

# The Image of Law Enforcement Bodies: Current State and Practices to Improve It

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## ABSTRACT

In the current context of heightened economic and socio-political conflicts around the world, there is a crisis of confidence in the state institutions that provide public security. The authors of the article consider the problem of forming the image of law enforcement agencies in the Russian Federation and abroad as a way to increase confidence in the state system. An analysis of the current state of the Russian law enforcement system's image is presented as well as the analysis of some reasons for the negative attitude of the population towards employees of penitentiary institutions and the role of mass media in shaping the image of law enforcement agencies. The analysis of the current state of the law enforcement system's image is supplemented by a review of the results of studies of the reputation of law enforcement bodies in the US and European countries. Successful domestic and foreign practices of reputation enhancement and improvement of interaction with the population are analyzed, such as: informing on the activity and employees of law enforcement agencies in social networks, interaction with the population through specialized electronic portals and social networks, popularization of thematic books, films and TV series etc. The authors of the article proposed a set of measures to form a positive image of the law enforcement system, increase public confidence in the law enforcement agencies of the Russian Federation in the framework of the Center for Public Security and Law Enforcement Research at the North-West Institute of Management of the RANEPA.

**Keywords:** law enforcement, public safety, image, image improvement practices, media

## Introduction

In the current context of aggravating economic and socio-political conflicts, special requirements are imposed on the activities of law enforcement bodies and human rights organizations. They are reflected in the shaping of the image of a particular department or organization as a whole, as well as its employees as representatives of a department or a human rights organization.

The analysis of the current state of the image of the law enforcement system and the search for best practices to improve its reputation are promising areas of interdisciplinary research in the field of maintaining public security. Analyzing the image of law enforcement bodies requires an integrated approach and taking into account various indicators that can directly or indirectly affect the image of both a particular agency and the law enforcement system as a whole.

## The current state of the image of law enforcement bodies in Russia and abroad

The image of the law enforcement system means "an emotionally colored image of a law enforcement body, purposefully created and having a psychological impact on various social groups"<sup>1</sup>.

As V.V. Mikhailova notes, "depending on how high and full-fledged the image of the authorities is, the decisions taken by the authorities will be supported by the population, which ultimately makes it possible to compare the image and social efficiency of the authorities"<sup>2</sup>.

In Russia, according to the All-Russian Center for the Study of Public Opinion (hereinafter — VTSIOM)<sup>3</sup> as of 2021, the public assessment of the institution of law enforcement bodies demonstrates positive dynamics in a number of areas:

- the index of approval of law enforcement bodies has increased by 36 points since 2010 (from -14 to +22);
- the level of trust in the police in the regions has increased by 49 points since 2012 (from -26 to +23).

<sup>1</sup> Mikhailova V.V. Police Image as a Factor of Effective Dialogue between the Population and Authorities. Civil society in Russia: challenges of our time : collection of scientific works Ulyanovsk : Ulyanovsk State Technical University. 2016. P. 473–476.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Expanded selection of VTSIOM data: for the thematic issue "Trust" [Electronic resource] No. 7, 2021. URL: [https://profi.wciom.ru/fileadmin/file/nauka/podborka/rasshirennaya\\_podborka\\_dannyh\\_wciom\\_022021.pdf](https://profi.wciom.ru/fileadmin/file/nauka/podborka/rasshirennaya_podborka_dannyh_wciom_022021.pdf) (date of access: 01.07.2021).

Also, according to the study conducted by the All-Russian Research Institute of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russia in 2020, there is a positive increase by 12.7 points in the assessment of the security of the population (from 38.4 to 51.1)<sup>4</sup>. Thus, one can observe a significant positive shift in the attitude of the population towards the law enforcement sphere.

At the same time, despite the positive developments, the absolute indicators of trust in law enforcement bodies are relatively low<sup>5</sup>. This is reflected in the approval index for the activities of public institutions, such as the Russian army, the judicial system and law enforcement bodies (see figure).

Based on the data presented in the chart, it can be noted that the Russian population as a whole positively assesses the activities of the Russian army, estimations of the activities of law enforcement bodies are more neutral, and the dynamics of the evaluation of the judicial system remains in a negative range.

The analysis of the reasons for the negative attitude of the population towards law enforcement officers is the subject of many studies. Thus, O. N. Yezhova and A. P. Semikina revealed that about 70% of citizens assess their level of trust in the employees of the penitentiary system as average and below average<sup>6</sup>.

