


# The long-term effects of policing the COVID-19 pandemic: Public attitudes toward the police in the ‘new normal’

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**Abstract** The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the reality of police agencies worldwide. Since January 2020, police were required to enforce a long, constantly changing, often controversial list of emergency regulations, while striving to keep themselves and the citizens they interact with safe. Following an early examination of the short-term effects of the pandemic on the attitudes of majority communities in Israel toward the police (Perry and Jonathan-Zamir, 2020), in this study, we examine if and how attitudes changed as the pandemic progressed. We returned to the same sample, and supplemented the initial survey carried out during the first peak of the pandemic in Israel (April 2020) with an additional wave during the third peak (December 2020). Our two-wave panel study reveals that following initial strong support for the police, public sentiments dropped. This trend was evidenced both in evaluations of pandemic-policing and in more general views of the police. Based on these findings, we conclude that in contrast to the short-term, a long-term transition into crisis-policing may bear significant costs in terms of citizens’ support and willingness to comply with the police and the law, precisely at a time when voluntary compliance is most needed.

## Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic presented law enforcement agencies with significant challenges. Since first declared by the World Health Organization (WHO) in January 2020, and as governments began to take action to address the rapid spread of the virus, police were required to enforce a long, constantly changing list of emergency regulations, such as the closure of businesses, social distancing, the obligation to wear face masks in public, and various degrees of lockdowns. Officers also had to adjust the way they interact with citizens in order to protect themselves,

including wearing protective gear and maintaining physical distance from others. Crime patterns have also changed: the pandemic led to a rise in some offences, such as domestic violence and cybercrime, further challenging police in what was already a highly demanding period (Lum *et al.*, 2020a,b; Neyroud, 2020; Perry and Jonathan-Zamir, 2021; Reicher and Stott, 2020).

Could such changes in police responsibilities and conduct, as well as the more general sense of threat brought about by the pandemic, influence citizens’

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attitudes toward the police? This question is of major importance, because in addition to the normative significance of police-community relations in democratic societies (which holds true regardless of the situation; Nagin and Telep, 2017; Sunshine and Tyler, 2003), public views of the police are particularly critical in periods characterized by emergencies or threats. This is because public attitudes towards the police are closely correlated with socially desirable behaviours that are of major importance in crisis situations, such as cooperation with the police and compliance with what may be unfamiliar, unpleasant, highly restrictive emergency regulations (De Cremer and Tyler, 2007; Hinds and Murphy, 2007; Jackson and Sunshine, 2007; McCarthy *et al.*, 2021; Murphy *et al.*, 2008; 2020; Reisig *et al.*, 2007; 2012; Tyler and Huo, 2002).

Following an earlier assessment of the short-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the attitudes of majority communities in Israel towards the Israel Police (IP; see Perry and Jonathan-Zamir, 2021), in this study, we examine the long-term effects using an additional survey wave carried out in the third peak of the pandemic. We begin with a detailed description of changes in policing during the COVID-19 pandemic that may influence public attitudes towards the police. The special importance of public sentiments during the pandemic, and previous studies examining such effects, are reviewed and discussed. We then present the sample, survey, analysis, and findings of this study. Following what appeared to be strong support for the police at the first peak of the pandemic (see Perry and Jonathan-Zamir, 2021), we find a significant drop over time in various types of evaluations, which we attribute to the long-term effects of the pandemic, including the inherent costs of pandemic policing.

## Policing during the COVID-19 pandemic: What changed?

Since its outbreak in January 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic spread rapidly. By March 2021, just over a year after its official declaration by the WHO,

over 124 million COVID-19 cases, and 2.74 million related deaths, were reported worldwide (WHO, 2021). Beyond its unprecedented effect on the health and wellbeing of billions, the global crisis influenced numerous aspects of civil society, from travel and finance to public policy and personal safety (Chakraborty and Maity, 2020; Nicola *et al.*, 2020). As living alongside COVID-19 became the ‘new normal’, government agencies in most countries changed their conduct in terms of priorities, agents’ appearance (e.g. wearing face masks or shields), and methods of communication with citizens (Lum *et al.*, 2020a,b), and law enforcement agencies were no different. Reports from multiple countries, including the USA and UK (e.g. Clements and Aitkenhead, 2020; Lum *et al.*, 2020a; Maskály *et al.*, 2021; Ognyanova *et al.*, 2020), reveal that the pandemic influenced policing in three main realms: police interventions to minimize and slow down the spread of COVID-19; the nature of police–citizen interactions; and responses to changes in crime.

First, the mission of the police changed: following emergency regulations enacted by governments worldwide, police agencies were required to partially set aside their ‘regular’ crime-control and order-maintenance responsibilities, and dedicate considerable resources to the emergency at hand. This included enforcing a long, frequently changing list of emergency regulations, such as lockdowns, social distancing, stay-at-home orders, closure of businesses, and travel restrictions (Bar-Tzvi, 2020; Lum *et al.*, 2020a,b). Importantly, these restrictions were not always well received by the public. They were new and unfamiliar, and often enforced without allowing citizens the time to adjust (Farrow, 2020). Second, the emergency regulations changed frequently to match the dynamic reality of the pandemic, and were thus often perceived by the public as confusing and inconsistent (Frenkel *et al.*, 2021). Moreover, politicians and government officials often did not set a personal example and were caught in violation of these restrictions (e.g. Carrel, 2020; Staff, 2020).

It should also be noted that the COVID-19 regulations often entailed restrictions on what can be perceived as basic citizen rights, such as freedom of movement and occupation (Goldenfein *et al.*, 2020; Kitchin, 2020). Moreover, the enforcement of some regulations involved the use of technological solutions that are generally not used to police law-abiding citizens in democratic societies, such as monitoring cellphone locations using GPS or electronic tagging to ensure self-quarantine (Babele, 2021). Thus, while many understood the importance of the emergency regulations and accepted the inconvenience, others did not welcome their enforcement by the police (Sekalala *et al.*, 2020; also see Amnesty International report, 2020).

