

# **Comparing Volunteer Policing in Malaysia, England and Wales, and the United States of America: Cross-National Findings**

## **ABSTRACT**

**Purpose:** There are few international comparisons of volunteer policing and almost none that compare approaches between Western and Eastern countries. This article offers a tri-national comparison of volunteer policing between and among Malaysia, England and Wales, and the United States of America.

**Design:** It is based on systematically reviewing, collating, comparing and contrasting previous research findings and government reports on the topic from the three national settings. We pay particular attention to similarities and differences to extract common themes.

**Findings:** Three key common themes are presented and elaborated on in the article in terms of the cultural positioning and experiences of police volunteer, their roles and capabilities, the prerequisites for recruitment and the nature of their training.

**Originality:** Based on this tri-national comparison, the challenges and strategic opportunities of volunteer policing are described. A richer understanding of the delivery, experiences and culture of volunteer police officer roles across three different national contexts is presented.

Further we identify the potential value of and major challenges in carrying out cross-national national comparative study in the field of volunteer policing.

**Key words:** Volunteer policing; Special Constabulary; Auxiliary; Reserve; International

## **INTRODUCTION**

Volunteer law enforcement is exists in many countries of the world (Greenberg, 2014; Albrecht, 2017b; Wolf & Borland-Jones, 2018; Bullock, 2018) . Individuals volunteering may be utilized in many roles that involve policing activities (patrol and investigative

assistance) and non-policing activities, (e.g., chaplains, translators, police cadets etc).

Comparative studies of law enforcement are recognized as beneficial in the general context of informing, challenging and innovating law enforcement policy and practice (Wang & Zhao, 2016; Sergi, 2017; van Stokkom & Terpstra, 2018; Mawby, 1999; Bayley, 1985). The value of comparative study has been specifically recognised in volunteer law enforcement research where numerous calls for more such studies have been made in that they would be beneficial for the development of policy and practice (Greenberg, 2014; Albrecht, 2017a; Bullock 2018; Wolf & Borland-Jones, 2018; Wolf, Pepper & Dobrin, 2016; Pepper & Wolf, 2015; Britton et al., 2018b).

Unfortunately, research on volunteer law enforcement officers despite having seen increased activity in recent years, remains relatively small and limited. There is widespread recognition of these limitations and of the need for development of this neglected field, given the large scale of police voluntarism (Bullock & Leeney, 2016; Dobrin & Wolf, 2016; Britton & Callender, 2018). These considerations of the need for the development of the field are often framed in arguments of an expanding ambition or role or need for volunteers in law enforcement, in the context of increasing demand, reducing resource and anticipated growth (Bullock & Leeney, 2016; Caless, 2018; Whittle, 2018), in broader strategic arguments of the value of voluntarism and community engagement in policing (Crawford, 2008; Gravelle & Rogers, 2009; Morgan, 2012; Britton & Knight, 2016; Dobrin & Wolf, 2016), and finally in the benefits volunteer law enforcement can bring to diversity of participation, thinking and practice (Ren et al., 2006; Bullock, 2014, Britton & Callender, 2018). Within this small but developing field of research, few studies in volunteer policing have crossed international borders. Previous international studies (such as Pepper & Wolf, 2015; Wolf et al., 2016b;

Albrecht, 2017b; Britton et al., 2018b; Bullock, 2018; Wolf & Jones, 2018; van Steden & Mahlbaum, 2019; Mayorov & Wolf, 2016) have provided a body of literature which researchers, practitioners, administrators and policy makers could benefit from, though focused exclusively in Western cultures, and especially on USA-UK comparative work, and undertaken mostly as small case studies rather than national-level comparisons.

In this paper, we present a comparative cross-national study that examines volunteer policing in three countries: Malaysia, England and Wales (E&W), and the United States of America (USA). This study adds to the literature by exploring at a cross-national scale the practices, policies, cultures, challenges and strategic opportunities of police volunteering within and across the three settings.

