



Trust of the Police in South Africa: A Research Note

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Abstract

This paper examines the issue of public trust of the South African Police, and attempts to identify the factors that predict the public's trust in the South African police. Utilizing a national probability sample collected by the Afrobarometer Project in 2008, the study uses logistical regression analysis to look at the effects of selected independent variables on trust of the police, which range from demographic indicators like race, rural-urban, gender, age and education. Others were derived from responses to a series of questions which ask about fear of crime and criminal victimization. Scales are also developed which measure poverty, interpersonal trust and perceived corruption. To preview the findings, the logistical regression revealed four significant predictors of mistrust of the police: interpersonal trust, perception of corruption, race and the poverty measure. Based on the literature review there were some surprising findings, including the fact that fear of crime and victimization as well as what may be defined as police visibility were not found to be significant predictors of trust of the police, nor were demographic measures like education, gender or age. The paper concludes with some thoughts on future research directions.

Keywords: South African Police, Trust, Afrobarometer, Poverty, Perceived Corruption.

Introduction

Effective social control depends upon the voluntary compliance and cooperation of citizens who perceive the police and the courts as having legitimacy; trust is a core value in determining legitimacy. Public trust is important to the police force particularly in democratic societies where the police have to earn legitimacy for their actions from citizens. Effective police work requires satisfactory and confidential relationships with citizens. The international literature suggests that there is large variation in the degree of trust of the police within and between societies, including in the United States (Sharp & Johnson, 2009), the United Kingdom (Bradford & Jackson, 2009; Bradford et al, 2008) and other European countries (Kaarianen, 2007). Africa has begun to receive some attention in that context, in some instances as an attempt to extend empirical investigation outside of Europe and North America (Bradford et. al, 2012) and previous studies generated by what is known as the Afrobarometer Project.

Of special interest will be Pruitt's (2010) study which examined mistrust of the police in South Africa using Afrobarometer data collected in 2002 and 2005. Pruitt's study

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looked at indicators of trust in the police, perceptions of corruption, and the payment of bribes based on responses provided by South African respondents. Corruption has been addressed in the South African criminal justice system and the criminology literature, and both will also receive some attention here. This study will be based on more recent data than was available to Pruitt, collected in 2008 from 2,400 respondents by Afrobarometer. This research relies on reports produced by the South African government and criminal justice system, especially the Victims of Crime Survey (VOCS) of 2011. The findings produced by this study will be examined in the context of the 2011 VOCS.

The South African Police Service (SAPS)

South Africa has one of the largest national police forces in the world. According to Bruce (2011), SAPS employs more than 190,000 persons; its jurisdiction includes South Africa's nine provinces, 54 or more local governmental jurisdictions, and has upwards of 1,200 police station precincts. South Africa has become more than the national police and is involved in Regional Policing in the Southern African Region (Van der Spay, 2009).

Within South Africa, there has been a concerted effort to address the problems that have plagued the South African Police Service (SAPS) during and since the end of Apartheid. SAPS has implemented a Code of Conduct, installed an Independent Police Investigative Directorate which deals with deaths in police custody, includes police corruption and deals with non-adherence of the prescripts of the Domestic Violence Act (Kinnes & Newham, 2012). The results of these actions have not been promising. As Kinnes and Newham noted, corruption appears to have overwhelmed those designated to root out corruption and there is a list of Cabinet Ministers fired for corruption. They note that in the period between 2007 and 2011, South Africa fell ten points on the Transparency International Corruption Index, from 5.5 to 4.5.

Afrobarometer Reviews: Trust in Institutions and the police

Police corruption has received a great deal of attention in South African criminology literature (Grobler & Joubert, 2004; Lambrechts, 2004; Pragal, 2006). The South African Police Service (SAPS) has been the focus of that attention, especially in terms of the search for the factors that are seen as causal for corruption to develop amongst police personnel (Gopal & Zondeka, 2008). Faull (2007) has suggested that research on corruption has been severely limited in South Africa, restricted to a handful of researchers and limited almost exclusively to a single province, leaving the rest of the country relatively unexplored. Faull and others identified legislative measures as the source of the weaknesses in the South African policing system. Ambiguous legislative measures are viewed as the source that creates corruption because of unclear roles for oversight personnel, lack of human and material resources, as well as the lack of feedback for personnel.