The second change to policing has to do with the way police officers interact with the citizens they encounter. As social distancing proved to be a vital measure in avoiding infection, officers were required to communicate with citizens from a distance of at least 2 m (~6.6 feet; see Belmonte, 2020). This already awkward setting became even more challenging when officers were asked to wear protective gear, such as face masks, gloves, and plastic face shields (Lum *et al.*, 2020b). These change the way police officers look and communicate with citizens, often making them appear unfriendly and less approachable (Blaskovits *et al.*, 2021; Neyroud, 2020; Simpson, 2020). Moreover, citizens were also required to wear face masks, which altogether made the encounter more prone to misunderstandings, resistance, and even violence (Mheidly *et al.*, 2020).

Finally, since the outbreak of COVID-19, many countries reported changes in crime (Lum *et al.*, 2020a). While some forms of crime, such as property crime and traffic violations, became less common during lockdowns, other types of crime, such as domestic violence and cybercrime, increased (Bar-Tzvi, 2020; Boserup *et al.*, 2020; Bradbury-Jones and Isham, 2020). Furthermore, citizens were often confused and needed guidance and assistance in the new situation, which led to a

particularly large number of calls to police emergency and non-emergency hotlines (Ashby, 2021; Lersch, 2020).

In sum, the policing reality changed significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic. But did these changes, as well as the pandemic situation more generally, affect the relationship between the police and the public? A survey carried out by the first and second authors in Israel during April 2020 showed particularly favourable attitudes towards the IP among majority communities (non-ultra-Orthodox Jewish adults) in the context of policing the pandemic, in comparison to general evaluations of the police (Perry and Jonathan-Zamir, 2021). At the same time, it is unclear if this support is long-lasting. Would the favourable sentiments persist over time, when the immediate threat became the 'new normal', or were they just a short-term peak in support? Below we develop our hypotheses based on the literature on policing crises and emergencies, and the small (but growing) body of work published in the past year on police–community relations during COVID-19. But first, we address the question of why public views of the police (and particularly trust in the police) warrant special attention in the context of emergencies or threats.

## Public attitudes towards the police and crisis situations

In any relationship, including that between the police and the citizens they serve, 'trust' stands for a set of expectations from one's partner. Trusting someone means that we expect them to act in a certain way, and believe that they would do so (Hawdon, 2008). From a normative perspective, earning public trust is a highly important goal for police in democratic societies, because it reflects the unofficial legitimacy to use their powers (Tyler and Fagan, 2008). At the same time, the importance of trust also derives from its practical implications. Because the expectations embedded in a

trusting relationship translate into action (Tyler and Huo, 2002), trusting the police to act in a way that reflects society's best interest means that citizens feel comfortable to engage in behaviours such as reporting crime to the police and providing accurate accounts when requested (Nagin and Telep, 2017). Indeed, a large body of research suggests that trust in the police is an important predictor of both compliance and cooperation with the police, as well as general law obedience (De Cremer and Tyler, 2007; Hinds and Murphy, 2007; Jackson and Sunshine, 2007; Murphy *et al.*, 2008; Reisig *et al.*, 2007; 2012; Tyler and Huo, 2002).

Two types of evaluations were found to predict trust: assessments of police effectiveness (the *what* of police conduct and the outcomes they deliver) and views regarding the fairness by which the police exercise their authority, often referred to as procedural justice (the *how* of police treatment) (Hinds and Murphy, 2007; Schulhofer *et al.*, 2011; Sunshine and Tyler, 2003; Tyler, 1990, 2006, 2009; also see review by Jonathan-Zamir *et al.*, 2015a). Numerous studies across contexts, populations, and locations (including Israel, our study site) find that of the two, procedural justice is more strongly correlated with trust in the police and with police legitimacy (Factor *et al.*, 2014; Gau, 2011; Hasisi *et al.*, 2020; Jackson and Bradford, 2010; Perry, 2021; Perry and Hasisi, 2018; Perry *et al.*, 2017; Sargeant *et al.*, 2014; Sunshine and Tyler, 2003; Tyler, 2016; Tyler and Fagan, 2008).

While favourable views of the police are always desirable, they are particularly important in situations of acute crisis or threat, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. In democratic societies, broad law obedience and social order rely primarily on voluntary compliance, not deterrence, because the police can never be in all places at all times (e.g. Sunshine and Tyler, 2003; Tyler, 1990, 2004). Situations of emergencies or threats may challenge voluntary law obedience if they lead to the enactment of unique regulations or restrictions to which citizens are not accustomed. As reviewed above, these restrictions may be contested on

various grounds, including unfamiliarity, inconvenience, and resistance to what may be perceived as government intrusion into citizens' private lives or violation of basic citizen rights (Aborisade, 2021; Malcai and Shur-Ofry, 2021; Mykhalovskiy *et al.*, 2020). Moreover, while police resources are rarely in abundance, in emergencies police resources are often spread even thinner, which further undermines their ability to sustain effective deterrence (Laufs and Waseem, 2020). Thus, the need for public trust in the police, which, in turn, should promote voluntary cooperation and compliance, is particularly important in situations of emergencies or threats. Indeed, recent evidence from Australia suggests that, as expected, favourable views of the police contributed to citizens' cooperation and compliance with the COVID-19 emergency regulations (McCarthy *et al.*, 2021; Murphy *et al.*, 2020b; Sargeant *et al.*, 2021).

### How may public views of the police change in crisis situations?

While the COVID-19 pandemic is a relatively new phenomenon, police agencies across the globe have had to adapt to challenging situations of crises, emergencies, or threats in the past (Laufs and Waseem, 2020). A significant body of work on policing natural disasters, wars and terrorism, suggests that public attitudes towards the police are influenced not only by changes in police conduct in such circumstances, but by the mere situation (Deflem and Sutphin, 2009; Jonathan, 2010; Lanza-Kaduce *et al.*, 1998; Punch and Markham, 2000; Weisburd *et al.*, 2009; also see Gould, 2020).

