

Understanding Londoners' Trust in the Police – Qualitative Analysis

Why do you say that you agree/disagree that..

“the MPS is an organisation you can trust”?

Context and Background

The proportion of Londoners agreeing that ‘the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) is an organisation I can trust’ has shown a gradual downwards trend over recent years. However, results for the latest discrete Q4 2021-22 saw a **particularly sharp decline to just 66%** - the lowest recorded level.

In response to this, Londoners interviewed as part of MOPAC’s Public Attitude Survey (PAS) during May 2022 were asked to **explain the reasons WHY they did or did not trust the Metropolitan Police Service**. Analysis of these comments sought to understand issues on the forefront of Londoners’ minds when answering this question, and to better understand what shapes their trust in the police. Overall, the main themes identified here are in line with factors previously identified in quantitative modelling of PAS data. However, findings add further nuance to this picture, and serve to highlight a **range of current challenges** pertinent to modern policing that are likely to have contributed to reduced public trust. This slide pack outlines the most commonly mentioned themes amongst those who **DO NOT** trust the MPS; followed by those who **DO** trust the MPS.

Summary of Key Findings

- Overall, analysis highlights the importance of **personal contact with the police and experiences of reporting crime** in shaping both positive and negative opinions. Interestingly, this emerged as *the most common theme both for those agreeing and disagreeing* that they could trust the police, and highlights an inevitable overlap between victim satisfaction and public trust. To a lesser extent, the **experiences of friends and family** members were also influential in shaping opinions, whilst positive **treatment** by police seemed to benefit trust.
- **Media coverage and current events** were also particularly influential in shaping trust, with the murder of Sarah Everard, Partygate investigations, the search of Child Q, and allegations of misogyny all prominent on Londoners’ minds. This is likely to have contributed to the particularly low levels of trust seen during Q4 2021-22; which coincided with widespread media coverage of such issues. Indeed - even amongst those who *did* trust the MPS - it was often evident that such events had introduced elements of doubt.
- Related to this, many Londoners expressed concerns over police conduct – highlighting perceived **racism and discrimination, sexism or misogyny**, and wider issues with **police leadership and culture** as key reasons for not trusting the police. Despite this, very few directly referenced the resignation of Cressida Dick. Many Londoners acknowledged that behaviour depended on **individual officers**, and believed the actions of a few ‘bad apples’ could tarnish the police’s reputation. This theme was prominent both amongst those who *did and did not* trust the MPS – with those who continued to trust the police tending to feel the vast majority of officers were nevertheless honest and hard-working.
- Perceptions of police effectiveness also appeared influential in shaping trust in the MPS. Those who responded negatively often believed officers **failed to tackle crime issues or had the wrong priorities**, and cited **reductions in police presence or visibility**. In contrast, many of those who felt they could trust the MPS held a general view that the **police were effective at reducing crime and keeping people safe**, and believed officers were **doing the best job they could; often despite challenges** such as budget cuts and resourcing issues.
- Interestingly, comments from those who *did* trust the police frequently asserted a **general sense that police should be trusted** or were doing a good job - often without specific reasons. For some, there was a view that police were integral to maintaining law and order in society, while others said they had been ‘brought up’ to respect police. Some simply trusted the police as they felt they didn’t have a choice or a reason not to, suggesting for many this remains a ‘default’ position based on societal factors and historical legacies.

What makes Londoners feel they **DO NOT** trust the MPS?

During **May 2022**, 427 Londoners who *either disagreed or were neutral* towards the statement ‘the Metropolitan Police Service is an organisation I can trust’ were asked the reasons why they felt this way. Thematic analysis was used to understand issues and perceptions at the forefront of people’s decision-making when answering this question. By far the most commonly mentioned reasons for NOT trusting the MPS were **direct personal experience and media coverage**, highlighting the potential for these factors to influence judgements.



Personal Experience

(122 comments – 26%)

Comments most often mentioned negative personal experiences or contact with police that influenced low trust. Most of these felt police had failed to take action in response to a crime report – highlighting a link between victim satisfaction and trust. A further 34 mentioned similar experiences amongst friends or family.

I had my flat burgled and they closed the case without them telling me.

When you call and they don't help. They just take notes and give you crime number. They don't do anything, they don't have enough resources.

I am a victim of rape and nothing happened.

I'm not keen on the police from when I was younger, 9 or 10, my mum lost me and a policeman was harsh with me.



Media Coverage

(110 comments – 26%)

The second most common theme related to the media. Some comments made general reference to negative coverage, but others noted specific incidents. Most often this was the murder of Sarah Everard; but other issues included Partygate investigations, the search of Child Q, and the murder of Bibaa Henry and Nicole Smallman.

In light of the recent murder committed by a policeman, I feel less trust in the police. If they are not investigating their own officers, you cannot feel trust in them.

What is reported in the media, regarding the strip search stories.

News today about Boris Johnson not receiving fines when he was at the party, showing they are corrupt.

Enough in the media to suggest they may not be trustworthy or may not have the right values but I have no personal experience to back that up.



