Expectations, Effectiveness, Trust, and Cooperation: Public Attitudes towards the Israel Police during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract The COVID-19 pandemic significantly affected the work of police agencies worldwide. Within a short period of time, the police were assigned new responsibilities and were required to change their priorities and focus on enforcing unusual emergency orders. These new tasks, as well as the emergency atmosphere and its socio-psychological implications, raise a series of questions about public expectations from and trust in the police during the pandemic period. In this article, we report the views of majority communities in Israel (non-Orthodox Jews), as expressed in a survey carried out in the midst of the pandemic. We find that this population supports police enforcement of the new orders and trusts them to do so with integrity, believes the police have been successful in this arena, and is willing to report violations of emergency regulations. Overall, responses indicate more favourable attitudes towards the police, echoing previous findings on policing emergencies.

The Coronavirus pandemic and emergency orders issued following its outbreak have had tremendous impact on civilian life in most Western democracies. As nation after nation experienced rising levels of infection, police agencies were required to take on a new role—the enforcement of emergency orders, such as stay at home, self-quarantine, shutdown of businesses, wearing face masks in public, social distancing, and lockdowns (Lum et al., 2020; Neyroud, 2020; Reicher and Stott, 2020). In a recent report of the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) and Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy (CEBCP), Lum and colleagues posit that:

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly affected the operational landscape of policing. The police... have been on the front lines of response, tending to medical emergencies and managing the social consequences of COVID-19, while at the same time...
providing safety and reassurance to their communities (Lum et al., 2020, p. 1).

In other words, in addition to their classic crime-control and order-maintenance responsibilities, the COVID-19 pandemic has forced police to engage in a new set of tasks. But this did not simply mean ‘more work’ for police. During the pandemic, the police were required to enforce regulations and orders that are not necessarily perceived as ‘natural’ in democratic societies. While some may understand and support measures such as self-quarantine or lockdowns, others perceive them as unnecessary, too harsh, unbalanced, or simply as a violation of their basic rights (Bradford et al., 2020).

Thus, policing during the COVID-19 pandemic raises a series of questions about the relationship between the police and the public. Does focusing on enforcing emergency orders undermine police ability to control crime, and, if so, would the public accept this cost? How do citizens respond to police enforcement of unusual or controversial orders? Does the public appreciate police efforts to help citizens during the crisis? Whatever the case may be, there is no question regarding the particular importance of public support for the police during this period (e.g. Jackson et al., 2020; Neyroud, 2020; Yesberg et al., 2020), because, as argued by Reicher and Stott (2020), it is critical to the successful enforcement of social distancing and prevention of civil unrest. In their words:

With careful management both at a general policy level and in terms of sensitive community-based and dialogued policing, it will be possible to maintain a sense of common endeavour and, hence, to draw on the community as a key resource in dealing with the crisis (p. 4).

In this study, we examine public attitudes towards the police in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. We focus on the views of majority communities in Israel (non-Orthodox Jews), including their expectations from the police during this period, perceived effectiveness, trust, and willingness to report regulation violations. We compare these views both to general perceptions unrelated to the pandemic and, where possible, to parallel attitudes measured in the same population but in the context of a different emergency—terrorism (Jonathan and Weisburd, 2010). We begin by reviewing changes to police mission during the Coronavirus pandemic and discuss their potential effects on public attitudes and expectations from the police, drawing from the literature on policing emergencies. We continue to describe the study context and sample, survey instrument and procedure, and findings, which suggest improved support for the police during the Coronavirus pandemic.

Policing during the COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has caught Western democracies unprepared in numerous ways (Alemanno, 2020). Healthcare providers and hospitals experienced shortage of supplies and personnel; financial institutes faced an unexpected depression with no clear exit strategy, and government authorities were required to make difficult, sometimes impossible decisions within a very short period of time (e.g. which businesses to shut down; who is considered ‘essential’ and must continue working; see Crowley and Rauh, 2020; Freund and Rendahl, 2020). The pandemic, which was declared by the World Health Organization (2020) as a public health emergency of international concern, is, without a doubt, one of the biggest challenges faced by many nations in the last century. As can be expected, it has also had tremendous impact on civilian life. Since 9 March 2020, governments of Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries have been declaring various versions of lockdown regulations. In
Europe, Italy was first to issue stay at home orders (9 March 2020), followed by Denmark (March 11), Ireland and Norway (March 12). In the USA, California was the first state to declare a lockdown (March 19), followed by New York (March 20). By April 1, almost all Western democracies were in some form of lockdown.

This state of emergency has had direct and immediate effects on three aspects of policing (Eisner, 2020; Neyroud, 2020; Posch et al., 2020). The first and perhaps most significant was the requirement to enforce a long, rapidly changing list of emergency regulations (Bar-Tzvi, 2020; Lum et al., 2020). In Israel, our study site, the authority and responsibilities of the Israel Police (IP) during the crisis were specified in emergency legislation passed on 21 March 2020 (Emergency regulations—new Coronavirus—activity restrictions [NEVO online version], 6a, b). The police were authorized to enforce (with fines, arrest, or physical force if necessary) the prohibition to open businesses; stay at home orders; self-quarantine if required; and restrictions on gatherings. Between March 21 and May 18, emergency regulations were updated over 15 times, forcing the police to quickly adapt. For example, movement restrictions changed from 100 m from residence (March 25) to a complete lockdown (April 8), and then again to 500 m (April 19); permissible reasons for leaving one’s residence changed several times; and the recommendation to wear a face mask (March 31) became a requirement in the presence of others (12 April), and then a requirement in public at all times (April 20). These rapid changes demanded flexibility at all levels of the organization, but also forced officers in the field to frequently explain the present state of restrictions to confused citizens (Bar-Tzvi, 2020).

