SOCIAL
JUSTICE
CENTER

THE COMPLEX LANDSCAPE OF POLICE CULTURE:
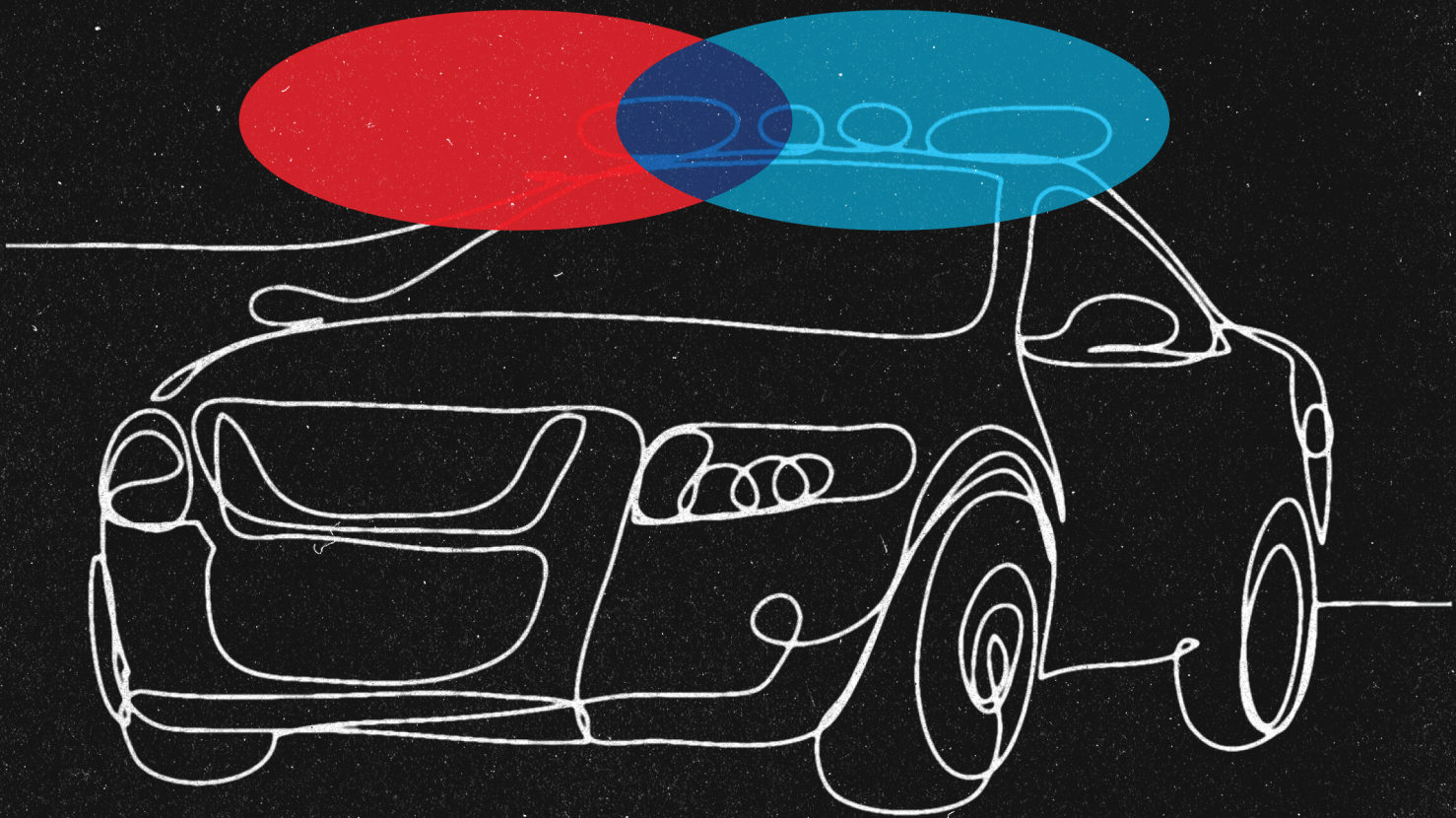
Challenges and Opportunities for Reform

Author: Gonzalo Croci

Cover: Salome Latsabidze

Citation: Croci, G. (2024). The Complex Landscape of Police Culture: Challenges and Opportunities for Reform. Social Justice Center.

Address: Abashidze 12 b, Tbilisi, Georgia

Phone: +995 032 2 23 37 06

www.socialjustice.org.ge

info@socialjustice.org.ge

https://www.facebook.com/socialjustice.org.ge

The Complex Landscape of Police Culture: Challenges and Opportunities for Reform

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

Amidst the multifaceted nature of governance, the role of police institutions is of central importance since it is tasked with the duty of harmonizing public safety with individual freedoms. The magnitude of police responsibilities extends beyond the enforcement of laws and public safety; it encapsulates the preservation of democracy, the maintenance of social order, and the protection of human rights.

The way police act among them and with the community is influenced by its culture. Police culture is generally defined as a combination of values, attitudes, prejudices and working practices that are commonly found amongst the lower ranks of the police (Westmarland, 2012). Crank (2014) argued that police culture are shared experiences, values, and symbols that create a sense of identity and loyalty among officers. This culture creates a dynamic power within law enforcement organizations, influencing the way officers understand their role in society, make decisions, and interact with one another and the public. As such, authors such as Prenzler (1997) suggested that to carry out a complete study on policing, police culture should be researched and understood.

Police culture is an informal and often implicit set of cultural elements that shape the identity and behavior of law enforcement officers. This culture is generally believed to affect police functioning negatively and alienates police officers from them the public. It is influenced by various factors, including historical traditions, organizational structures, and training practices (Cockcroft, 2012). Police culture has also been identified as a significant obstacle to policing reforms and a factor that perpetuates negative practices including the misuse of authority, sexual harassment, discrimination against minorities, and excessive use of force (Chan, 2007). Understanding police culture is important since it helps grasp the dynamics within law enforcement agencies and to identify areas in need of reform. In this sense, police culture reform has become a pressing necessity in contemporary society, as law enforcement agencies grapple with issues of accountability, transparency, and community trust (Ingram, Terrill, & Paoline III, 2018). As society evolves, so too must the culture that guides police institutions, ensuring they serve as strongholds of a just and equitable society. This article delves into the intricacies of police culture, exploring both its positive aspects and the challenges it poses to fostering accountability, transparency, and community trust.

