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Attitudes Toward the Police in Prolonged Emergencies: Findings from the First Year of the COVID-19 Pandemic in Israel

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Abstract

Emergencies, such as natural disasters, wars and terrorist attacks, are known to have important effects on police–community relations and, specifically, on public attitudes toward the police. At the same time, little is known about what happens to public sentiments over time in prolonged emergencies. Similarly, it is unclear if different types of attitudes follow a similar trajectory or if they “behave” differently. The present study examines general and pandemic-specific attitudes toward the police over the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic in Israel, using data from a community panel survey ($n = 535$) carried out in its first three peaks. We found a statistically significant deterioration in all types of attitudes in the first six months of the study, followed by stabilization in general attitudes. Interestingly, some emergency-specific attitudes followed a different path and demonstrated consistent deterioration throughout the study period. These findings contribute to our theoretical understanding of police–community relations in emergencies and bear practical implications for policing emergencies.

Keywords: COVID-19; policing; emergencies; public attitudes; police–community relations

INTRODUCTION

Managing emergencies and disasters, both manmade (wars, terrorism) and natural (floods, earthquakes), has become an important part of the police mission. While police agencies have traditionally taken on the role of first responders, recent natural disasters caused by climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic have demonstrated just how central this task is to policing (Kyprianides et al. 2022; Laufs and Waseem 2020; Mutongwizo, Blaustein, and Shearing 2022). Among the various implications of this role, such as adding a burden on limited resources and officer fatigue (see Drew and Martin 2020; Edwards and Kotera 2021; Shjarback and Magny 2021), the literature on policing emergencies suggests that the situation itself, as well as the police conduct during and about the crisis, will likely have an impact on police–community relations, and specifically public attitudes towards the police

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(Bonkiewicz and Ruback 2012; Jonathan 2010; Jonathan-Zamir, Weisburd, and Hasisi 2014).

A large body of research suggests that emergencies may both strengthen and weaken public sentiments of the police. Severe threats have been found to bring about a temporary, short-term wave of support for the national leader and, by extension, to other public institutions, including the police, a phenomenon known as the “rally ’round the flag effect” (Mueller 1970, 1973). The police’s focus on handling emergencies may also strengthen their public image, portraying them as heroic, highly relevant and attentive to immediate public concerns (Bonkiewicz and Ruback 2012). At the same time, the support generated by the rally effect is temporary by nature. Moreover, the potential costs of policing the crisis, such as adopting a “warrior” rather than “service-provider” policing style and being perceived by the public (rightfully or not) as paying little attention to other policing duties, may become more significant over time (Jonathan-Zamir *et al.* 2014; Laufs and Waseem 2020), thus undermining public support. The drop in support may be even stronger if the emergency regulations and/or the way they are enforced are perceived as violating privacy, freedom or citizen rights (Aborisade 2021).

However, despite the rich work on police–community relations in emergencies, at least two important gaps still need to be addressed. First, we know little about fluctuations in public attitudes towards the police throughout *prolonged* emergencies, that is, emergencies that do not amount to a single, isolated event but persist over a relatively long period. Such emergencies require the police and the public to adapt to a new reality – a “new normal”. Second, it is unclear if all types of attitudes toward the police follow a similar trajectory over time (i.e. a rise in favourable views at the early stages of the crisis followed by a drop over time, as suggested by the rally effect) or if different types of attitudes “behave” differently. Given the hypothesized effects of police conduct during and in relation to the emergency on public sentiments, we are particularly interested in whether general evaluations of the police and specific attitudes concerned with policing the emergency follow different paths.

In the present study, we address these questions using a longitudinal panel survey that measured public attitudes toward the police over the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic in Israel. Previous analyses revealed general support for the police at the first peak of the pandemic in Israel (Perry and Jonathan-Zamir 2020), followed by a drop in support (Perry, Jonathan-Zamir, and Factor 2022). In the present study, we take advantage of all three survey waves, measuring public attitudes towards the police at all three peaks of the pandemic in Israel, to examine the trends in specific *v.* general perceptions of the police over time. We begin by reviewing the literature on policing emergencies while focusing on police–community relations in such situations, their expression as public sentiments, and the factors expected to influence public attitudes toward the police in emergencies. We then discuss the COVID-19 pandemic as a prolonged emergency and review the growing body of work on public attitudes towards the police, specifically in the context of the pandemic. Next, we describe the study context – the first year of the pandemic in Israel and the role of the Israel Police (I.P.) in the national attempts to control the spread of the virus. The survey instrument, main variables, sampling and analyses are presented next, followed by the study findings. We conclude by discussing the

fluctuations in public sentiments that we identified, their potential root causes, and the more general implications of our study for theory, policy and practice.

Emergencies and Public Attitudes Toward the Police

The police play a critical role in crises and emergencies (Deflem and Sutphin 2009; Punch and Markham 2000; Rojek and Smith 2007; Varano et al. 2010). While the government often makes broad strategic decisions on handling the situation, police officers will communicate (and enforce) these decisions (Bonkiewicz and Ruback 2012). The police are called to address public concerns and ensure citizens' safety while enforcing compliance with emergency regulations, such as evacuations, stay-at-home orders and travel restrictions (Deflem and Sutphin 2009). Accordingly, police workload may rise significantly in volume and intensity (Bonkiewicz and Ruback 2010). Moreover, the police may be required to adjust to changes in crime: some forms of street crime, such as pickpocketing or traffic violations, may decrease, while other forms of crime may rise (Hodgkinson et al. 2022; Prelog 2016). For example, violent conflicts between citizens, car theft and store raids may increase during mass evacuations (Leitner and Helbich 2011), while domestic violence may rise during long periods of financial crises and stay-at-home orders (Gearhart et al. 2018).

How do emergencies and the various changes they bring about to policing have an impact on public sentiments of the police? Before we address this question, a few words about the importance of public views of the police more generally are in order. Public attitudes towards the police have long been a major area of interest for police researchers, practitioners and policymakers in democratic societies (e.g. President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing 2015), due to their normative importance and practical implications. On the theoretical–philosophical level, because the source of police authority and powers is the public, not some dictator or divine spirit, it is only right to expect the police to exercise their authority in a way that leads to public trust (Jackson et al. 2012b; Lentz and Chaires 2007). On the pragmatic level, favourable views of the police, and particularly “police legitimacy”,¹ are critical to police success because they increase the likelihood of cooperation with the police, compliance with their requests, support for police empowerment, and ultimately law obedience (Mazerolle et al. 2013; Sunshine and Tyler 2003; Tyler 2004, 2009). Negative attitudes toward the police – and particularly weak legitimacy – may have detrimental effects, including civil unrest, violent protests and rioting (President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing 2015; Sherman 2023; Weisburd and Majmundar 2018).

