

Trust in the Police Force,
Police Legitimacy,
and the Intent to Offend:
A Study of Japanese Teenagers

International Self-Report
Delinquency Study(ISRD)
Working Paper Series No. 2

Masahiro Tsushima (Ryukoku University)

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Author: Masahiro Tsushima (Ryukoku University)

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Traditional social bonds of family and community have eroded with the advancement of individualism and secularism. Some people find it difficult to access informal mutual support. Consequently, functions discharged by public services such as the police force have become more essential for the daily lives of citizens. Japan, a country once famous for its collectivist culture, is not an exception to this trend.

Police work requires public support for the recognition of incidents of crime and the identification of unknown suspects. The police force must be trusted by the public to execute the tasks with which it is charged. Critically, however, a series of police brutality incidents across the globe have decreased public trust in the police force, especially in Western societies. To cite a memorable example, the May 2020 incident of a white Minneapolis police officer killing a black man named George Floyd triggered the Black Lives Matter movement.

Both academic and practical attention has been attracted to the theory of procedural justice (PJ) and its role in shaping the public's willingness to support the police force in crime control. The current study forms a part of the International Self-Report Delinquency Study (ISRD)-JAPAN project¹ and involves three objectives. First, it purposes to examine the levels of trust and legitimacy accorded to police personnel by Japanese teenagers vis-à-vis their counterparts in other ISRD countries (mostly European

nations). Second, it assesses the suitability of the PJ model to the data obtained apropos Japanese teenagers. Third, the analysis outcomes of the study are referenced to demonstrate some limitations of the current investigation and its methodology and to highlight certain crucial issues for future research endeavors.

Procedural Justice Theory

American social psychologist Tom Tyler posited and developed PJ theory. The concept elucidates how police personnel interact with the public, how such interactions shape the public image of the police force, and how such interfaces influence the willingness of the citizenry to comply with the law and cooperate with the police (Tyler, 2006; Jackson et al., 2009). In specific terms, people are likely to trust the police force if they are treated fairly by police personnel. The level of legitimacy enjoyed by the constabulary also consequently increases. People who perceive the police force as more legitimate will, in turn, be more likely to comply with the law and cooperate with police officers (Figure 1).

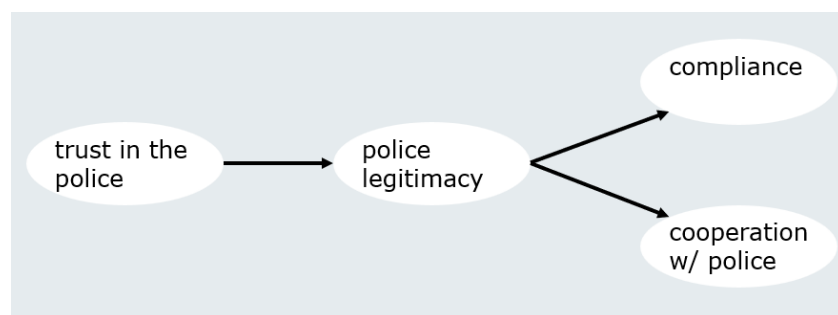


Figure 1. The Procedural Justice (PJ) Model (Tyler, 2006; Jackson et al., 2009)

The PJ model is sufficiently tested in Western settings and is endorsed by abundant empirical evidence (Jackson et al., 2012). The results of the ISRD3 survey using compliance as a dependent

variable also evinced that the PJ model was generally supported among teenagers in European countries and the United States (Farren et al., 2018). However, some studies have indicated that the PJ model is not equivalently applicable to non-Western countries (e.g., Tankebe, 2009 for Ghana; Jackson et al., 2014 for Pakistan; and Tsushima & Hamai, 2015 for Japan). In Japan, the PJ model was found to be inappropriate because of (1) the conceptual problem associated with the word “duty” in questions alluding to the “duty to obey the order of the police,”² (2) the paucity of information available to people about the police, and (3) the citizenry’s low expectations from the police force in Japan’s crime-free and safe society.

The current study duplicates the research design and data analysis methodology of a previously conducted study (Farren et al., 2018) examining ISRD3 data. It hypothesizes that Japanese teenagers who trust the police tend to regard the police force as legitimate and thus comply with the law. Importantly, this study is the first to verify the PJ model with data pertaining to Japanese teenagers.

Data and Method

The questions related to PJ in the ISRD3 survey were translated into Japanese and were employed for data collection. The variables included compliance with the law (dependent variable), trust in the police force (independent variable), and police legitimacy (intermediate variable).