Racism and Discrimination

(52 comments – 12%)

Many comments mentioned perceived racism or discrimination in the police, particularly towards black communities. In some cases this was based on personal experience or witnessing incidents, while for others it was a more general belief. Some felt the MPS does not represent those it serves.

They are biased and can be racist. I have seen them stop and search young black men for no reason.

Systemic racism and a lack of listening to communities, a lack of a representative profile of community (minorities).

I think there's quite a lot of institutional racism in the police. I know it's said a lot but it's true in my experience. They do not treat people from ethnic backgrounds the same. I am from an ethnic background and I have not reported incidents to the police for this reason. I do not believe they are policing for me.



Inconsistencies or Individuals

(43 comments – 10%)

Some felt behaviour depended on specific officers or situations, or acknowledged that the MPS had many employees and that the behaviour of a minority could affect its reputation. This was often amongst those ‘neutral’ about whether they trust the MPS.

There is good and bad in every organisation, there will always be one that ruins it for everyone. In emergency services everyone needs to do the job properly or it leaves a negative image. It only takes one police officer to ruin 100 years worth of good service.

It's a hard one. There are good and bad officers. Too much hit and miss.

It's a bit of pot-luck and the experience you get depends on the police officer you get.

Because there are always black sheep – a few individuals who are racist and misogynist...

What makes Londoners feel they **DO NOT** trust the MPS? (cont'd)

A range of **wider issues** also seem to be on the forefront of Londoners' minds when feeling they do NOT trust the MPS. This includes perceptions of police racism, sexism and discrimination – and concerns about the wider police culture and leadership structure in holding officers to account. Some Londoners believed the police failed to effectively tackle crime or held the wrong priorities, whilst others felt improving community engagement and patrolling visibility was important to regain trust.



Leadership and Culture

(39 comments – 9%)

Comments often raised concerns about the culture within the MPS, including feeling there was corruption, poor accountability, and a lack of transparency. This was associated with poor leadership and feeling such issues stem 'from the top'.

It's like an Old Boys Club.

I think that there is a toxic culture in the police and it needs to be policed by consent for all people, not just a privileged few.

The commanders of the Met police are very good at wringing their hands but not actually doing anything..

It's a closed shop that doesn't deal with things going wrong within its own organisation.

I think the notion of the police I can trust, but the police federation and top echelon lack honesty and transparency.



Effectiveness and Priorities

(38 comments – 9%)

Some Londoners mentioned a general perception that police are not dealing with crime, or felt they did not agree with the MPS' priorities. Some believed police did not tackle local issues, while others cited a range of specific crime problems including burglary, moped crime, robbery and serious violence.

They are not very efficient at solving crimes.

My area has got more crime than before.

A lot of teen boys getting mugged for their phones. Nothing is being done.

They are more worried about not offending anyone than actually dealing with the crime.

I strongly believe the MET polices' interests are self-centred and not really catered for the public. I find their ability to solve crimes and attend to public needs wanting



Visibility and Resourcing

(32 comments – 7%)

Some Londoners linked their trust in the MPS with a perceived lack of visible patrols in their local area and poor community engagement. Others noted wider issues with funding or resourcing, including officer numbers – this was often linked with personal experiences or perceptions of police effectiveness.

There are less officers being recruited to deal with the growing population. I think they are unable to fulfil their role to their full capacity.

Difficult to trust them when I don't see them much.

Never see a police officer. It is quite sad that there is no interacting with the public anymore. Lack of respect because you never see them.

Just because they are not involved in the community. They need to be not rushing off in the car. They need to be present, which they are not here.



Women's Safety and Misogyny

(28 comments – 7%)

Several comments also raised perceived sexism and misogyny in the police. This was often linked to wider discrimination or to recent media events, but comments here specifically related to gender-based issues. Some felt police failed to tackle VAWG issues or to keep females safe.

There is a protection racket around domestic violence. Police are not following procedures and are breaking the law themselves.

There's a mistrust of male police officers. As a single woman I wouldn't trust them on my own. They might be perpetrators themselves.

The culture within the police force that has come to light, texts, messages, sexist remarks and derogatory remarks about women and girls, both victims and non-victims.

What makes Londoners feel they **DO** trust the MPS?

Conversely, 1134 Londoners who *agreed* with the statement ‘the Metropolitan Police Service is an organisation I can trust’ were also asked the reasons why they felt this way. Once again, the most common theme was a **direct personal experience** with the police, highlighting the importance of such contact in shaping *both positive and negative* opinions here. However, many respondents admitted their trust in the MPS was based on a **more general sense** that the **police should be trusted** or were **doing a good job**.



Personal Experience

(280 comments – 25%)

Those that trusted the MPS most often said this was based on prior experience with police. For many this was as a victim of crime - once again highlighting the importance of such contact in shaping both positive and negative opinions. Here, respondents outlined good experiences - feeling police arrived quickly and listened to them.

I trusted they'd sort out my situation. I moved out due to ASB, drugs, and prostitution, and they've now dealt with it to the point where I was able to move back.

