

# Does the Fear of Crime Erode Public Confidence in Policing?

Jonathan Jackson\*, Ben Bradford\*, Katrin Hohl\* and Stephen Farrall\*

**Abstract** This paper examines the relationship between public confidence in policing and public perceptions of crime, disorder and social cohesion. Combining data from ten sweeps of the British Crime Survey, our analysis suggests that public confidence is based less on instrumental concerns about crime and more on expressive concerns about neighbourhood stability and breakdown. Therefore, confidence may be driven not by fear of crime but by lay concerns about disorder, cohesion and informal social control. Members of the public look to the police as old-fashioned representatives of community values and norms—as symbols of moral authority who address everyday problems and strengthen social order. To increase public confidence and decrease the fear of crime, the police need to re-engage as an active part of the community and represent and defend community values, norms and morals. We conclude, however, by questioning whether a pervasive (Loader (2006). “Policing, Recognition and Belonging.” *The Annals of the American Academy* 605: 201–221) police response to problems of low-level social disorder is either fully achievable or fully desirable. The causes of public anxiety about disorder may themselves run deeper than a policing response can (or should) reach.

## Introduction

The primary job of the police is to deal with crime: the ethos, image and mythology of the police are all built around an institution comprising ‘thief-takers’ and ‘crime-stoppers’ (Reiner, 2000). Yet as Bittner noted, the remit of the police actually runs far beyond crime, extending to any situation in which the use of non-negotiable coercion is required: the police are charged with dealing with situations where ‘something-that-ought-not-to-be-happening-and-about-which-someone-had-better-

do-something-now!’ is occurring (Bittner, 2005, p. 161).

When it comes to locating the sources of public confidence in the police, there is a tension between two conceptions of what the public think that the police should be doing. One is grounded in a deeply rooted perception that the job of the police is primarily to reduce crime and provide safety. According to this perspective, people judge the police chiefly in terms of crime rates, perceived chances of victimization, fear of crime, and so forth. This ‘instrumental’

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model holds that personal worries about falling victim of crime drive confidence in the police.

The second conception is based on the idea that the public perceive a more wide-ranging role for the police. Two recent UK-based studies have suggested that public confidence in policing is rooted in lay evaluations of social order, cohesion, trust and moral consensus (Jackson and Sunshine, 2007; Jackson and Bradford, 2008).<sup>1</sup> Such findings are consistent with the idea that people look to the police to defend community values and moral structures, especially when they believe these structures to be under threat. A more 'expressive' model stands in contrast to the instrumental model, holding that confidence in policing is rooted not in fear of crime, nor in perceptions of risk, but in more symbolic yet 'day-to-day' concerns about neighbourhood cohesion and collective efficacy. In essence, low confidence in policing expresses not just an unfavourable assessment of police activities but also an unfavourable assessment of the strength of local community ties and bonds. Put another way, people hold the police to account for local issues such as young people hanging around and the feeling that local community members have lost control over their neighbourhood.

Understanding the ways in which people form judgements about the British police has become increasingly important in practitioner, policy and academic circles.<sup>2</sup> Issues of confidence and legitimacy are keenly felt in a country where 'policing by consent' has long been the ideal. And whatever the ups and downs of police–community relations, there is much to suggest that people obey laws and cooperate with authorities when they see laws as legitimate and authorities as entitled to be obeyed. Such

legitimacy promotes self-regulation—a more effective way of achieving compliance with the law than coercion—and encourages people to report crimes, provide information and do all the other things that the criminal justice system relies on in order to function effectively.

At present, policies addressing confidence in policing—such as the National Reassurance Policing Programme—are strongly linked to the 'reassurance gap' (crime is falling but this appears to have had little impact on confidence), to a public ever-vocal in their demands for greater visibility and accessibility and to a strident mass media and populist punitive politics. Such policies recognize that ideas about the police are influenced by more than the local or national crime rates. Attempts are being made to improve public confidence and reduce fear of crime by moving away from narrow crime targets to deal with broader concerns about disorder and public incivility, as well as address issues of police visibility and community relationships. It is against this backdrop that we consider some of the processes underpinning public confidence in policing.