Studies conducted by Afrobarometer provide most of the baseline research on trust in institutions for all of Africa. Besides trust, corruption has been a major focus, and the police have received their fair share of attention in all of this literature. This review begins with Attila (2008), who utilized data collected by Afrobarometer from 1999 through 2001 from 21,531 respondents in 12 African countries to identify perceptions of corruption by looking at corrupt practices experienced by the respondents themselves. The study found that about 15 percent of all respondents indicated that "almost all" of their country's civil servants were corrupt as were 12.6 percent of their elected leaders. Among individual

characteristics identified related to perceptions of corruption were age, gender, status of employment (connection with public administration) and place of residence.

Lavallee, Razafindrakoto and Roubaud (2008) in their study of trust in political institutions in sub-Saharan Africa, reported on respondent assessments about public servants being involved in corruption in Round 1 and Round 2 of the Afrobarometer surveys. In Round 1, 50 percent reported they believed police were involved in corruption; this percentage was reduced to 40 percent in Round 2.

Afrobarometer and South Africa

Afrobarometer has published an extensive series of Working and Briefing Papers using the data generated by surveys in South Africa; none of the working papers have explored the issue of trust in the police in South Africa. One briefing paper (Afrobarometer, 2006), based on 2,400 respondents asked the question "Is South Africa Public service user friendly?" The police were included as one public service group and only 40 percent of the respondents indicated it was easy to get help from the police when they needed it. Rural dwellers were less likely to report efficient interactions with the police, 37 percent compared to 43 percent for urban residents. One in ten respondents (10 percent) said they were victimized by the police at least once the year before in order to avoid a problem with the police, for instance, avoiding a fine or arrest by providing bribes in the form of money or gifts.

Carter (2011) used all four Afrobarometer rounds to look at sources of state legitimacy in South Africa. She reported that support for the police was fairly constant over time in the Afrobarometer data, with 68, 68, 69 and 65 percent of respondents in Rounds 1 through 4, either choosing "agree" or "strongly agree" that police have the right to make decisions that are binding. Carter also looked at differences by race and found there was little shift in support from Blacks over time; support from Whites had declined slightly, and was the lowest of all racial groups, while support from Coloureds had increased over the four reporting periods.

South Africa's Approach to the Study of Trust in the Police

At the national level, South Africa's approach to the study of trust in the police relies on the use of crime surveys. As reported in the Victims of Crime Survey (VOCS, Statistics South Africa, 2011), the crime victim surveys are well established in South Africa. In 1998, Stats South Africa (Stats SA) conducted the Victim Survey based on the International Crime Victim Survey (ICVS). The Institute for Security Studies (ISS) conducted the 2003 and the 2007 surveys. The latest survey was conducted in 2010 by Stats SA, and this organization plans to conduct the VOCS annually from this point on.

The VOCS is the main source of quantitative data regarding trust in the police in South Africa. In her justification for the use of crime surveys to measure the public's perception of police performance in South Africa, Mistry (2003) argued that crime surveys provide a supplement to official crime statistics and they also provide an understanding of public perceptions of crime, safety, and the fear of crime. More importantly for our purposes here, these surveys often include questions about citizen impressions of the police, especially how respondents rate the performance of police in their local area. Below the results of the last three VOCS are reviewed.

South African Crime Survey Results

Mistry (2003) noted that the 2003 National Victims of Crime Survey (NVCS), showed that crime in South Africa had declined from 1998 through October 2003; however, respondents felt less safe. In 2003, 23 percent felt safe walking alone at night in their area compared to 58 percent in 1998. More than half of South Africans felt that crime had increased in the areas where they live over the past three years. Respondents were also asked about their impressions of police performance and how they rated police performance in their local area. Slightly over half (52%) said the police were doing a good job in their area, and 46 percent thought they were doing a bad job. The main reasons police were seen as doing a bad job were as follows: 1) response time (35 percent); 2) they are corrupt (13 percent); 3) they do not come into respondents' area (12 percent); and 4) they are lazy (11 percent).

The 2007 NVCS (O'Donovan, 2008) revealed that the gap between the levels of crime reflected in official statistics, which had continued to decline, and public perceptions of crime levels which had continued to increase. Again, respondents were asked whether or not they thought police were doing a good job in their area. In 2007, the percentage of respondents who thought the police were doing a bad job dropped from 46 percent to 37 percent. In contrast to the 2003 survey, most respondents in 2007 provided a single reason for their negative impressions of the police, response time.

