



Use of Force: Local Perceptions of Police Discretion

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Abstract: The purpose of this research was to examine existing data at the national level, as well as local public opinion on police use of force and discretion issues. It was not known how, or to what extent local and nationally publicized police use of force incidents have influenced local perceptions and trust in the local area law enforcement. This author hypothesized if law enforcement generally deployed tactical and lawful force options, public perception for local law enforcement force discretion would be supportive. Using a critical population group, local area college students from the El Paso, Texas area were surveyed in order to exam their perceptions of local law enforcement use of force issues. Survey respondents demonstrated a favorable view of local area law enforcement discretion, professionalism, and use of force issues. Regardless of negative media attention at the national level towards law enforcement, community perception and reaction to law enforcement are largely based on local issues.

Key words: Police, El Paso Law Enforcement, Mainstream Media, Use of Force Continuum

1. INTRODUCTION

The continued debate in the United States over excessive police use of force has focused on law enforcement agency accountability and the roles of law enforcement training, supervision, and discipline of officers, which play a part of police discretion and use of force tactics. Many agencies have deployed citizen use of force review boards to increase public accountability and transparency. Model use of force policies have become more restrictive towards officer discretion. However, the courts and law have remained consistent in defending police discretion and its application of force decisions made by officers in the field during split-second decision-making choices.

In 2016, the Police Executive Research Forum [PERF] provided a guiding principle on police use of force policies. Recommendations included improved policies, training, and equipment to reduce police shootings and improve officer safety (PERF, 2016). The PERF made note that about 25% of police shootings involved mentally ill persons, but only 9% of those fatal shootings were unarmed (PERF, 2016). Training law enforcement officers should not be limited to use of force tactics, but should also include communication tactics including de-escalation techniques, cultural sensitivity, and how to deal with mental illness and other persons with disabilities. This study explores police discretion in relation to force and lethal force incidents and the potential relationship with public perception and support.

2. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROBLEM

As a result of high-profile police shootings and the long-simmering perception of excessive force against minorities in the United States over the past several years, there has been an increased national debate on policing and community relations in this country. This debate has included the use of police powers granted to law enforcement, including police discretion. The vast majority of police-civilian contacts do not involve the use of force. However, through modern technology, the mainstream media, and social media, force incidents have left an impression on many there is an existing problem with police discretion and use of force. The purpose of this research is to examine existing data at the national level, as well as local public opinion on police use of force and discretion issues. It is not known how, or to what extent local and nationally publicized police use of force incidents have influenced local perceptions and trust in the local area law enforcement. This author hypothesizes if

law enforcement generally deployed tactical and lawful force options, public perception for local law enforcement force discretion will be supportive. This author surveyed local area college students from the El Paso, Texas area believing this group would have an elevated sense of current events and issues.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Law enforcement officials and researchers agree that force can be described as a physical action taken by an officer to control the movements or freedom of another individual (Alpert & Dunham, 2004). However, if there is no physical resistance requiring more than a police “come-along” hold, the force incident is generally not recorded. All other incidents requiring force where an injury does occur, this event is usually recorded by the agency. When using force, the United States Supreme Court ruled in *Graham v. Conner* (1989) that the force used by the officer must be objectively reasonable given all the facts and circumstances of the case, including the severity of the crime, whether the suspect poses an immediate threat to the officer or others, and whether the suspect is actively resisting or attempting to evade custody. Many people use the past to judge the present, but in reality, many aspects of policing and the practice of police use of force have changed over time (Alpert & Dunham, 2004). Force policy is continuously evolving with the ever-increasing access to newly developed use of force tools, force techniques, case law, and more importantly, public perception.

