Trust in the Police in 16 European Countries : A Multilevel Analysis

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A Multilevel Analysis

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ABSTRACT

There is considerable variation in public trust towards the police in different European countries. Through multilevel analysis, the article explores what lies behind this variation. It first approaches the issue at the country level through factors related to the quality and structure of government. The quality of government is looked at and measured by examining corruption in government, and the structure of government by exploring the extent to which society invests its resources in public order and safety services. Here the assumptions are, first of all, that general corruption among public officials decreases public trust in the police and, second, that big investments in public order and safety institutions also decrease trust in the police. In addition, certain individual-level factors are identified that explain public trust in the police. Finally, empirical results are presented that corroborate the above assumptions: in particular, corruption in government strongly explains the country-level variation in public trust towards the police.

KEY WORDS

Comparative Research / Corruption / ESS / Social Capital / Trust in the Police / Welfare States.

Introduction

In recent years, there has been an exponential increase in research on trust as well as in the debate on social capital. Trust is one of the key concepts in

social capital, and the basic idea behind it is that citizens' trust in one another and in social institutions, together with well-functioning social networks, has many positive effects on well-being, from health and safety to the effectiveness of the economy and government (see e.g. Halpern 2005).

From the perspective of trust, the police constitute a societal institution that is extremely interesting, because the police have been entrusted with the power of exercising authority, by virtue of which the police also have the right to use force against citizens. Public trust is also important to the police force itself, particularly in democratic societies in which the police have to 'earn' legitimacy for their actions from citizens. From the point of view of effective police work, good and confidential relationships with citizens are of primary importance. However, as Andrew Goldsmith states in a recent article (Goldsmith 2005: 445), it is surprising how little research has been done on public trust in the police. His statement concerns theoretical discussion in particular, but empirical research too seems only now to be taking its first steps (see e.g. Stoutland 2001). Citizens' attitudes towards the police or their satisfaction with police work have been studied somewhat more (Engel 2005; Frank et al. 2005; Weitzer and Tuch 2005). However, the empirical research in the field seems to be concentrated mainly in the United States; moreover, international comparative research in the field is hard to find.

This article explores public trust in the police in the European context and in a comparative setting. In the European Union today, there are 25 very different societies, and although the task of the police in all these countries is basically the same – to protect citizens against crime and other kinds of insecurity – historically the role of the police force as part of society and its modes of action are quite varied (see e.g. Mawby 1999, 2003; Tupman and Tupman 1999). The police also constitute part of the larger government of their societies, and the cultures of government in European societies probably vary quite a lot. This article looks at the culture of government, particularly from the perspective of corruption. The degree of corruption in government can justifiably be considered to form a central measure of the quality of government (Rothstein and Toerell 2005; Uslaner 2005). Here the main assumption is that the general level of government corruption in society explains public distrust in the police.

Public police services constitute only one, relatively small, part of public services as a whole. European societies differ also in this respect from each other: some invest in the police and in the functions of public safety authorities more than others. At first sight, investing in public safety services could be seen as increasing safety, thus leading to trust in the work of the police and other public safety authorities. However, if we think of the various societies' public services and government systems as a whole, the situation may actually

be reversed. Societies that direct relatively few of their resources to public safety services may at the same time attach much more weight to income transfers and welfare services, thus creating favourable conditions for citizens' trust towards each other and towards societal institutions. The extensive public welfare services decrease inequality among the population as well as the crime and insecurity resulting from inequality. Together with corruption, this factor linked to the service structure of societies is taken into account in this study as a society-level factor in an attempt to explain why the Europeans trust (or do not trust) the police of their respective countries.

When we talk about citizens' trust in the police, we are talking about people's experiences at an individual level. Thus, degrees of trust vary not only between societies but also within them. In fact, it is likely that variation in the degree of trust is even greater within societies than between them. In most multilevel analyses examining variation in some phenomenon measured at the individual level, this is exactly the case: individual-level variation is notably greater than society-level variation (see e.g. Leyland and Groenewegen 2003). This was likely to happen in this study as well. Yet, when public trust in the police measured at the individual level is investigated, both community-level and individual-level variables may play a significant part in the explanatory model. It is usual in multilevel analyses to distinguish a community-level contextual effect from an individual-level compositional effect; the idea is that, in order to explore the community effects, some significant compositional effects need to be controlled for. In this study, these might well include – besides the common background variables (age, gender or educational level) – factors that in different ways are linked to social exclusion and inequality among citizens. Many studies indeed show that social exclusion and inequality in their different forms create distrust towards authorities such as the police. There are probably also other factors that are related to the compositional effect and need to be taken into account before drawing any conclusions about the community-level effects. These might include factors related to social networking as well as, naturally, personal experiences of crime and insecurity or government corruption. These issues will be discussed in more detail later.

The article is structured as follows. First, I take a look at the concept of trust in a theoretical review. Next I introduce two community-level factors that are assumed to have an effect on trust towards the police. These are the degree of general corruption in government and the position of public safety institutions in public services as a whole. In the empirical part of this article, I first present the data and the variables used. I then examine the connections between corruption and trust in the police, as well as some other factors, in 16 European countries at the aggregate level. Finally, I use multilevel modelling to evaluate the effects of the community- and individual-level explanatory variables on the phenomenon to be explained.

Generalized trust and trust in institutions

The concept of trust is related to a larger debate on social capital. As defined by Robert Putnam, 'social capital refers to connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them' (2001: 19). According to another definition developed within the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), social capital is a 'network together with shared norms, values and understandings that facilitate co-operation within or among groups' (Healy and Cote 2001). Social capital usually refers primarily to social networks of 'personal relationships which are accumulated when people interact with each other in families, workplaces, neighbourhoods, local associations and a range of informal and formal meeting places' (ABS 2000; cf. Harper 2003). On the other hand, social capital also refers to norms of reciprocity and trust. The basic idea behind most definitions of social capital is that well-functioning social networks and communities lay the foundation for the emergence of norms of reciprocity and trust.

