

REPORTED COMPLIANCE IN POLICE-CIVILIAN ENCOUNTERS: THE ROLES OF ACCOMMODATION AND TRUST IN BULGARIA AND THE UNITED STATES

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Recent research has demonstrated that, for young adults, officers' accommodative practices are potent predictors of civilians' attributed trust in police, and their perceived likelihood of compliance with police requests. The present study continued this line of work in the United States and Bulgaria. The latter context is not only intriguing as little communication research has been conducted there, but is significant in being heralded as having one of the most corrupt governments and law enforcement institutions in the European Community. Besides differences between nations, results revealed that for U.S.A. participants, officer accommodativeness indirectly predicted civilian compliance through trust. For those in Bulgaria, however, only direct relationships were found – between officer accommodation and civilian trust, and between accommodation and compliance. The latter finding is fairly unique and the theoretical and practical significance of these are discussed.

Scholars and law enforcement officials have, for years, known that a key factor in the prevention of criminal activity is the degree to which civilians and police work together cooperatively and proactively (Bayley, 1994). However, residents in many communities sustain negative images of local enforcement, and experience problematic communication with associated agencies, thus hin-

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dering their willingness to assist law enforcement in combating crime (Sunshine & Tyler, 2003a). Tyler and Huo (2002) have suggested that individuals' willingness to defer to legal authorities – such as police officers – is, in part, shaped by motive-based trust. They also note that authorities' ability to gain compliance from community members may be accomplished by treating them in ways that encourage judgments that procedures are fair, and that the authorities' motives are benevolent. What Tyler and Huo refer to as dignified and respectful treatment, we regard as features of communication accommodation. Gaining an understanding of the role of accommodative practices, trust, and compliance in police-civilian encounters is complicated by regional, cultural, and historical differences.

Due to our continued interest in understanding the extent to which these differences – as well as potential similarities – influence attitudes toward law enforcement (see also Barker et al. 2008; Giles et al., 2006; Hajek, Giles, Barker, Makoni, & Choi, 2008; Hajek et al., 2008a, b), we launched an investigation in Bulgaria – a country with a history rich in social and economic change and one with, and at times, a troubled history as regards police-civilian affairs. Interestingly, too, little communication data have emerged from this nation, let alone as it relates to law enforcement – a topic also not having received much published social scientific treatment. As a point of contrast, we incorporate an American sample as well, to test a model of behavioral and attitudinal factors in police-civilian interaction. The North American context is included given its similarly turbulent history of police-civilian relations. What follow are historical backgrounds relevant to police-civilian interactions in Bulgaria and the United States.

Bulgaria

The country of Bulgaria has sustained a great deal of change in the past century. Its history – replete not only with conflict but also achievements – has created an interesting dynamic between the people and the government. This dynamic has been fueled by a challenged economy, a tough and combative police force, and a populace that is increasingly aware of human rights issues.

Mikhail Gorbachev's reform period was first felt in Bulgaria during the time of *perestroika* (meaning “rebuilding”) in the late 1980s. Soon after in November 1989, demonstrations on ecological issues were staged in Sofia, and these soon broadened into a general campaign for political reform. In February 1990, the Communist Party voluntarily gave up its claim on power and, in June 1990, the first free elections since 1931 were held in Bulgaria. The next year, in July 1991, a new Constitution was adopted, in which there was an elected President and a Prime Minister accountable to the legislature. Bulgaria today is a Parliamentary Republic (Kadar, 2001; Nachev, 2004).

Like the other post-communist regimes in Eastern Europe, Bulgaria found the transition to capitalism more painful than expected. A variety of government styles controlled the country one after another, guided either by the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) or by the newly established democratic parties like the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF). In 1997, the BSP government collapsed and the UDF came into power. Unemployment, however, remained high and the