3.1. Texas Penal Code, Statistics and the Media

Under Chapter 9 of the Texas Penal Code [TPC], written laws guide the use of force by law enforcement in the State of Texas. However, police officers are not immune to prosecution. In Section 9.05, a peace officer who recklessly injures or kills an innocent third person is not protected by a defense to prosecution (TPC, 2020). Even if a police officer is justified in the use of deadly force, an accidental injuring or killing of an unintended target will not protect the officer from prosecution. In a deadly force encounter, generally the peace officer is the only one in the encounter who is concerned about following the law. This section of the law provides a clear disadvantage to the officer. In Section 9.51, a peace officer is justified in using deadly force against another when and to the degree the officer reasonably believes the force is immediately necessary to make, or assist in making, a lawful arrest or search and the person to be arrested will cause death to another if the arrest is delayed (TPC, 2020).

Most police/suspect encounters do not result in the police using force against the suspect. On average, about 1,000 people are killed by the police each year (Washington Post, 2020). Also, about 25% of those killed were mentally ill (Frank ham, 2018). Shootings reported by the media give the appearance of a lethal force epidemic. However, according to Duff in (2019), the FBI’s Uniform Crime Reports show the police make about 12 to 14 million arrests in the United States each year. This equates to about 3,000 arrests per 100,000 residents. Of those, about 1.5 million are arrested for drug offenses (FBI Uniform Crime Report, 2019). By calculating the data, there is about a .006% chance that the police will kill a suspect during an arrest. The chance of anyone being shot and killed by a law enforcement officer in the United States is statistically insignificant. The risk is even lower for an unarmed person who poses no immediate threat to the law enforcement officer.

Displayed by the media almost every other week is another police officer shooting somewhere in the United States. Worse, the media is quick to report when a White police officer shoots an unarmed Black man. Again, this reporting gives the perception of police use of lethal force as an epidemic. According to Johnson (2016), media reports are unreliable as they attribute deaths by the hands of the police before investigations are complete, such as a reported police shooting resulting in a suicide. The media also accounts for accidental deaths from police use of force when there was no intent by the officer to harm the individual, such as automobile accidents (Johnson, 2016). Looking at police shootings in relative terms, of the 321 million people residing in the United States, the Center for Disease Control reported in 2015 there were over 40,000 suicides, 33,000 vehicle accident fatalities, 30,000 deaths from falls, 38,000 deaths from accidental poisonings, 16,000 murder victims, and 251,000 deaths from medical errors. With about 1,000 being killed by the police, which occurs far less frequently than many other causes which people do not show significant concern over, police shootings cannot be considered an epidemic (p. 2-3). This media-driven false perception negatively impacts public perception of law enforcement in this country.

In the United States, African Americans represent about 13% of the U.S. population but account for about 25% of those killed by the police (Beer, 2018). Such incidents of lethal police force against Blacks have driven protests, and in some cases, riots. Many people believe much of these victims of police shootings were unarmed, but in reality, only about 15-17 Blacks shot by the police were unarmed. Tragic? Yes, but 25 Whites and 12 Hispanics were also unarmed, which the media rarely reports to the public. According to a Harvard University study (Revised, 2016-2018), this research identified an unexplained higher rate of force on Blacks by the police, compared to Whites, but there were no racial differences discovered in officer involved shootings. According to Moskos (2009), adjusting for homicide rates, Whites are 1.7 times more likely than Blacks to die by the hands of the police. As stated in the Washington Times (2016), although the police kill Whites at a higher rate than Blacks, minority deaths generate more public outrage. This negative public perception occurs due to a bias media and certain politicians choosing to sow public discord. In a recent Tweet by Congresswoman Rashida Tlaib (Personal Communication, April 30, 2020) “*Black people get executed by police for just existing, while white people dressed like militia members carrying assault weapons are allowed to threaten State Legislators and staff*”, referencing a recent public protest at the Michigan, MO Capitol regarding the governor’s stay at home orders. Statements made by elected officials are taken seriously by many of their constituents. This is exasperated when the media repeats such statements to the public without providing any objective fact-checking or opposing arguments.

