

Understanding public confidence in policing: A longitudinal study of trust, legitimacy and neighbourhood policing

A three-wave panel survey examining the factors associated with public trust and confidence, police legitimacy and the impact of neighbourhood policing initiatives.

Key details

Lead institution	College of Policing
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Police region	West Midlands
Collaboration and partnership	• London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) • University College London (UCL) • VISAV
Level of research	Professional/work based
Project start date	July 2026
Date due for completion	December 2028

Research context

Public confidence in the police is a central outcome of the government’s Safer Streets Mission (SSM). The government aims to improve public confidence by introduction of the Neighbourhood Policing Guarantee, which is currently being implemented across England and Wales. However, the infrastructure for measuring changes in confidence, trust and legitimacy at local level during

implementation is limited. Existing national surveys, such as the Crime Survey for England and Wales, provide important national measures but are not designed to evaluate neighbourhood policing initiatives at force or more local level, or to follow the same people over time.

This project will develop and test a large-scale survey-based approach for understanding public perceptions of crime and policing using the Neighbourhood Alert community messaging platform. It will examine how confidence, trust and legitimacy are associated with people's views of neighbourhood policing. The research will also explore how these relationships compare with other factors that may shape public confidence, such as feelings of safety, perceptions of crime and anti-social behaviour, local community cohesion and personal experiences of contact with the police.

The study is intended to strengthen the evidence base for policing policy and practice. It will help assess whether neighbourhood policing and specific Neighbourhood Policing Guarantee commitments are associated with improvements in public perceptions and will provide national and local policing organisations with better tools for understanding and monitoring public confidence, trust and legitimacy over time.

Research methodology

The research will use a three-wave panel survey of users of the Neighbourhood Alert community messaging platform. The first wave will establish baseline measures of public confidence, trust, legitimacy, perceptions of neighbourhood policing and awareness of Neighbourhood Policing Guarantee commitments. Later waves will re-survey respondents, allowing researchers to examine how perceptions change over time and whether neighbourhood policing initiatives are associated with measurable differences in public attitudes.

The survey will include questions on:

- perceptions of crime and anti-social behaviour
- feelings of safety
- community cohesion and collective efficacy
- experiences of crime, anti-social behaviour and police contact
- perceptions of neighbourhood policing
- awareness of Neighbourhood Policing Guarantee commitments
- trust in police effectiveness, fairness and procedural justice

- confidence in the police
- police legitimacy

Researchers from the College, LSE and UCL will analyse pseudonymised survey data using cross-sectional, longitudinal and quasi-experimental methods to explore associations between key variables, test hypothesised causal pathways from neighbourhood policing to public confidence and police legitimacy, and evaluate the impact of neighbourhood policing initiatives.

Research participation

The survey will be administered through the Neighbourhood Alert platform, which is used by members of the public who have opted in to receive local police messages. Participation will be voluntary and limited to people aged 18 or over. Respondents will be able to skip any questions they do not wish to answer.

VISAV will administer the survey and create pseudonymised datasets for analysis by the College, LSE and UCL. The research dataset shared with the research team will not include names, addresses, email addresses, phone numbers or other direct contact details. Findings will be reported in aggregate form, with disclosure checks applied before results are published or shared.