1.1. What is police culture?

Police personnel' perceptions and behaviors inside their workplace are shaped by a set of principles known as police culture, which impacts in the everyday functioning of officers and is considered to play a critical role in policing (Nhan, 2014). Numerous terms have been used to refer to police culture, such as canteen culture, patrol culture, street culture, police subculture, cop culture, and police code (Alameri, 2018). At its core, police culture is rooted in the history and traditions of law enforcement agencies.

Researchers have highlighted that police culture in policing studies do not have a clear, widespread definition however some characteristics repeat across definitions (see table 1) (Chan, 1996). For example, police culture is often characterized by various elements and facets among occupational members such as, group loyalty, crime fighter image, organizational tension with supervisors, distrust of citizens, aggressive policing tactics, selective enforcement of the law, among others (Paoline III, 2003; Ingram, Terrill, & Paoline III, 2018). Others have included characteristics such as isolation, solidarity, cynicism, conservatism, and a mentality of us-vs-them (Reiner, 2010). Importantly, police culture and stereotype, in some cases, has developed into police sexism, racism, secrecy, anti-intellectualism, brutality, corruption, biased law enforcement and politicization (Prenzler, 2007). For example, a study of police forces in England and Wales found that although police culture discouraged prejudicial and improper behavior in general, a culture where misogyny, sexism and predatory behavior towards female police officers, staff, and members of the public (HMICFRS, 2022).[1]

Brough, Chataway and Biggs (2016) using a cultural web methodology applied in interviews and focus groups conclude that there are four salient characteristics of police culture. The first is a strong sense of the police role in relation to crime, which is associated with the belief that police have an important and worthwhile purpose in society (in many cases with greater authority than other public institutions or services). The second characteristic is masculinity, which is evidenced by the structure of power in police institutions, the secondary role that female police officers play and by masculine coping mechanisms. The third is an attitude of suspicion against members of the public and new recruits, that creates an isolation between the police and the community, an extreme level of loyalty between police officers and an incapacity for external oversight or accountability. The final characteristic relates to the solidarity between police officers, where police officers are expected to show loyalty to their colleagues above anything else.

Table 1: Examples of characteristic of police culture

Author	*Characteristics of police culture*
Reiner (2010)	Isolation-solidarity; conservatism; cynicism; suspicion; racial prejudice; pragmatism; pessimism; machismo
Loftus (2010)	Exaggerated sense of mission, promise of excitement; celebrate masculine exploits; willingness to use force; suspicion; solidarity; conservative morality; cynicism; pessimism; intolerance to those who challenge the status quo

---

[1] The survey was carried out an online survey, which 11,277 police officers, staff and volunteers responded to. Additionally, 668 of the respondents volunteered for follow-up interviews. For more information see: An inspection of vetting, misconduct, and misogyny in the police service.

Coliandris & Rogers (2008)	Sense of mission; pessimism; suspicion of others; sense of isolation; us-vs-them mentality; machismo; perception of violence; racial and societal prejudice; authoritarianism

Source: own elaboration adapted from Alameri (2018).

While critiques of police culture often focus on its negative aspects, it is important to recognize the positive elements that contribute to effective law enforcement. Solidarity among officers, team cohesion, a commitment to public service, resilience, and a sense of duty are also integral aspects of police culture. The camaraderie developed through shared experiences can create a tight-knit community that supports officers in their complex roles. The following section reflects on the main challenges and opportunities to reform police culture.

2. What are the main challenges of police culture?

Despite its positive aspects, police culture does pose some challenge for police reform. These challenges may impact the organizational effectiveness, the levels of public trust, and the overall relationship between the police and the communities they serve.

In essence, reforming police culture is not about discarding the positive aspects of tradition but rather about evolving to meet modern expectations and challenges. By embracing reform, police agencies can improve their effectiveness, adapt to changing legal and social standards, and ultimately provide a better service to their communities. For example, one distinguishing characteristic of police agencies has been their paramilitary organization, which includes hierarchy, discipline, chain of command and an emphasis on authority and control. This structure is set up to keep everything in order and deal with emergencies effectively. But it may also create an environment that is locked off to outsiders and prone to violence and may not effectively address contemporary societal needs, since it can create a divide between law enforcement and the community, hindering effective collaboration and mutual trust.

Reforming police culture to prioritize community engagement and evidenced based problem-solving can bridge this divide, fostering a partnership approach to public safety. However, reforming police faces several obstacles, including resistance to change, a historical reluctance to address misconduct within the force, and deeply ingrained traditions. Further, the "code of silence" mindset can perpetuate negative behaviors and hinder efforts to establish trust with communities and oversight mechanism of civil control. To achieve meaningful reform, it is crucial to address these challenges head-on.

2.1. Resistance to change

Police culture is resistant to change due to deeply ingrained traditions and practices. Like most kinds of occupational socialization, this socialization process—also known as the formation of a "blue fraternity"[2]—begins at the police academy and continues throughout the police officer's career. These elements interact and are then reinforced by other officers, which results in the formation of attitudes, actions, beliefs, and perceptions that finally represent the beliefs held by most police officers. For example, the New York Police Department (NYPD) has a long and complex history, with several efforts to reform its culture that have faced resistance from the police force. These reform efforts have encountered challenges, particularly in addressing issues such as aggressive policing, racial profiling, and resistance to external oversight. One important area of contention has been the NYPD's implementation of the stop-and-frisk policy, which allowed officers to stop and search individuals on the street based on reasonable suspicion. The NYPD was criticized for disproportionately targeting minority communities and leading to racial profiling (White, 2022). Similarly, the police force in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, has faced longstanding challenges related to corruption, excessive use of force, and resistance to external oversight. Efforts to reform the police culture of Rio de Janeiro have encountered difficulties in addressing the deeply ingrained culture that directly or indirectly supports these practices (OHCHR, 2022; Muñoz, 2022).

Resistance to change can stem from a desire to maintain established norms, values, and ways of operating, that may arise from a fear of the unknown or a perception that reforms undermine the officer's capacity and safety. Further, officers may feel cynicism towards the effectiveness of proposed reforms, especially if they have experienced previous initiatives that did not lead to meaningful change or improvements in working conditions. Additionally, they may fear that changes in policies or practices could impact their job security, particularly if they perceive reforms as potentially leading to increased scrutiny, disciplinary actions, or changes in their roles. In consequence, resistance to change is considered a serious obstacle to police reform (Chan, 1996; Skogan & Hartnett, 1997). Regular training and development programs for officers and senior leadership, that emphasizes change management and that include new policing techniques, technology, and contemporary social issues can help ease the transition into a modern police institution and address resistance to change.