Just looking at basic national data and nothing else, similar to the actions of the media, one may conclude the police kill more Blacks, per capita, than Whites, so there must be some type of prejudice occurring between African American males and the police. However, when observing national crime data, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics (2010), Black offenders committed 52% of homicides between 1980 and 2008, whereas 45% of the offenders were White. The same government study also revealed that the victimization rate for Blacks was six times higher than the rate for Whites. The offending rate for Blacks was eight times higher than the rate for Whites. The study also reported that victims are about 90% likely to be victimized by someone of the same race/ethnic group and Blacks and Latinos are two of the most violently victimized racial/ethnic groups in the United States (Pp. 2-19).

Are the police using lethal force as a form of institutionalized racism, or are the police more likely, per capita, to encounter resistance during an arrest from a Black offender than a White or Hispanic offender? It depends on which community is being observed. In consideration, police also do not use lethal force at the same rates equally across the country. In some regions of the country, police shootings are at much higher rate than other regions. As such, African Americans have every right to be upset over Black victimization rates in this country, but statistically, it is not on the hands of the police. In 2016, there were 7,881 Black homicide victims in this country. Of those, 233 came from the hands of the police. Of those, only 16 were unarmed (Mac Donald, 2017). Over the past decade, 42% of cop killers were Black males, although this population group only represents 6% of the U.S. population (Mac Donald, 2017). However, this is a national average. Because of those few pockets of high-density low-income inner-city violence, it raises the average across the U.S., which also provides a false threat to police in other regions if they do not understand the depth of the data. Most people get their information from a bias media in the United States, which are selective in their reporting, at best. Mainstream media quickly publishes questionable police shootings before there is any investigation in order to boost ratings, and in some cases, to create drama and discord. In 2018 alone, data shows there were over 2,400 shooting victims and 478 murders in Chicago. Would this be considered an epidemic? Should this be a concern to the national media? Should there be protests and public outrage to the endless violence and victimization in Chicago?

Unfortunate as police shootings are, statistically, they are rare. Statistics demonstrate that Blacks are not being targeted by the police nation-wide. Understandably, there are issues of concern in some regions of the U.S., but if Blacks were being targeted by law enforcement nationally, more extensive statistics looking at multiple factors would show it. Again, the police may use deadly or lethal force to make an arrest when they are in imminent fear that the offender is attempting to cause serious bodily injury or death to the officer or towards another. If the offender is attempting to flee from the arrest, the crime must have been a felony (not misdemeanor), and the offender poses a significant risk of seriously hurting or killing another should they getaway. The Supreme Court created this “fleeing felon rule” by establishing when police can use deadly force to prevent one’s escape from custody (Tennessee v. Garner: 471 US 1, 1985). In simpler terms, the police cannot use deadly force to arrest a

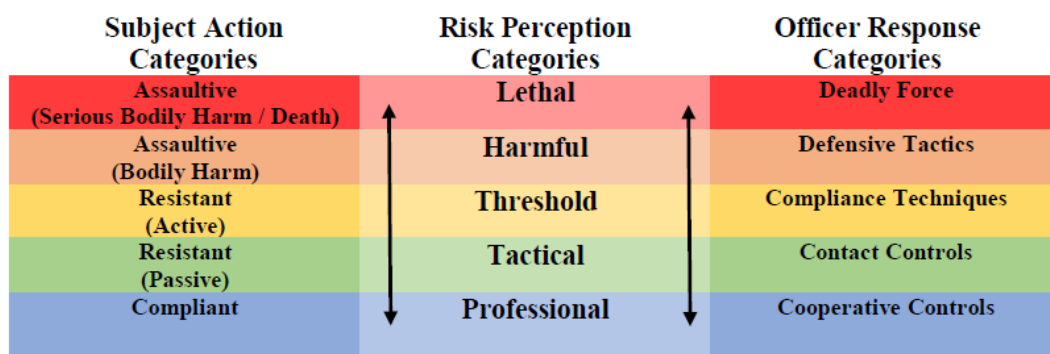
person wanted on a misdemeanor charge, or during a temporary detention unless the offender elevates their actions dictating lethal force by the officer, such as attempting to take away the officer’s weapon. Nor can a police officer shoot a person in the back when they are running away from a simple traffic violation. Doing so would likely result in a prosecution of the officer. In making an arrest, the police may use all reasonable means to effect it. No greater force, however, shall be resorted to than is necessary to secure the arrest and detention of the accused.

