



## CREATING A POSITIVE IMAGE OF A POLICE OFFICER IN THE MINDS OF CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS IN THE UNITED STATES

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### ABSTRACT

The article raises the question of the attitude of modern society (especially young people and adolescents) to law enforcement agencies; analyze research data on the relationship of American youth with police officers. First of all, the degree of trust in the police differs among young people of different groups depending on age, race (ethnicity), place of residence, education, the standard of living, political orientation; provides examples of positive cooperation between police officers and students in schools and colleges. Concluded that the formation of a positive image of a police officer in the minds of young people is impossible without establishing a relationship of trust between the police and young Americans.

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**KEYWORDS:** American police, Adolescents, Degree of trust, Positive image of a police officer

In modern society, there is a rather contradictory attitude towards police officers. In the minds of some citizens, a steadily negative attitude towards people in police uniform has recently formed [1]. Not an exception in this regard and The United States, but due to recent events (racial unrest over police actions against racial minorities due to the death of African-American George Floyd after severe police detention), which today can be assessed as a true tragedy of the American police when for the first time in the history of the United States, the attitude of Americans towards the police became such that calls for the elimination of this law enforcement institution became more explicit, clear, and often heard. And this although for a long time the attitude of Americans towards the police was quite respectful and even awe. Several experts claim a coordinated media attack on law enforcement agencies, which led to sheriffs and heads of municipal police departments leaving their

posts in several states of their own free will or under pressure from demonstrators and liberal politicians. In some regions, police departments are closing or reducing their funding. It all started with Minneapolis, and now it has reached millennial cities – San Francisco Mayor London Breed announced police reform. And the New York City Council supported a one-fifth reduction in the police budget, equal to one billion dollars a year. At the same time, a draft on deep police, reform has already been prepared in Congress, which guides law enforcement officers to „use a minimum amount of force” and also involves the abolition of immunity protecting police officers, the creation of a national policy control system, which in our opinion will mean a decrease in the ability of the police to withstand crime.

In this context, several politicians declare the loss of confidence of law enforcement officials on the part of citizens, but this opinion is not shared by all Amer-

icans. Despite the heated discussion, polls show that more than 50% of Americans are satisfied with the work of the police (only 16% – dissatisfied). Civil society, therefore, has a long way to go towards consensus. The White House has already spoken quite unequivocally. Donald Trump noted that the police allow the country to „live in peace“, and „99% of employees are excellent people“. Therefore, there will be no cutting off finances, much less dissolution, the US president assured.

At the moment, the formation of a positive image of a police officer in the eyes of most Americans is one of the significant tasks of state power [2]. It does not require proof that in a democratic and legal state, as the United States is, the police in the conduct of their activities must ensure the trust and support of citizens. This provision applies fully to young Americans. However, there are multiple problems in this area. So only in early September, several resonant reports were published in the American media at once about the police exceeding their powers about minors. In particular, in Salt Lake City, a police officer shot several times at a 13-year-old teenager with autism, who due to a nervous breakdown, began to threaten passersby. And such cases of the misuse of weapons against minors are not isolated.

American researchers and rating agencies (Associated Press, the National Center for the Study of Public Opinion at the University of Chicago, etc.) regularly measure the rating of society's attitude to police officers, including among young people. Such activities are important because to restore confidence and build a positive image of policing in the eyes of children and adolescents, it is initially necessary to understand what causes (positive or negative) attitudes of young people towards law enforcement agencies. Studying opinion polls can help to reveal not only what young people think about the police, but also why they think so, which in turn should help police departments and legislators develop policies to improve police-community relations.

According to these Bureaus of statistics of justice of the USA (BJS), in 2019 more than 33.4 million inhabitants at the age of 16 years are also more senior at least once asked for help in the police. And only 18.2% were the share of inhabitants aged from 16 up to 24 years. Young people less than elderly people, contact the police for such help. Most often, these addresses were connected with the message about a crime/disorder/suspicious activity, with the subsequent message about the emergency which isn't connected with a crime or for other reasons. However, to say that most young Americans are negative to

police is not quite reasonable. The answer to a question undertakes a key indicator in sociological polls: whether you report to police about crime by the eyewitness of which you accidentally became. Results of polls show that young Americans from 16 to 24 years will contact more likely to police, than representatives of any other age group.