Trust can mean a lot of things, but the social capital debate often mentions the concepts of 'personal trust' and 'generalized trust'. Personal trust refers to the idea that interpersonal trust is based on personal experiences: we trust those people who in personal interaction have proved worthy of our trust. Generalized trust in turn refers to the notion that citizens' basic attitude towards other people is trusting and that people are willing to cooperate with each other, as well as with people whom they do not know personally. Personal trust has therefore been generalized to apply to all members of society, independently of their background. The reverse of generalized trust is particularized trust, which refers to the notion that we trust only those groups of people who are close to our own reference group. In addition, we are accustomed to distinguishing interpersonal trust from trust in various institutions such as the Church, parliament, the health care system or the police. A large majority of studies on social capital assume that well-functioning social networks produce generalized trust among people. Participation in non-governmental organizations in particular is assumed to create trust (Putnam 2001). Although empirical studies partially support this assumption, they do not support it absolutely and unambiguously (e.g. Hooghe 2003; Mayer 2003; Wollebek and Selle 2003).

Rothstein and Stolle (2003) have challenged this society-centred approach with an institution-centred approach that starts from the premise that generalized trust is created by societal institutions rather than by non-governmental organizations. The authors argue that the institutions that are central from the point of view of creating and maintaining trust are, in particular, the policy-implementing institutions, that is, public service systems.

If public services, social or health care services or police services, for example, have been planned and developed so that the majority of citizens experience them as useful and accessible, trust emerges towards society at large and towards its members. On the other hand, societal institutions that are based on inequality among citizens and on a manifestation of distrust towards citizens create distrust between different groups of citizens. A corrupt police force or controlling social services create an atmosphere of distrust. A particularly important aspect of trust is thus trust in institutions, first and foremost trust in those institutions that provide public services. Trust in these institutions also creates generalized trust. This theory would seem to be backed up by observations indicating that in Nordic welfare states, which are typified by extensive public services adhering to the principle of universalism, the degree of generalized trust is also high (Kääriäinen and Lehtonen 2006; Van Oorschot and Arts 2005; Rothstein 2001).

What kinds of societies produce trust in the police: Corruption and the position of public safety institutions in public service systems

This article seeks to explain public trust in the police by using community- and individual-level factors. Of the community-level factors, special attention is paid to the quality and structure of government of the societies in question.

The police force is a part of government and thus anything that has an effect on generalized trust towards government also has to be taken into account when examining trust in the police. In other words, if government is trustworthy in general, trust in the police is probably a reflection of its functions. As Rothstein has found in his many studies, a major trust-creating factor – be it about generalized trust or trust in institutions – is the ability of government to be fair and impartial. In other words, all citizens are treated equally in the system of government, independent of their social status (e.g. Rothstein 2005: 7). We can say that in democracies the police and legal institutions are required to be explicitly impartial owing to their express purpose of controlling adherence to jointly agreed norms.

Corruption is a central aspect of the impartiality of government, and it can be considered the most important measure of the quality of government (Uslaner 2005: 4). A corrupt system of government is not able to fulfil the requirement of equality but provides services mainly for those who are willing to offer public officials enough favours in the form of bribes. Corruption can thus be defined as 'the misuse of public office for private gain' (Sandholtz and Koetzle 2000: 32). There are of course always two parties involved in corruption, the giver and the taker of the bribe, both of whom benefit from

bribery. Corruption can be said to have many counterproductive societal and economic repercussions; among other things, it reduces economic effectiveness and increases societal inequality (see e.g. Mauro 1995; Montionola and Jackman 2002; Uslaner 2005). From the perspective of trust in institutions, the most important of these repercussions are probably that government becomes less transparent and legitimacy is eroded. From the point of view of citizens, a corrupt government functions on principles that do not stand up to public debate and thus loses its legitimacy in the eyes of the citizens. Therefore, we can safely assume that there is a link between government corruption and public trust in government, and that there is also empirical evidence to support this assumption (see e.g. Anderson and Tverdova 2003).

You and Kaghram (2005) have presented an interesting theory and a compelling empirical study on how societal inequality and government corruption intertwine. The well-off have both the motivation and the opportunity to offer and receive bribes. The badly-off for their part have poor possibilities to control the legality of the acts of their own authorities. You and Kaghram claim that the inequality that people experience in their everyday lives decreases their faith in the legitimacy of norms and institutions, which in turn increases their tolerance of corruption. To back up their assumptions, the researchers present empirical evidence collected in data sets from 129 countries. The findings they present fit very well into the picture that Erik Uslaner (2005) has presented. According to Uslaner, economic and social inequality encourages government corruption, which in turn leads to increasing inequality. Thus corruption and inequality intertwine to form a vicious circle that is linked with weakened trust in fellow citizens and institutions.

This brings us to my first assumption in this article: *general corruption in government decreases public trust in the police*. Corruption is, however, only one aspect of the ability of the system of government to act impartially and fairly towards its citizens. A system of government can be slightly corrupt but structured to treat citizens unequally. For example, welfare services are organized in many different ways and at many different levels in European societies because the historical development of legislation on service and income transfer systems varies significantly between societies. Because of this, service systems may favour certain social groups because those groups were able to fight for their interests in the course of the development of their country's legislation. Esping-Andersen (1990), for example, has distinguished different kinds of welfare state regimes in which governments provide welfare services and redistribute incomes on varying principles. According to Esping-Andersen, the Nordic social democratic regime, for example, is built on a strong principle of universalism, according to which the right to services and benefits is determined on the basis of citizenship. In contrast, in Central European regimes, for example, benefits are determined on the basis of

inter-corporate agreements and, in countries with liberalist regimes, such as the United Kingdom and the United States, they are determined according to selective means-testing. On the other hand, in a country as social democratic as Sweden, there are both universal and selective elements in the public service and income transfer system (e.g. Rothstein and Stolle 2003).

From the point of view of research on the police, it is more relevant to examine what kind of position and what resources the police have within the system of government in a society. As Goldsmith (2005: 449–50) states, citizens' trust in government – and through it also in the police – is largely dependent on the relationship of the system of government to civic society. According to Goldsmith, in authoritarian and very unequal societies the relationship of government to citizens is typically *distant* and government functions with low resources. Such societies tend to have a shortage of public safety services, which leads to distrust in the public safety institutions. Some private arrangements seek to fill this gap in safety services, although they generally only exacerbate problems such as crime and insecurity.

