Police/Civilian Encounters:

Integrating Police Perceptions into a Theoretical Framework

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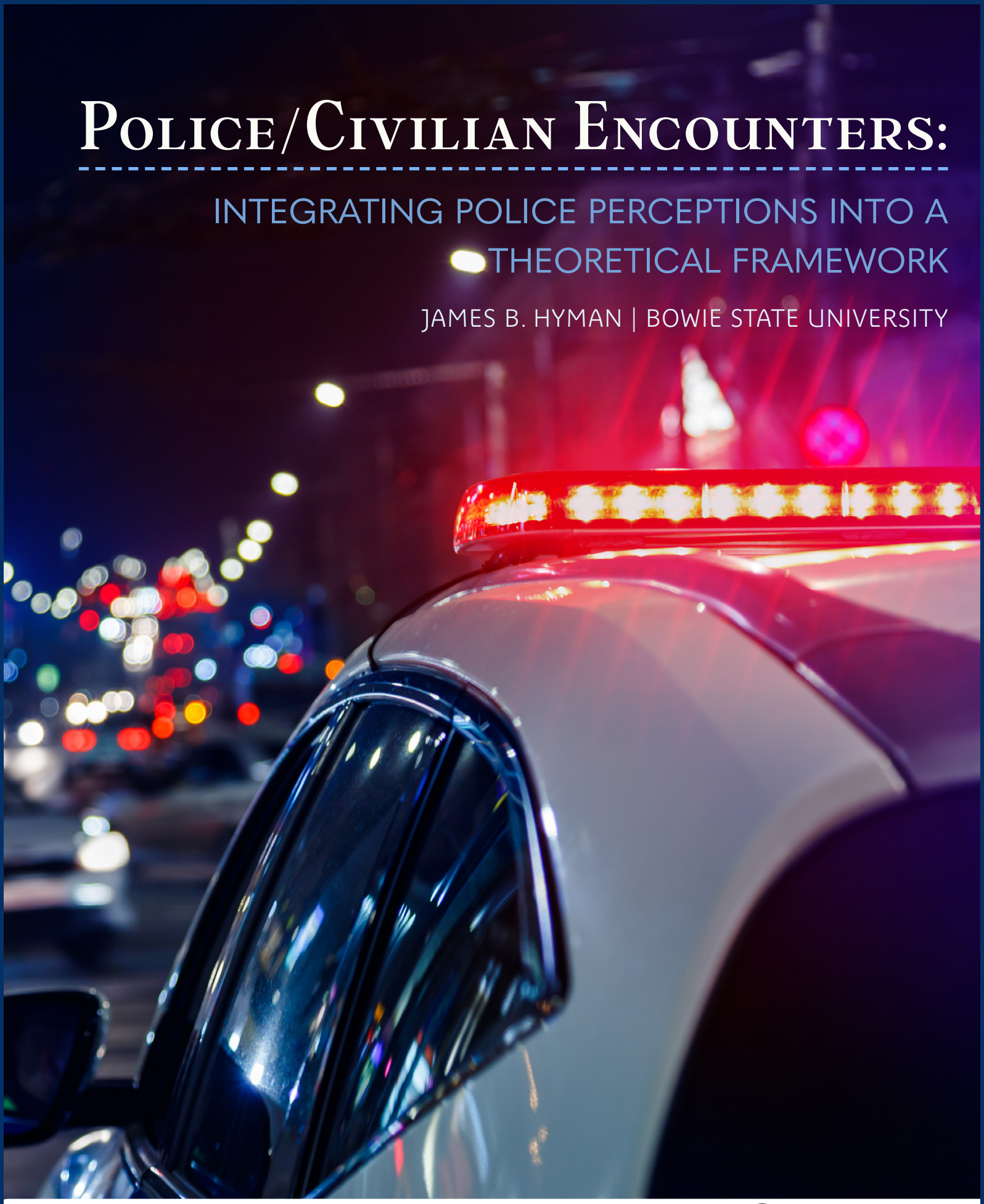

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study is the third in a series of studies I have undertaken to further our understanding of encounters between police and civilians. Traffic stops are used as the context for these encounters because they account for 41% of all encounters, making them the most common reason for police-initiated, civilian contacts with police. In my first report, "Police/Civilian Encounters: Understanding How and Why They Can Turn Deadly," I posited a framework that presented a step-by-step exposition of how traffic stops proceed. It outlined behaviors of the police officers and the civilians involved, noting how their interactions can influence the outcome of the stop for better or worse. However, the framework is no more than a map that is uniformed by human experiences with traffic stops. A shortcoming of the report was its inability to consider perceptions and perspectives of either party that might influence their behaviors and exchanges.

Consequently, the second report, "Police/Civilian Encounters: Officers' Perspectives on Traffic Stops and The Climate for Policing," was undertaken to fill a part of that gap. It conducted surveys and interviews with police officers to get their views on these events. The officers were not informed of the framework, so their views were not tainted. The current study represents a fusion of the framework's theory with the real-life practice of that sample of officers - testing its validity based on their testimonies and their perspectives on why traffic stops evolve the way they do. Three conclusions emerge. The first is that the officers' testimonies validate the Framework as an accurate depiction of traffic stop encounters. The second conclusion is that, from the officers' point of view, civilian behavior is the primary determinant of the outcomes of these encounters. Finally, officers believe that establishing a good rapport with the driver is the key to preventing the kinds of exchanges and behaviors that can lead to negative consequences during traffic stops. Further research into civilians' perceptions about traffic stops is needed to complete our understanding of these police/civilian encounters.

