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System satisfaction, contact satisfaction, and trust in the police: A study of Norway

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Abstract

Several studies have found that citizens' trust in the police is influenced by everyday encounters with the police. However, one important factor has been largely omitted from studies about contact and trust: citizens' overall satisfaction with the functioning of their country's political system and economy. What we label "system satisfaction" may influence both trust in the police and experiences and interpretations of encounters with the police. Using data from the European Social Survey, we investigate how system satisfaction is related to trust in the police in Norway, and the degree to which it accounts for or moderates the relationship between contact and trust. Our findings suggest that system satisfaction is highly significant for trust in the police. However, it does not seem to account for or moderate the relationship between contact satisfaction and trust. Thus, system satisfaction and direct contact experience appear to effects trust in the police independently.

1. Introduction

Trust in the police has become a hot topic in police research during the past few years. An important reason for this is the increasing number of studies suggesting that trust is strongly associated with legitimacy and willingness to cooperate and comply with the law (Hough, Jackson, Bradford, Myhill, & Quinton, 2010; Jackson, Bradford, Stanko, & Hohl, 2013; Murphy & Cherney, 2012; Tankebe, 2013; Tyler, 2001; Tyler, 2006; Tyler & Huo, 2002; Van Damme, 2015; Van Damme, Pauwels, & Svensson, 2015). Identifying the underlying causes of trust in the police is thus not only interesting from an academic point of view, but may also help inform policy and benefit the wider society.

A central question from a policy perspective concerns the extent to which trust in the police is influenced by everyday encounters between the police and the public. Is there anything the police can do to influence trust in these situations, or are citizens' attitudes mainly shaped by factors more or less beyond the control of the police? The extensive research in this field suggests that the police can and do shape peoples' attitudes through everyday encounters with the public, and many studies have found a statistically significant relationship between contact experience and trust in the police (Bradford, Jackson, & Stanko, 2009; Jackson et al., 2013; Mazerolle, Antrobus, Bennett, & Tyler, 2013; Skogan, 2005; Skogan, 2006). Furthermore, the relationship seems to hold up even after controlling for a range of relevant factors such as social background and neighborhood conditions (Bradford et al., 2009; Jackson et al., 2013; Skogan, 2006).

However, there is one potentially important factor that has been largely omitted from studies of contact with and trust in the police, which is citizens' overall satisfaction with the way in which the political system and economy works in their country. We label this "system satisfaction." For example, Morris (2011, p. 125) argues that the police "are an essential part of the government body, and when people evaluate the police they reflect on the government

in their country.” A similar argument is put forward by Reiner (2010), who observes that the police appear to be more successful when they are needed less. The underlying assumption is that the police benefit both directly and indirectly from a well-functioning political system.

Easton’s (1965) concept of specific and diffuse support of the political system may be useful in this context. While “specific support” denotes support originating from specific policy and experience with the political system, “diffuse support” denotes a more fundamental form of support that is ideological or structural in kind. In the case of the police, specific trust may be viewed as trust flowing from personal or vicarious experiences with the police. Diffuse trust in the police, on the other hand, may be viewed as trust flowing from greater general support for the social, economic, and political system of which the police are a part (ideological), and/or as general satisfaction with the way in which the political system, including the police, seem to work and perform over time (structural). However, the notion of a well-functioning political system may also have an indirect effect on trust in the police by acting as a potential control mechanism and reassurance against police malpractice. Thus, when general system satisfaction—which is not to be confused with system trust—is high, we should also expect trust in the police to be high.

Despite a substantial empirical literature suggesting a link between attitudes toward the wider political system and trust in the police (Jang, Joo, & Zhao, 2010; Kääriäinen, 2007; Morris, 2011; Reiner, 2010; Schaap & Scheepers, 2014; Thomassen, 2013), to our knowledge no studies of contact experience and trust in the police have controlled for this factor. However, those who are satisfied with the way the political system works may very well be more prone to interpret their encounters with the police in a positive way, and conversely, those who are dissatisfied tend to interpret contacts in a negative way. System satisfaction may influence both trust in the police and the perception of contact. In other words, we cannot rule out the possibility that the association between contact experience and trust in the police is fully or partially spurious and accounted for by the same underlying variable (system satisfaction). Neither can we rule out an interaction effect whereby system satisfaction moderates the effect of direct contact on trust. For example, system satisfaction could act as a buffer and dampen the effect of negative encounters on trust in the police.

