CLOSING THE GAPS

CRIME & PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS

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FOREWORD

The gap between actual crime trends and public perceptions has cast a shadow over criminal policy since it became apparent – with the downturn in crime – in the mid-1990s. Neither the fall in crime nor the fact that this has gone unnoticed by the public is unique to this country. There are also other areas of social policy where public beliefs are out of step with reality. However, the 'perception gap' in relation to crime and punishment is especially large, and the distortions thus caused to crime politics are particularly serious.

This is an important report and Ipsos MORI is to be congratulated for producing it. It brings together the key evidence to paint a picture of the nature and causes of these gaps – and it presents some serious challenges for the Government and the criminal justice system.

The irony is that the Government has given people much of what they are apparently asking for – much tougher sentencing, more people in prison, more police on the streets. However, like the fall in crime, these changes have gone largely unnoticed, and the Government has received very little credit for its efforts. A number of commentators – myself included – have criticised politicians for being overly responsive to the apparent demands of public opinion. However it emerges that this is a peculiarly unpopular form of populism.

A large part of the explanation is to be found in media coverage. Media-bashing is a tempting sport – though one that this report successfully manages to avoid. The print and broadcast media play a critical role in holding governments to account. One only has to think of Iraq and the weapons of mass destruction whose non-existence was brought to public attention by the media. But media portrayals of crime and justice do seem to be particularly perverse. News stories about soaring crime and judges who are soft on crime and soft in the head are good for circulation, but bad for justice – when the headlines bear so little relation to reality.

But part of the explanation why the Government's crime policies have achieved so little purchase on public opinion is the complexity and contradictory nature of public attitudes about crime and

justice. It is not just that different people hold different views, but that the same person can also be inconsistent in their attitudes. As the report shows, people want tougher sentences – but are not convinced that prison works. When asked to 'sentence' cases themselves, they are not especially punitive. Their preference would be for more preventative measures such as working with parents and children.

I welcome the report's policy recommendations. Compliance with the law requires institutions of justice that are not only effective but are also able to command the trust and confidence of the public. Bolstering the legitimacy of the justice system is an important priority. So the report is right to emphasise the need for robust measurement and monitoring of perceptions of crime. So too is the call for more effective engagement with the public by the different elements of the criminal justice system. Given their standing in the eye of the public, the police have a crucial role to play as positive advocates.

Over the next few years we can expect growing pressures on the criminal justice system. The last decade has seen reductions in crime that are the consequence of an improving economy, better design, better technology, more surveillance, coupled with increased investment from the government in the police and other parts of the system. Only a confirmed optimist would predict an ever-improving economy over the next decade or two, and pressures on public spending are likely to be intense. Now is the time to make a determined effort to get a healthier balance between crime policy and public opinion. The opportunities to do so may shrink if and when we are faced with another upturn in crime.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Crime has been a major focus for the government over the past decade, with a raft of new legislation implemented since 1997. And this has given people a lot of what they asked for – there are more police and they are more visible, sentencing is tougher and there are more people in prison. Overall, crime has fallen significantly.

But there are major gaps between these measurable facts and public perception. In particular the public still think that crime rates are soaring and that personal safety has declined – and they blame the government. This is a serious challenge, as we know that rating of competence on dealing with crime is a key driver of overall views of government, as well as citizens' quality of life.

This report explores why the gap between actual crime and the perception of crime exists and considers what government can do to improve public perceptions. Some issues are driven by the media and are beyond government control, but there are significant actions they can take. This seems a particularly appropriate time to pull together our extensive evidence, given that the new Home Secretary has just published a new crime strategy, Sir Ronnie Flanagan has just produced the interim report from his review of policing and Louise Casey has just been asked to head a review focusing on how to build confidence and reduce fear of crime in local communities.

Perceptions of crime

Crime became a feature of political party manifestos in the 1960s but it was not until the late 1970s that it became a key political issue. Through the 1980s and until the early 1990s, the public viewed the Conservative Party as the best party on crime. In 1992, following a clear focus on crime by the Labour Party and Tony Blair (*'tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime'*), the perceived gap between the two parties narrowed and indeed Labour took a slight lead. Yet, by 2000, the familiar pattern had been restored and once again, Labour was viewed as second best on crime.

This is a major issue for the government as crime is a top concern for the public. In fact, one of our polls from this summer showed that 55% of British people think crime and violence is one of the most worrying issues for them – this is one of the highest levels of concern that we have ever recorded for any single issue and 20 percentage points more than the next most important issue. Crime and violence is also a higher priority for the British public than in many other European countries and the US, and has been consistently since 1997.
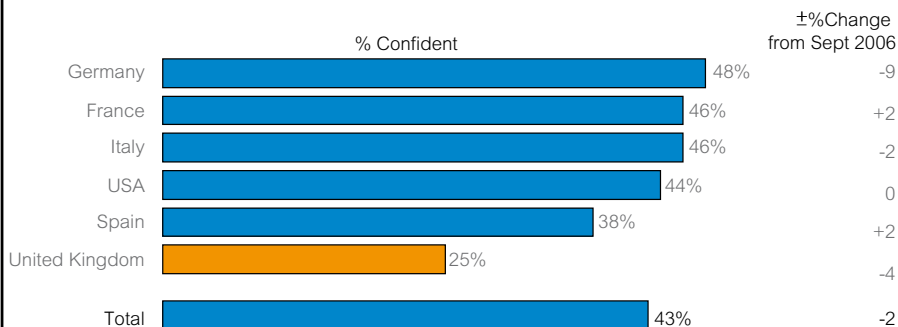
At the same time, the government has spent an unprecedented amount on the Criminal Justice System (CJS) and now spends more per head on law and order than any other country in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). And to a large extent, they have spent this money on areas and issues that, it would seem, should meet public demand. There are, for example, more police officers than ever before, neighbourhood policing has been a priority, average sentence length has increased and greater powers have been introduced to help tackle anti-social behaviour (ASB).

In terms of key outcomes, actual crime rates have fallen since 1997 with crime overall reduced by 32%. There have also been significant reductions in specific key crimes, with, for example, domestic burglary and vehicle crime reduced by 55% and 52% respectively since 1997. But the majority of people do not believe these figures: only one in five are willing to accept that crime is falling and less than half (43%) believe there are more police.

Confidence in the government's handling of crime is lower in this country than the five major countries included in our regular international tracking study, as shown in the following chart. This is not simply a result of an unpopular government in the UK not being trusted on all activities – the British public displays a higher level of confidence than these same countries in other areas including, for example, education.

CONFIDENCE IN THE GOVERNMENT TO CRACK DOWN ON CRIME AND VIOLENCE

Q: Please tell me whether you are confident in the current government, or not, when it comes to: 'Cracking down on crime and violence'

% Confident

±%Change from Sept 2006

	% Confident	±%Change from Sept 2006
Germany	48%	-9
France	46%	+2
Italy	46%	-2
USA	44%	0
Spain	38%	+2
United Kingdom	25%	-4
Total	43%	-2

Source: Ipsos MORI International Social Trends Monitor, Nov 2006   Base: c.1,000 interviews in each country

This is a key issue for the government because there is a strong correlation between trends in ratings of performance on crime and trends in voting intention. This is supported by analysis of the issues that people say will influence their vote: 'crime and ASB' is the most important issue with, 57% rating it as very important, followed by 'healthcare' and 'asylum and immigration'.

More detailed analysis also reveals that in recent times, crime has been an important driver of *dis*satisfaction with the Labour government rather than satisfaction. This is in contrast to other major issues – for example, feeling that race/immigration, NHS or tax are major issues for Britain are all related both to dissatisfaction and satisfaction with the government. One particularly worrying interpretation of this is that *while they get the blame among those that see crime as a major issue, the current government does not get the credit for it going well among those who are not concerned* (unlike with other issues). This seems believable, given patterns on Labour not being seen as the natural party of law and order.

There is however, a second, somewhat more positive perception gap – the public has more confidence in how crime is managed locally than nationally. Admittedly, people are still fairly pessimistic about local crime but they are much less negative than they are about national crime rates. This is not a particularly new or unique finding and is in fact seen in other public service areas, such as health and in studies in the 1990s in other countries. Even so, it is still important to try to understand *why* this gap exists.

Why do these perception gaps exist?

The first set of explanations involve the public misconceiving or being misled on the issues. A number of studies show that media coverage of crime is biased towards the negative, a fact that is likely to both explain why perceptions are more negative than actual trends and to influence national more than local opinion. Other reasons for misconceptions between local and national opinion include a natural 'hometown favouritism', where people tend to consider their community as better than other communities (i.e. safer, healthier, etc) and by extension to think less of the country as a whole since it is made up largely of 'other' communities.

The second possible explanation is that there is a number of high profile or 'signal crimes' that have a greater impact on perceptions than other crimes, and that these crimes – in contrast to some other crimes - are *not decreasing*. There is some evidence for this. For example, crimes resulting in injury from firearms are up almost four-fold and homicides are up 23% since 1997.

However, the numbers directly affected by these are very small, and so clearly the main impact on perceptions will be through media coverage, which is illustrated in the recent example of the killing of Rhys Jones and the generalisation from one tragic death to "anarchy in the UK" by The Sun newspaper. We will return to look at the role of the media in more detail later.

The third possible explanation is that the definition of 'crime' in the public's mind incorporates far wider issues than official definitions of crime, with personal conceptions of crime potentially encompassing such things as terrorism and ASB. There is qualitative and survey evidence that this is the case, and so to the extent that these have become greater concerns in the last 10 years (which is certainly the case for terrorism and possibly the case for ASB, depending on the measure used), then crime will also be seen to have increased.

These explanations go some way to explaining the gaps, but having a more detailed understanding of what factors really drive public opinion about crime provides other useful pointers on how best to improve public perceptions.

What drives public perceptions of crime?

Results from our research and other studies show there a number of factors which together drive views on crime. These include:

1. Demographic factors
2. Political views
3. Communications by the media, the government and opposition
4. Perceptions of the police, CJS staff advocacy, and contact with the CJS
5. Views about leniency of sentencing and prisons
6. Perceptions of ASB and terrorism
7. General levels of trust in government information

There are significant demographic variations in perceptions of government performance on crime. Research using simple analyses shows that older groups, those without qualifications, and those living in very affluent areas hold more negative views. Those more likely to hold positive views include the youngest groups, those with the highest qualifications, those living in the most deprived areas, and those from minority ethnic groups, particularly Asian.

We surveyed almost 2,000 members of the general public about their satisfaction that the 'government was dealing with crime'. Unlike most other studies, we included voting intention in the multiple regression model. Results suggested that the surprisingly negative views of those living in affluent areas is more likely to be related to the voting intention patterns of residents in these areas, who are much more likely to be Conservative supporters and to rate the government very poorly on dealing with crime. This may seem obvious, but voting intention is generally not examined in government reviews on perceptions of crime – which is understandable, but raises the risk of drawing the wrong conclusions about crime priorities.

There is strong evidence that the media plays a key role in both the perception of rising crime rates and the gap between perceptions about national and local crime rates. When we asked the public why they think there is more crime now than two years ago, more than half (57%) state that it is because of what they see on television and almost half (48%) say it is because of what they read in newspapers, as shown in the following chart. The political slant of newspapers they read also makes a difference; regression analysis reveals that those reading 'centre-right' papers are significantly less satisfied that the government is 'dealing with crime' (even after controlling for voting patterns of the readers).

WHY DO PEOPLE THINK THERE IS MORE CRIME?

Q: What makes you think that there is <u>more crime</u> than two years ago?

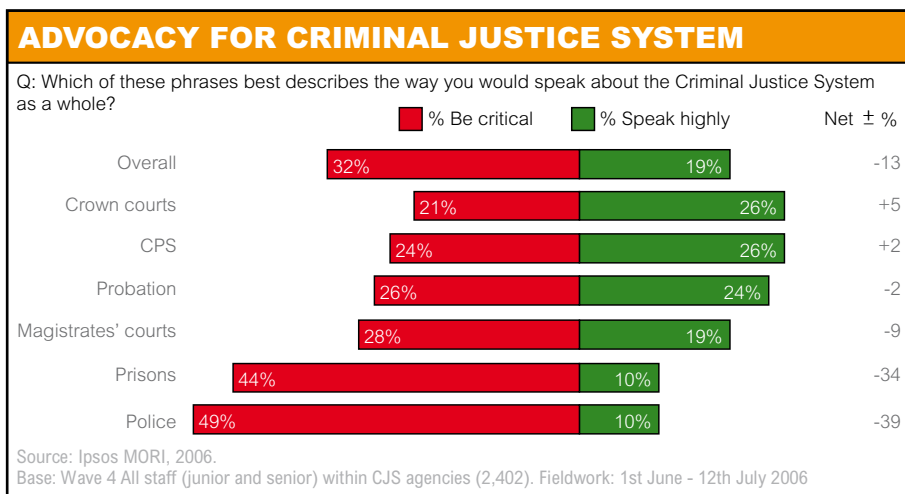|	
TV	57%
From what I read in newspapers	48%
Experience of people I know	24%
Personal experience	20%
Radio	15%
Feel generally less safe	12%
Teenagers hanging around	7%
Internet	3%
More police on the streets	1%
Other	5%
Don't know	1%
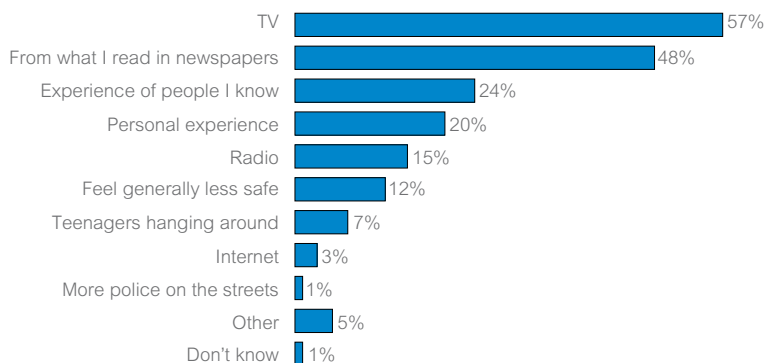
Source: Ipsos MORI January 2007   Base: Those who say there is a little/a lot more crime (1,191)

Public perceptions of the police are also very important, with confidence that the police are doing a good job largely driving overall views on the CJS, especially at a local level. Furthermore, when we ask what would increase their confidence in the CJS, the most common response is the wish for a greater police presence. The police are highly trusted (more so than politicians and civil servants) by the general public. Indeed, many blame the system or the government for any perceived ineffectiveness of the police.

There is evidence, however, that - unlike other government services - people may be less confident after they have come into direct contact with the police than they were before direct contact. This kind of finding underlines the need for a continued focus on improvements in police customer service.

One of the most significant problems for the government is that the police are extremely critical about the CJS with almost half (49%) saying that they would speak critically of the CJS and only 10% saying they would speak highly of it, as shown in the following chart. This low level of staff advocacy is extremely important; findings from wider studies reveal that staff advocacy is closely related to wider perceptions of competence. This, coupled with the fact that there are large numbers of police and that they are trusted more than most other professions, suggests that engaging the police themselves should be a major priority for the government.

ADVOCACY FOR CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

Q: Which of these phrases best describes the way you would speak about the Criminal Justice System as a whole?

% Be critical   % Speak highly   Net ± %

	% Be critical	% Speak highly	Net ± %
Overall	32%	19%	-13
Crown courts	21%	26%	+5
CPS	24%	26%	+2
Probation	26%	24%	-2
Magistrates' courts	28%	19%	-9
Prisons	44%	10%	-34
Police	49%	10%	-39

Source: Ipsos MORI, 2006.
Base: Wave 4 All staff (junior and senior) within CJS agencies (2,402). Fieldwork: 1st June - 12th July 2006

Perceptions of conviction rates, sentencing and prisons are also very strong drivers of opinion. The idea that punishments are too lenient comes through very strongly in our public perception studies: indeed, our regression analysis shows that this issue is the *single most important driver of perceptions* on how the government deals with crime. There is also a very strong demand by the public for the building of more prisons (74% support this).

This is not to say that all of the public think hardline approaches are particularly effective in cutting crime: when asked directly about what they think would best cut crime, early interventions (particularly parenting classes) are most mentioned. However, the public still want to see people paying for their crimes – which presents the government with a difficult balance to strike, particularly as expert commentators consistently suggest that alternative, less punitive approaches would be more effective.

Perceptions of ASB and terrorism also seem to drive confidence in the government's handling of crime. ASB is a particularly important driver with studies showing that disorder in a respondent's local area directly increases their view that overall local crime is rising. With terrorism, the evidence is less clear-cut, but it is thought of as an important crime issue by some, and concern about terrorism has increased substantially since 1997.

Finally, gaps in perception and reality are likely to be driven by a general lack of trust in government and the statistics they produce. The public is sceptical about the use of data to 'spin' the government's message and believe that government simply pick and choose statistics to fit their aims or story. Politicians are one of the least trusted groups and so this scepticism is heightened if it is a politician that is using statistics to make a point.

What can the government do?

Crime is a difficult area for this government: it is vitally important to people (and becoming more so), but despite responding to a number of popular demands, it remains more of a vote loser than a vote winner for Labour.

Responsiveness to public concerns has led to a number of accusations of populism and pandering to public opinion from expert commentators. But one of the unusual features of this area of policy is that public confidence and reassurance are key outcomes in their own right, due to the impact of fear of crime on quality of life - the assertion that *perception is fact* is more correct in crime than in most policy areas.
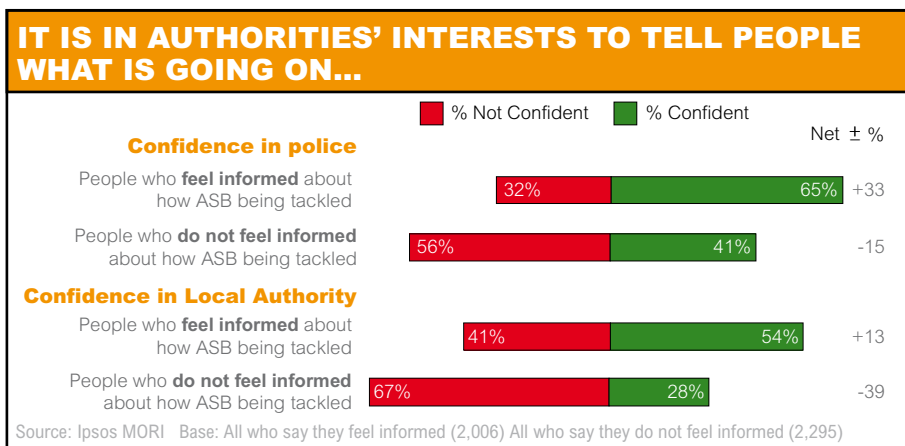
It may, therefore, be completely correct and logical to adopt some policies that the public think are clearly needed even when the government is aware that less popular alternatives may be more effective. Striking the right balance between policies that provide reassurance and those that have the most impact on crime outcomes is one of the greatest challenges in the area.