Also, researches show that the trust degree to police differs among the youth of different groups depending on age, race (ethnic origin), place of residence, education, standard of living, and political orientation [3]. So 69% of the young Americans living in suburbs are positive to police, also, as well as 60% of residents of the cities and 61% of inhabitants of rural areas.

In general, nearly 6 of 10 young Americans highly appreciate the local police for compliance with the law (59%), protection against violent crimes (56%), and a quick response to a call for help (56%). A little less (50%) highly appreciate the local police for disclosure of crimes.

White young Americans about 20% more often than the African-Americans and 10-15% more often than Latin Americans, highly appreciate the efficiency of the local police departments.

About 60% of white teenagers consider that the police effectively protect people from crimes, only 38% of the African-Americans and 49% of natives of Latin America agrees with it. In the same way, about 6 of 10 white young Americans consider that police give well potentially dangerous situations. Compliance with the law and quickly react, in comparison with 4 of 10 black and less than half of young Latin Americans.

About a quarter (27%) of the young Americans report that they had an experience when the police officer protected them or members of their families in potentially dangerous situations. It is quite expected that young people who gave such information 16 times more often report about the positive opinion on police, than those who have no such experience.

In one of the conducted researches trying to understand how the nature of contacts of youth with police influences the relation to police was also made. Positive contacts were found (i.e. in what police officers give to youth a certain help) improve reviews of police while negative experiences (i.e. connected with obligations of law enforcement agencies) hurt the attitude towards police officers.

Among African-American youth, more respondents point to „cruelty of police“ and racial discrimination. So, data from polls of young representatives of ethnic minorities show that concern about their

safety at a stop about their police patrol on the street ranks second in the list of the questions concerning African-American youth. Representatives of this group report that they are stopped more often than white and Latin American teenagers [4].

As for the experience and perception of the American youth, it is illegal the behavior of police, approximately, every fifth young American notes that police officers used offensive language (17%) in a conversation with him. At the same time, 21% of respondents noted that they are familiar with the facts when their friends or acquaintances were exposed to physical or psychological abuse from police.

Also, young Americans aren't convinced of the honesty of most police officers. Nearly half of respondents (49%) consider that „most police officers consider that they are higher than the law”, and 51% don't agree. Perception strongly differs depending on race and ethnic origin, income, and ideological preferences.

Young Americans are more concerned than members of other age groups about the dangers associated with the use of drones by police. Sixty percent (60%) are concerned by the fact that drones can intrude in their private life. Also, the American youth considers that the police in the USA are excessively militarized. About 54% of young Americans consider that the police using a military weapon and armored vehicles „go too far”, and only 46% say that these tools „are necessary for the law-enforcement purposes”.

In one of the last reports of Management of juvenile justice and prevention of offenses, the relation of the American youth to reform of police and activities on improvement of the relations of local managements of police with the communities are analyzed with the communities. At the same time many young Americans expressed an opinion that responsibility for the tense relations between police and youth is born by teenagers as the most part doesn't show due respect for the law and its performers and therefore, first of all, young Americans have to improve their behavior. For example, one of the respondents noted „It is possible to present how many deaths or injuries law enforcement officers could prevent if the suspect among youth and teenagers, showed more respect for the officer, obeyed his instructions and didn't try to resist arrest or to run. We need to better support our officers, but not to try to protect criminals”.

We represent data from the specified poll on the relationship of youth with police in fig. 1.