The aim of this article is thus to investigate more closely the relationship between system satisfaction, contact satisfaction, and trust in the police. More precisely, we pose two research questions: 1) To what extent is trust in the police associated with system satisfaction? 2) To what extent, if any, is the relationship between contact satisfaction and trust in the police spurious, or accounted for or moderated by system satisfaction?

To investigate the relationship between system satisfaction, contact satisfaction, and trust in the police, we analyze data from the fifth round of the European Social Survey, which includes a module on trust in justice (ESS, 2011). Our analysis focuses on Norway, which is a relatively small country (with five million inhabitants) on the northern periphery of Western Europe. The country scores high on most indicators of political, social, and economic development (Eurostat, 2014). It has a comparatively long and stable democratic tradition with a well-functioning and incorrupt bureaucracy. It is comparatively wealthy with low unemployment, a generous welfare state, and relatively little economic inequality. Moreover, the Norwegian police service is founded on democratic policing ideas such as responsiveness and accountability to the public (Bayley, 2005), and it operates in a relatively peaceful and low-crime context. Although there are occasional cases of police criminality and abuse of force (Spesialenheten, 2014), and in some districts there have even been indications of pervasive (sub)cultures of abuse in the past (Bratholm, 2005), the relationship between the police and the public in Norway in general appears to be good. For example, trust in the police remains high and stable over time. Not even the highly critical scrutiny of the police in

the wake of the terrorist attacks on July 22, 2011, which uncovered several troubling dysfunctions in the police, seems to have changed this trend (Thomassen, Strype, & Egge, 2013). This makes it an interesting testing ground for the relative significance of system satisfaction and contact satisfaction for trust in the police.

2. Previous research

A great deal of research on the topic of trust has been published during the past few years, and in this literature we can identify several factors that seem to influence trust in the police. The most interesting factor from a police perspective is perhaps the effect of police–citizen encounters. Knowledge in this area may help the police shape policy and improve police–citizen relations, which again may enhance cooperation and compliance. Many studies suggest that police–citizen encounters have a direct and significant influence on trust in the police (Bradford et al., 2009; Jackson et al., 2013; Skogan, 2006). Moreover, these findings seem to hold after controlling for a number of relevant factors, such as neighborhood conditions. However, a valid critique of research on police–citizen encounters and its effect on attitudes toward the police is that it pays insufficient attention to the influence of prior attitudes to the police on interpretation of the encounters. For example, Rosenbaum, Schuck, Costello, Hawkins, & Ring (2005) find that only negative experiences through self-initiated contact have any effect when they control for prior attitudes to the police. However, they find that vicarious experiences with the police, meaning the experiences of friends or relatives, has a significant effect on trust (see also Tankebe, 2010).

A recurrent finding in the literature is a marked asymmetry in the relationship between contact and trust, where the negative effects of bad experiences are stronger than the positive effects of good experiences. Drawing on social psychological research, Skogan (2006, p. 119) argues that this finding is best explained by an innate “negativity bias,” and concludes rather pessimistically that the police “can’t win, but merely cut their losses.” This view is to some extent modified by Bradford et al. (2009), who find that the asymmetry varies depending on how trust is measured. While they find almost complete asymmetry when they use police effectiveness as the dependent variable, they find a less asymmetrical relationship when they use procedural justice and shared values as dependent variables. In a similar study using newer data, Jackson et al. (2013) also find that contact satisfaction has a significant and positive effect on trust measured as procedural fairness. Moreover, Van Damme (2015) in a recent study in Belgium, finds a near-symmetrical relationship between contact satisfaction and trust in the police (effectiveness and procedural justice), suggesting that there are international variations.