We summarize key characteristics regarding each country in Table 1. Malaysia is the smallest of the three countries in this study in terms of population (32.7 million in 2020 according to the United Nations Population Fund, 2020) when compared to E & W (59.5 million) and the USA (329.1 million).. Malaysia has a lower income per capita, at USD 9,951 compared to USD 39,720 for the United Kingdom and USD 59,931 for the USA (World Bank, 2019).

Other relevant information regarding policing systems and police volunteerism are presented in Table 1, but will be discussed in the sections devoted to each of the countries below.

Given the differences in the countries being studied, we obviously expect to find dissimilarities in several aspects of volunteer policing among them. However, if we find similarities in patterns and issues, these will indicate recurring regularities (see Kohn 1987) and common themes that need to be examined further by volunteer policing researchers.

Further, by comparing two Western contexts with a non-Western one, the study provides critical observations on the similarities and differences across the varying contexts and in so

doing points both to potential practice implications and to future comparative research opportunities. This paper also reflects on the future of this research field, suggesting modes of comparison that are more analytical, evaluative, and critical. We begin by providing a short introduction to volunteer law enforcement in each of the three national contexts. Then the specific methods utilized in the study are presented followed by our key findings in terms of common themes identified. We finish with a discussion and draw conclusions from the study.

### **Malaysia**

Malaysia has a national police force, the Royal Malaysia Police (RMP) that is controlled by the federal government and administered by the Ministry of Home Affairs with a strength of 142,200 officers and staff (137,574 officers) which costs approximately USD 2.0 billion in 2019 (Ministry of Finance Malaysia, 2020). The force is structured in four tiers with the Bukit Aman RMP Headquarters at the top, followed by various state contingent headquarters, district headquarters and finally local police stations (RMP, 2020).

The involvement of civilian volunteers in the police force in Malaysia began in the context of a perceived need to maintain order and security in the country after the Second World War independence in 1957. Pre-independence, between 1945 and 1955, the police force and civilian volunteers were instrumental in maintaining security when this was deemed to be of “primary importance” (Shamsul, 2010:14-18). After the Japanese Occupation ended in 1946, the war-torn country saw ethnic clashes, labour unrest, insurgency, terrorism, and opposition to renewed British governance (Shamsul, 2010). In the effort to protect the country and its people from these threats, civilian volunteers were recruited to enhance the strength of the police force. Meanwhile, elements associated with the Communist Party of Malaya, who were camping out in the jungles (Ong, 1998) gathered strength from distraught local communities

(Ho, 2015) to destabilize the country (Mohd Razali, 2010). By 1948, the threats resulted in a declaration of a state of emergency that lasted for 12 years. During this time, several civilian security units were set up to aid the police and military forces under the British government. At first, civilians were recruited to form the Home Guard whose main responsibility was to protect new villages (resettlement zones) and rural areas from terrorist threats and attacks (Mohd Razali, 2010). Then other civilian police teams were formed such as the Special Constabulary; the Police Jungle Squad (which later became the Police Field Force); and, the Auxiliary Police (Mohd Razali, 2010). Civilians took part in police work in villages, tin mines, plantations and rural areas to protect them from attacks and extortion, to control the spread of communist ideology, to help the police fight insurgents in the jungles and, to carry out other operations (Mohd Razali, 2010). Subsequently, in 1957, when the country achieved independence, the Royal Malaysia Police Volunteer Reserve (PVR) was set up under the Police Ordinance 1952 (RMP, 2020). The PVRs serve in all thirteen states and three federal territories in Malaysia. Similar to their regular police counterparts, PVR officers adhere to the responsibilities listed in Section 3(3) of Malaysia's Police Act 1967 (2012). PVR officers are paid an allowance at the rate of USD 1.38 (or Malaysian Ringgit 6.00) per hour for the rank of Constable to Sub-Inspector and USD 1.78 (or Malaysian Ringgit 7.80) per hour for the rank of Inspector and above (RMP, 2020). In comparison, the minimum basic monthly salary for a police constable is USD 540 and officer at the rank of Inspector is USD 573 (RMP, 2020). Despite requests, we have been unable to obtain information on the total number of police volunteers and thus far, there has been almost no research published on the Malaysian volunteer police except for Cheah et al. (2018).