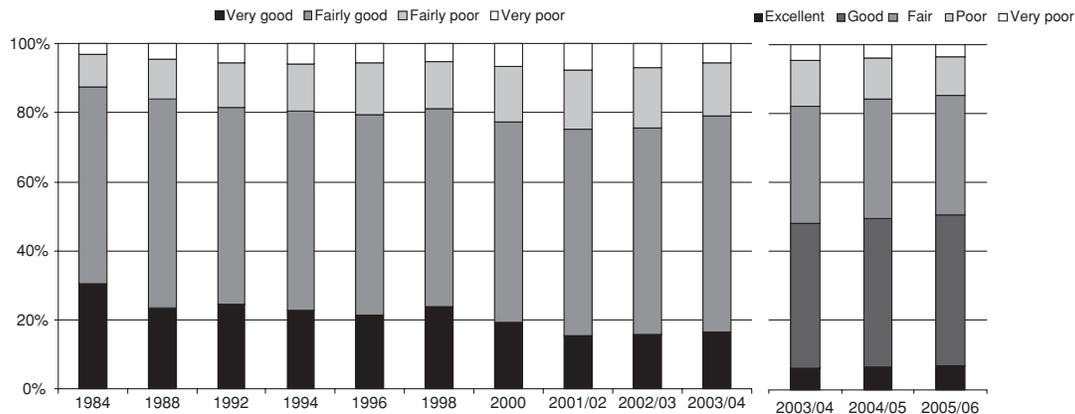
### Explaining trends and trajectories in public confidence in policing

Since 1982, the British Crime Survey (BCS) has asked respondents: 'How good or bad a job do you think the local police are doing?' Time-series data from 1984 to 2005/06 suggest a decline in confidence over the years, albeit with a recent stabilization (Figure 1).<sup>3</sup> 1980s and early 1990s saw a clear increase in public dissatisfaction with local policing.

<sup>1</sup> For comments on disorder and public confidence in policing in the USA, see Jesilow and Meyer (1995), Cao *et al.* (1996), Reisig and Parks (2000), Maxson *et al.* (2003), Yili *et al.* (2005), and Sprott and Doob (2008).

<sup>2</sup> There are many other factors that plausibly influence public trust and confidence in the police. In addition to public concerns about crime, disorder and cohesion, these include mass media coverage; knowledge and awareness of police activity (primarily through police visibility and accessibility); concrete public encounters with the police; broader social change (decreasing deference to authority, declining trust in social institutions); and high-profile scandals and tensions between the public and the police.

<sup>3</sup> However, a question with revised response categories was introduced in 2003/04, and the old question was dropped from 2004/05 onwards, meaning that data from later years are not directly comparable with those from earlier periods.



**Figure 1:** Public confidence in policing: 1984–2005/2006

In 1984, 11% of respondents reported that the local police were doing either a ‘fairly’ or ‘very’ poor job. By 1988 this figure was 16%, and by 1994 it was 20%. Rates of dissatisfaction increased again at the turn of the millennium, to reach 25% in 2001/02. Since then dissatisfaction appears to have fallen somewhat, although direct comparisons are rendered difficult by the change in the question format. There is also some evidence of an increase in satisfaction in recent years, although the most recent 2006/07 BCS data suggest that the proportion of people saying their local police did a good or excellent job was unchanged from 2005/06, at 51% (Nicholas and Flatley, 2008). Overall, however, since 1984 England and Wales has seen a decrease in public confidence in policing, with most of the decline happening in the 1980s and the rest of the fall occurring in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

A range of explanations for a long-term decline has been proposed (e.g. Loader and Mulcahy, 2003; Hough, 2003; Reiner, 2000). First, the past few decades have seen massive changes in society. During the 1970s and early 1980s—and in the context of soaring inflation, rising unemployment and increasing levels of industrial and social conflict—the police were often called upon at particular moments of discord; tense and troubled relations often developed between the police and particular communi-

ties. Second, the police service itself has changed from a parochial and local set of forces to a complex bureaucratic organization; the public may see the police as less visible and accessible than they once were (Fitzgerald *et al.*, 2002; Hough, 2003, 2007). Third, well-publicized cases of corruption, abuse of rights and other scandals have damaged the reputation of the police (Reiner, 2000; Loader and Mulcahy, 2003). Finally, crime in England and Wales increased from the 1950s onwards (although it has fallen since the mid 1990s). Crime has moved from a problem that mainly afflicted the poor to a daily consideration for many people (Garland, 2001).