3.2. Role of Law Enforcement

By this author’s observations, during a physical arrest, the police role is primarily defensive, which means the offender being arrested will dictate the level of force applied by the police officer. Webster's defines the word *Defensive* as "Serving to protect," or "devoted to resisting or preventing aggression or attack" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). It is not aggression when the officer takes the initiative to confront a law violator. That is an officer's duty and is what we (taxpayers) pay the police to do. The officer's act is not one of hostility, but the officer's behavior early in the encounter may result in the force used later in the encounter (Terrill, 2003). Force is designed to defend and protect the community from criminality.

Using the police use of force continuum by the National Institute of Justice [NIJ] (2009), the police are not expected to meet force-on-force equally. Society expects the police to win every time. Otherwise, who else will protect us? A law enforcement career would be rather short if the police were to have a 50/50 chance of winning a confrontation. Laws and accompanying policies afford the police the ability to meet any level of resistance legally with a higher level of force if necessary in order to achieve the objective of securing the offender. How much higher can the police go over the level of resistance given? That is up to each officer to determine dictated by the situation. The actions of the officer must meet the "Objective Reasonableness" standard established in *Tennessee v. Garner* (1985). A 130-pound police officer facing off with a 230-pound drug-induced offender may use a higher level of force than a 230-pound officer facing off with a 130-pound intoxicated grandmother. Again, the police role is defensive, and it depends on the intent of the offender, the level of resistance given, and no two situations will ever be the same.

Standard Use of Force Model



Source of Design: *Federal Law Enforcement Training Center (FLETC)*

Police force is best understood when it is measured among the continuum according to the injury imposed on the suspect (Terrill, 2003). According to the NIJ (2009), the continuum starts at officer presence, as mere presence alone works to deter crime or diffuse a situation. The model moves through verbalization, empty-hand control, less-lethal methods, and ultimately lethal force. An officer may use lethal weapons to gain control of a situation if the offender poses a serious threat to the officer or another individual (NIJ, 2009). Again, the officer's role is defensive. The goal is to control and take one into custody. How control is accomplished is dictated by the actions of the offender.

3.3. Mental Preparation

A lot goes on behind the scenes in preparing a law enforcement officer for the types of events they will be involved in when entering duty. People tend to respond to emotional situations emotionally unless they are mentally prepared for such events before engaging others. An officer must mentally prepare for the use of weapons used against him or her. This mental preparation begins when a person decides they want to join law enforcement. It continues when entering the academy, and long into one's career. The preparation never ends. If so, the results can be deadly.

Prior studies have generally demonstrated that officers rarely apply force, particularly lethal force (Terrill, 2003). Still, an officer must be prepared, based on training and experience, to react instantly to violent acts by persons who may have little to no regard for human life (Miller, 2007). Through proper and consistent training, an officer attains confidence in their skills, instinctive reaction, mental alertness, and; control over his or her emotions. When police engage in force, the reaction is generally instinctive (Police Research Forum, 2016). There is no time to think about it first. Afterward, the armchair quarterbacks will dissect the officer's actions with impunity, but during the event, the actions by the officer are dictated by the quality of his or her training (Community Relations Service, 2003).

