

Democracy As A Worth Living Environment And Law Enforcement: What Is The Role Of Emotional Intelligence?

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Abstract— *The aim of this paper is to present the dominant concepts of Emotional Intelligence (EI) and to outline the main theoretical considerations on the role and development of EI in relation to democracy, as an environment worth living. The emphasis is on contextualizing these theoretical concepts within the framework of specific empirical data. The empirical data was collected during the 1 quarter of 2024, under the framework of the POL-COM (KA220-VET - Cooperation partnerships in vocational education and training project: A developmental and educational platform and gamified tools for training police officers and similar professionals, with respect to communications) project, where members of the public were invited to share their opinion on contemporary communication with and of law enforcement officers. Methods of critical analyses of references, theoretical considerations, and empirical study, involving respondents – members of the public in the Republic of Lithuania, were used for the development of this paper. The findings revealed that the Lithuanian public holds a general positive perception of law enforcement. A large proportion of the respondents in the sample reported not having encountered the police; those who had experienced interactions with the police assessed them positively, which serves as an argument for a relatively good state of affairs in the state, the general environment and democracy.*

Keywords— *democracy, emotional intelligence, environment worth living, law enforcement.*

I. INTRODUCTION

In contemporary, democracy-oriented societies, the public is well aware of their rights—a fact that we, as professionals in education, acknowledge and are confident our reader also recognizes. On the one hand, this is a sign of a mature, well-functioning, sophisticated society, which honors all the thinkers who dedicated their thinking, writing, argumentation, and explanations to why democracy is a worthwhile environment for a human being. Starting with Plato (whose ideas—at least according to fragments passed down to us over thousands of years—are still influential) and including contemporary thinkers, democracy is considered good because it at least tries to ensure that no domination of one group over another is too evident or too harshly experienced. On the other hand, these considerations are related to expectations regarding how the state is governed, how its institutions—including law enforcement—operate, and the public's perception of their effectiveness and, at the same time, the level of respect for the rights that many members of the public expect today as an absolute necessity. A supportive, safe, respectful everyday environment is conducive to pursuing individual goals, such as creative, social, and personal endeavors. These perceptions are linked to law enforcement officers' communication skills and their ability to convey requirements, which, in turn, relate to Emotional Intelligence (further referred to as EI). EI is understood as the ability to perceive, interpret, demonstrate, control, evaluate, and use emotions to communicate with and relate to others effectively and constructively [1].

Research Object: the perceptions of the public regarding the communication competencies and EI of contemporary law enforcement officers.

The aim of this paper is to present the dominant concepts of EI and to outline the main theoretical considerations on the role and development of EI. The emphasis is on contextualizing these theoretical concepts within the framework of specific empirical data.

The paper is based on two research questions:

RQ1: What are recent theoretical considerations regarding communication and EI?

RQ2: What are the perceptions of the public regarding the communication of law enforcement officers today?

Methods: The data were collected during the first quarter of 2024, under the framework of the POL-COM (KA220-VET – Cooperation partnerships in vocational education and training project: A developmental and educational platform and gamified tools for training police officers and similar professionals with respect to communication) project, where members of the public were invited to share their opinions on the contemporary communication of law enforcement/police (the terms are used synonymously here) officers. Part of the data from this study, concerning the perspectives of law enforcement officers, was presented in a previous publication [2]; here, the emphasis is on the perspectives of members of the public.

II. DEMOCRACY AND EI: TOWARD SYNERGY

The contemporary condition of humanity is still controversial. To this day, democracy—which has been analyzed, criticized, promoted, fought against, fought for, defended, cherished, and derided for centuries—has still not been fully achieved. Less than half of the world's population currently lives under democratic systems (<https://www.eiu.com/n/campaigns/democracy-index-2024/>). Yet, as already noted, those who do enjoy democracy tend to be very critical about even the slightest violation, perceived or objective, of their human rights, especially from institutions such as law enforcement.

