

# The perception of crime victims

---

## 9. INTRODUCTION

So far, it has been shown that trust in the police is influenced by several factors, such as satisfaction with the treatment received in a police stop. In the following, a special population subgroup is in the focus. Victims of crime can be seen as a special category when it comes to trust in the police. Firstly, they may see the role of the police more critical, not fulfilling their job properly. Secondly, when they approach the police, they seek help, which may distinguish them from people in regular police-citizen-contacts initiated by the police. I will start with information on victims' trust in the police. The following chapter deals with police encounters initiated by crime victims.

## 10. VICTIMS TRUST IN THE POLICE

When splitting the file of the ESS2010 into two groups of crime victims and non-crime victims, results show clear differences between them. Trust in the police is lower amongst victims in Western and Eastern Europe (Table 29)<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore, victims are significantly less satisfied with police encounters (Table 30).

---

1 | Victimization is measured as burglary and assault in the ESS2010.

Table 29: Impact of victimization on trust in the police

Victim	Police doing good/bad job in country			Procedural fairness	
	Bad	Neither/nor	Good	No	Yes
<i>Western Europe</i>					
Yes	9.7 (383)***	26.6 (383)	65.9 (1,840)	28.0 (975)***	72.0 (2,510)
No	5.9 (1,111)	21.1 (3,948)	73.0 (13,672)	21.3 (3,437)	78.7 (12,701)
<i>Eastern Europe</i>					
Yes	19.2 (153)***	42.6 (340)	38.2 (305)	54.2 (354)***	45.8 (299)
No	10.5 (623)	37.5 (2,230)	52.0 (3,092)	39.6 (1,794)	60.4 (2,737)
<i>Switzerland</i>					
Yes	5.0 (12)	17.8 (43)	77.2 (186)	11.0 (24)**	89.0 (194)
No	2.9 (36)	15.3 (191)	81.9 (1,024)	6.0 (67)	94.0 (1,046)

Note: Source: ESS2010, percent, number of cases in brackets

Significance levels: \*  $0.01 < p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $0.001 < p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

Table 30: Impact of victimization on satisfaction with police encounters

Victim	Satisfaction with police contact		
	Dissatisfied	Neither/nor	Satisfied
<i>Western Europe***</i>			
Yes	27.7 (639)	11.4 (263)	60.9 (1,402)
No	21.4 (1,364)	10.9 (696)	67.7 (4,308)
<i>Eastern Europe***</i>			
Yes	30.6 (138)	22.8 (103)	46.6 (210)
No	22.2 (374)	20.8 (354)	57.2 (971)
<i>Switzerland*</i>			
Yes	28.8 (42)	13.7 (20)	57.5 (84)
No	18.4 (91)	11.3 (56)	71.3 (348)

Note: Source: ESS2010, percent, number of cases in brackets

Significance levels: \*  $0.01 < p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $0.001 < p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

For Switzerland, differences between victims and non-victims when it comes to the rating of the police are smaller overall compared to those in Western and Eastern Europe. Even when victims in Switzerland evaluate encounters with the police more negatively, their general attitudes toward the police seem to be less negative compared to victims in Europe as a whole. This may simply be caused by an overall more positive evaluation of Swiss police's work and their procedural fairness. Moreover, it is important to note here that there is no link between police encounters and criminal victimization. Further, data do not allow testing of whether the police contact happened before the incident or after.

When comparing frequencies of the European Social Survey ESS2010 with those of the International Crime Victims Survey, they were found to be too high in some and a little bit too low in other countries (see Chapter 4.1.2.1: Victims of crime). This may have an impact on the results. However, as per cluster, this was only the case for certain countries; the overall impact on trust in the police may not be affected. Moreover, it is not the strength of impact that is of interest here, rather if there is an impact at all. This result of difference in trust in the police between crime victims and non-victims has been considered in multiple linear regression analyses before by including criminal victimization as a control variable. Moreover, the use of data from the Swiss Crime Survey 2011 allows consideration of not only contact initiated by the police but also crime victims' reporting to the police, as outlined in the following chapter.

