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# Cooperation of Immigrant Communities to Avert Disaster: Refined and Improving Focus in Communication Strategy

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## Statement of Problem

As DHS works with its local first responder partners to protect U.S. citizens and infrastructure from terrorist threats and natural and manmade disasters, it is critical to both support effective communication with those potentially affected by disasters and elicit cooperation from those who can provide information that is important to minimizing disasters. Effective communication affects a range of first responder and law enforcement efforts—from mobilizing populations out of harm's way, to providing critical information on issues of health, to establishing the cooperation among groups that is critical to identifying threats. Past experiences have shown that poor communication with first responders has prevented the use of important information that could have averted destruction (Wax, 2002)<sup>1</sup>. Disaster preparedness and crime prevention

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<sup>1</sup> A recent analysis of foiled terrorist plots for the IHSS indicated that in 24% of the cases, the initial information that led to discovery of the plot came from the local community, and in 80% of cases it came

programs, however, most often focus on native, usually English-speaking, minority populations. Relatively little analysis addresses communication with other ethnic groups (Walker, Spohn, & Delone, 2000; Davis & Miller, 2002; James Hawkins, & Rowell, 2007).

Effectively communicating and eliciting cooperation becomes increasingly difficult when first responders and law enforcement personnel interact with immigrant groups. This difficulty is often cited as one important reason that disasters have significantly greater impact on immigrant communities (Marsella & Christopher, 2004; Khashu, Busch, & Latif, 2005; Carter-Pokras, Zambrana, Mora, & Aaby, 2007; Shiu-Thornton, Balabis, Senturia, Tamayo, & Oberle, 2007). In addition, immigrants seem to be less likely to cooperate with authorities, especially the police, in addressing public safety issues (Davis & Miller, 2002; James et al., 2007; Marsella, Johnson, Watson, & Gryczynski, 2008). Although some larger police departments are able to recruit from immigrant groups and thus facilitate effective communication and cooperation, information on these processes has not been collected in a systematic way to enable widespread use. Information about (1) how immigrants view first responders and law enforcement, (2) how those views impact the establishment of effective communications and cooperation, and (3) how first responders and law enforcement successfully counter any negative views, has not been analyzed or organized to be widely used in improving strategies and tactics for enhancing cooperation.

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## Background

Our analysis examines the sociological determinants of immigrants' levels of trust, particularly influences of culture, negative and threat-creating interactions, and networks or hierarchies of trust within immigrant communities. In addition, we examine sociocognitive processes (e.g., trust and actions affected by trust between the immigrant group and first responders or law enforcement) that influence immigrants' willingness and ability to cooperate.

Because there is a direct link between communication and cooperation, and because trust plays a mediating role in establishing effective communication and cooperation, we propose three broad challenges to improving communication and cooperation between immigrant communities and first responders and law enforcement. These challenges are (1) understanding how the imprints of previous and ongoing experience affect trust; (2) understanding how various forms of communication (e.g.,

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either from these direct tips or from investigation processes that are likely to require effective communication within the affected community (Hollywood, Strom, & Pope, 2009).

direct, indirect) and the importance and reliability of information sources affect trust; and (3) understanding how lessons gleaned from (1) and (2) can be used to design strategic and tactical training protocols for first responders and law enforcement for effectively communicating, building trust, and eliciting cooperation.

### **Legitimacy, Trust, and Social Capital**

Political and social theorists have extensively studied the concept of legitimacy. Tyler in particular has produced a great deal of analysis on the concept, especially in relation to legitimacy of authority figures such as police (see Sunshine & Tyler, 2003; Tyler, 1997, 2004, 2006; Tyler & Degoey, 1995; Tyler & Wakslak, 2004). Within the context of this brief, the extent to which individuals and groups view authority figures to be legitimate depends largely on procedural justice, a concept first developed by Thibaut and Walker (1975) and later examined by others (Tankebe, 2009; Tyler, 1990a, 1990b, 2003). Behavior vis-à-vis authority figures is linked to perceptions of the fairness exercised by those authorities. Hawdon (2008) adds an additional layer to the discussion of legitimacy, arguing that levels of social capital (e.g., trust between citizens and between citizens and leaders, strong advocacy organizations, religious organizations, business associations, ethnic-based business—especially those that engage significantly outside of the ethnic-group’s economy) also influence people’s perceptions of authorities.

