Trust, Risk and Public Willingness to Cooperate with the Police Evidence from a Mixed-Methods Study

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Objective: Previous research into public trust in the police has focused on cooperativeness as an outcome massively influenced by trust. Nevertheless, our understanding of the relationship between different types of trust and citizens' propensity to support policing remains insufficient, especially regarding personal risk. This study examines how perceptions of the police as fair, effective and community-oriented organisation influence cooperation. It also explores whether trust remains a predictor in instances where assistance involves higher personal or social costs.

Methodology: A mixed-methods approach was used, including a survey of 319 residents, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and structural equation modelling (SEM), and follow-up focus groups to identify the barriers residents encountered when trying to collaborate in situations involving heightened risk. EFA is a method of uncovering hidden patterns in people's responses. When a questionnaire contains many items, the answers often cluster together in meaningful ways. EFA identifies these clusters and shows which items belong to the same underlying concept. Structural equation modelling (SEM) shows how different concepts are connected, which concepts lead to specific outcomes, and how strong each connection is. The quantitative analysis found three dimensions of trust: procedural justice, distributive justice and police effectiveness, alongside community commitment. Cooperation proved to be a two-factor structure consisting of obedience and voluntary assistance to the police.

Findings: Trust was only a significant predictor of cooperative behaviour in low-risk situations involving minor incidents or transgressions, and where little personal vulnerability was evident. Willingness to report violations of more serious

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rules (assaults, drug sales or corruption) did not scale similarly with trust. Common barriers related to fear of reprisal, lack of trust in the system and possible social or professional consequences were supported by qualitative data.

Value: This research demonstrates that trust can promote cooperation, but only when individuals do not feel personally vulnerable. It highlights the need for contemporary campaigns that promote secure, responsible institutional environments to increase public participation.

Keywords: trust in the police, procedural justice, distributive justice, police effectiveness and community commitment, public cooperation

Trust – A multidimensional concept

There are many aspects of trust that have been theorised, described, modelled and measured over time (Lewicki–Brinsfield 2012). A large amount of work has been done on defining trust, distinguishing between its types and studying in what situations it becomes important and why. Over the last fifty years, a plethora of definitions and theoretical approaches have been developed by scholars to understand the fundamental role that trust plays in social relationships (Höppner 2009).

Despite this level of scholarly consideration, there is no universal agreement on what constitutes trust, its salient attributes, or even its essence (Khodyakov 2007; Büssing 2002). This enduring debate is grounded in the multiple dimensions of trust (Kappmeier et al. 2021; Wilkins 2018). Trust can be understood as benevolence, belief in or expectation of reliability, a predisposition towards beneficial action, or a combination of these. All of these interpretations are valid and open to different interpretations (Hermerén 2017).

Trust may be established among members of different groups, among family members and between citizens and agencies or organisations, whether private or public (Morrone et al. 2009). Boda et al. (2018: 6) point out that there are many factors that affect trust:

- rational (for example, based on previous experience)
- emotional (rooted in the character of the trusting person or the appealing features of the person or entity who is trusted, etc.)
- moral (for example, evaluating the fairness of the situation)
- individual (stemming from the individual's personal socialisation or community membership, etc.)
- macro-level (involving the pervasiveness of norm compliance in a society)

One of the well-known and widely accepted definitions of trust is found in the literature on organisational behaviour. In 1995, Roger C. Mayer, James H. Davis and F. David Schoorman (Mayer et al. 1995) authored the fundamental text *An Integrative Model of Organizational Trust.* Their model integrated theoretical and empirical approaches within a comprehensive framework, serving as a reference tool for research across disciplines (Ala-Luopa 2022; Bekmamedova et al. 2008).

Mayer et al. (1995) define trust as "the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party". Their model emphasises three major characteristics that impact whether an individual will trust another (Lee et al. 2022):

- ability–competence – the belief that the trusted party is competent at accomplishing certain tasks
- integrity – the belief that the trustee and trustor share a common set of values
- benevolence–altruism – trustworthiness in terms of the extent to which a trustee is believed to have good intentions toward the trustor

These dimensions have been extended or adapted by several authors. For instance, Sekhon et al. (2014) identified five dimensions: Expertise and Competence; Integrity and Consistency; Communication, Shared Values and Concerns; and Benevolence. Robbins (2021) also suggested that there are five components: Integrity; Competency; Consistency; Loyalty; and Openness. Höppner (2009) identified eight relevant competence domains: Honesty; Openness; Fairness; Reliability; Reciprocity; Respectfulness; Commitment; and Shared Interests. Some authors have identified significantly more; Seppänen et al. (2007), for instance, identified 22, while McEvily and Tortoriello (2011) identified as many as 38.

