Structural arrangements in large municipal police organizations
Revisiting Wilson's theory of local political culture

Kimberly D. Hassell and Jihong "Solomon" Zhao
Department of Criminal Justice, University of Nebraska at Omaha, Omaha, Nebraska, USA, and

Edward R. Maguire
Administration of Justice Program, George Mason University, Manassas, Virginia, USA

Abstract *For the past 35 years, Wilson's theory of local political culture has influenced many students of policing and has greatly contributed to the erudition of American police practices. Wilson, based on empirical study, found that variation in the structural arrangements of police organizations could be explained by examining the local political culture of the municipalities in which they are located. Police departments in cities with a professional form of government, for example, focused more on law enforcement activities and had a more bureaucratic structure than agencies residing in cities with a traditional form of government which focused more on order maintenance activities and, correspondingly, had a less bureaucratic structure. The purpose of this paper is to test the utility of Wilson's theory in today's police organizations. Data collected from a sample of large, municipal police departments were included in the analysis. The findings suggest that the relationship between local political culture and police organizational structure that Wilson identified many years ago has indeed attenuated. The sample of large municipal police agencies, finds no relationship between local political culture, as measured by Wilson, and four dimensions of organizational structure: formalization, vertical differentiation, functional differentiation, and centralization.*

Introduction

Over the past 30 years, scholars and practitioners have attempted to identify theories capable of explaining one simple issue: how to predict organizational behavior in American policing (Bittner, 1970; Wilson, 1968; Walker, 1999). Researchers have examined a number of important factors thought to have significant impact on police behavior at the organizational level. For example, the role of leadership (Skolnick and Bayley, 1986) and organizational subcultures (Brown, 1981) are often used to explain the differences found among police agencies. One of the most popular theories along this line of research is Wilson's theory of police behavior, which focuses on the

relationship between local political culture and organizational behavior in policing (Wilson, 1968). In his seminal book, *Varieties of Police Behavior* (hereinafter referred to as *Varieties*), Wilson (1968) drew on concepts from political science to develop a theory that explains variation in police organizational arrangements and practices.

Since the publication of *Varieties,* Wilson's theory of police behavior has remained one of the most influential theories of police behavior, particularly in police organizational theory. A cursory review of police literature shows that almost every textbook on American police has a description of Wilson's three types of police departments (e.g. Langworthy and Travis, 1999; Walker, 1999; Fyfe *et al.,* 1997; Roberg *et al.,* 2000; Bartollas and Hahn, 1999; Carter and Radelet, 1999). The social science citation index lists 568 citations of Wilson's book between 1980 and 2001. Citation and page analyses have shown that both Wilson and his 1968 book are among the most prominent and widely cited in police and criminal justice scholarship (Cohn *et al.,* 1998; Wright and Miller, 1998)[1]. Guyot (1997) cited *Varieties* as the lone exception to the lack of empirical research on police organizations. Langworthy (1986, p. 32) suggested that Wilson's theory of police behavior "remains the only empirically derived theory of police organization to date". During that same year, Slovak (1996, p. 5) lamented that "there is a very real sense in which the promise offered by Wilson's original analysis has gone unfulfilled." Unquestionably, this theory has influenced many scholars and contributed to the body of knowledge on American police.

A review of the literature, however, indicates that there have been few studies designed to investigate the basic assumptions of Wilson's theory of police behavior (see Langworthy, 1985; Skolnick and Bayley, 1986; Crank, 1990; Crank and Langworthy, 1992; Pursley, 1976). In addition, to the best of our knowledge, there has only been one study that attempts to re-test empirically Wilson's theory on the relationship between local political culture and specific structural arrangements among police organizations (see Langworthy, 1986). We believe, therefore, that Wilson's theory of police behavior occupies the ironic position of being one of the most frequently cited and least tested theories in contemporary policing research.

The purpose of this paper, then, is to re-examine the influence of local political culture on police organizational structure by utilizing Wilson's theory. More specifically, we examine four dimensions of organizational structure to see if particular structural arrangements are associated with distinct styles of local political culture. The data used in this study come from a national survey of large police agencies in the USA conducted in 1998.

Literature review
Three styles of organizational arrangements in policing
Wilson's theory of police behavior is based on data he collected from a study of eight police departments. Extensive interviews with officers of all ranks, field

study, and official departmental records led Wilson to identify three distinctive styles of policing, namely:

 (1) the legalistic;

 (2) the watchman; and

 (3) the service-oriented styles.

Each of the three policing styles is associated with distinctive organizational arrangements and prioritized activities.

