Mechanisms for Ensuring Transparency and Accountability of Police Operations: A Comparative Study

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Abstract

The article aims to conduct a comparative analysis of approaches to the definition and implementation of mechanisms for ensuring transparency and accountability in police operations and to identify best practices. The research used the comparative analysis method, the formal-legal method, and the content analysis method. It was established that principal mechanisms of ensuring transparency in police operations involve providing open access to information through digital channels available to the public; ensuring public participation and control over police activities; implementing interaction with mass media. The principal approach to ensuring the accountability of police operations is the evaluation of police activity. The work proved that enhancing transparency and accountability can be achieved through various mechanisms, including implementing a top-notch electronic platform for citizens, as demonstrated by the UK police website. Adopting the concept of community policing is another effective strategy to promote these principles, as well as utilising social networks for interaction with citizens and carrying out qualitative and quantitative evaluations of police work, such as police effectiveness, efficiency, and legitimacy assessments. The findings of this study have the potential to provide valuable insights for law enforcement agencies in Ukraine and other countries by facilitating the integration of successful practices into their policing operations etc.

Keywords: transparency, accountability, police, electronic platforms, community policing, social networks

Introduction

Transparency and accountability are fundamental law enforcement principles, yet adherence to these doctrines frequently sparks contentious debate. This is related to the specifics of police activity, namely: police officers must protect the public, whereas police have the authority to limit citizens' rights and freedoms; police must work transparently, and cannot disclose the entire information (Yesberg, Brunton-Smith & Bradford, 2023). Accountability involves, among other things, a proper evaluation of police officers' activities,

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approaches to which are also controversial (Chanysheva et al., 2019). In particular, the approach that defines citizens' level of trust as the key criterion for evaluating police activity is quite subjective. Assessments that rely solely on numerical metrics do not always provide a conclusive indication and do not contribute to increasing the motivation of police officers (Dragan et al., 2020; Kyprianides et al., 2021). In addition, operating conditions and modern trends, which tend to change rapidly, put additional pressure on police officers, requiring them to adapt to changes (Petrenko et al., 2019). It also creates new challenges in the process of ensuring transparency and accountability.

Legislation and practice of different states regarding the definition of mechanisms for ensuring transparency and accountability of police operations may differ significantly. Schaap (2021), examining approaches to building trust strategies in the police in England and Wales, Denmark, and the Netherlands, notes that, despite all countries being located in Western Europe, they represent dramatically different approaches to understanding the relationship between the public and the police. In this connection, de Maillard and Terpstra (2021) highlight differences in policing in developed and transition economies. The researcher conducts a comparative analysis of the implementation of community policing in different countries, noting the differences explained by the model of police activity introduced in the country (centralised, decentralised, mixed), the degree of confidence in law enforcement, the existence of a post-war condition within the community, receptiveness to external impact. etc. On the other hand, scrutinising the encounters of diverse nations enables us to pinpoint best practices for ensuring transparency and accountability, which can later be adapted to the conditions of a specific country.

The article aims to conduct a comparative analysis of approaches to the definition and implementation of mechanisms for ensuring transparency and accountability in police operations and to identify best practices.

The objectives of the study are as follows:

- To compare the principal mechanisms for ensuring transparency in police operations through probing into the approaches: 1) to the introduction of open access to information, in particular through electronic platforms for citizens; 2) to ensure public participation and control over police activities; 3) to interact with mass media.
- To compare the principal mechanisms of ensuring accountability in the work of the police through the analysis of approaches to the evaluation of police operations.
- Identify best practices for ensuring transparency and accountability in the police's work.

Literature review

Mechanisms of police transparency and accountability are a topical topic for research in numerous countries associated with certain problems in this area. Issues frequently exhibit specificity and peculiarity corresponding to a particular nation. Therefore, scholars' approaches to tackling this topic can differ significantly. Bloch-Wehba (2021) notes that opaqueness within the realm of law enforcement is an issue in the United States of America and is primarily related to the non-transparent operation of surveillance technologies utilised by the police, as well as insufficient oversight by the courts and the public.

Lee, Taylor, and Willis (2019) examine police transparency and accountability, focusing on public perception of body-worn cameras. Researchers note numerous examples that testify to the benefits of using such cameras, particularly in enhancing transparency and accountability. At the same time, some citizens' reactions to the cameras indicate dissatisfaction. Tregle et al. (2022) document the proliferation of police body cameras to promote transparency and accountability. Researchers are probing into the problematic aspects of legislation that obliges the release of video footage from such cameras.

