

*Police Community Relations In 21st Century Malta: Implications For Police Practices In
Immigrant-Destination Countries*

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Our thanks and sincere appreciation to Denise Xerri for her assistance with data entry, analysis, and preparation of graphs.

INTRODUCTION

Between 1985 and 2005, the number of people living outside their countries doubled from 105 to 200 million people, particularly in Europe (Penninx 2006). Many reasons for migration are cited in the literature. One of the more prominent relates to migration from colonies to countries with a colonial history. Today, the reasons are more complex and varied. These include expatriates working for multinational companies; refugees and asylum seekers from Africa, the Balkans, former Soviet states, near-Eastern and Asian countries, and students from China, as well as undocumented workers from Africa, etc. (Penninx 2006).

With the formation of the European Union, many countries in Europe are beginning to feel an increased movement of people from Eastern Europe and from Africa. This is compounded by the fact that Europe is believed to be heading toward the “super-aging population” (Wilson 2007) resulting in many policymakers asking the question whether doors should be opened for immigrants or should the movement of people be restricted. Such labeling has implications for policies relating to integration and social cohesion which in turn influences the imagery and perceptions of the general population.

Malta, though a relatively small nation with a population of about 400,000, has experienced a surge in both legal and illegal migrants in recent years. According to the National Statistics Office (2009) non-Maltese citizens represent nearly 4.4% of the total population. In addition to legal migration, Malta has also experienced an increase in illegal migration. According to the Immigration Section of the Police General Headquarters, both the number of boat loads, as well as the number of people on board, has increased by many folds (table 1).

Table 1. Data on boats arriving in Malta with irregular immigrants: 2002-2008

Year	No. of boats arriving	No.of people on board	Average number of people on board per boat
2002	21	1,686	80
2003	12	502	42
2004	52	1,388	27
2005	48	1,822	38
2006	57	1,780	31
2007	68	1,702	25
2008	84	2,775	33

Such increases in both legal and illegal migration have implications for police community relations. Experiences from immigrant countries such as the U.S. and Australia suggest that local law enforcement agencies rely on rich sources of community structures and resources for effective delivery of services. In this paper we begin with a brief literature review of police-citizen relationships in immigrant countries such as the United States and the efforts made to increase the effectiveness of police practices in dealing with multicultural societies. We briefly review the concept of community policing and various strategies for building strong police-citizen partnerships, including private security, and follow-up with our survey of police officers' attitudes towards citizens and private security guards with specific reference to building community-policing relationships.

POLICING NEW IMMIGRANT SOCIETIES – EXPLORING POLICE-CITIZEN RELATIONS

Historically, police-citizen relations in immigrant countries such as the U.S. suggest that minorities such as Blacks/Latinos negatively view police as compared to Whites (Lurigio, Greenleaf, Flexon 2009). The study also notes that both African-Americans and Latinos who had been stopped and disrespected by the police were less willing to assist them and less likely to believe that the police care about their neighborhoods. Compared to these groups, Chinese immigrants had overall positive views of the police (Wu 2009). More specifically, this group had positive views on police demeanor, integrity, and effectiveness but were less positive on police fairness. On a relative scale, Wu noted that the level of Chinese immigrants' global satisfaction stood in the middle with whites at the top and Blacks at the bottom. Further, Wu noted that recent police contact, media exposure to police misconduct, neighborhood conditions and city effects, were significant variables. Interestingly, satisfaction with local police was found to be linked to satisfaction with immigration authorities (Wu 2009).

Our literature review revealed limited studies on police-immigrant relations in countries traditionally considered non-immigrant. One such study was from Finland, which experienced a considerable presence of migrants from Africa since 1990s. Though Egharevba noted that police-citizen relations were generally considered good (2009), Egharevba and White (2007) identified many challenges and problem areas in Finish-migrants police relations. These include unfavorable circumstances in their encounters; poor communication or language barriers; perceived police prejudice against dark-skinned immigrants; fear of crime; African immigrants' mistrust of the police and its relationship to reporting criminal acts; alleged slow response of the police to African immigrants' calls; and encounters and meetings which are often tension-filled resulting in reluctance to co-operate with police (Egharevba and White 2007).