INTRODUCTION

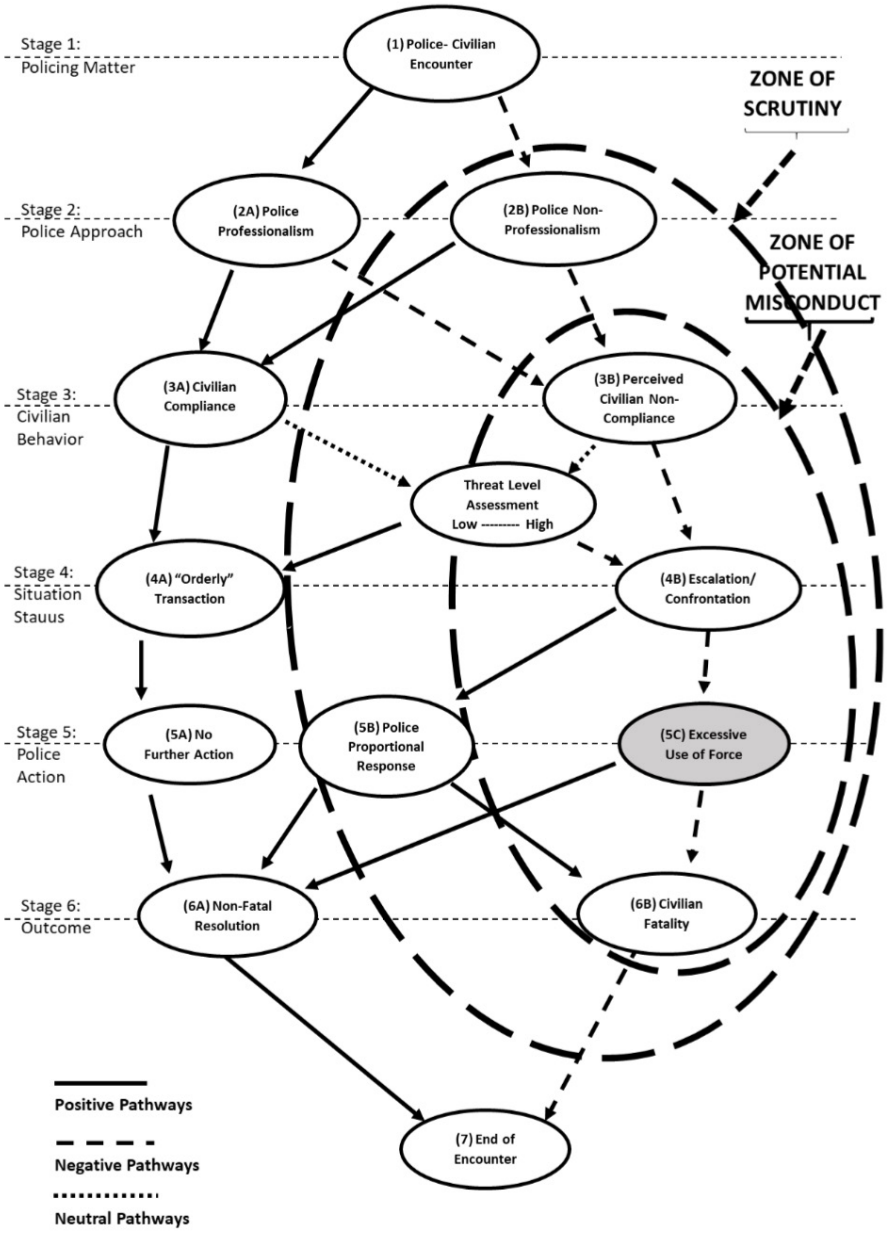
Several years ago, to better understand how interactions between police and civilians unfold, and particularly, how they can unfold in ways that produce harmful and sometimes fatal results, I constructed a framework that mapped the sequence of events likely to ensue during these encounters. Traffic stops are used as the context because they account for 41% of all encounters, making them the most common reason for police-initiated, civilian contacts with police (Davis et al, 2018). The Police/Civilian Encounters Framework (P/CE), that resulted (Hyman, 2022), posited a tree diagram containing 14 "nodes" arranged among seven stages of a traffic stop encounter (see Figure 1 below). The Framework traces pathways linking police and civilian behaviors to events that can occur during the encounter – noting "benign" pathways that conform to acceptable policing standards, and "malign" pathways that do not. It highlights pathways that can lead to excessive use of force and civilian deaths and identifies patterns of police behavior that may deserve intense scrutiny – even those that may warrant criminal investigation.

The Framework begins at Stage 1, where a traffic infraction, or other policing matter, has occurred or is suspected. Stage 2 focuses on the police officer's approach and whether the officer behaved professionally when interacting with the driver. At Stage 3, the Framework considers how the driver responds to the officer's approach and whether that response is cooperative and compliant or defiant and noncompliant. In this formulation, Stages 2 and 3 interactions are the most pivotal determinants of the encounter's eventual outcome. Here, the tone of subsequent stages is set, and the officer's assessment of any potential threat can be most clearly determined.

