Senior Citizens as a Pro-Police Interest Group*

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Abstract

Which groups and individuals influence policy through their political activities? Criminal justice policy, because it is made at the local level, is often excluded from the study of interest group politics. In this paper, I show that senior citizens operate as a pro-police interest group at the city level. First, I show that senior citizens' attitudes are much more pro-police than their younger counterparts, even within the same race groups. Second, I show that cities with a greater share of residents over age 65 have larger and better-funded police departments, all else equal. These results have important implications for the study of interest groups, racial and ethnic politics, and criminal justice policy.

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1 Introduction

Which groups and individuals influence policy through their political activities? This question has been of interest to political scientists since at least Dahl (1961). But with some notable exceptions (Anzia 2013; Hankinson 2018), almost all research on interest groups and their influence concerns national politics (e.g. Gilens and Page (2014); Fouirnaies and Hall (2018)). This leads to a gap in our understanding of the influence of interest groups in areas where policy is made either primarily or entirely at the local level – which are some of the policy areas which most directly influence citizens' day-to-day lives.

One such policy area is policing. For many Americans, police officers are the only state representatives with whom they regularly interact (Soss and Weaver 2017). While some studies have documented the political consequences of policing policy (Weaver and Lerman 2010), fewer have examined the political forces that shape policing policy in the first instance – and those that do focus almost entirely on the role of race in determining policing preferences and political participation (Eckhouse 2019).

In this paper, I marshal several types of evidence to show that the current generation of senior citizens constitute a pro-police interest group at the local level. First, I use an original survey question written for the 2016 Cooperative Congressional Election Survey (CCES) to show that seniors have much stronger preferences for additional policing than non-seniors, even when controlling for age-correlated demographic variables such as race, income, and home ownership status. Indeed, age is a much better predictor of support for additional policing than race is, holding other relevant demographic variables constant. Second, I use General Social Survey (GSS) data from the 1970s to the 2010s to show that this difference is likely a cohort effect, rather than an effect of numeric age. Finally, I provide suggestive evidence that seniors successfully influence the size and budget of local law enforcement agencies by combining police agency data from the 2007 and 2013 Law Enforcement Management and Administration Surveys (LEMAS) with data from the 2010 and 2015 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year demographic estimates.

This paper makes several contributions to the research literature. First, by showing that age differences are more important than race differences in explaining preferences for policing, I show how the relative youth of racial minorities may lie behind many differ-

ences in policy preferences that have traditionally been attributed to race, and may help to explain why those minority groups' interests are often poorly represented in American politics. Second, even though there is scant evidence of policy being biased towards those who turn out to vote at high rates, this analysis provides novel evidence that, for city-level police policy, policy reflects the preferences of the median voter rather than those of the median individual (since the median voter is much older than the median individual). Finally, these results have implications for understanding crime policy. Preferences for policing among older Americans of all races – the citizens most likely to vote – may explain the persistence of large police departments, even in the face of a nationwide decline in violent crime over the past generation and significant recent criticism of aggressive policing tactics.

2 Age, policy preferences, and political participation

The classic definition of an interest group is "any group that is based on one or more shared attitudes and makes certain claims upon other groups or organizations in the society" (Truman et al. 1971). Senior citizens already operate as a national-level interest group through organizations such as the National Council of Senior Citizens and the American Association of Retired Persons (Hrebenar and Scott 2015). And Sarah Anzia has discovered that senior citizens operate as a city-level interest group in the formation of local transportation policy (Anzia 2019).

Previous research has found that older and younger individuals have divergent opinions of education spending (Poterba 1998), entitlement programs (Pampel and Williamson 1989), and redistribution (Sørensen 2013). Although older people clearly have material interests in funding certain social programs (such as Social Security and Medicare) over others (such as primary education) at the margin, it is likely that period and cohort effects such as the baby boom, liberalizing social norms, and drastically increased rates of college completion throughout the 20th century all also shape observed differences in policy preference between older and younger Americans (Schwadel and Garneau 2014).[1]

[1] Age is also closely correlated with partisan identification, which may seem on the surface to explain its importance in determining policing policy. Older Americans are much more politically conservative and much more likely to identify with the Republican Party than younger Americans (Fisher 2008, 2010). So-called

Existing research on public opinion of policing (and anticrime policy more generally), however, is almost singularly focused on the role of race and racism in opinion (Kinder, Sanders, and Sanders 1996; Hurwitz and Peffley 2005; Gilliam Jr and Iyengar 2000; Unnever and Cullen 2010). Even studies of attitudes towards policing that find that age is a better predictor of attitudes than race is ignore this result in favor of extensive discussion of race differences (Howell, Perry, and Vile 2004; Weitzer and Tuch 2005; Rosenbaum et al. 2005). Research directly related to older persons and the police is primarily concerned with older persons' fear of criminal victimization, and the fact that fear of criminal victimization seems to increase with age even as the real risk of victimization decreases (Snedker 2002; Ferraro 1995; Jackson 2004).

Age-based differences in public opinion about policing matter in part because of an age-based political participation gap. Higher levels of political participation and civic engagement among older Americans as compared to younger Americans is a basic fact of American politics and has been the object of scholarly study for decades (Glenn and Grimes 1968; Strate et al. 1989; Timpone 1998; Schlozman, Verba, and Brady 2012). Even in the 2008 presidential election, when turnout among young voters was historically high, voters over 65 were 54% more likely to turn out than those aged 18 to 24 (Southwell 2016).