But this review suggests there are practical actions that can be taken on communicating with and engaging the public. And the first recommendation for improving confidence is that *we need to measure perceptions more systematically and set important targets on them that services are judged by*. This is done in a number of other areas of policy and it is arguable that perceptions are even more important in crime and safety and so should be given particular prominence in any performance assessments, targets or Public Service Agreements.

CJS agencies could also learn from the good (and bad) practices in other areas. This could include collecting this information more effectively - there are now a large number of surveys sponsored by different service areas that could be sensibly brought together and rationalised.

In terms of information provision, it could be argued that, given the negative slant the media tend to take on crime issues and the contestability of the information (along with an apparent continued natural disadvantage on law and order issues for Labour), it may be best for the government not to say very much at all on crime.

But even the simplest analysis shows the importance of communications to perceptions of crime and related issues – as the following figure shows, those who feel informed are more confident in the approaches being used.

IT IS IN AUTHORITIES' INTERESTS TO TELL PEOPLE WHAT IS GOING ON...

■ % Not Confident   ■ % Confident

Net ± %

Confidence in police

People who **feel informed** about how ASB being tackled
32% | 65% | +33

People who **do not feel informed** about how ASB being tackled
56% | 41% | -15

Confidence in Local Authority

People who **feel informed** about how ASB being tackled
41% | 54% | +13

People who **do not feel informed** about how ASB being tackled
67% | 28% | -39

Source: Ipsos MORI   Base: All who say they feel informed (2,006) All who say they do not feel informed (2,295)

This is backed up by experimental studies. For example, there is evidence to suggest that attitudes can be changed through providing more information:

• Research from 2002 found that providing information (either in a booklet, video or seminar) led to both increased levels of knowledge and increased confidence in the CJS; and

• In 2004, researchers provided a sub-sample of people participating in the British Crime Survey with a booklet containing information about crime and sentencing. They reported modest increases in knowledge and confidence, with for example, respondents who had received the booklet more likely to see the CJS as being effective in reducing crime, bringing the guilty to justice and meeting the needs of crime victims

But the independence of any information provided is vital in increasing its impact, particularly as crime data are among the most susceptible to accusations of spin. This suggests that the government should be commissioning *more independent reviews* of trends and ensuring they are publicised. Our previous studies on trust in government information suggest that *Which?*-style reviews of progress and variations in performance across local areas would be useful.

It is arguable, however, that there is a highly trusted but relatively untapped source of information within the CJS itself; the police themselves are among the most trusted but least cited as sources of information.

Clearly the *police should publish more information and on a broader range of issues*. Many already do provide newsletters or flyers and annual reports (and are in fact required to produce basic information), but these are not registering with people – and more targeted communications on key performance measures and local initiatives are likely to have a greater impact.

Similarly, many police forces hold open meetings and surgeries in local areas but these are generally attended by small numbers and not widely known about. To improve their impact, *community-police meetings need to be better supported and have a direct link to action*. This could include feeding more directly into plans – or even deciding on how budgets are allocated locally. These types of approaches are important and should be helpful – and in particular *passing the control of local budgets to local people* will have an impact on perceptions.

However, local control of (a portion of) crime and safety budgets at neighbourhood level will raise some challenges and will not always produce unequivocal support among local residents. We saw this in the deliberative discussions we held to feed into the Policy Review earlier this year, where people were asked to vote on their support for neighbourhood control of some policing budgets. There was general support initially but following more detailed discussion among participants, support fell significantly because many became more worried about the possibility of more able (middle class) neighbourhoods being better equipped and "playing the system" while more deprived neighbourhoods would not be able to take full advantage of the opportunity and therefore fall further behind. This sense of "fairness" and a real concern about "postcode lotteries" developing in policing as they are seen to exist in other services were key themes of the discussions. Clearly this does not mean that the approaches should not be pursued, just that *significant support needs to be put in place for lower capacity neighbourhoods* neighbourhoods. Furthermore, resassurances should be given to the wider public that this support is in place.

It is worth noting that it is here, in this shift to local control, that the two perception gaps we have seen throughout this report come together. Rather than trying to close the perception gap between views of national trends in crime and actual changes, it may be more effective to concentrate attention on the more positive and in many ways more important perceptions of how crime is dealt with locally through promoting neighbourhood flexibility and control.

Of course, all of these approaches that increase direct contact and communications with the police and other CJS bodies will only improve confidence if the staff involved are positive about progress and the policies they are being asked to put into action. Set-piece communications, whether at meetings or in publications, would be dismissed as spin if they were undermined by direct communications from police and other CJS staff. A key action will therefore be to *engage the police and other elements of the CJS further in the reform and design of approaches* - this may be helped by large-scale deliberative exercises on the future of the service, which have been used effectively in other public services.

Bobby Duffy, Rhonda Wake, Tamara Burrows and Pamela Bremner.
Ipsos MORI

1.INTRODUCTION

Crime has been a major focus for the government over the past decade, with a raft of new legislation implemented since 1997. And this has given people a lot of what they asked for – there are more police and they are more visible, sentencing is tougher and there are more people in prison. Overall, crime has fallen significantly.

But there are major gaps between these measurable facts and public perception. In particular the public still think that crime rates are soaring and that personal safety has declined – and they blame the government.

This is a serious challenge, as we know that rating of competence on dealing with crime is a key driver of overall views of government, as well as citizens' overall quality of life. It does seem that the government have recognised a need for a renewed focus on building confidence, as the recent crime strategy paper, Sir Ronnie Flanagan's Review of Policing and Louise Casey's newly established review on how to connect with communities on fighting crime make clear.[1] The particularly worrying aspect is that if confidence is low now, in a time of falling crime, any actual increase is likely to hit perceptions hard. This does seem to be a risk - a government report speculates that a significant increase in crime is a real possibility if the economy slows.[2]

But why does this perception gap exist in the first place – and is there more the government can do to reassure people and get credit for improvements?

This report explores these questions, first by unpicking what actually drives the general public's views on crime and the government's handling of it. We do this by bringing together a wide range of public opinion data from our own and other work and conducting new statistical analyses.

The first section outlines the relationship between perceptions of crime and perceptions of government. It also describes and provides possible explanations for two perception gaps – the gap between perceptions of crime rates and actual crime rates; and the gap between perceptions of crime locally and nationally.

The second section explores the drivers of confidence in the government's handling of crime and the Criminal Justice System (CJS) and the final section outlines some thoughts on what steps the government can take.

1 'Cutting Crime: A New Partnership 2008-2011' Home Office (July 2007) and 'The Review of Policing – Interim Report by Sir Ronnie Flanagan' Home Office (September 2007)

2 The report suggests that up to 80% of the decline in crime in recent years can be attributed to sustained economic growth, and that historically economic declines have been associated with rises in crime. Prime Minister's Strategy Unit, Cabinet Office (November 2006). 'Policy Review: Crime, Justice, and Cohesion'.

2.PERCEPTIONS OF CRIME

## After a brief lead, Labour is seen as second best on crime again

Crime is now a highly politicised issue, but this wasn't always the case. Law and order issues did not appear in political party manifestos until the 1960s, but by the end of the 1970s the former bipartisan consensus had disappeared and 'law and order' became a political topic, largely initiated and dominated by the Conservative party.[3]

Labour made a concerted effort to shake off its 'soft on crime' image in the early 1990s and, as the following figure shows, started to close the gap on the Conservatives from around 1992 – which was the year that the '*tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime*' message was first used in a major speech by Tony Blair as Shadow Home Secretary. This successfully combined a focus on prevention and enforcement and was popular with both the party and the electorate. However, the figure also shows that the gap was closed mainly by a loss of confidence in the Conservatives, which in turn was at least partly a result of the economic downturn and consequent steep crime rate increases in the early 1990s.[4]

BEST PARTY ON CRIME

Q: I am going to read out a list of problems facing Britain today. I would like you to tell me whether you think the Conservative party, the Labour party or the Liberal Democrats has the best policies on each problem Crime/Law and Order (asked as 'Crime/Anti-social behaviour' in Sep 2007)

% best party   ——— Con ——— Lab ——— Lib Dem
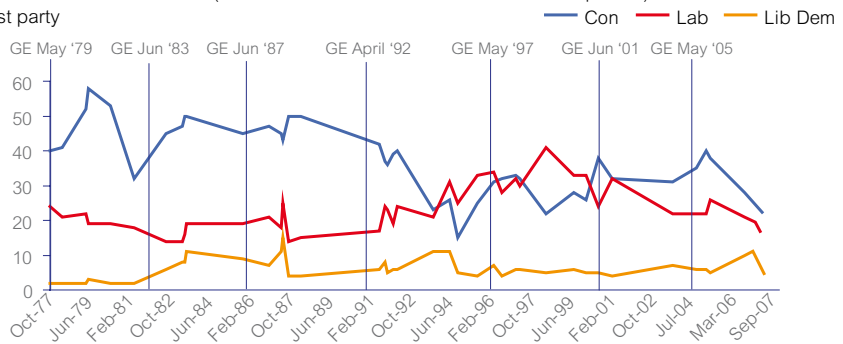
Source: Ipsos MORI Political Monitor, http://www.ipsos-mori.com/polls/trends/bpoki-law.shtml   Base c.1,000 British adults aged 18+

3 Downes, D., & Morgan, R. (2006) 'Skeletons in the cupboard: The politics of law and order at the turn of the millennium' In M. Maguire, R. Morgan & R. Reiner (Eds) Oxford Handbook of Criminology (3rd Ed, pps 286-321). Oxford University Press.

4 Ibid.

But Labour's hold on being the best party to deal with crime was short-lived, and by 2000 the more familiar pattern of a Conservative lead returned. However, the gap has not yet developed to anything like the extent of the 1980s – and there are a number of possible interpretations of this.

First, from a Labour perspective, that they have lost their lead on this issue could be seen as either deeply disappointing - given their progress on some key crime measures – or, as about the best that could be hoped for given the history of Conservative leadership on the issue. Conversely, the Conservatives could interpret their regained – but diminished – lead on crime either as a reasonable position given that many indicators have improved, or as disappointing that it has not grown more given that confidence in the Labour government on crime is so low (as we will see).

The variety of apparently credible interpretations of perception data on crime is common and perhaps understandable given that the data, trends and effectiveness of policies themselves are so contestable (again, as we will see). But whatever the perspective, it is clear that crime will be a key campaigning issue in the coming years. As things stand now, the position of 'the best party on crime' is still up for grabs.

Crime is a top concern for the public…

Clearly crime will also be key to political debates because it is regularly at or near the top of peoples' concerns for the country as a whole (along with immigration, terrorism, health and education), which has been the case for the last few years, as shown in the figure below. In our August 2007 Political Monitor, it was in fact at the top of the list by some distance (20 percentage points ahead of the next most important issue and one of the largest jumps we have seen in any issue, as seen in the following two charts.[5] This will be related to the extensive media coverage of the shooting of Rhys Jones, the 11 year-old boy from Liverpool.

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5 Ipsos MORI. Political Monitor (August 2007).

IMPORTANT ISSUES FACING BRITAIN

Q: What would you say is the most important issue facing Britain today?
Q: What do you see as other important issues facing Britain today?

% important issue

Defence/Foreign Policy/Terrorism

NHS

Crime

Education/Schools

Race Relations/Immigration

Environment
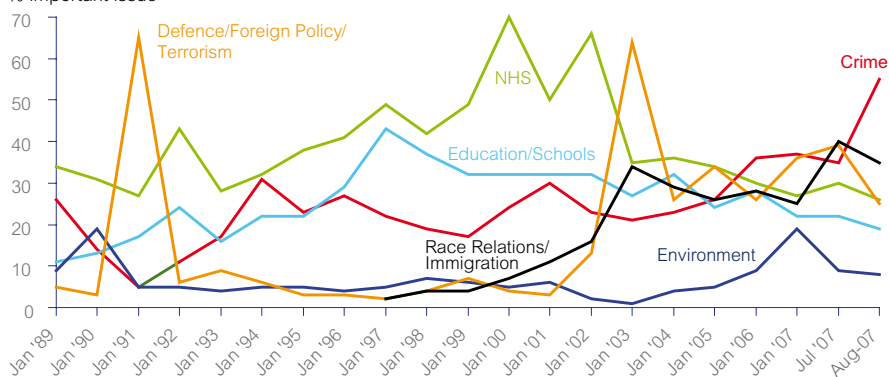
Source: Ipsos MORI Political Monitor Long Term Trends, http://www.ipsos-mori.com/polls/trends/issues.shtml
Base c.1,000 British adults aged 18+

ISSUES FACING BRITAIN: AUGUST 07

Q: What would you say is the most important issue facing Britain today?
Q: What do you see as other important issues facing Britain today?

Top spontaneous mentions

Issue	%
Crime/law and order	55%
Race Relations/immigration	35%
NHS/Hospitals	26%
Defence/foreign affairs	25%
Education/schools	19%
Housing	9%
Morality/individual behaviour	9%
Economy	9%
Pollution/environment	8%
Drug abuse	8%
Unemployment	7%
Taxation	6%
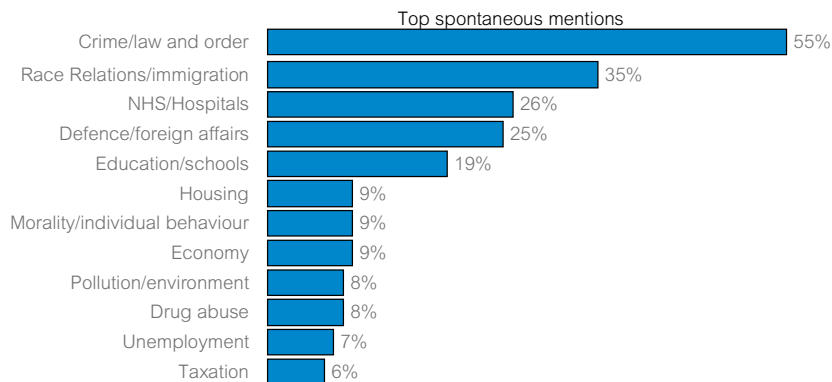
Base: 975 British adults 18+, 23-29 August 2007

... and it is higher on the British public's list of concerns than in other countries

It is not simply the case that there has been a generalised increase in worry about crime internationally. Concern about crime varies significantly by country, and it is consistently a bigger issue for the British than people in other major European countries or in the USA.

For example, as shown in the figure below from our International Social Trends Monitor, over two in five British people thin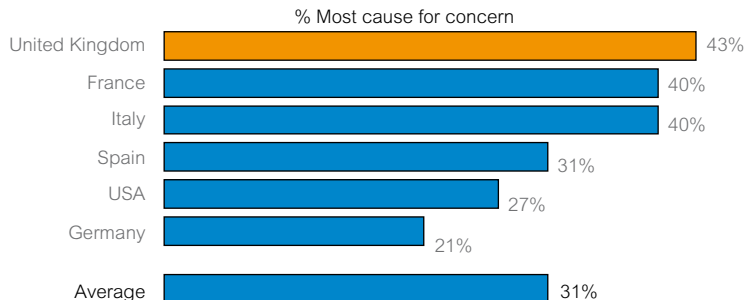k that crime and violence is one of the most worrying issues for them (43%), which is double the level of Germany (21%). Even Americans are far less concerned (27%).   This is not just a recent pattern – it has been the case for the vast majority of the time since this survey started in 1997.

MOST WORRYING ISSUES NATIONALLY - CRIME AND VIOLENCE

Q: Which three of the following eleven topics do you find the most worrying in your country?
   Crime and violence

% Most cause for concern

United Kingdom	43%
France	40%
Italy	40%
Spain	31%
USA	27%
Germany	21%
Average	31%

Source: Ipsos MORI International Social Trends Monitor, September 2006   Base: c.1,000 interviews in each country

Comparable international evidence on actual crime rates is hard to come by and rather out of date, so it is difficult to assess whether this is a fair reflection of relative risk. However, there is some evidence that crime rates are relatively high in this country: according to the International Crime Victim Survey in 1999, England and Wales had the second highest risk of crime from 17 countries, while the 2003 European Sourcebook of Crime shows we have the fourth highest per capita crime rate from 39 countries.[6]

6 Civitas (March 2006) 'Crime: Are public policies working? On line briefing' www.civitas.org.uk/pdf/crimeBriefingMarch06.pdf

This is despite the government investing heavily in the CJS – and giving people a lot of what they've asked for

This will be particularly disappointing for the Government, as they have spent an unprecedented amount of money on reducing crime, averaging a 5% per year increase in real terms since 2001. The UK now spends more per head on law and order than any other country in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), including the US and major European Union members such as France, Germany and Spain, as the following figure shows. Total spending for public order and safety by the Government was £29.5 billion in 2006.[7]

SPENDING ON PUBLIC ORDER AND SAFETY AS A PERCENTAGE OF GDP IN OECD 2004

Source: Prime Minister's Strategy Unit, Cabinet Office (November 2006). Policy Review: Crime, Justice, and Cohesion.
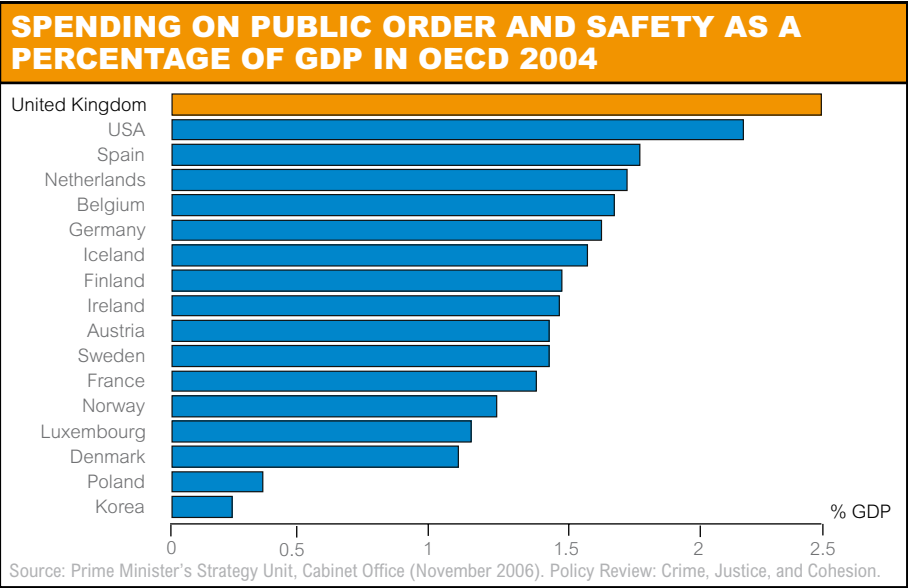
To a large extent the Labour government has spent this money giving people what they say they want, by trying to address the priorities that come up consistently in research studies.

For example, there are now record police numbers[8] (141,000 compared with 127,000 in 1997). In addition, Community Support Officers (CSOs) and neighbourhood policing have been introduced, the number of people sent to prison has increased greatly, average sentence lengths have increased, there has been more use of mandatory and minimum sentences, there are new powers to tackle anti-social behaviour – and so on.

In one sense, of course, these increases in inputs and initiatives need not feed through into perceptions, particularly if the outcomes that people really care about are not affected. But even here the government has some positive stories to tell. Actual crime rates have fallen quite significantly according to the British Crime Survey (BCS), which is generally acknowledged to be the best source of trends on crime (as reported crime is subject to changes in recording practices).

