



Reducing traffic violations in minority localities: Designing a traffic enforcement program through a public participation process

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ABSTRACT

The current study tests an innovative public participation process for designing and implementing a tailored traffic enforcement program in minority localities. The quasi-experiment used two matched pairs of randomly selected Israeli Arab localities, where one locality in each pair was randomly assigned to the experimental group and the other to the control group. The intervention's main features were the public participation process and implementation by police of the traffic enforcement program designed during the process. Systematic field observations on 12,236 vehicles in the four localities found a meaningful and significant reduction in traffic violations in the experimental localities following the intervention, while a small increase in violations was observed in the control localities. The most meaningful decline, indicating improvement in drivers' behavior, was in non-use of seatbelts and small children in the front seat. The study suggests that a public participation process which identifies local road traffic problems and "dark" hot spots (places where offenses and risky behavior recur but might not be known to the police), followed by implementing tailored solutions for these problems, can reduce traffic violations. Future research should aim to separate out the independent effects of the two phases (the public participation process and tailored enforcement).

1. Introduction

In many countries, non-dominant minorities (e.g., members of ethnic or racial minority groups) tend to be over-involved in delinquent and risky behavior and to be over-represented in road traffic crashes and traffic violations (see, e.g., Marshall, 1997; Department for Transport, 2001; Briggs et al., 2005; Hilton, 2006; Factor et al., 2008; Bui, 2009; Veen et al., 2011; Peterson, 2012; Andersen, 2015; Coughenour et al., 2017; Factor, 2018). Moreover, negative interactions between minority group members and law enforcement authorities can reduce trust in the police and satisfaction with their services, and, in consequence, cooperation with police and obedience to the law (Tyler, 2005; Carr et al., 2007; Hasisi and Weitzer, 2007; Factor et al., 2014; Ross, 2015). To address these concerns, there is strong interest in developing enforcement strategies tailored for minority communities, customized for their needs and designed to create positive interactions between the police and the community.

The current study aimed at developing and empirically evaluating an innovative public participation process (Abelson et al., 2003; Delli Carpini et al., 2004) for designing and implementing a specially tailored road traffic enforcement program. The public participation process was designed to encourage the community's active involvement in crash and

traffic violation prevention decision-making and to enable the identification of "dark" hot spots (see below) of unlawful and risky driving in the community. The resulting enforcement program was expected to fit the characteristics of the community, and thereby to reduce alienation and social resistance, enhance trust in the police, and eventually increase obedience to the law (Tyler, 2005; Factor et al., 2013c).

A quasi-experimental study was conducted among Israeli Arabs – a minority group in Israel that is over-represented in the enforcement system generally, and in road traffic crashes and traffic violations specifically, relative to their size in the population and their distance traveled (Factor et al., 2008, 2013b; Central Bureau of Statistics, 2016c, a). Two pairs of Israeli Arab localities, matched over a range of characteristics (see Section 5.1), were randomly selected, with one locality in each pair randomly allocated to either an experimental or a control group. In each of the two experimental localities, a traffic enforcement program and related community-run communication campaigns (to alert community members to the program) were designed through a public participation process, and were then implemented by the police for four and a half months. The effect of the intervention was evaluated through systematic before-and-after field observations on vehicles in the four localities.

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2. Minorities, traffic violations, and policing

Massive enforcement efforts in minority communities can reduce unwanted behavior, at least temporarily – but at the cost of heightened resentment, alienation, perceptions of paternalism, and social resistance (Taylor, 2006; Factor et al., 2011, 2013b).¹ Therefore, if enforcement programs are to be effective, they must be adapted to the community, and perceived by its members as fair and legitimate (Schwartz, 2006; Mehozay and Factor, 2017).

There is growing understanding that to effectively reduce crime and disorder, the police must engage with the community and work together with local citizens in different ways (Weisburd and Eck, 2004; Gill et al., 2014). Contemporary law enforcement has access to a set of overlapping policing strategies and models aimed at tightening enforcement while building positive interactions between the police and the community. These are community policing, problem-oriented policing, and hot-spot policing (Brunson et al., 2015; Lum and Nagin, 2015; Fridell, 2016). When used in conjunction, these policing strategies do appear to make communities safer, at least to some extent (see, e.g., Braga et al., 1999; Weisburd and Eck, 2004; Gill et al., 2014; Groff et al., 2015). However, although these strategies aspire theoretically and philosophically to involve the community, the degree to which they do so in practice – i.e., actively involving local citizens in identifying and addressing local problems – is unclear (Skolnick and Bayley, 1988; Mastrofski, 2006; Skogan, 2006; Schaefer Morabito, 2010; Gill et al., 2014; Groff et al., 2015). For instance, efforts to involve the community may start with good intentions, but then devolve into simply informing the public about police actions, rather than allowing citizens to participate meaningfully in decision making about police services and management.