---

[2] The phrase "blue fraternity" is often used to describe the collective identity and sense of brotherhood or sisterhood among police officers who share common experiences, challenges, and a commitment to maintaining public safety.

2.2. The code of silence and lack of accountability

A cynical view of outsiders and tacit acceptance of misbehavior is colloquially referred to as "the blue wall of silence"[3] or closed police society. The code of silence is a significant challenge of police culture since it discourages officers from reporting misconduct by their peers. This unwritten understanding among police officers to not report or disclose misconduct or wrongdoing committed by their colleagues has far-reaching consequences on the levels of trust with the rest of the society. For example, a recent survey carried out by Pew Research Center (2017) showed that 40% of officers would advise other officers to follow departmental rules instead of doing the morally right thing (see figure 2). Further, when asked if the code of silence prevails in their department when someone witnesses' wrongdoing or unethical behavior by a fellow officer, more than half (53%) of the officers surveyed said that most officers in their department would not report the officer who covered up for his colleague. Another study to more than 11,000 police officers in England and Wales found that officers who had personally experienced prejudicial and improper behavior and that such behavior was witnessed by colleagues, including supervisors, said that these colleagues would rarely challenge the people responsible (HMICFRS, 2022).

---

[3] The term "blue wall of silence" refers to the unofficial police code of silence that disincentivizes or directly forbids reporting a fellow officer's mistakes, misconducts, or crimes, particularly those related to police brutality.

Figure 2: Percentage of officers saying they would advise another officer to do one of the following, if faced with a situation in which doing the morally right thing required breaking a department rule.
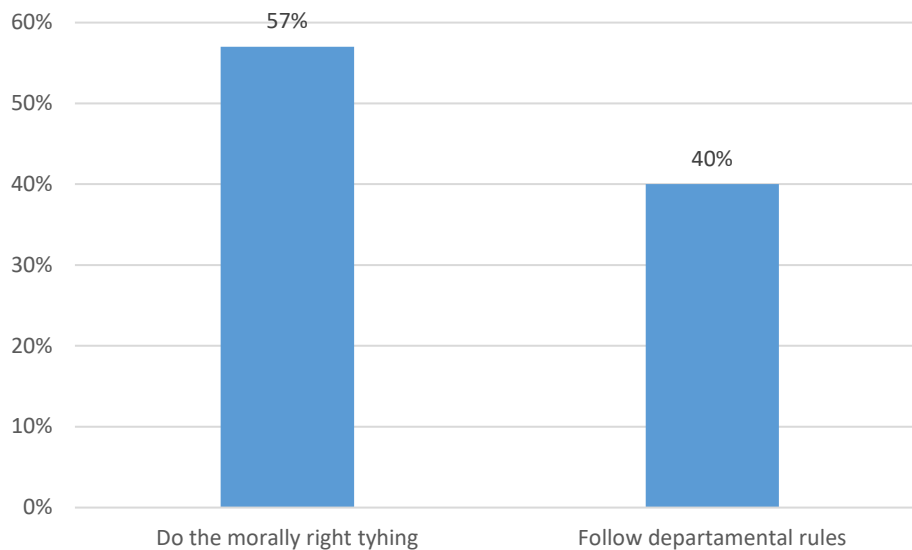
Source: own elaboration with data from Pew Research Center (2017).

The code of silence is related to the incapacity of a police force to oversee itself; it obstructs internal investigations and undermine public trust. Centrally, it prevents individual police officers from being held accountable. Officers who commit misconduct are protected from the repercussions of their acts when it remains undetected, which fosters a climate in which misbehavior is accepted. For example, in the Chicago police department the code of silence was implicated in cases of police misconduct, particularly in the handling of the 2014 shooting of Laquan McDonald, a black teenager that was fatally shot by a white police officer. Officers at the scene of the shooting were accused of withholding information and not providing an accurate account of the events. Further, the code of silence contributed to delays in taking disciplinary action against the involved officer and there were allegations that some officers were hesitant to come forward with information that contradicted the official narrative, hindering the pursuit of justice (Davey, 2018). As instances of misconduct become public or are perceived to be covered up, communities experience heightened distrust towards the police. In consequence of these type of actions, communities feel that police officers are not bound by the law, for example, a study carried out in the US showed that 49% of respondents believed that police officers thought that they were above the law (CATO Institute, 2026) (see figure 3).

Figure 3: Percentage of people who say, "Most police officers think they are above the law".
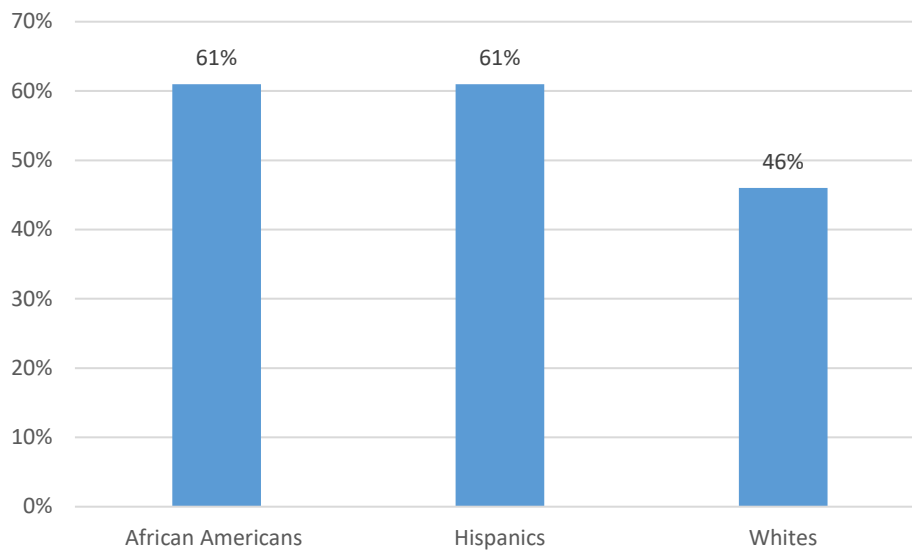
Source: own elaboration with data from CATO Institute (2016).

The consequence of these type of attitudes is a negative perception how police forces work. A survey carried out in the UK showed that 44% of the surveyed thought that the police was doing a bad job, further 53% had not very much confidence or no confidence at all in the police to deal with crime (Tudor, 2023). In Latin American and the Caribbean, 52% of the population does not trust the police (Global Corruption Barometer, 2019).