Tanko (2019) investigates the emergence of a model of cooperation between the police and the public, noting the effectiveness of the concept of "community policing". According to the researcher, implementing the said approach in Ukrainian practice will entail the spread of the service model of police units, increase the social responsibility of the community, and contribute to improving the image of the police.

De Graaf and Meijer (2019) point out that the use of social networks contributes to new clashes of values in public administration. To that end, the police directly face the said negative changes. However, as noted by researchers, they do not have a systematic understanding and strategies for overcoming such conflicts. What is more, Kryzhanovska (2020) suggested that the use of social media in the police's work can indeed lead to certain problems regarding security and justice. On the other hand, the researcher sees in their use a significant potential for establishing mutual relations between the police and citizens based on partnership. With all the mentioned aspects, Bullock, Garland and Coupar (2021) also do not provide a clear evaluation of the use of social media in policing. A critical takeaway from these analyses is that the researchers cite both opportunities and limitations of the above phenomenon.

The conducted literature review allows us to note that studies most often reveal one approach to ensuring transparency and accountability of police operations in a specific country. At the same time, the share of studies devoted to

comparing accountability and transparency mechanisms in different countries conducted to identify best practices is insignificant. The current study aims to bridge this gap by conducting a comparative analysis of mechanisms for ensuring transparency and accountability in different countries, considering diverse areas (providing access to information, working with the media, public control, performance evaluation, etc.).

Methodology
Research procedure

The research procedure consists of conducting a comparative analysis of mechanisms for ensuring accountability and transparency in police operations in the sequence as follows. At the first stage of the study, a comparison of the principal mechanisms for ensuring transparency in police operations was carried out by examining the approaches to introducing open access to information. It is worth noting that special attention was paid to introducing open access for citizens through electronic platforms. Their benefits and drawbacks, alongside optimal procedures, were disclosed through an examination of the British police's website Police.uk and the website of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) of Ukraine.

In the second stage of the research, a comparison of the principal mechanisms for ensuring transparency in the work of the police was carried out through the analysis of approaches to ensuring public participation and control over police operations. The introduction of the concept of community policing in many countries was noted. Furthermore, the peculiarities of the formation and activity of public councils in Ukraine were revealed.

In the third stage of the study, a comparison of the principal mechanisms for ensuring transparency in police operations was carried out by examining the approaches to interaction with the mass media. Special attention in this unit was devoted to the use of digital media, in particular, social platforms, in police operations across various countries worldwide.

In the fourth stage of the study, a comparison of the principal mechanisms for ensuring accountability in the police's work was performed by analysing approaches to evaluating police operations. The approach introduced in the United Kingdom by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) was characterised, by PEEL (police effectiveness, efficiency, legitimacy) as the key assessment tool. Furthermore, the approach to assessment implemented within the framework of public expertise in Ukraine is characterised. Legally defined approaches to evaluating the police operations in Ukraine are highlighted. The advantages and disadvantages of the Ukrainian approach to evaluating police operations and the PEEL approach were identified.

Sample

The sample of countries for the study consists of Ukraine, the United Kingdom, France, Denmark, the Netherlands, Northern Ireland, the United States of America (USA), and others. Ukraine was chosen as a state where the active transformation of the law enforcement system is taking place because of the country's European integration, globalisation processes, and other factors. The choice of other countries is explained by the successful mechanisms for ensuring transparency and accountability found in their police practice.

Methods

The leading research method is a comparative analysis, which made it possible to compare the experience of Ukraine and other countries worldwide in ensuring accountability and transparency in police operations and identifying best practices. Moreover, the formal legal method was applied in the study, where legislative decisions and documents were analysed (including the development of public councils, etc.). The content analysis method was applied to evaluate the information presented in the PEEL report of the West Midland Police and the report based on the results of public expertise in Ukraine.