Police departments with a legalistic style of policing share the organizational arrangements of the bureaucratic model of policing (Kelling and Moore, 1988). According to Wilson (1968), legalistic style departments are more formalistic, with more rules and regulations, than other kinds of departments. The inherent purpose of formalization is the control of discretion among rank-and-file officers. Wilson (1968, p. 181) pointed out that:

> Discretion, except under carefully defined circumstances, creates opportunities for officers to use that discretion out of improper or corrupt motives.

Furthermore, there are not only more rules and policies, but the rules and policies are strictly enforced to ensure that officer behavior follows departmental policies.

At the same time, a legalistic style department is more hierarchically differentiated. That is, there are more ranks in the department to strengthen the authority. As Wilson (1968, p. 184) found: "formal, hierarchical authority was strengthened at the expense of informal, clique authority." The result of increased height in an organization is usually centralization. This concept of centralization is particularly reflected in the area of decision making in a legalistic department. As an organization becomes more formalized, the decision making becomes highly centralized. Decisions are usually made at the very top with relatively little input from other ranks. Wilson (1968, pp. 183-4) observed that when a new chief arrived at a legalistic police department: "he seeks to centralize control, formalize authority, and require written accounts of everything that transpires".

The final structural feature of legalistic style departments that warrants attention is functional differentiation. There is more division of labor in a legalistic police department. Functions of police work are divided into specific areas so that personnel can focus on more specific tasks.

High levels of the four structural features we have outlined here – formalization, hierarchical differentiation, centralization, and functional differentiation – are crucial to achieve what Wilson referred to as the "institutional" or legalistic style of policing because they emphasize organizational rationality in achieving organizational goals. Law enforcement oriented activities, therefore, become the top priority and such activities are carried out with professionalism and impartiality.

In contrast, the watchman style of policing is at the opposite end of the spectrum with respect to its organizational arrangements. This policing style is

similar to the "communal" model of policing. First, the watchman style of policing is not as formal as the legalistic style. There are fewer rules, policies, and ranks in a watchman style police department. Wilson (1968, p. 152) noted that:

> The departments display in extreme form the craft-like characteristics of all police departments – that is to say, learning is by apprenticeship rather than formal training, procedures and rules are passed along by word of mouth and example rather than by written instructions or published manuals, there is comparatively little specialization of tasks (a patrolman, like a carpenter, is supposed to be able to do everything that comes his way) and a minimum of deference to a formal hierarchy.

Similarly, a watchman style police department pays less attention to centralization of authority. Police officers are like "craftsmen" and are deeply involved with the community. This "craftsman" work requires police officers to be generalists and to have discretion in carrying out their daily work. Wilson (1968, p. 142) found:

> This "privatization" of the law defining misdemeanors and offenses and the emphasis on keeping order in public places is squarely within the nineteenth-century tradition of American law enforcement.

Consequently, there are fewer rules and policies to regulate officers' behavior. In addition, rules and policies are less likely to be strictly enforced. Similarly, fewer functions are handled by special units in watchman-style police departments compared with legalistic-style departments. Watchman-style ` departments, therefore, are less functionally differentiated than legalistic departments. Overall, the watchman style of policing emphasizes decentralization and informality. These organizational arrangements are well suited for achieving the goal of order maintenance.

The third style of policing is the service orientation. The organizational arrangements of service-style departments rest between the legalistic and watchman style. Conceptualizing legalistic and watchman style departments on different ends of a continuum, service-style departments would fall in between these two extremes. Service-style departments, consequently, are not as formal and hierarchically tall as legalistic-style departments but are more formal, with greater command structures than watchman style departments. Wilson observed, for example, that the Nassau County Police Department, a service-style department with 3,200 members, was much more localized than a typical police department of that size. For example, the department did not have some typical bureaucratic characteristics, such as well-defined chains of command and tight, top-down administrative control as seen in the legalistic-style departments.

The police departments with a service orientation emphasize community residents' satisfaction as a major organizational goal. Accordingly, police officers take requests for both law enforcement and order maintenance seriously. Crimes such as burglaries and robberies take precedence over minor infractions of the law and "arrests are avoided when possible, but there will be frequent use of informal nonarrest sanctions" (Wilson, 1968, p. 201).

Local political culture and three styles of policing

After identifying these three styles of policing, Wilson (1968, pp. 228-35) argued that the major determinant of variation in police behavior was the local political culture:

> Thus, police work is carried out under the influence of political culture, though not necessarily under day-to-day political direction. By political culture is meant those widely shared expectations as to how issues will be raised, governmental objectives determined, and power for their attainment assembled; it is an understanding of what makes a government legitimate.

