

Fostering Public Cooperation with the Police : Testing the Impact of Police Legitimacy

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of police legitimacy on public cooperation with the police. This study consists of obligation to obey, moral alignment, and legality of police actions as factors of police legitimacy. This research employs a survey questionnaire to evaluate the police legitimacy and public cooperation with the police. The number of subject of the study is 354 citizens residing in Daegu metropolitan city and some cities of Gyeongsangbuk-do province. The study employs a multi-regression analysis to investigate the effect of the three factors of police legitimacy on public cooperation with the police. The effects of the three key factors of police legitimacy- obligation to obey, moral alignment, and legality of police actions-on public cooperation with the police are significant; specifically, legality of police actions is shown to be more effective for nurturing public cooperation than the rest of these factors. The findings also have some implications for how Korean police can foster better relationships with citizens in the communities.

Keywords: *Police legitimacy, Obligation, Moral alignment, Legality, Public cooperation*

1. Introduction

The Korean police suffer from a difficult situation in which police officers do not have an effective control against crimes without the official exercise of stronger governmental authority. There was a very big shock on November 14 last year that the protesters in the indignation meeting held by 53 organizations including the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions, the Korean Teachers and Education Worker's Union, and the Korean Peasants' League recklessly used physical violence to the police. They absolutely denied a governmental authority exercised by the police as a criminal justice agency, which means that police legitimacy is at risk in Korean society.

The concept of legitimacy is highly abstract and complex to define and has been approached and interpreted by studies in different academic fields[1]. In general, legitimacy is defined as a psychological property of an authority, institution, or social arrangement that leads those connected to it to believe that it is appropriate, proper, and just[2]. There are, however, some concept definitions with different approaches on legitimacy. There is not a big difference between the general definition of legitimacy and different definitions. Applied to the criminal justice system, the concept of legitimacy is bound up with fairness, legality, moral values, and compliance of power and authority exercised by the police. According to this definition, police legitimacy consists of the following three elements: (a) people's sense of duty to obey the orders of the police, (b) people feeling aligned with the moral values of the police, (c) the perceived legality of the police[3].

Police legitimacy has a very close relationship with cooperation of citizen to effectively control crimes. People who respect police legitimacy are more likely to comply with the law than people not. Police organizations enforce the law to protect the public from a variety of crimes and harms with police's authority and force. Whether people accept or deny the authority and force of police agencies depends on citizens' trust to police. One of the most common things that citizens can have from police trust is public cooperation with the police. So public police agencies need to understand the intrinsic and internal motivations shaping people's desire to voluntarily cooperate with police[4]. US and UK researches highlight the conclusion that such motivations are largely linked to perceptions of legitimacy[5][6]. Researches show that if people view an authority as legitimate they will be more likely to cooperate with that authority[7][8].

The Korean police tend to consider police power as a rightful use of physical force which sometimes plays a negative important role of triggering people's exercise of violence. In particular, people do not make a friendly relationship with the police because of bad and negative images of the Korean police, relating to corruptions or misconducts. That's why there is a great difficulty in building an amicable relationship between citizens and the police. This is a barrier that interrupts forming and promoting public cooperation with the police. The Korean police absolutely need public cooperation to deter or prevent crime occurrence. Considering that the Korean police agencies have faced significant challenges in dealing with rapid changes of crime trends, they need to generate public cooperation with the police in response to enhancing police's ability of collaborative crime control. To get citizens to cooperate with the police, police organizations need to make people perceive police activities as legitimate. Using data collected from a sample of Korean citizens, the present study examines factors of police legitimacy that affect the willingness of people to cooperate with police efforts to control crime and disorder effectively.

2. Data and Method

2.1 Sample

The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of police legitimacy on public cooperation with the police. The study is based on statistical analyses as an empirical research to test the impact of police legitimacy. The data used for the statistical analyses were from a survey targeting citizens who reside in Daegu metropolitan city and some cities of Gyeongsangbuk-do province. The surveyors met the prospective respondent's on the street to conduct the survey through a random sampling. It was conducted from September 20 to October 7, 2016.

Sample data were collected from 354 respondents, giving a response rate of 88.5%. The demographics of the respondents are shown in Table 1. Respondents in the sample were between 20 and 77 years of age ($M =$

46.7 years), 69.2% were male, 59.2% were married, 81.6% had attained more than a college qualification, and 89.5% have been living in the survey areas for more than 5 years. It is worthy to note that the respondents tended to be a little bit old and more educated. In particular, the response rate of men was higher than the one of women. This fact needs to be taken into consideration when looking at the analytical results.

