(RESEARCH ARTICLE)

An investigation of the factors associated with public trust in the Sierra Leone Police

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Abstract

The stability and legitimacy of police institutions rely heavily on public confidence in law enforcement. In Sierra Leone, the public's trust in the Sierra Leone Police (SLP) has been influenced by a complex interplay of factors, including colonial history, post-conflict issues, economic disparities, and ongoing accountability concerns. Despite efforts to implement reforms and initiatives like community policing, public opinion of the SLP remains divided, highlighting the need for a more comprehensive examination of trust-influencing factors. While existing studies emphasize the importance of police effectiveness, procedural fairness, openness, and responsibility, there are still gaps in understanding how these elements interact in post-conflict environments. This research utilizes a quantitative methodology, employing a cross-sectional survey to gather data from 169 SLP personnel across various ranks and departments. Using structured questionnaires, the study assessed perceptions of police performance, community policing efforts, and media impact. The data was then analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) through SmartPLS. Findings reveal that police performance is a crucial factor in fostering public trust, with transparency and accountability also playing significant roles. Community policing initiatives showed limited success due to implementation difficulties, while media portrayals considerably shaped public perception. Ongoing issues such as corruption and historical grievances continued to undermine trust. These results emphasize the necessity for targeted reforms addressing corruption, enhancing transparency, and improving community engagement. To rebuild trust and promote collaboration between law enforcement and the public in Sierra Leone, it is essential to strengthen media strategies and effectively implement community policing initiatives.

Keywords: Community Policing; Public Perception; Sierra Leone Police; Police Performance; Public Trust

1. Introduction

Public trust in the police is a critical component of a functioning society, as it directly impacts the effectiveness of law enforcement and the overall safety and well-being of communities. Trust in the police is built on a foundation of transparency, accountability, and ethical conduct. When individuals have confidence in the police force, they are more likely to cooperate with law enforcement, report crimes, and support crime prevention efforts. However, when trust is eroded, it can lead to strained relationships between the police and the community, hindering their ability to effectively serve and protect. Studies have shown that police trust has a positive impact on public satisfaction (Hevi et al. 2022; Hohl 2011; Kryzhanovskyi 2019; Maillard, Carole, and Jobard 2017; Shoyode 2018; Sung, Capellan, and Barthuly 2022)Factors such as police effectiveness, fairness, and treating people equally and fairly contribute to building trust in the police (Melkamu and Teshome 2023). Additionally, police unionization has been found to affect trust levels, with a polarization of trust between Black and non-Black individuals in jurisdictions where police bargain collectively (DiSalvo and Nagler 2023). Strategies for building police trust include focusing on social and institutional contexts, as well as utilizing technology and community engagement to improve transparency and accountability(Kumar, Kumar, and Chaudhary 2023). These findings highlight the importance of trust in the police for effective law enforcement and the need for efforts to enhance public trust through various means.

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Sierra Leone, located in West Africa, has a complex history deeply affecting its citizens' relationship with law enforcement. The nation endured a prolonged civil war from 1991 to 2002, marked by human rights abuses involving security forces (Binaifer Nowrojee n.d.). The legacy of this conflict continues to shape perceptions of law enforcement. Key factors influencing public trust in the Sierra Leonean police encompass historical context, stemming from colonial rule and the civil war. Socioeconomic issues, including poverty, unemployment, and limited education access, also impact public perceptions. Accountability and transparency are pivotal, with police corruption and abuse eroding trust. Community policing initiatives foster positive interactions and address local concerns. Perceptions of safety and media influence public trust, with the legal framework governing the police playing a crucial role. Understanding these factors is vital for enhancing law enforcement, community safety, and governance. Research in this area can provide evidence-based policy recommendations and reforms to strengthen the police-public relationship in Sierra Leone and similar contexts.

1.1. Research Problem Statement

Public trust in law enforcement agencies is crucial for the effective functioning of a democratic society. In Sierra Leone, the level of public trust in the Sierra Leone Police (SLP) has been a subject of concern due to various factors that may influence citizens' perceptions and attitudes toward the police force (Charley and M'Cormack 2012; Senesie 2016).

However, in Sierra Leone, as in many post-conflict societies, public trust in law enforcement institutions is an issue of critical concern due to historical legacies, socioeconomic disparities, and perceived accountability deficits. The legacy of the civil war, coupled with ongoing challenges related to socioeconomic development, corruption, and accountability issues, has resulted in fluctuating and often low levels of trust in the Sierra Leone Police (SLP). This problem is exacerbated by negative media portrayals, incidents of police misconduct, and the persistent perception of a gap between police actions and community safety needs.

Understanding the specific factors contributing to low public trust in the SLP is essential for fostering a more effective and accountable law enforcement system, enhancing community safety, and facilitating positive interactions between the police and the public. A comprehensive investigation into these factors is needed to identify the root causes of distrust, assess the impact of historical events, socioeconomic factors, and the state of police accountability, and provide evidence-based recommendations for policy reform and trust-building initiatives.

This research aims to shed light on the nuanced interplay of these factors in Sierra Leone, contributing to the broader discourse on the relationship between law enforcement and public trust in post-conflict settings. By addressing this issue, the study seeks to inform policy and reform efforts that can enhance public trust in the police, improve law enforcement effectiveness, and ultimately contribute to the development and stability of Sierra Leone.

1.2. Research Objectives

- To assess the public perception of the Sierra Leone Police.
- To analyze the effect of police performance and its influence on public trust.
- To identify and analyze the key determinants that influence public trust in the Sierra Leone Police
- To assess the role of media in shaping public opinion and trust in the Sierra Leone police.
- To evaluate the presence and effectiveness of community policing initiatives in building trust between the Sierra Leone Police and local communities.

1.3. Research Questions

- What are the factors influencing the public perception of the Sierra Leone Police?
- What is the impact of police performance on public trust and how does it influence public perception and behavior?
- What are the key determinants that influence public trust in the Sierra Leone Police?
- How does media influence public opinion and trust in the Sierra Leone police?
- How do community policing initiatives contribute to building trust between the Sierra Leone Police and local communities?

1.4. Significance Of the Research

The significance of this research is multifaceted and vital for the future of Sierra Leone. Firstly, it aims to enhance the effectiveness of the Sierra Leone Police (SLP) by pinpointing factors that influence public trust, thereby enabling law enforcement agencies and policymakers to address weaknesses in police-community relations. This improvement is

crucial for fostering community safety and well-being, as trust in the police is directly linked to a secure environment where residents feel empowered to collaborate with law enforcement, ultimately deterring crime and enhancing crime-solving efforts. Furthermore, building trust between the police and the community is essential for promoting social cohesion, particularly in a post-conflict society like Sierra Leone, where healing divisions and strengthening societal bonds are paramount. The research also plays a critical role in post-conflict reconciliation, as rebuilding trust in institutions, including the police, is essential for peace and stability. Additionally, it addresses accountability and governance by identifying issues related to police misconduct and corruption, paving the way for reforms that promote transparency and the rule of law. The findings will inform evidence-based policy recommendations, guiding policymakers in developing strategies to improve law enforcement practices and foster trust. Moreover, this study contributes to the academic discourse on the intricate relationship between law enforcement and the public, providing a foundation for future research in post-conflict and developing contexts. Lastly, it emphasizes the importance of human rights and justice, ensuring that the rights of Sierra Leone's citizens are respected and protected through a more accountable and trustworthy police force.

2. Material and methods

2.1. Theoretical Framework

Despite increased scrutiny of police conduct, empirical research in policing remains inconsistent in addressing issues and suggesting changes to strategies, policies, and practices. Experts highlight that studies can influence organizational and operational practices (Tankebe 2009). Further research is needed on police-citizen trust and factors enhancing these relationships. Public confidence in criminal justice is crucial for crime reduction, societal safety, public relations, and law enforcement legitimacy(Boateng 2014; Tankebe 2009). Understanding trust's significance across various socioeconomic contexts and identifying key aspects to improve police-citizen interactions is essential. A 2011 World Bank study found that effective law enforcement should foster unofficial social control, reinforce social cohesion, and increase public trust, with similar findings reported elsewhere(Skinns 2007). Trust in criminal justice institutions promotes collaboration, cooperation, crime reduction, and community safety. Trusting citizens are more likely to report crimes and use informal social control to regulate behavior (Kirk and Papachristos 2011; Roberts and Roberts 2009). The literature offers conflicting views on why individuals trust criminal justice institutions. Some researchers argue that police performance in crime suppression and service provision better explains trust, while others believe police procedural justice plays a more significant role (Boateng 2012; Songze, Mingshen, and Yuhao 2024). This research suggests a reciprocal relationship between effective crime control and trust. In contrast,(Jackson et al. 2021; Nix et al. 2015; Tyler 2001) and others assert that police procedural justice is more influential. Additionally, factors like prior victimization, perceived crime levels, and fear of crime can diminish trust in criminal justice systems in democratic contexts (Singer et al. 2019)

2.1.1. Conceptualization of Public Trust in the Police

Trust is defined as the "willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the acts of another party based on the anticipation that the other will undertake a particular action significant to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party" (Mourtgos et al. 2020). In the context of criminal justice, public trust refers to the expectation and confidence in the fairness, efficiency, and integrity of the system and its associated institutions within their jurisdictions (Murray, Mueller-Johnson, and Sherman 2015). Specifically, police trust involves the public's belief in law enforcement's ability to provide safety and essential services (Boateng 2012; Murray et al. 2015) identifies three elements of trust in the criminal justice system: fairness, efficacy, and integrity. These components are crucial as they enhance the system's efficiency and authority, encourage public cooperation, and increase the likelihood of crime reporting and information sharing (Singer et al. 2019). Public trust in the police is fundamentally defined as the belief that law enforcement officers possess the capability to perform their duties in a professional and ethical manner(Akinlabi 2020; Davids and McMahon 2014).

Trustworthiness is a critical attribute for police agencies as it directly influences public perception and cooperation. Individuals typically do not possess comprehensive knowledge regarding police operations or the metrics used to evaluate their performance effectively(Zmerli 2022). Consequently, people's trust in the police is typically based on limited personal experiences that provide minimal insight into police objectives and qualities. Researchers have been exploring the foundations of public trust in the police to enhance engagement and maximize the benefits of trust relationships (Van Craen 2013; Nix et al. 2015; Skinns 2007). The performance model suggests that the effectiveness and quality of police services are more important in building public trust than fairness in methods and procedures (Marzuki et al. 2025; Tankebe 2009). However, proponents of procedural justice argue that it is a critical aspect of police work, and the public evaluates officers based on their impartial handling of situations and decision-making. (Nix et al.

2015; Sunshine and Tyler 2003; Tankebe 2009), these scholars assert that to gain community trust, police must treat everyone fairly, regardless of race, gender, or socioeconomic status.