Antonopoulos' (2006) work on police-immigrant relations suggests that Greece, with a long history of emigration, has become a land not favorable for immigrants. Greek society turned against immigrants, identifying them as the criminal "other." This has in turn led to a number of racist incidents though no official data exists. Antonopoulos notes that racial attacks are not limited to the public, as a number of such attacks have been committed by police as well. Underlying these police-led attacks is a fairly common racist attitude towards migrants. Some comments include (Antonopoulos 2006:95):

Migrants have made us fearful of sleeping in our yards and balconies in the summer, as we used to do before.

Everyone lives in fear now.

Foreigners take jobs from the Greeks.

They make us install alarms in our houses and sleep with a gun under the pillow.

I do not think that migrants are a good thing for Greece

Experiences from the U.S. as well as Europe suggest that tensions between police and minority communities is a pressing issue. Police officers are more likely to use aggressive or punitive measures in dealing with ethnic minorities: Other commonly noted events include excessive police violence; discriminatory treatment of juveniles; discourtesy toward ethnic minorities; and excessive use of arrests – characteristics similar to those noted in Finland (Egharevba 2009). In general, ethnic minorities feel a lack of power and influence, that they are disenfranchised from the local white power structure, and view police as a symbol of oppression and racism.

As far back as 1968, effective community relations were recognized as one of the key factors for building positive police-citizen relations. In the 1980s many such programs were created under the rubric of community policing. Further, language and cultural barriers were recognized as impediments for effective relations with immigrant groups as well as majority communities resulting in proactive recruitment of bilingual police officers to promote police-citizen relations. In addition, Culver (2004) notes examples of practices that were found to help bridge the gaps with efforts that include creating a positive image by attending immigrant cultural events; distributing bilingual crime prevention information/public service announcements, videos to help learn how to free themselves from crime victimization; and a comprehensive needs assessment of immigrant community groups. This requires a comprehensive cultural change in police organizations.

Drawing from political incorporation theory, Lewis and Ramakrishnan (2007) argue that new groups need to be incorporated into city electoral politics to help pave the way for improvements in the way that local bureaucrats treat members of those groups. Evidence from California cities suggests that police departments are ahead of city councils and other municipal agencies in providing support for bureaucratic incorporation of immigrants, in which local bureaucracies proactively develop their own practices based on professional ethos.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The police in civil societies represent a state governed by rule of law and one that protects human rights and freedoms. The primary role of police in democratic societies is to protect the fundamental rights of citizens: the primary criteria for police governance include equity, delivery of service, responsiveness, distribution of power, redress, and participation (Jones, Newburn and Smith 1998). Bayley (2006) notes that although the police themselves cannot bring about political democracy, they can contribute to democratic political development. Police in democratic societies perform a fine balancing act: they not only cautiously exercise their limited authority granted by the Constitution and legislative mandates but also make certain others do not violate citizens' constitutionally guaranteed rights (Goldstein 1971).

The citizen is the primary focus in democratic policing. Protecting citizen rights is elevated to the protection of basic human rights with the police mediating tension between "freedom-limiting searches" and aggressive enforcement (Pino and Waitrowski 2006). Essentially, police conduct is subject to the rule of law that values and respects human dignity; intervenes in a citizen's life under "limited and controlled circumstances"; and is accountable to the public it serves (Marx 2001). Implicit in the role of police in democratic societies are the following elements (Goldstein 1971; Bayley 2001; Marx 2001):

Serve the public by preventing crime and maintaining order

Police service is directly dependent on the public approval of police existence

Police seek public approval but maintain impartiality in offering services to all groups

Police intervene in the lives of citizens, albeit with strict limitations as provided by the constitution and other legal provisions

Police use force to the extent that law is observed and order is restored

Police tend to mirror the socioeconomic, cultural, and other characteristics of the community in which they serve

Police are part of, and not separate from, the community they serve

Finally, police are accountable to the public.