In turn, the immense body of work on police legitimacy developed by Tom Tyler (e.g. Tyler 2004, 2009) and many others (e.g. Bradford, Jackson, and Stanko 2009; Gau et al. 2012; Hinds and Murphy 2007; Reisig and Lloyd 2009; Sunshine and Tyler 2003) identifies two additional types of important attitudes, which presumably lead to police legitimacy. Research demonstrates that people judge the legitimacy of the

¹There is no single definition of “police legitimacy”, but a frequently used one is “The belief that the police are entitled to call upon the public to follow the law and help combat crime and that members of the public must engage in cooperative behaviors” (Tyler 2004, 86–7).

police based on both the *what* – the outcomes the police deliver (or “police effectiveness”) and on the *how* – the fairness of the processes by which the police exercise their authority (or “procedural justice”). Of the two, procedural justice is typically found to be more closely tied to legitimacy (for reviews, see Jackson *et al.* 2012a; Mazerolle *et al.* 2013; Nagin and Telep 2017, 2020; Tyler, Mentovich, and Satyavada 2014; Weisburd and Majmundar 2018). As detailed below, these types of attitudes inspired many of the items in our survey.

What Makes an Impact on Public Attitudes Toward the Police in Emergencies?

It has been argued that in situations of crisis or threat, public views of the police are likely to be influenced by the emergency itself and by the perceived police conduct in response to the emergency. As noted earlier, at the outbreak of a crisis, when the situation is characterized by uncertainty and fear, citizens tend to unite against the common “enemy” and support their leader – a phenomenon known as the “rally round the flag effect” (Mueller 1970, 1973; Stein 1976; Tajfel 1974, 1978). As government representatives, the police may benefit from this wave of support (Jonathan 2010; Kelling and Moore 1988; LaFree and Adamczyk 2017). However, the rally effect is short lived (Brody and Shapiro 1989; Mueller 1970, 1973; Parker 1995). Over time, citizens may become habituated to the threat, thus weakening the initial boost in support (Baum 2002; Jonathan 2010).

In terms of the effects of (perceived) police action and conduct, in emergencies, the police often place the threat at the centre of their attention and dedicate considerable resources to it. Thus, they may initially be viewed as highly relevant, competent and attentive to immediate public concerns (Bonkiewicz and Ruback 2012). However, over time, citizens may feel that the resources invested in addressing the immediate threat undermine police effectiveness in other “classic” responsibilities, such as maintenance of order and crime control. Citizens may also feel that the nature of policing has changed from providing a service and viewing citizens as “customers” to controlling the public and treating citizens as suspects (Bayley and Weisburd 2011; Jonathan-Zamir, Weisburd, and Hasisi 2015). Finally, the enforcement of unfamiliar, unpleasant emergency regulations (Grace 2020; McCarthy *et al.* 2021), as well as the often-intrusive means by which such regulations are enforced (Kennison and Loumansky 2007; McCulloch 2004), may increase negative encounters with citizens, which may, in turn, undermine support for the police. Thus, both types of influences – the social–psychological effects of the crisis and police conduct in response to the situation – suggest a trend whereby support for the police is expected to rise during the early stages of the crisis but subsequently drop.

Indeed, numerous studies provide empirical support for this expected trend. Putnam (2002) found higher levels of trust in the police six weeks after the terror attacks of 11 September 2001, compared to trust before the attack. Trust returned to pre-attack levels six months after the attack. Dinesen and Jæger (2013) analysed six waves of a survey conducted in Spain both before and after the 11 March 2004 terrorist attack in Madrid. They found a significant rise in the share of participants who expressed trust in the police immediately after the attack, followed by a drop

that began a week after. Attitudes appeared to stabilize seven months after the attack. Thomassen, Strype, and Egge (2014) analysed four waves of a survey conducted in the year following the terror attack that took place on 22 July 2011 in Oslo, Norway. To compare citizens' trust in the police to pre-attack levels, the researchers included several questions from the Citizen Survey commissioned by the Police Directorate in 2010 and the 2011 European Social Survey. They found that trust in the police was relatively stable in the three years preceding the attack, with a small yet statistically significant rise five weeks after. Trust returned to pre-attack levels 18 weeks after the attack and remained stable in subsequent survey waves. They also found significant improvement in evaluations of police effectiveness and procedural justice immediately after the attack but no substantial change in citizens' sense of moral alignment with the police. Wollebæk et al. (2012) also found a significant rise in trust in the police shortly after the same terror attack. Other examples include a surge in support for the police during the initial stages of the Second World War in the United Kingdom (UK) (Todman 2020) and in Israel during the "Second Intifada" (Jonathan 2010).

Thus, while the general trend of a short-term rise in support for the police in emergencies has been discussed and received much empirical support, most studies have focused on a single-event emergency (such as a specific terrorist attack) and compared citizens' attitudes before and after the event. Moreover, most of these studies did not differentiate between different types of attitudes toward the police, and particularly not between general evaluations and emergency-specific views. We found this last question particularly important given the expected effects of police action and conduct in an emergency, and in light of the literature suggesting that general and specific attitudes toward the police are inherently different. The core distinction between general and particular attitudes is rooted in social psychology research (e.g. Kruglanski et al. 2015). Studies in this area have shown that general, broad views (such as *liking* something) tend to be more robust and stable than specific attitudes (such as *wanting* the same thing), while the latter were found to be better predictors of particular behaviours (Ajzen 1985, 2012; Fishbein and Ajzen 1975, 2010).

In the context of public attitudes toward the police, researchers have often distinguished between broad, general views of the police (e.g. how procedurally fair the police are on the whole) and evaluations of police conduct in a specific encounter (e.g. how procedurally fair police officers were in a particular encounter) (e.g. Bradford et al. 2009; Mazzerole et al. 2013). For example, in a notable study, Skogan (2006) found that a negative experience with the police in a specific encounter (as subjectively perceived) had a strong and negative effect on broad views of the police, while a positive experience had only a small, positive impact. In terms of stability, Brandl et al. (1994) found that global attitudes towards the police were more stable than views concerning a specific encounter, and Nivette, Eisner, and Ribeaud (2020) identified relative stability in general views of the police (police legitimacy and legal cynicism) from adolescence to early adulthood. These studies emphasize the importance of distinguishing between general and specific attitudes toward the police and suggest that specific attitudes are likely to be less stable than general views, making them more sensitive to the effects of crises.

The COVID-19 Pandemic as the Study Context

The COVID-19 pandemic provides a unique opportunity to examine our research questions. First, it is a global emergency, one of few in modern history (Guterres 2020). As such, it presented police agencies across Western democracies with similar challenges, which suggests that lessons learned in one agency may be highly relevant to others (Shaw 2021). Second, the COVID-19 pandemic is a prolonged crisis (rather than a single-event emergency) and thus enables longitudinal assessments of public attitudes toward the police over relatively long periods while the state of emergency is still ongoing. In this section, we elaborate on the COVID-19 pandemic, the changes it brought to policing, and what has already been learned about its effects on public attitudes toward the police.

