review

Rebuilding trust between police & communities through procedural justice & reconciliation

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abstract

In many societies around the world, segments of the public strongly distrust legal and political authorities. Regardless of how the distrust arises, it lessens the possibilities for future social cohesion, democratic governance, and successful economic development—factors that define strong communities. How can authorities build trust amid a legacy of distrust? In this review, the authors focus on relations between the police and communities and draw on two psychological literatures that articulate evidence-informed trust-building strategies. One, the *procedural justice approach*, concentrates on the fair and respectful exercise of authority during everyday interactions between individuals. The other, *reconciliation*, involves gestures that are carried out at the community level with the expressed intention of addressing past injustice and that promise changes in an authority's future relations with a community. This review concludes with policy recommendations, drawn from both literatures, describing a process of trust building that involves substantive improvements in procedural justice combined with reconciliatory gestures that signal a sincere intent to increase trust through service to communities.

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Core Findings

What is the issue?
Community distrust in law enforcement remains a serious issue in the United States. Psychological research can assist policymakers and law enforcement officials in rebuilding this trust. Delivering procedural justice and engaging in reconciliatory actions are two ways in which to do so. This has broader implications for authorities seeking to build trust and gain legitimacy.

How can you act?
Selected recommendations include:
1) Transitioning law enforcement from a militaristic model to a service model, adopting metrics that measure community feelings and concerns
2) Evaluating the community's perception of the sincerity behind gestures designed to build trust

Who should take the lead?
Researchers, policymakers, and stakeholders in law enforcement

Social, political, and economic discrimination by authorities against a range of racial, religious, and ethnic groups is a sorry and continuing part of America's history. It has interfered with people's ability to buy homes, get hired and promoted in jobs, and receive health benefits, among other injustices. And America, of course, is not alone in this type of discriminatory behavior. It is no wonder, then, that political and other authorities around the world often lack legitimacy (acceptance as rightful, trustworthy bearers of power) in the eyes of the people they are meant to serve and find themselves encountering distrust and hostility. How can authorities who want to rebuild trust go about it?

In this article, we examine this question in the context of American policing, a context that offers a highly visible example of the challenges of trust building. Law enforcement as an institution has a long legacy of enforcing segregation and inequality, and individual officers continue to act in discriminatory ways—as news reports detailing beatings and killings of unarmed black men attest. If strategies for rebuilding trust between the police and communities in America can succeed, such achievements could pave the way for improving trust-building efforts beyond policing and beyond America.

Psychological research provides several potential paths forward for rebuilding trust between the police and the community. We focus on two—delivering procedural justice and engaging in reconciliatory actions—and delve into the research behind those approaches.

By way of context, we note that a substantial body of research in other fields (including sociology, organizational behavior, and organizational psychology) also has implications for trust building; their findings are not inconsistent with the implications proposed here.[1] One major finding of this extensive, multidisciplinary behavioral science research is that the ability to trust requires an acceptance of vulnerability.[2] In fact, scholars have defined *trust* as a psychological state in which a person is willing to be vulnerable because he or she expects the intentions or behavior of another to be positive.[3] Trust can thus entail high stakes, particularly when vested in powerful entities such as institutions and when people aware of past misconduct have good reasons to be wary of overtrusting the authorities in their communities.

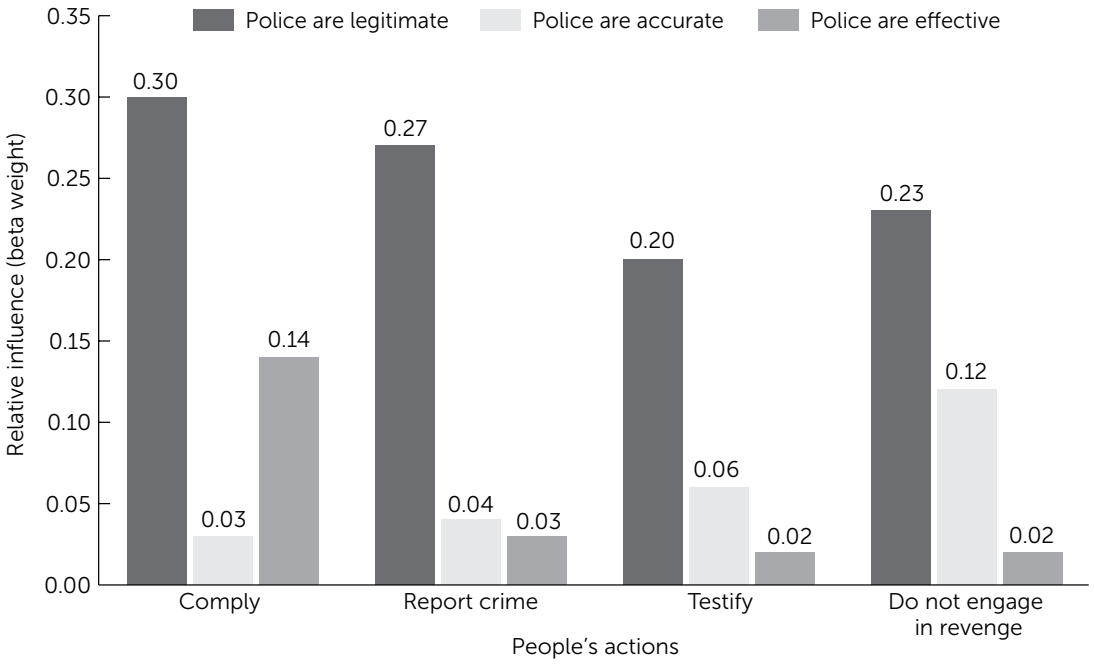
The results of a national survey help to clarify why the police would want to take steps to enhance communities' belief in their trustworthiness. The survey compared three potential views of the police that might shape people's civic behavior: whether they view the police as legitimate, whether they think the police are accurate (such as not making mistaken arrests), and whether they believe that the police are effective in managing community problems such as crime.[4] Figure 1 compares the influence of these factors on compliance with the law, willingness to report crimes to the police, willingness to testify in court if needed, and willingness to bring grievances to the police for redress rather than engaging in acts of private retribution or vengeance. The results indicate that the police have a great deal to gain from being viewed as legitimate: Legitimacy is the most powerful influence on all of these behaviors. Police officers who are seen as legitimate can do their jobs much more effectively. We argue that a combination of procedural justice and sincere efforts at reconciliation can go a long way toward enhancing trust in the police.