Initially, as the threat erupts and the situation is characterized by uncertainty and fear, citizens tend to unite against the common enemy and support their leaders, a phenomenon known as the 'Rally Round the Flag Effect' (Mueller, 1970, 1973; Stein, 1976; Tajfel, 1974, 1978). As an arm of the government, the police may benefit from this wave of unity and support for authorities (see Jonathan, 2010; Kelling and Moore, 1988; LaFree and Adamczyk, 2017). Public support may further

strengthen as a result of viewing the police as highly relevant: in such situations, the police often place the threat at the centre of their attention, dedicate considerable resources to handling the crisis, and help citizens cope during a time of uncertainty and fear, for example by providing information and maintaining public order (Bonkiewicz and Ruback, 2012).<sup>1</sup> Examples of increased support for the police during the initial stages of crises can be found in the UK during World War II (Todman, 2020) and in Israel during the ‘Second Intifada’ (Jonathan, 2010).

However, the Rally Effect is short lived (Brody and Shapiro, 1989; Mueller, 1970, 1973; Parker, 1995). If and when the crisis prolongs, citizens tend to become habituated to the threat, thus weakening the Rally Effect and the wave of support for the leader that comes with it (Baum, 2002; Jonathan, 2010). Additionally, citizens may feel that the resources the police have invested in addressing the threat have undermined performance in other, equally important tasks, such as maintaining public order and preventing crime (Fishman, 2005; Jonathan-Zamir *et al.*, 2015b; Bayley and Weisburd, 2015). Moreover, the activities carried out by the police to face the challenges presented by the crisis, such as the enforcement of emergency regulation, may lead to an increase in negative police–citizen encounters (Grace, 2020; McCarthy, 2021). Similarly, the intrusive enforcement measures often employed by the police in emergencies, such as the use of paramilitary units, gear, and technology, may undermine public sentiments (Kennison and Loumansky, 2007; McCulloch, 2004). Indeed, a long-term drop in support for the police in crisis situations was identified, for example, in the context of natural disasters in the USA (Deflem and Sutphin, 2009) and terrorism threats in Israel (Jonathan, 2010). Importantly, it has been suggested that support may not only return to pre-crisis levels, but may

erode further due to the accumulation of costs (Jonathan, 2010; Lai and Reiter, 2005).

### Public attitudes towards the police during the COVID-19 pandemic

Recent studies assessing the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on public attitudes towards the police suggest similar trends to those identified in other types of emergencies. Because the pandemic is still very recent, most have focused on its early phases. Chamberlain (2020) conducted a survey among a sample of over 500 residents of Teesside, UK, during the first lockdown. Participants were asked about their behaviour (e.g. did they stay at home and follow lockdown instructions?) and views of police performance during COVID-19. Over 60% perceived police performance to be ‘fair’, ‘good’, or ‘excellent’. Moreover, the majority reported that they were ‘fairly’ or ‘very’ comfortable with the police using roadblocks, penalty fines, and arrests to enforce COVID-19 regulations.

In New Zealand, Sibley *et al.* (2020) took advantage of a longitudinal panel survey in which the 11th wave was underway when the COVID-19 crisis commenced. They used Propensity Score Matching to compare participants before the first lockdown to those who completed the survey within the first 18 days of lockdown. The researchers found a rise in trust in the police and the government during the lockdown, concluding that these ‘effects are consistent with the concept of “rallying around the flag”’ (Sibley *et al.*, 2020, p. 626). In Serbia, Janković and Cvetković (2020) conducted an online survey 4 weeks after the state of emergency was declared. They found that even when participants perceived the police as being underprepared for the crisis, their trust in the police was high. Surveys administered in Australia (Murphy *et al.*, 2020b) and the UK (Stripe, 2020) yielded similar findings.

<sup>1</sup> During the COVID-19 pandemic in Israel, perceptions of the police as highly relevant were expressed, for example, in the large number of calls to the police hotlines during the first peak of the pandemic (Bar-Tzvi, 2020): the IP report a 25% increase in calls during 2020 compared to 2019, most of which were pandemic-related (Saban, 2021).

As noted earlier, the first two authors carried out an online survey measuring the views of majority communities in Israel towards the police at the first peak of the pandemic (Perry and Jonathan-Zamir, 2021). It included 1,575 respondents who represent the population of non-ultra-Orthodox Jewish adults in Israel in terms of their socio-demographic characteristics. Since we did not have baseline attitudes, we compared evaluations related to policing the pandemic to more general views of the police. We found more favourable attitudes in the context of the pandemic, including perceptions of police effectiveness in handling their new, pandemic-related tasks; trust the police in the context of pandemic-policing; and willingness to report violations of the emergency regulations.

Moreover, and in line with the literature reviewed above, some recent, preliminary findings suggest that such favourable views may be short lived. Three studies offer a glimpse into what might happen to police image over the prolonged pandemic. In the UK, Caluori and Clements (2020) and Shaw (2021) conducted three online survey waves—two in April 2020, when the pandemic first dictated a state of emergency, and one in January 2021, in the midst of the third lockdown. The researchers found that while the public generally supported police conduct in relation to the pandemic, it has eroded over time. For example, the percentage of respondents who fully supported the approach taken by the police in handling the COVID-19 lockdown dropped from 42% in April 2020, to 27% in January 2021 (also see Clements and Aitkenhead, 2020). Similarly, Adepeju and Jimoh (2021) found more negative Tweets in relation to police conduct over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic in England and Wales. In Israel, Kimhi and colleagues (2020) conducted a two-wave online survey (in May and July 2020) among ~900 respondents who represent the adult Jewish population. It was designed

to capture participants' levels of distress, resilience, and subjective well-being. As part of the resilience scale, respondents were asked to rank their trust in the IP from 1 to 5. The researchers found that average levels of trust in the police dropped from 3.45 in May to 2.85 in July.

