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Exploring the Influence of Police Social Media Responses on Left-Wing Activists' Trust in the Police in the Netherlands: A Qualitative Interview Study

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Abstract

Discourse on police responses to online posts could have a negative effect on activists' trust in the police. As existing research suggests, multiple aspects have an influence on trust: power discrepancy, differences between activists and the police and the display of certain trust characteristics by the police (ability, integrity, benevolence and charisma). For this thesis, six left-wing activists were interviewed and given a think-aloud exercise based on these four characteristics. This data was analyzed by using both inductive and deductive codes. The findings were divided in aspects that have null effect, positive effect and negative effect on trust, and legitimacy. All aspects seemed to be affected by a background influence: earlier experiences with the police. Null effect aspects consisted of perceived inconsistency between the online police's response and real-life police action, and already existing, firmly rooted distrust. Positive effects consisted of the aspects: humanization of the police and shared values between the police and activists. Negative effects consisted of the aspects: perceived police intentions' influence on police power, amorality and the police as an institution. Legitimacy of police responses seemed dependent on the activist perception of what is a proportionate response, which is based on beliefs, norms and values. This thesis helps to understand what aspects of police's responses and circumjacent aspects have influence on left-wing activists' trust in the police, and suggests that only focussing on the online handling of the police is an incomplete view of the issue at hand.

Keywords: trust, police, left-wing activists, social media, qualitative data

The Influence of Police Social Media Responses on Left-Wing Activists' Trust in the Police

in the Netherlands

Social media has become a big part of day to day life. The emergence of this communication can influence social relations. The online space harbors many different groups that communicate on various subjects, for example activism. Activists use social media as a mobilization tool for protests and demonstrations, among other things. This public posting leaves the activists' social media posts accessible to be seen and reacted to by the police, which happened with a call to action for an Extinction Rebellion protest. In Januari, 2022, the call was shared to block the A12, an important Dutch highway. Six people who posted the call were arrested two days before the protest ("Klimaatactie op snelweg mogelijk strafbaar, maar aanhoudingen 'aan zware kant'", 2023). The public prosecution argued that the arrests were justified, and described the protest as dangerous and illegal. Activist organizations such as Greenpeace Netherlands and a professor of constitutional and administrative law argued that the arrests were uncalled for, that civil disobedience is a part of the right to demonstrate. The matter was also raised in the House of Representatives. These arrests exemplify the police responding to an activists' social media post. There are different levels of police responding: liking a post, responding publicly, responding privately and physical contact or arrests. The A12 blockade discussion caused media attention and outrage, and raised the question of this thesis: what are legitimate police responses according to left-wing activists, and how do these responses influence left-wing activists' trust in the police?

To research this matter, police communication needs to be examined. Police communication with civilians influences civilians' trust and feelings about the police (Bradford, 2010). The relatively new way of social media communication makes left-wing activists' calls

for actions more observable for the police, who gain the option to respond. The observability of these freely accessible responses are at risk of being ill-received by left-wing activists and therefore hurting trust in the police. This could have negative consequences such as decreasing people's perception of well-being and life satisfaction (Altindag & Xu, 2011). Furthermore, Balliet and van Lange (2013) argue that trusting relationships between persons cause better cooperation, which could benefit protest situations. And, according to Amnesty International, the balance between facilitating the right to demonstrate and countering illegal behavior is currently unstable (Amnesty Campagne Right to Protest, 2024, "Right to demonstrate in the Netherlands under pressure"-section), who state: "The right to demonstrate in the Netherlands is under pressure" and that demonstrations are seen as a risk for public order by the authorities, rather than an exercise of human rights, which shows that activists do not feel supported by the police. This disbalance and dangers of distrust shows the importance of researching the effect of online police responses.

When reviewing online police communication, media consumption should be taken into account, as it influences people's opinions and attitudes towards the police (Callanan & Rosenberger, 2011). Dowler (2002) even argued that the perception of the police is mostly determined by their portrayal in traditional media. The internet has caused a more complex evaluation of the police and what legitimate police action entails (Goldsmith, 2010). Observing police responses on activists' posts can decrease the trust of left-wing people in the police, as certain actions could be perceived as police misconduct, a threat to democracy and human rights (Hohl, 2011).

This decreasing of trust can decline swiftly, as we distrust quicker than we trust (Hardin, 2002). Skogan (2006) concluded that a negative personal experience has 4-14 times more impact

than a positive personal experience, and building distrust needs less information than building trust (Hardin, 2002). Distrust is not the absence of trust, it is built from information and belief just like trust. If there is neither trust nor distrust formed, there should be no especially negative or positive expectations, and positive experiences can lead to trust development. Consequently, because distrust forms faster than trust, it is important to focus on the antecedents of both trust and distrust.

Combining the insights of the above mentioned research, it is clear that researching the aspects of online police responses is important. This thesis is based on interviews with left-wing activists and seeks to fill the knowledge gap of how different kinds of Dutch police responses to left-wing activist posts regarding calls to action, influence left-wing activists' trust in the police.

The Police Online

The Dutch police are active on social media through accounts of city police insitutions and individual police officers, which post, among other things, responses to activists. As argued in the introduction, different police responses can have an influence on the perception and trust of activists in the police.

The police can respond in different ways. Firstly, they can respond with a public response. For example, a police chief responded to online hate posts about the police with: "So, you keyboard hero on socks. It is not the question if, but when we are coming to get you. You're coming to stay with us. Get your suitcase with your pajamas and toothbrush ready." (Politie Gelderland & Overijssel, 2021, original Dutch text in Appendix D). Secondly, they can respond in a private message to the original poster, for example with a question or remark. Thirdly, they can respond in a physical manner in real life, such as a house visit or the Extinction Rebellion arrests mentioned previously. These different ways of responding could have an influence on

trust and perception in the police. This thesis focuses on online, public police responses. However, other forms of online responses are also important to consider, especially when reviewing causes of activists' perception of legitimacy in online police responses.

Trust and Legitimacy

Although the main focus of this thesis is trust, the role of legitimacy is important to take into account. Zelditch (2001, p.33), based on Weber (1978), states: "something is legitimate if it is in accord with the norms, values, beliefs, practices and procedures accepted by a group". Legitimacy is the belief that an authority has the right to lay down rules. When the police are perceived as legitimate, civilians accept their authority (Jackson et al., 2012). People with no prior contact with the police perceive them with the highest level of legitimacy and functioning (Smith & Gray, 1985; Lammers, 2004; Bradford, 2010). These opinions change when police contact does not align with expectations or prior judgment (Bradford, 2010). This suggests that if a police response is perceived as legitimate or illegitimate, the perception of police legitimacy changes. To view a police response as legitimate, it should align with one's norms. If police responses do not align with left-wing activists' norms, those responses will likely be seen as illegitimate by the activists.

To research left-wing activists' trust in the police, the concept of trust needs to be defined. Most describe trust as a psychological state where the trustor allows a certain amount of vulnerability and expects positive behavior or intentions of the trustee (Mollering 2006; Rousseau et al., 1998). Hardin (2002) characterized trust as a context-specific tripart relationship where a trustor (e.g., activists) trusts a trustee (e.g., the police) with potential action or behavior. Hardin (2002) sees trust as an encapsulated interest, which means that one trusts another because one thinks it is in another's interest to take one's interest seriously. Trusting someone can be

defined as knowing or believing certain things about them, for example believing that the police do not have a prejudice against certain groups equals trusting them to treat everyone equally (Hardin, 2002).

Creating trust in the police is difficult because of the power discrepancy between the police and civilians. The police have power over civilians: the power to arrest, the physical power of the weapons they carry and the power of the police institution. This can make people feel powerless, which can create distrust (Mirowsky & Ross, 1983; Ross et al., 2001).

Trust between activists and police officers, such as an individual police officer's account reacting to an activist, is interpersonal trust, which encapsulates one's willingness to be vulnerable based on past expectations of behavior of another individual (Rousseau et al., 1998). Bradford (2010, p.2) states: "Personal contact is a key moment in the formation of opinions about the police. Individual encounters can create moments in which the legitimacy of the police is reinforced or undermined". When looking at the police as an institution, a different kind of trust is applicable, namely institutional trust (Hardin, 2002). One does not see individual officers, but the police force and their actions as a whole. In the online context, this would be the city police account, as this represents the organization. Interpersonal and institutional trust are not the main topic of this thesis, but are relevant to better understand trust relationships.

This thesis understands trust as a concept where the trustor trusts a trustee with potential behavior. For example, activists trust the police to protect them during a demonstration. Trust can be viewed as knowing or believing certain things about the trustee, meaning that trust is dependent on the perception the trustor has of the trustee. This can be on the interpersonal or institutional level.

Aspects Influencing Trust

Stern and Coleman's (2014) trust framework with key components of trust theory shows three kinds of antecedents that influence trust: the characteristics of the trustor (e.g. activists), the characteristics of the trustee (e.g. the police) and the context of action. This thesis mainly focuses on the characteristics of the trustee, but the context of action will be briefly explained as it influences the forming of trust regarding this thesis' topic. The characteristics of the trustor are not the focus of this thesis, thus will be left out.

The antecedent context of action consists of the history between the entities (previous experiences with the police) and control systems which influence behavior with concepts as rules or contracts (the law and contextual norms). Contextual norms dictate behavior in specific contexts, which differs between individuals. These norms shape one's perception of appropriate behavior, which influences how a situation is interpreted. Contextual norms are similar to legitimacy, as both depend on norms. An example of different contextual norms is that a police officer may justify their decision while an activist may view the same decision as an unnecessary display of power and intimidation.

Stern and Coleman (2014) state that characteristics of the trustee encompass the trustee and their behavior. If the trustor views someone as having or lacking these trust characteristics, it influences the trustors' predictions of the trustees behavior, or in other words: how trustworthy the trustor is perceived (Stern & Coleman, 2014). This thesis focuses on the trust characteristics: ability, integrity, benevolence (Barber, 1983; Mayer et al., 1995) and charisma (Stern & Coleman, 2014). These four trust characteristics influence the trust the trustor (activists) has in the trustee (the police), which play a significant role in researching what aspects of online police responses have on trust.

Firstly, integrity is defined as honesty and having strong, unchangeable morals. It refers to trustors' perception of the trustees value system. This is depicted in police social media posts where facts, laws, or violations are stated. These posts can be interpreted as the police being ethical, which could impact trust, as the more ethical we see the police, the more we trust them (Tyler, 1989). The perception of how civilians are treated has more effect on overall trust and police legitimacy than perception of police effectiveness (van Craen & Skogan, 2014; van Damme et al., 2013). Thus, the characteristic of the police having integrity, perceiving the police to be ethical and treating people fairly, seems to have a positive influence on trust.

Secondly, ability is the confidence the trustor has in the trustees capabilities to carry out an action. Police social media posts showcase successful actions or preparation to demonstrate their ability to handle various situations they encounter, which can influence perceptions of their capabilities. As seen in the procedural justice model, where the perception of police's ability to fight crime effectively and the quality of decision-making have a positive influence on public trust (Damme et al., 2013; Sunshine & Tyler 2003a, 2003b). In conclusion, police displaying the characteristic of ability, being perceived as capable, could positively affect trust.

Thirdly, benevolence refers to the trustor's beliefs that the trustee wants to do good for the trustor. This positive intention is reflected in police social media posts where they are thanking or trusting civilians. This could positively affect trust in the police, as Gilmour (2008) and Kääriäinen (2012) state that if the police trust civilians, civilians trust the police more. The procedural justice model states that when citizens are treated with dignity, honesty and respect, the public trust in the police is high (Sunshine & Tyler 2003a, 2003b). These findings suggest that the police showing the characteristic of benevolence, being thankful, appreciative and respectful towards civilians can positively affect trust.

Lastly, charisma is a compelling attractiveness or charm, which is more affective and emotional than cognitive. Stern and Coleman (2014) added charisma to the existing literature (Barber, 1983; Mayer et al., 1995), as an emotional source of trust development, as charismatic leaders often generate higher levels of trust than uncharismatic ones. Charisma is depicted in social media posts where the police are humanized, for example a picture of an officer off duty. Because this humanizes the police, it could cause one to see the police as part of one's group. When a police officer is described as, for example, a dad, other dads might relate more to this police officer, as they then share the same social identity (Hogg, 2003) which can provide a basis for trust (Brewer, 1981), which suggests that if police displays the characteristic charisma, it could positively affect trust.