To summarize, the code of silence and low levels of accountability obstructs police investigations, perpetuates a cycle of inappropriate behavior, and undermines efforts to maintain a professional and ethical police force, increases the risk of corruption and weakens the principles of a just and fair legal system. Establishing whistleblower protection mechanisms, providing anonymous reporting channels, and creating an environment where officers feel safe reporting misconduct without fear of retaliation are some of the tools to solve this challenge. Breaking the code of silence is crucial for building a police force that is accountable, trustworthy, and committed to serving and protecting the community.

2.3.   Militarization and us-vs-them mentality

The degree of militarization within a police force can vary, and it often depends on factors such as training, equipment, tactics, and the overall approach to law enforcement. However, many police departments have a militarized structure and a culture that emphasizes authority, control, and a readiness for conflict. This approach can contribute to an adversarial relationship with the community and may lead to an over-reliance on force in certain situations. For example, the use of military-style equipment and tactics can create a confrontational relationship between the police and the community. Civilians may perceive the police as an occupying force rather than as public servants, leading to a breakdown of trust and cooperation. Further, the appearance of heavily armed and militarized police units can be intimidating and create fear among community members. This fear may discourage people from cooperating with law enforcement or reporting crimes, limiting the effectiveness of policing efforts. For example, a survey carried out in the US[4] showed that 44% of the police officers surveyed believe that some people can only be brought to reason the physical way while 56% believed that in certain neighborhoods of the city it was more useful for an officer to be aggressive than to be courteous (see figure 1).

---

[4] Most of the data of the survey came from online interviews completed by 7,917 law enforcement officers from 54 police and sheriff's departments across the United States. For more information, see: Behind the Badge: Methodology.

Figure 1: Percentage of officers saying they agree or disagree with each of the following statements.

■ In certain areas of the city it is more useful for an officer to be aggressive than to be courteous
■ Some people can only be brought to reason the hard, physical way

Strongly Agree	17% / 5%
Agree	39% / 39%
Disagree	34% / 45%
Strongly disagree	10% / 10%
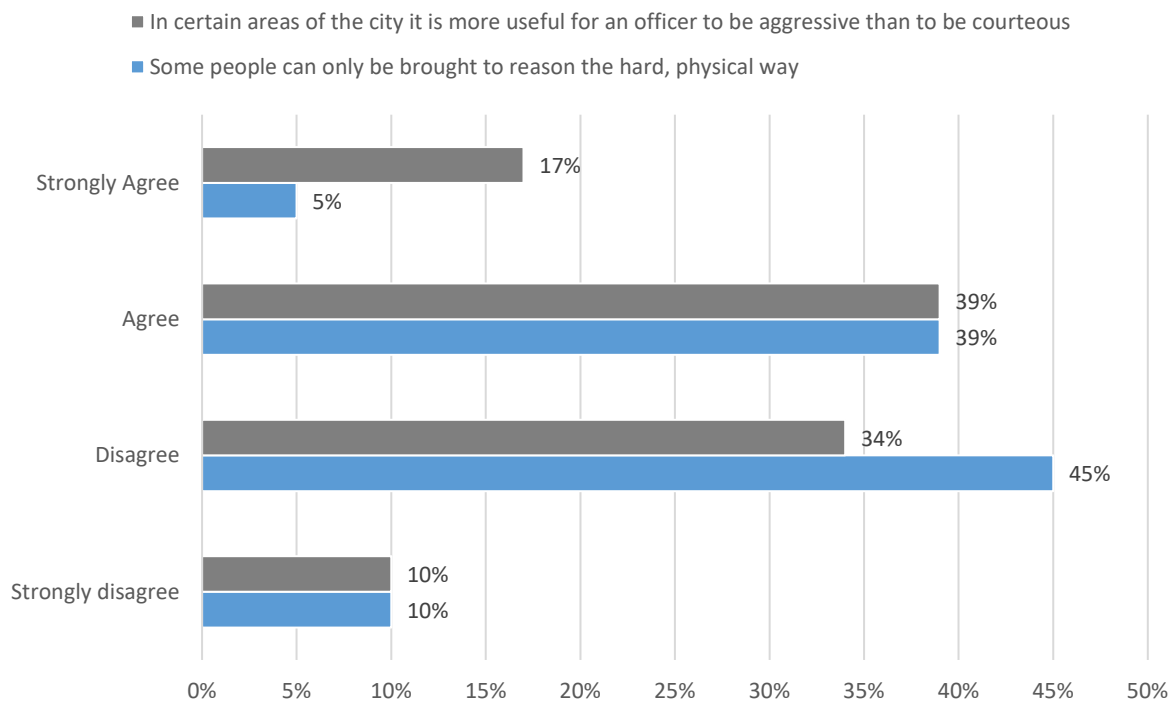
Source: own elaboration with data from Pew Research Center (2017).

There are several cases of highly militarized police forces around the world, due to its history, its culture, or the specific political context. For example, Mexico has long faced significant challenges related to drug cartels and organized crime. The government has frequently deployed a militarized approach to combat these issues which has relied in the use of heavily armed personnel that raised concerns about human rights abuses and extrajudicial killings (Flores-Macías & Zarkin, 2023). The transformation in 2019 of the Federal Police to the National Guard is an example of increasing the militarization of a police force. This approach has shown negative results, for example, the federal security forces' lethality index exceeds expected levels, a study showed an increase of between 150% and 218% in serious abuse complaints against these agencies depending on the year (Brewer & Verduzco 2023; Flores-Macías & Zarkin, 2023). In 2018, President Michel Temer ordered the deployment of the Brazilian Armed Forces in Rio de Janeiro, a state that already had one of the most violent and militarized police forces in the entire region. In Jamaica, Prime Minister Bruce Golding in 2010 tried to curtail illegal activities in Tivoli Gardens in an operation that resembled urban warfare more than policing activities (Felbab-Brown, 2011). In short, militarized police activities have become a common feature in many countries of around the world which separates the police from the rest of the society.