My only experience with the Met Police was positive, they were very polite towards me and kept me informed over a few weeks.

In all the dealings I've had with the police, 99% have been positive [...] I've had the odd incident when I was younger, where I was stopped by the police and they gave me a rubbish answer as to why, but on the whole they are quite good.

I am 76 and all dealings with the police have been good.



General Sense of Effectiveness

(211 comments – 19%)

The second most common theme was a general sense that police do a good job by effectively tackling crime, keeping people safe, or protecting individuals. Many did not provide specific reasons for these beliefs, but some linked it in with personal safety or local crime rates. A few compared the MPS with police in other countries.

I've lived in London my whole life. I travel a lot, and they clearly represent one of the best police forces on the planet. The low levels of crime reflect that.

It's a safe area to live in with no major problems.

They are there to protect the public so I would feel safe with them.

They tend to do a good job, the best intentions are always there.

To have a career in the police, you must want to look after people, keep them safe, protect them.



General Sense of Trust

(195 comments – 17%)

Similarly, many Londoners simply voiced a general belief that police should be trusted. Once again, comments were often brief and many did not provide specific reasons for this view. However, some linked it back to their upbringing, or felt there was no reason *not* to trust police. Others viewed the police as central to maintaining societal order.

They're part of the three pillars of our society. I have faith in them.

You should be able to trust them, they are there to uphold the law.

We have to trust them or society will collapse.

Because I was always brought up to believe police can be trusted.

On principle, if I can't trust the police who can I trust?

The way that England is organised as a state, I have confidence in the rule of law here



Media and Current Events

(92 comments – 8%)

Even amongst those saying they *could* trust the police, many still mentioned the media and recent events – often as a justification for choosing ‘tend to agree’ rather than ‘strongly agree’. A smaller number felt they had seen positive things in the media or that coverage was unfair,

Sometimes they seem trustworthy in things you see on television, but sometimes they are being violent to people and kicking people.

I think they have very unfair press coverage.

They always come when called and always polite. But thinking of the negative stories too, makes you question it.

I was going to say neutral due to the Sarah Everard case, but I know not everyone is the same and when I needed the police myself, they did help me.

Judging by what I hear on the radio and TV, I support the Metropolitan police and the actions they take.

What makes Londoners feel they **DO** trust the MPS? (cont'd)

Once again, a range of **wider themes** were also important in understanding why Londoners felt they DID trust the police. However, across these themes, respondents also recognised challenges inherent in policing – for example, while many mentioned positive examples of police treatment and behaviour, many also highlighted inequalities, inconsistencies in officers' conduct, and wider societal pressures. Despite this, respondents tended to be united in the view that most police officers were still trustworthy and did their best for London.



Police Treatment

(88 comments – 8%)

Many Londoners specifically mentioned police treatment – often linked with personal contact where police had been helpful and respectful. However, some felt police would treat *them* well; but also believed treatment may be different for certain groups in society.

I think that from any contact that I have had with the police, I have always felt that they were honest and dealt with me with respect.

They are courteous, polite and helpful.

I think the respect and fair treatment they give to people is good.

I am a middle-aged white woman who isn't involved in crime, so I would probably be treated well by the police

They are building relationships with [the] community.



Doing Best Despite Challenges

(83 comments – 7%)

Often linked with more general perceptions of effectiveness, Londoners often said they trusted police as they believed they were doing their best in the face of challenges – including financial, political, societal and resourcing issues.

Because I don't think they are fast enough, or have the numbers to do their job. I think they are trying to help where they can.

I think that they have a hard job. They are damned if they do and damned if they don't.

They have a difficult job, especially with the mayor breathing down their necks. Kids don't respect them now, unlike back in my childhood.

For the most part they do the best they can, put their lives on the line for a pittance, their hands are tied.

They are trying their level best.



Inconsistencies and Individuals

(70 comments – 6%)

Despite trusting the MPS overall, many once again noted that some individuals may be less trustworthy than others – often referring to 'bad apples'. However, this group continued to believe that the majority of police officers were honest and could be trusted.

I think there are a few bad apples but most police officers will tend to do the right thing.

There are some bad apples that spoil it. They've been politicised recently. Humans are corruptible.

A large proportion of police officers are hard working and well intentioned, but the continued violence against women is disconcerting.

Historically, they have always helped people to solve problems but there is always a few that spoil it for everybody.

Never Had Bad Experience

(68 comments – 6%)

Some Londoners simply noted they trusted the police as they had never had direct contact or negative experiences.

No reason not to trust them, I've never had any dealings with them.

I have never had a bad experience with them.

Professional Affiliation with Police

(48 comments – 4%)

Another sizeable group said they trusted the MPS as they had personally been an officer, had friends/family in the police, or had worked with police in a professional capacity. Knowing officers personally or being aware of processes seemed influential for this group.

Having worked with the Met police, I know the kind of training that they go through.

My friend is a Met officer and informed me about practices within the police force.

Police officers in the school I work in have worked hard to gain kids trust.