A number of studies have examined the influences of race and ethnicity on perceptions of legitimacy in the police and have findings that are consistent with the cognitive relationships outlined above (Cheurprakobkit, 2000; Davis & Henderson, 2003; Sunshine & Tyler, 2003; Tyler, 2001, Schuck, Rosenbaum, & Hawkins, 2008). Most of these analyses examine relationships between the police and White, American-born African American, and Hispanic populations. Fewer studies examine these relationships between other immigrant communities and authorities (Chu & Song, 2008; Davis & Hendricks, 2007; Davis & Miller, 2002; Egharevba, 2006, 2009). Some analysts have noted how immigrants differentiate among first responders and law enforcement, but often with perceptions that are inaccurate and influenced by previous experience (Schuck & Rosenbaum, 2005).

### **Impact of Previous Experience, Culture, and Values**

Some studies appear to have considered immigrants’ experiences with law enforcement that derive from their culture, values, and previous experience in their homeland. The older model of Brown and Benedict (2002) includes four variables, two of which (contact with police and race) are particularly relevant to immigrants’ status. A number of authors in the book edited by Martinez and Valenzuela (2006) address numerous immigrant groups’ perceptions based on past victimization, racial conflict, and

exposure to violence. Meeuwesen, van den Brink-Muinen, & Hofstede (2009) also provide a model of interest, focused primarily on communications and considering how differences in traditional cultural values shape how individuals (in this case immigrants) might perceive communications with authority figures such as law enforcement. Egharevba (2006, 2009) found that in Finland, most racially motivated crime or acts of discrimination directed towards immigrants were never reported to the police because immigrants felt the crimes were not going to be addressed or because of perceived unfair focus on immigration issues.

Many immigrants to the United States come from communities abroad where there are few incentives—and often many disincentives—to cooperating with first responders, especially police and other security services. Menjivar and Bejarano (2004) present a model of immigrants' perceptions and explicitly include their prior experiences in the homeland (see also Henderson, Oritz, Sugie, & Miller, 2008). Other research (Brandl, Frank, Worden, & Bynum, 1994; Davis & Miller, 2002; Culver, 2004; Rosenbaum Schuck, Costello, Hawkins, & Ring, 2005) also suggests the importance of previous negative attitudes as influencing current attitudes. This was also seen to be important by Wachholz and Miedema (2000), who found that perceptions of law enforcement from numerous prior countries influenced immigrants' perceptions in Canada, while Culver (2004) found a similar fear of police in the perceptions of immigrants who came from Latin American countries to the American Midwest. Meanwhile, Chu and Song (2008) found that prior contact with police generally led to lower ratings of police, but this trend was reversed when the result of prior experiences was positive.

## **Communication**

Analysis to date shows immigrants having significantly lower levels of contact with first responders in the United States and having higher levels of apprehension about contact than nonimmigrants. Fear of consequences is important in discouraging contact, and immigrants appear to arrive with more fear of authority figures than the average American (Carter-Pokras et al., 2007; Davis & Henderson, 2003; Henderson et al., 2008). At the same time, and contrary to the findings of most other studies, Davis and Hendricks (2007) found that that some immigrant groups studied had more positive perceptions of police than nonimmigrants. The same study cites strong evidence that, varied perceptions aside, recent immigrants are much less likely to engage with police. Type of contact is critical, and contacts that produce negative perceptions reduce willingness to communicate. Positive perception of contacts stems from both the nature of the contact and the presence of positive cultural signals (Cheurprakobkit, 2000; Chu & Song, 2008; Davis & Miller, 2002; Marsella et al., 2008).

Communication is often a subset of contact, with negative contact reducing communication (both willingness and quality) and positive contact increasing

communication (Cheurprakobkit, 2000; Egharevba, 2006; Schuck & Rosenbaum, 2005). Our review indicates wide agreement that communication that takes into account important cultural issues is critical to improving cooperation and the development of trust (Carter-Pokras et al., 2007; Marsella et al., 2008).