Beyond the threat assessment, Stage 4 posits the status of the encounter as either "orderly" – meaning it has proceeded without incident, or whether it has devolved into a confrontation. Stage 5 considers the officer's reaction to the status at Stage 4. Orderly encounters suggest that no additional action needs to be taken. Contrastingly, contentious exchanges can escalate to confrontation and require more forceful action by the officer. Stage 5 also suggests that responses can be either proportional to the threat or lead to an excessive use of force. The outcomes possible from Stage 5 are categorized at Stage 6 as either fatal or non-fatal. Stage 7 marks the end of the police/civilian encounter.

In addition to outlining these events, the Framework identifies behavior that may warrant scrutiny by police authorities and those subject to prosecution. The impetus for such scrutiny arises when unprofessional police behavior is evident at Stage 2 and contributes to escalation at Stage 4 in the Framework. Further escalation to an excessive use of force at Stage 5 characterizes potential misconduct that can be subject to prosecution. The zones of scrutiny and potential misconduct, depicted in Figure 1, will not be explored for the current study.

Figure 1: Police/Civilian Encounters Framework.



Ideally, traffic stops should proceed in ways that position them on the benign pathways on the diagram's left side, leading to an orderly transaction. Conversely, they should avoid devolving into negative exchanges that will locate them on the right side of the Framework with a potential for confrontation and the use of force. The interior pathways of the Framework demonstrate the volatility of traffic stops and their potential to move from one side to the other.

ADDRESSING A GAPING HOLE IN THE FRAMEWORK: EXPLORING POLICE ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTIONS

While the P/CE Framework, described above, presents a logical arraying of the events that can unfold during traffic stops, it sheds no light on variables that can influence how or why any particular traffic stop evolves the way it does. It provides no clues as to why these stops take one path versus another. Missing from the Framework is an understanding of the underlying attitudinal and/or behavioral dynamics that may be at play during critical exchanges.

To address this gap, I conducted a second study (P/CE-2) that explored police perspectives on these encounters (Hyman, 2023). That study collected data on the number, frequency, and duration of officers' traffic stops. It surveyed their experiences with noncompliant civilians, threats, escalations, and force use. It further explored their feelings about their standing in public opinion.

Study Goals. The current study has several goals. The first is to add a human dimension. As noted earlier, the Framework is no more than a map – one that is uniformed by human experiences. While it offers a glimpse into how traffic stop encounters can evolve in the abstract, it lacks any data on either party's motivations, perceptions, or perspectives on the stop that influence how these encounters evolve in real-life circumstances. This study will fill in the gap for one side of the police/civilian interaction – adding the officers' perspective.

The second goal is to see whether testimonies from the surveys and interviews support the theory posited by the P/CE Framework. Our sample of officers was not briefed on the Framework. Neither were they asked about any of its stages during the interviews. This separation was deliberate to avoid any contamination in their responses. Nevertheless, I will explore their responses to determine whether, and how well, they align with the event sequences proposed in Figure 1.

This series of P/CE studies aims to learn how and why these encounters can turn deadly. The third goal of this paper is to get the officers' views on this question. To do so, we will explore their testimonies to learn what kinds of police/civilian interactions they believe are more or less likely to result in contentious and potentially harmful results.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In developing the P/CE Framework, I conducted a literature search to determine whether models already existed that examined police and civilian traffic stop behavior. None were found. According to Jiao (1997), there are four major models of policing: police professionalism, community policing, problem-oriented policing, and the security orientation. These models focus on various aspects of the relationship between policing tactics and their efficacy in addressing or preventing crime in the aggregate. None addresses the micro issue of what happens during actual encounters between police officers and civilians.

Similarly, searching the literature on police perceptions, for the P/CE-2 study, revealed that extensive material exists on civilian perceptions of police. However, little research has been done on police perceptions of their experiences with civilians (Hyman, 2023). These literature reviews suggest that neither of the P/CE studies conducted to date has direct predecessors. The synthesis of the two previous studies breaks new ground.

METHODOLOGY

Before proceeding, it is instructive to describe the methodology employed for the P/CE-2 study and the sample from which my observations are taken. The study employed a mixed-method, qualitative research methodology based on a phenomenological approach. Phenomenology, as a research method, "seeks to explore, describe, and analyze the meaning of individual lived experience. (Marshall, C., & Rossman, 2016)." For the study, a survey was administered to a convenience sample of 63 police officers in Prince George's County, Maryland. Twenty-four were subsequently recruited to sit for 90-minute interviews. The officers were not briefed on the Framework and were unaware of it. Nor did they know that their testimonies might subsequently be applied to it. As a result, there is no cross-contamination between these studies.

Of the twenty-four officers interviewed, twelve were African American, and nine were Caucasian. Only one was Hispanic, and the remaining two were of other races. There were three women – 2 Black and 1 white. Educational attainment varied widely, with four officers completing high school and 4 having some college. The other officers (16) had either completed or gone beyond a bachelor's degree. Five of the officers had prior military experience. More than half (14) were married. Six were single and 4 were divorced. Fourteen were under 45 years of age. The remaining 10 ranged from 45 years to retirement age.