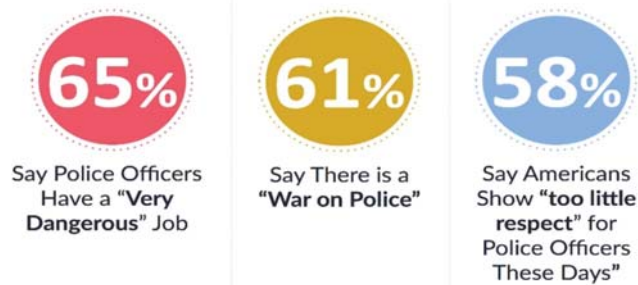


Fig. 1. The relationship of youth with the police

The data presented in the figure show that two-thirds (65%) of young respondents say that police officer has „very dangerous” work, 30% believe that working in the police is „somewhat dangerous”, and only 5% believe that their work is not very dangerous.

Most young Americans (58%) believe that today young people „have too little respect” for the police. Only the third believe that young people and adolescents respect and trust the police. Some of the respondents surveyed do not see systemic problems in the work of the police. At the same time, young Americans praise local law enforcement agencies for complying with the law (59%), using appropriate force (58%), courtesy (57%), honesty (57%), protecting people from violent crimes (56%), equal treatment of all racial groups (56%), quick response to the call for help (56%) and care for the local community (55%).

Most representatives of American youth believe that in the modern period there is a confrontation between the police and young people.

The White young Americans are more likely than African-Americans to say that people do not respect the police enough (64% versus 34%) and believe that there is a confrontation between youth and the police (64% versus 46%). Latin American youth occupy an intermediate position between the greatest (45%), who say that the police are not properly respected, and the small majority (52%), who believe that there is a war with the police. On the contrary, most young African-Americans say that there is no war with the police (54%) and that officers are duly respected (54%).

Representatives of different ethnic youth groups express different views on the relationship with the police [5]. They differ on the effectiveness, impartiality, honesty, empathy, tactics, and responsibility of the police. Their views differ in part because Hispanic, Black, and White Americans report many personal and indirect experiences with police officers. For example, some groups are more likely to report verbal or physical abuse by officers. Taken together, these disparate perceptions and described experiences create a deep gap in favor of law enforcement agencies.

However, many ignore the agreement between these groups. Americans, regardless of race and ethnicity, agree on what the police should be and what reforms should be carried out.

Blacks, whites, and Hispanics agree on the main priorities of law enforcement, the maintenance of the current level of police presence in their communities, and the dangers inherent in the work of the police. Most Hispanic, white and black Americans also support various police reforms: more training, nocturnal cameras, citizen warnings about stops and searches, and independent investigations of alleged police misconduct. Similarly, most young Americans oppose a variety of possible police practices: racial profiling, the usual use of combat weapons and armored vehicles, pretext stops of vehicles to search for drugs without a warrant, confiscation of personal and private property before a person is found guilty of a crime (civil property confiscation), the use of profanity by officers. Most also support the decriminalization of drug-related offenses from criminal offenses to civil charges. This change can improve the interaction between the police and young people.

As is known with teenagers in the United States, two types of police officers most often interact with patrol and school assistants who investigate criminal complaints about offenses committed at school work with students who violate the law. For the latter to succeed, students must trust the police. A fairly positive experience in the interaction of young people and police officers is available in Chicago, where a youth police project (Y/PP) has been implemented for several years. As part of this project, a report study was published, „How does Chicago's ethnic youth perceive the police?“ The essence of the project is that its participants (high school students, college students, and police officers) must interact with at least five hours of school time during the school year. This considerable amount of time contributes to stabilizing the relationship between the project participants and building the trust that is necessary for mutual responsibility.

During meetings held by police officers at school with adolescents, an attempt is made to establish a dialogue with at-risk adolescents. To increase the confidence of young people in the police, painstaking and long-term work is necessary because trust is possible only if police officers have high professionalism, qualified professional training, appropriate cultural and legal level, and the development of personal moral and moral qualities. Appropriate training should be acquired in the course of training at educational institutions of the USA police academy system.

The priority qualities in which it is possible to solve the problem of building the trust of young Americans in police officers is communication, the ability to empathy, and understanding other people.