This concept of relating to a shared identity, such as being a dad, relates to social identification, which is about attaching affective significance to a group one belongs to, which can shape behaviors, feelings and social perceptions (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Social identity theory introduces the concepts of ingroup and outgroup, in this thesis reflected as the activists versus the police or "us versus them". Ingroup favoritism is being more favorable toward ingroup than outgroup members (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This ingroup favorability suggests that experiences of others within one's ingroup have influence on one's own perception, as learning from ingroup members is relevant for the forming of intergroup impressions (Zhou et al., 2022). Social identification could help understand the left-wing activists' perceptions of the police.

Focus of the Study

The research question of this thesis is: What kind of influence do different kinds of police's responses have on left-wing activists' trust in the police in the Netherlands? Interviews with left-wing activists will be coded with deductive and inductive codes. The deductive codes

that are expected to be represented in the data are: the perceived legitimacy of police responses, the perceived power discrepancy between the police and activists, ingroup versus outgroup and the trust characteristics (ability, integrity, charisma and benevolence).

Methods

Participants

The participants consist of six self-proclaimed left-wing activists. This sample is from a specific group of people with similar experiences. This was represented by the last interviews repeating the same sentiments as earlier interviews. The smaller sample also allows for deeper analysis of the data (Shayegh et al., 2016), as there could be more time spent on analyzing each interview. Three activists are very active, often going to protests or events and have had multiple experiences with the police during protests. The other three activists are more casual activists, participating a few times a year and have had no direct contact with the police as activists. Two of these activists have had a positive interaction with the police in their personal lives. The average age of the activists is 24.5 years (range of 21-30), consisting of 50% males and 50% females. Recruitment went through the authors' personal network and contacting left-wing squatting instagram accounts, which received a direct message asking if they were interested or knew anyone else interested in participating in this research, with a small summary of the topic. Interviews were conducted in different locations decided by the activist: homes of the interviewer or activist or university buildings.

The Ethical Committee approved this research (PSY-2324-S-0119), and all the participants gave informed consent.

Procedure

The semi-structured interviews were conducted by the author, lasted 74 minutes on average with a range of 63-81 minutes, were audio-recorded, and verbatim transcribed for analysis before the audio files were deleted to ensure the anonymity of the activist participants. Interviews with P3 and P6 were conducted in English (non-native language). The interviews with P1, P2, P4 and P5 were conducted in Dutch (native language). The language was decided by what language the activist was most proficient with. Transcription and analysis were in the original language of the interview. Quotes from the Dutch interviews used in this paper were translated into English (Appendix D). The interviews started with the subject of activism, covering the activists' different topics of interest and amount of engagement in activism. Then their opinions about the online presence of the police were discussed (Appendix A). Unfortunately, this sample had little experience with this topic. After that, the topic of trust in the police was reviewed. These questions often prompted stories of previous experience the interviewee has had with the police. The last part of the interview consisted of think-aloud exercises (Appendix B; cf. Ericsson & Simon, 1993; Greijdanus & Postmes, 2018). The four think-aloud exercises each contained a fictitious example of the police responding to an activist's call to action post on social media X. This post states that a protest is happening today, organized by the poster. The activist post was the same every time to limit context influences, while the police's responses differed, each based on one of the four trust characteristics (Stern & Coleman, 2014), to see what kind of different influences each characteristic has. The participants were asked to write a response to these police posts and think-aloud, which involves explaining why they write the response the way they do and their thoughts about the post. Each example was adapted to one of the four trust characteristics: ability (based on capability), benevolence (based on believed intention), integrity (based on morals) and charisma (based on likeability) (Stern &

Coleman, 2014) (Appendix B). The responses were made to encapsulate one of each characteristic, and designed by the author with the definitions of the characteristics in mind. The interview ended with a question about their hopes for the future.

Positionality statement

The interpreting of the data can be influenced by the author's own perception and connections with the interviewees. The author knew three of the activists personally before they were asked to participate in an interview for this thesis. The author's political standpoint is left-wing and pro-climate. Both these aspects can influence how questions were asked, how questions and answers were interpreted and how the data were analyzed.

Analysis

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The first step of this analysis was coding the data. The semi-structured interview and the think-aloud exercises were coded together, to get an overview of all the themes that came up. The expected codes, deducted from the literature in the introduction, were: negative effect on trust, positive effect on trust, null effect on trust, trust, distrust, power discrepancy, integrity, charisma, ability, benevolence, interpersonal trust, institutional trust, experiences of others, legitimacy of police action. Inductive codes found during analysis consist of: ingroup vs. outgroup, detachment from situation, negative intention, positive intention, ascribed police emotion, negative emotion toward the police, positive emotion toward the police, clashing moral values, influence of police action, neutrality of the police, online persona and history between the police and activists. There were 32 codes that covered 489 quotations in total (Appendix C). Appendix C includes short descriptions of the used codes.

After coding with the expected deductive and explorative inductive codes, the themes were determined. By observing the data and with the research question in mind, the codes were represented in themes of: null effect, positive effect and negative effect of police's response aspects on activists' trust, and legitimacy.

Results

The thematic analysis focused on aspects of police's responses that influence left-wing activists' trust in the police. Both inductive and deductive codes were used to analyze the interviews. However, most of the relevant data regarding online police's responses were activists' responses to the think-aloud exercises, which were based on deductive aspects. The results are divided into the themes: null effect on trust, positive effect on trust, negative effect on trust, and legitimacy.

Null Effect on Trust

Multiple activists mentioned, regarding their own real-life experiences with the police and in responses to the think-aloud exercises, that police actions (either negative or positive) had little or no effect on their emotions or perceptions of the police. Two possible explanations for this inductive theme emerged from the data. The first regards online scenarios (including the subject of social media presence of the police and responses from the think-aloud exercises), where activists see police communication on social media as a persona, something that does not align with real-life police action, as P3's quote exemplifies:

Interviewer: And would any of these posts [all four posts from the think-aloud exercise] have an influence on your attitudes towards police? Or maybe your trust / distrust?

P3: No, I think they just... That's quite standard of like having this public image and then not really caring about it once you're there [at a protest]. So I think: no.

This shows P3's perception of the inconsistency between how the police portray themselves online and their actual actions, stating that this is why police's responses have no effect on their attitude towards the police. This inconsistency is accompanied with a feeling of dishonesty: "They have a social media to, well, to show what kind of good things they are doing, right? Not to… Their goal is not at all to show how things really are." (P1). This quote suggests that activists perceive the police as untruthful about situations. P1 states that the goal of the police presence on social media is not to show how things really are but to create a good impression. This could explain why online responses have little effect on activists' trust in the police; they do not view the responses as being truthful, which leads activists to perceive the responses as containing no real information.

Another explanation is founded in the concept that one has so much evidence of distrust, that new information does not change their view and thus raises no reaction. This is evident in the reaction of P3 to the police response based on benevolence:

> *I think maybe if you'd asked me a few years ago, I would have said that it [the perception that police response is openly making fun of activists] is humiliating. But I think by now I'm also a bit more used to these things. And it gets.. You get more and more desensitized to these things, right? Yeah. That's also probably, it's proof of the deterioration of trust. As in, to find something outraging, you need to start from the premise that there is a base of respect that gets then broken. But if you start from, there is no basis of mutual respect, then it's not outraging, right?* (P3)

This shows the effect of having many negative experiences, which provides information for distrust, causing P3 to become "more and more desensitized to these things". This desensitization could cause a police response to have no effect on activists' perception of the

police. This is also reflected in P1's response when asked if a helpful police action changed their perception of the police: "No, it is.. It feels like the exception, you know?", suggesting that most or all of P1's experiences have been negative, which causes the one positive experience to seem like an uncharacteristic outlier. This firmly founded distrust or desensitization could lead to activists detaching their emotions from the situation by using humor, seen in this example of activist (P1) at a protest:

> *It [a police officer standing closely in front of P1, puffing his chest and threatening to take P1 into the police van] didn't bother me that much and that just made him scream even louder. Really like: "and you don't have to put on such a face." Well, very strange. And then he was taken by his colleagues and was a bit soothed by them saying: "calm, calm down, it is not worth it". So, yeah, this was of course funny. [...] And funny, because it is like: "oh of course, this is how they [the police] are." That's the joke then, right?*

This regards an example of real life instead of an online scenario, but it does show an interesting insight in the view of the activist. P1 describes a situation many could experience as alarming and interprets it as funny. This dissonance therefore shows that this behavior is not shocking because P1 has no other expectation. Using humor can be a way of self-defence: "Everything is, the world is fucked up. And every time you try to speak about it, the police knocks you down. Then [by using humor as reaction to police response] I am a bit like: yeah, but they don't fool me." (P1). By using humor to deflect, activists protect themselves from being "fooled" by the police.

Based on the interviews and quotes shown above, the aspects of police's response that have a null effect on activists' trust seems to be rooted in perceived insincerity between online and real-life police behavior, and desensitization caused by well-supported distrust.

Positive Effect on Trust

The theme of aspects of the police's responses that seem to have a positive influence on activists' trust consists of humanization and shared values. These sub-themes were most prominent in the data concerning the aspects of police's responses that positively impacted activists' trust in the police. Humanization is based on interpersonal trust and the trust characteristic charisma, both based on deductive codes. Shared values are based on the deductive trust characteristics integrity and benevolence. The trust characteristic ability did not seem to have a prominent role in the positive aspects.

Humanization

When observing activists' reaction to the think-aloud police responses, there seems to be a humanizing factor positively influencing the opinion and trust in the police. Interpersonal contact, thus regarding interpersonal trust, seems to cause activists to have a more positive opinion of the individual instead of the institution.

> *I think that there will be a very positive response to this post [based on charisma] and that it is a very positive way to give the police some humanization instead of the regulator who always keeps control. This gives a certain.. Well, it gives a certain goodwill on all sides and a certain... Yes, this makes me happy.* (P2).

This quote shows that humanization, showing the police more as a person and less as a rule enforcer (which could be seen as an institutional view) seems to help with perceiving police officers as individuals, therefore giving P4 a positive feeling. The interpersonal view is also reflected in P1's reaction, when they were asked about their thoughts regarding the police's goal with the charisma based response, stating: "Well, I didn't even think of that, because I see a human in front of me. I don't see any evil intent or something." This shows that the focus on the

individual leaves space for viewing the police as something more than their uniform, as human, which is a social identity we all share. P4's first reaction to the charisma based response was: "He looks so cute. [...] I like that, okay? Old, grandpa looking men who look sweet." which suggest that, because they see a person, there is space for other associations. Viewing an officer as more than being the police, but also as a grandpa (for example), could have positive connotations. In conclusion, the individualisation of police officers can humanize them and show them as an individual. One can relate to other individuals and observe others' social identities, which could give rise to positive feelings and associations. This seems to have a positive influence on activists' trust in the police.

Shared Values

The interviews often referred to the concept of shared values between activists and the police, which encompasses the shared goal that both groups want the best for the activists and that they follow the same morals (based on norms) and rules (the law). These two components refer to the characteristics of benevolence and integrity. The perception that the police want the best for activists or have positive intentions could have positive effects, as is shown in P4's reaction to the police response based on benevolence:

> *P4: And I think they [police] genuinely thank them [activists] that they did it [organising the protest] by the book. [...]*
>
> *Interviewer: Does this bring up a certain emotion?*
>
> *P4: I don't know, I do find it sweet or something. It is just helping each other to make sure these kinds of events go smoothly. It feels.. Yeah, it just feels nice.*

This feeling of appreciation, sharing a goal, and working together gives P4 positive affective feeling, which could help in perceiving the police positively.

P2's quote below shows the police showing that integrity (they are behind the law, and that they follow the law they themselves enforce), which seems to have a positive influence. When the police follow rules and morals, it can help to trust the police, as following rules makes their behavior within reason or that one knows what one can expect.

I think this [police response based on integrity] is a positive way for the police to show they are going to be present at the protest, so people are informed of their presence. I think this is a good, nuanced way of showing the right of demonstration or to show like: we stand behind the right for demonstration. So I am actually pretty positive about it [the response]. (P2)

This example shows activists' appreciation for the police acknowledging the law and activists' rights, which suggests that activists can expect the police to also respect their rights and will not act outside of moral or formal rules. By perceiving shared values between activists and the police, activists could perceive the police as being more in their ingroup. This sub-theme reflects that having the aspects of benevolence and integrity, or shared values, could have a positive effect on police perception, and thus trust.

Summarizing, the sub-themes of humanization and shared values both seem to have a positive effect on activists' perception of the police. Humanization is based on the individualisation of the police and the positive interpersonal perceptions that come with seeing someone as an individual. Shared values are based on activists and the police working together to the same goal and both following the same morals and rules.