The lack of proper training [and continued quality training] will likely result in the officer lacking self-confidence, poor performance with weapons, panic, and loss of control and civil liability (Andersen & Gustafsberg, 2016). Training does not just include shooting a gun at a firing range. An officer must engage in consistent training on tactical communication, intermediate weapons and control tactics. Poor tactics increase an officer's risk of being attacked. What many people do not understand about the police is, for the most part, no police officer wants to hurt anybody, let alone kill anyone. Just because laws allow for it when reasonable, most police officers act within their moral code. Ultimately, the officer's actions are dictated by individual choice, which is generally more restrictive than policy or law. These choices are reflective of the internal controls of the officer. Most of the time, an officer will use far less force than reasonable because he or she simply does not want to use the level of force allowed.

3.4. Qualified Immunity

Unlike the standard used in establishing probable cause where an ordinary person would view the circumstances of the officer by making a similar assumption, when it comes to use of force the ordinary person is removed because an ordinary person does not usually understand the use of force laws applied to the police. When an officer uses force on someone, the standard of reasonableness applies to an "objective reasonableness" standard (Kappeler, 2013). In other words, the officer's actions are to be judged as reasonable by whether a reasonable officer would have used the same level of force if put in a similar situation.

Since every situation is different, there are rarely any clear-cut guidelines on the use of force continuum, which would dictate the exact appropriate response to a specific actionable threat. Because of this, an officer is usually protected from prosecution under qualified immunity. Unless the officer's actions were a clear violation of a person's Constitutional rights, the officer has qualified immunity from litigation, generally, if a reasonable officer would have acted in a similar manner (*Kisela v. Hughes*, 2018). Many people think this is unfair and typically call it the corruption of the court system after a grand jury *No Bill*, but many do not understand that the police need some levels of protection because they face use of force incidents throughout their careers. Every force situation faced by a law enforcement officer is different and whether to escalate, or de-escalate, can be a split-second decision by the officer. Without some level of protection, almost every law enforcement officer in the U.S. would face prosecution during their career. If this were the case, few would pursue a career in law enforcement, especially the people we would want to enter public service.

3.5. The El Paso (Texas) Police Department

According to the El Paso Police Department [EPPD] latest (2018) annual report, the department received 350,723 calls for service during the year, resulting in 20,147 arrests. The EPPD's manning table shows female officers represent 13% of the force, with 80% of officer ethnicity being Hispanic. EPPD has a progressive social media presence in the community, with about 40,000 followers. Only about .1% of the crimes reported in El Paso were criminal homicides, and about 42% were assault offenses. The EPPD has five regional command centers for easy public access to the department. According to the same report, the Internal Affairs division reported a total of 539 complaint cases against officers during that year, including 816 use of force incidents. Of those use of force incidents, 45 cases involved the use of the Taser (Pp. 9-21). Of the reported arrests made by the department, only about 4% involved reported use of force by officers. According to local press reports, there have been at least three officer-involved shootings between January 2019 to April 2020. The last EPPD officer to be killed in the line of duty [by vehicular assault] was in 2016 (Officer Down Memorial Page, 2020). The census.gov (2018) webpage lists the total population for the City of El Paso at 682,669.

3.6. The El Paso (Texas) Sheriff's Office

According to the El Paso Sheriff's Office [EPSO] latest (2016) published annual report, the department generated 2,536 criminal complaint reports, with types of victimization being about .3% for homicides and at a total of 79% being other violence-related crimes. According to the same report, the Internal Affairs Section reported a total of 272 complaint cases against officers during that year [includes jailed inmates], including 40 citizen complaints. Of the complaints, 30% were sustained (Pp. 8-18). The EPSO not only provides law enforcement but civil process, court security, and detention services to the County of El Paso. The EPSO 2016 annual report did not describe the annual use of force incidents, the number of annual arrests, or any specifics on complaints, nor did the report identify officer gender or ethnicity. According to local press reports, there have been at least two officer-involved shootings between January 2019 to April 2020. The last EPSO officer to be killed in the line of duty [by offender gunfire] was in 2019 (Officer Down Memorial Page, 2020). The census.gov (2018) webpage lists the total population for the County of El Paso at 840,758, with a reported ethnic population of about 81% Hispanic.

