

Effective Policing for 21st-Century Israel

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Since the founding of the state of Israel, the Israel Police has been a national force, serving all communities. But how well does the public feel it is being served – is the public satisfied with its effectiveness? To answer this question, the Ministry of Public Security, the Ministry of Finance and the Israel Police asked the RAND Corporation to conduct a study that would help these organizations address several issues of mutual concern, such as public perceptions and public trust in the police, performance measurement, and crime prevention. This article discusses the resulting two-year study.

Israel Police – A Unique National Force

The Israel Police not only provides domestic policing and crime prevention, but also polices the borders; provides traffic, drug, alcohol, and firearms patrols; is the agency for criminal investigations; conducts anti-corruption investigations; operates the national emergency call center; is responsible for domestic counterterror operations and maintaining the national emergency crisis center; manages Civil Guard volunteers; and prosecutes more than 80 percent of all cases in the criminal courts system. Policy oversight of the police comes most directly from the Ministry of Public Security, which also oversees the fire and prison services, as well as several community-based programs.

The police currently have an authorized strength of 29,300, although the actual force size is smaller. Approximately one-quarter of the total number of police are short-term recruits performing national service, and of the total police force, one-quarter constitute the Border Police (Magav), as distinct from the blue-uniformed police. The police also augment their assets by using civilian volunteers who perform both routine and specialized functions under the direction of professional police. Approximately 36,000 volunteers are on the official rolls. The police have a system of command that corresponds to that of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), with the commissioner of police enjoying a rank equivalent to that of the IDF Chief of Staff.

The Need for a Study

The police in the past several decades have come under the scrutiny of both the general public and government oversight bodies, particularly the Ministry of Public Security and the Ministry of Finance. As Israel has changed dramatically during this time, these parties are interested in the police providing a type and level of service that keeps pace with these changes. The general effectiveness of the police has been questioned, and the apparent high variability in service delivery is a cause for concern, especially in some population groups viewed as underserved by the police.

Despite relatively low crime rates, the Israeli public perceives an increasing threat to personal security. This is matched by concern within the government over the effective use of resources. Popular approval of the police is lower than that of the IDF and many other public institutions; and the media's readiness to expose police errors does little to enhance police stature. The European Social Survey of 2010 shows that Israelis have a low level of trust in the police and that Israelis are the least satisfied with their relationship with the police in comparison to 20 European countries.

The Study

The RAND Corporation, which was chosen to conduct the study, is a nonprofit institution established in 1948 that helps improve policy and decision-making through research and analysis. During the course of a two-year effort, the RAND team met many times with the police in various settings. It was important for us to understand Israel as the unique policing environment that it is and not apply solutions from elsewhere to a situation where they may not be warranted.

We received briefings on almost all aspects of policing, met with the staff of various specialized police units and senior members of the police, visited police stations and district headquarters, rode patrol in both urban and rural regions, and met with Ministry of Public Security and Ministry of Finance working groups for each of the main tasks of this project. We also discussed policing issues with third parties, analyzed the Hebrew, Arabic, and Russian-language media, and conducted focus groups throughout the country.

The decision was made to focus our efforts in four broad areas:

- To aid in benchmarking the Israel Police and its activities in several areas against other police forces
- To assist in the improvement of the tools used by the police to measure indicators of performance
- To assess public attitudes toward the police
- To help enhance police deterrence and efforts to boost crime prevention

Conceptual Model of Effective Policing

Addressing the overarching question – what must the police do to provide effective policing – first requires defining what constitutes effectiveness. It is dependent not solely on the activities of the police, but also on the connection between the police and the community it serves. Effective policing requires both good policing outcomes as well as public support.

Policing outcomes, as indicated by crime rates, crimes solved, and the level of public order in society, are influenced by many factors other than policing, such as socioeconomic status, individual characteristics, etc. First, the ability to achieve such outcomes will depend in part on how much support the public provides the police. Second, even if the police judges policing outcomes to be successful according to formal measures of policing, public acceptance and recognition of these outcomes are needed for the police to be deemed effective by the citizenry they serve. Thus, even if the crime rate is low overall, a lack of trust or cooperation on the part of the public can mean that the police are perceived as being ineffective.

As such, effective policing will require a congruence of views on precisely what the role of the police should be in contemporary Israel and how their response to the demands placed on them should be judged. Israel's society is among the most heterogeneous in the world. The police, as a national force, are often the most tangible representation of government that most people see on a daily basis. As the discussion of our findings will show below, perhaps neither party to this intersection has fully understood what the other expects.

Public Opinion

The results of the study show that the public does recognize many positive elements in police actions and behavior. Many sources noted that the Israel Police is effective at fighting many types of crime. At the same time, the public holds many negative views of the police. The perception persists that the police do not always behave in a professional way and do not adequately provide safety and security. Informants noted that the police typically do not have a "customer service" orientation when dealing with the public (e.g., they arrive late and do not write down information). There was also perceived bias in police behavior, and many focus groups described fear of the police.