## 11. VICTIM-INITIATED POLICE CONTACT IN SWITZERLAND

According to data from the European Social Survey ESS2010, 16.2% (243) of the Swiss population was a victim of a burglary and/or an assault between 2006 and 2010. According to Swiss Crime Survey 2011 data, rates are similar when victimization rates of burglary and assault are added up (17.7%). As the ESS2010 data does not allow for any further distinctions between different forms of criminal victimization, and neither includes information about victims contact with the police, data from the Swiss Crime Survey 2011 is used to fill this gap.

Criminal victimization is a serious event, greatly affecting people's well-being, especially in cases of violent crime. Such a crime can lead to a disruption in people's trust in the police in terms of failing to fulfill their duties of properly fighting crime. Results confirm that crime victims have lower trust in the police compared to non-victims. This is true for both crime against property and crimes against the person, such as assault or sexual offences (Table 31).

The rate of trust in the police of non-victims is about 73%, while only about half of those whose car or motorcycle was stolen reported trusting the police (55.1%). Clearly lower levels of trust are also reported for victims of sexual offences (61.3%), assaults (62%), or attempted burglary (63.1%). Other offences against property, such as thefts or burglaries seem to lead to lower levels of trust but are not that strongly destructive with regard to

police's trustworthiness. Results partly support studies where victims of crimes against the person had a less favorable opinion of the police (Killias 1989).

*Table 31: Victims' trust in the police according to different modes of victimization*

	Trust in the police		Total
	Yes	No	
Vehicle theft	55.1 (61)***	44.8 (75)	100.0 (136)
Sexual offence	61.3 (183)***	38.7 (290)	100.0 (473)
Assault	62.0 (627)***	38.0 (1,021)	100.0 (1,648)
Attempted burglary	63.1 (385)***	37.0 (659)	100.0 (1,044)
Theft from a vehicle	66.0 (384)***	34.0 (744)	100.0 (1,128)
Theft	67.2 (850)***	33.0 (1,741)	100.0 (2,591)
Burglary	67.9 (367)***	32.0 (778)	100.0 (1,145)
Bicycle theft	69.1 (1,169)***	30.9 (2,616)	100.0 (3,785)
Robbery	69.5 (120)	30.5 (273)	100.0 (393)

*Note: Source: CS2011 (full sample)*

*Percent of four-year-prevalence rates (2006-2010), number of cases in brackets*

*Significance levels: \* 0.01 < p < 0.05 \*\* 0.001 < p < 0.01, \*\*\* p < 0.001*

In Hypothesis 5.3, I supposed that victims of crimes against the person have lower trust in the police compared to victims of crimes against property. Results only partly confirm this. Low trust in the police amongst victims of vehicle theft suggests that no clear difference in trust levels exists between victims of crimes against the person and victims of crimes against property. It may well be that these variations are based on different experiences with the police. The interaction with the police of someone whose bicycle was stolen may be minimal, resulting in eventual reporting of the offence. Furthermore, the chance that the stolen bike will be found and returned to the owner is small. A car or motorcycle, on the other hand, is more valuable. Hence, such victims have higher expectations of the police, hoping to get their stolen goods back. In order to shed light on this possibility, the rates of reporting are analyzed next. Moreover, the difference in police trust is only marginal between victims of robbery and non-victims and does not meet statistical significance. Reasons may lie in the high level of satisfaction with the treatment received. Robbery victims may also belong to a certain group, such as young people robbed at night while going out. The low influence of the victimization on trust in the police may stem from their involvement, in a group also attacking others, for example. However, further analyses to shed light on this possibility would go beyond the scope of this book. Another possibility is that rob-

bery victims were satisfied with the treatment received by the police. This eventuality is analyzed later.