Since its outbreak in January 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has had an unprecedented effect on law enforcement agencies worldwide (e.g. Clements and Aitkenhead 2020; Kyprianides *et al.* 2022; Maskály, Ivković, and Neyroud 2021; Nix, Ivanov, and Pickett 2021; for a detailed review of the changes to policing during COVID-19, see Lum, Maupin, and Stoltz 2020a, b; Perry and Jonathan-Zamir 2020). This effect was expressed, first and foremost, in changes to the mission and tasks of the police, whereby police agencies were forced to dedicate considerable resources to pandemic-related duties and enforce emergency regulations (Farrow 2020; Goldenfein, Green, and Viljoen 2020; Kitchin 2020; Mazerolle and Ransley 2021). The nature of interactions between officers and citizens also changed – they were now influenced by the need for social distancing and protective gear, such as face masks and sometimes even hazard suits (Lum *et al.* 2020b). In terms of public attitudes toward the police during COVID-19, as detailed below, a growing body of research suggests that, overall, they followed the expected trajectory: a rise in favourable views at the early stages of the crisis, followed by a drop in support as the pandemic progressed (Chamberlain 2020; Janković and Cvetković 2020).

Several studies conducted during the early stages of the pandemic describe initial high levels of support for the police (Chamberlain 2020; Janković and Cvetković 2020; Murphy *et al.* 2020; Sibley *et al.* 2020). For example, in New Zealand, Sibley *et al.* (2020) compared public attitudes towards the police before and during the first lockdown using a panel survey. They found a significant rise in trust in the police and the government during the first lockdown, which they attribute to the rally effect. Similarly, a survey conducted during the first lockdown in Teesside, UK (Chamberlain 2020) found favourable views of police performance in handling the pandemic: 60% of the respondents agreed that the police were “doing a good job” in handling the pandemic, and the large majority was comfortable with the police using various enforcement measures related to the lockdown (asking people to provide a valid reason for being out [81%]; issuing fines for breaching the lockdown [86%]; arresting people who refused to return home [76%]). In Serbia, Janković and Cvetković (2020) conducted an online survey using snowball sampling during March and April 2020, four weeks after the state of emergency was declared. They found strong support for the police: 61.9% of the respondents agreed that the police did their job well and that they had full confidence in the police; 62.6% thought that police officers play the most significant role in combating the coronavirus (second only to health workers); and 69.3% agreed that the police were prepared for the

emergency response caused by the pandemic. Studies from Australia (Murphy et al. 2020) and the UK (Stripe 2020) show similar findings. As mentioned above, the first wave of our online survey, conducted in Israel during the first peak of the pandemic, showed a similar, general support for the police (Perry and Jonathan-Zamir 2020).

Concerning the more advanced stages of the pandemic, as expected, studies show less favourable attitudes toward the police over time (Adepeju and Jimoh 2021; Clements 2020; Kimhi et al. 2020; Shaw 2021). For example, in Australia, Williamson et al. (2022) found that the longer participants spent in lockdown, the less accepting they were of the COVID-19 restrictions and the less they felt obligated to obey authorities. In the UK, Adepeju and Jimoh (2021) found more negative publicly available tweets about police conduct throughout the second and the third lockdowns. Still in the UK, Clements (2020) and Shaw (2021) conducted three waves of an online survey and found that while participants generally supported police conduct during the pandemic, this support eroded over time. For example, in January 2021, only 27% of the participants agreed with the statement “I fully support the approach taken by the police”, compared to 36% in late April 2020 and 42% in early April 2020 (see Clements and Aitkenhead 2020). In Israel, the drop in support was prominent in the third peak of the pandemic (Perry et al. 2022). Similarly, Kimhi et al. (2020) conducted a two-wave online survey examining levels of distress, resilience and subjective wellbeing, and found that average levels of trust in the police dropped from 3.45 in May to 2.85 in July 2020.

These findings are important because they show that in the sense of public attitudes toward the police – the COVID-19 pandemic appears to be similar to the general trend identified in other types of emergencies. However, like most published work in this area, the studies reviewed above do not address potential variation in the trajectories followed by different types of attitudes, particularly general *v.* pandemic-specific evaluations of the police. As ongoing emergencies become more prevalent, understanding the dynamics of police–community relations in such situations is of great theoretical and practical importance (Murphy et al. 2022). If police agencies can pinpoint the more “fragile” attitudes, that is, the views that are more readily or severely undermined in emergencies, they may be able to do something about it, thus maintaining public support when it is most needed.

METHOD

Study Setting: The COVID-19 Pandemic in Israel

Following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, a national state of emergency was first declared in Israel on 15 March 2020 (State of Israel Ministry of Health 2021). Since then, three peaks in detected cases led to three lockdowns: 8 April 2020–4 May 2020; 25 September 2020–17 October 2020; 27 December 2020–7 February 2021 (Israel Ministry of Health 2021).² Similar to most Western democracies, lockdowns in Israel entailed stay-at-home orders, strict limitations on the distance and purpose of travel from home, closure of schools and businesses defined as “non-essential”, restrictions on gatherings and international travel, and

²The fourth and fifth waves occurred in June 2021 and January 2022. However, due to more general changes in policy, these waves did not lead to lockdowns.

the requirement to wear face masks in public (Government of Israel 2020). As in other countries, such measures had been rarely or never applied before in Israel (Shany 2020b).

Like most police agencies in Western democracies, I.P. officers were required to enforce a constantly changing list of emergency regulations and frequently explain these regulations to citizens (Shaw 2021). They enforced social distancing, the obligation to wear face masks in public and lockdowns by issuing warnings and fines (Maskály *et al.* 2021). Officers were required to interact with citizens while wearing protective gear and maintaining physical distance (Lum *et al.* 2020a, b). Finally, I.P. officers were required to handle pandemic-related protests and demonstrations (Shany 2020a), similar to those in the United States, UK and Europe (Metcalf and Pickett 2021). Thus, we consider the COVID-19 pandemic in Israel a useful setting for examining the questions at the heart of the present study.

Sampling and Participants

We carried out a three-wave online survey using “Midgam Project Web Panel”, an online platform based in Israel and frequently used by social scientists (e.g. Gubler, Halperin, and Hirschberger 2015; Schori-Eyal *et al.* 2015). Participants were sampled by “Midgam” out of approximately 91,000 registered panellists, using stratified sampling by quotas of gender and age based on data from the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS).³ Invitations were sent to all “Midgam” panellists who meet the inclusion criteria defined by the researchers, and the option to participate remained open until the quotas had been met.

The first wave of data collection took place in the days preceding the first lockdown (6–8 April 2020). A total of 1798 questionnaires were completed in this wave, of which we excluded 223 that had been filled out within five minutes or less, which, in our judgement, indicated inattentiveness (Curran 2016). This left us with a final wave 1 sample of 1575. Wave 2 was conducted near the initiation of the second lockdown (16–17 September 2020). All respondents who provided valid questionnaires in wave 1 were invited to participate in wave 2 (up to the quota of 800, which was set due to budget constraints). Of those, 166 were excluded due to inattentiveness (final wave 2 sample: 616). Wave 3 was again administered soon after the initiation of the third lockdown (31 December 2020–14 January 2021). All 1575 respondents who provided valid questionnaires in wave 1 were again contacted and invited to participate. Of the 1085 who agreed, 101 were excluded due to inattentiveness (final wave 3 sample: 984). For the present analysis, we took advantage of the 535 participants who had completed a valid questionnaire at all three time points. The sociodemographic characteristics of this sample and the characteristics of the population (obtained from the Israeli CBS in 2020) are detailed in Table 1.

