Chapter 1
Evaluating Police-Community Relations Globally

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Introduction

At the inception of professional policing in the 1820s, Sir Robert Peel emphasized the relevance of the role that the community should play in assessing the efficacy of the police and in setting the priorities for professional public security. After highlighting the basic mission of the police in crime and disorder control, the second of Peel's nine principles of policing (Lee 1901) clearly delineates that *"(t)he ability of the police to perform their duties is dependent upon public approval of police actions*," and continues in Principle five with the assertion that the *"(p)olice seek and preserve public favor not by catering to the public opinion but by constantly demonstrating absolute impartial service to the law.*" And the most noteworthy point noted was that the police "*at all times, should maintain a relationship with the public that gives reality to the historic tradition that the police are the public and the public are the police*." It is obvious from the initial foundation of the law enforcement profession almost two centuries ago that the input and feedback of the public being served must be viewed as being paramount in assessing the effectiveness of police performance. Clearly the relevance of these perspectives applies to all members of the public, not only to those who have connections with the political leadership and the elite, but to all citizens, regardless of social class, ethnicity or other influential factor. More importantly, failing these vital principles will result in the loss of trust and confidence in the police, the criminal justice system, and likely the government as a whole.

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Examining Public Perceptions of Police Legitimacy

The actions and legitimacy of the police have been scrutinized since the profession's inception in the 1820s, however empirical analysis of citizen perceptions of the police did not take place until 100 years later in the United States (Bellman 1935; Parratt 1936). It was not until the 1960s that more concrete efforts were undertaken to examine police-community relations, normally following allegations that the police overstepped their authority or used force excessively (Roche and Oberwittler 2018). It was Weber (1947) who attempted to examine, through his theory of interpretive sociology, just how public perceptions of the police and other government actors are subjectively interpreted. This is supported by recent research which has indicated that the public will grant the police legitimacy if they feel they are being treated with fairness and respect, regardless of the outcome of the actions of the police (Donner et al. 2015; Jackson et al. 2013; Roche and Oberwittler 2018; Tyler 2011).

Understanding Public Perceptions of the Police

It was Bellman in 1935 who first attempted to gauge police performance by examining public perceptions of the police. Decades later, Decker (1981) examined the impact that individual and contextual variables play on citizen attitudes as it relates to the police. While Decker concluded that factors such as race, socioeconomic status, local crime rates, and victimization may influence personal perceptions of local law enforcement, a vast number of research studies concluded that recent 'negative' incidents that had raised distrust and doubt in the professionalism of the police, more so when sensationalized by the media, tend to dramatically and immediately reduce the generally positive image of the police (Jesilow and Meyer 2001; Kaminski and Jefferis 1998; Lasley 1994; Tuch and Weitzer 1997).

It has been proposed that the findings of public perception surveys evaluating police performance and attitudes could be utilized to influence the development of agency policies (Bordua and Tifft 1971; Klyman and Kruckenberg 1974) and organizational priorities (Peak et al. 1992; Thurman and Reisig 1996; Weisel 1999). While public perception surveys have not been found to be generally used by American police jurisdictions, even when they have been conducted, there is no strong evidence to indicate that their findings have influenced later decisions and policy reform measures of law enforcement administrators. However, since such critical factors as race, socioeconomic status, and age have been commonly found to influence public confidence and support, or lack there of, for the police (Brown and Benedict 2002), it is recommended that government officials and police executives strongly consider the incorporation of community policing strategies, which rely on the direct input of the public into police operational prioritization into their decision-making and policy revision processes.

A newer perspective advocates procedural justice theory (Tyler et al. 2015) as the contemporary method for assessing public perceptions of the police, particularly in western societies. This notion received further emphasis in the Final Report of the President's Task Force on twenty-first Century Policing (2015) that identified the need to strengthen the relationship between the police and the community in an effort to build trust and enhance legitimacy as the first as the first of six priorities for contemporary policing. Individuals perceive their interaction with the police to be positive or negative, not only based on that specific police-citizen contact, but also based on the influence of prior attitudes and their belief as to whether they were treated fairly. It is therefore proposed that individuals will view the police as being more legitimate when they believe that they have been given sufficient opportunity to directly participate in the identification of policing priorities and when they additionally believe that those policies will be being implemented fairly (Tyler and Sevier 2014; Tyler et al. 2010). And thus we return to Peel's nine principles of policing, which repeatedly advocate public input into local policing initiatives and practices, and which rely on citizen feedback as to how police agencies are perceived to be functioning.