Empirically, Wilson operationalized the concept of political culture as the type of local government in place where his subject police agencies were located. Wilson identified four types of local government:

(1) high-professional council-manager;

(2) low-professional council-manager;

(3) nonpartisan mayor council; and

(4) partisan mayor-council.

More specifically, cities with high-professional council-manager regimes were termed good government, while cities with partisan mayor-council regimes were termed traditional government.

Wilson clearly linked the good-government form of local government with the legalistic style of policing. Not surprisingly, the emergence and development of a city manager's position is similar to the bureaucratic model of policing under the same philosophy – namely, the politics and administration dichotomy and the independent professional control of the organization (Stillman, 1974, pp. 9-10). The watchman style of policing is associated with the partisan mayor-council government. An important feature of this policing style is the openness to the influence of local politics. Accordingly, a department with a service orientation is linked to both low-professional council-manager and nonpartisan mayor-council governments.

Wilson empirically tested the hypothesized link between political culture and variation in police practices by examining the types of local government and the arrest rates for specific crimes in corresponding police departments. He controlled for city size and nonwhite population in his analysis of 146 police agencies. The results reported supported Wilson's hypothesis. Again, to the best of our knowledge, there has only been one partial test of Wilson's hypothesis regarding the relationship between local political culture and the structural arrangement of police organizations (Langworthy, 1986). Operationalizing government into a dichotomous designation ("good" government was created by collapsing high and low professional council-manager governments while "other" government was the result of combining partisan and nonpartisan mayor-council governments). Langworthy's analysis did not support Wilson's implied theory that police organization is constrained by political culture (Langworthy, 1986, p. 122). Langworthy's analysis, while

significant in its own right, represents only a partial test of Wilson's theoretical link between political culture and organizational arrangements.

Due to the impact of Wilson's study in the field of criminal justice, it is important to note this lack of attention to research designed to empirically test the influence of local political culture on specific structural arrangements in police agencies. As stated earlier, *Varieties*, depending on whether influence is measured through the incidence or prevalence of citations, is the second or third most cited work in policing scholarship (Wright and Miller, 1998). Although *Varieties* is now more than 30 years old, it remains a widely acknowledged contribution to the study of police behavior. A test of its external validity is long overdue.

Studying the causes of structural arrangements is also important when considering the pursuit of achieving organizational goals. Theoretically, organizational arrangements, like formal organizational structure, are both caused by, and causes of, an agency's operations and behaviors (Maguire, 2002). Structural arrangements are the framework within which organizations achieve, or attempt to achieve, their goals. That is why Weber (1977) painstakingly discussed the important role of structural arrangements in his "ideal type" bureaucracy.

Recent studies in police innovation also show, quite forcefully, that change in police behavior should also lead to a corresponding change in organizational arrangements, such as flattening hierarchical structures, increasing spatial differentiation, and empowering employees (e.g. Cordner, 1997; Trojanowicz and Bucquerioux, 1990; Maguire, 1997). We, therefore, focus our attention on retesting Wilson's theory that local political culture impacts on organizational arrangements in large, municipal police departments.

In the following section, we discuss the methodology used to assess the relationship between local political culture and organizational arrangements as outlined in Wilson's (1968) book.

Methodology
Police department survey
The focus of this study is large municipal police agencies. These are the police departments with the largest amount of variation in organizational structure. For purposes of this study, a "large" police agency is one that employs 100 or more full-time actual sworn police officers; a "municipal" police agency is one whose primary jurisdiction is a city or town, and not a state, a county, a territory, or a specialized district such as a school or an airport; and a "police agency" is any general-purpose law enforcement agency that responds to calls for service from citizens and enforces a wide range of state criminal laws and local ordinances. There are approximately 482 police agencies in the USA fitting this definition. These 482 agencies became our sampling frame.

These agencies were surveyed using an extensive, 13-page mail survey asking myriad questions regarding their organizational structure. After three waves of mailings beginning in July 1998, the data collection ended with a

response rate of 83 percent (401 of the 482 agencies surveyed returned the survey). These agencies make up the sample for the analyses in this study. The functional differentiation measure was obtained using 1997 Law Enforcement Management and Administrative Statistics (LEMAS) data. The information concerning local political culture was obtained through two sources. The *1992 Census of Government: Volume One, Government Organization* (US Bureau of Census, 1995) reported the local governmental structure for most of the cities in our sample. For the remaining cities, we contacted the police agencies directly to obtain the information on local governmental structure. These variables are discussed in detail below (see descriptive statistics provided in Table I).