As seen from Table 1, our sample closely mirrors the population from which it was drawn in terms of gender and country of origin. At the same time, it is somewhat older on average and includes a slightly larger proportion of married and

³Due to lockdown restrictions dictating online data collection, and despite our effort to include a valid sample of minorities in Israel, our sample was non-representative of minority groups (such as ultra-orthodox Jews and Israeli Arabs). Therefore, the analysis only includes the majority-group members.

Table 1. Sample Characteristics

Variable	Study Sample (<i>n</i> = 535)	Population of Israeli, Adult, Non-Ultra-Orthodox Jews (<i>N</i> = 3,468,661) ^a
Family status (%)		
Single	25.0	29.4
Married	59.4	57.6
Separated/divorced	13.7	10.1
Widowed	1.9	2.9
Gender (%)		
Female	51.4	50.60
Male	48.6	49.40
Age (years)		
Average	49.1	44.75
Standard deviation	15.43	19.25
Country of birth (%)		
Israel	75.5	73.6
Other	24.5	26.4

^aObtained from the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) in 2020. “Non-Ultra-Orthodox” was self-defined in the study, but defined by the type of secondary school attended by the respondent in the CBS data.

separated/divorced individuals. This may be due to using a sample of registered panellists, which, as already noted, was dictated by limited opportunities for data collection during the lockdowns. We return to this point in our discussion section below.

The Survey Instrument

The questionnaire included 64 items, which inquired about participants’ attitudes towards the police (both general and specifically in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic), personal experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic and sociodemographic characteristics. Most items were in the form of statements, which respondents were asked to rank on a scale ranging from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 5 (“strongly agree”). Items measuring public attitudes towards the police were based on previous surveys in Israel (e.g. Jonathan and Weisburd 2010; Perry, Jonathan-Zamir, and Weisburd 2017) and elsewhere (e.g. Gau 2011; Sunshine and Tyler 2003). Questions concerning expectations from the police during the COVID-19 pandemic were based on previous studies on policing emergencies (Jonathan and Weisburd 2010). In the third wave, several questions were added to measure assessments of how the Israeli government has been handling the pandemic, broad concerns about the potential effects of the pandemic on society, and personal hardships during the pandemic.

In line with our research questions, in the present analysis, we focus on the 13 survey items that (1) appeared in all three survey waves and (2) assessed respondents' attitudes toward the police, both generally and specifically in the context of the pandemic. Based on the literature reviewed above on public attitudes toward the police in the context of emergencies, as well as on the large body of work on police legitimacy (e.g. Tyler 2004, 2009), each of the 13 survey items reflects one of five themes that emerged as central in these bodies of work. These themes also guide the presentation of our findings below:

- (1) Pandemic-related expectations from the police: whether or not the police should focus on enforcing the emergency regulations, how police officers should treat violations of these regulations, and whether or not this enforcement was necessary to ensure compliance with the regulations;
- (2) General and pandemic-related evaluations of police effectiveness: how effective are the police in handling crime, "regular" policing tasks, and tasks specifically related to the pandemic;
- (3) General fairness and trust in the police: to what extent do citizens trust in the police, generally in the context of policing the pandemic, whether or not police officers are dishonest, and whether they treat citizens fairly;
- (4) Pandemic-related fairness and trust in the police: to what extent do citizens trust in the police, specifically in the context of policing the pandemic, whether or not police officers are dishonest, and whether they treat citizens fairly; and finally
- (5) Perceived costs of policing the pandemic, such whether or not focusing on the pandemic has undermined other police missions or their relationship with the community.

A list of all survey items is available in Appendix 1.

Analytic Strategy

For each of the 13 survey items, we compared the mean score across the three time points using repeated-measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) and *post hoc* paired-samples *t* tests. These mean scores are presented in graphs (the asterisks represent the significance level of the *t* tests). Full reporting of the repeated-measures ANOVA and *post hoc t* tests are available in Appendices 1 and 2. Survey items are presented by theme and are numbered for convenience.

FINDINGS

Pandemic-Related Expectations from the Police

Figure 1 reports participants' expectations from the police about the pandemic. As can be seen from Figure 1, expectations have significantly changed over the nine months following the first peak of the pandemic in one of two main paths.

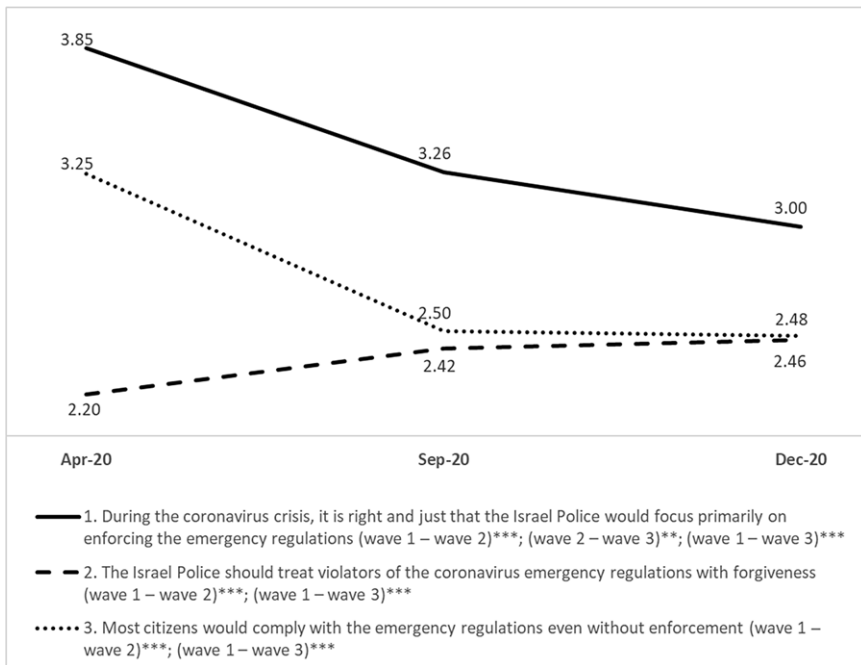


Figure 1. Pandemic-related expectations from the police.

*** $p < 0.001$. Only statistically significant results are reported in the parentheses.

Compared to April 2020, in September 2020, participants' support for police focusing on enforcing the emergency regulations (question 1; Q1) significantly weakened, and this drop continued into the second period of the study (September–December 2020). Reflecting a similar perspective, between April and September 2020, we found a significant rise in participants' level of support for treating violators of emergency regulations with forgiveness (Q2). At the same time, unlike Q1, attitudes stabilized between September and December 2020. Notably, when asked whether most citizens would comply with the emergency regulations even without enforcement (Q3), we found a significant drop in this view between April and September 2020, followed by stabilization between September and December 2020. Thus, it appears that the drop in the desire for forceful, unforgiving enforcement of the emergency regulations is *not* because such enforcement is deemed unnecessary.