Another recurrent finding, at least in the US and Western Europe, is that satisfaction with process, such as perceptions that the police act in a fair and respectful manner and are responsive, is a more powerful predictor of general trust than satisfaction with outcomes and efficiency (Bradford et al., 2009; Fagan & Tyler, 2004; Hough et al., 2010; Lind & Tyler, 1988; Myhill & Bradford, 2011; Tyler, 2006; Van Craen & Skogan, 2015). Trust in the police is a multidimensional concept, and it has become customary to adopt one of two perspectives on trust in the police: the instrumental or the procedural perspective (see, for example, Sunshine & Tyler, 2003). The instrumental perspective refers to how well the police perform. The basic assumption is that the citizens trust the police when they appear to be effective in combating crime and disorder. The procedural perspective, on the other hand, refers to how the police behave. This theory posits that fair and respectful treatment signals to the citizens that the authorities take their concerns seriously, while at the same time confirming that they are valued members of society. As Hough et al. (2010, p. 206) put it, “the experience of

procedural fairness fosters in people feelings of motive-based trust in (and shared group membership with) the authority concerned, that both it and they are on the same side.” This is good news in the sense that it often seems easier for the police to improve their behavior than to increase their efficiency.

Several studies have also pointed to the importance of the wider political context when accounting for trust in the police. Morris (2011) finds in a multilevel study of 53 countries that full democracy increases citizens’ trust in the police. In a more recent study, Schaap & Scheepers (2014) find a strong correlation between trust in legal and political institutions in most European countries. Furthermore, a number of studies find that countries with high levels of government corruption tend to have low levels of trust in the police and vice versa (Kääriäinen, 2007; Thomassen, 2013). Moreover, individual-level studies find that positive attitudes to democratic functions are strongly associated with trust and confidence in the police (Jang et al., 2010; Thomassen, 2010), although the association is somewhat weaker for the police than for other institutions such as parliament and courts. To our knowledge, no study of contact and trust has controlled for system satisfaction. However, in a Norwegian study of generalized trust in government, Christensen & Laegreid (2002) find that both satisfaction with democracy and specific experiences with health, social, or employment services significantly predict trust in government. Thus, evidence suggests that both diffuse and specific factors may influence trust in government agencies.

Another important factor identified in the literature on trust in the police is the effect of neighborhood conditions. Several studies find that people living in neighborhoods with multiple social problems or concentrated disadvantage tend to have more negative perceptions of the police (Jackson et al., 2013; Reisig & Parks, 2000; Sampson, 2013; Sampson & Jéglum-Bartusch, 1998; Weitzer, 1999). Moreover, many studies find that perceived neighborhood conditions are at least as powerful a predictor of trust as actual structural conditions. Perceptions of disorder and collective efficacy (social cohesion and informal controls) seem to be particularly important in this respect (Bradford et al., 2009; Jackson et al., 2013; Skogan, 2006). These findings may indicate that citizens to some extent blame (or credit) the police for the perceived conditions of their neighborhood, and interpret these conditions as a sign of police neglect (or care).

Individual characteristics such as race, gender, age, political orientation, education, and socioeconomic status have also been found to correlate with trust in the police (Bradford et al., 2009; Bradford & Jackson, 2009; Brown & Benedict, 2002; Callanan & Rosenberger, 2011; Reisig & Parks, 2000; Skogan, 2006). However, with the exception of race in America, these demographic and social characteristics tend to have a rather modest effect on trust in the police, and the relationships between some of these variables and trust in the police vary from country to country.

To summarize, much of the research literature on trust in the police has focused on the effect of personal experience, neighborhood conditions, and individual characteristics such as race. Less attention has been devoted to citizens’ overall attitudes toward the political system, although theory and previous research suggest that these attitudes influence trust in the police quite substantially. Moreover, to our knowledge no study of the link between personal experience and trust in the police has controlled for attitudes toward the political system. Thus, in the following sections we investigate the relationship between system satisfaction, contact satisfaction, and trust in the police.

3. Data

The data in the study were extracted from the fifth round of the European Social Survey, which included data from 27 countries. This round of the ESS also included a rotating module called “Trust in justice” (ESS, 2011) which, among other topics, included questions about various aspects of trust in the police, such as *procedural justice* and *effectiveness*. It also included questions about police-initiated encounters between police and the public, and the respondents’ satisfaction with the treatment. Sadly, the survey did not include questions about citizen-initiated contact.

The respondents of the survey were selected through random sampling and interviewed face to face during the latter part of 2010. A total of 1549 respondents were interviewed, which was a response rate of approximately 58% (ESS, 2014). The sample appears to be representative in terms of indicators such as gender and age structure (Table 1).