Indirect communication appears to be as important as direct communication with first responders in establishing effective communications. Word-of-mouth networks—typically within but often extending outside of family networks—are typically the most trusted sources of information and most important in the development of attitudes of trust toward law enforcement and other first responders (Brinkerhoff, 2008). Media, especially in the language of immigrants, is also an important and often trusted source of information, as are community groups either organized to serve an immigrant population or organizations that have developed an especially close relationship with immigrant groups (Davis & Henderson, 2003; Davis & Miller, 2002). Trusted advocacy organizations appear to be particularly important as sources of reliable information among immigrants (Adler, 2006).

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## Synthesis

Expanding networks of information through effective communication and established cooperation is important to first response. A range of first responders (e.g., firefighters, medical personnel, and civilian relief workers) rely on information from the populations they serve, but reliable information is even more critical to homeland security and law enforcement personnel whose responsibilities include assessing threats of violence to populations and infrastructure. The public's willingness to see as legitimate, make contact with, and trust first responders is critical to many of the goals of protecting populations and infrastructure.

Improved strategies for outreach to minority and immigrant communities are evolving in many police departments—typically through community policing (Cheurprakobkit, 2000; Davis & Miller, 2002). Outreach is also a focus among agencies that support other first responders, especially regarding disaster preparedness and the recovery of disaster-affected populations, but the evidence we uncovered suggests that most focus is on African American and Latino populations, with little attention to other immigrant communities. Outreach efforts within local law enforcement and disaster preparedness agencies appear to be occurring with little cross-communication, shortchanging the need for better understanding of the issues and development of training strategies and tactics to improve communications and cooperation.

Previous studies with these populations have focused mostly on how lack of attention to communities' perception of and relationship with responders—usually vis-à-

vis cultural issues—has reduced willingness to make contact, cooperate, and comply with first responders. But within these studies are few recommendations that would lead to improving perceptions. In general it appears first responders and law enforcement need to consider cultural impediments to communication (e.g., Marsella et al., 2008) and legitimacy concerns regarding authority that may be related to experience or perceptions brought from countries of origin and reinforced by contacts with first responders in their new communities in the United States (Davis & Hendricks, 2007; Egharevba, 2006, 2009).

Any training devised on strategies and tactics for first responders in dealing with immigrants must rely on key specific issues in communication (both direct and indirect). Additionally, information on cultural attitudes and imprints deriving from experiences in countries of origin can be useful for first responders and law enforcement, with the understanding that such experiences are country- and even class-specific.

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## Future Directions

We recommend that future research focus on three areas, with the first two types of research addressing the significant gap in understanding issues affecting immigrant communities' trust of, and willingness to communicate and cooperate with, first responders and law enforcement.

- A. **Surveys designed to assess sociocognitive aspects of change in attitudes toward first responders.** These surveys can explore the relationship between cognitive imprints that immigrants bring with them and the negotiation of social issues related to first responders.
- B. **Additional data on the influence of experiences in country of origin.** (This could focus on groups seen to be more important to perceived threats or potential disasters.) These data may be acquired from interviews and focus groups of immigrants, from ethnographic studies, and from reports generated by sound analysis of the security sector in these countries.
- C. **Survey of staff recruited from immigrant communities.** These surveys can be conducted in 10 law enforcement agencies—local, regional, and national—to collect and organize lessons learned with specific ethnic groups. A significant amount of undissemated information can be collected and organized from these staff, recruited from immigrant communities in major police departments, who are building understanding of the individual and collective dynamics within ethnic communities and providing advice on strategies for effective engagement with these communities.

These activities would be focused as pilot programs on two to four specific communities. The data and the methodologies would then be reviewed and adjusted and then expanded with these immigrant groups to refine the understanding as well as

application to other groups. Findings would be disseminated among training specialists, criminologists, sociologists, and other professionals working with first responder agencies to refine training strategies and tactics specific to ethnic groups.

Study results would provide specific baseline information for building strategies to (1) facilitate better communication, (2) improve cooperation, and (3) improve training efforts.

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