Relatedly, the sample was relatively experienced, with officers having an average of 14.4 years of policing experience. Caucasian officers were more experienced than African American officers by an average of over 3 years. The officers had conducted more than 2,600 traffic stops over the twelve months preceding the survey. The sample contained officers of all ranks. The ranks appeared to be equitably distributed, with half (12) having obtained the rank of Corporal (six of them African American) and with fifteen (7 African Americans) being at a rank of Corporal or lower. 7 were Sergeants (4 African American, 3 Caucasian) and 2 were of higher rank – one Black and one White.

FINDINGS

INTEGRATING POLICE PERSPECTIVES INTO THE P/CE FRAMEWORK

The following findings are derived from the 24 interviews, and the results are integrated into the Framework using the officers' own words. These testimonies bring additional insights to our understanding of how police/civilian encounters evolve. They also allow us to test their fidelity to the Framework and discern the officers' views on how and why encounters can go wrong. The study will proceed using the framework's step-by-step structure as its outline and present the discussion stage by stage.

STAGE 1: THE ONSET OF A TRAFFIC STOP FROM AN OFFICER'S POINT OF VIEW

Stage 1 in the Framework begins with the police/civilian encounter. However, testimony from the officers suggests that this stage is fraught with anxiety and apprehension even before the encounter begins. All the officers testified that traffic stops are more dangerous than "calls for service." Traffic stops present them with "too many unknowns" – as examples: the identity, disposition, and circumstances of the driver; the lack of dispatcher involvement and prior information, and the resultant unpredictability of the situation. Here are some of their reflections.

> When I approach your car, I have no idea who you are. I have no idea what your intentions are. I have no idea if you just killed your mother and now you're driving somewhere. I have no idea. I don't have a visual scan of your car to see that you have a gun in your waistband or under your seat. So traffic stops are heightened like that. You're walking more into the unknown in a traffic stop than you are with a regular call for service. (Black female officer #108)

> I don't feel that heightened sense of danger going to a call for service, whether it's a domestic, whether it's a theft of an auto, an alarm call, whatever the case may be. But in a traffic stop, my senses are much more heightened. For one, I cannot see anything that's in that car as I'm walking up to it. Through… watching some things that have happened to officers who were killed on traffic stops, I know how fast a person can turn a weapon on you, and you don't even know it's coming. Action is always gonna be faster than reaction. So, if they already know… that, when this person gets up to the car door, I'm gonna shoot them. They're prepared for it. I'm not prepared for that. (Black female officer # 103)

> In calls for service, someone is calling us there. Someone wants us there. So, be it a domestic call, be it a shooting, you know what you're facing. When you go to the call, the dispatcher or the phone tech is getting the information for us… So we kinda know a lot of information going into it – not all, but a lot. Where, in a traffic stop, I'm literally walking into the unknown. (Black female officer # 108)

STAGE 2: THE OFFICER'S PERSPECTIVES ON PROFESSIONAL VS. NONPROFESSIONAL TRAFFIC STOP BEHAVIORS

With these concerns as context, the P/CE-2 study asked the officers to retrace their traffic stop behaviors beginning with the decision to pull a vehicle over. Here is how one officer put it.

> Well, first you activate your emergency equipment. You call out on the radio, advise the dispatcher: the description of the vehicle, and the tag number and the color. I exit my vehicle. We're trained to put a thumbprint on the trunk of the car, just in case something goes wrong. They can locate the car and know that that is the car you were in contact with by obtaining your fingerprint off it. As I'm approaching the car, I'm walking so I can, at least, attempt to see, what's in the back of the car. As I approach the door, I'm talking to the driver and watching the movement of his hands. I'm also watching to see whether they're reaching or moving from side to side or trying to discard anything. And then I start my pleasantries. "Hi, I'm Officer XXX with Prince George County Police. The reason I stopped you is X, Y, and Z. Can I have your driver's license, and registration?" On a good stop, they just comply. Give me everything. I go and run them – check 'em for warrants and make sure their registration, everything is good. And I send them on their merry way with a warning. (Black male officer # 106)

This description of the Stage 2 Police Approach was corroborated in each interview as both standard operating procedure and best practice when making a traffic stop. It also provided insight into police professionalism at Node 2A in the Framework. However, professionalism in policing goes beyond mere adherence to standard operating procedure. It also applies to how officers manage the encounter. Several officers spoke to this point.

> You need to have good interactions with people – being able to talk to people and people talking back are usually good traffic stops. It starts with the officer's demeanor, walking up, and making the initial contact. (White male officer # 132)

Several officers expressed the importance of empathizing with the drivers – recognizing that other pressing matters in their lives may influence their behavior – and using their discretionary authorities to promote goodwill.