On the other hand, in some authoritarian, and particularly (post)socialist, societies government is typically distant but too strong; we can talk about *claustrophobic* government or about a police state. In these societies, state security agencies receive a disproportionate amount of resources and their attitude to citizens is suspicious, monitoring and hostile. Strong public distrust of these kinds of state security agency is entirely rational.

Societies with a democratic government are more likely than authoritarian societies to be characterized by a closer relationship with civic society. If citizens have the possibility to participate in the management and control of public services, they are more ready to trust their functions.

Societal inequality seems in many ways to generate distrust of public institutions among citizens. Societies that seek to even out inequality direct resources through taxation to income transfers and public health care, training and social services. In these societies, equality seems also to be a marker of a low level of criminal victimization, as van Wilsem (2004) found in his study of 27 countries. In unequal societies, the police are left to deal with social conflicts and problems, such as tackling the consequences of crime. This leads to a situation in which the roles of the police and the judicial system in handling social problems are emphasized. We can also assume that underprivileged citizens' level of trust in these institutions, in particular, remains lower in societies that direct relatively fewer resources to these institutions.

We can ask, however, to what extent this is a question of implementing alternative policies. The issue can be approached empirically through the public expenditure structures of European societies by means of Eurostat statistics. In classifying public expenditures, Eurostat uses the United Nations'

classification of the functions of government (COFOG), in which one of the expenditure categories is 'Public order and safety', which includes police services, law courts and prisons as well as fire protection services. COFOG also includes categories for 'Health', 'Education' and 'Social protection', which we can aggregate as a measure of 'Welfare expenditures'. If we then calculate a country-level correlation coefficient between the variables 'Public order and safety' and 'Welfare expenditures' (using data from 25 EU member states and two candidate countries in 2003; Eurostat 2005), we obtain a value of –.62. On the basis of this finding, it indeed seems that it is largely a question of alternative policies of action: countries with a strong social policy invest relatively less in public safety institutions than do countries with weak social security, and vice versa.

Thus my second assumption in this study can be formulated: *the strong position of the police and other institutions subject to the rule of law relative to the position of the welfare state leads to distrust towards these institutions*. In this article, I limit the examination to public trust in the police.

Who has trust in the police: Some potential individual-level explanatory variables

This article is based on a two-level regression analysis, in which the phenomenon to be explained is citizens' trust in the police in their respective countries measured at the individual level. The main research question here is whether the corruption level of the country's system of government and the country's investment in public safety institutions measured at the country level explain public trust in the police in the country. In this research setting, these two phenomena are contextual explanatory variables. Their effect on the dependent variable is examined at the aggregate level – at the country level in this case. It is possible, however, that the connections potentially found at the country level disappear if the effects of lower-level units are controlled for in multiple regression analysis. In this case, for example, it makes sense to assume that differences in trust in the police between countries can be explained in part through the existence of systematic differences between countries as regards the kinds of factor that are known to explain trust in the police at the individual level. In addition to potential contextual effects, potential compositional effects should thus also be taken into account.

What would these compositional effects potentially found at the individual level be? For a start, it needs to be noted that this study obviously has to be limited to those individual-level explanatory variables that are within the bounds of the empirical data. Because of this, many important explanatory

factors are undoubtedly ignored. One of the most important shortcomings in the data is that they do not include any information about citizens' personal experiences of police work. It may well be that citizens assess police work independently of the corruption level of the country's system of government or other structural elements characterizing government. As Goldsmith (2005) states, distrust of the police springs from concrete police practices. For example, indifference in the line of duty, outright neglect of duties, incompetence, venality, extortion, discrimination, excessive force or brutality definitely create distrust among those citizens who need police services (see also Frank et al. 2005; Weitzer and Tuch 2005). On the other hand, this kind of weak police work is probably also reflected in citizens' conceptions indirectly through unofficial social networks and the media.

The potential individual-level explanatory variables used in this study are grouped as follows. First of all, typical individual *background factors* such as age, gender, educational level, position in the labour market and type of domicile need to be taken into account. The connection of these factors with trust in the police is not separately addressed here; the assumption is that these kinds of background factor are self-evidently included in the explanatory model. Second, it can be assumed that *economic and social exclusion* decrease trust in the police. Frank et al. (2005: 215), for example, have made the observation in their research conducted in the United States that the lowest satisfaction with the police occurs in the lowest income bracket. The reason for this may be that both the victims of crime and criminals are overrepresented in the poorest part of the population. Likewise, many studies conducted in the United States have found that the degree of satisfaction with the police is lower among ethnic minorities than among the main (white) population (e.g. Carter 2002: 226–9; Frank et al. 2005; Weitzer and Tuch 2005). Third, individual social capital, particularly in the form of *social networks*, may be reflected in citizens' experiences of safety (see e.g. Halpern 2005; 119–21) and lead to trust in the police. Functioning social networks create a sense of security and control and thus decrease expectations in relation to police services. What may be unclear is how this is reflected in trust in the police. For example, social exclusion may increase willingness to resort to the police, but it may also increase critical attitudes towards the police in situations experienced as threatening or frightening. Fourth, experience of being a victim of crime, whether personally or through someone in one's immediate circle, and fear of crime probably decrease trust in the police (see e.g. Weitzer and Tuch 2005). Fifth, this research makes it possible to take into consideration the effect of citizens' *subjective experiences of corruption* on trust in the police. The assumption here is that subjective experiences of corruption in government decrease trust in the police. An open question to which my empirical evidence can still

seek an answer is whether distrust in the police emerges only through personal experiences or whether the level of corruption in a country also decreases trust in the police among those with no experience of corruption in government.

Data and methods

The individual-level empirical data used come from interview data collected in connection with the European Social Survey (ESS) 2004. The ESS was conducted in 25 European countries and in September 2005 data on 17 countries were available. However, survey data from Switzerland had to be omitted because no comparative data were available on the variables describing its public expenditures. The ESS data are collected through interviews in all countries by simple random sampling (SRS) among the population aged 15 and above. In this study, weighting coefficients calculated in connection with the ESS were used to eliminate the dropout effect. There are 31,947 valid survey respondents in the 16 countries. (For more detail on the data, see European Foundation for the Improvement of Living Conditions 2006; Jowell et al. 2005.)