Independent variables
In his book, *Varieties of Police Behavior*, Wilson (1968) identified three distinctive types of local political culture. The differences, as he pointed out, were represented by a city government's structural arrangements. More specifically, type of local mayoral election, relationship between city chief administrator and council and educational attainment of the administrator were important in identifying the three types of local political culture. An earlier study on the influence of local political culture on police innovations, using a sample of 281 cities with populations ranging from 25,000 to 3,000,000, showed that over 96 percent of city chief administrators had college degrees (Zhao, 1996). This suggests that, unlike 30 years ago, almost all city administrators today have college degrees. This item, therefore, was not included in the analysis to construct a measure of political culture.

Following Wilson's coding method, the three types of local political culture are operationalized as:

(1) *Professional government*. A council-manager form of government with nonpartisan election (corresponding to legalistic style police agencies).

(2) *Traditional government*. A mayor-council form of government and the mayoral election is partisan (corresponding to watchman style police agencies).

(3) *Mixed type of government*. A low-professional council-manager government or mayor-council form of government where mayoral election is nonpartisan (corresponding to service style police agencies).

Dependent variables
Formalization is the extent to which an organization is governed by formal written rules, policies, and standards (Hall *et al.*, 1967). In this study, formalization is measured by the presence and absence of rules and policies, using a 30-item additive index[2]. Each item represents a rule or policy derived from the standard operation procedures (SOP) of police organizations. In creating this section of the survey instrument, we studied both the 1997 LEMAS survey instrument and the SOPs of two large police agencies. The items included in the survey instrument represent those most often found in

large municipal police organizations. These rules and policies vary from the use of deadly force, use of confidential funds, to press releases and represents our first hypothesis:

> *H1.* The greater the tendency toward professional form of government the greater number of rules and policies.

Vertical differentiation focuses on the nature of the hierarchy within an organization. Vertical differentiation is analyzed as a measure of bureaucratic segmentation[3]. According to organizational theorists, arranging positions in hierarchical order with clear chains of command is a key principle for promoting organizational efficiency (Gulik, 1937; Hage, 1965; Zhao, 1996). Organizations with elaborate chains of command, consequently, are more vertically differentiated and more formal than those with simpler command structures. In the 1998 Survey of Large Police Agencies, respondents were asked to list the number of command levels, beginning with the patrol officer level and ending with the chief, in their respective departments. We have the following hypothesis concerning the relationship between local political culture and vertical differentiation in police agencies:

> *H2.* The greater the tendency toward professional form of government the more vertically differentiated the organization structure.

Functional differentiation measures the degree to which tasks are broken down into functionally distinct areas. The number of functions performed by special units in a police organization is an indicator of the presence of knowledge and experience deemed necessary for the adoption of innovation (Zhao, 1996; Maguire, 1997). In the current study, we adopt a measure similar to that used by Reimann (1973, p. 464), who operationalizes "functional specialization" as "the number of discrete, identifiable functions performed by at least one, full-time specialist". The LEMAS survey instrument for 1997 provides a list of functions for which agencies might have a specialized unit. Our measure of functional differentiation, therefore, is the number of functions out of these 17 for which the agency has assigned full-time personnel to a special unit:

> *H3.* The greater the tendency toward the professional council-manager form of government, the more functions performed by specialized units in a police agency.

Centralization is the degree to which the decision-making capacity within an organization is concentrated in a single individual or small select group. On one hand, centralization is a popular method for achieving organizational control and internal accountability. On the other hand, centralization removes discretion from lower-level employees, which could potentially stifle creativity and innovation at the line officer level (Simons, 1995; Raynor and Bower, 2001). In this study, centralization is measured using two dimensions. The first dimension taps into the extent of authority empowered to senior management in a police agency. A scale comprising ten items (each ranging from 0-4) is used

to measure the senior management decision-making. The questions include the presence or absence of authority in adoption of new programs, selecting the type or brand of new equipment to controlling the release of information to the media.

The final dimension used to measure centralization concerns the actual day-to-day decision-making authority empowered to first-line supervisors. A scale comprising ten items (each ranging from 0-4) is used to measure the actual empowerment of authority, including establishing a unit's budget, personnel rewards, and authorization of overtime for front-line employees:

H4. The greater the tendency toward the traditional mayor-council form of government the more authority empowered to senior administrators.

H5. The greater the tendency toward the traditional mayor-council form of government the more authority empowered to first-line supervisors.

