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The Impact of Perceived Police Justice on Legal Compliance: Exploring Trust as a Key Mediator in Thailand

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Abstract

This study explores the intricate relationship between perceived police justice, trust in the police, and legal compliance, aiming to understand how these elements interact to influence public behavior towards law enforcement. Drawing on a conceptual framework grounded in procedural justice theory, the research specifically investigates the mediating role of trust between perceived police justice and compliance with the law. Utilizing quantitative methods, data was gathered through surveys administered to a diverse demographic within the eastern region of Thailand, ensuring a comprehensive analysis of public perceptions and behaviors. The results confirm that perceived police justice significantly enhances trust in the police, which in turn promotes greater legal compliance. Additionally, trust was found to mediate the relationship between perceived police justice and legal compliance effectively, indicating that the quality of police interactions with the public directly impacts the likelihood of law adherence. These findings align with and extend previous research by demonstrating the critical role of procedural justice in building trust and ensuring effective law enforcement. This study contributes to the field by highlighting the essential role of trust in the dynamics of law enforcement and public compliance. The implications for policy are clear: police departments must prioritize fair and transparent practices to foster public trust and enhance compliance. This research supports the development of policing strategies that focus on fairness and integrity, which are pivotal in achieving not only compliance but also broader community safety and cooperation.

Keywords: Legal Compliance; Police Legitimacy; Procedural Justice; Public Trust

1. Introduction

For the justice system to function effectively and efficiently, it requires the active cooperation of various stakeholders, particularly the general populace and the police officers who initiate the justice process through direct interactions with the public. Effective law enforcement and the maintenance of public order hinge critically on this cooperation. When police actions disregard public needs, exhibit favoritism, or demonstrate unequal treatment, it erodes public trust and confidence in both the police force and its overarching organization. On the other hand, when police conduct their duties with fairness, professionalism, and adherence to legal standards without bias, it cultivates public trust. Such trust is vital for enhancing the effectiveness and legitimacy of police operations [1][2][3]. Moreover, public trust and confidence in the police encourage community engagement with policing efforts, leading to increased police accountability and a greater responsiveness to public demands. This also results in heightened public compliance with the law [4].

Research on public trust in police has been a long-standing interdisciplinary focus, particularly within the fields of political science, public administration, and economics. This research traditionally prioritizes institutional trust and typically explores public attitudes, satisfaction, or trust towards governmental agencies. The basis of such studies often involves

public opinion surveys, contrasting with research on service quality and justice in political science which historically analyzes trust in institutions or government agencies, frequently through similar survey methodologies. In contemporary societies, dependence on governmental institutions is unavoidable, making the examination of trust distinctions in research imperative. Within criminology, trust in institutions and justice processes forms a part of organizational studies and represents a relatively recent research theme, influenced by neo-institutional frameworks in economics, political science, and sociology since the late 1980s. Unlike traditional institutionalism that emphasized a rational-choice model, neo-institutionalism places importance on the roles of location, trust, and economic exchanges, including the functions of non-profit organizations. Therefore, institutional studies typically examine trust in a broad context, whereas police studies often focus more concretely on attitudes such as public satisfaction with police services [5].

In the United States, scholarly interest in police trust began to surge in the latter half of the 1960s [6] and has since seen increased attention from criminologists and sociologists, as evidenced by works from Flexon et al. [7]; Lai and Zhao [8]; Skogan [9] Taylor and Lawton [10] and Warren [11]. Similarly, in Australia, research such as that by Goldsmith and Harris [12]; Lee and McGovern [13]; Murphy [14]; Murphy and Cherney [15]; and Sargeant et al. [16] has contributed significantly to this discourse. Studies from various countries reveal that public trust in police tends to be moderate at best. For instance, research conducted in Turkey indicated a moderate level of public trust in police, averaging 3.89/5, suggesting that a trust level of 4.00 or higher is necessary to be considered robust [17]. In Thailand, research by Suwan et al. [18] indicated that only 71.2% of crime victims who utilized police services expressed confidence in the investigators' performance at the National Police Office, reflecting a relatively low level of public trust. Additionally, a study by the National Institute of Development Administration titled "The Project to Assess the Effectiveness of Police Stations and Public Confidence in Police Performance for the Fiscal Year 2015" highlighted the importance of studying public confidence levels and the factors influencing this confidence [19]. The findings suggest that only 70.02% of the public held a considerable level of confidence in the police, highlighting an area for significant improvement.