At the same time, respondents noted that they receive information about the Federal Penitentiary Service of the Russian Federation in 55% of cases from unreliable sources, such as the press, television and radio broadcasts, social networks, movies, rumors and conversations with friends<sup>7</sup>. A.V. Lyapanov noted that the negative attitude of the population and the mass media towards the employees of the penitentiary system may be due to the transfer of the public "stigma" of convicts to people working with them<sup>8</sup>. Researchers emphasize that stereotypical ideas about law enforcement officers can become persistently negative in conditions of social tension<sup>9, 10</sup>. These ideas can be reinforced by some informational confrontation between media representatives and law enforcement bodies<sup>11</sup>. On the one hand, law enforcement officials may avoid contact with representatives of the press due to cases of inaccurate reflection of certain facts and, as a result, negative attitudes towards journalists. On the other hand, representatives of the media seek to detect injustice and bring it up for public discussion, and avoiding communication with them by law enforcement officials can be interpreted as concealing important and even sensational information<sup>12</sup>, and any mistakes — as malicious intent<sup>13, 14</sup>.

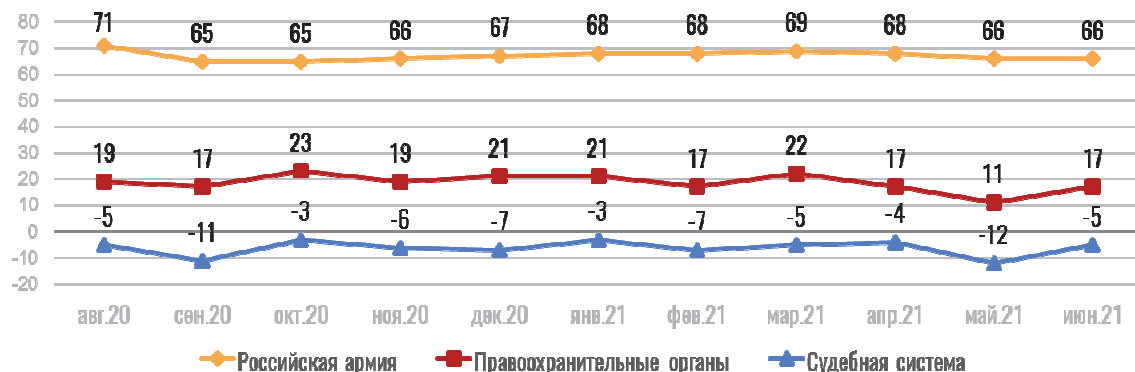


Fig. The Approval Index of Public Institutions According to Russian Public Opinion Research Center (VTsIOM) for August 2020 — June 2021 (◆ – Russian Army; ■ – Law-Enforcement Authorities; ▲ – Judicial System)

<sup>4</sup> Assessment of police activity in the Russian Federation in 2020 "Research Institute of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russia" [Electronic resource] 2020. URL: [мвд.рф/publicopinion](http://мвд.рф/publicopinion) (date of access: 01.07.2021).

<sup>5</sup> Activities of public institutions. All-Russian Center for the Study of Public Opinion [Electronic resource] 2021. URL: [wciom.ru/ratings/deyatelnost-obshchestvennykh-institutov](http://wciom.ru/ratings/deyatelnost-obshchestvennykh-institutov) (date of access: 01.07.2021).

<sup>6</sup> Ezhova O.N., Semikina A.P. Image of an Employee of Penitentiary System: Psychological Aspect. Bulletin of Samara Law Institute. 2020. No. 4 (40). P. 113–120.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Lyapanov A.V. Problems of Improving the Image of the Penitentiary System [Electronic resource] Bulletin of The Penitentiary System. 2014. No. 1 (140). URL: <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/problemy-povysheniya-imidzha-ugolovno-ispolnitelnoy-sistemy> (date of reference: 01.07.2021).

<sup>9</sup> Anufrieva D.A. Perception of an Employee of Internal Affairs Bodies as a Factor Influencing the Formation of the Image of the Police. Bulletin of St. Petersburg University of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russia. 2020. No.4. P. 215–219. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.35750/2071-8284-2020-4-215-219>

<sup>10</sup> Miroshnichenko O.N., Mikhaylova M.V. Shaping a Positive Image of the Public Civil Servant: Domestic and Foreign Experience. Bulletin of Chuvash University. 2013. No. 4. P. 147–156.

<sup>11</sup> Ovsyannikova A.A. The Image of the Bailiff in the Media: Problems and Ways of Improvement. Bulletin of Enforcement Proceedings. 2018. No. 2. P. 98–115.

<sup>12</sup> Vasiliev V.L. Legal Psychology. Saint Petersburg: Piter, 2002. 291 p.