Results

One of the main principles of police operations in many countries is transparency, which involves ***informing state and local authorities as well as the public*** about the activities of the police in protecting the rights and freedoms of citizens, combating crime, and ensuring security by providing access and publishing relevant information. To date, ensuring the transparency of police operations is a challenging task without utilising information technologies to provide open access to complete, reliable, and comprehensive information in the manner specified by current legislation. With the use of such technologies, citizens can familiarise themselves with the content of documents and decisions made in the field of police activity, to be informed about the essence of police work and the results of such work. Furthermore, it is imperative to satisfy the needs of citizens in providing information affecting their rights through the possibility of submitting appeals in a form convenient for citizens (in person, by mail, online, etc.) and receiving an urgent and comprehensive response to them. Given that a person of any age and socio-economic status may need information about police operations, it is imperative to ensure the implementation of a practical and comprehensible means of granting access to such data. In particular, the disparity and inconsistency of information sources can hinder their

accessibility. Thus, creating a unified information platform with a clear interface is a viable solution.

An example of a successful approach to establishing an effective information platform for providing citizens with access to information is the official website of the police of Great Britain (Police.uk, 2023). The users of this resource have extensive opportunities to acquire and request information about the following:

- Various options for interaction between citizens and the police (via telephone, online, anonymously), including when the situation is urgent.
- Support services for various categories of citizens: children, youth, offenders and their families, victims and witnesses of offenses, and business representatives.
- Forms of interaction between the police and citizens intending to be volunteers.
- Existing types of crimes and related advice.
- Description of the police system as a whole and by region.
- Statistical data on crime, including the geographical indication of crime quantity in certain localities, etc.

Comparing the aforementioned website with the official website of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine (Portal of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, 2023), it can be noted that the website of the Ministry of Internal Affairs also provides information on various areas of its activities, regulatory documents as well as citizens' opportunities to apply through various channels such as personal reception, electronic form submission, telephone hotline assistance or written communication, etc. That said, the mechanisms and procedures for representing the interests of the public deserve special attention, since ensuring the transparency of the police operations also involves ***public participation and public control***. Whereas in the UK much attention is paid to ensuring the interests of the public through a wide range of forms of interaction between citizens and the police, engaging various volunteer opportunities, in Ukraine the mechanisms for representing the interests of the public include:

- Citizens' appeals.
- Possibility of accessing public information.
- Conducting consultations with citizens.
- Public Council.
- Public expertise.

- Promoting the development of civil society (Portal of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, 2023).

Various forms of interaction between citizens and the police in the UK are carried out, primarily within the "community policing" concept, introduced in many other countries of the world. This concept envisages cooperation between citizens and the police and is primarily focused on proactive operations as regards crime prevention. In numerous countries, the principles of the community policing concept are implemented through special tools, the specific composition of which may vary depending on the country. Thus, in countries such as the United Kingdom, France, Denmark, and the Netherlands, municipal (local) security councils, specialised (local) police teams are functioning, various training programs are deployed, robust consultation activities are carried out, and crime prevention and monitoring measures are carried out (Police.uk, 2023; OSCE, 2023; Centrum voor Criminaliteitspreventie en Veiligheid, 2023; European Commission, 2023).

In Ukraine, collaboration between civilians and law enforcement is established through various means, including public council operations, created under the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine (Portal of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, 2023). Such councils are mediators between state bodies and the population, and their main goal is to defend the interests of citizens and their coordination with the interests of the state, local self-government bodies, public organisations, etc., in the process of forming state policy. Public councils inform society about their activities, perform consultative and expert functions, and strengthen governmental activities' transparency. However, ensuring transparency through the activity of public councils, which is currently implemented, had to go through quite a long path, during which the development of Ukrainian legislation took place. Thus, in the early 2000s, the number of such councils was scarce, and the relevant authority determined the nature of their interaction with the public. The establishment of public councils at both central and local government entities was mandated as early as 2004 (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2009). In the future, the rights and capabilities of public councils developed in 2010, when they received the right to submit proposals regarding the preparation of normative legal acts drafts that must be considered in a mandatory manner, as well as control the activities of the relevant authority. A significant step towards optimising community activities, primarily because of increasing the transparency of the election process, was made in 2019. It should be noted that online voting made it possible to elect a public council (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2023).