It is apparent that prior investigations concerning trust in the police have predominantly concentrated on assessing the general level of public trust towards the police. Research exploring determinants that influence this trust has largely prioritized demographic factors. Furthermore, there exists a gap in the literature regarding the mediatory function of police trust between perceived judicial fairness by the police and the public's compliance with the law. Thus, this study seeks to examine the interrelationships among these three variables. The findings from this research are anticipated to provide valuable insights for the Royal Thai Police Office and to inform subsequent scholarly inquiries into police trust.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Perceived Police Justice and Trust in the Police

Perceived justice within police practices is fundamentally connected to public trust, with this trust predominantly emerging from the public's perception of fairness in law enforcement actions. Nix et al. [20] highlight the crucial role of procedural fairness in enhancing the legitimacy and trustworthiness of police, emphasizing that procedural engagements with the public are essential for fostering trust. Additionally, the notion of collective efficacy, which pertains to individual perceptions of community strength and unity, significantly influences trust levels in the police [21]. Carr and Maxwell [21] delve into the

internal mechanisms within police departments, particularly focusing on how officers' perceptions of organizational justice can shape their interactions with the public, thereby impacting overall public trust in law enforcement. Furthermore, Madon and Murphy [22] investigate the effects of perceived police bias and procedural justice on trust among minority groups, revealing that procedural justice can maintain trust even in contexts marked by perceived bias, underscoring the complex role that equitable police procedures play in building trust across diverse community groups. These studies collectively illuminate the intricate interplay between internal police dynamics, community perceptions, and procedural interactions that collectively influence public trust in law enforcement, leading to the formulation of the first hypothesis.

Hypothesis 1: Higher levels of perceived police justice are positively associated with greater trust in the police.

2.2 Perceived Police Justice and Legal Compliance

Perceived police justice plays a crucial role in shaping legal compliance, with research consistently highlighting the significance of procedural fairness in enhancing police legitimacy and public adherence to law. Nagin and Telep [23] emphasize that citizens' perceptions of police justice significantly correlate with their views on police legitimacy and subsequent legal compliance, though causal connections remain to be further explored. Jackson et al. [24] expands this understanding by linking compliance to the recognition of law enforcement's moral alignment with community values, suggesting multiple influence pathways. A study by Kulachai and Cheurprakobkit [25] has explored the direct relationship between perceived police justice and legal compliance, suggesting that perceptions of fairness and impartial treatment by police can foster a higher degree of compliance among citizens. Watson and Angell [26] introduce the complexity of interactions involving stigmatized groups, noting that perceived procedural justice leads to increased cooperation, especially when moderated by stigma perceptions and specific encounter types. Internally, Haas et al. [27] demonstrate that procedural justice within police organizations positively affects officers' compliance with internal policies, highlighting the importance of fairness in internal police dynamics. Additionally, Barkworth and Murphy [28] find that emotional reactions mediate the relationship between procedural justice and compliance, underscoring the need to manage emotional dynamics in policing effectively. Collectively, these studies underline the intricate interplay between internal and external perceptions of justice, emotional responses, and the broader implications for law enforcement practices and public trust, leading to the formulation of the second hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2: Higher levels of perceived police justice are positively associated with greater legal compliance.