Media Analysis: While positive stories about the police found their way into the media, a single negative incident could quickly overshadow all improvement efforts. With regard to non-Hebrew media, clearly the police can have only limited effect on underlying sectarian biases in Israel and therefore on how performance of some of its tasks will be reflected in the media that serve Israel's various communities. However, it is possible to stay aware of and be sensitive to these biases and try to address fairness in public reports about police performance, as well as identify stories to promote.

Focus Groups: To gain a deeper understanding of the sources of dissatisfaction, we turned to focus groups.

Overall, the focus groups emphasized that perceptions of the police differ by ethnicity. Some differences reflect different interaction patterns between police and demographic groups and some reflect differences in opinions of Israel and the Israeli government. But it is striking that there is a concern about respect and treatment across all groups, even those in the majority. Dissatisfaction stems from a dissonance between the roles people believe the police should play but do not or cannot.

Civilian-Police Interactions: Interactions between the police and public, especially negative ones, have been linked to attitudes about the police. As an experiment, the Israel Police agreed to equip six officers from each of the Petah Tikva and Ayalon stations with body cameras for a period of two weeks. As a condition for undertaking this pilot, the officers were allowed to turn the cameras off at their discretion, and so a complete record of interactions with citizens may not have been collected. The cameras provided anecdotal evidence to suggest that, even when police are respectful, interactions frequently become argumentative and disrespectful.

Additionally, although it has been widely demonstrated that explaining police procedure is a key factor affecting satisfactory outcomes, police failed to do so in about half of all interactions. Finally, citizens often leave interactions without believing that the officer tried to resolve the problem.

Improving Public Support

There is a mismatch today between what the Israel Police does and what the public expects of it. To the degree this stems from misunderstanding, improved public information about police success and examples of heroism and sacrifice might have an effect, as would better awareness of police policies and procedures. Moreover, such efforts are likely to increase the success of the police not just in terms of public satisfaction, but also in terms of the cooperation the police receive in pursuing investigations, the respect officers are accorded as they perform their duties, and the quality of officers recruited to the force.

While there are many potential paths to take, we group the actions we recommend into two broad areas:

- Embracing a procedural justice model for serving and interacting with the Israeli public while carrying out police activities
- Expanding the use of information to support more focused deterrence and police activity and less reliance on a posture of general deterrence

Procedural justice is a general term for policing practices that ensure that interactions with the police are perceived as fair and just. This means developing policing standards and a police culture that provides consistency in the treatment of all citizens, without regard to ethnicity, and no matter which officer responds. It means treating citizens with respect: listening and trying to understand citizens' perspectives,



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explaining procedures, and providing timely and accurate information. We find in this a significant contributing factor to many of the more specific complaints and frictions that arise between the police and the communities that they serve. Procedural justice also means the police needs to do a better job at helping people understand what they do and how they operate.

The Israel Police has already taken steps to make its procedures and decisions understandable to the public and to establish a system of accountability for the police. We believe that further improvements are possible and will be rewarded with improved public satisfaction and better policing outcomes.

Improving Policing Outcomes

Police forces have deployed many new tools in recent decades to improve policing outcomes and their relationship with citizens. These include community policing and partnerships with the community, volunteers, and problem-oriented policing – applying preventive approaches and systematic methods for focusing police resources on high-priority problems.

While none of these tools can be blindly accepted and implemented in Israel, they should be considered. However, our main recommendation to improve policing outcomes is to change the deterrence method from general deterrence, aimed at the population level, to focused deterrence, aimed at the segment of the population with a higher risk of criminal activity. When conducted properly, focused deterrent involves forming partnerships with community members and organizations and can necessitate structural realignments to be effective. In short, focused deterrence activities can be supportive of, and an important component of, community policing.

Additionally, we recommend that the Israel Police create a national deterrence program oversight team and deterrence research team to ensure that proposed interventions are responsive to public needs, are based on careful empirical analysis of the problem, receive tailored interventions and are subjected to careful evaluation and appropriate in-process adjustments.

From Words to Actions

Effecting far-reaching changes to the culture and performance of any policing organization poses a major challenge and is unlikely to succeed without strong leadership support, objective performance standards and measures, hiring strategies and training standards that guarantee necessary levels of competence, and external accountability. The fact that the Israel Police and its partnering ministries initiated this study, were willing to engage in a detailed examination of so many aspects of policing, and have already shown an inclination toward transformation and change, suggests that the Israel Police is ready to meet these challenges.

The RAND team delivered a draft final report in December 2012, several months before the conclusion of the study in order to enable further engagement with the police on the meaning and implementation of the recommendations. Upon receiving the report, Police Commissioner Danino appointed two working groups within the police – one to address the issues of enhancing professionalism within the police, and the second to focus on issues of accountability. In doing so the Commissioner took on two of the most difficult issues facing the police. It is one thing to change procedures; it is another thing entirely to change internal culture. But no matter how long or difficult the road, the journey begins by taking the first steps.



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(Courtesy, Isreal Police Spokesperson)