There are reasons to suspect that age-based gaps in political participation translate into policies that more closely track the preferences of older rather than younger citizens. Political scientists have long been concerned with how low rates of political participation in some demographic groups can translate into policies that disadvantage those groups (Lijphart 1997; Citrin, Schickler, and Sides 2003). That concern is especially warranted in local elections, where turnout tends to be low overall and relatively small demographic groups have the power to be electorally decisive (Hajnal and Trounstine 2005). Indeed, mounting empirical evidence, including the findings in this paper, suggests that municipal governments are often disproportionately responsive to citizens who participate in

law-and-order issues have long been more central to conservative than to liberal politics in the United States (Edsall and Edsall 1992; Scheingold 2011). To the extent that voters form policy preferences based on the preferences of their preferred party's elites, rather than choosing their preferred party to accord with their preexisting policy preferences (Lenz 2013; Achen and Bartels 2017), Republican Party identifiers will be much more supportive of a law-and-order platform. Even gerontologists have noted the extent to which political conservatism is a defining identity of the current generation of older Americans (Hudson 2018). The data analysis, though, shows that age differences persist even when holding party identification constant.

elections at disproportionately high rates. Sances (2016), for example, finds that elected property assessors in New York are more likely to underassess higher-value homes relative to lower-value homes than appointed property assessors are, and Berinsky (2005) finds that reforms aimed at easing the voting process, such as early voting and voting by mail, skew the makeup of the electorate more towards the socioeconomically advantaged. There is less evidence on non-voting political behaviors, but Einstein, Palmer, and Glick (2019) show using meeting minute records that participation in local planning and zoning meetings in 97 Massachusetts cities and towns is heavily tilted towards older people – the average age of persons making a comment is 59, while the average age of individuals in the voter file in these towns is 51. Finally, Anzia (2019) shows that senior citizens have outsize influence over transportation policy in California cities due to their relatively higher rates of participation in local politics. In this case, too, differences of both opinion and participation rate work together to over-represent the interests of older individuals in policy.

3 Data and Methods

The CCES is a nationally representative, stratified sample survey administered annually online by YouGov/Polimetrix. In 2016, as in all election years, one wave was administered before the national election and a second wave was administered afterwards, with all surveys completed in October and November 2016. YouGov constructs the CCES sample by first creating a target sample via simple random sampling, and then using proximity matching to find individuals in their opt-in online panel who match individuals in the target sample. The survey weights are constructed via entropy balancing. All analysis presented here uses these survey weights.[2] The CCES research team also partners with the private voting data corporation Catalist to match survey respondents to their records in the voter file.

This analysis leverages an original survey question I wrote for the CCES common content. The question appeared in a series of support/oppose policy proposals in the survey

[2]For more information on the CCES sampling methodology, see http://projects.iq.harvard.edu/cces/home.

(asking respondents to indicate support or opposition for a specific proposal). The proposal which constitutes the main dependent variable in this study is, "Increase the number of police on the street by 10%, even if it means fewer funds for other public services." Of the 65,079 total respondents to the CCES common content, 64,549 responded to this question – an item response rate of over 99%. The question includes a proposed trade-off against "other public services" in order to capture respondents who would not only prefer additional policing in general, but would prefer it *more* than spending on other public services. Even though asking about "other services" is perhaps problematically vague, naming a specific other service (such as education) would have risked introducing noise due to respondents' relative preference for the named service.

Two variables included in the analysis of CCES responses do not come from the CCES. One is the 3-point urban-rural classification, which were matched to CCES responses based on respondent county FIPS codes. These codes come from a 2013 calculation by the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS), which creates six categories for counties, from the most urban to the most rural. [3] The other is the log of the violent crime rate per 1,000 persons in the respondent's county in 2014.[4] This information comes from the FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) program data, matched to CCES responses again using respondent FIPS codes. The UCR defines four violent crimes: murder or manslaughter, aggravated assault, robbery, and forcible rape.

To illustrate the general level of support for additional policing in relevant demographic categories, Table 1 presents summary statistics.

To investigate the relationship between share of seniors and police force size and budget at the city level, I combined two years of the LEMAS (2007 and 2013) with corresponding city-level variables from the 2006-2010 and 2011-2015 ACS 5-year estimates and the 2007 and 2013 UCR data. This merge yields 669 cities whose law enforcement agencies completed both the LEMAS and the UCR in 2007 and 2013, for 1,338 total observations in the two-period panel analysis.

[3] For the purpose of this study, I consolidate these categories down to three: (1) micropolitan and noncore counties, indicating small towns and rural areas, (2) medium and small metropolitan counties, indicating exurban areas and medium-sized cities (metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs) with under 1 million residents), and (3) large central and large fringe metropolitan counties (MSAs with over 1 million residents), indicating urban areas.

[4] 2014 is the most recent year for which UCR data aggregated to the county level is available.