The dependent variable measuring citizens' trust in the police is formed by the following question, in which the police are included as one of the institutions:

> Using this card, please tell me on a score of 0–10 how much you personally trust each of the institutions I read out. 0 means you do not trust an institution at all, and 10 means you have complete trust.

In addition to traditional background variables (age, gender, educational level), a number of variables describing a person's economic and social status, social networks, crime victimization and sense of safety, as well as experiences of corruption, are used as individual-level independent variables. The exact form of the questions concerning these variables is presented in Appendix 1.

There are two country-level independent variables. The first is Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) 2004. The CPI ranks countries in terms of the degree to which corruption is perceived to exist among public officials and politicians. It draws on corruption-related data in expert surveys carried out by a variety of reputable institutions, reflecting the views of businesspeople and assessments of country analysts from around the world (see Transparency International 2004). The second country-level independent variable is an indicator measuring the degree to which a society invests in public order and safety institutions, such as the police and the judicial and prison systems. For this purpose a statistical figure compiled

by Eurostat is used that includes the expenditures not only of the police, judicial and prison systems but also of the fire and rescue services in relation to the country's gross domestic product (GDP) in 2003 (Eurostat 2005).

Results

Country-level observations

Let us first take a look at how the degree of trust in the police varies between the 16 countries under examination. Figure 1 displays the country-specific means of the variable describing the degree of trust (on a scale of 0–10). It shows that the top three countries standing out from the others are all Nordic countries: Finland, Denmark and Norway. Sweden, ranked fourth, belongs to the same group. Next come Central and West European countries such as

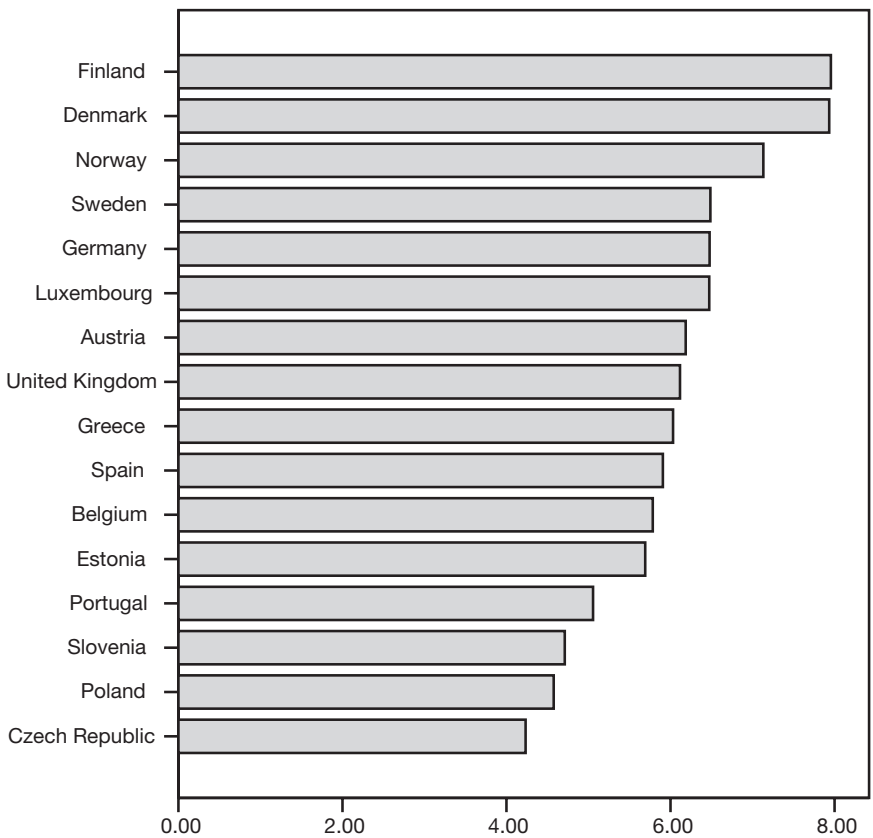

Figure 1 Trust in the police in 16 European countries in 2004, mean values by country.

Germany, Luxembourg, Austria and the UK. At the other extreme are mainly post-socialist countries such as the Czech Republic, Poland and Slovenia. The main observation that can be made is that the differences between these countries are quite big: in the Czech Republic and Poland, the mean value is just above 4, whereas in Finland and Denmark it is nearly 8. Concerning the Nordic countries in particular, this observation is also constant over time: Eurobarometers have repeatedly shown high figures for the Nordic countries (see European Foundation for the Improvement of Living Conditions 2006).

How then can trust in the police be explained at the country level? Table 1 shows the coefficients of correlation between the explanatory variables and the variables describing the level of corruption in a country (CPI; a high figure corresponds to a low corruption level), investment in safety institutions and, for comparison, investment in welfare services. In addition, correlation coefficients are calculated for two variables, based on the ESS, that describe the level of insecurity experienced in the respondent's own neighbourhood and the number of victims of burglary or assault in the last five years (see Appendix 1, question codes C5 and C6).

Table 1 Correlation coefficients between dependent and independent variables at the country level ($n = 16$)

	Trust in the police	*Corruption*	*Public order & safety expenditure, % of GNP*	*Welfare expenditure, % of GNP*	*How safe feeling when walking alone in local area after dark, ESS 2004*
Corruption	.84(**)				
Public order & safety expenditure, % of GNP	−0.51(*)	−0.24			
Welfare expenditure, % of GNP	0.56(*)	0.60(*)	−0.62(*)		
How safe feeling when walking alone in local area after dark, ESS 2004	−0.64(**)	−0.62(*)	0.56(*)	1.00(**)	
Victims of burglary or assault, ESS 2004	0.47	−0.35	0.05	−0.03	0.08

** Correlation significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
* Correlation significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

First of all, the integrity of the government system and public trust in the police really do seem to be interlinked. The country-level correlation coefficient of these factors is .84. The same thing can be seen in Figure 2, which shows the scatter plot of these variables. In this figure, only Greece deviates from the imaginary regression line between these variables.