In Switzerland, the level of reporting a criminal offence to the police varies widely between different kinds of offences, as shown in Killias and Berruex (1999) and Killias et al. (2011). Results confirm those of the aforementioned studies: highest rates of reporting exist for burglary (79.7%) as well as for vehicle thefts (73.5%, Table 32)<sup>2</sup>. Contrary to this, offences against the person are rarely reported. For example, only every fourth victim of an assault has reported the offence to the police, and only one sexual offence was reported at all. In cases of sexual offences, people might be ashamed. Moreover, the chance that the offender will be convicted may be evaluated as low, despite the fact that the solve rate is much higher for offences against the person than against property<sup>3</sup>.

*Table 32: Reporting to the police over a number of years according to different modes of victimization*

	Reported to the police			
	1989 <sup>1</sup>	2000 <sup>2</sup>	2005 <sup>2</sup>	2010
Vehicle theft (car, motorbike)	94,0	91,7	93,3	73.5 (25)
Theft from a vehicle	-	71,0	-	46.1 (41)
Bicycle theft	84,0	68,5	60,1	57.5 (122)
Burglary (dwelling)	79,0	73,1	68,0	79.7 (68)
Attempted burglary	-	45,0	-	36.0 (32)
Theft (personal larceny)	42,0	45,0	-	43.4 (93)
Robbery	67,0	59,4	31,3	44.6 (17)
Sexual offence		10,0	18,8	-(1)
Assault	26,0	32,0	22,4	24.1 (43)

*Note: Source: CS2011 (national sample)*

*Percent, number of cases in brackets for the year 2010 (not available for other years)*

*Sources of numbers of earlier Crime Surveys: 1 Killias 1991; 2 Killias/Haymoz/Lamoz 2007*

When looking at the trends since 1989, it is interesting to note that in 2010 the rate of reported burglaries was, at 79.7%, about the same as it was in 1989 (79%), while it decreased in the years in between. On the other hand,

**2** | In order to facilitate comparison with results from earlier years, analyses are based on data of the weighted national sample here.

**3** | The 2013 solve rates are as follows: rape 77.6%, bodily harm (mean value of heavy and light offences) 78.1%, assault 82.4%, thefts (without vehicle thefts) 16.2%, robbery 33.8% (Bundesamt für Statistik BFS 2014).

robbery reporting rates declined steadily, down to a very low level of only 31.3% in 2005, increasing again in 2010 (44.6%). Major changes in reporting also exist for vehicle thefts, where the reduction since 1989 is more than twenty percent. In addition, bicycle thefts were reported less often in 2010 (-26.5% from 1989). However, due to the small number of cases, interpretations of changes should certainly be treated with caution. One possible explanation for the decline in the reporting of the offence with the largest number of cases – vehicle thefts – may be the increase of such thefts, at least between 1999 and 2004 (Killias/Kuhn/Aebi 2011), related to a possible lower solve rate. Moreover, bicycles were of a greater value to the owner back in 1989, leading to a stronger feeling of loss, while bicycles have become affordable for everyone in recent years. Furthermore, results show that reporting an offence has no significant impact on trust in the police (not shown here), confirming Hypothesis 5.4: Reporting to the police does not correlate with trust in the police. Hence, the argument that reporting to the police is more dependent on personal attributes, such as the age in cases of violent crime (Simonin/Killias 2003) or the amount of damage in cases of burglaries (Killias/Berruex 1999), than on the existing image of the police is supported. However, the direction of causation remains unclear. It may well be possible that people's trust in the police affects their reporting behavior. Suspicious people would probably refrain from reporting an offence more often than people with high trust in the police. In the following, I will elaborate on victims' satisfaction with how the police have treated their case.