Table 1: Opinion across relevant demographic categories

Characteristic	Support for additional policing
Age under 30	0.38
Age 30-44	0.51
Age 45-64	0.62
Age 65+	0.73
Black	0.46
White	0.58
Hispanic	0.57
Asian	0.50
Female	0.58
Male	0.54
No HS	0.58
HS degree	0.62
Some college	0.54
College grad	0.51
Postgrad	0.48
Democrat	0.48
Republican	0.69
Independent	0.51
Rural county	0.55
Medium metro county	0.56
Urban county	0.56
Income under $30k	0.54
Income $30k-$60k	0.57
Income $60k-$100k	0.56
Income over $100k	0.54

4 Results

4.1 Illustrating the importance of age differences in opinion

Figure 1 summarizes the main results for opinion on policing in 16 age-race groups. These summary results are remarkable for the similar 30-point gap in opinion between those under 30 and those over 65 within each race group. Despite the racialized nature of the politics of policing, well less than half of those under age 30, and a very large majority of those over 65, support additional policing in all four race groups. Furthermore, the age distributions in these four race groups are very different: only 18% of voting-age whites are under 30, compared to 27% of Blacks, 33% of Hispanics, and 38% of Asians. Nearly one-fifth of voting-age whites are over 65, but only 11% of Blacks, 8% of Hispanics, and 4% of voting-age Asians are over 65. There is a ten-year age difference between the median white and the median Black American (43 and 33 years old, respectively), and a 15-year difference between the median white and median Hispanic American (43 and 28 years old, respectively). Because of these differences in age distributions, roughly one-third of

the raw difference between white and Black opinion is attributable to different age distributions between these groups, and over 100% of the raw difference between white and Hispanic and white and Asian opinion is attributable to different age distributions in these race groups, as Figure 2 illustrates.

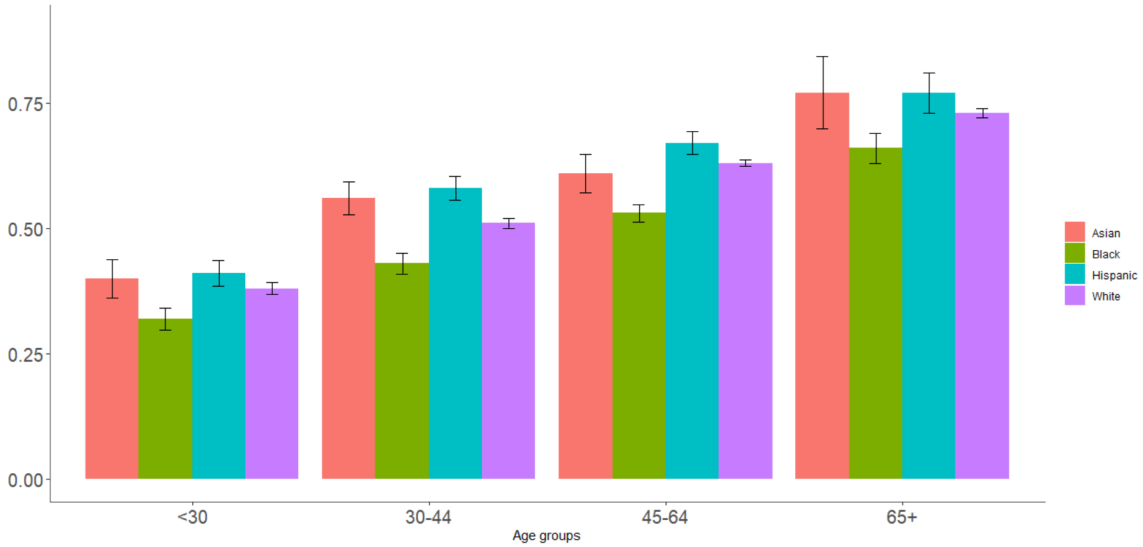

Figure 1: Opinion by race and age

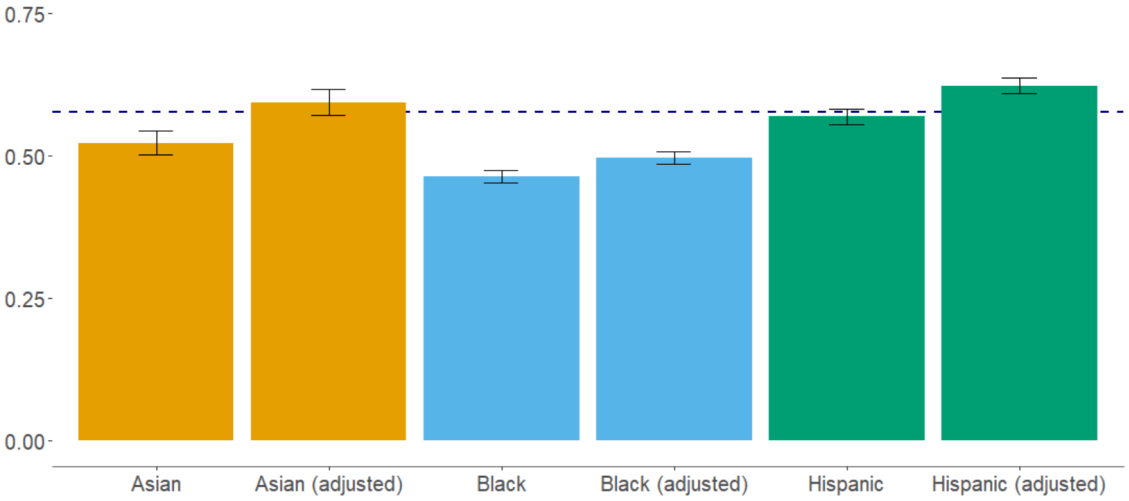

Figure 2: Age-adjusted opinion among Asians, Blacks, and Hispanics. This figure presents opinion in four race groups, along with Asian, Black, and Hispanic opinion adjusted to the age distribution among whites. Opinion among whites is represented by the dashed line.