Benefits of Procedural Justice & Reconciliation

Procedural justice is the use of dispute-settling procedures that the people involved would say are unbiased, give them a voice, and treat them with respect.[5] It is one of the best-studied and most-used methods for building legitimacy. By reorganizing policies and practices using a procedural justice framework, legal and political authorities can alter their behavior toward the public in ways that counteract negative beliefs about the authorities and earn the trust of the people they affect. Although trust building is more difficult when the parties involved begin from a position of strong distrust, it is still possible to achieve.[6–8]

Abundant research supports the benefits of procedural justice in general and also specifically

Figure 1. How citizens' views of police affect their actions



Note. Whether people comply with laws, report crimes, testify in court, and bring problems to the attention of legal authorities instead of engaging in private acts of retribution is affected more by whether they think the police are legitimate than by whether they think the police are accurate (do not make mistaken arrests) or are effective in managing problems in their community. The data come from a 2012 national survey of 1,603 randomly chosen Americans who were asked about their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. The bar heights represent the relative influence of each factor on the behavior listed. In statistical terms, they are beta weights for a regression that includes all three factors. Details of the study are explained in Tyler and Jackson, 2014.

Tyler, T. R., & Jackson, J. (2014). Popular legitimacy and the exercise of legal authority: Motivating compliance, cooperation, and engagement. *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law, 20,* 78–95.

when applied in policing.[5] But simply instituting new procedures is not enough. Policymakers must also attend to several related practical issues. In the case of policing, procedural justice requires officers to change their everyday behavior toward the community—which itself involves changing the goals of policing, altering the culture of how police deal with the public, revising training programs and work rules, and in many cases revamping the internal culture of police departments themselves. For example, the police can make building public trust an organizational goal, reward officers who earn the trust of the community, and recognize the importance of seeking community input when making department policies. When these tasks have been successfully accomplished, police departments can increase public trust over time by managing problems in the community in a new way.

Procedural justice strategies are forward looking and meant to improve interactions with individuals. They do not focus on the past, nor are they centered on acknowledging or apologizing for that past. They assume that if authorities treat people fairly, the affected individuals and others who hear about good experiences with the authorities will increasingly come to trust them. Although procedural justice approaches focus mainly on individuals, police leaders who implement them may, of course, make statements to the community that highlight the features of procedural justice—for example, by explaining why the police have adopted new policies, stating the goal of treating community members respectfully, and pointing out ways that the police will be held accountable (such as through complaint mechanisms).

One drawback of the procedural justice approach is that its lack of attention to the past means that any existing distrust can slow the process of trust building, with community

"police leaders can jump-start the trust-building process instead of waiting for people to notice the fairer treatment"

members interpreting their new experiences through the lens of the past.[8] Authorities can compensate for this problem by complementing procedural justice with diligent work toward reconciliation.

Reconciliation is a process that emphasizes gestures intended to earn the trust of communities; these gestures address the community rather than individuals and acknowledge historical and other reasons for any distrust. Such efforts differ from procedural justice both in concentrating on the community as a whole and in recognizing, explicitly or implicitly, that authorities have acted with procedural injustice in the past (whether as an institution toward a group, such as African Americans, or in individual interactions).

Psychological research has shown that reconciliatory actions can ameliorate the distrust that arises from past injustice.[1,9] The exact actions can vary, but they should display recognition of the past injustice; acknowledgment of the past harm; and either acceptance of responsibility, an apology, or both. It is key that authorities confront the past, not simply move beyond it. Moreover, to repair relationships, authorities making reconciliatory gestures should recognize that a community's needs have not been met and make it clear that change is occurring to redress that past failure. We emphasize the role of process in defining reconciliation because it is not one speech or event that will succeed in building trust but rather a series of gestures that community members view as coinciding with substantive improvements in procedural justice.

