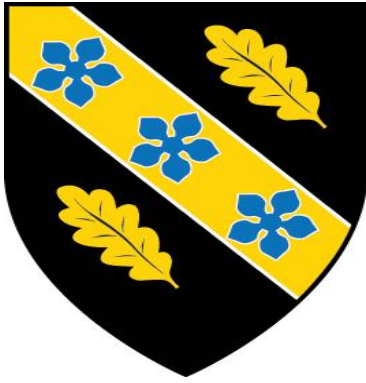




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UNIVERSITY OF WALES

Trinity Saint David

SWANSEA - ABERTAWE

**What is the public's perception of the routine arming of police officers in
England and Wales?**

By: Jorge Lee

Student Number: 2031205

Acknowledgements

As a person who puts themselves firmly in the 'non-academic' category, this research project has been an immense challenge for me personally as someone with neurodiverse conditions, which seem to pit me against myself when academic work must be undertaken. Yet, this challenge was a necessary one that had to be overcome to set my role as a police constable in stone for the foreseeable future, and has been completed to the very best of my ability. The completion of this research project would not have been possible without the love and support of my partner, many friends, family members and colleagues.

A special thanks is due to Kerry Merchant, a former tutor of mine, who had the power to make or break the journey I started back into education in 2018. Kerry's kind approach and genuine passion for helping people and educating resonated with me, and inspired me to push forward and achieve my goals regardless of how difficult the journey became. Thank you Kerry, you are still with me.

I must also give bucketfuls of credit to Dr. Rhiannon Sandy for her patience, understanding, assistance and support throughout not just this research project, but my entire course of study. Dr. Sandy has been there for me constantly at all hours of the day, and has provided valuable advice and guidance in a way that is both palatable to me and easily implementable. Without Dr. Sandy, this project would have been impossible, and Dr. Sandy has given me confidence and motivation in times where I needed a boost to chip away at this project or stay up until the early hours just to finish 'one more thing.' Thank you Rhiannon, I will always appreciate and remember you, and I wish I had met you much earlier on in life.

Declaration

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Signed: J. Lee

Date: 15/04/2024

Statement 1

This dissertation is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of BA.

Signed: J. Lee

Date: 15/04/2024

Statement 2

This dissertation is the result of my own independent work/investigation, except where otherwise stated.

Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

Signed: J. Lee

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I hereby give consent for my dissertation, if accepted, to be available for photocopying and for interlibrary loan, and for the title and summary to be made available to outside organisations.

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Abstract

There is limited research surrounding the topic of routine arming of police officers in England and Wales, and what the public's perception regarding this topic is. This project aims to conduct targeted research to explore how the public perceives the routine arming of police officers in England and Wales and what other inferences could be drawn from the results gathered from the study within.

This project will be conducting a study by way of a digital-based survey to collect responses from participants relating to the routine arming of police officers in England and Wales. This allows precise questions to be asked so that specific data can be collected and analysed.

Within the results of the study, 25 people responded to 7 questions. 52% of respondents said they were "Very comfortable" or "Comfortable" with the routine arming of police officers in England and Wales, and 52% said that routine arming would have a positive effect on the police's ability to keep the public safe. 68% of respondents thought that routinely armed police officers would keep the public safer. However, 72% of respondents believed that there were viable or effective alternatives to routine arming of the police.

To conclude, public perceptions regarding the routine arming of the police in England and Wales vary greatly. The majority of respondents appear to have a positive view towards routine arming of the police in England and Wales, but some respondents held negative reviews and raised valid points that must be considered in the discussion surrounding routine arming of the police.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Currently, police officers in England and Wales are not routinely armed, making them two of the very few countries in the world not to routinely arm their police officers (Fox, 2017). This could be considered an outdated approach rooted in the tradition that British police have never been routinely armed and thus never will be.

This 'tradition' is a false one, as British police have always had access to firearms and have always been armed. There have been periods where they have been routinely armed for the most part, such as during the First and Second World War when rifles, pistols and revolvers were issued to the police to discourage saboteurs and to provide protection in the case of an invasion of mainland Britain (Smith, *The History of Firearms in the British Police*, 2019).

It was decided to routinely arm the police in England and Wales during both world wars for the purposes of protecting themselves, the homeland, and the public, when conflict had not even touched mainland Britain, 'just in case' it came to it. This leaves the question of why not routinely arm police in England and Wales now 'just in case', especially considering there has been a heavy increase in knife crime levels over the last decade and 261 homicides involving a sharp instrument in 2022 alone? (ONS, 2023).

Investigations into the effect public perception has on the routine arming of police officers in England and Wales are limited. By conducting targeted research, this project explores how the public perceives the routine arming of police officers in England and Wales and what other inferences could be drawn from the results gathered from the study within.

This project opens with a limited review of some of the available literature surrounding this topic, before offering an insight into the research methodology and the way the project's study was planned and conducted. The results/findings of the study are presented, analysed and discussed one at a time. Finally, the project closes by offering its conclusions and recommendations.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

When considering policing in the context of the present day, it is important to continually evaluate the service it provides. The police as a service is informed by evidence-based policing (College of Policing, 2024) to ensure it is fit for purpose and equipped to deal with modern challenges that pose a threat to public safety. An important modern challenge and threat to public safety to consider is the increase in offences involving knives or sharp instruments and firearms. Compared to 2022, these increased by 5% to 48,716 and by 3% to 6,233 respectively in 2023 (ONS, 2023). One strategy to deal with this could be to routinely arm police officers in England and Wales. However, the research on whether this helps to reduce violent crimes and improve public perception is scarce and inconclusive. Additionally, as the police in England and Wales police by consent (Home Office, 2012) it is important to consider the public's perception on routine arming and the ability of the police to keep them safe. This will be investigated in this project. This investigation will be beneficial to policing within an academic context, as current research into the public's opinion of routine arming of the police in England and Wales is limited.