Previous literature has typically conflated these age and race differences in opinion by examining race differences only, and treating age as a control variable, and thus have ignored the way that different age distributions within race groups mean that age differ-

ences and race differences necessarily travel together (Tuch and Weitzer 2004, Barkan and Cohn 2005). Prior studies have neglected two key points which I seek to emphasize in the present analysis. First, race differences in opinion (or, for that matter, in behaviors such as voting) amount in significant part to age differences, because nonwhites – especially nonwhite Hispanics – are much younger than whites on average. When twice the share of whites are over 65 compared to the share of Hispanics over 65, white-Hispanic differences cannot be understood without the context of age group differences. Second, age group differences in opinion are, in this case, statistically significant and substantively larger than race group differences, even when holding other characteristics constant. Indeed, these age differences cannot be explained by age-correlated differences in education level, family income, partisan identification, parenting status, gender, urbanness of the respondent's resident county, or the violent crime rate in the respondent's county (as shown in Table 2).

Table 2: Predicting support for additional policing (linear probability model)

	Dependent variable:		
	Support for additional policing		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Age 30-44	0.130***	0.131***	0.121***
	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)
Age 45-64	0.243***	0.240***	0.234***
	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.006)
Age over 65	0.349***	0.345***	0.325***
	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.007)
Black		−0.096***	−0.057***
		(0.006)	(0.007)
Hispanic		0.033***	0.033***
		(0.008)	(0.008)
Asian		0.021**	0.059***
		(0.010)	(0.011)
Democrat			−0.123***
			(0.004)
Male			−0.033***
			(0.004)
Medium metro county			0.008
			(0.006)
Urban county			0.035***
			(0.006)
Income $30k-$60k			0.008
			(0.005)
Income $60k-$100k			0.002
			(0.006)
Income over $100k			−0.011
			(0.007)
HS grad			0.043***
			(0.008)
Some college			−0.014*
			(0.008)
College grad			−0.062***
			(0.009)
Postgrad			−0.124***
			(0.010)
Parent/guardian of child < 18			0.046***
			(0.005)
Homeowner			0.051***
			(0.005)
Violent crime rate (log)			0.041***
			(0.005)
Constant	0.389***	0.416***	0.353***
	(0.017)	(0.018)	(0.022)
Observations	64,549	61,682	55,240
State fixed effects?	Yes	Yes	Yes
R^2	0.064	0.068	0.095

[1] *Notes:* *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01.
[2] Omitted categories: no HS, rural county, white, age under 30.

This analysis makes clear that older Americans are significantly more likely than younger ones to prefer additional policing, conditional on a host of relevant variables (race, party identification, gender, county urbanness, county violent crime rate, household income, education level, parenting status, and home ownership status).[5] In particular, Column (3) of Table 2 shows that as compared to those ages 18 to 29, being ages 30 to 44 is associated with 12% greater likelihood of reporting support for additional policing, being ages 45 to 64 is associated with 23% greater likelihood of reporting support for additional policing, and being over age 65 is associated with 33% greater likelihood of reporting support for additional policing. By contrast, conditional on age group and the same set of background characteristics, Black respondents were only 5.7% less likely than white respondents to report supporting additional policing, Hispanic respondents were 3.3% more likely than whites to report supporting additional policing, and Asian respondents were 2.1% more likely than whites to report supporting additional policing.

Notably, age category is a more powerful predictor of support for additional policing than race, holding all other variables constant.[6] Indeed, this is not the first study to show that age is a better predictor of attitudes toward police and policing than race. But previous studies that included this finding papered it over in favor of extensive discussion of race differences (Howell, Perry, and Vile 2004; Rosenbaum et al. 2005; Weitzer and Tuch 2005).

4.2 Age versus cohort differences in opinion

Are age differences in support for additional policing primarily due to age (that is, numeric age) or cohort (that is, generational membership)? Because the CCES 2016 is a single cross

[5]Throughout this paper, I use ordinary least squares (OLS) regressions to estimate the binary outcomes variables of interest (the linear probability model (LPM)). Although it has become common to use logit, probit, or Tobit models to predict binary dependent variables, I choose to follow Angrist and Pischke (2009) and use an OLS regression in this case for two reasons. First, as they point out, coefficients from LPMs are readily interpretable in terms of the linear relationship between each predictor variable and the outcome variable, and one not need compute marginal effects in order to understand the impact of changes in predictors on the outcome (although I do examine these marginal effects for the sake of discussion and completeness). Second, the main drawback of the LPM approach is that it can produce predictions outside [0,1]. But this is less likely to occur when covariate distributions are bell-shaped and lack extreme outliers, and the covariates in this study are categorical and well-behaved, and so no average predictions outside [0,1] have been generated. Because standard errors from LPMs are necessarily heteroskedastic, in Table **??** I compute Table 2 with robust standard errors, and they are not importantly different from the standardly calculated standard errors.

[6]I use age category in this analysis instead of numerical age so that the comparisons between age groups and race groups are more easily interpretable. In Table 6, I repeat this analysis using a continuous variable for numeric age, and find that each additional year of age is associated with a 0.7% higher likelihood of reporting support for additional policing.

section, age and cohort are unavoidably confounded. I thus investigate this age-versus-cohort question using data from the General Social Survey (GSS). The GSS is a widely used survey program which has asked respondents the same core social and political questions in 31 of the years since 1972, along with a changing set of other questions. Since 1994, the survey has been administered in every even-numbered year. In recent years the number of respondents has been nearly 3,000, but was between 1,000 and 2,000 from 1972 to 1993. Researchers interview the randomly selected, nationally representative participants in person at their homes, and interviews last about 90 minutes.[7] The GSS is a repeated cross-section, and is thus appropriate for assessing the roles of age (that is, numeric age, or place in the life cycle), period (the calendar year), and cohort (an individual's generational membership) if the hierarchical structure of the data is appropriately accounted for (Yang and Land 2006).