It is common to refer to democracy as having a history of at least 2,500 years, typically exemplified by the heritage of Ancient Greece. However, democracy in ancient Athens, while, no doubt, a beacon of hope and pride for democratic thought, was quite limited. Plato, the acknowledged founder of much of what is considered the cornerstone of Western civilization, is known to have described it as a very bad form of governance (Plato, as cited in [3]). On the one hand, we can agree with this critical sentiment, as the democracy built five centuries BC certainly had its limitations—such as the exclusion of women from citizenry—among many other aspects that a contemporary person finds appalling, and certainly not the environment worth living [4]. On the other hand, this sentiment also reflects a certain arrogance of contemporary people, as it took more than 2,000 years after the collapse of the Ancient Greek system for this form of governance to be widely discussed again, despite its misgivings.

What are the productive, effective approaches? What are the roles of citizens? What are the mechanisms and institutions that foster the coexistence of diverse ideas and ambitions, as well as individuals? Therefore, democracy, in its current and still imperfect form, is a relatively recent human innovation that deserves to be valued and characterizes an environment conducive to more or less free individual choices, creativity, and emancipation more than any other historically known form, that is, the one worth living.

While constructive criticism is important—particularly regarding issues like a lack of transparency in certain areas and the imperfect functioning of some institutions—it's essential to remember that this system represents only a small fraction of recorded human history. This underscores the necessity for continuous reflection, attention, and effort to stabilize democracy and empower the role of citizens. The works of thinkers of Modernity (17th, 18th centuries) and the rebirth of the idea of democracy, and consequently, the establishment of democracy as an experienced human reality, are of utmost importance—including public perceptions of the performance of contemporary institutions, such as law enforcement.

After the near-total collapse of democracies in the 20th century—manifested by cruel worldwide wars and the entrenchment of Soviet influence after WWII—the foundational pillars of democracy received renewed attention. Among many theoreticians, the depth of democracy, its features, and the relationships between those features, as well as the roles of citizens, were central to shaping a contemporary, more inclusive idea and practice of democracy ([5] (first edition: 1943); [6]; [7]).

Schumpeter primarily associated democracy with free elections and the freedom to vote. For him, the mechanism of fair representation was of utmost importance—unsurprisingly, given that his ideas were formulated in the mid-20th century, right after WWII [8]. Dahl, writing three decades later, expanded the concept to include features such as the possibility for all citizens to express their expectations and

needs, to make these expectations publicly known, and to have them considered with equal seriousness. He emphasized the importance of the right to association, the right to vote, the right to elect representatives, and the right to be elected. He also emphasized the need for multiple impartial news outlets, free elections, and elections that have real consequences—meaning that the policies voted for must be implemented. These ideas were further developed by other contemporary thinkers; for example, it was added that every governing body, including the military and, relevant to this study, law enforcement, must be accountable to citizens ([9], as cited in Zuzeviciute [8]).

While these concepts constitute the foundation of a contemporary, more inclusive democracy, the focus of this study is directed less toward accountability mechanisms and more toward public perceptions of law enforcement performance. Accountability mechanisms are generally activated when a certain level of dissatisfaction has been reached. Therefore, when public perception is generally positive and law enforcement performance—particularly in communication—is deemed satisfactory, it is likely that accountability mechanisms remain untriggered. This hypothesis can be stated with a high degree of confidence. Effective, productive communication is an essential component of EI. Initially conceptualized by Salovey and Mayer [10] and popularized by Goleman [1], EI refers to the ability to perceive, understand, regulate, and utilize emotions in oneself and others to facilitate cognitive processes and interpersonal relationships.