2.3 Trust in the Police and Legal Compliance

The relationship between trust in the police and legal compliance is fundamental to effective law enforcement and community safety. Research consistently demonstrates that when the public trusts the police, they are more likely to comply with the law and cooperate with police directives, thus fostering a more orderly and law-abiding society. A key study by Haas et al. [27] explores how internal procedural justice within police organizations—how officers perceive they are treated by their superiors—can enhance their compliance with departmental policies, including those related to the use of force. This internal trust significantly correlates with how these officers then enact their duties publicly, impacting public trust and compliance. Furthermore, the broader conceptual framework provided by

Jackson et al. [24] illustrates that public trust in police enhances not only compliance but also the perceived legitimacy of the police. This perceived legitimacy, grounded in public trust, is crucial for voluntary compliance with the law and cooperation with police during community interactions. These insights suggest a reciprocal relationship where trust in the police fosters compliance, and this compliance in turn reinforces public trust, creating a cycle that enhances the effectiveness and legitimacy of law enforcement efforts. These dynamic underscores the importance of police departments maintaining and enhancing trust through fair, transparent, and accountable practices to ensure ongoing public support and legal compliance, leading to the third hypothesis.

Hypothesis 3: Higher levels of trust in the police are positively associated with greater legal compliance.

2.4 Trust as a Mediator between Perceived Police Justice and Legal Compliance

Trust plays a crucial mediating role between perceived police justice and legal compliance, with several studies emphasizing how trust can bridge the gap between the fairness of police conduct and citizens' compliance with the law. The concept of procedural justice is central to understanding this relationship, as highlighted by Tyler and Huo [29], who demonstrate that when authorities are perceived as treating individuals fairly and with respect, it significantly enhances their legitimacy and the public's compliance with laws. This is because procedural justice contributes to the development of trust, which in turn, fosters a sense of obligation and acceptance of the police's authority to enforce laws. Murphy [30] extends this understanding by exploring how emotions mediate the relationship between perceived justice and compliance behaviors. In her study, positive and negative emotional reactions to police encounters, influenced by perceptions of fairness, were found to significantly affect subsequent compliance with police directives. This suggests that emotions can act as a critical mediator, reinforcing the role of trust between perceived justice and compliance. Further, Barkworth and Murphy [28] provide empirical support for this model in their study on the impact of procedural justice on police legitimacy and public compliance. They find that the public's trust in the police, developed through fair treatment, significantly predicts their willingness to comply with the law, effectively mediating the relationship between perceived police justice and legal compliance. These studies collectively highlight the importance of procedural justice in enhancing trust between citizens and the police, which is crucial for ensuring effective law enforcement and public compliance. The mediation by trust underscores the need for police departments to adopt practices that promote fairness and respect, thereby fostering trust and enhancing overall legal compliance, leading to the fourth hypothesis.

Hypothesis 4: Trust in the police mediates the relationship between perceived police justice and legal compliance.

3. Methods

3.1 Participants

The research included 971 individuals from three eastern Thai provinces: Chonburi, Prachinburi, and Trad. Ages varied from 20 to 84, with an average of 34.27, while monthly incomes ranged from 2,300 to 100,000 Thai Baht, averaging at 17,261.58 Thai Baht. Most of the participants were from Chonburi, making up 63.85% of the sample. The gender distribution was nearly balanced, and more than half of the sample were single (51.29%). Participants had a wide range of educational levels, primarily higher education, with the most

frequent occupation being general labor (41.19%). This demographic and economic profile provides a detailed framework for analyzing how trust influences the relationship between perceived police justice and legal compliance among various demographic groups in Thailand.

3.2 Measures

In this study, we assessed three constructs—Perceived Police Justice (PPJ), Trust in the Police (TIP), and Legal Compliance (LC)—using Likert scale items to evaluate the relationships among them in the context of Thai citizens. Perceived Police Justice was measured with four items evaluating how equitably police enforce the law and treat various groups, achieving a Cronbach's alpha of .919, indicating high reliability [31]. Trust in the Police was gauged through three items assessing the correctness of police duties, satisfaction with maintaining order, and trustworthiness, with an alpha of .922, suggesting strong internal consistency [32]. Legal Compliance was captured by three items focused on the moral appropriateness of law compliance and obedience to police, with a reliability of .881, which is considered acceptable [33]. These constructs, reflecting robust internal consistencies, are crucial for exploring the dynamics of law enforcement and public compliance within the Thai socio-legal environment [34].