For this analysis of GSS data, I focus on a survey item that on each of the 21 GSS surveys since 1984 has asked respondents, "We are faced with many problems in this country, none of which can be solved easily or inexpensively. I'm going to name some of these problems, and for each one I'd like you to tell me whether you think we're spending too much money on it, too little money, or about the right amount. Are we spending too much, too little, or about the right amount on halting the rising crime rate?" Following Yang and Land (2006), I estimate coefficients for age, for other relevant covariates which are correlated with age and with the outcome variable, and for cohorts (groups of respondents born in certain years), along with fixed effects for survey years. Table 3 below presents the results of this analysis (in which the belief that we are spending "too little" on halting the rising crime rate is coded as a 1, and "about the right amount" and "too much" are coded as 0).

Table 3 shows that there is no significant relationship between numeric age and belief that there is too little anti-crime spending, conditional on birth cohort, survey year, and other relevant demographic variables. Only two of the survey years (1994 and 2002) were significantly correlated with spending preference at the 0.05 level or below. By contrast, having been born from 1946 to 1958 is associated with an 8.2% increased likelihood of believing there is too little anti-crime spending, having been born from 1958 to 1970 is asso-

[7] More information about the GSS is available at http://gss.norc.org/About-The-GSS

ciated with a 9.8% increased likelihood of believing there is too little anti-crime spending, and having been born from 1970 to 1982 is associated with an 7.9% increased likelihood of believing there is too little anti-crime spending (all compared to having been born from 1982 to 1994).

Table 3: GSS analysis: predicting the assessment that the government spends too little on halting the rising crime rate

	Anti-crime spending (R believes there is too little)
Age	0.001
	(0.001)
Born 1898 to 1910	0.017
	(0.096)
Born 1910 to 1922	0.055
	(0.077)
Born 1922 to 1934	0.059
	(0.064)
Born 1934 to 1946	0.075
	(0.052)
Born 1946 to 1958	0.082**
	(0.040)
Born 1958 to 1970	0.098***
	(0.029)
Born 1970 to 1982	0.079***
	(0.021)
College grad	−0.034***
	(0.010)
Democrat	−0.025***
	(0.008)
Income (log)	0.022***
	(0.004)
Black	0.068***
	(0.011)
Male	−0.076***
	(0.007)
Parent/guardian of child < 18	0.029***
	(0.009)
Homeowner	0.003
	(0.008)
Constant	0.234***
	(0.049)
Region fixed effects?	Yes
Survey year fixed effects?	Yes
Observations	18,464
R^2	0.030
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

[1] *Notes:* *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01.

[2] The variable Black denotes Black respondents; all other respondents are coded as non-Black. The GSS did not begin recording Hispanic respondent identity until 2000.

[3] Reference birth cohort: birth year 1982 to 1994.

[4] Only two survey years (1994 and 2002) were significantly associated with the outcome at the 0.05 level.

These results suggest that the reason we observe high levels of support for additional policing among those over 30 as compared to those under 30 in 2016 is because of a generational feature of the cohort born between 1946 and 1982 (who were aged 34 to 70 in 2016), rather than because of the numeric age of those aged 34 to 70 in and of itself. This result is consistent with the assessment of Fisher (2008) based on twentieth century election returns, that Americans born between 1946 and 1964 are the most conservative cohort of living Americans. In the next section, I address the question of what mechanisms might explain this cohort effect.

4.3 What explains the cohort effect?

Although the present study does not provide direct evidence for why current cohort of older Americans is much more supportive of additional policing than the current cohort of younger Americans, I here present three hypotheses for why these differences may exist. Each hypothesis is consistent with prior studies on the effects of formative events on public opinion and deserve further research.

First, older Americans lived through and remember the most recent crime wave in the U.S., from the 1960s through the early 1990s, while younger Americans were born either at the tail end of the crime wave or once the crime drop had already begun. The FBI's UCR data indicate that violent crime rates rose from 161 per 100,000 persons in 1960 to 758 per 100,000 persons between 1960 and 1991, and property crime rose from 1,726 per 100,000 persons to 5,140 per 100,000 persons over the same period. Crime rates then began a rapid downward trend, which has slowed, but not stopped or reversed as of 2016. The long period of increasing crime featured extensive media reporting on the causes and consequences of this trend (Lowry, Nio, and Leitner 2003; Simon 2007), in addition to resulting in a large number of Americans victimized by crime.[8] The cohort which opposes additional policing – those born from 1982 to 1994 – is too young to remember this period well. This hypothesis is consistent with a large literature on attitude formation which emphasizes the importance of memory of past events in shaping current attitudes. For example,

[8] According to data from the Bureau of Justice Statistics National Criminal Victimization Survey, there were 33.7 violent crimes per 1,000 Americans over age 12 in 1978, and 18.6 violent crimes per 1,000 Americans over age 12 in 2015.

individuals who have experienced low stock market returns report more risk aversion in financial investments (Malmendier and Nagel 2011), and an individual's first presidential election is significantly predictive of later voting behavior (Sears and Valentino 1997; Jennings, Stoker, and Bowers 2009).