The 2010 Victims of Crime Survey (statistics SA, 2011) revealed that more than 40 percent of households believed the level of both violent and non-violent crime had decreased in their area from 2008 to 2010. Less than 30 percent thought crime had increased. One-third of households (33.3 percent) avoided going to open spaces alone because of fear of crime, 22.2 percent of households would not allow their children to move around unsupervised by an older person or to play freely in their area, and 14.7 percent would not permit their children to walk to school alone. Almost 80 percent of households were satisfied with the police in their area, and 70.8 percent of the households thought the police were trustworthy. Police response time and police visibility were two issues addressed in the 2010 VOCS. Households in South Africa were asked about traveling time to the nearest police station, and 66.4 percent indicated it would take less than 30 minutes. These responses were broken down by province and racial group. Again the greatest source of dissatisfaction with the police was response time.

Trust in the South African Police: Pruitt's Study

The recent paper by Pruitt (2010) is most important for our purposes here. This study looked at trust in the police in South Africa and used the Afrobarometer online data system data to conduct the analyses. Pruitt begins by providing the history of the South African Police Service (SAPS) pre and post-Apartheid. Then the paper discusses the problems that have historically plagued policing in South Africa, assessed the current state of police service in the country and then provided recommendations for the future. The study presented results generated by questions from the 2002 and 2005 surveys. These were questions which had asked about trust in the police, police involvement in corruption, whether the respondent had paid a bribe in the last year, as well as a question which asked respondents to provide their view about whether if they were the victim of a violent crime they would turn to the police or find a way to seek revenge themselves.

The results showed that the level of trust in the police had stayed the same between 2002 and 2005 and the results of the corruption question were somewhat mixed, with

more respondents choosing “all of them” are corrupt in 2005 as compared to 2002, 14.1 percent compared to 7.6 percent. The wording of question about the payment of bribes was changed from 2002 to 2005 but the actual payment categories remained the same, "once or twice", "a few times" and "often". Based on those responses, more respondents reported paying bribes in 2005 than in 2002, 8.9 percent compared to 6.3 percent. Pruitt (2010) reported on the responses to the 2005 question regarding turning to the police or seeking revenge and showed that 84.4 percent of the respondents either very strongly or agreed with the alternative of turning to the police, suggesting to him that respondents revealed greater trust and the ability to embrace the police.

The Study

Background of the Study

Since Pruitt's (2010) paper utilized the Afrobarometer online system, he could not provide statistical results based on more than simple frequency counts for the study's questions. This study will be able to provide a more in-depth analysis than that paper and will be able to look for the factors that predict trust in the police in South Africa.

The Data Source

Afrobarometer is a collaborative research effort produced by social scientists from 20 African countries. The Project's objectives are as follows; 1) to produce scientifically reliable data on public opinion in sub-Saharan Africa; 2) to strengthen institutional capacity for survey research in Africa and 3) to broadly disseminate and apply survey results. Begun in 1999, four rounds of the survey have been completed; South Africa was included in all four waves. The last available wave was conducted in 2008 and those data provide the basis for this paper.

The Survey

Interviews were completed with 2,400 citizens of South Africa, 18 years of age or older. These are face-to-face interviews and were conducted in five different languages. The sampling frame included all nine South African provinces, and the final sample supports estimates to the national population of all adults in South Africa that is accurate to within a margin of error of plus or minus 2 percentage points at a confidence level of 95 percent.

Sample Characteristics

The characteristics of the study's sample are presented in Table 1. Table 1 reveals that about 80 percent of the sample was less than 50 years of age; slightly more than one-third are less than 30 years of age, 34.3 percent. The gender breakdown is fifty-fifty. Almost two-thirds of the respondents were Black Africans, 63.5 percent, 16.2 percent were White Europeans, 14.8 percent are classified as colored/mixed race and the remainder, 5.5 percent are South and East Asians. There are a range of educational levels in the sample from no formal education 21.7 percent compared to 8.1 percent of respondents who completed primary school, 4.6 percent compared to 3.5 percent of respondents who completed University; 23 of those respondents completed some post graduate education. About two-thirds of the sample resided in urban settings.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Afrobarometer Sample