3.3 Data Collection

Data collection for this study was conducted using a structured survey designed to measure the constructs of Perceived Police Justice (PPJ), Trust in the Police (TIP), and Legal Compliance (LC) among Thai citizens. The survey was administered over a period of three months, targeting a diverse sample of participants from three provinces in the eastern region of Thailand: Chonburi, Prachinburi, and Trad. To ensure a representative sample of the population, we employed a stratified sampling technique based on demographic factors such as age, gender, and occupation, a method supported by best practices in social science research [35]. Participants were approached through various channels, including community centers, local government offices, and social media platforms, to increase the reach and diversity of the respondent pool. The survey was available in both paper and electronic formats, allowing participants to choose the most convenient method for them, thereby maximizing response rates and inclusivity. Prior to participation, all respondents were provided with an information sheet detailing the study's purpose, their rights as participants, including confidentiality and voluntary participation, and the anticipated use of the data collected. Informed consent was obtained from each participant before administering the survey, aligning with ethical guidelines outlined by [36]. The survey itself was designed to be completed within 15-20 minutes. It consisted of multiple-choice and Likert-scale questions that were pre-tested in a smaller pilot study to ensure clarity and effectiveness in measuring the intended constructs [37]. The responses were anonymized and securely stored, with data entry and initial cleaning being completed within two weeks of the close of the data collection period. The systematic approach to data collection in this study aimed to provide a robust dataset for analyzing the mediating role of trust in the relationship between perceived police justice and legal compliance. This method ensures data integrity, which is crucial for maintaining research quality and reproducibility, as highlighted in research emphasizing the critical role of proper data management, quality, and security throughout the research process to achieve trustworthy and valid results [38].

3.4 Data Analysis

In this investigation, surveys were the main tool for gathering data, meticulously designed to encompass a wide range of variables relevant to the Thai context. Initially, a pilot

test was conducted to validate the design and functionality of the questionnaire, ensuring its clarity and appropriateness for the target population [39]. Following this validation, quantitative data was gathered from a diverse group of participants, representing various demographic profiles. For data analysis, the study utilized structural equation modeling (SEM) through SMART PLS software, selected for its suitability with the research objectives [40]. SEM played a crucial role in examining the intricate causal relationships among observed variables and helped uncover the latent constructs influencing these relationships. This method was essential in revealing the complex interactions between supervisor trust, job satisfaction, employee engagement, and creativity, providing insightful implications for the organizational dynamics within Thailand’s local government sectors.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

In this research, strict adherence to ethical standards was maintained, beginning with obtaining ethical clearance from the Research Ethics Review Committee for Research Involving Human Research Participants at Burapha University, Chonburi, Thailand (Project Reference # HU 037/2563). This clearance was pivotal for affirming our dedication to the highest ethical standards in academic research, particularly focusing on protecting the welfare of participants and maintaining the confidentiality of data. Central to our ethical practices was the informed consent process. During this process, participants were fully informed about the objectives of the study, the methods used, and their rights, including the freedom to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. This thorough approach to informed consent underscored our commitment to ethical research, emphasizing the importance of voluntary participation and informed decision-making, thereby enhancing both the reliability and validity of our research findings.