Throughout this project, 'routine arming' refers to police officers being forced to carry conventional firearms with access to live ammunition whilst conducting their duties as police officers, as part of their personal protective equipment (*PPE*), similar to how all police officers in England and Wales are currently routinely issued with handcuffs, incapacitant spray, a baton and body armour. These items are sometimes referred to as 'appointments,' and form the basis of what PPE a police officer is initially issued with from being appointed to the role and upon successful completion of relevant training courses (Thames Valley Police, 2023).

While the literature on the topic appears to be emerging, there are certainly gaps in the present research around routine arming of the police in England and Wales, this study intends on answering some of the more contemplative thoughts or concepts raised within. Routine arming of the police is a divisive topic, and this study will utilise questionnaires to target both serving police officers and members of the British public to capture their thoughts on routine arming of the police. It is hoped that this study will contribute to existing research surrounding whether public perception prevents the routine arming of the police. This will not only be by attempting to fill gaps in the existing research, but also by lightly exploring themes that surround and intertwine this topic, such as views of less-lethal options such as the widely used TASER (Northamptonshire Police, 2023) and whether these options are suitable alternatives to conventional firearms or not.

2.1 – Routine Arming of Police Officers

Traditionally, the police have not been routinely armed. However, in a modern England and Wales where terrorism and serious and organised crime are among the police's key priorities (Home Office, 2023), and can involve seriously violent acts, this could be considered a "tradition trap". Providing all police officers with lethal firearms as tools-of-the-trade could bring policing in England and Wales into the modern era, joining its contemporaries that do arm their police officers. Various examples of police forces that routinely arm their officers can be found across the world. The presumption is that these police officers are routinely issued with firearms to be used for the defence of themselves and others; the 'others' being the public that the police exist to protect. Such forces such as Police Service Northern Ireland (PSNI) and the seven territorial police forces of Australia (Barker, 2018) would perhaps be more similar to the police in England and Wales than police forces in the United States of America (USA) would be, and thus more suitable for examination and consideration throughout this study. These are more applicable considerations as there are more similarities within the cultures, judicial systems and law enforcement apparatus of Northern Ireland and Australia, owed mostly to the fact that Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom and Australia is part of the Commonwealth of Nations. As a result, both countries are heavily influenced by common law and the 'English' legal system that reigned in the territories of both the British Empire and still reign its modern-day remnants (Creyke, Hamer, O'Mara, Smith, & Taylor, 2021).

PSNI and the Australian police are routinely armed with personal issued handguns such as the Glock 17 (PSNI, 2022) (Sporting Shooters Association of Australia, 2004). Firearm acquisition and application within law enforcement in the USA is less standardised and therefore much more difficult to consider and compare. This is because the USA's system of law enforcement is made up of hundreds of municipal and state police agencies, as well as county sheriff's departments, special district police and federal law enforcement agencies (OSCE, 2024). Additionally, given the sheer scale of the USA's law enforcement apparatus and the inherent differences in most cases from town-to-town, it is impossible to draw on a consistent standard of consideration and comparison to use appropriately within this study.

The founding of the Metropolitan Police in 1829 saw the introduction of a police force in England that would carry out law enforcement functions in a more professional manner than had been seen previously. Prior to their establishment, disorder and other situations requiring a professional policing presence would mean the British Army were called upon, complete with their distinct red uniforms and rifles. In stark contrast, the Metropolitan Police were armed with truncheons, yet inspectors and above in rank could carry small pocket pistols or revolvers, and some police officers could be armed with sabres when policing dangerous areas or in the case of an emergency (Smith, The History of Firearms in the British Police, 2023). Police officers were also issued with conventional firearms (*typically revolvers*) in limited

numbers on various occasions throughout the 19th century. Following the murder of two police officers at the hands of armed burglars in

June 1884, 4,430 out of 6,325 police officers within the Metropolitan Police wanted to be armed. The Home Office then ordered around 1,000 revolvers from manufacturer Webley & Son, which were to be issued to police officers conducting night duties at the discretion of the divisional commander. Despite all this, most never used these revolvers, and while firearms were certainly more accessible to police officers at that time than perhaps ever before or since, they were certainly not routinely armed, nor was it imposed on those police officers that they must be armed to conduct their duties as police officers (Waldren, 1994).

Currently, of approximately 150,000 warranted police officers in England and Wales' (Home Office, 2023), only around 6,651 of these are routinely armed (Bradley, 2023). In order for these officers to be routinely armed as part of their role, they must first be selected and trained to become an accredited Authorised Firearms Officer (AFO), and be given the authorisation by a Chief Officer within their force to carry a firearm (College of Policing, 2023). As such, there are a limited number of AFO's in England and Wales. By comparison, upon completion of initial training, police officers within PSNI are issued with the above appointments as well as a personal issue handgun, which they are authorised to carry both on and off duty (PSNI, 2022). It is important to recognise the unique set of circumstances surrounding PSNI police officers being routinely armed, as while Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom, police officers serving there have had additional threats to face than that of counterparts on the British mainland. These threats present themselves in the form of acts of domestic terrorism that have been perpetrated against British military and police personnel as a result of the so-called 'Troubles' in both Northern Ireland and Ireland (Imperial War Museum, 2023).

