

# **‘The relationship between social capital and trust in the police’**

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Using data from Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Survey in the Netherlands, this study aims to test the contribution of intergroup contact theory and social capital theory on explaining the relationship between social capital and trust in the police. The central question was: How does social capital influence trust in the police among young people with and without a migration background in the Netherlands? To measure social capital respondents indicated the amount of friends from both majority and minority groups. Results from the regression analysis show that more interracial social capital has a positive effect on trust in the police for the minority group. In contrast interracial contact shows a negative effect on trust in the police among the majority group. Implications for theorization and research are discussed.

**Keywords:** social capital, police trust, minorities, interracial contact, prejudice

## **Introduction**

In the midst of a global pandemic the killing of George Floyd on the 25<sup>th</sup> of May 2020 sparked a wave of BLM (Black Liver Matter) protests around the world against police violence. Even though the movement developed itself in the United States, it now has supporters and sympathizers on a global scale. The killing of George Floyd while being in police custody enraged many people as this was yet another example for them that people of color are treated differently than white people. During this time there were strict regulations in terms of big public gatherings, which in most countries were forbidden in order to contain the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Despite these restrictions protests were held in over 60 countries on all seven continents, of which one took place on Dam Square in Amsterdam (NOS, 2020). Where hundreds were expected to join the protest, eventually thousands of people showed up. Authorities seemed to have underestimated the sentiments among the Dutch population on the topic of discrimination and racial profiling within the police department (Het Parool, 2020). This started a debate about how minorities in the Netherlands are treated and how their relationship with authorities and the police department is.

Generally minority groups have less trust in the police and law enforcement than people belonging to the majority group in the Netherlands (Weitzer & Tuch, 2002). Important is to find out what mechanisms explain people with a migration background having less trust in the police than those without a migration background. Many research has been done into the question how race and ethnic identity affects police trust (Tyler, 2005; Macdonald & Stokes, 2006; Wu, Sun, & Triplett, 2009; Lai & Zhao, 2010). Something that could positively influence the troubled relation between minorities and the police is increased interracial social capital. Research has shown that higher levels of interracial social capital positively influences trust in the police among minorities (Rothstein & Stolle, 2008; Sun, Hu & Wu, 2012). Social capital makes people familiarize with the workings of authorities and institutions, which in turn provides them with knowledge on how to influence policy (Putnam, 2000).

However, how social capital might influence trust in the police among young people with an immigration background has been relatively underexposed. Many studies have taken age into account when researching trust in the police, but not often has a complete sample of youth been studied on their attitudes towards the police.

Therefore the focus in this study will be on how social capital affects trust in the police and how this relationship differs between young people with and without a migration background.

## Literature review

One of the main goals of the police is to maintain public order, enforce the law, prevent, detect and investigate criminal activity (Walsh et. al, 2020). Research has shown that higher levels of social capital lead to reduced crime rates and improved trust in the police (Putnam, 2000). In order to study what the relationship is between social capital and trust in the police, it is important to describe what social capital exactly entails.

Putnam describes social capital as: *'features of social organizations, such as networks, norms, and trust, that facilitate action and cooperation for mutual benefit'* (Putnam, 1993 p. 35).

Research has found that depleted levels of social capital negatively influences trust in local police (MacDonald & Stokes, 2006). Although their results did not proof a moderating effect, community social capital was still found to be a significant predictor of trust in the police among black people (MacDonald & Stokes). Higher levels of social capital can reinforce norms within communities, which can then lead the reduced crime rates and higher levels of trust in the police (Hawdon, 2008). Hawdon (2008) argued that those with more social capital are more likely to feel like they are part of that social order that has been created and therefore feel involved in preserving this order.

Another important theory in explaining the obtention of social capital is Allport's contact theory (Allport, 1954). In his work he describes how optimal intergroup contact could lead to reduced intergroup prejudice. According to Allport (1954) the optimal conditions would be when there is equal group status within the situation, common goals, intergroup cooperation and authority support. However, later research has shown that positive intergroup contact can also be reached when only some of the conditions are met (Pettigrew, 1998).

