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**Police Officers' Attitudes toward Citizen Advisory Councils**

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Abstract

*Purpose:* We explored the antecedents of sheriff deputies' perceived legitimacy of their agency's citizen advisory council.

*Design/methodology:* We obtained survey data from 567 sheriff deputies in a southeastern state. We first asked whether respondents knew their agency had a citizen advisory council, and then asked those who responded affirmatively a series of questions about the legitimacy of the council. We then ran an OLS regression that included organizational justice, self-legitimacy, and public scrutiny as independent variables predicting perceived legitimacy of the citizen advisory council.

*Findings:* Deputies who perceived greater organizational justice from command staff were significantly more likely to perceive the citizen advisory council as legitimate.

*Originality/value:* In response to strained police/community relations, reform advocates have urged the police to embrace a more democratic style of policing, including allowing for more citizen oversight of agencies. Our study sheds light on how line-level officers perceive such oversight.

Keywords: citizen oversight, organizational justice, self-legitimacy, public perceptions, democratic policing, legitimacy

Paper type: Research paper

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## Police Officers' Attitudes toward Citizen Advisory Councils

In response to strained police-community relations (Weitzer 2015), reform advocates, scholars, and progressive leaders have called for American policing to adopt a more democratic style of policing (Ramsey and Robinson, 2015; Walker, 2016). For example, the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing advised agencies to encourage public engagement and collaboration through the formation of citizen advisory councils (CACs; also commonly referred to as citizen advisory committees, civilian review boards, and the like). Specifically, the Task Force identified the need for CACs to assist in developing, revising, and advising on agency policies, crime prevention strategies, and the adaptation of new technologies (Action item No. 3.2.1 and 4.5.3).

Although CACs may be appealing because they can improve transparency and public trust, police are often cynical of both their organization's leadership and the public (Paoline, 2003; Van Maanen, 1978). This cynicism leads to critical questions surrounding citizen oversight: How do line-level officers feel about this oversight, particularly during a time of strained police-community relations? Do they trust that the council has the community's or agency's best interests in mind? Do they believe the council serves to enhance the organization's legitimacy in the eyes of the public? Do officers see the council as a form of community policing? Lack of police support for CACs could have serious consequences: it may exacerbate the "us v. them" problem, diminish police faith in their organization's leadership, or cause officers to do less in order to avoid scrutiny from civilians (Rushin and Edwards, 2017; Stone et al., 2009). Understanding the factors associated with officers' support for CACs is foundational to ensuring that they are effective in their democratic policing intent.

The current study explored the factors associated with officers' perceived legitimacy of a CAC using survey data collected from a sheriff's department in the southeastern US. Using a sample of 567 deputies, we first asked respondents if they were aware of their agency's CAC. Deputies who were aware of their agency's council were asked a series of questions about potential benefits of the council, such as whether it helps their agency's community policing efforts or improves their legitimacy in the eyes of the public. Drawing on prior studies, which have examined support for other types of democratic policing, we also considered deputies' perceptions of organizational justice, their self-legitimacy, and their perceptions of public scrutiny. We expected each of these sentiments to be associated with their perceptions of their CAC.

## Democratic Policing

Successful policing in democratic societies is highly contingent on the level of consent provided by citizens. The police cannot be effective if they do not garner consent from the public; citizens must acknowledge the police as holding legitimate authority and they must consent to being policed (Manning, 2015; Tyler, 1990). Policing by consent involves the public willingly giving up some of their rights in exchange for protection from the police as representatives of the government. This social contract facilitates cooperation and legal compliance from the public. What is more, when the public believes the police hold legitimate authority and consent to their power, they are more likely to empower the police; they are more likely to trust the police have the appropriate expertise in deciding how best to fulfill their mandate (Sunshine and Tyler, 2003).

Consent from the public is best achieved through democratic styles of policing, which can take a variety of forms (Walker, 2016). For example, officers can ensure democratic policing

at the interaction-level by treating citizens with dignity and respect, allowing them a voice during interactions, and clearly explaining the reasons for their decisions (Jackson et al., 2012; Tyler, 1990; Wolfe et al., 2016). At the agency-level, many departments have adopted community-oriented policing models over the past few decades (Reisig, 2010). In practice, community-oriented policing varies considerably, but generally it involves integrating the public in decision-making processes. For example, community-oriented policing agencies typically elicit participation from the public in devising strategies to combat crime and disorder problems in their community (Goldstein, 1987; Maguire and Mastrofski, 2000).