The following overview summarises some of the most important definitions of trust. Comparing them demonstrates that trust most often refers to the trustor's expectations regarding the trustee's future behaviour:

- "a generalised expectancy held by an individual that the word, promise, oral or written statement of another individual or group can be relied on" (Rotter 1980: 1)
- "confident positive expectations regarding another's conduct" (Lewicki et al. 1998: 439)
- "psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behaviour of another" (Rousseau et al. 1998: 395)
- "the expectation of other persons' goodwill and benign intent, implying that in certain situations those persons will place the interests of others before their own" (Keser 2003: 500)
- "a psychological state involving positive confident expectations about the competence, benevolence, integrity and predictability of another person and the willingness to act on the basis of these expectations; issues of trust arise in contexts involving risk, vulnerability, uncertainty and interdependence; trust expectations are created primarily by the interaction of the perceived qualities of the trustee and contextual factors in play when trust decisions are made" (Adams–Webb 2003: 38)
- "the belief that others will not deliberately or knowingly do us harm if they can avoid it, and will look after our interests, if this is possible" (Delhey–Newton 2005: 311)
- "a feeling that the entity being trusted will act in the best interests of the trustor and will be honest in what was indicated/promised" (Haynes et al. 2020: 626)

The Police and the issue of trust: History and concepts

Public trust in the police has long been a significant concern for policing organisations and governments across Europe and elsewhere (Schaap 2020; Wu et al. 2012). The early sociological analyses of policing were also developed concomitantly with a period of radical social change and political anti-establishment movements across the Western world in the 1960s. Social and political tensions had spilt onto the streets, manifesting in increased crime rates – violent crimes, in particular, had soared (Worrall 2014; Tonry 2014). In the U.S., robberies increased almost threefold over that period (Uchida 2004).

Increasing public fears about crime and disorder caused trust in state institutions, including law enforcement, to waver. As a visible part of the state, the police were heavily scrutinised and politicised (Staubli 2017).

Academia responded with a wave of research that further scrutinised the institutions and behaviour of the police (Staubli 2017). Some researchers argued that police practices at the time threatened the rule of law (Mouhanna 2017). In the wake of the 1968 movements, however, by the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s, there was a greater demand for more participatory and cooperative approaches to government by civil society – a 'cooperative state' (Pusca et al. 2017).

This intellectual and civic transition produced community policing, a practice designed to adapt to new standards of democratic policing. Its intention was to bring the public and police closer together (Ren et al. 2005) and, therefore, increase public satisfaction (Wehrman – De Angelis 2011). Traditional police tactics, it appeared, were inadequate; they sometimes produced not less but more crime, and on occasion even added to public fear and social tension (Neild 1998).

Community policing, therefore, prompted one of the most radical shifts in policing paradigms in modern times (Murray 2005). It moved from a reactive, enforcement-based model to a holistic, collaborative one, grounded in trust and transparency.

Throughout Europe, community policing has manifested in manifold ways, depending on the historical and organisational environments in the respective countries (van der Giessen et al. 2017). While the specifics may differ, several key principles are widely accepted: the law enforcement and citizens work together to address local problems, such as solving disputes, helping victims, ensuring road safety, managing disorder and reducing crime, with the aim of improving the quality of life (Pusca et al. 2017; Adams et al. 2002; Terpstra 2010; Cordner 2010). Community policing is based on public trust. Trust is what makes cooperation possible; it also allows legitimacy to be maintained and social order sustained.