Scholars such as Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso [11] argue that EI is not merely an innate trait but a set of skills that can be developed and applied in emotionally charged contexts, such as conflict. Leaders with high EI are better equipped to recognize emotional cues, manage stress, empathize with diverse perspectives, and foster constructive dialogue [12]. Research on the application of EI in conflict resolution demonstrates its positive effects on team functioning, employee well-being, and organizational climate ([13], [14]). Leaders skilled in EI contribute to reducing workplace stress and enhancing employee satisfaction by creating environments where conflicts are handled empathetically and collaboratively [15](Cherniss, 2010).

The construct of EI has become increasingly influential in understanding leadership effectiveness and conflict management. EI enhances an individual's ability to regulate emotions and navigate social complexities, promoting mutual understanding, empathy, and reasoned decision-making among colleagues ([10]; [1]).

According to the Cambridge English Dictionary (2024), EI is defined as “the ability to recognize how people feel and react and to use this skill to make appropriate decisions and solve or avoid problems.” Thus, EI represents a synergy between emotional and rational capabilities that contributes to effective communication and conflict resolution.

As it was already stated above, originally introduced by Salovey and Mayer [10] and later popularized by Goleman [1], EI is conceptualized as a multi-dimensional framework comprising the following five components:

Self-Awareness – Recognizing and understanding one's own emotions, motivations, strengths, and limitations. Self-awareness is fundamental to EI and enables individuals to anticipate their own reactions in emotionally charged situations [16].

Self-Regulation – The ability to manage emotional impulses, remain composed, and act consistently with personal and organizational values, particularly under stress [1].

Self-Motivation – Demonstrating internal drive and resilience in the face of setbacks. Individuals with strong self-motivation are goal-oriented and maintain focus despite adversity [16].

Empathy – The capacity to understand and respond to the emotional needs of others. Empathetic people can build trust and diffuse tensions, making them more effective in handling interpersonal conflicts [1].

Social Skills – Proficiency in managing relationships, communicating effectively, and influencing others constructively. Socially skilled people foster collaboration and unity within teams [16].

Together, these components create a foundation for emotionally intelligent behavior that can significantly improve communication outcomes, especially in high-conflict environments, which are

almost inevitably intrinsic to the performance of law enforcement, where members of the public and law enforcement officers interact.

EI has increasingly become recognized as a core competency in professional and organizational contexts. Furthermore, Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso [17] define EI as “the ability to perceive, understand, and regulate emotions in oneself and others,” a skill set essential for fostering adaptive interpersonal interactions and enhancing decision-making processes within complex organizational environments. This emotional competence not only improves collaboration but also plays a preventive role against burnout and mitigates workplace conflicts, thereby sustaining organizational health ([18]; [15]).

Modern workplaces are often characterized by rapid change, high pressure, and complex interpersonal dynamics that can act as potent stressors [19]. Within this framework, EI provides individuals the capacity to “recognize and regulate their emotional responses in stressful situations, enabling rational problem-solving and emotional control” ([10], p. 189). This regulation enhances employees’ resilience and capacity to cope effectively with work-related demands. Additionally, empathy—one of EI’s foundational components—facilitates a deeper understanding of colleagues’ emotional states and fosters appropriate, compassionate responses, which are pivotal for preventing and resolving conflicts ([1], [20]). Additionally, EI positively influences team dynamics. Ehigie et al. [21] found that “teams comprising members with high EI experience fewer conflicts and utilize more effective communication strategies,” highlighting EI’s role in enhancing interpersonal relations and collective functioning. Similarly, Zhao and Cai [22] observed that “workplace trust and interpersonal relationship quality are markedly enhanced by employees’ emotional intelligence” (p. 45). Beyond conflict mitigation, EI also serves as a protective factor against burnout, supporting psychological well-being and boosting job satisfaction ([23]; [24]). Given these insights, EI emerges as an indispensable factor not only for individual professional success but also for achieving impactful professional outcomes. EI facilitates leadership trust, nurtures collaborative environments, and contributes to effective conflict management and elevated team productivity ([25]; [1]). These are the attributes that are expected of a contemporary professional, especially representing an institution instrumental for the functioning of democracy, yet flexible and attuned to the rights of citizens, any member of the public.