> There have been times when people have just been so irritated, but there's a reason. Like, there's one guy in particular. He was very agitated. He was very argumentative. He was rude. He called me every name in the book. And I noticed that he had the booklets that they give you at a funeral. He was wearing a suit, and he had that on the seat. And I asked him if he was just coming from there, and he said, "Yeah, what's it to you?" And I said, "Well, obviously that would explain why you are a little agitated right now. I'm not trying to make your day any worse." So, he got warnings for everything and, after I gave him the warnings and he realized that it wasn't gonna be tickets and it wasn't gonna be money and it wasn't a trip to court, that instantly brought him down, and he was very thankful. So, a lot of times, a warning can change behavior on the spot, once they realize that you're not out there trying to just hammer everybody that you find. (White male officer # 124)

> If someone's committed five offenses and they're a relatively a good person, I don't have to write 'em five tickets. I can write 'em one cheap one, the least expensive one, and give 'em four warnings. We have that kind of discretion. I just feel like you have to have empathy and sympathy in this job. And, if you don't have that, you do not belong in this job. You're in it for absolutely the wrong reason if you don't have those two qualities. (White male officer #119)

Testimonies of these officers suggest that police professionalism, at Node 2A, involves following procedure and managing the encounter with some sensitivity. However, they also recognize that some officers may not conform to such standards. Here is how one officer characterized unprofessional policing.

> 90% of people take this job to help. Again, 10% is always out there. You know, they wanna wear the badges. They wanna feel powerful. And unfortunately, there's not a psych test or anything that's gonna help you find that out before you give those people a gun. And a lot of the videos you see of bad interactions with police. A lot of it is officers just have this big ego and, when they get challenged, they're like, "oh I have to show this person why I'm here." And it's always about being the bigger, bad, tougher person. Some officers are just out here to assert dominance, and that's not how it should be. (White male officer # 117)

Several conclusions emerge here about officers' views on proper police conduct during these stops: First is the need to follow proper procedure during the approach as a matter of officer safety. Second, there is the need to manage the encounter with sensitivity. These results suggest that creating rapport with the driver, showing empathy in the exchanges, and using their discretionary authority promotes goodwill. We can infer, from these testimonies, that taking a professional approach and promoting that goodwill will place the encounter on the left side of Figure 1, encouraging civilian compliance that leads to an orderly transaction at Stage 4 of the Framework.

However, officers know that some of their colleagues may be temperamentally unsuited for the profession and unlikely to proceed in these ways, in which case, their lack of professionalism (at Node 2B) can lead to noncompliance (at Node 3B) and escalation (at Node 4B).

STAGE 3: POLICE PERSPECTIVES ON CIVILIAN BEHAVIOR AND HOW IT INFLUENCES THEIR DECISIONS

As suggested above, the interactions between officers and drivers at Stages 2 and 3 are pivotal to the events that follow during the traffic stop. They can put the encounter on a "benign" orderly pathway, as shown on the left side of the Framework in Figure 1, or set it off on a negative "malign" pathway on the right.

Several theories that have explored the dynamics underpinning police-civilian interactions support this view. One of them, the procedural justice theory is central, positing that civilians' perceptions of fairness in police procedures significantly influence their cooperation and trust (Tyler, 1990). It suggests that respectful and unbiased treatment enhances legitimacy, fostering positive interactions and compliance. Similarly, the social exchange theory highlights reciprocity and mutual respect, proposing that civilians' perceptions of fairness are shaped by the quality of interpersonal exchanges with officers (Blader & Tyler, 2003). These studies suggest that establishing, or failing to establish, a rapport with the driver is an important factor in influencing which of the pathways is taken. Driver behavior and the degree of compliance at Node 3A are primary contributors to either outcome. Indeed, police officers have a clear prescription for how civilians should behave when being stopped.

> Just pull over and comply whether you agree with the stop or not. I understand people feeling like, "I don't have time for that." But you can make time to get things right without having to take it to a level where you can end up in jail or having force against you for something that's against the law, but not a big deal. (Hispanic male officer # 117)

Data from the P/CE-2 study showed that noncompliant behavior (at Node 3B) occurred in about 200, or 7.5%, of the 2600 stops made by the 24 interviewed officers during the most recent 12-month period (Hyman, 2023). This civilian noncompliance trends toward adverse outcomes for the driver – often influencing the officer's decisions on how severely to treat the violation. Several officers suggested that some drivers talk themselves out of a warning and into a ticket. The following are examples.

> I pull the driver over, and my intent is to give him the warning. And as you're talking to 'em, they're effing you and going through the whole spiel of, "Don't you have something better to do?" And then, instead of the warning, I give 'em a citation because their behavior isn't going to change with just a warning. So them maybe coming to court or paying a fine, maybe their behavior will change. (Black male officer # 106)

> A majority of the people that we deal with, even if they're argumentative, we let go with a verbal warning or just a written warning. Sometimes we'll issue citations. If you're a real a--hole, I might write you four or five tickets because we tried to explain, "Hey, look, this is what I stopped you for." And we get, "Well, I don't care. So what. There's other people out here committing crimes." You come off at me with that attitude. This is part of my job. This is what I do. I enforce traffic law. (White male officer # 137)

Officers are very clear about how a driver's attitude and behavior can impact how they handle the incident. Exhibit 1 below, from the P/CE-2 study, used officers' testimonies to produce a table of "Dos and Don'ts" as advice they would give to drivers about how to behave when pulled over.