In conclusion, public trust in police work enhances police effectiveness and legitimizes their actions(Goldsmith 2005) (Goldsmith 2005). This leads to voluntary acceptance, which promotes positive behavioral outcomes such as cooperation, compliance, and information sharing, ultimately improving police effectiveness (Sunshine and Tyler 2003). Not all law enforcement agencies are viewed as reliable and credible, with some facing significant trust issues that hinder their effectiveness. When public confidence in a police department wane, it becomes challenging to secure cooperation and compliance from citizens. Research has demonstrated that trust in law enforcement is crucial for reducing criminal activities and violent behavior (Kochel 2012; Renauer 2007). Individuals who have faith in the police are more likely to report witnessed crimes and provide valuable information leading to the apprehension of offenders. Previous studies across various sociocultural settings have shown that police can contribute to collective efficacy and crime reduction through efficient service delivery, minimizing misconduct, and enhancing procedural justice. Consequently, investigating trust in law enforcement and the factors that shape it can support police efforts in crime control. Fundamentally, public trust in law enforcement is largely influenced by effective and lawful police performance in service provision, as well as transparency and community involvement in decision-making processes that enhance public satisfaction. However, low or negative public trust in the police can adversely affect public satisfaction. The subsequent section will explore some of the factors that erode public confidence in law enforcement.

2.1.2. Factors Affecting Public Trust in Police.

The intricate nature of modern society makes it challenging to enumerate all factors that undermine public confidence in law enforcement. In Sierra Leone, corruption has been a persistent issue eroding trust. (Sayed and Bruce 1998) describe corruption as "any illegal conduct or misconduct involving the use of occupational power for personal, group or organizational gain." Similarly, (Snyman 2008) defines it as "the unlawful and intentional giving of an agent, or making an offer or closing a deal with such agent, giving the agent an advantage in return for certain conduct on the part of the agent, either in future or for something in the past, given his/her official capacity". A crucial legal distinction exists between these definitions: the terms 'illegal' and 'unlawful'. "Corrupt behaviors violate legal principles. While the concept of police corruption is multifaceted, most definitions encompass at least one of the three dimensions outlined by (Barker and Carter 1986) to characterize the attitudes and motivations of officers involved in corrupt practices." These aspects include: (1) actions that contravene legal or ethical guidelines; (2) the misuse of an officer's position for personal advantage; and (3) the acquisition of tangible or intangible rewards."(Olutola and Bello 2016). (Boateng et al. 2019) suggest that any conduct prioritizing an officer's interests over professional duties violates both police protocols and criminal laws, meeting the criteria for police corruption. (Newham 2004) describes police corruption as a situation where law enforcement officers place self-interest above national interest. Moreover, instances of police brutality in Sierra Leone have frequently diminished public trust in the service. At least 27 individuals have lost their lives in anti-government demonstrations in Sierra Leone, sparked by economic hardship and a perceived governmental failure to address rising prices. The protests were primarily concentrated in the opposition's northern stronghold and Freetown, resulting in fatalities among both police officers and civilians. The government responded by imposing a curfew and pledging a comprehensive investigation into the events. Subsequently, an unsettling calm descended upon Freetown, with businesses closed and residents remaining indoors.

2.1.3. Findings from Empirical Investigations on Public Trust in the Police

Researchers have explored the relationship between public trust and police legitimacy through various empirical studies (Boateng 2012; Bradford and Jackson 2010b; Kääriäinen 2007, 2008; Mourtgos et al. 2020; Yesberg, Brunton-Smith, and Bradford 2023). An examination of these studies reveals significant variations in the understanding of public confidence in law enforcement across different research. Moreover, these studies shed light on the various factors influencing trust levels in police operations (Kääriäinen 2008). In modern societies, a favorable public perception of law enforcement is often seen as an indicator of effective policing practices (Boateng 2012). Investigations have identified key factors that influence public trust in police forces (Boateng 2012; Bradford and Jackson 2010b). A fundamental responsibility of any government is to ensure the safety and protection of its citizens and their assets, with the police playing a vital role in this endeavor. (Goldsmith 2005) noted a strong link between public trust in law enforcement and their capacity to deliver essential security services. Ineffective protection of citizens can erode public trust, while efficient policing can enhance it. (Kääriäinen 2007) Social disparities can lead to diminished public confidence in institutions, including law enforcement agencies. (Kääriäinen 2007) Although perfect equality may be unattainable due to diverse human aspirations and limited resources, substantial inequalities can foster social discord and perceptions of police favoritism towards privileged groups. The legacy of police misconduct during the apartheid era, where law enforcement was accused of serving the ruling regime's interests rather than those of the general public, further supports the notion that systemic inequality can negatively affect public trust in police. Public confidence in law

enforcement can be analyzed from two main angles: personal experiences and societal elements (Kääriäinen 2007). Studies have demonstrated that individual factors such as education level, gender, and age can influence public trust in the police. Furthermore, direct interactions with police officers, whether positive or negative, can significantly shape individual perceptions and trust levels in law enforcement (Kääriäinen 2007).

2.2. Theoretical Framework

From a societal standpoint, satisfaction within communities fosters public confidence in law enforcement. This claim is supported by the incentive-based theory of institutional trust, as proposed by (Tyler and Huo 2002). According to this theory, public trust in an institution is primarily influenced by the perception that the institution shares and safeguards the community's goals and interests. The theory emphasizes the crucial role of the relationship between the public and the police in establishing trust. Similar conclusions were reached in a study by (Reynolds, Semukhina, and Demidov 2008; Semukhina 2018) examining public satisfaction with Russian police from 1998 to 2005, their research revealed a strong connection between trust in the criminal justice system and community satisfaction with law enforcement, corruption negatively impacts public evaluations of police performance. (Aslam, Tahir, and Shaikh 2024; Banks et al. 2022; Villegas 2023), in his research on police performance determinants, discovered that officers soliciting bribes from citizens undermined public trust in the legitimacy of their duties. Research has also shown that corruption in other state institutions adversely affects public trust in the police (Boateng 2012; Kääriäinen 2007). As previously mentioned, the police do not operate in isolation but are interconnected with other components of the criminal justice system and state institutions. Consequently, allegations of corruption in other public institutions often influence public trust in the police (Kääriäinen 2007).

Prior studies have also employed crime indexes, including crime impacts, fear of crime, victimization, and crime rates, to assess public trust in law enforcement (Haim Dotan, Nanes Matthew, and Ravanilla Nico 2017; Sutton 2004; Tyler 2004). Numerous studies have explored public fear of crime in communities (Adams and Serpe 2000; Albrecht and Jackson 2009). Most of these studies have demonstrated a correlation between fear of crime and trust in the police (Kääriäinen 2008; Reynolds et al. 2008). These studies consistently found that fear of neighborhood crime promotes negative attitudes toward law enforcement, affecting overall public trust in the police. Fear of crime was measured in terms of experiences as a crime victim, including sexual assault, robbery, and theft. Conversely, previous research has also indicated that reducing public fear of crime leads to increased long-term trust in the police (Singer et al. 2019). Nevertheless, some studies challenge these findings, with research like that of (Jackson et al. 2009) indicating no link between public fear of crime and attitudes toward law enforcement. Furthermore, research has demonstrated that prior experiences of crime or victimization influence public confidence in the police. Studies examining public-police relationships have revealed that victimization diminishes trust in law enforcement (Merry et al. 2012; Ren et al. 2005). (Ren et al. 2005) discovered that individuals who reported being "victimized during the last twelve months before the study, reported having less trust in the police."

This negative perception may arise from the police's inability to protect victims during attacks, leading to a view of law enforcement as ineffective in crime prevention. Research has also established a connection between crime rates and public trust in the police (Blumstein and Wallman 2005; Boateng 2014; Headley 2016; Murray et al. 2015). These studies consistently show an inverse relationship between high crime rates and trust in law enforcement. In their daily duties, police officers exercise considerable discretion, including initiating stops, making arrests, and using force when necessary (Cummings Mike 2019). This autonomy raises questions about public confidence in their ability to act fairly, appropriately, and within legal bounds (Goldsmith 2005). Efforts to improve police-citizen relations have focused on building public trust and confidence, as this encourages greater citizen participation, which is crucial for crime prevention (Bradford and Jackson 2010b)

Despite these initiatives, issues of police mistrust, including hostile and discriminatory behavior, persist (Durán 2013). Consequently, there is growing research on procedural justice and legitimacy concerning trust in the police (Gau and Brunson 2015; Goldsmith 2005; Tyler and Wakslak 2004). Procedurally just policing, which emphasizes trust-building, is considered a critical step towards enhancing police legitimacy and community ties, including public cooperation with law enforcement (Skinns 2007; Sunshine and Tyler 2003; Tyler and Wakslak 2004). While most procedural justice research examines all four pillars of the theory (trust, respect, participation, and fairness), there are advantages to exploring each component in depth. This is particularly true for trust, as public perceptions of trust play a vital role in promoting police effectiveness, legitimizing the force, and enabling officers to protect citizens fundamentally (Goldsmith 2005). However, trust is volatile, being constantly reviewed, developed, maintained, and eroded through social interactions with police (Goldsmith 2005). Law enforcement officers wield considerable influence in communities, but this power may not be distributed evenly. Some segments of society might feel alienated from police protection (Carr, Napolitano, and Keating 2007; Gau and Brunson 2010; Hahn 1971; Kirk and Papachristos 2011), or

perceive themselves as unfairly targeted by police suspicion and mistreatment (Brunson 2007; Durán 2013; Rios 2011). In these cases, such individuals may exhibit higher levels of skepticism towards law enforcement compared to others (Brunson 2007; Durán 2013; Hahn 1971; Tyler and Wakslak 2004).

Conversely, trust in law enforcement may positively impact perceptions of police and reduce potential non-compliance during direct interactions, potentially averting situations where officers might resort to force (Chevigny 1995). Considering the scarcity of research on the most effective approaches for engaging with gangs (Fritsch, Caeti, and Taylor 1999), it is crucial to examine gang-affiliated youth's perspectives on law enforcement. This understanding could provide officers with deeper insights into how their actions are interpreted by the public and how they can build, maintain, or erode trust among a demographic that frequently interacts with police. It could also shed light on face-to-face encounters where these individuals either trust or distrust law enforcement.