Conceptualizing Public Perceptions of the Police: 'Trust' v. 'Confidence'

The terms '*trust*' and '*confidence*' have often been used interchangeably when researchers and the public have discussed citizen perceptions of the police (Cao and Hou 2001; Center for the Study of Democracy 2011; Devos et al. 2002; Jackson and Sunshine 2007; Kaariainen 2008). However, there are fundamental differences between these two factors that require clarification. Generally, the term '*trust*' in the police or any government organization is closely affiliated with the maintenance of proper ethical standards, where as '*confidence*' in public service agencies can be viewed as an indication that a specific entity is viewed as performing effectively. In essence, trust can be said to be associated with integrity, while confidence apparently is aligned with perceived performance.

In contrast, Uslaner (2005) differentiated between '*moralistic trust'* and '*strategic trust*,' delineating that '*moralistic trust'* is based on expectations of behavior and '*strategic trust*' relies on experiences and observations. It would appear, however, that '*moralistic trust'* could be associated with trust (i.e. ethics), while '*strategic trust*' could be construed to be related to actual organizational performance. Uslaner did not specifically differentiate between public trust and public confidence in the police, but appeared to present competing versions of trust, i.e. '*strategic*' versus '*moralistic*' trust, to portray the concepts of what are generally delineated as '*confidence*' and '*trust*' in government officials.

Tyler (2001) evaluated differences in public confidence in the police through the comparison of responses by majority and minority group members in the United

States. Tyler specifically conducted survey research in Chicago, Illinois and Oakland, California. This research was mainly oriented at measuring public perceptions of police performance and public confidence in the police organization. These surveys did include one item that specifically stated: "*The Police are generally honest.*" in an effort to potentially evaluate public trust in the police. But Tyler's resulting statistical analysis did involve a 10-item scale to gauge public confidence in the police, which actually incorporated the single item related to respondent trust in the police.

Tyler (2005) extended his research into disparities between white and minority residents as it related to public trust and confidence in the police in New York City. In this study, Tyler examined both '*institutional trust*,' which he described as "*beliefs about the degree to which the police are honest and care for the members of the communities they police* (Tyler 2005, p. 324), and '*motive based trust*,' defined as involving "*inferences about the motives and intentions of the police and reflects the concept of fiduciary trust, which is central to discussions among legal scholars* (Tyler 2005, p. 325). Tyler measured '*institutional trust*' through an 8-item scale that included statements that examined factors specifically related to perceptions of citizen confidence in the police, public trust in police leadership, police legitimacy, organizational dishonesty, among others; and gauged '*motive based trust*' upon respondent opinions related to three items: police empathy, concern for public needs, and the provision of "*honest explanations for their actions*" (Tyler 2005, p. 329). In his concluding discussion, Tyler combined institutional and motive based trust into his findings related to the concept of public '*trust and confidence*' in the police, but did not specifically delineate or define these terms within this research endeavor.

Jackson and Bradford (2010) examined the phenomena involving public trust and confidence in the police from a British perspective. Their primary thesis is that when attempting to measure public trust or confidence in the police, it would be best to incorporate four inter-related survey items into the scale to enhance the measurement of these concepts. Specifically, Jackson and Bradford recommended the creation of four separate indices to analyze: (1) trust in police effectiveness, (2) trust in police fairness, (3) trust in police engagement and shared values, and (4) overall confidence in policing in an effort to best measure general public trust and confidence in the police. In addition, Merry et al. (2012) also incorporated trust in police into a scale examining public confidence in the police in the United Kingdom.

In contrast, Van Craen (2013) examined public trust in the police in Belgium through the use of a one-item measure of trust that provided respondents with a 5-point Likert scale to directly report whether they trusted the police, which correlates to similar survey instruments utilized by Cao and Hou (2001); Cao and Zhao (2005); Kaariainen (2007); and MacDonald and Stokes (2006). It is therefore not uncommon for researchers analyzing public trust in the police to rely solely on a one-item measure or variable.

Mazerolle et al. (2013) conducted a meta-analysis of 30 studies related to police legitimacy and trust. This seminal examination utilized the terms related to citizen '*trust*' and '*confidence*' in the police interchangeably, and did not distinguish

between the two concepts. It should be noted that this compilation of research studies had focused more on police legitimacy than on other issues. It is consequently difficult to draw conclusions about public "trust" in the police or the conceptualization of this concept (and public confidence in the police) from this meta-analysis when the term is routinely exchanged with the term '*confidence*' throughout the paper. It may have been beneficial to clearly define these terms, as will be done within this dissertation research, in order to make interpretation of the findings clearer and more relevant to practical applications. This generalization of terminology is often a contentious issue when assessing the value of meta-analysis based research.

