

Trust in the Belgian police: The importance of responsiveness

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Abstract

The international literature contains very few empirical tests of Tyler's (2011) claim that in Europe, as in the United States, procedural justice plays a larger part than police performance in accounting for citizens' trust in the police. With regard to procedural justice, there has also been little research on the distinct effects of responsiveness and fair treatment. This study is a step towards filling in these gaps. We used quantitative data collected in Belgium to examine to what extent citizens' trust in the police is determined by being a victim of crime, perceptions of disorder, feelings of insecurity, perceptions of the way the police treat people and perceptions of police responsiveness. The results indicate the relevance of procedural justice for explaining police trustworthiness in European countries. In Belgium, perceived responsiveness seems to be the cornerstone of a strong trust relationship.

Keywords

Performance, police, procedural justice, responsiveness, trust

Introduction

In two seminal articles, Tyler (2001, 2005) argued that people's judgement of the fairness of police behaviour plays a larger part than do perceptions of police performance in accounting for citizens' trust in the police. His research suggests that, in the United States, this is indeed the case; research based on multiple datasets suggests that

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perceptions of the way people are treated by the police and of the extent to which the police care about people's concerns determine Americans' trust in the police more strongly than do feelings of insecurity, perceptions of crime problems and perceptions of disorder. Summarizing the implications of his findings, Tyler concluded that 'the police can most effectively build and maintain public trust by focusing on how police officers exercise their authority' (2005: 339).

In an article in this journal, Tyler (2011) hypothesized that his statements on the determinants of trust in the police hold for both the USA and European countries. However, he recognized that this hypothesis is based on an extrapolation of US findings to European countries and that empirical research in Europe is needed to test the generalizability of his claim. Such research would 'allow the breadth of the arguments being made here to be more fully addressed' (Tyler, 2011: 255).

Indeed, to further scientific knowledge on this topic we have to test Tyler's framework in the European context. Relying only on US studies to understand Europeans' trust in the police may be risky, as was demonstrated by Kautt (2011). Her research suggests that factors explaining public trust in the police in the USA do not necessarily perform the same in Europe. However, she focused only on the UK, and did not consider procedural fairness. Other studies suggest that, in Europe, perceptions of procedural justice do have a great impact on trust in the police and also influence cooperation with the police and compliance with the law. Yet most of these studies too have been carried out in the UK (Bradford and Jackson, 2010; Hough et al., 2010; Jackson and Sunshine, 2007; Jackson et al., 2012, 2013). Little is yet known about the extent to which these findings hold for other European countries. The study on which we report here is one of the initiatives that have recently been made to help fill in this gap (see also Dirikx and Van den Bulck, 2014; Hough et al., 2013; Van Damme and Pauwels, 2013; Van Damme et al., 2013). Research in Sweden and Belgium indicates that perceptions of procedural fairness have a strong direct impact on moral alignment with the police, but only a weak to moderate indirect impact on citizens' willingness to cooperate with the police and compliance with the law (Van Damme and Pauwels, 2013; Van Damme et al., 2013). These studies did not test the impact of procedural fairness on trust. Another Belgian study, which did scrutinize the antecedents of trust, suggests that procedural justice indeed plays a larger part than police performance in accounting for citizens' trust in the police (Dirikx and Van den Bulck, 2014). Yet the findings of this study are based on a survey among secondary school students (12–18 years old) and thus shed light on only a part of the 'big picture'.

In this article we use data collected among Belgian young people and adults to assess the relative impact of perceptions of procedural fairness and perceptions of performance on citizens' trust in the police. This assessment is conducted by subjecting quantitative data collected from 952 respondents to regression analysis. The results indicate to European researchers and policymakers that Tyler's conclusions on the origins of trust in the police have a relevance that reaches beyond the previously demonstrated implications for the UK. The findings suggest that an explanation of Belgians' trust in the police must give a prominent place to perceptions of the way the police treat people and to perceived police responsiveness. It seems that, in Belgium, victimization experiences, perceptions of disorder and feelings of insecurity are not the key factors shaping public

trust in the police. Further, the results suggest that, within the procedural-justice-based model, perceived responsiveness is a stronger determinant than perceived treatment.

Research context

In the USA, research studying citizens' trust in the police has a rich history. Benson (1981), for instance, refers to a series of US surveys from the second half of the 1960s that addressed this topic. This long history of studying trust in the police has produced a large body of knowledge that criminologists and sociologists continue to find appealing and challenging (see, among others, Flexon et al., 2009; Lai and Zhao, 2010; Skogan, 2009, 2012; Taylor and Lawton, 2012; Warren, 2010). Besides the US, the UK too has an established research community studying people's trust in the police. Although it is more recent, it has already produced a number of high-profile publications (see, among others, Bradford, 2011; Hohl et al., 2010; Jackson and Bradford, 2009; Jackson et al., 2013; Kautt, 2011). Further, steps towards developing a subfield on this topic have also been taken in Australia (Goldsmith and Harris, 2012; Lee and McGovern, 2013; Murphy, 2013; Murphy and Cherney, 2011; Sargeant et al., 2014) and Belgium (Billiet and Pleysier, 2012; Dirikx and Van den Bulck, 2014; Parmentier and Vervaeke, 2011; Van Craen, 2012, 2013; Van Damme et al., 2012).

