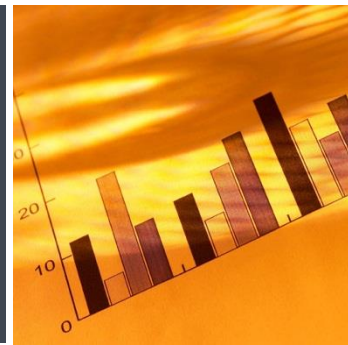


# Developing a Common Data Standard for Measuring Attitudes toward the Police in Canada



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BUILDING A SAFE AND RESILIENT CANADA

A common approach to measuring attitudes toward the police within Canada will enhance our understanding of the public's perceptions of Canadian police.

## Background

Currently, most police services in Canada conduct public attitude surveys on a regular basis; however, no two police services ask the same survey questions, and many police services vary their questions between surveys. These inconsistencies create problems of comparability between jurisdictions and within a given jurisdiction over time. What this means is that we do not have a clear picture of the Canadian public's attitudes toward police at the national, provincial, or local level.

Throughout 2017 and 2018, Public Safety Canada and Halifax Regional Police engaged in a series of research activities with the goal of achieving more consistent and valid measures of public attitudes toward the police in Canada. The end-product of these activities is a list of 12 indicators that police services in Canada can use to measure attitudes toward police in a consistent manner (see Appendix).

## Method and Results

This project involved four main research phases, including: (1) convening an expert panel to identify preexisting measures that are believed to be central to capturing public attitudes toward the police; (2) selecting a subset of these measures for pilot testing; (3) conducting a pilot survey; and (4) analyzing the data and recommending a set of “core indicators” as a common data standard.

### Phase 1: Expert Panel

The expert panel included four international academic experts with expertise in public attitude surveying, as well as four police service representatives from Canada. Panellists were asked: “if you could only ask

10 to 15 questions to gauge public attitudes toward the police, what would those questions be?” Panellists were also asked to provide a brief rationale, recommended response categories, and indicate whether the questions were previously validated.

A wide range of over 100 suggested questions were received from panel members. Most recommended questions tapped into dimensions of trust and confidence (51 items), followed by: perceived police effectiveness (31 items); perceptions of safety, crime, and disorder (28 items); contact with police and satisfaction with contact (14 items); legitimacy perceptions (10 items); propensity to cooperate with the police (7 items); and satisfaction (4 items).

### Phase 2: Question Selection

Following the expert panel, the project team selected a subset of questions to inform future pilot testing. Where possible, the project team selected questions that were: (1) empirically validated in previous research; (2) theoretically supported; (3) proposed by multiple respondents; and (4) quantitative in nature. Questions were also assessed for clarity and construct representativeness to ensure that all dimensions of the core constructs were reflected in the questions.

### Phase 3: Pilot Survey

In early 2018, Halifax Regional Police led a survey exercise with support from the Calgary Police Service and the Ottawa Police Service ( $N = 2,527$ ). Using online survey panels, a minimum of 500 respondents from each of the following groups were targeted: Halifax Regional Municipality residents, Calgary area residents, Ottawa area residents, rural residents from across Canada, and those indicating that French is their first language.

## Phase 4: Expert Data Analysis

In spring 2018, experts were commissioned to analyze the data from the pilot survey exercise to provide an empirically-informed recommendation for a set of 10-15 core indicators that could be used by police services in Canada to measure public attitudes toward the police (see Jackson and Bradford 2019).

Jackson and Bradford (2019) found good scaling properties in the survey items regardless of whether the survey was completed by French versus English respondents or rural versus urban respondents. This means that these questions are applicable across these demographic groups. They also found that the key tenets of procedural justice theory were supported by the data, paralleling the findings of previous research.

Based on their analyses, Jackson and Bradford (2019) recommended the 12 indicators listed in the Appendix as core indicators for measuring attitudes toward the police. We fully agree with the questions they have recommended.

In addition to the core indicators, Jackson and Bradford (2019) recommended that surveys incorporate questions measuring key correlates of attitudes toward the police, including: demographics (e.g., gender identity, ethnic identity, age, income, rural/urban location); contact (self- and police-initiated); previous victimization; and perceived safety and disorder. These factors can be useful for explaining the variation observed in community members' attitudes in any given survey. Where possible, we encourage the use of the same questions used in this project (see full report, Appendix E).

## Recommendations and Conclusion

The core indicators have been endorsed by the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police as a common data standard for public attitude surveys on policing in Canada. **Police services are encouraged to adopt these questions – in the order presented in the Appendix, and with the same response scales – as the first series of questions on any public attitude survey.**

These indicators are not intended to replace all public attitude surveying conducted by or on behalf of police services. Rather, they are intended to be included as a

small set of front-end 'core' indicators whenever a public attitude survey is undertaken, to ensure that key measures of public attitudes toward the police are collected regularly, in a consistent fashion, across police services in Canada. Implementation of this common data standard across Canada will allow us to develop a better local and national understanding of the public's perceptions of Canadian police. Police services that adopt this standard into their community surveys are encouraged to contact the Research Division at Public Safety Canada to discuss next steps toward sharing and developing data at a multijurisdictional and national level.

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## Source

Giacomantonio, C., Mugford, R., Maslov, A., & Lawrence, A. (2019). *Developing a common data standard for measuring attitudes toward the police in Canada*. Ottawa, Canada: Public Safety Canada.

## Additional Sources

Jackson, J., & Bradford, B. (2019). *Measuring public attitudes towards the police*. Prepared for Public Safety Canada, Community Safety and Countering Crime Branch, Research Division.

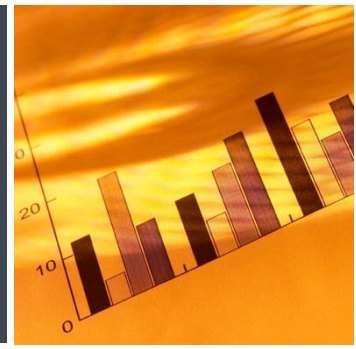
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# Core Indicators for Measuring Attitudes toward the Police in Canada



These questions should be used in this order and with the response scales included here – as the first five questions of any public attitude survey. Where necessary, the core indicators can be placed after demographic screening questions that are intended to ensure that respondents meet the survey eligibility criteria, but **the core indicators should not be placed after other attitudinal measures**. Police services that adopt this standard into their community surveys are encouraged to contact the Research Division at Public Safety Canada to discuss next steps toward sharing and developing data at a multijurisdictional and national level.

1. When you think about [INSERT POLICE SERVICE], to what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
a. The police make decisions based on facts.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
b. The police treat people with respect.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
c. The police provide the same quality of service to all citizens.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
d. The police are dealing with the things that matter to people in this community.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
e. I feel a moral duty to follow police orders.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
f. I generally support how the police usually act.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
g. I would help the police if asked.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5

2. About how often would you say that the police in your neighbourhood exceed their authority?

Never/Almost never 1  
 Rarely 2  
 Sometimes 3  
 Most of the time 4  
 Always/Almost always 5

3. In general, to what extent do you agree that the [INSERT POLICE SERVICE] [is/are] effective at:

Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
a. Resolving crimes where violence is involved?	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
b. Responding quickly to calls for assistance?	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5

4. Taking everything into account, how good a job do you think the police in this area are doing?

Very poor 1

Poor 2

Average 3

Good 4

Excellent 5

5. Taking everything into account, how good a job do you think the police in this country are doing?

Very poor 1

Poor 2

Average 3

Good 4

Excellent 5