<sup>13</sup> Khamidova I.V. Conflict Situations in Relations between Mass Media and Internal Affairs Bodies, Their Causes and Consequences. Bodies of Internal Affairs and a Society in Russia: problems of Interaction in the Past and Present: Collection of Findings of Regional Interdepartmental Round Table (Ryazan, 21 May 2008). Edited by V.I. Chernyshov, N.M. Demko, I.V. Khamidova. Ryazan: Ryazan Branch of the Moscow State University of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russia. 2009. P. 4.

<sup>14</sup> Antoshkina K.P. The Image of a Bailiff in the Media. Bulletin of Enforcement Proceedings. 2017. No. 2. P. 113–127.

In the USA, public opinion on the activities of certain public institutions is regularly monitored. For example, the international analytical and consulting agency Gallup annually polls American public on the professions they consider the most ethical and honest. It can be noted that the image of the police is quite high — police officers are in the TOP-5 professions<sup>15</sup>, although from 2016 to 2019, trust in them ranged from 50 to 60%<sup>16</sup>. Since 2020 and to the present, the situation in the United States has changed dramatically, among other reasons due to the social movement “Black Lives Matter”, which calls for the fight against violence on the part of law enforcement bodies<sup>17</sup>. The consequences of distrust in law enforcement bodies are diverse: an increase in the crime rate; tougher penalties; the refusal on the part of the population to report crimes and help investigators<sup>18</sup>; the refusal on the part of juries to charge or convict; the emergence of vigilante groups, etc<sup>19</sup>.

In Europe, a global survey of public confidence in the police was carried out in 2014<sup>20</sup>, which led to the following conclusions.

1. Global trust in the police positively correlates with trust in political and legal institutions.
2. Global trust in the police is closely linked to trust in its work and trust in procedural justice.
3. The ratings of the local police influence the opinion of the police in general.
4. The higher the social trust in the country — trust in strangers, in their justice and goodwill, the higher the trust of people in the police, in its procedural fairness, as well as trust in its work.
5. Dissatisfaction with the way the police has treated someone leads to a decrease in confidence in the procedural fairness of the police and to a decrease in confidence in its work.

Leading researchers of the image of law enforcement bodies note the need to use tactics of advanced management of the process of forming attitudes and assessments of the public<sup>21</sup>, high-quality information about the activities of public institutions and the algorithm for appeals in emergency situations<sup>22</sup>.

## Analysis of domestic and foreign practices for improving the image of law enforcement bodies

The analysis of foreign practices of shaping a positive image of law enforcement bodies allows us to note their focus on “humanizing” a law enforcement officer. The public relations departments of the US police, together with universities, organize annual public opinion polls among local residents to assess their satisfaction with the local police and other law enforcement bodies<sup>23</sup>. The public is also solicited for suggestions on the ways the local police department can provide a higher level of service and a more positive perception of employees when interacting with local residents<sup>24</sup>. Social networks are actively used not only to inform about the activities of law enforcement bodies and for direct interaction with the community, but also to promote new law enforcement officers in the local media (biography, level of education and training at the academy, personal qualities, hobbies)<sup>25</sup>.

Also, heads of law enforcement bodies tend to make frequent public appearances and attend public events to increase public trust and maintain a positive image of law enforcement officials<sup>26</sup>.

In the United States, the practice of debunking myths about the police work, and what is happening behind prison walls, is successfully applied, aimed at increasing the transparency of the work of law enforcement bodies. In particular, the books

<sup>15</sup> Gallup’s “Profession Ratings for Having Very High/High Honesty and Ethical Standards”, 2016–2020 [Electronic Resource] URL: <https://news.gallup.com/poll/274673/nurses-continue-rate-highest-honesty-ethics.aspx> (date of access: 01.07.2021).

<sup>16</sup> Gallup’s “American’s Ratings of Honesty and Ethics of Police”, 1977–2019 [Electronic Resource] URL: <https://news.gallup.com/poll/187874/americans-faith-honesty-ethics-police-rebounds.aspx> (date of access: 01.07.2021).

<sup>17</sup> Gingles D. Black Lives Matter. In: A Scientific Framework for Compassion and Social Justice. 2021. P. 38–44.

<sup>18</sup> Muller C., Schrage D. Mass Imprisonment and Trust in the Law. The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences. 2014. No. 1. P. 139–158.

<sup>19</sup> Robinson P.H., Robinson S.M. Shadow Vigilantes: How Distrust in the Justice System Breeds a New Kind of Lawlessness. NY, Prometheus, 2018. 344 p.