Furthermore Pettigrew (1998) states that when intergroup contact results in friendship then this also creates the opportunity for reduced prejudice and perceptions of discrimination. A more surprising finding is that prejudice and perception of discrimination could actually be generalized towards other outgroups (Pettigrew, 2009). He discovered that contact with foreigners could not just lead to more favorable sentiments towards foreigner but also towards gay and homeless people. (Meleady, Crisp, Hodson & Earle, 2019)

This means that in practice it would be possible for minority members that are friends with majority members to also extend those reduced feelings of discrimination and prejudice towards another majority group like the police.

However, later research focused on a 'stimulus generalization gradient' (Harwood, Paolini, Joyce, Rubin, & Arroyo, 2010), which looks at to what degree the target group is similar to the secondary group. Their results show that the more similar the secondary group is to the

target group (the one that contact is made with), the more likely it is that reduced feelings of prejudice are generalized to the secondary group. Coming back to obtaining these contacts and friendships it is important to also take into account the mechanisms that lead to different forms of social capital. Within the framework of social capital theory, you can distinguish between two forms of social capital: bonding social capital and bridging social capital (Van Craen, 2013).

Bonding social capital refers to relationships and networks with similar groups, also called homogeneous relationships. Homogeneous can have multiple meanings of which some are: composed of parts or elements that are all of the same kind, not heterogeneous, of the same kind or nature; essentially alike. In social research it can then refer to groups with a common characteristic like ethnic identity, age, socio economic status, sex etc.

In his research Putnam (2000) states that bonding social capital is inward looking and leads to stronger ingroup loyalty. He also states that it could lead to out-group hostility, which would then be a negative effect of increased (in-group) social capital.

On the other hand there is bridging social capital, which refers to relationships and networks with different groups, also called heterogeneous relationships. Heterogeneous means the opposite of homogeneous, and refers to social relationships with people and groups that have a different characteristic (Putnam, 2000; Coffé & Geys, 2007, Van Craen, 2013). In contrast to bonding social capital, bridging social capital can have positive effects on out-group sentiments. Moreover Putnam states that bridging social networks are better than bonding social networks for information diffusion. This is particularly interesting for research on attitudes towards the police. Since groups might change their views on police when they make contact with other groups with more or less positive attitudes towards the police. In fact, other research has already shown that interracial contact can reduce perceptions of group discrimination among black people (Dixon et al., 2010; Northcutt & DeMaris, 2015). If the same mechanism would apply to attitudes towards the police then interracial contact might be effective in changing levels of trust in the police as well. Therefore the first hypothesis is the following: *'The more that people from the minority group are in contact with the majority group, the more trust they will have in the police'* (H1).

In research from Van Craen (2013) an attempt is made to connect bridging and bonding capital with trust in the police. He finds that bridging and bonding social capital do not have the same effect on trust in the police. The study focuses social capital derived from chatting with neighbours from either Turkish and Moroccan descent or from the majority group.

His study shows that bonding social capital has a negative effect on trust in the police for minority group members, meaning that chatting with neighbours from Turkish or Moroccan descent leads to lower levels of trust in the police among minority members. Surprisingly chatting with neighbours from Turkish or Moroccan descent among majority members (bridging social capital) has no significant effect on trust in the police (Van Craen). The negative effect for minority groups is not surprising, since Putnam already explained that through out-group interaction a foundation of trust is built between dissimilar individuals, while in-group interaction more often leads to confirmation of your own beliefs and experiences (Putnam, 2000). Van Craen explained the results by referring to previous findings in research on the information hypothesis. The main idea of this hypothesis is that ethnic composition of neighbourhoods could influence perceptions of discrimination through more accessible information on negative experiences from co-ethnic neighbours (Magee, Fong & Wilkes, 2007). However, this raises the question why in research from Van Craen these possible negative experiences of neighbours from Moroccan and Turkish descents only affects attitudes on the police among minority members and not among majority members.

Building on this knowledge the following is hypothesized: *'The more that people from the minority group are in contact with other minority members, the less trust minority members will have in the police.'* (H2).