2.2 – Justifications for Routine Arming

Recent statistics show that from 1st October 2022 to 30th September 2023 alone, PSNI recorded 7 bombing incidents, 35 shooting incidents, 33 casualties of paramilitary style assaults, 19 casualties of paramilitary style shootings and 120 security related arrests under the Terrorism Act (PSNI, 2023). Comparatively, most recent policing statistics from England and Wales show 6,645 offences being committed involving firearms, and these firearms are broken down into type used; 380 shotguns, 2,003 handguns, 55 rifles, 2,566 imitation firearms, 1,090 unidentified firearms and 551 'other' firearms (ONS, 2023). Thus, this data begs the question why all police in England and Wales are not routinely armed when it appears they are considerably more likely to deal with offences involving firearms than their PSNI counterparts in a one-year period. As domestic terrorism is more prevalent in Northern Ireland, and the memory of the Troubles and the Global War on Terrorism are recent in Ireland, this could provide the wider British public with justification,

support, understanding and acceptance for PSNI's routine arming (National Archives, 2023).

The Royal Ulster Constabulary (*RUC*) was the police force for Northern Ireland from 1922 until 2001, when it was transformed into PSNI as we know it today. The RUC were routinely armed with revolvers and sometimes automatic weapons even before the Troubles began (Pockrass, 1987). The Good Friday Agreement of 1998 proposed a reorganisation of several systems within Northern Ireland's society, including the policing system, and thus a review into policing was commissioned (The Belfast Agreement, 1998). In 1999, the independent commission on policing for Northern Ireland, or the so-called 'Patten Commission' produced what is commonly known as 'the Patten Report.' This report acknowledged that the Good Friday Agreement had stated that the police service, "in a peaceful environment, should be routinely unarmed," much like as was and still is the norm throughout the rest of the United Kingdom. The report specifically refuted this, and stated that it did not believe the "peaceful environment" referred to in the Good Friday Agreement existed, and the report made the recommendation for PSNI to remain routinely armed, but continuously review moving towards the objective of a routinely unarmed police service as the security environment of Northern Ireland developed (Patten, et al., 1999).

In February 1894, the brutal attack of several police officers in Sydney, New South Wales at the hand of armed robbers during what is now called the 'Bridge Street Affray' changed the way police officers went about their duties in New South Wales. The brandishing of a revolver by one of the robbers and the threat to shoot police officers shocked the public, and the press of the time began demanding in media that all police officers be issued with revolvers as a matter of routine. Within days of the incident, all police officers on night duties were issued revolvers (The Sydney Morning Herald, 1894). Soon after, the Premier of New South Wales, Sir George Dibbs, came under public pressure from the incident, and perhaps conscious of the upcoming election for his office later in the year, quickly instituted the routine arming of all police officers with revolvers within the state (Franks, 2018). This showcases a phenomenal example of a process for how public perception affects routine arming of the police.

2.3 – Public Perception of the Routine Arming of Police Officers

Public perception is extremely important when the policing model in England and Wales is considered. 'Policing by consent' is a philosophy within British policing, which dates back to at least 1829. It refers to the concept of the power and legitimacy of the police coming from the common consent of the public and being driven by social change, rather than being imposed by the state. The concept relies heavily on public cooperation, and one of its tenets are, in basic terms, 'the people are the public, and the public are the police.' This tenet gives credence to the notion that the British public want a police force that reflects them, is them, and is there to

help them, not oppress them (Home Office, 2012). Public perception must therefore be considered within British policing whenever a key decision, such as the decision to routinely arm police, is to be made.

Public perception of the routine arming of police in England and Wales is not abundantly documented in the literature. Public perception of routine arming depends heavily on a person's trust in the police and opinion on whether routine arming is fair and proportionate (Jackson, Bradford, & Stanko, 2012). As perception of the police in England and Wales is the most negative it has been since 2020, and only 46% of the public feel positive about the police, this could mean the public would have negative perceptions towards the routine arming of the police (IOPC, 2023). The majority of the public's view of the police in Australia is that they are fair, honest and professional on the whole, meaning they have a largely positive perception of the police, despite them being routinely armed (Macdonald, 2023), although the proportion of people who share these views has decreased significantly and is at an all-time low when comparing with previous years. This positive view is not shared by most indigenous people, however, as the data suggests that this group have been negatively affected by Australian police for several decades (Korff, 2023). Public perception of the police in Northern Ireland is mostly positive with the majority of the public stating they are "satisfied" with policing (Ulster University, 2024). This opinion does differ greatly between Protestants and Catholics. However, there are still murder attempts against and attacks on police officers in Northern Ireland by minority groups, and in 2023 the threat of terrorism was increased to the threat level of "severe" (Sproule & O'Neill, 2023). As public opinions are heavily influenced by demographics and socioeconomic circumstances (Yesberg & Bradford, 2019) and as there are wide variations in these opinions across the general public in England and Wales, it is important that the opinions of minorities are not excluded, as they can differ greatly from the "average" view.

Given that gun ownership is extremely limited and strictly controlled in the UK, it could be argued from a public perception standpoint that, 'the public don't have firearms, so why should the police?'. However, this neglects to consider the fact that criminals are not representative of the wider public, and those who involve firearms or knives and sharp instruments in their criminal activities pose a threat to the safety of the public and police. It could be suggested, therefore, that by having a routinely unarmed police force, police officers are perceived to not be adequately equipped to protect themselves or the public without a conventional lethal option such as a firearm (AOAV, 2023).

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

The purpose of the research methodology is to describe the methods and procedures used to conduct research and analyse the results to contribute to the project. Having a robust methodology will enable the reader to evaluate the project's reliability and validity. The methodology needs to contain enough detail for an independent person to conduct the research successfully in the same way as done in this project. The methodology will also identify the most appropriate research philosophy and method to successfully engage with the project's question: "What is the public's perception of the routine arming of police officers in England and Wales?"