<sup>20</sup> Staubli S. Trust in and Attitudes towards the Police: Empirical Analyses for Europe with a Special Focus on Switzerland, 2014 [Electronic resource] URL: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/280317880\\_Trust\\_in\\_and\\_Attitudes\\_towards\\_the\\_Police\\_Empirical\\_Analyses\\_for\\_Europe\\_with\\_a\\_Special\\_Focus\\_on\\_Switzerland](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/280317880_Trust_in_and_Attitudes_towards_the_Police_Empirical_Analyses_for_Europe_with_a_Special_Focus_on_Switzerland) (date of access: 01.07.2021).

<sup>21</sup> Robinson P.H., Robinson S.M. Shadow Vigilantes: How Distrust in the Justice System Breeds a New Kind of Lawlessness. NY, Prometheus, 2018. 344 p.

<sup>22</sup> Staubli S. Trust in and Attitudes towards the Police: Empirical Analyses for Europe with a Special Focus on Switzerland, 2014 [Electronic resource] URL: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/280317880\\_Trust\\_in\\_and\\_Attitudes\\_towards\\_the\\_Police\\_Empirical\\_Analyses\\_for\\_Europe\\_with\\_a\\_Special\\_Focus\\_on\\_Switzerland](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/280317880_Trust_in_and_Attitudes_towards_the_Police_Empirical_Analyses_for_Europe_with_a_Special_Focus_on_Switzerland) (date of access: 01.07.2021).

<sup>23</sup> Some Solutions to the Reputation Crisis Impacting Policing. The e-newsletter of the COPS Office, 2016 [Electronic resource] URL: [cops.usdoj.gov/html/dispatch/09-2016/reputation\\_crisis.asp](https://cops.usdoj.gov/html/dispatch/09-2016/reputation_crisis.asp) (date of access: 01.07.2021).

<sup>24</sup> Winkunle O. Image Management in the Nigeria Police Force: Prospects and Challenges, 2020.

<sup>25</sup> Mayes L. Social Media and Community-Oriented Policing: Examining the Organizational Image Construction of Municipal Police on Twitter and Facebook. Police Practice and Research. 2020. No. 22. P. 1–18.

<sup>26</sup> Some Solutions to the Reputation Crisis Impacting Policing. The e-newsletter of the COPS Office, 2016 [Electronic resource] URL: [cops.usdoj.gov/html/dispatch/09-2016/reputation\\_crisis.asp](https://cops.usdoj.gov/html/dispatch/09-2016/reputation_crisis.asp) (date of access: 01.07.2021).

“Doing Prison Work” by Alanie Crowley, “Media, Crime, and Criminal Justice” by Ray Surett and the autobiography “The Crime Fighter” by Jack Maple and Chris Mitchell are devoted to this issue.

In Estonia, the Ministry of Justice in 2008 approved the Code of Ethics for Prison Officers, which describes in great detail the various aspects of the work of employees of the penitentiary system<sup>27</sup>. The main difference from the Russian counterpart is a detailed description of what behavior can be considered corrupt, incorrect in communicating with colleagues and prisoners, unacceptable when interacting with the media and on the Internet, as well as the rules of conduct for employees outside working hours. In addition, since 2005, Estonia has been implementing the “Electronic Police” program, where a set of technical means is installed in each patrol car, which allows police officers to access all the necessary information<sup>28</sup>. In this way, the headquarters coordinates the movement and location of each employee in a real time mode. Also, any citizen has the opportunity to leave official requests, monitor the proceedings of his case, and pay fees on the official website of the Estonian police. As a result, in 2012 Estonia stated that the number of murders has significantly decreased, and confidence in the police has increased enormously<sup>29</sup>.

In the UK in 2017, the Child Sexual Exploitation and Policing Knowledge Hub published a manual for law enforcement officers on the principles of police communication with children and young people so as to establish trusting contact with them and provide assistance as effectively as possible<sup>30</sup>.

Strengthening the academic training of law enforcement officials with regular courses, such as on verbal and non-verbal communication, crisis intervention, de-escalation and stress reduction training, as well as on the effective treatment of people with emotional disorders, is a promising area of development for law enforcement personnel, which has a positive effect on public confidence in law enforcement system<sup>31</sup>.