## **England and Wales**

E&W does not have a national police force. It is policed by 43 geographical police forces with a total of 129,110 regular police officers (Home Office, 2019). With a population of 67 million, E&W is almost twice as large as Malaysia and approximately five times smaller than the USA (United Nations Population Fund, 2019). Special Constables are distinct within E&W policing, being unpaid volunteers who, after successful completion of their training, hold the same warranted powers as regular paid police officers (Straine-Francis, 2018; Callender et al., 2018a). Citizens have undertaken volunteering roles as police constables in E&W since before the development of organized law enforcement, with the roles of volunteer Constable and of a volunteer Special Constabulary having deep historical roots and a strong tradition including significant service at times of national emergency and conflict such as during the two World Wars (Gill & Mawby, 1990; Emsley, 1996; Leon, 1991; Leon 2018a, Leon 2018b). Since the end of the Second World War, the Special Constabulary has substantially reduced its numbers, but also become a more active, professionalised and integrated entity with policing more widely (Borland-Jones & Wolf, 2017; Britton & Callender, 2018). It has also undergone various processes of national review and Royal Commissions (Leon, 2018b).

The Special Constabulary (current strength 9,571) is organised in a nationally consistent model but led and managed in individual police forces with some degree of variation (Britton et al. 2018a) and a majority of Special Constables are concentrated on front-line responding, neighbourhood policing and visible patrol (Bullock & Leeney, 2016; Britton & Callender, 2018). However, “in an increasing proportion of forces some Specials are now also engaged in more specialist areas of policing, including aspects such as roads policing, cyber-crime and

specialist public protection roles” (Britton et al., 2018b:13). In a recent national survey of police forces (Britton et al. 2019b) 1,826 Special Constables were identified in specialist roles, i.e., approximately one in six of the total. Such innovations position Special Constables within an important space, “resetting relationships with communities and achieving much greater involvement of citizens” (Britton & Callender, 2018: 149). Recently, the National Police Chiefs Council launched a 2018-2023 national strategy for the Special Constabulary to capitalise upon contemporary innovations and establish a national framework to set direction and expectations for local forces, whilst being “cognisant, however, for the need for discretion and the ability to flex according to local need where appropriate” (NPCC, 2018:13). There has been expanding research activity over the past five years within E&W focused on the Special Constabulary, developing a stronger data picture nationally (Britton et al., 2016; Britton et al., 2018a), undertaking national surveys of Special Constables (Britton et al., 2016; Callender et al., 2018a) and delivering national research projects (see also: Britton & Knight, 2019; Britton et al., 2019a; Britton et al., 2019b).

### **United States of America**

The USA is the largest country in this study, with a population of 329.1 million (United Nations Population Fund, 2020). Police officers in the USA serve in a complex highly decentralized or fragmented arrangement involving over 18,000 agencies at the federal, state, county, and local levels (Banks et al., 2016). Each policing agency has legal and geographical jurisdiction and they can range from very small departments with one officer, to the largest of more than 30,000. Local police departments and sheriff’s offices make up more than 80% of these agencies and employ over 635,000 full-time sworn officers (Dobrin, 2017). The average police department in the United States employs 10 or fewer officers. The decentralized

organizational nature of law enforcement in the USA makes it challenging to generalize in research on the topic (Banks et al., 2016; Hyland & Davis, 2019).

In the USA, the historical and current practice of volunteer law enforcement roles reflects a its diverse policing practice, with much less national structure and governance in terms of the model of utilization of volunteer law enforcement officers, than is the case in the other two countries in this study. The de-centralized model of policing has greatly influenced the development of police volunteerism, as has the complexity of evolution of different policing models across the country during the formation of the USA. Almost all policing in the early history of the American British Colonies was undertaken by volunteers, although some service as a ‘volunteer’ was often mandatory (Greenberg, 2015). Policing in the New World followed the blueprint of the London Metropolitan (Peelian) policing model. However, the rapid expansion of the West and the industrialisation of the North-East and Mid-West led to the evolution of variations in models in different areas of the country (Dobrin, 2016).

