

Reform Thematic

1

Rebuilding Trust and Delivering Safer Communities: New Polling Shows the Public Want to See Meaningful Police Reform, Tony Blair Institute, 3rd July 2023: Link [here](#)

Rebuilding Trust and Delivering Safer Communities: A Plan for Reforming UK Policing, Tony Blair Institute, 3rd July 2023: Link [here](#)

A Plan to Reform the Criminal-Justice System, Tony Blair Institute, 3rd October 2023: Link [here](#)

Context

- This series of articles is based on research commissioned by the Tony Blair institute on how research demonstrates the need for "a new era of invention and innovation, based on radical-yet-practical ideas and genuine reforms that embrace the tech revolution".
- The reports look at public polling on policing, the case for reform of policing and the case to reform the wider criminal justice system.
- Whilst the initial polling is based on a UK-wide cohort, the cases for reform are based upon England and Wales only.

Summary/Findings - Rebuilding Trust and Delivering Safer Communities: New Polling Shows the Public Want to See Meaningful Police Reform

- This article opens by setting the context for why the Institute believes the principle of policing by consent is at risk: the deterioration of performance standards, the challenge from crime becoming more complex, the solving of fewer crimes, fewer offenders being charged and brought to justice, and public confidence being at an "all time low".
- The Institute commissioned a survey to determine the public's opinion of policing in the UK. 1,576 British adults (terminology used by the Institute) were interviewed online in April 2023, with the data being weighted to be representative of the British population as a whole.
- The findings of the survey have been summarised into different categories:
 1. **Trust in Policing:** Whilst the majority of respondents continue to trust the police (55%), the police are now less trusted than social services and the courts/legal system. This is explained in the paper as a new development.
 2. **Concern About Crime:** 45% of the public say crime is either "a very big" or "quite a big" problem in their area (with this rate being 44% in Scotland). Individuals were most worried about knife crime (18%), followed by online fraud (16%).
 3. **Experience and Reporting of Crime:** The results showed that one in five individuals in the UK have experienced crime in the past 12 months, with men reporting at a higher rate than women (27% and 13% respectively). In addition, the survey **found 41% of people who experienced crime did not report to the police or other relevant authorities**. When disaggregated by gender, this equated to 44% of women and 40% of men. In addition, those who report a crime are likely to be dissatisfied with the response received – this was highest amongst the "baby boomer" category (the oldest age cohort of participants - please note that the age range was not specified).

Reform Thematic (continued)

Summary/Findings - Rebuilding Trust and Delivering Safer Communities: New Polling Shows the Public Want to See Meaningful Police Reform (continued)

4. **What the Public Would like to See from Their Local Police:** This area was the most substantive aspect of the survey results:
 - According to respondents, **"answering 999 calls rapidly"** is the most important function requiring good performance (94% of respondents), with 19% of respondents believing this is actually being performed badly. This was followed by "officers should be approachable, friendly and professional" and "victims being kept informed on the progress of their case", with both being found by 91% of respondents to be important. Respectively, 19% and 27% believed that these two aspects of policing are being performed badly.
 - In addition, 51% of respondents said the police are "less visible and approachable" than in the past. This rate was 49% in Scotland.
 - The survey next asked respondents to consider prioritisation. Whilst 40% believed that policing should focus on the most harmful offences, such as violence, 37% were of the view that police should respond to every incident/report.
5. **What the Public Think About Police Powers:** The majority of respondents support the increased police powers to collect DNA including from those who are charged, rather than only those who are convicted (84%), and for the police to have increased powers to tackle online crime (84%). Furthermore, whilst the majority of participants were not in favour of police having the ability to trace online messages back to individuals (55%), 52% were in favour of reforms to end anonymity online, and 53% were in favour of the rollout of a system of digital identification system to reduce fraud.
6. **Restoring Trust:** The first aspect of this section was in relation to rebuilding trust in police. The most chosen response was better vetting of candidates who wish to join the police (31%). Finally, the survey asked participants to consider what the government's priority should be to address issues in the wider Criminal Justice System, with the highest number of respondents opting for "tougher punishments in the community as an alternative to prison" (31%).

Summary/Findings - Rebuilding Trust and Delivering Safer Communities: A Plan for Reforming UK Policing

- The paper opens with a foreword by Baroness Casey. These opening remarks discuss the findings in the previously mentioned polling. In addition, Baroness Casey notes that as criminal activity continues to evolve, policing is unable to keep pace with this change, and also that there should be a focus on neighbourhood policing. The foreword also briefly mentions the public's relationship with the police, and how the policing by consent model has been damaged in London. The foreword concludes with advocating for "wholesale and radical reform" to rebuild trust and confidence.
- The paper is structured by identifying drivers for reform, corresponding policy implications and recommendations. These recommendations are underpinned by the polling data discussed in the previous section.