### Instrumental and expressive perspectives in public confidence in policing

Increasing levels of direct and indirect experience, the mass media raising the salience of crime and thereby ‘institutionalising’ public concern, and the growing visibility of signs of crime in the form of physical incivilities—such as vandalism, and social incivilities—all these factors helped bring an awareness of crime into people’s everyday lives. In the circumstances of increased crime and increased visibility of crime and disorder, confidence in the police seems almost bound to suffer.

Consistent with this, it is often assumed that a key influence on confidence in policing is public judgement on the severity of the crime problem, as well as public anxieties about victimization. The expectation here is that confidence suffers when people are worried about falling victim to crime: people look to the police for protection; fear of crime leads them to judge the police as ineffective and failing to fulfil its most basic purpose. Following Tyler and Boeckmann (1997), we use the term 'instrumental' to describe this idea—not because other orientations towards the police may not be instrumental in character—but because it suggests a straightforward relationship between an idea of the police role, perceptions of performance, and public confidence.

How might this 'instrumental' perspective on public opinion help us explain recent patterns in crime and public confidence? Crime has certainly been falling for over a decade with little comparable uplift in confidence. People are generally unrealistic about the extent of crime—perhaps no surprise given sensational mass media coverage, shrill political rhetoric and little public faith in official statistics. According to the instrumental perspective, it is the erroneous sense of the crime problem that leads to an inflated sense of fear that then erodes confidence. The subsequent effect of fear of crime on public confidence in policing may mean that—in the end—the police are judged on the basis of ill-informed anxieties about crime and risk: confidence in policing may therefore suffer because the public does not 'feel' any improvements in crime.

If it is indeed fear of crime that has driven the decline in public confidence in policing over the past decade, one would expect a rise in fear of crime of that period of time. Yet trends in fear of crime and beliefs about crime actually depart from the recent trends in confidence. Relying again on the BCS, Figure 2 shows changes in levels of crime, public confidence in policing, lay beliefs about crime and fear of crime over the past decade, all indexed at 1994 levels. The percentage of respondents who think crime has risen over the past two years has in fact decreased,

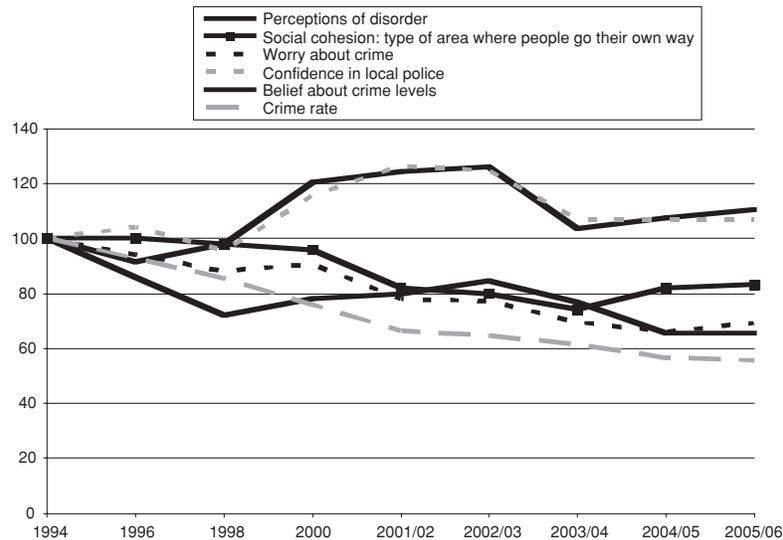
mirroring the fall in crime. Strikingly, fear of crime also improved while confidence deteriorated. Thus, the explanation for recent changes in public confidence in the effectiveness of the police seems to be something other than mere mistaken belief and public fears of victimization.