The second change involves efforts to minimize officers’ risk of infection. In the USA, Europe, and Israel, police were required to wear face masks or visors and gloves, and maintain a distance of 2 m (~6.6 feet) from citizens whenever possible (Belmonte, 2020). To successfully do so, 76% of police agencies in the USA and Canada distributed personal protection equipment to frontline officers (Lum et al., 2020). In Israel, officers were equipped with face masks as early as 27 February 2020 (Nusbaum et al., 2020). This gear, as well as physical distance from citizens in interpersonal interactions, changes the way officers appear (Neyroud, 2020)—they may be misunderstood by citizens or perceived to be less accessible and even hostile. Accordingly, in Scotland, the police advertised this change on social media and explained that ‘sometimes we will wear a mask, this helps protect us and you’ (BBC News, 2020).

The final change to policing during the pandemic developed from changes in crime patterns during this period (Lum et al., 2020): an overall drop in crime alongside a rise in specific types of crime. For example, in the UK, the metropolitan police report a decrease in burglaries but a rise in domestic violence (Eisner, 2020). In Israel, the IP reports a drop in overall crime, but a 9% rise in emergency calls for service, 14% rise in violent crime, 34% rise in domestic violence, and an unspecified rise in cybercrime (Bar-Tzvi, 2020). Eisner (2020) proposes that such changes were caused by shifts in routine activities (e.g. more people spend more time at home); various emotions (such as fear from the pandemic or anger); changes in prices and availability of goods (such as face masks or medical supplies); changes in opportunities for crime (e.g. a rise in online shopping and numerous empty premises); and strains (such as unemployment). In the next section, we consider how such changes to police tasks, as well as the overall crisis situation, may influence public expectations from and attitudes towards the police.

What are the potential effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on public attitudes towards the police?

Public attitudes towards the police: trust, cooperation, effectiveness, and fairness

Before turning to the potential effects of the pandemic on public expectations and views, it is
important to reiterate the significance of public attitudes towards the police, particularly trust. Trust characterises beliefs and expectations in a relationship. When we trust someone, we expect them to behave in desirable ways and believe that they would do so (Hawdon, 2008). In the words of Tyler and Huo (2002, p. 58), ‘Trust in a person’s motives or character refers to his or her internal, unobservable characteristics that are inferred from his or her observable actions’. In the context of policing, trust refers to the expectation and belief that police officers will behave in ways citizens perceive to be positive (Nagin and Telep, 2017).

Why is trust in the police important? First, on the normative level, in democratic societies where citizens are policed by consent, perceiving the police as a trustworthy entity is a desirable normative standard (Tyler and Fagan, 2008). Second, on the practical level, trust in the police bears important implications for police ability to successfully carry out its mission. While deterrence and other forms of formal social control can be effective in addressing specific crime problems (Sampson, 1986), long-term public order and crime-control require ongoing, large-scale voluntary law obedience and cooperation, including, for example, reporting crime and suspicious activities, assisting investigations, and taking part in police–community programmes (Sampson et al., 1997; Tyler, 2006; Tyler and Fagan, 2008). Such behaviours rely, to a large extent, on trust. Studies consistently find that when citizens trust the police and view officers as a legitimate authority, they are more likely to cooperate with the police and declare commitment to the law (e.g. Tyler and Fagan, 2008; De Cremer and Tyler, 2007; Hinds and Murphy, 2007; Jackson and Sunshine, 2007; Reisig et al., 2007; Murphy et al., 2008; Reisig et al., 2012). This relationship was identified in Western democracies (Jackson and Bradford, 2010; Sargeant et al., 2014; Tyler 2016), developing countries (Barker et al., 2008; Reisig et al., 2014), and, importantly, Israel, our study site (Perry and Hasisi, 2018; Hasisi et al., 2020; Perry, 2020).

How do citizens develop trust in the police? The literature suggests that trust is primarily shaped by two complimentary aspects of policing: effectiveness and fairness (Tyler, 1990, 2006, 2009; Sunshine and Tyler, 2003; Hinds and Murphy, 2007; Schulhofer et al., 2011; also see review by Jonathan-Zamir et al., 2015a). Perceptions of effectiveness concern what the police do—the outcome of their work. Fairness assessments are subjective perceptions of how the police exercise their authority (Sunshine and Tyler, 2003). They develop from four more specific evaluations: a sense of participation in police processes and decisions; perceptions of respectful treatment; the perceived neutrality of the process; and displays of trustworthy motives (Blader and Tyler, 2003; Tyler and Fagan, 2008). While evaluations of both effectiveness and fairness were found to impact trust, studies often find procedural justice to be the primary predictor (e.g. Sunshine and Tyler, 2003; Tyler and Fagan, 2008; Gau, 2011; Perry et al., 2017).

