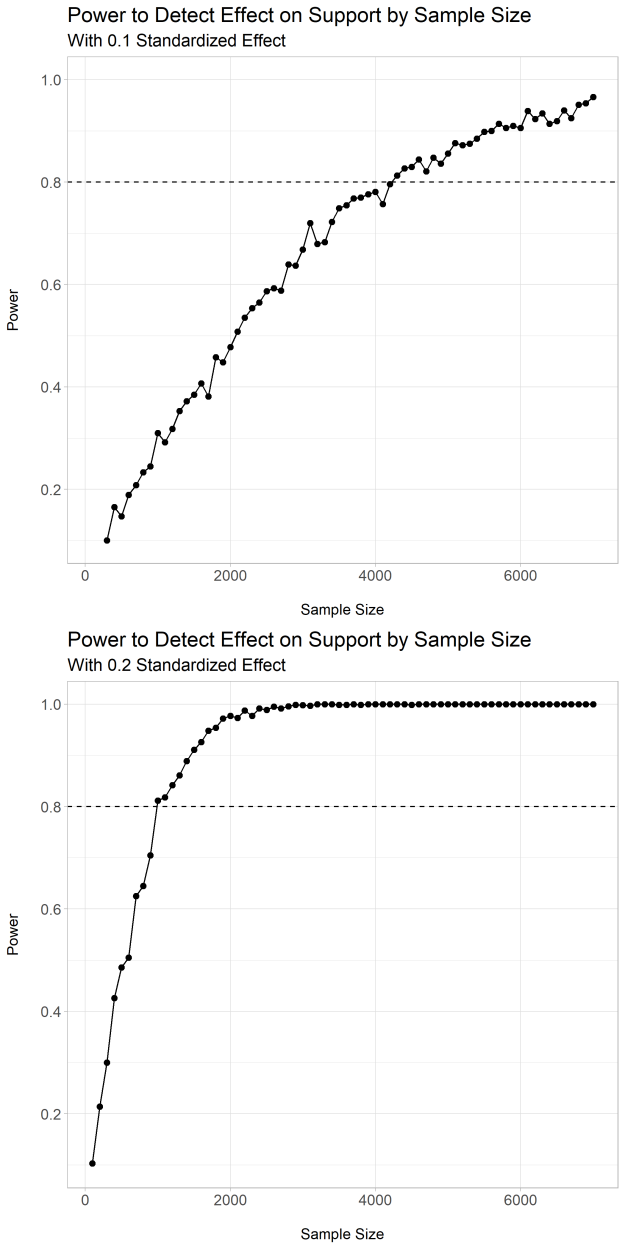

Figure A1: Power Analysis with Two Estimates of Effect Size

A.2 Cheap Talk?

We thank the readers who have brought up the question of 'cheap talk.' In short, this question asks: Are respondents simply complying with some perceived social desirability or researcher demand, thus producing a bias in our results? We do not think so, for several reasons.

First, defining social desirability and researcher demand in this context is quite easy. Given the high public support, the 'desirable' response is one that expresses a) strongly approves of CRBs, b) a willingness to establish a CRB in the respondent's own agency, and c) approval for investing a CRB with a high number of independent powers and (logically) a high total sum of powers. However, on average, we do not see this type of aggregate response. For example, among our control group, approval for CRBs is $\bar{x} = 2.66$ (indicating a neutral range), only 7% indicated a willingness to establish a CRB, and on average, they only grant CRBs 1.41 powers. Taken together, these are not the responses one expects if social desirability is the goal of the respondents.

Further, we believe our respondents are giving thoughtful (rather than cheap) answers because of the quantity and quality of open-text responses the respondents provided during the survey. Responding to an open prompt is much more demanding than responding to traditional survey questions[60]. However, in our sample ($n = 1331$), 77.3% of respondents took the time to provide an open-text response regarding their views on CRBs. This type of investment is not what we would expect in a cheap talk environment. While we do not engage with the open responses in this paper, parallel investigations will pursue this study avenue.