Those victims who reported their cases to the police were satisfied overall with the treatment received (Table 33). While victims of burglaries and attempted burglaries in particular seem to be positive (81.3%, 84.8%), low satisfaction rates are found for assault (58.7%). One source of victims' dissatisfaction is the information policy of the police. Only between 46.4% and 59.8% of victims of a crime received information about further steps taken (Table 34). Of those not informed, the majority express the wish to be informed about subsequent steps. This is especially true for victims of a robbery (73%) but also for victims whose car or motorcycle was stolen, or who had something stolen out of their car (69%).

Table 33: Victims' satisfaction with treatment received by the police according to different modes of victimization

	Satisfied with treatment of case	
	Yes	No
Assault	58.7 (105)	41.3 (74)
Vehicle theft	69.4 (84)	30.6 (37)
Robbery	71.7 (66)	28.3 (26)
Sexual offence	73.3 (11)	26.7 (4)
Theft from a vehicle	76.4 (188)	23.6 (58)
Bicycle theft	77.9 (809)	22.1 (229)
Theft	79.3 (447)	20.7 (117)
Burglary	81.3 (283)	18.7 (65)
Attempted burglary	84.8 (140)	15.2 (25)

Note: Source: CS2011 (full sample)  
Percent, number of cases in brackets

Table 34: Information policy according to different modes of victimization

	Further information received		Wish for further information (no information received)	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Assault	46.4 (83)	53.6 (96)	55.2 (48)	44.8 (39)
Attempted burglary	47.6 (78)	52.4 (86)	46.3 (37)	53.8 (43)
Burglary	48.8 (167)	51.2 (175)	57.2 (95)	42.8 (71)
Theft from a vehicle	53.8 (129)	46.3 (111)	69.1 (67)	30.9 (30)
Robbery	56.4 (53)	43.6 (41)	73.0 (27)	27.0 (10)
Bicycle theft	56.8 (581)	43.2 (441)	53.7 (211)	46.3 (182)
Theft	58.9 (327)	41.1 (228)	50.7 (106)	49.3 (103)
Vehicle theft	59.8 (73)	40.2 (49)	68.9 (31)	31.1 (14)

Note: Source: CS2011 (full sample), percent, number of cases in brackets  
Results for sexual offence not displayed due to low amount of numbers (10 cases)

Criminal victimization is a serious event, leading to uncertainty and mental health problems in the vast majority of cases. Low self-esteem and increased fear of crime may be the outcome. Amongst victims of crime, consequences found are anxiety, depression, suicidal behavior, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), especially amongst victims of violent crime (Ruback/Thompson 2001). In addition, burglary has a serious effect on feelings of security (Maguire 1980). Victims contacting the police are therefore in a situation of uncertainty, looking for help. This requires certain sensitivity on the part of the police officer dealing with the case. Results clearly confirm how important the behavior of the police is in such circumstances: Dissatisfaction clearly leads to a lower level of trust in the police (Table 35). Contrary to expectations, this is not only true for serious

cases of crimes against the person. The same can also be reported for offences against property. Dissatisfied victims whose possessions were stolen out of a car or motorcycle trust in the police in 46.6% of cases, while the rate for satisfied victims is about 20% higher (76.1%). The significant differences between satisfied and dissatisfied victims' trust in the police are at least 20% (for thefts) and go up to 31% in cases of burglaries.

While satisfaction with treatment influences the level of trust in the police overall, confirming procedural justice theories, information policy is also found to be important, analogous to existing research (Skogan 1989; Sunshine/Tyler 2003; Bradford/Jackson/Stanko 2009). However, the information itself is only statistically significant in cases of bicycle thefts and burglaries. The number of informed burglary victims' trust in the police is even larger than the average trust in the police of the Swiss population (79% vs. 72.7%). Whether non-informed victims report a need for information or whether they say that it was not necessary is of great importance. Amongst those that would have wished to be informed, the number of individuals with a high level of trust in the police is significantly lower compared to those who report that there was no need for further information (Table 35). Again, the largest discrepancy in trust in the police is found for victims of attempted burglaries (33.9%). On the other hand, victims of theft from a vehicle without a need for further information trust the police about the same as the average population (84%), while the number is again much lower for those with an unsatisfied need for information (59.7%).