Trust in the Police

In advanced liberal democracies, the police are the most visible and symbolic face of state power (Fleming–McLaughlin 2010; Kirmizidağ 2015). As such, public trust in the police is an important gauge of how citizens view not only the legitimacy and authority of the policing institution but also, more generally, the state's power (Cao et al. 1998). This

is especially important, given that citizens often lack the technical knowledge of police work to assess such performance directly. Instead, their judgments tend to be based on either limited personal experience or hearsay, which provides little information about the nature and purpose of police work (Jackson et al. 2012). The concept of trust in the police can be defined as:

- "the degree to which community members believe that the police will share their priorities, act competently, behave dependably, and treat them with respect" (Stoutland 2001: 227 quoted in Pryce–Chenane 2021: 811)
- a condition in which individuals believe that police services are grounded in fairness and that police officers prioritise the interests and safety of the community (Nix et al. 2015)
- "the belief that the police, as legal authorities, will carry out their duties in a manner consistent with societal normative expectations connected with their roles" (Bello 2025: 639)
- the public's trust that the police (and the justice system) are capable of maintaining their institutional integrity and meeting public expectations (Murphy et al. 2014) by upholding the existing social order and norms, and ensuring public safety (Goldsmith 2005)

Building trust between the police and the community requires ongoing alignment with community expectations, the provision of quality services and transparency regarding shared objectives (Kääriäinen 2008). Trust, similar to public opinion, is more than just a measure of efficiency. What citizens want is to feel that they are understood, that the police are treating them fairly and with respect, that the police are speaking openly about issues, and that they are given opportunities to provide feedback (Jackson–Bradford 2010).

The level of public trust in the police affects the resources required to maintain public order and peace, as well as the police's ability to prevent crime and detect offenders (Barton–Beynon 2015). Police organisations that have achieved a higher level of public trust can more easily attain their goals, as their tasks have gained legitimacy (Tyler–Fagan 2008). The primary role and functions of police forces in every country are to fight crime, maintain order, and protect public safety and peace (Schulhofer et al. 2011; Millie–Bullock 2012). However, ensuring that these duties are undertaken effectively and consistently depends greatly on the voluntary participation of society's members (Bello – John-Langba 2020). In this regard, the relationship between the police and the public becomes essential. The level of citizens' trust directly determines their willingness to cooperate with law enforcement in various forms, from everyday interactions to participation in the justice system. The following section outlines how citizens engage with the police and how trust shapes these interactions. Specifically, the different roles that citizens assume in relation to the police illustrate how deeply this trust permeates everyday policing practices and institutional cooperation (Brodeur 2017: 113):

- The citizens are police clients, either on an individual basis by calling the police or on a collective basis by making their service demands known through public consultations and the constitution of pressure groups that uphold, for instance, the rights of victims.

- They are the prime source of information for the police, and it is unlikely that this situation will be substantially reversed by surveillance technology.
- They provide vital assistance to the police through formal partnerships or through informal networks, influencing behaviour.
- Their role in court – as witnesses, jurors, or in other capacities – is also indispensable.

Summary of the study on the impact of trust in the police on the public's willingness to cooperate with the Police

Studies conducted over the past few decades have emphasised that trust is an important factor in determining whether residents will cooperate with the police. At the end of 2024, we conducted an in-depth empirical study of how citizens evaluate police performance across various areas and whether these evaluations influence their willingness to cooperate. The results of this study were presented in a scientific monograph that outlined the methodological framework and the effects and consequences for future work in police organisations.

Research framework and theoretical background

This study builds on the work of numerous scholars who have argued that the role of the police extends well beyond enforcement and that maintaining positive relationships with the public is essential for effective policing. Past research provides evidence that people are more likely to help solve crimes, report crimes, express support for law enforcement, act as witnesses, and obey the law when they trust the police. This is based on the perception that the police's efforts to provide good service to them and treat them fairly are satisfactory. In addition, we argue that these perceptions of effectiveness in policing must be reflected not only in attitudes towards the police generally but also in dimensions associated with procedural justice, certainty and consistency of treatment, as well as the belief that (police) officers genuinely hear what community members say and understand their problems.

Guided by these insights, we formulated the primary research hypothesis that individuals' willingness to cooperate with law enforcement correlates with their level of trust in the police. The aim of the research was to determine which dimensions of trust had the greatest impact on cooperation.

Methodological approach and research sample

The study adapted a survey instrument from prior research on police legitimacy and public trust. The original sample consisted of 365 participants; however, after strict data quality control, only questionnaires with no missing answers were retained. The final sample

included 319 participants, all of whom were from different age groups, educational levels and employment statuses.

The sample was fairly evenly distributed across the age and sex groups. The educational background was diverse, with a dominance of secondary and higher educational levels. Most respondents were employed, which shed valuable light on the views of people participating in regular work and social responsibilities concerning security.