A comparable research community scrutinizing citizens' trust in the police does not yet exist in other countries. However, recent efforts of individual researchers have turned trust in law enforcement into a worldwide academic topic: in previous years, it has been an object of study and reflection in both developing countries (Kwak et al., 2012; Reynolds et al., 2008; Sun et al., 2013; Tankebe 2008, 2010; Wu and Sun, 2009) and developed countries (Ellison et al., 2013; Jonathan-Zamir and Weisburd, 2013; Kääriäinen, 2008; Kääriäinen and Sirén, 2011). Researchers have also started to apply a comparative approach to countries in one continent (Hough et al., 2013; Kääriäinen, 2007), two continents (Cao and Hou, 2001; Cao and Zhao, 2005) and the world (Cao et al., 2012; Jang et al., 2010). These are significant developments. Testing theoretical frameworks in different contexts is an important way to widen and further scientific knowledge.

It is highly relevant to test Tyler's claim in Belgium, because both Belgium and the US have introduced community policing to improve the functioning of their police. Building on previous initiatives (such as team policing, community relations units, community crime prevention projects and foot patrols), a number of US cities started to set up community policing programmes in the 1980s. In the first half of the 1990s, massive federal funding spurred the more widespread implementation of community policing in the USA. Key features of the US variant are decentralization, community engagement and problem solving (Skogan and Roth, 2004). Belgium adopted this policing model at the turn of the millennium, after it was confronted with the Dutroux case. In 1996, Marc Dutroux was arrested for the abduction of six girls. Two of them were found alive, but help was too late for four others. In response, about 300,000 people expressed their dissatisfaction at the shortcomings of police and judiciary in an unusually large public demonstration known as the 'White March'. The Belgian government took this as a cue for far-reaching reform of the police forces. In 1998, the governing parties, supported by

most of the opposition parties, decided to merge the different existing police forces into what has been called 'the integrated police, organized at two levels: the federal level and the local level'. At the local level, 196 local police zones were created (in the meantime this number has been reduced to 195), which have their own chief and a high degree of autonomy to address local problems. The role of the federal component is complementary to that of the local police zones: the federal police has more specialized duties, is charged with supra-local tasks and supports the local police zones whenever necessary. To ensure that both officers and citizens would perceive the integrated police as one entity, a single statute was introduced that applies to officers at both levels and a new – quasi-identical – uniform was ordered for officers of the federal and local police (only a few details differ). Moreover, a common logo was designed for both components of the integrated police and an identical training programme was developed for all officers (Bruggeman et al., 2009).

Along with the new organizational structure, policymakers introduced a new policing model: community policing. The implementation of this model required time, however. In 2003, the authorities gave the concept of community policing concrete definition in terms of the Belgian situation. The Belgian variant is based on five pillars: external orientation, problem solving, partnership, accountability and empowerment (Vande Sompel et al., 2003a, 2003b). In recent years this community-oriented approach has been complemented with information-led policing. The objective of this combined approach – which guides the functioning of both the federal and the local police – is to work towards 'excellent policing' (Bruggeman et al., 2007). This implies, among other things, 'establishing and maintaining a trust relationship between the population and the police' (Bruggeman et al., 2007: 19).

In this article we assess which factors contribute to that trust relationship. Because both Belgium and the USA are now using a similar policing model, we may find that in Belgium, as in the USA, perceptions of procedural justice play a larger part than perceptions of police performance in accounting for citizens' trust in the police. However, there are reasons to assume that the opposite is the case. First, in Belgium the change towards the new policing model has been launched only recently and is still in progress. Compared with the USA, Belgium has been guided for longer by what Skogan and Roth (2004) have called 'the professional model'. This model emphasizes responding rapidly when victims call the police and driving around ('preventive patrols') to deter crime. The police decide themselves on the focus of their work, which is mainly related to serious crimes. Initiatives to give citizens input into police policies and to build police–citizen partnerships are recent developments (Gelders et al., 2009). Second, although more attention is being paid to the relationship with citizens, evaluations of police work still give much more importance to outcomes, compared with processes. One reason for this is that outcomes are easier to define in numerical targets. Another, which is related to the first, is that many police chiefs and policymakers believe that outcomes are easier to measure. Third, in the political discourse on safety and the police, crime fighting and reducing disorder are still the central themes. Politicians have recently announced a 'war on drugs', introduced an extensive system of administrative fines to tackle disorder problems, and kept focusing their electoral campaigns on feelings of insecurity. Based on all these elements, an alternative hypothesis can be formulated, which states that citizens'

trust in the Belgian police is determined primarily by perceptions of performance and to a lesser extent by perceptions of procedural justice.

Theories about trust

Performance theory

Performance theory relates trust and distrust to, respectively, good and bad performance by government (Bouckaert et al., 2002; Brown and Coulter, 1983; Lipset and Schneider, 1987). It emphasizes the importance of citizens' performance expectations and the output of institutions. In a recent review, Fleming and McLaughlin concisely outlined the main ideas of the theory: 'Trust and confidence in public institutions is a function of the extent to which these institutions produce preferred outcomes. When citizens are satisfied with the output of relevant institutions, they will tend to trust and support them' (2012: 262). Macro-performance theory states that differences in trust in the authorities arise from variation in the range of social phenomena for which (some measure of) responsibility is attributed to the authorities (changes in unemployment rates, crime rates, etc.; Cao et al., 2012; Jang et al., 2010). Micro-performance theory links differences in individuals' trust in the authorities to variation in personal perceptions of government outcomes (Kautt, 2011; Ren et al., 2005). The central claim of both performance models is this: the more that citizens see their performance expectations met, the more confidence they will place in the authorities.