Second, for the current generation of younger Americans, the advent and spread of "broken windows" policing (and similar strategies such as proactive policing or zero-tolerance policing) has coincided with the age at which they were (and are) most likely to become targets of police attention. For example, in 2011, at the height of the New York Police Department's stop, question, and frisk strategy, the NYPD made over 685,000 stops. Over half (51%) of these stops were of individuals aged 14 to 24. These individuals would have been born between 1987 and 1997, and are aged 22 to 32 today. It is reasonable to hypothesize that these individuals might oppose additional policing partly as a result of their experience with police stops. A corollary consequence of the timing of the introduction and spread of broken windows policing is that older individuals observed a major crime decline in the years that followed. Although most criminologists do not believe that broken windows policing caused the crime decline (e.g., Harcourt and Ludwig (2006), it is easy to understand how individuals who lived through this major policy change and the subsequent crime decline would attribute the latter to the former (Zimring 2006).

Third, local television news reports extensively on crime, and local television news viewing is highly concentrated among older Americans (Mitchell, Holcomb, and Page 2015). The relationship between age and TV news consumption is by definition a cohort effect, because television news did not become widespread in the U.S. until the mid-1950s (de Leon 2015). Television news consumption has declined precipitously in the last ten years, and is lowest among Americans aged 18 to 29 (Pew Research Center 2018). Although there is no direct evidence of a relationship between television news consumption and concern about crime from the United States, it is plausible to think that news coverage of local crime (of the sort common on local news) might increase demand for policing, and research has found a strong relationship of this sort by exploiting the random rollout of digital television in Italy (Mastrorocco and Minale 2018). Future research is required to definitively show that Americans who watch more local news are also more concerned

about crime.

4.4 Consequences for policy

In this section, I examine whether and how age differences in support for additional policing have consequences for policy. First, I illustrate that older individuals compose an outsized share of voters and participants in non-voting political activity. Second, I use data the LEMAS and the ACS to show that cities with a greater share of residents over 65 have more full-time sworn police officers and a larger police operating budget, all else equal.

4.4.1 Voting and other costly political behavior

Extensive research has investigated whether elected officials better represent the interests of voters than the interests of non-voters (e.g., Griffin and Newman (2005), Martin and Claibourn (2013)), but has typically focused on either race (Hajnal and Trounstine 2005) or income (Gilens and Page 2014). With the important exception of Anzia (2019), this research mostly neglects (1) the higher voting rates of older individuals, regardless of race or income, and (2) that older Americans are whiter and wealthier than younger Americans on average, and so policies that favor wealthy whites also necessarily favor the relatively older. Those age 45 to 64 represent 36% of the voting-age population but 41% of the electorate, and those over 65 represent 17% of the voting-age population but 23% of the electorate. Within race groups, these differences tend to be even larger. 27% of voting-age American Blacks are under age 30, but only 17% of Black voters are; Hispanics over age 65 are only 8% of all Hispanics in the U.S., but they are fully 14% of voting Hispanics.

There are many political behaviors other than voting, and these behaviors are at least as important in the shaping of public policy as voting (Schlozman, Verba, and Brady 2012). Importantly, behaviors such as attending local meetings or donating to candidates can convey specific policy preferences to officials in ways that voting cannot (Anzia 2019).

For criminal justice policy preferences in particular, this type of local political participation outside the voting booth seems to be extremely consequential for policy; sociologists have documented that local anticrime and community-support nonprofits, which very often partner with local police agencies to divert youth from criminal activity, are directly

responsible for a portion of the crime decline between the 1990s and the 2010s (Sharkey and Torrats-Espinosa 2017).

The 2016 CCES asked respondents whether, in the last year, they had engaged in any of four kinds of costly political behaviors: attending a local meeting, putting up a political sign, working for a candidate or campaign, or donating money to a candidate or campaign. These behaviors are not only general indicators of political engagement, but are also ways for citizens to signal particular policy preference to public officials. Figure 3 illustrates that the group of Americans who had engaged in at least one of these behaviors in the 12 months before survey administration skews significantly older than Americans as a whole – Americans over 65 are 17% of the voting-age population, but 24% of those engaged in non-voting costly political behaviors. Figure 3 presents the ratios of voter registration (top) and political participation (bottom) for different age groups within their race group. Bars which meet the dark line indicate that the ratios are equal, while bars that fall above or below the line indicate higher or lower levels of participation, respectively. For example, whites under 30 make up 18% of voting-age whites but only 12% of white registered voters, so the bar representing whites under 30 is at 0.66 in the top panel of the figure.