Control variables
Four control variables are included in the analysis. The first control variable is departmental size. Research on the relationship between the environment and structural arrangements show that organization size is often the most important factor in shaping police organizations (Blau and Schoenherr, 1971; Donaldson, 1995). Research on policing also finds that departmental size is a strong predictor of the configuration of organization structure in police agencies (Maguire, 1997, 2002; Zhao, 1996; Crank and Wells, 1991). Accordingly, we include size as a control variable, measured by the total number of full-time employees (both sworn and non-sworn) in the police department.

The second control variable is geographic region. Generally, policing in America is very decentralized and localized. There is, therefore, considerable variation between police departments across the nation. Because the data collected for this project come from a national survey of large police agencies in the USA, regional effect is taken into consideration. In police research using national data, regional effect is always considered a potential predictor. For example, Warner *et al.* (1989) found that geographic region was the second most important factor related to the hiring of female police officers. Zhao and Lovrich (1998) identified a significant impact of geographic region on the unionization in policing. Similarly, Maguire (1997) investigated the organization structure of large police departments and suggested that geographic region has a strong impact on police innovations. Like previous national studies, geographic region is divided into four categories: northeast, midwest, west and south.

The third control variable is departmental age. Recent studies on organization structure and innovations in policing have identified organizational age as a useful predictor. King (1999) and Maguire (2002), for example, found that organizational age is significantly correlated with both structure and innovation in police departments. For purposes of this study, the organizational age is defined as the year the city instituted uniformed, paid, full-time 24-hour police services within a single organization.

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The final control variable used in our analysis is departmental leadership. Many police scholars have suggested that the police chief plays an important role in the planning and enforcement of change in departmental policies and structural arrangements. Skolnick and Bayley (1986), for example, found that police innovations are closely related to the inauguration of a new chief. Although Wilson (1968) identified the major predictor of the three styles of policing as local political culture, he also mentioned the important role of police leadership in directing the daily operations of police departments. We include, therefore, a variable to control for change in police leadership. This final variable is defined as the number of police executives who have held office since 1 January 1970.

Findings

In this section, the major findings of this study are reported. We first discuss the descriptive statistics followed by the multivariate analyses of the four structural dimensions of an organization: formalization, vertical differentiation, functional differentiation and centralization. Descriptive statistics for the dependent and independent variables are included in Table I.

Formalization is represented by a 30-item scale measuring the presence or absence of rules and policies. The mean of this scale is 25 with a standard

Variables	Mean	SD	n
Dependent variables			
Formalization			
Number of rules and policies	25.05	3.60	384
Vertical differentiation			
Number of ranks	5.85	0.91	396
Functional differentiation			
Number of functions performed by special units	9.13	2.23	385
Centralization			
Senior management authority	2.74	0.61	380
First line supervisor authority	1.85	0.51	383
Independent variables			348
Professional government (legalistic style)			164
Traditional government (watchman style)			58
Mixed type of government (service style)			126
Control variables			
Departmental size	654.38	2,701.32	380
Departmental age	102.27	37.11	380
Departmental leadership	5.33	4.38	341
Geographic region			401
Northeast			94
Midwest			83
South			127
West			97

Table I.
Descriptive statistics: independent, dependent and control variables

deviation of 3.60, indicating that most large police departments have comprehensive policies and rules in place.

Vertical differentiation is measured by the number of command levels. The mean number of command levels in our sample of large, municipal police agencies is six.

Functional differentiation is the degree to which tasks are divided and assigned to functionally distinct units. Our measure of functional differentiation is the number of functions (out of 17) for which the agency has assigned full-time personnel to a special unit. Agencies in our sample have a mean number of nine (9.13) functions for which an agency has assigned full-time personnel to a special unit.

Finally, the mean score of centralization of authority shows that senior management has more centralized authority (2.74) than the first-line supervisors (1.85). Although these two centralization subscales measure two different types of centralization and are in different metrics, there is substantial variation across agencies.

Other descriptive statistics show that out of the 401 municipalities included in our study[4], 47 percent had professional council-manager type of governmental structure ($n = 164$). In comparison, about 17 percent had partisan mayor-council type of government ($n = 58$) while the remaining 36 percent ($n = 126$) can be classified as the mixed type. The respondent agencies have an average of 654 employees and the turnover rate for the chief is five chiefs (from 1970 to 1998). The average departmental age of our sample is 102, suggesting that most departments were established at the turn of the twentieth century. Finally, analysis of the four geographic variables indicates that there are more departments in the south than the other three regions. Additionally, regression diagnostics show that there is no multicollinearity or heteroskedasticity. The findings from the multivariate analysis are reported in Tables II and III.

Table II reports the results concerning the impact of local political culture on three dimensions of structural arrangements:

(1) formalization;

(2) vertical differentiation; and

(3) functional differentiation.

