Police legitimacy, collective efficacy and community safety

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(joint work with Ben Bradford, Oxford)
Legitimacy and procedural justice

Procedural justice is key to ‘audience’ legitimacy:

1. Wielding authority in fair, neutral and accountable ways generates a belief among subordinates that power-holders act morally and lawfully.

2. Procedural justice communicates status, value and inclusion within the larger group, and people are motivated to legitimate authorities of groups they feel connected to.

*** note: a brazen amalgam of Tyler, Bottoms/Tankebe & Coicaud...
Useful to think of this in terms of the police (institution) and policing (activity)

Legitimacy of the institution is premised on the success of policing as an activity

...what do we mean by policing as an activity?

Procedural justice theory predicts that:

• the power of the police is premised on the fairness of policing (norm-based) not on the effectiveness of policing (outcome-based)
• where ‘effectiveness’ is phrased in terms of crime reduction and public protection, and ‘fairness’ is phrased in terms of procedural justice
Norm-based policing and outcome-based policing

Lots of US data on the **primacy of norm-based policing** rather than outcome-based policing... and European Social Survey data are consistent with prior studies.

Asked respondents in 27 countries about their beliefs in police effectiveness (in terms of **catching criminals, deterring crime and turning up quickly in emergencies**)

Analysis supports the idea that the **police claims to legitimacy** are processed **on the basis of procedural fairness**, where empirical legitimacy is defined along two dimensions:

1. Felt obligation to obey the police (**recognition of authority**)
2. Belief that the police act morally & lawfully (**normative justifiability of power possession**)
The flat-capped boy on the right thinks the helmet-wearing boy on the left has **legitimate authority** when ... 

1. the helmet-wearing boy is **fair in terms of interpersonal treatment and decision-making**

2. the flat-capped boy believes that **order is maintained in the local area**

We argue in the book that the **power of the police** is partly premised on the **success of policing more broadly understood**

Crucial to the **felt success of policing** is the ‘**feel on the street**’ – most evident in neighbourhood order, a shared sense of safety, and strong collective efficacy

**JUST AUTHORITY?**
**TRUST IN THE POLICE IN ENGLAND AND WALES**
**JONATHAN JACKSON, BEN BRADFORD, BETSY STANKO AND KATRIN HOHL**
Legitimacy in community context

Metropolitan Police Service Public Attitudes Survey

Just over 40,000 face-to-face interviews with Londoners clustered within just under 5,000 neighbourhoods

Generated measures of structural characteristics of the neighbourhood from official statistics:

- concentrated disadvantage
- residential stability
- ethnic diversity
- police-recorded crime statistics

Generated measures of social characteristics of the neighbourhood from the survey itself:

- collective efficacy
- disorder
- fear of crime
First step of analysis:

Does the procedural justice model work even when we adjust for neighbourhood context?

Individuals were nested within neighbourhoods in London

We linked within-neighbourhood variation in people’s willingness to cooperate with the police to:

- direct and indirect contact with the police, involving procedural justice and unjustified violence (strong predictor)
- trust in police fairness (strong predictor, mediated much of the estimated effects of contact)
- trust in police effectiveness (weak predictor)
- police legitimacy (mediated much of the estimated effects of trust in the police)

The procedural justice model worked well, even adjusting for community context
Second step of analysis:

*What about neighbourhood variation in perceived police legitimacy?*

Some neighbourhoods were **very different** to other neighbourhoods. What explains this?

We found **small or zero effects of structural characteristics of the neighbourhood:**

- Crime levels was not an important predictor of police legitimacy
- Contra to Sampson’s work in Chicago, the more deprived a neighbourhood, the *greater* the perceived police legitimacy (not a big estimated effect, however)

We found **very strong effects of social characteristics of the neighbourhood:**

- The stronger the collective efficacy and the lower levels of disorder and shared sense of safety, the greater the perceived police legitimacy
So, what does ‘quality of policing’ mean?

At least in London, and at least in terms of how people judge police legitimacy ...

• Quality of policing does not mean levels of crime

• Quality of policing does not mean the perceived ability of the police to catch criminals, deter crime, turn up quickly in an emergency, provide a visible patrolling presence
So, what does ‘quality of policing’ mean?