4. Results

4.1 Assessment of the Smart PLS SEM Outer Model

Evaluating the outer model in SmartPLS Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) is essential to confirm the reliability and validity of the constructs within the SEM framework [40]. This evaluation includes several critical elements: Indicator Reliability, which requires item loadings on their respective constructs to be at least 0.7 to ensure reliability [41]; Construct Reliability, evaluated using metrics such as Cronbach’s alpha and Composite Reliability (CR), where values above 0.7 indicate satisfactory internal consistency [42]; Convergent Validity, confirmed by an Average Variance Extracted (AVE) of at least 0.5, showing that a significant amount of the variance of its indicators is explained by the construct [43]; Discriminant Validity, which checks that constructs are distinct and assessed through the Fornell-Larcker criterion and the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio, ideally below 0.9 [41]; Cross Loadings, ensuring that indicators load more significantly on their own constructs than on others; and Collinearity Assessment via Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values, which should remain under 5 to prevent collinearity problems [40]. These steps collectively safeguard the measurement model’s integrity, providing a solid basis for the analysis of the structural relationships within the SEM. The outcomes of this assessment are detailed in Table 1, Table 2, and Table 3.

Table 1. Measurement Model Assessments

Item	Loadings	VIF	α	C.R.	AVE
Perceived Police Justice (PPJ)			0.951	0.952	0.828
PPJ1	0.896	4.240			
PPJ2	0.949	4.699			

PPJ3	0.866	4.962			
PPJ4	0.927	5.222			
Trust in the Police (TIP)			0.893	0.908	0.738
TIP1	0.756	2.832			
TIP2	0.982	2.475			
TIP3	0.824	2.711			
Legal Compliance (LC)			0.814	0.865	0.616
LC1	0.682	1.748			
LC2	0.979	1.999			
LC3	0.651	1.725			

Table 1 presents the measurement model assessments for three constructs: Perceived Police Justice (PPJ), Trust in the Police (TIP), and Legal Compliance (LC), within a structural equation modeling framework. The table is structured to assess various indicators such as item loadings, Variance Inflation Factor (VIF), Cronbach's alpha (α), Composite Reliability (C.R.), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct and their respective items. Perceived Police Justice (PPJ) has four items (PPJ1 to PPJ4) with item loadings ranging from 0.866 to 0.949, indicating strong individual contributions to the construct [41]. The VIF values for these items range from 4.240 to 5.222, suggesting moderate concerns about collinearity, as values are close to the upper acceptable threshold of 5 (Hair et al., 2017). Cronbach's alpha and Composite Reliability for PPJ are 0.951 and 0.952 respectively, showing excellent internal consistency [42], while the AVE is 0.828, well above the minimum threshold of 0.5, confirming strong convergent validity [43]. Trust in the Police (TIP) is measured by three items (TIP1 to TIP3) with loadings from 0.756 to 0.982. The lowest loading of 0.756 is slightly above the acceptable threshold, ensuring sufficient reliability [41]. The VIF values for TIP are lower than those for PPJ, ranging from 2.475 to 2.832, indicating no significant collinearity issues. The construct's Cronbach's alpha and Composite Reliability are 0.893 and 0.908 respectively, denoting very good reliability, and its AVE is 0.738, demonstrating robust convergent validity. Legal Compliance (LC), with three items (LC1 to LC3), shows loadings that vary more widely, from 0.651 to 0.979. The lower loadings of LC1 and LC3 are close to the threshold of 0.7, which could be a concern for their reliability [41]. The VIF values are all below 2, indicating no issues with collinearity [40]. The Cronbach's alpha and Composite Reliability values for LC are 0.814 and 0.865, both satisfactory for reliability assessments, and its AVE is 0.616, which meets the requirement for convergent validity. Overall, Table 1 illustrates that the measurement model provides a reliable and valid assessment of the constructs used in the study, supporting their use in further analysis of the structural relationships within the SEM framework.