Furthermore, increasing transparency is carried out through such a direction of police activity as ***collaboration with the mass media***. Currently, such

cooperation is not only a source of information for citizens, highlighting socially significant events but also providing feedback directly from the public. First, this becomes possible due to the development of digital media, namely social platforms, etc. The public evaluates the police activity by viewing the posts and can also comment on them and post their records, which can be of informational value to the police. Communication with citizens through digital technologies has already been implemented in many countries, which not only increases transparency but also helps in the search for criminals and solving crimes. Thus, the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine created accounts on such social networks as Facebook, Instagram, Telegram, Twitter, and YouTube. In the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland, a Twitter alert system has been introduced, through which citizens will learn about information provided by law enforcement agencies and other state structures. Moreover, the said social network is actively used by the London police, disseminating information about combating theft, criminal investigations and searching for missing people. In Seattle (USA), an initiative called Tweets by Beat was implemented, which was designed for viewing the Twitter feed of police dispatches in all police centers in Seattle (Seattle Police Department, 2023).

The principle of accountability in police activity is closely related to ensuring transparency. However, unlike the latter, it may involve defining internal standards of police activity, a system of responsibility for violations, as well as a certain system of evaluating such activity. Of special interest in the context of the present study is the examination of the last direction - *the system of police activity evaluation*, because the assessment of law enforcement agencies activity clearly demonstrates their effectiveness, has defined criteria and provides state bodies and the public with a clear idea of the effectiveness of police activity.

One of the effective approaches to evaluating police performance was introduced in the United Kingdom by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS). The inspectorate oversees the performance of police units, using their findings to generate periodic and thematic reports that are readily accessible to the public. The key assessment tool is PEEL (police effectiveness, efficiency, legitimacy). The Police effectiveness indicator in the said assessment presupposes revealing how the police perform their duties; the productivity indicator shows what it took to achieve the result; and the legitimacy indicator weighs the legality of the activity. As an illustration, it would be expedient to characterise the content of one of the latest PEEL assessment reports, namely West Midlands PEEL Assessment 2023–2025 (HMICFRS, 2023). The said report consists of the following components:

- Overall summary.

- Providing a service to the victims of crime;
- Police powers and treating the public fairly and respectfully;
- Preventing and deterring crime and antisocial behavior, and reducing vulnerability);
- Responding to the public;
- Investigating crime;
- Protecting vulnerable people;
- Managing offenders and suspects;
- Building, supporting and protecting the workforce;
- Leadership and force management;
- About the data;
- Further information and documents.

Areas of activity are rated as "adequate", "inadequate" or "needs improvement". Detailed information for each direction is revealed in detail through the following components: Promising practice (identified positive aspects in the activity); areas requiring improvement (Area for improvement); major reasons for concern (Cause of concern); recommendations (Recommendations); key findings (Main findings).

