

Regularized Lethal Force: An Analysis of Lethal Force by Police toward Black Individuals

ABSTRACT

Black individuals are being killed at a disproportionate rate by police in the United States. The purpose of this research was to identify factors that lead to police violence. The Institutional Analysis and Development (IAD) framework was used to analyze biological factors, community attributes, and rules-in-use to predict interactions between police and black individuals in the action arena. Analysis through the prisoner's dilemma was then used to explain a lack of cooperation and propensity toward defection (use of violence) by police within the action arena. Recommendations for decreased police use of lethal force are made based on analysis of costly sanctioning, a change in payoffs, reciprocity, and communication.

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

Introduction

The murder of George Floyd at the hands of police officer, Derek Chauvin caused national outrage early 2020, adding fuel to outrage and black-led movements in response to the murders of other black men such as Philando Castile, Tamir Rice, Michael Brown, and Eric Garner. One would think with the end of slavery or the Jim Crow era, police murders of black individuals would cease. Yet, countless other black individuals have been murdered at the hands of the police. Data shows that police killings are one of the leading causes of death in the United States with 1 out of every 2,000 men dying at the hands of the police; however, when race is considered, 1 out of every 1000 black men will be killed by police (Esposito & Edwards, 2019). Multiple studies have highlighted the use of excessive lethal force toward black individuals with black death rates ranging from 2.8 to 3.4 times higher than white deaths (DeGue, et al., 2016; Ross, 2015; Ross et al., 2020). Furthermore, black victims are more likely to be unarmed (14.8%) than white (9.4%) or Hispanic (5.8%) victims. (DeGue, et al., 2016).

Purpose

The purpose of this research was to identify factors that lead to police violence with the intent of making recommendations to decrease deaths of black individuals at the hands of police.

METHOD(S)

Institutional Analysis and Development (IAD) framework

- Analyzed use of lethal force by police toward black individuals through biophysical factors, community attributes, and common rules within an action arena.
- One benefit to the IAD framework is the ability to analyze "regularized social behaviors" with the ability to predict future behaviors (Andries & Janssen, 2013, p. 17). See figure 1 for an illustration of how such exogenous variables interact with the action arena and produce certain outcomes through the IAD framework.

Prisoner's Dilemma

- Used to determine recommendations to the problem of regularized lethal force against black individuals.
- This analysis was used to demonstrate how lethal force is used to control black populations and how this can change.
- See table 2 for one possible interpretation of the prisoner's dilemma as applied to cooperation between police and black individuals

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

IAD Framework

- Biophysical segregation leads to community attributes such as high poverty rates, high unemployment, lack of social safety nets, and a police culture that focuses on violence intervention leading to rules in use that further perpetuate and allow violence against black individuals.
- Historical factors and stereotypes, in addition to biased statistics, lead to police perceptions that justify lethal violence.

Prisoner's Dilemma

Continual enticement toward defection by police (use of violent or lethal force) mixed with cooperation by black individuals leads to the "suckers payoff" due to severity of police defections."