The "us-versus-them" mindset can develop within police culture, creating a divide between law enforcement and the communities they serve. Centrally, with this type of mindset, police officers perceive themselves as distinct from and in opposition to the communities they serve. A divisive mindset can contribute to increased tensions and confrontations between the police and the community. This mentality can contribute to a lack of empathy and understanding, hindering effective community policing, and creating a strained police-community relation. Encounters that could be de-escalated may escalate due to perceived hostility, leading to negative outcomes for both officers and civilians. Additionally, community members may be less willing to cooperate with law enforcement if they perceive officers as adversaries rather than partners in ensuring public safety (Tyler & Fagan, 2008). Finally, the "us-vs-them" mentality can contribute to negative stereotyping of community members, perpetuating biases and leading to discriminatory practices. An example of a militarized institution and an us-vs-them mentality is the "War on Drugs" in the Philippines, initiated by former President Rodrigo Duterte in 2016. The campaign involved the use of militarized police forces to conduct anti-drug operations. The approach, characterized by a high number of extrajudicial killings, has been criticized for human rights abuses and a militarized response to a social issue (Human Rights Watch, 2023). The rhetoric and strategy emphasized a tough stance and an us-vs-them mentality, often portraying drug users and dealers as the enemy. The strategy resulted in the killing of an estimated 12,000 to 30,000 individuals (Iglesias, 2023). The aggressive tactics and rhetoric had a significant impact on community-police relations that continue to impact society.

A militarized structure complemented by a mentality that divides the police force from the rest of the population has tarnishing effects for its efficiency. This mentality can strain community-police relations and make it challenging for officers to perform their duties effectively. As such, proponents of police reform are pushing for changes in several areas, such as limiting the use of force, creating new training programs, altering the tactical approach to riots, and establishing civilian review bodies to supervise police agencies.

3. Opportunities for reform

Police institutions need to be adapted to meet changing security needs as well as the expectations of society (DCAF, 2022). Police culture reform is essential for fostering a more transparent, accountable, and community-oriented approach to law enforcement. Recent high-profile incidents of police misconduct, often captured on video, have underscored the urgent need for change (Green, Kuczynski, McGuirk, & Reichert, 2022). Police culture is a complex and multidimensional concept that is molded and shaped at various levels (i.e., organization, rank, style, assignment, background), as such, a comprehensive approach is needed to change it (Ingram, Terrill & Paoline III, 2018). Reforming police culture is not only about correcting negative behaviors but also about aligning policing practices with evolving societal expectations and values.

Experts have discussed how to improve the efficacy of new police reform initiatives by using tools such as body cameras, virtual reality training, and data collection. The following sections addresses both, individual and departmental aspects that law enforcement agencies can create to have a comprehensive approach towards improving police culture and fostering a positive and community-oriented environment.

3.1. Reforms at the Individual Level

3.1.1. Alternative ways of recruiting, training, and educating the police

Investing on ongoing training that includes cultural competence, de-escalation techniques, and ethical decision-making can enhance the professionalism and effectiveness of law enforcement agencies. Officers should undergo cultural competence training to enhance their understanding of diverse communities and improve their ability to communicate effectively, de-escalation training (which focuses on using verbal and non-verbal communication techniques to reduce a threat, allowing for more time to consider the routes of action or resources to resolve a situation) and implicit bias training to reduce the use of bias and stereotyping in police decision-making (Green, Kuczynski, McGuirk, & Reichert, 2022). Training programs should also focus on ethical decision-making emphasizing the importance of integrity and adherence to ethical standards and in crisis intervention techniques to handle challenging situations with a focus on minimizing the use of force (Police Executive Research Forum, 2016). For example, the Toronto Police Service (TPS) in Canada, has been working to enhance diversity training programs to promote cultural competency. In particular, the Gender Diverse and Trans Inclusion (GDTI)[5] initiative is a key part of the TPS efforts to foster an inclusive, accountable, and transparent culture. The College of Policing, in turn, released a positive action recruitment guide, to promote equality of opportunity during recruitment processes[6].Promoting cultural diversity within police forces and fostering an inclusive environment can contribute to better understanding and communication with diverse communities and break the current forms of police culture.

Further, promoting mental health awareness and encouraging a culture that values mental health, offering support services, and reducing the stigma associated with seeking help can contribute to a healthier police force and a better police culture. The Law Enforcement Mental Health and Wellness Act of 2017 (LEMHWA) in the US, was an important step in recognizing that law enforcement agencies need and deserve support in their ongoing efforts to protect the mental health and well-being of their employees.[7] One notable example is the "The Shield of Athena"[8] initiative in Canada which include trainings that aim to increase

---

[5] For more information see: GDTI.
[6] For more information see: Positive Action: A guide for police recruitment.
[7] For more information see: Law Enforcement Mental Health and Wellness Act of 2017.
[8] For more information see: The Shield of Athena.

awareness of mental health issues, reduce stigma, and provide resources for officers to recognize and address mental health concerns within themselves and their colleagues.

3.1.2. Transforming leadership

Police leaders play a central role in transforming policing and police culture, since they tend to ascribe to a perception of culture which is inflexible and largely negative (Caveney, Scott, Williams, & Howe-Walsh, 2020). Leaders should set a positive example, promote accountability, and create an organizational culture that values integrity and professionalism. Leadership training programs should emphasize ethical leadership, communication skills, and the ability to foster a positive organizational culture. Additionally, it should equip leaders with cultural competence training to enhance their understanding of the diversity within communities and to promote inclusive leadership practices (Cockcroft, 2014).

The hiring and the advancement of officers who possess the viewpoints and leadership abilities required to bring about and maintain a good cultural shift, must be a top priority for police departments. Further, police leaders should be held accountable for their actions, ensuring that they are subject to the same standards of conduct as officers. Transparency in leadership accountability will reinforce a culture of fairness within the police. Strong, ethical, and inclusive leadership is essential for shaping the behavior and values of the entire police force, contributing to improved community relations and overall effectiveness (Archbold, 2021; Meechan, 2023).

3.2. Reforms at the Departmental Level
3.2.1. Data and Technology Integration

Data and technology integration can play a transformative role in improving police culture by enhancing accountability, transparency, efficiency, and the overall effectiveness of law enforcement operations (Open Government Partnership, 2020). Technologies that focus on data gathering and analysis help monitor and assess police activities. Moreover, the use of data analytics to enhance transparency and review incidents helps identify areas for improvement. Specifically, data integration facilitates and comprehensive tracking of officer activities, including responses to incidents and use of force, also enables police departments to share relevant data with the public, fostering transparency. For example, implementing body-worn cameras (BWCs) (typically worn on an officer's uniform that record audio and video footage of interactions with the public) has been shown to provide several benefits such as i) promoting accountability by providing an objective record of police interactions which serves as a valuable evidence in investigations and legal proceedings, ii) the presence BWCs can act as a deterrent to inappropriate behavior, leading to improved conduct and reduced instances of misconduct, and iii) BWCs can enhance trust between law enforcement agencies and the communities and can be used as a valuable tool for training and professional development (Williams, Weil, Rasich, Ludwig, Chang, & Egrari, 2021). There are several

examples of police forces that have effectively implemented BWCs and demonstrated promising outcomes as is the case of the police force in Birmingham in the United Kingdom and Rialto, Las Vegas, and Phoenix in the United States (NIJ, 2023).