Despite their appeal and broad empirical support, it is important to note that the core arguments outlined above—that procedural justice is the primary source of trust and legitimacy, which, in turn, lead to law obedience—have also been the subject of important critique (e.g. Nagin and Telep, 2017, 2020). For example, it has been argued that there is little empirical support for the proposition that these relationships are causal (Nagin and Telep, 2017). Concerns were also raised about the measurement and operational definitions of key terms within this framework (Gau, 2011; Maguire and Johnson, 2010; Reisig et al., 2007; Tankebe, 2013). Finally, some have suggested that the model does not give adequate attention to the social and cultural context (Gau, 2011; Ivković, 2018; Lobos, 2019; Tankebe, 2009a). Nevertheless, the overall picture emerging from the literature is that trust in the police, its antecedents and outcomes, are critical to police success. Below we discuss how the COVID-19 pandemic...
may influence these views, drawing from the literature on policing emergencies.

The effects of policing emergencies on police–community relationship

While the unique roles of the police during the COVID-19 pandemic may be new, the questions they raise about police–community relations are not. Previous emergency situations, such as wars, natural disasters, and particularly terrorism, have all influenced police responsibilities and their relationship with the communities they serve (e.g., Deflem and Sutphin, 2009; Jonathan, 2010; Lanza-Kaduce et al., 1998; Punch and Markham, 2000; Weisburd et al., 2009; also see Gould, 2020), and thus provide a useful body of literature to develop hypotheses about the potential effects of policing the COVID-19 pandemic. Interestingly, some tactical responses to the pandemic were adopted from earlier models of policing crises. These include, for example, placing roadblocks on freeways to contain a potential risk (of terrorism or infection), and using intelligence-based technologies, such as tracking citizens’ location using their cellular phone (Birnhack, 2020).

The literature on policing crises offers two apparently contradicting hypotheses about the effects of policing the COVID-19 pandemic on public support for the police. The first suggests that focusing on the emergency would undermine the relationship between the police and the public, for three main reasons: first, to adequately address the threat, the police must dedicate significant time, effort, and resources to a new set of obligations, often at the expense of ‘ordinary’ crime-control and order-maintenance responsibilities (Fishman, 2005; Jonathan-Zamir et al., 2015a; Bayley and Weisburd, 2015). Perceptions that the police are neglecting their ‘classic’ duties may, in turn, weaken public trust. Such concerns have been raised both in the context of policing terrorism (e.g., Jonathan, 2010) and with regard to natural disasters, such as hurricane Katerina (Deflem and Sutphin, 2009).

Second, policing emergencies such as terrorism often involve the use of military strategies, training, and gear (Kennison and Loumansky, 2007; McCulloch, 2004). Paramilitary appearance and conduct are attractive to police because they are perceived to be effective, but also because the image they project appeals to officers (Kraska, 2007). However, paramilitary policing may make officers appear (and indeed behave) in a less accessible and service-oriented manner, thus undermining police–community relations (Perry et al., 2017). For example, Spalek (2010) argues that in the UK, paramilitary police response to terrorism after 9/11 undermined trust in the police, which led to public demand to rehabilitate police–community relations. Perry and Jonathan-Zamir (2014) argued that in Israel, police involvement in counterterrorism changed the nature of policing: it had become more militarized and less attentive to procedural justice, which, as expected, hampered public trust.

Finally, measures that are often employed in crisis situations, such as tracking cellular phones, collecting intelligence and restricting movement, may be perceived by individuals or communities as intrusive or as violations of civil rights. In Israel, for example, such measures have been used in Israeli Arab communities perceived to be a potential source of terrorism (Perry and Hasisi, 2018), which significantly undermined trust in the police in these communities (Jonathan-Zamir et al., 2015b). In Serbia, invasive actions by the government during the civil war led to considerable distrust in the police (Gordy, 2004). Similarly, in Liberia, Blair et al. (2019) found that invasive policing tactics used during the civil war hampered citizens’ trust in the police, courts, and the government more generally.

At the same time, the literature also suggests an opposite hypothesis, according to which emergency situations would improve public support for the police, for two reasons (Jentleson, 1992; Jentleson and Britton, 1998; Jonathan and Weisburd, 2010). Firstly, during crises, by focusing
on the issue citizens find most troubling, the police may be perceived as highly relevant and attentive to community needs (Jonathan, 2010; Kelling and Moore, 1988; LaFree and Adamczyk, 2017). Indeed, it has been argued that focusing on the immediate crisis and addressing pressing public concerns is a critical factor in successfully policing any emergency (Punch and Markham, 2000), and specifically natural disasters (Deflem and Sutphin, 2009).

Second, crises often lead to a sense of social cohesion, in which the police are perceived to be part of the in-group in a joint struggle against an external threat (Tajfel, 1978). For example, in the UK, during World War II, a sense of cohesion and identification with a common goal strengthened the legitimacy of the government and support for the emergency regulations (Todman, 2020). This notion of unity, often linked to the 'Rally 'Round the Flag Effect' (Mueller, 1970, 1973), encourages support for authorities, including the police, in crisis situations (Stein, 1976; Tajfel, 1974).

It is important to note that the effects of emergencies on public support for the police may vary across the short and long term. While focusing on the issue citizens find most troubling and unity in the face of threat may lead to a rise in support in the short term, once the threat subsides or becomes the new routine, these forces weaken, while the costs of policing the emergency become prominent (Baker and Oneal, 2001, Lai and Reiter, 2005; Sigelman and Conover, 1981; Sorrentino and Vidmar, 1974). Thus, while crises predict a short-term peak in public support for the police, in the long run support may not only return to pre-crisis levels, but may weaken further due to the costs (Jonathan, 2010).