Finally, police are famously distrustful of academics[61], so the argument for researcher demand bias is unclear in this context. While it might be generally true that academics are likely to support the implementation of CRBs (though the current authors have mixed priors on that question), it is not self-evident that policing executives would bow to that pressure and engage in cheap talk. However, there may be a slightly different threat here, in terms of selecting into the survey. For example, when researchers offer to collaborate with agencies in order to assess agency performance, policing executives are less likely to respond affirmatively to that offer, even when the agency is already high-performing[62]. This type of selection could bias results and threaten generalizability. However, a separate analysis shows that correlates are balanced across responding and non-responding police executives, which buffers against such a threat. Our results for that analysis are shown in A3.

In sum, while we remain sensitive to the threats that cheap talk (and other sources of bias) pose to survey-based research designs, we do not find evidence, or see reasonable and logical paths, for that particular threat in the current study.

A.3 Additional Tables of Results

Table A5: Main Results - Non-standardized

	Feeling	Establish	Appropriate Powers
Treatment			
Public CRB Support	0.115	−0.012	0.341*
	(0.082)	(0.025)	(0.159)
Public CRB Support w/ Firing	−0.095	0.009	0.559***
	(0.082)	(0.025)	(0.159)
Peer CRB Adoption	0.181*	0.044+	0.452**
	(0.081)	(0.024)	(0.158)
Controls			
Sheriff	−0.063	−0.051*	−0.478**
	(0.078)	(0.024)	(0.151)
Current CRB	0.963***		1.035***
	(0.083)		(0.161)
Independent	−0.449***	−0.031	−0.732***
	(0.104)	(0.032)	(0.202)
Republican	−0.434***	−0.075*	−0.789***
	(0.096)	(0.029)	(0.186)
FTE 25-49	−0.056	0.026	−0.396**
	(0.075)	(0.022)	(0.145)
FTE 50-99	−0.022	0.119***	−0.192
	(0.088)	(0.027)	(0.170)
FTE 100-499	−0.244*	0.131***	−0.484*
	(0.110)	(0.035)	(0.213)
FTE 500-999	0.239	0.281+	−0.368
	(0.339)	(0.153)	(0.657)
FTE 1000+	0.025	0.476***	0.066
	(0.361)	(0.132)	(0.699)
Years in Position	0.000	0.000	−0.002
	(0.005)	(0.001)	(0.009)
N	1071	905	1069
R2	0.15	0.06	0.09
R2 Adj.	0.136	0.052	0.077
F			7.817

Survey February 1 to March 7, 2022.

Reference categories: Chief; Democrat; Sworn Personnel < 25

+ p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Table A6: Main Results - Pre-registered Controls Only

	Feeling	Establish	Total Powers
Public CRB Support	0.056	−0.017	0.260+
	(0.077)	(0.024)	(0.148)
Public CRB Support w/ Firing	−0.098	−0.007	0.563***
	(0.077)	(0.024)	(0.150)
Peer CRB Adoption	0.166*	0.042+	0.459**
	(0.077)	(0.023)	(0.149)
Sheriff	−0.109	−0.035+	−0.537***
	(0.070)	(0.021)	(0.134)
Current CRB	0.978***		1.022***
	(0.077)		(0.150)
Intercept	2.547***	0.078***	1.442***
	(0.058)	(0.017)	(0.111)
N	1214	1009	1215
R2	0.13	0.01	0.06
R2 Adj.	0.122	0.005	0.059
F	34.572	2.388	16.352

Survey February 1 to March 7, 2022.
Reference categories: Chief; No Current CRB
+ p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Table A7: Main Results - Uncontrolled

	Feeling	Establish	Total Powers
Public CRB Support	0.104	−0.016	0.321*
	(0.082)	(0.024)	(0.152)
Public CRB Support w/ Firing	−0.061	−0.006	0.614***
	(0.082)	(0.024)	(0.153)
Peer CRB Adoption	0.162*	0.041+	0.450**
	(0.082)	(0.023)	(0.153)
Intercept	2.646***	0.071***	1.461***
	(0.058)	(0.017)	(0.109)
N	1216	1009	1217
R2	0.01	0.01	0.01
R2 Adj.	0.005	0.004	0.012
F	3.024	2.255	5.775