The positive image of the policeman is due to expectations of manifestations of intelligence, honesty, justice, decency. Police officers are expected to make fair decisions, from the perspective of the younger generation, ensuring the protection of rights, property, and personal security.

In the psychological context, evaluation, the formation of a positive image, as a rule, occurs on an unconscious, intuitive level through the perception of facial expressions, intonation, gestures. When creating a positive image of a policeman, the expectations of youth are such characteristics as assembly, determination, courage, the ability to make the right decisions, initiative, lack of rudeness, indifference, formalities, extortion, violence.

The most important role in the formation of public opinion, in particular, the formation of both a positive and negative image of a modern police officer is played by the media (media), which have a direct impact on the perception of information. However, the result of such influence does not contribute in all cases to the formation of a positive image of a police officer but often has the opposite, opposite effect [6]. Thus, some television programs designed to cover the criminal chronicle broadcast high-profile crimes related to corruption scandals, abuse of official position, bureaucratic bribery, traffic accidents involving police officers, and others. This kind of information, as well as the lack of an objective assessment of what is happening, again undermines the authority of police officers and is reflected negatively in the minds of young Americans. The campaign that the media are actively conducting against the American police today does not help to increase the positive image of the policeman. When television and news programs broadcast only negative stories with the participation of police officers, and do not talk about the real work against crime carried out by police throughout America. Journalists do not tell or show reports about the heroic actions of the police.

The media is a powerful tool for shaping and changing the image, which is currently used very irrationally. The use of the Internet has great potential in solving this problem. To change the existing opinion, it is necessary, first of all, to receive new information. In the context of the wide information of modern society, the Internet is the easiest and most accessible channel for disseminating information [7].

The final report of the 21st century Presidential

Police Task Force states that the mission of law enforcement agencies is „to build trust between citizens and their peacekeepers, to ensure that all components of the community treat each other fairly and share in the maintenance of law and order, public security and act in an atmosphere of mutual respect“ [8]. One of the keys to building confidence in the police in local communities is better relations between law enforcement agencies and young people.

It should be noted that the image of a policeman in modern American society has its historical characteristics. It reflected existing traditions, customs, morals, culture, and way of life, as well as perceptions of the population, including youth about the work of the police. The lack of legal awareness of police officers leads to the fact that they often use their official position for personal purposes, and in some cases violations of the law. None of the existing institutions is as negative as the police, so the population places increased demands on them. Deviation from the reference representations causes a negative assessment of the population, including youth. This is because police officers in the eyes of society are representatives of the law and therefore are obliged to respect and protect the rights and freedoms of a person and citizen. In mass consciousness, a stereotypical image of a police officer has developed, steadily associated with stereotypes of mass consciousness about the negative social qualities of a policeman. This stereotype is supported by historical attitudes, media, artistic images, and traditions in American society. Therefore, the main task is to create circumstances for the effective creation of social order for certain positive characteristics of a police officer, such as a high degree of culture, honesty, education, decency, legal and professional training. Of course, the established, negative image of the policeman needs to be changed in the direction of increasing confidence between the police and young citizens.

How law enforcement agencies control young people is critical to building trust. To this end, the youth-oriented police can use a structure of six main elements:

- Building confidence and legitimacy;
- Policy and supervision;
- Internet technologies and social networks;
- Public policy and crime reduction;
- Education and education (legal education);
- Improving the efficiency of the service of security and welfare officers in educational institutions.

The task force report notes that citizens, including young people, are more likely to „obey the law

if they believe that those who use it have the power they have under the law.

When it comes to engaging young people, law enforcement agencies must find many ways to encourage staff to build trust and legitimacy among young people. Officers should demonstrate the mentality of the „keeper“, not the „warrior“. This is achieved through prevention, which contributes to the formation of a positive image of a policeman in the eyes of American youth interaction between young people and the police [9].