For example, by 2007 overall crime had fallen 32%, with falls in domestic burglary of 55% and vehicle crime of 52%, as shown in the following table.[9]

CHANGE IN INCIDENTS OF CRIME FROM 1997 TO 2007	
Type of crime	% change
All crime	- 32
Domestic burglary	- 55
Vehicle crime	- 52
Source: Nicholas, S, Kershaw, C and Walker, A (2007) 'Crime in England and Wales 2006/07 Home Office Statistical Bulletin 2nd Edition' Crown Copyright	

8 Solomon, E., Eades. C., Garside, R., Rutherford, R. (2007) 'Ten years of criminal justice under Labour – An independent audit' Centre for Crime and Justice Studies.

9 Nicholas, S., Kershaw, C. and Walker, A. (2007) 'Crime in England and Wales 2006/07 Home Office Statistical Bulletin 2nd Edition' Crown Copyright

Even worry about particular types of crime has declined significantly, as seen in the following figure, for burglary, car crime and even violent crime.

VERY WORRIED ABOUT CRIME

%

— Burglary — Car crime — Violent crime

25		
22		
19		

30
25
20
15
10
5
0

1998   2000   2001/02   2002/03   2004/05   2005/06   2006/07

17
13

Source: Nicholas, S., Kershaw, C. and Walker, A. (2007) 'Crime in England and Wales 2006/07 Home Office Statistical Bulletin 2nd Edition' Crown Copyright
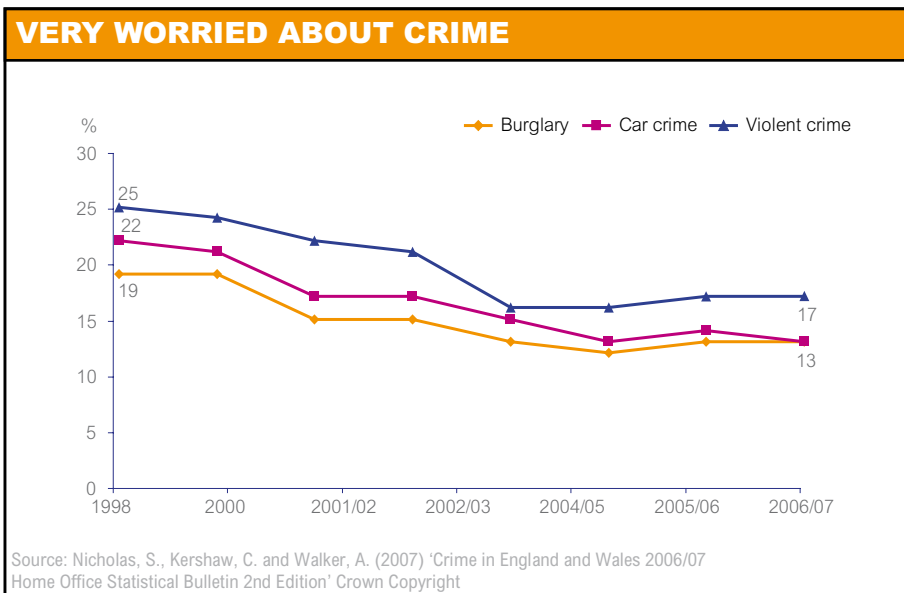
But no-one believes these positive trends – there is a 'perception gap'

Unfortunately for the government, even though personal levels of worry about crime have decreased, the majority of the public just don't believe that crime rates are actually falling, or even that criminal justice services are better resourced or more hardline now than they once were. As the following figure shows, 83% think violent crime is rising (despite fewer being very worried about it personally), just four in ten (43%) believe there are more police than ever, only a quarter think that sentences for persistent offenders are stricter, and just 20% are willing to accept that crime overall is declining.

Of course the figure also shows that crime is not the only area to suffer from this perception gap – there are also significant gaps for immigration, education and health services. But crime and safety trends do seem to be a particular cause for pessimism among people. For example, our survey data shows that 65% think there is more crime than two years ago and just 6% think there is less.[10]

NO ONE BELIEVES CRIME IS FALLING

Q: I am now going to read out a number of statements about how Britain's public services have changed over the last few years. For each one I would like you to tell me whether you think it is true or false.

% True

Statement	%
Violent crime is rising	83%
Asylum applications are higher now than 5 years ago	80%
Truancy levels are the highest ever	68%
Average waiting times for NHS surgery have increased	58%
Fewer people die from cancer and heart disease	53%
More money is being invested in public transport	49%
Patients have more choice about their treatment and care	46%
Police numbers are the highest ever	43%
Getting a GP appointment is quicker	39%
Asylum applications have fallen dramatically in the last 12 months	28%
There are thousands more doctors & nurses working in the NHS	27%
There are more train services	27%
Burglary has been cut by 40%	26%
There are stricter penalties for persistent offenders	24%
There are thousands more teachers	22%
Crime is falling	20%

Source: Ipsos MORI 2005

Indeed this gap can be seen very clearly in the following figure, which shows actual crime rates dropping while the perception that crime is increasing has remained high and constant. We return to explore the reasons for this at the end of the section.

10 Ipsos MORI, November 2007.

GAP BETWEEN ACTUAL CRIME AND THE BELIEF THAT CRIME IS INCREASING

British Crime Survey crimes (k)   % population

Belief crime is rising nationally

Actual crimes

Source: Nicholas, S., Kershaw, C. and Walker, A. (2007) 'Crime in England and Wales 2006/07 Home Office Statistical Bulletin 2nd Edition' Crown Copyright
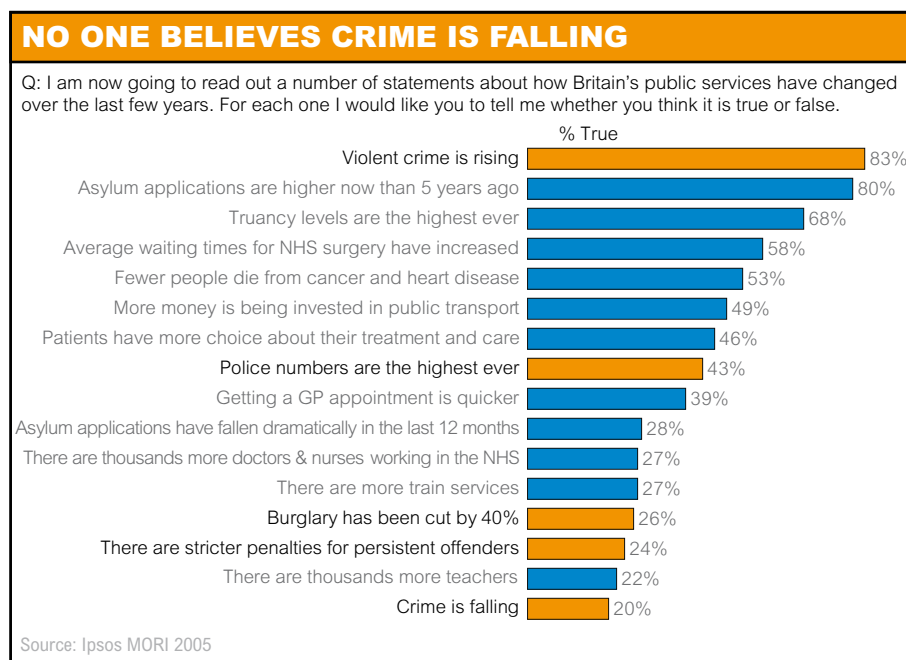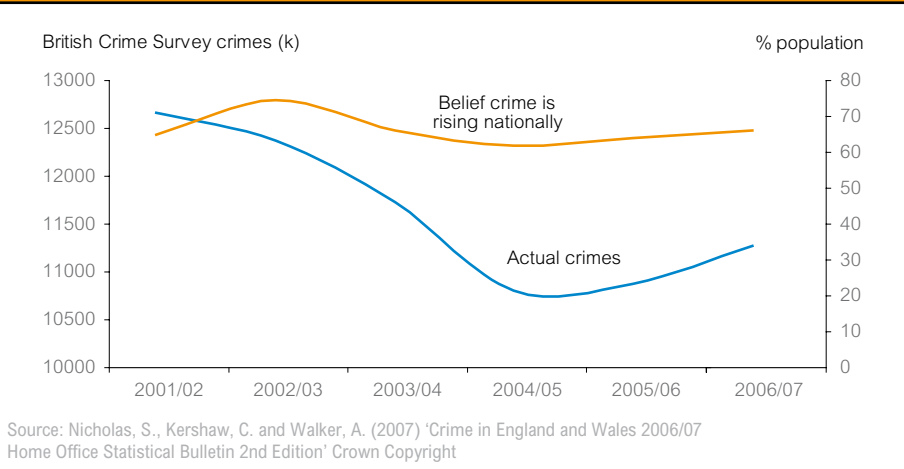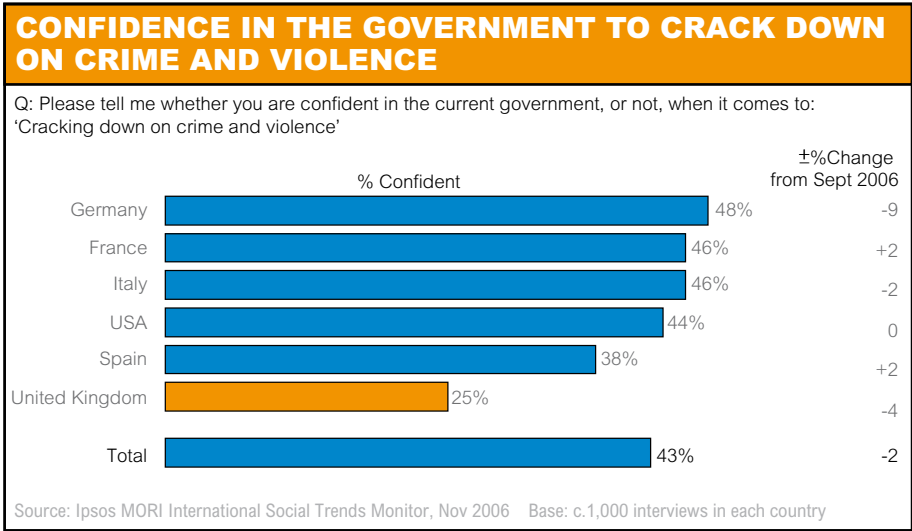
The British public is less confident in its government when it comes to crime compared with other countries

Whatever the causes of the gap, it is clear that the government do seem to be blamed for perceived failures on crime – to a much greater extent than is the case with governments in other countries. As seen in the figure below, British people have the lowest confidence in their government when it comes to crime – by some distance. While a quarter of people in Britain believe Labour is capable of cracking down on crime, confidence runs much higher in countries like Germany, France, and Italy, where around half of people feel that their government is capable.

CONFIDENCE IN THE GOVERNMENT TO CRACK DOWN ON CRIME AND VIOLENCE

Q: Please tell me whether you are confident in the current government, or not, when it comes to: 'Cracking down on crime and violence'

% Confident

±%Change from Sept 2006

Country	% Confident	±%Change from Sept 2006
Germany	48%	-9
France	46%	+2
Italy	46%	-2
USA	44%	0
Spain	38%	+2
United Kingdom	25%	-4
Total	43%	-2

Source: Ipsos MORI International Social Trends Monitor, Nov 2006   Base: c.1,000 interviews in each country
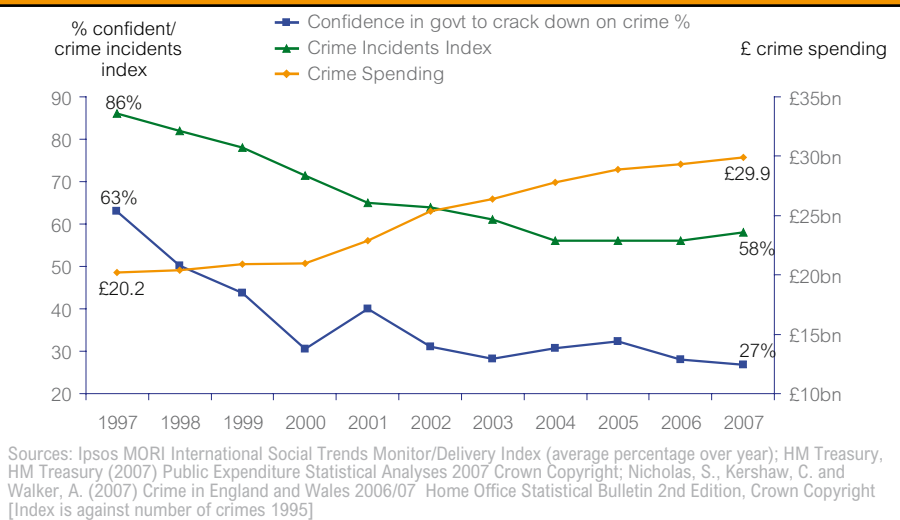
The explanation for this is not just that we have an unpopular Labour government and other countries currently feel more positive about all policy issues than we see here – for example, the British tend to be more confident in their government on education than those in other countries. It does seem to be a particular concern related to this government and crime.

The worrying position for the government is summed up in the following figure,[11] which shows clearly how huge rises in criminal justice expenditure and falling crime rates have come at the same time as a steep decline in confidence that the government can crack down on crime.

11 In this figure, confidence refers to % confident in government to crack down on crime (Ipsos MORI International Social Trends Monitor). Crime spending is total expenditure in real terms on 'public order and safety' (at 2004-5 price levels; HM Treasury, 'Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses 2006' p. 44 Table 3.3). Crime Incidents are indexed against number of incidents in 1995 (British Crime Survey). Interpolated data used for Crime Incidents Index for 1998 & 2000.
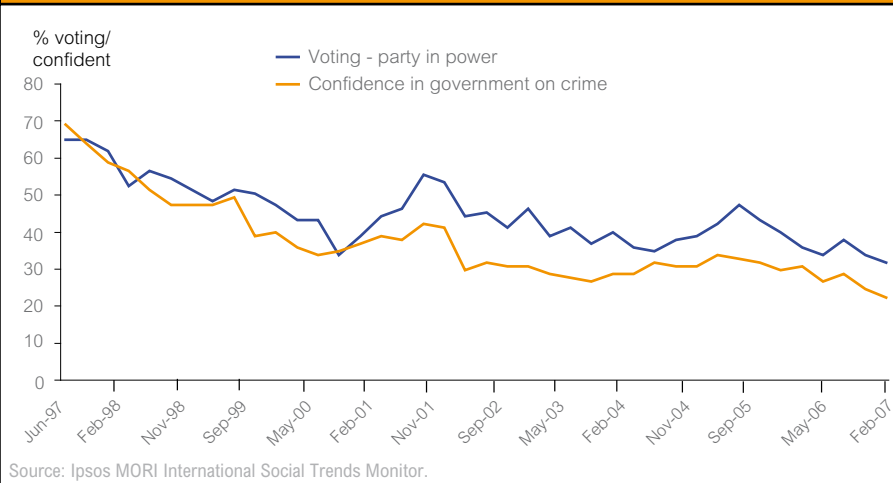
SPENDING ON CRIME, CRIME LEVELS AND PUBLIC CONFIDENCE

% confident/ crime incidents index

£ crime spending

- Confidence in govt to crack down on crime %
- Crime Incidents Index
- Crime Spending

Sources: Ipsos MORI International Social Trends Monitor/Delivery Index (average percentage over year); HM Treasury, HM Treasury (2007) Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses 2007 Crown Copyright; Nicholas, S., Kershaw, C. and Walker, A. (2007) Crime in England and Wales 2006/07 Home Office Statistical Bulletin 2nd Edition, Crown Copyright [Index is against number of crimes 1995]

And competence on crime has a strong relationship with overall ratings of government

All of this is a key issue for the government because it is clear that ratings of performance on crime are closely related to voting intention, as shown in the following figure. In this figure the two lines have a correlation coefficient of 0.54, which is high for this type of study. This relationship is actually stronger than seen for a number of other key government responsibilities that we have tracked, including in managing the economy and dealing with terrorism.

VOTING INTENTION AND CONFIDENCE IN CRIME REDUCTION

% voting/ confident

—— Voting - party in power
—— Confidence in government on crime

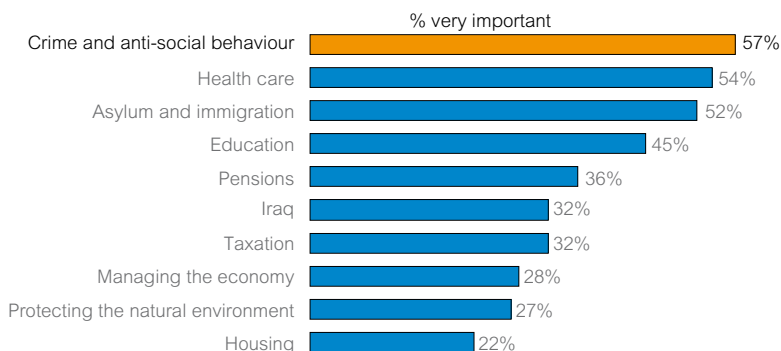Source: Ipsos MORI International Social Trends Monitor.

Of course, this does not mean that changes in confidence on crime are causing changes in voting intention – the relationship could be the other way round (with general opinions of the government driving views of their competence on crime), or there could be other factors causing shifts in both. However, it does seem likely that perceived competence in this key area will have at least some impact on overall ratings and voting behaviour.

And this is backed up when we look at what issues people *say* will influence who they vote for – crime and anti-social behaviour (ASB) actually come out as the most important issues, slightly ahead of health care and immigration.

VERY IMPORTANT ISSUES WHEN DECIDING HOW TO VOTE

Q: Looking ahead to the next General Election, which, if any, of these issues do you think will be very important to you in helping you decide which party to vote for?

% very important

Crime and anti-social behaviour	57%
Health care	54%
Asylum and immigration	52%
Education	45%
Pensions	36%
Iraq	32%
Taxation	32%
Managing the economy	28%
Protecting the natural environment	27%
Housing	22%

Source: Ipsos MORI Political Monitor, Sep 2006. Base: c.1,000 British adults aged 18+

But when we use statistical techniques to attempt to isolate the impact of perceptions of crime on ratings of the government, we find that in recent times it has only been important in driving levels of *dissatisfaction* and not levels of *satisfaction*.[12] In other words, lacking confidence in the government's handling of crime is related to overall dissatisfaction with the government, but being confident does not appear to lead to greater overall satisfaction with the government. This is in contrast to other major issues – for example, feeling that race/immigration, NHS, or tax are major issues for Britain are all related both to dissatisfaction and satisfaction with the government.