The synergy between democracy and EI manifests itself via many facets of communication between citizens, members of the public, and the institutions (while law enforcement is at the focus of this study; however, similar principles apply when other institutions are analyzed). The synergy becomes of utmost importance in the context of conflict, especially when it is pronounced sufficiently to call for law enforcement.

Conflict resolution strategies vary widely based on the situation, organizational culture, and the personalities involved. Thomas and Kilmann’s [26] seminal model identifies five primary conflict management styles: avoiding, accommodating, competing, compromising, and collaborating. The avoiding style is characterized by withdrawal from conflict, often in an attempt to prevent escalation. While sometimes strategic, avoiding conflict “often results in losses for both sides, with interests unmet, tension rising, and problems deepening” [27]. From an EI perspective, this style may reflect either a deficiency in emotional awareness and initiative [10] or, conversely, a high level of EI when avoidance is used judiciously to prevent unnecessary escalation [1].

Accommodating: this style involves yielding one’s own interests to satisfy others, often to preserve harmony. It requires leaders to regulate their emotions and adapt to others’ perspectives effectively, demonstrating EI traits such as self-control, empathy, and social awareness ([28]; [17]). Accommodators prioritize maintaining relational harmony by emphasizing emotional understanding to reduce tension [29].

Competing/Dominating: centers on asserting one’s position with less regard for others. Although this may appear counter to EI principles, emotional factors are still present. For example, leaders employing this style might exhibit “less developed EI skills such as self-regulation and empathy” [30], often influenced by situational stressors or unmet expectations [31]. Gender and generational differences have been noted in this style’s use, with female leaders and younger managers showing varying tendencies toward dominance in conflict [32].

Compromising: involves mutual concessions and partial satisfaction of interests. This method relies on EI competencies like empathy, self-motivation, and social skills to balance competing needs and sustain working relationships [17]. Research shows that younger employees tend to prefer compromising approaches more frequently than older ones, possibly reflecting developmental aspects of EI [29].

Collaborating: the most integrative and effective conflict management style, collaboration emphasizes mutual understanding and long-term relational improvement. It requires a high level of self-awareness and social awareness—key components of EI—and fosters organizational growth as well as a positive workplace climate [29]. This style exemplifies the practical application of EI principles in conflict resolution. Overall, traditional conflict management models provide valuable frameworks, “incorporating EI insights and recognizing human emotions significantly increases the effectiveness of conflict resolution” [1]. High EI enables professionals to assess emotional climates accurately, respond with empathy, and choose or adapt strategies that best fit the context, even when that involves nuanced uses of avoidance or accommodation, which is extremely important when in democratic society a functioning law enforcement institution is involved, as well as the performance of law enforcement officers. The members of the public may not be fully aware of the psychological mechanisms underlying interactions with law enforcement officers; however, the quality of such interactions is closely observed. For many individuals, these interactions serve as indicators of the status and maturity of democracy. In response to RQ1 (What are recent theoretical considerations regarding communication and EI?), it can be posited that everyday interactions, the manner in which problems are addressed, and the quality of communication constitute facets of the overall performance of law enforcement institutions. For a significant portion of the public—barring serious violations of rights—these perceptions reflect not only the institution’s performance but also, to some extent, that of the state. Consequently, the quality of these interactions and the extent to which EI is perceived as demonstrated by the public may at least partially serve as a reflection of the perceived quality of democracy, an environment conducive to individual freedom, choices, and creativity.

III. PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS OF COMMUNICATION WITH LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS TODAY: SELECTED EMPIRICAL STUDY RESULTS

In light of the theoretical considerations outlined above, an empirical study was designed and implemented during the first quarter of 2024 under the framework of the POL-COM (KA220-VET – Cooperation Partnerships in Vocational Education and Training project: A developmental and educational platform and gamified tools for training police officers and similar professionals with respect to communication) project.