While these preliminary findings suggest that the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on public views of the police indeed changed over time, whereby support tended to be initially strong and decreased as the pandemic progressed, research evidence is still scarce. In this study we supplement our initial survey (Perry and Jonathan-Zamir, 2021) with an additional wave, which allows us to examine the long-term effects of the pandemic on the views of majority-communities in Israel towards the police.

## Methods

### Study context

The present study takes place in Israel, where a national state of emergency following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic was first declared on March 15, 2020 (State of Israel Ministry of Health, 2021). Between that time and March 2021, within a population of just over 9 million, more than 870,000 cases of COVID-19 were detected, of which over 6,000 resulted in death. The number of new detected cases per day varied across this period with three clear peaks, which led to three corresponding lockdowns: April 8, 2020–May 4, 2020; September 25, 2020–October 17, 2020; December 27, 2020–February 7, 2021 (State of Israel Ministry of Health, 2021).<sup>2</sup> The lockdowns entailed stay-at-home orders, which posed strict limitations on the distance and purpose of travel from home. Schools and businesses defined as 'non-essential' were shut down, and gatherings were restricted by both purpose and number of participants. International travel was limited and

<sup>2</sup> A fourth wave of the pandemic in Israel began in June 2021. Due to more general changes in policy, this wave did not lead to a lockdown.

all citizens were required to wear face masks in public (Government of Israel, 2020). These regulations were enforced by the IP using a variety of methods, including barricades on highways and around cities, foot patrols in city centres, and issuing fines to individuals and businesses who were caught in violation of the regulations (I24 News, 2021). From March 2020 to March 2021, over 560,000 COVID-19-related fines were issued by the IP (Cohen and Adamker, 2020).<sup>3</sup>

The timing of the pandemic peaks, the nuances of the emergency regulations, and the specific strategies used by the police vary somewhat across countries (Maskály *et al.*, 2021). At the same time, it is important to emphasize that the challenges involved in policing the pandemic and the specific activities carried out by the police appear similar overall across the Western world: most police agencies in Western democracies were required to enforce a constantly changing list of emergency regulations, including lockdowns, and engage in frequent explanations of these regulations to citizens (Shaw, 2021). Officers enforced social distancing; the obligation to wear face masks in public and lockdowns by issuing warnings and fines (Maskály *et al.*, 2021). Specifically with regard to Israel, similar to police officers in the UK, the USA, and Australia (Jennings and Perez, 2020; McCarthy *et al.*, 2021; Stott *et al.*, 2020), Israeli police officers were required to interact with citizens while wearing protective gear and maintaining physical distance (Itzhaki *et al.*, 2020). Like crime trends in the UK and the USA (Boman and Gallupe, 2020; Langton *et al.*, 2021), crime trends in Israel have also changed, including a significant rise in calls for service during lockdowns (Bar-

Tzvi, 2020). Finally, the IP were required to handle pandemic-related protests and demonstrations (Shany, 2020), similar to those witnessed in the USA, UK, and Europe (Metcalf and Pickett, 2020). In sum, we consider Israel to be a useful setting for demonstrating what may happen to public attitudes towards the police over the COVID-19 period.<sup>4</sup>

### Sampling and participants

Following the method of the initial survey (Perry and Jonathan-Zamir, 2021), the second wave was carried out online using 'Midgam Project Web Panel'.<sup>5</sup> All participants in our panel are members of the majority community in Israel: non-ultra-Orthodox, Jewish adults. We clearly recognize the importance of examining the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the relationship between the police and minority communities, such as Israeli Arabs and ultra-Orthodox Jews, but unfortunately minority sectors are not well represented in online surveys (Scherpenzeel and Bethlehem, 2010), which were the only feasible surveying method during the lockdowns.

The second wave was administered between December 31, 2020, and January 14, 2021. The timing was in close proximity to the initiation of the third lockdown in Israel (December 27, 2020), when the number of new COVID-19 cases per day reached 3,000 (Cohen and Adamker, 2020). Invitations to participate were sent to all 1,575 participants who completed a valid questionnaire in Wave I. As detailed in Perry and Jonathan-Zamir (2021), this initial sample represents the population from which it was drawn in terms of sex, age, country of origin, and family status. Of the initial sample, 1,085

<sup>3</sup> It should be noted, however, that many of the fines were subsequently cancelled by either the police or the courts (Staff, 2021). No information on their distribution over time is publicly available.

<sup>4</sup> More generally, we should note that the IP shows much resemblance to many police agencies in the West in terms of its core functions and restraints, and indeed Israel has become an important location for policing research in recent decades (e.g., Abu *et al.*, 2017; Hasisi *et al.*, 2009; Jonathan-Zamir and Harpaz, 2018; Perry and Jonathan-Zamir, 2014; Perry *et al.*, 2017; Weisburd *et al.*, 2020). Further information on the characteristics of the IP as an organization and the nature of policing in Israel can be found elsewhere (e.g. Jonathan-Zamir and Harpaz, 2018; Jonathan-Zamir *et al.*, 2015b, 2019; Weisburd *et al.*, 2009).

<sup>5</sup> For further information on the survey platform, see <https://www.midgampanel.com/clients/index.asp>.

completed the questionnaire in the second wave. As in Wave I, 101 participants who have done so within 5 min or less were excluded from the sample, resulting in a final sample of 984 participants for which we had valid questionnaires in both time points. Prior to analysis, this sample was weighted by age, gender, and education according to the distribution of these characteristics in the population of non-ultra-Orthodox, adult Jews, based on data obtained from the [Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics \(2020\)](#).