In summary, it can be concluded that researchers have generally utilized the terms '*trust*' and '*confidence*' in the police interchangeably. In many cases, when the terms have been differentiated, some researchers have incorporated the concept of trust in the police into a multi-item scale or index in order to measure citizen confidence in the police. As such, it is likely that researchers will continue to not clearly differentiate between the two terms when conducting studies on police legitimacy.

Public Perceptions of Police: Global Perspectives

Generally speaking, developing nations in Eastern Europe, Central Asia, the Middle East, and Northern and Sub-Saharan Africa are plagued by limited trust in government authorities, including the police (Transparency International 2018). The most unstable countries, including those plagued by armed conflict with corresponding rule of law vacuum (e.g. Somalia, Sudan, Yemen, Afghanistan, and Syria), are often relegated to receiving the lowest scores in general corruption perception surveys. Nations with established democratic ideals and lower crime rates, such as those in North America (i.e. United States and Canada), western Europe (e.g. United Kingdom and the Scandinavian countries), and Australia and New Zealand tend to receive the highest grades and generally tend to be viewed as being the least corrupt.

When it comes specifically to the rule of law arena, trust in the administration of justice and law enforcement generally appears to score higher than other government and public service agencies. Globally 68% of individuals report that they have confidence in their local police. Results vary across the globe with rates of 82% in the USA and Canada, 80% in Western Europe and 80% Southeast Asia through 60% in Sub-Saharan Africa and 42% in Latin America and the Caribbean (Gallup 2018). Once again, confidence in the police appears to coincide with crime victimization rate and the extent of democratic practice.

In the United States, public confidence in the police stands at 57%, but the rate varies by race, as Whites have the highest confidence in the police with 61%, Hispanics at 45%, and Blacks at a disappointing 30%. More disturbing is that the rates for Hispanics (−14%) and Blacks (−5%) has actually declined dramatically over the last 5 years (Norman 2017).

In Europe, public trust in the police varies from high scores exceeding 85% in Switzerland and the four Scandinavian nations to scores below 40% as one moves farther east across Europe, including the Russian Federation and Belarus. It appears that lower crime rates and perceived lower levels of police and government corruption in Europe coincide strongly with higher trust in the police institution (Kaariainen 2007).

Conclusion

In conclusion, it would appear that a number of macro- and micro-level factors strongly influence public confidence and trust in the police. The macro-level variables generally associated with lower levels of public satisfaction in the police are regional armed conflict, political instability, higher crime rate, higher criminal victimization rate, perceptions of rampant police and government corruption, and lack of confidence in local democratic principles. The predominant micro-level factors correlated with lower levels of public trust in local rule of law practices include diminished or negligible involvement of citizens in the establishment of policing priorities and policies, preconceived beliefs that they will not be treated fairly when engaging elements of the criminal justice system, prior negative experiences with police and justice agencies, recent sensationalized events that tarnish the image of the police (whether accurate or not), race, ethnicity, lower socio-economic status, age, and membership in a politically underrepresented group.

It is therefore recommended that police administrators and government officials take the time to re-acclimate themselves with Peel's nine principles of policing (Lee 1901). The concept of "*the police are the public and the public are the police*" (Principle 7) has not lost its appeal or relevance after two centuries. Policing priorities, policies and actions should be guided by '*public approval*' (Principle 2). Front line police personnel should strive to '*secure and maintain the respect of the public*' (Principle 3) '*by constantly demonstrating absolute impartial service to the law*' (Principle 5). The use of force by police should be avoided, while '*persuasion, advice and warning*' (Principle 6) in an effort to '*secure the willing cooperation of the public'* (Principle 2) should be the guiding ideals.

It would accordingly be appropriate for law enforcement executives to consider the traditional form of community policing, which combines crime control through localized problem-solving with direct public input into organizational priorities and policies, as a legitimate option for enhancing legitimacy and increasing public trust and confidence in the police. Measuring the effectiveness of the police should not only include evaluation of index and other crime rates, and arrest and traffic enforcement data, but should incorporate public perception surveys that evaluate perceptions of trust, confidence, fairness and performance using a variety of variables. Technology may guide the future of policing and crime prevention, but it is the traditional doctrines of public policing (i.e. Peel's principles) and the later evolution to community policing (Albrecht 2012; Goldstein 1979; Trojanowicz 1982;

Trojanowicz and Bucqueroux 1994) that should continue to be comprehensively integrated into police agency ideologies and practices to enhance public input and improve agency transparency and legitimacy.

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