What Drivers Should Do		What Drivers Should Not Do	
Suggestion	**Mentions***	**Suggestion**	**Mentions***
Comply with all instructions	100%	Don't reach without permission	83%
Be still, calm, courteous, respectful	100%	Don't argue the citation	67%
Keep hands visible	67%	Don't get out of the car	33%
Pull over as soon as possible	50%	Don't leave the car in gear	25%
Control your passengers	25%	Don't unfasten the seatbelt	18%

EXAMINING THE STAGE 2/STAGE 3 INTERACTIONS

The framework suggests that professional police behavior can bring the encounter to an orderly resolution when met with compliance by the civilian. However, as earlier testimony has shown, it also recognizes that an officer can encounter noncompliant behavior regardless of his/her approach. For example, this is depicted in the pathway from Nodes 2A to 3B. Likewise, the Framework shows that an officer behaving unprofessionally can nevertheless see compliant behavior by the driver (Node 2B to 3A). Alternatively, they can experience, or even provoke, noncompliant responses (at Node 3B). In short, the officer's approach (at Stage 2) does not necessarily predict civilian responses (at Stage 3).

Consequently, these dynamics are depicted as fluid – an encounter that begins on an upbeat track (at Node 2A) can nevertheless be pulled toward a negative track (at Node 3B). The converse is also shown at Node 2B, where nonprofessional police behavior can still be met with civilian compliance. The net result of these interactions becomes part of the officer's threat assessment.

The Threat Level Assessment: Officers' Views on Threatening Civilian Behaviors

> When we pull people over, we don't know who's inside the car. There is always that unknown. It creates nervousness, right? Until you initially look at that person and you have that first few seconds of exchange, you don't know where that traffic stop's gonna go. (White male officer # 119)

The Threat Level Assessment in the P/CE Framework occurs after Stage 3 and is intended to reflect the degree to which either party to the stop feels disquieted by their initial exchanges. For the officer, this assessment is part of an ongoing situational awareness.

According to Horne (2020), situational awareness has three levels – recognizing readily available cues, understanding the significance of those cues, and anticipating future events/states based on that understanding. Some of those cues can come from antecedent factors that officers can detect by Stage 3 – for instance health issues, or impairment from alcohol or drugs. However, there are other factors, like mental illness or prior experiences, that may not present themselves in noticeable ways. In any case, the early exchanges between the officer and the driver provide the cues for this assessment and set the stage for what comes next. The officers shared several scenarios where they felt a level of threat.

> I find evasive and non-communicative behaviors threatening. If I'm having a conversation with you and you're not engaging in the conversation, and it seems as if you're trying to find a way out of this, that raises threat levels to me. And so that's why a lot of times you hear officers say, "Okay, just step out of the car." Cause now I don't know what you have in that car. So now I wanna separate you from your car. It can bring me back down once I pat you down and make sure you don't have any weapons. And now that we're outside the car, we can have a conversation… (Black female officer # 108)

Officers reported other instances where the threat level was raised by factors unrelated to their exchanges with the driver. Several of the interviewees shared the following comments.

> When I first started police work, you didn't see a lot of tint on windows, but now everybody's tinted. They don't care – these tint shops out here. They'll sell you whatever you want. So most of the cars that we're walking up on have limo tint – 5% limo tint. You cannot see inside the car. And that is extremely dangerous. I mean, literally, even with a flashlight, you cannot see into these cars. So I'm walking up to the back of a car. If it's a four-door car and you end up walking past that tinted-out window, you don't know if somebody's sitting in a backseat with a shotgun. (White male officer 137)

The issue cited as most threatening, by nearly all of the officers interviewed, was movement inside the car. Exhibit 1 above clearly warns that reaching for something without permission is something drivers should never do. Here is one officer's view.

> I'm also looking at the movement in the car as I'm talking to the dispatcher. Most people are just rummaging around looking for their license and registration prior to us making that approach. But if I you see tuck into the left more, like under the seat, or not even under the seat, but if I see you tucking to the left more, it's gonna raise questions because there's nothing to the left, in my opinion, that you will be reaching for on a traffic stop – if anything, it will be the middle console to the right, or to the glove box. (Black female officer # 108)

So the officers' testimonies reinforce the importance of officer/civilian exchanges in determining threat levels, and they justify the placement of the threat assessment between Stages 3 and 4. They also highlight other situational factors that can contribute. Both are important determinants of what happens next.

THE STAGE FOUR SITUATION STATUS: WHERE IS THE ENCOUNTER HEADING?

Stage 4 of the Framework takes stock of the encounter in the wake of the preceding exchanges and the threat assessment made by the officer. The diagram shows that, where the threat is low, the encounter can progress in an "orderly" manner (to Node 4A) – meaning it has proceeded without serious incident or consequence. By contrast, assessing a high threat level can move the encounter in a negative direction (at Node 4B).

It must be noted that, while traffic stops often involve minor infractions, they may nonetheless lead to significant escalations. An escalation usually refers to a situation where the interaction between the parties builds toward conflict and confrontation (Engel, R. S., et al, 2018). According to Kahn (2020), the police use of discretion during these encounters can defuse or exacerbate these situations. Factors such as the demeanors of the officer and the citizen involved, during the Stage 2 and 3 interactions, play crucial roles in determining the outcomes of these interactions. Here is an excerpt from one interview.