In the study, three groups of respondents were invited to share their opinions: 1) law enforcement/police officers, 2) teachers working in the field of educating future law enforcement officers, and 3) representatives of the general public. The total number of respondents, including those from Romania and the Czech Republic, exceeded 300. While the POL-COM international team collaborated on the task both nationally and at the project level, the data analysis was completed by Vilma Milašiūnaitė (Lithuania, MRU).

Respondents in each group were asked to share their perspectives through respective questionnaires. The questionnaires, developed by the Czech Republic team, comprised both closed and open-ended questions. Here, only a portion of the data shared by Lithuanian respondents is presented.

Members of the public were invited to share their opinions on the contemporary communication of law enforcement officers. The part of the data from this study concerning the perspectives of law enforcement officers has already been presented in a previous publication [2]; here, in this paper, the emphasis is on the perspectives of members of the public.

An anonymous online survey was used to address the general research question (RQ2): What are the perceptions of the public regarding the communication of law enforcement officers today?

IV. PARTICIPANTS AND STUDY LIMITATIONS

A total number of respondents was 87, which is not high, and this comprises a limitation of the study. However, in a small country (Lithuanian population is approximately 2.7 mln), it is adequate for the

identification of specific trends; also, the limitation is to some degree compensated by the anonymous and volunteer participation in the study.

The average age of respondents was 38.8 years, with ages ranging from 19 to 70. Thus, the range includes adult people, whose life experiences are at least in principle, sufficient to be reflective of the interactions that were at the focus of the study. Yet, this is another aspect of limitations that stems from the fact that 41 respondents, which accounts for 47% of the sample, indicate that they have never had any encounters with police. Some of the entries were as follows: 'luckily, never', 'never, and I hope that continues'. However, we, researchers, are cautious not to discount these findings as making the other responses irrelevant. The encounters may have been very mundane, such as several (12 respondents', Fig.1) answers, such as the fact that they communicated with the police regarding the issue of a driver's license. Given that such interactions are a routine aspect of adult life, it is likely that other respondents had similar experiences but did not classify them as encounters with law enforcement due to their mundane nature. Therefore, we did not exclude the answers of those 41 respondents regarding other questions. 2 respondents did not provide any answer. Among the remaining 44 respondents, the interactions were regarding issues that reflect the inevitable course of life of any adult person; our respondents mentioned no extraordinary incidents, Fig. 1.

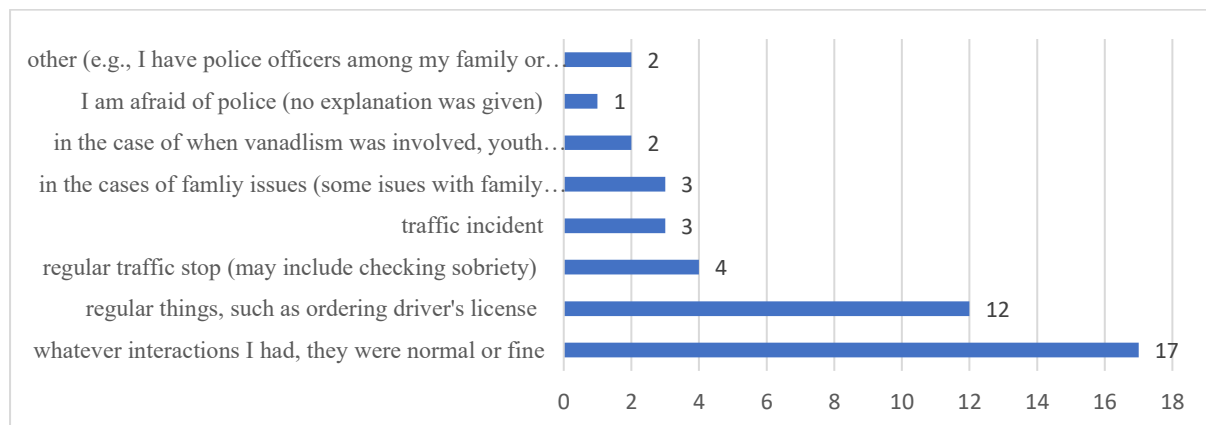


Fig. 1 The type of interactions/situations with the police that Lithuanian respondents experienced, in cases

V. MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC'S PERCEPTIONS OF LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS' PERFORMANCE

Respondents were asked to assess their experiences during interactions with law enforcement officers using a scale from 1 (extremely unsatisfactory/negative) to 5 (definitely satisfactory/positive). The average assessment was 4.01, indicating a generally positive perception of these interactions.

In addition to assessing their personal experiences, respondents were asked to rate the importance of various aspects in their interactions with law enforcement officers. These aspects were evaluated on a scale from 1 (not important) to 5 (definitely important).

As illustrated in Figure 2, the results demonstrate that all listed aspects were regarded as highly important by respondents. Notably, none of the aspects received an average score below 4, suggesting a strong consensus on the value of multiple dimensions of communication and conduct during such interactions.

Interestingly, when analyzing the distribution of respondents' assessments for the aspects that received the highest and lowest average scores, a notable pattern emerges. Although all aspects were assessed highly overall, it becomes evident that members of the public place relatively greater importance on confidence that a conflict will be resolved than on the empathy shown during the interaction.

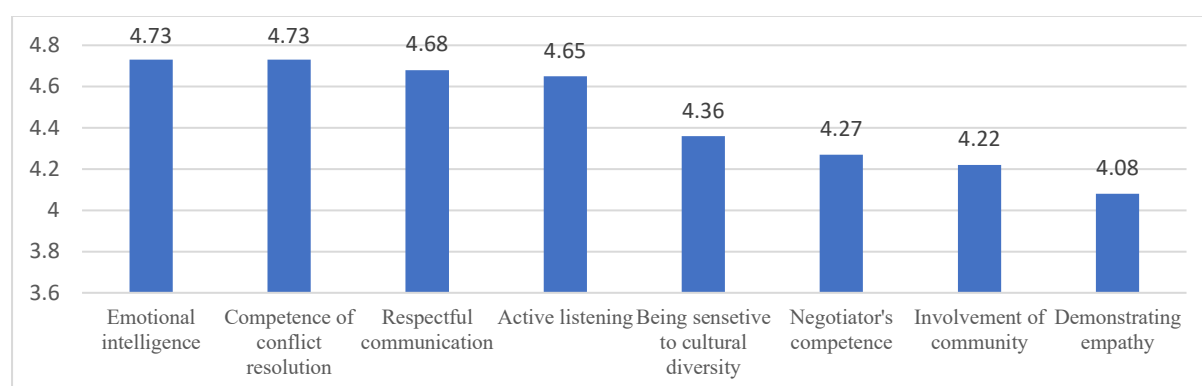


Fig. 2 Respondents' assessment regarding the importance during interactions with law enforcement (1-not important; 5-definitely important); here, the average of the assessment is indicated

This distinction, while subtle, suggests that outcome-oriented expectations—such as resolution of the issue—may take precedence over affective qualities in some public assessments. Figure 3 illustrates this difference in selection frequencies and highlights the nuanced priorities of the respondents.