Perceived Police Effectiveness During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Figure 2 reports both general and pandemic-specific assessments of police effectiveness. As can be seen from Figure 2, views related to effectiveness in policing the pandemic show a sharp deterioration throughout the first and second period of the study (Q4), while views of general police performance (Q5, Q6)

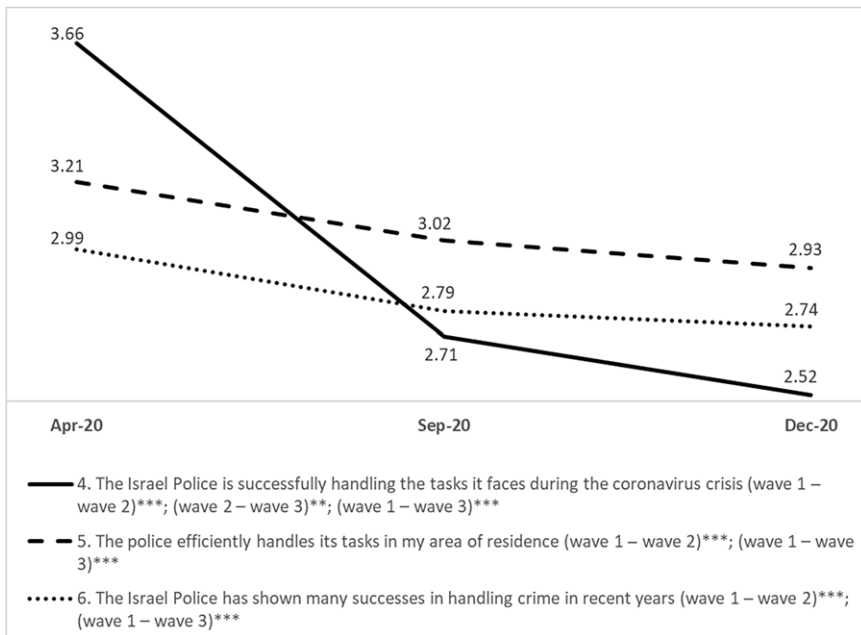


Figure 2. General and pandemic-related evaluations of police effectiveness.
 *** $p < 0.001$. Only statistically significant results are reported in the parentheses.

moderately weakened between April and September 2020, but showed no statistically significant difference between September and December 2020.

Perceived Fairness and Trust in the Police During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Figures 3 and 4 report participants’ views regarding police fairness and their levels of trust in the police. As can be seen from these figures, participants’ responses to most items – both pandemic-specific and general – show a significant deterioration in the first period of the study (April–September 2020), followed by stabilization in the second (September–December 2020). These include broad assessments of police fairness (Q8), general trust in the police (Q9) and trust in officers to behave with integrity when enforcing the emergency regulations (Q10). The survey item “Police conduct during the coronavirus crisis strengthened my trust in the police” (Q11) showed a consistent drop in support throughout the study period. The only survey item that showed no significant changes over time is Q7 (“Police officers are often dishonest”).

Perceived Costs of Policing the Pandemic

In Q12 and Q13, participants were asked about their views of the costs of policing the COVID-19 pandemic: Did it come at the expense of other police responsibilities (Q12), and did it undermine the police–community relationship (Q13)? Following

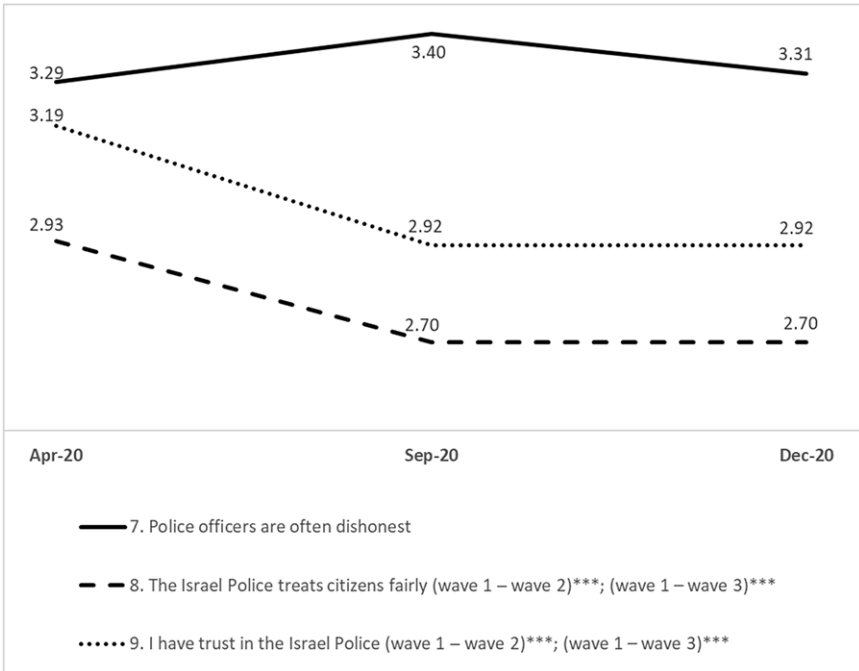


Figure 3. General fairness and trust in the police.
 *** $p < 0.001$. Only statistically significant results are reported in the parentheses.

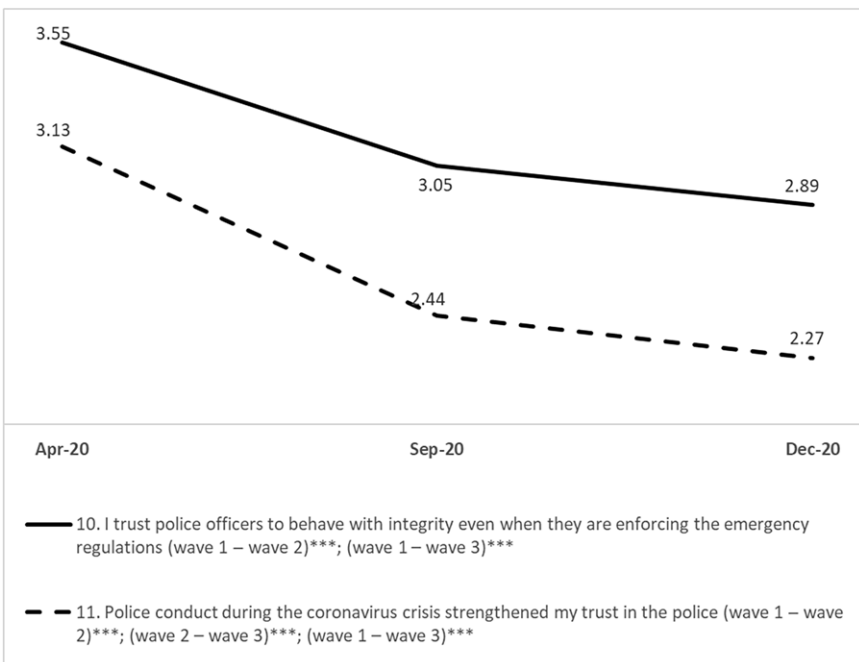


Figure 4. Pandemic-specific fairness and trust in the police.
 *** $p < 0.001$. Only statistically significant results are reported in the parentheses.