Table 1. Demographics of Respondents (N=354)

Gender	
1 = Male	69.2%
2 = Female	30.8%
Age	
From 20 years age to older than 70 years	M = 46.7 years Minimum = 20 years, maximum = 77 years
Marital status	
0 = single, divorced, widowed	40.8%
1 = married	59.2%
Education	
1 = less than the level of high school	18.4%
2 = college	79.1%
3 = graduate school	2.5%
Years of residence	
1 = less than 1 year	1.7%
2 = 1 year to less than 2 years	8.8%
3 = 2 years to less than 5 years	18.4%
4 = 5 years to less than 10 years	39.7%
5 = 10 years to less than 20 years	23.5%
6 = equal to or longer than 20 years	7.9%

2.2 Measures

The questionnaire was drawn from the ESS Trust in Justice Module made by Jackson et al.(2009)[3]. Of particular interest to the current study were survey questions that related to 2 variables: police legitimacy and public cooperation with the police.

Police legitimacy. Police legitimacy is consisted of 3 sub-constructs: obligation to obey, moral alignment, and legality of police actions. This research measured police legitimacy by ten questions on 5-point Likert-type scales, with a higher score indicating more favorable evaluations. The following questions were concerned with your own feeling about obeying the law: (a) "You should do what the police tell you to do even if you disagree" (b) "You should accept the decisions made by police, even if you think they are wrong" (c) "You should do what the police tell you to do even when you don't like the way they treat you" The questions for measuring moral alignment are as follows: (d) "The police usually act in ways that are consistent with my own ideas about what is right and wrong" (e) "The police can be trusted to make decisions that are right for people in my neighborhood" (f) "My own feelings about what is right and wrong usually agree with the law" At last, the questions for legality of police actions are as follows: (g) "When the police take written evidence from people, do you think what they write down is always a fair and accurate record of what was said?" (h) "Police officers have to use force to defend themselves when they are making arrests or restraining prisoners. Apart from this, do you think the police ever use more force than is necessary when making arrests?" (i) "Do you think the police ever use violence to people held at police stations without good reason?" (j) "From what you heard, do you think police officers ever make up evidence or plant evidence on people?" This study combined these items into a scale of police legitimacy.

Public cooperation with the police. Responses to three items were combined to form a cooperation scale. This research measured public cooperation with the police by three questions on 5-point Likert-type scales, with a higher score indicating more favorable evaluations. Respondents were asked what they would do if they were the only witness to a crime. The questions are as follows: (a) “Imagine that you were out and saw someone push a man the ground and steal his wallet. How likely would you be to call the police?” (b) “How willing would you be to report suspicious activity near your house to the police?” (c) “How willing would you be to provide any information to the police to help find a suspected criminal?”

3. Results

A factor analysis was conducted to test for the assumed conceptual differentiation between the individual variables used to construct each scales (see Table 2). Many of the items used to construct these scales were based on previous work [6][8][9]. As can be seen from Table 2, no overlap between the constructed scales is detected. Table 2 also shows Cronbach alpha reliability coefficients of 3 sub-constructs of police legitimacy and public cooperation with the police. As can be seen, the Cronbach alpha coefficients of each scale are reasonably reliable scales.

Table 2. Factor analysis and reliability analysis to variables used in the study

Item	Factor				Cronbach alpha
	1	2	3	4	
Obligation to obey					
Do what the police tell you to do even if you disagree	.791				
Accept the decisions made by police...	.848				.799
Do what the police tell you to do when you don't like the way...	.798				
Moral alignment					
Police act in ways being consistent with my own ideas...		.800			
Police can be trusted to make decisions...		.847			.784
My own feelings about what is right and wrong...		.794			
Legality of police actions					
Police take written evidence from people...			.680		
Police have to use force to defend themselves...			.786		.823
Police use violence to people...			.833		
Police make up evidence or plant evidence...			.847		
Public cooperation with the police					
Call police to report a crime				.846	
Report suspicious activity				.811	.786
Provide police with information				.681	
Eigen values	1.112	1.093	7.187	1.016	
Explained variance (%)	8.556	8.410	55.283	7.813	

Table 3 shows the correlation coefficients between police legitimacy and public cooperation with the police. In Table 3, it is seen that obligation to obey ($r=.393$, $p < 0.01$), moral alignment ($r=.340$, $p < 0.01$), and legality of police actions ($r=.593$, $p < 0.01$) are most closely related to public cooperation with the police. This may have implications for the findings obtained by regression analysis.