Few question that it is a core duty of the state to promote the safety of its subjects, or that it is expedient to institute a specific service (namely, a police force) to pursue this end. According to Wilson, citizens also have a clear expectation of police work: 'The average citizen thinks of the police as an organisation primarily concerned with preventing crime and catching criminals. When crime increases or criminals go uncaught, the conventional public response is to demand more or better policemen. When the crime rate goes down or a particularly heinous crime is solved, the police often get – or at least try to take – the credit' (1975: 81). Although this quote dates from nearly 40 years ago and the role of the police has changed drastically in the intervening decades, expectations concerning the crime-fighting duty of the police are still considered a relevant determinant in present-day theoretical reflections on trust in the police. Victimization experiences would lead people to believe that the police are failing to protect them, and would erode confidence in the ability of the police to fulfil their crime control mandate (Kautt, 2011; Lai and Zhao, 2010; Ren et al., 2005).

In their influential article 'Broken Windows', Wilson and Kelling (1982) stated that the expectations of citizens regarding safety should not be thought of too narrowly. They emphasized the desire of citizens to have something done to prevent disorder as well. They argued that dealing with disorder helps prevent more serious crime, reduces fear and improves public attitudes towards the police. Not quite 15 years later, Kelling and Coles found in *Fixing Broken Windows* (1996) that this approach was beginning to be implemented and to pay its first dividends, but at the same time they repeated the call to pay more even-handed attention to citizens' different concerns regarding safety: disorder, crime and fear.

This call did not fall on deaf ears. Community policing has put disorder and public insecurity higher on the police agenda. A key feature of community policing is that the police embrace a problem-solving orientation towards their work and take on a much broader range of issues than they did before: '[W]hile dealing with crime remains at the heart of the police mission, problems can include a broad range of community concerns. They range from noise to the dilapidated condition of many of the city's older rental buildings, and include a host of social disorders, municipal service shortcomings, and a broad range of code enforcement matters' (Skogan, 2007: 162). Because tackling disorder is now an essential aspect of police work in those countries that have introduced community policing, we could expect that the extent of unchecked disorder problems plays a considerable part in accounting for citizens' trust in the police. Ren et al. (2005) argue that both physical and social disorder send a message that the police have lost control over the community.

Thus, performance theory suggests that the confidence that citizens place in the police is based on the degree to which the citizens in question are bothered by crime, disorder and feelings of insecurity. The assumption is that citizens expect a safe environment – free of crime and disorder – and that they regard the police as the central actor (or one of the central actors) responsible for bringing this about (Brown and Coulter, 1983). Or, as Skogan summarized it: this theoretical framework argues 'that people hold police accountable for local crime, disorder and fear' (2009: 301). From an academic or policy-making perspective a case can be made that such expectations and judgements are, to some extent, unrealistic or mistaken. However, it has been argued that distorted public images of the role and impact of the police determine the attitudes and actions of citizens (Bottomley and Coleman, 1980).

Finally, we note that Jackson et al. (2009), like Wilson and Kelling (1982), argue that trust in the police is strongly influenced by concerns about disorder, but their line of argument does not imply that people base their opinion of the police on whether they fear for their own safety. In their approach, anti-social behaviour and incivilities are assumed to undermine trust in the police because they lead people to judge that the police are no longer symbols of moral authority (see also Jackson and Bradford, 2009).

Procedural justice theory

The literature on social justice (Tyler and Smith, 1997; Tyler et al., 1997) indicates that people's reactions to authorities, whether legal, political or managerial, are shaped by judgements about how those authorities make decisions and how they treat people over whom they exercise authority. Working from this premise, Tyler (2001, 2005, 2011) states that trust in the police is primarily determined by one's judgement of the fairness of police behaviour. More specifically, he argues that public trust is linked to citizens' perception that the police treat people equally and respectfully, and to their perception that the police care about people's concerns. Citizens will not accept biased or rude treatment. Moreover, they expect the police to listen to their views and to be concerned about their problems.

According to Edwards (1999), citizens are more concerned about the way in which the police behave than about the ways in which many other occupational groups behave, because police officers have great power over individuals. Even junior officers patrolling

the streets have a freedom of response that allows them to make decisions that in other organizations would be reserved to more senior employees. Citizens who have not (yet) themselves had any contact with the police can share this concern: 'Media reports of police corruption and violent or racist behaviour used by individual officers and use of the term "cop culture" in an invariably negative way have led even people who have had no dealings with the police at all to become armchair critics, and to have firm ideas about the need to eliminate such behaviour from policing' (Edwards, 1999: 148).

In a theoretical reflection on the reform of the police in developing countries and new democracies, Goldsmith (2005) lists a series of qualities and actions that can undermine trust in the police. Many of these characteristics and behaviours imply a lack of procedural fairness: venality, discrimination, intimidation, excessive force, brutality, and so forth. A similar emphasis on police corruption and misconduct can be found in the work of Tankebe (2008, 2010) on transitional societies in Africa. These discussions may, however, have broad implications. Although much progress has been made in developed democracies in tackling discrimination, corruption and misbehaviour, remaining procedural improprieties may undermine public trust in these countries as well: 'Wherever policing is experienced as partisan in nature, generalized trust in the police is unlikely' (Goldsmith, 2005: 456). According to Jackson and Sunshine (2007), the police are assessed from a concern for the norms and values that buttress social life. A police force will gain cooperation and trust if it embodies the norms and values of the community. A concrete way to do this is to treat citizens respectfully and fairly.

