Media influence on college students’ perceptions of the police

Matilda Foster

Abstract

There exists an ample body of literature that examines the influence of factors associated with how the public perceives the police. Few studies, however, examined perceptions of the police using Easton’s (1965) systems theory of support for public institutions and possible ways of cultivating diffuse support, instead of specific support. One possible influence on the latter is citizens’ vicarious interactions with the police via media consumption. Using a factorial survey design, this study adds to the literature by using ordinary least squares (OLS) and ordered logistic regression (OLR) models to analyze the potential effects of the consumption of various police-related media and other factors on perceptions of the police that relate to specific support. The survey was administered to undergraduate criminal justice majors at two state universities (N=782). Results of the OLR models found that levels of media consumption were significantly related to changes in perceptions of the police in their community, but not when asked questions about the police in general. Results of the OLS models indicated that consumption levels of different types of media outlets (TV entertainment, Internet entertainment or traditional news) did not significantly influence how a respondent perceived the police.