
Swiss police commanders' view on strategies against the COVID-19 pandemic

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1. Project outline

Research question: What is the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the police and policing in Switzerland?

Project duration: January 2021 – December 2021

Methodology:

- Media Analysis
- Literature review
- Analysis of crime statistics
- Semi-structured expert interviews with police commanders in Switzerland (30-60 minutes)

Interview guide

Part I: Introduction

Part II: Police work in general

Part III: Pandemic

- Legal basis
- Organisational reaction
- Specific challenging situations/groups
- Inter-institutional cooperation

Sample

Planned interviews	Interviews done	Date	Transcription/ Analysis
City Police 1	City Police 1	March 21	X
Cantonal Police 1	Cantonal Police 1	May 21	X
Cantonal Police 2	Cantonal Police 2	May 21	
Cantonal Police 3	Cantonal Police 3	June 21	
Cantonal Police 4	Cantonal Police 4	Sep 21	X
Cantonal Police 5	Cantonal Police 5	Nov 21	X
City Police 2	City Police 2	Nov 21	X
Cantonal Police 6	Cantonal Police 6	Dec 21	X
Cantonal Police 7		Cancelling due to Covid	
Cantonal Police 8		Declined	
Cantonal Police 9		Declined	
Cantonal Police 10		Declined	
12		8	6

State of research/sensitizing concept

Police legitimacy;

Self-legitimacy;

Police-citizens interaction, crowd policing

2. Context

- Pandemic phases
- autumn 2020: Increase of protests against the Anti-COVID-19 measures
 - Several demonstrations
 - Group of police officers against the COVID-19 measures (“Wir für Euch”)
- 2020: Measures without a legal basis: Jan 2021: Introduction of the Ordinance on Administrative Fines

Pandemic phases and their significance for the police

Phases	Characterization	Police tasks
Phase 2 16.03-26.04.2020	Shutdown	Controls: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Closure of businesses/restaurants • Crowds • Borders
Phase 3 27.04.-1.11.2020	Progressive relaxation	
Phase 4 2.11.-31.12.2020	Another Shutdown	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring of compliance with quarantine regulations • Obligations to wear mask
Phase 5 1.1.-30.03.2021	Extension of shutdown	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fines for non-compliance with COVID-19 measures • Controls on the closure of shops, restaurants and cultural facilities • Monitoring of compliance with quarantine regulations
Phase 6 31.3.2021 -	Progressive relaxation	

3. Results

Perception of legal basis and its implementation

- Covid rules and regulations by Swiss government:
 - Many changes at a short notice -> very short time to react and implement them in guides for action very short;
 - Widely ramified details -> hard to keep the overview about what applies now;
- Implementation
 - Hard to implement in certain areas;
 - Different views

Criticising short time to react:

“Most of the time it was on Friday and applied on Monday, if we were unlucky it applied on Saturday. Also the pressure from the corps. So, the corps was screaming for action guidelines.” CaPol6, 40:51

“And there it is simply toxic (...) if you had had more time, you could perhaps have defined it differently, more clearly, but you had little time. And then all the questions just came.” CaPol6, 42:02

Questioning of the rules and regulations:

"Yes, logic was questioned (...) Then I said: Forget logic. Law has nothing to do with logic. It is simply law. (...) Stop thinking in the relationship. That's the way it is (...) And we just have to do it. Otherwise there will be more confusion if everyone still wants to interpret it themselves.”

CaPol4, 20:00

“Because I believe that this is a political task, where the focus is now on convincing people of the correctness of the required behaviour. With the best will in the world, I can't do that through fines, I just don't believe it, do I?” CaPol1, 13:25

“So the penalisation is highly questionable for me, isn't it? I would have to work on convincing people. And if I don't succeed in doing that, I'm doing something wrong, aren't I?” CaPol1, 13:55

“Who loses is the rule of law, is the police, isn't it? And we simply have the feeling that if I have to appear like that, then I lose the support of the population.” CaPol1, 43:20

Implementation

“The biggest challenge is all the demonstrations and fundamental rights, where, yes, a great deal of interpretation and creative power was really necessary.” CiPol2, 08:06

“As an example: If you say 100 people are allowed to demonstrate, then we have to wait until there are exactly a hundred, and which of those over a hundred have to leave, the ones that are allowed because they were already there, and, no, that's absurd, such rules, aren't they?”
CiPol2, 16:51

“(…) or, when it comes to wearing masks yes or no at these demonstrations, and, and how are we supposed to enforce that, do we have to arrest someone and hold them for hours because they get a fine of 100.- (…)” . CiPol2, 08:10

Self-perception

- Corona-sceptics within the police corps:
 - accepted, as long as they do not make a public statement;
 - In case they do, they can be fired
- Professionalism:
 - doing the job also when being critical towards the law;
 - Not to show own critical feelings and emotions in interactions, such as at demonstrations
 - But also doubts: Divided society (pro/contra measures) does not allow an adequate reaction (e.g. demonstrations): police will lose trust of the population

I: “That's part of the work, just to say, maybe that's not so good now, but I'm doing my work.”

PC: “That's how it is, you have to have this attitude (...), everyone has their political opinion. Also at these demos, [when they think] are you actually crazy walking through these streets? but you can't see it in the police officers behaviour.” CiPol2, 29:28

“And I made this comparison (...): the oldest [in the corps] (...) [during the time of the] Gösgen nuclear power plant: there [you] were also opponents of the nuclear power plants, nevertheless you stood there. Didn't you? And that's how I expect it to be.”

CaPol6, 53:33

4. Conclusions

- Unified critique of the process by which the anti-Covid 19 measures were created and communicated;
- More heterogenous picture in questioning the implementation;
- Internal criticism tolerated but should not be formulated in the public
- Limitations: Views of commanders and not of police officers themselves

Thank you very much for your attention!

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