In fact, Figure 2 suggests a quite different stimulus for changes in public confidence. With anti-social behaviour featuring prominently on the policy agenda, it may be that it is public concern about incivilities that is paramount. Crucially, judgement of disorder is the one aspect of public opinion that has echoed changing levels of public confidence in policing over the last decade. Lay concern about disorder increased—and confidence fell—between 1998 and 2002/03. Similarly, disorder concerns fell and confidence increased between 2002/03 and 2003/04. Disorder—teenagers hanging around, litter, vandalism and graffiti—may indeed be an important driver of public confidence in policing.

However, Figure 2 can only hint at likely explanations. To pursue this properly, we need a more systematic approach, we need high-quality data, and we need a theoretical framework to guide the analysis and interpretation. To this end, we next assess whether it is that satisfaction with the police is influenced more by concerns about disorder than by beliefs about crime or the fear of crime.

### An expressive perspective on public confidence in the police?

The idea of a symbolic or expressive orientation towards policing is rooted in the moral significance of rule-breaking behaviour (Tyler and Boeckmann, 1997; Jackson and Sunshine, 2007). This approach suggests that rule breaking is an affront to shared values and norms, and that people base their opinion of the police not on whether they fear for their own safety or their sense of the crime problem, but on the extent to which they believe the police are addressing the moral consequences of rule-breaking behaviour. Crucially, such concerns are intimately bound up with ideas about social cohesion, community



**Figure 2:** Crime, worry about crime, confidence in policing, and public concerns about disorder and cohesion: 1994–2005/2006

effectiveness and local disorder (Jackson and Bradford, 2008).

The expressive perspective proposes that the police are viewed as representatives and guardians of the community. Individuals look to the police to strengthen moral structures. It follows that when signs of social breakdown are evident, the police will be judged accordingly, beyond and despite what is happening to crime. ‘[The] police are not just the simple protectors of the community, they are constantly and actively engaged in the construction and reconstruction of the *moral and social order*’ (Lothouse, 1996, p. 44, emphasis added).

According to this perspective, more day-to-day concerns over anti-social behaviour, disorder and incivilities, signs of low community cohesion and declines in moral authority move towards the foreground of public confidence in policing. In part this is because these things loom larger in most people’s lives than do more serious crimes. People look on the police less as super-cops roaring past in patrol cars to the scene of a bank robbery and more as old-fashioned representatives of community values and norms—symbols of moral authority—there to

address more everyday problems. Might it be that the public are actually more in tune with—and place value on—the reality of police work as defined by Bittner?

This expressive perspective already finds support in work from the USA (Tyler and Boeckmann, 1997; cf. Cao *et al.*, 1996; Reisig and Parks, 2000; Sprott and Doob, 2008) and the UK (Jackson, 2004; Jackson and Sunshine, 2007, Jackson *et al.*, 2007; Jackson and Bradford, 2008). These studies suggest that when the right-wing press highlights ASB, ‘youths hanging around’, and public drunkenness, it touches a public nerve which links anxieties about the pace and direction of social change to more local worries about neighbourhood disorder and cohesion (as distinct from anxieties about crime). Further research suggests that public confidence in policing is less about the effectiveness of police services and more about both procedural fairness and identification with group values (Tyler, 1990; Tyler and Huo, 2002; Sunshine and Tyler, 2003a, 2003b; Reisig *et al.*, 2007).

A New Public Management agenda that prioritizes the setting and meeting of crime-related

**Table 1:** Linear regression models predicting overall confidence in local policing (high values = high confidence)

	Model A	Model B	Model C
Predictors	<i>b</i> (coeff.)	<i>b</i> (coeff.)	<i>b</i> (coeff.)
Worry about crime	-0.079***		-0.020***
Public concern about disorder		-0.216***	-0.210***
Public concern about social cohesion		-0.083***	-0.082***

\*  $P < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $P < 0.01$ ; \*\*\*  $P < 0.001$ .

Sample size  $n = 80,270$ . Unweighted data.