Clarence Cox, Chief of Public School Safety and Security at Clayton County, Georgia explains how his staff participates in student mentoring throughout the year: „We speak, share, care, and show respect for young people. We emphasize that to gain the confidence of our youth, they need to know that the police care for the community they serve.“

Politics is another powerful strategy that can be used to improve youth-oriented policing. Local police policies should reflect the values of the local community. Communities should seek to develop policies and strategies to reduce crime and improve relationships and interactions with young people.

Law enforcement authorities can work with local schools to develop policies that help reduce juvenile delinquency.

The report prepared by the Justice Center of the Council of State Governments confirmed that the role of school security and welfare officers is not only about enforcing school discipline. In a policy statement, the report said: „Educators and school officials do not urge officers to respond to minor student misconduct that can be appropriately addressed as part of the school's disciplinary process, and officers use their discretion to minimize arrests for these offenses when possible“.

The use of Internet technologies makes it possible to better engage young people and improve communication. One of the rapidly changing technologies is social networks. Police agencies use tools such as creating their own Facebook page and posting on Twitter information containing details that can be missed by the main media. Since young people often feel more comfortable than adults in using social networks, participating in these media, law enforcement agencies can use methods of communication with young people, which allow police departments to provide the necessary information, as well as collect information about the state and level of crime.

Protection of public order is to work with residents of the community, including youth, to ensure public safety. For youth-oriented policing, this means in-

volving young people in the process of public security, including their opinions on the problems facing the community, as well as in joint solutions to problems. Some law enforcement agencies are making more conscious efforts to attract young people as department volunteers to interest them in the future of the community.

As part of efforts to reduce and prevent youth delinquency in Rockland County, New York, the District Attorney, together with the Chief of Police and other county police departments launched the Youth and Police Initiative (YPI), an eight-day dialogue program for breaking the stereotypes of young people and police officers, developing mutual respect and starting a long-term positive relationship.

Law enforcement officials and leaders should be retrained and trained on a wide range of youth-related issues, including how to engage young people positively in cooperation with the police, how to de-escalate conflicts in the youth environment, understanding the mental development of young people, the impact of trauma and other mental health problems, cultural differences among young people and much more.

For example, the Montgomery County Police Department (Maryland) provides a 40-hour training course that teaches the resolution of incidents involving persons (including youth) with mental illness, malformations, co-morbidities (drug addiction, alcoholism, substance abuse), as well as traumatic brain injuries.

All members of the Montgomery County Police Department are required to complete a special training course to familiarize themselves with the district's resources available to young people in crises.

One of the significant areas of activity of security and welfare officers in educational institutions is the improvement of relations with young people and adolescents. So in the Vancouver Police Department (Washington), open seminars and webinars are regularly held at which, through role-playing games and simulation situations, young Americans get the opportunity to experience the process of decision-making under pressure and ways to diffuse a tense situation. The officers then discuss with the youth what they observed and felt if they perceived the threats, and how and why they made certain decisions during the given scenario. Such forms of communication are in demand among representatives of the younger generation and allow young people to understand what situations officers have to deal with security and well-being in educational institutions. Such awareness contributes to increased security in educational institutions and on the streets.

Building trust between the police and young people in communities is an essential task for law enforcement in the twenty-first century. Today, it is necessary to more actively introduce practical-oriented programs for young people into the work of the police, which at the same time can become one of the areas of prevention of juvenile offenses. This approach will pay off now and even more so in the future.

If we are to contain crime and effectively carry out prevention, fundamental fragmentation, and destruction of the barriers of apathy and mistrust are necessary so that a constructive partnership can be forged. Trust is the value that lies at the heart of the public partnership; it allows the police to establish closer relations with the community. Without trust between the police and young people, effective policing is impossible.

In conclusion, I would like to summarize that the creation of a positive image of a police officer is directly related to the formation of a high-quality image of a person wearing a police uniform. This process, on the one hand, is a comprehensive long-term program of influence on the consciousness of citizens, for increasing public confidence in law enforcement officials through the media; however – awareness by the police of the social significance of their profession, its effectiveness, and prestige, clear adherence to the laws, as well as the work of the government to give right qualified professional training, constantly improving the level of legal culture through seminars, training, and advanced training.

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