In an article in which she brings together issues from several areas of policing research, Stoutland (2001) states that, in studying trust in the police, we have to ask not only about the competence and efficiency of the police in safeguarding public order, but also about the extent to which police behaviour shows respectfulness and responsiveness to the concerns and priorities of citizens. Besides questions on outcomes, she puts two additional questions: Are the police respectful, courteous and fair in their interactions with us? Do they care about our concerns as they plan and implement policies? Stoutland takes the view that 'the degree to which people trust law enforcement is based as much (or more) on their perceptions of the way in which they are treated as on the actual outcomes of law enforcement's actions' (2001: 231).

A strong focus on procedural matters can further be found in the work of the Chicago Community Policing Evaluation Consortium (2004). According to Skogan and his team, public trust in the police is linked not only to perceptions of performance but also to perceptions of police demeanour and perceptions of responsiveness. Concerning police demeanour, they stress the importance of the politeness, helpfulness and fairness of the police. Perceived responsiveness refers to the extent to which people see the police as dealing with the problems that concern residents and working with residents to solve them.

The core argument of the procedural-justice-based model is that citizens in the first place expect the police to treat everyone with justice and dignity and to be responsive to their concerns (Tyler, 2001). In other words, the way that the police deal with citizens is central to this theoretical framework.

We note that, in a reaction to Tyler's vision, Tankebe (2008) argues that perceived police *effectiveness* is a necessary condition for the maintenance of police legitimacy. However, according to him, assuming a direct link between effectiveness and

trustworthiness is not the only way in which the relationship between the two can be conceptualized. Another way is to assume that the contributions that perceived effectiveness make to perceptions of police trustworthiness are mediated by or hidden in concerns about issues that relate to procedural fairness. Tankebe (2008) states that, although people are concerned about the ability of the police to provide them with security in their neighbourhoods, this does not mean that effectiveness by itself can purchase trustworthiness for a police force. Police effectiveness would have a legitimation potential only to the extent that it is achieved in a manner that respects citizens' sense of dignity.

Methods

Data

Our aim is to stimulate research that assesses the explanatory power of performance theory and procedural justice theory in Europe. In this article we take a step towards that goal by analysing data collected in Belgium, more specifically in the police zone HANO. This police zone comprises three municipalities: Hamont-Achel, Neerpelt and Overpelt. These are predominantly rural municipalities, which are situated in the province of Limburg. In total the police zone HANO has about 45,000 inhabitants. HANO can be described as a typical Belgian police zone: of the 195 police zones in Belgium, 117 are rural in character; only 27 are urbanized areas and 51 constitute a middle category (Dexia Bank Belgium, 2011). The average number of municipalities in a Belgian police zone is three and the average number of residents in both the rural police zones and those in the middle category is close to 45,000 (about 42,000 and 44,000 respectively; Dexia Bank Belgium, 2011).

In 2011, Hennau, Van Craen and Ackaert conducted a standardized face-to-face survey on attitudes towards the police and related topics in HANO (Hennau et al., 2012). On the basis of population data provided by the local authorities, two representative random samples were drawn from the inhabitants of HANO aged between 15 and 80 years old. The initial sample totalled 1000 individuals and the reserve sample also totalled 1000 individuals. Fieldwork ran from 11 October 2011 to 13 December 2011 and resulted in 952 usable face-to-face interviews. Of these interviews, 72 percent were with respondents from the initial sample. Respondents from this sample who could not be reached or refused to participate were, as much as possible, replaced by respondents with similar characteristics (age, gender and neighbourhood) from the reserve sample. This approach was aimed at ensuring that the survey data would be representative of the population in HANO. A comparison of the database with the population on the basis of the variables gender, age and neighbourhood indicates that the interviewers did their work well. None of the age groups, gender categories or neighbourhoods is significantly under- or over-represented, and the data are representative of the population (for detailed information, see Hennau et al., 2012).

Measures

To assess the explanatory power of performance theory and procedural justice theory, the following variables were subjected to ordinary least squares regression analyses (linear regression analyses):

Dependent variable. ‘Trust in the police’ was measured with responses to four items:

- Do you trust the police a lot, quite a lot, neither a lot nor a little, a little, or very little? (1 to 5; reversed)
- Do you trust federal police a lot, quite a lot, neither a lot nor a little, a little, or very little? (1 to 5; reversed)
- Do you trust local police a lot, quite a lot, neither a lot nor a little, a little, or very little? (1 to 5; reversed)
- Do you trust neighbourhood policemen a lot, quite a lot, neither a lot nor a little, a little, or very little? (1 to 5; reversed)

These types of question have often been used in studies assessing the impact of procedural justice on trust in law enforcement (see, among others, Murphy, 2013; Taylor and Lawton, 2012; Tyler, 2001) and in other research on police trustworthiness (see, among others, Cao et al., 2012; Kääriäinen, 2007; MacDonald and Stokes, 2006). To guarantee the reliability and validity of the measure, we combined the four items into an index (the factor loadings ranged from .67 to .95, Cronbach’s alpha: .85). The scale measures general trust in the police: it expresses the extent to which respondents believe that the police will meet their expectations. Our operationalization builds on the work of Tyler (2001) and is a variant of the scales that have been used by Murphy and Cherney (2011, 2012), Sargeant et al. (2014), Murphy (2013) and Taylor and Lawton (2012) in their studies on procedural justice and trust in law enforcement. Further, we took inspiration from research on political trust (see, among others, Janmaat, 2008; Marien, 2011a; Mishler and Rose, 2001). Combining questions that ask respondents how much they trust different government institutions is an operationalization of political trust that is widely accepted and applied since it is measured in this way in the European Social Survey (for more information on this approach, see Marien, 2011b).