In sum, there is an assumption that police in democratic societies work for the community in which they serve and that the citizens support the police to effectively discharge their duties of

crime prevention and order maintenance. This brings us to the next related concept in police-community relations: community policing.

Though much has been written about community policing, there is a general consensus among researchers that the concept still evokes varied images to different people. These images include establishing a foot patrol, helping to form neighborhood crime prevention units, establishing neighborhood substations, and “crime-watch” plug-ins in television advertisements. All of these programs aspire to attain one goal: improve public safety and order, develop positive working relationships with citizens, and to work with citizen groups to assist them in order maintenance. Similar terms such as “citizen groups” and “partners of law enforcement” that are commonly heard among proponents of police/citizen partnerships are just as unclear as the term community policing. References to citizen and community groups may be very general and broad (i.e., including the entire neighborhood in which the beat officers are posted), or may refer to specific entities (i.e., neighborhood watch groups, typically located in high crime areas). However, one citizen group that is generally not included in the discussion of community policing is the private security employee.

Private entrepreneurship and privatization of public sector functions are inherent to all market economies. In the last 30 years many countries around the world have aggressively privatized many functions once considered public – including social control. The number of personnel employed in the private security industry, as well as security-related organizations in developed economies, has increased significantly in recent decades (Bailin and Cole 2000). Compared to private security industry growth, such expansion in the employment of public law enforcement officers was not apparent in these countries (Nalla and Newman 1990; 1991). Broad changes in the nature of property relations (i.e., “mass private property” where much public life takes place, i.e., amusement parks and large apartment complexes [Shearing and Stenning 1983]), consumerism and promotion of private security as a commodity (Shearing 1992), and the redefinition of the state’s role in crime prevention resulted in the rapid growth of the private security industry.

One of the significant organized groups in many communities is private security. Most research on the growth of security personnel suggests that there are more personnel employed in the private security profession than in law enforcement (Nalla and Newman 1991). A majority of private security employees are private citizens unlike the police, most of whom are sworn

officers. Contrary to typical citizen groups, security employees are more likely to meet frequently as members of their professional associations. Further, many of the goals and objectives of security professionals are similar to law enforcement organizations (Nalla and Newman 1990). Nalla and Hummer (1999) argued that if law enforcement organizations would like to establish successful relationships with citizen groups police should consider security employees as one of the most viable partners. These relationships should be established not simply at a superficial level but rather as well integrated within the context of organizational culture, structure, and processes. In a study in the late 1990s, Nalla and Hummer (1999) found that security professionals as a group are more inclined than other citizen groups to develop working relationships with local law enforcement agencies for pursuing commonly shared goals of crime prevention activities and promotion of safety for respective clients. However, the major hindrance to developing partnerships was poor communication and misperceptions between the law enforcement and private security personnel (Nalla and Hummer 1999).

Police organizational culture consists of norms, myths, assumptions, and practices which officers use to construct their meaning of police work. Police culture creates a unique organizational climate in which officers routinely work. Police cultural norms advocate particular rules governing officer interactions with citizens. Citizens are, in essence, the clientele of the police. With the reintroduction of citizens as the major foci of law enforcement's goals and objectives through popularly used phrases such as community policing, community-oriented policing, and problem-oriented policing, some attention has been focused on citizen-police relations and particularly, officer perceptions of citizens and citizen support of officers and their work.