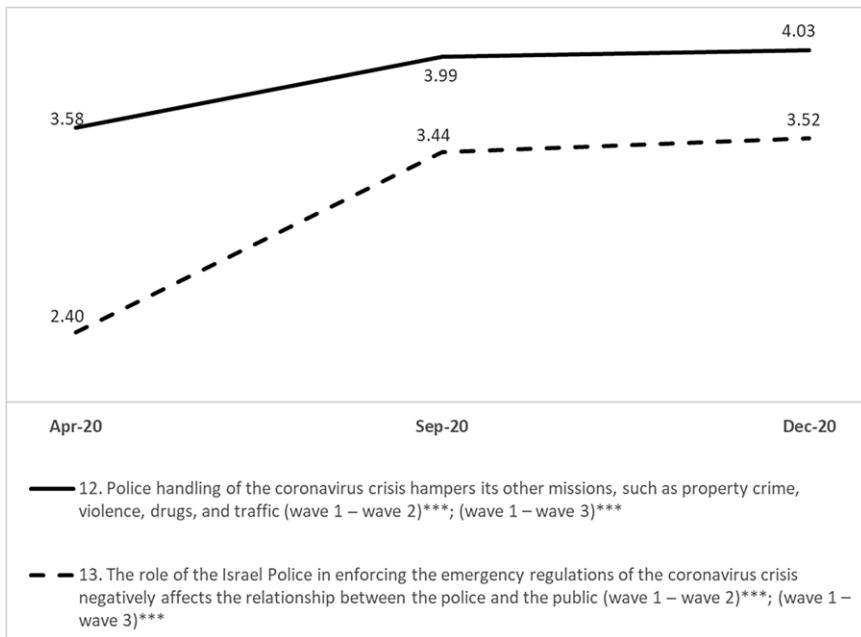


Figure 5. Perceived costs of policing the pandemic.
 *** $p < 0.001$. Only statistically significant results are reported in the parentheses.

the prevailing trend, while both costs were perceived to be significantly higher in September than in April 2020, no statistically significant change occurred between September and December 2020 (Figure 5).

DISCUSSION

The present study addressed a notable gap in the literature on police–community relations in emergencies: What happens to general *v.* emergency-specific attitudes toward the police throughout prolonged emergencies? We examined the attitudes of Majority community members in Israel during the first year of a global, ongoing crisis – the COVID-19 pandemic. By comparing public attitudes across the three peaks of the pandemic (April, September and December 2020), we were able to shed light on fluctuations in citizens’ views of the police, both general and emergency-specific, throughout a prolonged emergency.

In line with the literature on policing emergencies, as well as previous studies on public attitudes towards the police during COVID-19, we found relatively high levels of support for the police at the first peak of the pandemic, followed by a significant drop in all types of evaluations between the first and second peaks. We also identified stabilization in most views between the second and third peaks, while some evaluations, specifically concerned with policing the pandemic, continued to deteriorate throughout the study period.

How can these findings be explained, and what can they tell us more generally about police–community relations in emergencies? First, the favourable views during the first peak of the pandemic and the significant deterioration in most attitudes as the pandemic progressed are not surprising and are in line with the vast literature on the “rally ’round the flag” effect reviewed earlier (Mueller 1970, 1973; Stein 1976; Tajfel 1974, 1978). We did not have pre-pandemic data (our first measurement was at the first peak of the pandemic), but according to the rally effect and previous research on attitudes toward the police in emergencies (e.g. Jonathan 2010), the views measured in April 2020 are, in all likelihood, more favourable than pre-pandemic evaluations. Accordingly, we expect that the drop in general evaluations between April 2020 and September 2020 reflects the “natural course” of attitudes toward the government and its representatives in emergencies, and the stabilization between September 2020 and December 2020 indicates that these views had returned to their baseline, pre-pandemic level.

At the same time, a less expected finding is that not all attitudes toward the police behave the same. While general evaluations of the police followed the expected path of the rally effect, some views related specifically to policing the emergency appear also to be influenced by other factors. They were irrelevant before the pandemic, very favourable at the first lockdown (more so than parallel, general evaluations), but then began to deteriorate, with no end in sight. Notably, all types of attitudes deteriorated between April 2020 and September 2020; it was only between September 2020 and December 2020 that the different trajectories emerged. This highlights the importance of studying police–community relations for relatively long periods during ongoing emergencies, as we have done here.

Why did evaluations of pandemic policing continue to deteriorate? We suspect that over time, as the crisis prolonged, the emergency regulations and how the police enforced them undermined support for the police in this context (Deflem and Sutphin 2009). At the outbreak of a crisis, fear of the unknown threat and its potential implications may be enough to justify strict enforcement of new, intrusive emergency regulations (Goldenfein et al. 2020). However, as the state of emergency becomes prolonged, citizens may become accustomed to the threat, less fearful and exhausted by the regulations, and thus less willing to accept the restrictions, particularly how they are enforced (Sekalala et al. 2020).

In terms of implications for policy and practice, our findings first suggest that neither the favourable sentiment of the police at the outbreak of the emergency nor the significant drop in support over time can be fully attributed to police conduct. During prolonged emergencies, police agencies can be expected to enjoy an initial boost in public support but, at the same time, should prepare for a deterioration that will soon follow. Thus, the police should not congratulate themselves too much during the early stages of emergencies when public support is on the rise, nor should they be expected to take full responsibility when support weakens over time. Both trends are, to a large degree, the result of greater forces beyond police control. By being aware and prepared for these trends, the police may not only avoid spending unnecessary time and resources questioning what they have done wrong amid a crisis but may also be able to focus on strengthening their relationship with the public when support is low.

At the same time, while this may be true for general attitudes, the drop in evaluations specifically related to policing the emergency may not be inevitable. As the state of emergency continues and the crisis becomes the “new normal”, it may well be that what the police do, and particularly how they do it (De Cremer and Tyler 2007; Jackson and Sunshine 2007; Sunshine and Tyler 2003), has important implications in terms of public evaluations of emergency policing. Specific aspects of policing the emergency, such as paying attention to enforcing the emergency regulations at the expense of other responsibilities, may be key areas where the police could strive to do things differently or communicate differently to stop the deterioration in support.

Before concluding, the limitations of our study should be acknowledged. First, our data are based on a sample of registered panellists, and, indeed, as noted earlier, our sample is somewhat older than the population from which it was drawn. At the same time, we should note that support for the police was found to be positively correlated with age (Tyler 2005; Tyler and Wakslak 2004). Thus, a younger sample, on average, would have probably shown an even stronger drop in support over time. Second, data collection was limited to Israel and focused on the attitudes of Majority community members over nine months during the first year of the pandemic. Fluctuations in attitudes may prove to be different in other countries, over longer periods, for minorities, or in different types of crises (e.g. health, natural disasters and security crises, such as terror attacks and wars). Indeed, prior research suggests that the experiences of minority communities with the police during COVID-19 may have been different from those of majority community members (Kajeepeta *et al.* 2022; Njoku, Ahmed, and Bolaji 2021). We thus encourage the replication of our analysis in various contexts and communities. Ideally, future studies should include pre-crisis attitudes, which would allow for a better understanding of what happens to public sentiments of the police while policing an emergency, in both the short and long term.