‘The paradox is that not all that is policing lies in the police, to paraphrase Durkheim on the contract. The police will appear more successful the less they are actually necessary. The sources of order lie outside the ambit of the police, in the political economy and culture of a society ... Subtle, informal social controls, and policing processes embedded in other institutions, regulate most potential deviance. When these informal control processes are successful, the police will appear highly effective in crime prevention, and deal effectively and legitimately with the crime and disorder that do occur.’ (Reiner 2000: xi).
So, what does ‘quality of policing’ mean?

According to our data, at least in its links to legitimacy, quality of policing is about the ‘feel on the street’ ... about the policing that is done by **subtle, informal social control mechanisms**

- **Quality of ‘policing’ = collective efficacy** (shared values and collective propensity to act on behalf of the collective good ... strength of informal social control mechanisms)

- **Quality of ‘policing’ = disorder** (aspects of the social and physical environment that indicates to the observer (a) a lack of control and concern and (b) the values and intentions of others that share the space)

- **Quality of ‘policing’ = shared sense of safety** (collective levels of fear of crime)
THREE PARTS TO THE ARGUMENT

1. Police (institution) is synonymous with policing (activity) in the public mind.

2. Policing (social control, social regulation) is done at the formal and informal levels – this is the co-production of social control and regulation

3. Perceived legitimacy of the police (their right to exercise power and authority) depends upon the success of policing at the local level, most evident in the sense of neighbourhood/everyday order and informal social control.

We claim people over-identify the police (institution) with policing (activity)
...where most policing is done not by the police, but by everyday mechanisms of informal social control
Bad news for the police?

Policing can help reduce disorder and improve community spirit ... but they may have limited power to effect real change

Can patrolling and police visibility help mitigate the impact of neighbourhood disorder, shared safety and collective efficacy?

Control signals are:

• “...acts (particularly those taken by officials or by informal community leaders) that communicate (‘send signals’) to the general public, in a way that helps to promote the general sense of order in a neighborhood” (Bottoms 2014: 1954)

Think of police visibility as signalling control to audiences...

These signals may be more important when the neighbourhood lacks control
Control signals and police visibility

Q65. SHOWCARD 27 On average, how often do YOU see the police PATROLLING ON FOOT OR BICYCLE IN THIS AREA? Remember we are talking about the area within about 15 minutes walk from your home.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Count</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>At least daily</td>
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<td>At least monthly</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less often</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know/not sure</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
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(282)

Q66.

Q67. SHOWCARD 27 On average, how often do YOU see the police PATROLLING IN VEHICLES IN THIS AREA?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Count</th>
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(285)

We took the mean of foot and car visibility at the individual level, and then calculated a weighted neighbourhood average.
Four statistical interactions

(1) Police visibility moderated the effect of neighbourhood disorder on felt obligation to obey the police.

The moderating role of police visibility on neighbourhood disorder (when predicting felt obligation to obey the police)
Four statistical interactions

(2) Police visibility moderated the effect of neighbourhood disorder on beliefs that the police act morally

The moderating role of police visibility on neighbourhood disorder (when predicting felt obligation to obey the police)
Four statistical interactions

(3) Police visibility moderated the effect of worry about crime on felt obligation to obey the police

The moderating role of police visibility on neighbourhood fear of crime
(when predicting felt obligation to obey the police)
Four statistical interactions

(4) Police visibility moderated the effect of worry about crime on beliefs that the police act morally.

The moderating role of police visibility on neighbourhood fear of crime (when predicting felt obligation to obey the police).
Control signals

It seems like the **physical and symbolic presence of the police** can depress the negative impact of signs of disorder, lack of control, and shared sense of fear of crime.

Legitimacy can be enhanced when the police help to promote the general sense of order in a neighbourhood.
Community identification and collective efficacy

Disorder and fear of crime relate to visible signs of lack of control over an environment and the a lack of control and concern and the values and intentions of people in public space.

Collective efficacy refers to shared values and shared propensities for collective action.

We asked people whether they felt part of the local community.