Azzopardi- Cauchi (2004) was one of the first to undertake an extensive study of Maltese police organizational culture, specifically, the Maltese police officers' relationships with: the community, offenders, victims, judiciary and corrections. Her study notes that Maltese officers expressed prejudices against some immigrant groups such as Libyans, Arabs, Sicilians and Italians – and were thus more likely to target some groups. This study is an extension of police organizational culture in Malta with a focus on police citizen relations, and their views on democratic policing that captures police citizen relations as well as their relations with another citizens' group, the private security guard.

In this study we specifically examine police attitudes towards citizens and a specific organized citizen group, security guards, to assess the extent to which Maltese police personnel perceive the larger guiding philosophy of police work in the context of their relationship to citizens, both

organized and the general community. More specifically, we examine Maltese police organizational culture to the extent of how they view their relationships with citizens and private security guards.

The survey which was originally developed for Slovenia (Nalla et al. 2007; Nalla, Johnson, Meško 2009), South Korea (Nalla and Wook 2009a,b; Nalla and Hwang 2006), El Salvador and Guatemala (Nalla 2009), was used as a framework for the current study. The survey was administered to over 400 police officers in Malta and the findings from the initial responses (N=61) are presented here. Survey questions were coded on a Likert scales of 1~5 with 1 representing Strongly Agree and 5 Strongly Disagree. We have measured various elements of democratic policing based on the questionnaire administered by Nalla (2009). More specifically, we identify four key elements that capture the operational philosophy; accountability to law and democratic structures of the community; and the extent to which officers perceive citizen support. In addition, we also asked the respondents their views about private security guards on matters relating to government training and professionalism, how to improve relations with each other, and if security guards would be a good citizen group to partner in community policing activities. Once again, the assumption was that the extent to which police culture reflects officers' internationalization of police values and norms revolves around the interest of citizen safety and wellbeing.

RESULTS

At the time of the conference presentation, we had received only 61 valid responses and thus the findings reported below do not have confidence levels to extrapolate for the larger population. The demographic characteristics of the respondents are presented in Table 2. Nearly 60 percent of the respondents are 36 years or older, compared to the age group that is younger than 35 years. A little over half of all the respondents have 16 years or more of experience and nearly three-fourths of the sample are male officers. Nearly half of the officers have post-secondary education and only a fifth of the sample have a university first degree or higher.

Table 2. Maltese Police Officers' Demographic Characteristics (N=61)

Variables	Description	N	% ^a
Age	≤35 years	23	38
	≥36 years	37	60

	Missing	1	2
Years of Experience	≤15 years	27	44
	≥16 years	32	53
Gender	Missing	2	3
	Male	47	77
	Female	13	21
Education	Missing	1	2
	Secondary School	16	26
	Post-secondary School	28	46
	University First Degree or more	13	21
Rank	Missing	4	7
	Police constable	28	46
	Sergeant or higher	32	52
	Missing	1	2

a. May not add to 100 due to rounding

Officers Primary Responsibility:

We asked police officers a series of questions relating to their primary responsibility and their perceptions of citizens and community policing programs. The first two questions which tapped into their primary responsibility were “ Officers in my unit know their primary duty is to serve the people of the community” and “ Police officers’ primary responsibility is to serve the government.” Figure 1 shows the distribution of the officers’ views relating to citizens. Nearly 90 percent of all officers view their primary responsibility is to serve the people of the community, in comparison to the question on service to the government (figure 2), where there was an even distribution between those who agree and disagree with nearly one-fifth of the respondents expressing ambiguity. This suggests that officers generally perceive citizens as their primary clients, a notion that is expected from police organizations that clearly adhere to democratic policing with an emphasis on rule of law and human rights.

Figure 1. Officers in my unit know their primary duty is to serve the people of the community.