2.2.1. Procedural Justice-Based Model

Studies indicate that the procedural justice-based model is particularly applicable in explaining trust in law enforcement among minority groups. This theory is supported by evidence of high levels of racial bias within police forces (see, among others: (Pitkänen and Kouki 2002; Wortley and Homel 1995) and research linking officers' prejudiced attitudes to discriminatory behavior towards minorities (Dhont, Cornelis, and Van Hiel 2010). Nevertheless, American research by (Tyler 2001, 2005) has shown that perceptions of procedural fairness significantly impact trust in police and courts for both minority and majority groups. In the United States, the perception of unfair treatment reduces confidence across all ethnic groups. There is no immediate reason to believe this wouldn't apply in other countries. Belgian research has shown that subgroups of both minority and majority populations experience "over-policing" (Easton et al. 2009). As this study focuses on comparing majority group members living in less affluent neighborhoods, the procedural fairness paradigm appears crucial in explaining trust among the majority as well. The dataset doesn't provide information on the second aspect of the procedural justice-based model—perceptions of the process by which police decisions are made—so we cannot examine this aspect. However, we introduce a second variable that connects the first feature of the procedural justice-based model to performance theory. Based on these theoretical frameworks, one can hypothesize that not only the perceived treatment by police but also how individuals feel they are treated by society at large will influence trust in law enforcement. People expect fair treatment at all times from all entities (government agencies and fellow citizens). Moreover, it's plausible that the police are viewed as one of the organizations expected to lead efforts against societal prejudice (Oakley 2001). In any event, this is something that the Belgian police force themselves consider to be quite significant. Thus, they investigate, for instance, discrimination in access to discos and cafes. It is therefore feasible that people's trust in the police is impacted by the performance expectation that police (along with other public authorities) act to limit experiences of discrimination within normal boundaries. To test this, we include the number of times that respondents personally felt discriminated against. The question asked was: How frequently during the previous 12 months have you felt discriminated against (on a six-point scale from "never" to "very often")?

The hypothesis about emotions of discrimination is that respondents will have less faith in the police the more often they have been discriminated against in the preceding 12 months, irrespective of whether they are members of the majority group or a minority group. Various theoretical frameworks have been put out to elucidate the reasons behind the public's trust in the criminal justice system, its applicability to real-world situations, and potential areas for improvement (Bouckaert et al. 2002; Van Craen 2013; Tyler and Huo 2002). These theories were formed with the knowledge that a lack of public engagement and trust impairs the police's ability to enforce laws and handle crimes that harm the safety and security of societies. Furthermore, it was considered that people who trusted the police were more willing to aid them by reporting crimes and surreptitiously enforcing social rules (Nix et al. 2015).

Furthermore, approaches to authorities that prioritize building trust have been shown to produce higher prosocial outcomes than instrumental tactics like offering rewards for crime prevention or threatening punishment for criminal activity (O'Brien and Tyler 2019). The effectiveness of deploying trust strategies makes sense from both a moral and practical aspect, lowering anxiety among communities coping with crime and boosting their desire to become active stewards in delivering solutions to social concerns (O'Brien and Tyler 2019). Furthermore, trust-based initiatives can positively influence cultural views toward authority, creating solid links between individuals and those responsible, keeping them safe, developing goodwill between all parties involved, and producing a better society.

In examining the value of trust, performance (outcome-based or instrumental), procedural justice (process-based or expressive), and community policing models are commonly highlighted to inform future research on the subject (Boateng 2014; Van Craen 2013; Renauer 2007). In the present study, performance, procedural justice, and community

policing models and assumptions are used to guide the investigation to determine if they explain the fluctuation of public trust in the police and are applicable in the Ethiopian context.

2.2.2. Influences of Police Brutality/Violence During Demonstrations as A Cause Cost of Public Trust in The Police.

This portion examines factors that have concurrently affected the public's trust in law enforcement. Multiple aspects shape police conduct during protests and subsequently impact public confidence. These aspects include the individual traits of police officers, the relationship between violence and law enforcement, ideological rifts within police departments, core issues driving demonstrations, and the difficulties in effectively managing protests and crowd control.

2.2.3. The Personal Identities of Police Officers

Research suggests that the character traits of police officers play a significant role in incidents of police violence (Ellrich and Baier 2016). The process of choosing individuals for law enforcement positions typically involves assessing their history, recruitment methods, principles, and personal convictions. Public confidence can be significantly undermined if an officer exhibits a negative demeanor or if their hiring process is viewed as dishonest. (Cuncic 2023) classifies police officers' characteristics as individual-level factors, suggesting that these aspects originate from the officers themselves. One such element could be the officer's psychological well-being, which may impact the use of abusive policing techniques. Studies show a strong link between harmful police practices and elevated rates of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among law enforcement personnel (Beshears 2017; Violanti 2018) observes that police officers frequently encounter traumatic situations, such as shootings and discovering deceased persons, increasing their susceptibility to PTSD. These experiences can potentially damage officers' mental health and impair their capacity to effectively serve the community (Beshears 2017; Covey et al. 2013). Public trust may be eroded when citizens interact with officers who display aggressive conduct in circumstances that require calm, particularly during protests where police brutality might occur (Covey et al. 2013).

According to (Ellrich and Baier 2016), law enforcement officers suffering from PTSD may display an increased "smile response," especially in potentially volatile situations like demonstrations. These environments can generate distrust among police personnel grappling with aggression-related issues. Such aggressive inclinations heighten the risk of unwarranted use of deadly force. This dynamic reinforces a divisive "us versus them" perspective, where demonstrators perceive the police as "monsters," and law enforcement views the public with disdain (Bisson Desrochers et al. 2021).

2.2.4. Violence and The Police

(Feld Barry 1970) underscores the vital link between law enforcement and violence as a key element of police brutality during protests. In addition to the behavioral and attitudinal characteristics of officers related to their social background and work environment, it is essential to examine the relationship between police and violent actions, particularly the line between legal and illegal violence (Weisburd and Eck 2004). Although police may legitimately use force in protests, especially for self-protection and ensuring the safety of the public and demonstrators, excessive force can rapidly become unlawful. (Westley 1970) argues that the realities of police work, including instances of aggression against officers, provide a rational and legal foundation for police violence. This suggests that even unlawful violence can be justified and accepted by law enforcement, impacting public confidence when police condone their use of illegal force that the public deems unacceptable. The UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force permit police to use force, when necessary, in carrying out their duties, when core professional values are at stake, and when the public is informed(Crawshaw, Cullen, and Williamson 2007; Wills 2018) Research indicates that officers believe violence can be legitimately employed to "coerce respect" - referring to the use of force to demand public respect for their professional status.(Terrill, Paoline, and Manning 2003) Studies show that law enforcement personnel believe individuals who disrespect or disobey police deserve harsh treatment (Nix, Pickett, and Mitchell 2019; Sunde, Weenink, and Lindegaard 2023). Thus, as a result, initial police training is a primary factor in the public's struggle to trust officers who use violence as a method to command respect.

2.2.5. Political Polarization in The Police

Studies show that law enforcement activities have significantly contributed to deepening political divides (Feld Barry 1970). Police forces often share ideological and political affiliations with groups that oppose protesters' demands, leading to social divisions and increased animosity towards law enforcement and judicial institutions (Trouillard 2022). However, (Gilad and Dahan 2021; Sargeant, Murphy, and Bradford 2023) note that police face explicit opposition from progressive and left-wing representatives, ethnic minorities, and academics, potentially affecting their ability to maintain impartiality and objectivity. This antagonism is partly due to some officers' tendency to employ more aggressive tactics when dealing with certain groups. (MacColman and Dikenstein 2023) argue that police frequently

view ideological and political disputes as conflicts between "upright, law-abiding citizens" and "unlawful, deceptive troublemakers." However, these confrontations typically stem from political disagreements rather than criminal activities.(Levy and Wright 2020) suggests that the "upright, law-abiding citizens" are generally conservative groups resisting demands from other factions seeking social, political, or economic benefits at their expense. During public protests, police presence is essential for maintaining social order (Levy and Wright 2020) While their role should involve crowd management and protester protection, experts contend that officers sometimes become active participants, opposing the demonstrators themselves. This shift in behavior undermines public trust, as police fail to fulfill their duty to safeguard and interact with protesters (Levy and Wright 2020) (Nägel and A. Nivette 2023; Trinkner, Kerrison, and Goff 2019) demonstrate that when law enforcement personnel transition from impartial peacekeepers to protest participants, violence escalates due to heightened "us versus them" tensions, further eroding public confidence in the police force.

2.3. Research Gap

The effectiveness of policing and the maintenance of social order heavily rely on the public's confidence in law enforcement agencies. In Sierra Leone, where various historical and contemporary factors have shaped citizens' views of the police, it is essential to comprehend the elements influencing public trust in the Sierra Leone Police (SLP). (Hevi et al. 2022; Hohl 2011; Kryzhanovskyi 2019; Maillard et al. 2017; Nägel and A. E. Nivette 2023; Shoyode 2018; Sung et al. 2022). Nevertheless, a comprehensive examination of the diverse factors linked to public trust in the SLP is lacking in current research. Previous studies have primarily concentrated on particular aspects such as community policing (Akose and Badu n.d.; Albrecht 2022); security sector reforms (Aning and Axelrod 2023; Ebo 2006; Gadkari 2022; Gbla 2006); while overlooking other potentially significant factors. Consequently, there is a need for a holistic investigation that encompasses various dimensions, including historical context, community engagement, transparency, accountability, and the efficacy of law enforcement practices. Additionally, minimal attention has been given to exploring the impact and role of media on public trust in the SLP. Filling this research gap will offer valuable insights for policymakers, law enforcement agencies, and researchers to create evidence-based strategies aimed at boosting public trust in the Sierra Leone Police.
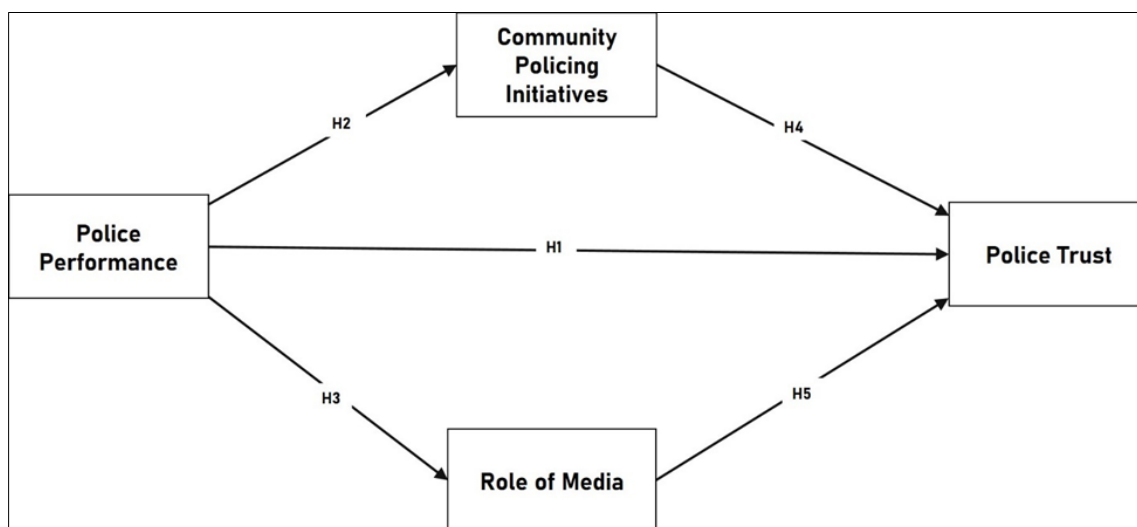

Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

3. Results

3.1. Study Area

This section explores the intricate relationships between public confidence in the Sierra Leone Police Force (SLP) and examines the various elements influencing societal attitudes towards law enforcement in Sierra Leone. Utilizing a quantitative research methodology and a cross-sectional survey design, this portion of the study seeks to offer substantial insights capable of guiding evidence-based policy suggestions and tactical approaches to enhance public trust in the SLP. This empirical method is essential for scrutinizing the interplay between law enforcement and public sentiment in Sierra Leone, particularly in Freetown. The credibility and consistency of social science research depend on a systematic and methodologically rigorous approach, as endorsed by (Plano Clark 2019; Tashakkori and Creswell

2007). To enable a thorough analysis, this investigation incorporates demographic variables). These variables provide context and improve the interpretability of survey responses. The present study includes key demographics such as age, gender, and length of service in the police force, and these demographic insights assist in comprehending how different population segments perceive and trust the police. A structured survey questionnaire (see Appendix A) functions as the primary data collection instrument. Trust in the police was evaluated using a five-item Likert scale adapted from (Sullivan and Artino 2013). Community policing was assessed with a comparable scale developed by (Connell, Miggans, and McGloin 2008). Public perception was measured using a five-item scale based on (Nadal and Davidoff 2015), while media influence was gauged using (Hohl 2011), five-item scale.