3.1. The dependent variables

Trust in the police was measured by responses to one question, which asked the respondents to indicate, on a scale ranging from 0 (no trust at all) to 10 (complete trust), the extent to which they personally trust the police.

In addition to the general trust measure, we wanted to examine the effects of system satisfaction and contact experience on perceptions of *police effectiveness* and *procedural justice*. To that end, we included two indexes from the rotating module. The index measuring perceptions of *police effectiveness* included three questions/items:

- Based on what you have heard or your own experience, how successful do you think the police are at preventing crimes where violence is used or threatened?
- How successful do you think the police are at catching people who commit house burglaries?
- If a violent crime were to occur near your residence and the police were called, how quickly do you think they would arrive at the scene?

All three questions in the effectiveness index were scored on a scale ranging from 0 (extremely unsuccessful/slowly) to 10 (extremely successful/quickly). The internal consistency of the index was satisfactory, with a Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of .72.

The index measuring perception of *procedural justice* included the following three questions/items:

- Based on what you have heard or your own experience, how often would you say the police generally treat people with respect?
- About how often would you say the police make fair, impartial decisions in the cases they deal with?
- When dealing with people, how often would you say the police generally explain their decisions and actions when asked to do so?

The respondents were asked to indicate on a scale from 1 to 4 how often they thought the police treated people with respect/make fair and impartial decisions/explain their decisions and actions. The Cronbach’s alpha value was .66.

3.2. The independent variables

System satisfaction was measured through a combined index consisting of the three following items/questions:

- How satisfied are you with the present state of the economy in the country?
- How satisfied are you with the national government?
- How satisfied are you with the way democracy works in this country?

The respondents were asked to indicate on a scale from 0 (extremely dissatisfied) to 10 (extremely satisfied). The Cronbach's alpha value was .71.

Contact with the police was measured through the following question: Have you been approached, stopped, or contacted by police over the last two years? If the respondents answered "yes", they were asked a follow-up question: How satisfied were you with your treatment by the police when contacted? The respondents were given five alternative responses: very dissatisfied, dissatisfied, neither dissatisfied nor satisfied, satisfied, and very satisfied. The variable was converted into three separate dummy variables: *satisfied*, *neutral*, and *dissatisfied*. By converting the variable into dummy variables, we can also include those who did not have any contact with the police in the regression analysis and use them as a reference group.

Unfortunately, the ESS has no extensive measure of neighborhood conditions, but it does have a question about perceived safety when walking alone in the local area after dark. Here, the respondents were asked to indicate on scale from 1 (very safe) to 4 (very unsafe) how safe they felt. The scale was reversed so a low score indicated a low degree of safety and a high score indicated a high degree of safety.

A variable measuring *previous victimization* was also included. Along with perceived safety, this variable may shape citizens' perceptions of police performance, and hence trust in the police (Van Craen & Skogan, 2015). Here, the respondents were asked whether they or someone in the household had been a victim of burglary or assault during the previous five years. The variable was coded as a dummy variable where 0 = no and 1 = yes.

The control variable of *education* was coded as a dummy variable where 0 = less than bachelor's level and 1 = bachelor's level or higher.

Gender was coded as a dummy variable where 0 = male and 1 = female.

Age was measured as a continuous variable ranging from 15 to 99.

3.3. Analysis

We can see from Table 1 below that trust in the police is quite high in Norway, with an average score of 7.2 on a scale from 0 to 10 (the European mean is 5.2). The Norwegian police also score relatively high on procedural fairness with a score of 2.9 on a scale from 1 to 4 (the European mean is 2.6), while the perception of police effectiveness is slightly tempered with a score of 5.1 on a scale from 0 to 10 (the European mean is 5.3).

Turning our attention to the main independent variables, we find first that approximately 38% had been approached or stopped by the police during the previous two years. Second, we find that most citizens who were approached by the police were satisfied with the way they were treated. Approximately 70% reported that they were satisfied or very satisfied, which yields a mean score of 3.7 on a scale from 1 to 5 (the European mean is 3.4).

Norway is also a country with a high degree of system satisfaction, with a mean score of 6.6 on a scale from 0 to 10 (the European mean is 4.1). The comparatively high satisfaction score

in Norway is hardly surprising when we take into account the favorable economic and political conditions mentioned in the introduction.