4. METHODS

Quantitative results of this study included a survey containing eight questions related to public perceptions of police use of force and discretion. This survey was randomly administered to enrolled college students in the El Paso, Texas area. Quantitative data from the survey was collected and analyzed to identify patterns of public perspectives in relation to the survey questions.

4.1. Data Analysis, Design and Procedure

In order to ensure a reliable and valid survey instrument, the survey was examined by the El Paso Community College Institutional Research Board for face validity and content. In **Table 1**, a *Cronbach's alpha* reliability test on questions Q1 – Q8 demonstrated reliability in cumulative responses given by the test group. The resulting " α " coefficient of reliability ranges from 0 to 1 in providing an overall assessment of a measure's reliability. The closer the results to 1, the more likely the items in the survey have a shared covariance and probably measure the same underlying concept. If the results are less than .06, underlying concepts formed by the grouped questions and answers cannot be logically concluded on a broader scale.

4.2. Survey Design

This survey was administered with voluntary and random student participation in the Spring of 2020. A total of thirty-four ($N = 34$) respondents agreed by informed consent to engage in the survey. Minors were not allowed to participate. Participating respondents were instructed on confidentiality and the purpose of the survey. The survey questions were posed to the respondents with Likert scaled level responses: (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) not sure, (4) agree, and (5) strongly agree.

5. RESULTS

The following are results of the analysis of the eight-question public survey related to police use of force and discretion. A Cronbach's alpha test was used to provide an overall assessment of the survey responses. The quantitative analysis was accomplished by taking the total number of survey responses to each question (N) and calculating the numerical mean of student responses. **Table 1** includes each of the 8 questions taken from the survey instrument. A *Cronbach's Alpha* test ($\alpha = .712$) demonstrated an acceptable rate of internal consistency. **Table 2** provides respondent distribution by age grouping and gender. **Table 3** includes the survey responses by gender differences. By chance from the random sampling, 100% of the survey respondents were ethnic Hispanic.

Table 1. *Cronbach's Alpha* ($\alpha = .712$) Reliability Measurement for Public Perceptions on Police Use of Force ($N = 34$)

Variable	M	SD	$\alpha = .712$
Q1: I have a favorable view of the local police in my area.	4.33	1.05	
Q2: I respect the police in my area and understand that they have a very dangerous job to do.	4.69	.809	
Q3: When approached by a local police officer, I do not fear being physically manhandled or struck by the officer.	4.36	1.02	
Q4: The police in my area generally use a lower level of force they are legally entitled to because they don't want to hurt an offender.	4.09	1.01	

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Q5: Most police officers in my area use professionalism as a tool to avoid an unnecessary escalation of force with a traffic violator.	4.45	.904
Q6: I can imagine situations where a police officer would be justified in physically striking a person resisting their authority.	4.15	.939
Q7: Police in my area are well trained in use of force tactics and use deadly force only as a last resort.	4.51	.755
Q8: When the police in my area use deadly force, they tend to receive public support.	3.15	1.09

Table2. Respondent Distribution

Age Group	N	%
< 31	28	82.4
> 30	6	17.6
Gender	N	%
Male	15	44.1
Female	19	55.9

Table3. Survey Averages by Gender

Variable	Male	Female
Q1: I have a favorable view of the local police in my area.	4.80	3.94
Q2: I respect the police in my area and understand that they have a very dangerous job to do.	4.73	4.66
Q3: When approached by a local police officer, I do not fear being physically manhandled or struck by the officer.	4.53	4.22
Q4: The police in my area generally use a lower level of force they are legally entitled to because they don't want to hurt an offender.	4.13	4.05
Q5: Most police officers in my area use professionalism as a tool to avoid an unnecessary escalation of force with a traffic violator.	4.60	4.33
Q6: I can imagine situations where a police officer would be justified in physically striking a person resisting their authority.	4.53	3.83
Q7: Police in my area are well trained in use of force tactics and use deadly force only as a last resort.	4.80	4.27
Q8: When the police in my area use deadly force, they tend to receive public support.	3.20	3.11

