

Perceptions of Policing: Trust and Confidence Among Visible Minorities in Canada

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Introduction

This research paper examines how visible minorities perceive their trust in the Canadian police. Studying this issue is critical due to significant disparities in police confidence across different racial and ethnic groups. As reported by Statistics Canada (2023), while 67% of Canadians generally trust the police, Southeast Asian (63%), Black (52%), and Japanese (47%) individuals maintain considerably lower levels of confidence in the police. These differences highlight a critical sociological problem, as distrust in law enforcement can create barriers to accessing essential support and life-saving help (Adjordan et al., 2017, p. 588).

This topic is sociologically crucial because racialized communities often face systemic barriers when interacting with law enforcement, including discrimination, racial profiling, and a higher number of racial minority casualties (Pass et al., 2020, p. 1320). Research has revealed that Black Canadians, for example, are disproportionately subjected to police stops, questioning, and bodily searches compared to their white counterparts (Owusu-Bempah & Gabbidon, 2021). While many studies have explored the general relationship between visible minorities and police trust, few have examined how other factors, such as religious discrimination, education level, age, and gender, may shape these perceptions. It is essential to explore these dynamics further to better understand how intersecting social and demographic factors contribute to varying levels of trust in Canadian law enforcement.

With this in mind, I pose the research question: *Does being a visible minority influence trust in the police while considering the control variables of religious discrimination since COVID-19, highest level of education, age, and gender?* By analyzing data from the 2020 General Social Survey (GSS) database, this paper aims to provide a deeper understanding of how these factors intersect to influence visible minorities' confidence in law enforcement. This research project will not only add to the growing body of literature on racialized communities' relationships with the police, but it will also inform future discussions on police reform and community engagement.

I will be delving into a literature review that examines various factors related to confidence in the police, such as education, age, and gender. Then, utilizing the 2020 GSS data set, I will perform a univariate, bivariate, and multivariate regression analysis to test the research question asked above. Lastly, a conclusion of the data examined will be provided, and the limitations of this study will be discussed in further detail at the end.

Literature Review

Contemporary research examines the complex intersections between confidence in the police, visible minorities, religious discrimination, highest education, age, and gender across various studies and populations (Boateng, 2016; Cao, 2014; Kira et al., 2022; Madon, 2018; Pass et al., 2020; Pickering et al., 2024; Wu, 2014). Studies have found that a variety of social, demographic, and experiential factors significantly influence an individuals' confidence in law enforcement (Boateng, 2016; Cao, 2014; Kira et al., 2022; Madon, 2018; Murphy & McPherson, 2022; Pass et al., 2020; Pickering et al., 2024; Wu, 2014) Hu et al., 2015)

The complexities of visible minorities' trust in the police have been explored through a variety of lenses. Notably, a recent study by Pass, Madon, Murphy, and Sargeant (2020) analyzed how trust in the police varies among different generations of ethnic minority immigrants in Australia. Their focal dependent variables centred around several trust variables, including trust in procedural fairness, police effectiveness, and simple trust in the police (Pass et al., 2020). Key independent variables included immigrant status and length of residence, perceptions of police harassment, and police contact. The researchers focused on two main questions: Does trust in police vary between first and second-generation immigrants, taking into account the length of residence in Australia for foreign-born immigrants? And, do different measures of trust in police vary by immigrant status, taking into account the length of residence for foreign-born immigrants? The survey, conducted with 1,367 participants from African, Middle Eastern, Indian, and Vietnamese immigrant communities in Brisbane and Melbourne. Their findings revealed that when testing the single variable of "simple trust in the police," there was no significant difference between first-generation (foreign-born) and second-generation (Australian-born) immigrants, nor did police trust vary based on length of residence (Pass et al., 2020). However, when examining more complex variables such as trust in procedural fairness and police effectiveness, the researchers found significant variations in first-generation and second-generation immigrants' trust in the police, with second-generation immigrants reporting lower levels of trust (Pass et al., 2020). The study's overall results suggest that trust in the police tends to decrease over time for second-generation immigrants, emphasizing the need for diverse measures of study to fully capture the complexities of trust in police institutions (Pass et al., 2020).