Reconciliation can have many goals.[10] In this article, we focus on efforts intended to increase the community's trust in the police and to inspire community members to behave lawfully and cooperate with the police. Police gestures may include conducting community meetings attended by both authorities and members of the public to discuss crime, safety, or trust of authorities; having officers mentor or coach youths or volunteer their time to help community members; or running a police department–led summer camp. The actions might also take the form of statements that overtly or implicitly acknowledge existing distrust and signal a desire to change the relationship. For instance, police could express remorse over past actions that have hurt the community, accept responsibility for such harm, or apologize for it—as when a Georgia police chief apologized in 2017 for a lynching that occurred decades earlier.[11]

By communicating directly with the community, police leaders can jump-start the trust-building process instead of waiting for people to notice the fairer treatment being accorded by the police through procedural justice. In other words, by directly addressing the past, police who engage in such reconciliation efforts can potentially dispel a legacy of distrust more quickly than they could by relying solely on the incremental, essentially future-facing approach to trust building that characterizes procedural justice. Of course, although gestures can initiate and help to sustain a process of reconciliation, they cannot be expected to completely and suddenly resolve distrust. Forgiveness for a specific event or for a systemic problem is especially difficult to muster when past experiences have created strong distrust.[9]

In the balance of this article, we consider what research says about the outcomes of past procedural justice and reconciliatory efforts, which factors influence success, and the potential downsides to engaging in these approaches when addressing alienation and distrust. Many police departments have embraced some aspects of procedural justice, but reconciliatory gestures have been less widely used, and their effects have been less studied. Procedural justice policies are easier to adopt because they focus on changing what the police do in the future without noting historical problems or grappling with such issues as whether and

how to acknowledge or apologize for existing distrust. In this review, therefore, we attempt to fill in the gap and emphasize empirical research on the reconciliatory approach. Although we describe these literatures separately, we believe that trust building requires substantive improvements in everyday procedural justice combined with reconciliatory gestures to the community.

Research on Procedural Justice

Overall, research into procedural justice demonstrates that it is an effective way to build and maintain trust[4,5,12,13] and legitimacy.[14–18] Community members grant authorities legitimacy when the authorities demonstrate that the methods they use to make and implement decisions are fair—such as when, after pulling over a speeding driver, an officer explains that surpassing the speed limit was the reason for the stop and listens to the driver's explanation. Procedural fairness affects legitimacy more than various other contributing factors do, such as whether people receive the outcome they desire,[19] whether the outcomes themselves are deserved, or whether the police are deemed effective at managing crime and other community problems.[13] These procedural justice findings have been replicated at the individual and community levels, with people reacting both to their own experiences and to their impression of what goes on in their neighborhood.[16,20]

Whether fairer procedures will increase trust in authorities depends on many factors beyond the implementation of the procedures themselves. Judgments are influenced, for instance, not only by fairness but also by whether people are given the opportunity to provide input when policies are initially being designed.[20]

Past history and inferences about the motivations of authorities matter as well. When legal authorities try to build popular legitimacy using procedural justice approaches, they often have to do so from a starting point of distrust. As panel studies (which make comparisons at different points in time) have demonstrated, people's views about the police after direct personal contact are colored by both their prior views and the nature of their new experience.[8]

Indeed, procedural justice research consistently finds that people react strongly to their inferences about the motives of legal authorities.[4] What is more, the perception that most shapes public reactions is whether the authority is sincerely trying to address a person's or a group's needs and concerns. For example, when survey respondents were asked about their degree of agreement with the statement that police officers "try to do what is best for the people they are dealing with," the respondents' answers correlated notably with their trust in the police. Similarly, a respondent's belief that judges are "trying to do what is best for the people they are dealing with" correlates closely with that respondent's trust in the courts.

The strong influence of inferred motives highlights the importance of sincerity in both procedural justice and reconciliatory gestures.[9] If community members infer that the police truly regret past injustices or intend to make beneficial changes in procedures and behavior and then find that the authorities were insincere, this lack of sincerity is likely to backfire in the long run. To be sustainable over time, the effort to build trust must involve policies that community members view as sincerely motivated.

To be sure, procedural justice and reconciliation efforts have some commonalities. Procedural justice does, after all, contain an element of reconciliation: If the community desires respect as well as acknowledgment and affirmation of its dignity, and if the motivation of authorities is a sincere desire to address the needs and concerns of the community, then procedural justice is partly about addressing grievances that arise from the past. It does not, however, acknowledge or address those concerns directly.

If authorities say, "You are entitled to treatment with dignity, and we will give you that type of treatment in the future," that statement is similar to but not the same as saying, "We acknowledge that you have been treated unfairly in the past; we apologize for that past mistreatment, and we will treat you differently in the future." The latter statement moves into the realm of reconciliation.

Procedural justice is necessary for legitimacy and trust building, but it takes more than procedural justice to achieve legitimacy in a context of distrust. Groups in the United States who have suffered systemic discrimination have strong reasons to distrust the motives and behaviors of the government. Their concerns are distinct from the low level of trust that many people have in the motives and behaviors of authorities on the basis of their own personal experiences.[7,9] When group-based distrust runs high, authorities need to engage in a trust-restoring process that involves major improvements not only in procedural justice but also in how the past is addressed.