Reform Thematic (continued)

Summary/Findings - Rebuilding Trust and Delivering Safer Communities: A Plan for Reforming UK Policing (continued)

- **Rising demand and broadening of the police's role** – The report discusses how the landscape of policing has changed considerably, with the profile of crime being very different to previous decades. This is seen through an increase in serious violence including knife-enabled crime, and the impact of cyber-enabled crime. In addition, the changing expectations of the police is highlighted, including the impact of mental health demand, and the pressure faced by police to respond to traditionally "hidden" types of violence, such as sexual offences and domestic abuse, with 17% of recorded crime in England and Wales relating to domestic abuse (which includes familial, intra-household abuse). As such, the report suggests that policing shifts to a more preventative model and reestablishes neighbourhood policing, which leads to **Recommendation 1: Putting prevention at the heart of policing, with a new neighbourhood policing guarantee and greater focus on diverting prolific offenders away from crime.**
- **Technological change: new crimes and threats** - In particular, the report notes the prevalence of online crime, with 61% of fraud recorded in 2022 being cyber-enabled. This, combined with the increased prevalence of child sexual abuse, requires policing to develop new skills and capabilities. The report suggests that a lack of alternative routes of entry into policing, limited performance management for police and a lack of a national strategy to develop specialist capabilities (such as digital forensics) is highlighted as being a barrier to policing being adaptable. This is summarised in **Recommendation 2: A modern and flexible workforce, with multiple new entry routes into policing to encourage new skills.**
- **Declining confidence in the ability of the police to uphold standards and respond to issues of local concerns** - The report also discusses a reduction of confidence in policing at a local level. Whilst this reduction in confidence can be seen across society, this is described as being particularly prevalent in some communities. This leads to **Recommendation 3: A new focus on professional standards and responsiveness, with forces judged by HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) to be failing to be subject to intervention from the centre, as well as new ways for the public to drive action on issues of local concern, such as anti-social behaviour.**
- **Concern about the effectiveness of existing policing structures** - The 43 forces that make up policing in England and Wales are found to pose challenges to how the police can respond to crimes which cross force boundaries or crimes which require a national-level response. In addition, the report notes the 'Specialist Capabilities' that may require development (e.g., digital forensics). The report advocates for this to be developed on a national scale. This is also relevant with the reported "lack of a coherent approach to investment in and use of police technology", with the siloing of resources and a lack of interoperability noted by the report. This results in the report's **Recommendation 4: An overhaul of structures, with a new national force to tackle threats that cross force boundaries and require a strategic response, encompassing counterterrorism, serious organised crime (SOC) and cyber-crime.** This recommendation is in contrast to the findings of the [Strategic Review of Policing in England and Wales](#), commissioned by The Police Foundation. This review found that "there is a real risk that [a national force] would break the local connection that it is at the heart of effective and legitimate policing".
- **Officer numbers** – "Traditional policy levers" such as increased officer numbers, will likely not be an option for police forces in England and Wales, with the report suggesting that the continued increase in government spending on healthcare due to an aging population resulting in police funding being "squeezed rather than expanded". This is supplemented by analysis which the report summarises as showing no direct relationship between police officers and detection rates. The report's final Recommendation is **Recommendation 5: Smarter use of technology to prevent criminality, including digital identity to tackle online fraud and an expansion of facial-recognition technology.**

Reform Thematic (continued)

Summary/Findings - A Plan to Reform the Criminal-Justice System

- Building upon the previous publications' call for policing reform, this looks at the wider criminal justice system (CJS) and calls for widescale reform of the system overall. The CJS is the system from the police through to the Probation Service.
- In particular, the report notes the interdependencies of the different aspects of the system. For example, it discusses that although the increase in officer numbers may be seen as a positive, this may increase the number of cases appearing at court, which consequently impacts other organisations in the CJS.
- The report notes the importance of 'swiftness and certainty' to drive effectiveness in the CJS. These principles impact the deterrence of crime, with the report explaining that certainty (for example, the likelihood of being caught) is more important than severity (the "harshness" of the sentence).
- Again, this report is structured by identifying drivers of reform, resultant policy implications and recommendations.
- **A small minority of offenders responsible for a large proportion of total crime:** Data show that 9% of offenders are responsible for half of crime. Furthermore, the data show that more than 40% of "prolific offenders" already have seven convictions before they are sent to prison for the first time. The report suggests that this indicates local-level interventions are not early or thorough enough. In addition, the report cites studies which show many these offenders lack settled accommodation (40%) and 81% are involved in substance misuse. The case for reform for this area is summarised in **Recommendation Area 1: The CJS should establish a distinctive and enhanced response to prolific offenders, with mandatory drug testing on arrest, diversion into treatment, multi-agency support and the use of electronic tags to enforce compliance.**
- **Too few offenders being charged – and those that are charged facing lengthy delays:** The report provides the context of the system for charging offenders in England and Wales. In the past, lawyers from the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) would be embedded in police stations, enabling the CPS to shape investigations from the beginning and efficient decision making. However, CPS faces its own resourcing issues, resulting in the service operating remotely from police stations, requiring the police to send CPS an electronic file for a charging decision to be made. This can result in months lapsing before this decision is made. Ultimately, this requires the police to release suspects who are under investigation, posing a risk to victims. The report notes that this can result in victim attrition, and frontline officers becoming unmotivated to progress the charging process for "more commonplace crimes" such as burglaries. This results in **Recommendation Area 2: Streamlining the charging process, freeing up capacity to deal with the most serious and complex crimes.**

