

Methodology

Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodology that will be used to investigate the research question “What drives public distrust of the police in England & Wales, and why do negative attitudes form. The research aims to identify the key factors contributing to public distrust of the police and examine why negative attitudes towards policing develop. In particular, the study will consider perceptions of police behaviour, accountability, legitimacy, media reporting, high-profile police incidents, and public trust.

The study will adopt a mixed-methods research strategy, using both quantitative and qualitative data collected through an anonymous online questionnaire. Mixed-method research allows researchers to combine different forms of data within a single study. It can be appropriate where the research problem requires both identifying patterns and understanding the explanations behind them REF. This approach is considered appropriate for the present research because the public distrust of policing is a complex issue that cannot necessarily be understood through numerical response alone.

Approximately 50 participants will be recruited. Recruitment will be primarily focused on North Wales through social media and the family and friends network. However, participants will not be required to live in North Wales, and any individual aged 18 or over from England and Wales will be eligible to participate. The questionnaire will include a combination of closed and open-ended questions. Quantitative response will be analysed using descriptive statistics in Microsoft Excel, and qualitative response will be analysed manually using thematic analysis. The findings from both data sources will subsequently be combined and considered alongside existing research and literature.

As ethical approval has been submitted to UWTSD and is currently awaiting approval, data collection will not commence until the appropriate ethical approval has been obtained. The methodology will therefore describe the attendant research process rather than the research already conducted.

Research Strategy

Mixed-methods approach

The research will employ a mixed-methods strategy, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches within a single questionnaire. Ref- Explains that mixed methods research involves an intentional integration of quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem. The

approach is particularly useful where one form of data may provide information that cannot be attained adequately through the other method.

The quantitative components of the research will be generated through a closed questionnaire. These questions will allow participants' attitudes towards policing to be recorded numerically and will provide a measurable benchmark across the samples. The qualitative component will be generated through open-ended questions, enabling participants to provide explanations and opinions in their own words. This will provide an additional in-depth look at the numerical findings.

The two forms of data will be analysed separately initially, then compared during the interpretation stage. REF- explains that integration is an important feature of mixed-methods research and can occur at the design, method, analysis, and interpretation stages. In this study, integration will primarily occur when the quantitative and qualitative findings are compared to identify areas of agreement, differences and explanation.

Justification of research strategy

The mixed-method approach has been selected as it will help me get the answer more clearly and support a more informed conclusion. The research is not solely concerned with measuring whether participants trust or distrust the police; it's more about understanding why negative attitudes form. A quantitative approach can identify patterns in attitudes, but it may provide limited information about the reasoning behind those attitudes. On the other hand, a qualitative response can allow participants to explain their views in greater detail.

For example, if a quantitative finding indicates a high proportion of participants believe that media reporting affects their trust in police, the quantitative response may help explain why participants hold this view. Similarly, if a participant reports a different level of trust depending on whether they have previously had contact with the police, the open-ended response may provide an additional avenue for understanding these differences.

The use of mixed methods helps provide a deep explanation. Quantitative data can identify patterns across samples, while qualitative data can explore the explanations associated with these patterns. REF - identifies the ability to combine different forms of evidence as an important strength of mixed-method research.

The approach will also allow the primary findings to be considered alongside the secondary evidence exemplified within the literature review. The research proposal identifies academic journal articles, governance reports, College of Policing materials, HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Service materials, Independent Office for Police Conduct materials, and Crime Survey for England and Wales data as

relevant secondary sources. The combination of primary and secondary evidence will help establish whether participants' views differ from existing research.

Data Collection

Online Questionnaire

Primary data will be collected through an anonymous online questionnaire. The questionnaire will be designed following ethical approval from UWTSD. An online questionnaire has been selected because it provides a more practical method for distributing questions to participants remotely and allows researchers to reach participants through online networks. REF- identifies a range of strengths and weaknesses associated with online survey research and highlights the continuing importance of online surveys within research.

The questionnaire is expected to take approximately 5 to 10 minutes to complete. Keeping the questions relatively short is an attempt to reduce participant burden whilst still allowing sufficient opportunity to address the research objectives.