While Pass, Madon, Murphy, and Sargeant (2020) measured trust in the police to examine how it varies among different generations of ethnic minority immigrants in Australia, other studies take a deeper look at the racial and ethnic disparities in trust toward the police in the United States. Wu (2014) carried out a study to examine two things: firstly, how perceptions of police problem-solving, hassling, racial profiling and bias resonate among Hispanic, Asian, Black and White Americans, and secondly, factors that influence police perceptions. The study revealed significant variations in attitudes toward the local police between majority and minority groups, as well as among different minority groups (Wu, 2014). Focal dependent variables were problem-solving, hassling, and racial profiling, whereas independent variables included race, ethnicity, demographic attributes, experiences with the police and crime-related events, fear of crime, and neighbourhood characteristics. Using data from the Seattle Neighbourhoods and Crime Survey (SNCS) from 2002-2003 (n= 2,200), it was concluded that Black Americans held more negative views on police problem-solving, harassment, and racial profiling (Wu, 2014). Hispanics and Asian Americans occupied an in-between position, displaying less police criticism than Black Americans and more criticism than White Americans, and White Americans displayed the most trust in the police (Wu, 2014). However, Hispanics and Asian Americans differed in their perceptions of police bias and discrimination, highlighting that higher percentages of Hispanic respondents believe that police treat wealthy people better than poor,

White citizens better than Black citizens and Hispanic citizens, and English-speaking people better than non-English-speaking people (Wu, 2014). These findings generally align with existing literature highlighting how race and ethnicity can contribute to disparities in trust in the police (Cao, 2014; Murphy & McPherson, 2022; Hu et al., 2015; Meeusen et al., 2024), highlighting the importance of understanding these factors when addressing trust in law enforcement.

Likewise, Cao (2014) examined the influence of Aboriginal status on confidence in the police in Canada, which was analyzed using data from the General Social Survey (GSS) on Victimization (2009). The study used a 6-item index to measure the dependent variable confidence in the local police force, focusing on independent variables such as if the police: enforced laws, were responsive, were approachable, cared about neighbourhood safety and treated people fairly. Aboriginal participants consistently reported drastically lower levels of confidence in local police compared to non-Aboriginal respondents, with the largest gap observed in their perception of police fairness, even after controlling for variables such as age, education, and income (Cao, 2014). These findings emphasize the historical gap in trust between Aboriginal communities and their local police force, with Cao suggesting that broader systemic racism is a likely contender in the mistreatment of Aboriginal individuals by police (2014). This is consistent with the findings of other scholars, such as Alberton et al. (2020), and David & Mitchell (2021), who have also emphasized the impact of institutional bias on shaping trust in law enforcement. Overall, this study emphasizes the need for continued police reform to improve the treatment of and relationships between the police and Aboriginal groups in Canada (Cao, 2014).

Trends in intersected discrimination and its impact during the COVID-19 pandemic have indicated notable disparities between different religious and ethnic groups in Iraq. A study by Kira et al. (2022) explored the effects of intersected discrimination and discrimination types on COVID-19, mental health, and cognition. The research took place in two sites: Baghdad and the regions of Northern Iraq, including Diyala and Sulaymaniyah, where participants had been exposed to the psychological and economic stressors of war with ISIS before the pandemic began (Kira et al., 2022). Utilizing data from a sample of 542 Iraqis, aged 18 to 73, and consisting of 264 Muslims and 278 Christians, the study aimed to investigate the dependent variable effects of COVID-19 stressors on a 5-point Likert scale, with the independent variables including but not limited to: collective identity trauma (discrimination and oppression), personal identity trauma (early childhood trauma), and status identity/achievement trauma (failed business or school drop-out), which all intersected with the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on health and wellbeing (Kira et al., 2022). While the study did not specifically measure the severity of discrimination, it revealed that Christians, particularly those who had experienced religious discrimination, had significantly higher existential anxiety regarding status and death, or genocidal discrimination, compared to Muslims (Kira et al., 2022). The findings highlight that while the rates of infection and death from COVID-19 were disproportionately high among minorities, the intersection of ethnic and religious discrimination alongside the pandemic's

stressors exacerbated the impact on participants' health (Kira et al., 2022). More specifically, the authors point out that Christians faced heightened stressors linked to economic disparities, lockdowns, and existential fears of death. The study emphasizes that addressing the impact of intersected discrimination, particularly genocidal discrimination, should be a focus for future research (Kira et al., 2022).

