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Wilson's theory in more contemporary times.

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The effect of local political culture on policing behaviors in the 1990s: A retest of Wilson's theory in more contemporary times

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Abstract

In research on policing, James Q. Wilson was among the first scholars to suggest that local political culture constitutes a significant factor in explaining variation among law enforcement agency practices. Almost forty years after the publication of *Varieties of Police Behavior*, a classic study of police organizational behavior, Wilson's monograph remains the basis of a widely held theory used to explain variation in police agency behaviors. More specifically, Wilson (1968) identified three distinctive styles of policing: the legalistic, the watchman, and the service styles. In his empirical work with these styles of policing, Wilson argued that local political culture was the major determinant of variation in policing styles. The purpose of this study was to retest the validity of Wilson's argument in today's policing environment. Using panel data collected among police agencies across the U.S. surveyed in 1993, 1996, and 2000, the

authors found that there was little evidence to support the application of Wilson's theory to the practices of contemporary police organizations.



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