In the Western USA, the office of the Sheriff was widely used for law enforcement. The local sheriff was authorised to organize a posse of volunteers from the community to assist with enforcement of the law and order maintenance, particularly to find fugitives from justice. This authority to mobilise volunteers is still in effect in many states and allows local law enforcement to summon assistance in times of need (Kopel, 2014).

Data on the numbers of full-time police in the USA are available from the federal government; but there is no similar annual accounting for volunteer police. Dobrin (2017) used state-level estimates, academic reports, and national data to determine that there are approximately 58,500 volunteer police in the USA with at least some law enforcement powers, and another 19,000 volunteer police without police power for a total of 77,500 volunteer police. By these

estimates, volunteer police total approximately 12% of the number of full-time police personnel in the USA. However, research also suggests that around 30-35% of all local and county policing agencies in the USA utilize volunteer officers (Reaves, 2015; Hickman & Reeves, 2006a; Hickman & Reeves, 2006b).

## **METHODS**

The aim of this paper is to gain a better understanding of volunteer policing across three countries and to explore the differences and similarities (context, culture, and policies), challenges and opportunities related to volunteer policing in these nations. Both ‘data-driven’ and ‘research question-driven’ approaches were employed jointly (Cheng & Phillips, 2014). We examined volunteer policing through a cross-national comparative study (Kohn 1987) employing a descriptive, cross-sectional design.

This study analyses and builds on secondary data about volunteer policing in the three countries that is accessible and published. First, each of the three cases was described in terms of background, strength and structure of its police force (see above). This is because understanding each country and its uniqueness are important factors when making cross-national generalisations (Kääriälä et al., 2018). Next, secondary data were gathered from past literature and government reports. Third, constant comparison (Corbin & Strauss, 2015) was used to examine information gathered from the three countries. Then, recurring themes were identified from the various streams of data and discussed in several virtual meetings of the co-authors. While our research purpose (i.e., uncovering common themes in volunteer policing across the three countries) provided analytic focus, we were careful not to constrain or limit the scope of analysis.

As with other cross-national studies, assessing a single topic using secondary information is challenging because past studies and reports differ in terms of their parameters and populations. As a result there are two main limitations to this study. First, we recognise the sample size of three countries is small and the themes and issues found may not be conclusive or generalizable. However, given that this is the first comparative study across Western and Eastern cultures, it serves to inform and provide insights to all countries who have or plan to set up volunteer law enforcement units or other related organisations. Second, the common themes identified may not be comprehensive or in-depth. Much of the information on law enforcement volunteer units in the three countries is not published, revealed or made publicly available for reasons such as national security. Also, the inherent limitation in using secondary data is that it is not collected to address specific research questions or purposes (Cheng & Phillips, 2014). However, the use of secondary information allowed the researchers to focus on designing the study questions and data analysis (Alvarez et al., 2012). Despite this limitation, the themes in terms of similarities identified and generated from the available data are indicative of and limited to the system, organisation, and structure of volunteer law enforcement in the three countries.

## **THEMES**

Three dominant themes of similarity emerged from the analysis of available information about volunteer policing in the three countries: 1. The relevance of the cultural positioning of volunteers in policing; 2. The importance of understanding the roles and capability of police volunteers; 3. Recognizing pre-requisites for recruitment of volunteers and the nature of their subsequent training. Each theme will be discussed, highlighting the significance of recurring similarities, without, at the same time, neglecting mention of differences found.

### *1. Cultural positioning and experiences of volunteer law enforcement officers*

Studies in each of the three national sites point to the importance of the policing culture within which volunteer law enforcement roles are situated. This has consequences for quality of engagement, integration, deployment and support (Cheah et al. 2018; Callender et al. 2018b; Wolf and Borland-Jones, 2018). This cultural context is important to how volunteer officers experience their roles, to their morale and with their activity and retention. At a more strategic level, cultural context is recognised as being important to building understandings of how volunteer programmes can be strengthened and grown in scale, reach and effect in the future (Britton and Callender, 2018).