While Kira et al. (2022) examined religious discrimination during COVID-19, Boateng (2016) explores the ways education may influence levels of trust in the police across different neighbourhoods in urban areas of Ghana utilizing these two questions: Why do some neighbourhoods trust the police more than other neighbourhoods? What makes a person living in a specific neighbourhood to have more or less trust in the police, controlling for the person's personal views? These questions were tested for using the dependent variable trust in the police, and the independent variables included aggregate level of education, fear of crime, neighbourhood disorder, and aggregate income. The study's target population included individuals aged 18 years and above living in urban areas of Ghana, with data collected through a multi-stage cluster sampling method to ensure proper representation. The research involved five highly heterogeneous regions: Ashanti, Greater Accra, Central, Eastern, and Volta. From these regions, 250 households were randomly selected, and participants were chosen using the "birthday method," where the individual with the next upcoming birthday within the household was selected (Boateng, 2016). Findings from the study indicated significant variations in the levels of trust. The results revealed that neighbourhood levels of education influenced how citizens perceived the police. Participants who lived in neighbourhoods where the majority of the residents had a highly educated background were more likely to show greater confidence in the police (Boateng, 2016). The author suggests that this may be due to well-planned neighbourhoods with developed infrastructure and robust security services, ultimately leading to lower crime rates and fewer negative police interactions, whereas those who possessed lower educational attainments, and therefore poorer neighbourhoods, reported less confidence in the police (Boateng, 2016). Overall, this study emphasizes that individuals' trust in the police is not solely shaped by their personal experiences or views, but instead, it is heavily influenced by the characteristics of the neighbourhoods in which they live (Boateng, 2016).

Additionally, Madon (2018) conducted a study investigating the relationship between age and confidence in the police in Canada, challenging the previously assumed linear connection between age and attitudes toward law enforcement. Using data from the General Social Survey (GSS) on Victimization 2009, the study focused on a dependent variable measuring respondents' opinions on whether they believed the police were doing "a good job," "an average job," or "a poor job" (Madon, 2018). Key independent variables included visible minority status, feelings of safety at night, and contact with the police. The results indicated that the relationship between age and confidence in the police was not strictly linear as previously thought by scholars such as Sindall et al., (2017). Instead, the study found that younger individuals aged 15-17 generally held more positive views of the police, but confidence declined quickly between the ages of 18-24, before increasing again in ages 25 and above (Madon, 2018). Moreover, participants who felt

safe in their neighbourhoods were more likely to view the police positively, whereas those with more frequent contact with the police, particularly through personal involvement, tended to have more negative views of the police (Madon, 2018). Madon theorizes that the differences in confidence are due to more negative interactions with the police during adolescence, such as at parties, while a more positive relationship develops as individuals enter adulthood (Madon, 2018).

Finally, Pickering et al. (2024) examined gender's influence on police trust in London, England, with this leading question: What factors influence respondents' specific trust in policing in England and in London specifically? Data from a 15-month study from July 2022 to September 2023, where respondents from across England were asked to rate their trust in the police on a seven-point scale, with 1 indicating not at all, and 7 meaning completely. This study identified several independent variables, including age, whether the respondents lived in London or other regions, and whether the respondents aligned with political conservatism or not. The control variables included ethnicity and personal income (Pickering et al., 2024). Results indicated that trust in the police was significantly lower in London compared to other regions in England, with London women reporting much lower trust in police than London men. (Pickering et al., 2024). This was a notable shock to the researchers, as prior literature, such as Kamas and Preston (2021) indicates higher levels of trust between women and their local police force. Pickering et al. (2024) note that trust in the police is both context and geographically dependent, with London women's lack of trust seemingly rooted in the exposure of over 1,000 officers being suspended or placed on restricted duties for various nonconsensual allegations. Ultimately, the authors argue that rebuilding trust in the police requires addressing both systemic issues within the London Police and the broader societal factors that influence perceptions of law enforcement.

Current Study

This quantitative study aims to investigate the research question: *Does being a visible minority influence trust in the police while considering the control variables of religious discrimination since COVID-19, highest level of education, age, and gender?*

The dependent variable of my study is "confidence in the police". It will be compared against my independent variables, including "visible minority," "religious discrimination since COVID-19," "highest degree," "age," and "gender". The hypothesized statements for this study are as follows:

- I expect those who identify as a visible minority to report less confidence in the police than those who are not a visible minority.
- I expect those who have experienced religious discrimination since COVID-19 to report less confidence in the police than those who have not.
- As education increases, I expect one's confidence in the police will also increase.
- People who are older will report higher confidence in the police than those who are younger.