We can also see from Table 1 that most Norwegians feel safe when walking alone in the local area after dark, with a mean score of 3.37 on a scale from 1 to 4. Approximately 19% reported that someone in the household had been a victim of burglary or assault during the previous five years, while 33% of the respondents reported having entered higher education. The average age of the respondents was 46.3 years, and there was a nearly even split between men (49.6%) and women (50.4%).

Table 1 about here

Next, we turn our attention to the statistical relationship between the variables included in the study and in particular between the various measures of trust in the police and the independent variables measuring treatment satisfaction and system satisfaction. First, in the correlation matrix shown below (Table 2), one can see a moderately strong relationship between the different measures of trust in the police (the dependent variables). The strongest correlation is found between the general measure of trust in the police and perception of procedural justice ($r = .469$) while the weakest correlation is found between procedural justice and effectiveness ($r = .374$).

Second, one can see that both treatment satisfaction when contacted by the police and general system satisfaction are quite strongly correlated with our dependent variables. Treatment satisfaction is positively correlated with both trust in the police (.274) and with procedural justice (.239), and to a lesser degree with effectiveness (.145). However, system satisfaction has an even stronger relationship with trust in the police (.415), procedural justice (.312), and effectiveness (.333). Moreover, there is also a positive and statistically significant relationship between system satisfaction and treatment satisfaction (.168). Thus, it seems highly relevant to control for system satisfaction when investigating the relationship between treatment satisfaction and trust in the police.

The rest of the control variables are correlated to a varying degree with one or more of the dependent variables. Being a crime victim or sharing a household with a crime victim is negatively correlated with both trust in the police and perception of police effectiveness. A feeling of safety in the local area after dark is positively correlated with perception of procedural justice. Being female is positively correlated with perception of effectiveness, while higher education is positively correlated with both trust in the police and perception of procedural justice. The only variable that appears to be unrelated to any of the measures of trust is age.

Among the relationships between the independent variables, there is only one that really stands out, which is the relationship between gender and feeling of safety when walking alone after dark. Women tend to feel less safe than men do when walking alone. This is not at all surprising considering the recurrent focus in the media on crimes such as rape and sexual harassment in public spaces. These are crimes where women are more likely than men are to become victims.

Table 2 about here.

What we investigate in this study is first, the extent to which trust in the police is associated with system satisfaction, and second, whether the relationship between contact satisfaction and trust in the police holds after controlling for system satisfaction and the other variables. In other words, are the relationships between contact satisfaction and trust in the police fully or partially spurious? We also attempt to discover whether system satisfaction moderates the effect of treatment satisfaction on trust in the police. To investigate this, we have applied

ordinary least squares regression analysis (SPSS). Here, we also tested for multicollinearity, but neither the tolerance statistics nor the variation inflation factor (VIF) indicated any problems in this respect. Below, we first analyze the general measure of trust in the police, followed by perception of procedural justice, and finally perception of police effectiveness. In each table, we begin by adding the dummy variables for contact satisfaction. We then add the variable for system satisfaction before adding the remaining independent variables to the analysis.

In Table 3 below, we report the results from the regression analysis using the general measure of trust in the police as the dependent variable. In the first column, we add the three dummy contact satisfaction variables using “no contact” as a reference. First, we can see that the dummy variables measuring contact satisfaction explain about 5% of the variation in trust in the police. Second, we find a clear asymmetrical pattern in the relationship between contact satisfaction and trust in the police. While both the dissatisfied and the neutral (neither satisfied nor dissatisfied) respondents report significantly lower trust in the police, those who were satisfied with their treatment are not significantly different from those who reported no contact with the police.

In the next column, we have added system satisfaction to the model and in consequence, we observe a substantial increase in the explained variance (R squared) to about 20%. Furthermore, an increase in system satisfaction is associated with an increase in trust in the police. More precisely, we find that an increase of one unit on the satisfaction scale (0–10) is associated with an increase of about 0.5 on the trust scale (0–10). The inclusion of system satisfaction also leads to some reduction in the effect of the dummy variables for contact satisfaction. However, the effect of both dissatisfactory and neutral treatment remains negative and statistically significant.