The methodological strategy for this project can be illustrated in a rudimentary manner using the PICO model (Richardson, Wilson, Nishikawa, & Hayward, 1995):

- P (Population) – Members of the general public and the police,
- I (Intervention) – A survey with subsequent quantitative analysis,
- C (Comparison) – Existing data regarding routine arming of police and current codes of practise relating to armed policing,
- O (Outcome) – Contribute evidence to the discussion surrounding routine arming of police officers in England and Wales.

3.1 – Research Types

There are two types of research that were considered to be undertaken for this project: primary and secondary. Primary research is information that is gathered or generated first-hand by the author of the project, whereas secondary research is information that is gathered or generated second-hand from existing data, sources or studies (University of Minnesota Crookston, 2023). While both types of research are suitable for use in this project, primary research will be necessary and more prevalent to contribute to achieving the project's goals. This is due to the fairly limited existing research around the topic of routine arming, but particularly the nuances this project seeks to engage with.

3.2 – Chosen Research Philosophy

This project has adopted positivism as its research philosophy. Positivism relies on measurable observations, and states that if something is not measurable then it cannot be proven as fact. A positivist approach will enable the project to draw meaningful conclusions, which can subsequently be used to inform the project's overall conclusion (Ryan, 2018). Given that this project is conducting its research by way of a quantitative survey, a positivist approach is deemed appropriate.

3.3 – Methodological Approaches

There are three core types of methodological approaches when conducting research: deductive, inductive and mixed. For the purposes of contributing to the discussion surrounding routine arming of police officers in England and Wales in a meaningful way, all approaches have been considered for use in this project.

3.4 – Chosen Research Approach

Inductive research uses a ‘bottom-up’ approach and is ideal for smaller samples that are analysed more critically. The inductive approach seeks to begin with an observation (or observations) and then seeks to find a pattern within (Babbie, 2010).

The deductive approach was considered for use in this project, but it can be considered as “reasoning from the general to the particular” (Pellissier, 2008), while the inductive approach is completely the opposite. These two approaches must be considered as distinctly different from one another, and best applied in separate circumstances. Given the sample size of this project and the lack of any existing or known pattern to test against, the most appropriate approach for use in this project is the inductive approach.

3.5 – Data Collection Method, Sample and Design

This project will be using a digital-based survey to collect data. This will allow precise questions to be asked so that perhaps more nuanced data can be collected and analysed than currently exists relating to the topic of routine arming. While there seems to be some existing research regarding routine arming, the question this research project aims to explore is: “What is the public’s perception of the routine arming of police officers in England and Wales?” While this could be considered as somewhat more nuanced than typical discussions around the topic of routine arming, there appears to be a clear gap in the research when it comes to the specific area of public perception and its potential influence on routine arming. Given this nuanced question, the survey will be composed of seven questions. These will be closed, multiple-choice questions that will seek to gather relevant and current data to help establish a respondents view on routine arming and thus contribute to the current research on the topic. Two questions allow respondents to choose a pre-determined answer or specify with a free-text response, thus enabling more qualitative data.

These types of questions have been chosen as they take less time for a respondent to answer than an open question, thus increasing the survey’s completion rate. Additionally, the data will be easier to analyse, and the overall sentiment relating to public perception’s impact on routine arming can be quantified more immediately.

The survey will be created using SurveyMonkey.com and be distributed via email and private messaging. The goal of this method of distribution is to achieve a larger, more diverse sample. The survey should take no longer than five minutes to complete, which is necessary to avoid respondents getting survey fatigue and ensuring higher quality respondent engagement and resulting data (de Koning, et al., 2021).

The survey will target both currently serving police officers and non-police officers; this will enable conclusions to be drawn as to whether or not police officers perceive things differently to 'civilian' members of the public, effectively capturing both sides of the story. The survey has been designed so that it is quick to complete and easy to read, so that respondents will be more inclined to participate, share the survey and thus produce a larger dataset. The results will be collated and displayed in a relevant form of graph or chart and an analysis will follow.

3.6 – Analysis Method

The data from the survey will be analysed both qualitatively and quantitatively, through the use of crosstab analysis. This will allow relationships between the results of different questions to be investigated, which will reveal any correlations and help to answer the question posed by the project.

3.7 – Limitations and Ethical Considerations

Quantitative analysis will be used due to the time and resource constraints of the project, which means research must be conducted in a more simplified way. The consequences of simplifying the research in the form of a single online survey means that certain demographics may be excluded from the research. This also means that the sample is not as large as it could be if the survey were distributed using more wide-reaching means, such as in-person surveying or distributing paper copies.

The survey will gather anonymous responses as total anonymity can result in a respondent being less motivated to answer in a thorough and precise manner (Jaidka, Zhou, Lelkes, Egelhofer, & Lecheler, 2021). However, total anonymity is necessary because some respondents may be serving police officers, which mandates personal security/anonymity. Some respondents may be more likely to express their views honestly if they know their responses are anonymised and thus shielded from potential backlash. Additionally, the introductory page of the survey explains to respondents that they will be kept anonymous, that no personal data will be collected and that their responses will be used as part of this research project. Formal ethical approval has been sought via a comprehensive ethics form and granted by University of Wales Trinity Saint David.

3.8 – Time Considerations

Considerations have been made to time and the limitations it may present. There is not much time to collect responses for the survey in a varied way, as human resources in this project are extremely limited. The project also considers that people in general are busy with their own lives, and this coupled with the project's assumption that routine arming is a polarizing subject, may mean some potential respondents may not want to give up their free time to participate in the survey and thus engage with the topic at all. Additionally, as there is a deadline for this project's submission, the research must be conducted in a more timely manner, especially when this project's limited human resources are considered.

3.9 – Summary

Research will thus be conducted by way of an online survey containing closed questions so that deductive research can be conducted. The results will be collated in relevant forms of graphs or charts and then an analysis of these results will follow.

