

Chapter 60

Perception of Race Discrimination by the Police in Europe

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ABSTRACT

Procedural justice is an important principle in democratic societies, which fails when police discriminate minorities through for example racial profiling and during crime report procedures. This not only violates individuals' rights, it also increases corruption, make police work problematic and decrease trust in the justice system. The aim of the chapter is to investigate perception of police discrimination against minorities, with focus on whether anti-immigrant attitudes have an independent impact on the perception of police discrimination. We use European Social Survey, collected in 2010, including 24 countries and around 45,000 respondents. The results show that anti-immigrant attitudes imply that respondents don't believe the police to discriminate independent on individual factors such as education, gender, minority and country factors such as corruption, inequality and the proportion of non-European inhabitants in the country.

INTRODUCTION

Mistrust in the police can decrease citizens will to cooperate and report crimes, implying a risk of inefficiency in police's ability to fight crime and uphold law and order. Mistrust in the police can also be related to non-transparency, corruption, lack of democratic legitimacy in the police and state authorities in general. Citizens' trust in and perception of the police has often been a highlighted subject in the media, in political debates and in research at least since the 1930s (Brown & Reed Benedict, 2002). Since the 1980's the research interest in the topic has increased. In the USA, where most research on the subject has been conducted, media reports on police misconduct is often related to race/ethnicity¹, for example

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the police violence against Rodney King and the following riots in Los Angeles in 1991 (Brown & Reed Benedict, 2002; Lasley, 1994) as well as more recent examples such as the shooting of Walter Scott in North Charleston 2015. As a consequence, race has also become the main focus in research, at least in the USA (Brown & Reed Benedict, 2002; Weitzer & Tuch, 2005a).

Even though trust in and perception of the police is a relatively well researched area, a literature review by Brown and Reed Benedict (2002) shows that only four variables are consistently proven to affect attitudes toward the police: ethnicity/race, age, contact with the police and neighbourhood characteristics. The main finding is that race is the most important predictor, i.e., Afro Americans and Latino Americans in the USA have less confidence in the police than White Americans. Studies also indicate that the relation between ethnicity/race and perceptions on the police are complex. For example, studies indicate that highly educated African Americans have less confidence in the police than African Americans with a low level of education, while education in most studies is weakly related to trust in the police, and even that high education correlates with low trust (Brown & Reed Benedict, 2002). Moreover, the few studies investigating Latino Americans show that this group has more confidence in the police than African Americans, but less than White Americans suggesting that racial/ethnic hierarchies in society in general are of importance (Weitzer & Tuch, 1999). Similar results have been shown in a European context (cf. Kääriäinen & Niemi, 2014).

In this chapter we will expand previous research beyond socio-demographic parameters and contextual circumstances by focusing on the impact of attitudes towards immigrants. We will further focus specifically on perceptions of race discrimination by the police, rather than attitudes or confidence in general. Thus, the aim of the paper is to investigate the impact of anti-immigrant attitudes on the perception of police discrimination of minority groups in the society. The hypotheses put forward are: 1) attitudes towards immigrants have an independent effect, i.e., independent of socio-demographic and contextual variables, on the perception of police discrimination, and 2) anti-immigrant attitudes correlate with the belief that the police do not discriminate on the basis of race/ethnicity, and vice versa, that pro-immigrant attitudes correlate with a belief that the police do discriminate. The theoretical motivation behind the hypotheses is that attitudes towards immigrants are based on, at least partly, a sense of group threat by ethnic/racial others, and we assume that a perception of group threat, e.g., expressed through anti-immigrant attitudes, is related to the degree of tolerance regarding police conduct towards the group(s) that are perceived as a threat. Further, since it is assumed that anti-immigrant attitudes have an independent effect, group threat is not understood as based in socio-economic status alone but on a perception found throughout the hierarchy in the society. The data used in the chapter consists of the European Social Survey, conducted in 2010. The working data consists of 24 countries and 45,638 respondents. This rich data set allows us to investigate and control for most variables used in previous research.

Previous Research

Previous research mainly focuses on trust in the police, which is a broader concept than perception of discrimination against minority groups in the society. Since the main theoretical perspective on trust in the police, procedure of justice, pinpoint the importance of equal treatment as one of the most important parameters (Bradford, Murphy, & Jackson, 2014; Frank, Smith, & Novak, 2005; Tyler, 2005; Van Craen & Skogan, 2014), the two concepts, at least theoretically, are related. Discrimination is after all the opposite of equal treatment. In this part of the chapter we will review previous literature on trust in

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