Reform Thematic (continued)

Summary/Findings - A Plan to Reform the Criminal-Justice System (continued)

- Victims losing confidence, meaning they withdraw from the process, allowing offenders to evade Justice: Ministry of Justice data show that victims who were "very satisfied" with police and in CPS has dropped from 42% to 32% since 2014. The report notes that the overarching priority of victims is timely and effective communication, with this being particularly focused on being updated about the progress of their case through engagement with a single point of contact. The experience of female victims of sexual offences is found to be "even worse". This is found to be specifically with regards to "insensitive attitudes", victim blaming and prolonged investigations. This is summarised in **Recommendation Area 3: Improving the victim experience by using technology to create an end-to-end service for victims, with a single case officer assigned from the moment a crime is recorded.**
- Declining trial effectiveness and lengthy court backlogs leaving suspects and victims in limbo: The report presents three structural barriers to embedding the principles of swiftness and certainty into the CJS:
 1. **Due process:** Defendants in criminal trials have the right to a fair trial.
 2. **Organisational:** As the CJS in England and Wales is centralised, there is limited flexibility at a local level.
 3. **Cultural:** Although some specialist courts have been piloted in England and Wales, they remain small examples of isolated practice.
- These barriers to improvement in the efficiencies of the CJS are summarised in Recommendation Area 4: A new national timeliness target and greater use of technology to drive efficiency across the whole criminal-justice system and reduce long waiting times.
- Offender-management system that neither punishes nor rehabilitates offenders: As previously mentioned, many offenders who are delivered a prison sentence have often been through the court system before, with prison being viewed as the last remaining option. However, a fifth of those sentenced to prison have been convicted for theft offences, resulting in sentences of less than six months. This timeframe is viewed to be insufficient for treatment courses or to explore the factors driving offending. Simultaneously, community sentences are cited as "not commanding public confidence". Therefore, the final area of reform is Recommendation Area 5: Tougher and more intensive community sentences and the use of next-generation tags as alternatives to custody to help manage overcrowded prisons.

Previous Oversight by the Authority

- Bi-annual polling is undertaken by the Diffley Partnership on behalf of the Authority. This is regularly reported to the Policing Performance Committee (PPC), with the [most recent update](#) presented in September 2023. The Authority website also has [a page](#) summarising all previously reported polling. This includes ad-hoc polling, and the use of Police Scotland polling data.

Reform Thematic (continued)

Previous Oversight by the Authority (continued)

- In November 2023, the [Scottish Crime and Justice Survey \(SCJS\) 2021/22](#) findings were published by the Scottish Government. Some of the findings within the survey included:
 - There has been a further drop in the proportion of respondents saying that the police are doing an excellent or good job overall. This has fallen to 49% and has been in decline since a high of 63% reported back in 2012/13.
 - The majority of people report not having had any contact with the police in the last 12 months. Among those who have had direct contact (whether reporting a crime, being questioned or searched, contact through work, or being approached by the policing carrying out enquiries), satisfaction levels remain high. 93% of people say that they were dealt with in a polite manner, 85% say they were treated fairly, 67% say that the police took an appropriate amount of interest in what the respondents had to say, and 60% say that overall they were satisfied with how the police handled the matter.
- The Authority have included input to the Your Police Stakeholder Group.
- COSLA have regular involvement at PPC to give a voice to local issues/concerns.
- In addition, the Authority and Police Scotland's Community Confidence Action Research Project to co-develop initiatives with local communities to improve confidence in policing. The project regularly publishes its findings, and the project is due to conclude in [April 2024](#).
- The Policing in a Digital World Programme presented [an update](#) in June 2023 to PPC. This programme aims to transform the Police Scotland response to cybercrime. Of particular relevance to these publications, this programme focuses on an improved victim experience and to prevent the engagement of vulnerable individuals in cybercrime.
- HMICS, HM Inspectorate of Prisons for Scotland and the Care Inspectorate [presented the Joint Review – Diversion from prosecution](#) to PPC in June 2023.

Future Oversight by the Authority

- The [Digital Evidence Sharing Capability service \(DESC\)](#) is a Scottish Government-led initiative that spans the entire Scottish criminal justice system, including the Authority. This initiative aims to digitally transform the management of evidence in the criminal justice system. The Authority will continue to be actively engaged in this project as it progresses.
- As previously covered in a previous edition of the monthly digest, the [Victims, Witnesses, and Justice Reform \(Scotland\) Bill](#) aims to improve the experience of victims and witnesses in the justice system. Authority officers will continue to monitor the progress of the Bill through Scottish Parliament.
- The Authority plans to conduct a deep dive of its polling, combined with a correlation with the 2021 SCJS to get an in-depth Scottish picture.

External Sources

- The Guardian - [Women's groups criticise move to delay sentencing in England and Wales](#) – 12th October 2023
- Holyrood – [Justice on trial: The challenges facing Scotland's courts, prisons and police](#) – 10th April 2023