### The survey instrument

The questionnaire began with a standard consent form explaining the purpose of the survey, its expected duration, and the identity of the researchers. Participants were assured that the study is anonymous and voluntary, and that they may cease participation at any time and for any reason. The questionnaire inquired about participants' attitudes towards the police, personal experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic, and socio-demographic 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'). They were designed based on previous surveys assessing public attitudes towards the police both in Israel and elsewhere (e.g. [Gau, 2011](#); [Jonathan, 2010](#); [Perry et al., 2017](#); [Sunshine and Tyler, 2003](#)). Questions concerning expectations from the police during the COVID-19 pandemic were adopted from previous studies on policing emergencies ([Jonathan and Weisburd, 2010](#)).

In wave II, some survey items were replaced with others. In this study, we only use items that appeared in both waves. In line with our research question, we focus on all items that assess attitudes towards the police in the context of policing the COVID-19 pandemic (10 items). They reflect police effectiveness during the pandemic, fairness, and trust in the police, and perceived outcomes of pandemic-policing. Where possible, we compare

pandemic-related attitudes to parallel, more general evaluations of the police (11 items).

### Analytic strategy

To assess potential fluctuations in public views of the IP between the first and third peaks of the pandemic, we compare responses to the relevant survey items across the two survey waves. For each item, we present the percentage of respondents who agreed with the statement (responses 4 and 5) to those who disagreed (responses 1 and 2). We also compare the differences between the mean scores of the items using paired-sample *T*-tests. The asterisks in the tables represent the level of significance of the *T*-tests, while the full reporting is available in Appendix A. Survey items are numbered for convenience.

## Results

### Perceived police effectiveness during the COVID-19 pandemic

[Table 1](#) reports both general and pandemic-related assessments of police effectiveness. It reveals that both types of evaluations weakened from the first to the second survey wave. However, while the change is statistically significant for all items, the drop is larger in the pandemic-related evaluations: responses indicating high levels of general effectiveness ('agree' + 'strongly agree') dropped from 41% in wave I to 32% in wave II (item 2), and from 32% in wave I to 21% in wave II (item 3). At the same time, assessments of police success in handling pandemic-related responsibilities (item 1) showed a larger drop—from 58% in wave I to 19% in wave II. The effect size of this change is 0.90, which is considered large ([Cohen, 1988](#); see Appendix [Table A1](#)).

The drop in evaluations of effectiveness in pandemic-policing is also evidenced when examining each wave separately: while, as reported by [Perry and Jonathan-Zamir \(2021\)](#), wave I shows



**Table 1:** Police effectiveness

	Wave I		Wave II	
	Agree + strongly agree	Disagree + strongly disagree	Agree + strongly agree	Disagree + strongly disagree
Pandemic period				
1. The IP is successfully handling the tasks it faces during the coronavirus crisis. <sup>***</sup>	57.5% (N = 944)	10.5% (N = 944)	19.1% (N = 916)	43% (N = 916)
General evaluations				
2. The police efficiently handles its task in my area of residence. <sup>***</sup>	40.6% (N = 929)	23.7% (N = 929)	31.6% (N = 878)	28.8% (N = 878)
3. The IP has shown many successes in handling crime in recent years. <sup>***</sup>	31.7% (N = 938)	24.9% (N = 938)	20.6% (N = 877)	36.1% (N = 877)
The costs of policing the pandemic				
4. Police handling of the coronavirus hampers its other missions, such as property crime, violence, drugs, and traffic. <sup>***</sup>	49.8% (N = 931)	15.1% (N = 931)	64.5% (N = 888)	8% (N = 888)

<sup>\*\*\*</sup> $P < 0.001$

more favourable assessments in the context of pandemic policing compared with ‘regular’ policing, in wave II this trend is reversed. Moreover, Table 1 shows growing recognition of the costs involved in focusing police resources on pandemic-related tasks (item 4): while nearly half of the respondents initially thought that focusing on the pandemic undermines the ability of the police to adequately handle other missions, 65% thought this was the case in wave II. *T*-tests reveal that all mean differences between waves in the items reported in Table 1 are statistically significant ( $P < 0.001$ ).

### Perceived fairness and trust in the police during the COVID-19 pandemic

In Table 2, we report on perceived police fairness and trust in the police. Responses again indicate more negative views in wave II compared with wave I, and again, while this trend applies to both general and pandemic-related evaluations, the drop is larger in the pandemic-related items. While there was no significant change in general assessments of police dishonesty (item 7), assessments of police

fairness (item 8) dropped from 29% in wave I to 21% in wave II. General trust in the police (item 9), which, as reviewed above, is an outcome of fair treatment, also showed a statistically significant drop from 42% in wave I to 31% in wave II. The size of the effects is 0.22 and 0.26, respectively (see Appendix A), which are considered to be small effects (Cohen, 1988).

At the same time, trust in officers to behave with integrity while enforcing pandemic-related regulations (item 5) dropped from 58% in wave I to 35% in wave II, and only 13% in wave II (compared with 39% in wave I) thought that police conduct during the pandemic period strengthened their trust in the police (item 6). Both effects are of medium size (Cohen, 1988; see Appendix A). In terms of the costs of pandemic policing (item 10), over 50% agreed or strongly agreed in wave II that the role of the police in enforcing the emergency regulations had negative effects on police–community relationship, compared with only 17% in wave I. *T*-tests reveal that except for item 7, the mean differences between the waves in all items reported in Table 2 are statistically significant ( $P < 0.001$ ).