Research on Reconciliation

Next, we review a selection of reconciliation research studies that are relevant to policing but do not directly address policing. Then we turn to studies focused specifically on the police.

The reconciliation literature complements the procedural justice literature in several ways. First, it emphasizes antecedent conditions, such as the degree to which parties have equal power or common goals and how these antecedent conditions can influence perceptions within and following the interaction.[21] For instance, although groups in conflict may have equal status in specific contexts (such as by law), their power is usually asymmetric.[22] The procedural justice literature focuses not on antecedent conditions but on what happens during interactions (that is, on whether the police enact the rules governing just decisionmaking) and on how people should be treated. Second, as noted, reconciliatory gestures are directed at entire communities, whereas procedural justice is directed at particular people, and the literature reflects that difference. Finally, reconciliation involves attention to the past, whereas procedural justice relates to current and future actions.

Broad Findings

In reviewing reconciliation research, we have concentrated on literature addressing the repair of relations between groups rather than between individuals. Researchers conducting this work have sought to understand how groups in conflict can build trust and overcome hostility. With the exception of research into the legitimacy of the South African government near the end of and after apartheid,[23,24] the psychological literature we examined has largely focused on the attitudes of and interactions between different ethnic or social groups and on the factors that influence behaviors that affect and are affected by relations between groups.

One such behavior is the willingness of the members of different groups to become friends and cooperate with members of other groups, including different racial and ethnic groups. This research tends to support *contact theory*: it shows that, under certain circumstances, contact (which could include direct conversation or other forms of interaction) can increase positive attitudes between groups,[25,26] in particular when individuals have close and positive contact, such as when they become friends.[27]

Research into the effects of intergroup contact reveals that groups can differ in their responses to interactions. Authorities embarking on reconciliation efforts need to keep these differences in mind. Although contact strongly reduces prejudice in members of powerful groups, the impact of contact is milder in members of less powerful groups.[25] Research on intergroup contact suggests that background factors reflecting the power or status of the group, such as race or income level, strongly shape the motives of the parties involved.[10,22,28,29] For instance, groups that have more power may be less motivated to examine power differences.[22] Such findings indicate that, to be successful, contact interventions should not focus solely on prejudice reduction but must also focus on justice.[22]

Studies likewise show that circumstances influence whether efforts at reconciliation have positive or negative consequences for individuals and societies. Reconciliatory efforts can, for instance, build a community's social capital—increasing the strength of social networks and norms that favor contributing to the common good. But they can also undermine the mental health of victims.[30] For example, although truth

telling could have psychological benefits, in the context of the Gacaca courts of Rwanda following the 1994 genocide, witnesses who testified had higher levels of posttraumatic stress disorder and depression than nonwitnesses did.[31]

Satisfying interactions can reduce a group's perception that other groups have bad intentions.[26,27,32,33] At times, though, positive contact might not have completely positive consequences: Certain communities may be leery of having good interactions with more powerful groups that might abuse the less powerful group's trust; such a wariness could reflect the recognition that positive feelings about the interactions could undermine their own group's will to demand social change. For example, Tamar Saguy and her coauthors[34] have conducted research demonstrating a tendency for positive contact to undermine motivation for social change.

As we have noted, people routinely attempt to infer the motives behind the behavior of others,[35,36] and they are likely to wonder why authorities who attempt reconciliation are doing it. They might ponder the issue especially intently if they have reason to believe that someone could be acting deceptively. (In the case of policing, many communities have reasons to suspect that the police might be disingenuous and will eventually betray the trust they are seeking.)

Some work has focused on the question of how perceptions of the motives behind reconciliatory gestures can affect the gestures' success. Gestures will impress a community favorably only if (a) its members infer that the authority's motivation in making the gestures stems from a true desire to restore trust and help the community and (b) the community is not suspicious that some other agenda is operating; communities may be less likely to infer sincerity when they start from a place of strong distrust.[6] Whether reconciliatory gestures enhance trust and cooperation will also depend on such factors as whether procedural justice is also occurring and whether authorities are confronting the past in ways that are helpful or inadvertently distressing. Further, if the authorities act more fairly in everyday interactions but do not indicate to the public that they are trying to build trust, their efforts may have less effect.

"people routinely attempt to infer the motives behind the behavior of others"

Given that inferences about motives so strongly influence whether people react positively to reconciliatory gestures, a key question is, How do the circumstances and nature of a reconciliatory gesture shape perceptions of its sincerity? In 2018, Michael Wenzel and his colleagues found that delaying an apology usually reduced perceived sincerity, although perceived sincerity increased when the apology was given in a commemoration.[37] Other studies have examined the conditions under which apologies promote forgiveness. In a nutshell, the effectiveness of apologies depends on the victims' perceptions of the sincerity of the harmdoer.[38] Being the victim of historical subjugation or of specific acts of aggression may lead some groups to perceive public apologies or acknowledgements of injustice as insincere.[39]

Not surprisingly, insincere gestures are often counterproductive. In the early procedural justice literature, scholars commented on the possibility that sham gestures might occur and undermine legitimacy. Craig Haney famously argued in 1991 that court authorities provided only symbolic and not real justice and that, if the public recognized this, it might at some point rebel against this pretense and distrust the motives of the authorities.[40] Similarly, if leaders seem to be making insincere gestures of reconciliation, they may also undermine rather than build trust.[38] The issue in both cases is the inferred motive for the authorities' behavior.