> I think a driver's attitude can cause a situation to escalate. Typically, we're actually trying to de-escalate. If I'm dealing with a driver who is very nasty, I'm not getting equally as nasty with them because I know that will cause it to escalate. I already know that, if they are yelling and screaming, and I start yelling and screaming, no good can come from that. However, if they continue at that level and I'm still not getting the cooperation that I need, I may ask them to step out of the car for my safety. Typically people don't act like that. Those kinds of traffic stops are very few and far between. (Black female officer # 103)

Several officers shared that failure to reach a rapport with the driver (at Stages 2 and 3) raises the possibility of a confrontation. The passage above exemplifies an officer's attempt to de-escalate and move a contentious interaction to a safer, more orderly place (at Node 4A), but there are some circumstances that may not lend themselves to de-escalation. For example, officers were adamant that furtive movement by the driver or passenger(s) is almost certain to result in an escalation.

> You reaching? Like I said, the hands are what kill people. If you're reaching, especially if I tell you "Don't reach man" – no, don't do that. That's gonna cause a use of force. I'm not gonna have you reach under your seat. I don't know what's under there, and I don't wanna find out – not while it's in your hands. No, absolutely not. Yeah, that's gonna escalate – reaching for stuff. (Black male officer # 141)

STAGE 5: POLICE ACTION AND THE USE OF FORCE

In a worst-case scenario, escalations can lead to the use of force. The International Association of Chiefs of Police (2023) has described use of force as the "amount of effort required by police to compel compliance by an unwilling subject." It encompasses a range of officer behaviors from "officer presence" and using a more commanding tone and language, to using more assertive tactics, including physical contact, and/or ultimately using a weapon (Purdue, 1980).

At Stage 5, the Framework arrays three possible directions for police action given the situation status at Stage 4. The preferred path is depicted at Node 5A where an "orderly" transaction (at Stage 4) suggests that the situation requires no further action from the officer. The other two options for police action, at Nodes 5B and 5C, occur in response to an escalation at Node 4B to which force was applied.

Data from the P/CE-2 study indicated that 16, or 2/3 of the 24 officers, were compelled to apply force in at least one stop during the previous 12 months (Hyman, 2023). Node 5B connotes a proportional use of force where "proportional" is defined by a formulation called "The Use of Force Continuum." The Continuum provides officers with guidelines prescribing graduated levels of force in response to various levels of civilian resistance (National Institute of Justice, 2009).

It is important to note, however, that said force should only be used to ensure compliance and should never be initiated without provocation or employed beyond the point of submission. Doing so would be considered excessive as at Node 5C. Among the officers interviewed for this study, there was consensus about the kind of event most likely to involve using force.

> I would say the kind of incident that caused most of the use of force is once you go to place somebody under arrest. It's what we call defensive resistance. They don't want to be put under arrest. So that leads to either them trying to get away or them tensing up or fighting you putting handcuffs on them. That is considered a use of force in our use of force continuum. If they resist and you have to use even the slightest amount of force to get their hands behind their back, that's a use of force. (White male officer # 137)

One officer recounted an example of a proportional response she actually applied to this defensive resistance.

> I've actually had to go hands-on with someone because they were being arrested on an open warrant plus their license was suspended. The vehicle had no insurance, and the tags were wrong. So the vehicle's gonna get impounded. Once I got him out of the car, told him he was being arrested and tried to handcuff him, he started to pull away, which caused me to escalate my force. So yeah, I've had to use force on a traffic stop, but the force was no greater than what was needed to gain control of the person. (Black female officer # 103)

The example above involved a proportional response (i.e., Node 5B) to secure submission. However, in extreme circumstances, proportionality can also result in a fatal civilian outcome (at Node 6B), as might be the case where a driver has a weapon. None of the P/CE-2 officers reported an experience with excessive use of force. Most commented that they preferred not to use force at all.

> Right now, the use of force thing is a big stress on everybody. People are scared to police. Officers are scared to engage because they think that, if they get into a use of force, they're gonna get fired, they're gonna go to jail. So that, on itself, is a big stress. The police officers are really, really stressed about that. (Hispanic male officer # 117)

Many officers stressed the importance of de-escalation to avoid using force.

> I try to calm them down, like, "Look, it's just a traffic stop. The only reason why I stopped you is for your break light, you know, it's not the crime century, you know, it's okay." I try to use my words to de-escalate because ultimately your mouth is the best weapon you have, and your mouth can talk you out of a use of force just as much as your mouth can talk you into a use of force. (#Black male officer # 141)

STAGE 6: THE END RESULTS

At this stage in the Framework, the encounter has reached its conclusion. Two possible outcomes are arrayed. Following an orderly transaction at Node 5A, the encounter concludes at Node 6A without incident. Peaceful, orderly transactions are, by far, the dominant result in civilian contacts with police (Hyman, 2020). For instance, the Bureau of Justice Statistics estimates that, between 2002 and 2011, an annual average of 44 million people in the U.S. had face-to-face contacts with police. Of those, 1.6%, or about 715,500, experienced the threat or actual use of force, and only 1.2% of those with contacts, roughly 535,300, reported excessive use of force (Hyland et al., 2015). As such, Node 6A of the Framework represents 98.4% of encounters, in which force was not involved.