Survey February 1 to March 7, 2022.
+ p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

A.4 Additional Information about Pre-Registered Hypotheses and Results

Table A8: Pre-registered Hypotheses and Results

Hypothesis	Statement of Results
H1 Law Enforcement Learning Hypothesis: *When exposed to information about external support for CRBs from either the public or elites, police executives will be more supportive of CRBs.*	We find mixed results, where information about elite peers, but not public support, shifts police executive support for CRBs.
H2 Public Influence Hypothesis: *When exposed to information on public support for CRBs, law enforcement leaders will be more supportive of CRBs.*	We do not find general support for this hypothesis. The public opinion treatments were not associated with more approving feelings towards CRBs by police executives.
H3 Elite Diffusion Hypothesis: *When exposed to information indicating that CRBs have diffused in elite peer institutions, police executives will be more supportive of CRBs.*	We find support for this hypothesis. Police executives are more likely to approve of CRBs, be willing to establish a CRB in their own agency, and engage in more power sharing with CRBs, when exposed to information about how CRBs are used in large agencies.
H4 What's Mine is Mine Hypothesis: *Police executives will be more accepting of CRBs with limited powers of investigation, compared to CRBs with independent disciplinary power.*	We find mixed support for this hypothesis. In general, police executives did not move in response to public opinion of any type (i.e., they did not differentiate between the different forms of public opinion treatments). However, public support for CRBs with independent disciplining power *did increase* police executive willingness to share the power to *recommend discipline*. Further, the independent discipline public opinion treatment also produced a larger effect in how many total powers police executives were willing to share.
H1.1 The Electoral Effect: *The effect of public opinion on CRB policy preferences will be stronger for elected sheriffs compared to appointed police chiefs.*	Our results reject this hypothesis. Sheriffs did not display heterogeneous response to public opinion treatment compared to their chief colleagues.
H1.2 Give 'Em What They Want: *Stronger levels of public support will increase police executives' support for CRBs.*	Our results reject this hypothesis. Level of state-level public opinion did not significantly shift the effect of the public opinion treatments.
H2.1 Partisan Effects: *Police executives serving in jurisdictions with higher (perceived) percentages of Republicans will be less likely to support CRBs.*	We have not yet tested this hypothesis. Future work will continue to focus on this and other political effects.
H2.2 Race Effects: *Police executives serving in jurisdictions with higher percentages of Non-White members of the public will be more likely to support CRBs compared to those serving higher percentages of White members of the public.*	We have not yet tested this hypothesis. Future work will continue to focus on this and other demographic effects.

Table A9: Interaction Model: Does Level of Public Support Matter?

	CRB Feeling	CRB Establish	CRB Total Power
Public CRB Support	−0.080	0.207	0.985
	(1.065)	(0.314)	(2.010)
Public CRB Support w/ Firing	−0.831	−0.226	−1.583
	(0.875)	(0.269)	(1.652)
Peer CRB Adoption	0.166*	0.045+	0.388*
	(0.082)	(0.024)	(0.154)
% Support	0.013	0.005	0.013
	(0.013)	(0.004)	(0.025)
% Firing Support	−0.010	−0.001	−0.006
	(0.011)	(0.003)	(0.022)
Public CRB Support x % Support	0.003	−0.003	−0.010
	(0.016)	(0.005)	(0.030)
Public CRB Support w/ Firing x % Firing Support	0.012	0.004	0.035
	(0.015)	(0.004)	(0.027)
Intercept	2.339***	−0.229	0.924
	(0.585)	(0.168)	(1.104)
N	1205	975	1221
R2	0.01	0.01	0.01
R2 Adj.	0.007	0.007	0.007

Survey February 1 to March 7, 2022.
+ p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

A.5 Additional Information about Public Survey

To provide state-level public opinion data, we partnered with a national polling firm, Data for Progress, to survey 16,840 individuals about their support for CRBs both with and without independent disciplinary power, an essential distinction in the scope of CRB powers[5,48]. Figure A2 displays the state-level public support rates for CRBs without disciplinary power provided to respondents in the associated treatment group. Figure A3 displays the state-level public support rates for CRBs *with* disciplinary power provided to respondents in the associated treatment group.