In Russia there also exist successful practices that contribute to a positive impact on the image of law enforcement bodies, such as:

- a. news about the success of law enforcement officers in preventing crimes and catching criminals (headlines with the words: “saved”, “helped”, “returned to the owner”, “thanked”, “excellent job”);
- b. information about the activities carried out within the structure of law enforcement bodies to inform the public about their work (headings with the words: “awarded”, “did a good job”, “improved statistical indicators”, “improved the situation”);
- c. coverage of events by official departments in social networks (Odnoklassniki, VKontakte, Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, etc.) in which it is very important to answer questions and comments from citizens, to be in direct contact with them<sup>32</sup>.

In general, it is important to note that the availability, informativeness and clarity for citizens of the official resources of law enforcement bodies is an important factor in increasing trust in them.

Themed films and series are a powerful channel for shaping of images and role models of law enforcement officers. Among them, “Streets of Broken Lanterns”, “Kamenskaya”, “Cold Case”, “Bellman”, “Convict”, “At gunpoint”, “Trace” and many others. In such series, scriptwriters and directors try to reproduce the everyday life of a law enforcement body, forming the image of a “hard worker” — smart, resourceful, decent, principled.

## Discussion

Shaping of a positive image of law enforcement bodies in perception of civil society is an urgent problem of the law enforcement system of many countries around the world. The existing practices of studying public opinion, creating the image of both individual employees and the entire law enforcement system as a whole using social networks and media platforms demonstrate positive dynamics of public opinion. Research and development of successful practices require a comprehensive solution, involvement of a wide range of experts and high-quality interaction of law enforcement bodies, the media and public organizations.

In order to implement a comprehensive solution to the problem of shaping a positive image of law enforcement bodies in 2021, the Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration has established a Centre for Public Security and Law Enforcement Studies. The Center organizes interaction between the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Investigation Committee, the Federal Penitentiary Service, Interpol, Rosgvardiya (the Russian guard), the Prosecutor’s Office, human rights organizations, as well as youth social and political associations.

<sup>27</sup> Code of Ethics for Prison Officers (Estonia) [Electronic resource] URL: [www.vangla.ee](http://www.vangla.ee) (date of access: 01.07.2021).

<sup>28</sup> The New Estonian e-Police System Is a Sight to Behold, 2017 [Electronic resource] URL: [www.e-estonia.com](http://www.e-estonia.com) (date of access: 01.07.2021).

<sup>29</sup> How the Ministries of Internal Affairs were reformed in Georgia and Estonia [Electronic resource] Kommersant Power. No. 15. 16.04.2012. p. 28. URL: [www.kommersant.ru/doc/1916117](http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/1916117) (date of access: 01.07.2021).

<sup>30</sup> Working Together to Enhance Police Responses to Child Sexual Exploitation and Related Vulnerabilities by CSE and Policing Knowledge Hub [Electronic resource] URL: [www.uobcsepolicinghub.org.uk/hub-resources](http://www.uobcsepolicinghub.org.uk/hub-resources) (date of access: 01.07.2021).

<sup>31</sup> Some Solutions to the Reputation Crisis Impacting Policing [Electronic resource] The e-newsletter of the COPS Office, 2016. URL: [cops.usdoj.gov/html/dispatch/09-2016/reputation\\_crisis.asp](http://cops.usdoj.gov/html/dispatch/09-2016/reputation_crisis.asp) (date of access: 01.07.2021).

<sup>32</sup> Tishchenko A.V. Confidence in the Police: Value, Factors, Prospects of Formation: thesis of Candidate of Social Sciences: 22.00.04. Adyghe State University, Stavropol, 2020. 214 p.

The main tasks of the Center include: 1) conducting research to find best practices of interaction between law enforcement bodies and human rights organizations in order to improve communication and cooperation between the police and civil society institutions by analyzing the role of both parties and making suggestions on how to manage interaction to ensure successful partnership; 2) inviting independent experts to conduct research, collect data and give recommendations on the use of analytical tools and techniques in the field of increasing public confidence in the law enforcement system; 3) creating and maintaining a system for monitoring effectiveness and quality control in the field of public security; 4) creating guidelines for law enforcement bodies and public organizations based on a thorough review of research literature, statistics and law enforcement practice; 5) implementation of programs of additional education and advanced training in the field of ensuring public safety and the quality of interaction between law enforcement bodies and public structures (formal and informal), taking into account international experience.

## Conclusion

In order to increase the prestige of law enforcement bodies, a comprehensive solution is needed that will combine large-scale research of public opinion, creation of a forecasting model with an eye to the influence of various factors on the reputation of the law enforcement system and the formation of effective practices that promote public confidence in security and law enforcement bodies. Implementation of such a comprehensive solution is possible provided that effective cooperation is built between law enforcement bodies and the media, educational and public organizations.

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