3.2. Data Analysis and Presentation

Data analysis is conducted using structural equation modelling (SEM), a powerful statistical technique for exploring complex relationships between variables. SmartPLS, known for handling small samples and non-normal data distributions, is used for this study (Fauzi 2022; Al Humdan, Shi, and Behnia 2024). The analysis process includes defining latent variables, checking for data cleanliness, and importing the dataset into SmartPLS. Path coefficients, loadings, and key statistics are then estimated. Findings are presented with visual models and tables that summarize the statistical outputs. These results are discussed in relation to the research questions and hypotheses, ensuring comprehensive interpretation.

3.3. Population And Sample

In this study, the population comprises members of the Sierra Leone Police Force stationed in Freetown. This focus aligns with the research's aim to explore public trust in a local context influenced by socio-political factors. Including various ranks and units ensures diverse perspectives. In the research study, both purposive sampling and convenience sampling approaches were employed to select participants, each serving distinct purposes and contributing to the overall data collection strategy. Thus, the researcher employed a combination of purposive and convenience sampling methods to maximize their data collection efforts while still targeting relevant participants resulting in a total sample size of 169 participants.

Table 1 Departments Included in the Sampling Process

No	Department
1	Criminal Investigation Department (CID)
2	Operational Support Division (OSD)
3	Traffic Police Unit
4	Media and Public Relations Unit
5	Legal and Justice Department
6	Human Resource Department
7	Community Relations Department (CRD)
8	Complaint Discipline Internal Investigation Department
9	Precious Mineral Department
10	Interpol Department
11	Family Support Unit (FSU)

Source: https://www.police.gov.sl/

4. Results and Discussions

In this section, the researcher presents the results of our study, which examines the perceptions and trust dynamics surrounding the Sierra Leone Police. The analysis is structured around five key objectives: first, to assess the public perception of the Sierra Leone Police to understand the community's overall sentiment and views toward law enforcement. Next, to analyze the effect of police performance on public trust, exploring how various factors such as responsiveness and accountability influence community confidence in the police force. To also identify and analyze the

key determinants that shape public trust in the Sierra Leone Police, focusing on aspects such as transparency, integrity, and community engagement.

Additionally, to assess the role of media in shaping public opinion and trust in the Sierra Leone Police, examining how coverage and representation in the media impact community perceptions. Lastly, we evaluate the presence and effectiveness of community policing initiatives as a strategy for building trust between the Sierra Leone Police and local communities, analyzing how these efforts foster collaboration and enhance public confidence. Through this comprehensive examination, the researcher aims to provide insights into the complex interplay of factors that influence public trust in the police, contributing to the broader discourse on law enforcement and community relations in Sierra Leone.

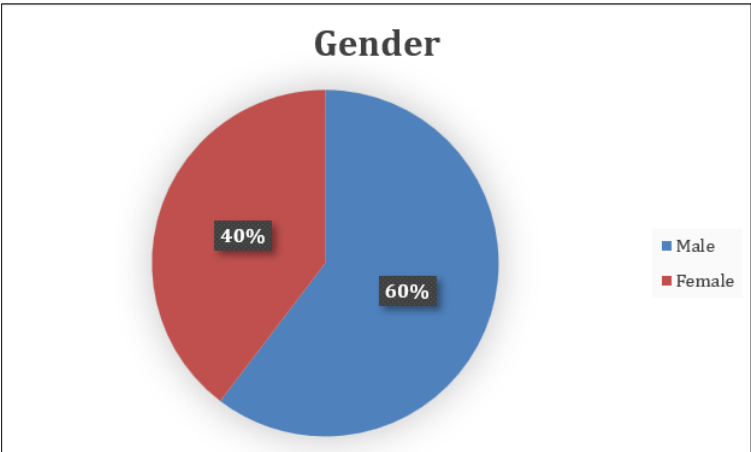### 4.1. Demographic Characteristics

The demographic characteristics of respondents play a crucial role in understanding the perspectives and experiences that shape their perceptions of the Sierra Leone Police. This section presents the biographical data of the participants, including their educational qualifications, age, years of experience in the police force, and gender. By analysing these variables, the researcher aims to contextualize the study findings and explore how different demographic factors shape public perception and trust in law enforcement. Furthermore, understanding the backgrounds of respondents provides valuable insights into the diverse viewpoints that contribute to the overall assessment of the Sierra Leone Police, thereby enriching the analysis of the public's trust dynamics and the factors that underpin them.

Table 2 Gender

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Male	102	60%
Female	67	40%
Total	169	100%

Source: Researcher's Field Survey 2024

According to this survey, the gender distribution among participants in the Sierra Leone Police indicates a predominance of males, who make up 60% (102) of the sample, compared to 40% for females. This disparity highlights a significant gender imbalance within the police force, suggesting that men are more represented in the force. While the presence of 40% female participants is a positive indication of gender inclusion, it also points to potential challenges in achieving gender equity in a traditionally male-dominated field. The relatively high percentage of female officers may contribute diverse perspectives and approaches to policing, which can enhance community relations and overall effectiveness. However, the substantial majority of male officers suggest that there is still work to be done in promoting gender diversity and ensuring that women have equal opportunities for advancement and leadership roles within the police force. This is also represented in the Figure 2 below

Source: Researcher's Field Survey 2024
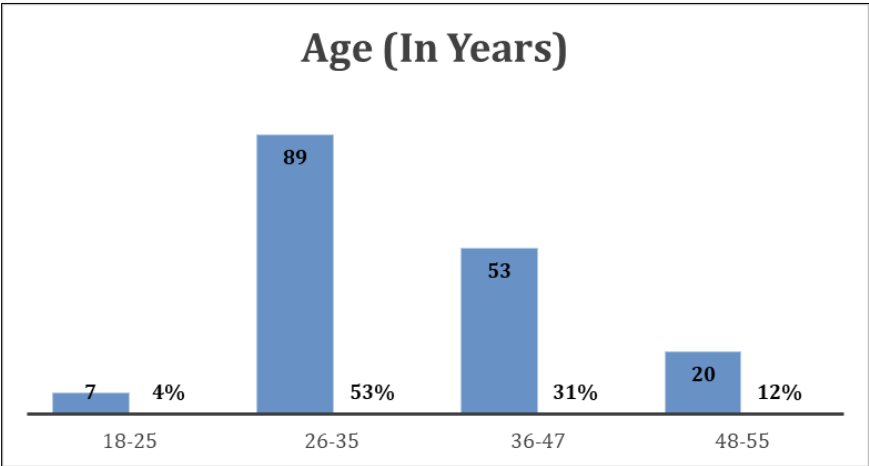
Figure 2 Gender

Table 3 Age (In Years)

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
18-25 Years	7	4%
26-35 Years	89	53%
36-47 Years	53	31%
48-55 Years	20	12%
Total	169	100%

Source: Researcher's Field Survey 2024

The age distribution of participants in the study conducted within the Sierra Leone Police indicates a predominantly younger workforce, with the majority, 53%, (89) falling within the 26-35 age bracket. This suggests that a significant portion of the personnel are in the early to mid-stages of their careers, likely bringing energy and adaptability to the organization. The 36-47 age group comprises 31% (53) of the participants, indicating a solid representation of mid-career.

Professionals who may possess valuable experience and expertise. Conversely, only 12% (20) of the participants are aged 48-55, and a mere 4% (7) are between 18-25, suggesting that the force has a limited number of younger and older personnel. Overall, this age distribution reflects a workforce primarily composed of individuals in their prime working years, which may be advantageous for organizational stability and growth. This is also represented in Figure 3 below

Source: Researcher's Field Survey 2024

Figure 3 Age (In Years)

Table 4 Educational Background

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Certificate	4	2%
Diploma	23	14%
Bachelor's Degree	89	53%
Master's Degree	51	30%
Doctorate Degree	2	1%
Total	169	100%

Source: Researcher's Field Survey 2024

The data from the study reveals the educational qualifications of the participants, highlighting a clear trend towards higher education among the workforce. A significant majority, 53% (89), hold a Bachelor's Degree, indicating that most personnel have attained at least this level of education. This is followed by those with a Master's Degree at 30% (51), suggesting a strong representation of advanced education. Diplomas constitute 14% (23) of the qualifications, while only 2% (4) possess a Certificate. Notably, Doctorate Degree holders are minimal, comprising just 1% (2) of the total sample. Overall, the findings suggest a workforce that is predominantly educated at the undergraduate level or higher, which could positively influence professional competencies and performance within the police force. This is also represented in the Figure 4 below
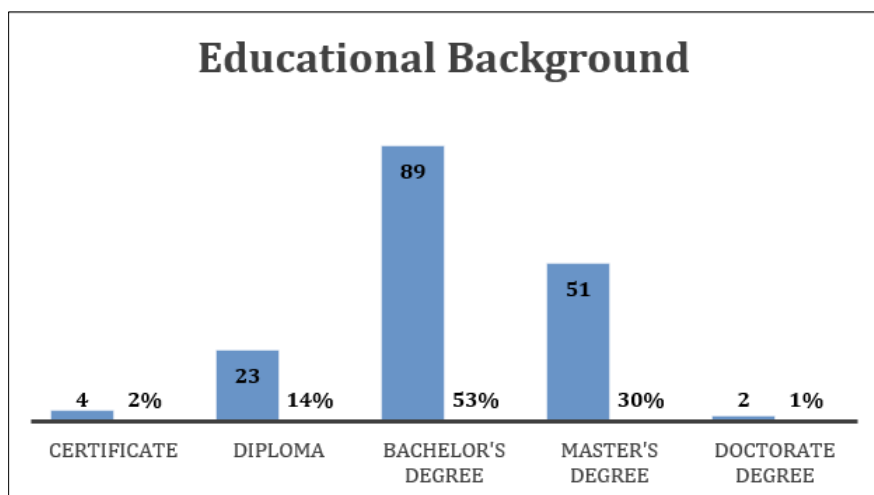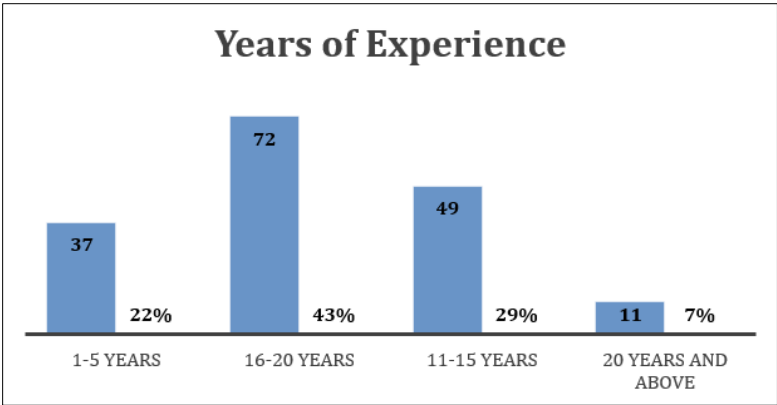