Note: High scores on the 'worry', 'disorder' and 'cohesion' variables indicate high levels of worry and concern. Control variables were victim status, gender, age, ethnicity, income, car ownership, inner city area resident, household size and year of survey. For the full table of parameter estimates, please see the online supplementary material for the paper.

targets overlooks these issues (Hough, 2007). A 'target culture' may exacerbate public concerns about an inaccessible and withdrawn police force, in turn leading to the reassurance gap as the police fail to gain credit for reductions in crime. This is because—in some senses at least—such reductions are beside the point: they do not reflect the public's priorities. Recent policy changes suggest an acknowledgement of this, refocusing police attention away from a narrow crime-based agenda towards a greater concern with public (dis)order (cf. Innes, 2004a, 2004b, 2007; Millie and Herrington, 2005). In many ways this represents a reconnection with some of the original ideas of policing, which were always at least as concerned with order as with crime (Reiner, 2000; Johnston, 2003).

### Delving deeper: Study 1

In the first of two studies presented here, we draw on data combined from ten sweeps of the BCS (1988 to 2005/06). We exclude the earliest two sweeps (1982 and 1984) from our analysis since they did not field the relevant survey questions. In this print version, we only briefly summarize the findings—for details of the method and an expanded summary of the findings please see the online supplementary material for the paper.

Table 1 presents the results. Model A shows that higher levels of fear are significantly associated with lower levels of confidence, thus providing support for the instrumental model. Model B provides evi-

dence in support of the expressive model: perceived disorder and perceived social cohesion have a significant and substantial effect on confidence and low levels of perceived cohesion and high levels of perceived disorder go along with this. Thus, it appears that confidence is both instrumental and expressive. People judge the police on the basis of both instrumental concerns about the risk of crime and more expressive concerns about the health of group life in their local neighbourhood.

Yet Model C pits the two explanations against one another, and the results reveal that the unique contribution of fear on confidence is much lower once expressive drivers are taken into account. About three quarters of the effect of fear on confidence is explained by the expressive drivers. In turn, expressive drivers fully retain their explanatory power when fear is taken into account.

This finding is consistent with two other UK-based studies (Jackson and Sunshine, 2007; Jackson and Bradford, 2008), and totting up the evidence from these three pieces of empirical work, it seems to be that both fear of crime and confidence in policing are dependent upon public assessments of neighbourhood disorder and cohesion. Individuals make judgements about the order and disorder of their neighbourhood (a sense of control over the streets that is eroded by young people hanging around, by litter and graffiti, and by a feeling that the community has lost control over its members and over certain individuals/groups who occupy public space), the extent to which people trust and support one another, and whether individuals

**Table 2:** Linear regression models predicting overall confidence in local policing (high values = high confidence)

	Model D	Model E	Model F
<b>Predictors</b>	<i>b</i> (coeff.)	<i>b</i> (coeff.)	<i>b</i> (coeff.)
Worry about crime	−0.187***	–	−0.070***
Public concern about the crime problem	−0.043*	–	0.030
Public concern about social cohesion	–	−0.087***	−0.080***
Public concern about collective efficacy	–	−0.055***	−0.054***
Public concern about disorder	–	−0.209***	−0.188***

\*  $P < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $P < 0.01$ ; \*\*\*  $P < 0.001$ .

Sample size  $n = 1,879$ . Unweighted data.

Note: High scores on the 'worry', 'disorder' and 'cohesion' variables indicate high levels of worry and concern. Control variables were victim status, gender, age, ethnicity, social class, car ownership, employment status, disability, deprivation at ward level and contact with the police in past 12 months. For the full table of parameter estimates, please see the online supplementary material for the paper.

lack the appropriate norms and values. These diagnoses of social order and moral consensus shape inferences about crime and inferences about the ability of the local police to impose authority and ordered behaviour.

Of course, other factors influence public confidence in the police. Turning to the control variables included in the models (see online version of the paper for parameter estimates), being young, male, white, living in an inner-city area and on a lower income, as well as having recent victimization experience (particular of a violent crime against the person) all contribute to less favourable views. Interestingly, the full set of key and control variables do not fully explain the development in confidence over time. Net of the effect of changes in instrumental and expressive drivers of confidence, victimization, police contact and socio-demographic make-up, confidence was significantly higher in the early 1990s and experienced another temporary peak in 2000.