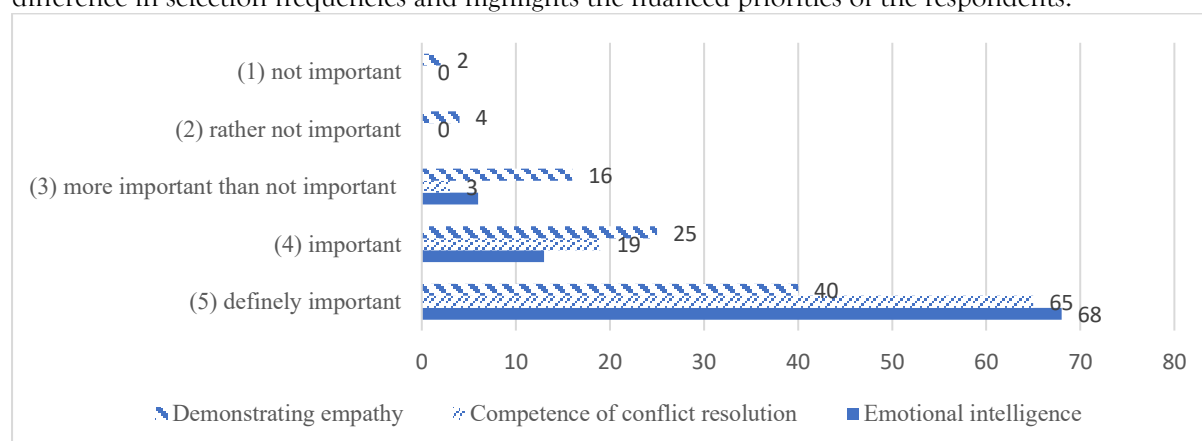


Fig. 3 Number of respondents who selected a certain assessment of what is important in interactions with the police

The findings suggest that, although empathy is recognized as an important component of interaction, respondents place comparatively greater emphasis on the ability of law enforcement officers to effectively resolve conflicts. In this context, respectful and emotionally intelligent communication is expected to be accompanied by competent and outcome-oriented action. Given that police are typically engaged in situations involving tension or conflict rather than routine or celebratory contexts, the professional execution of duties—particularly conflict resolution—is both an anticipated and valued aspect of officer performance. This indicates that the public's perception of communication quality includes not only interpersonal sensitivity but also the practical fulfillment of professional responsibilities.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

The theoretical considerations enabled answering the first RQ (What are recent theoretical considerations regarding communication and EI?). We may conclude that every day, here and now interactions, the way problems, experienced by public were addressed, and the quality of communication are the facets of the overall quality of performance of law enforcement institution. Which may, for many people (unless they are faced with serious breaches of their rights), reflect the quality of performance of this institution, and even the state itself. Thus, the quality of these interactions, the level at which EI was demonstrated as perceived by members of the public, is sometimes even reflective of the perceived quality of democracy, the environment worth living, at least to some extent.

The empirical study provides at least a preliminary answer to the second research question (RQ2): What are the perceptions of the public regarding the communication of law enforcement officers today?

Firstly, despite the study's limitations, the data suggest that the Lithuanian public generally holds a positive perception of law enforcement.

Secondly, a significant portion of respondents reported not having had any encounters with police. This may indicate at least two things: on the one hand, members of the public might not consider routine, everyday interactions—such as those related to obtaining a driver's license—as noteworthy encounters with law enforcement. On the other hand, this could reflect a generally positive situation within the country—where a substantial portion of the population does not require contact with police—possibly serving as an indicator of a well-organized, safe, well functioning society. This interpretation remains hypothetical rather than conclusive.

Thirdly, those respondents who had interacted with law enforcement officers evaluated their experiences rather positively. This serves as an additional argument in support of the claim that the state of public security and democratic governance, the general environment is relatively sound.

Fourthly, all aspects offered for assessment in the survey were considered important by respondents, with no item receiving an average score below 4 on a five-point scale. It is worth noting, however, that the importance assigned to the demonstration of empathy was assessed lower than the competence of conflict resolution—a core function of law enforcement.

Finally, the results underscore the need for quality interactions with law enforcement to encompass both EI and the effective performance of core professional duties. In this regard, the professionalism of contemporary law enforcement officers in a democratic society must be understood as integrative, comprising multiple dimensions of professional competence.

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