Table 2. Cross Loadings

	PPJ	TIP	LC
PPJ1	0.896	0.444	0.387
PPJ2	0.949	0.459	0.422
PPJ3	0.866	0.421	0.383
PPJ4	0.927	0.458	0.401
TIP1	0.372	0.756	0.356
TIP2	0.503	0.982	0.438
TIP3	0.377	0.824	0.420
LC1	0.300	0.321	0.682
LC2	0.434	0.457	0.979
LC3	0.276	0.316	0.651

Table 2 illustrates the cross loadings for the constructs Perceived Police Justice (PPJ), Trust in the Police (TIP), and Legal Compliance (LC) within a Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) framework, providing evidence for discriminant validity, a crucial aspect for ensuring construct uniqueness in model analysis [41]. The results show that each item within the constructs strongly loads highest on its respective construct—ranging from 0.866 to 0.949 for PPJ, 0.756 to 0.982 for TIP, and 0.651 to 0.979 for LC—while maintaining significantly lower cross loadings with other constructs, all below 0.5, thereby confirming that each item correlates more strongly with its own construct than with others. This pattern of loadings underscores the discriminant validity of the constructs, indicating that the model's constructs are not only reliable but also distinctly represent their intended concepts, thus enhancing the robustness and interpretability of the overall SEM analysis.

Table 3. Discriminant Validity Calculations

	AVEs Scores			HTMT Scores		
	1	2	3	1	2	3
1-PPJ	0.785					
2-TIP	0.438	0.910		0.437		
3-LC	0.472	0.490	0.859	0.473	0.486	

Note: bold values are squared AVE values.

Table 3 presents the discriminant validity calculations for the constructs Perceived Police Justice (PPJ), Trust in the Police (TIP), and Legal Compliance (LC) using Average Variance Extracted (AVE) scores and the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratios, crucial metrics for validating the uniqueness of constructs within a structural equation model [40]. The AVE scores—PPJ = 0.785, TIP = 0.910, LC = 0.859—surpass the recommended threshold of 0.5, indicating that a substantial portion of the variance in the indicators is captured by their corresponding constructs, evidencing strong convergent validity [43]. Furthermore, the HTMT ratios, an advanced measure for assessing discriminant validity, show values between PPJ and TIP (0.437), PPJ and LC (0.473), and TIP and LC (0.486), all below the conservative threshold of 0.9, suggesting distinctiveness among the constructs [41]. Additionally, the table includes squared AVE values in bold, which are utilized to ensure that constructs share more variance with their own indicators than with those of other constructs, thereby reinforcing the discriminant validity in the SEM framework.

4.2 Evaluation of the SmartPLs SEM Structural Model

To rigorously evaluate the hypothesized relationships within the structural model of the study, an extensive bootstrapping analysis was employed as the primary statistical technique. This method entails generating random subsamples from the original dataset through replacement, allowing for a thorough examination of the data's variability. Each subsample is subsequently used to estimate the parameters within a Partial Least Squares (PLS) path model, a critical phase in the analytical process. Typically, this procedure is repeated across 5,000 random subsamples, enhancing the robustness of the analysis by ensuring that the derived estimates are not merely artifacts of sample-specific peculiarities but are representative of the broader data structure. The bootstrapping technique is particularly advantageous as it facilitates the calculation of standard errors associated with the PLS-Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) outcomes. These standard errors form the basis for determining t-values, p-values, and confidence intervals, crucial metrics for statistically validating the significance of the modeled relationships in PLS-SEM. This methodological rigor lays a solid foundation for making substantive inferences from the model, offering a quantitatively rigorous approach to assess the validity of the proposed hypotheses. The results

of this bootstrapping analysis, pivotal for confirming the study's theoretical assertions, are methodically delineated in Figure 1 and Table 4. These presentations not only provide visual and tabular summaries of the findings but also serve as fundamental components for the empirical substantiation of the hypothesized relationships within the study's conceptual framework. By capitalizing on the insights derived from the bootstrapping analysis, the study delivers a statistically substantiated exploration of the proposed hypotheses, significantly enhancing the scholarly understanding of the investigated phenomena, as articulated by Hair et al. [44].