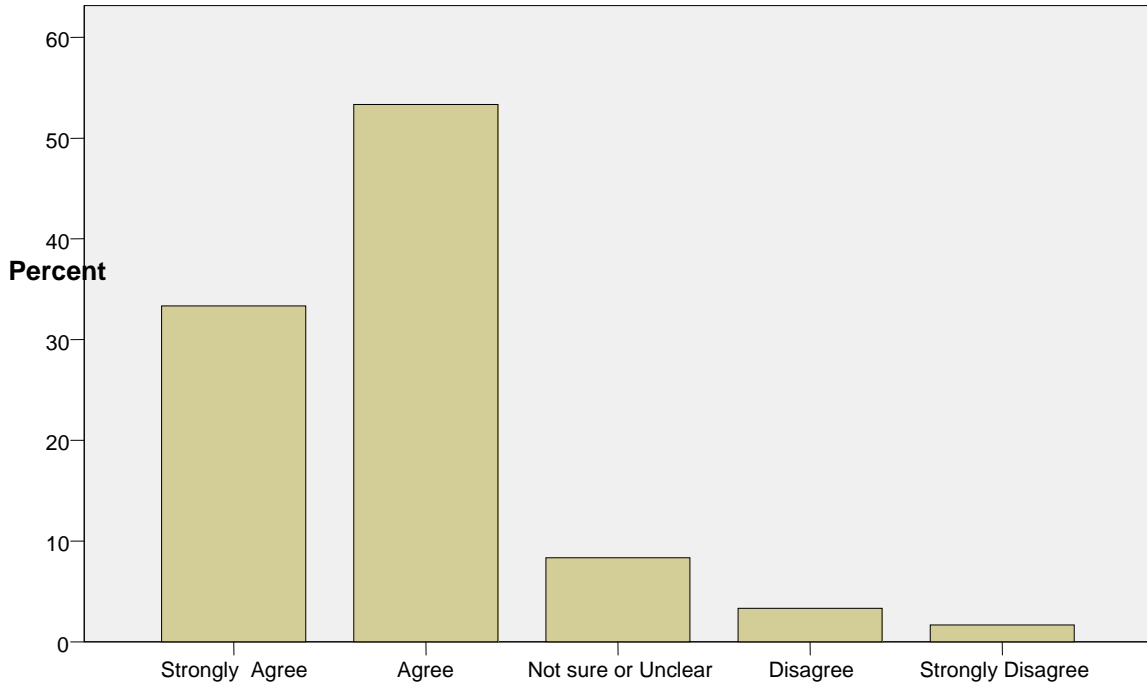


Figure 2. Police officers' primary duty is to serve the government.

