

Procedural Justice and Legal Compliance

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Abstract

This article reviews the evidence on whether procedurally just treatment of citizens by agents of the criminal justice system, usually the police, has the effect of increasing the citizen's compliance with the law. In brief, we find that perception-based studies consistently show that citizen perceptions of procedurally just treatment are closely tied to perceptions of police legitimacy, and that with only a few exceptions perceptions of legitimacy are strongly associated with legal compliance. However, what has not been established is whether these associations reflect a causal connection whereby changes in policies that are effective in changing actual procedurally just treatment of citizens by police and others lead to changes in legal compliance and perceived legitimacy. Three priority areas for future research are identified: (a) devising and testing a theory of the cumulative effects of experience and community and situational context on perceptions of procedurally just treatment and perceptions of legitimacy, (b) filling out and testing a theory of the circumstances in which improved perceptions of legitimacy translate into greater legal compliance, and (c) designing and evaluating policies and training protocols that are effective in translating the constituent components of procedurally just treatment into improved legal compliance.



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