Second, societies' investment in public order and safety institutions also seems to be linked with trust in the police, although not as strongly as corruption. The relationship between these factors is as expected: the less (proportionally) societies invest in safety institutions, the more trust citizens have in the police (correlation coefficient: –.51; see also Figure 3). Correspondingly, investment in welfare services seems to increase trust in the police (correlation coefficient: .56). We can also see a correlation between trust in the police and a feeling of insecurity: the more people experience insecurity, the less trust

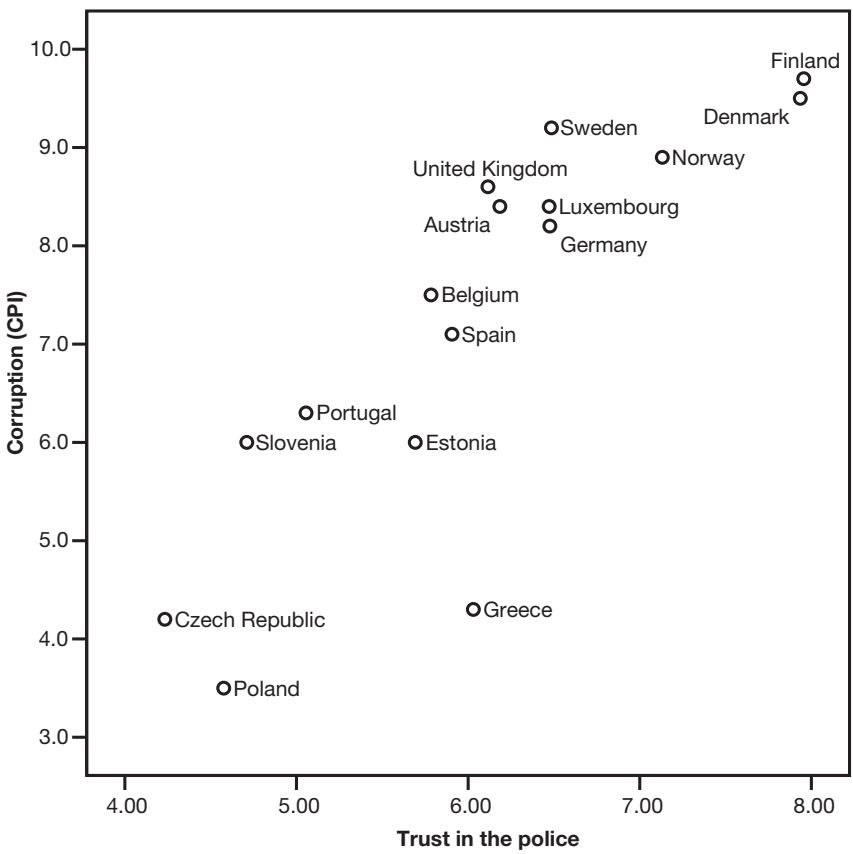

Figure 2 Corruption (CPI, low score = high level of corruption) and trust in the police (mean values) in 16 European countries in 2004.

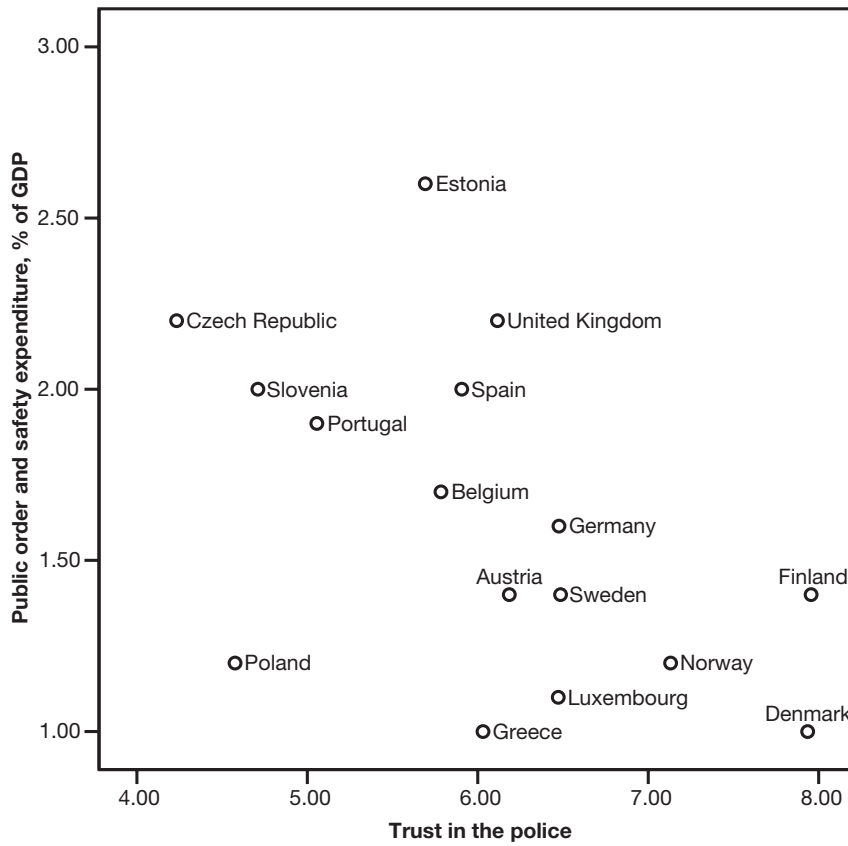

Figure 3 Public order and safety expenditure (% of GDP) in 2003 and trust in the police (mean values) in 2004 in 16 European countries.

there is in the police in the country. In other words, the level of subjective experience of security seems to explain institutional trust in the police. However, this connection is not as clear as the connection between trust and corruption.

In addition, the main explanatory variables can be inserted in the country-level regression model (Table 2), with the result that the model explains 77 percent of the variation in trust of the police.

Results of the multilevel analysis

The country-specific means were calculated above on the basis of individual-level data on trust in the police. By examining these means, conclusions can be drawn about the differences between individual countries in the occurrence of trust.

Table 2 Coefficients of the regression model at the country level

	B	*Std. error*	*Beta*	*t*	*sig.*
(Constant)	4.24	0.77		5.49	0.000
Corruption (CPI)	0.41	0.07	0.76	5.90	0.000
Public order & safety expenditures	−0.72	0.28	−0.32	−2.53	0.025

Notes: Dependent variable: Trust in the police; adjusted $R^2 = 0.77$, $n = 16$.