Negative Effect on Trust

This theme is composed of aspects of police's responses that seem to have a negative influence on activists' trust: history, the influence of perceived police intention on police power,

amorality and the police as an institution. These sub-themes were most prominent in the data concerning the aspects of police's responses that negatively impacted activists' trust in the police. The deductive concept of history is based on activists' own previous experiences and experiences of others. Perceived police intention on police power is based on the deductive concept of power discrepancy and the inductive concept of perceived police emotions or thoughts by activists. Amorality is based on the deductive trust characteristic integrity. Lastly, the deductive sub-theme of the police as an institution is based on institutional trust and social identity. The trust characteristics, ability, benevolence and charisma did not seem to have a prominent role in the negative aspects.

History

This is an aspect that can lead to either a positive or negative effect of police responses on trust: history. The data suggests that most activists have more negative than positive experiences with the police, thus, this sub-theme is incorporated in the negative effect theme. History, or previous experiences could be a background influence which has an effect on one's trust in the police, and how one perceives and interprets police posts:

> *I think that my first real police experience [police coming to their house after a burglary happened, and had a kind interaction] was just very early in life and just very impressively positive. Yes, that causes a certain kind of… I think that the piece of trust did start there, or something.*(P2)

This is a positive example, which explicitly states that this previous, positive experience had an effect on the forming of trust in the police. It might even have had more effect as it was P2's first contact with the police. But, prior experiences can also have a negative effect:

It's like this: before I did trust that if I were in need, that the police would protect me. Because you know, violence is violence and they don't like that. So, right? But after this incident [police beating in on their protest march]... and all the others - but now I am talking about this one - I feel like I'm more dependent on myself to make sure that I.. I don't have the feeling that I can always trust the police when I am in need. No, I maybe used to have that more. (P1)

The last two sentences of this quote explicitly state that this experience with the police has damaged P1's trust in the police, not only in this instance but it seems to have affected their general perception of the police.

History between the groups could also have influence on the police's perception of activists, and thus on the activists' perception of police's perception of activists, as P5 stated:

So, I think that they [police] are just very scared for things that reasonably are not going to happen [activists coming to a protest with the goal of hurting police]. And the times that violence did happen, that people fought with police, like hooligans or what happened in the eighties with the squatter riots. They threw stones back then. I think they [police] are scared for that, that this is going to happen again. That we are those people.

This shows P5 distancing themself from "those people" (violent activists), stating that they do not identify themselves as part of this group. However, P5 perceives the police to categorize P5's group with violent activists together. This can influence the way P5 interprets the intention behind police action, as P5 perceives the police to perceive P5's group as violent, which can color the interpretation of police action and police communication.

The aspect of history includes shared stories of others, as P1 states: "Well, you begin thinking, you know the stories, so you think: oh, what if they suddenly just begin hitting? Like,

beating in on the march." This quote shows P1's existing distrust in the police, showing perceived negative intentions and expected use of police violence, which can influence their perception of, and their behavior towards, the police. The perception seems influenced by previous experiences of others: "you know the stories", which shows that these could have an impact on one's own perception of, and thus trust in, the police.

History of activists, including their own experiences and those of others, seem to be influencing the perception activists have of the police. It depends on the experiences if this effect is positive or negative, though the data reflected more negative experiences had by activists. This, in turn, influences the interpretation of police action and communication, including such things as police responses on social media.

Perceived Police Intentions' Influence on Police Power

Observing the activists' responses to the think-aloud exercises, activists' perception of police feelings and thoughts seem to negatively influence the opinion and trust in the police.

> *This [police's response based on integrity] is again clearly propaganda, actually. Kind of like: let's hear all voices. They just mean: you're not allowed to be difficult, we don't like it when you are being difficult.* (P5)

P5's interpretation of the police's response is different from what the response factually states. P5 perceives another layer of meaning, seemingly influenced by P5's perception of the intention behind the response. This perception forms their interpretation of what the police mean with their response.

Because of current perceptions activists hold, they interpret police responses negatively. This happened with all four responses of the think-aloud exercise. An example of this negative interpretation of police intention is:

> *"96% of protests proceed without incidents. Today we are once again, well prepared and*
>
> *ready." This sounds like a threat to me. So I'm gonna threaten them back, and I'm gonna*
>
> *say: "Dear police. We are also well prepared and ready." (P3)*

P3 clearly states their interpretation of the response as threatening, though the words used in the police response were not associated with violence or intimidation. This shows how their perception of the police influences her interpretation of the police response and influences their behavior toward the police.

These perceptions of the police's intention seem to influence the way activists feel about the power discrepancy between the police and civilians. This power discrepancy with the perceived negative intentions of the police combined, could cause activists to believe that the police may misuse their power:

> *If it's from a normal person, like, if I would say to another person: hey, do you want to*
>
> *take that [a doxing post] offline, otherwise I'll look into whether I can do anything*
>
> *legally about it. That is different, but with police… You just know they are going to look*
>
> *at if you have broken a law, so they can arrest you because you did something they did*
>
> *not like. Yeah, well, I think that's a bad thing. (P5)*

P5 states that there is a difference in interacting with a "normal person" compared to interacting with the police. This formulation seems to encapsulate the feeling of 'us versus them'. P5 also perceives that 'them' (police) have power and that they could exploit this "because you did something they did not like".

It is a common fact that the police have more power than civilians. This seems to be associated with negative feelings when this power is combined with negative perceptions of police intentions. The opposite (positive perceptions of police intentions) has been found in the

aspect of police's responses that has a positive effect on trust: shared values. Here, the perception that the police want the best for activists or have positive intentions seems to have a positive impact. This suggests that perceived negative police intentions have a negative impact on trust, and that viewing the police's emotions and intentions in a negative way, the fear for police power - and what that could entail - gets bigger.

Amorality

Aside from the negative expectations of police behavior, perceptions of questionable police morality also seems to have a negative effect on trust. Amorality revolves around dishonesty, hypocrisy, inconsistencies and amoral values. It can be observed in inconsistent treatment between different social groups, where the common value of treating everyone equal are infringed:

> *That you're not allowed to share a police officer's identity on social media. Yeah. But, arresting someone for that, I think it's very disproportionate. And it just proves that the system is, oppressive in that regard. Because also when some right wing extremist person posts pictures of left wing activists with their name and where they go to school. These pictures are never taken down and pictures are never... The people that post them are never prosecuted. Which proves that police is just part of the oppressive system that only protects its own interests. But not the others.* (P3)

P3 gives a concrete example of unequal treatment, stating that the police will protect their own interests, but not those of left activists. When the police make an arrest to protect an officer from doxing but do not act when an activist is doxed, it seems hypocritical. So, when activists observe unequal treatment, it seems to have a negative influence on the perception of police morality.

P1 views the police as untruthful, which is an infringement of a common value: honesty. This showed when talking about the police response based on ability, P1 reacted:

P1: Oh, that sounds nice. As in, no but that.. 96%.. Well, that probably isn't true, right?

Interviewer: Why do you think that?

P1: Well, why would it be true if they [police] say it?

This interaction shows the distrust P1 has in the police and the value of their word. Police dishonesty was also discussed in the section regarding aspects that have null effect on activists' trust. There, it showed activists' perception that there was no (trustworthy) information in the response, thus no information to influence their trust. Here, it indicates that activists view the police as lacking the moral value of honesty. Previous experiences might influence the interpretation of a police's response. In the think-aloud exercise, activists often did not trust the intention behind the police's response: "When I see posts where they [police] try to seem very sweet, then I think like: yeah, that's from their side propaganda to be seen in a better light." (P5). If police responses get seen as propaganda, even the posts with the best intentions could have a negative effect on trust, as it can be perceived as hypocritical or as tactical lies. This perception of untruthfulness can be caused by the neutral or formal language the police tend to use online. This kind of language could be associated with marketing tactics, as P1 states: "It [police's response based on benevolence] is so formal. Formal, a spiel [a drill, something you have heard many times before]."

Weak moral values are also perceived in the observation that the police do not care about the work they do:

I don't think that those posts [neighborhood police responded to a squatter account] exist

because the neighborhood police officer actually really cares about these people or really

thinks it's important. He does this because it's his job, as police officer and not as a

person. And that's why… It is to present the police as a more accessible and friendlier

organisation. (P5)

The last sentence of this quote mentions the perceived dishonesty that was also displayed in the

previous quote, solidifying the activists' perception of dishonesty in police's responses. P5's

quote also clearly states their belief that the police do not have any real concern for people and

only respond because it is part of their job description.

When it appears that the police lack a moral compass to 'do the right thing,' it can

negatively influence police perception, as activists may lose trust in police actions and view the

police more as an outgroup. In conclusion, the amorality aspect of police's responses, represented

by perceived hypocrisy, dishonesty and weak moral values, could have a negative influence on

activists' trust in the police.

The Police as an Institution

Among the activists, there seems to be generally more distrust and a negative view of the

police as an institution compared to the police as individuals. The perception of police as

individuals seems to have a positive effect on activists' trust as talked about in the section on

humanization. When P6 was asked if they would trust the police officer in the police response

regarding charisma, they responded:

Ron might be a very nice, friendly guy standing there, and then out of sudden, the chief

would tell them: arrest them all, and Ron becomes an enemy. And then you have to run

from Ron and he knows where you live.

The first reaction was positive, when P6 was talking about the individual, fictitious police officer

Ron. But this changed when this officer gets orders and acts out the will of the institution, losing

the individuality as an officer and becoming part of the police force. This facing of a system, an institution, can make one feel hopeless if you want to activate change, which is reflected in the following quote of P3:

> It's very difficult to talk to each other as human beings because you come from very different understanding of things. And even if you can see that the other person is quite clearly a person with their own life and their own things, they are not seeing you as a person in that moment. So anything that you will say, they will never say: "oh, actually, I'm going to think about that" or something like this. They look like robots sometimes. And that is something that is very scary and leaves you very helpless. Because if I can't even talk to a human being, then the human being gets lost in the system. And then I'm facing suddenly a system and not a human being. And that is something that I am not capable of doing as a person. Right? I can discuss with a human, but I can't take down a system by myself.

Just as P6, P3 states that the human being (a police officer) gets lost in the system (the institution) which shows the difference between the interpersonal view and institutional view of the police. One can relate with a person as we are all human, but this connection is not present within a system, which can feel inhuman ("robots") and so large that it can make one feel helpless.

The perception of the police as an institution seems to enlarge the perception of the police as an outgroup. P5's words exemplify differences between the groups activists and the police:

> I think [the police has] a big focus on criminal activity and the subversive elements in society that are there, or something. They are so concerned with that, and that is also their job, they have a hyper focus on it. We maybe, as activist but also as anarchist, have

a hyper focus on the government, who does all kinds of bad things. And they think that

maybe about us as well, because they are our enemies.

The 'them versus us' thinking comes back in this quote. The fact that they are different groups, have different goals and values is something that may influence trust, as one trusts their ingroup usually more. Because of this difference, when the police respond to activists, activists might be more likely to take the side of their own group.

The police and left-wing activists being different groups could explain why the interviewed activists have little contact with police social media, as P2 says:

It's not in my [social media] algorithm, for the police to show up. And if I see posts about

it, it is usually from, for example, the movement in Groningen that concerns itself with

University Rights. Yes, those [people from the movement] are some of my friends, but

those [the posts] are usually pretty negative ways in which the police are displayed.

This shows that P2 mostly has online interaction with their own group (ingroup), which could strengthen the negative perception of the police (outgroup). Interaction with one's ingroup might be preferred, as beliefs and values are shared. In conclusion, the aspect regarding the police as an institution (consisting of the depersonalisation of the police and the differences between the two groups) seems to have a negative influence on activists' trust in the police.

To summarize, the four aspects of police's responses that seemingly have a negative influence on activists' trust in the police are: history, perceived police intentions' influence on police power, amorality and the police as an institution. The background influence of history consists of previous experiences of themselves and others with the police which influence interpretation of police's responses. Perceived police intentions' influence on police power is based on the negative intentions the activists believe the police to have and that these perceived

intentions cause police power to be perceived as a more negative thing. Amorality is based on observed police behavior where the police is perceived to be hypocritical, dishonest, having weak moral values and giving unequal treatment to different groups. The police as an institution is based on the depersonalisation of the police and the differences between the two groups.