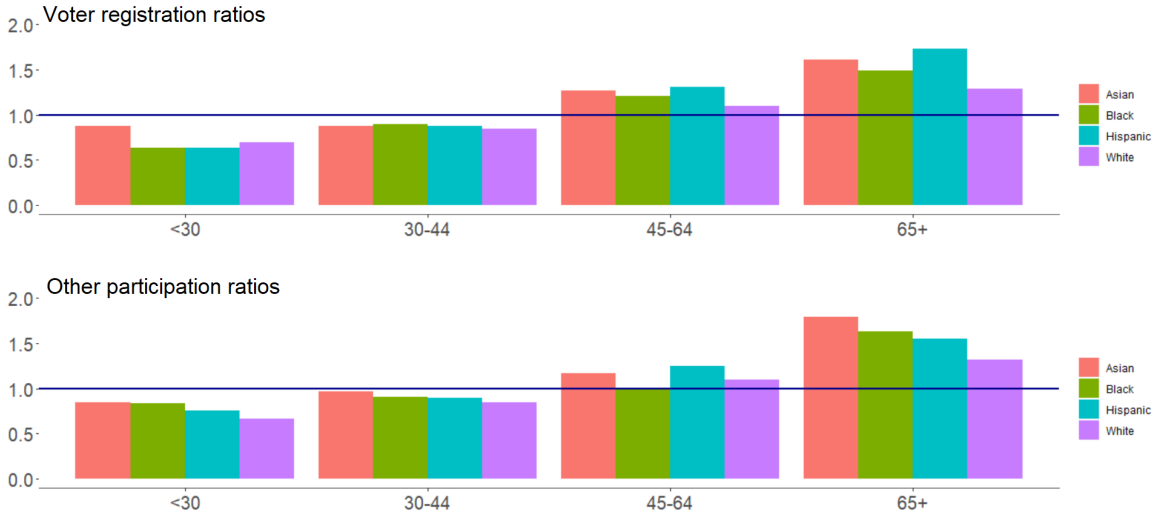

Figure 3: Ratios of voter registration and political participation to age group shares of racial groups. The top panel displays the ratios of the shares of registered voters in an age group within a race group to that age group's share of its race group's voting age population. The bottom panel displays the ratios of the shares of political participants in an age group within a race group to that age group's share of its race group's voting age population.

Column (2) of Table 4 shows that these differences can be partly, but not fully, explained by race, party identification, gender, income, education level, presence of a child in the home, homeowning status, and state. Conditional on all these variables, those 30 to 44 are actually 5% less likely to participate in politics, those 45 to 64 are no more or less likely, and those over 65 are 10% more likely, compared to those under age 30.

Column (1) of Table 4 below shows that these large age differences in voting participation persist even holding party identification, gender, income, education level, presence of a child in the home, and homeowning status constant. Conditional on those background variables and including state fixed effects, those age 30 to 44 are 7.5% more likely to be registered voters than those under 30, those age 45 to 64 are 21.5% more likely to be registered voters than those under 30, and those over 65 are 35% more likely to be registered voters than those under 30. By contrast, holding those background variables and age group constant, Blacks are just 5% less likely to be registered voters than whites, Hispanics 8% less

likely, and Asians 14% less likely.

Table 4: Predicting registered voter status and non-voting political participation

	Registered voter	Other political participation (past year)
	(1)	(2)
Age 30-44	0.077***	−0.065***
	(0.006)	(0.007)
Age 45-64	0.210***	−0.044***
	(0.006)	(0.007)
Age 65+	0.321***	0.040***
	(0.007)	(0.008)
Black	−0.021***	−0.058***
	(0.007)	(0.008)
Hispanic	−0.084***	−0.092***
	(0.008)	(0.009)
Asian	−0.192***	−0.124***
	(0.010)	(0.012)
Democrat	0.071***	0.114***
	(0.004)	(0.005)
Male	−0.015***	0.081***
	(0.004)	(0.004)
Medium metro county	0.019***	−0.018***
	(0.006)	(0.007)
Urban county	−0.008	−0.024***
	(0.006)	(0.007)
Income $30k-$60k	0.083***	0.069***
	(0.005)	(0.006)
Income $60k-$100k	0.119***	0.136***
	(0.006)	(0.006)
Income over $100k	0.146***	0.206***
	(0.007)	(0.007)
HS grad	−0.042***	−0.019
	(0.011)	(0.012)
Some college	−0.037***	−0.014
	(0.011)	(0.012)
College grad	−0.045***	−0.006
	(0.012)	(0.013)
Postgrad	−0.027**	0.001
	(0.012)	(0.013)
Child under 18	−0.053***	0.009
	(0.005)	(0.006)
Homeowner	0.023***	0.049***
	(0.005)	(0.005)
Violent crime rate (log)	−0.017***	0.013**
	(0.005)	(0.005)
Constant	0.418***	0.118***
	(0.024)	(0.026)
Observations	55,382	45,028
R^2	0.128	0.067
Adjusted R^2	0.127	0.066
Note:		*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

[1] *Notes:* *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01.
[2] Omitted categories: no HS, rural county, white, age under 30.

These differences in voting rates are consequential for policing policy because demographic groups who are numerical minorities can be decisive in local elections (Hajnal and Trounstine 2005), and because public safety policy is especially responsive to the preferences of local voters (Gerber and Hopkins 2011).

4.4.2 Policy consequences

Large differences in both opinion and the rate of political participation do not necessarily mean that policy outcomes are biased towards the preferences of the higher-participation group. To show that seniors are indeed influential in achieving larger municipal police departments, I turn to data from the Law Enforcement Management and Administrative Statistics (LEMAS) Survey, an occasional survey of law enforcement agencies nationwide conducted by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS). BJS sends the survey form to all agencies with over 100 full-time sworn officers, and to a nationally representative sample of smaller agencies. The survey includes detailed questions about agency staff, including the number of full-time sworn officers.

To empirically test the relationship between senior citizen political participation and sworn police force size, I combine data from the LEMAS 2013 survey with city-level demographic data from the ACS (2011-2015 5-year estimates) and crime data from the UCR program (2013 data), and data from the LEMAS 2007 survey with city-level demograhic data from the ACS (2006-2010 5-year estimates) and crime data from the 2007 UCR reports.