We are aware that in research dealing with trust in the police, especially in research on the consequences of trust in the police, other operationalizations have also been developed (Jackson et al., 2012; Round 5 of the European Social Survey: Hough et al., 2013). However, for this study – which focused on the origins of trust – the outlined approach was most useful because it ensured that the trust measure did not conflate with the independent variables.

Not only methodological reasons but also the organizational structure and functioning of the Belgian police have led us to create this four-item index. As mentioned before, policing in Belgium is the responsibility of an integrated police force, organized at two levels: the federal level and the local level. Since the creation of this police force in 1998, the authorities have had the intention of developing the federal and local police in such a way that they would be perceived by both officers and citizens as components of one entity. In the years following the political decision on the reform of the Belgian police, a common statute, training programme, uniform, logo and policing model were introduced to achieve that goal. These measures turned out to be successful. In an evaluation report on the reform, drafted in 2008–9 (10 years after the start of the process), the Federal Police Council stated that ‘the federal and local police view themselves and are viewed

as one integrated police force' (Bruggeman et al., 2009: 19). Our factor analysis indicates that the latter is indeed the case. We further note that, besides merging different police forces into one integrated police force, another goal of the reform was to promote neighbourhood policing. This duty has been assigned to the local police. Neighbourhood policemen are personnel of the local police.

The outcome-based performance model. Performance theory states that differences in trust in the authorities arise from variation in (the perception of) social phenomena for which (some measure of) responsibility is attributed to the authorities (Bouckaert et al., 2002; Lipset and Schneider, 1987). In the context of policing, this theoretical framework argues that people hold the police accountable for local crime, disorder and fear. To test the outcome-based performance model, we used four variables: victimization experience, perceptions of two types of disorder and feelings of insecurity. These variables were derived from research on this framework undertaken by Sunshine and Tyler (2003), Tyler (2005), Tankebe (2008), Skogan (2009), Van Craen (2012, 2013), and Van Craen and Skogan (2014).

'Victimization experience' is a dummy variable: code 1 was assigned to respondents who, in the 12 months preceding the interview, had been the victim of at least one of the following types of crime:

- home burglary
- a home burglary attempt
- car theft
- car break-in
- a car break-in attempt
- handbag or wallet theft
- a violent act

Respondents who had not been the victim of one or more of these types of crime were assigned the code 0. A similar measure has previously been used by, among others, Ren et al. (2005), Skogan (2009), Lai and Zhao (2010) and Van Craen and Skogan (2014). Overall, 9 percent recalled a victimization experience.

With regard to disorder, aspects of both physical and social disorder were measured, as has been done in other studies on trust in the police (for example, Cao et al., 1996; Kautt, 2011; Sunshine and Tyler, 2003; Tyler, 2005; Van Craen, 2012). The interviewers presented the survey participants with questions about conditions that people in some communities might consider to be a nuisance (dilapidation of the housing stock, dog mess, neighbours' quarrels, drug use and drug dealing, etc.). They were asked how often they had been bothered by these problems in their own neighbourhood over the course of the previous 12 months (answer categories: never, a few times, many times, often and very often; 1 to 5). In this sample most disorder questions yielded hardly any variation in responses; almost nobody in this area had been bothered by these issues. Only one indicator of social disorder – bothered by drug use and drug dealing (17 percent) – and one indicator of physical disorder – bothered by dog mess (55 percent) – proved to be problems in HANO, and they were included in the analyses.

The variable 'feelings of insecurity' is a scale consisting of responses to two questions:

- How safe do you feel walking alone in this neighbourhood after dark?
- How safe do you feel walking alone in your municipality after dark?

Both questions had the following Likert-type response set: 1 (very safe) to 5 (very unsafe). The responses were combined to create an index (Cronbach's alpha: .85). Similar questions have previously been used by, among others, Kautt (2011), Lai and Zhao (2010), Sunshine and Tyler (2003), Tankebe (2008) and Tyler (2005).

The procedural-justice-based model. To test the procedural-justice-based model, we included two variables in the analyses: respondents' perception of the way the police treat people and their perception of police (un-)responsiveness.

The first variable, 'perception of unequal treatment', is a scale comprising responses to two items:

- The police are equally strict with everyone.
- The police discriminate (reversed).

Both of these questions had the following Likert-type response set: 1 (fully agree) to 5 (fully disagree). We combined the responses into an index (Cronbach's alpha: .60). For this measure we have built on studies by Tyler (2001, 2005) and Van Craen (2012, 2013).

The second variable, 'perceived unresponsiveness', is a scale composed of responses to four items:

- The police deal with the issues that are important to me.
- The police take too little account of the views of citizens (reversed).
- The police are open to people's suggestions about tackling problems.
- Citizens have too little say in the functioning of the police (reversed).