**Table 2:** Fairness and trust in the police

	Wave I		Wave II	
	Agree + strongly agree	Disagree + strongly disagree	Agree + strongly agree	Disagree + strongly disagree
Pandemic period				
5. I trust police officers to behave with integrity even when they are enforcing the emergency regulations. <sup>***</sup>	57.6% (N = 974)	16.2% (N = 974)	34.5% (N = 964)	33.2% (N = 964)
6. Police functioning during the coronavirus crisis strengthened my trust in the police. <sup>***</sup>	38.7% (N = 967)	25.5% (N = 967)	13.3% (N = 925)	51.3% (N = 925)
General evaluations				
7. Police officers are often dishonest.	42.8% (N = 969)	22.7% (N = 969)	39.8% (N = 961)	22.9% (N = 961)
8. The IP treats citizens fairly. <sup>***</sup>	28.8% (N = 967)	31.3% (N = 967)	20.8% (N = 956)	38.6% (N = 956)
9. I have trust in the IP. <sup>***</sup>	41.7% (N = 980)	24.2% (N = 980)	30.9% (N = 977)	31.3% (N = 977)
The costs of policing the pandemic				
10. The role of the IP in enforcing the emergency regulations of the coronavirus crisis negatively affects the relationship between the police and citizens. <sup>***</sup>	16.9% (N = 942)	52.2% (N = 942)	51.6% (N = 924)	18.7% (N = 924)

<sup>\*\*\*</sup> $P < 0.001$

### Expected outcomes of policing during the COVID-19 pandemic

Table 3 presents expected outcomes of policing during the pandemic, including participants' expectations from the police during this period (items 11–13); willingness to cooperate with the police (items 14–19); and willingness to comply with police directives (items 20–21). Regarding public expectations from the police during COVID-19, given the drop in support in relation to pandemic policing in terms of both effectiveness and fairness, it is not surprising that the percentage of participants who agreed or strongly agreed that the police should focus on enforcing the pandemic regulations dropped from 68% in wave I to 37% in wave II (item 11). Similarly, 21% of participants in wave II (compared with only 13.6% in Wave I) thought that violators of pandemic-related regulations should be treated with forgiveness (item 12). Both responses indicate less support for police enforcement of the pandemic

regulations. Notably, this is *not* because they thought that enforcement was no longer needed: not only did the share of participants who believed that most citizens would voluntarily comply with the emergency regulations (item 13) *not* rise, but it dropped from 41% in wave I to 21% in wave II.

As for willingness to cooperate with the police, the inclination to report serious crime and objects suspected to be terrorist-related explosive devices (items 16–17) remained high and stable throughout the pandemic period, and willingness to volunteer and assist the police (item 18) and provide information to help a police investigation (item 19) showed a relatively small (albeit statistically significant) decline. At the same time, willingness to cooperate with the police in the context of the pandemic showed a considerable drop: willingness to report violations of self-quarantine (item 14) dropped from 77% in wave I to 50% in wave II, and willingness to report a neighbour violating the emergency regulations (item 15) dropped over

**Table 3:** Expected outcomes of policing during the COVID-19 pandemic

	Wave I		Wave II	
	Agree + strongly agree	Disagree + strongly disagree	Agree + strongly agree	Disagree + strongly disagree
Pandemic-related expectations from the police				
11. During the coronavirus crisis, it is right and just that the IP would focus primarily on enforcing the emergency regulations. <sup>***</sup>	68.1% (N = 976)	9.3% (N = 976)	37% (N = 958)	30.4% (N = 958)
12. The IP should treat violators of the coronavirus emergency regulations with forgiveness. <sup>***</sup>	13.6% (N = 980)	63% (N = 980)	20.8% (N = 952)	54.7% (N = 952)
13. Most citizens would comply with the emergency regulations even without enforcement. <sup>***</sup>	40.6% (N = 977)	33% (N = 977)	21% (N = 964)	53.5% (N = 964)
Pandemic-related willingness to cooperate with the police				
14. I am likely to report violations of self-quarantine by an individual suspected to be infected with the coronavirus. <sup>***</sup>	77.3% (N = 973)	8.1% (N = 973)	50.1% (N = 932)	21.7% (N = 932)
15. I am likely to report a neighbour violating the emergency regulations of the coronavirus crisis. <sup>***</sup>	66.7% (N = 971)	14.6% (N = 973)	42.5% (N = 939)	31.4% (N = 939)
General willingness to cooperate with the police				
16. I am likely to call the police if I witnessed a serious crime.	84.4% (N = 980)	6.2% (N = 980)	84.1% (N = 971)	6.4% (N = 971)
17. I am likely to call the police if I saw a suspicious object.	83.7% (N = 981)	5.1% (N = 981)	85% (N = 979)	6.8% (N = 979)
18. I am likely to volunteer to assist the police in my area of residence. <sup>***</sup>	24.5% (N = 968)	51.8% (N = 968)	21% (N = 930)	51.3% (N = 930)
19. I am likely to agree to provide information to assist a police investigation. <sup>***</sup>	79.2% (N = 976)	6.6% (N = 976)	71.3% (N = 954)	9.9% (N = 954)
General willingness to comply with the police				
20. In some cases, it is OK to ignore police orders. <sup>***</sup>	9.3% (N = 974)	75.5% (N = 974)	12.8% (N = 960)	62.4% (N = 960)
21. The police should be obeyed, even if we are not happy with the way they treat citizens. <sup>***</sup>	84% (N = 980)	3.3% (N = 980)	74.5% (N = 974)	6% (N = 974)

<sup>\*\*\*</sup> $P < 0.001$ ; 'Suspicious object' in item 17 refers to a suspected terrorist explosive device.

time from 67% to 43%. Both effect sizes are large (Cohen, 1988; see Appendix A). General willingness to comply with the police also deteriorated over time, with more participants (13% in wave II compared with 9% in wave I) agreeing that in some cases, it is OK to ignore police instructions (item 20), and only 74% of the participants in wave II (compared with 84% in wave I) agreeing that the police should be obeyed regardless of the

way they treat citizens (items 21). Both differences are statistically significant ( $P < 0.001$ ).

## Discussion

Over a year into the COVID-19 pandemic, there is little doubt that across the globe, it has had tremendous impact on all aspects of civilian life. Despite the literature on policing crises and the

limited—yet growing—body of work on policing the COVID-19 pandemic, little is known about the effects of this state of emergency on police–community relationships over time. The goal of this study was to begin to fill this gap by building on a survey carried out in the first peak of the pandemic (Perry and Jonathan-Zamir, 2021), and examining potential fluctuations in the attitudes of majority communities in Israel towards the police over the long-term, as the pandemic situation evolved. By using a panel design and comparing views across the first and third peaks of the pandemic in Israel, we were able to assess how within the same individuals, apparently similar situations in terms of the objective levels of threat and police enforcement, may have different effects on views of the police due to the larger forces that are at play during prolonged crisis situations.