CONCLUSIONS

During prolonged emergencies, general attitudes toward the police appear to follow the well-known “rally ’round the flag” effect, whereby support is relatively high at the early stages of the crisis but subsequently drops and eventually stabilizes. At the same time, attitudes concerned with policing the emergency do not necessarily follow this trajectory. Similar to general attitudes toward the police, they tend to be favourable at the early stages of the crisis and subsequently deteriorate, but the deterioration in specific attitudes does not stabilize quickly. Specific concerns about policing of the crisis tend to drop for longer periods, perhaps for as long as the state of emergency continues. In this sense, general attitudes toward the police show more stability than situation-specific attitudes. Thus, in prolonged emergencies, police agencies may encourage more favourable sentiments by focusing not on their broad image but on how they handle the specific emergency. By showing fairness and effectiveness in handling the crisis, they may halt the long-lasting deterioration in public sentiments and improve public support in the context of the challenging emergency.

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TRANSLATED ABSTRACTS

Abstracto

Se sabe que las emergencias, como los desastres naturales, las guerras y los ataques terroristas, tienen efectos importantes en las relaciones entre la policía y la comunidad y, específicamente, en las actitudes del público hacia la policía. Al mismo tiempo, se sabe poco sobre lo que sucede con el sentimiento público a lo largo del tiempo en emergencias prolongadas. De manera similar, no está claro si diferentes tipos de actitudes siguen una trayectoria similar o si se “comportan” de manera diferente. El presente estudio examina las actitudes generales y específicas de la pandemia hacia la policía durante el primer año de la pandemia de COVID-19 en Israel, utilizando datos de una encuesta de panel comunitario ($n = 535$) realizada en sus primeros tres picos. Encontramos un deterioro estadísticamente significativo en todo tipo de actitudes en los primeros seis meses del estudio, seguido de una estabilización en las actitudes generales. Curiosamente, algunas actitudes específicas ante emergencias siguieron un camino diferente y demostraron un deterioro constante durante todo el período del estudio. Estos hallazgos contribuyen a nuestra comprensión teórica de las relaciones entre la policía y la comunidad en emergencias y tienen implicaciones prácticas para la vigilancia policial en emergencias.

Palabras clave: COVID-19; vigilancia; emergencias; actitudes públicas; relaciones entre la policía y la comunidad

Abstrait

On sait que les situations d'urgence, telles que les catastrophes naturelles, les guerres et les attaques terroristes, ont des effets importants sur les relations entre la police et la communauté et, en particulier, sur l'attitude du public à l'égard de la police. Dans le même temps, on sait peu de choses sur l'évolution de l'opinion publique au fil du temps lors de situations d'urgence prolongées. De même, il n'est pas clair si différents types d'attitudes suivent une trajectoire similaire ou s'ils « se comportent » différemment. La présente étude examine les attitudes générales et spécifiques à la pandémie à l'égard de la police au cours de la première année de la pandémie de COVID-19 en Israël, en utilisant les données d'une enquête par panel communautaire ($n = 535$) réalisée au cours de ses trois premiers pics. Nous constatons une détérioration statistiquement significative de tous les types d'attitudes au cours des six premiers mois de l'étude, suivie d'une stabilisation des attitudes générales. Il est intéressant de noter que certaines attitudes spécifiques aux situations d'urgence ont suivi un chemin différent et ont démontré une détérioration constante tout au long de la période d'étude. Ces résultats contribuent à notre compréhension théorique des relations entre la police et la communauté dans les situations d'urgence et ont des implications pratiques pour le maintien de l'ordre dans les situations d'urgence.

Mots-clés: COVID-19; maintien de l'ordre; situations d'urgence; attitudes du public; relations police-communauté

抽象的

众所周知，自然灾害、战争和恐怖袭击等紧急情况会对警察与社区的关系，特别是公众对警察的态度产生重要影响。与此同时，人们对长期紧急情况下公众情绪的变化知之甚少。同样，目前还不清楚不同类型的态度是否遵循相似的轨迹，或者它们的“行为”是否不同。本研究使用在前三个高峰期进行的社区小组调查 (N = 535) 的数据，探讨了以色列 COVID-19 大流行第一年对警察的总体态度和特定大流行态度。我们发现，在研究的前六个月中，所有类型的态度都出现了统计上显著的恶化，随后总体态度趋于稳定。有趣的是，一些针对紧急情况的态度遵循了不同的路径，并在整个研究期间表现出持续恶化。这些发现有助于我们对紧急情况下警察与社区关系的理论理解，并对警务紧急情况具有实际意义。

关键词: COVID-19; 警务; 紧急情况; 公众态度; 警察与社区关系

خلاصة

من المعروف أن حالات الطوارئ، مثل الكوارث الطبيعـية والحروب والهجمات الإرهابية، لها تأثيرات مهمة على العلاقات بين الشرطة والمجتمع، وعلى وجه التحديد، على المواقف العامة تجاه الشرطة. وفي الوقت نفسه، لا يعرف سوى القليل عما يحدث للمشاريع العامة مع مرور الوقت في حالات الطوارئ الطويلة الأمد. وبالمثل، من غير الواضح ما إذا كانت أنواع المواقف المختلفة تتبع مسارا مشابها أم أنها "تتصرف" بشكل مختلف. تبحث هذه الدراسة في المواقف العامة والخاصة بالبواباء تجاه الشرطة خلال السنة الأولى لجائحة كوفيد-19 في إسرائيل، باستخدام بيانات من استطلاع رأي مجتمعي (العدد = 535) تم إجراؤه في القمم الثلاث الأولى. ونجد تدمورا ذا دلالة إحصائية في جميع أنواع الاتجاهات في الأشهر الستة الأولى من الدراسة، يليه استقرار في الاتجاهات العامة. ومن المثير للاهتمام أن بعض المواقف الخاصة بحالات الطوارئ اتبعت مسارا مختلفا وأظهرت تدمورا مستمرا طوال فترة الدراسة. تساهم هذه النتائج في فهمنا النظري للعلاقات بين الشرطة والمجتمع في حالات الطوارئ وتحمل آثارا عملية على حالات الطوارئ الشرطية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: كوفيد-19; الشرطة; حالات الطوارئ; المواقف العامة; العلاقات بين الشرطة

Appendix 1. Repeated-Measures Analysis of Variance^a

Survey Item	Survey Wave	Mean	Standard Deviation	n	F	p	
Pandemic-related expectations from the police							
	1. During the coronavirus crisis, it is right and just that the Israel Police would focus primarily on enforcing the emergency regulations	April 2020	3.85	1.07	527	112.4	0.00
		September 2020	3.26	1.20			
		December 2020	3.00	1.27			

(Continued)

(Continued)