## Broadening out: Study 2

Despite the obvious strengths of the data—which span ten sweeps of the BCS—the results of Study 1 are hampered somewhat by the reliance on single-item measures of confidence and social cohesion. To address this issue and replicate the analysis, Study 2 draws on data from six quarters (2005/06 and the first half of 2006/07) of the Metropolitan Police's Public Attitudes Survey. In particular, because this

survey administered a broader range of questions, we can move beyond treating confidence in the police as a single 'thing'. Three components of public confidence in policing are identified here: opinions about police effectiveness; fairness; and community engagement (see also Fitzgerald *et al.*, 2002; Jackson and Sunshine, 2007; Bradford *et al.*, in press). Additionally, we are also able to disaggregate feelings about crime into two component parts—worry (about being robbed, burgled and so on) and perceptions of the crime problem (the extent to which people feel crime is an issue in their local area).

Finally, we include in the analysis public impressions not only of disorder/incivilities but also community efficacy (for example, whether the public think that neighbours can be counted on to help out in dealing with low-level disorder) and social cohesion (the extent to which people in the local area can be trusted, have similar values, and get on with each other). The expressive model of public confidence in policing predicts that such concerns will be just as important as disorder in influencing confidence in the police. For example, a low level of perceived social cohesion might predict lower confidence because the police—being seen as representative of moral authority—become associated with perceived declines in social cohesiveness and shared values.

Model D (Table 2) tests the instrumental model. The response variable is public confidence in policing measured by the single indicator question

(as in Study 1). As expected, perceptions of the crime problem and worry about crime were both important predictors of confidence, even controlling for demographics, class, ethnicity, crime levels, victimization and contact. Notably, worry played a bigger role than perception of the crime as an issue in the local area.

Moving to the expressive model (Model E), the hypothesis was that people lack confidence in their local police when they judge there to be problems of disorder, cohesion and community efficacy—not when they fear for their safety or judge there to be problems of crime. As expected, perception of social cohesion, collective efficacy and disorder all predicted confidence, each making a unique contribution. Note also that once perceptions about the local area were taken into account, the coefficient for the measure of local deprivation loses statistical significance. This underlines the point that it is not ‘objective’ community conditions and relations that matter, but people’s subjective perception of their local area.

Finally, Model F tests how the instrumental and expressive models jointly explain confidence. Strikingly, net of such community concerns, judgement of the crime problem is no longer statistically significant, and the effect size of worry is considerably smaller. The effect of the three expressive drivers (perception of disorder, social cohesion and collective efficacy) retains significance and strength. This provides overall support for the expressive model: while worry still played a small role, the biggest issues were concerns about disorder, cohesion and informal social control.

Broader concerns about community cohesion and efficacy therefore appear at least as important as those about disorder *per se*; and all these community concerns appear more important than ideas about crime. The places where people live also seem to matter, but more in terms of perceptions rather than objective circumstance.

The final step in the analysis is to bring these partial explanations of confidence together in one model. Path analysis provides the statistical means