Bridging social capital on the other hand had no effect on trust in the police for the majority group, while it has a positive effect on trust in the police for the minority group (Van Craen). From the perspective of interchanging experiences this seems rather surprising. One could expect that bridging social capital has a negative effect on trust in the police for majority group members. Since minority group members more often experience hostile behaviour from the police (Skogan, 1996; Lai & Zhao, 2010), which would therefore negatively impact the image majority group members have of the police. However, since research did not find concluding evidence for this mechanism the last hypothesis is: *'People from the majority group that are more in contact with the minority group, will not have less trust in the police than majority members who have less contact with the minority group.'* (H3)

## **Methods**

### *Data and selections*

For the purpose of this study data has been used from the research project ‘Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Survey in the Netherlands’ (CILSNL). CILSNL is a continuation of the cross-national project “Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Survey in Four European Countries” (CILS4EU) (Geven, Kalmijn & Van Tubergen, 2016). As the name states the study is part of an international study in four different European countries of which the Dutch study (CILSNL) is used for this research project (Van Tubergen & Kalmijn, 2009).

This longitudinal study started with the first wave in 2010 and ended with the seventh and final wave in 2017. The study used online questionnaires to reach participants.

The participants were approached based on their previous contribution to the longitudinal study between the first and third wave. For the purpose of this study only the data from wave 7 will be used. In total, 3,577 respondents participated in this wave. The majority filled out the questionnaire online (86.8%), while some participated through the telephone interview (13.2%). The overall response rate was 56.7% of the target sample. The invited response rates, which only included the participants who had not previously refused to participate in future waves, ended up at 67.7%. The sample selection contains a majority of people without an immigration background; 67.7 %. Furthermore, women are slightly overrepresented in the sample selection; 60% female and 40% male. The overall mean age is about 22 years old. (Geven, Kalmijn & Van Tubergen)

### *Operationalization dependent variable*

The dependent variable trust in the police is measured by using a question in which respondent are asked about the amount of trust they have in the police. The question can then be answered on a scale from 0 to 10, where a 0 stands for ‘No trust at all’ and a score of 10 stands for ‘A lot of trust’. The question is part of a more extensive question in which the respondent is asked to indicate the amount of trust they have in multiple groups. These groups are politician, lawyers, scientists, police officers and neighbours. The respondents that either did not answer the question, filled in ‘not applicable, were not asked the question during the interview or are missing for other reasons are recoded as missing. There are 35 missing for this variable, which makes a final N of 3526 respondents.

### *Operationalization independent variable*

The independent variable social capital is operationalized using a question about the respondents her or his friends. This question requires the respondent to indicate how many of their friends have a Dutch, Moroccan, Turkish, Antillean/Surinamese or other background.

The respondents had to then answer on a scale of 5 different categories how many of their friends were from these backgrounds. The categories from 1 to 5 are: 'Almost none/None', 'Some', 'About half', 'Many' and 'Almost all/All'. Since these categories do not contain numbers, it is up to the respondent to decide what each category exactly means to them. For research purposes it was decided not to recode the answer categories, because it could be argued that each category has a similar distance to the others. The questions about friends with a non-Dutch background were recoded into one variable which then contains the average score on the same five categories for the four nationalities: Moroccan, Turkish, Antillean/Surinamese or other non-Dutch. The Cronbach's alpha for these 4 variables is .68, which is an acceptable level of reliability. The respondents that either did not answer the question, filled in 'not applicable', were not asked the question during the interview or are missing for other reasons are again recoded as missing. With 38 missings the final N is 3523 respondents.

Migration background is operationalized using a question from wave 4, since wave 7 did not include a variable of which to derive information concerning the respondents' cultural background. The question that is used indicates whether the respondent feels like they belong to any of most common 13 ethnic groups in the Netherlands. The ones that answered not to belong to any other group were recoded as majority group, while the ones that answered to belong to any of the 13 ethnic groups or answer 'other group' were recoded as minority group. A score of 0 represents the majority group and a score of 1 represents the minority group. The mean on this question after recoding is .22, which is equal to 22% of the respondent belonging to the majority group and 68% belonging to the minority group. Due to overlapping datasets of wave 4 and wave 7 all the respondents of wave 7 that did not participate or answer the question for creating the variable migration background in wave 4 are excluded from the analysis. This results in 411 missings and a N of 3150.