Age		
18 through 29	814	34.3
30 thru 49	1076	45.3
50 and over	485	20.4
Gender		
Male	1,200	50.0
Female	1,200	50.0
Race		
Black/African	1,523	63.5
White/European	390	16.2
Coloured/Mixed Race	356	14.8
South/ East Asian	131	5.5
Education		
No formal/informal school/Some primary school	316	21.7
Primary school completed	194	8.1
Some secondary/high school	778	32.4
Completed secondary/high school	684	28.5
Post secondary qualifications, not university	277	11.5
Some University	58	2.4
Completed University/post graduate	83	3.5
Employed		
Yes full/part-time	1,186	49.3
No	1,200	50.3
Residence		
Urban	1,576	65.7
Rural	824	34.3

Measures

The Dependent Variable: Trust of the Police

In this study respondents were provided with a list of public officials, public offices, including national bodies, various levels of government and certain public institutions, including the police. Fixed responses regarding the level of trust were provided as follows; 0) none at all; 1) a little bit; 2) somewhat; 3) a lot. With a minor wording change, that measure was the trust in police measure used by Pruitt (2010), and Table 2 compares the 2008 South African survey results with those presented by Pruitt drawn from the 2002 and 2005 Afrobarometer surveys.

Table 2 shows that the findings from 2002, 2005, and 2008 regarding 'not at all' category were virtually identical; 22.2, 22.8 and 21.1 respectively. There was some variation in the "just a little" category, while the "somewhat" was also fairly constant over the three different years. The biggest difference in Table 2 was in the trust police "a lot" category, which went from 7.5 percent in 2002, to 18.8 percent in 2005 and to 19.6 in 2008, showing police were gaining in their efforts to acquire more trust from citizens.

Table 2. Trust in the Police in South Africa at Three Different Time Periods

Year	2002		2005		2008			
Trust Police	N	%	N	%	N	%		
Not at all	533	22.2	Not at all	548	22.8	Not at all	506	21.1
Just a little	979	40.8	A little	651	27.1	Just a little	743	31.0
Somewhat	659	27.5	Somewhat	700	29.2	Somewhat	572	23.8
A lot	179	7.5	A lot	451	18.8	A lot	471	19.6
DK/HHE*	50	2.1	DK/HHE	50	2.1	DK/HHE	108	4.5
Total	2400	100.0		2400	100.0		2400	100.0

* DK? HHE Don't know/haven't heard enough

The Dichotomous Dependent Variable

The Sharp and Johnson (2009) paper cited in the Introduction used the same measure of trust in the police as this study. This research used that measure to create a dichotomous dependent variable which places the "not at all" response in one category and all other responses in the other category, "just a little", "somewhat" and "a lot". This measure will provide the basis for the logistical regression analysis described below.

The Independent Variables

Scales were developed for the study designed to tap respondent levels of trust in their interpersonal relationships, their degree of trust in public institutions, their perceived assessments of the level of corruption in the society as well as their level of personal deprivation, poverty. These measures were constructed through the use of factor scaling and scales scores were calculated and assigned to each respondent.

Some of the control variables listed in Table 1 were collapsed into fewer categories; these include race which became a dichotomous variable, Black Africans and all others, and education, which was reduced to five categories, by combining no school, informal only and some primary. Other variables were measured by single items, including the following: fear of crime, crime victimization, including both property and violent crimes committed against self or family, police visibility as well as the presence of a police station in the local area.

The Analysis

The analysis was conducted through the use of logistic regression because the study utilizes a dichotomous dependent variable. The purpose will be to differentiate the “not at all” response from all others responses to the trust the police question, "a little , "somewhat" and "a lot".

Results

The results of the logistic regression appear in Table 3. The table shows the coefficient, standard error, z score, and probability score for each variable entered in the equation.

Table 3. Logistic Regression of trust in the Police and Study Independent variables

Variable	Coefficient	Standard Error	z	P	> z
Interpersonal trust	.12	.024	5.14	0.00	
Perceived corruption	-.07	.19	-3.69	0.00	
Poverty level	-.035	.015	-2.33	0.02	
Race	.32	.15	2.11	0.04	
Urban rural	-.09	.158	-0.53	0.60	
Police station present	-.18	.161	-1.11	0.27	
Police visible	.24	.152	1.64	0.10	
Age	.01	.01	1.15	0.25	
Education	.01	.10	.11	0.91	
Gender	-.05	.13	-0.39	0.97	
Religion	.00	.00	.67	.50	
Employed	.07	.137	0.54	0.59	
Fear of Crime	.51	.14	.20	0.36	
Victim property crime	.22	.157	1.44	0.15	
Victim violent crime	.01	.11	0.03	0.97	
Paid Bribe	.00	.28	-.01	0.99	
Constant	.52	.57	.91	0.36	

Table 3 reveals that four variables reach significance in the logistic regression analysis; interpersonal trust and corruption were beyond the .01 level, and the poverty measure at the .02 level of significance, and race at the .04 level. Except for the poverty measure, none of the demographic indicators reached significance, nor did the crime related measures, which included fear of crime or the victimization measures, for property or violent crime. The interpersonal trust measure was highly predictive of trust in the police, with a z-score of 5.14, as was corruption. Poverty and race were both significant, but both did not reach the .01 level of significance.