Chapter 4: Analysis of Results

This chapter will present an analysis of the results from a survey conducted as part of this project. The survey contained 7 questions and 25 different people responded.

Question 1) Are you currently a serving police officer?

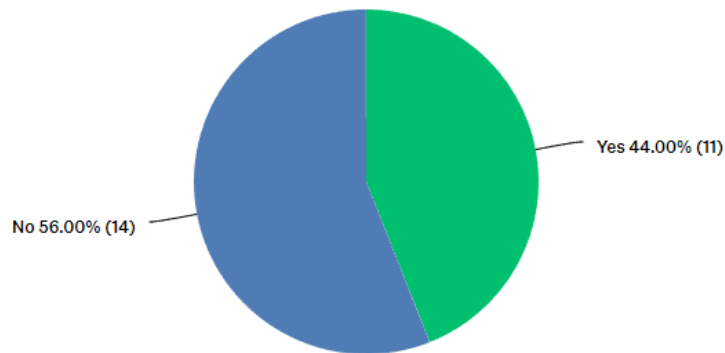


Figure 1 - A pie chart showing the percentage of respondents who are/are not currently serving police officers.

Question 1 aimed to determine the percentage of respondents that were currently serving police officers. This would provide a greater understanding of respondents' background when analysing further responses. 11 people responded "Yes", 14 responded "No" (Figure 1). Both answers have a similar number of responses which is important to provide a balance of opinions and reduce biases.

Question 2) Did you know that most police officers in England and Wales are routinely unarmed, meaning they do not carry firearms as part of their everyday duties?

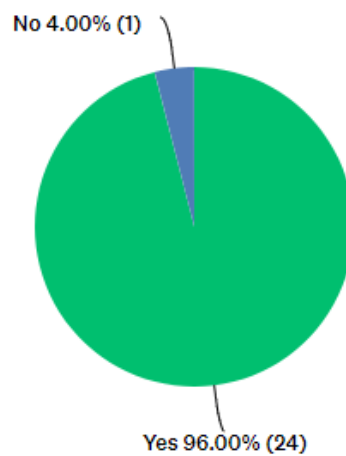


Figure 2 - A pie chart showing the percentage of respondents who knew that police officers in England and Wales are routinely unarmed.

The aim of the second question was to establish if the respondents understood the current situation of routine-arming in England and Wales and basic knowledge of the topic under investigation. 1 of the 25 respondents said they were not aware that most police officers were routinely armed. 24, the vast majority, said they were aware (Figure 2).

Question 3) How comfortable are you with the idea of all police officers being routinely armed?

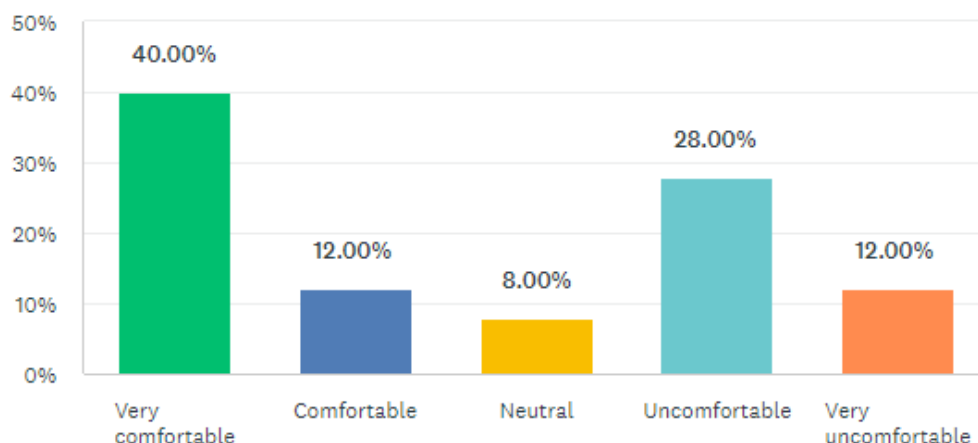


Figure 3.1 - A graph showing how comfortable respondents are with the idea of all police officers being routinely armed.

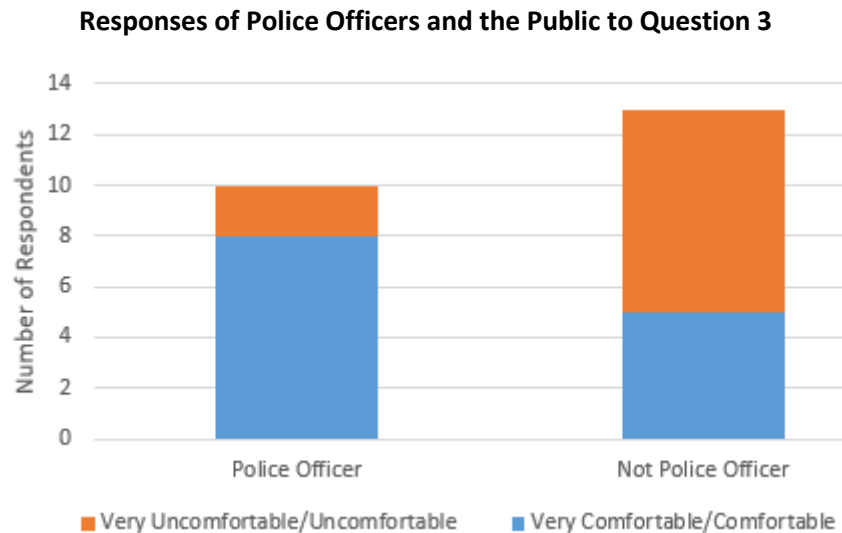


Figure 3.2 - A graph to show the number of people who were “Very Comfortable/Comfortable” and “Very Uncomfortable/Uncomfortable” with the routine arming of police officers and the proportion that stated they were or were not serving police officers.