**Hypothesized effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on public support for the police**

What can the literature on policing emergencies tell us about the potential effects of the Coronavirus pandemic on public support for the police? Similar to other types of crises, policing the pandemic demands time and resources at the expense of 'ordinary' policing duties (Neyroud, 2020). Citizens may blame the police, for example, for the rise in domestic violence or cybercrime. Further, policing during this period requires maintaining physical distance from citizens and wearing protective gear, which, as noted above, may make the police appear less friendly and accessible (Lum et al., 2020). Finally, the specific regulations enforced by the police, such as stay-at-home orders and limitations on daily activities, as well as some of the measures taken to enforce them (e.g. intrusive technologies), may be perceived as a severe breach of civil liberties (Jackson et al., 2020; Reicher and Stott, 2020; Yesberg et al., 2020). Although the police are 'only the messenger', enforcing such orders has led to negative police-citizen encounters (Neyroud, 2020). In Israel, the prohibition to spend recreation time in parks and beaches led to several violent clashes between officers and citizens (Staff, 2020). Such negative encounters, and particularly their publicity in the media and social networks, may significantly undermine the image of the police.

At the same time, similar to policing other emergencies, public attitudes towards the police may improve during the pandemic, because the police dedicate much time and effort to the issue many citizens find most troubling. By enforcing social distancing, the police may be perceived as caring for the health and welfare of community members, particularly the elderly and other populations at risk of infection. In other words, their actions suggest 'trustworthy motives', an important component of the procedural justice model, which has been consistently found to be the primary predictor of trust in the police (Jackson and Bradford, 2010; Tyler and Huo, 2002). Public support for the police during this period may further improve as a result of the general sense of cohesion in the face of an emergency or threat, as reviewed above (Clements, 2020).

These conflicting hypotheses gave rise to this study, in which we examine the expectations and views of majority communities in Israel (non-
Orthodox Jews) in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. We focus both on attitudes related specifically to the role of the police during the emergency situation (expectations and perceptions of the costs; e.g. Jonathan and Weisburd, 2010; Perry and Jonathan-Zamir, 2014) and on ‘traditional’ attitudes deriving from the process-based model of regulation (e.g. Bradford, 2014; Cherney and Murphy, 2013): perceived police effectiveness, trust in the police, and willingness to cooperate. We provide context to pandemic-related views by comparing them to more general attitudes towards the police (unrelated to the pandemic). Where possible, we also provide a comparison to similar attitudes concerning policing terrorism, which were expressed by majority communities in Israel in 2008 (Jonathan and Weisburd, 2010).

Method

Study context

Policing in Israel is similar in many ways to other policing contexts in the West. A thorough review on the Israel Police (Israel’s national police agency), its history, structure, and functions, as well as the ways in which Israeli policing resembles and differs from other policing contexts, can be found elsewhere (e.g. Jonathan-Zamir and Harpaz, 2018; Jonathan-Zamir et al., 2015b, 2019; Weisburd et al., 2009). What is important to note here is that, as detailed below, during the COVID-19 pandemic the IP followed similar protocols to those utilized in the USA and Europe (Bar-Tzvi, 2020; Lum et al., 2020; Neyroud, 2020). While some emergency regulations were issued in Israel earlier than in other countries or were more severe, by the time the survey was conducted (6–8 April, see below) the situation in Israel in terms of the emergency orders in place and their enforcement was similar to that of many Western democracies (Hirsch, 2020).

The first infection with the Coronavirus in Israel was announced on 27 February 2020, and the number of infected individuals reached 16,237 by May 4 (YNET, 2020). Emergency orders were first issued on 15 March. They required all citizens to stay at home with the exception of work defined as ‘essential’, and for the purpose of purchasing food or medicine, or receiving medical treatment. Schools and non-essential businesses were shut down, and Israeli citizens returning from abroad were required to self-quarantine. These regulations were imposed by the police. For example, home visits were made to ensure self-quarantine; the police set roadblocks on main highways and patrolled inner cities to enforce stay at home orders; and individuals caught in violation of the orders were sent home and/or fined. Fines were also issued if non-essential businesses were opened and to citizens who were caught without a face mask in public. Between 15 March and 22 April, the IP issued ~46,000 Coronavirus-related fines (Greintzeig, 2020).

During the survey period, the IP was in the process of preparing for a large-scale, three-day lockdown (7–10 April 2020) during the Passover holiday, an important Jewish holiday observed by the majority of Jewish families in Israel (Ministry of Health press release, 2020). Officials from the Ministry of Health were concerned that extended families would get together and significantly increase the spread of the virus. Thus, during the holiday, citizens were instructed to stay at home, all stores (including grocery stores and pharmacies) were closed, roadblocks were set on all major highways, and over 1,200 fines were issued for lockdown violations (e.g. Blumenthal, 2020; Jaffe-Hoffman and Ahronheim, 2020; Kaplan-Sommer, 2020). This was the first lockdown of this magnitude to ever take place in Israel and the first to affect majority communities. Thus, our survey was carried out during the peak of the pandemic and enforcement of emergency orders.