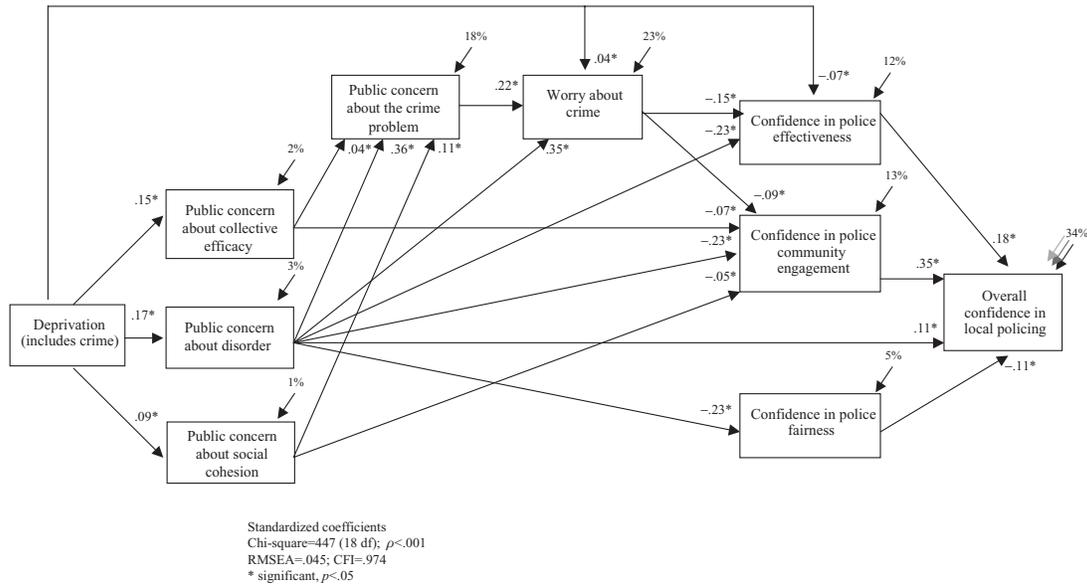
to do so. Figure 3 is a path diagram that depicts the five-stage model:

1. Levels of deprivation and crime in respondents’ neighbourhoods
2. Expressive drivers: disorder, cohesion and collective efficacy
3. Instrumental drivers: fear of crime and perception of the crime problem
4. Separate components of confidence in policing: effectiveness, fairness and community engagement
5. An overall judgement of confidence in local policing.

The model states (only paths statistically significant at  $P < 0.05$  or greater have been included), first, that levels of deprivation predict people’s assessments of disorder and cohesion in their neighbourhood (that is, perceptions of the state of one’s community are not entirely subjective). Second, perception of disorder, cohesion and collective efficacy themselves influence people’s judgements about the crime problem (people use sub-criminal aspects that are necessarily symbolic of crime to infer the actual problem of crime) and subsequent worries about victimization.

Third, we assess separate influences of the expressive and instrumental drivers of different types of confidence. Are judgements about police effectiveness driven by concerns about cohesion, disorder and informal social control, on the one hand, or by more instrumental factors on the other? Finally what are the most important elements of police behaviour in overall judgments about confidence?

The findings show that living in a deprived area is associated with judging there to be problems of cohesion, disorder and collective efficacy. These environmental perceptions influence attitudes towards the crime problem and fear of crime. The latter has some direct effect on confidence and engagement in the community (recall that worry was not correlated with the overall index of confidence once other factors were controlled for). However, perception of



**Figure 3:** Drivers of public confidence in policing

disorder is the most important predictor of judgements about police effectiveness, fairness and level of engagement with the community. Social cohesion and collective efficacy have smaller roles to play, but disorder is key. Finally, judgement of police community engagement is the other key factor in predicting overall confidence: it has the biggest influence on the overall index and is most highly correlated with the instrumental and the expressive drivers.

The most important thing to understand about the model shown in Figure 3 is its mediational nature. Consider deprivation, on the far left of the diagram. This predicts environmental perception. In turn, environmental perception influences worry and finally public confidence. Thus, deprivation does affect public confidence, but this is almost entirely because it affects people’s perceptions of the condition of their community.

### Conclusions

The results presented here suggest that the public look to the police to deal with sub-criminal be-

haviours that signal to members of the public low levels of cohesion, informal social control and order in the community. Of the different components to public confidence, engagement with the community is the most central. In practise this means that in order to improve public confidence, the police need to re-engage as an active part of the community, representing and defending community values, norms and morals. Dealing with disorder and anti-social behaviour—and being a visible and accessible symbol of social control—may address both fear of crime and public confidence in policing.

Returning to the different conceptions of police work we outlined initially, it appears that the public are in tune with a police role that is far broader than just ‘crime’ (consider, for example, the nature of many of the incidents which the police routinely have to deal with Hope *et al.*, 2001). Crime and risk do not loom as large in people’s concerns as disorder and cohesion. To those witnessing them, such events—neighbours arguing loudly, groups of ‘threatening’ teenagers, stray dogs—say something about the nature of their society and changes

occurring within it. Public confidence will be not only be based on how these problems are dealt with, but may also be affected at a more fundamental level as the police become tainted by association with a social order which allows such things to happen.