This method can be criticized from some methodological perspectives. First of all, it leads to a loss of a lot of information linked with the individual-level variation in trust in the police. Therefore, it is necessary to estimate how large a part of the variation in the level of trust is explained by differences between individuals and how large a part derives from the differences between the countries. Second, to be able to draw conclusions about the differences in the degree of trust, the main factors explaining trust should be controlled for, because some of the differences identified at the country level may be explained by the compositional effect of individuals (see e.g. Leyland and Groenevegen 2003: 270). Third, if the differences between countries prove significant even though individual-level explanatory variables are controlled for, the analysis still needs to be able to demonstrate to what extent the country-level explanatory variables – namely the level of corruption and expenditure on public order and safety – explain this country-level variation.

Because the research setting and data can be considered to be hierarchically organized here – individuals (level 1) live in certain countries (level 2) – the multilevel analysis performed with the MLwiN software package is described next. The models for the dependent variable are calculated in eight phases altogether. First, the base model is calculated. This includes only the intercept with which the variance of the trust variable can be distributed at the individual and country levels. In the next phases (Models 2–6), a number of individual-level variables are gradually added in following order: background variables (Model 2), economic and social security variables (Model 3), variables on social networks (Model 4), variables on personal safety (Model 5), and variables on personal experiences of corruption (Model 6). Finally, at the country level, first corruption (Model 7) and then variables on public order and safety expenditures are added (Model 8). At every phase, it is mainly the changes in the residual variance of the country level that are looked at. Table 3 summarizes the modelling results in this respect. Table 4 tabulates the estimates of the parameters of the final model with their tests.

Let us look at the polarization of the variance in trust in the police into two different levels (see Table 3). The baseline model indicates that, of the total variance in trust, about 17 percent occurs at the country level. In Models 2–6, individual-level variables are brought in as explanatory variables in groups. Model 6 shows that including all the individual-level variables reduces the country-level residual variance by slightly less than 18 percent (to 14 percent). Therefore, the conclusion can be drawn that the individual-level variables in this study do not significantly explain the country-level variation. In addition, the most significant of the individual-level variable groups seems to be the one describing economic and social security, which reduces the country-level residual variance as a percentage of the total variance by a few percentage units.

From the point of view of the entire study, the most interesting models are Models 7 and 8, which include two country-level explanatory variables. As regards Model 7, the inclusion of the indicator of corruption reduces the country-level residual variance dramatically by nearly two-thirds, from 0.84 to 0.30. In addition, the other country-level variable, public order and safety expenditures, reduces the residual variance even further, from 0.30 to 0.22, and can also be considered as a significant explanatory variable. It can therefore be stated that both assumptions of the country-level variables explaining trust in the police are accurate on the basis of this evidence: the degree of trust in the police varies not only between individuals but also between countries. The variation between countries is explained by the level of corruption in the countries' system of government but also by the position of their public order and safety institutions in the system of government.

The estimates of the final model are presented in Table 4. Although the actual purpose of the study was not to look at the effects of individual-level factors on the degree of public trust in the police, the results are described here next. The background variables reveal that older people seem to have more trust in the police than the young, and that women have more trust in the police than men. In addition, those working at home have more trust in the police than those in waged work and, correspondingly, the unemployed trust the police less than those in waged work. Further, on the basis of the background variables, the inhabitants of small cities and rural villages trust the police more than do the inhabitants of big cities.

Concerning other individual-level factors, attention is drawn mainly to four things. First, both financial insecurity and experiences of social exclusion at the individual level seem clearly to increase distrust of the police. Financial insecurity indeed seems to be reflected in the European data in the same way as in Frank et al.'s (2005: 215–16) data on the Americans: those in the poorest economic position in particular have the least amount of trust in

Table 3 Variance distributions of the dependent variable in different models

Dependent variable: Trust in the police		*%*
Model 1: baseline		
Level 1 variance (σe_{0ij})	5.36	83
Level 2 variance (σe_{0j})	1.09	17
Total variance ($\sigma e_{0ij}+\sigma e_{0j}$)	6.45	100
Model 2: Model 1 + background variables		
Level 1 variance (σe_{0ij})	5.29	83
Level 2 variance (σe_{0j})	1.06	17
Residual variance ($\sigma e_{0ij}+\sigma e_{0j}$)	6.35	100
Residual variance, % of total variance	98.45	
Model 3: Model 2 + economic and social security variables		
Level 1 variance (σe_{0ij})	5.11	85
Level 2 variance (σe_{0j})	0.91	15
Residual variance ($\sigma e_{0ij}+\sigma e_{0j}$)	6.01	100
Residual variance, % of total variance	93.21	
Model 4: Model 3 + social networks		
Level 1 variance (σe_{0ij})	5.09	85
Level 2 variance (σe_{0j})	0.89	15
Residual variance ($\sigma e_{0ij}+\sigma e_{0j}$)	5.98	100
Residual variance, % of total variance	92.71	
Model 5: Model 4 + personal safety		
Level 1 variance (σe_{0ij})	5.05	85
Level 2 variance (σe_{0j})	0.87	15
Residual variance ($\sigma e_{0ij}+\sigma e_{0j}$)	5.92	100
Residual variance, % of total variance	91.74	
Model 6: Model 5 + personal experiences of corruption		
Level 1 variance (σe_{0ij})	5.03	86
Level 2 variance (σe_{0j})	0.84	14
Residual variance ($\sigma e_{0ij}+\sigma e_{0j}$)	5.87	100
Residual variance, % of total variance	91.05	
Model 7: Model 6 + corruption (CPI) at country level		
Level 1 variance (σe_{0ij})	5.03	94
Level 2 variance (σe_{0j})	0.30	6
Residual variance ($\sigma e_{0ij}+\sigma e_{0j}$)	5.33	100
Residual variance, % of total variance	82.62	
Model 8: Model 7 + public order & safety expenditure at country level		
Level 1 variance (σe_{0ij})	5.03	96
Level 2 variance (σe_{0j})	0.22	4
Residual variance ($\sigma e_{0ij}+\sigma e_{0j}$)	5.26	100
Residual variance, % of total variance	81.49	

Table 4 Parameter estimates from the final multilevel model (n = 28,129)