The questionnaire consisted of several sets of statements measuring:

- perception of procedural justice
- perception of distributive justice
- perception of police effectiveness and community commitment
- willingness to comply with police demands
- willingness to assist the Police

Factor analysis – Understanding dimensions of trust and cooperation

We conducted an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) in the first stage of our analyses to determine the latent dimensions of trust and cooperation. The aim was not only to investigate whether the indicators are consistent with our theoretical framework and expectations, but also to establish which specific pattern(s) of associations would emerge in the Slovenian context that differed from those predicted by other theories. Although the questionnaire contains dozens of statements, we are primarily interested in identifying the core dimensions that influence people's perception of the police. Using EFA, we transformed many detailed impressions into fewer meaningful concepts, reducing complexity. For instance, people may distinguish clearly between how they are treated, how fairly the police act towards everyone, and how well the police do their job. It is only when we examine how answers cluster together across all respondents that this distinction becomes visible, rather than by looking at individual questions in isolation. Therefore, EFA offers more than just statistical tidiness; it provides a deeper understanding of public perceptions. The findings showed that trust in the police could be conceptualised as three fundamental dimensions:

Procedural justice: This dimension refers to experiences of respectful, fair and dignified treatment by police officers, including a general understanding that police perform their duties in a manner deemed just by members of the public. According to our results, beliefs about treatment quality and decision-making quality are bundled within this dimension, implying that participants perceive these two aspects as interrelated.

Distributive justice: This refers to the perception of fairness towards fellow community members, including fair treatment, the consistent application of laws and equal services at all levels. According to our results, distributive justice in Slovenia is clearly distinct from procedural justice. Respondents were able to distinguish between the two, viewing the fair provision of services primarily as a matter of how procedures are applied rather than as an issue of equitable distribution.

Police effectiveness and community commitment: This incorporates the expectation that the police will act efficiently and effectively in operational terms, for example, in response times, crime prevention, and the maintenance of law and order, as well as their ability to listen to and engage with the local community. It seems that residents regard police performance and community orientation as two interconnected aspects of a single dimension.

In terms of the dimensions of cooperation with the police, two factors were evident:

- obeying the police, which implies the duty to obey police commands
- assisting the police, which includes voluntarily reporting a crime or providing information about a criminal

Table 1: Community cooperation with the Police

	Factor	**Factor**
Statement	1	2
Obeying the police (Pryce et al. 2017)		
You should accept police decisions even if you think they are wrong.	0.584	
You should do what the police tell you to do even if you don't understand why the order was given.	0.795	
You should do what the police tell you to do even if you disagree with the given order.	0.898	
You should always do what the police tell you to do even if you don't like the way the police treat you.	0.853	
Assistance to the police (Buzarovska et al. 2014; own statements)		
Imagine that you were out and saw someone steal a wallet. What is the likelihood that you will call the police?		0.674
If the police were looking for witnesses in a case where someone's wallet was stolen, what is the likelihood that you will voluntarily provide information if you witnessed the theft?		0.780
Imagine that you are outside and see someone beating another person. What is the likelihood that you will call the police?		0.714
If you were to witness a fight and the police were looking for witnesses, what is the likelihood that you will voluntarily report what you saw?		0.741
If you witnessed a fight and the police were looking for eyewitnesses, what is the likelihood that you would voluntarily provide information?		0.813

	Factor	Factor
What is the likelihood that you will voluntarily provide information to the police if they were looking for eyewitnesses to a drug sale that you had witnessed?		< 0.5
Imagine that you have evidence that someone bribed a public official. What is the likelihood that you will report this to the police?		< 0.5
Imagine that you have evidence that someone bribed your supervisor. What is the likelihood that you will report this to the police?		< 0.5
Explained variance (in %) = 74.989	**47.989**	**27.000**

Source: compiled by the author

Hair et al. (2009) emphasise that standardised factor loadings should reach at least 0.5 to be considered acceptable, with values of 0.7 or higher indicating strong relationships between items and their underlying factors. In our study, three items fell below this threshold and did not align clearly with any trust dimension, so we excluded them from further modelling. Explained variance refers to the proportion of overall variation in people's answers that a model can account for. In our case, the two dimensions of cooperation, obedience and assistance, together account for around three-quarters of the variation in responses. This indicates that the model effectively captures public attitudes towards cooperating with the police. This suggests that the identified factors are meaningful and reflect genuine differences in how people perceive cooperation.