The majority of respondents to this question, 52%, revealed they were either “Very comfortable” or “Comfortable”, with the routine arming of police officers. Whereas 40% stated that they were “Uncomfortable” or “Very uncomfortable.” 8%, stated that they were “Neutral” (Figure 3.1).

Out of all the respondents who answered “Very comfortable” or “Comfortable”, 8 stated they were police officers while 5 stated they were not. Out of all the respondents who answered “Very uncomfortable” or “Uncomfortable”, 2 stated they were police officers while 8 stated they were not (Figure 3.2). Therefore, the majority of positive responses came from police officers, whereas the majority of negative responses came from the public.

Question 4) What most influences your opinion regarding routine arming of police officers?

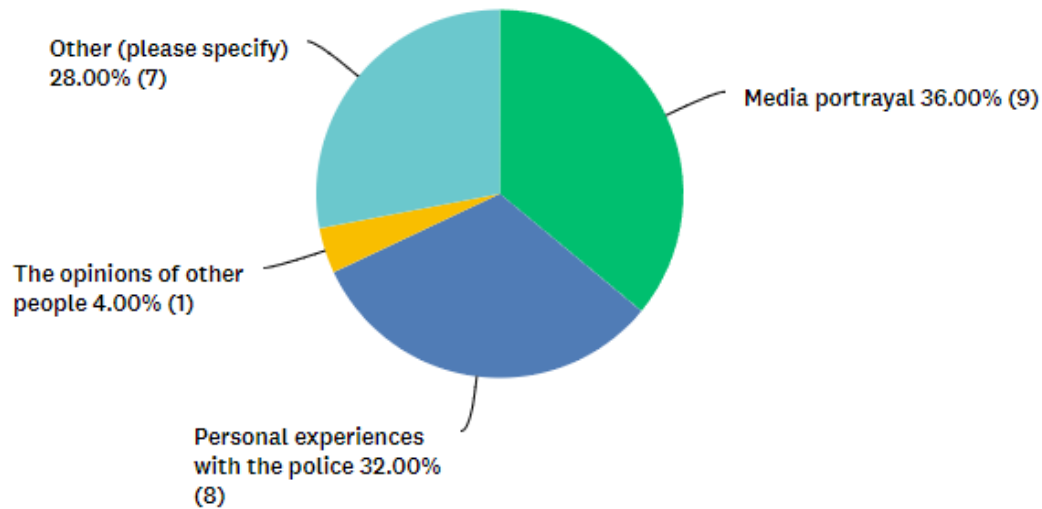


Figure 4.1 – A pie chart showing what most influences the opinion of respondents regarding routine arming of police officers.

The attitude of respondents to routine arming of the police and the sources that influence them:

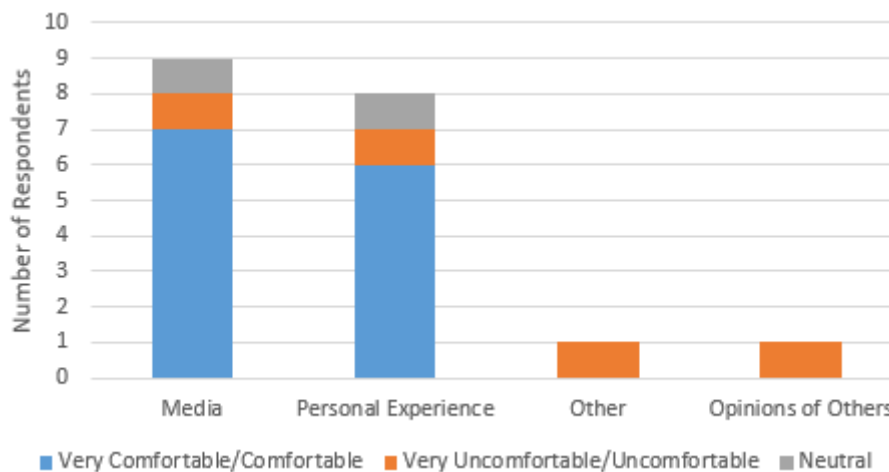


Figure 4.2 – A graph to show the comfortability of respondents with the routine arming of the police and what influences them most.

Question 4 aimed to understand the main sources of influence for police perception. While the answers indicated a variety of sources, “Media Portrayal” was the most common answer, 36% (Figure 4.1). 6 of the 7 people who answered “Other” were members of the public. The majority of these detailed that firearms could cause more deaths and violence, and some were concerned about police being inadequately trained.

All 7 of these respondents answered negatively to question 3. Of the 8 respondents who selected “Personal Experiences with the Police”, 6 responded positively to question 3. The single person who responded that they didn’t know the police weren’t routinely armed stated that “Opinions of Others” influences their opinion of routine arming the most (Figure 4.2).

Question 5) If police officers were routinely armed, what effect do you think this would have on the police's ability to keep the public safe?