Legitimacy

There is little data regarding legitimacy of online police responses on posts in the data, so examples of relevant real-life events will also be noted. Regarding legitimacy, the theme of action and consequences comes up, meaning that when an activist does something, they understand that there may be consequences (carried out by the police).

> *I think for me it comes from this: whenever I feel powerless against something, especially when I didn't do anything. That's the thing, right? Especially because I can understand action and consequences, right? If I'm at a university occupation, and get grabbed by police, I can understand that. [...] If I am just a demonstration, and then I suddenly get carried out and put in a fucking bus somewhere. That pisses you off, and that makes you way more hostile towards them than you maybe would have been.* (P3)

At the university occupation, the police reaction feels legitimate, but during a normal demonstration, it does not. The difference lies in the context, as the university occupation was an act of civil disobedience, something P3 understands the police could act upon. However, at an allowed and peaceful demonstration, the consequence feels larger than the action. When activists view the police response as disproportionate, it is viewed as illegitimate. P3 stated, regarding a story they heard: "I think the arrest [for insulting a police officer by name in a post] was unjustified because it was disproportionate." (P3). When activists view a response as

disproportionate, it gets met with outrage. But what is viewed proportionally depends on one's own perspective.

Activists seem to find a severe police response (such as intimidating messages or real-life action) legitimate, when it regards threats of physical violence from non-police individuals. When P3 was asked about their opinion on the police taking physical action in response to online posts in general, they stated:

> *And I think it depends what the posts are about. I do think that [police intervention is legitimate] if someone is sending death threats because of, someone's race, for example, like a racist online that sends death threats. These [examples] are all heavy topics, you can tell me to stop. But like if someone is a pedophile or something like this, then I do think that there should be action taken.*

P3 states that when there is a situation where someone could get hurt (death threats, pedophilia) police intervention is legitimate. But when the posts are not hurting anyone, activists seem to view it as unjustified for the police to react in an intimidating or physical way. There could be a different perception between activists and the police of how hurtful or influential some posts or actions are. For example, the police could feel it is necessary to arrest people for organizing a civil disobedience protest, and activists often view this as not hurting anyone, meaning that they do not think severe action is justified. In conclusion, how legitimate left-wing activists view police response depends on how proportionate the activists view the police response to the situation.

Police Presence on Social Media

It is important to consider not only when police's responses have an influence because of the police response's contents, but if the post was necessary to begin with, and when it is

legitimate for the police to interact or even observe online. This inductive sub-theme is rooted in the concept of police neutrality, which consists of activists' thoughts on how present or active the police should be on social media. P6 was surprised and disappointed to hear of police presence on social media:

> *This is like the only, not the only, but it's like one of the spaces where people can just, like, speak out loud and they wouldn't really like to have someone to be like the big brother to tell them... I don't know what kind of way, but I wouldn't really like that. Terminology like a police social media.*

Here, P6 seems to view the police in the online setting as a force observing and waiting until someone crosses a line, which can limit one's perception of freedom of speech online. This distrust seems to stem from the feeling that the police are 'out to get you', instead of the perception that the police are online to join the conversation, which could also be a viewpoint. Though left-wing activists do not seem to have this view, also exemplified by P1:

> *Interviewer: If you would post something like this [a joking response to police's response based on integrity], how long would you dwell on the matter of posting it?*
>
> *P1: Yes, if I would, I would take a moment.*
>
> *Interviewer: Why?*
>
> *P1: Because they can just show up at your door.*

The perception that if you even joke about the police in an online post the police could react by showing up at your doorstep, could in itself be intimidating and therefore disproportionate. Though this is a hypothetical situation, it shows how P1 views the handlings of the police and believes they could react in this way. Because there have been instances where the police have reacted to activists' online posts with house visits, only the knowledge of the police being on the

social media platform could cause this conclusion. When P2 was asked what their opinion was about the existence of police presence on social media, they answered:

> *The part that does irritate me a bit, is that you [police officer] are part of the power triangle and that you have a certain authority, that makes you… I'm fine with it if you, as a police officer, post on social media about being a police officer. But maybe the sharing of opinions in that context, I find it complicated. Because as a police officer, you should be neutral and stand behind the law. And that should be disconnected from you as an individual.*

P2 mentions that as the police, you have a certain authority, which could bring extra power to the opinions you share. This hints at the previously mentioned power discrepancy and suggests that certain subjects better left unaddressed by the police. "I think it is weird when they [police] interfere in political actions or give an opinion about it. Look, if there's an Amber Alert: fine, good! Share it!" (P4), suggesting that police social media should be focussed on information and less on interfering with politics. This sub-theme does not answer the research question directly, but it implies that left-wing activists' behavior is affected by the presence of the police on social media, and that activists would prefer the police being more neutral with the focus on being informative.

To summarize, the perception of legitimacy in police responses of left-wing activists depends on how proportionate the activists view the police response to the situation. Left-wing activists seem to want police online to be more neutral when responding to political issues, and consider that the most legitimate response can be no response.

Discussion

This thesis investigated the influence of online police responses on left-wing activists' trust in the police in the Netherlands. Through thematic analysis of the qualitative data, influential aspects were divided into themes: null, positive and negative effects on trust, and legitimacy. Though legitimacy was not included in the research question, it came back significantly in the interviews and was included as a theme. Firstly, aspects of police responses suggesting a null effect on trust consisted of police persona (perceived inconsistency between the response and real-life police action), and when activists had firmly rooted distrust of the police. Secondly, aspects indicating a positive effect on trust were the humanization of the police, by individualizing officers causing activists to see them as human and other social identities, and shared values between the police and activists (shared goals and norms), which caused activists to view the police more as their ingroup. Thirdly, several aspects showed a negative effect on trust. Previous experiences, as a background influence, shaped perception of police and interpretation of police's responses. Additionally, the aspect of negative perception of the intentions of the police heightened fear of police power. The amorality aspect in police's responses caused distrust in police action and encouraged viewing the police as an outgroup. Viewing the police as an institution also encouraged an outgroup perspective and depersonalized the police. Lastly, legitimacy of police responses seemed to depend on how proportionate the police's response is in left-wing activists' perception, which influenced activists' opinion of the police's response.

Firstly, the findings regarding the aspects of police responses having null effect on activists' trust. Starting with online police persona, which is police responses perceived to be inconsistent with police actions. Referencing this to literature, activists may view the inconsistency between online responses and police actions as an empty message if they have

experienced this previously, as Stern & Coleman (2014) state that history influences the forming of trust. Thus, previous inconsistencies can influence activists' trust in the truthfulness of the responses. Because one needs information to either build trust or distrust (Hardin, 2002), the perception of a post lacking information could explain why there is no effect.

The finding of the responses' null effect on activists with firmly rooted distrust could also be explained by Hardin's (2002) theory of trust building, as new information might have no effect on grounded distrust, which is built from a large amount of information. This distrust appears together and may cause dissonance and activist self-defense behavior in the form of humor, which is a method for coping with stressful situations (Sliter et al., 2013). This unexpected humor finding could warrant further research. Overall, the aspect of perceived discrepancy between the online police persona and real-life police action seems to have null effect on activists' trust in the police, and firmly rooted distrust appears to cause police responses to have no effect.

Secondly, the findings regarding aspects of police's responses which positively affect activists' trust consist of the humanization of the police and having shared values. The results suggest the human aspect could be described as activists seeing a person instead of an institution when perceiving the police, and possibly having a positive feeling about this individual. This interpersonal view allows space to see similarities which can encourage a connection fostered by social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Recognizing a social identity in a police officer, such as being a father, could cause one to relate to the officer, thus causing positive feelings toward them (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Tyler & Blader, 2003). Perceiving a shared social identity can further promote trust and liking (Abrams & Hogg, 2010). These positive feelings and humanization of police officers can be connected with the trust characteristic charisma, which is an antecedent for

trust (Stern & Coleman, 2014). In conclusion, the humanizing aspect in police's responses appears to have a positive influence on activists' trust in the police.

The positive effect of the shared values aspect was reflected in the findings, as activists seemed to react positively when perceiving the police share norms or goals. Connecting this finding to the literature, this positive effect could be rooted in benevolence, a trust characteristic which positively influences trust (Stern & Coleman, 2014). When the goal of both groups is shared, the fulfillment of the goal could be perceived as the trust characteristic benevolence (doing good for the trustor), and when sharing the same values the police can be seen as ethical. The more ethical one views the police, the more one trusts them (Tyler, 1988), and when one perceives others to be fair in their procedures, this can help to create trust (Tyler & Blader, 2003). Thus, shared values reflected in police's responses seem to have a positive effect on activists' trust in the police.

Thirdly, the results regarding the police response aspects that negatively influence activists' trust consist of history, perceived police intentions' influence on police power, amorality and the view of the police as an institution. As mentioned, history with the police could influence activists' perception of police's responses. This makes it an important background influence on both positive and negative effects on trust, though left-wing activists mostly experience the negative effects. Connecting this to the literature, the influence of history has an impact on trust according to Stern and Coleman (2014), and how one interprets police responses (Lee & McGovern, 2013). The data suggested that activists' view of how the police perceives activists is influenced by past interactions. Activists tend to believe the police view them more negatively than they perceive themselves, which can lead to negative social consequences such as negotiation effectiveness (Brion et al., 2015). The results also concluded

that previous experiences of other activists seem to have an influence, which can be explained by Zhou et al. (2022), who argue that experiences of your ingroup shape intergroup impressions. Thus, the aspect of history appears to negatively influence activists' trust in the police and the interpretation of police responses.

The findings regarding perceived police intentions' influence on police power consist of the view activists have of the police's emotions and reasoning behind their actions. Connecting this finding with literature, Malle (2011) suggests that perception could be shaped by the amount of information one has available to form an assumed intention and if this behavior represents a trend. Connecting this to Hardin (2002), who states that one needs information to build distrust. When there is little information available about the trustee (the police), meaning the reasoning behind the police's response is unclear, reasons for the behavior are more based on contextual and cultural knowledge. This could lead to assumptions that the police have negative intentions toward activists as activists' perception of the police according to the data has been mostly negative. Therefore, this could lead to viewing the police's power as more dangerous and could make activists feel powerless, which was reflected in the results. According to Mirowsky and Ross (1983) and Ross et al. (2001) this powerlessness could create distrust. In conclusion, too little information about the intentions of a police's response, seems to have a negative effect on activists' trust in the police.

Another finding that could negatively influence trust is amorality, which is perceived through characteristics like hypocrisy, dishonesty and weak moral values. When connecting amorality with the opposite of the trust characteristic integrity (Stern & Coleman, 2014; Mayer et al., 1995), it suggests that the perception of the trustee (the police) having amoral characteristics negatively influences the formation of the trustors' (activists') trust. Thus, when a police's

response is perceived to involve amoral concepts, it appears to negatively affect activists' trust in the police.

The last finding regarding aspects of the police's response that negatively influence activists' trust is the view of the police as an institution. The police are an institution, but results suggest that focusing on this can depersonalize the police. According to Hardin (2002), the institutional view perceives the police collectively, together with their actions, implying that previous actions and police power are represented by any police presence. This finding of perceiving the police as an institution stands opposite from the humanisation aspect, which suggests a positive influence on trust and focuses on the individualisation of the police. In conclusion, when the police are perceived as an institution in their response, it seems to negatively influence activists' trust in the police.

Lastly, the results suggested that how legitimate a police response is depends on activists' perception of the response's proportionality, and that activists could prefer neutral or no police responses. The findings indicate that a legitimate response depends on one's norms and values. This corresponds with Zelditch's (2001) definition of legitimacy and suggests that if a police response aligns with activists' norms, it is perceived as legitimate. These norms can be context dependent (Stern & Coleman, 2014). This could however be difficult to achieve, as the police are a different group with different norms than left-wing activists. Overall, it appears that if activists view a police response as proportionate, it is perceived as legitimate.

Practical Implications for the Police

The findings of this thesis could have practical implications to understand activists' trust in the police and the influence of social media police responses on this trust. However, it is important to consider how much impact online police's responses actually have. A returning

concept is the impact of previous experiences which shapes activists' view and trust of the police (Stern & Coleman, 2014), and inadvertently influences the interpretation of online police's responses. This suggests that to actually improve trust in the police, they should not only focus on police responses online, but also take the effect of real-life police (re)actions on activists' trust into account. According to Bos et al. (2002) online trust can take longer to develop than distrust, it could be less stable than in real life and previous research (Bos et al., 2002) suggests that developing online trust is more difficult than in real-life. So, if activists distrust the content of the police's responses, or have rooted distrust in the police, police's responses appear to have no effect on trust in the police. To improve this trust, real-life police reactions to activists could be prioritized, which could be implemented by taking left-wing activists' perception of legitimate action into account in police guidelines. A future study could investigate how online and real-life police responses differ in their impact on trust.