Participants

As noted above, this study focuses on the majority, non-Orthodox Jewish community. We clearly
recognize the importance of examining the views of minority communities (e.g. Orthodox Jews and Arabs), particularly given a history of tension between these communities and the police (e.g. Hasisi and Weitzer, 2007; Henderson et al., 2006), and initial resistance in Orthodox communities to the emergency orders (Halbfinger, 2020). Unfortunately, this was not possible in this study because these sectors are not well represented in web-based survey platforms like the one used here (see below), and it was not possible to supplement these data with a telephone survey, as the infrastructure for such surveys was shut down during the pandemic.

Thus, our sample included 1,575 adult (18+), non-Orthodox Jews. Table 1 presents the characteristics of this sample in comparison with the population of Israeli, adult, non-Orthodox Jews, as obtained from the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS). As can be seen in Table 1, our sample closely mirrors the population from which it was drawn. It does appear, however, to be more educated at the non-academic levels: in our sample, only 10% reported 12 years of education or less, compared to 25% in the population. Similarly, while in our sample 22% reported having non-academic higher education, only 7% reported this level of education in the population. We attribute this gap to measurement differences: the education categories in our sample are based on self-reports and include education in progress. In contrast, CBS data are based on official records—each category only includes those who have formally completed their degree. Thus, we expect that the actual gap in education between our sample and the population from which it was drawn is smaller than it appears. We should also note that ‘non-Orthodox’ in our sample is based on self-definition (participants were asked to rank their level of religiosity, ranging from ‘secular’ to ‘Orthodox’), while CBS measures religiosity according to the school system attended by the individual (secular, religious, or Orthodox), which may also contribute to apparent differences between the sample and population. Nevertheless, the data in Table 1 indicate that our sample is highly similar to the population of non-Orthodox, adult, Israeli Jews in terms of personal status, gender, age, and country of origin.

The survey instrument
The survey used for this study included a total of 64 items, most in the form of statements which respondents were asked to rank on a scale ranging from 1 (‘strongly disagree’) to 5 (‘strongly agree’). In line with the goal of this study, here we focus on the 16 statements that capture expectations from the police during the pandemic, or ‘classic’ attitudes towards the police (perceived effectiveness, trust in the police, and willingness to cooperate), both generally and in the context of the present crisis situation.

Most statements were designed based on previous surveys carried out both in Israel and elsewhere.1 Questions concerning expectations from the police during the COVID-19 pandemic were adopted from previous studies on policing emergencies (Jonathan and Weisburd, 2010; Perry et al., 2017). They inquired about what the IP should be doing during this period (item 1); the way emergency regulations should be enforced (items 2 and 3); and the possible costs that policing the crisis may entail (items 7 and 10). Statements capturing the perceived effectiveness of the IP inquired about police success in handling crime and disorder (items 4 and 5; adopted from Jonathan-Zamir and Weisburd, 2013), and in addressing pandemic-related duties (item 6). Trust in the police was measured using concepts such as ‘dishonesty’ and ‘integrity’ (items 8–11; adopted from Jonathan-Zamir and Weisburd, 2013; Perry et al., 2017). Cooperation with the police was

1 Israeli studies, such as Jonathan-Zamir and Weisburd (2013) and Perry et al. (2017), often rely on questionnaires designed and validated in English-speaking countries, while making minimal necessary adaptations (e.g. Gau, 2011; Reisig and Lloyd, 2009; Sunshine and Tyler, 2003; Tyler, 2002).
measured using willingness to report various types of crime and suspicious activities (items 12–16; see Jonathan-Zamir and Weisburd, 2013). In terms of order, because we did not want general evaluations of the police to be tainted by a particular context, respondents were first asked about the police in general and only then presented with the items concerning the pandemic.

Procedure
The survey was administrated between 6 and 8 April 2020, by ‘Midgam Project Web Panel’—an online survey company based in Israel and frequently used by social scientists (e.g. Gubler et al., 2015; Schori-Eyal et al., 2015). Panelists for ‘Midgam’ are recruited and registered online, and complete a socio-demographic questionnaire that includes personal information such as age, gender, education, employment status, religion, and political proclivities. The participants for this study were sampled out of the approximately 91,000 registered panellists, using stratified sampling by quotas of gender and age based on CBS data. All participants received a small compensation for the

Table 1: Sample characteristics

| Variable         | Study sample (N = 1,575) | Population of Israeli, adult, non-Orthodox Jews (N = 3,468,661)a |
|------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Personal Status  |                          |                                                                   |
| Single:          | 34.5%                    | Single: 29.4%                                                     |
| Married:         | 52.9%                    | Married: 57.6%                                                    |
| Separated/ Divorced: | 11.3%                     | Separated/ Divorced: 10.1%                                        |
| Widowed:         | 1.3%                     | Widowed: 2.9%                                                     |
| Gender           |                          |                                                                   |
| Female:          | 53.1%                    | Female: 50.60%                                                    |
| Male:            | 46.9%                    | Male: 49.40%                                                      |
| Age              |                          |                                                                   |
| Average:         | 43.55                    | Average: 44.75                                                    |
| Median:          | 42                       | Median: 43                                                        |
| SD:              | 16.03                    | SD: 19.25                                                         |
| Age group        |                          |                                                                   |
| 18–24:           | 13.3%                    | 18–24: 14.1%                                                      |
| 25–29:           | 11%                      | 25–29: 9.7%                                                       |
| 30–34:           | 10.5%                    | 30–34: 10%                                                       |
| 35–39:           | 10.9%                    | 35–39: 9.7%                                                      |
| 40–44:           | 8.6%                     | 40–44: 9.5%                                                      |
| 45–49:           | 8.1%                     | 45–49: 8.5%                                                      |
| 50–54:           | 7.6%                     | 50–54: 7.3%                                                      |
| 55–59:           | 9.1%                     | 55–59: 7.1%                                                      |
| 60–64:           | 7.3%                     | 60–64: 7.3%                                                      |
| 65–69:           | 7.6%                     | 65–69: 7.2%                                                      |
| 70–74:           | 5.9%                     | 70–74: 5.6%                                                      |
| 75+:             | 0%                       | 75+: 4.1%                                                        |
| Educationb       |                          |                                                                   |
| 12 School years or less: | 10.2%                    | 12 School years or less: 24.6%                                    |
| High school diploma: | 18%                      | High school diploma: 21.2%                                       |
| Non-academic higher education: | 22%                       | Non-academic higher education: 6.7%                              |
| BA:              | 21.7%                    | BA: 20%                                                           |
| MA:              | 12.6%                    | MA: 10.9%                                                         |
| Doctorate or equivalent: | 1.3%                    | Doctorate or equivalent: .9%                                     |
| Country of Birth |                          |                                                                   |
| Israel:          | 77.7%                    | Israel: 73.6%                                                     |
| Other:           | 22.3%                    | Other: 26.4%                                                      |