	Estimate (fix)	*Standard error*	*Level of significance*
Intercept	2.937	0.720	
Background variables:			
Age	0.010	0.001	***
Years of education	0.003	0.004	–
Gender (ref. cat. = Female)	−0.120	0.029	***
Main activity (ref. cat. = Paid work)			
Education	0.227	0.053	***
Unemployed	−0.309	0.062	***
Retired or disabled	0.079	0.048	–
Housework or caring	0.240	0.051	***
Other	−0.116	0.124	–
Domicile (ref. cat. = A big city)			
The suburbs or outskirts of a big city	−0.023	0.050	–
A town or a small city	0.140	0.039	***
A country village	0.175	0.041	***
A farm or a home in the countryside	0.121	0.067	–
Economic and social displacement:			
Feeling about household's income (ref. cat. = Living comfortably)			
Coping on present income	−0.157	0.034	***
Difficult on present income	−0.395	0.046	***
Very difficult on present income	−0.729	0.068	***
Hampered by illness, disability, etc. (ref. cat. = Yes a lot)			
Hampered to some extent	0.049	0.068	–
Not hampered	0.159	0.065	*
Member of group discriminated against (ref. cat. = No)	0.540	0.058	***
Social networks:			
How often socially meet friends, relatives, etc. (ref. cat. = Once a month or less often)			
Several times a month	0.053	0.045	–
Once a week	0.117	0.047	*
Several times a week	0.118	0.044	**
Every day	−0.001	0.050	–
Anyone to discuss intimate and personal matters with (ref. cat. = Yes)	−0.204	0.049	***
Personal safety:			
Victim of burglary/assault in last 5 years (ref. cat. = No)	0.185	0.033	***

Table 4 (*continued*)

Table 4 (*continued*)

	Estimate (fix)	*Standard error*	*Level of significance*
Feeling of safety walking alone in local area after dark (ref. cat. = Very safe)			
Safe	−0.129	0.034	***
Unsafe	−0.367	0.045	***
Very unsafe	−0.785	0.069	***
Personal experience of corruption:			
Public official asked favour/bribe for service or respondent offered favour/ bribe to public official (ref. cat. = Yes)	0.555	0.060	***
Country-level variables:			
Corruption (CPI)	0.384	0.064	***
Public order and safety expenditure, % of GDP	−0.569	0.262	*

*** Correlation significant at the 0.001 level (2-tailed).
** Correlation significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
* Correlation significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

the police. The reason for this may be that it is most often the poorest sections of the population that end up as victims of crime (see e.g. Wohlfarth et al. 2001) and that police control is targeted more often at those living on the margins of society than at those who are privileged. As far as social exclusion is concerned, these observations fit well with the picture of ethnic minorities' distrust of the police presented in American studies (e.g. Bowling et al. 2003; Engel 2005; Tyler 2005; Weitzer and Tuch 2005).

Second, the significance of social networks seems to have two sides. General social activity as such does not seem to have an effect, but loneliness clearly does matter here: people with no close friends trust the police less than do others. This may be all about a general lack of trust linked to social exclusion, which probably applies to both generalized trust and trust in general in societal institutions. As Uslaner (2005), for example, has stated, a low level of generalized trust is reflected in a low level of trust in societal institutions as well.

Third, as expected, criminal victimization and fear of crime seem to decrease trust in the police, as is shown in the European data, and the results support the observations made in the United States (e.g. Weitzer and Tuch 2005: 280). It is worth noting, however, as shown in Table 3, that personal

feelings of fear and safety affect both individual-level and country-level variations in trust relatively little.

Fourth, respondents' personal experiences of corruption among public officials lessened their trust in the police. This result is understandable and expected. Here it is also worth noting that these individual-level experiences of corruption explain the country-level variation in trust in the police only very slightly (see Table 3 – the country-level variance drops from 0.87 to 0.84 when the variable is included in the model). In other words, the level of corruption in the system of government measured at the country-level affects trust in the police, independently of whether or not citizens themselves have experience of corruption among public officials. This observation can be simply explained by the fact that the level of corruption in government and the consequent distrust of public officials is generally known among citizens: corruption in government has become 'everyday knowledge', which is reproduced on the basis not only of personal experiences but also of the experiences of one's immediate social circle and the images provided by the media.

Discussion

The purpose of this article was to explore citizens' trust in the police in their respective societies in 16 European countries. The countries under examination represent fairly diverse societies in different parts of Europe. The starting point for the study was the empirical observation that the degree of trust in the police varies quite a lot between European societies: the least amount of trust seems to occur in the former socialist countries in Eastern Europe and the greatest amount of trust in the Nordic countries. The aim of the study was to find an answer to the question of how these differences could be explained.

The answer was sought by means of society- and individual-level explanatory variables. Special attention was paid to the quality and structure of government in the societies in question as the societal-level explanatory variable. The quality of government was measured by an indicator of corruption in government. The indicator describing the structure of government consisted of the expenditure on public safety services in relation to GDP. In addition to these country-level explanatory variables, some individual-level explanatory variables were used to control for the impact of the compositional effect in the models.

The study brought to the fore a central empirical observation that the quality and structure of the system of government indeed clearly affect the degree of citizens' trust in the police of their countries. In particular, the level of corruption in the system of government in general clearly decreases trust in the police and probably in other public service institutions as well. In this

sense, the result corroborates many earlier conceptions of the link between corrupt government and distrust (e.g. Anderson and Tverdova 2003). Citizens apparently do expect government to be particularly fair and impartial (see Rothstein and Stolle 2003; Rothstein and Toerell 2005), independently of whether or not the system of government is producing the desired outcomes in terms of decisions and services. The same kinds of observation have also been made in examinations of trust in the judicial system or police services in particular: even if the decisions and measures are negative from an individual point of view, what is most important for citizens is to feel that they have been treated fairly and justly (Engel 2005; Tyler 2001).

In addition to corruption, the structure per se of the government and service systems seemed to be significant: the fewer resources societies invest in public safety services, the more trust citizens have in the police. This result may seem surprising, even paradoxical. Behind this observation probably lies the issue of the position of welfare services in relation to safety services: countries with extensive welfare services and social security generally use fewer resources for public safety services than do countries where publicly funded social security networks are weaker. At the same time, this might be a question of different definitions and different attempts to solve societal problems.