Narrative: Survey respondents (84% under the age of 31) had strong agreements to survey questions Q1 – Q7, demonstrating a favorable view of local area law enforcement, including a strong connection to the statements of police discretion and its connection to use of force. The survey respondents demonstrated an understanding to the dangers of police work and the necessity for police use of force under certain circumstances. Respondents also strongly agreed that local law enforcement in the El Paso, Texas area are well trained in police tactics in order to minimize the risk of excessive and lethal force. On Q8, respondents generally agreed that local area police receive public support when using lethal force. In observing survey response by gender, Female respondents were slightly less supportive in agreement to the survey questions as the male respondents. However, none of the survey questions resulted in a disagreement by the female respondents to any of the eight questions. Using a two-tailed single sample T-Test ($N = 34$), the results of this survey were statistically significant at $p < .05$ demonstrating support of this author's original hypothesis.

5.1. Limitations of Study

Although the reliability testing of the survey responses and their designed groupings were statistically significant at $p < .05$, survey respondents ($N = 34$) may have produced alternate results based on personal bias in relation to one's age, community status and past experiences with the survey topics. Any subsequent studies expanding this research should focus on local area studies, as national data observation does not necessarily represent the data within individual communities.

6. CONCLUSION

According to reliable crime data, crime in the El Paso area has been relatively low for over a decade. For example, the 2018 crime rate in El Paso, Texas was 1.4 times smaller than the U.S. average and the area experienced only 23 reported homicides (City-Data.com, 2020). The 2018 reported homicides were the highest El Paso has experienced for over 20 years. Violent crime and police use of force have a correlation. The more violence in a community, the more likely local law enforcement will face higher levels of resistance from offenders.

Community perceptions of the police matter. It is incumbent upon police managers to maintain open dialog with the communities in which they serve, including assuring consistent employee professional tactical training. In addition to weapons proficiency, the training curriculum should include professional communication strategies, as officer initial presence can dictate the necessity for force later. Training needs to be realistic, based on critical thinking strategies where officers are trained in making split-second use of force decisions while meeting the “objective reasonableness” standards. Officers must be prepared to react instantly to violent acts used against them and others by persons who may have little to no value for human life. Reactions to such incidents need to be instinctive, based on one’s training.

Many times, police – offender – community communications do have an impact on the level of resistance given. Outside of tactical weapons training, law enforcement training should focus just as much attention to tactical communication, as an officer’s de-escalation techniques when feasible will reduce the probabilities for force escalation. As stated in 1829 by Sir Robert Peel, the *Father of Modern Policing*:

“To use physical force only when the exercise of persuasion, advice and warning is found to be insufficient to obtain public cooperation to an extent necessary to secure observance of law or to restore order, and to use only the minimum degree of physical force which is necessary on any particular occasion for achieving a police objective” (Law Enforcement Action Partnership, n.d.).

When officers use tactical communication to deescalate potential resistance, the perception of the officer [and the agency] by the public is more positive. Effective communication by the police increases public confidence, support and trust of local law enforcement. An increase in public support and trust increases police efficiency as well. An increase of police efficiency continues to build additional support and trust from the community. Also stated in 1829 by Sir Robert Peel:

“To recognize always that the power of the police to fulfill their functions and duties is dependent on public approval of their existences, actions and behavior, and on their ability to secure and maintain public respect” (Law Enforcement Action Partnership, n.d.).

When an officer is put in a dangerous situation where force, or lethal force is used, the officer and the agency are more likely to receive public support on the incident if public perceptions and trust in the agency are positive. Regardless of national media reporting, local law enforcement is dependent on its relationship with the local community in which they serve. Having local community support should be what matters most to any law enforcement agency.

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