We view the overall process of restoring trust as one that unfolds over time, shaped in part by while also shaping beliefs about procedural justice and legitimacy.[6,9,41] Reconciliatory efforts can help to change a community's view of the

legitimacy of the police or other authorities in ways that are distinct from the community's view of procedural justice—the fairness of the interactions they or their family, friends, and neighbors have had with the authorities on an individual level. This is not to say that legitimacy built entirely on reconciliatory gestures would be sustainable without continuing procedural justice but that this boost to legitimacy may give authorities the level of trust they need to convince the public to expect fair treatment and to thus facilitate positive interactions in the future. In this sense, reconciliation attempts can potentially jump-start the building of trust that follows reforms in procedural justice. When it comes to policing, a sustainable process of reconciliation requires substantive improvements in procedural justice in addition to acknowledgment of the historical and ongoing reasons for why groups would distrust policing as an institution.

trust

Psychological state in which a person is willing to be vulnerable because he or she expects the intentions or behavior of another to be positive

contact theory

Under certain circumstances, direct conversation or other forms of interaction can increase positive attitudes between groups

injustice gap

Discrepancy between what conciliatory messages acknowledge and the scope of the problem

Reconciliation Between Police & Communities: Field Data

Police–community relations make an ideal arena for exploring how to reestablish popular legitimacy (including trust), because law enforcement represents an arm of governmental power. In the last decade, police leaders across the United States have widely recognized that they have a trust gap with minority communities and have made attempts to bridge it. These activities, as we have mentioned, have included community-level initiatives intended to build trust, such as meetings to discuss local crimes; public statements by leaders acknowledging harm; and the acceptance of responsibility and even apologies for past injustices that the police have committed.

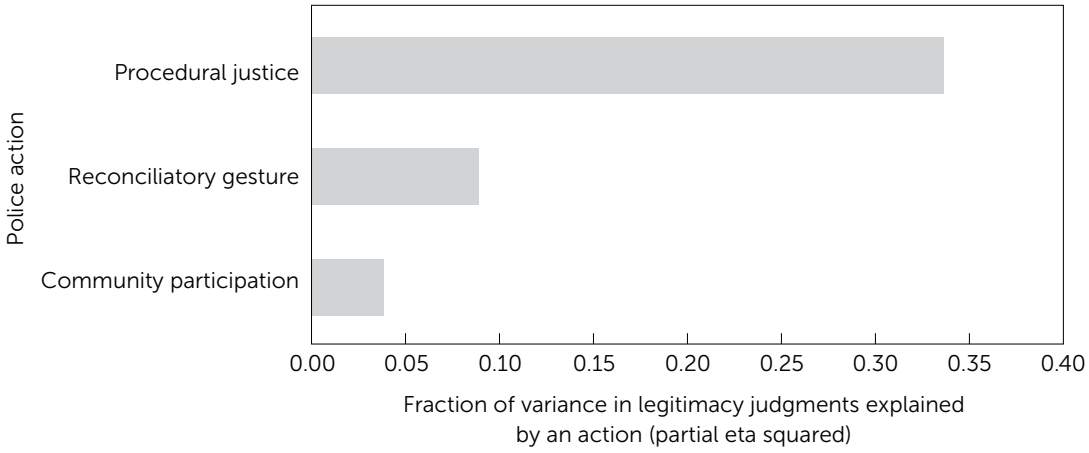
Most law enforcement is managed by local communities, so no systematic national database records all the community-level efforts taking place to increase trust in American police forces. To offer insight into the factors influencing responses to reconciliation efforts by police, we draw on some of our own research that speaks directly to this issue. In the spring of 2017, we, together with Tracey L. Meares, surveyed 2,501 New York City residents about the communities in their neighborhoods, city government, and their experiences with and behavior toward police in their neighborhood.[42]

In one part of the survey, we asked if respondents had heard about the New York Police Department in their neighborhood "taking any initiatives to improve their relationship with the community and build trust." We controlled for other factors that shape legitimacy and cooperation and found that those who knew of some initiative viewed the police as more legitimate and reported a stronger likelihood of cooperating with the New York Police Department by reporting crime.