Another consideration is whether a police response should even be posted. Results suggest that left-wing activists prefer more neutral or no police response. Though this finding reflects activists' perception, this does not mean this should be implemented. Less or no contact between the groups does not aid trust-building, while contact between groups can reduce prejudice (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006) and increase trust (Hewstone et al., 2005). This finding does show that a police response to one's post can unpleasantly surprise and causes negative feelings among left-wing activists. The police should take this into consideration when deciding whether to respond. This subject could be explored in a future study.

The aspects of police responses that seemingly influences activists' trust rooted in values, norms and beliefs (legitimacy, the positive influence of shared values and the negative influence of amorality) could be difficult to apply, as the police and activists differ in their perceptions and

values. The focus could be on values both groups agree on, to find common ground. This could help to recognise oneself in the police. For example, a left-wing activist and a police officer who share the same religion have values they agree upon. Thus, having a diverse police force could help represent various values, norms and beliefs which could positively affect left-wing activists' trust in police.

Applying the concepts of interpersonal and institutional trust could be complicated, as the police have both aspects. A police officer is part of the institution, which holds the power and gives orders, while individual officers themselves have little influence. This suggests that the positive perception of individual police officers is overshadowed by the institutional view of the police, as an officer always represents the institution by wearing the uniform. However, an emphasis on the individuality of an officer could foster possibly shared social identities. This could be implemented in police's responses by showcasing individual officer's personality and attributes.

Limitations and Future Research

This thesis' outcomes should be viewed with the consideration of the author's perception and values. Qualitative research leaves room for interpretation, meaning that another researcher could find different results and draw different conclusions. The author knows activists and has heard their stories, though they did not have negative encounters with the police themselves. This influences the authors' perspective, but also could help them understand activists' perception better.

This thesis had a small sample size, so one could question the generalizability. Although, the last interview repeated certain themes and thoughts that were expressed in previous interviews. This could suggest data saturation, as the interviewed activists were a specific group

with the same kind of experiences. Because of the small sample, there was more time to analyze each individual interview, which caused deeper analysis of the data.

Little information was collected regarding activists' real-life experience with police's responses on social media. While the interview questions (Appendix A) could have been more specific, responses regarding online experiences often resulted in either no experience or real-life examples. This indicates that this sample had minimal to no contact with online police's responses. A possible explanation could be the worldview of the activists in this study, who may focus on life offline, or only follow other activists. Even though real-life experience could be more informative, the think-aloud exercises made it possible to collect activists' reactions and opinions on the topic. Future research could use social media influencer activists to get more specific data on online police responses.

Content topics for further research mentioned earlier that emerged from this study are: the forming of activists' humor coping mechanisms, the influence of real-life compared to online police responses on activists' trust, and when it is perceived as legitimate for police to respond to online activists' posts.

Conclusion

This thesis used a qualitative method to suggest what aspects of police's responses might influence the trust of left-wing activists in the police. Aspects with null effect are based on perceived discrepancies between online police's responses and their real-life behavior, and activists' firmly rooted distrust. Aspects with positive effects include the humanization of the police and the sharing of values (norms and goals). Aspects that suggest a negative effect are history, the influence of perceived police intentions on the perception of police power, amorality and viewing the police as an institution. How legitimate left-wing activists view police responses

depends on how proportionate the activists view the police's response to the situation. The findings provide insight into the aspects of online police responses that influence left-wing activists' trust. They also suggest that previous experiences could influence trust and limit the aspects influencing trust, and indicate that left-wing activists may prefer the police refrain from responding at all.

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol

This appendix consists of the interview protocol used when interviewing the activists in this thesis. Both the Dutch and English version are included.

Dutch version

Geïnformeerde toestemming

Hallo, ik ben Yvette en ik doe nu mijn master thesis aan de rijksuniversiteit groningen, met het onderwerp: de invloed van politie social media op het vertrouwen van linkse activisten in de politie.

Ik ben geïnteresseerd in hoeverre linkse activisten de politie vertrouwen en de invloed van politie social media post op deze vertrouwensband. In dit gesprek zullen we het hebben over uw mening over politie, eventuele aanrakingen met politie en politie op social media. We zullen afsluiten met een Think Aloud opdracht. Hierbij zal ik u een tweet (X post) van een politie twitter account laten zien die reageert op een activistische tweet. Ik zal u dan vragen wat u er van vindt en of u een reactie hierop zou willen schrijven waarbij u hardop nadenkt. Dit onderdeel leg ik straks nog wat verder uit.

Dit gesprek zal ongeveer een uur duren, misschien wat minder of meer, dat verschilt per persoon. Ik zou graag dit gesprek opnemen zodat ik geen aantekeningen hoef te maken tijdens het interview die afleiden van het gesprek. Daarnaast wil ik duidelijk maken dat alle antwoorden vertrouwelijk worden behandeld en de opname alleen beschikbaar is voor mij en mijn thesisbegeleider, en dat de opname na het transcriberen van het gesprek direct zal worden verwijderd, wat waarschijnlijk 1 maand, hoogstens 2 maand zal duren.
- Ja, ik geef toestemming voor opname van mijn interview voor dit onderzoek
- Nee, ik geef geen toestemming voor opname van mijn interview voor dit onderzoek.

Tijdens het gesprek mag u altijd vragen stellen of opheldering verzoeken. Als u nog vragen hebt na het onderzoek kunt u me altijd contacteren. Heeft u op dit moment vragen?
- Ja
- Nee

Als laatste wil ik u vragen om geen toekomstige plannen met mij te delen die illegaal van aard zijn.
Afgezien daarvan, zijn er geen goede of foute antwoorden, wij vragen slechts naar je mening! Deelname is vrijwillig, u kunt altijd stoppen. Als laatste hebben wij uw formele toestemming nodig om te beginnen. Geeft u toestemming om deel te nemen aan dit onderzoek?

- Ja, ik geef toestemming
- Nee, ik geef geen toestemming.

<u>Interview</u>
Activisme
- In hoeverre zie jij jezelf als een linkse activist? Wil je daarover uitbreiden? Rond welke onderwerpen ben je vooral actief?
- Om wat voor acties gaat het? Hoe veel tijd steekt u erin? Hoe vaak doet u mee? Organiseert u ook zelf?
- Ben je bij activistische evenementen geweest?
- Gebruikt u hier ook sociale media bij? Waarvoor en op welke manier?
- Welke sociale media gebruikt u vooral? Waarvoor?
- Wat vind je van de aanwezigheid van politie op social media?
- Volg je politie op social media of zie je wel eens social media post van de politie?
    - Zijn er bepaalde posts of reacties die je bij zijn gebleven? Zoja, waarom?

Politie online
- Politie voert wel eens fysieke actie uit tegen of door wat activisten op social media posten. Wat vind je hier van?
    - Kunt u ons verder nog vertellen over ervaringen van anderen uit uw omgeving met reactie(s) van de politie op sociale media?
        - Wat postte iemand? Vertel eens iets meer over… de aanleiding, of er ook anderen actief waren.
        - Wat wilden ze hiermee bereiken? Wat hebben ze hiermee bereikt?
        - Wat deed de politie?
        - Waarom deed de politie dit, denkt u? Wat wilde de politie volgens u hiermee bereiken? Wat was de intentie van de politie, denkt u?
        - Als u teruggaat naar die situatie, kunt u dan (kort) beschrijven:
            - Hoe reageerde u toen de politie dat deed? Heeft wat de politie deed uw gedrag beïnvloed? Zo ja, hoe?
            - Wat dacht u erover toen ze dat deden? Als u het gedrag van deze persoon of personen vergelijkt met de reactie van de politie erop, hebt u dan begrip voor waarom de politie dat zo doet? Sloot wat de politie deed aan bij het beeld dat u tot dat moment had van de politie? Waarop was dat beeld gebaseerd? Hoe sloot dit (niet) aan? Heeft wat de politie deed uw beeld van de politie beïnvloed? Zo ja, hoe?
            - Hoe voelde u zich toen ze dat deden? Sloot wat de politie deed aan bij de relatie die u tot dat moment had met de politie? Waarop was

die relatie gebaseerd? Hoe sloot dit (niet) aan? Heeft wat de politie deed uw relatie met de politie beïnvloed? Zo ja, hoe?

- En hoe veranderde dat (uw gedrag, attitudes, emoties) in de weken en maanden daarna?

Eigen ervaringen

De volgende vragen gaan over uw ervaringen met de manieren waarop de politie reageert op (linkse) protesten en activisme.

- Heeft u zelf weleens "iets activistisch" gedaan waarop de politie op de een of andere manier reageerde?
    - Wat deed u? Vertel eens iets meer over… de aanleiding, of er ook anderen actief waren.
    - Wat wilde u hiermee bereiken? Wat heeft u hiermee bereikt?
    - Wat deed de politie?
    - Waarom deed de politie dit, denkt u? Wat wilde de politie volgens u hiermee bereiken? Wat was de intentie van de politie, denkt u?

- Als u teruggaat naar die situatie, kunt u dan beschrijven:*
    - Hoe reageerde u toen de politie dat deed? Heeft wat de politie deed uw **gedrag** beïnvloed? Zo ja, hoe?
    - Wat **dacht** u erover toen ze dat deden? Als u uw eigen gedrag vergelijkt met de reactie van de politie erop, hebt u dan **begrip** voor waarom de politie dat zo doet? Sloot wat de politie deed aan bij het beeld dat u tot dat moment had van de politie? Waarop was dat beeld gebaseerd? Hoe sloot dit (niet) aan? Heeft wat de politie deed uw beeld van de politie beïnvloed? Zo ja, hoe?
    - Hoe **voelde** u zich toen ze dat deden? Sloot wat de politie deed aan bij de **relatie** die u tot dat moment had met de politie? Waarop was die relatie gebaseerd? Hoe sloot dit (niet) aan? Heeft wat de politie deed uw relatie met de politie beïnvloed? Zo ja, hoe?
    - En hoe veranderde dat (uw gedrag, attitudes, emoties) in de weken en maanden daarna?
        - *Doorvragen naar vertrouwen/wantrouwen in politie en factoren die daar invloed op hebben
    - Zijn er nog meer ervaringen die u hebt gehad met politiereacties op (linkse) acties waarover u wilt vertellen?

- Heb je wel eens social media gebruikt voor activistische doeleinden?
    - Zoja, wat was dat? Wat postte u? Vertel eens iets meer over… de aanleiding, of er ook anderen actief waren.
    - Wat wilde u hiermee bereiken? Wat heeft u hiermee bereikt?
    - Is daar ook op gereageerd door politie? Wat deed de politie?

- Waarom deed de politie dit, denkt u? Wat wilde de politie volgens u hiermee bereiken? Wat was de intentie van de politie, denkt u?
- Wat vond je daar van?

- Als u teruggaat naar die situatie, kunt u dan beschrijven:
  - Hoe reageerde u toen de politie dat deed? Heeft wat de politie deed uw **gedrag** beïnvloed? Zo ja, hoe?
  - Wat **dacht** u erover toen ze dat deden? Als u uw eigen gedrag vergelijkt met de reactie van de politie erop, hebt u dan **begrip** voor waarom de politie dat zo doet? Sloot wat de politie deed aan bij het beeld dat u tot dat moment had van de politie? Waarop was dat beeld gebaseerd? Hoe sloot dit (niet) aan? Heeft wat de politie deed uw beeld van de politie beïnvloed? Zo ja, hoe?
  - Hoe **voelde** u zich toen ze dat deden? Sloot wat de politie deed aan bij de **relatie** die u tot dat moment had met de politie? Waarop was die relatie gebaseerd? Hoe sloot dit (niet) aan? Heeft wat de politie deed uw relatie met de politie beïnvloed? Zo ja, hoe?
  - En hoe veranderde dat (uw gedrag, attitudes, emoties) in de weken en maanden daarna?
- Zijn er nog meer ervaringen die u hebt gehad met politiereacties op online uitingen waarover u wilt vertellen?

Voorbeelden/ think aloud

Voordat we beginnen met de uitleg van het volgende onderdeel, wil ik u vragen om het apparaat erbij te pakken dat u normaal ook gebruikt om berichten over acties op sociale media te plaatsen en te gaan zitten op de plek waar u normaal gesproken ook zit.