One particularly worrying interpretation of this for the government is that **while they get the blame among those that see crime as a major issue, they do not get the credit for it going well among those who are not concerned** (unlike with other issues).
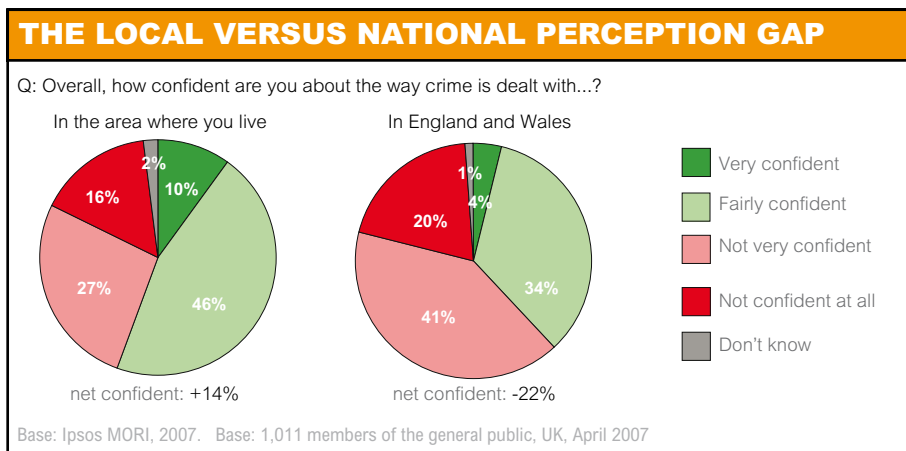
12 On the aggregated 2006 Ipsos MORI Political Monitor data, we conducted two logistic regression analyses, one with 'satisfied with the Government' as the dependent variable and the other as 'dissatisfied with the Government', controlling for all the demographic factors that were bivariately related. Naming crime as an important issue is a significant independent (positive) predictor of dissatisfaction, but not of satisfaction.

This seems believable, given patterns already shown on Labour not being seen as the natural party of law and order and the gaps between actual trends and perceptions of specific government actions (such as increased police numbers and spending). It may also reflect a view that while some crimes are decreasing, this is not down to the government but to the increased security measures available from the private sector (e.g. improved car security and anti-burglary measures).

But whatever the explanation, this pattern should be a major concern for the government, as it suggests the only real benefit they will gain from their efforts on crime is to reduce its impact as a significant driver of negative opinions. The somewhat ironic aspect to this is that probably the greatest single explanation for improvements in crime rates[13] – continued economic growth – is recognised as a key strength for Labour,[14] but clearly the general public are unlikely to connect the two issues.
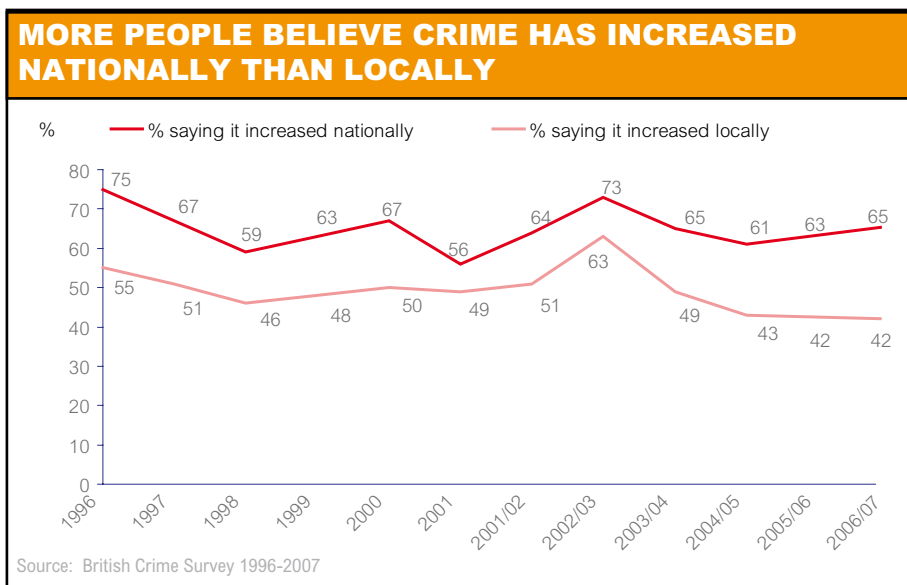
But there is a second perception gap

But as well as there being a gap between what people think is happening on crime and what is actually happening, there is also a second, arguably more positive gap between their views of what is happening to themselves and in their local area compared with the national picture. For example, as shown in the following figure, the public are much more confident about how crime is being dealt with in their local area than in the country as a whole.

THE LOCAL VERSUS NATIONAL PERCEPTION GAP

Q: Overall, how confident are you about the way crime is dealt with...?

In the area where you live

2% | 10% | 16% | 27% | 46%

net confident: +14%

In England and Wales

1% | 4% | 20% | 41% | 34%

net confident: -22%

Very confident
Fairly confident
Not very confident
Not confident at all
Don't know

Base: Ipsos MORI, 2007.   Base: 1,011 members of the general public, UK, April 2007

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13 As noted above, up to 80% of declines according to the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit.

14 Duffy, B. and Robey, R. (2006) 'A new British model? Ratings of economic and public policy' from the Ipsos MORI International Social Trends Monitor in Britain, the US, France, Germany, Spain and Italy. Ipsos MORI.

And this gap has remained relatively consistent over the last ten years, as the following figure shows. People are still fairly pessimistic about how crime has changed in the last two years in their own local area - significant proportions believe it has increased. Notwithstanding, the proportion that believes it has increased has declined in the past decade. People are generally much less pessimistic about their local crime rate than they are about the national crime rate.

MORE PEOPLE BELIEVE CRIME HAS INCREASED NATIONALLY THAN LOCALLY

% ━━ % saying it increased nationally ── % saying it increased locally

Source: British Crime Survey 1996-2007

How can we explain these perception gaps?

There are a number of explanations for these two perception gaps, and the next section explores this in more detail by examining what is driving perceptions of the government on crime.

But it is important to note that neither perception gap is particularly new or unique to crime or to Britain. For example, the local/national perception gap and the gap between actual changes in services or outcomes and perceptions is seen in other services here, such as the NHS. The local versus national gap was also identified across a range of services in the US back in the mid 1990s.[15] Other reviews have noted the gap between actual and perceived trends internationally, particularly in North America, Australia, and South Africa.[16]

15 Smith, T.W. (1998) 'An analysis of public evaluations of neighborhoods, communities, and the country' National Opinion Research Center: University of Chicago.

16 Roberts, J. and Hough, M. (2005) 'Understanding public attitudes to criminal justice' In series 'Crime and Justice' M. Maguire (series editor). Open University Press: Maidenhead (p.10).

So it is not then simply perceptions of New Labour 'spin' leading to distrust in official figures, as some have suggested. Indeed it seems that the main explanations can be split into three groups – public misperceptions; signal crimes; and wider concerns about ASB, security and terrorism.

1. Public misconceptions

First, there are explanations that involve the public misconceiving or being misled on the issues, either deliberately or unknowingly. The media are likely to have a key role in this type of explanation, as a large body of research shows us that media coverage in general and on crime in particular is biased towards the negative. This is both more likely to influence national views compared with local (and so help explain the local versus national perception gap) and to explain why perceptions are more negative than actual trends. This is seen in a number of studies across issues and countries, and is, for example, given as an explanation for patterns where positive trends in unemployment and teen pregnancies in the US were both seen to be negative by the public – as Roberts and Hough (2005) conclude: *Taken together these findings suggest that 'good news' – for example, declining crime or unemployment rates – is seldom conveyed by the news media, and accordingly is less likely to be assimilated by the public. In short, bad news sells better than good news, so bad news is what people get.*'[17] We return to examine the role of the media in more detail in the next section.

But there are other reasons for misconceptions. For example, on the local versus national perception gap in particular, studies in the US suggest that people have a natural 'hometown favouritism' where they tend to consider their community as superior to other communities (i.e. safer, healthier, etc) and by extension to think less of the country as a whole since it is made up largely of 'other' communities.[18] This is partly driven by the assumption that others who live locally will have the same values and behaviours as you because they are more familiar and more likely to have similar socio-economic characteristics. Related to this could be some element of post-hoc rationalisation of your choice of area to live – you would not choose somewhere to live that is worse than the average. Perceptual biases have also been identified when comparing local and national situations because of issues of scale; for example, national crime rates reported in actual numbers seem very large and worrying even if they are proportionally lower than in our local areas.[19]

17 Roberts, J. and Hough, M. (2005) 'Understanding public attitudes to criminal justice' In series 'Crime and Justice' M. Maguire (series editor). Open University Press: Maidenhead (p.11).

18 Smith, T.W. (1998) 'An Analysis of Public Evaluations of Neighborhoods, Communities, and the Country' National Opinion Research Center, University of Chicago.

19 Ibid.

Finally on this group of explanations, it is very likely that political views play a key role: while you are willing to admit that your own local situation has improved, you may be reluctant to acknowledge any national improvements if you are not a supporter of the government. Again, we return to this in the next section.

2. Signal crimes

The second explanation is that certain high profile or 'signal crimes'[20] that people are basing their judgements on are not actually decreasing at all. There appears to be some evidence of this in the following table. For example, the number of crimes involving firearms has increased from under 13,000 in 1997 to over 21,000 by 2006 and the number of firearms injuries and burglaries involving firearms has increased four- or five-fold over the same period. Knife crime is difficult to trend in official figures, but convictions for possession have increased by 70% between 2001 and 2006. Homicides are up from 608 in 1997 to 746 in 2006.

But this does not provide a very convincing case that crime has got worse enough to justify the pessimism seen. Indeed, some of these crimes have actually fallen again in recent years, including overall firearms offences and homicides. Further, the numbers involved are generally very small, which will mean that direct experience will be little influenced by the changes seen. Again the homicide example illustrates this; while a 23% increase in the number of murders sounds significant, the actual number of murders has only increased from around 12 people to around 14 people per million of the population. The extremely small scale of these type of crimes – and the difficulties with using recorded crime as a measure of actual changes in crime rates[21] – is seen in the huge spike in the number of murders in 2002/3 caused mainly by all 172 Harold Shipman victims being counted against this year.

20 The fundamental tenet of the signal crimes concept is that people interpret and define particular criminal incidents as indicators about the range of dangers that exist in contemporary social life and that might potentially assail them. From Innes, M. (2004) 'Crime as a signal, crime as a memory' Journal for Crime, Conflict and Media, 1 (2), 15-22.

21 Also note that the figures for firearms offences may be inflated by some police forces implementing the principle of 'National Crime Recording Standard' after 1 April 2002.

CRIME RATES FOR SELECTED FIREARM CRIMES, KNIFE CRIMES, AND HOMICIDES 1997/98 – 2005/06

	1997/ 1998	1998/ 1999	1999/ 2000	2000/ 2001	2001/ 2002	2002/ 2003	2003/ 2004	2004/ 2005	2005/ 2006
CRIMES INVOLVING FIREARMS									
Crimes involving firearms	12,805	13,874	16,946	17,697	22,400	24,070	24,094	22,896	21,521
% increase from 1997/98	n/a	8%	32%	38%	75%	88%	88%	79%	68%
Crimes involving firearms resulting in injury	804	864	1,195	1,382	1,877	2,179	2,367	3,912	3,821
% increase from 1997/98	n/a	7%	49%	72%	133%	171%	194%	387%	375%
Residential burglaries/ robberies involving firearms	119	109	152	160	290	280	345	450	645
% increase from 1997/98	n/a	-8%	28%	34%	144%	135%	190%	278%	442%
KNIFE CRIME									
Number of convictions for possession of a knife	n/a	n/a	n/a	3,511	4,299	5,281	5,308	5,784	5,961
% increase from 2000/01	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	22%	50%	51%	65%	70%
HOMICIDES									
Number of homicides	608	646	675	771	803	952	788	793	746
% increase from 1997/98	n/a	6%	11%	27%	32%	57%	30%	30%	23%
Number of homicides per million population	11.8	12.5	13.0	14.9	15.4	18.2	14.9	14.9	14.0

Sources: Police recorded figures for homicide and firearm crime from Coleman, K., Jansson, K., Kaiza, P., & Reid, E. (2007). Home Office Statistical Bulletin. 'Homicides, firearm offences and intimate violence 2005/06 (Supplementary Volume 1 to Crime in England and Wales 2005/2006) (Tables 1.01, 2.01, 2.06 and 2.09). Knife crime figures from 'Banning offensive weapons: A consultation' Home Office 2007. Note: Homicides include 172 Harold Shipman victims in 2002/03 and the 52 victims of the 7 July bombings in 2005/06. 'Residential burglaries/ robberies' refer to crimes which are mostly burglaries where firearms have been used immediately before or at the time of stealing items from a residential property, and in order to steal these items. If firearms are used in the getaway, then it is classified as a burglary. Figures for firearms offences may be inflated by some police forces implementing the principle of National Crime Recording Standard after 1 April 2002.

Of course, while direct experience of these serious signal crimes is very rare, their impact is mainly through media coverage of particular incidents, with the shooting of Rhys Jones a notable recent example. As seen in the following figure from The Sun, the media generalise from these individual incidents to a general decline in the country, something we will return to later.

RHYS JONES, 11: VICTIM OF ANARCHY IN THE UK

How did we sink so low?
How do we put it right?

GUNS SO EASY TO GET ON THE STREETS

ROTTEN PARENTS LET DOWN KIDS

3. Concerns about wider disorder, security and terrorism

But there is also a third group of explanations that suggest the public are not just being irrational or misunderstanding (or being misled on) the data, but are actually basing their judgement on a wider set of factors. It is probable that people's personal concepts of crime encompass a broader range of concerns about social problems in the local community and in wider society than the often fairly narrow official definitions of 'crime'. This could include ASB (although ASB is increasingly being included in measures of crime), and other associated problems such as litter on the streets, broken windows or a general lack of 'respect'.

These can also be interpreted as 'signals', with research showing that many people find local disorders such as graffiti, vandalism and young people hanging around on the streets more threatening than serious crimes. As one respondent in a survey by Surrey University commented: '*Yes, it is daft, it is almost daft, but graffiti is the thing that sort of bothers me more, because it is in my face every day. I mean, obviously rape and murder are more horrendous crimes, but it is graffiti that I see.*' We return to the role of ASB later.

Similarly, there has been a large increase in concern about terrorism in the last few years, and we know that some do include this in their view of crime (as seen later, for example, where terrorism does come out as one of the most important issues facing Britain when it comes to crime).

In order to understand the relative influence of these factors in greater detail the next section examines the key possible explanations of public views of the government's competence on crime. Knowing what drives satisfaction and dissatisfaction with how the government handles crime should provide clues on how best to actively reassure people.

3. WHAT DRIVES PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS OF CRIME?

This section examines the key drivers of public perceptions of crime, using information from surveys, qualitative research and further statistical analyses.

There are many different indicators of public perceptions on crime...

Before we look at which factors are most responsible for driving views, it is important to note that there are a wide range of indicators of public perceptions of crime, including:

1. Confidence in/satisfaction with the CJS
2. Confidence/satisfaction that the government is protecting the public
3. Confidence/satisfaction that crime is being dealt with nationally
4. Confidence/satisfaction that crime is being dealt with locally
5. Perceptions about whether the crime rate has increased/decreased
6. Feelings of personal safety (for example, outside alone after dark)
7. Worry about crime generally or particular types of crime

While all of these will be related and some are very similar, it is clear that each reflects a slightly different issue. For example, it may be possible to be satisfied with the government's approach to crime but lack confidence in the CJS, or feel that crime is being dealt with locally but not nationally (as we have seen) or believe that crime is decreasing but still be concerned about your own personal safety.

In this section we use data from a range of sources to provide the richest possible picture of the drivers of attitudes – which includes covering a number of the measures outlined above. However, we focus on satisfaction with and confidence in the *government's* handling of crime rather than on perceptions about the effectiveness of the CJS or general feelings of safety/views of crime. We do, however, look at the effects of attitudes towards the CJS where it impacts on perceptions of the government.

Our analysis identifies seven key drivers of views of the government's handling of crime:

1. Demographic factors
2. Political views
3. Communications by the media, the government and opposition
4. Perceptions of the police, CJS staff advocacy, and contact with the system
5. Views about leniency of sentencing and prisons
6. Perceptions of ASB and terrorism
7. General levels of trust in government information

The key demographic factors in determining views of the way government is handling crime

There are significant demographic variations in perceptions of government performance on crime, as shown in the following table. Simple (univariate) analyses of our research with around 2,000 members of the general public show that older groups, those without qualifications, and those living in very affluent areas are least satisfied with how the government has dealt with crime, and those most satisfied include the youngest age groups, those with the highest levels of qualifications, those living in the most deprived areas, and those from ethnic minority groups, particularly Asian people.

These relationships chime with much other work – for example, Home Office research[22] analysing BCS data shows that having no or low educational qualifications is independently related to believing the crime rate has increased.

In some ways these kinds of findings should be encouraging for the government, in that those most likely to be affected by crime (the young and those in deprived areas)[23] are more positive towards the government than others (although note that in just about all cases, more are still dissatisfied than satisfied).

22 Nicholas, S. and Walker, A. (2004) 'Crime in England and Wales 2002/2003: Supplementary Volume 2: Crime, Disorder, and the CJS – Public Attitudes and Perceptions' HO Statistical Bulletin 02/04. London: Home Office.

23 Jansson, K., Coleman, K. and Kaiza, P. (July, 2006) 'Violent Crime' (p. 61-83) in Walker, A., Kershaw, C. and Nicholas, S. (Eds) 'Crime in England and Wales 2005/06' Home Office.

However, there are some apparently contradictory patterns here, with, for example, those without qualifications more negative about the government's handling of crime, but those from deprived areas (where qualification levels are much lower) are more positive. Similarly, there is no relationship between satisfaction with the government on crime and social class, but there is with qualifications and deprivation levels.

When this is the case, it usually suggests that there are other factors that are the underlying cause of some of these relationships – which we can use statistical techniques to unpick further.