In the multivariate analysis, three dummy variables are created to measure the local political cultures of the cities included in our analyses. Cities with a traditional form of government are used as the comparison group and suppressed in the equation. This means that the coefficients of the other two political cultures are used to compare against the baseline of the comparison group. A positive coefficient of the cities with a professional government, for example, means police organizations are more formalized than the comparison group, cities with a traditional government.

Our first hypothesis is: the greater the tendency toward professional form of government, the greater number of rules and policies. The regression analysis shown in Table II finds no support for this claim. The professional form of

Variables	No. of rules and policies		No. of ranks		No. of functions performed by special units	
	b	β	b	β	b	β
Independent variables						
Professional government	−0.820	−0.114	−0.333	−0.183*	0.182	0.040
Mixed type of government	−1.524	−0.198*	−0.159	−0.082	0.197	0.040
Control variables						
Departmental size	0.0002	0.119*	0.0001	0.453*	0.0001	−0.092
Departmental age	0.015	0.162*	0.0031	0.128*	−0.011	−0.180*
Departmental leadership	0.0025	0.030	−0.0045	−0.021	0.046	0.087
Geographic region						
Midwest	2.599	0.291*	0.162	0.072	−0.555	−0.099
South	2.951	0.386*	0.501	0.259*	−1.18	−0.244*
West	3.528	0.694*	−0.008	−0.004	−1.65	−0.308*
	Adj. R^2 = 0.118		Adj. R^2 = 0.300		Adj. R^2 = 0.073	
	F = 6.17*		F = 17.448*		F = 3.929*	

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Table II.
Regression analyses – formalization, vertical differentiation and functional differentiation as the dependent variables

Note: * Significant at the 0.05 level

government is not a significant predictor of the extent of rules and policies in a police department. In addition, police agencies operating in a mixed government are significantly different from the comparison group, agencies in cities with traditional governments. However, the sign of the coefficient (−1.52) is in the opposite direction of what was hypothesized. The other variables – region, size, and mean age of an organization – turn out to be the significant predictors of the number of rules and policies implemented in a department.

Variables	Senior management authority		First line supervisor authority	
	b	β	b	β
Independent variables				
Professional government	−0.113	−0.094	0.129	0.125
Mixed type of government	−0.072	−0.056	0.057	0.052
Control variables				
Departmental size	0.000	0.025	−0.000	−0.061
Departmental age	0.001	0.066	−0.000	−0.030
Departmental leadership	−0.003	−0.024	0.010	0.087
Geographic region				
Midwest	−0.075	−0.051	0.402	0.314*
South	0.113	0.089	0.352	0.321*
West	−0.125	−0.090	0.399	0.333*
	Adjusted R^2 = 0.015		Adjusted R^2 = 0.145	
	F = 1.581		F = 7.716*	

Table III.
Regression analyses – centralization as the dependent variables

Note: * Significant at the 0.05 level

The second hypothesis is: the greater the tendency toward professional form of government, the more vertically differentiated the organization structure. The findings from the second regression analysis reveal that the professional government is significantly related to vertical differentiation, but the coefficient (–0.33) is in the opposite direction than was hypothesized. This means that cities with professional governments have police departments with fewer ranks than cities with a traditional or mixed form of government. The model shows that the other significant predictors of variation in the vertical differentiation of a police department is departmental size followed by departmental age. The total variance explained by these variables is quite impressive at 30 percent.

Our third hypothesis is: the greater the tendency toward the professional council-manager form of government, the more functions performed by a specialized unit in a police agency. The findings do not show support for Wilson's claim that there is a significant difference between the three styles of local political culture with respect to functional differentiation. At the same time, departmental age and geographic region (south and west) produce significant results.

The next two hypotheses are concerned with the influence of local political culture on the degree of centralization in a police department. The fourth hypothesis is: the greater the tendency toward the traditional mayor-council form of government, the more authority is empowered to senior police administrators. Findings are listed in Table III.

The findings from the regression analysis lend little support for the claim that local political culture is closely associated with the authority empowered to senior management. In fact, none of the independent variables are significant predictors of this dependent variable.

Our final hypothesis derived from Wilson's theory is: the greater the tendency toward the traditional mayor-council form of government, the more authority is empowered to first-line supervisors. The second model shown in Table III presents the empirical testing of this hypothesis. Similar to the previous models, the findings fail to detect any significant impact of local political culture on the authority empowered to first-line supervisors. In fact, the coefficients of the independent variables reveal that geographic region is the only significant predictor of the authority given to street level supervisors. In the three regions, midwest, south and west, first-line supervisors are reported to have more discretionary authority concerning disciplinary issues, budget allocation, and so forth than their counterparts in the northeast.