The measure of intention to offend was chosen as a proxy for compliance in congruence with Farren et al.’s (2018) study. The intention extent was measured using two vignette questions (9.2, 9.4):

respondents read a fictitious account and selected one answer option that most approximated their opinions.

The variable of trust in the police was evaluated via five questions (10.1–10.5). Perceived police legitimacy was assessed through three questions (10.6–10.8). The respondents were required to select the response closest to their desired answer. The questions and answers may be reviewed in the Appendix.

The ISRD survey was conducted between December 2019 and February 2020 with 1,226 students attending seventh to ninth grades in randomly selected classrooms in the Kansai region. Osaka, the largest city of this territory, is also the second-most populated metropolitan area in Japan. ISRD-Japan researchers visited the designated classrooms and asked students to fill in their answers to the questionnaire during a class period. The computer-assisted self-interviewing method was employed to collect the data. The targeted number of the respondents was 1,362. Some students were absent on the day of data collection and some parents refused their children's participation in the survey. Further, two answer sheets were deemed invalid and eliminated. Therefore, the final response rate was 90.0%. Only ninth-grade participants (N=422) were asked to respond to PJ-related questions upon contemplation of their appropriate ability to evaluate the contents.

Results

Among other objectives, this study purposed to ascertain the levels of trust Japanese teenagers vested in the police force and their perception of police legitimacy by comparing these parameters against the results reported by their ISRD peers. Figure 2 presents the mean POMP scores³ reported by Japan and other ISRD3 countries apropos trust. The figure reveals that Japan's score is almost the highest among all ISRD3 countries.

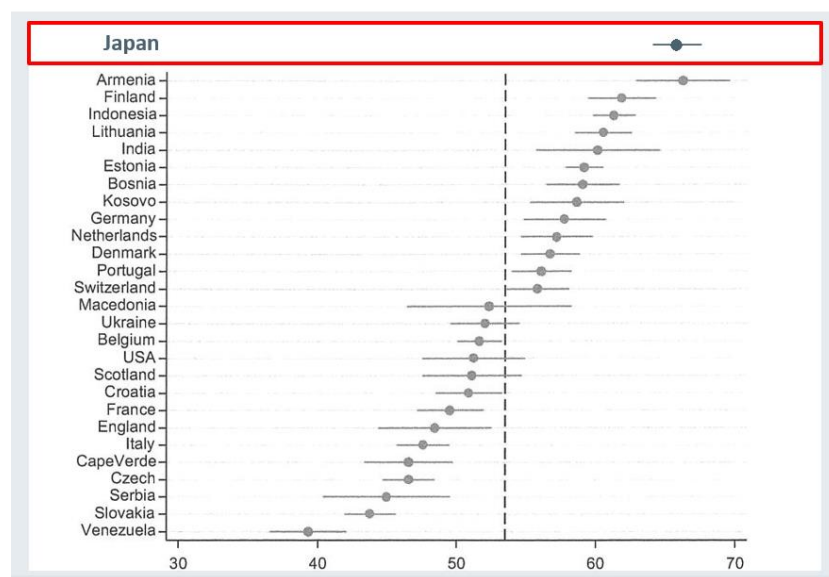


Figure 2. Mean POMP Scores of Trust for All ISRD Countries

Note: This figure is modified from Farren et al. (2018: 178)

Figure 3 displays the mean POMP scores vis-à-vis legitimacy. Japan's score is somewhat higher than the average tallies reported by the other ISRD3 countries.

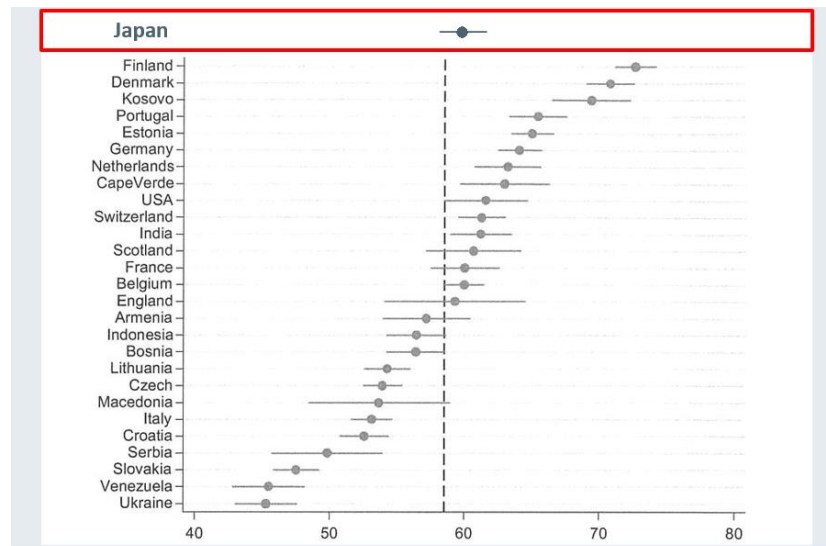


Figure 3. Mean POMP Values of Legitimacy for All ISRD Countries

Note: This figure is modified from Farren et al. (2018: 179)

Figure 4 exhibits the effects of trust on legitimacy after controlling for gender, age, and self-control.