- I expect that women will report less confidence in the police than men.

The data utilized in this study comes from the 2020 General Social Survey (GSS) on Social Identity, a cross-sectional survey that collects information on social trends, living conditions, and emerging interests in social policy issues within Canada (Statistics Canada, 2020).

Methods

Data and sample

The 2020 General Social Survey (GSS) is a statistical survey analyzing the social identity of Canadians. Two primary objectives guided this dataset: 1) To gather data on social trends to observe changes in the living conditions and well-being of Canadians; and 2) To gather immediate information on specific social policy issues of current emerging interests (Statistics Canada, 2020). This cross-sectional survey design, meaning that researchers collected data from participants at one point in time, utilizes a multi-stage random sampling design (Dim, 2025). This type of sampling leads to a randomly selected sample of individuals, but does not require the initial listing of all individuals in the city's population, and uses different sampling techniques at different stages of a complex population (Dim, 2025). The sampling frame was divided into two to account for visible minorities within the Canadian population.

The first sampling frame uses the Statistics Canada Dwelling Universe File (DUF) to locate household addresses to contact by mail and telephone. This was used to produce accurate estimates at the provincial level and initiate contact with the research participants (Statistics Canada, 2020). Canadian households were randomly selected from the DUF, and every household member over the age of 15 was given a number and ordered amongst the other participants. From there, one person was selected randomly from the household using the age-order method. This selection method is based on the number of eligible members in the household and the ordered age of each member (Statistics Canada, 2020).

The second frame utilized was the oversampling frame to ensure that visible minorities were represented accurately. The sample design for the oversample of visible minorities was a stratified two-stage random sample. This utilizes the 2016 long-form Census of Population (Statistics Canada, 2020). Households included in the oversample required all members of the household to be consistent with the same visible minority. The six visible minority groups of interest, alongside the provinces, formed the initial strata that were then divided into six additional strata based on a three-category income variable and a two-category education variable, totalling 229 strata (Statistics Canada, 2020). In the first stage of data collection, households were randomly selected, and in the second stage, one person was selected from within the household using the age-order selection method highlighted above. The selection algorithm was influenced by the number of eligible members in the household and the ordered age of each member (Statistics Canada, 2020).

The original sample included 34,044 participants, with 19,473 in the regular sampling frame and 15,571 in the oversampling frame (Statistics Canada, 2020). Due to the recoded variables and analysis specific to this research project, the final sample size is smaller than

Measures

Dependent variable

The variables used in this study are derived from the 2020 General Social Survey (GSS) Cycle 35: Social Identity. The dependent variable for this study is confidence in institutions - police. Similar to Pass et al. (2020), I am including the variable trust in the police to represent the attitudes of visible minorities and those who have experienced religious discrimination. This study measured trust in the police as the likeliness that an individual believes they are going to encounter a positive experience or behaviour from officers in situations that involve risk or uncertainty (Pass et al., 2020). Although this study uses a similar survey and telephone methodology used by the authors Cao (2014), Madon (2018), Pass et al. (2020), Pickering et al. (2024), and Wu (2014), this study conceptualizes respondents' trust in police by measuring a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "1," i.e., no confidence at all, to "5," i.e., a great deal of confidence in the police.

Independent variables

This study will examine the independent focal variable visible minority. Seeing as one's social standing can influence their interactions with institutions such as the police, as seen in Cao (2014) and Wu's (2014) research, this variable will be measured on whether the respondent identifies as (1) South Asian, (2) Chinese, (3) Black, (4) Filipino, (5) Latin American, (6) Arab, (7) Southeast Asian, (8) West Asian, (9) Korean and Japanese, (10) other visible minority, or (11) not a visible minority as taken from the 2020 GSS data set.

The second independent focal variable is labelled beginning of COVID-19 - reasons discrim. - religion. As mentioned by Kira et al. (2022), religious discrimination involves treating a person unfairly because of their religious beliefs or identity. This variable is similar to how Kira et al. (2022) compared religious discrimination to war. While the global pandemic and war are different events, they both had significant impacts on broader social influence and discrimination. The categories measured include a (1) "yes" or (2) "no" question when the respondent was asked if they had experienced discrimination or been treated unfairly by others in Canada since the beginning of COVID-19.