These Likert-type questions had answer categories ranging from 1 (fully agree) to 5 (fully disagree). The responses were combined to create an index (all factor loadings were higher than .50, Cronbach's alpha: .68). For this measure we have built on studies by Tyler (2001, 2005) and the Chicago Community Policing Evaluation Consortium (2004). Tyler did not use the term 'responsiveness' but used scales labelled 'care' and 'input' as process variables. In the broader literature on trust in government institutions, responsiveness is a common concept and has been identified as an important process variable (Bouckaert et al., 2002).

Control variables. We included three background characteristics in the regression analyses: gender (0 = female or 1 = male), age (15–80, in years) and level of education (we applied dummy coding to create four dummy variables: low level of education, medium low, medium high, and high level of education). Tables 1 and 2 display the descriptive statistics for all the variables.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics: Part 1.

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD	N
Trust in the police ^a	1	5	3.53	0.65	682
Age	15	80	47.76	17.35	952
Bothered by drug use and drug dealing	1	5	1.30	0.77	927
Bothered by dog mess	1	5	2.16	1.30	949
Feelings of insecurity ^a	1	5	2.30	0.86	911
Perception of unequal treatment ^a	1	5	2.86	0.80	762
Perceived unresponsiveness ^a	1	5	2.87	0.65	601

^aThe scale scores were divided by the number of items.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics: Part 2 (percent).

	Police (N = 928)	Federal police (N = 776)	Local police (N = 925)	Neighbourhood policemen (N = 806)
Trust in				
A lot	4.7	2.6	5.6	10.8
Quite a lot	54.5	42.8	60.2	55.2
Neither a lot nor a little	31.8	42.5	27.1	24.6
A little	6.8	10.2	5.8	6.2
Very little	2.2	1.9	1.2	3.2
Gender (N = 952)				
Female	50.7			
Male	49.3			
Education (N = 934)				
Low level	15.1			
Medium low level	17.2			
Medium high level	37.0			
High level	30.6			
Victimization experience (N = 934)				
No	90.7			
Yes	9.3			

The descriptive statistics for the ‘trust in the police’ scale (see Table 1) and the separate trust items (see Table 2) indicate that the level of trust in the police is moderately high among inhabitants of the Belgian police zone HANO. The mean score for the ‘trust in the police’ scale is 3.53. The percentage of respondents expressing a lot or quite a lot of trust ranges from 45 percent to 66 percent (depending on the item) and the group of respondents expressing little or very little trust is small (the percentage ranges from 7 percent to 12 percent).

We note that some trust items and procedural justice items yielded a relatively high non-response (see Tables 1 and 2). A number of respondents indicated to the interviewers

that they had not formed an opinion on some police-related topics. Consequently, they could not answer particular questions on the police. Probably this is (partly) owing to the low level of contact between inhabitants of HANO and the police. In the 12 months preceding the interview, 58 percent of the respondents had no contact with the police operating in their municipality. Another 34 percent reported only one or two contacts.

Results

Table 3 contains the results of the regression analyses. These indicate that both the outcome-based performance model and the procedural-justice-based model offer explanatory elements. However, their explanatory power is not identical. Perceptions of treatment and responsiveness play a much larger part than perceptions of outcomes in accounting for respondents' trust in the police.

We present our results in four steps. This approach enables us to assess the relative impact of perceptions of procedural fairness and perceptions of performance, and to reveal indirect effects. Linear regression Model 1 (see Table 3) comprises only the background characteristics. None of them determines citizens' trust in the police.

Regression Models 2 and 3 suggest that all factors derived from performance theory have some influence on respondents' trust in the police. Model 2 adds the crime victimization variable and perceptions of disorder. It shows a statistically significant relationship between victimization experience and trust in the police: victims of crime trust law enforcement less than do people who had no victimization experience. This finding suggests that being a victim of crime has a negative impact on trust in the police. Model 2 further shows that the two disorder indicators correlate with the dependent variable: the more often respondents had been bothered by drug-related nuisance and dog mess, the less they trust law enforcement. These results indicate that both social and physical disorder affect trust. Model 3 adds feelings of insecurity. From this we learn that feelings of insecurity correlate with the dependent variable as well. The more respondents feel insecure, the less they trust law enforcement. Feelings of insecurity thus seem to erode people's trust in the police. We also note that in Model 3 the correlations between the disorder indicators and the dependent variable are no longer significant. The analysis suggests that perceived disorder has an indirect effect through feelings of insecurity. Perceived disorder makes citizens feel unsafe, which affects their trust in the police.

Regression Model 4 adds the perception of unequal treatment and perceived unresponsiveness. It shows a statistically significant relationship between both procedural justice factors and trust in the police. The more respondents feel that the police treat people unequally, and the more they believe that the police disregard citizens' views and suggestions, the less they trust law enforcement. These results suggest that perceived unequal treatment and a perceived lack of responsiveness affect people's confidence. Put otherwise, people expect the police to deal with citizens in a non-discriminatory way and to take account of their views and suggestions. When they perceive that these expectations are not met, they lose trust in the police. We further note that in Model 4 none of the outcome variables is still correlated with the dependent variable. This seems to suggest that perceptions of outcomes have an indirect effect through procedural justice factors.

Table 3. Factors determining trust in the police.