Volunteer law enforcement in each of the three national settings is recognised at a strategic level as having the potential to contribute towards meeting key policing challenges. In all three settings, these challenges include meeting increasing demand for police services, fiscal austerity amid tight budgets, new areas of police work, the increasing complexity of policing activity, and the challenges of building trust and engagement with fast-changing and diverse communities. In all three settings there are also common challenges in situating, prioritising and articulating strategically the contribution and worth of the volunteer officer. These include ambiguities in the professional positioning of the volunteer officer. Questions here include what is the professional identity of the volunteer officer; and whether the position is needed and warranted. These may be juxtaposed with the realities of the lesser status and circumscribed modes of deployment of volunteer officers. For example, the Malaysian volunteer reserve officer's role has been described as subordinate and directed-by regular officers - "We are never in the forefront as our role is to support and assist the regular police

officers. We keep a low profile, as we should, and follow the lead of the regular police officers in carrying out their tasks.” (Cheah, 2020). This is while being visibly no different from, and performing the same tasks as regular officers: “The public cannot tell the difference. This adds on to the pressure to perform. The public expects us to have nerves of steel and muscles of iron to accomplish tasks as professionally as the regular police officers do” (Cheah, 2020). These challenges in each national site also include a sense of the volunteer officer role as being peripheral to mainstream police strategic thinking, organisational development and reform (cf. Britton and Callender, 2018, in respect of the E&W Special Constabulary context; and Britton et al. 2018b for discussion of this challenge in a comparative USA-E&W study). In all three national settings, research has explored the volunteer experience. However, this has been most developed in the E&W context (cf. Bullock and Leeney, 2016; Callender et al. 2018a), with fewer studies in Malaysia (cf. Cheah et al., 2018) and in the USA (Britton et al. 2018b). In each of the three sites, there appears some dissonance between policy ambition and cultural positioning (both strategic culture, and occupational front-line culture) in respect of volunteer officers. Ambitions for growth in role, numbers and contribution sit alongside challenges in creating a commensurate, culturally supportive, context in respect of prioritisation, status, integration and support. This is key in analysing the roles that volunteer police perform along with their capabilities and contributions, which are discussed next.

## ***2. Roles and capabilities of volunteer law enforcement officers***

Given the differing policing contexts of the three countries in this study, there would be an expectation of variations in the roles that volunteer police perform, and our comparative analysis has identified several dimensions of difference. At the same time, there are also striking similarities in role across the three national settings.

All PVRs in Malaysia are armed. In terms of formal powers, they hold the same authority and powers as regular officers and they can execute these in a manner similar to their counterparts of the corresponding rank. There are four self-perceived role orientations among PVRs in carrying out their responsibilities: 'support officer', 'consultant', 'ambassador' and 'regulator' (Cheah et al., 2018). PVRs on Malaysia carry out a range of functions: serving at the enquiry counter, performing administration duties, walking beats, patrolling by foot or in vehicles, monitoring traffic, and other duties within and outside police stations. The Police Act 1967 states that police officers in Malaysia are to maintain law and order, preserve peace and security, prevent and detect crime, apprehend and prosecute offenders, and collect security intelligence. PVRs are, in various ways, involved across this remit. The deployment and management of the PVRs are directed and overseen by regular officers.

In E&W, whilst there has been no legislative change that has redefined roles and Special Constables have always had the full authority and warranted powers equivalent to a regular constable, the functions performed by the former have expanded over time. Most significantly, the front-line policing activity undertaken by Specials is much more aligned to, and comparable with, that of their regular officer colleagues than had historically been the case. Additionally, recent research has identified that as many as one in six Special Constables in E&W has a specialist deployment (Britton et al. 2019b).