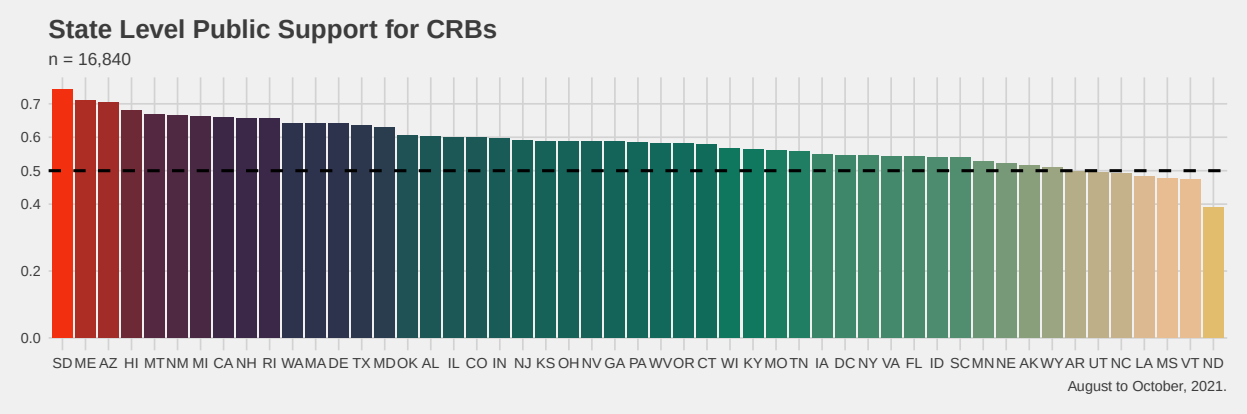

Figure A2: State-level Support for CRBs

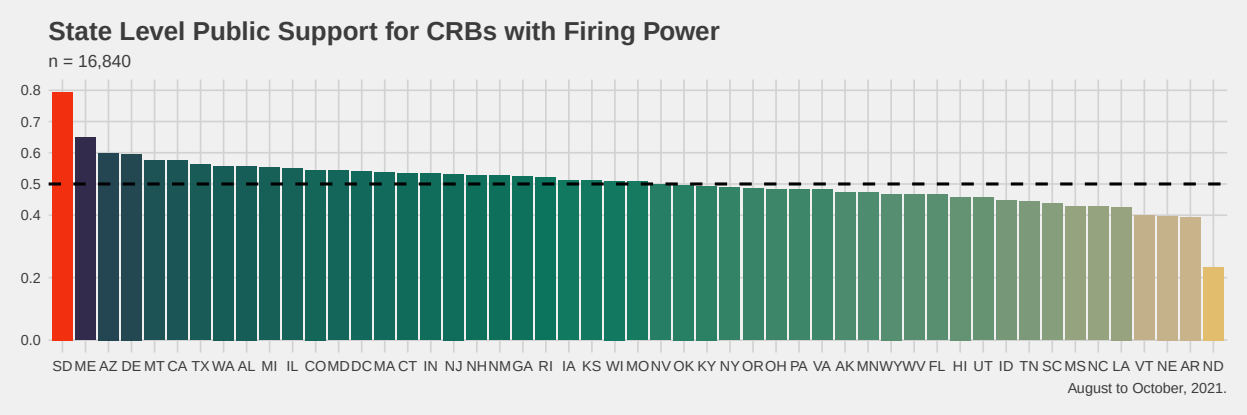

Figure A3: State-level Support for CRBs with Disciplinary Power