SATISFACTION WITH THE WAY THE GOVERNMENT IS DEALING WITH CRIME

Base: 2,993 adults aged 15+, *interviewed Nov 2006-Jan 2007.*	Satisfied	Dissat.	Net
	%	%	±%
Total	22	60	-38
GENDER			
Male	25	59	-34
Female	21	61	-40
AGE			
15-24	30	47	-17
25-34	30	52	-22
35-44	22	61	-39
45-54	23	59	-36
55-64	18	70	-52
65+	18	71	-53
HIGHEST QUALIFICATION			
No formal qualifications	19	69	-50
GCSE/ O-LEVEL/ CSE	23	60	-37
Vocational	23	60	-37
A-Level	24	52	-28
Bachelor Deg.	29	54	-25
Masters/ PhD	33	44	-11
Still studying	23	45	-22

SATISFACTION WITH THE WAY THE GOVERNMENT IS DEALING WITH CRIME (CONTINUED)

Base: 2,993 adults aged 15+, *interviewed Nov 2006-Jan 2007.*	Satisfied	Dissat.	Net
	%	%	±%
REGION			
South	24	55	-31
Midlands	21	66	-45
North	24	62	-38
Scotland	27	54	-27
Wales	18	63	-45
ETHNICITY			
White	21	63	-42
Black	42	45	-3
Asian	45	26	19
DEPRIVATION LEVEL			
Very affluent	16	69	-53
Affluent	20	65	-45
Average	21	61	-40
Deprived	25	61	-36
Very deprived	34	51	-17
RURALITY			
Urban	24	59	-35
Mixed	19	64	-45
Rural	21	62	-41
SOCIAL GRADE			
AB	25	56	-31
C1	22	59	-37
C2	29	64	-35
D	23	63	-40
E	27	58	-31

Source: Ipsos MORI, 2007

Here we have used 'multiple regression', which involves identifying which are the 'key drivers' of satisfaction with the government's handling of crime, while controlling for other factors – ie it identifies which are most important.[24]

The results from this are shown in the very simple diagram below, which shows the relative strength of the factors in explaining levels of satisfaction. The first point to note is that overall the model with these factors included can 'explain' 17% of the variation seen in satisfaction. This is a fairly low proportion, which means that a large part of the variation is unaccounted for here – and will be caused by other factors we are not measuring (probably personal life experience and values). However the relationships that the analysis highlights are still significant.
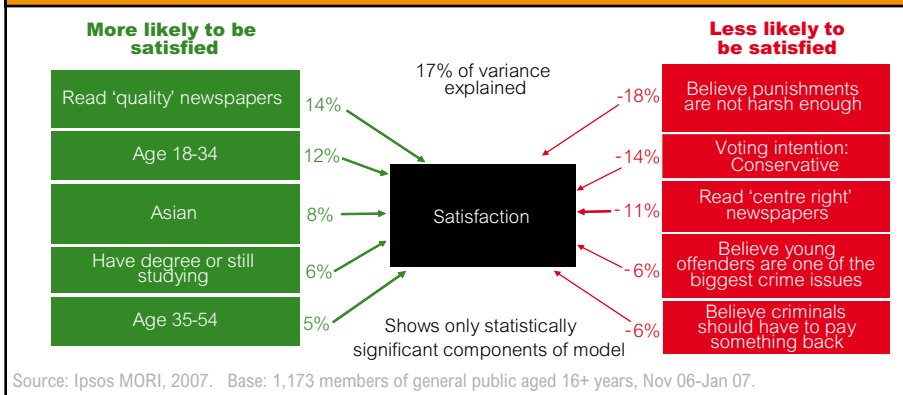
The strength of relationship with the factors is indicated by the percentage – the higher the absolute value of the percentage the stronger the predictor of satisfaction that factor is. The direction of the relationship is also shown, with those in red and with minus signs negatively related to satisfaction.

And overall, the model shows that the only important demographic factors are age (with younger groups more satisfied), education (whether the respondent has a degree or higher degree or is still studying – which will mostly be college and university students), and whether the respondent is Asian. The other factors relate to other perceptions of the CJS, media consumption and political views – which we look at in the next sections.

This does put a different interpretation on some of the simple patterns seen earlier. For example, when we control for other factors, living in a deprived area is not positively related to satisfaction with the way the government is dealing with crime nationally as was suggested in the previous table. This is likely to be because this was in fact caused by other variables – in particular, political views, due to the low level of Conservative voters in deprived areas.
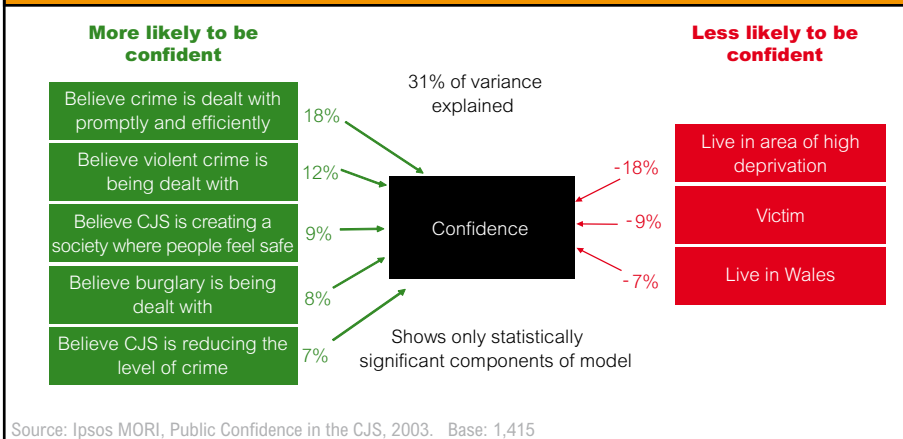
24 We included the following independent variables in the model – age, gender, ethnic fractionalisation, qualifications, ethnicity, work status, voting intention, region, IMD (area deprivation), social class, rurality, activism activities, read 'quality' newspapers, read 'popular' newspapers, read 'centre left' newspapers, read 'centre right' newspapers, read the 'Daily Mail, read 'The Sun', thinks one of the most important issues in the UK when it comes to crime is punishments are not harsh enough, thinks one of the most important issues in the UK when it comes to crime is too much reoffending, thinks one of the most important issues in the UK when it comes to crime is terrorism, thinks one of the most important issues in the UK when it comes to crime is criminals should have to pay something back to the victim(s)/communities, thinks one of the most important issues in the UK when it comes to crime is young offenders, thinks one of the most important issues in the UK when it comes to crime is that there are too many criminals/ too much crime, thinks one of the most important issues in the UK when it comes to crime is that there is too much crime in some (deprived) areas, thinks one of the most important issues in the UK when it comes to crime is that criminals are not being caught or not caught fast enough, thinks one of the most important issues in the UK when it comes to crime is that more police are needed, thinks one of the most important issues in the UK when it comes to crime is gun crime, thinks one of the most important issues in the UK when it comes to crime is violent crime, thinks one of the most important issues in the UK when it comes to crime is drug taking, thinks one of the most important issues in the UK when it comes to crime is ASB.

SATISFACTION WITH HOW THE GOVERNMENT IS DEALING WITH CRIME

More likely to be satisfied

Read 'quality' newspapers	14%
Age 18-34	12%
Asian	8%
Have degree or still studying	6%
Age 35-54	5%

17% of variance explained

Satisfaction

Shows only statistically significant components of model

Less likely to be satisfied

-18%	Believe punishments are not harsh enough
-14%	Voting intention: Conservative
-11%	Read 'centre right' newspapers
-6%	Believe young offenders are one of the biggest crime issues
-6%	Believe criminals should have to pay something back

Source: Ipsos MORI, 2007.   Base: 1,173 members of general public aged 16+ years, Nov 06-Jan 07.

Further evidence for a less optimistic interpretation of the government's impact on perceptions of crime in deprived areas is seen in the figure below, which shows the results of the same type of analysis but on how crime is being dealt with in the local area (a measure that is less likely to be driven by political views). Here those living in deprived areas are significantly less likely to have confidence in the way crime is dealt with locally.

CONFIDENCE IN THE WAY CRIME IS DEALT WITH LOCALLY

More likely to be confident

Believe crime is dealt with promptly and efficiently	18%
Believe violent crime is being dealt with	12%
Believe CJS is creating a society where people feel safe	9%
Believe burglary is being dealt with	8%
Believe CJS is reducing the level of crime	7%

31% of variance explained

Confidence

Shows only statistically significant components of model

Less likely to be confident

-18%	Live in area of high deprivation
-9%	Victim
-7%	Live in Wales

Source: Ipsos MORI, Public Confidence in the CJS, 2003.   Base: 1,415

Political views are strongly related to confidence

The analysis suggests that one of the most strongly related factors to perceptions of government performance on crime is political views – as can be clearly seen in the following table. As we might have expected from previous discussions of how Labour only get the blame and not the credit on crime, it is the very negative views of Conservative voters that most stands out, rather than the positive views of Labour supporters.

SATISFACTION THAT THE GOVERNMENT IS DEALING WITH CRIME			
	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Net
	%	%	±%
VOTING INTENTION			
Conservative	14	76	-62
Labour	33	48	-15
Liberal Democrat	24	46	-22
Other	23	70	-47
Source: Ipsos MORI, 2007			

This may seem very obvious, but it is not a point you will see made in government reviews of perceptions of crime. This is a difficult area of study for those in government who are evaluating programmes and tracking public confidence, as it is seen as inappropriate to ask about political views in government-funded studies (which in many ways makes sense).

While this analysis cannot tell us about cause and effect (and clearly, as discussed, it may be views of performance on crime that is driving voting rather than the other way round), the danger with ignoring these relationships is that we come to the wrong conclusions about the drivers of opinion – and in turn what action is required. For example, as seen above it is probable that a significant part of the explanation for the greater dissatisfaction with government's approach to crime among those living in affluent areas is their greater likelihood to vote Conservative. Ignoring this raises the risk of misidentifying the causes of patterns in views, and therefore focusing on activities that will not actually improve perceptions.

The media play a key role

There is also strong evidence that the public's perception of rising crime rates and the gap between views of the local and national situation are both in large part due to the media. This comes partly from the public themselves – for example, when we ask those people that think crime rates are rising why they think so, 60% say it is because of what they see on television and 46% say it is because of what they read in the newspapers. Personal experience and reports from people they know are significantly less likely to be cited.

WHY DO PEOPLE THINK THERE IS MORE CRIME?

Q: What makes you think that there is <u>more crime</u> than two years ago?

Category	Percentage
TV	57%
From what I read in newspapers	48%
Experience of people I know	24%
Personal experience	20%
Radio	15%
Feel generally less safe	12%
Teenagers hanging around	7%
Internet	3%
More police on the streets	1%
Other	5%
Don't know	1%
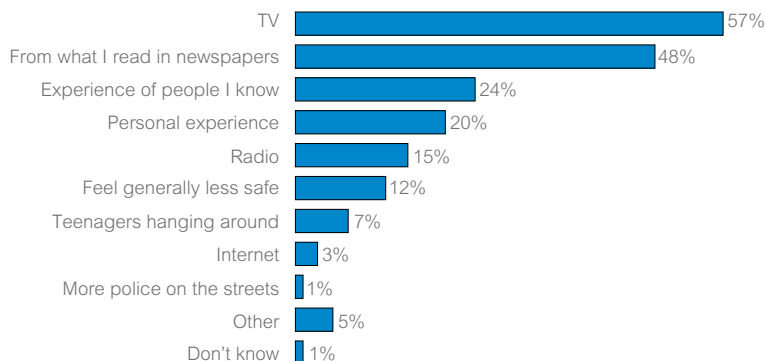
Source: Ipsos MORI January 2007   Base: Those who say there is a little/a lot more crime (1,191)

This is backed up by a number of qualitative studies we've conducted where people refer again and again to media influence on their views of crime and the CJS, because of their lack of direct experience:

There is one in the papers at the moment - a 20 year old that's has committed 150 crimes and he has never served any time, and I think that something has to be wrong

Probation Service … I reckon that's utterly a waste of time. How many times do you hear or have seen in the paper about broken probation and all that. What good does it do?

The Crown Prosecution Service, you never hear anything good about those people … according to the newspapers, the TV and everything, they seem to mess up everything they handle

The role of newspapers is also seen in the regression analysis shown previously. From the large number of variables included, two of the top ten factors are what type of newspaper people read, with those who read 'centre-right'[25] newspapers significantly more negative and those reading 'quality'[26] newspapers more positive. It is worth emphasising that this is after controlling for voting patterns (so, for example, in the case of centre-right newspaper readers this effect is independent of their greater likelihood to vote Conservative) and other differences in the demographic profile of readers – which provides a strong case for the direct impact of newspaper content on views. The following table shows the basic data illustrates the divergence of views between different readership groups.

SATISFACTION THAT THE GOVERNMENT IS DEALING WITH CRIME			
	Satisfied	Dissat.	Net
	%	%	±%
Read Centre-Left Newspapers[27]	32	50	-18
Read Centre-Right Newspapers	16	65	-49
Read 'Quality' Newspapers	20	51	-31
Read 'Popular' Newspapers[28]	20	65	-45
Source: Ipsos MORI, 2007			

The impact of the media is also suggested by a large number of studies examining content. These generally find that the media concentrate on stories of serious crime against the person and violence, particularly homicide and sexual offences. For example, Jason Ditton from the University of Sheffield has shown that 45% of crimes reported in newspapers in the UK involve sex or violence, compared with only 3% of actual reported crime. This will help explain the fact that people overestimate the incidence of these types of crime by a factor of three. A similar pattern is seen in other countries, with, for example, one American study suggesting that about two-thirds of crime news stories are primarily about violent or sex offences, while they account for less than ten percent of crimes recorded by the police.[29]

25 Reads one or more of: The Times, Telegraph, The Sun, The Daily Express, The Daily Mail, and Evening Standard.

26 Reads one or more: Herald, The Independent, Telegraph, Guardian, Financial Times, Scotsman.

27 Reads one or more of: Guardian, The Independent, and the Mirror.

28 Reads one or more of: Daily Express, Daily Mail, Metro, Daily Record, The Sun, Daily Mirror, The Star, Evening Standard, and Western Mail (Wales only).

29 Reiner, R., Livingstone, S., Allen, J. (2003) 'From Law And Order To Lynch Mobs: Crime News Since The Second World War' In P. Mason (Ed) In Criminal Visions: Media Representations Of Crime And Justice (pp. 13-32). Willan.

And it is very easy to find examples of sensationalist and one-sided reporting of crime across a range of newspapers. The following excerpts from a special feature in The Sun from a few years ago illustrates a number of the issues, including the selective use of data and the questioning of other (respected) sources, generalising from individual incidents and the use of extreme language (seen again in the coverage of the killing of Rhys Jones, shown earlier). However, it also illustrates how the government creates problems for itself by trying to balance an overly negative tone with an overly positive picture (as we'll come back to later).

Of course, it is difficult to be certain whether negative media reports are leading or following public opinion, and to what extent people with certain attitudes simply choose to read certain newspapers/watch particular programmes that reflect their already held views rather than being influenced by them. But there are strong indications (including from longitudinal studies[30])that newspapers and broadcast media do have a great deal of direct impact.

For example, when analysis of stories appearing in the media about specific crime-related events is run alongside a survey tracking fear of crime in London (as in the following figure), we see troughs in perceptions of safety following stories about violent attacks and increases in feelings of safety following positive news stories about crackdowns on crime.

MEDIA IMPACT ON FEAR OF CRIME IN LONDON

Net attitude to London becoming safer   Exposure/Slant on Racial incidents, youth & street crime & drugs

Police teams abseil into crack den in massive drug raids

Drug cops shut down super club

Muslims offered protection against Sept 11th backlash

Mobile phone theft and racist attack on Turk

Drug den crackdown

Police end cannabis seizures

Youth crime - London muggers starting as young as 4

4 week rolling average
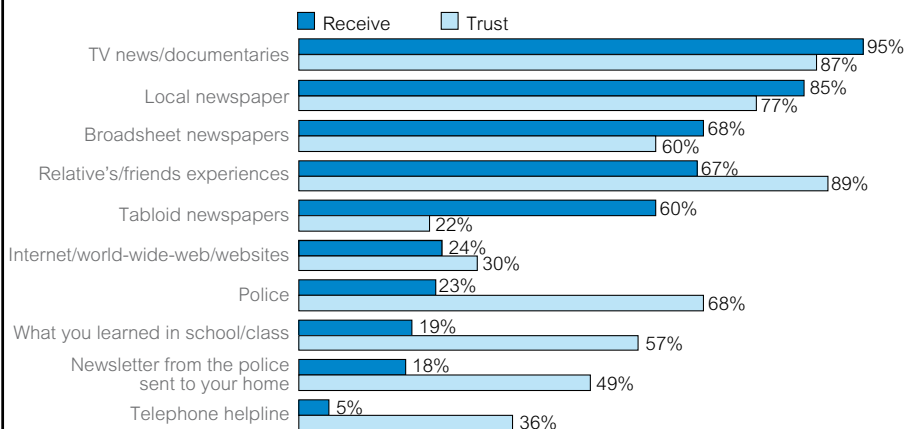
Source: Test Research, Ipsos MORI

A common argument for the media having a limited role in shaping views is that trust in them is very low in the UK, and therefore people do not believe a lot of what they say. This is clearly true to a degree, but it is important firstly to note that there are clear distinctions made between different sections of the media – and while (as the following figure shows) a relative's or friend's experience is more trusted, TV news and documentaries are not far behind. Local newspapers are also highly trusted (a key message for those communicating on these issues), along with broadsheet papers to a slightly lesser degree. People do treat the coverage in popular newspapers with caution, but exposure to them is high – much higher than more trusted sources such as direct communications from the police – and so their impact will still be significant.

WHAT DO WE SEE AND WHO DO WE TRUST ON CRIME?

Q: I am going to read some of these out, would you please tell me from which ones you personally receive the most information?

Q: Do you <u>trust</u>… to tell the truth about how crime is being dealt with?

■ Receive   ☐ Trust

	Receive	Trust
TV news/documentaries	95%	87%
Local newspaper	85%	77%
Broadsheet newspapers	68%	60%
Relative's/friends experiences	67%	89%
Tabloid newspapers	60%	22%
Internet/world-wide-web/websites	24%	30%
Police	23%	68%
What you learned in school/class	19%	57%
Newsletter from the police sent to your home	18%	49%
Telephone helpline	5%	36%

Base: Ipsos MORI 2003.   Base: 2,001 GB aged 16+, Feb-March 2003.

And the opposition play a role here too

It is very clear that opposition politicians employ similar approaches to encouraging fear of crime and negative perceptions of the government's performance on the issue – the following excerpts are just a tiny fraction of the almost daily, excessively negative comments on crime:

'The Tories today accused Tony Blair of being complacent about the rise in violent crime. Shadow Home Secretary David Davis warned that 'violence and lawlessness' was spreading from the inner cities to the suburbs and market towns across the country.'[31]

'Tory leader Michael Howard has claimed crime is 'out of control' as he continued his battle with Prime Minister Tony Blair over their law and order records. Mr Howard cited the 'horrific' murder of financier John Monckton to back up his claim that 'the fight against crime is being lost'. He told the Commons that violent crime had risen, detected offences were up and detection rates had slumped since Labour came to power in 1997.'[32]

30 Duffy, B. and Rowden, L. You are what you read? Ipsos MORI, 2003.

31 Blair complacent over violent crime The Daily Mail [internet] 22 April 2005 http://www.dailymail.co.uk/pages/live/articles/news/elections2005.html?in_article_id=345930&in_page_id=1853 (Accessed 16 April 2007)

32 Anon (2004) Crime is out of control, says Howard The Daily Mail [internet] 1 December 2004 http://www.dailymail.co.uk/pages/live/articles/news/news.html?in_article_id=329182&in_page_id=1770 (Accessed 16 April 2007)

'Crime today is out of control. There is a gun crime every hour. A million violent crimes are committed each year...'[33]

'David Cameron has called for young offenders to be barred from driving as part of a concerted programme to tackle crime and lawlessness. The Tory leader seized on concerns about a series of high-profile assaults and murders to warn that the country was facing a "real and growing problem" of violence and anti-social behaviour.'[34]

'Shadow Home Secretary David Davis said: "Knife crime is just a symptom of the breakdown in society on our streets. The Government owes it to the public to get a grip of drink, drugs and the broken homes that have spawned this plague on Britain.'[35]

But this is clearly not just a Conservative approach, and it is difficult for Labour to complain too much as they used very similar tactics when they were in opposition in the early and mid-1990s. Most famously, Tony Blair made a speech following the 1993 murder of James Bulger by two ten-year-old boys that generalised from an extremely unusual crime, when saying '*The news bulletins of the past week have been like hammer blows struck against the sleeping conscience of the country,*' and that we need '*to wake up and look unflinchingly at what we see*'. Jack Straw took a similarly extreme approach when he became Shadow Home Secretary and for example promised, in September 1995, to '*reclaim the streets for the law-abiding citizen from the aggressive begging of winos and addicts and the squeegee merchants who wait at large road junctions to force on reticent motorists their screen-cleaning service*'.