In the USA, as with all aspects of this study, the picture is highly variable at a sub-national level within individual states and forces. Wolf et al. (2015) reported in their national survey of American police volunteers in Sheriff's offices that respondents indicated that they engaged in patrol, performed traffic and crowd control duties at special events, but also served in specialised emergency response teams, marine patrol units, and dive teams. There are some

police organisations in the USA where volunteer officers have achieved a greater operational integration and equivalence with regular colleagues, and more engagement in specialist areas, than in E&W (cf. Britton et al, 2018b), but this is a mixed picture. In other police organisations the volunteer officer role is less empowered, and subsidiary, ancillary and assisting in nature. Differences across the USA are exemplified when examining two volunteer police units with contradictory programmes, that of the New York City Police Department (NYPD) and that of the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD). The NYPD Auxiliary Police Program was formed in 1951, following the enactment of the New York State Defense Emergency Act. New York auxiliary police do not have arrest or law enforcement authority; they cannot carry a firearm; but serve as the eyes and ears of the police by reporting criminal acts and illegal behaviour using a NYPD radio. NYPD auxiliaries perform routine foot and vehicle patrol, traffic control, and are often used for crowd control at large events. They wear uniforms strikingly similar to those of regular NYPD officers, even though they do not have police powers. In contrast, the LAPD utilizes the Los Angeles Police Reserve Corps to supplement paid full-time police of the city. “Level II” and “Level I” LAPD reserves receive significant training, are armed, certified as California peace officers, and are authorised to make arrests and perform police duties, wearing uniforms identical to full-time LAPD police (Los Angeles Reserve, 2015; Wolf et al., 2015; Dobrin and Wolf, 2016). All police volunteer programmes in the USA fall somewhere on this scale of training and deployment with the NYPD model at one end of the spectrum, and the LAPD model on the other. States such as Florida and Texas are closer to the LAPD model, while others such as Maryland follow more the NYPD model.

It is clear that there are important variations of role and capability not only between the three national sites, but also between different policing organisations within national settings.

Comparing this picture across the three nations is complex: in effect, the USA has both some of the most 'developed' and 'equivalent' operating models, most akin to regular officer role operation, but also has examples of practice in other policing organisations which are the furthest away from that. The predominant picture in E&W is of volunteer Special Constable roles that are growing closer to those of regular officers, becoming more integrated, interoperable, skilled and professionalised than they have historically been. In Malaysia, E&W, and much of the USA, there is little to differentiate the visual presentation of a regular officer and volunteer police colleague, and significant elements of the duties, powers, and models of operating are very similar. The orientations discussed above have significant implications for selection and training, which are discussed in the next theme.

### ***3. Pre-requisites for volunteer law enforcement officer recruitment and training***

Looking at requirements for joining as a volunteer officer across the three national settings, in Malaysia pre-requisites for civilians to join the PVR include having completed secondary education thereby holding the Malaysian Education Certificate for the rank of Constable, and a degree or diploma with the Police Undergraduate Voluntary Police Corps certificate for the rank of Inspector (RMP, 2020). In E&W, beginning 1<sup>st</sup> January 2020, the new Policing Education Qualification Framework (PEQF) entry requirements are changing recruitment criteria and required qualification for regular officers but the requirements (effectively moving towards a graduate profession model) are not inclusive at present of volunteer officers. In the USA, the entrance requirements for volunteer police officers differ widely across and within states (Wolf et al., 2015; Wolf et al. 2016a; Fredericksen & Levin, 2004).

Significant variations in models of volunteer law enforcement officer training programmes among the national sites were identified. In Malaysia, there is a national model for training but with varying execution in different areas. New recruits in the PVR must go through the initial training administered and budgeted for by each state's police contingent headquarters. The police contingent through its Department of Crime Prevention and Community Safety also decides on the duration of the training, which varies in each location. Typically, training in police training camps and academies would include history, law, musketry, the Inspector General of Police's Standing Order and other rules, regulations and practices that the recruits should know before serving. Recruits also go through skills training in marching, giving orders, firearms and target shooting, conducting searches and other policing duties such as routine checks and road blocks. Following from this training period are several weeks of operational, 'on-the-job' training combining classes and field training.