### *Operationalization control variables*

On top of independent variable there will also be controlled for other factors that could influence the relationship between the independent and dependent variable.

The first variable that will be taken into the controlled regression is education. Previous studies have shown that those who are higher educated also have higher levels of trust in the police than those who are lower educated (Callanan & Rosenberger, 2011).

The question that is used to create this variable is: ‘What is the highest form of education that you have successfully finished with a diploma?’. The 12 possible answers on this question have a range from the lowest level in high school up to a university master. In order to create a more coherent order the categories are recoded into three main categories 1=lower education, 2= intermediate education and 3= tertiary education. These categories are in line with the standard educational classification in the Netherlands (CBS, 2021). The first category consists out of the levels: vmbo basis, vmbo kader, vmbo-t, vmbo-gt, mbo-level 1 and ‘no diploma’. The second category consists out of havo, vwo, mbo-level 2, mbo-level 3 and mbo level 3. The third category consists out of hbo-associate degree, hbo-propedeuse, hbo-bachelor, hbo-master, university bachelor and university master. There are 56 missings on this question which leaves a N of 3505 respondents.

The second variable that will be controlled for is sex. The question that will be used is: ‘Are you a man or woman?’. A score of 0 represents male and a score of 1 represents female. There are 18 missings on this question which leaves a N of 3543 respondents.

The third variable that is controlled for is having been the victim of an offense. The question that is used is: ‘Have you been the victim of any of the following offenses in the past 12 months?’. The five options are: ‘someone broke into your house’, ‘your bike got stolen’, ‘your phone, tablet or laptop got stolen’, ‘you have been physically attacked or threatened’ and ‘you have been scammed online’. A score of 0 means no and a score of 1 means yes. The score on this variable is the average score on these five question options. There are no missings on this question which leaves a N of 3561 respondents.

The fourth and last variable that is controlled for is having been an offender. The question that is used is: ‘Have you done any of the following things in the past 12 months?’. The six options are: ‘purposely broke something that was not yours’, ‘stole something from a store or person’, ‘carried a knife or weapon’, ‘hit or kicked someone’, ‘Pretended to be someone else online’ and ‘illegally downloaded software, music or movies’. A score of 0 means no and a score of 1 means yes. The score on this variable is the average score on these six question options. There are 45 missings on this question which leaves a N of 3516 respondents.

**Table 1. Descriptive statistics**

	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Maximum</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
<i>Independent variables</i>				
Dutch social capital	1.00	5.00	1.42	.51
Non-Dutch social capital	1.00	5.00	4.25	1.11
Migration background	.00	1.00	.22	.41
<i>Dependent variable</i>				
Police trust	1.00	10.00	6.89	1.67
<i>Control variables</i>				
Educational level	1.00	3.00	2.07	.50
Sex	.00	1.00	.61	.49
Offender	.00	1.00	.42	.40
Victim	.00	1.00	.21	.34

*Descriptive statistics*

The variable sex is unequally distributed, which in this case means that women are overrepresented in the sample. The educational level of the respondents is neither high or low with a mean of 2.07 out of 3. On the scale this would represent an intermediate educational level. However, most of the respondents are still in their early twenties. In this case some would maybe not have yet had the opportunity to finish a tertiary education.

Furthermore, respondents score an average of 6.89 out of 10 on police trust.

The mean score on non-Dutch social capital, based on the amount of friends with this background, is low with 1.42 on a scale of 1 to 5. This means that the average lies between the two categories of ‘Almost none/None’ and ‘Some’. The mean score on Dutch social capital, the amount of friends with a Dutch background, is low with 4.25 on a scale of 1 to 5. This means that the score lies between the two categories ‘Many’ and ‘Almost all/All’.

The variable offender has a mean of .42, which comes down to the respondents having been ‘guilty’ on 42% out of the six offenses on average. So out of the six previously described offenses the average lies right between two (33.33%) and three (50%) offenses in the past 12 months. This seems high, but it is important to keep in mind that these offenses consist out of petty crimes. Meaning that for most of these offenses they will not even be prosecuted.