In addition, official crime data often exclude “dark” hot spots, a term we borrow from the well-known “dark figure of crime” of Biderman and Reiss (1967). Dark hot spots are defined in the current study as places where (a) the community suffers from recurring offences or risky behavior, including traffic violations and traffic crashes, which (b) are not recorded in police statistics, whether because each instance is not sufficiently severe; because the police are not active in those locations; or because members of the public, for whatever reason, do not report these cases to the police. Such failure to report may be particularly relevant in minority communities, where alienation from and mistrust of the police result in a loss of police legitimacy among ordinary citizens (Tyler, 2006). At the same time, the problems that beset these dark hot spots, from delinquency and antisocial behavior to recurring petty or low-level crime, may burden the community as much as or more than severer crime (Skogan, 2006; Sousa and Kelling, 2006; Hamilton-Smith et al., 2014).

3. Public participation

Public participation holds potential to help address both the issues raised above – insufficient community involvement in resolving local issues, and identifying dark hot spots. Public participation is defined as citizens’ involvement in decision-making on service delivery and management, and involves a group of procedures aimed at informing, consulting, and engaging the public in the design and execution of projects (Rowe and Frewer, 2000; Bickerstaff et al., 2002). The idea dates back to the 1960s, when it was introduced in the context of urban planning (Fagotto and

¹ For example, strategies such as broken window policing and zero tolerance policing are aimed at making communities safer by increasing enforcement and arrests for low-level anti-social behavior and misdemeanor offences. Although research into the effects of these strategies has produced mixed results, there is some evidence that they do reduce crime rates to a certain degree. However, this heightened police activity is also likely to increase levels of racial inequality in the criminal justice system. This, in turn, increases negative perceptions and distrust of the police (Taylor, 2006; Telep and Weisburd, 2012; Weitzer, 2015).

Fung, 2006). Today, public participation processes are employed to involve the public in setting targets and policies, deciding how taxes are allocated, and executing programs in a variety of areas (Arnstein, 1969; Rowe and Frewer, 2000; Ghai, 2001; Healy, 2009). As such, public participation – at least in theory – redistributes power in society, giving a voice to people who might otherwise feel excluded from political and economic processes (Arnstein, 1969; Ghai, 2001).

Public participation processes fall between two poles, where one pole represents traditional unilateral decision-making by government institutions, and the other represents a true or authentic participation in decision making processes through active dialogue and information exchange between citizens and government institutions (Arnstein, 1969; King et al., 1998). Along the spectrum are different methods that allow for different levels of citizen participation in decision-making. These methods differ in the number and selection of participants, the types of resources provided, the number of meetings held, and so forth; and they go by different names (e.g., consensus conferences, citizens’ juries, and public deliberation forums; Rowe and Frewer, 2000; Delli Carpini et al., 2004; Innes and Booher, 2004). But all, ideally, involve a process where lay members of the public are invited to meet with government planners or other professionals to discuss an issue, hear and share opposing views and concerns, challenge the data presented, weigh different costs and trade-offs, and eventually reach a set of recommendations for activity (for a description of different methods, see, e.g., Rowe and Frewer, 2000; Abelson et al., 2003).

The theoretical literature and empirical evidence suggest numerous advantages of public participation. To cite but a few: (1) Public participation processes empower the individuals and communities that take part. (2) They create synergy in the flow of information between the authorities and the public. (3) They may lead to a new or wider range of alternatives that would not be considered otherwise. (4) They help decision-makers understand the needs of the public, and expose issues that are not recorded in official systems. (5) They improve local services and make it possible to customize interventions or decisions for a particular community. (6) They improve public commitment to and compliance with policies or programs, and reduce resistance to change. Finally, (7) they increase the community’s social capital and cohesion, raise levels of satisfaction with, trust in, and perceived legitimacy of the authorities, and reduce citizens’ alienation and cynicism (Lowndes et al., 2001; Abelson et al., 2003; Delli Carpini et al., 2004; Innes and Booher, 2004; Fagotto and Fung, 2006; Mannarini et al., 2010; Ron and Cohen-Blankshtain, 2011). At the same time, public participation also has downsides. It can create unrealistic expectations, slow down the decision-making process, and demand time and effort from participants, who in some cases might be isolated or stigmatized (King et al., 1998; Lowndes et al., 2001; Grossardt et al., 2003; Delli Carpini et al., 2004; Mannarini et al., 2010).

Recent years have witnessed growing efforts around the world (e.g., the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia, Italy, Denmark, the Netherlands, and Israel) to design more effective and successful public participation processes in a range of fields, including urban planning, transportation planning, public health, public policy, the environment, education, and crime (Bickerstaff et al., 2002; Abelson et al., 2003; Schelp et al., 2006; Mannarini et al., 2010; Lu and Liang, 2011; Ron and Cohen-Blankshtain, 2011; van Steden et al., 2011). However it is not clear how this should be done in practice (Webler et al., 2001; Grossardt et al., 2003). As a starting point, Rowe and Frewer (2000) suggest a number of criteria for building an effective public participation process. First, all stakeholders should be represented in a steering committee that will guide the process from start to finish. Second, participants should be chosen so as to represent the community to the fullest extent possible. Third, all protocols of the deliberations and other aspects of the process should be transparent, and be published through social media and other forms of mass communication. Finally, the process objectives, available resources, and manner of decision-making need to be defined clearly at the beginning of the process to

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