

Abstract

The underlying question posed in this book asks: What shapes people's perception of the police? The book aims to contribute to the field of trust and attitudinal research in several ways. Firstly, institutional approaches are considered, identifying the police as part of wider governmental institutions. Secondly, theories of procedural justice are examined. They argue that fair decisions and respectful treatment largely contribute to institutional legitimacy and trustworthiness. In contrast, arguments treating police's effectiveness as central to people's trust in them are called "instrumental". Whether the police are doing a good job, i.e. fighting crime effectively, is more important than the use of appropriate procedures and correct behavior. These approaches enter into the analyses in such a way that the global notion of trust in the police is linked to global statements about police's procedural fairness and effectiveness. Moreover, the level of satisfaction in concrete interactions with the police is taken into account.

Institutional representatives play an important role in the trust-building process, as mentioned in procedural justice theories. Going one step further, interactions with police officers are expected to be influenced by social trust. A culture marked by a general openness toward strangers may contribute not only to a higher trust in interactions with ordinary people, but may also be transferred to institutional representatives. Diverse research has confirmed the link between social trust and institutional trust, especially with regard to trust in political institutions, such as the government or political parties. However, the causal direction is unclear. Nevertheless, since studies dealing primarily with institutional trust in the police are rare, social trust is taken into account as an explanatory force in the upcoming analyses.

Studies within the field of police research are often based on local surveys. Cross-country analyses with data from large opinion polls are rather

rare. Another aim is to link cross-national analyses to a concrete in-depth country study. A country study of Switzerland follows the search for correlations at a cross-country level. It tests whether the links can be proven in a single country marked by high levels of trust in the police. Finally, not only people's trust in the police, but also views of crime victims and victim-initiated police contacts, are analyzed.