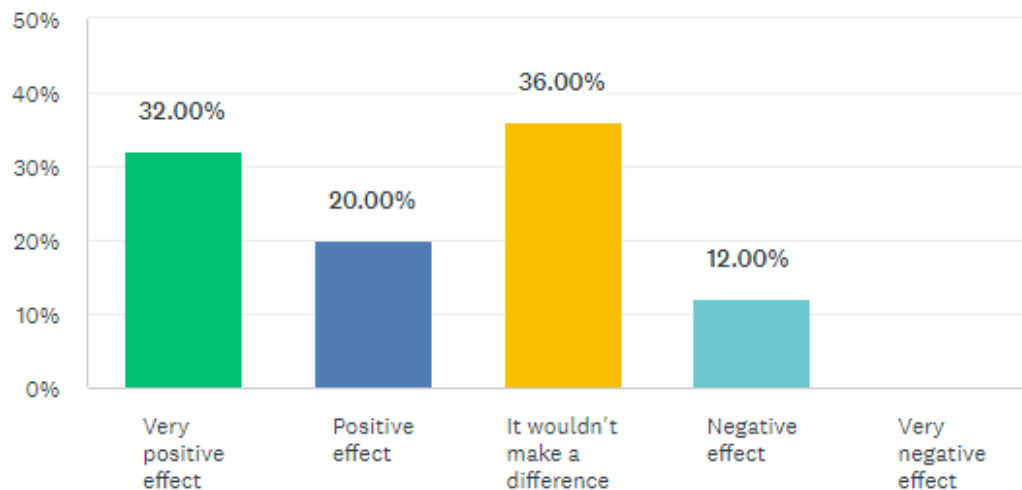


Figure 5 - A graph showing what effect respondents think police officers being routinely armed would have on the police's ability to keep the public safe.

This question aimed to understand the respondents’ thoughts on the effect on public safety routine arming would have. None of the respondents thought routine arming would have a “Very Negative” impact and 3 thought it would have a “Negative” impact (Figure 5). 2 of these people were not police officers and stated in the previous question that they were worried about an increase in deaths due to routine arming. The other respondent was a police officer and stated that media influenced them most about routine arming.

The majority of respondents, 52%, held a positive opinion about this question, with 5 selecting “Positive effect” and 8 “Very positive effect” (Figure 5). Out of these 13 people, 6 were not police officers. All of them stated they were “Comfortable”, “Very comfortable” or “Neutral” with the routine arming of police and were mostly influenced by the media or experiences with the police. 36% of respondents stated that routine arming wouldn’t impact the ability of police to keep the public safe.

Question 6) Do you believe there are viable and effective alternatives to routine arming that would enable the police to keep the public safe?

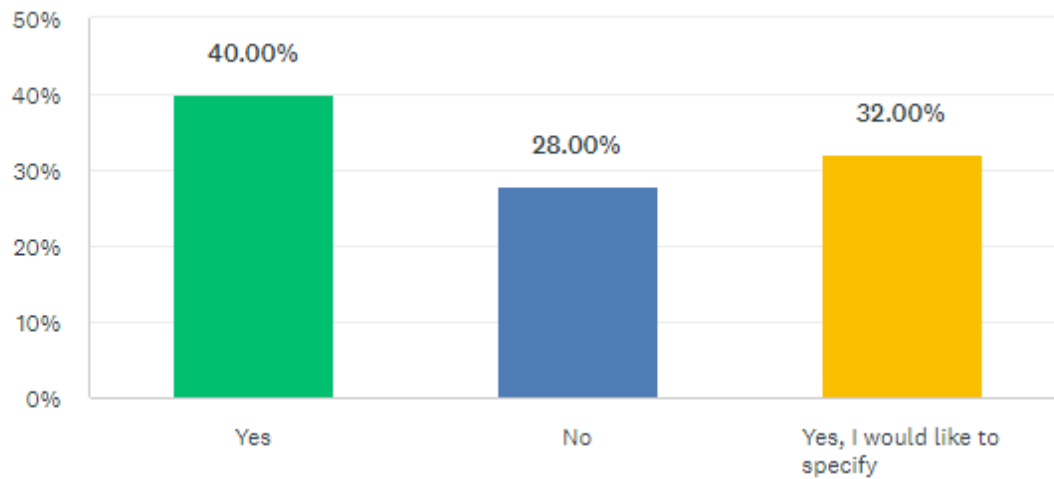


Figure 6 - A graph showing the percentage of respondents who believe that there are viable and effective alternatives to routine arming that would enable the police to keep the public safe.

The minority of respondents to this question, 28%, stated that they didn't believe there were any alternatives to routine arming of the police. These also believed that routine arming would have a "Positive" or "No effect" on the police's ability to keep the public safe. The majority, 72%, thought there were alternatives and 8 of these specified their alternative (Figure 6). 4 related to the increased use of tasers or baton guns and 3 related to increased training and officers.

Question 7) Who do you think is able to keep the public safer?

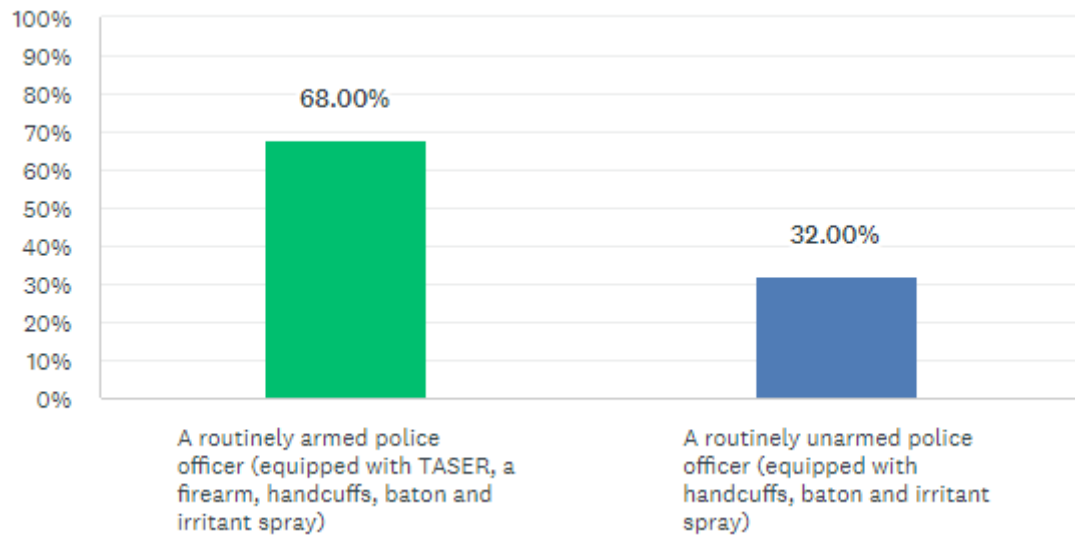


Figure 7 - A graph showing who respondents feel is able to keep the public safer.