In E&W, akin to the Malaysian model, there is a national programme designed to support Special Constables to the point of safe and lawful accompanied patrol called the 'Initial Learning for the Special Constabulary' (IL4SC). As is also the case in Malaysia, in E&W there is considerable variation in delivery of training locally across police forces (Britton et al. 2018a). In E&W, there have been critiques of Special Constable training not accounting for individuals who may have significant experience prior to their volunteering career (e.g. retired officers) nor do training models currently consider specific skills volunteers may contribute in specialised departments or roles. There are currently a few pilot initiatives in some forces in E&W assessing the creation of more bespoke recruitment and training pathways for specialised roles. Of the three national sites, E&W also has the largest proportion of translation through volunteer police roles into regular officer careers. Currently, there is also

national consideration of how training for Special Constables can be more aligned to that of regular officers and how that ‘journey’ through Specials into a regular role can be better managed holistically.

In the USA, as with all other aspects, there is much greater variation in the standards and training for volunteer law enforcement officers (Wolf et al., 2015; Wolf et al. 2016b); Further variation exists not only between States but also within them (Fredericksen & Levin, 2004).

Alongside the various training models in the USA there are also many examples where training is more substantive than the Malaysian and E&W contexts and is more closely equivalent to regular colleagues in terms of Police Academy delivery, accreditation and regulations. This model of close equivalence in training content, delivery and accreditation has been identified as contributing to enhanced confidence to practice (Wolf et al., 2016b) and in supporting cultural integration and pathways to initial competency (Britton et al., 2018a).

Regarding models of training delivery and of ‘what works’ in this area for volunteer police, there has again been little systematic study of the efficacy or experience of training (cf. Wolf et al. 2016b, as an example of such a study comparing US and E&W settings).

In all three countries, it is recognised that the degree of consistency or difference in training and in the pre-requisites for joining between regular officers and volunteer police have for the value volunteers add to policing, the status and valuing of volunteers, and the extent of integration and interoperability between regular and volunteer officers.

The training programmes across the different national settings varied a great deal in length (some examples in the USA being the most lengthy and comprehensive, and most closely equivalent to regular officer training). Models of structured field training, allowing volunteer officers to be supported in a systematic and supervised manner to build initial practical

policing skills and experience seem to be most developed in Malaysia and in some USA contexts. In E&W field training models were more variable in quality and substance, often being more limited in investment and focused support. In the E&W context, these often amounted in effect to little more than new volunteer officers being posted to accompany regular colleagues on shifts in a relatively unplanned manner. Whilst practice in the USA varies widely, in some examples the active practical coaching and field training on new-in-service volunteers is in marked contrast to this picture in many police forces in E&W (cf. Britton et al., 2018b).

The consideration of legitimacy of volunteer police in the eyes of the public and the relationship of this to models of training and competency is one which has not been comprehensively researched in any of the three national settings. In all three national sites, there are elements of volunteer officers that render them, when they present themselves to the public, mostly indistinguishable from regular officers. However, this is juxtaposed with training models and competency requirements which are often at variance with regular officers. This tension is one that merits further research exploration in respect of the trust for and legitimacy of volunteer officer roles, as do the consequent cultural impacts and professional identity ambiguities internally within police organisations.

Our analysis of the varying entry requirements and training suggests there is much that can be learnt by examining best practice in other national settings, particularly in terms of stronger, structured models of field training, and in respect of the equivalence and accreditation of training. What is evident across our analysis of the three national sites is the importance of appropriate recruitment and training in developing competency and credibility to practice.

## **DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

The comparison of volunteer policing in Malaysia, E&W, and the USA shows three varying contexts in which volunteer law enforcement officers are recruited, trained and serve.

There have been clear challenges in this research leading to a recognition of several limitations. We approach the implications flowing from our findings again by emphasising that this study is a formative, exploratory international comparison of volunteer law enforcement officers at a national scale. Three key challenges throughout, in respect of gaps in data, the limited policy literature and the limited research-base in each of the national settings, has constrained our ability to compare and contrast findings in a fully systematic, comprehensive and nuanced manner. At the same time, making international comparisons of law enforcement policy and practice at this macro, cross-national-level scale is important to the future development of this field. However, this study has reflected some challenges inherent in doing so given the very different sizes of the countries involved and also the scale of intra-country variability, the latter being an issue for E&W but most particularly in respect of the USA. There is an argument that the USA context is so varied as a policy and practice environment for volunteer law enforcement officers that the ability to meaningfully summarise or generalise that complexity on a whole country scale is diminished. A study of this nature engaging different national settings also brings the usual challenges of any comparative work in respect of researching what are varying policing and social contexts with the attendant risks of over-simplification in respect of both similarities and differences.