Figure 4 Educational Background

Table 5 Years of Experience

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
1-5 years	37	22%
16-20 years	72	43%
11-15 years	49	29%
20 years and above	11	7%
Total	169	100%

Source: Researcher's Field Survey 2024

The experience distribution among participants in the Sierra Leone Police highlights a workforce with significant tenure, as evidenced by 43% (72) of respondents having 16-20 years of service. This substantial representation of long-serving personnel suggests a wealth of knowledge and expertise within the force, likely contributing to its operational effectiveness and institutional memory. Additionally, 29% (49) of participants have between 11-15 years of experience, further underscoring the presence of seasoned professionals who can offer valuable insights and mentorship. In contrast, only 22% (37) of respondents have 1-5 years of experience, indicating that a relatively smaller segment of the workforce is relatively new to the police force. Finally, those with 20 years or more of experience account for just 7%, (11) suggesting that there may be limited representation of the most senior members. Overall, this experience distribution reflects a police force that benefits from a blend of established expertise and emerging perspectives. This is also represented in the Figure 5 below

Source: Researcher's Field Survey 2024

Figure 5 Years of Experience

Table 6 Survey Distribution

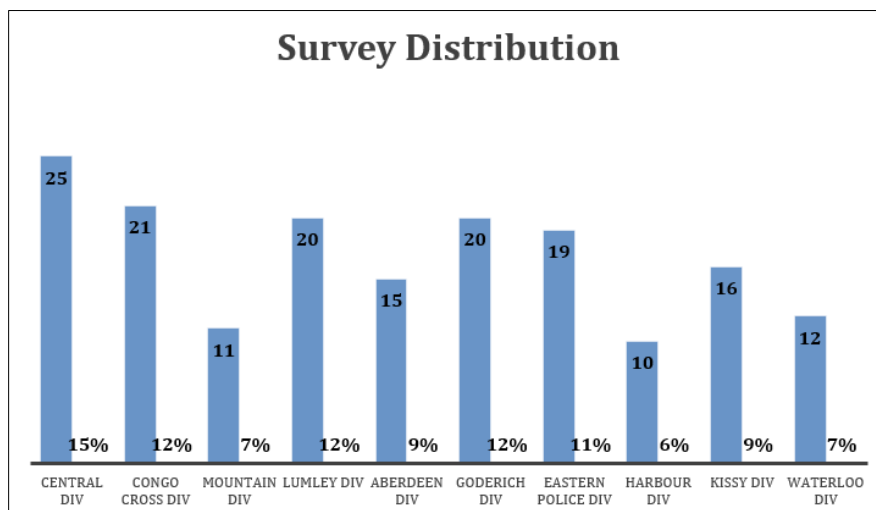| Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Central Division	25	15%
Congo Cross Police Station	21	12%
Mountain Division	11	7%
Lumley Division	20	12%
Aberdeen Division	15	9%
Goderich Division	20	12%
Eastern Police Division	19	11%
Harbour Division	10	6%
Kissy Division	16	9%
Waterloo Division	12	7%
Total	169	100%

Source: Researcher's Field Survey 2024

The survey distribution of respondents from the Sierra Leone Police reveals a comprehensive breakdown of participation across various divisions within Freetown, which is categorized into two main regions: Freetown West and Freetown East.

In Freetown West, the Central Division emerges as the most represented area, with 25 respondents (15%), underscoring its significance in the overall police structure. The Congo Cross Police Station and Goderich Division follow closely, accounting for 21 (12%) and 20 (12%) respondents, respectively, indicating their substantial roles within the police service. Additionally, the Lumley Division contributes 20 respondents (12%), further emphasizing the strong representation from this region.

Conversely, in Freetown East, the Eastern Police Division stands out with 19 respondents (11%), indicating a solid engagement from this area. However, the Harbour Division has the least representation, with only 10 respondents (6%), which may suggest a smaller operational scale or lower engagement in the survey. Other divisions in Freetown East, such as the Kissy Division and Waterloo Division, have 16 (9%) and 12 (7%) respondents, respectively.

Overall, the data reflects a fairly balanced distribution of responses between the two regions, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of perspectives across the Sierra Leone Police in Freetown. No single division dominates

the responses, providing a robust basis for analyzing perceptions and experiences across these regions. This balanced representation is crucial for understanding how the different divisions may influence public trust and perceptions of the police within the broader context of community relations in Freetown. This is also represented in Figure 6 below

Source: Researcher's Field Survey 2024

Figure 6 Survey Distribution

4.2. Reliability And Validity Analysis

The study employed structural equation modeling (SEM) using the partial least squares (PLS) approach, a method widely recognized for its robustness in management and social sciences research (Hair et al. 2017). PLS-SEM was selected due to its distinct advantages over other SEM techniques, particularly its ability to handle complex models with multiple constructs and smaller sample sizes. This approach is well-suited for the current study as it allows for the simultaneous estimation of hypothesized relationships. In assessing the measurement model, key criteria such as discriminant validity, convergent validity, internal consistency, and reliability were evaluated to ensure the robustness and accuracy of the constructs (Hair et al. 2017).

4.2.1. Assessment of Measurement Model

Before proceeding with data analysis, it is essential to ensure that the constructs are both reliable and valid. As shown in Table 7, all constructs meet the necessary thresholds for reliability and validity (Sempere-Ruiz et al. 2024). Factor loadings (FL) for all items exceed the generally accepted minimum of 0.70, indicating adequate item reliability (Hair et al. 2017). Cronbach's Alpha (CA) values for internal consistency also surpass the 0.70 threshold, confirming the reliability of the constructs (Nunnally 1978). In addition, Composite Reliability (CR) values are above 0.70, further demonstrating high reliability (Hair et al. 2017). Convergent validity is confirmed, as the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for all constructs exceeds the 0.50 benchmark, showing that the constructs explain a substantial portion of the variance in the measured items (Fornell and Larcker 1981). This combination of high FL, CA, CR, and AVE values supports the robustness of the measurement model for subsequent analysis.

Furthermore, discriminant validity was assessed by comparing the square root of the AVE for each construct with the correlation coefficients between constructs, as presented in Tables 4.7 and Table 4.8. In all cases, the square root of the AVE for each construct (Police Performance, Community Policing Initiatives, Role of Media, and Police Trust) is greater than the corresponding correlation coefficients, indicating that the constructs are distinct and effectively measure separate underlying concepts in the model. This confirms strong discriminant validity, supporting the use of these constructs in further analysis.

Table 7, Provides a detailed psychometric assessment of four constructs: Police Performance, Community Policing Initiatives, Role of Media, and Police Trust, using Cronbach's alpha, Composite Reliability (CR), Average Variance Extracted (AVE), as well as mean and standard deviation to evaluate the constructs' internal consistency, reliability, and validity.

Table 7 Reliability and Validity of Constructs

Construct	Mean	STD	FL	CA	CR	AVE
Police Performance				0.901	0.927	0.719
PP1	3.604	0.837	0.742			
PP2	3.491	0.980	0.884			
PP3	3.533	0.930	0.900			
PP4	3.308	1.125	0.898			
PP5	3.491	1.033	0.803			
Community Policing Initiatives				0.891	0.918	0.693
CPI1	3.491	1.337	0.787			
CPI2	3.361	1.408	0.853			
CPI3	2.822	1.193	0.772			
CPI4	3.349	1.207	0.856			
CPI5	4.201	1.267	0.887			
Role of Media				0.839	0.880	0.596
ROM1	3.148	1.149	0.826			
ROM2	3.201	1.149	0.820			
ROM3	3.112	1.112	0.732			
ROM4	2.964	1.146	0.759			
ROM5	3.633	0.833	0.717			
Police Trust				0.817	0.866	0.565
PTRUST1	3.509	0.924	0.710			
PTRUST2	3.438	0.960	0.803			
PTRUST3	3.089	1.196	0.716			
PTRUST4	3.172	1.071	0.777			
PTRUST5	3.503	0.924	0.748			

Source: Researcher's computation 2024

Starting with Police Performance, the mean scores of its items range from 3.308 to 3.604, indicating moderately positive perceptions, with standard deviations ranging from 0.837 to 1.125, reflecting a fair amount of variability in responses. The factor loadings are all strong, ranging from 0.742 to 0.900, showing that individual items correlate well with the construct. Its Cronbach's alpha of 0.901 surpasses the acceptable 0.7 threshold (Nunnally 1978), indicating high internal consistency, while the CR of 0.927 further confirms this strong reliability (Bagozzi and Yi 1988). The AVE of 0.719, exceeding the minimum criterion of 0.5 (Fornell and Larcker 1981), indicates strong convergent validity, meaning the construct explains more than 71% of the variance in the measured items.

Community Policing Initiatives has a mean ranging from 2.822 to 4.201, suggesting more variability in perception, with standard deviations between 1.193 and 1.408, indicating a wide range of responses. The factor loadings are similarly high, from 0.772 to 0.887, demonstrating strong item-to-construct correlations. The Cronbach's alpha is 0.891, and CR is 0.918, both exceeding the 0.7 threshold, confirming strong internal consistency and reliability. The AVE of 0.693 shows that 69.3% of the variance in the items is explained by the construct, further supporting good convergent validity.

Role of Media, with mean scores between 2.964 and 3.633 and standard deviations ranging from 0.833 to 1.149, indicates a moderate level of agreement with the items and some variability in responses. The factor loadings range

from 0.717 to 0.826, which are acceptable but slightly lower than the previous constructs. Despite this, Cronbach's alpha (0.839) and CR (0.880) are well above 0.7, confirming adequate reliability. The AVE of 0.596 is just above the 0.5 threshold, indicating that while the convergent validity is acceptable, it is not as strong as the other constructs, implying that some items may need refinement.