The variable victim has a mean of .21, which comes down to the respondents having been the victim of 21% of the five ‘crimes’. So on average the respondents have been the victim on one of the five crimes in the past 12 months.

### *Analysis*

During the analysis multiple regressions will be run through the research program SPSS Statistics. First a multivariate regression will be performed to test the effect of the independent on the dependent variable separately for people with and without a migration background, so the effect of Dutch and non-Dutch social capital on trust in the police for people from the majority group and the minority group.

Afterwards a different regression with control variables will be added to the model to see how sex, educational level, offenses and victimization play a role in predicting trust in the police.

### **Results**

Table 2 shows the regression analysis of the independent variables on the dependent variable without controlling for sex, education, victim and offender. These coefficients show no real deviations from the more comprehensive linear regression. The explanatory power of both minority ( $R^2=.025$  vs  $R^2=0.33$ ) and majority ( $R^2=.117$  vs  $R^2=0.130$ ) models are larger in the linear regression with control variables than in the linear regression without control variables.

**Table 2. Linear regression with independent variables.**

	<b>Model 1(majority)</b>		<b>Model 2(minority)</b>	
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>
Constant	6.565	.308	5.810	.375
Dutch social capital	.205***	.048	.349***	.058
Non-Dutch social capital	-.306**	.094	-.415**	.129
R <sup>2</sup> (adjusted)	.025		.117	
<i>N</i>	2445		679	

\*\*\*  $p<.001$ , \*\*  $p<.01$ , \*  $p<.05$

*Dependent variable: trust in the police*

Table 3 shows the results from a linear regression model analysis. First the effects of Model 1 that applies to the majority group will be examined.

This model shows the effects of Dutch and non-Dutch social capital on trust in the police for people without a migration background. The results show that more contact with the majority group leads to more trust in the police among the majority group. Dutch social capital has a significant positive effect on trust in the police ( $b=.197, p<.001$ ).

On the other hand non-Dutch social capital has a significant negative effect on trust in the police among the majority group ( $b=-.283, p<.01$ ). This is not in line with hypothesis 3 which stated that majority group members who are more in contact with minority groups will not have less trust in the police than those who are less in contact with minority groups. This is also not in line with previous findings which showed no evidence for bridging social capital having an effect on police trust for the majority group (Van Craen, 2013).

Out of the four control variables, two were found to have a significant effect on police trust. These are educational level ( $b=.151, p<.05$ ) and victim ( $b=-.378, p<.001$ ). This means that people that belong to the majority group with a higher educational diploma tend to have more trust in the police. Furthermore, majority group people that have been the victim of an offense have significantly less trust in the police than those who have not been the victim of an offense.

Lastly, the two remaining control variables have no significant effect on trust in the police. Sex ( $b=.047, p>.05$ ) and offender ( $b=.088, p>.05$ ) are both not significant for  $p<.05$ .

**Table 3. Linear regression with control variables**

	Model 1(majority)			Model 2(minority)		
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Beta</i>
Constant	6.515	.380		5.569	.637	
Dutch social capital	.197***	.048	.098	.352***	.059	.255
Non-Dutch social capital	-.283**	.094	-.072	-.380**	.128	-.125
Sex	.047	.063	.015	-.146	.149	-.036
Educational level	.151*	.061	.049	.362*	.133	.098
Offender	.088	.078	.023	.168	.181	.034
Victim	-.378***	.090	-.084	-.473*	.215	-.079
R <sup>2</sup> (adjusted)	.033			.130		
<i>N</i>	2445			679		

\*\*\*  $p<.001$ , \*\*  $p<.01$ , \*  $p<.05$

*Dependent variable: trust in the police.*

Model 2 shows the effects of Dutch and non-Dutch social capital on trust in the police for people with a migration background, so the ones who belong to the minority group.

The results from this model confirm hypothesis 2 that more contact with the majority group leads to more trust in the police among the minority group. Dutch social capital has a significant positive effect on trust in the police ( $b=.352, p<.001$ ).

On the other hand non-Dutch social capital has a significant negative effect on trust in the police ( $b=-.380, p<.01$ ). Both of these outcomes are in line with the expectations.