Dit laatste onderdeel van het onderzoek bestaat uit het hardop nadenken tijdens het schrijven van een post op sociale media. Daarover geef ik straks een specifiekere uitleg. We zullen nu eerst beginnen met een aantal oefeningen. We doen deze oefeningen om u te laten oefenen met hardop nadenken.

Als mensen een taak uitvoeren of een probleem oplossen, hebben ze een bepaald doel in hun hoofd. Om bij het doel uit te komen moeten ze een weg naar dat doel afleggen. Als u bijvoorbeeld een rekensom krijgt voorgelegd, is het doel de oplossing en de weg ernaartoe zijn alle tussenberekeningen die u uitvoert. In het geval van dit onderzoek is het doel een post op sociale media en de weg ernaartoe zijn uw gedachten tijdens het schrijven.

Bij de volgende oefeningen zijn we niet geïnteresseerd in goede of slechte antwoorden, maar zijn we slechts benieuwd naar uw gedachten (dus naar de weg die u aflegt). Begrijpt u wat er van u verwacht wordt? Dan vertel ik u nu de instructies:

In dit onderzoek zijn we geïnteresseerd in waar u over nadenkt terwijl u een online reactie op sociale media schrijft. Het gaat hierbij om uw reactie op hoe de politie reageert op een post over een protest, maar eerst oefent u met drie opdrachten die niets te maken hebben met sociale media of protesten. [LETTERLIJK VOORLEZEN] Om dit te doen zal ik u vragen om HARDOP NA TE DENKEN terwijl u bezig bent met een post. Met hardop nadenken bedoel ik dat u me ALLES vertelt waaraan u denkt, vanaf het moment dat u voor het eerst de sociale media posts ik u aanreik, leest, tot het moment dat u klaar bent met het schrijven van uw online reactie. Het is belangrijk dat u CONSTANT hardop nadenkt vanaf het moment dat u de posts ziet totdat u uw definitieve reactie hebt geschreven. Als u even stopt met hardop nadenken zal ik u verder helpen door te zeggen 'zeg het maar hardop'/ 'blijf praten'. Het is niet de bedoeling dat u probeert vooraf te plannen wat u gaat zeggen of dat u probeert aan mij uit te leggen wat u zegt.

Begrijpt u wat er van u verwacht wordt in deze taak?

Goed, als u er klaar voor bent zouden we graag beginnen met de eerste van de drie oefenopdrachten. De oefenopdrachten gaan nog niet over sociale media of politie, dat komt daarna.

Als eerste oefening wil ik u vragen om hardop na te denken over het volgende vraagstuk.

"Hoeveel ramen heeft uw huis?"

Goed. Nu zal ik u nog twee oefeningen geven voordat we doorgaan met het hoofdonderzoek over sociale media. Ik wil u vragen om hetzelfde als zojuist te doen bij beide vraagstukken. Denkt u alstublieft hardop na terwijl u probeert antwoord te geven. Het is niet nodig om te tellen, ik zal het aantal voor u bijhouden.

"Noem 20 dieren."

Goed. Als laatste oefening wil ik u vragen om deze twee getallen met elkaar te vermenigvuldigen en mij te vertellen wat u denkt tijdens het vinden van het antwoord.

"Wat is het product van de vermenigvuldiging 24 x 36?"

Goed. Dit is het einde van de oefeningen, we gaan nu beginnen met het hoofdonderzoek. U krijgt een post te zien over een protest, met daaronder een reactie van de politie. Dit noemen we een interactie. Stelt u zich voor dat u deze interactie leest via het sociale media platform waarop u het vaakst posts leest over acties en protesten. Typ een reactie op deze interactie voor op sociale media terwijl u net als bij de oefenopdrachten hardop nadenkt:

Checklist tijdens think aloud

*Tijdens het hardop nadenken de onderstaande onderwerpen afvinken als ze worden benoemd. Indien **NIET** alle variabelen zijn afgecheckt:*

Wij hebben nog enkele vragen over de opdracht die u zojuist heeft gedaan
1. **Doel** van de post
   Wat hoopt u te bereiken met deze post? (+doorvragen?)
2. **Emotie**
   Welke emoties voelde u tijdens het schrijven van deze post?
   Doorvragen naar emoties *(wantrouwen / vertrouwen)*
      - Over wat?
      - Tegenover wie?
3. Sociale **identiteit** (ingroup)
   U kunt een post schrijven op persoonlijke titel, maar ook als activist of deelnemer aan een protest of onderdeel van een sociale beweging. Dat betekent dat u deze kunt schrijven namens uzelf als individu of namens een groter geheel (zoals bijvoorbeeld demonstranten). Namens wie schreef u deze post?
4. Sociale **validatie**
   In hoeverre hebt u het gevoel dat anderen het eens zijn met deze post?
5. **Doeltreffendheid** van de post
   U had het tijdens het hardop nadenken/U antwoordde op mijn eerste vraag wat u als doel had met deze post.
   In hoeverre denkt u dat uw doel bereikt is met deze post?
   In hoeverre denkt u uw doel te gaan bereiken?
6. Het **publiek** van de post
   Wie leest deze post volgens u, als u deze op Facebook / Twitter plaatst?
   Had u tijdens het schrijven van de post iemand in gedachten aan wie u uw post richtte? Zo ja, wie?
7. **Weloverwogenheid**
   Hoelang heeft u stilgestaan bij wat u zou posten?

Indien alle variabelen zijn afgecheckt: Goed, dat was het eerste onderdeel van het onderzoek. Ik wil u vragen om de post die u zojuist heeft geschreven nog niet te verwijderen. (foto/ screenshot van maken om precies te weten waar ze het over hebben in de opname)

Demografische informatie:
- Wat is uw leeftijd?
- Wat is uw geslacht?

Afsluiting
- Wat hoop je voor de toekomst?
- Wil je nog iets anders kwijt?
- Weet je nog iemand waar we ook mee zouden moeten praten over dit onderwerp?

DISCLAIMER: De posts van politie die ik heb laten zien waren niet echt.

English version:
Informed Consent
Hello, I'm Yvette and I am currently conducting my master's thesis at the University of Groningen, focusing on the influence of police social media on the trust of left-wing activists in the police.
I am interested in understanding the level of trust left-wing activists have in the police and the impact of police social media posts on this trust relationship. In this conversation, we will discuss your opinions about the police, any interactions you've had with the police, and police presence on social media. We will conclude with a Think Aloud task. During this task, I will show you a tweet (X post) from a police Twitter account responding to an activist tweet. I will then ask you what you think about it and if you would like to write a response while verbalizing your thoughts. I will explain this part further shortly.

This conversation will take approximately one hour, maybe a bit less or more, depending on the individual. I would like to record this conversation so I don't need to take notes during the interview, which could be distracting. Additionally, I want to clarify that all answers will be treated confidentially, and the recording will only be accessible to me and my thesis supervisor. The recording will be deleted immediately after transcribing the conversation, which will likely take 1 month, at most 2 months.
- Yes, I consent to the recording of my interview for this research.
- No, I do not consent to the recording of my interview for this research.

During the conversation, feel free to ask questions or request clarification. If you have any questions after the study, you can always contact me. Do you have any questions at this time?
- Yes
- No

Lastly, I ask you not to share any future plans with me that are illegal in nature. Apart from that, there are no right or wrong answers; we are just asking for your opinion! Participation is voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time. Finally, we need your formal consent to begin. Do you consent to participate in this research?

- Yes, I consent.
- No, I do not consent.

<u>Interview</u>

Activism

- To what extent do you see yourself as a left-wing activist? Would you like to expand on that? What topics are you particularly active in?
- What types of actions are involved? How much time do you invest in them? How often do you participate? Do you also organize them yourself?
- Have you attended activist events?
- Do you use social media for activism? If so, for what purposes and in what ways?
- Which social media platforms do you primarily use? For what purposes?
- What do you think about the presence of police on social media?
- Do you follow the police on social media or come across police social media posts?
- Are there certain posts or reactions from the police that have stuck with you? If so, why?

Police Online

- The police sometimes take physical action against or in response to what activists post on social media. What are your thoughts on this?
    - Can you tell us more about the experiences of others in your environment regarding the police's reactions on social media?
        - What did someone post? Tell us a bit more about... the trigger, whether others were involved.
        - What did they hope to achieve? What did they achieve?
        - What did the police do?
        - Why do you think the police did this? What do you think the police intended to achieve? What was the police's intention, in your opinion?
        - If you go back to that situation, can you (briefly) describe:
            - How did you react when the police did that? Did what the police did influence your behavior? If yes, how?
            - What did you think about it when they did that? When you compare the behavior of this person or people to the police's response, do you understand why the police did that? Did what the police did align with the image you had of the police up to that point? What was that image based on? How did this (not) align? Did what the police did affect your image of the police? If yes, how?

- How did you feel when they did that? Did what the police did align with the relationship you had with the police up to that point? What was that relationship based on? How did this (not) align? Did what the police did affect your relationship with the police? If yes, how?
- And how did that change (your behavior, attitudes, emotions) in the weeks and months afterward?

Personal Experiences

The following questions are about your experiences with the ways the police respond to (left-wing) protests and activism.

- Have you ever done anything "activist" yourself that the police reacted to in some way?
    - What did you do? Tell us a bit more about... the trigger, whether others were involved.
    - What did you hope to achieve? What did you achieve?
    - What did the police do?
    - Why do you think the police did this? What do you think the police intended to achieve? What was the police's intention, in your opinion?

- If you go back to that situation, can you describe:
    - How did you react when the police did that? Did what the police did influence your behavior? If yes, how?
    - What did you think about it when they did that? When you compare your behavior to the police's response, do you understand why the police did that? Did what the police did align with the image you had of the police up to that point? What was that image based on? How did this (not) align? Did what the police did affect your image of the police? If yes, how?
    - How did you feel when they did that? Did what the police did align with the relationship you had with the police up to that point? What was that relationship based on? How did this (not) align? Did what the police did affect your relationship with the police? If yes, how?
    - And how did that change (your behavior, attitudes, emotions) in the weeks and months afterward?

*Follow-up questions about trust/distrust in the police and factors influencing that.
    - Are there any more experiences you've had with police reactions to (left-wing) actions that you'd like to share?

- Have you ever used social media for activist purposes?
    - If so, what was that? What did you post? Tell us a bit more about... the trigger, whether others were involved.

- What did you hope to achieve? What did you achieve?
- Did the police react to that? What did the police do?
- Why do you think the police did this? What do you think the police intended to achieve? What was the police's intention, in your opinion?
- What did you think about it?
  - If you go back to that situation, can you describe:
    - How did you react when the police did that? Did what the police did influence your behavior? If yes, how?
    - What did you think about it when they did that? When you compare your behavior to the police's response, do you understand why the police did that? Did what the police did align with the image you had of the police up to that point? What was that image based on? How did this (not) align? Did what the police did affect your image of the police? If yes, how?
    - How did you feel when they did that? Did what the police did align with the relationship you had with the police up to that point? What was that relationship based on? How did this (not) align? Did what the police did affect your relationship with the police? If yes, how?
    - And how did that change (your behavior, attitudes, emotions) in the weeks and months afterward?
  - Are there any more experiences you've had with police reactions to online expressions that you'd like to share?

Think Aloud example excersizes

Before we proceed with the explanation of the next section, I would like to ask you to grab the device you normally use to post messages on social media and sit in the same place you usually do. This final part of the study involves thinking aloud while writing a post on social media. I will provide a more specific explanation shortly. First, we'll start with a few exercises. We do these exercises to help you practice thinking aloud.

When people perform a task or solve a problem, they have a specific goal in mind. To reach that goal, they need to navigate a path. For example, if you're presented with a math problem, the goal is the solution and the path to it is all the intermediate calculations you perform. In the case of this study, the goal is a post on social media, and the path to it is your thoughts while writing. We're not interested in right or wrong answers for the following exercises, but rather in your thoughts (the path you take). Do you understand what is expected of you? Then I'll explain the instructions now:

In this study, we're interested in what you think while writing an online response on social media. This involves your reaction to how the police respond to a post about a protest, but first, you'll practice with three tasks unrelated to social media or protests. [READ LITERALLY] To do this,

I'll ask you to THINK ALOUD while working on a post. By thinking aloud, I mean you tell me EVERYTHING you're thinking, from the moment you first see the social media posts I provide, to when you finish writing your online response. It's important that you CONTINUOUSLY think aloud from the moment you see the posts until you've written your final response. If you pause your thinking aloud, I'll prompt you to continue by saying 'say it out loud'/'keep talking'. You shouldn't try to pre-plan what you're going to say or explain what you're saying to me.

