

# Definitions

Defining the terms satisfaction, trust, legitimacy and confidence.

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In policing, the terms 'satisfaction', 'trust', 'legitimacy' and 'confidence' are used inconsistently and sometimes interchangeably. Although these outcomes are closely related and can overlap, each has distinctive features and relates to a different type of public attitude about the police.

## Satisfaction

Satisfaction refers to how well someone thinks the police have done in the past.

- Surveys tend to ask respondents to make retrospective judgements about different aspects of policing.
- This may include general service delivery in their area or specific experiences they have had, either as victims of crime, witnesses or as suspects.
- Sometimes, survey questions simply ask people whether a particular police activity happened, without asking them whether they were satisfied with it. In these instances, the activity is itself seen as a positive.

## Example survey questions

- "Thinking about your initial contact with the police through the 999 call, how satisfied or dissatisfied were you with how long it took to get through and speak to a police operator?" (Crime Survey of England and Wales)
- "Thinking about the last time you were stopped and searched by the police, would you say that they treated you with respect?" (Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) Public Attitudes Survey)
- "On average, how often do you see police officers or police community support officers (PCSOs) on foot patrol in your local area?" (Crime Survey of England and Wales)

## Trust

Trust is about how well people believe the police are doing now or will do in the future. However, expectations will inevitably be shaped by people's prior experiences.

- Survey respondents are usually asked how likely it is that the police will act or perform in particular ways.
- Measures of trust tend to focus on police fairness or effectiveness, at either:
  - an interpersonal level (such as individual encounters or officers)
  - an institutional level (such as the police locally or nationally)

## Example survey questions

- “How much would you agree or disagree with the following statement: ‘They (the police in this area) would treat you with respect if you had contact with them for any reason?’” (Crime Survey of England and Wales)
- “How well do you think the Metropolitan Police respond to violence against women and girls?” (MOPAC Public Attitudes Survey)

## Legitimacy

Legitimacy, or policing by consent, describes how much the public accept the police as an institution that is right and proper. It also describes how much the public see the police as acting in ways that are justified and as having authority.

- Surveys often ask people if they believe the police share their values and whether they have a moral obligation to obey the police.
- Surveys regularly show that police legitimacy is strongly associated with people cooperating with the police and not breaking the law. This suggests that public perceptions should be central to police efforts to reduce crime.

## Example survey questions

- “To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: ‘The police have the same sense of right and wrong as I do?’” (MOPAC Public Attitudes Survey)
- “Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: ‘You should accept decisions made by the police, even if you think they are wrong?’” (Jackson and others (2012))

# Confidence

Confidence is best seen as a person's global assessment of the state of policing overall at a local, force or national level. In this sense, confidence is similar to institutional-level trust.

- Questions on public confidence normally have a broad focus and avoid delving into particular aspects of policing.

## Example survey questions

- "Taking everything into account, how good a job do you think the police in this area are doing?" (Crime Survey of England and Wales)
- "How much would you agree or disagree with the following statement: 'Taking everything into account I have confidence in the police in this area'?" (Crime Survey of England and Wales)

## Tags

Evidence-based policing   Community engagement