Discussion and conclusion

Although Wilson's discussion on the relationship between local political culture, styles of policing and structural arrangements of police organizations has been extensively cited, there has been limited empirical research on the subject. This lack of empirical research on the relationship between local political culture and organizational arrangements is what peaked our interest in the utility of Wilson's theory in the study of today's structural arrangements

in large police organizations. As reported, our study did not find significant impact of local political culture on four dimensions (formalization, vertical differentiation, functional differentiation, and centralization) of organization structure in a sample of large police agencies. This finding is significant since these four dimensions are commonly and routinely used to measure organization structure in both public and private sectors (for a review, see Donaldson, 1995).

In police organizational research, the literature indicates that the primary determinant of organization structure is environment. Over the past 15 years, there have been many empirical studies investigating the impact of environment on structural arrangements of police departments (e.g. Langworthy, 1986; Crank and Wells, 1991; Zhao, 1996; Maguire, 1997, 2002). Scholarly and empirical research has demonstrated that an organization's task environment, as well as the larger cultural/societal environment in which an organization resides, plays a prominent role in shaping organizational arrangements (Meyer and Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Scott, 1994; Crank and Langworthy, 1992; Langworthy, 1992; Nalla *et al.*, 1997; Crank and Wells, 1991). In 1968, Wilson found that local political culture was a primary predictor of the organizational arrangements of police departments. Our replication of Wilson's analysis, over 30 years later, indicates that local political culture, as empirically defined by Wilson (1968), no longer influences organizational arrangements in large, municipal police departments. At this point, we speculate why Wilson's theory of local political culture failed to predict today's structural arrangements in large, municipal police departments.

First, when Wilson undertook his research on police organizational behavior, the relationship between local political culture and city agencies was more pronounced. Even before the 1960s, the progressive movement had been pressing hard for the removal of political patronage from public service agencies. Furthermore, the progressive movement advocated for major reform in city politics. Council manager types of government, without partisan election, were considered a more "ideal type" of government in which the influence of politics was supposed to be limited (e.g. Lineberry and Fowler, 1967). Even though the police will never be entirely shielded from the influence of local politics, the political influence on police behavior has been significantly reduced. This reduction, it can be argued, has largely occurred in the 1950s and 1960s, when Wilson was still conducting his field research for his book, *Varieties*. The changing nature of local government between the time of Wilson's study and our re-examination may account for the current findings.

At the same time, Wilson's measurement of local political culture may be too simplistic for contemporary study. For example, our analysis did not allow us to assess the differences between republican and democratic influences on local government. It is plausible to assume that partisan influence may shape policies, procedures and arrangements of municipal organizations. At the same time, we have no measure of the relationship between city chief administrators and municipal police chiefs. Large city police chiefs today, as a group, are

better educated, more skilled at public relations and are better trained in management (Mahtesian, 1997). In the early part of the twentieth century, the police chief and the police agency were little more than "appendages of the urban political machine" (Mahtesian, 1997, p. 20).

The findings of this study suggest that today's police organizations are much more professional and bureaucratic in organization structure than their counterparts some 30 years ago, when Wilson conducted his research. The push to bureaucratize law enforcement agencies during the early part of the twentieth century was to purposefully remove the politics out of municipal police administration (Mahtesian, 1997). In sum, we cannot be sure that Wilson's measurements of local political culture are valid for study of the relationship between type of government and police organizational behavior for contemporary study and analysis.

What we can say with confidence is that several important factors have contributed to the standardization of organization structure in large police agencies over the past 30 years. First, the federal government has played a leading role in setting a uniform standard for police organization and practice. For example, the most recent movement, community-oriented policing (COP), involved $6 billion and the establishment of the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services in the Department of Justice to streamline community policing practices. A total of 35 community policing training centers, numerous training seminars, and standard requirements made COP the standard police practice in the 1990s.

Second, professionalism has played an important role in transforming the police from a traditional, locally controlled force to a professional force with law enforcement as the top priority (Walker, 1999). Most large municipal police departments today are accredited. The Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies Inc. (CALEA) was established in 1979 with the support of major law enforcement membership associations (International Association of Chiefs of Police; National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives; National Sheriffs' Association; and Police Executive Research Forum). State mandates and accreditation have all left their influence on the standardization of police departments (Burnton et al., 1994). Finally, the impact of the United States Supreme Court, in landmark decisions such as Miranda vs Arizona (1966), Terry vs Ohio (1968), Tennessee vs Garner (1985) and so forth, has had a pronounced impact on regulating and standardizing police behavior.