Our original question was ‘Does the fear of crime drive public confidence in policing?’ The answer we have come to—on the basis of the data we have at our disposal—is therefore largely no. We propose a somewhat different explanation: that both fear and confidence are rooted in public assessment of non-criminal aspects of their neighbourhood (cf. Jackson and Bradford, 2008). People look to the police to defend community norms and values, especially when those norms and values are seen to be declining (cf. Jackson and Sunshine, 2007). This same decline creates a lack of comfort and trust in one’s environment, which can then bring forth anxieties about victimization (cf. Tulloch, 2003).

The evidence we have presented corresponds in many ways to the ‘signal crimes’ approach developed by Martin Innes and colleagues (Innes and Fielding, 2002; Innes, 2004b, 2007). As well as suggesting that certain crimes have particular importance for people in forming their opinions about law, order and policing, this approach also stresses the relevance of ‘signal disorders’—public drunkenness, signs of drug use, graffiti or litter—in representing danger and a lack of social control. People assess the risks in their environment not only in terms of criminality but also in terms of disorder and decay that they perceive as part of their everyday lives.

### Implications for policy

What, then, are the implications for policing policy and practice? On the positive side, dealing with the low-level issues that people find important may result in uplift in confidence. Although they are poorly captured by a narrow crime-fighting agenda, serving officers are well accustomed to dealing with such problems. On the negative side, many of the huge range of issues people seem to want the police to address—‘the-things-that-are-happening-about-which-something-ought-to-be-done-now’—are not

usually truly resolvable. It is often remarked that the police cannot really stop crime because its causes are well beyond a purely policing response; equally, although officers may be able to deal with individual breaches of social norms, they will be quite unable to address the *systemic* causes of these breaches.

### Impractical and undesirable?

We finish, therefore, with two words of caution. On the basis of what is presented here the public wish a policing response which, to paraphrase Loader (2006), is both wide and deep. As well as problems related to crime itself, police intervention is desired across many other circumstances. The natural policy answer is the provision of ambient, or what Loader has called pervasive, policing. However, even if the police could resolve the issues at hand (and Reiner, 2007, underscores that this is probably not the case), Loader has outlined a number of reasons why this would be undesirable as well as impractical. Pervasive policing assumes firstly that demands for police attention are entirely benign, and not, for example, excessively directed towards socially excluded or stigmatized groups. Secondly, requirements for particular styles of policing often appear limitless and cannot be met from finite resources. Finally, pervasive policing implies criminalization of activities and events hitherto thought merely inconvenient or annoying, with all the potential negatives which may flow from this.

Equally importantly, there is emerging evidence that public concerns about disorder, social cohesion and collective efficacy are themselves rooted in more fundamental social values and orientations (Jackson, 2004; Jackson *et al.*, 2007; Jackson and Bradford, 2008). Individuals who hold more authoritarian views about law and order—and who are more concerned about a long-term deterioration of their local community—are more likely to perceive disorder in their environment. They are also more likely to link these physical cues to declines in (a) social cohesion and consensus and (b) the quality of social bonds and informal social control. Broader social anxieties influence the thresholds at which

individuals begin to think things happening in their local environment are problematic. Therefore, however much a neighbourhood might be 'cleaned up' (for example by police and other agencies working to reduce disorder and anti-social behaviour), it might be difficult to persuade everybody that community cohesion and informal social controls have been strengthened. The question must therefore be: will dealing with disorder offset broader social concerns about social change, community and authority (and might the public see disorder as merely a symptom, not the problem itself)? If this is the case, perhaps the emphasis should be on crafting a more stable society rather than trying to alleviate people's concerns about the local results of social instability. In the final analysis, policing solutions may be sought for concerns about low-level disorder, social cohesion and community efficacy, but these may be unlikely to address the underlying causes of insecurity in Britain today.

## Supplementary material

Supplementary material is available at *Policing Online*.

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