This is an effective campaigning approach, but as a number of commentators have pointed out, it encourages a kind of fear of crime 'arms race' in talking up the threat and severity of the required solutions – with the significant downside of encouraging a greater concern than there needs to be.

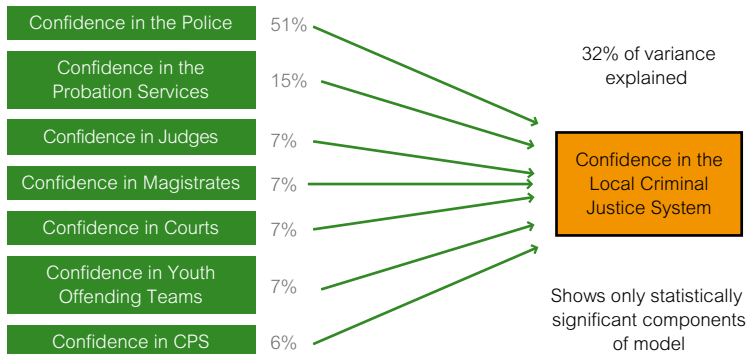## Perceptions of the police – and what they say about the service – are vital too

Confidence that the police are doing a good job is absolutely vital to overall views of the CJS, especially at the local level – much more so than other CJS agencies such as prisons and probation. As the following figure shows, confidence in the CJS locally is overwhelmingly driven by views of the police (over half of the variance can be explained by confidence in the police alone).

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33 Conservative Party Election Manifesto 2005

34 Cameron urges youth crime crackdown The Daily Mail (internet) 22nd August 2007 http://www.dailymail.co.uk/pages/live/articles/news/news.html?in_article_id=476938&in_page_id=1770

35 Anarchy in the UK as yobs rule The Sun [internet] 20 August 2007 http://www.thesun.co.uk/article/0,,2-2007380532,00.html

CONFIDENCE IN CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM LOCALLY

Confidence in the Police	51%
Confidence in the Probation Services	15%
Confidence in Judges	7%
Confidence in Magistrates	7%
Confidence in Courts	7%
Confidence in Youth Offending Teams	7%
Confidence in CPS	6%

32% of variance explained

Confidence in the Local Criminal Justice System

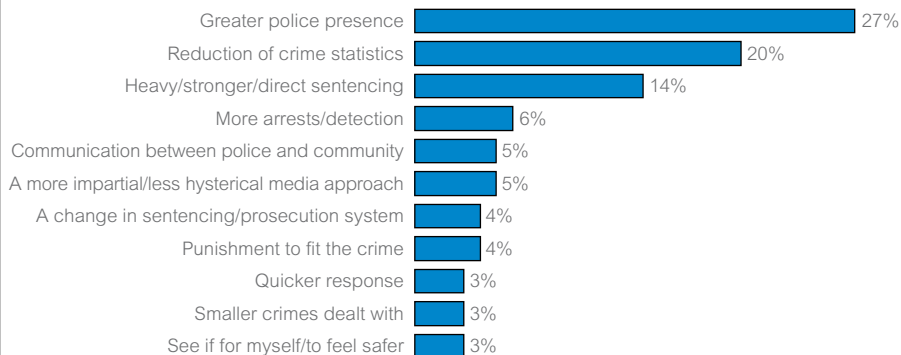Shows only statistically significant components of model

Source: Ipsos MORI, Public Confidence in the CJS survey 2003.   Base: 1,942 members of the general public

This is also seen in the fact that when we ask respondents what would increase their confidence in the CJS, the most common reply is increased police presence. The third most frequent mention is more severe sentencing, which we will come back to in the next section.
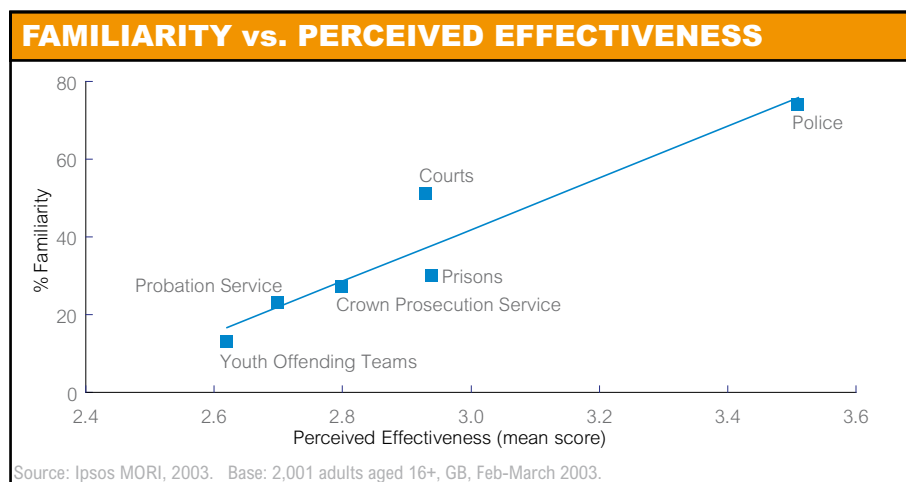
DEALING WITH CRIME EFFECTIVELY

Q: What, if anything, would convince you that crime was being dealt with more effectively, both in your area and in England and Wales?

Greater police presence	27%
Reduction of crime statistics	20%
Heavy/stronger/direct sentencing	14%
More arrests/detection	6%
Communication between police and community	5%
A more impartial/less hysterical media approach	5%
A change in sentencing/prosecution system	4%
Punishment to fit the crime	4%
Quicker response	3%
Smaller crimes dealt with	3%
See if for myself/to feel safer	3%

Source: Ipsos MORI, Public Confidence in the CJS survey 2003.   Base: 1,942 members of the general public.

Of course this is partly because for most people the police are the main image they have when they think about the CJS, as suggested by the following figure. The police are far and away the most familiar branch of the service to people – and, fortunately, they are also seen as having the greatest effect on local crime, by some distance. This pattern of the most familiar organisations being seen as the most effective is in fact a very common one, which we see across a range of sectors and which, in part, underlines the importance of good communications and frequent contact in building relationships.

FAMILIARITY vs. PERCEIVED EFFECTIVENESS

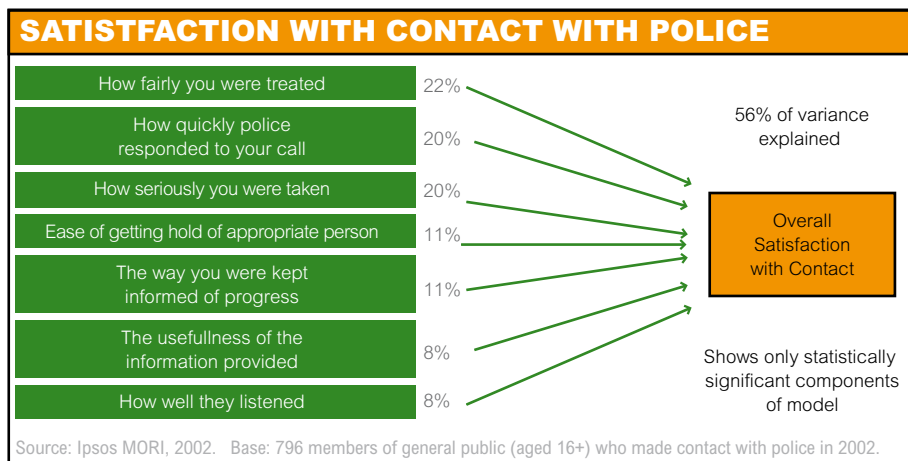Source: Ipsos MORI, 2003.   Base: 2,001 adults aged 16+, GB, Feb-March 2003.

But, unlike other services, contact increases dissatisfaction

But the bad news for the police and other elements of the CJS is that people seem to *become less confident* after having come into direct contact with the system than they were before contact. That is, victims and witnesses are less favourable towards the CJS and the police than those who have not had contact: our data shows that 56% of those who have had contact with the police through being victims or witnesses say they are confident in the CJS, compared with 67% of those who have had no dealings with the police.

This does not seem to be solely explained by the fact that victims and witnesses are different types of people from the general public – as we saw earlier, not having been a victim of crime is a significant driver of confidence in the way crime is dealt with locally even after controlling for other profile differences.

This is a very unusual pattern – in fact it is the opposite of what we find in most other government (and indeed private sector) services, where increased contact is related to increased satisfaction.[36] It suggests that the system is less effective than people expect from what they have heard from other sources – which is worrying, given that the largely negative media slant is not likely to encourage particularly high expectations.

There is also evidence of the importance of service quality issues from our studies that have shown that victim/witness satisfaction with the contact they have had with the police is driven as much by these types of factors as by outcomes. Our research for the Cabinet Office examined the relationship between how police talk to their 'customers' and these customers' satisfaction with the contact, as shown in the following figure. Perceived fairness, speed and how seriously the contact is taken are the key determinants of overall satisfaction, while communications and information are also important. These types of factors have traditionally been less of a focus for the police and other elements of the CJS,[37] but in the last couple of years there does seem to be a greater interest in improving their customer service culture. Indeed the recent Flanagan Review emphasises the importance of customer service skills within the police, given that *"every contact leaves a trace"*.

SATISTFACTION WITH CONTACT WITH POLICE

How fairly you were treated	22%
How quickly police responded to your call	20%
How seriously you were taken	20%
Ease of getting hold of appropriate person	11%
The way you were kept informed of progress	11%
The usefullness of the information provided	8%
How well they listened	8%

56% of variance explained

Overall Satisfaction with Contact

Shows only statistically significant components of model

Source: Ipsos MORI, 2002. Base: 796 members of general public (aged 16+) who made contact with police in 2002.

36 Note that this is even the case with regulatory services – so it is not just a case of people consuming more of services they enjoy in other sectors, a situation that clearly would not apply for victims and witnesses, and which may have explained the different relationship seen here.
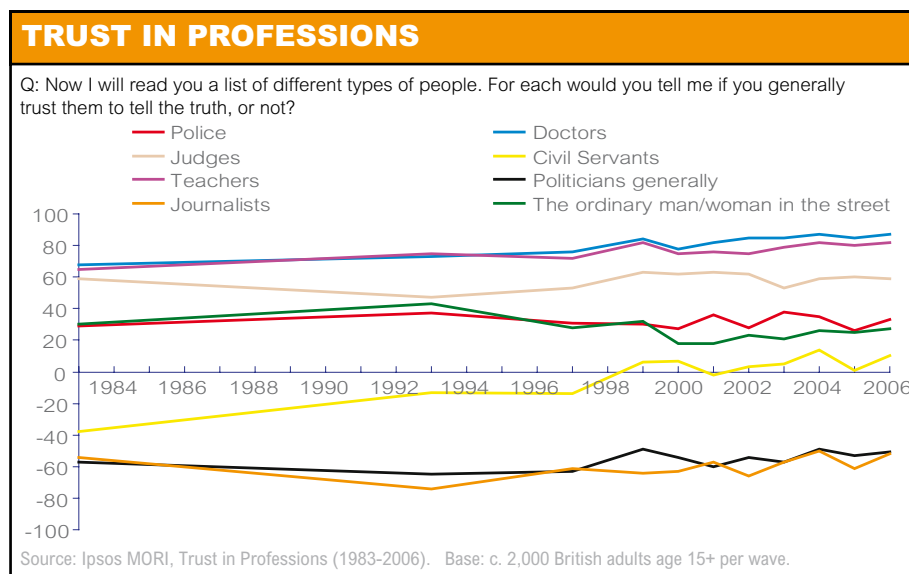
37 See for example, J. Foster (2003). Police Cultures. In Handbook of Policing (T. Newburn (Ed.) 2003. Willan Publishing: Devon.

But there is still widespread sympathy for the police – and reasonable levels of trust

Nevertheless, as we have seen, there is general sympathy with the police among many people. The public tends not to blame the police for their dissatisfaction with the CJS but to see the police as being constrained by the government and bureaucracy and "red tape". They tend to blame the 'system' rather than the police as the following quote from Ipsos MORI's 2005 report for the Independent Police Complaints Committee (IPCC) shows:
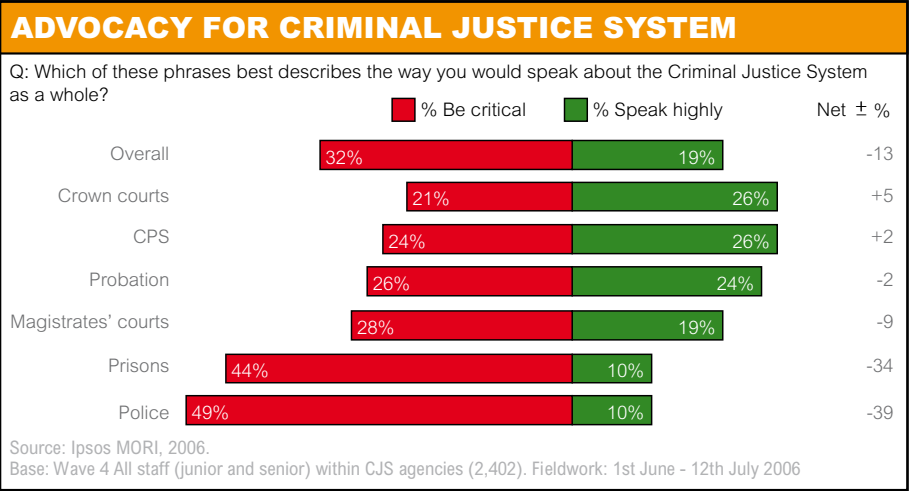
> *'There seems to be so much bureaucracy these days about political correctness and having to deal with them in this way and that way, that they're [the police] completely ineffective. Their power is diminished because of bureaucracy.'* [38]

We saw earlier that the police are among the most trusted sources when it comes to information on how crime is being dealt with – and even on the much broader measure of trusting them to 'tell the truth' they do relatively well, as the following figure shows. They are not as trusted as judges, but are significantly ahead of politicians, journalists and even civil servants.

TRUST IN PROFESSIONS

Q: Now I will read you a list of different types of people. For each would you tell me if you generally trust them to tell the truth, or not?

Source: Ipsos MORI, Trust in Professions (1983-2006).   Base: c. 2,000 British adults age 15+ per wave.

But the police are not advocates of the CJS

This makes it particularly worrying for the government that the police themselves are highly critical of the CJS – much more so than staff from most other branches of the system. As the following figure shows, around half of police say they speak critically about the CJS to people they meet and only around 10% say they speak highly, with prison workers nearly as critical. These are very negative findings, and given the number of police and the high levels of trust in them, this is likely to have a serious impact on general perceptions.

ADVOCACY FOR CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

Q: Which of these phrases best describes the way you would speak about the Criminal Justice System as a whole?

% Be critical   **% Speak highly**   Net ± %

	% Be critical	% Speak highly	Net ± %
Overall	32%	19%	-13
Crown courts	21%	26%	+5
CPS	24%	26%	+2
Probation	26%	24%	-2
Magistrates' courts	28%	19%	-9
Prisons	44%	10%	-34
Police	49%	10%	-39

Source: Ipsos MORI, 2006.
Base: Wave 4 All staff (junior and senior) within CJS agencies (2,402). Fieldwork: 1st June - 12th July 2006

Our work in other areas has shown just how closely related staff advocacy is to wider perceptions of competence. For example, the following figure from our local government research shows how authorities that are rated excellent in independent assessments have much higher levels of staff advocacy, particularly in comparison to those rated as poor. Now clearly this does not mean that what staff are saying is the main driver of performance and wider perceptions, but it is likely to be having some impact.

38 Ipsos MORI report for the IPCC on public confidence in the police complaints system (2005). The research consisted of a series of discussion groups and depth interviews from the groups identified in a previous survey for the IPCC as less willing to make a complaint or more sceptical of the system. These groups included a variety of Black and Ethnic Minority groups, traditionally 'hard-to-reach' groups, including Gypsies/Travellers, Lesbian and Gay people, and recent immigrants to the UK.

ADVOCACY - SELF FULFILLING PROPHECY?

% who strongly agrees that they would speak highly of the authority to others outside the organisation
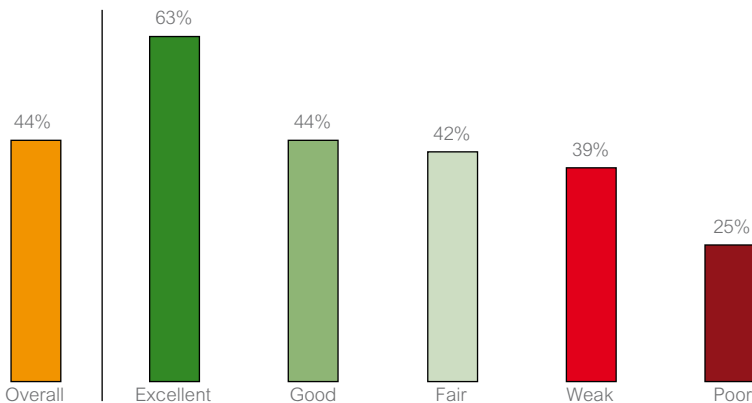
Source: Ipsos MORI, 2003.   Base: 500 local government staff interviewed by phone - July/August 2003.

Interestingly, when we look at what in particular the police are critical about, we find that their concerns are very similar to those seen among the general public – for example, they feel that not enough offenders are being brought to justice, that victims' needs are not being adequately met, that offenders are not being appropriately punished and that offenders are not paying anything back to the community and to victims.[39]
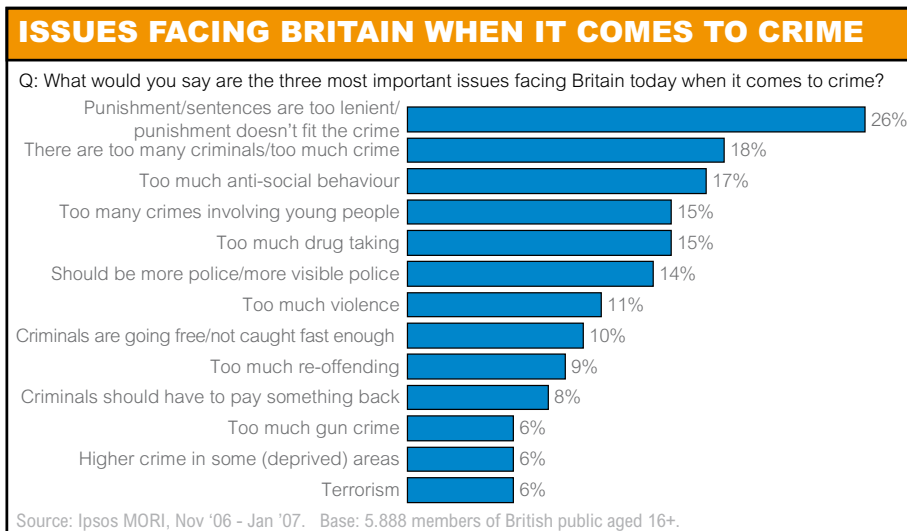
It is clearly difficult to determine the extent to which this is just the police mirroring the views of the public (as they will be influenced by the media too) or a reflection of the fact that they play a significant role in actually shaping wider concerns – but it seems likely to be mix of both.