Finally, Police Trust shows mean values between 3.089 and 3.509, with standard deviations from 0.924 to 1.196, suggesting moderately positive perceptions of trust in the police, with some variation in responses. The factor loadings range from 0.710 to 0.803, which are satisfactory. Cronbach's alpha is 0.817, and CR is 0.866, both exceeding the 0.7 threshold, indicating strong internal consistency and reliability. However, the AVE of 0.565, while above the minimum of 0.5, is lower than other constructs, pointing to adequate convergent validity.

In conclusion, the analysis reveals that all constructs demonstrate strong reliability, as reflected by their high Cronbach's alpha and CR values. The mean and standard deviation show moderate to positive perceptions across the constructs, with some variability. The AVE values, were acceptable across the board, and hence, the constructs are robust, with sound psychometric properties.

Table 8 Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

Construct	CPI	ROM	PP	PTRUST
CPI				
ROM	0.110			
PP	0.194	0.498		
PTRUST	0.224	0.670	0.635	

Source: Researcher's computation 2024

Table 8, Presents the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) values, which assess discriminant validity between constructs. HTMT measures the extent to which constructs are distinct from each other, with thresholds typically suggested by (Henseler, Ringle, and Sarstedt 2015). The most conservative threshold is 0.85, while a more liberal one is 0.90. Values below these thresholds indicate good discriminant validity. In this case, all HTMT values are below the conservative threshold of 0.85, suggesting excellent discriminant validity between the constructs. Starting with Community Policing Initiatives (CPI), its HTMT values with Role of Media (0.110), Police Performance (PP) (0.194), and Police Trust (PTRUST) (0.224) are well below 0.85, confirming that these constructs are distinct. Similarly, the Role of Media (ROM) shows discriminant validity with Police Performance (0.498) and Police Trust (0.670), as both values are significantly below 0.85, reinforcing the distinction between these constructs. Finally, the relationship between Police Performance and Police Trust yields an HTMT value of 0.635, also below the threshold, further validating discriminant validity. Overall, the HTMT analysis confirms that all constructs—CPI, ROM, PP, and PTRUST—are sufficiently distinct from one another, ensuring discriminant validity in the measurement model. This supports the robustness of the constructs and their ability to measure unique concepts without significant overlap.

Table 9 Fornell-Larcker Criterion

	CPI	ROM	PP	PTRUST
CPI	0.832			
ROM	-0.093	0.772		
PP	-0.189	0.505	0.848	
PTRUST	-0.187	0.626	0.627	0.752

Source: Researcher's computation 2024

Table 9, Presents results based on the Fornell-Larcker Criterion, which is a widely used method for assessing discriminant validity in structural equation modeling. According to the Fornell-Larcker Criterion, the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct should be greater than its correlations with other constructs in the model (Fornell and Larcker 1981). This ensures that a construct shares more variance with its indicators than it does with other constructs.

In this table, the diagonal elements (in bold) represent the square root of the AVE for each construct: Community Policing Initiatives (CPI) at 0.832, Role of Media at 0.772, Police Performance (PP) at 0.848, and Police Trust (PTRUST) at 0.752. For each construct, these values are greater than their respective correlations with other constructs, which confirms discriminant validity. For instance, the square root of the AVE for CPI (0.832) is higher than its correlations with ROM (-0.093), PP (-0.189), and PTRUST (-0.187), confirming that CPI is distinct from the other constructs. Similarly, the square root of the AVE for Role of Media (0.772) is greater than its correlation with PP (0.505) and PTRUST (0.626). PP has a square root of AVE of 0.848, higher than its correlation with PTRUST (0.627), confirming the distinctiveness of PP as well. Finally, PTRUST has a square root of the AVE of 0.752, which exceeds its correlations with the other constructs.

In conclusion, the Fornell-Larcker Criterion is satisfied for all constructs in this table, indicating strong discriminant validity. This means that the constructs are well-differentiated and measure distinct concepts within the model, thereby supporting the robustness of the measurement model.

Table 10 Variance Inflation Factor (VIF)

Construct	VIF
CPI1	3.155
CPI2	3.859
CPI3	3.241
CPI4	3.813
CPI5	2.222
ROM1	2.232
ROM2	2.634
ROM3	2.639
ROM4	2.423
ROM5	1.252
PP1	1.717
PP2	3.143
PP3	3.505
PP4	3.202
PP5	2.044
PTRUST1	2.954
PTRUST2	3.198
PTRUST3	1.630
PTRUST4	1.679
PTRUST5	1.389

Source: Researcher's computation 2024

Table 10, Presents the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values for the items associated with four constructs: Community Policing Initiatives (CPI), Role of Media (ROM), Police Performance (PP), and Police Trust (PTRUST). VIF is a measure used to assess collinearity among predictor variables in a model. High collinearity (where VIF exceeds a threshold of 5 or, more conservatively, 3) suggests that the variables are highly correlated and may inflate the standard errors of the regression coefficients, leading to unreliable estimates (Hair et al. 2017).

Starting with Community Policing Initiatives (CPI), the VIF values range from 2.222 (CPI5) to 3.859 (CPI2), with several values exceeding the more conservative threshold of 3 (e.g., CPI1 at 3.155, CPI2 at 3.859, CPI3 at 3.241, and CPI4 at 3.813). This suggests some multicollinearity among these items, which could potentially distort the relationships in the structural model. However, since none of the values surpass the critical threshold of 5, the multicollinearity is not severe enough to warrant major concern but might still be worth addressing through item review or refinement. For Role of Media, VIF values range from 1.252 (ROM5) to 2.639 (ROM3), indicating low multicollinearity among its indicators. Since all values are well below the threshold of 3, it can be concluded that collinearity is not an issue for the Role of Media construct.

Regarding Police Performance (PP), the VIF values range from 1.717 (PP1) to 3.505 (PP3). Here, PP2 (3.143), PP3 (3.505), and PP4 (3.202) exceed the conservative threshold of 3, indicating moderate multicollinearity. Although these values do not exceed 5, which would indicate a serious collinearity problem, it is recommended to monitor these items closely to ensure they do not undermine the model's reliability. Finally, the Police Trust (PTRUST) construct shows VIF values between 1.389 (PTRUST5) and 3.198 (PTRUST2), with PTRUST1 (2.954) and PTRUST2 (3.198) slightly exceeding the conservative threshold of 3, again indicating some mild collinearity, though not enough to be considered problematic.

In summary, while there are some instances of VIF values exceeding the threshold of 3, particularly for Community Policing Initiatives and Police Performance, none of the constructs exhibit VIF values over 5, which would indicate serious multicollinearity. Thus, the overall collinearity statistics suggest that while there is some multicollinearity present, it is not severe enough to compromise the model's validity.

4.3. Hypothesis Testing of Results

In this section, the researcher undertakes a comprehensive exploration of the hypothesis testing related to the study results, which is a vital aspect of assessing the validity and reliability of the research objectives. Hypothesis testing serves as a systematic approach that allows for a thorough evaluation of the relationships between various variables linked to public perception and trust in the Sierra Leone Police. By carefully formulating specific hypotheses derived from the overarching research objectives, the researcher can systematically analyze the collected data to ascertain whether the observed patterns and trends support or contradict the initial assumptions made at the outset of the study. This analytical process not only enhances the robustness and credibility of the findings but also provides empirical evidence that significantly informs our understanding of the multifaceted factors that influence public trust in the Sierra Leone Police.

Moreover, the study aims to delve into the outcomes of the hypothesis testing to uncover significant correlations and insights that could have far-reaching implications. By identifying these relationships, the findings will contribute meaningfully to the broader discourse surrounding policing in Sierra Leone, thereby guiding future initiatives that seek to foster trust and collaboration between law enforcement agencies and the communities they serve. The researcher has proposed the following hypotheses to structure this inquiry:

- Hypothesis 1: Police Performance positively and significantly influences Police Trust in Sierra Leone.
- Hypothesis 2: Police Performance positively affects the Role of Media in Sierra Leone.
- Hypothesis 3: Police Performance positively influences Community Policing Initiatives in Sierra Leone.
- Hypothesis 4: The Role of Media positively and significantly impacts Police Trust in Sierra Leone.
- Hypothesis 5: Community Policing Initiatives positively affect Police Trust in Sierra Leone.
- Hypothesis 6: Community Policing Initiatives serve as a mediator in the relationship between Police Performance and Police Trust in Sierra Leone.
- Hypothesis 7: The Role of Media acts as a mediator in the relationship between Police Performance and Police Trust in Sierra Leone.

Table 11 Hypothesis testing results

Hypothesis	Relationship	β	T stat	P values	Decision
H1	PP -> PTRUST	0.403	5.987	0.000	Supported
H2	PP -> CPI	-0.189	4.378	0.000	Rejected
H3	PP -> ROM	0.505	6.493	0.000	Supported

| H4 | CPI -> PTRUST | -0.072 | 1.527 | 0.127 | Rejected |
| H5 | ROM -> PTRUST | 0.416 | 5.763 | 0.000 | Supported |

<div align="center">Source: Researcher's computation 2024.</div>

The results from the structural equation model using SMART PLS analysis provide valuable insights into the relationships between Police Performance (PP), Community Policing Initiatives (CPI), the Role of Media (ROM), and Police Trust (PTRUST).

Hypothesis 1 assessed the impact of public perception on police trust. The results indicate a significant and positive relationship between public perception and police trust ($\beta = 0.403$, T = 5.987, p < 0.001). This suggests that a favorable public perception of the police is crucial for enhancing trust in law enforcement. The data demonstrates that as the public's view of the police improves, so does their trust in these institutions. This finding highlights the importance of fostering a positive image of the police in the community, as it directly correlates with increased trust levels.

Hypothesis 2 evaluated the relationship between public perception and community policing initiatives. The results reveal a negative relationship ($\beta = -0.189$, T = 4.378, p < 0.001), leading to the rejection of this hypothesis. This finding indicates that adverse public perceptions may negatively influence the effectiveness of community policing strategies. It suggests that when the public harbors negative views of the police, it undermines the potential benefits of community policing efforts, posing challenges for law enforcement in building effective community engagement.

Hypothesis 3 examined the impact of public perception on the role of media. The results show a significant and positive relationship ($\beta = 0.505$, T = 6.493, p < 0.001), indicating that public perception is heavily influenced by media portrayal. This finding implies that favourable media representation of police activities contributes to improved public perception of law enforcement. Consequently, this emphasizes the necessity for police departments to collaborate with media outlets to ensure positive narratives that enhance public views.

Hypothesis 4 assessed the influence of community policing initiatives on police trust. The results indicate a negative relationship ($\beta = -0.072$, T = 1.527, p = 0.127), leading to the rejection of this hypothesis. This suggests that community policing initiatives do not significantly enhance trust in law enforcement. The negative coefficient reflects a potential disconnect between the implementation of these initiatives and their effectiveness in fostering police trust, indicating the need for more tailored approaches to engage the community effectively.