The survey also included questions about the procedural justice of two aspects of policing: (a) how the police acted when dealing with people in the community and (b) whether people were given a chance to comanage crime-control strategies through participation in community meetings. The results indicated that both types of procedural justice mattered to legitimacy. As in past research, individual experiences and community-level judgments about police procedural justice in the neighborhood were associated with popular legitimacy and willingness to cooperate.[13] Also consistent with past procedural justice findings were survey responses showing that people had strong opinions about whether the police treated people fairly and respectfully and whether the police allowed community participation in decisionmaking.[43]

Awareness of a reconciliatory gesture had an influence on trust distinct from the contribution of procedural justice. (See Figure 2.) Reconciliatory gestures had the greatest positive impact on trust when people agreed or agreed strongly that these gestures were sincerely intended to help the community, and most respondents who had heard of a gesture fell into one of those categories. Knowing of a gesture the police had made predicted stronger belief in the police's legitimacy; however, this relation held true only for participants who agreed that the gesture was truly intended to help the community. Hence, with both procedural justice and reconciliatory gestures, evaluations of sincerity appear to moderate their impact.

Figure 2. Relationship between police actions & residents' judgments of police legitimacy



Note. A survey of New York City residents assessed the degree to which three police actions influenced their opinion of police legitimacy (their opinion that that the police act in ways consistent with residents' beliefs about right and wrong). The survey measured respondents' agreement with the view that their neighborhood police use procedural justice (behave fairly) and that the police value community participation (pay heed to community views when managing crime), and it asked whether respondents knew of reconciliatory gestures that the police had engaged in (initiatives undertaken to build trust with the community in the respondents' neighborhood). Views on procedural justice most strongly predicted belief in police legitimacy, but views on reconciliatory gestures and community participation also had an influence. Partial eta squared is commonly used to assess effect size, or the extent to which a particular variable predicts or causes another variable.

O'Brien, T. R., Tyler, T. R., & Meares, T. (2019). Building popular legitimacy with reconciliatory gestures and participation: A community-level model of authority. *Regulation & Governance.* Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1111/rego.12264

The results also add support for the notion that the gestures people perceive as insincere can backfire and undermine trust. Respondents who did not agree that a gesture they had heard about was sincerely intended to help the community expressed significantly less belief in the legitimacy of the police, not just compared with others who knew of a gesture and perceived it to be sincere but also compared with those who had not heard of a gesture. An additional analysis in which we used the same controls as we did in the main analysis suggested that knowing of a gesture had divergent effects on assessments of legitimacy: positive for those who agreed that the gesture was sincerely intended to help and negative for those who did not.

This correlational study suggests that making a gesture that recipients view as designed to be reconciliatory (to improve relationships) can be helpful and that this effect is distinct from the positive benefits of procedural justice. However, gestures not viewed as occurring in good faith can impair trust. In this study, we did not examine the content of the gestures made and did not address whether and how reconciliatory gestures should speak to the past, but we conducted a separate experimental study in which we considered these issues, as we discuss next.

Experimental Evidence

The two of us have used vignette-based experiments to seek causal evidence of our survey findings.[44] We conducted three studies with African-American respondents who used the TurkPrime platform.[45] We presented hypothetical scenarios concerning community-level actions by a police chief and asked participants to consider how they would respond if those actions occurred in their own community.

The findings support the survey results. Studies 1 and 2 found that a conciliatory message (presented to respondents as being motivated by the desire to "build trust with the community") enhanced willingness to cooperate with the police relative to a control message on improving technology (Study 1) or a message indicating the desire to take joint actions to control crime (Study 2). Study 3 showed that

conveying the intent of building trust matters more than the specific topic of focus and that the intent can be communicated effectively without spelling it out explicitly. Regardless of whether the police were portrayed as trying to build trust or reduce crime, participants who read that the police wanted input (participation) from the community expressed more willingness to cooperate than did participants who received messages that did not mention community input. In addition, the findings of Studies 2 and 3 demonstrated that the impact of the conciliatory message on cooperation was mediated by participant inferences about the sincerity of the police gesture for helping the community.

Experiments have also explored which aspects of specific types of police gestures are most important. Consider research on public apologies. Some U.S. police chiefs have advanced apologies to minority communities in an effort to address past injustices. Although these apologies can be a start, they may omit key points that community members may want to hear. For instance, one chief apologized for the "actions of the past" but went far out of his way to assert that police officers of today were not responsible for those actions, and he even dismissed the notion that the police of the past were responsible, blaming the laws instead. In this situation, there is a clear *injustice gap*,[9] a discrepancy between what the message acknowledges and the scope of the problem. What is the impact of apologies that include an acknowledgment of responsibility or, on the contrary, expressly dismiss responsibility?

We and Meares[46] have conducted an experiment in which we varied the content of apologies given by authorities to a sample of online respondents recruited from TurkPrime.[45] We asked participants how they would react if a described gesture occurred in their own community. We manipulated two dimensions of the message: whether a police chief acknowledged responsibility for past harm and whether the police chief apologized.

We found that apologies lacking acknowledgment of responsibility for past harm can reduce cooperation among those who do not believe that the police are generally procedurally just; these are the very people whom the authorities most want to reach with reconciliatory gestures. For this group, apologies without some acceptance of responsibility actually reduced cooperation relative to messages that included no apology.[46] Different messages had no significant impact among those who already viewed the police as generally being fair. More studies are needed to tease out the features of reconciliatory gestures that will lead to the best outcomes.