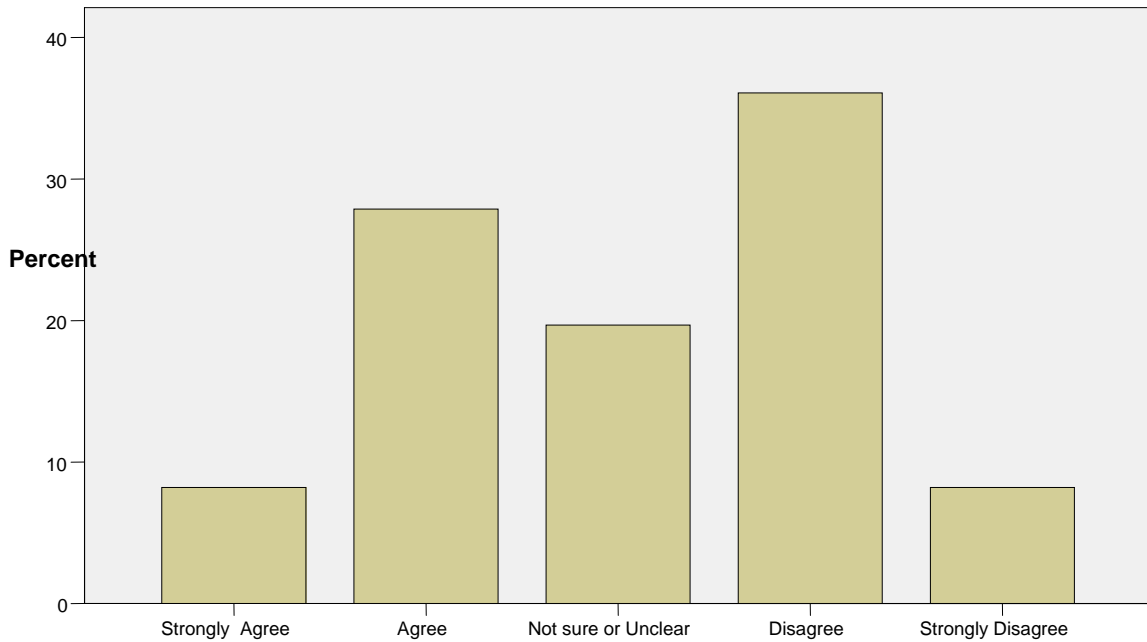


Figure 3. Enforcing the law is by far a police officers' most important responsibility.

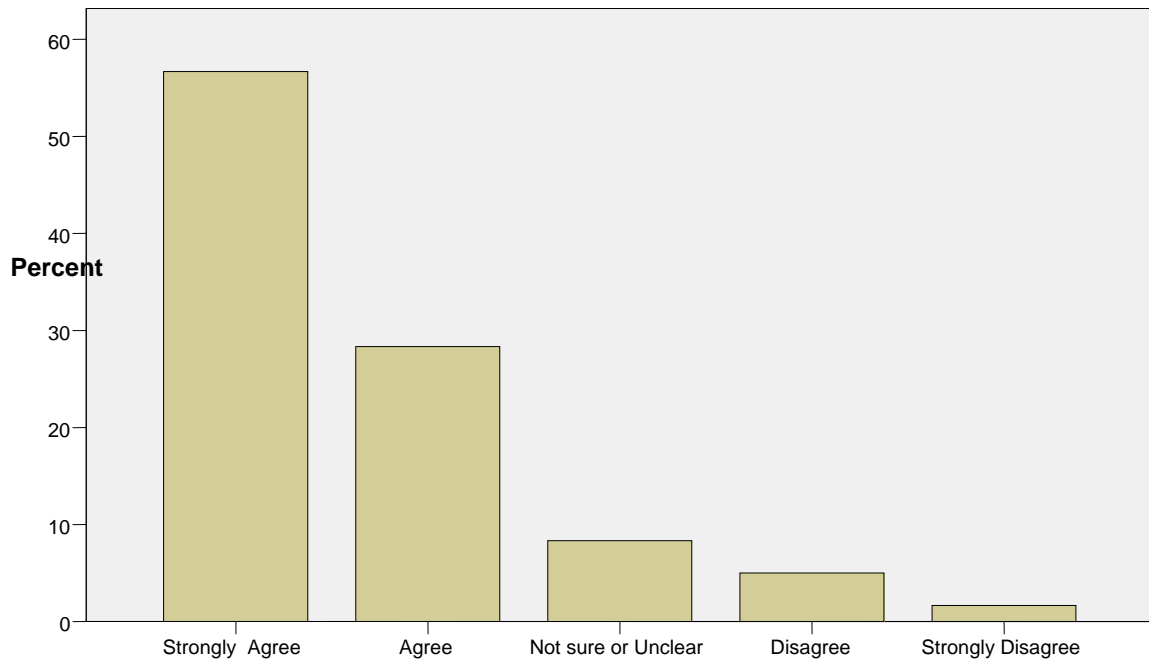


Figure 4. Police officers have to be accountable to the citizens for their acts.