As an example, we can consider the part of the above-noted report that regards the investigation of crimes. The published report deemed the actions taken toward investigating crimes as "inadequate". The "Promising practice" section highlighted the success of West Midlands Police in helping to develop national practice aimed at enhancing the response to an investigation of rape and other serious sexual offences. Furthermore, the areas necessitating enhancement are the approach to recording victims' decisions and the reasons for their refusal to support investigations, some aspects of documentation, and compliance with the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime. Notably, the major cause of concern is the insufficient efficiency of investigations, which do not lead to results that would satisfy the victims of crimes. Accordingly, this section and the others are followed by detailed info graphics showing the trends and structure of quantitative indicators of specific types of activity. For instance, a noteworthy indicator of the appropriate response of the police to public appeals is the percentage of telephone calls from citizens to which the police answered within 10 seconds, from 10 to 60 seconds, or more than 60 seconds (Figure 1). The findings are broken down by the regions.
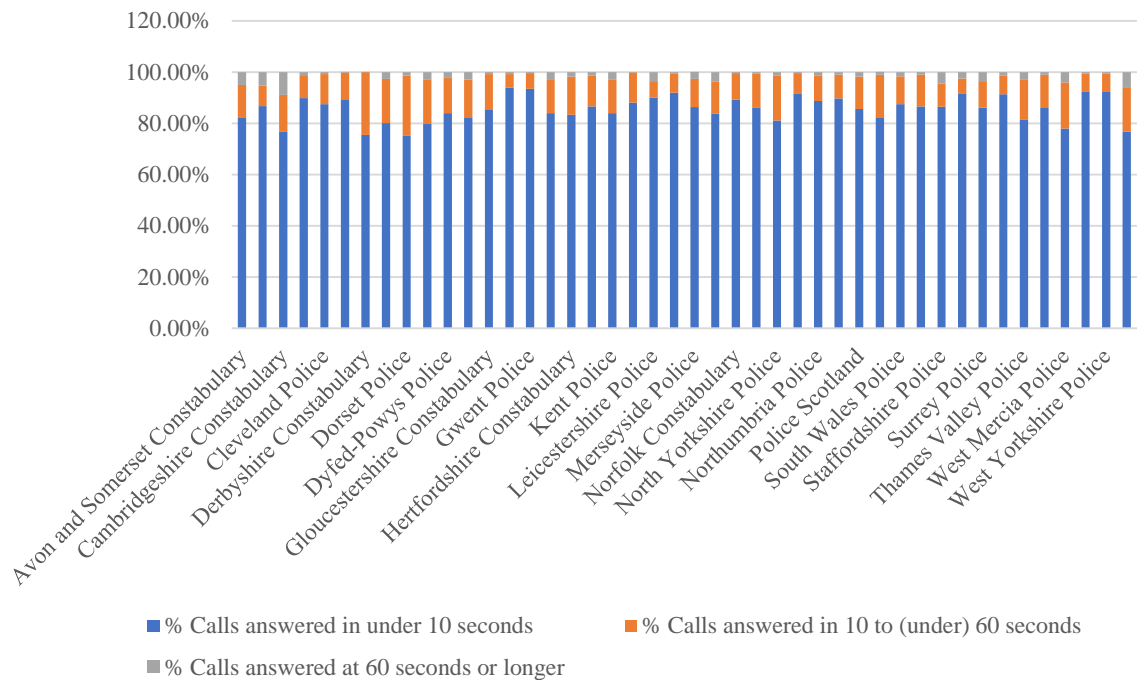
Figure 1. The distribution of citizens' calls based on police response time
(elaborated by the author according to HMICFRS (2023))

The recommendations to the crime investigation section of the report note the following:

- It is imperative to ensure that the employees' skills and abilities are sufficient to conduct investigations of the appropriate quality;
- To ensure that investigations are timely, thorough, relevant and provide effective oversight;
- To ensure that all applicable investigation plans are in place and that all available opportunities are used;
- To ensure appropriate outcomes for victims;
- To ensure appropriate application of investigation results.

In Ukraine, the mechanism for evaluating police activity is implemented through public expertise, which, as noted above, belongs to the mechanisms for representing the interests of the public. Expert proposals are prepared by the NGO "Ukrainian Democracy", a public organisation established in 2016. The said NGO's principal activities expose shortcomings in the work of state and local government bodies, enhancing the work of these bodies and defending the rights of the organisation's members (UKRDEM, 2023). The organisation evaluates the effectiveness and public involvement by the Ministry of Internal Affairs in the

specified areas of interaction, utilising a scale from 0 to 5 points (where 0 is the absence of activity in the area, 5 is full compliance with the activity with legislation with an orientation to the result). Drawing upon the evaluation results, the organisation prepares an extended report in which expert proposals are provided in nine areas. Those encompass an assessment of assistance in the implementation of the rights of citizens and civil society organisations (CSOs), an assessment of public involvement in the implementation of regulatory activities, conducting anti-corruption examinations, consultations, anti-discrimination procedures, etc. (Portal of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, 2019). As can be seen from the concise list of directions, this approach is not aimed at a direct assessment of IMF's activities and its structural units, but rather at assessing the interaction with the public, which is no less important in the context of ensuring transparency and accountability of the National Police. Of particular note is the provision of quite specific and detailed recommendations as compared to the recommendations in the PEEL assessment report, which are quite general.

The direct assessment of the activity of the National Police in Ukraine through quantitative indicators characterising the results of the activity was last established in the Order of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine No. 138 "On the approval of the System for evaluating the activities of internal affairs bodies of Ukraine and reporting form No. 1-KRIT" (LIGA 360, 2012). However, the directive lost its validity. At the current stage, it was legally determined that the key criterion for evaluating the effectiveness of police activity is the level of trust of the population (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2024). Nevertheless, the author's opinion is that the above approach should be supplemented with a system of qualitative and quantitative assessment criteria, as in the PEEL approach.