The control variable labelled highest degree will also be examined. This variable is measured with the following categories set out in the 2020 GSS data set: (1) high school diploma or a high school equivalency certificate, (2) trade certificate or diploma, (3) college, CEGEP or other non-university certificate or diploma, (4) university certificate or diploma below the bachelor's level, (5) Bachelor's degree (e.g. B.A, B.Sc), and (6) University certificate, diploma or degree above the bachelors.

This study will also investigate the control variable age. It is labelled as age group of respondents (groups of 10) and was defined in the data set as follows: (1) 15-24 years, (2) 25-34 years, (3) 35-44 years, (4) 45-54 years, (5) 55-64 years, (6) 65-74 years, and (7) 75 years and older.

Finally, the control variable labelled gender (2) after the distribution of the non-binary person is used to measure the categories female and male. As specified in the 2020 GSS data set, the non-binary population is so small that risks of respondent confidentiality are high. This resulted in a two-category gender variable being used. In this case, people in the category 'non-binary person' are distributed in the other two gender categories (Statistics Canada, 2022). The gender variable is measured as (1) Women+ and (2) Men+ in the data set.

Plan of analysis

To properly analyze my variables, depending on their level of measurement, the mean, range, and standard deviation will be examined (Dim, 2025). Due to this variable being treated as continuous, its dispersion will also have to be considered by calculating the range and standard deviation of the responses (Dim, 2025). This would explain the measure of variance around the mean of the variable. Seeing as the variable age (groups of 10) is treated as continuous, it will also be analyzed with the methods mentioned above.

Moreover, the independent nominal variables of gender and religious discrimination since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic are dichotomous levels of measurement, meaning that these variables should be examined using the mode and valid percentage (Dim, 2025). The focal independent variable, visible minority, will be treated as nominal and recoded into eight categories. The same logic applied to religious discrimination since the beginning of COVID-19 and gender will apply to this variable's analysis. Lastly, the ordinal variable highest degree will be recoded into 4 categories. Seeing as it is an ordinal variable with 4 categories, the valid percentage will be examined (Dim, 2025). To analyze how the focal independent variable (visible minority) influences the dependent variable (confidence in the police), an ANOVA test will be conducted. This test will be used to compare means across variables with 2+ categories, and deals with variance between groups (how large the mean differences are between groups) and within groups (how large the differences in an outcome are for people within the same group) (Dim, 2025). To test if the group means are truly different after the ANOVA test is conducted, a second test, labelled the post-hoc test, or a test of multiple comparisons, will have to be conducted. This test will specifically be using the Tukey HSD test, which compares the means of each group with others and tells us which ones are different from each other (Dim, 2025).

A t-test will be conducted to test the relationship between the dependent variable (confidence in the police) among those who have experienced religious discrimination since the beginning of COVID-19. The t-test is suitable as the dependent variable will be treated as continuous, whereas the independent variable is nominally dichotomous. This test is used to determine whether there is a statistically significant difference between the means in two unrelated groups by testing the difference between two group means (Dim, 2025).

For examining the relationship between confidence in the police and age a Pearson's r test will be utilized. This is applicable seeing as the variable confidence in the police contains 5 categories and age (groups of 10) contains 7 categories, making them both continuous. Pearson's

r test will examine the sign of the coefficient and will indicate the strength, magnitude, and direction of the relationship between these two variables (Dim, 2025).

For testing the differences between variables confidence in the police and gender, a t-test will be conducted. This is applicable because the variable confidence in the police is continuous and gender is dichotomous, meaning it only has 2 categories. The t-test will reveal if there is a statistically significant difference between the means in two unrelated groups (Dim, 2025),

Lastly, the relationship between the dependent variable confidence in the police and the independent variable highest degree will be tested using an ANOVA test. This is applicable because the dependent variable mentioned above is continuous, and the independent variable highest degree is ordinal with 4 categories. An ANOVA test is most useful as it will reveal if at least two of the categories in the variable highest degree have statistically significant differences in means and a post-HOC Tukey test will reveal how the categories within this variable may vary (Dim, 2025).

Results

Descriptive and bivariate results

Multivariate results

Conclusions and Limitations

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