Becoming Blue: Perceptions of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities of police recruitment

This study explores how racially minoritised communities perceive policing and recruitment, examining trust, representation and institutional barriers shaping career aspirations and diversity within policing.

Key details

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Police region	East Midlands
Level of research	PhD
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Research context

The relationship between policing and racially minoritised communities in Britain has long been marked by tension, mistrust and calls for reform. Decades of public inquiries have repeatedly highlighted the disproportionate policing of minoritised communities, persistent institutional racism and the chronic under-representation of ethnically diverse officers. Despite successive recruitment campaigns and diversity initiatives, progress has been slow. Confidence in policing among racially minoritised groups continues to lag behind, shaped by experiences of over-policing, under-protection and discriminatory workplace cultures (Waters and others 2007).

Aims

This research seeks to address these long-standing challenges by exploring a central question: What are the perceptions of policing as a career among ethnically diverse communities?

This study examines how historical, cultural and structural factors shape attitudes toward policing as a career. To achieve this, three subsidiary research questions guide the study:

- how relevant are the cultural tropes of policing in recruiting an ethnically diverse police service?
- how do the structural elements of policing affect the recruitment of ethnically diverse individuals?
- what are the narratives of ethnically diverse communities surrounding the police as legitimate workers?

By addressing these questions, the research aims to illuminate the barriers and opportunities influencing recruitment perceptions, providing an evidence base for strategies that strengthen trust, legitimacy and inclusivity within policing.

This study sits at the intersection of these debates, exploring how racially minoritised communities perceive policing and recruitment, and how historical, cultural and structural factors shape these attitudes. By integrating community perspectives with insights from police recruitment and diversity professionals, the research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the barriers and opportunities influencing recruitment into policing. Ultimately, the study seeks to inform strategies that move beyond symbolic representation toward meaningful inclusivity, addressing the persistent gap between policing ideals and the lived realities of racially minoritised communities.

Research methodology

This research adopts a qualitative methodology to explore perceptions of policing. A qualitative approach is particularly suited to capturing the complexity of attitudes, experiences, and social contexts shaping views on policing as both a public institution and a potential employer.

Data collection involves two key participant groups:

- outsiders: young people (aged 16–21) within education from racially minoritised communities
- insiders: police professionals working in recruitment, HR and equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) roles, providing organisational perspectives on diversity and recruitment challenges

For outsiders, focus groups will be used to facilitate open discussion about experiences of policing, perceptions of representation and views on policing as a career. Focus groups encourage interaction between participants, allowing shared experiences and differing opinions to emerge. For insiders, semi-structured interviews will be conducted to explore organisational practices, recruitment barriers and diversity initiatives in greater depth.

All participants will be recruited through schools and police networks. Ethical approval will be obtained from the University of Leicester, with informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity strictly maintained.

Data analysis will employ thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006), enabling systematic identification of recurring patterns and themes across both participant groups. Critical Race Theory (CRT) will provide an analytical lens, highlighting how race, representation and institutional practices intersect to shape perceptions of policing and recruitment.

References

Braun V and Clarke V. 2006. 'Using thematic analysis in psychology', Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3(1), pp 77–101.

Waters I and others. 2007. 'Ethnic minorities and the challenge of police recruitment', The Police Journal, 80(3), pp 189–284.

Additional resources

Related project: Being Blue: An examination of the lived experience of minority ethnic police officers