Discussion

In summary, the fundamental mechanisms for ensuring transparency and accountability in police operations encompass four key aspects: unrestricted access to information, optimally facilitated through user-friendly electronic platforms for public use; active public participation and oversight of police activities; engagement with mass media outlets; as well as rigorous evaluation of the performance of law enforcement officers. With all the mentioned aspects, it is worth noting that accountability involves using internal standards of activity and the appropriate system of responsibility. The value of the research can be emphasised through comparison with other scholars' works.

Bloch-Wehba (2021) emphasises the problem of non-transparency of the police in the context of insufficient control by the courts and the public over the use of technologies for monitoring and predicting behavior (the use of surveillance

cameras, technologies for automatic license plate reading, etc.). Furthermore, the researcher notes that license plate cameras are disproportionately installed in low-income or "non-white" communities. The scholar raises quite a controversial question: firstly, law enforcement officers' use of surveillance tools should frequently remain discreet, as complete transparency may not only inform the public but also alert criminals. Second, installing more surveillance cameras in certain areas may be determined not by the residents' income level or ethnicity but by the magnitude of criminal activity within the vicinity.

Considering the advantages and disadvantages of police officers' use of body cameras, Lee et al. (2019) and Kopotun et al. (2020) focus on the relationship between transparency and accountability of police activity. The researchers note that transparency is often called a key element of accountability. However, as in the case of body cameras, enhanced transparency does not always lead to accountability.

Tregle et al. (2022) notes the ambiguous attitude of the interviewed police chiefs to the legislation, which obliges the release of video footage of body cameras upon request as public information. In the current study, the author shares the opinion from the paper reviewed above, in particular, that the disclosure of information should comply with the current legislation. If this condition is fulfilled, the disclosure of data captured by video surveillance cameras should be attributed to the discretionary authority of police management.

According to Tanko (2019), in Ukraine, the cooperation of the public with the National Police is not sufficiently developed due to the lack of legislative support, cooperation mechanisms tested in practice, and some other factors. It is important to agree with the above standpoint because, in the author's article, it was found that in countries such as the UK, a widespread mechanism involving citizens' engagement to cooperate with the police as volunteers is lacking in Ukraine.

While in the current study, the use of social media was identified as a good and useful practice, De Graaf and Meijer's note that regarding openness and engagement, social media provoke value conflicts. The prioritisation of transparency entails a clash of principles for law enforcement, as they may encounter the imperative to disclose intelligence and involve civilians, thereby contradicting other values. The police's conservative reaction to such disputes could potentially erode their credibility in a transforming environment. According to Kryzhanovska (2020), the use of social media is an effective tool for interaction between the police and society, which helps to solve the problems of public law and order and to establish the principle of social partnership. With all the mentioned aspects, Bullock et al. (2021) note the following opportunities provided

by using social media in police work: visibility, editability, and associations. On the other hand, individual, organisational, and technological factors can affect the realisation of such opportunities. Based on the insights from several nations as case studies, the present research demonstrates the viability of utilising social media in police work due to its user-friendly access to primary information and potential for feedback.

Conclusions

Drawing upon the findings of the study, the principal mechanisms for ensuring police transparency and accountability were identified, in particular:

- Introduction of open access to information;
- Ensuring public participation and oversight of the police activities;
- Interaction with mass media;
- Assessment of police activity.

Due to the introduction of open access to information through electronic platforms for citizens, it was noted that there are wide possibilities for involving citizens in cooperation with the police, presented on the official website of the police of the UK. Community policing is extensively employed in the nation, fostering synergistic collaboration between law enforcement and civilians, who can join police activities as volunteers. In synergy with other measures, this serves as a potent mechanism to guarantee public engagement and oversight of police operations, a practice globally maintained by the leading nations. Regarding the police interaction with the media, the effectiveness of using the most recent digital media was pinpointed. Thus, the effectiveness of interaction between citizens and the police of the USA, the UK, and Ukraine using social networks was underscored. The PEEL approach, which is applied in the UK provides both a qualitative and quantitative assessment of police activity with the provision of recommendations was exemplified as an effective mechanism for evaluating police activity. Ukraine has developed its approach to assessing police activity with its work involving citizens, which is implemented through public expertise. Further scientific endeavors should be dedicated to constructing a framework for assessing law enforcement operations, encompassing the degree of societal confidence and a relevant array of qualitative and quantitative metrics.

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