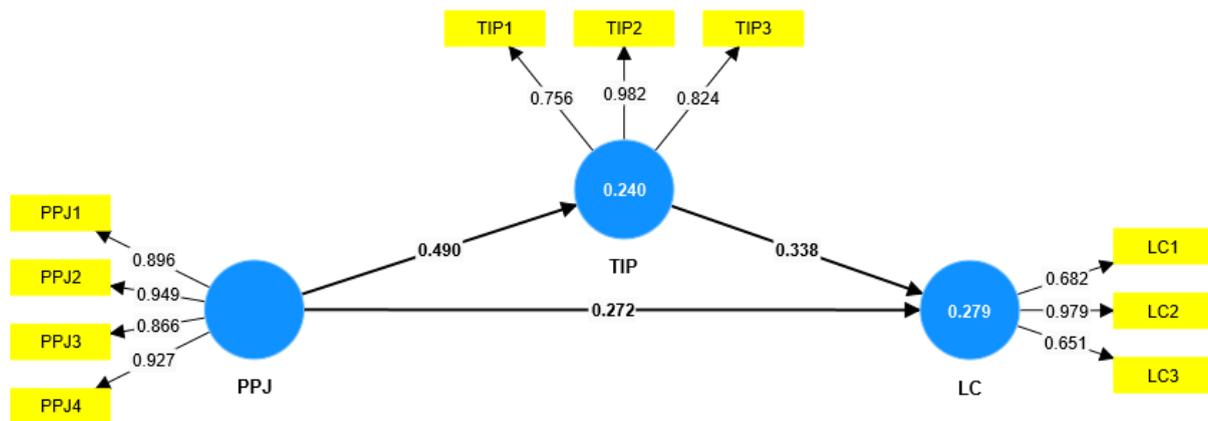


Figure 1. The SEM Model.

Table 4. Relationship between Variables and Hypothesis Testing

Relationship	β	Standard Deviation	t-Statistics	p-Value	Hypothesis
PPJ ---> TIP	0.490	0.030	16.467	0.000	H1: Supported
PPJ ---> LC	0.272	0.030	14.842	0.000	H2: Supported
TIP ---> LC	0.338	0.039	8.635	0.000	H3: Supported
PPJ ---> TIP ---> LC	0.166	0.021	7.839	0.000	H4: Supported

Table 4 delineates the results from hypothesis testing within the structural equation modeling framework, focusing on the relationships among Perceived Police Justice (PPJ), Trust in the Police (TIP), and Legal Compliance (LC). The data displays robust statistical outputs, including path coefficients (β), standard deviations, t-statistics, and p-values, affirming the significance of each hypothesized relationship. Specifically, the direct effect of PPJ on TIP ($\beta = 0.490$, $SD = 0.030$, $t = 16.467$, $p < 0.000$) supports Hypothesis 1, indicating a substantial positive influence of perceived police justice on trust in law enforcement. Similarly, the impact of PPJ on LC ($\beta = 0.272$, $SD = 0.030$, $t = 14.842$, $p < 0.000$) corroborates Hypothesis 2, suggesting that higher perceptions of police justice lead to increased legal compliance. The relationship between TIP and LC ($\beta = 0.338$, $SD = 0.039$, $t = 8.635$, $p < 0.000$) confirms Hypothesis 3, highlighting that trust in police significantly fosters compliance. Moreover, the mediated path from PPJ through TIP to LC ($\beta = 0.166$, $SD = 0.021$, $t = 7.839$, $p < 0.000$) validates Hypothesis 4, illustrating the mediating role of trust between perceived justice and compliance. Collectively, these results underscore the critical interconnectedness of justice perception, trust, and compliance within the governance framework, providing a quantitatively substantiated affirmation of the theoretical model proposed in the research.