Adding the remaining control variables in the third column does not change the overall picture greatly. The explained variance remains practically unchanged, and the only variable that has a significant effect on trust besides contact satisfaction and system satisfaction is education level. Having higher education is associated with a small but statistically significant increase in trust in the police.

Table 3 about here.

In Table 4 below, the general measure of trust in the police has been replaced with perception of procedural justice as the dependent variable. Starting in the left column, one can see that contact satisfaction explains slightly less of the variation in perception of procedural justice ($R^2 = .035$). However, the same asymmetrical relationship is found between contact satisfaction and perception of procedural justice. Respondents who were dissatisfied or neutral have significantly less trust than those who reported no contact with the police, while those satisfied with the contact are not significantly different from the “no contact” category.

Adding system satisfaction to the equation increases the explained variance to approximately 12%. The relationship between system satisfaction and perception of procedural justice is positive and quite strong, but not as strong as the relationship with trust in the police. Again, we find that the inclusion of system satisfaction leads to some reduction in the effect of the dummy variables for treatment satisfaction, but the effect of dissatisfactory and neutral experiences remains negative and statistically significant.

The remaining control variables have only a marginal effect on the explained variance, and the only variable with a statistically significant effect on perception of procedural justice is, once again, higher education. Higher education is associated with an increase in perceived procedural justice.

Table 4 about here.

Finally, in Table 5 below, we use perception of effectiveness as the dependent variable. The dummy variables for contact satisfaction explain about 2% of the variation in perceptions of effectiveness. As in Tables 2 and 3, the relationship is asymmetrical, and only dissatisfactory and neutral experiences have a significant and negative effect on the dependent variable. Moreover, the effects are slightly weaker on this measure of trust compared with those of the two previous ones.

The effect of system satisfaction on perception of effectiveness is significant and positive. The effect of system satisfaction is slightly stronger on effectiveness than on procedural justice, but weaker than on trust in the police. The explained variance increases to around 13.5% when we include system satisfaction in the analysis.

Several of the remaining control variables also appear to influence citizens' perceptions of effectiveness in the police. Being a victim or having a member of the household who has been a victim of burglary or assault during the previous five years has a small but significant negative effect on perceptions of effectiveness. Women are more likely to have positive views of police effectiveness. Again, we find that higher education has a significant effect, but unlike the effect on trust in the police and procedural justice, the effect of higher education on effectiveness is negative.

Table 5 about here.

Overall, then, controlling for system satisfaction does not seem to reduce (or increase) the effect of contact satisfaction on trust in the police in any significant way. However, it may be that system satisfaction moderates the relationship between contact satisfaction and trust; for example, contact experience may have a stronger effect on trust among those who score low on system satisfaction. To investigate this, we computed an interaction variable by multiplying system satisfaction with the original contact satisfaction variable. To avoid problems with multicollinearity, we centered both variables by subtracting the mean from each case before we computed the interaction variable. The results reported in Table 6 suggest that there is no statistically significant interaction effect between system satisfaction and contact satisfaction on trust in the police.

Table 6 about here.

Finally, to test further the idea that system satisfaction is a diffuse source of trust in the police, we ran a model that included perception of procedural justice and of effectiveness in the police as independent (explanatory) variables and the generic single item measure of trust in the police as the dependent variable. The results reported in Table 7 show that the effect of system satisfaction on trust in the police is somewhat reduced, but it is still substantial.

Table 7 about here.

4. Summary and conclusion

We posed two research questions at the outset of this article concerning the relationship between system satisfaction, contact satisfaction, and trust in the police. First, to what extent is trust in the police associated with system satisfaction, and second, to what extent, if any, is the relationship between contact satisfaction and trust in the police spurious, and accounted for or moderated by system satisfaction? For the first question, we found that system satisfaction matters a great deal for people's trust in the police. An increase in overall system satisfaction is associated with a substantial increase in all three measures of trust in the police.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the strongest association was found between system satisfaction and the general measure of trust in the police. However, using procedural justice and effectiveness as dependent variables, we found a weaker but still significant and substantial relationship with system satisfaction. Overall, system satisfaction appears to be an important predictor of trust in the police in Norwegian society and it is more important than contact satisfaction. The strength of the relationship is underscored by the fact that the effect of system satisfaction on general trust in the police remains substantial even after controlling for perception of procedural justice and effectiveness.