*Table 35: Impact of police contact on trust in the police in Switzerland according to different modes of offences against property*

	Trust in the police ("yes")					
	Satisfied with treatment of case		Further information received		Wish for further information (no information received)	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Vehicle theft	64.8 (59)*	45.5 (25)	61.7 (50)	52.3 (34)	59.3 (67)	50.0 (17)
Attempted burglary	70.7 (99)**	40.0 (10)	71.8 (56)	58.1 (50)	40.5 (15)**	74.4 (32)
Theft	72.0 (322)***	50.4 (59)	69.1 (226)	65.4 (149)	54.7 (58)**	74.8 (77)
Burglary	73.5 (208)***	41.5 (27)	79.0 (132)***	55.4 (97)	47.4 (45)*	64.8 (46)
Theft from a vehicle	76.1 (143)***	46.6 (27)	71.3 (92)	65.8 (73)	59.7 (40)*	83.3 (25)
Bicycle theft	77.8 (629)***	51.5 (118)	76.9 (477)***	63.7 (288)	59.7 (126)*	70.3 (128)

*Note: Source CS2011 (full sample), percent, number of cases in brackets*

*"Don't know / no answer" were treated as missing*

*Significance levels: \* 0.05 > p > 0.01, \*\* 0.01 > p > 0.001, \*\*\* p < 0.001*

When looking at offences against the person, the very high percentage of trust in the police amongst satisfied robbery victims attracts attention: More than 85% of victims who report being satisfied with how the police treated them trust in the police, while the number is significantly lower for unsatisfied victims (Table 36). Contrary to this remarkably high trust, the low trust level of unsatisfied victims of assault sticks out (39.2%). Furthermore, an information policy perceived as negative leads to even worse trust in the police. Trust in the police amongst non-informed victims of an assault with the need for further information is only around 30%. No statements can be made about sexual offences, as the already low number of 25 cases reported to the police leads to an even lower number of cases in follow-up questions, which is too small of a sample for testing the influence on trust in the police.

*Table 36: Impact of police contact on trust in the police according to different modes of offences against the person*

	Trust in the police ("yes")					
	Satisfied with treatment of case		Further information received		Wish for further information (no information received)	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Robbery	86.4 (57)*	65.4 (17)	84.9 (45)	70.7 (29)	66.7 (18)	70.0 (7)
Assault	76.2 (80)***	39.2 (29)	71.1 (59)**	51.0 (49)	31.3 (15)***	69.2 (27)

*Note: Source: CS2011 (full sample), percent, number of cases in brackets*

*"Don't know / no answer" were treated as missing*

*Significance levels: \*  $0.05 > p > 0.01$ , \*\*  $0.01 > p > 0.001$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$*

It can be concluded that negative experiences with the police by victims whose possessions were stolen lead to a reduction in trust in the police, while the police, on the other hand, can gain trustworthiness when treating victims of robberies and assaults correctly. Thus, results confirm findings from other studies (Furstenberg/Wellford 1973; Smith/Hawkins 1973; Brandl/Horvath 1991). Moreover, Hypothesis 5.5 – , which states that victims satisfied with how the police have treated their case evaluate them better than those being dissatisfied – , is confirmed as well.

## 12. SUMMARY

This part was dedicated to victims of crime and their view of the police. It was shown that they have a lower trust in the police compared to non-victims. For Switzerland, differences between victims and non-victims are overall smaller when it comes to the rating of the police compared to those in Western and Eastern Europe. Excepting involuntary contact, victims of crime in Switzerland show less favorable attitudes toward the police. This is reflected firstly in dissatisfaction with the treatment received and secondly in the information policy. It is important to note here that negative experiences with the police by victims whose possessions were stolen lead to a reduction in their trust, while the police, on the other hand, can gain trustworthiness when treating victims of robberies and assaults correctly.