Our findings reveal that the attitudes of the majority, non-ultra-Orthodox Jewish community in Israel towards the police significantly weakened as the pandemic progressed and the ‘emergency’ became the ‘new normal’. Over time, members of the majority community perceived the police to be less effective, fair, and trustworthy, and they became more aware of the costs of policing the pandemic in terms of both police performance in their other areas of responsibility and in terms of police–community relations. Notably, the drop in support was stronger overall in relation to pandemic-policing compared with more general assessments of the police. This finding is expected given that the study took place during a period when the pandemic overwhelmed civilian life, and suggests that the drop in evaluations of pandemic-policing may well have been a precursor to the more moderate erosion in general attitudes towards the IP.

Moreover, as the pandemic evolved, citizens desired less enforcement of the emergency regulations and were less willing to report violations of these regulations, and *not* because they believed people would voluntarily comply with

these regulations. Finally, not only were citizens less inclined to assist the police, but they were also less supportive of obeying the police as an arm of the law. Such a decline in inclination to comply and cooperate with the police, while always a reason for concern, is of special significance during emergencies or crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. As police agencies are required to take on an entirely new set of responsibilities while still obligated to their ‘ordinary’ duties, they must rely on broad voluntarily law obedience. Police officers cannot be everywhere all the times, and this is especially true when enforcing a nationwide lockdown. Thus, the long-term negative effects of pandemic-policing on cooperation and compliance as demonstrated in the findings of this study may become a major obstacle, undermining not only policing efforts but also public health more generally.

How can the drop in support over time be explained? Our findings are very much in line with what we already know about public evaluations of government institutions, including the police, in situations of crises or threats (Jonathan, 2010; Laufs and Waseem, 2020). When the crisis erupts, uncertainty, fear, and a sense of a joint struggle against a common enemy dominate public sentiments, which encourage support for the police. Moreover, citizens want the police to focus on the threat (even when they are aware of the costs this may entail; see Perry and Jonathan-Zamir, 2021), and by doing so the police appear highly relevant and attentive to the immediate priorities of the public. As a result, citizens evaluate the police more favourably. However, over time the threat becomes the ‘new normal’, weakening the instinctive support for government institutions (Lazarus et al., 2020). Moreover, the prices the police, and consequently the public, pay for focusing police resources on the crisis become more evident over time, and the increased focus of the police on the crisis at hand may expose more citizens to unpleasant, enforcement-oriented encounters with

officers, further undermining public support for the police.<sup>6</sup> Thus, our findings suggest that pandemic situations impact public sentiments of the police in much the same way as other types of crises in which the police are inevitably involved—natural disasters, terrorism threats, and wars (Laufs and Waseem, 2020).

Indeed, the COVID-19 crisis has brought about major challenges in terms of public trust in governments more generally (Hermann *et al.*, 2020; Lofredo, 2020; Williams *et al.*, 2020). Citizens in numerous Western democracies, including Israel (Zonshine, 2021), have protested against their governments' conduct and decision-making, and the restrictions imposed on their freedom as part of the emergency regulations (Brennan, 2020; Metternich, 2020). Thus, as noted above, the long-term drop in favourable sentiments of the police may be the outcome of broader erosion in public trust in state institutions (Herian, 2014; Hinton, 2006; Thomassen, 2013; Wu *et al.*, 2012). An important conclusion that can be drawn from this is that fluctuations in public attitudes towards the police in situations of crises, emergencies, or threats may only be partially the outcome of police conduct. While negative interactions with the police during the pandemic may account for some of the drop in support (Grace, 2020; McCarthy *et al.*, 2021), both the initial favourable attitudes and the subsequent drop appear to be, to some extent, the outcome of the broader situation. Thus, the police should not congratulate themselves too much at the beginning of the crisis when public support is favourable, or, alternatively, berate themselves as public sentiments erode over time.

Importantly, this is not to say that the police have no influence on their public image. Our findings indicate that the costs involved in policing the pandemic (as reviewed above) are increasingly recognized by the public over time. Police awareness

of these potential costs may go a long way in mitigating their expected negative effects on public sentiments. As articulated by Stott *et al.* (2020) in their thought-provoking piece published shortly after the pandemic began, police agencies should treat the Coronavirus period as an opportunity: 'This is a moment and an opportunity for law enforcement to take its place in this new dynamic, to map and link with these new groups, and help build momentum for a style of policing that is consent based and therefore more sustainable both now and long into the future'. (p. 578).

Before concluding, the limitations of our study should be acknowledged. First, our survey was carried out in Israel, and focussed on the attitudes of a specific sector of the population—majority community members, and on a particular timeframe—the 9 months between the first and third peaks of the pandemic. Despite similarities in the characteristics of the pandemic and in the measures used in Western democracies to police the pandemic, some variation across countries is only expected. Future studies are thus encouraged to examine public views of the police in other countries and communities, and over prolonged periods of time (e.g. 6 and 12 months following the last pandemic peak). Particular attention should be devoted to the 'day after', when the police return to their 'ordinary' priorities. Further, to fully understand the impact of the pandemic on public attitudes, citizens' qualitative narratives should be studied. Only by unravelling the subjective link between pandemic-related factors and views of the police, can we advance beyond quantitative evidence of change to the mechanism at its root (Perry *et al.*, forthcoming).