Turning to the second question, we found that the association between contact satisfaction and trust in the police continued to be significant after controlling for system satisfaction. The only visible effect of controlling for system satisfaction was to reduce the effect of dissatisfactory and neutral experiences slightly. Neither did we find that system satisfaction moderates the effect of contact satisfaction on trust in the police in any significant way. Thus, system satisfaction does not appear to be any buffer against loss of trust when members of the public have bad experiences with the police. In other words, the police can make a significant difference through their everyday encounters with the public independent of the level of system satisfaction.

However, for all three measures of trust in the police, we found a clear asymmetrical pattern where only dissatisfactory and neutral experiences had an effect on trust. Thus, unlike some previous international research (e.g. Bradford et al., 2009; Van Damme, 2015) we did not find any significant positive effect of satisfactory experiences on perception of trust. This is perhaps not surprising considering the comparatively high levels of trust in Norway.

The findings of our study, as well as those of many previous studies, suggest that the source of trust in the police is both specific and diffuse, flowing from personal experiences as well as factors more or less outside the reach of the police, such as system satisfaction. However, it appears that diffuse factors such as system satisfaction are more important than personal experience in explaining variations in trust. This also makes sense from a theoretical point of view. Many citizens have little or no direct personal experience with the police, so they must form an opinion based on other more diffuse and indirect cues, for example whether the government in general seems trustworthy and competent, or whether phenomena such as crime seem to be under control.

However, there is still a substantial amount of unexplained variance to account for, and it is still too early to draw firm conclusions about the impact of specific experiences. One of the limitations of this study is that it only includes police-initiated contact and not citizen-initiated contact. Moreover, it is worth noting that some research suggests that vicarious experiences, meaning contact experienced by people such as family members or friends, may be at least as influential as direct contact experiences (Rosenbaum et al., 2005; Tankebe, 2010; Weitzer & Tuch, 2005). Thus, future research needs to focus on both personal and vicarious experiences, as well as on more diffuse factors, to capture the real effect of specific experiences with the police. Another limitation is that the study can only draw conclusions about correlations and not causations. Therefore, we can only speculate about causal relationships. Future studies should focus on specifying and testing the causal relationship between system satisfaction and trust in the police. Finally, future studies should test the relationship between system satisfaction, contact experience, and trust in the police in other political and social contexts. It could be that Norway represents a special case, but that remains to be tested. It may be safely stated that there are more than enough questions to keep researchers of trust in the police busy in the future.

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Table 1. Descriptive analysis of the variables

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean/median	Mode (%)	SD
Trust in the police	0 (No trust at all)	10 (Complete trust)	7.20/8.00		2.02
Procedural justice	1	4	2.90/3.00		0.46
Effectiveness	0	10	5.07/5.00		1.57
Contact satisfaction	1 (Very dissatisfactory)	5 (Very satisfactory)	3.66/4.00		1.33
System satisfaction	0	10	6.58/6.67		1.53
Victim of burglary/assault in past five years (entire household)	0 (No)	1 (Yes)		0 (81.4%)	0.38
Feeling of safety when walking alone in local area after dark	1 (Very unsafe)	4 (Very safe)	3.37/4.00		0.74
Age	15	99	46.34/45.00		19.04
Gender	0 (Male)	1 (Female)		1 (50.4%)	
Higher education	0 (Lower education)	1 (Higher education)		0 (67.2%)	

Table 2. Bivariate analysis of the variables

	Trust in the police	Procedural justice	Effectiveness	Contact satisfaction	System satisfaction	Victim (0 = No)	Feeling of safety	Age	Gender (0 = Male)
Procedural justice	.469**								
Effectiveness	.421**	.374**							
Contact satisfaction	.274**	.239**	.145**						
System satisfaction	.415**	.312**	.333**	.168**					
Victim (0 = No)	-.079**	-.026	-.085**	-.058	-.068**				
Feeling of safety	.047	.064*	.013	.029	.098**	.019			
Age	.049	.020	-.025	.163**	-.067**	-.150**	-.069*		
Gender (0 = Male)	.034	.016	.086**	.052	-.008	-.060*	-.340*	.036	
Higher education (0 = Lower)	.099**	.116**	-.033	.043	.086**	.009	.085*	.00	.024