Structural Equation Modelling (SEM)

In the second part of our analysis, we used structural equation modelling (SEM) to examine how different aspects of trust influence an individual's willingness to cooperate with the police. SEM revealed the relationships between these concepts. It enables us to examine not only whether two factors are connected, but also the strength of their mutual influence. It enables us to answer a core question: Does greater trust in the police lead to a higher willingness to cooperate? SEM simultaneously tests and demonstrates the strength of relationships. It thus provides a clear picture of the dynamics between trust and cooperation.

The main research hypothesis concerns the influence of trust in the police on levels of cooperation. The final model shows that citizens' willingness to assist the police voluntarily is positively related to the three primary domains of trust: 1. perceived procedural fairness; 2. distributive justice; and 3. police effectiveness, combined with community commitment. Police effectiveness and community engagement were the best predictors of willingness to assist, whereas perceived procedural justice strongly predicted willingness

to share information. Cooperation was promoted by distributive justice, especially when the risks were minimal.

In the final structural model, three trust dimensions were found to be significantly related to aiding the police. However, this assistance was primarily of a less demanding nature (e.g. reporting witnessed crimes or acting as a witness). The model provided valuable practical insights: trust only increases people's willingness to cooperate in situations with low personal risk. People are more likely to aid the police when reporting minor incidents, such as minor thefts, if they believe the police will act fairly and effectively. However, this effect was not observed in types of cooperation that posed a greater risk to the individual or involved greater costs for others. In high-risk situations, trust no longer predicts cooperation. Even when people express trust in the police as an institution, fear of retaliation or exposure can counteract this. Structural equation modelling (SEM) clearly demonstrates this pattern: the effect of trust disappears in the most sensitive contexts.

Further inspection of whether higher confidence in the police drives an increased propensity to help across the board revealed that this is not universally true. Trust is a statistical predictor in all but two forms of assistance; however, trust did not matter when respondents were faced with providing information as witnesses to an assault and reporting drug sales. While these are a part of the general construct of "assistance to the police" factor analysis, they were not sensitive to changes in perceived trust in the structural model. This suggests that greater confidence in the police is not enough to encourage people to take such action, partly due to the increased personal danger or risk of identification.

The findings reveal that local residents' propensity to cooperate is highest when anticipated involvement does not entail substantial personal or social costs. Trust matters for cooperation only in actions that do not require significant risk or a great deal of personal exposure.

Results of the structural model are similar to those of earlier studies in Slovenia. Reisig et al. (2012) found that, for low-risk topics, participants mostly collaborated. Likewise, Meško et al. (2012) found that although trust in police encourages people to cooperate, the sense of duty involved (that is, the "respecting the decisions" of the police) was not statistically related to residents' propensity to cooperate.

Focus group results

Factor analysis revealed that three items within the "assistance to the police" factor had poor loadings, and it was not clear which of the emerging factors they would relate to. These items also had relatively low means, indicating disagreement among respondents and a limited likelihood of engaging in such behaviours. This pairing demonstrates a strong reluctance toward cooperation in certain (sensitive) and perhaps high-risk environments. The contingency contexts were: witnessing and reporting drug dealing, reporting the payment of a bribe to a public official, and a supervisor being bribed. Since it was not possible to quantify the reasons for the low willingness, we included a qualitative element in the 2025 research activity – focus groups. These scenarios were given to the

participants, and they had to explain what they could do and disclose their motivations for supporting (or not supporting) the police.

Focus groups complement statistical findings by providing a clearer insight into people's reasoning. Even though they generally trust the police, participants explained why they would not report drug dealing, violence, or corruption. Their explanations consistently pointed to:

- fear of retaliation or harm
- the need to protect family members
- anxiety about repercussions from superiors
- scepticism that reporting would lead to any further measures against the offenders

These contextual insights help us to understand the human logic behind the statistical patterns. While numbers show that trust does not predict cooperation in high-risk situations, focus groups reveal why: perceived danger, institutional uncertainty and social vulnerability can override even positive views of the police.

Dissemination about *Witnessing Drug Dealing:* Participants often spoke of their fear of reprisal. Knowing that drug dealing was linked to criminal organisations and dangerous people, many believed that reporting or passing on information would put themselves or their families at risk. There was also widespread concern about exposing family members, as people think not just of their own safety but also of that of partners, children and parents. Others disclosed that they would only help if doing so would prevent harm to a personal associate. This illustrates how the inclination to support the police in such situations may stem more from social bonds than from general confidence in the police or a sense of civic duty.