Research into reconciliatory efforts by the police highlights a tension between the motivations of authorities and the needs of communities. To build trust through reconciliatory gestures, authorities should acknowledge their institution's responsibility for past harm, yet other pressures may work against such acknowledgment. For instance, police officers themselves may be angered by this kind of action. Psychological research shows that people do not like their group to be criticized,[47] and officers who were not personally involved in past injustices may particularly dislike being cast as having some responsibility for them. Further, people are particularly sensitive to their groups being criticized in front of an outside audience.[48] Yet public self-criticism is the express purpose of any meaningful acknowledgment and apology.[49]

In crafting reconciliatory gestures, institutional leaders will have to address the needs of the communities they have sworn to serve and also find a way for members of the institution to cooperate with the program.

Policy Implications

The procedural justice and reconciliation literatures both offer potentially relevant psychological bases for policymakers seeking to build trust. They provide theoretical frameworks and sets of empirical research findings. But do they offer empirically supported suggestions for making policy and, in particular, for devising policing policies? As this review shows, procedural justice has been demonstrated to have value for policing. Reconciliatory gestures also

seem to have considerable potential, but that potential has been less studied. Some national groups have called for reconciliatory gestures (for example, the National Network for Safe Communities at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice), but no one has made a concerted effort to apply empirical research findings about reconciliation to policing. Hence, policy recommendations concerning applications of reconciliatory gestures to policing must be more tentative.

Policy Implications for Procedural Justice

Procedural justice has already been widely used as a framework for efforts to build trust in the courts and in police departments. It is an incremental process that involves multiple efforts to build trust by exercising authority through fair procedures. A strong body of research supports its general propositions, and findings from recent studies more specifically suggest it can be applied to policing.[50] Specific types of policy changes that advance the agenda of trust building through procedural justice involve reimagining the mission of the police, expanding the metrics of success, reevaluating policy, retraining officers, and changing internal procedures.

Change the Mission Statement. Many police departments conceptualize themselves as a police force, framing their role in terms of a command-and-control presence in a community. If the police define themselves as a police service, their focus changes to whether they are, in fact, meeting the concerns and needs of their community. As officers transition from a militaristic model of their function to a service model, the nature of their interactions should change as well. This emphasis on the community should also lead to the adoption of metrics that measure community feelings and concerns and thereby provide information about the police's popular legitimacy.

Enlarge the Suite of Metrics for Assessing Success. Today, most departments define their success or failure by looking at the crime rate, in part because crime rate data are automatically collected and available for analysis. In contrast, few departments systematically collect data on their popular legitimacy. This lack means that officers who make more arrests have evidence of achievement that can be pointed to for promotions and awards, whereas officers who prevent crime by cultivating a positive relationship with the community tend to go without official recognition or reward when their contributions cannot be so easily quantified. It is important to find ways to acknowledge and reward efforts to build popular support. This requires finding ways to quantify those efforts, such as through post-contact surveys in which the public evaluates officers' actions.

"few departments systematically collect data on their popular legitimacy "

Reevaluate Policy. The policies and practices of legal institutions—the police, the courts, jails and prisons, parole systems—need to be evaluated and brought into conformity with the principles of procedural justice to increase perceived fairness. Many of the changes to these institutions will directly affect the dynamics of their interactions with the public.

In an early effort, the California courts audited their procedures with the aim of creating an environment that allowed disputants to feel that they were treated fairly.[51] On the basis of their findings, they instituted a variety of innovations—for example, they enhanced help lines, established in-court aid centers, and provided translation services. A similar effort in police departments is described in *Principles of Procedurally Just Policing*.[52] Departments took steps such as establishing rules for when officers are allowed to use force, instituting the use of wearable cameras (to provide an objective record of interactions), and training police in de-escalation tactics. Another similar effort, in the United Kingdom, is the West Midlands Police's Fairness in Policing project, which focuses on police–citizen interactions.[53]

Retrain Officers. Both courts and police departments recognize that their staffs need to be

trained to incorporate the concepts of procedural justice into their work and to adopt new tactics for dealing with the community. A core objective is to change the staff's vision of their mission. Such training was recommended by Barack Obama's President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing, which advocated training police officers to think of themselves as a police service, not a police force.[54]

Can training change police behavior? Several assessments tentatively suggest it can. In a study published in 2015, Wesley G. Skogan and his colleagues found that participation in a procedural justice training program in Chicago increased police officers' expressed support for using procedural justice strategies in the community.[55] Dennis P. Rosenbaum and a colleague reported in 2017 that such training shifted cadet behavior toward being more neutral and respectful during scenarios involving interactions with people in the community.[56] Emma Antrobus and her associates found similar positive effects of procedural justice training on officer attitudes and on-the-job behavior in a small sample of Australian police officers.[57] And Emily G. Owens and her colleagues found in 2016 that procedural justice training led a group of Seattle police officers to use force less frequently against people in the community.[58]

Each of these studies supports the value of procedural justice training. However, they have important limits. Only two consider behavior in the community, and both use small samples. Further, the Owens study focuses on one-on-one training by a supervisor once an officer has been identified as exhibiting problematic behaviors.[58] None of these studies speak to the key policy question: Can a police department change the overall nature of officer behavior across a large number of officers using a training program that can realistically be implemented? At this time, the data are too sparse to provide an answer.