*a Obtained from the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS).

b ‘Non-Orthodox’ was self-defined in the study sample, but defined by school in the CBS data.

Sample categories include self-reporting of those studying for a degree; CBS data only include those who have completed a degree.

2 For further information on the survey platform, see https://www.midgampanel.com/clients/index.asp.
completion of the survey directly from ‘Midgam’, which ensured their anonymity to the researchers.

The survey began with a standard consent form explaining the purpose of the study, expected duration, and the identity of the researchers. Participants were assured that the survey is anonymous and voluntary, and they may cease participation at any time and for any reason. Out of 1,798 complete questionnaires, we excluded 223 because they were filled out within five minutes or less, which in our judgement indicated inattentiveness. This process resulted in the final sample of 1,575 questionnaires.

Analytical strategy

In this article, we focus on views and expectations from the police during the COVID-19 pandemic, and thus focus on 16 questions that either measure these views directly or provide context by measuring similar, but more general evaluations of the police unrelated to the present situation. We also consider pandemic-related attitudes in relation to attitudes towards the police in the context of a different type of crisis—terrorism/security threats (Jonathan and Weisburd, 2010). We clearly recognize that these attitudes were measured over a decade ago, but nevertheless view the comparison as useful because in both situations, majority communities in Israel provided their views and expressed expectations from the IP in times of immediate crisis or threat, where the police played a major role in handling the situation. Moreover, as reviewed above, our hypotheses about public responses to the police during the pandemic draw, in large part, from the literature on policing emergencies, including terrorism (e.g. Perry & Jonathan-Zamir, 2014). Below, we present responses to specific items organized by the four main themes of the survey: general expectations from the police during the pandemic (Table 2); evaluations of police effectiveness (Table 3); trust in the police (Table 4); and willingness to report violations of the emergency regulations (Table 5). Survey items are numbered for convenience.

Findings

Public expectations: role and enforcement

As can be seen from item 1 in Table 2, the vast majority of respondents (70%) believe that during the pandemic, the police should focus primarily on Coronavirus-related duties. These views are understandable given item 2, which shows that less than half believe that most citizens would comply with the emergency regulations without enforcement. Similarly, as little as 15% posit that the police should be forgiving and tolerate violations of the emergency regulations, while nearly 65% disagree (item 3).

Perceived police effectiveness

Responses in Table 2 suggest general support for police focusing on enforcing the Coronavirus

Table 2: Expectations from the police during the COVID-19 pandemic

| Survey item                                                                 | Agree + Strongly Agree (%) | Neither agree nor disagree (%) | Disagree + Strongly Disagree (%) |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. During the coronavirus crisis, it is right and just that the Israel Police would focus primarily on enforcing the emergency regulations. (N = 1,563) | 69.8                       | 20.3                          | 9.9                             |
| 2. Most citizens would comply with the emergency regulations even without enforcement (N = 1,557). | 43.5                       | 23.2                          | 33.3                            |
| 3. The Israel Police should treat violators of the coronavirus emergency regulations with forgiveness (N = 1,566). | 15.2                       | 20.5                          | 64.3                            |
emergency regulations, and, indeed, by the time the survey took place, the police have been doing so for about three weeks. But have they been successful? Table 3 reveals that over 60% believe that the answer is yes (item 6). Interestingly, assessments of effectiveness are much lower (47.7%; 35.4%) when asked about ‘ordinary’ policing unrelated to the COVID-19 pandemic (items 4, 5).

Does success in handling pandemic-related tasks come at the expense of crime control? Jonathan and Weisburd (2010) found 66.3% agreement with the statement ‘Handling terrorism threats hampers other police duties, such as property crimes, violence, drugs and traffic’, while 18.12% disagreed. Item 7 reveals nearly 52% agreement with this statement in the context of the Coronavirus crisis, and 19% disagreement. Thus, citizens appear to recognize the price of police focusing on an immediate emergency, although fewer believe this to be the case now than it was in the context of policing terrorism a decade ago.