Hypothesis 5 investigated the relationship between the role of media and police trust. The results reveal a significant positive relationship ($\beta = 0.416$, T = 5.763, p < 0.001), supporting the hypothesis. This finding indicates that positive media representation significantly enhances public trust in law enforcement. It highlights the critical role media plays in shaping perceptions of the police and underscores the importance of proactive media engagement strategies to build and maintain trust within the community.
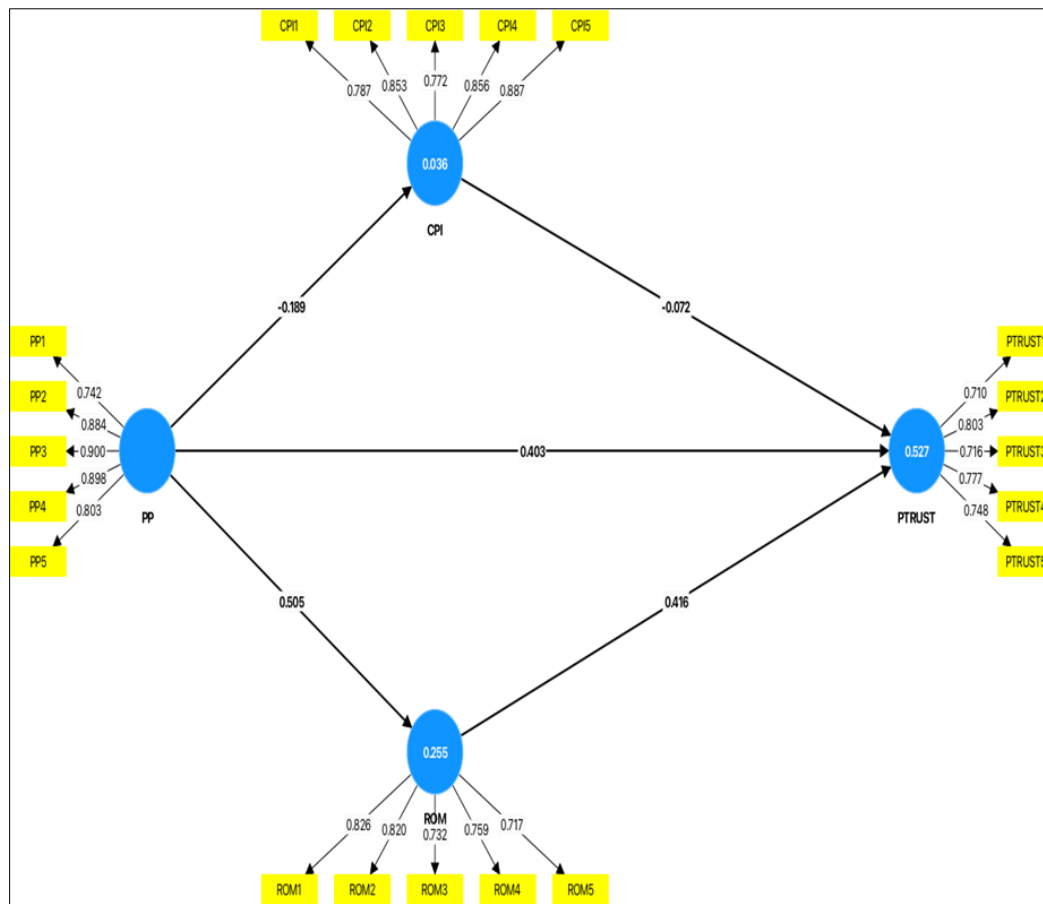
Table 12 Results of the Mediation Analysis

Hypothesis	Relationship	β	T stat	P values	Mediating Effect	Decision
H6	PP -> CPI -> PTRUST	0.014	1.344	0.179	No mediation	Rejected
H7	PP -> ROM -> PTRUST	0.210	4.884	0.000	Partial mediation	Supported

<div align="center">Source: Researcher's computation 2024.</div>

Hypothesis 6 assessed the mediating effect of community policing initiatives on the relationship between public perception and police trust. The results show a very weak positive relationship ($\beta = 0.014$, T = 1.344, p = 0.179), leading to the rejection of this hypothesis. This indicates that community policing initiatives do not serve as a significant mediator between public perception and police trust. The lack of a meaningful relationship suggests that even if public perception improves, it does not translate into increased police trust through community policing efforts. This finding highlights a potential disconnect in how community policing initiatives are perceived and their effectiveness in fostering trust among the public.

Hypothesis 7 examined the mediating role of the media in the relationship between public perception and police trust. The results indicate a moderate positive relationship ($\beta = 0.210$, T = 4.884, p < 0.001), supporting the hypothesis and suggesting a partial mediating effect. This finding implies that while public perception significantly influences police

trust, the role of media acts as an important intermediary that enhances this relationship. The media's portrayal of police activities can shape public perception, thereby contributing positively to trust in law enforcement. This underscores the critical role of media in facilitating trust-building efforts and suggests that strategies to improve media engagement could be effective in enhancing police-community relations.

Source: Researcher's computation 2024

Figure 7 Structural Model Analysis of Constructs

4.4. Summary

In summary, the analysis examines the relationships between key constructs—Police Performance (PP), Community Policing Initiatives (CPI), Role of Media (ROM), and Police Trust (PTRUST)—using structural equation modelling (SEM). The findings confirm that all constructs demonstrate strong reliability and validity, supported by high Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE) values, ensuring the robustness of the measurement model. Discriminant validity is established through both the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) and Fornell-Larcker Criterion, confirming the distinctiveness of the constructs. While there is mild multicollinearity in some constructs, none of the values exceed critical thresholds, minimizing concerns about collinearity. Hypothesis testing reveals that Police Performance positively influences Police Trust and the Role of Media but harms Community Policing Initiatives. Additionally, the Role of Media significantly enhances Police Trust, whereas Community Policing Initiatives do not. Finally, the mediation analysis indicates that the Role of Media partially mediates the relationship between Police Performance and Police Trust, while Community Policing Initiatives do not act as mediators.

4.4.1. FINDINGS

The summary of findings section presents a quantitative analysis of the influences of public perception, community policing initiatives, and the role of media on police trust in Sierra Leone. By employing statistical methods to analyse the data, this section offers a clear and objective view of how these variables interact and affect the community's trust in law enforcement. The findings indicate that public perception significantly enhances police trust, while the impact of community policing initiatives appears to be negligible, suggesting that they do not effectively mediate this relationship. In contrast, the role of media shows a positive and significant partial mediation effect, indicating that favourable media

representation can bolster public perception and, in turn, enhance police trust. This quantitative assessment provides valuable insights into the dynamics of police-community relations and highlights the critical role of public perception and media engagement in fostering trust within the community.

4.4.2. Objective 1: To analyse the relationship between public perception and trust in the Sierra Leone police.

This research revealed (Table 11) a substantial positive correlation between public perception and police trust. Numerous studies have established a strong correlation between police performance and community trust, aligning with Hypothesis 1.

For instance, research by (Alalehto and Larsson 2016; Sabijon and Magbojos 2023) reported a significant positive correlation between police-community relations and police trust, indicating a meaningful relationship. Furthermore, (Abdi and Hashi 2024; Melkamu and Teshome 2023) highlighted those perceived police effectiveness directly influences public trust, suggesting that when communities view their police as effective, trust levels increase correspondingly. Additionally, (Branton et al. n.d.; Hanway Pamela 2023; Modise 2023) argue that community-oriented policing strategies are effective in fostering positive perceptions of police performance and these strategies not only improve the public's view of law enforcement but also enhance trust in local governance structures.

A survey conducted by (Abess 2015; International Republic Institution 2021) indicated that approximately 70% of the population in Sierra Leone expressed support for police performance, suggesting that positive perceptions of police activities can significantly impact public trust. However, despite these encouraging findings, trust in the Sierra Leone Police remains low overall, with reports indicating that less than 20% of the population expresses trust in the police. This low trust is often attributed to persistent issues such as corruption and negative interactions between police and the public (Krönke Matthias 2024; Rashid Thomas Abdul 2013; Roberts Benjamin 2022) and the general perception of police corruption and misconduct are closely linked to low trust levels.

4.4.3. Objective 2: To investigate the influence of public perception on community policing initiatives in Sierra Leone.

The evaluation of the relationship between public perception and community policing initiatives reveals a significant negative correlation, leading to the rejection of Hypothesis 2. However, this finding underscores the detrimental impact of adverse public perceptions on the effectiveness of community policing strategies. Research indicates that negative public attitudes can severely hinder police efforts to engage with communities, as poor police-community relations adversely affect crime prevention and law (Bangura 2018; Griego 2021; Schlosser et al. 2021). Moreover, the negative public perception of law enforcement significantly impacts community cooperation, which is crucial for the success of community policing initiatives. When communities harbour mistrust towards police, it often results in decreased willingness to engage with law enforcement, undermining efforts to foster collaboration and improve public safety (Jackson and Bradford 2010; Kruis et al. 2023).

Moreover, negative attitudes towards police can result in decreased community engagement, further undermining the goals of community policing (Brantingham and Uchida 2021; Cummings Mike 2019) and this relationship underscores the importance of addressing public perceptions to enhance police-community relations and improve the effectiveness of policing strategies (Maese Ellyn 2023; National Institute of Justice 2013).

Furthermore, studies by (Gill et al. 2014; Skogan 2006; Tyler and Fagan 2008) added that community-oriented policing has been shown to improve public attitudes towards police when positive interactions occur, suggesting that proactive engagement is essential for rebuilding trust. Hence, addressing negative perceptions through transparency and community involvement is crucial for law enforcement agencies aiming to enhance community policing outcomes and foster effective community relationships.

Objective 3: To assess the effect of public perception on the role of media in shaping community views towards the police in Sierra Leone.

Hypothesis 3 examined the impact of public perception on the role of media, revealing a significant positive relationship. This finding indicates that public perception is heavily influenced by media portrayal, suggesting that favourable media representation of police activities contributes to improved public views of law enforcement. Research supports this notion, highlighting that positive media coverage can enhance public trust and cooperation with police, which is essential for effective community policing initiatives (Bangura 2018; Chermak and Weiss 2005; Dowler and Zawilski 2007; Intravia, Wolff, and Piquero 2018; M'bayo 2013; Nix and Pickett 2017; Schultz 2019). According to (Hohl, Bradford, and Stanko 2010; Lasley 1994; Miller et al. 2003; Tankebe and Asif 2016), the media narratives play a crucial role in shaping public attitudes, with favourable portrayals leading to increased community support for law

enforcement efforts. So, this further underscores the necessity for police departments to actively collaborate with media outlets to promote positive narratives that enhance public perceptions and foster stronger community relationships (Chermak and Weiss 2005; Cooke and Sturges 2009; Hanke 2005; Headley 2016; Mawby 2010).

However, engaging in proactive media strategies can help law enforcement agencies counteract negative portrayals and build a more favourable public image, ultimately benefiting community safety and cooperation (Bullock 2018; Grimmelikhuijsen and Meijer 2015; Han, Xu, and Pan 2022; Headley 2016).