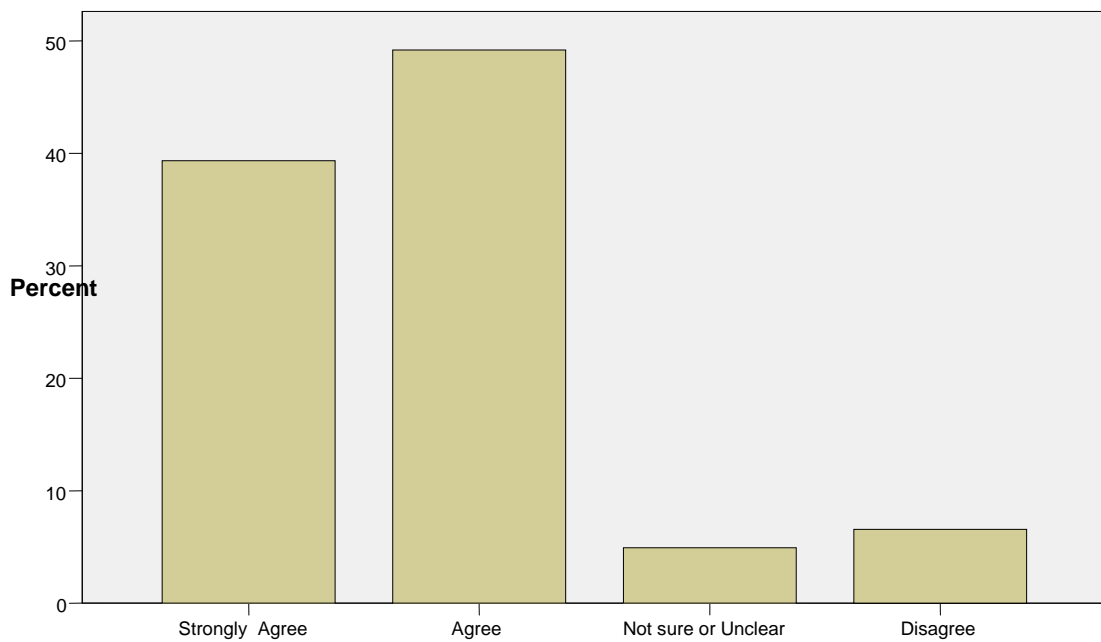


Table 3. Maltese Police Officers' Perceptions of Citizens (N=61)

Variables	SA/A ^a (%)	NS ^b (%)	D/SD ^c (%)
Citizens generally cooperate with police officers	40 ^d (66) ^e	13 (21)	8 (13)
Citizens trust police officers	31 (51)	23 (38)	7 (11)
Citizens would often call the police if they saw something suspicious	40 (65)	17 (28)	4 (7)
Citizens would often provide information about a crime if they knew something and were asked by police	19 (31)	23 (38)	19 (38)
Citizens are willing to work with the police and try to solve neighborhood problems	31 (51)	17 (28)	13 (21)

SA/A = Strongly Agree or Agree

NS = Not Sure or Unclear (Missing is collapsed into this category)

D/SD = Disagree or Strongly Disagree

Number

Percentages May not add to 100 due to rounding

Findings on police officers' views of citizens are presented in Table 2. Nearly two-thirds of the respondents believe that citizens generally cooperate with officers and that they provide information if they saw something suspicious. Nearly half of the officers feel that citizens generally trust police officers and that are willing to work with police to solve neighborhood problems. The findings are mixed regarding the issue of citizens providing information about a crime if they knew and were asked by the police.

Table 4. Maltese Police Officers' Perceptions of Security Guards (N=61)