Survey Item	Survey Wave	Mean	Standard Deviation	<i>n</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
2. The Israel Police should treat violators of the coronavirus emergency regulations with forgiveness	April 2020	2.20	1.19	528	11.04	0.00
	September 2020	2.42	1.22			
	December 2020	2.46	1.29			
3. Most citizens would comply with the emergency regulations even without enforcement	April 2020	3.25	1.30	529	107.97	0.00
	September 2020	2.50	1.27			
	December 2020	2.48	1.25			
General and pandemic-related evaluations of police effectiveness						
4. The Israel Police is successfully handling the tasks it faces during the coronavirus crisis	April 2020	3.66	1.00	511	301.3	0.00
	September 2020	2.71	1.04			
	December 2020	2.52	1.12			
5. The police efficiently handles its tasks in my area of residence	April 2020	3.21	1.07	497	18.73	0.00
	September 2020	3.02	1.12			
	December 2020	2.93	1.12			
6. The Israel Police has shown many successes in handling crime in recent years	April 2020	2.99	1.07	498	27.92	0.00
	September 2020	2.79	1.13			
	December 2020	2.64	1.15			
General fairness and trust in the police						
7. Police officers are often dishonest	April 2020	3.29	1.03	526	3.20	0.04
	September 2020	3.40	1.06			
	December 2020	3.31	1.05			
8. The Israel Police treats citizens fairly	April 2020	2.93	0.99	526	21.15	0.00
	September 2020	2.70	0.96			
	December 2020	2.70	0.99			
9. I have trust in the Israel Police	April 2020	3.19	1.03	533	32.92	0.00
	September 2020	2.92	1.05			
	December 2020	2.92	1.09			
Pandemic-specific fairness and trust in the police						
10. I trust police officers to behave with integrity even when they are enforcing emergency regulations	April 2020	3.55	1.09	531	102.8	0.00
	September 2020	3.05	1.18			
	December 2020	2.89	1.21			

(Continued)

(Continued)

Survey Item	Survey Wave	Mean	Standard Deviation	<i>n</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
11. Police conduct during the coronavirus crisis strengthened my trust in the police	April 2020	3.13	1.17	520	178.9	0.00
	September 2020	2.44	1.13			
	December 2020	2.27	1.12			
Perceived costs of policing the pandemic						
12. Police handling of the coronavirus crisis hampers its other missions, such as property crime, violence, drugs and traffic	April 2020	3.58	1.09	504	41.04	0.00
	September 2020	3.99	1.00			
	December 2020	4.03	0.99			
13. The role of the Israel Police in enforcing the emergency regulations of the coronavirus crisis negatively affects the relationship between the police and the public	April 2020	2.40	1.17	515	204.1	0.00
	September 2020	3.44	1.20			
	December 2020	3.52	1.19			

^aShapiro–Wilk tests did not show evidence of non-normality ($p > 0.05$). When sphericity was violated ($\epsilon > 0.75$), Huyn–Feldt-corrected results were reported (e.g. Field 2013; Howell 2002).

Appendix 2. Post Hoc *t* Tests

Survey Item	Comparison	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval ^a	<i>t</i>
Pandemic-related expectations from the police				
1. During the coronavirus crisis, it is right and just that the Israel Police would focus primarily on enforcing the emergency regulations	April 2020–September 2020	0.59	0.48, 0.70	10.24***
	September 2020–December 2020	0.26	0.14, 0.38	4.42***
	April 2020–December 2020	0.85	0.73, 0.96	14.59***
2. The Israel Police should treat violators of the coronavirus emergency regulations with forgiveness	April 2020–September 2020	-0.22	-0.33, -0.10	-3.68***
	September 2020–December 2020	-0.04	-0.16, 0.07	-0.69
	April 2020–December 2020	-0.26	-0.38, -0.14	-4.36***

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Survey Item	Comparison	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval ^a	<i>t</i>
3. Most citizens would comply with the emergency regulations even without enforcement	April 2020–September 2020	0.75	0.63, 0.87	12.63***
	September 2020–December 2020	0.02	-0.10, 0.13	0.23
	April 2020–December 2020	0.77	0.65, 0.88	12.79***
General and pandemic-related evaluations of police effectiveness				
4. The Israel Police is successfully handling the tasks it faces during the coronavirus crisis	April 2020–September 2020	0.95	0.85, 1.04	19.22***
	September 2020–December 2020	0.19	0.09, 0.29	3.86***
	April 2020–December 2020	1.14	1.04, 1.23	22.80***
5. The police efficiently handles its tasks in my area of residence	April 2020–September 2020	0.19	0.10, 0.27	4.11***
	September 2020–December 2020	0.09	-0.00, 0.18	1.95
	April 2020–December 2020	0.28	0.18, 0.36	5.96***
6. The Israel Police has shown many successes in handling crime in recent years	April 2020–September 2020	0.20	0.12, 0.30	4.47***
	September 2020–December 2020	0.15	0.05, 0.24	3.02
	April 2020–December 2020	0.35	0.26, 0.44	7.41***
General fairness and trust in the police				
7. Police officers are often dishonest	April 2020–September 2020	-0.11	-0.20, -0.02	-2.41
	September 2020–December 2020	0.09	-0.00, 0.19	1.87
	April 2020–December 2020	-0.02	-0.11, 0.06	-0.53
8. The Israel Police treats citizens fairly	April 2020–September 2020	0.23	0.15, 0.30	5.66***
	September 2020–December 2020	0	-0.08, 0.07	0.06
	April 2020–December 2020	0.23	0.14, 0.30	5.59***
9. I have trust in the Israel Police	April 2020–September 2020	0.27	0.19, 0.34	6.97***
	September 2020–December 2020	0	-0.07, 0.08	0.11
	April 2020–December 2020	0.27	0.20, 0.35	7.07***
Pandemic-specific fairness and trust in the police				
10. I trust police officers to behave with integrity even when they are enforcing emergency regulations	April 2020–September 2020	0.50	0.41, 0.60	10.47***
	September 2020–December 2020	0.16	0.06, 0.25	3.26
	April 2020–December 2020	0.66	0.57, 0.76	13.69***

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Survey Item	Comparison	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval ^a	<i>t</i>
11. Police conduct during the coronavirus crisis strengthened my trust in the police	April 2020–September 2020	0.69	0.60, 0.79	14.43***
	September 2020–December 2020	0.17	0.07, 0.26	3.53***
	April 2020–December 2020	0.86	0.77, 0.96	17.78***
Perceived costs of policing the pandemic				
12. Police handling of the coronavirus crisis hampers its other missions, such as property crime, violence, drugs and traffic	April 2020–September 2020	-0.41	-0.52, -0.30	-7.51***
	September 2020–December 2020	-0.02	-0.15, 0.07	-0.74
	April 2020–December 2020	-0.45	-0.56, -0.34	-8.14***
13. The role of the Israel Police in enforcing the emergency regulations of the coronavirus crisis negatively affects the relationship between the police and the public	April 2020–September 2020	-1.04	-1.16, -0.92	16.90***
	September 2020–December 2020	-0.08	-0.20, 0.04	1.33
	April 2020–December 2020	-1.12	-1.25, -1.00	18.04***

^aConfidence intervals were adjusted to account for the multiple comparisons.

*** $p < 0.001$ (e.g. Bender and Lange 2001).

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