4.4.4. Objective 4: To evaluate the relationship between the community policing initiative and police trust in Sierra Leone.

Hypothesis 4 assessed the influence of community policing initiatives on police trust, revealing a negative relationship. This outcome leads to the rejection of the hypothesis, suggesting that community policing initiatives do not significantly enhance trust in law enforcement in Sierra Leone. The negative coefficient indicates a potential disconnect between the implementation of these initiatives and their effectiveness in fostering police trust.

Research supports this finding, indicating that while community policing aims to build trust, its effectiveness can vary significantly based on execution and community context. For instance, a study highlights that community policing strategies often fall short in certain environments, failing to improve citizen-police relations or trust levels (Abdi and Hashi 2024; Brogden and Nijhar 2013; Trojanowicz 1974). Additionally, the literature suggests that merely implementing community policing initiatives is insufficient; they must be tailored to the specific needs and dynamics of the community to be effective (Blair et al. 2021; Greene 2000; Terpstra 2011), further argue that community policing strategies must be customized based on the unique characteristics of each community; and require deeper structural changes as this is crucial for addressing specific local needs, building trust, and fostering cooperation between law enforcement and community members. Moreover, (Cordner 2014; Mooney 2020)), argue that, the lack of significant improvement in trust may reflect broader societal issues, such as historical tensions between law enforcement and communities, which require more comprehensive strategies beyond traditional community policing efforts.

Meanwhile, (Baker 2008) examines the difficulties of implementing community policing in post-civil war Sierra Leone. The study points out that foreign policing models often overlook local cultural and social factors, resulting in community resistance. Historical distrust due to past police abuses also complicates engagement efforts. Additionally, the Sierra Leone police face resource limitations that impede effective community policing. Baker suggests involving the community in developing policing strategies is crucial for creating effective models that meet local needs and rebuild trust between law enforcement and residents.

Therefore, this study highlights the importance of police forces adopting community-specific strategies to connect with citizens and effectively rebuild trust in law enforcement. By tailoring their approaches to the unique characteristics of each community, police can enhance the effectiveness of their initiatives and foster a collaborative environment

4.4.5. Objective 5: To examine the impact of the role of media on police trust in Sierra Leone.

Hypothesis 5 investigated the relationship between the role of media and police trust, revealing a significant positive relationship. This finding supports the hypothesis, indicating that positive media representation significantly enhances public trust in law enforcement.

Research consistently underscores the critical role that media plays in shaping public perceptions of the police. Positive media portrayals can foster trust and cooperation between law enforcement and the community, as favorable coverage often leads to increased public confidence in police activities (Chermak and Weiss 2005; Hohl 2011). For instance, studies have shown that when media outlets highlight successful police-community interactions, it can lead to a more favorable public sentiment toward law enforcement (Chermak and Weiss 2005). Moreover, proactive media engagement strategies are essential for building and maintaining trust within the community (Belair-Gagnon, Nelson, and Lewis 2019; Habibi, Laroche, and Richard 2014; Lee and McGovern 2013; Warren, Sulaiman, and Jaafar 2014). Law enforcement agencies that actively collaborate with media outlets to promote positive narratives can counteract negative portrayals and enhance their public image (Mawby, 2010. This proactive approach not only helps in shaping public perception but also plays a vital role in community safety and cooperation, as it encourages a more informed and supportive public (Williams and Fedorowicz 2019).

In summary, the significant positive relationship between media representation and police trust emphasizes the need for law enforcement to engage with media strategically, ensuring that the narratives presented to the public reflect the positive contributions of police work to community well-being.

4.4.6. Objective 6: To examine the mediating roles of community policing initiatives (CPI) and the role of media on the relationship between public perception and police trust in Sierra Leone.

Hypothesis 6 assessed the mediating effect of community policing initiatives on the relationship between public perception and police trust, revealing a very weak positive relationship. This outcome leads to the rejection of the hypothesis, indicating that community policing initiatives do not serve as a significant mediator between public perception and police trust. The findings suggest a disconnect between the implementation of community policing initiatives and their effectiveness in fostering trust among the public. Research indicates that while community policing aims to improve relationships between law enforcement and the community, its impact on trust can be minimal if not executed effectively (Community Policing Consortium 1994; Zalta et al. 2021). For instance, studies have shown that community policing efforts often fail to translate into increased trust when they do not align with community needs or when the public perceives them as superficial (Gill et al. 2014).

Moreover, the literature highlights that various factor beyond community policing, such as historical relationships with law enforcement and broader societal issues can influence public perception. (Branton et al. n.d.; Zalta et al. 2021). This complexity suggests that improving public perception alone may not be sufficient to enhance trust in police, particularly if community policing initiatives are not perceived as genuine or effective by the community (Kumar 2012; Signori et al. 2023).

In summary, the weak positive relationship found in this hypothesis emphasizes the need for law enforcement agencies to evaluate their community policing strategies critically. Tailoring these initiatives to address specific community concerns and fostering genuine engagement may be essential for bridging the gap between public perception and trust in law enforcement.

Hypothesis 7 examined the mediating role of the media in the relationship between public perception and police trust, revealing a moderate positive relationship. This outcome supports the hypothesis, indicating that the media serves as an important intermediary that enhances the relationship between public perception and trust in law enforcement

The findings suggest that while public perception significantly influences police trust, the media's portrayal of police activities plays a crucial role in shaping these perceptions. Positive media representations can enhance public trust by framing police actions in a favorable light, thereby reinforcing community support for law enforcement (Dowler and Zawilski 2007; Gauthier and Graziano 2018). Research indicates that effective media engagement strategies can significantly improve public attitudes towards police, as favorable coverage often leads to increased trust and cooperation (Dowler 2002; Dowler and Zawilski 2007; Glascock 2023; Intravia, Thompson, and Pickett 2020).

Moreover, the literature emphasizes the importance of proactive media strategies in building trust within the community. By fostering positive narratives and transparent communication, law enforcement agencies can leverage media to enhance their public image and strengthen community relations (Hatfield 2021; Manzoor 2015; Mayes 2021; Nix and Wolfe 2017; Succar et al. 2024). This underscores the critical role of media in facilitating trust-building efforts and highlights the need for police departments to develop strategies that improve media engagement, ultimately contributing to better police-community relations.

In summary, the moderate positive relationship identified in this hypothesis reinforces the idea that media engagement is vital for enhancing public trust in law enforcement, suggesting that targeted efforts to improve media interactions could yield significant benefits for community policing initiatives.

4.5. Contributions Of The Study

4.5.1. Theoretical Implications

This study enhances the understanding of public trust in law enforcement, especially in post-conflict settings such as Sierra Leone. This analysis elucidates the distinct impacts of historical and socio-political elements, enhancing comprehension of trust dynamics within Sierra Leone's law enforcement. This study fills a significant gap in the literature by investigating issues such as community policing, media influence, and perceived police accountability—elements that have been little examined in post-conflict cultures. This corresponds with current studies highlighting that trust in law enforcement is essential for social cohesiveness and civic participation, especially in transitional countries (Goldsmith 2005; Tyler 2006). Additionally, synthesizing theoretical perspectives on procedural justice and performance-orientated models provides a thorough framework for analyzing the factors influencing police legitimacy (Sunshine and Tyler 2003; Tankebe 2009).

4.5.2. Practical Contributions:

The study's findings offer pragmatic insights for politicians, policymakers, law enforcement agencies, and community leaders. Recognizing critical elements that affect public trust—such as efficient community policing, transparent practices, and media interaction—offers avenues to enhance police-community interactions in Sierra Leone. These findings advocate for a strategic emphasis on augmenting transparency, procedural equity, and community engagement, which research indicates can bolster public trust and endorsement of law enforcement initiatives (Bradford and Jackson 2010a; Skogan 2006).

This study provides a framework for reforming policing practices in Sierra Leone by basing recommendations on empirical data, thereby fostering a more accountable and trustworthy police force that adheres to democratic principles and international best practices for post-conflict recovery and social trust-building (Boateng 2021; Crime 2011). These contributions enhance both the scholarly comprehension of confidence in policing and the practical frameworks for advancing law enforcement in post-conflict environments. The study has the potential to inform effective, trust-centered reforms in Sierra Leone's police force and other areas by addressing the specific requirements of communities and emphasizing trust-building initiatives.

4.6. Limitations and Further Research

The research acknowledges various constraints that must be taken into account when evaluating its results and considering their wider relevance.

The study employs a cross-sectional survey design, which captures data at a single point in time, thus limiting the ability to establish causality. This approach provides insights into correlations but does not allow for an analysis of how trust in the police might change over time in response to policy reforms or social events. Whereas longitudinal studies, which track variables over extended periods, are often recommended for exploring causal relationships in complex social issues (Bryman 2006; Lavrakas 2008). Furthermore, the study's primary data collection method is a survey, relying on self-reported responses from participants. This approach introduces potential biases, such as social desirability bias, where respondents may answer in ways they believe are more socially acceptable rather than providing true reflections of their views. This limitation may affect the accuracy and reliability of the data, particularly on sensitive topics like trust in law enforcement   (Podsakoff et al. 2003).

Another limitation was the sampling method adopted. The study employs both purposive and convenience sampling methods, which may affect the representativeness of the sample. Although these methods facilitate targeted data collection and are suitable for exploratory studies, they limit the generalizability of findings to the broader population. This risk of sampling bias could lead to an overrepresentation or underrepresentation of certain perspectives within the community, reducing the overall applicability of the results to all regions or groups (Elfil and Negida 2017). Conversely, the study is also limited by Geographical Focus. By focusing primarily on the Sierra Leone Police (SLP) in Freetown, the study may not fully capture the diversity of public trust levels and police-community dynamics in other regions. Sierra Leone's regional variations in socioeconomic conditions and historical experiences with law enforcement suggest that public trust in the police could vary widely across different areas. This geographical limitation restricts the scope of the findings to urban contexts and may not account for rural or provincial dynamics (Taris, Kessler, and Kelloway 2021). Finally, the study's focus on Sierra Leone's post-conflict setting means that findings may have limited transferability to other countries or regions with different historical, cultural, and political contexts. Factors influencing public trust in Sierra Leone's police may not apply universally to other post-conflict or non-post-conflict societies; thus, this cultural specificity restricts the broader applicability of the findings (Goldsmith 2005).

5. Conclusion

This chapter presents a summary of the key findings from the study, providing insights into the complex factors that influence public trust in the Sierra Leone Police (SLP). The results indicate that police effectiveness, transparency, community engagement, and media portrayal are pivotal in shaping public trust in law enforcement. Notably, community policing initiatives, which foster closer relationships between the police and the public, were found to have a positive impact on trust levels. Media coverage emerged as a significant factor, capable of either strengthening or undermining trust, depending on how the police are portrayed. Specifically, negative media portrayals of police misconduct were linked to a decline in public confidence, underscoring the powerful role the media plays in influencing public perceptions. The chapter also discusses the study's limitations.

Compliance with ethical standards

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