Trust was found to statistically significantly influence the perception of police legitimacy. Teenagers in Japan as well as other ISRD3 countries who trusted the police also tended to perceive the police force as legitimate.

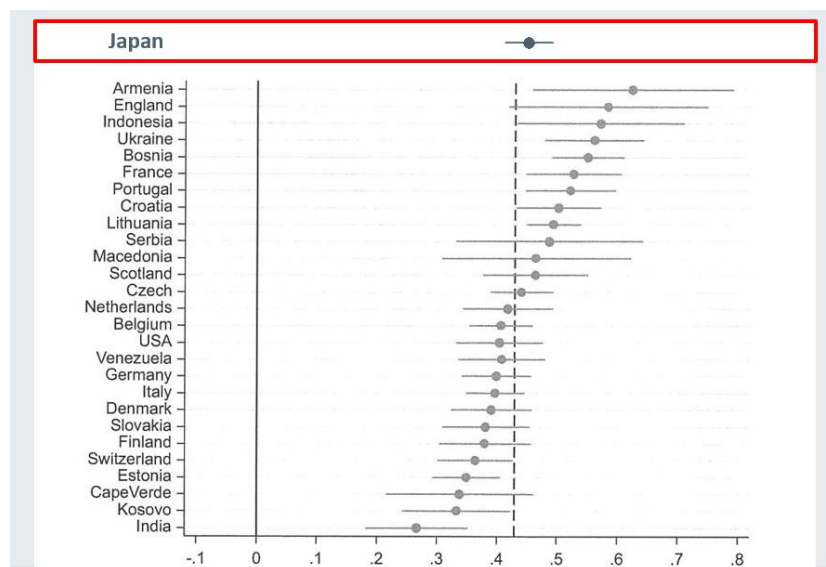


Figure 4. Effects of Trust on Legitimacy in All ISRD Countries

Note: This figure is modified from Farren et al. (2018: 180)

Next, this study examined the suitability of the PJ model to the data obtained for Japanese teenagers.

Table 1 evinces the results of regression models controlling for gender, age, and self-control.

Table 1. Regression models for the effects of PJ on the intention to offend

	Model 1 (N=387)			Model 2 (N=370)		
	B	SE	β	B	SE	β
(Constant)	59.258	12.662	-----	58.179	12.866	-----
Trust	-.052	.06	-.044	.031	.069	.026
Legitimacy	-----	-----	-----	-.19**	.073	-.151
Gender	-2.535	2.448	-.052	-1.415	2.484	-.029
Age	.887	2.762	.016	1.123	2.793	.02
Self-control	-12.859***	2.304	-.286	-11.404***	2.355	-.253
R ²	.096			.104		
Adj. R ²	.087			.091		
F ratio	10.222			8.439		
F ratio sig.	.000			.000		

***p<.001, **p<.01, *p<.05

Model 1 shows how trust influences the intention to offend without controlling for legitimacy. In other words, it displays the total effect of trust on the intention to offend. Model 2 reveals the effect of trust on the intention to offend after controlling for legitimacy. Put differently, it evinces the direct effect of trust on the intention to offend. The results reject the PJ hypothesis, divulging that both the total and direct effects of trust on the intention to offend are not statistically significant at the .05 level. According to Farren et al. (2018), 18 of the 27 ISRD countries reported a significant total effect of trust on the intention to offend. When the variable of legitimacy was introduced, the total effects decreased dramatically for most of the above-mentioned 18 countries, which primarily represented developed European nations. In other words, perceived legitimacy was found to mediate between trust in the police and the intention to offend. The

results of the present study were statistically significant at the .01 level for the effect of legitimacy on the intention to offend. Notably, self-control also statistically significantly influenced the intention to offend at the .001 level and denoted the most significant variable for the present analysis.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study is the first to validate the PJ model with data pertaining to Japanese teenagers. This section summarizes the results and discusses directions for prospective research endeavors.