**Significant at 0.01 level, *Significant at 0.05 level

Table 3. System satisfaction, contact satisfaction, and trust in the police

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	B	SE	Beta	B	SE	Beta	B	SE	Beta
(Constant)	7.344	0.064		3.937	0.209		3.504	0.397	
Dissatisfactory contact	-1.406	0.188	-0.192**	1.135	0.173	0.155**	1.050	0.176	0.143**
Neutral contact	-1.256	0.289	-0.111**	0.961	0.265	0.085**	0.866	0.268	0.076**
Satisfactory contact	0.075	0.117	0.017	0.036	0.107	0.008	0.079	0.108	0.017
System satisfaction				0.514	0.030	0.395**	0.511	0.031	0.392**
Safe in local area							0.006	0.068	0.002
Victim last five years							-0.123	0.121	-0.024
Gender							0.109	0.099	0.027
Age							0.004	0.003	0.039
Higher education							0.244	0.099	0.057*
Adjusted R squared	0.047			0.200			0.204		

**Significant at 0.01 level, *Significant at 0.05 level

Table 4. System satisfaction, contact satisfaction, and perception of procedural justice in the police

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	B	SE	Beta	B	SE	Beta	B	SE	Beta
(Constant)	2.934	0.015		2.356	0.052		2.226	0.098	
Dissatisfactory contact	-0.253	0.045	0.151**	0.200	0.043	0.120**	0.189	0.043	0.113**
Neutral contact	-0.300	0.067	0.118**	0.246	0.064	0.096**	0.233	0.065	0.091**
Satisfactory contact	0.021	0.027	0.021	0.018	0.026	0.017	0.022	0.027	0.021
System satisfaction				0.087	0.007	0.292**	0.085	0.008	0.286**
Safe in local area							0.016	0.017	0.026
Victim in past five years							0.007	0.030	0.006
Gender							0.022	0.024	0.024
Age							0.001	0.001	0.022
Higher education							0.080	0.024	0.082**
Adjusted R squared	0.035			0.118			0.124		

**Significant at 0.01 level, *Significant at 0.05 level

Table 5. System satisfaction, contact satisfaction, and perception of effectiveness in the police

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	B	SE	Beta	B	SE	Beta	B	SE	Beta
(Constant)	5.172	0.052		2.999	0.175		2.752	0.332	
Dissatisfactory contact	-0.652	0.152	-0.114**	0.482	0.144	0.084**	0.456	0.146	-0.080**
Neutral contact	-0.995	0.236	-0.111**	0.812	0.224	0.090**	0.849	0.225	-0.094**
Satisfactory contact	-0.079	0.094	-0.022	0.108	0.089	-0.031	0.078	0.090	-0.022
System satisfaction				0.329	0.025	0.321**	0.329	0.026	0.321**
Safe in local area							0.023	0.057	0.011
Victim in past five years							-0.215	0.100	-0.053*
Gender							0.279	0.083	0.089**
Age							-0.003	0.002	-0.036
Higher education							-0.236	0.082	-0.071**
Adjusted R squared	0.021			0.122			0.135		

**Significant at 0.01 level, *Significant at 0.05 level

Table 6. Testing for possible interaction effect between system satisfaction and contact satisfaction on trust in the police

	Trust in the police			Perception of procedural justice			Perception of effectiveness		
	B	SE	Beta	B	SE	Beta	B	SE	Beta
(Constant)	7.028	.080		2.876	.019		4.912	.064	
Contact satisfaction	.348	.061	.214**	.070	.015	.190**	.119	.048	.100*
System satisfaction	.547	.053	.406**	.096	.013	.306**	.313	.043	.303**
Contact*System satisfaction	.009	.035	.009	.004	.008	.019	.019	.028	.028
Adjusted R Squared	.23			.14			.10		

**Significant at 0.01 level, *Significant at 0.05 level

Table 7. System satisfaction, perception of procedural justice, perception of effectiveness, and trust in the police

	B	SE	Beta
(Constant)	-.199	.300	
System satisfaction	.310	.031	.237**
Perception of procedural justice	1.326	.105	.306**
Perception of effectiveness	.297	.031	.233**
Adjusted R squared	.34		

**Significant at 0.01 level, *Significant at 0.05 level