The questionnaire will contain a combination of closed and open-ended questions. Different types of closed questions will be used where appropriate to measure a participant's attitudes and perceptions. Open-ended questions will allow participants to provide explanations or opinions in their own words. The use of both formats reflects the mixed-method design of the study

. The questions will develop around the research question and the four research objectives identified in the research proposal. These objectives concern identifying factors contributing to police distrust, examining the influence of police behaviour, accountability, and legitimacy, exploring the influence of media reporting and high-profile incidents, and considering strategies that could improve public trust and confidence.

The question will therefore examine several areas, including police behaviour and fairness, police accountability, police legitimacy and trust, media reporting, high-profile police incidents, and previous contact with the police. Participants will not be required to provide detailed accounts of personal experience. However, the questions will ask whether participants have previously had contact with the police. This information will allow for comparison of descriptions between participants who have had contact with the police and those who have not.

The questionnaire will also consider whether media reporting and high-profile policing incidents influence participants' perception of trust in the police. This directly relates to the research objective concerning the impact of media reporting and high-profile policing incidents on public trust.

Participants and sampling

The study will aim to recruit approximately 50 participants. Their sample size has been selected because it is considered manageable within the time and resource constraints of the master's dissertation, whilst providing sufficient responses to identify patterns in the collected data. The target of approximately 50 participants will not, however, be treated as a statistically representative sample of the wider population.

The participant will be an adult aged 18 and over. There will be no additional conclusion based on occupation. Recruitment will primarily focus on North Wales, reflecting the proposal's geological emphasis. However, living in North Wales will not be required for the participants. Eligible participants from elsewhere in England and Wales will therefore also be able to take part

Convenience sampling is appropriate for the practical circumstances of this study because the research is completed within a limited time frame and the resources of the master's dissertation. However, the approach also creates a limitation because participants will not be selected at random. REF- highlights the importance of recognising sampling considerations when evaluating the extent to which research findings can be generalised. Consequently, the findings from this study will be treated as exploratory rather than representative of all adults in England and Wales.

Demographic Information

The questionnaire will collect limited demographic information. Participants will be asked to provide their age in age categories rather than their exact age. The proposal categories will be 18-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54 and 55+.

Participants will also be asked to identify their gender using the categories male, female, non-binary, and prefer not to say. Geographical information will be collected at a broader level rather than the specific address or town; for example, participants may identify areas such as Gwynedd or Anglesey.

Education level, employment status, or ethnicity will not be collected. Limiting demographic questions in this way will reduce the amount of personal information collected, whilst still allowing basic comparisons to be made.

The demographic information will be used to explore whether patterns and attitudes towards policing differ between age groups, genders, and geographical areas. These comparisons will remain descriptive because the relatively small convenience sample does not support claims about broader population differences.

Recruitment procedure

Following ethical approval, the questionnaire will be distributed via the researcher's social media accounts and through the researcher's family and friends. A short recruitment message will accompany the questionnaire link. The recruitment message will explain the purpose of the research, identify who can participate and make it clear that participation is voluntary.

Friends and family will also be sharing the questionnaires with other eligible participants. The approach is intended to enhance the questionnaire's research and assist in obtaining the target sample.

If recruitment is slower than expected, the questionnaire will be shared more widely across social media platforms, and participants will be encouraged to share the questionnaire further. Recruitments will continue within the available dissertation time frame. If fewer than 50 responses are obtained, the available responses will still be analysed, and the final sampling question will be reported transparently as a limitation.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data analysis

The quantitative response obtained from a closed questionnaire will be organised and analysed using Microsoft Excel. The analysis will primarily use descriptive statistics because the research has a relatively small convenience sample and is not intended to produce statistically generalisable findings.

Frequencies and percentages will be calculated to identify patterns within participants' responses. Charts will also be used where appropriate to present the findings clearly. Descriptive statistics are appropriate for summarising the characteristics and responses of a sample without making claims that extend beyond the data collected
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Simple comparisons will also be made between demographic categories. For example, the research may compare responses between different age groups, genders and geographical areas. Comparisons may also be made between participants who have previously had contact with the police and those who have not.

The purpose of these comparisons will be to identify patterns within the sample rather than establish statistically significant relationships within the wider population. The research will therefore not use advanced statistical tests. This reflects the exploratory nature of the study and the relatively small non-probability sample.

Qualitative data analysis

The qualitative responses generated by the open-ended questions will be analysed manually using thematic analysis. REF – describe thematic analysis as a flexible

approach to identifying, analysing and reporting patterns within qualitative data. The method is suitable for this study because it will allow a current explanation of public distrust and negative attitudes towards policing to be identified across participants' responses.