Perceptions of conviction rates, sentencing and prisons

This public (and police) focus on punishments being too lenient comes through very strongly in perception studies. For example, as we saw in our regression analysis earlier, the feeling that sentences are not harsh enough is the **single most important driver** of perceptions of how the government deals with crime.

39 CJS Staff Survey 2005/6

And this is also seen in the following figure, where, out of all possible concerns, leniency of sentences is seen as the most important issue facing Britain today when it comes to crime, ahead of other signal issues such as ASB, young offenders, drugs and gun crime.

ISSUES FACING BRITAIN WHEN IT COMES TO CRIME

Q: What would you say are the three most important issues facing Britain today when it comes to crime?

Issue	%
Punishment/sentences are too lenient/ punishment doesn't fit the crime	26%
There are too many criminals/too much crime	18%
Too much anti-social behaviour	17%
Too many crimes involving young people	15%
Too much drug taking	15%
Should be more police/more visible police	14%
Too much violence	11%
Criminals are going free/not caught fast enough	10%
Too much re-offending	9%
Criminals should have to pay something back	8%
Too much gun crime	6%
Higher crime in some (deprived) areas	6%
Terrorism	6%

Source: Ipsos MORI, Nov '06 - Jan '07.   Base: 5.888 members of British public aged 16+.

International comparisons show that we are not alone in having a hardline public opinion on these issues – dissatisfaction with the leniency of sentencing is common across the US and Europe.[40]

VIEWS ACROSS EUROPEAN COUNTRIES ON LENIENCY TOWARDS CRIMINALS

% agreeing with:
'Nowadays there is too much tolerance. Criminals should be punished more severely'

COUNTRY	% AGREE
United Kingdom	88%
Italy	87%
Germany	86%
Spain	81%
France	79%

Source: Ipsos MORI International Social Trends Monitor, Nov 2006. Base: c 1,000 interviews in each country.

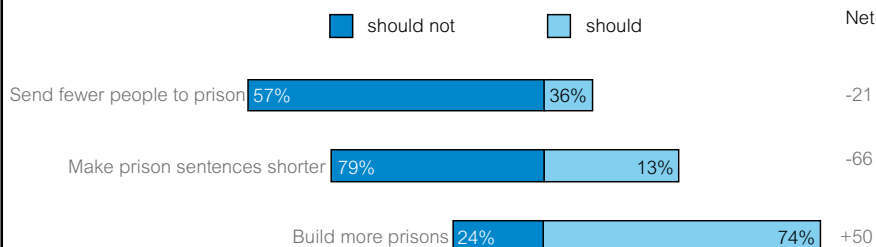40 http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb66/eb66_highlights_en.pdf

But findings that the British public remain so concerned about leniency will be disappointing for the government, given that they have introduced a range of tougher sentencing policies, including the introduction of mandatory and minimum sentencing. A number of commentators question whether the government has actually followed through on all of their hardline rhetoric and policies, but average sentence lengths (which have increased substantially from 20 to 30 months)[41] and the large increase in the number of people in prison (from around 61,000[42] in 1997 to 80,300[43] in March 2007) suggest that they have.

Of course it is possible that the public are unaware of these initiatives and trends, particularly given the media focus on examples of perceived leniency. Indeed, current perceptions will be related in part to recent high profile coverage of judges being asked to avoid custodial sentences where possible because of prison over-crowding – particularly as one case that the media highlighted was (very memorably) of a man who was convicted of downloading child pornography but given a suspended sentence because the judge was 'bearing in mind' the Home Secretary's advice to only jail dangerous and persistent offenders.[44]

On this, when we ask for the public's view on how to deal with prison overcrowding their solution is simple – build more prisons. As seen in the second of the following figures, if in the meantime this means converting ferries to floating prisons, the majority of the public are okay with that too.

SOLVING THE PRISON PROBLEM

Q: As you may know, Britain has a bigger proportion of it's population in prison than many other countries, and Britain's prisons are nearly full. For each of the following ways of dealing with this, do you think they should or should not be used?

	should not	should	Net
Send fewer people to prison	57%	36%	-21
Make prison sentences shorter	79%	13%	-66
Build more prisons	24%	74%	+50

Source: Ipsos MORI/Sun, 2006.   Base: 1,001 British public aged 18+, 12-17 January 2006.

41 Prime Minister's Strategy Unit, Cabinet Office (November 2006) 'Policy Review: Crime, Justice, and Cohesion'

42 White, P. (1997) 'The prison population in 1997: A statistical review' Home Office Research and Statistics Directorate Research Findings No. 76. London.

43 'Inmate numbers at record 80,300'. BBC News online. http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/6510673.stm (Accessed 23rd May, 2007).

44 BBC NEWS (online) 'Reid hits back in sentencing row' http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/uk_politics/6301125.stm. (Accessed 15th Feb, 2007).

FLOATING PRISONS

Q: If no prison space is available, should the government use converted ferries as floating prisons, or not?

Don't know
7%

Should not
31%

Should
63%
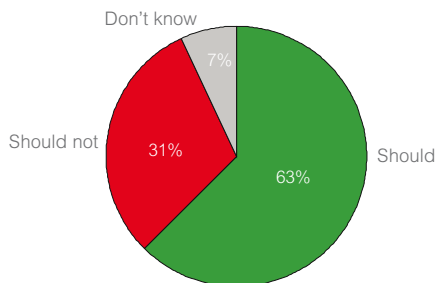
Base: Ipsos MORI/Sun, 2006.   Base: 1,001 British public aged 18+, 12-17 January 2006.

Again, these present difficult issues for the government, as they are attacked by the opposition (with some justification) for not predicting future needs accurately ('The rise in the prison population didn't start last Wednesday, it's been going on steadily for about 20 years')[45] and attacked by experts for misdiagnosing the issue by focusing on increasing capacity rather than reviewing sentencing ('It's not actually going to deal with the fundamental issue… that sentencing has become much tougher. It's a bit like adding extra lanes to the M25 – they'll get filled up pretty quickly').[46]
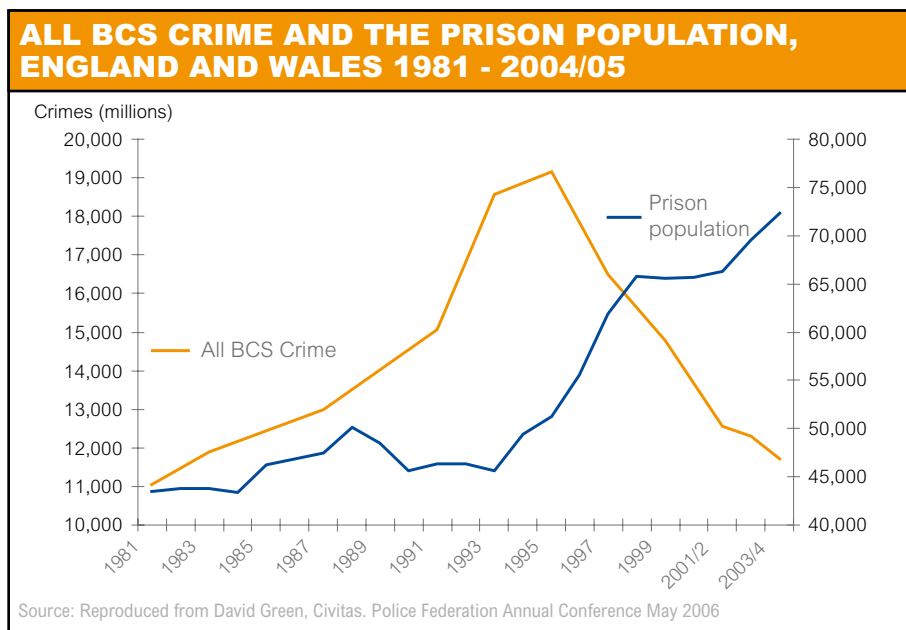
But calls for tougher punishment are not universal

This does reflect a wider concern among a number of commentators that the 'tough' approaches adopted by the government are designed mainly to appeal to the electorate, regardless of evidence on whether they work. Some have suggested that the introduction of relatively punitive policies have resulted in more problems than they have solved, and even government reports suggest that prevention and early intervention are more effective than punishment.[47]

45 Ibid
46 Ibid
47 Prime Minister's Strategy Unit, Cabinet Office (November 2006). Policy Review: Crime, Justice, and Cohesion.

However, some (usually) right-of-centre commentators do suggest that an increase in the use of imprisonment can be effective, if used in conjunction with other measures. The following figure which shows the crime rate falling as prison numbers increase is often given as evidence for this; this is seen to be a sign that the risk of being caught and punished is increasing, and therefore the net benefit of criminal activities is reducing. These reviews also often defend the sustainability of these approaches by citing US examples, particularly New York, where there was a large initial increase in prison numbers following the introduction of 'zero tolerance' approaches, but these have since fallen again to below previous levels as possible offenders are deterred.

ALL BCS CRIME AND THE PRISON POPULATION, ENGLAND AND WALES 1981 - 2004/05

Crimes (millions)

Prison population

All BCS Crime

Source: Reproduced from David Green, Civitas. Police Federation Annual Conference May 2006
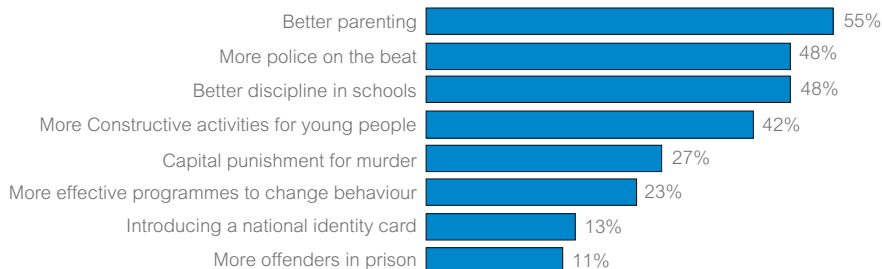
It is interesting, however, that the public do not agree that increasing prisoner numbers will be effective in reducing crime. As can be seen from the following figure,[48] just 11% believe that increasing the number of offenders in prisons would 'do most' to reduce crime in Britain. Rather, the public is more focused on intervening at the level of families and young people – better parenting, activities for young people and school discipline - and having more police on the beat. These perceptions are to some extent consistent with findings about what actually is effective in reducing crime (we return to this in the next chapter) and are themes that all major political parties focus on.

48 Note, however, that these figures should be interpreted with caution due to the small sample size used in this research.

WHAT WOULD DO MOST TO REDUCE CRIME IN BRITAIN?

Q: Which two or three of these do you think would do most to reduce crime in Britain?

Better parenting	55%
More police on the beat	48%
Better discipline in schools	48%
More Constructive activities for young people	42%
Capital punishment for murder	27%
More effective programmes to change behaviour	23%
Introducing a national identity card	13%
More offenders in prison	11%

Source: Ipsos MORI for Respect Task Force, October 2006
Base: 2,048, 16+ years

The challenges for government are significant then – they face calls from experts for the greater use of alternative approaches to prison while already being seen as too lenient by a public who, at the same time, recognise that other methods may be more effective.

Perceptions of ASB and terrorism

It is clear from a number of studies that when people think about crime and their confidence in the government's handling of it, they also take a wide range of ASBs into account. This was seen in an earlier figure, where increasing ASB comes out as second only to sentencing as the main reasons why people think crime is increasing. It is also seen in a number of qualitative studies, such as that conducted by Surrey University quoted earlier.

These suggest that because we all have to negotiate our way through public spaces in the course of our everyday lives, if they become unpredictable or threatening, this can cause quite significant personal distress. Unfortunately, the police did not recognise this for quite a while, telling callers who reported such incivilities that they had to concentrate their resources on 'real crimes' such as burglary, and so on. So while crime overall has been decreasing for a number of years, if these examples of ASB are seen to be increasing or staying the same, then perceptions of crime are likely to be a lot less positive. And the following table does provide some mixed evidence; while abandoned or burnt out cars are now much less of an issue, there has been no real change in perceptions of litter, teenagers hanging around or people being drunk or rowdy in public places.

PERCENTAGE PERCEIVING PROBLEMS WITH ASB IN THE LOCAL AREA 1992 TO 2006/07 BRITISH CRIME SURVEY

	Problems with noisy neighbours /loud parties	Teenagers and young people hanging around	Rubbish or litter	Vandalism or graffiti & other deliberate damage to property	People using or dealing drugs	People being drunk or rowdy in public	Abandoned or burnt out cars
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
1992	8	20	30	26	14	n/a	n/a
1996	8	24	26	24	21	n/a	n/a
1998	8	27	28	26	25	n/a	n/a
2000	9	32	30	32	33	n/a	14
2001/02	10	32	32	34	31	22	20
2002/03	10	33	33	35	32	23	25
2003/04	9	27	29	28	25	19	15
2004/05	9	31	30	28	26	22	12
2005/06	10	32	30	29	27	24	10
2006/07	11	33	31	28	28	26	9

Note. Figures refer to percentage saying very/fairly big problem in their area. Source: Nicholas, S., Kershaw, C. and Walker, A. (2007) 'Crime in England and Wales 2006/07' Home Office Statistical Bulletin 2nd Edition, Crown Copyright

Similarly, we saw earlier that some people give increases in terrorism as a reason for thinking that crime has increased. While only a small minority spontaneously come up with this as an issue, it is likely that many more will have terrorist activity in mind when thinking about crime. It is undoubtedly the case that concern about terrorism has increased significantly over the last ten years, as shown in the following figure. This is clearly highly related to particular terrorist events, but it is consistently 30-40 percentage points higher than it was in the late 1990s, when it barely registered as an issue.

ISSUES FACING BRITAIN: TERRORISM/DEFENCE

Q: What do you see as the main/other important issues facing Britain today?
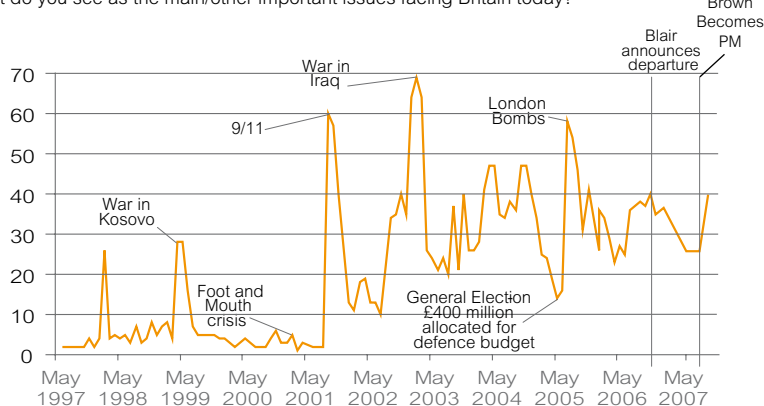
Source: Ipsos MORI Political Monitor, 2007. Base: c. 1,000 British adults each month age 18+.

Lack of trust in government and statistics

Finally, these perception gaps may also be partly due to a lack of trust in government information generally and their use of statistics in particular. Our recent paper on trust in government information[49] highlights that it is not the data itself that is the problem but rather the way it is used. As focus group participants put it:

'Everything — there's spin on it. Even when you don't think it has got spin, it's got spin on it.'

'Stop spinning. The situation now is that they've been doing it so long that they're branded as untrustworthy and it's such a powerful branding that it'll take them ten years of being honest to sort it out — and they haven't got that long.'

49 Duffy, B., Hall, S., & Williams, M. (Nov 2005) 'Who do you believe? Trust in government information' Ipsos MORI.

In the focus groups we conducted for the study, crime statistics came out again and again as one of the key examples of how government (and to a lesser degree the media) can pick and choose information to fit with their aims or story. Many people picked up on the discrepancy between different sources.

'Well the thing is they've got two figures that they measure crime by and one's the British Crime Survey and one's the, I think it's the actual figures that are recorded by the police. And they keep changing which one they're highlighting depending on which one's the best and so the police one is actually a much lower figure than the British Crime Survey, although the British Crime Survey's gone down a lot so they're highlighting that.'

'I think what disturbs me about the figures that you constantly hear trolleyed out at the moment, is the fact that, when the last set of figures that the Labour government released didn't suit them, they changed the way the crimes were counted. It stinks, it's just false accounting. If it doesn't suit the picture you want to paint, they're moving the numbers.'

This is a serious challenge for those trying to describe what is happening in crime, as these perceptions, once established, are very difficult to shift.

The problem is worse if the source delivering the information is not trusted, and, as we saw earlier, politicians are among the least trusted groups. As an experiment, in different focus groups we provided the same information on crime rates through a number of different sources – as if they were from an independent think tank, a junior government minister and David Blunkett (who was Secretary of State at the time). The Secretary of State was clearly the least trusted – by some distance:

'Because… if you look at it, it can mean nothing. A quarter of something has gone down, you don't know what the parameters were on the previous thing. He's a politician … and say it actually has done … I'm not going to base any faith or any knowledge on that statement.'

The challenge for government is clearly that the information they provide is up against that delivered by the media (which is often more trusted and certainly more prevalent than direct communications from politicians) and from frontline staff (which, while less prevalent will be highly trusted). The temptation is therefore to try to re-balance this by presenting as positive a case as possible, as often as possible – but that is likely to only lead to more accusations of spin.

A number of our surveys suggest that it may be more effective for communications to come from independent sources. For example, a very simple survey experiment that we conducted with Prospect magazine[50] told people some positive delivery facts on crime (crime being down, police numbers being up etc) and for one half of the sample attributed them to an independent source while the other half of the sample was told it was government information. The half of the sample who were told the facts were independent were significantly more likely to change their minds on whether the government's handling of crime was improving. This was a very simple experiment, but it does point to the potential impact of making more information independent.

The next section explores these and other types of approaches to improving perceptions.

50 Duffy, B., Hall, S., & Cole, H. (Prospect April 2005). Opinions: Before and After. Ipsos MORI.

4. WHAT CAN THE GOVERNMENT DO?

As we outlined earlier, crime is a difficult area for this government: it is vitally important to people (and becoming more so), but despite responding to a number of popular demands, it remains more of a vote loser than a vote winner for Labour.

Responsiveness to public concerns has led to a number of accusations of populism and pandering to public opinion from expert commentators, as discussed in Roberts and Hough (2005).[51] But one of the very unusual features of this area of policy is that public confidence and reassurance are key outcomes in their own right, due to the impact of fear of crime on quality of life - the assertion that perception is fact is more correct in crime than in most policy areas. The government recognises this, as the recent government crime strategy paper Cutting Crime A New Partnership 2008-2011 points out "*If crime falls but people do not see and feel that fall, their quality of life is affected and the benefits of reduced crime are not being realised*".