Do you understand what is expected of you in this task?

Alright, whenever you're ready, we'd like to start with the first of the three practice tasks. The practice tasks do not involve social media or the police yet; that comes next.
For the first exercise, I'd like you to think aloud about the following question:

"How many windows does your house have?"

Okay. Now I'll give you two more exercises before we move on to the main study about social media. I'd like you to do the same thing as before for both questions. Please think aloud as you try to answer. There's no need to count; I'll keep track of the numbers for you.

"Name 20 animals."

Alright. For the final exercise, I'd like you to think aloud while finding the answer to this question:

"What is the product of the multiplication 24 x 36?"

Alright. This concludes the exercises. Now, we'll begin the main study. You'll see a post about a protest, followed by a response from the police. This is called an interaction. Imagine you're reading this interaction on the social media platform where you often read posts about actions and protests. Type a response to this interaction for social media while thinking aloud, just like with the practice tasks.

Checklist during Think Aloud

During the Think Aloud task, tick off the following topics as they are mentioned. If NOT all variables are checked:

We have a few more questions about the task you just completed.
1. Purpose of the post
   What do you hope to achieve with this post? (+follow-up questions?)

2. Emotion
   Which emotions did you feel while writing this post?
   Further inquiries about emotions (distrust/trust)
      About what?
      Towards whom?

---

3. Social identity (ingroup)
   You can write a post on a personal basis, as an activist, or as a participant in a protest or part of a social movement. This means you can write it either as an individual or as part of a larger group (such as demonstrators). Who did you write this post on behalf of?

4. Social validation
   To what extent do you feel that others agree with this post?

5. Effectiveness of the post
   You mentioned during the Think Aloud/You answered my first question about what your goal was with this post. To what extent do you think your goal has been achieved with this post?
   To what extent do you think you will achieve your goal?

6. The audience of the post
   Who do you think will read this post if you post it on Facebook/Twitter?
   Did you have someone in mind to whom you addressed your post while writing it? If so, who?

7. Consideration
   How long did you consider what you would post?

Alright, that completes the first part of the study. I'd like to ask you not to delete the post you've just written yet. (Take a photo/screenshot of it to precisely identify it during the recording.)

Demographic Information
- What is your age?
- What is your gender?

Closing
- What do you hope for the future?
- Is there anything else you'd like to add?
- Do you know anyone else we should talk to about this topic?

DISCLAIMER: The police posts I showed were not real.

Appendix B

Think Aloud Prompts

This appendix contains the prompt the activists were given for the think aloud exercise.

Both Dutch and English versions are included.

Dutch posts

1.

2.

3.

WOONPROTEST @WOONPROTEST ···
Vandaag naar het #woonprotest in Adam.
Dat een mensenrecht als onderdak is getransformeerd
naar een verdienmodel voor beleggers is te absurd voor
woorden. Wonen is een recht!

Politie Nederland @Politie ···
Ron, onze favoriete koffieliefhebber, was ook bij het
laatste #woonprotest en heeft met veel van jullie gepraat.
Hij is vandaag weer van de partij!

Picture of a middle aged, male police officer in uniform

4.

English posts

WOONPROTEST @WOONPROTEST · ···
Today heading to the #housingprotest in Amsterdam. The
fact that a fundamental human right like shelter has been
transformed into a profit-making scheme for investors is
beyond words. Housing is a right!

Politie Nederland @Politie ···
We aim to respect all viewpoints and ensure that
demonstrations proceed peacefully and within the rules.
Let's ensure there is enough space for everyone to voice
their opinions.

1.

WOONPROTEST @WOONPROTEST · ···
Today heading to the #housingprotest in Amsterdam. The
fact that a fundamental human right like shelter has been
transformed into a profit-making scheme for investors is
beyond words. Housing is a right!

Politie Nederland @Politie ···
96 percent of protests proceed without incidents, and
today we are once again well-prepared and ready!

2.

WOONPROTEST @WOONPROTEST ···
Today heading to the #housingprotest in Amsterdam. The fact that a fundamental human right like shelter has been transformed into a profit-making scheme for investors is beyond words. Housing is a right!

Politie Nederland @Politie ···
We thank the organizers of this protest for registering this event; this way, we can help each other ensure that such gatherings proceed smoothly. Thank you!

3.

WOONPROTEST @WOONPROTEST ···
Today heading to the #housingprotest in Amsterdam. The fact that a fundamental human right like shelter has been transformed into a profit-making scheme for investors is beyond words. Housing is a right!

Politie Nederland @Politie ···
Ron, our favorite coffee enthusiast, was also at the last #housingprotest and had a chat with many of you. He's joining us again today!
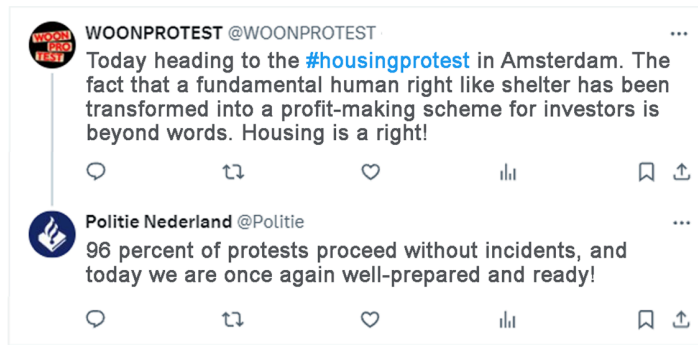
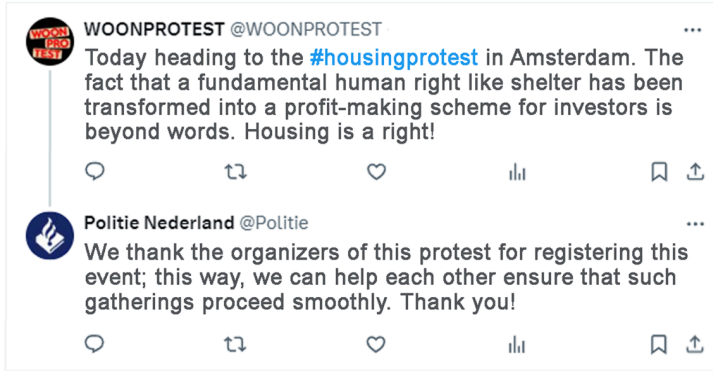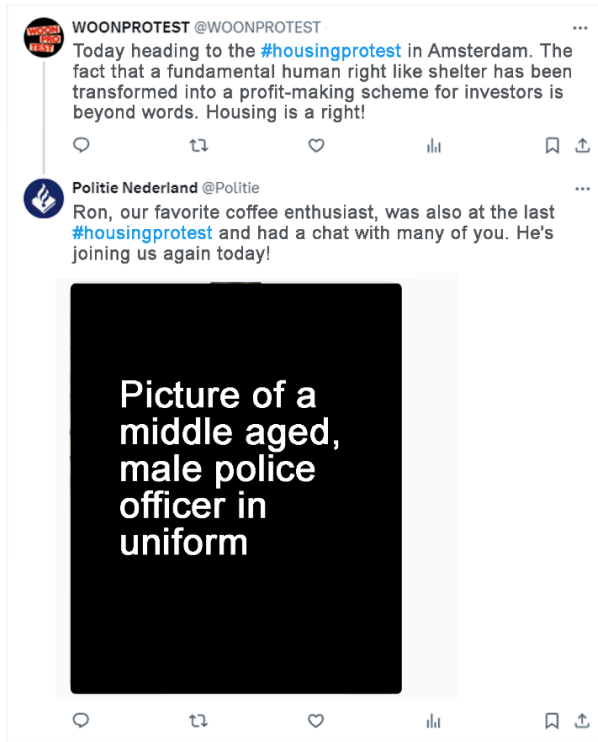Picture of a middle aged, male police officer in uniform

4.

Appendix C

Thematic Analysis Codes

This appendix consists of the list of codes that were used in the thematic analysis this

thesis used to analyze the data.

Codes used in analysis:

Ability - police is perceived as capable, and correctly executing the tasks of their job

Ascribed police emotion - emotion or thoughts the activist ascribed to police

Benevolence - police is perceived to be trusting, thankful or respectful toward activists

Charisma - police is perceived to be likable or humanized

Clashing moral values - the values of activists and police do not match

Detachment from situation - having humoristic / very calm reaction to heavy situations

Distrust - statements that showed distrust of activists in police

Experiences of others - stories and experiences activists heard from others in their circle

History between police and activists - previous experience between police and activists

Influence of police action - something that the police did had influence on activist
perception of police

Ingroup / outgroup - us vs. them view, clear talk about groups

Institutional trust - trust in an institution, police was talked about as an organization

Integrity - perception of good morals and obeying the law

Interpersonal trust - trust between individuals, police was talked about as people

Legitimacy of police action - opinion or reaction regarding how justified a police
response or police action was

Negative effect on trust - aspects or experiences that seemed to have a negative
influence on trust

Negative emotion toward police - negative emotions that came up when discussing
police (such as frustration or fear)

Negative intention - perception of activists that police has negative or harming intentions

Neutral effect on trust - no perceived effect on trust

Neutral emotions toward police - neutral/ little/ flat emotions toward police

Neutrality of police - perceptions or opinions regarding how neutral or non neutral the
police is or should be

Online persona - the perception that online police is marketing / not truthful

Opposite of ability - police is perceived as incapable, not performing their job correctly

Opposite of benevolence - police is perceived as suspicious or disrespectful toward
activists

Opposite of charisma - police is perceived as unlikable or unhuman/demonized

Opposite of integrity - police is perceived as amoral or hypocritical

Opposite of legitimacy - police actions are perceived as not proportional to the instigating action

Positive effect on trust - police action or aspects that seemed to have a positive influence on activists' trust

Positive emotion toward police - positive emotions that came up when discussing police (such as endearment or gratefulness)

Positive intention - perception of activists that police has positive or helpful intentions toward them

Power discrepancy - the difference in power between activists and police

Trust - statements that showed trust of activists in police

Appendix D

Original Dutch Citations and Texts

The original Dutch text or quotes, which were translated into English, are displayed below in order of in-text appearances:

English translation: "So, you keyboard hero on socks. It is not the question if, but when we are coming to get you. You're coming to stay with us. Get your suitcase with your pajamas and toothbrush ready."

Original Dutch text: "Dus, jij, toetsenbord held op sokken. Het is niet de vraag of, maar wanneer we je komen halen. Je komt namelijk bij ons logeren. Zet je koffertje met je pyjama en tandenborstel maar vast klaar." (Politie Gelderland & Overijssel, 2021)

English translation: "They have a social media to, well, to show what kind of good things they are doing, right? Not to… Their goal is not at all to show how things really are." (P1)

Original Dutch Text: " Ze hebben toch een social media presence om, nou ja, om te laten zien wat voor goeds ze allemaal wel niet doen. Niet om... Hun doel is helemaal niet om te laten zien hoe dingen echt zijn."

English translation: "No, it is.. It feels like the exception, you know?"(P1)

Original Dutch text: "Nee, het is al... Dat voelt als de uitzondering. Snap je?"

English translation: "It [a police officer standing closely in front of P1, puffing his chest and threatening to take P1 into the police van] didn't bother me that much and that just made him

scream even louder. Really like: "and you don't have to put on such a face." Well, very strange. And then he was taken by his colleagues and was a bit soothed by them saying: "calm, calm down, it is not worth it". So, yeah, this was of course funny. [...] And funny, because it is like: "oh of course, this is how they [the police] are." That's the joke then, right?"

Original Dutch text: "Het deed me niet zo heel veel en daardoor ging ie alleen maar harder schreeuwen. Echt zo van: "en dan hoef je niet zo'n smoel op te zetten" Nou, helemaal raar. En totdat hij dus door zijn collega's mee naar achteren werd genomen en een beetje werd gesust van: "rustig, rustig, het is het niet waard." Ja. Goed. Dit was natuurlijk lollig. [...] En ja. En lollig Ja, omdat het. Zo van: "Oh ja, dit is hoe ze zijn." Dat is het grapje dan hè."

English translation: "Everything is, the world is fucked up. And every time you try to speak about it, the police knocks you down. Then [by using humor as reaction to police reaction] I am a bit like: yeah, but they don't fool me." (P1)

Original Dutch text: "Van: alles is, de wereld is fucked up. Elke keer dat je denkt je tegen uit te spreken, knuppelt de politie je neer. En dan een beetje van: ja maar mij hebben ze niet hoor."