**Trust in the police**

Recent surveys in Israel identify low levels of trust in the IP among the majority Jewish population. Trust is lower than it was two decades ago and is low in comparison with both other public institutions in Israel (Smith and Arian, 2006; Yogev, 2010) and other Western democracies (Jackson et al., 2011). Thus, we were not surprised to find that 40% of respondents agree that police officers are often dishonest, while only 24% disagreed (Table 4, item 8). At the same time, when focusing on the pandemic emergency regulations, 60% believe that the police would enforce them with integrity, while only 16% disagreed (item 9). What appears to be improved trust in the police in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic is further supported by responses to items 10 and 11: less than one-fifth of respondents believe that pandemic-related enforcement undermines the relationship between the police and the public, while over half disagree (item 10). Jonathan and Weisburd (2010) found that nearly 35% agreed that ‘Dealing with terrorism negatively affects the relationship between the police and the public’, while nearly 39% agreed. Clearly, there is more agreement that enforcing the COVID-19 emergency orders does not hamper police–community relations. What is more, over 40% state that police function during the pandemic improved their trust in the IP (item 11).

**Willingness to report regulation violations/crime**

The vast literature on police legitimacy links trust to willingness to cooperate with the police in various ways, including reporting crime (e.g. Sunshine and Tyler, 2003; Tyler, 1990, 2008, 2011). Thus, we were not surprised to find that 40% of respondents agree that police officers are often dishonest, while only 24% disagreed (Table 4, item 8). At the same time, when focusing on the pandemic emergency regulations, 60% believe that the police would enforce them with integrity, while only 16% disagreed (item 9). What appears to be improved trust in the police in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic is further supported by responses to items 10 and 11: less than one-fifth of respondents believe that pandemic-related enforcement undermines the relationship between the police and the public, while over half disagree (item 10). Jonathan and Weisburd (2010) found that nearly 35% agreed that ‘Dealing with terrorism negatively affects the relationship between the police and the public’, while nearly 39% agreed. Clearly, there is more agreement that enforcing the COVID-19 emergency orders does not hamper police–community relations. What is more, over 40% state that police function during the pandemic improved their trust in the IP (item 11).

**Table 3:** Perceived police effectiveness during the COVID-19 pandemic

|                                       | Agree + Strongly Agree (%) | Neither agree nor disagree (%) | Disagree + Strongly Disagree (%) |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| **General evaluations:**              |                             |                                |                                  |
| 4. The police efficiently handles its task in my area of residence (N =1,493). | 47.4                         | 29.9                           | 22.7                             |
| 5. The Israel Police has shown many successes in handling crime in recent years (N =1,497). | 35.4                         | 39.1                           | 25.5                             |
| **Pandemic period:**                 |                             |                                |                                  |
| 6. The Israel Police is successfully handling the tasks it faces during the coronavirus crisis (N =1,523). | 62.2                         | 27                             | 10.8                             |
| 7. Police handling of the coronavirus hampers its other missions, such as property offences, violence, drugs, and traffic (N =1,491). | 51.6                         | 29.4                           | 19                               |
2009; Murphy et al., 2014). Given unusual trust in the police in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, we expected more willingness to report violations of the emergency regulations to the police. However, Table 5 reveals that this is not necessarily the case. Over 80% of respondents indicate that they would likely call the police in various ‘ordinary’ circumstances: witnessing a serious crime (item 12); finding an object suspected to be a terrorist explosive device (item 13); and witnessing dangerous or suspicious activity in the neighborhood (item 14). These figures drop below 70% when respondents are asked about violations of the Coronavirus emergency regulations (items 15 and 16). Nevertheless, these figures still indicate that the large majority is willing to report such violations.

**Discussion**

Months of emergency orders, such as stay at home and lockdowns, have presented a new challenge to citizens and police alike. Reports in the media and social networks voice endless concern about the measures taken to enforce these emergency regulations. However, respondents indicate that the large majority is willing to report such violations.

**Table 5:** Willingness to report violations of emergency regulations

| What is the likelihood that you would take each of the following actions: | Likely + very likely (%) | Do not know/not sure (%) | Unlikely + very unlikely (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| General: | | | |
| 12. Call the police if you witnessed a serious crime (N = 1,566). | 84.6 | 9.1 | 6.3 |
| 13. Call the police if you saw a suspicious object (N = 1,572)a | 86.7 | 8.6 | 4.7 |
| 14. Call the police if you saw a dangerous/suspicious activity in your neighbourhood (N = 1,570). | 81 | 12.5 | 6.5 |
| Pandemic period: | | | |
| 15. Report a violation of self-quarantine by an individual suspected to be infected with the coronavirus (N = 1,559). | 67.9 | 17.3 | 14.8 |
| 16. Report a neighbour violating the emergency regulations of the coronavirus crisis (N = 1,555). | 66.8 | 17.9 | 15.3 |

*a'Suspicious object’ in this context refers to a suspected terrorist explosive device.
orders—from fines to phone surveillance—and their harmful effects on police–community relations (Palmer, 2020). The literature on policing crises suggests a bidirectional hypothesis: on the one hand, the cost of policing the pandemic, including less resources available for ‘ordinary’ policing tasks; physical distance from citizens and the use of protective gear; and the enforcement of unusual orders that may be perceived as unnecessarily harsh or in violation of citizen rights, may undermine public support for the police. On the other hand, police investment in what appears to be the issue citizens find most troubling, alongside a natural tendency to unite in the face of threat, should encourage support for the police during the pandemic. The findings of this study support the second hypothesis, reflecting favourable attitudes towards the police in the context of handling the pandemic. Despite recognition of the price this new role entails, most participants support police focus on enforcing the emergency regulations; perceive the police to be effective in handling their new, pandemic-related tasks; display more trust in the police; and are willing to report violations of the emergency regulations.