It may, therefore, be completely correct and logical to adopt some policies that the public think are clearly needed even when the government are aware that less popular alternatives may be more effective. Striking the right balance between policies that provide reassurance and those that have the most impact on crime outcomes is one of the greatest challenges in the area.

And there is real concern that whatever the government does on crime the gaps between reality and perception will continue; as Sir Ronnie Flanagan says, over the next ten years "*the "reassurance gap"…will probably remain stubbornly wide.*"

But this review suggests there are practical actions that can be taken on communicating with and engaging the public. These are outlined in the second section below – but first it is worth noting some common suggestions for actually reducing crime further.

Reducing crime further

Discussing the most effective approaches to reducing crime has not been a focus for this paper, as our aim has been to look at the drivers of perceptions, and there are already a large number of detailed reviews on the relative impact of different crime reduction measures. These typically focus on the following types of actions – many of which are being tried to some extent already:

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51 Roberts, J. and Hough, M. (2005) 'Understanding public attitudes to criminal justice' In series 'Crime and Justice' M. Maguire (series editor). Open University Press: Maidenhead.

- **Early intervention and prevention:** this includes work with children and families, focusing on the transition to school for pre-schoolers in deprived areas, engaging vulnerable families to try to connect them to agencies and institutions, the use of parenting classes, tailored treatment programmes with teenagers at risk of drug dependence and so on. There is strong evidence that these kinds of approaches do work and are cost effective.

- **Targeting a small number of prolific offenders:** around one tenth of offenders are responsible for half of all crime, and around 5,000 offenders in the UK are responsible for around one in 10 offences. There is evidence that focusing resources on deterring, bringing to justice, rehabilitating and resettling these most prolific offenders can be effective.[52]

- **More and better education opportunities, vocational training and drug rehabilitation for offenders:** each of these has been shown to have a positive impact on re-offending.

- **Use of technology to prevent and detect crimes:** this includes a whole range of private and public sector advances including for example, immobilisers in cars, sensing and surveillance technologies identification technologies (biometrics such as facial recognition, voice, and signature recognition systems, offender tracking, and DNA), verification and encryption technologies, product and brand protection technologies (e,g hologram, smart inks, security marking, tagging and tracking, etc). The effectiveness of these has been shown in a number of studies, and it is worth noting that while commentators are concerned about the civil liberty implications of some, the public are generally very positive towards these kinds of technology (including CCTV, ID cards with biometric chips etc).

- **Designing out crime:** related to the above, this involves using approaches that aim to reduce opportunities to offend by focusing on the design of products, services and places to as far as possible crime-proof them.

- **Greater use of the private sector and local communities as co-producers.**

- **Greater local control and autonomy:** related to the point above, it is argued that local communities and police forces need to be able to tailor their approaches more to suit local conditions and priorities – we return to this in the next section.

- **Police reform more generally:** and beyond local tailoring, some argue that the police need more general reform, including ensuring they are more joined up with other elements of the CJS.

52 Joint Inspection Report into Persistent and Prolific Offenders. Published by Home Office Communications Directorate (May, 2004).

- **Shaping social norms to make the drivers of crime less acceptable:** this could include, for example, discouraging binge drinking through a combination of social marketing and legislative approaches. The government and its advisors are very interested in exploring the potential of these – despite clearly being a challenge to achieve, the potential returns are great. Right of centre think tanks also highlight the importance of shaping norms and behaviour – but tend to place this in the context of the family, community and church.[53]

Improving perceptions – closing the gap

A few of the previous points illustrate the possible role for communications, consultation and engagement in actually reducing crime – but clearly the main role for these approaches is in understanding perceptions and reassuring people.
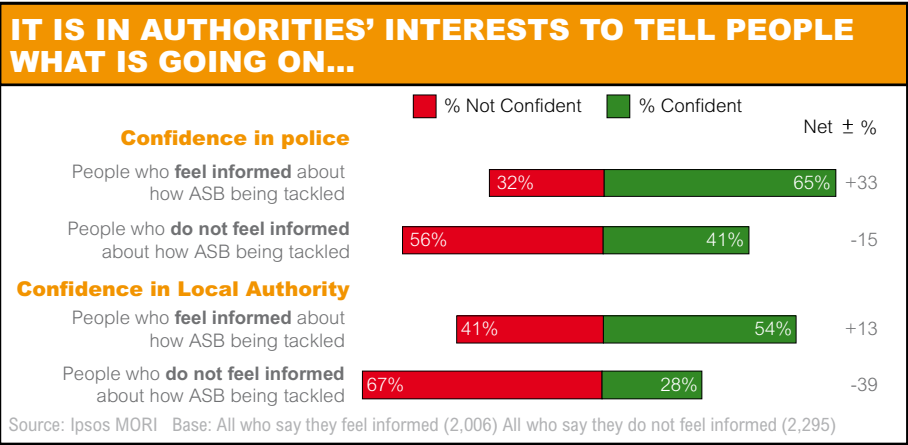
And the first recommendation is that *we need to measure perceptions and confidence more systematically – and set important targets on them that services are judged by*. This is something that does now seem to be widely recognised – as the Flanagan Review says "…*that which is measured gets focused on…for example it is important that community confidence and satisfaction are given sufficient weight alongside measures of crime.*" This is done in a number of other areas including local government, health, sport and cultural activities – and it is arguable that perceptions are even more important in crime and safety and so should be given particular prominence in any performance assessments, targets or Public Service Agreements.

CJS agencies could also learn from the good (and bad) practices in these others areas with, for example, the surveys being much more useful if they could be mapped and analysed for small local areas or neighbourhoods. This of course implies larger surveys, which adds to costs – but there may be a way to collect this information more effectively given that there are now a large number of surveys sponsored by different service areas that could be sensibly brought together and rationalised. Options for bringing together surveys in local government, health and education are being developed by the Local Government Association and the National Consumer Council, and it may be worth the CJS also engaging in this.

In terms of information provision, it could be argued that, given the negative slant the media tend to take on crime issues and the contestability of the information (along with an apparent continued natural disadvantage on law and order issues for Labour), it may be best for the government to not say very much at all on crime.

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53 Civitas (2006). Crime: Are public policies working? http://www.civitas.org.uk/pdf/crimeBriefingMarch06.pdf

But even the simplest analysis shows the importance of communications to perceptions of crime and related issues – for example, as the following figure shows, those who feel informed are more confident in the approaches being used. Clearly cause and effect will be working both ways here, with people who are positive for other reasons also being more positive about the communications approach – but there is likely to be at least some direct impact from informing people more.

IT IS IN AUTHORITIES' INTERESTS TO TELL PEOPLE WHAT IS GOING ON...

	% Not Confident	% Confident	Net ± %

Confidence in police

People who **feel informed** about how ASB being tackled — 32% / 65% — +33

People who **do not feel informed** about how ASB being tackled — 56% / 41% — -15

Confidence in Local Authority

People who **feel informed** about how ASB being tackled — 41% / 54% — +13

People who **do not feel informed** about how ASB being tackled — 67% / 28% — -39

Source: Ipsos MORI   Base: All who say they feel informed (2,006) All who say they do not feel informed (2,295)
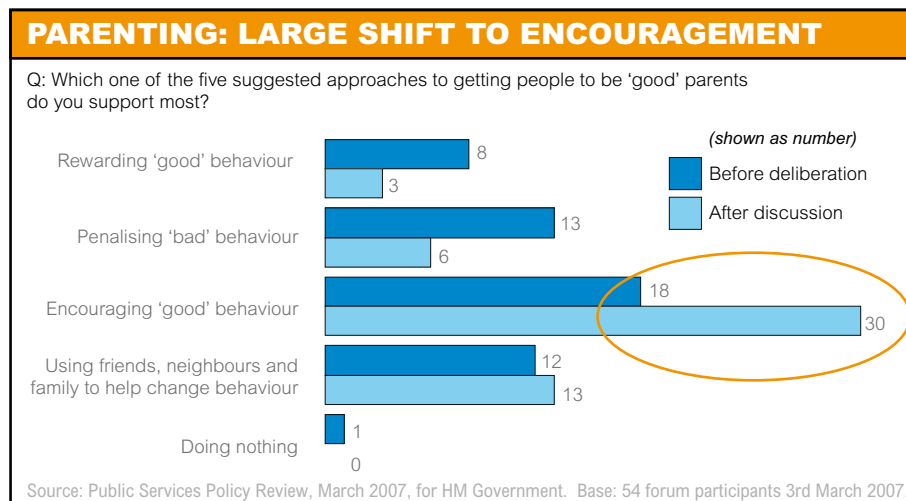
This is backed up by experimental studies. For example, there is evidence to suggest that attitudes can be changed through providing more information:

- Research from 2002[54] found that providing information (either in a booklet, video or seminar) led to both increased levels of knowledge and increased confidence in the CJS; and

- In 2004,[55] researchers provided a sub-sample of people participating in the British Crime Survey with a booklet containing information about crime and sentencing. They reported modest increases in knowledge and confidence, with for example, respondents who had received the booklet more likely to see the CJS as being effective in reducing crime, bringing the guilty to justice and meeting the needs of crime victims

54 Chapman, B., Mirrlees-Black, C., & Brawn, C. (2002) 'Improving public attitudes to the criminal justice system: The impact of information' Home Office research study 245. London: HO.

55 Salisbury, H. (2004) 'Public attitudes to the criminal justice system: The impact of providing information to BCS respondents' Online Home Office Report. London: HO.

Clearly part of the explanation for this is that just giving information and asking people to deliberate on issues increases their appreciation of the complexity of the problems and the lack of clear cut solutions. For example, in a workshop among 60 people on the future of public services that we conducted for the Cabinet Office it was clear that on a range of subjects the more participants discussed the particular situations that different people face the more they moved from simple 'reward' and 'punish' approaches to encouragement. This is seen in the example below, where encouraging good behaviour as parents, through for example offering parenting classes, is much more likely to be selected as the best approach following discussion than when people first consider the issue.

PARENTING: LARGE SHIFT TO ENCOURAGEMENT

Q: Which one of the five suggested approaches to getting people to be 'good' parents do you support most?

(shown as number)

Before deliberation
After discussion

Rewarding 'good' behaviour — 8 / 3

Penalising 'bad' behaviour — 13 / 6

Encouraging 'good' behaviour — 18 / 30

Using friends, neighbours and family to help change behaviour — 12 / 13

Doing nothing — 1 / 0

Source: Public Services Policy Review, March 2007, for HM Government. Base: 54 forum participants 3rd March 2007.

But, as we saw above, the independence of any information provided is vital in increasing its impact, particularly as crime data are among the most susceptible to accusations of spin. This suggests that the government should be commissioning **more independent reviews** of trends and ensure they are publicised in ways that are accessible and meaningful to people. Our previous studies on trust in government information suggest that independently produced *Which?*-style reviews of progress and variations in performance across local areas would be useful.

However, it is arguable that there is a highly trusted but relatively untapped source of information within the CJS itself; as the following chart (again on ASB) shows, the police themselves are among the most trusted sources of information, but among the least cited as sources of information (the vital importance of local newspapers in communicating on these issues is also highlighted by the chart).

WHICH COMMUNICATION SOURCES SHOULD BE TAGETED?

Source: Ipsos MORI. Base: TB Average: All residents aged 16+ living in one of the 10 trailblazer areas plus London (4,400)

There are a number of elements to this. Clearly ***the police should publish more information and on a broader range of issues***. Many already do provide newsletters or flyers and annual reports (and are in fact required to produce basic information), but these are not registering with people – and more targeted communications on key performance measures and local initiatives are likely to have a greater impact. Again this is something the government says it will focus on with the roll out of Neighbourhood Policing, with the recent crime strategy paper committing to "…*ensure crime information is published in a more accessible way at a more local level and more frequently – at least monthly.*" Clearly the nature and tone of this information will be key, and should not be limited to bare statistics. It is argued that providing this sort of information will help local people make a more evidence-based case for what the police should be concentrating on locally. This is true, but it will only engage the most interested, and there needs to be greater narrative-based communications from the police on the issues facing an area and the actions they and other CJS partners are taking to tackle them.

Similarly, many police forces hold open meetings and surgeries in local areas but these are generally attended by small numbers and not widely known about. This is often contrasted with the 'beat meetings' in Chicago in the late 1990s and early 2000s, which take a very similar form to meetings here, in focusing on responding to community-raised concerns – but their awareness

was extremely high (60% were aware that meetings were happening) and attendance was around 60-70,000 people per annum. For a similar impact here, **community-police meetings need to be better supported and have a direct link to action**.
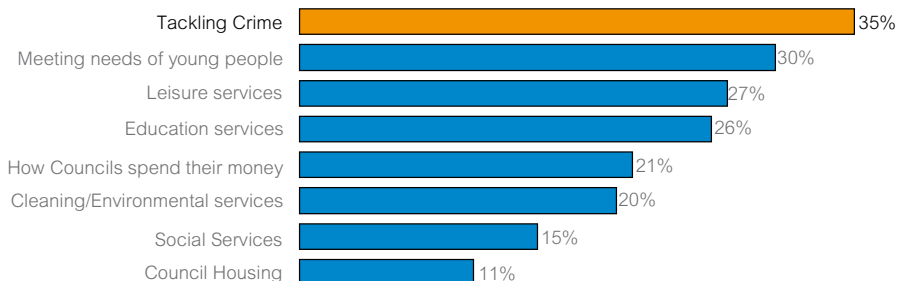
Again the recent crime strategy paper and Flanagan Review both highlight possible approaches to achieve this, with different emphases. The strategy paper suggests that the new requirement for CDRPs to engage with local people should be done through "*face the people*" sessions, with the resulting partnership plan then published. There are some other initial steps in this direction already underway, with '*Community Calls for Action*', which give local communities the power to request and ensure that action is taken by the police, local authorities and others in response to persistent ASB or community safety problems. The Flanagan Review suggests that the police apply participatory budgeting techniques, which involve local people actually deciding how (a portion of) the local budget is spent (the Review also talks more broadly about the move from "*policing by consent to policing by participation*").

These types of approaches are important and should be helpful – and in particular **passing the control of local budgets to local people will have an impact on perceptions**. As an aside, these actions seem more likely to improve confidence than the Conservative Police Reform Task Force suggestion that local accountability could be achieved by introducing elected Commissioners at Force-level. This is likely to have little impact on local perceptions in itself, as the areas involved are too large and knowledge of and engagement with these types of structures is low.

It is true that in one sense activities that deal with crime have a natural advantage when it comes to community engagement – crime is very important to people and has a clear impact on local quality of life and therefore it is the issue most people say they would like to get involved in dealing with, as seen in the following chart. Clearly these large proportions would not actually get actively involved when it came to it (and we need to maintain a range of levels of engagement from information provision, through consultation approaches such as surveys to more involved methods), but it is still encouraging that crime issues should be an easier sell to people than other policy areas.

ISSUES THAT INTEREST PEOPLE

Q: In which, if any, of the following services or issues would you personally like to have greater involvement?
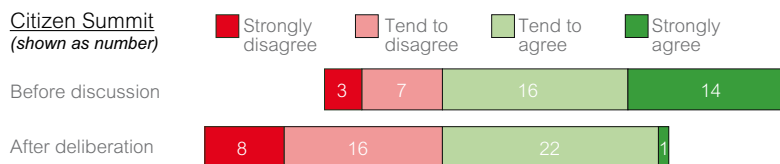
Issue	Percentage
Tackling Crime	35%
Meeting needs of young people	30%
Leisure services	27%
Education services	26%
How Councils spend their money	21%
Cleaning/Environmental services	20%
Social Services	15%
Council Housing	11%

Source: Ipsos MORI.   Base: 2,448 Residents aged 16+

However, local control of crime and safety budgets at neighbourhood level will raise some challenges, and will not always produce unequivocal support among local residents. We saw this in the deliberative discussions we held to feed into the Cabinet Office's Public Service Policy Review earlier this year, where people were asked to vote on their support for neighbourhood control of some policing budgets, as seen in the following chart. There was general support initially, but following more detailed discussion among participants support fell significantly. This was because many became more worried about the possibility of more able (middle class) neighbourhoods being better equipped to "play the system" while more deprived neighbourhoods would not be able to take full advantage of the opportunity and therefore fall further behind. This sense of "fairness" and a real concern about "postcode lotteries" developing in policing as they are seen to exist in other services were key themes of the discussions. Clearly this does not mean that the approaches should not be pursued, just that **significant support is put in place for lower capacity neighbourhoods** and reassurance is given to the wider public about that being the case.
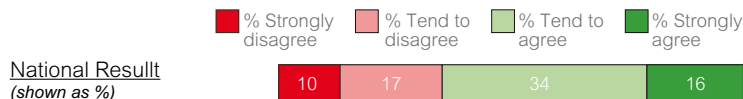
NEED FOR REASSURANCE ON GIVING COMMUNITIES MORE CONTROL OVER RESOURCES

Q: If neighbourhoods take more responsibility for addressing crime and anti-social behaviour (such as through reporting crime or monitoring community CCTV), they should be given more control over police resources.

Citizen Summit
(shown as number)

| Strongly disagree | Tend to disagree | Tend to agree | Strongly agree |

Before discussion

| 3 | 7 | 16 | 14 |

After deliberation

| 8 | 16 | 22 | 1 |

| % Strongly disagree | % Tend to disagree | % Tend to agree | % Strongly agree |

National Resullt
(shown as %)

| 10 | 17 | 34 | 16 |

Source: Policy Review Citizen Summit, 3rd March 2007   Base: 54 forum participants
Source: Ipsos MORI 2-8 March 2007   Base: 1,984 GB adults (15+)

It is worth noting that it is here, in this shift to local control, that the two perception gaps we have seen throughout this report come together. Rather than trying to close the perception gap between views of national trends in crime and actual changes, it may be more effective to concentrate attention on (the more positive and in many ways more important) perceptions of how crime is dealt with locally through promoting neighbourhood flexibility and control.

But of course, all of these approaches that increase direct contact and communications with the police and other CJS bodies will only improve confidence if the staff involved are positive about progress and the policies they are being asked to put into action – which as we have seen is often not the case. Set-piece communications, whether at meetings or in publications, would be dismissed as spin if they were undermined by direct communications from police (and other CJS) staff.   A key action will therefore be to **engage the police (and other elements of the CJS) further in the reform and design of approaches**. The Flanagan Review suggests that this could be partly helped by the shift to Neighbourhood Policing, as this seems to be a popular approach among the police as well, partly through reducing the level of bureaucracy which is a particular cause of frustration. But there are clearly wider issues that will be a real challenge to address. These may be helped by, for example, large-scale deliberative exercises on the future of the service that bring staff together with other stakeholders to help build a sense of collective action.

Ipsos MORI
Social Research Institute

"This report provides a thorough examination of crime and public perceptions, which should be invaluable reading for policy makers and all those interested in the battle against crime…"

Louise Casey
Head, Crime and Communities Review