Discussion

The results presented here are partially consistent, and at the same time some findings contradict both the international and African literature devoted to trust in the police. The fact that Interpersonal trust was found to be the strongest predictor of trust in the police was consistent with Sharp and Johnson's (2009) findings from America. They reported that distrust of the police may include a pervasive pessimistic outlook that presupposes the individual toward distrust in general or overall hostility towards government and this in turn may shape distrust of the police in particular. The finding that the perception of corruption measure was a highly significant predictor of trust in the police was to be expected. The fact that poverty was another significant predictor of trust in the police was to be expected. In a recent study which also used Afrobarometer data, Justesen and Bjornskov (2012) found that poverty and corruption are linked. Those who are worst off materially were also more likely to be victims of corruption. The findings regarding race were also consistent with Carter's (2011) findings about the effects of race on trust of the police.

It was somewhat surprising that age, education, and the urban-rural distinction were not significant independent variables. Based on the South African criminal justice literature, there was also the assumption that fear of crime or prior victimization, both property or violent crime, would prove to be significant predictors of trust in the police, and they were not significant. The other surprising finding was the fact that the presence of a police station and what can be defined as police "visibility" were not significant predictors of trust in the police. The South African Victimization Study had suggested that police response time was the number one factor in citizen complaints that the police were not doing their jobs; this study was not able to shed any light on that issue.

This study did provide partial support for some of Pruitt's (2010) findings. His study attempted to determine whether the South African Police had succeeded in their new role, creating a democratic police force. He found evidence that respondents did display more trust in the police than they had previously. The purpose of this research was to identify those factors that predict citizen trust in the police in South Africa. The findings from this paper revealed that the levels of trust between Pruitt's study and this research were virtually identical. As shown in Table 2, the range for three years of data on the trust the police question was 1.7 percent. Noting that corruption was a chronic problem for South Africa, Pruitt identified corruption as a source of the lack of citizen trust in the South African Police. The results presented here support that conclusion. Pruitt also looked at the payment of bribes which was a measure that did not reach significance in the logistical regression analysis presented here. Pruitt did not include any of the demographic measures utilized here nor did he have a measure of interpersonal trust; the other measure which reached significance in the logistic regression.

Two ways are suggested in order to proceed with future research regarding trust in the police in South Africa. One is to look at some of the other data Afrobarometer has collected from other African countries, with the Round 4 consolidated file which contains 20 countries an example. As far as can be determined, this data remains underutilized to this point in time. Round 5 is being completed and is expected to be available by the end of 2013. The questions included in the country level questionnaires are sometimes changed or even eliminated, based on the assessment of country level experts regarding what is appropriate material/questions for that particular country. A second approach would consist of looking at the South African data utilized here and to look at breakdowns by province, and what are called districts; some of these are cities and their suburbs, and still others are villages.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the factors that predict trust in the police in South Africa. Consistent with the earlier paper by Pruitt (2010), this paper found that the perception of corruption was a significant predictor of trust in the police in South Africa. However, interpersonal trust was found to be the strongest predictor and poverty and race were found to be the other significant predictors of trust in the police. Perhaps what is most surprising are the number of previously identified predictors of trust in the police that were found to not be significant. These items range from fear of crime, criminal victimization, police visibility and a range of demographic factors, age, education and others. The suggestion for future research is twofold; 1) to begin to mine the wealth of information available from Afrobarometer about the numerous African countries that participate in this massive survey project. South Africa has been included in Round 5 which is being completed in 2011-2012 and should be available in 2013; and 2) there is the need to look more closely at the South African data which provided the basis of this paper. This would begin by examining possible differences in trust of the police by South Africa's nine provinces, as well as results available by what are called districts, in this instance by cities or suburbs of these cities. Whether those breakdowns would shed light on the issue of trust of the South African Police is an open question.

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