Second, since this study was conducted in the midst of the pandemic and during lockdowns, the survey was disseminated online to a sample of registered panelists. While this methodology has

<sup>6</sup> We should note, however, that this is unlikely to be the case in our data. Only 6.7% of the respondents in wave I reported contact with the police in the context of COVID-19 in the 12 months prior to the survey, and 8% reported such a contact in wave II. Moreover, these 'contacts' do not necessarily indicate an enforcement encounter (such as issuing a ticket), but may represent a service-oriented encounters (e.g. providing information/assistance).

become common in the study of public attitudes towards the police (e.g. Gerber and Jackson, 2013; Hamm *et al.*, 2017; Pedersen *et al.*, 2017; Pickett *et al.*, 2018; Tyler *et al.*, 2014), it relies on non-probability convenience samples. Additionally, as is often the case in longitudinal surveys (Ahern and Le Brocque, 2005), our initial sample suffered from attrition. As already noted, we have addressed this challenge by weighting the final sample by age, gender, and education according to the distribution of these characteristics in the population. Nevertheless, future research is encouraged to examine similar research questions using probability samples.

## Conclusions

Public attitudes towards the police during the COVID-19 pandemic behave in much the same way as in other situations of emergencies or threats: they tend to be relatively strong at the beginning of the crisis, and weaken over the long term. This trend is attributed to the costs involved in pandemic policing, but no less important—to the broader situation that influences public support for the government more generally. Thus, our findings send a complex message to police leaders: on the one hand, they should interpret public sentiments with caution, while being fully aware that they are influenced, to a large extent, by broader forces. On the other hand, the police *can* influence public views by acknowledging the costs involved in policing the crisis. By addressing their potential negative outcomes, they may be able to sustain public cooperation and compliance in a time when it is most needed.

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## Appendix A

**Table A1:** Paired sample *T*-tests.

	Mean wave I (SD)	Mean wave II (SD)	Mean difference <sup>*</sup>	95% CI	<i>t</i>	df	Cohen's <i>d</i>
Police effectiveness							
1. The IP is successfully handling the tasks it faces during the coronavirus crisis.	3.70 (0.98)	2.60 (1.1)	1.1	(1.01, 1.17)	26.90***	890	0.90
2. The police efficiently handles its task in my area of residence.	3.20 (1.07)	2.97 (1.14)	0.23	(0.16, 0.29)	6.65***	845	0.23
3. The IP have shown many successes in handling crime in recent years.	3.02 (1.07)	2.69 (1.12)	0.33	(0.26, 0.40)	9.11***	856	0.31
4. Police handling of the coronavirus hampers its other missions, such as property crime, violence, drugs, and traffic.	3.48 (1.04)	3.87 (1.07)	-0.39	(0.48, 0.30)	-8.48***	854	-0.29
Fairness and trust in the police							
5. I trust police officers to behave with integrity even when they are enforcing the emergency regulations.	3.61 (1.14)	3.00 (1.24)	0.61	(0.53, 0.69)	14.29***	958	0.46
6. Police functioning during the coronavirus crisis strengthened my trust in the police.	3.19 (1.18)	2.30 (1.13)	0.89	(0.81, 0.97)	22.33***	913	0.74
7. Police officers are often dishonest.	3.32 (1.07)	3.30 (1.06)	0.02	(-0.04, 0.09)	0.78	945	0.03
8. The IP treats citizens fairly.	2.91 (1.05)	2.70 (1.04)	0.21	(0.15, 0.27)	6.66***	943	0.22
9. I have trust in the IP.	3.18 (1.09)	2.92 (1.08)	0.26	(0.20, 0.32)	8.14***	975	0.26
10. The role of the IP in enforcing the emergency regulations of the coronavirus crisis negatively affects the relationship between the police and citizens.	2.42 (1.18)	3.50 (1.21)	-1.08	(-1.18, -0.99)	-22.41***	891	-0.75
Expected outcomes of policing during the COVID-19 pandemic							
11. During the coronavirus crisis, it is right and just that the IP would focus primarily on enforcing the emergency regulations.	3.87 (1.00)	3.06 (1.28)	0.81	(0.72, 0.89)	18.90***	950	0.61
12. The IP should treat violators of the coronavirus emergency regulations with forgiveness.	2.19 (1.16)	2.42 (1.27)	0.23	(-0.32, -0.15)	-5.29***	949	-0.17
13. Most citizens would comply with the emergency regulations even without enforcement.	3.06 (1.25)	2.40 (1.24)	0.66	(0.57, 0.75)	14.46***	960	0.47
14. I am likely to report violations of self-quarantine by an individual suspected to be infected with the coronavirus.	4.19 (1.07)	3.45 (1.33)	0.74	(0.65, 0.81)	18.15***	922	0.60

*Continued*

**Table A1:** Continued

	Mean wave I (SD)	Mean wave II (SD)	Mean difference <sup>*</sup>	95% CI	<i>t</i>	df	Cohen's <i>d</i>
15. I am likely to report a neighbour violating the emergency regulations of the coronavirus crisis.	3.90 (1.22)	3.19 (1.41)	0.71	(0.63, 0.80)	16.82***	929	0.55
16. I am likely to call the police if I witnessed a serious crime.	4.35 (0.94)	4.34 (0.98)	0.01	(-0.04, 0.08)	0.55	967	0.02
17. I am likely to call the police if I saw a suspicious object.	4.41 (0.94)	4.36 (0.96)	0.05	(-0.00, 0.10)	1.84	977	0.06
18. I am likely to volunteer to assist the police in my area of residence.	2.59 (1.35)	2.44 (1.36)	0.15	(0.07, 0.23)	3.73***	916	0.12
19. I am likely to agree to provide information to assist a police investigation.	4.24 (0.93)	4.00 (1.07)	0.24	(0.18, 0.31)	7.66***	947	0.25
20. In some cases, it is OK to ignore police orders.	1.95 (1.05)	2.21 (1.12)	-0.26	(-0.34, -0.18)	-6.44***	949	-0.21
21. The police should be obeyed, even if we are not happy with the way they treat citizens.	4.22 (0.84)	3.97 (0.92)	0.25	(0.20, 0.32)	8.32***	970	0.27

\*1 = Strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree; mean differences were calculated by subtracting the mean in wave II from the mean in wave I.