Table 3. Relationships between Police legitimacy and public cooperation with the police

	Police legitimacy			Public cooperation with the police
	Obligation to obey	Moral alignment	Legality of police actions	
1	1.0			
2	.393*	1.0		
3	.419*	.340*	1.0	
4	.499*	.444*	.593*	1.0

1: Obligation to obey, 2: Moral alignment, 3: Legality of police actions, 4: public cooperation with the police

*p < 0.01 (two-tailed test)

To isolate the impact of each variable on the public cooperation with the police, an OLS regression analysis was performed on the full sample. The results are presented in Table 4. These results show that obligation to obey ($\beta = .251$, $p < 0.01$), moral alignment ($\beta = .214$, $p < 0.01$), and legality of police actions ($\beta = .522$, $p < 0.01$) are predictors of the public cooperation with the police. As can be seen, about 72% of the variation in perception of the public cooperation with the police could be explained by obligation to obey, moral alignment, and legality of police actions.

Table 4. OLS regression analysis of public cooperation with the police

Variables	Coefficient	Standard error	t ratio	β
Obligation to obey	.215	.107	5.299*	.251
Moral alignment	.186	.041	4.841*	.214
Legality of police actions	.500	.038	11.514*	.522
Constant	.264			
R2		.727		
Adjusted R2		.723		

*p < 0.01

4. Discussion

The main purpose of the present study is to examine the effects of police legitimacy on the public cooperation with the police. This is very rare that such a study has been undertaken in Korea.

To summarize the findings, it was found that police legitimacy predicted public cooperation with the police. The empirical evidence shows that police organizations need to build an amicable relation with people in order to control and prevent crimes and disorders in the community effectively. Police legitimacy is a mechanism for a social control that is an important tool to keep our society safe and ordered. This mechanism depends on a friendly relationship between police and citizens so the police have to construct a cooperative linkage with citizens to make a society safe and secure against crimes and disorders.

As can be seen in Table 4, legality of police actions has the highest impact on public cooperation with the police compared to obligation to obey and moral alignment. It is closely related to the way that how the police deal with citizens while enforcing the law. Legality of police actions, that is to say, is bound up with whether the police keep legal procedures in performing their duty. Considering this analytical result, first of all, police organizations need to find managerial strategies for police officers' compliance of legal procedures to enhance cooperation with people.

The police have a coercive force like a governmental authority to respond crimes and destruction of social orders, which means that the police can use a compulsory power to force citizens to cooperate in policing for

preventing and controlling crimes and social disorders. In particular, abuse of police force is too much likely to induce distrust of police and resistance against police actions because it breaks legality of police actions. A coercive force is not an effective way of triggering public cooperation with the police for the dysfunction of using an excessive police power.

This key finding of this study is that police legitimacy can be an effective way of leading public cooperation with the police in the Korean context. The effects of the three key elements of police legitimacy—namely obligation to obey, moral alignment, and legality of police actions—on public cooperation with the police are significant. There is something different from the findings of researches surveyed in some countries. In particular, the legitimacy model does not seem to be sufficiently applicable to the Japanese data [10]. The authors suggest that possible reasons for the discrepancy between the model's hypotheses and the analytical results are related to the lack of citizenship and information about the police. From the suggestion, we can draw proper implications for building public cooperation with the police effectively.

The ideal world for optimization of police legitimacy is a highly civilized society where individualism is highly valued and praised as a part of citizenship [8]. The individualism is similar to civic individualism called by Bellah et al. [11]. Civic individualism sees the individual in relation to a larger community and stresses active citizenship and the obligation to contribute to the public good while valuing individual freedom and liberty; it is capable of sustaining genuine individuality and nurturing both public and private life. Civic individualism means individuals with a good citizenship that can trigger obligation or duty as a member of highly civilized societies that require cooperation with public agencies.

The lack of information about the police among people is relating to the fact that people scarcely have contact with the police in their daily lives. Except for a relation with incidents, citizens are likely to avoid from contracting with the police directly. Thus, due to this, the police are on a long distance relationship with people. Finally people tend to be uncooperative with police officers in dealing with incidents.

The findings of this study highlight a few issues for consideration in future research. It would be worthwhile to question further the causal relationship between police legitimacy and public cooperation with the police. Specifically, what are the main characteristics of police legitimacy for building cooperation with the police? Is police legitimacy necessarily tied to public cooperation with the police to take care of crimes effectively? Perhaps a useful approach for studying these issues is an examination of the dynamics of the interaction between police legitimacy and public cooperation with the police with more data collected from police officers and citizens. The relationship between police legitimacy and public cooperation with the police may have implications for education, supervision, appraisal of individual performance, training, and guideline for jobs to enhance police effectiveness of crime deterrence. Researches designed to disentangle and clarify the causal relationship may offer useful information for such a policy development.

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