One possible explanation relates to the changes the pandemic has brought to most citizens’ routine. If citizens largely stay at home, then it is reasonable to assume that they would be less aware of the possible costs of enforcing the emergency regulations in terms of other policing tasks. For example, if citizens are currently not driving to work or visiting shopping centres, they may not be aware that the police are paying less attention to traffic problems or street crime. With regard to police–community relations, it has been argued that policing terrorism hampers the relationship between the police and the general public (due to militarization and a less service-oriented approach), but that these effects are particularly salient in minority communities perceived to be associated with the source of the threat (Jonathan and Weisburd, 2010; Perry and Hasisi, 2018). Policing the Coronavirus emergency does not entail conflict with a minority sector, which explains why it is perceived to be less harmful in terms of police–community relationship. Finally, it should be noted that while the survey was conducted three weeks after emergency orders were put in place, it is possible that the costs of policing the emergency were not yet evident. As noted earlier, in the short term social cohesion may mask the costs of policing a crisis (Jonathan, 2010).

Surprisingly, while trust in the police and perceptions of effectiveness and integrity improved during the pandemic, participants appear to be less willing to report regulation violations compared to other types of ‘ordinary’ suspicious activity. We suspect that while contacting the police regarding crime or terrorism is a well-established habit, it is possible that violations of the pandemic emergency orders are not yet perceived as a ‘crime’. This proposition is further supported by the prevailing belief that compliance with the emergency regulations cannot be achieved without police enforcement. In other words, little acceptance of the emergency regulations as ‘the law’ appears to be behind both the belief that the public would not voluntarily comply with the new
regulations and the lack of willingness to automatically report violations of these regulations. If this is indeed the case, clear and consistent communication with citizens explaining what is expected and why would be essential in the long run to the internalization of such regulations (Reicher and Stott, 2020).

Nevertheless, it is clear that the attitudes towards the police reported in our survey reflect broad support for the police during the pandemic. These results are in line with other, recent findings. A survey of the general public carried out in Israel between 30 April and 3 May 2020 found that 51% agreed that during the Coronavirus crisis, the relationship between the police and the public improved (Hermann and Anabi, 2020). A survey conducted in the UK during 3–5 April revealed that the majority of participants (74%) support the approach taken by the police in enforcing the COVID-19 lockdown (Clements, 2020).

This study is not without limitations. First, the survey reported here was conducted at the peak of the COVID-19 crisis in Israel, when emergency regulations, but also a sense of social cohesion and shared goals, dominated public discourse. Additional waves are required to determine the long-term effects of policing the pandemic on public attitudes, particularly given the literature suggesting that the effects of crises vary across the short and long term (e.g. Jonathan, 2010). Second, the present survey only reflects the views of the majority sector in Israel. Similar to minorities elsewhere, minority communities in Israel not only have a history of complicated relationships with the police, but also responded differently to the present crisis (Hermann and Anabi, 2020), and thus require a focused study.

Finally, conducting the survey at the peak of the pandemic under a strict lockdown made telephone surveys impossible and demanded the use of an online survey platform based on registered panellists. While this methodology has become common in the study of public attitudes towards the police (e.g. Gerber and Jackson, 2013; Tyler et al., 2014; Hamm et al., 2017; Pedersen et al., 2017; Pickett et al., 2018), it relies on nonprobability convenience samples. As noted earlier, the sample of this study closely resembles the population of adult, non-Orthodox Jews in Israel in terms of personal status, gender, age, and country of origin, but the observed difference in education may be partly attributed to the non-random sampling procedure. At the same time, it should be noted that studies often find a negative relationship between education and trust in the police (e.g. Brown and Benedict, 2002; Tyler, 2005; MacDonald and Stokes, 2006), meaning that if participants in our sample were indeed more educated than the population they are meant to represent, we can expect that support for the police among a random sample would have been even stronger.

Conclusions

The findings of this study suggest that similar to other emergencies, the police in Israel enjoyed a rise in public trust and support during the COVID-19 pandemic period. However, it is important to conclude on a more cautious note. As reviewed earlier, findings from the literature on policing terrorism in Israel suggest that while support for the police improved for a short, limited period of time, in the long run evaluations dropped and eventually reached levels that were lower than those measured prior to the crisis (Jonathan, 2010). Over time, as the costs of policing the pandemic become prominent, social cohesion fades, and new invasive enforcement strategies that seemed inevitable at the peak of the crisis appear extreme, unnecessary, and even undemocratic, the police may lose the support they have gained. Indeed, in the UK, public support for the police has already begun to erode (Clements, 2020). Thus, it is important that during crisis situations (including the present pandemic), the police do not take the flattering public support for granted, acknowledge that the rise in trust develops, in large part, from the emergency atmosphere,
and keep in mind that in the long run, public support depends on hard work in terms of procedural fairness, accountability, and effectiveness (De Cremer and Tyler, 2007; Tyler and Huo, 2002). As recently suggested by Palmer, ‘As the pandemic continues, and it may get worse, pandemic policing might head in directions the broader population has never experienced…we need to reinforce the notion that policing by consent, with transparency and accountability, is vital’ (Palmer, 2020).

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