Data analytics and technology tools provide law enforcement agencies with actionable insights for more informed decision-making. Officers equipped with accurate and timely information can make better decisions, leading to improved public safety outcomes and reinforce a culture of professionalism. Complementarily to the above, technology integration that streamlines case management processes makes investigations more efficient. This reduces administrative burdens on officers, allowing them to focus on core law enforcement duties and contributes to a positive work environment. In turn, technologies allow for data-driven metrics that provide objective measures for evaluating officer performance and promoting a culture of accountability (Archbold, 2021). As a final point and central to police culture, data analytics tools can help analyze patterns of enforcement to identify and address disparities, promoting fair and unbiased law enforcement practices (Maslov, 2016).

3.2.2. Diversifying the police force

Encouraging inclusiveness and diversity in police forces to better represent the communities they serve is an important step to improve police culture since it addresses issues related to bias and discrimination. Further, a diverse police force brings a range of cultural perspectives and experiences that police forces usually do not have. This diversity enhances the cultural competence of the police force, allowing officers to better understand and respond to the needs of a diverse community which increases trust from the community. When residents see officers who look like them and share similar experiences, it contributes to a sense of inclusivity and improves the perceived legitimacy of law enforcement (van Ewijk, 2012; Legewie, & Fagan, 2016).

To successfully diversify the police force, proactive recruitment strategies, inclusive hiring practices, promotion of officers, and ongoing diversity trainings are essential. These steps will create a culture that respects diversity and forbids prejudice. Additionally, efforts to create an inclusive and supportive environment within the police organization are important for retaining diverse talent and fostering a positive police culture. The Metropolitan Police Service (Met Police) in London, is an example of a police force that has taken significant steps to diversify its officer ranks. The Met Police has implemented various initiatives to increase the representation of individuals from diverse backgrounds within the force. For example, it has a comprehensive Diversity and Inclusion Strategy (STRIDE)[9] that outlines specific goals and actions to promote diversity within the police force. In that sense, it has targeted recruitment campaigns aiming to attract candidates from underrepresented communities and has leadership development programs emphasizing the importance of diversity and

---

[9] For more information see: Met diversity and inclusion strategy (STRIDE).

inclusivity at all levels of the organization. In parallel, the College of Policing and the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) designed the Police Race Action Plan[10] that sets out changes across policing to improve outcomes for black people who work within or interact with policing. It's important to note that while progress has been made, challenges and ongoing efforts to enhance diversity in policing persist.

3.2.3. Transparency and accountability measures

Police culture, that sometimes prioritizes loyalty above integrity, encourages wrongdoing by hiding it. Any effort to improve police integrity must be supported by initiatives to increase openness and transparency, or, to put it another way, a professional view where accountability for police acts is fully recognized and respected (UNODC, 2011). Transparency in policing refers to an open communication, disclosure of information, and clear visibility of law enforcement activities to the public. It is a crucial element for reforming police culture by fostering trust, accountability, and positive relations with the community. Further, emphasizing transparency in police operations and establishing robust accountability measures are crucial for rebuilding public trust (Hope, 2020). This includes prompt and impartial investigations into allegations of misconduct. Additionally, developing a clear and consistent disciplinary procedure and eliminating barriers to the reporting of misconduct is an important step towards transparency. The New York City Police Department (NYPD) has implemented various transparency measures to enhance openness and transparency and made efforts to provide the public with access to information about its activities, policies, and interactions with the community. One example of transparency measures is the implementation of the NYPD Crime Data[11] and the Stop, Question, and Frisk Data initiatives[12]. These transparency measures contribute to the NYPD's commitment to providing the public with information about its activities and fostering a greater understanding of law enforcement practices.

Strengthening internal and external accountability mechanisms and establishing independent oversight bodies, will help ensure transparent investigations into misconduct, and the implementation of consistent disciplinary procedures. These changes, in turn, will foster a culture where reporting misconduct is encouraged and protected and consequently improve overall accountability. According to a recent report of the Council of Europe for a police oversight system to be effective it needs to have several levels of control (Byrne & Priestley, 2017): internal oversight, executive control (policy control, financial control and horizontal oversight by government agencies), parliamentary oversight (members of parliament, parliamentary commissions of enquiry), judicial oversight, independent bodies such as national human rights institutions; and, civil society oversight. The different processes and

---

[10] For more information see: Police Race Action Plan.
[11] For more information see: NYPD Crime Data.
[12] For more information see: Stop, Question and Frisk Data.

institutions complement each other, and there may be some overlap regarding their objectives and purposes. Further, oversight bodies have been created with differing models and powers, and there are diverse police accountability mechanisms across the globe (Varaine & Roché, 2023). These agencies and institutions carry a range of mandates and deal with different areas of policing, such as human rights violations, police corruption, corporate management, and complaints against individual officers.

One example of an effective accountability mechanism within the police is the establishment of the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC)[13] (previously known as the Independent Police Complaints Commission) in England and Wales. The IOPC is an independent body that investigates complaints and allegations of misconduct or wrongdoing against the police, and ensures impartial and transparent investigations, promoting public confidence in the accountability of the police. In turn, an example of an independent effective oversight mechanism over the police is the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland (PONI)[14]. The Police Ombudsman's role is to investigate complaints and allegations of misconduct independently and impartially against the police in Northern Ireland. Further, PONI deals with those complaints in a manner which is free from any police, governmental or sectional community interest. In short, accountability mechanisms are integral to reforming police culture, and promoting a positive police culture by establishing clear expectations, enforcing ethical standards, and building trust with society.