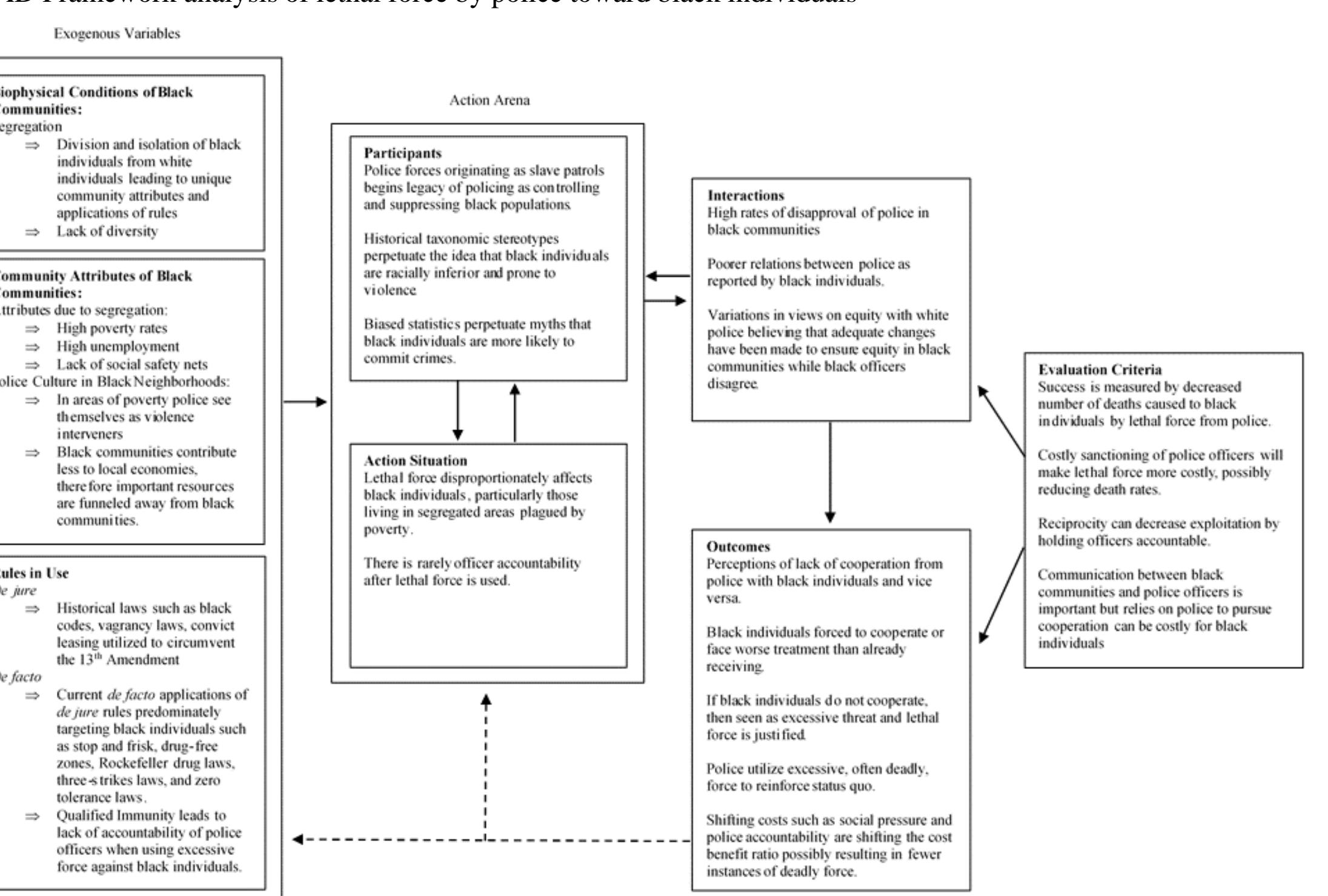
Table 2

Prisoner's Dilemma of Lethal Force by Police officers toward Black Individuals

BLACK INDIVIDUALS		
POLICE OFFICERS	Cooperate-cooperate with police	Defect- don't cooperate with police
Cooperate-no violent response	R=No harm caused, R=No harm caused Rewards for cooperation-noviolence	S= Violence from black individual, harm to self T=Perceived violence from police, run or fight back <i>Sucker's payoff</i> , and temptation to defect
Defect-violent response or lethal force	T=Lethal Force, immediate subduing of individual, personal safety S=possibility of violence, death Temptation to defect, and <i>sucker's payoff</i>	P=Violent response, P=Violent response <i>Punishment</i> for mutual defection-higher chance of violent outcome, highest chance of lethal force

Figure 1

IAD Framework analysis of lethal force by police toward black individuals



PROPOSED SOLUTION/RECOMMENDATIONS

- Social movements such as Black Lives Matter (BLM) can elicit social change through cooperation by focusing on factors such as changing payoffs, reciprocity, costly sanctions, and communication (Andries & Janssen, 2013, Axelrod, 2006)
- Costly sanctioning leads to better cooperation which results in a "change of payoffs" for officers. Centering outrage toward lack of police accountability and changing rules in use (qualified immunity) will eventually hold police accountable, thus changing payoffs. As the cost for lethal force increases for police officers, the cost of lethal force will outweigh the reward of the status quo.
- Unconditional cooperation has led to exploitation and violence, as seen in black communities. Acting out of reciprocity is important to ensure police are held accountable for their actions when they don't cooperate. Due to the high cost of cooperation, movements such as BLM should continue to "defect" from social contracts until police cooperate enough to build trust. If trust cannot be built, and police continue to use unjustified lethal force, then a new social contract, in this case, a new policing system is needed. The cost is too high to keep using the existing system.
- Communication becomes important when considering the cooperation between police and black individuals. Having deeper understanding about situations, in this case the variables discussed in the IAD model become important, so officers don't enter an action situation with preconceived expectations of violence.
- Communication can also improve feeling of belonging and the ability to build trust which provides regularity for behaviors in which participants can make better predictions (Andries & Janssen, 2013). Communication strengthens reciprocity in that both participants can enter the action situation trusting the other.

CONCLUSIONS

The IAD framework has shown that biophysical conditions, community attributes, and rules in use can be utilized to analyze regularized behaviors in social situations. This analysis has shown various interactions that lead to negative outcomes at the hands of the police in black communities. Furthermore, utilization of the prisoner's dilemma has illustrated how perceptions about black individuals lead to defection from officers resulting in disproportionate use of lethal force against black communities. Future avenues of cooperation were also explored in hopes that the black-led demonstrations can capitalize on changing attitudes and policies. Yet, until police departments start doing their part in communicating and listening to the communities they serve, black individuals will suffer the results of the "sucker's payoff," in this case death, regardless of defection or cooperation.

References

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