Alongside these challenges, the study also provides key elements of potential value from such international comparative work. Whilst inevitably broad given that they are drawing from national levels of focus, nevertheless such studies begin the important task of mapping the relatively uncharted terrain of international practice in respect of volunteer law enforcement.

Acknowledging the diverse and unique social, economic and cultural characteristics of each national policing context, we identify next three implications arising from the areas of apparent similarity of challenges, themes, and issues across the three national contexts. These implications which may also be read as policy recommendations for police administrators pertain to following: the creation of police volunteer forces that are representative of the plural societies that they operate in; the identification of qualifications and pre-requisites for becoming police volunteer along with consideration of the nature of their training once hired; and, how the performance of those enrolled is to be assessed for evaluation and promotion purposes. These are enumerated below.

1. The ideal of a fully representative (in terms of gender, ethnicity etc.) police volunteer force is often a goal for policy-makers and administrators in each of the countries but in each setting law enforcement agencies struggle to achieve this goal. Systematic consideration of existing common barriers (e.g., the positioning of police volunteers in the police culture and in larger society) identified above and strategies on how to overcome them as well as the maximization of available facilitators will help police agencies move forward in the desired direction in their local communities.

2. Our identification across the three settings of role and capability, prerequisites for joining the ranks and nature of ensuing training police volunteers receive once they do, have both short- and long-term implications for such individuals and their agencies. Confidence, understanding of specific assignments and associated role tasks as well as possibilities for movement within and up the ranks (not to mention moving into the ranks of regulars) will affect how individuals function in volunteer roles and more broadly how volunteer law enforcement officer programmes thrive or decline.

3. Opportunities exist to examine in more detail the relationship between training received and resulting confidence achieved to practice and perform. This relationship becomes increasingly important given the increased number of specialised roles that this research indicates may form a greater part of volunteer law enforcement roles of the future in each of the national settings.

## **CONCLUSION**

The findings from the three different national settings of volunteer law enforcement officers reflect learning that can be utilised by policy-makers and police leaders, both within these settings and across other countries, to guide and plan future design and development of programmes for the delivering and growing of a volunteer police force. The findings point to some key considerations for ‘growing well’ a volunteer police programme, in particular in understanding ‘growth’ in a broader sense than numerical increase in headcount and hours served, to encompass aspects of role development, shifts in professional status and identity, changes in strategic and front-line culture, and development of training and competency.

The study points to the potential value of a field of comparative approach to volunteer law enforcement officers. It should prompt future research seeking to develop analytical models for comparison of settings, which undertakes fieldwork across international settings to explore particular elements of practice in greater detail, which seek to build a stronger picture in respect of data and policy, and which encourages collaboration among researchers with expertise in this area of policing in different national settings. More broadly, the existence of a fundamental gap in terms of the lack of a basic mapping of practice internationally has been exposed, with not even a basic picture of practice in different settings internationally being available. This study has also focused only on volunteer law enforcement officers and the

future evolution of a comparative practice could also seek to embrace wider dimensions of police and public safety voluntarism, for example non-warranted police volunteers, wider community-based public safety volunteering models, volunteer models engaging young people in policing and public safety, and volunteering in broader public safety and first response settings, e.g., ambulance, fire and rescue, albeit recognising the growth in complexity of engaging across that wider and harder-to-define scope.

Volunteer law enforcement officers have for long played important roles in policing in many national settings. Yet models of volunteer policing are an under-researched and less understood dimension of policing. We hope this small-scale, exploratory study will spur further research about volunteer policing within and among various countries and their criminal justice systems.

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