3.2.4. Following the principles of procedural justice

The most basic reform needs to target how individual officers engage with the public (Green, Kuczynski, McGuirk, & Reichert, 2022). Procedural justice plays a pivotal role in shaping and improving police culture by fostering positive interactions between law enforcement officers and the community. Procedural justice refers to the fairness and perceived fairness of the processes used in decision-making and interactions between authorities, such as the police, and the individuals involved. It is a concept that emphasizes the importance of fairness not only in the outcomes of decisions but also in the procedures used to reach those outcomes. According to these principles, citizens who believe they are treated with respect and justice by the police are more cooperative and compliant with the law and better accept decisions of public authorities (Tyler, 2001). Several studies have tested this hypothesis and discovered that those who have a positive perception of procedural justice are more likely to cooperate with law enforcement officers and follow the rules compared to those who have a negative perception (Fagan & Tyler 2005; Reisig & Mesko, 2009). For example, research focusing specifically on the criminal justice system showed that citizens who consider the treatment and decision-making processes of the police to be fair and just are more likely to cooperate with the police (Tyler & Huo, 2002), trust criminal justice agents (Rottman, 2007; Tyler &

---

[13] For more information see: Independent Office for Police Conduct.
[14] For more information see: PONI.

Fagan, 2008) and participate in crime prevention programs (Reisig, 2007). Further, this approach helps break down the "us-versus-them" mentality by fostering empathy and understanding between police officers and the community since officers are more likely to see themselves as part of the community they serve, promoting a sense of shared purpose.

Procedural justice principles include treating citizens with dignity, transparency in police action, giving citizens a voice during encounters and impartiality in the decision-making process. If these principles are implemented by the police through officers training programs, research shows that it will enhance police legitimacy and cooperation with the law, and ultimately reduce tensions with the community (Mazerolle, Bennett, Davis, Sargeant, & Manning, 2013). It is important to note that the effectiveness of procedural justice initiatives needs to be assessed over the long term, and continuous evaluation and adjustments are essential for sustaining positive changes within the police force. In sum, integrating procedural justice principles into policing practices contributes to a positive shift in police culture by emphasizing fairness and respectful treatment. The Seattle Police Department (SPD) in the United States has been recognized for its efforts to implement procedural justice principles in its interactions with the community. The SPD's initiatives include training programs, community engagement efforts, and a commitment to building trust through procedural justice practices.[15] This approach not only enhances community trust but also creates an organizational culture that values professionalism, accountability, and continuous improvement.

4. Discussion and conclusion

In the realm of law enforcement, police culture stands as a central element that shapes the attitudes, behaviours, and operational methodologies of police officers. This unique set of values, norms, and practices, deeply ingrained within police departments, significantly influences how personnel conduct their daily business, interacts with the community, and enforces the law. In consequence, understanding police culture is essential for policymakers to implement effective reforms that fosters positive relationships between the police and communities. As such a deeper understanding of the challenges that police culture presents and the ways to reform it is crucial to improve police effectiveness.

As Chan (1997) argued change in the police is possible but it is difficult. Police reform aims to change the police by transforming the norms, culture, and practices of police institutions so that police can perform their duties better, with more respect for democratic values, diversity, human rights and the rule of law (DCAF, 2022). Police culture thought is beginning to change, as departments diversify demographically and philosophically. Several police forces have seen notable changes in recent years, such as a modification to the composition of the body of police officers, the implementation of community-oriented and evidence-

---

[15] For more information see: Professional Standards Bureau.

based policing, heightening ethical standards and creating effective oversight mechanism (Brough, Chataway, & Biggs, 2016).

Police culture reform is a multifaceted and ongoing process that demands commitment, collaboration, and a willingness to confront entrenched norms. By acknowledging the positive aspects of police culture and implementing a comprehensive roadmap that addresses accountability, community engagement, diversity, and transparency, law enforcement agencies can transform their culture to better align with the evolving needs and expectations of society. Further, it is possible to create a law enforcement environment that is both effective and accountable, ultimately building stronger relationships between the police and the communities they serve. The goal is not just to correct problematic behaviors but to foster a positive and community-oriented ethos within law enforcement, ultimately building trust and ensuring public safety and the rule of law.

References

Alameri, A. (2018). Front-line service employees' service recovery performance: a practice theory-based study into customer complaint handling in the Abu Dhabi Police Force. Nottingham Trent University (United Kingdom).

Archbold, C. A. (2021). Police Accountability in the USA: Gaining Traction or Spinning Wheels? Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice, 15(3), 1665-1683.

Brewer, S. & Verduzco, A.L. (2023) Militarized Transformation: Human Rights and Democratic Controls in a Context of Increasing Militarization in Mexico. WOLA, available at: https://www.wola.org/analysis/militarized-transformation-human-rights-and-democratic-controls-in-a-context-of-increasing-militarization-in-mexico/

Brough, P., Chataway, S., & Biggs, A. (2016). 'You don't want people knowing you're a copper!'A contemporary assessment of police organisational culture. International Journal of Police Science & Management, 18(1), 28-36.

Byrne, J., & Priestley, W. (2017). Report on police oversight in the Council of Europe Countries. Council of Europe Publishing.

CATO Institute. (2016). Policing in America: Understanding Public Attitudes toward the Police. Results from a National Survey. Available at: https://www.cato.org/survey-reports/policing-america-understanding-public-attitudes-toward-police-results-national

Caveney, N., Scott, P., Williams, S., & Howe-Walsh, L. (2020). Police reform, austerity and 'cop culture': time to change the record?. Policing and society, 30(10), 1210-1225.

Chan, J. (1996). Changing police culture. The British Journal of Criminology, 36(1), 109-134.

Chan, J. (2007). Making sense of police reforms. Theoretical criminology, 11(3), 323-345.

Cockcroft, T. (2012). Police culture: Themes and concepts. Routledge.

Cockcroft, T. (2014). Police culture and transformational leadership: outlining the contours of a troubled relationship. Policing: a journal of policy and practice, 8(1), 5-13.

Coliandris, G., & Rogers, C. (2008). Linking police culture, leadership and partnership-working. The Police Journal, 81(2), 111-125.

Crank, J. P. (2014). Understanding police culture. Routledge.

Davey, M. (2018). Police 'Code of Silence' Is on Trial After Murder by Chicago Officer. The New York times, available at: https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/03/us/chicago-police-code-of-silence.html

DCAF. (2022). Police Reform: Applying the principles of good security sector governance to policing. Available online at: https://www.dcaf.ch/sites/default/files/publications/documents/DCAF_BG_16_PoliceReform_EN_Jul2022.pdf

Fagan, J., & Tyler, T. R. (2005). Legal socialization of children and adolescents. Social justice research, 18, 217-241.

Felbab-Brown, V. (2011). Bringing the State to the Slum: Confronting organized crime and urban violence in Latin America. Brookings Institution, December.

Flores-Macías, G., & Zarkin, J. (2023). The consequences of militarized policing for human rights: evidence from Mexico. Comparative Political Studies, 00104140231168362.