Node 6B, on the other hand, points to incidents where civilians have died either as a result of proportional force or because of excessive use of force. None of the officers interviewed in the P/CE-2 study had experienced a death, from either cause, on any of their stops, and they unanimously expressed regret over stops that result in fatal civilian outcomes. In discussing these events, most reflected upon the 2020 killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis, MN, as their reference point.

> I think it was wrong. I don't think that eight minutes, whether it was the back or the shoulder or the neck, there was no reason to have him there for that long handcuffed. That's just not Right. …We know that a guy laying on his stomach handcuffed, it's a no no, for no minutes. As soon as you've got him handcuffed, turn him over. He's on his back, sit him up. Everybody grab him. Put him in the cruiser. Take him to the hospital. Take him to jail. Do what you need to do but get him up. Wrong is wrong. But not all of us are like that. (Hispanic male officer # 117)

Beyond decrying these incidents, they saw George Floyd's murder and its graphic coverage as pivotal inflection points in public opinion. Several expressed resentments over the media coverage, saying it presented an unbalanced view.

> I think people just think that we wake up and grab a gun and we're out looking for people to shoot. That's honestly what I think, and especially minorities think that. I have a number of people, especially after George Floyd, the first thing they would do is, say, "Oh, don't shoot me." I'm like, "Really? That's how you feel? I show up and you'd say, don't shoot me? I haven't even said a word. Why do you think I'm just gonna shoot you? Right. Oh, cause that's what I do." (White male officer # 137)

> If we talk about George Floyd, all you see in the video, constantly, is Derek Chauvin with his knee on his shoulder or his knee on his neck. Right? And that's all you're constantly consuming, you know, and instead of people saying," okay, well, that guy might be a bad cop," they think everybody that wears a badge, and a gun is a bad guy. (Hispanic male officer # 117)

> What I don't like is the perception that we get because of isolated incidents and bad apples. We all get grouped together. There's bad people in every profession, but you don't hear people going around saying F*** the school teachers or F*** the doctors like we get." Even if you are trying to do the right thing, you still get all the bad heat from everything else. (Black female officer # 108)

STAGE 7: FRAMEWORK OUTCOMES

Here is where the Framework ends. The encounter is over. This is the point where the officers disengage. The civilian is either released from the event or taken into custody. What comes next depends on the events that led to either outcome—policing matters that lead to an enforcement action result in the filing of a police report. Those that involve the use of force, leading to serious injury or death, or the discharge of a firearm, are reported to the FBI as a Use of Force Incident. Such incidents are usually reviewed by the Department of Jurisdiction (Hyman, 2022).

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study (i.e., Goal 1) has been to enhance the original conception of the P/CE Framework by integrating the perceptions of police officers as expressed in their own words. It is fair to assert that the officers' testimonies have done that. As a result of our interviews, we have a much better understanding, at least from the officers' points of view, of how and why these encounters evolve the way they do.

In addition, by integrating these two studies, I have been able to show that the officers' testimonies provide validation (i.e., Goal 2) for the P/CE Framework even though they had no knowledge of it. Using them, I was able to trace officers' behaviors and experiences through the pathways shown in Figure 1. This result suggests that the Framework can be a valuable tool for instruction and for analysis of traffic stop encounters.

Finally, the third goal of this report was to find an answer to the question of how and why police/civilian encounters turn deadly. From our officers' perspective, establishing rapport between officers and drivers during these stops is a primary means of preventing escalations and, by extension, civilian injuries and deaths. The officers in our P/CE-2 study were not prone to violence. Indeed, most reported an inclination toward exercising leniency in enforcement – issuing warnings rather than citations in resolving these encounters. Some mentioned the importance of showing empathy in their conduct, but they recognize that some of their colleagues may not. They are concerned that some officers may be ill-suited for the job and can be the source of negative opinions about police. Still, they were clear in their view that civilian behavior is the trigger for escalation when it occurs. This suggests that gaining a better understanding of civilian behavior is imperative to an even fuller exposition of the Framework and of police/civilian encounters more generally.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this series of traffic stop studies, the primary question is how and why they can turn deadly. These studies show that, in over 98% of the cases, they don't. How do we contextualize the magnitude and significance of the fatalities that do occur?

According to a Bureau of Justice Statistics report, law enforcement officers in the United States conduct millions of traffic stops annually—around 50 million in 2018 alone (BJS, 2018). Unfortunately, the tally of civilian fatalities from these stops is less precise. "Mapping Police Violence," in their analysis, reveals that in 2021, approximately 1,055 people were killed by police officers in the U.S., with "a significant proportion" occurring during traffic stops (Mapping Police Violence, 2022). A 2020 study published in the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* estimated that fatalities from traffic stops, including crashes resulting from police pursuits, number in the hundreds annually. The study highlights that around 300-400 civilians die each year as a result of police-related crashes, pursuits, or other violent interactions during traffic stops (Stuntz, M., et al., 2020).

These data suggest that civilian deaths during traffic stops are very rare, but being rare does not mean they are not significant. As was shown by the events that followed the George Floyd murder, it takes only one high-profile death to spark a national public outrage, exacerbate distrust and suspicion in many communities, and pose serious challenges for police and policing nationwide. That further suggests that gaining a better understanding of these events, and how to prevent them, should remain a priority for citizens, law enforcement, and academic research.

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