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3			Model 4		
	Unstandardized coefficients	SE	Standardized coefficients	Unstandardized coefficients	SE	Standardized coefficients	Unstandardized coefficients	SE	Standardized coefficients	Unstandardized coefficients	SE	Standardized coefficients
(Constant)	3.578	0.084		3.807	0.102		4.030	0.125		5.597	0.172	
Gender	-0.027	0.050	-0.021	-0.044	0.050	-0.034	-0.086	0.054	-0.067	-0.023	0.055	-0.018
Age	0.001	0.002	0.021	-0.000006	0.002	-0.001	0.00019	0.002	-0.005	-0.001	0.002	-0.035
Low level of education (ref. high level)	-0.078	0.086	-0.041	-0.090	0.086	-0.048	-0.033	0.087	-0.017	-0.068	0.086	-0.036
Medium low level of education (ref. high level)	-0.060	0.077	-0.035	-0.046	0.077	-0.027	-0.032	0.077	-0.019	-0.079	0.076	-0.047
Medium high level of education (ref. high level)	-0.109	0.061	-0.082	-0.090	0.061	-0.069	-0.079	0.061	-0.060	-0.109	0.061	-0.083
Victimization experience				-0.194	0.088	-0.087*	-0.202	0.088	-0.091*	-0.178	0.096	-0.073
Bothered by drug use and drug dealing				-0.077	0.035	-0.087*	-0.066	0.035	-0.075	-0.074	0.039	-0.075
Bothered by dog mess				-0.039	0.019	-0.079*	-0.037	0.019	-0.075	-0.031	0.020	-0.062
Feelings of insecurity							-0.098	0.033	-0.128**	-0.058	0.034	-0.074
Perception of unequal treatment										-0.090	0.037	-0.108*
Perceived unresponsiveness										-0.478	0.045	-0.469***
R ²		0.005			0.028			0.045			0.331	
N		669			647			633			450	

* $p < .050$; ** $p < .010$; *** $p < .001$.

Although both performance theory and procedural justice theory offer factors that account for people's trust in the police, they do not have the same explanatory power. Model 3 shows that the outcome variables explain less than 5 percent of the total variation in the dependent variable. Adding the process variables into the analyses increases the explained variation by roughly 29 percentage points. This suggests that the procedural-justice-based model has much more explanatory power than the outcome-based performance model. Further, the results indicate that, within the procedural-justice-based model, the second aspect – perceived (un-)responsiveness – is the most influential. The standardized regression coefficient of perceived unresponsiveness is much larger than that of perceived unequal treatment ($-.469$ versus $-.108$). This finding suggests that taking account of people's concerns and suggestions is key to building and maintaining a strong trust relationship.

Conclusion and discussion

The international literature contains very few empirical tests of Tyler's (2011) claim that in Europe, as in the USA, procedural justice plays a larger part than police performance in accounting for citizens' trust in the police. Research on the broader procedural justice framework is rapidly growing in Europe (see, among others, Hough et al., 2013; Jackson et al., 2012; Van Damme and Pauwels, 2013; Van Damme et al., 2013), but European researchers – strongly driven by the approach used in Round 5 of the European Social Survey and in recent British studies – pay little attention to the relationship between procedural justice and (general) trust in the police. In the Australian approach, this relationship seems to have a more prominent place (see, among others, Cherney and Murphy, 2013; Murphy, 2013; Murphy and Cherney, 2011; Sargeant et al., 2014). A review of the literature further indicates that international research on procedural justice and trust in the police has yielded relatively little knowledge about the distinct effects of responsiveness and fair treatment. This study is a step towards filling in these gaps.

On the basis of the results, we can draw three conclusions, at least with regard to Belgium, but they may hold for other European countries as well. First, this study suggests that both performance theory and procedural justice theory are relevant to explain trust in law enforcement. Second, we have strong indications that, in line with Tyler's (2011) claim, perceptions of procedural justice play a larger part than perceptions of police performance in accounting for citizens' trust in the police. Finally, this study is important because it indicates that, within the procedural-justice-based model, perceptions of police responsiveness are more influential than perceptions of the way people are treated by the police.

With regard to these conclusions, a few observations should be made. First, we note that our study was carried out in a rural police zone, which has relatively low crime and disorder rates. Because a majority of Belgian police zones have a rural character, an extrapolation of our conclusions to Belgium as a whole may be justified. However, in particular areas where crime and disorder rates are relatively high – in big cities such as Brussels or Antwerp, or in other European cities such as Paris or London – the explanatory power of victimization experiences, perceptions of disorder and feelings of insecurity could be greater. This raises an interesting question: would an increased explanatory

power of performance theory in high-risk areas imply that Tyler's (2011) claim does not hold in such areas? Probably not. Research in Israel suggests that procedural justice is consistently the primary antecedent of police legitimacy, even when the public is faced with the stressful situation of immediate security threats. Jonathan-Zamir and Weisburd (2013) examined the relative importance of perceptions of procedural justice and perceptions of police performance as antecedents of police legitimacy in communities that did not suffer from acute security threats and in a town that faced acute security threats. They found that, although evaluations of police performance did increase in importance for the public under threat, evaluations of procedural justice did not decline in importance and remained the primary antecedent of police legitimacy. Police legitimacy was operationalized using four statements tapping trust in the police, so on the basis of this study one may expect that our conclusion on Tyler's (2011) claim will also hold in big European cities such as Brussels, Paris and London. At least with regard to London, there are empirical indications that support this hypothesis. In a paper on Londoners' confidence in the police, Bradford and Jackson summarized their findings as follows: 'Trust in both police fairness and community engagement has strong and substantively large statistical effects on overall confidence. By contrast trust in police effectiveness has only a relatively weak association with overall confidence' (2010: 14).