Global Corruption Barometer. (2019). Citizens' Views of Experiences of Corruption. Transparency International. Available at: https://www.transparency.org/files/content/pages/2019_GCB_LatinAmerica_Caribbean_Full_Report.pdf

Green, E., Kuczynski, B., McGuirk, M., & Reichert, J. (2022). The Effectiveness and Implications of Police Reform: a Review of the Literature. Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority.

HMICFRS. (2022). An inspection of vetting, misconduct, and misogyny in the police service. Available online at: https://hmicfrs.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/publications/an-inspection-of-vetting-misconduct-and-misogyny-in-the-police-service/

Hope Sr, K. R. (2020). Civilian oversight of the police: The case of Kenya. The Police Journal, 93(3), 202-228.

Human Rights Watch. (2023). Philippines Admits Police Role in 'Drug War' Killings. Available at: https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/02/25/philippines-admits-police-role-drug-war-killings

Iglesias, S. (2023). Explaining the pattern of "war on drugs" violence in the Philippines under Duterte. Asian Politics & Policy.

Ingram, J. R., Terrill, W., & PAOLINE III, E. A. (2018). Police culture and officer behavior: Application of a multilevel framework. Criminology, 56(4), 780-811.

Legewie, J., & Fagan, J. (2016). Group threat, police officer diversity and the deadly use of police force. Columbia Public Law Research Paper, (14-512).

Loftus, B. (2010). Police occupational culture: classic themes, altered times. Policing and society, 20(1), 1-20.

Maslow, A. (2016). Measuring the Performance of the Police: The Perspective of the Public. Public Safety Canada, research report, available at: https://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/rsrcs/pblctns/2015-r034/2015-r034-en.pdf

Mazerolle, L., Bennett, S., Davis, J., Sargeant, E. & Manning, M. (2013). Legitimacy in Policing: A Systematic Review. Campbell Systematic Reviews, 9(1), i-147.

Meechan, F. (2023). Intelligence Led? Policing, People Leadership And Compassion-And The Need For Speed In Culture Improvement: A Qualitative Study of Senior Police Leaders, Guided by Intelligent Compassion.

Morin, R., Parker, K., Stepler, R., & Mercer, A. (2017) Police Culture. Pew Research Center. https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2017/01/11/police-culture/

Muñoz, C. (2022). Brazil's Supreme Court Orders Plan to Reform Rio de Janeiro Police. Human Rights Watch, available at: https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/03/02/brazils-supreme-court-orders-plan-reform-rio-de-janeiro-police

Nhan, J. (2014). Police culture. The encyclopedia of criminology and criminal justice, 1-6.

NIJ. (2023). Research on Body-Worn Cameras and Law Enforcement. National Institute of Justice, available at: https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/articles/research-body-worn-cameras-and-law-enforcement

OHCHR. (2022). Brazil: UN experts decry acts of racialised police brutality. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, available at: https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/07/brazil-un-experts-decry-acts-racialised-police-brutality

Open Government Partnership. (2020). Transparency and Accountability at the Frontlines of Justice: Police Data Transparency. Available online at: https://www.opengovpartnership.org/documents/transparency-and-accountability-at-the-frontlines-of-justice-police-data-transparency/

Paoline III, E. A. (2003). Taking stock: Toward a richer understanding of police culture. Journal of criminal justice, 31(3), 199-214.

Paoline, E.A. (2014). Police Culture. In: Bruinsma, G., Weisburd, D. (eds) Encyclopedia of Criminology and Criminal Justice. Springer, New York, NY. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-5690-2_394

Pew Research Center. (2017). "Behind the Badge: Amid protests and calls for reform, how police view their jobs, key issues and recent fatal encounters between blacks and police." Available at: https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2017/01/11/behind-the-badge/

Police Executive Research Forum. (2016). Guiding Principles On Use of Force. Available online at: https://www.policeforum.org/assets/30%20guiding%20principles.pdf

Prenzler, T. (1997). Is there a police culture? Australian Journal of Public Administration, 56(4), 47-56.

Reiner, R. (2017). Is police culture cultural?. Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice, 11(3), 236-241.

Reisig, M. D. (2007). Continuing the Discussion on Community Policing, Issue 2 Procedural Justice and Community Policing—What Shapes Residents' Willingness to Participate in Crime Prevention Programs?. Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice, 1(3), 356-369.

Reisig, M. D., & Mesko, G. (2009). Procedural justice, legitimacy, and prisoner misconduct. Psychology, crime & law, 15(1), 41-59.

Rottman, D. B. (2007). Adhere to procedural fairness in the justice system. Criminology & Pub. Pol'y, 6, 835.

Skogan, W. G., & Hartnett, S. M. (1997). Community policing. Chicago style, 110.

Tudor, S. (2023). Police standards and culture: Restoring public trust. UK Parliament, House of Lords Library. https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/police-standards-and-culture-restoring-public-trust/

Tyler, T. R. (2001). Public trust and confidence in legal authorities: What do majority and minority group members want from the law and legal institutions? Behavioral sciences & the law, 19(2), 215-235.

Tyler, T. R., & Fagan, J. (2008). Legitimacy and cooperation: Why do people help the police fight crime in their communities. Ohio State Journal of Criminal Law, 6, 231.

Tyler, T. R., & Huo, Y. J. (2002). Trust in the law: Encouraging public cooperation with the police and courts. Russell Sage Foundation.

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. (2011). Handbook on police accountability, oversight and integrity. UN.

UNODC. (2011). Handbook of police accountability, oversight, and integrity. Criminal Justice Handbook Series, UNODC. Available online at:

https://www.unodc.org/pdf/criminal_justice/Handbook_on_police_Accountability_Oversight_and_Integrity.pdf

van Ewijk, A. R. (2012). Diversity within police forces in Europe: A case for the comprehensive view. Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice, 6(1), 76-92.

Varaine, S., & Roché, S. (2023). The fourth power. a mapping of police oversight agencies in Europe and Quebec. Policing and Society, 1-24.

Westmarland, L. (2012). Police cultures. In Handbook of policing (pp. 281-308). Willan.

White, M. D. (2020). The New York City Police Department, its crime control strategies and organizational changes, 1970-2009. In Understanding New York's Crime Drop (pp. 74-95). Routledge.

Williams Jr., M. C., Weil, N., Rasich, E. A., Ludwig, J., Chang, H. & Egrari, S. (2021). Body-Worn Cameras in Policing: Benefits and Costs (NBER Working Paper Series núm. 28622). Cambridge, MA. National Bureau of Economic Research.