International comparative research on social capital has in recent years also investigated the relationship of the welfare state to social capital. Some researchers have expressed a suspicion that public welfare services and extensive income transfers erode citizens' independent social interaction, trust in one another and related informal social support. In contrast, others emphasize that the structures of the welfare state first of all create and strengthen trust in public institutions and lead to the creation of trust in fellow citizens as well. Generalized trust in turn lays the foundation for voluntary citizen activity and social support. According to these observations, it thus seems that a well-functioning system of government and extensive welfare services tend to activate rather than suppress citizen activity (on this discussion, see e.g. Kääriäinen and Lehtonen 2006; Van Oorschot and Arts 2005). On the basis of the underlying research, the observation of trust in the police in this article seems to take the latter stand in the discussion. In the Nordic welfare states, the degree of public trust in the functioning of the entire system of government is quite high, and this trust is also enjoyed by the police. The good and trustful relationship of citizens with the police probably also means that the informal social control exerted by ordinary citizens complements and supports the official social control provided by the police.

From some theoretical and methodological points of view, it could be recognized that this article has possible shortcomings. From the theoretical perspective, the study design is restricted to examining the effects of two

variables on trust in the police at a country level: corruption and the resources of security institutions. The strict definition of the research problem has meant the rejection of many alternative explanations. One possible optional explanation could be premised on the notion that there are different police systems in different societies. As Mawby (2003: 15) has noted, national police organizations can be distinguished in terms of their legitimacy, structure and function. In comparing, for example, continental Europe and England and Wales, he has argued that 'continental police systems may be characterised as (1) structurally more centralised and militaristic, (2) functionally putting more emphasis on political and administrative tasks and (3) in terms of legitimacy, being more closely tied to government and less accountable either to public or law' (Mawby 2003: 20). From the theoretical perspective of Mawby, if public accountability really is more restricted and police organizations really are more centralized and militaristic in continental countries, those things should be evident in the figures for trust in the police in those counties. Another question is how much variation there actually is between continental countries and, for example, the position of the Nordic countries in this context. The police organizations of the Nordic countries are usually classified as centralized but, as we have seen, people in those countries have great trust in their police. In any case, I agree that much more research is needed to clarify the connections between the structures of police organizations and trust in them.

A criticism of this paper from the methodological point of view would be that the dependent variable actually measures the general image of the police rather than real experiences of the activity of police organizations and their personnel. It is possible that most of respondents in the survey had had no personal contact with police personnel, say, in the past year. We can assume, with Skogan (2006: 99–100), that a lot of factors affect the variation in these images: respondents' own personal experiences of the activity of the police, experiences of people close to the respondents, or information created by the mass media. I would like to add to these the factor of citizens' experiences of authorities other than the police: if people experience public services in general working well and fairly, it is possible that this experience is reflected in their trust in the police. This effect is probably stronger in those countries in which the functions of the police are broader than crime investigation or street patrols. Sunshine and Tyler (2003: 513–47) have also emphasized that the most dominant predictor of people's orientation towards the police is the general legitimacy they are willing to accord to that institution. This is linked more to their basic social values than to personal experiences of the police.

In any event, it is clear that, if we want to find out how the police can maintain or increase citizens' trust in them, we have to consider the experiences of those people who actually have personal contact with them. In this

sense, the quality of the contact matters, as Skogan (2006) has observed; in particular, trust is easily eroded by negative contacts but very difficult to build up with positive contacts.

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Appendix

Appendix 1 Descriptions of individual-level explanatory variables

Variable in this study	*Question code in ESS*	*Question*	*Scale*
Age	F3	Year of birth	
Years of education	F7	How many years of full-time education have you completed?	
Gender	F2		Male (1), female (2)
Main activity	F8	Using this card, which of these descriptions applies to what you have been doing for the last 7 days?	In paid work (1), in education (2), unemployed and actively looking for a job (3), unemployed, wanting a job but not actively looking for a job (4), permanently sick or disabled (5), retired (6), in community or military service (7), doing housework, looking after children or other persons (8), other (9)
Domicile	F5	Which phrase on this card best describes the area where you live?	A big city (1), the suburbs or outskirts of a big city (2), a town or a small city (3), a country village (4), a farm or home in the countryside (5)
Feeling about household's income		Which of the descriptions on this card comes closest to how you feel about your household's income nowadays?	Living comfortably on present income (1), coping on present income (2), finding it difficult on present

Appendix 1 (*continued*)

Appendix 1 (*continued*)

Variable in this study	*Question code in ESS*	*Question*	*Scale*
			income (3), finding it very difficult on present income (4)
Hampered by illness, disability, etc.	C8	Are you hampered in your daily activities in any way by any longstanding illness, or disability, infirmity or mental health problem? If yes, is that a lot or to some extent?	Yes a lot (1), yes to some extent (2), no (3)
Member of group discriminated against	C16	Would you describe yourself as being a member of a group that is discriminated against in this country?	Yes (1), no (2)
How often socially meet . . .	C2	Using this card, how often do you meet socially with friends, relatives or work colleagues?	Never (1), less than once a month (2), once a month (3), several times a month (4), once a week (5), several times a week (6), every day (7)
Anyone to discuss . . .		Do you have anyone with whom you can discuss intimate and personal matters?	Yes (1), no (2)
Victim of burglary/ assault last 5 years	C5	Have you or a member of your household been the victim of a burglary or assault in the last 5 years?	Yes (1), no (2)
Feeling of safety walking alone . . .	C6	How safe do you – or would you – feel walking alone in this area after dark? Do – or would – you feel…	Very safe (1), safe (2), unsafe (3), very unsafe (4)
Public official asked a favour . . .	E11	How often, if ever, have each of these things happened to you in the last five years?…	Never (1), once (2), twice (3), 3 or 4 times (4), 5 times or more (5)

Appendix 1 (*continued*)

Appendix 1 (*continued*)

Variable in this study	*Question code in ESS*	*Question*	*Scale*
		A public official asked you for a favour or a bribe in return for a service.	
	E29	How often, if ever, have you done each of these things in the last five years? …offered a favour or bribe to a public official in return for their services?	Never (1), once (2), twice (3), 3 or 4 times (4), 5 times or more (5)

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