The qualitative analysis will initially be guided by research objectives. Areas of interest will include police behaviour, accountability, legitimacy and fairness, media influence, reasons of distrust and potential approaches to improve public trust.

The researcher will first read the responses carefully to become familiar with the data. Relevance points will be identified and organised according to the research objectives. Similar responses will be grouped to identify recurring patterns and develop them into a broader theme. REF- Emphasis is important on systematic engagement with data when developing and reviewing themes.

Although the research objectives will be provided in the initial framework for analysis, the process will remain open to new themes emerging from participants' responses. If a participant identifies issues that were not anticipated in the original objective but are relevant to the research question, these will be considered in the analysis.

The qualitative analysis will therefore be both structured and responsive. It will provide a consistent framework for examining the responses, whilst allowing participants' views to introduce issues that may not have been anticipated when the questionnaire was designed

Integration of quantitative and qualitative findings.

Following the separate analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data, the findings will be compared and considered together. REF- identifies integration during interpretation as an important component of mixed method research, allowing researchers to consider how different forms of evidence relate to one another.

For example, if the quantitative result indicates that many participants believe media reporting influences public trust in the police, the quantitative response will examine the reasons participants provide for this influence. Likewise, if differences are identified between participants who have and those who have not had prior contact with the police, the qualitative response may provide additional context for interpreting those differences.

The quantitative and qualitative findings may therefore support, explain or challenge one another. This comparison will provide a more comprehensive interpretation than considering either data form in isolation.

The primary findings will also be compared with academic literature and secondary evidence examined within the dissertation. This will allow the research to consider

whether participants' views align with existing research on police legitimacy, accountability, and public confidence and distrust.

Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations will be addressed throughout the research process. The research ethical application will be submitted to UWTSD and is currently awaiting approval. Primary data collection will not commence until ethical approval has been received

Participation will be entirely voluntary. Before accessing the questionnaire, participants will receive information explaining the purpose of the research, the participants involved, how their responses will be used, and their rights as participants. Participants will be required to provide informal consent before proceeding.

Participants will have the right to withdraw before submitting their response. As the questionnaire will be anonymous, it will not be possible to identify an individual's response after submission. This limitation will therefore be made clear to participants before they complete the questionnaire.

No names, e-mail addresses, telephone numbers, addresses or other directly identifying information will be collected. Geographical information will be collected only at a broad level, rather than at specific addresses. This will minimise the amount of personal information collected.

The data will be stored securely using UWSTD OneDrive. The research data will be managed in accordance with the relevant university requirements and applicable data protection legislation. The precise retention. Will be determined in accordance with the relevant UWTSD research ethics and data management requirements rather than being assumed within this methodology.

Limitation and potential hurdles

Server limitations and practical hurdles may affect the research. The 1st is the target sample size, approximately 50 participants. Although this is considered manageable for a master's dissertation, such a sample cannot be considered representative of the wider population of England and Wales.

The second limitation relates to convenience sampling. Recruiting through social media and family and friends networks creates a possibility of self-selection bias. Individuals who choose to participate may have different views from those who do not. The sample may also become concentrated within a particular age group, gender, or geographical area.

The researcher may therefore face 2 practical recruitment difficulties: obtaining the target number of participants and achieving a reasonable spread across demographic groups. To address this issue, the questionnaire will be distributed across social media,

and participants will be encouraged to share this further through their own networks. Recruitment will also continue within an available dissertation time frame.

The online nature of the questionnaire creates an additional limitation, as participants cannot be asked to answer follow-up questions if their responses are unclear. An online survey can provide practical benefits but also pose methodological challenges related to participant recruitment and response quality REF. To reduce this problem, the questionnaire will use clear, accessible wording and be designed to take approximately 5-7 minutes to complete.

An incomplete response may also occur. Participants may choose not to answer individual questions or may leave the questionnaire before completing it. The available data will nevertheless be analysed where appropriate, and the extent of incomplete response will be acknowledged when interpreting the findings.

The geographical focus of the research means that the findings should not be interpreted as a representative account of public opinion across England and Wales. Although recruitment will primarily focus on North Wales, eligible participants from elsewhere in England and Wales are also welcome to participate. The study will therefore provide an exploratory account of participants' views.