A second observation relates to the explanatory power of the two aspects of the procedural-justice-based model. Other than this study, there has been relatively little research on the distinct effects of perceived responsiveness and perceptions of fair treatment. Here the results suggest that – at least in Belgium – perceived responsiveness determines citizens' trust more strongly than do perceptions of equal treatment. We note, however, that this finding is based on data from a police zone that is characterized by low ethnic diversity. Studies using data from areas in Europe that are characterized by high ethnic diversity – here again the big cities come into the picture – or focusing specifically on minority groups may find that perceptions of equal treatment determine people's trust in the police as much as – or even more than – perceptions of responsiveness. In this respect we refer to a study by Tyler (2005), carried out in New York, which suggests that there are ethnic group differences in the importance of procedural justice factors. Yet indications from London suggest that such differences do not occur everywhere (Bradford and Jackson, 2010).

With regard to perceived responsiveness, we further note that local governments and local police departments in Belgium are beginning to recognize its impact. Some of them are starting to set up projects to improve police responsiveness. For instance, in 2012 the city of Ghent – the second-largest city in the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium – started a pilot project called 'the neighbourhood governs'. In one particular neighbourhood, the inhabitants come together every two months to draw up a list of disturbing safety and disorder problems. At the end of the meeting the inhabitants may instruct the police and community guards (unarmed civilians with responsibility for order maintenance activities) to tackle their three most important priorities. They may also formulate suggestions on how to approach their concerns. In response to this input, the police explain what they will do to meet the defined targets and when dealing with the neighbourhood's concerns they give feedback by SMS. The project still needs to be evaluated, but local government and local police in Ghent have the intention of improving police responsiveness in other

neighbourhoods as well. Our study and similar projects launched earlier in the Netherlands and the UK suggest that their efforts will pay off (Lowe and Innes, 2012).

Fourth, we need to consider how the relationship between perceived outcomes and trust in the police should be understood. As Tankebe (2008) noted, there are at least two ways in which this relationship may be conceptualized. The first is to assume a direct link between perceived outcomes and trust. The second is to assume an indirect link: this implies that the contributions that perceived outcomes make to citizens' trust are mediated by or hidden in concerns about issues that relate to procedural justice. In Ghana, Tankebe (2008) found support for both approaches. He found that perceptions of police performance have some direct influence on citizens' trust, but also that the influence of perceived police performance is powerfully mediated by perceptions of procedural justice. Our study in Belgium seems to support only the second approach. The fact that in the final regression model none of the outcome variables is still correlated with the dependent variable suggests that perceptions of outcomes have an indirect effect through procedural justice factors. Crime victimization, perceived disorder and feelings of insecurity erode citizens' perceptions of procedural justice. This erosion then affects their trust in the police. We consider this an interesting finding, because it suggests that the relationship between perceived outcomes and trust in the police differs according to the context.

To conclude, we discuss some suggestions for future research. First, one could deal with discrimination by the police not only from a procedural fairness perspective but also from a distributive fairness perspective. The former emphasizes unbiased/neutral treatment (Jonathan-Zamir and Weisburd, 2013; Sunshine and Tyler, 2003; Tankebe, 2008; Tyler, 2005), the latter a fair distribution of outcomes (Adams, 1965; Colquitt et al., 2001) or the provision of equal outcomes (Tyler, 2005). It remains to be seen, however, to what extent these approaches can provide a different perspective on discrimination in police–citizen relations. In the field of organizational justice, some authors have questioned the distinction between procedural and distributive justice (for a summary of this debate, see the review by Colquitt et al., 2001). Recently, reservations regarding this distinction have also been formulated in the field of police research. In a review of the literature on legitimacy in policing, Mazerolle et al. noted that it is 'somewhat difficult to tease out distributive justice from procedural justice' (2013b: 20). Because biased treatment may lead to an unfair distribution of outcomes, it may turn out that in a number of cases the distinction between procedural and distributive justice is only a subtle one.

Second, one could integrate insights proposed by social capital theory and police–citizen contact frameworks. Respondents' social capital and contacts with the police were not included in the analyses because of limitations of the data. Adding these factors to our models might help to make clear how different explanatory factors relate to one another and might help to make progress in refining theoretical frameworks. Recent articles have discussed possible interfaces between, on the one hand, social capital theory or police–citizen contact models and, on the other hand, the theoretical frameworks used here (Skogan, 2012; Stanko et al., 2012; Van Craen, 2012, 2013). The authors concluded that combining different methodological approaches – representative data, contrast groups, panel data, quasi-experiments, and the like – may be an interesting way to further scientific knowledge. An impressive example of theoretical and methodological

innovation is the study by Mazerolle et al. (2013a) based on the Queensland Community Engagement Trial. Using an experimental manipulation, Mazerolle et al. showed that encounters with police officers influence general perceptions of the procedural fairness and legitimacy of the police (through perceptions of the procedural fairness of specific officers during the encounters). These findings and the methodological approach that has been used to generate them provide much inspiration for future research on the determinants of citizens' trust in the police.

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