English translation: "I think that my first real police experience [police coming to their house after a burglary happened, and had a kind interaction] was just very early in life and just very impressively positive. Yes, that causes a certain kind of… I think that the piece of trust did start there, or something." (P2)

Original Dutch text: "Ik denk dat dat gewoon mijn eerste echte politie ervaring gewoon echt heel vroeg was en gewoon heel indrukwekkend positief. Ja, wat dan maakt dat daar meteen een bepaald soort... Ik denk dat dat het stukje vertrouwen daar wel is gestart of zo."

English translation: "It's like this: before I did trust that if I were in need, that the police would protect me. Because you know, violence is violence and they don't like that. So, right? But after this incident [police beating in on their protest march]... and all the others - but now I am talking about this one - I feel like I'm more dependent on myself to make sure that I.. I don't have the feeling that I can always trust the police when I am in need. No, I maybe used to have that more." (P1)

Original Dutch text: "Zo zit het: daarvoor vertrouwde ik er wel op dat als ik dan een keer in nood zou zijn, dan zou de politie me wel beschermen. Want weetje, geweld is geweld en dat vinden ze niet goed. Dus dan, he? Maar na dit incident. En alle anderen, maar het gaat hier over. Ik voel me meer op mezelf aangewezen om ervoor te zorgen dat ik, ik heb niet het idee dat altijd ja, ik heb niet het idee dat ik altijd de politie kan vertrouwen als ik in nood verkeer. Nee, dat had ik misschien wel meer."

English translation: "So, I think that they [police] are just very scared for things that reasonably are not going to happen [activists coming to a protest with the goal of hurting police]. And the times that violence did happen, that people fought with police, like hooligans or what happened in the eighties with the squatter riots. They threw stones back then. I think they [police] are scared for that, that this is going to happen again. That we are those people." (P5)

Original Dutch text: "Dus ik denk dat ze gewoon heel bang zijn voor dingen die redelijkerwijs niet gaan gebeuren. En de keren dat het wel gebeurt, dat mensen de politie vechten, dus als hooligans het doen of als het gebeurt in de jaren 80 met de krakersrellen toen er wel echt met stenen werden gegooid. Ik denk dat ze daar bang voor zijn, dat dat weer kan gebeuren. Of dat wij dat zijn."

English translation: "Well, you begin thinking, you know the stories, so you think: oh, what if they suddenly just begin hitting? Like, beating in on the march." (P1)

Original Dutch text: "Nou ja, je gaat meteen al denken, je kent de verhalen, dus je gaat meteen nadenken: oh, wat als ze dr in, gewoon zomaar erop los gaan slaan? Uh, op de mars in gaan houwen."

English translation: "I think that there will be a very positive response to this post [post 4, based on the trust characteristic charisma] and that it is a very positive way to give the police some humanization instead of the regulator who always keeps control. This gives a certain.. Well, it gives a certain goodwill on all sides and a certain... Yes, this makes me happy." (P2)

Original Dutch text: "Ik denk dat hier echt heel positief op gereageerd zal worden en dat het een hele positieve manier is om de politie een beetje menselijkheid te geven in plaats van de regelaars die het altijd maar onder de duim houden. Nu geeft het een bepaalde... Nou, dat geeft een bepaalde goodwill aan alle kanten en een bepaalde... Ja, ik word hier blij van."

English translation: "Well, I didn't even think of that, because I see a human in front of me. I don't see any evil intent or something." (P1)

Original Dutch text: " daar heb ik dus nog niet eens over nagedacht, want ik zie een mens voor me. Ik zie geen evil intentie of zo."

English translation: "He looks so cute. [...] I like that, okay? Old, grandpa looking men who look sweet." (P4)

Original Dutch text: "Hij kijkt zo schattig. [...] Ze hebben me oke. Oude, opa-achtige mannen die lief kijken."

English translation:

"P4: And I think they [police] genuinely thank them [activists] that they did it [organising the protest] by the book. [...]

Interviewer: Does this bring up a certain emotion?

P4: I don't know, I do find it sweet or something. It is just helping each other to make sure these kinds of events go smoothly. It feels.. Yeah, it just feels nice."

Original Dutch text:

"P4: En ook oprecht denk ik ze bedanken dat ze dat hebben gedaan volgens het boekje [...].

Interviewer: Ja, brengt ook een bepaalde emotie naar boven?

P4: Ik weet niet, ik vind het wel lief of zo. Het is gewoon gewoon elkaar helpen om zulke bijeenkomsten soepel te laten verlopen. Het voelt... Ja, het voelt wel aardig gewoon."

English translation: "I think this [police reaction based on integrity] is a positive way for the police to show they are going to be present at the protest, so people are informed of their presence. I think this is a good, nuanced way of showing the right of demonstration or to show like: we stand behind the right for demonstration. So I am actually pretty positive about it [the post]." (P2)

Original Dutch text: "Dit vind ik een positieve manier om voor de politie even zich te laten zien dat ze aanwezig gaan zijn bij het protest, zodat mensen daarvan op de hoogte zijn. En ik vind dit een mooie genuanceerde manier om het recht op demonstratie wel.. open te laten of een soort van te laten zien van: wij staan ook achter het recht op demonstratie. Dus ik ben er eigenlijk best wel positief over."

English translation: "This [police response based on integrity] is again clearly propaganda, actually. Kind of like: let's hear all voices. They just mean: you're not allowed to be difficult, we don't like it when you are being difficult." (P5)

Original Dutch text: "Dit is weer dit is dus wel duidelijk propaganda eigenlijk. Een soort van: laat alle stemmen wel horen. Ze bedoelen gewoon: je mag niet lastig lastig doen, we vinden het niet leuk als jullie lastig doen."

English translation: "If it's from a normal person, like, if I would say to another person: hey, do you want to take that offline, otherwise I'll look into whether I can do anything legally about it. That is different, but with police… You just know they are going to look at if you have broken a law, so they can arrest you because you did something they did not like. Yeah, well, I think that's a bad thing." (P5)

Original Dutch text: " als het van een normaal persoon komt zovan, als ik tegen een ander persoon zou zeggen: he, wil je dat offline halen, anders ga ik kijken of ik er rechterlijk ook wat aan kan doen. Dat is anders, maar de politie.. Je weet gewoon dat zij dan gewoon gaan kijken of je een wet hebt overtreden, om je dan op te pakken omdat jij iets gedaan wat ze niet leuk vonden. Ja nou ja, dat vind ik wel kwalijk dus."

English translation:

"P1: Oh, that sounds nice. As in, no but that.. 96%.. Well, that probably isn't true, right?

Interviewer: Why do you think that?

P1: Well, why would it be true if they [police] say it?"

Original Dutch text:

"P1: Oh, dat klinkt prettig. Alsin, nee maar dat het.. 96%.. Nou dat zal vast niet waar zijn he?

Interviewer: Waarom denk je dat?

P1: Naja goed, waarom zou het wel waar zijn als zij het zeggen."

English translation: "When I see posts where they [police] try to seem very sweet, then I think like: yeah, that's from their side propaganda to be seen in a better light." (P5)

Original Dutch text: "als ik zo'n post zie waar ze weer proberen, heel erg lief over te komen, en dan denk ik van: ja, dat is volgens mij meer van hun kant ook weer propaganda om een beetje in beter licht te komen."

English translation: "It [police response based on benevolence] is so formal. Formal, a spiel." (P1)

Original Dutch text: "Ik bedoel echt. Formeel. Formeel, een riedeltje."

English translation: "I don't think that those posts [neighborhood police responded to a squatter account] exist because the neighborhood police officer actually really cares about these people or really thinks it's important. He does this because it's his job, as police officer and not as a person. And that's why… It is to present the police as a more accessible and friendlier organisation." (P5)

Original Dutch text: "Ik denk niet dat die posts er zijn omdat die wijkagent zelf echt heel erg geeft om die mensen of dat heel belangrijk vind. Dat doet ie uit zijn baan, als politieagent en niet als persoon. En daarom.. Het is om de politie zeg maar neer te zetten als een wat toegankelijker en vriendelijker organisatie."

English translation: "I think [the police has] a big focus on criminal activity and the subversive elements in society that are there, or something. They are so concerned with that, and that is also their job, they have a hyper focus on it. We maybe, as activist but also as anarchist, have a hyper focus on the government, who does all kinds of bad things. And they think that maybe about us as well, because they are our enemies." (P5)

Original Dutch text: "Ik denk toch een beetje, ja een erge focus op dat er criminaliteit is en dat er subversieve elementen in de maatschappij zijn of zo. Ze zijn er zo erg mee bezig en dat is voor hun ook hun baan en zij leggen daar de hyper focus op. Wij misschien als activist of als

anarchist vooral, de hyperfocus op de staat, die doet allemaal foute dingen. En zij denken dat misschien ook weer over ons, want dat zijn onze vijanden."

English translation: "It's not in my [social media] algorithm, for the police to show up. And if I see posts about it, it is usually from, for example, the movement in Groningen that concerns itself with University Rights. Yes, those [people from the movement] are some of my friends, but those [the posts] are usually pretty negative ways in which the police are displayed." (P2)

Original Dutch text: "Dat is niet in mijn algoritme, komt de politie erg vaak voor. En als ik er dan posts over zie, dan zijn het vaak van bijvoorbeeld de beweging in Groningen die heel erg veel bezig is met Universiteitsrecht. Ja, dat zijn ook wel wat vrienden van me, maar dat zijn vaak hele negatieve manieren waarop de politie in beeld wordt gebracht."

English translation: "But if a police officer strangles someone, like during your job, and someone takes a picture of it. Let's let the police explain why that is good. And if that wasn't good, then I don't really understand why someone gets arrested for slander or libel or doxing [for posting it online]. Because that police officer is just doing his job, a photo is taken of this. That is allowed. And then they say like: yeah, this is slander. But why is it slander? Yes, it looks bad. But then explain why it is bad, and they often can't. So that is then, I think a bit intimidation of activists." (P5)

Original Dutch text: "Maar als een agent gewoon iemand wurgt, zeg maar voor werk en je maakt er een foto van. Laat de politie maar uitleggen waarom dat wel goed is. En als dat niet goed was, dan snap ik niet zo goed waarom iemand daar voor laster of zo wordt opgepakt of

voor smaad, of voor doxen. Want die agent doet gewoon zijn werk. Daar wordt een foto gemaakt in het openbaar. Dat mag. En dan wordt je opeens gezegd van: ja, nee, dat is laster. Maar hoezo is dat laster? Ja, het ziet er slecht uit. Maar leg dan uit waarom het slecht is en dat lukt vaak niet. Dus dat is dan. Ik vind het een beetje intimidatie van activisten."

English translation:

"Interviewer: If you would post something like this [a joking response to police response based on integrity], how long would you dwell on the matter of posting it?

P1: Yes, if I would, I would take a moment.

Interviewer: Why?

P1: Because they can just show up at your door."

Original Dutch text:

"Interviewer: Als je iets zou posten op zo'n social media zoals dit, hoe lang zou je er bij stil staan voordat je het post? Stel he.

P1: Ja, als ik dat zou doen wel effe.

Interviewer: Waarom?

P1: Ja omdat ze zomaar voor je deur kunnen staan."

English translation: "The part that does irritate me a bit, is that you [police officer] are part of the power triangle and that you have a certain authority, that makes you… I'm fine with it if you, as a police officer, post on social media about being a police officer. But maybe the sharing of opinions in that context, I find it complicated. Because as a police officer, you should

be neutral and stand behind the law. And that should be disconnected from you as an individual." (P2)

Original Dutch text: "Waar het bij mij wel een beetje schuurt is dat je onderdeel bent van de machtsdriehoek en dat je daar dan een bepaalde, je hebt een bepaalde autoriteit. Die maakt dat je... Ik vind het prima als je als politieagent op je sociale media post over het zijn van politieagent. Maar misschien het delen van meningen dan in die context vind ik wel ingewikkeld. Omdat je als politieagent eigenlijk neutraal moet zijn en achter de wet moet staan. En dus dat los moet staan van wie je bent als persoon."

English translation: "I think it is weird when they [police] interfere in political actions or give an opinion about it. Look, if there's an Amber Alert: fine, good! Share it!" (P4)

Original Dutch text: "Ik vind het raar wanneer ze zich met politieke acties bemoeien of daar een mening over geven. Kijk, als er een Amber Alert is: prima, goed! Deel het."