What stands out compared to the majority groups is that both effects seem stronger for the minority group, especially having Dutch social capital seems to have a stronger effect on trust in the police for minority group people ( $Beta=.255$  vs  $Beta=.098$ ). This means that the effect of Dutch capital on trust in the police is more than 2.5 times stronger for minority members than for majority members. Whether this difference is significant is unclear.

Out of the four control variables, the same two as before were found to have a significant effect on trust in the police.

Level of education has a significant positive effect on trust in the police ( $b=.336, p<.05$ ) and having been the victim of an offense has a significant negative effect on trust on the police ( $b=-.473, p<.05$ ). Compared to the majority group it stands out that level of education has a stronger effect on trust in the police for the minority group ( $Beta=.098$  vs  $Beta=.049$ ). This means that education has twice as much effect on trust in the police for minority members as for majority members.

The two remaining control variables neither have a significant effect on trust in the police for the minority group. Sex ( $b=-.146, p>.05$ ) and offender ( $b=.168, p>.05$ ) are both not significant for  $p<.05$ .

Comparing the two models, Model 2 concerning the minority group has more explanatory power ( $R^2 = .130$ ) than Model 1 concerning the majority group. ( $R^2 = .033$ ). This seems to be coherent with the data when comparing the coefficients of model 2 with the ones of model 1.

## **Discussion**

This study was an attempt to explore the relationship between social capital and trust in the police for people with and without a migration background. Based on prior research it was hypothesized that contact with the majority group would lead to higher levels of police trust among minority members. Furthermore the expectation was that contact with the minority group members would lead to lower levels of police trust. The findings of this study are in

line with prior research and with the hypothesized expectations about differences between majority and minority groups.

The results of the analysis clearly show a strong correlation between having friends belonging to a majority group and increased trust in the police for minority members. This is in line with the hypothesis and prior research on bridging social capital and its positive effects on police trust for minority members (Van Craen; Kääriäinen). Furthermore, this research has shown that bonding social capital has negative effects for trust in the police among the minority group. This is in line with previous findings which have looked at how ingroup contact influences prejudice and perceived discrimination (Pettigrew, 1998).

Interesting outcomes from the data is that the model predicting the effect of social capital on trust in the police is much stronger for the minority group than for the majority group.

This could be an indication that social capital is more important for minority group members than for majority group members. An explanation might be that majority group members have had less negative encounters with the police and therefore trust the police more to start with. While minority group members might have had more negative encounters with the police and therefore 'benefit' more from social capital in terms of leading to increased trust in the police. However this study has a number of limitations, both theoretical as methodological. The data does not specify the exact amount of friends each person has from the minority and majority group. Since the answer categories for this variable were categorical and therefore subjective. Someone could argue that five friends is a lot while another person argues that five friends is not much. If this happens often, then this could lead to a wrong distribution of data.

Besides that, indicating to have a friend from a minority or majority group does not indicate anything about how close he or she is that person. In terms of changing attitudes it makes a difference if that friend is one of his/her closest friends or if he/she sees that person more like an acquaintance.

Another shortcoming of this study is that the used data consists out of young people of which the majority is between the age of 21 and 23. This makes for quite a specific target audience, which could cause some issues in generalizing the results to the whole population. For example, most of these people might be relatively inexperienced when it comes to encounters with the police and therefore may have not fully developed an opinion on the matter.

It would be interesting to see if the same results that were found in this study could apply to a larger target audience in terms of age.

In conclusion, by adopting a secondary data research analysis, this study has contributed to existing literature on social capital research. It has confirmed some of the previous findings on

trust in the police while also bringing to light new insights on how social capital influences trust in the police. In the introduction it was argued that interracial social capital might be an important factor in improving the troubled relationship between minorities and the police department. The findings of this study confirm the made assumption: interracial contact seems to be of significant positive influence on police trust for the minority group. In general social capital is more than twice as important in predicting trust in police for the minority group than for the majority group. This is an important finding, because it can seriously contribute to how policy makers approach the issue of trust in the police department and other authorities.

Future research could also consider to study different factors that might explain the relationship between social capital and police trust. Interesting would be to see how socio economic factors like social class, salary or residential form would affect this relationship.

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