This question revealed that the majority of respondents, 68%, thought a routinely armed police officer would be able to keep the public safer than an unarmed police officer (Figure 7). All of the 32% that responded “unarmed” to this question, stated they were “Very uncomfortable” or “Uncomfortable” with the routine arming of police officers.

Chapter 5: Findings and Conclusion

5.1 – Findings

The results from this survey demonstrate how both currently serving police officers and members of the public understand the topic of routine arming of police officers in England and Wales, and how this understanding influences their perception, which in turn can influence the routine arming of police officers. The results from this survey show that public perception of routine arming varies depending on the circumstances and is influenced in many different ways.

There are many metrics to consider when discussing routine arming of the police and the influence the public have. Public understanding of the contemporary situation could influence routine arming. As the 1 respondent who was not aware that police in England and Wales were not routinely armed (Figure 2) was a member of the public, it could be suggested that 1 in 14 members of the public, 7%, are not aware of this fact.

Despite a small majority of the public having a positive perception of police officers in England and Wales being routinely armed, it is important not to overlook the large portion of the public that are uncomfortable with this idea, which is evident from stated concerns over possible increases in deaths and harm. The results from question 3 (Figure 3.2) could have arisen from police officers having a better understanding of why they might need to be routinely armed through their own experiences, and thus feel more comfortable about police officers being routinely armed. The media was identified as the largest source of influence on the public (Figure 4.1), which could cause public perception to have a negative impact on the police in England and Wales being routinely armed, as highlighted in the literature review. The wide variety of influential sources mentioned by the respondents (Figure 4.1) means they may be more informed about situations like the routine arming of police, but too many influences may cause a choice overload bias (TDL, 2021), which can have various negative impacts.

Interactions with the police seem to have a positive impact on public perception, and therefore routine arming (Figure 4.2). This finding agrees with the points aforementioned in this project's literature review. 6 of the respondents who responded positively to question 3 said their main influence was interactions with the police.

It is clear that the public's perception is that the police require more resources to keep the public safe (Figure 6). 72% believed there were alternatives and 8 specified

these alternatives. Of these 8, 3 previously stated that they were “Very comfortable” with the routine arming of police. This means that even if someone is comfortable with routine arming, they may not think it is the best way to keep the public safe, and this perception may have a negative effect on routine arming if they think other methods may be sufficient or superior. All of these methods would require police forces to be given additional funding for resources, equipment and training. This perception could affect routine arming as it has been suggested that perception affects funding (Shakespeare, 2023).

2 people who said they were “Uncomfortable” with the idea of routine arming of the police stated they believed an armed police officer could keep the public safer. This suggests that perception of the police and safety circumstances may be more influential on a member of the public’s individual opinion on routine arming. However, this study further showed that 32% of respondents who thought an unarmed police officer could keep the public safer were also uncomfortable with routine arming. Considering these results, such a large percentage of respondents disapproving of routine arming in this way would likely prevent the police being routinely armed, as routine arming could not be enacted whilst adhering to the tenets of policing by consent (Home Office, 2012). There would likely have to be a much higher favourable majority to do so.

5.2 – Conclusion

To conclude, the results of the study were inconclusive. It is clear that public perceptions regarding the routine arming of the police in England and Wales vary greatly. While the majority of respondents appear to have a positive view towards routine arming, some respondents held negative reviews and raised valid points that must be considered in the discussion surrounding routine arming of the police.

Chapter 6: Recommendations, Limitations and Further Work

Due to the aforementioned time and resource constraints present during this project, only a small amount of data was collected from a single survey in the form of an online questionnaire. If the opportunity arose for lengthier research to take place in the future, it would be recommended that the study be expanded to include more questions more directly relevant to public perception and its impact on routine arming. It would also be recommended that the sample size be greatly expanded to better represent and gather the opinions of the general public, and the way in which the survey is distributed should be expanded to include multiple methods rather than just being online for the same reasons.

Further work should be undertaken to consider how routine arming would impact things such as police officer retention, police training programmes/standards, budget implications for police forces and whether policing by consent would need to be revisited as a concept when police officers are routinely armed, and what the public's perception on these things are. This project only touches the surface of public perception, and it was discovered during its completion that there is far too much that can and should be discussed relating to this topic. This discussion would be necessary to ensure that the police are able to adequately protect the public, and receive appropriate protections themselves when executing their duties.

As a result of the study, this project recommends that vast further investigations must be conducted before the routine arming of the police in England and Wales is even considered. Larger, more varied groups must have a higher representation in the data, as public perception and opinions of the police will depend largely on a person's demographic and personal experiences. This project also recommends that more research be conducted into whether the police being routinely armed increases deaths of members of the public and members of the police. The current data regarding this is inconclusive and often biased. This concern was highlighted by respondents in the results of the study. This project's final recommendation garnered from the results of the study, is to further investigate how public perception has influenced other policies in England and Wales, and what the impacts on the public and the police were. Previous successes and failures can be reflected upon and learned from to improve how policies are implemented in the future, possibly like the routine arming the police. As this study revealed positive perceptions of the police coincided with interactions/experiences with the police, this would be a good place to start when attempting to uncover more about the public's perception of the police.

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Appendix