Table 5: Predicting police force size and budget using city-level demographic variables

	Dependent variable:	
	Officers per capita (log)	Budget per capita (log)
	(1)	(2)
Share over 65	0.133***	0.087***
	(0.014)	(0.017)
Share Black	−0.121***	−0.135***
	(0.019)	(0.024)
PC income (log)	0.343***	0.546***
	(0.054)	(0.068)
Violent crime rate (log)	0.587***	0.613***
	(0.015)	(0.019)
LEMAS 2013	0.888***	0.689***
	(0.088)	(0.112)
Constant	−11.830***	−1.652**
	(0.677)	(0.841)
State fixed effects?	Yes	Yes
Observations	1,338	1,304
R^2	0.679	0.585
Note:		*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 5 shows that, holding a city's share Black residents, per capita income, violent crime rate, and state constant, a 10% increase in the share of voting-age residents over 65 is associated with a 1.3% increase in the number of police officers per capita and a 0.8% increase in the police department operating budget per capita. For a city with 50,000 residents, these coefficients translate into a police department with a predicted value of 350 full-time sworn officers adding 5 additional full-time sworn officers if its share of voting-age residents over 65 increased by 10%. For the same city, this model would predict a police department operating budget of $45.4 million to increase to $45.8 million if its share of voting-age residents over 65 increased by 10%. The inclusion of two time periods in this data analysis also allows me to non-parametrically control for national differences in police force sizes between 2007 and 2013. (Just 8.7% of residents are over 65 in the mean city, and so for the mean city, a 10% increase in the share of residents over 65 would represent an increase from 8.7% to 9.6%.)

This analysis should not be considered causal because the share of senior citizens is not randomly assigned to cities. This analysis is also limited by the relatively small number of cities (669) which completed both the LEMAS and the UCR in both 2007 and 2013. But it shows that senior citizen share of the population is significantly positively associated with police force size and budget, even when accounting for important confounders in city demographics and crime rates.

5 Discussion and Conclusion

In this paper, I have sought to show that senior citizens are a pro-police interest group by (1) showing that today's senior citizens have shared attitudes on policing not shared with younger age cohorts, even co-ethnic younger age cohorts, and (2) showing that disproportionately high rate of political participation by today's seniors likely results in larger and better-funded police departments in cities where they make up a relatively larger share of the population.

By showing that senior citizens operate as a largely overlooked interest group at the local level, these results beg the question of what other policies are systematically favored by senior citizens and how that might be affecting local policy. This question is perhaps

particularly important in the current sociopolitical moment, since the risks and benefits of different public health restrictions, vaccination campaigns, and educational and business re-openings fall very differently on seniors and non-seniors duing the COVID-19 pandemic.

These results also suggest a solution to a longstanding puzzle concerning the expansion of police departments in an ever-safer America. The rate of violent crime fell by 38% and the rate of property crime fell by 44% between 1987 and 2013. But U.S. local police departments expanded the size of their officer corps by 34% on average over the same period (Truman and Morgan 2016). Police departments which saturate low-income, majority-minority neighborhoods with patrol officers face mounting criticism from community organizations cognizant of the detrimental impact of chronic, involuntary law enforcement contact (Brunson and Miller 2006). City policy seems to be responsive to the public's preferences (Gerber and Hopkins 2011), and many police departments make specific efforts to incorporate community feedback into their strategy and tactics (Tillyer 2018). The results in this paper suggest that one explanation for the persistence of large police departments despite these despite falling crime and criticism of police tactics is the confluence of age differences in opinion and political participation on policing. This form of turnout bias may be partly responsible for policies which lead young people to have frequent, involuntary contact with the police, which is both burdensome in and of itself and has potentially serious downstream consequences, most notably for incarceration and labor market participation (Meares 2004; Lopoo and Western 2005; Pager 2008). These results suggest that testing strategies for increasing youth participation in criminal justice policymaking – already an area of exploration by some scholars of the criminal justice system – is likely to be a fruitful avenue for future research as well (Luttig and Cohen 2016; Weaver, Prowse, and Piston 2019; Weaver and Geller 2019).

Finally, by illuminating how racial minorities suffer disproportionately from the well-studied problem of youth under-representation (Schlozman, Verba, and Brady 2012), these results suggest that increased youth political participation may also help ameliorate racial minority under-representation in politics. Prior research has noted the severe under-representation of minorities even in local-level political institutions, such as city coun-

cils, and attributed this to low minority turnout (Hajnal and Trounstine 2005), insufficient voting rights protections (Marschall and Rutherford 2016), or districting practices (Trounstine and Valdini 2008). The challenge of youth representation may be especially acute in the case of criminal justice policy, where individuals most directly affected are often officially disenfranchised or informally demotivated from political participation due to their adverse experiences with government authority (Lerman and Weaver 2014; White 2016). Increased political participation among those who are both young *and* non-white could reverberate in several policy domains which implicate dimensions of both age and race.

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6 Appendix

Table 6: Replication of Table 2 with age as a continuous variable

	Dependent variable:
	Support for additional policing
Age (years)	0.007***
	(0.0001)
Black	−0.051***
	(0.007)
Hispanic	0.039***
	(0.008)
Asian	0.065***
	(0.011)
Democrat	−0.122***
	(0.004)
Male	−0.033***
	(0.004)
Medium metro county	0.007
	(0.006)
Urban county	0.034***
	(0.006)
Income $30k-$60k	0.007
	(0.005)
Income $60k-$100k	0.005
	(0.006)
Income over $100k	−0.005
	(0.007)
HS grad	0.047***
	(0.008)
Some college	−0.013
	(0.008)
College grad	−0.060***
	(0.009)
Postgrad	−0.118***
	(0.010)
Parent/guardian of child < 18	0.060***
	(0.005)
Homeowner	0.047***
	(0.005)
Violent crime rate (log)	0.042***
	(0.005)
Constant	0.203***
	(0.022)
Observations	55,240
State fixed effects?	Yes
R^2	0.096

[1] *Notes:* *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01.
[2] Omitted categories: no HS, rural county, white, age under 30.