In this research, the present study applied the variance accounted for (VAF) test to evaluate the mediating effects, a methodology recommended by Hair et al. [44] for its robustness in mediation analysis. The VAF test determines the extent of mediation by dividing the analysis into three categories: no mediation if VAF values are below 20%, partial mediation if values are between 20% and 80%, and full mediation if the values exceed 80%. This classification is calculated using the formula:

$$\text{VAF} = \text{Indirect effect} / \text{Total effect}$$

For the present study, the VAF value quantifying the mediating role of trust in the police on the relationship between perceived police justice and legal compliance was calculated to be 37.90%. This result, as detailed in Table 4, indicates that trust in the police serves as a partial mediator in this relationship, providing substantive insight into the dynamics of how trust influences the overall impact of police justice on compliance behaviors. This partial mediation underscores the significant, yet not exclusive, role that trust plays in mediating the effects of perceived justice on compliance, suggesting other factors may also be influential in this process.

5. Discussion

This study's findings resonate with established literature emphasizing the significant impact of perceived police justice on trust in the police and subsequent legal compliance. Our results align with previous research by Tyler and Huo [29] and Jackson and Bradford [4], which highlighted that procedural fairness not only enhances the legitimacy of police but also fosters a cooperative relationship between law enforcement and community members. Consistently, our research supports the notion that when police are perceived as fair, trust naturally develops, leading to greater compliance with the law. Procedural justice has been central in our discussions, mirroring insights from Barkworth and Murphy [28], who demonstrated the direct influence of fair treatment by police on increasing trust and promoting compliance. This study further confirms that trust significantly mediates the relationship between perceived police justice and compliance, supporting Murphy's [14] findings that emotional responses to police interactions can significantly influence compliance levels. These emotional responses, which are heavily impacted by perceptions of fairness, underscore the complex dynamics between police actions and public reactions. Moreover, the findings extend the dialogue on the critical role of internal procedural justice within police organizations as discussed by Haas et al. [27]. The internal dynamics of how officers perceive their treatment by superiors significantly affect their interactions with the community, which in turn impacts public perceptions of fairness and trust. This internal aspect of procedural justice highlights the need for police departments to cultivate a culture of fairness not only externally in their dealings with the public but also internally among their ranks. The consistent theme across these studies, and affirmed by our findings, is the reciprocal relationship between police justice, trust, and compliance. Effective policing strategies should, therefore, integrate principles of fairness and transparency to foster trust, which is pivotal in ensuring community members' compliance with the law. The implications for policy are clear: law enforcement agencies must prioritize procedural justice as a cornerstone of their operations to enhance both the efficacy and the ethical grounding of their policing practices. In conclusion, the integration of our findings with existing literature strongly suggests that enhancing procedural justice in policing is not merely a regulatory or ethical issue but a practical strategy for improving public safety and community relations. As trust in police increases through fair and just interactions, legal compliance naturally follows,

leading to a more orderly society where the rule of law is maintained effectively and equitably.

6. Conclusion

The findings of this study significantly reinforce the established understanding that perceived police justice and trust are foundational to fostering legal compliance within communities. By highlighting the direct and mediated pathways through which perceptions of fairness influence public compliance, this research underscores the pivotal role of procedural justice in enhancing the legitimacy and effectiveness of law enforcement practices. Trust emerges as a crucial mediator in the relationship between perceived police justice and legal compliance, affirming that the quality of police-citizen interactions deeply impacts the willingness of the community to follow legal directives. Our study confirms that when law enforcement is perceived as fair and just, it not only improves trust but also significantly boosts compliance rates. This relationship suggests that interventions aimed at improving procedural justice should be a strategic priority for police departments seeking to enhance community relations and operational effectiveness. Moreover, the implications of our findings extend beyond the theoretical into practical policy-making. Law enforcement agencies are encouraged to adopt measures that promote transparency, fairness, and respect in all interactions with the public. Training programs that emphasize ethical policing and respect for community values can help bridge gaps in trust, particularly in diverse communities. In essence, the path to improved legal compliance and community safety is fundamentally linked to how law enforcement is perceived by the public. Establishing and maintaining trust through fair practices is not only a matter of justice but also a pragmatic approach to effective policing. As this study shows, the benefits of such an approach extend to all aspects of community engagement with law enforcement, culminating in a safer, more harmonious society.

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