Reporting Bribery of a Public Official: Participants noted that, in these circumstances, "everyone was already talking about the lack of trust in the system". They felt that, while allegations of corruption seldom result in visible sanctions, the processes are also protracted and complex. This reinforces the view that reporting will not result in change and may expose the person to negative repercussions or stereotyping. Participants also raised the issue of "hidden connections", as well as networks of acquaintances that they believed gave certain people an advantage. These interpretations further reduce bystanders' incentive to report because they begin to question the impact of their own behaviour.

Reporting Supervisor Bribery: The greatest reluctance was observed when management had to be reported for corruption. The participants stressed that reporting someone they are directly dependent on is often fraught with the risk of job loss, reduced income or damage to one's career. Alongside economic implications, participants also emphasised the strong social pressures and informal relationships in workplaces where connections and hierarchy are closely interlinked. Reporting on a superior was portrayed as an act that invariably invites shunning, demotion or some form of payback. Participants also emphasised the impracticality of anonymous reporting in these situations and noted that the personal impact was very high.

At the focus group level, the findings are consistent with relevant international publications, e.g. in that the fear of retaliation plays a significant role in preventing victims

from reporting incidents to the police. In this vein, Clayman and Skinns (2012) argue that respondents assess whether assisting the police might put them at risk, and that cooperation becomes unlikely when the perceived risk is too high. If the risk is perceived as too high, cooperation is unlikely. They provide evidence of this practice in London: those concerned about the potential consequences were overwhelmingly unwilling to assist the police unless assured anonymity. Consequently, the fear of retaliation is a major barrier to reporting, particularly when it endangers oneself and one's family. Mbewu et al. (2021), Yoon (2015) and Perez-Vincent et al. (2024) highlight additional reporting barriers, including pessimistic doubt about the police from victims' and offenders' perspectives, an extensive and complex reporting process, and persistent fears for one's own safety. Fyfe and Sheptycki (2023) also emphasise that witness intimidation is a significant barrier to cooperation in both serious and organised crime.

Conclusion

The research develops a more nuanced perspective of the association between trust in the police and citizens' cooperation with law enforcement. Whereas past work has tended to find that trust is a key determinant of public engagement, the analysis here shows that this relationship is conditional rather than absolute. Each of the three trust dimensions discovered – procedural justice, distributive justice and police effectiveness with community commitment – all contribute heavily to cooperation. However, the impact of these findings is most significant in situations where individuals face minimal personal risk. In less serious cases, such as reporting minor crimes or exchanging trivial information, trust is a reliable indicator of cooperative behaviour that lends legitimacy to the police.

Conversely, the results suggest a clear threshold at which trust cannot trigger participation. In high-risk contexts, the influence of trust diminishes sharply. People become much more cautious about assisting when cooperation places a citizen at greater risk, as is often the case with issues involving violence, drugs and corruption. The fear of reprisal and mistrust in institutions, along with being susceptible to career or social consequences, can override even the best perceptions of the police. This behavioural threshold implies that the cooperation level is governed not only by a normative evaluation of the police's fairness and ability, but also by a more comprehensive evaluation of personal threat, social surroundings and perceived consequences of action.

The embedding of risk perceptions within the routine reasoning process is also enhanced by the incorporation of focus group data. The participants repeatedly referred to pressures and potential harms affecting their personal lives, families and work environments, demonstrating that the choice to cooperate is a matter of practical interpretation or situational response rather than a cognitive attitude. These results highlight the need for law enforcement agencies to strengthen witness protection measures, increase transparency in corruption cases, and develop reporting mechanisms that reduce personal risk. Future research needs to provide more evidence on how institutional safeguards, community ties and situational conditions interact to shape cooperation, especially when fear and uncertainty remain major barriers.

Taken together, these insights highlight a fundamental yet crucial truth: trust can facilitate cooperation, but it cannot overcome situations where individuals feel exposed or vulnerable. When the risks of assisting the police become too great, whether due to fear of retaliation, institutional uncertainty or potential social and professional consequences, even strong beliefs in the fairness and effectiveness of the police lose their motivational force. Therefore, the decision to cooperate depends not only on normative evaluations of policing but also on whether citizens feel safe enough to act. Without credible institutional safeguards and clear protections, trust is ineffective and cannot sustain public participation.

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