The study found that the trust vested by Japanese teenagers in the police force and consequently their perceptions of police legitimacy are relatively high compared to teenagers of other ISRD countries. This outcome opposes the outcomes of a previous study conducted with adults by the author of the present investigation (Hamai & Tsushima, 2012). The age of the respondents could be a factor for the disparity in results: the current study was targeted at early teenagers aged 14 and 15, while the previous study involved adults (15–79 years old). Very few teenagers have experienced actual contact with the police and most of them probably answered the questions based on the positive image of the police force disseminated by the media. The results could also reflect the reality: annual survey results (Chuo-chosa sha, 2022) reported 2.3 out of 5 points as the level of trust in the police force in 2000 (higher scores indicated a higher level of trust); this score rose steadily to 3.6 points in 2021. Thus, the public trust in the constabulary has grown over the last two decades.

Second, the effect of trust in the police on legitimacy was found to be statistically significant. Thus, Japanese teenagers who trust the police are likely to feel that the police should be allowed to exercise their authority to maintain social order, manage conflicts, and solve problems. The effect of legitimacy on the intention to offend was also statistically significant. Teenagers who regard the police as legitimate are likely to comply with the laws. However, no causal relationship was found between the level of trust in the police and the degree of the intention to offend. In sum, the data obtained from Japanese teenagers reject the PJ model. Put differently, the PJ hypothesis that fair police actions incentivize the public to comply with the law may not apply to Japanese teenagers. The reasons for this divergence are unclear for the moment. Further analyses must be conducted with the Japanese data and additional studies of PJ are required to more comprehensively apprehend the associations between teenagers and the police force.

Finally, the results of the present study indicate that individual personal factors such as self-control function crucially as triggers of delinquent behaviors in juveniles in Japan rather than the public perceptions of the police force. However, this finding is unrelated to the central theme of the present study and could be undertaken in future initiatives.

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Appendix: Questions and Answers

Measures of Compliance (Intention to offend)

Imagine: You own a two year old mobile phone. You convince a class-mate that this old model is great and you do not say that there is a new model that is much better and cheaper. You are able to sell your class-mate your old mobile phone for a price that allows you to buy yourself the brand new model.

9.2 Can you imagine actually doing this?

not at all	probably not	undecided	probably yes	yes, surely
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Imagine: In a big store you see something which you always wanted but couldn't afford (e.g. smart trainers, expensive teshirt, CD, or perfume). You take it home without paying.

9.4 Can you imagine actually doing this if it you were certain of not getting caught?

not at all	probably not	undecided	probably yes	yes, surely
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Measures of Trust in the Police (1)

10.1) When victims report crimes to the police, do you think the police treat people of different races, different ethnic groups, or of foreign origin equally?

Tick **ONE** box

- ☐ Yes, everyone is treated equally
- ☐ No, some groups are treated worse,
Which groups? _____ (write in)

10.2) If a violent crime or a burglary happened near where you live and the police were called, how quickly do you think they would arrive at the scene?

Tick one box between 0 and 10

[illegible]

Measures of Trust in the Police (2)

10.3) Would you say the police generally treat young people with respect?

(almost) never sometimes often (almost) always

10.4) How often, would you say, the police make fair decisions when dealing with young people?

(almost) never sometimes often (almost) always

10.5) How often would you say the police explain their decisions and actions to young people?

(almost) never sometimes often (almost) always

[illegible]

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before this iteration, and the ISRD-JAPAN project began in 2017. The “flexible part” of the ISRD3 includes a set of questions designed to measure the major concepts of PJ.

² Tsushima and Hamai (2015: 222) explain: The PJ hypothesis presupposes that the ideal respondents are members of civilized societies that highly value and praise individualism as an attribute of citizenship. However, the Japanese sense of citizenship differs from the Western, partly because Japanese society did not experience a civic rebellion such as the French revolution or the American War of Independence. Democracy and civic individualism are thus not completely entrenched in Japanese society.

³ POMP refers to percentage of maximum possible (Farren et al., 2018: 175). POMP scores are employed when every question encompasses a different number of responses. All Individual responses are standardized or converted into percentage, ranging from 0% to 100%. POMP scores are calculated using the formula $POMP = 100 * (raw - min) / (max - min)$, where raw = original mean score of variables (items) with valid values, min = minimum possible value, and max = maximum possible value (min and max need not exist in the actual data) (see Cohen et al., 1999). For example, Question 9.2 (See Appendix) offers 5 response categories. The first response category is converted into 0, the second into 25, the third into 50, the fourth into 75, and the fifth into 100.

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