Does feeling part of the local community moderate the observed links between social characteristics of the neighbourhood and perceived police legitimacy?
Two statistical interactions

Community identification moderated the effect of collective efficacy on felt obligation to obey the police

The moderating role of identification with community
(when predicting felt obligation to obey the police)
Two statistical interactions

**Community identification** moderated the effect of **collective efficacy** on normative alignment with the police.

![Graph showing the moderating role of identification with community](image-url)
Community identification and collective efficacy

People who feel connected to their community seem to care more about how local people regulate each other’s behaviour.

Their judgements of the legitimacy of the police are more strongly rooted in the success of everyday informal social control mechanisms.
Take-home message #1

At least in London, individual and neighbourhood factors are linked to legitimacy:

• **Contact with police officers and procedural justice are key**, even adjusting for neighbourhood context (in fact, we found that things like concentrated disadvantage did not alter the observed relationship between procedural justice and legitimacy)

• Neighbourhood context is also important, and it’s about social characteristics (**shared sense of disorder, informal social control and safety**) not structural characteristics (e.g. crime rates and concentrated disadvantage)
A relational account is about social connections between institutions and citizens regarding:

- just and fair treatment/decision-making and,
- the status/value/identity connotations of fair/unfair treatment/decision-making

Police generate legitimate authority and moral validity in the eyes of the public because power is premised on process and identity-relevant messages.

But a relational account is also about the quality of policing not in terms of outcomes relating to crime reduction, but rather about the quality of norms, values and informal social controls at the local level.

People hold the police to account for the quality of these norms, values and informal social controls, especially when people have a stake in their community.
Take-home message #3

Police visibility is linked to legitimacy in London

A way to reassert a lost sense of control and authority
Thanks!

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For information on the European Social Survey module on ‘trust in justice’, see:

http://www.lse.ac.uk/methodology/whosWho/Jackson/jackson_ESS.aspx
Legitimacy and social influence

Belief that the police act morally and lawfully

Feeling of status, value and inclusion within the larger group

Identification with the role of a law-abiding citizen

Internalisation of the value that one should obey the law

Social influence occurs via procedural justice and legitimacy through:

- **Identifying** with the group generates role and expectation involvement. People accept a reciprocal-role relationship (the law-abiding and upstanding citizen) and they feel a corresponding need to meet the expectations of that role, engaging in reciprocal-role relationships that revolve around notions of a ‘morally-upstanding citizen’

- **Internalising** means that a person feels obligated to follow the directives or rules that authority establishes; he or she *internalises* the value that it is morally just to obey the law; and authorization obviates the necessity of making judgments or choices.
Trust ..... 

Trust is the public belief that the police have the right intentions and are competent in the tasks assigned to them. 

About vulnerabilities and needs within a power relationship: we need the police when things go wrong, but the police also regulate our behaviour and have the power to intervene in our lives. 

We trust the police when we feel officers would treat us appropriately and proportionately; and we trust the police when we believe it is able (at least minimally) to fulfil the tasks it is set.
.... and legitimacy

Recognition of power: authorities are legitimate when we feel a sense of duty toward them

• A key idea here is legitimacy is disconnected from specific value judgments (we obey ‘the law’ not ‘this law’ ... we obey the police because they’re the police, not because we agree with the specific directive)

Normative justification of power: authorities are legitimate when we feel they ‘do the right thing’ (i.e. they act morally and lawfully)

• We operationalize this latter as moral or normative alignment – citizen’s sense that the police act according to a normative framework they themselves share (as well as beliefs about the lawfulness of the police)
Procedural justice theory

• Why does procedural justice ‘work’?
  • Affective: Fairness expresses inclusion and shared group membership
  • Evaluative: Police are exemplars of good conduct (or they should be).

• And if procedural justice ‘works’
  • Cooperation and compliance will be secured by process-based styles of policing that encourage people to see cooperating with officers and obeying the law as the right things to do.
My claim is that legitimacy depends not just on procedural justice because also on the quality of ‘policing’ more broadly understood

Prior studies have focused on people’s trust in police effectiveness (to control crime, to deter crime, to protect the public)

**Think of the social contract:** we give up some of our freedom (we allow the police to dictate appropriate behaviour) in exchange for order maintenance

**Think about normative justifiability of power:** when order is maintained, we believe that the police act morally and lawfully, because they power is premised on the maintenance of social order and control in people’s neighbourhoods. Justifiability of the institution is about what is necessary for legitimacy