Variables	SA/A ^a (%)	NS ^b (%)	D/SD ^c (%)
Overall Views			
In general, police officers have a positive view of security guards	22 ^d (36 ^e)	24 (39)	15 (25)
Overall, my view of security guards is positive	37 (60)	11 (18)	13 (21)
In general, police and security guards cooperate in crime prevention	30 (49)	20 (33)	11 (18)
Government Training and Professionalism			
Government mandates relating to training would improve image of security guard industry	43 (70)	15 (25)	3 (5)
Government training of security would improve image of security guard industry	50 (82)	9 (15)	2 (3)
Professionalism of security officers would improve relations	52 (85)	9 (15)	0 (0)
Improve Relations with Others			
Police agencies are willing to share information with security agencies	9 (15)	26 (42)	26 (42)
Create an information database for joint usage	27 (44)	15 (24)	19 (31)
Exchange personnel with security for training	29 (47)	16 (26)	16 (26)
Conduct regular meetings of security agency representatives	39 (64)	16 (26)	6 (10)
Participate in joint training programs with guards	33 (54)	16 (26)	12 (20)
Security Guards and Community Policing			
Security guards will be good partners for community policing	35 (57)	15 (24)	11 (18)
Joint community efforts with security guards to protect citizens	35 (57)	15 (24)	11 (18)

SA/A = Strongly Agree or Agree

NS = Not Sure or Unclear (Missing is collapsed into this category)

D/SD = Disagree or Strongly Disagree

Number

Percentage may not add to 100 due to rounding

Police officers' perceptions on various dimensions of their relationship with private security guards are listed in Table 4. These include: Overall views on government mandated training and professionalism; improving relationships with each other; and security guards' roles in community policing activities. While 60 percent of police officers indicated that their own view of security guards is positive, only 36 percent indicated that generally police officers view security guards positively, suggesting a general lack of confidence in security guards. Only half of the respondents felt that security guards cooperate with police officers in crime prevention activities.

Nearly three-fourths of the respondents felt positive about government mandated programs used to enhance professionalism and the image of security guards. Further, police officers felt that an improvement in security guards' professionalism would help improve police-security relationships. On the issue of improving relationships with security guards, findings were mixed. Nearly two-thirds of the respondents felt that conducting regular meetings with security guard representative would help improve relationships and 54 percent indicated that participating in joint training programs with guards would help the cause. However, less than half of the respondents were supportive on the issue of creating information databases for joint use (44 percent) or exchanging personnel for training purposes (47 percent). Further, there was a considerable disagreement (42 percent) or ambiguity (42 percent) on the issue of sharing information with security guards.

Finally, we asked police officers two questions relating to a security guard's role in community policing. Findings suggest that a little over half (57 percent) of the respondents felt positive on the issue of a security guard's role in community policing efforts. Police officers not only felt that security guards would be good partners to work with in community policing efforts but also felt positive about joint community policing efforts with security guards. However, it is worth noting that nearly 25% of all the respondents were unsure or ambivalent about security guards' roles in community policing efforts.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have attempted to draw from the conceptual framework of democratic policing that policing involves concerted efforts in developing positive relationships with citizens for effective delivery of police services. Elements included in establishing democratic policing are recognizant of police as not only being dependent on public approval but also acknowledge that they are part of the community they serve. Additionally, democratic policing suggests adhering to rule of law, accountability to the constituents they serve, and operating within the framework provided by the constitution and other legal provisions. Once migrants are accepted into the society as naturalized citizens they are no different from other citizens. Thus, examining police community relations in migrant countries is the first step toward assessing police attitudes towards migrant groups.

In this exploratory study we examine the extent to which Maltese police officers adhere to the larger notions of democratic policing as measured in the context of rule of law and human rights. Further, we also examine the extent to which police officers consider security guards as viable citizen partner groups in community policing. Findings suggest that in general Maltese police officers consider citizens as their primary clients and view them positively. Police officers also believe that citizens have faith in police and that they cooperate with the officers in crime prevention activities. Additionally, police officers are positive of their relationships with security guards and believe they can work with them to expand their scope of community policing efforts as well as joint crime prevention activities.

While data gathering is still in progress, this analysis of the partial data offers glimpses at police perceptions of their primary duty, relationships with citizens and citizen groups such as private security. We hope the final data will offer insights to differences, if any, along gender, rank, and education variables as well as factors that determine positive or negative attitudes towards citizen groups to help shape policy to strengthen police acceptance of the principles of democratic policing.

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