Change Internal Department Procedures. An obstacle to retraining is that officers may resist the teachings and be reluctant to shift their approach to policing. They may, however, respond to departmental changes that revise internal procedural justice, not solely police treatment of members of the public. Research on police departments indicates that officers themselves feel that they work in environments that lack procedural justice. Studies suggest that if a department is converted into a fairer work organization, officers will change their behavior toward the community.[59–66]

This kind of internal change can help police departments meet multiple goals simultaneously. The performance of officers improves, because they are more likely to adhere to department policies. Their well-being improves, thanks to a reduction in the notoriously high levels of stress associated with police work. And officers treat people in the community more fairly.[67] Further, the approach does not meet the resistance to change that is sometimes encountered with retraining. As officers experience fairness in their departments, they become less alienated and stressed and are more open to treating the public fairly without explicit orders to do so.

Policy Recommendations in Brief

- Redefine the mission of policing as providing a service.
- Adopt measures that quantify successes in building popular legitimacy.
- Evaluate policies in terms of their impact on popular legitimacy.
- Retrain officers to emphasize procedural fairness in their actions in the community.
- Structure police departments so that officers are treated in a procedurally just way.

Policy Implications for Reconciliation Efforts

Although the recommendations emerging from reconciliation research do not have the strong evidence base of the recommendations from procedural justice research, the following suggestions for the police seem reasonable. Critically, reconciliatory gestures alone are not enough. They acknowledge problems and

signal the intention to build trust, but to be fully successful, they must be paired with substantive improvements in procedural justice.

Make Explicit Reconciliatory Gestures. Because past and present racial and other inequalities make distrust likely, explicit gestures to improve police–community relations are critical. Research has shown that such gestures have added value: they can contribute to building trust beyond the benefits derived from procedural justice. In addition to working on improving people's everyday experiences with the police, leaders should directly articulate to the community and beyond how they are working to establish just policing and should state frankly that they want to rebuild trust. However, they must also seek community input about all the reasons why these gestures may be perceived as insincere and then address those factors. This step is particularly important, because research into reconciliation in policing is still in its beginning stages. We recommend seeking community input especially but not exclusively from communities that are most likely to distrust police, to fully understand the barriers that must be addressed before gestures are made.

Be Thoughtful About the Types of Gestures Chosen. Research demonstrates that not all gestures are equally influential. Hence, a key question for further study is what traits they should have. As we have stressed, there is no simple formula. One thing is certain, though: To be effective, gestures must be perceived as sincere. Further, apologies without acknowledgements of responsibility are not effective.

Reconciliatory gestures themselves can address the past, but they are also about the present and future. So far, studies have not explored whether simply promising to change in the future is an adequate response to distrust. Researchers need to look further into whether leaders must address the past if they want to build trust and, if so, how to best do so.

Be Aware That Positive Effects Will Not Occur Automatically. Leaders who decide to take reconciliatory steps need to understand the needs and grievances of community members so as to gear gestures and devise future policies appropriately. Piecemeal apologies or acknowledgments that sound defensive may not be effective and can even be counterproductive. Research shows, for instance, that failing to acknowledge responsibility can negate the potential benefits of apologizing.

Combine Procedural Justice With Reconciliation. Although the procedural justice and reconciliation literatures have been presented separately, reconciliatory gestures will not work in a vacuum. They need to be accompanied by ongoing changes in everyday police behavior. Police leaders eager to address distrust and frustrated by the challenges of changing their departments might be drawn to the seeming simplicity of making reconciliatory pronouncements. Those are unlikely to have positive impact in the absence of signs that policing practices are changing.

The connection between procedural justice and reconciliation is that people are likely to assess the sincerity of reconciliatory gestures through the perspective of procedural justice. If people experience or learn about procedurally just interactions between authorities and community members, they will see reconciliatory gestures (such as acknowledgments, apologies, or community–police meetings) as sincere attempts to help the community. If people experience or learn about procedurally unjust interactions between authorities and communities, they will see reconciliatory gestures as insincere. Unless authorities join reconciliatory gestures directed at the community with a commitment to procedural justice in individual interactions, communities will perceive such gestures as a sham.

It is important to avoid the trap of considering policies built around reconciliatory gestures as a substitute for changes in everyday practices. In particular, the success of both reconciliation and procedural justice depends on perceived sincerity, and these two approaches can either mutually reinforce or mutually undermine each other in shaping such perceptions.

Policy Recommendations in Brief

- Make community-level trust-building gestures.
- Recognize that not all gestures are effective. Evaluate the community's perception of the sincerity behind any such gestures.
- Combine community-level gestures with visible acts of procedural justice to provide evidence of sincere intentions.

Conclusion

This review has focused on distrust of the police. The discussion has centered on the police because distrust of them has recently drawn national attention. Yet the implications of this research are much broader. In many places, including the United States, people have lost faith in their political, legal, and social institutions; policies that can restore trust are crucial to humanity's collective future. The police-related research suggests that the procedural justice and reconciliation literatures provide useful frameworks for designing evidence-based policies and practices aimed at building trust in many realms where it is broken.

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