Change in the structural arrangements in police organizations has been slow, but over the course of the twentieth century, large police organizations have become increasingly more professional and standardized (Maguire, 1997). The nature of policing arrangements has changed dramatically from the time Wilson tested his theory of local political culture. According to our findings, local political culture, as defined by Wilson (1968), is no longer a direct predictor of certain structural arrangements in large, municipal police organizations. Future research should explore whether the same holds true for smaller agencies as research has demonstrated that factors affecting

organizational structure in large police departments may not generalize to smaller agencies (Crank and Wells, 1991).

Considering the impact of Wilson's theory, the findings produced herein should not prevent future study, but should incite intellectual curiosity into the relationship between local government and police organizational behavior.

Notes

1. James Q. Wilson is one of the most cited scholars in textbooks and journals from both criminal justice and criminology (Cohn et al., 1998). His work covers a wide swath, from criminology and criminal justice to political science and organization theory. Therefore, his rankings in citation and page-coverage analyses of journals and textbooks are due in part to other works. Nonetheless, Wilson was the fourth most cited scholar in *Justice Quarterly*; his most cited work in that analysis was *Varieties*. He was the fifth most cited scholar in three criminal justice journals, and once again, *Varieties* was his most cited work (Cohn et al., 1998). In police scholarship, Wilson's footprint is even more pronounced. He is the fourth most cited scholar in police studies (Wright and Miller, 1998). *Varieties*, depending on whether influence is measured through the incidence or prevalence of citations, is the second or third most cited work in policing (Wright and Miller, 1998). Thus, all available evidence suggests that *Varieties of Police Behavior*, though it is now more than 30 years old, is widely acknowledged as an enduring contribution to the study of police.

2. See Appendix 1 for the alpha levels of all indexes and Appendix 2 for the construction of these indexes.

3. In our study, we use the number of command levels as a measure of organizational segmentation. This differs from height in that vertical height is generally measured by the number of ranks, and not the levels of supervisory authority (see Langworthy (1986) and Maguire (2002) for a discussion of organizational segmentation and height).

4. We were only able to collect data on local political culture from 348 out of the 401 municipalities included in our study.

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Appendix 1.

	n	Min.	Max.	α	Item no.
Formalization	384	11	30	0.79	30
Centralization – senior management authority	384	0.80	4.0	0.85	10
Centralization – first line supervisor authority	384	0.40	3.4	0.78	10

Table AI.
Summary scale
characteristics

Appendix 2. Composite index construction
Dependent variables
Formalization. Questions: indicate whether your agency has written policy directives on the following:

- Use of deadly force.
- Discharge of firearms.
- Handling the mentally ill.
- Handling the homeless.
- Handling domestic disturbances/spousal abuse.
- Handling juveniles.
- Pursuit driving.
- Relationships with private security firms.
- Off-duty employment of sworn personnel.
- Strip searches.
- Code of conduct.
- Use of confidential funds.
- Employee counseling assistance.
- Citizen complaints.
- Sexual harassment in the workplace.
- Maximum hours worked by officers per week.
- Discretionary arrest power.
- Smoking on duty.
- Accepting gratuities.
- Use of body armor.
- Dress code.
- Grooming and personal hygiene.
- Hostage situations.
- Insubordination.
- Loose wild animals.
- Meal and rest breaks.
- Press releases, speaking with media, representatives.
- Radio operations.
- Use of less-than-lethal force.
- Protection mechanisms for undercover officers.

Centralization – senior management authority. Response categories are rated from 0 (never) to 4 (always). Questions: to what extent would senior management make actual decision (not just signing off) in the following areas:

- Adoption of new programs.
- Adoption of new personnel policies.
- Creating a new specialized unit.

- Establishing the content and methods for training employees.
- Selecting the type or brand of new equipment.
- Selecting the suppliers of materials to be used.
- Setting priorities about what criminal offenses the department should focus its resources on.
- Setting priorities about what geographic areas in the community the department should focus its resources on.
- Setting standards for measuring departmental performance.
- Controlling the release of information to the media.

Centralization – first line supervisor authority. Response categories are rated from 0 (never) to 4 (always). Questions: how much discretion does the typical first-line supervisor have in the following areas:

- Establishing his or her unit's budget.
- Determining how his or her unit's performance will be evaluated.
- Hiring and firing personnel.
- Personnel rewards.
- Personnel discipline.
- Purchasing of equipment and supplies.
- Establishing a new project or program.
- Altering shift schedules of front-line employees.
- Authorize overtime for front-line employees.
- Allocation of work among available workers.