Citizen oversight is another manifestation of democratic policing, which can be broken down into three categories: investigation-focused, review-focused, and auditor/monitor-focused (De Angelis et al., 2016; Walker, 2001, 2016). CACs are a review-focused form of oversight, allowing the community to weigh in on internal policies, disciplinary matters, citizen complaints, and other issues. Establishing CACs allows police agencies to provide the public a voice, ensure citizens play a role in developing or revising the type of policing that ultimately impacts their communities, and sends the message that together the police and public are part of the same community. When implemented properly, CACs can be key to ensuring a democratic style of policing for the public (Walker, 2016).

Perceived legitimacy of CACs by line-level officers is potentially key to their success. Officers who view the council as more legitimate, for example, are likely more apt to accept the council's recommendations regarding policy and disciplinary matters. On the other extreme, officers who do not trust their CAC may undermine its efforts by treating the public poorly on the street. For example, officers who mistrust a council's recommendations may be less trusting of the public in general and be less likely to treat them in a procedurally fair manner (Bottoms

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and Tankebe, 2012). Officers who lack trust in such councils or believe they do not have their agency's or community's best interests in mind may respond by withdrawing from their responsibilities. De-policing may occur as a way of avoiding the perceived unfairness of citizen oversight in the form of an advisory council (Oliver, 2017; Stone et al., 2009). Indeed, the push for citizen oversight of police actions dates back at least to the Kerner Commission and was historically resisted by police executives (Walker, 2016). The International Association of Chiefs of Police, for example, released an official statement opposing citizen oversight in 1964 (Walker, 2016). Accordingly, understanding the factors associated with officers' support for CACs is key to developing new or improving existing councils. Agencies with CACs viewed as legitimate by their line-level officers likely will be in a better spot to have such councils achieve their democratic policing goals.

## Theoretically Salient Predictors of Officer Attitudes
## Toward CACs

Extant research has considered police officers' commitment to various examples of democratic policing including community-oriented policing (Myhill and Bradford, 2013) and procedural justice (Tankebe, 2014a). CACs are yet another reflection of democratic policing, but it is not clear how officers feel about giving citizens such oversight. Before turning to our methodology and results, we discuss three potential antecedents of officers' perceived legitimacy of CACs – organizational justice, self-legitimacy, and public scrutiny.

### Organizational Justice

Studies have long demonstrated the importance of organizational justice – that is, fairness – within the workplace environment. Organizational justice is comprised of three elements: distributive justice, procedural justice, and interactional justice. Distributive justice refers to the extent that employees perceive the distribution of outcomes in their organization as fair (Adams,

1963). For example, when managers fairly distribute salary increases, promotions, or disciplinary actions (i.e., without favoritism), employees are more likely to be satisfied and to behave in ways that benefit the organization, such as putting in extra effort (Cohen-Charash and Spector, 2001; Lind and Tyler, 1988). In contrast, procedural justice refers to the extent employees believe they are *treated* fairly by their organization. Specifically, employees want their voices heard and to know that processes are unbiased and consistent (Levanthal, 1980). Again, extant research demonstrates that employees who feel their organization adheres to fair procedures are more likely to engage in beneficial behaviors (Colquitt et al., 2001). The third element – interactional justice – pertains to honesty and politeness by supervisors during interpersonal communication with employees (Bies and Moag, 1986).

Police departments are similar to other business settings – they are hierarchically structured and they consist of employees working toward the same goals. Thus, criminologists have increasingly begun to explore the effects of organizational justice within police departments. Collectively, this body of research suggests that like employees in other fields, officers tend to be more satisfied and committed to their jobs when they are treated fairly by their organization (Donner et al., 2015). Bradford et al. (2014), for example, showed that perceptions of organizational justice were associated with greater identification with the agency and procedural compliance (see also Rosenbaum and McCarty, 2017; Tyler et al., 2007). Likewise, Wolfe and Piquero (2011) found that perceived organizational justice was associated with less misconduct.

Other recent studies suggest that the benefits of organizational justice extend beyond the walls of the department and into the community, in the form of commitment to democratic policing. Studies by Haas et al. (2015) and Van Craen and Skogan (2017), for example, indicate

that "internal" procedural justice (i.e., by the supervisors in a department) is associated with support for greater restrictions on the use of force. Myhill and Bradford (2013) showed organizational justice predicted higher levels of commitment to community-oriented policing. Similarly, Tankebe (2014a) showed officers who perceived greater fairness within their department were significantly more supportive of exercising procedural justice during their interactions with citizens. Trinkner and colleagues' (2016) study illuminated the causal mechanisms underlying such results. Specifically, they demonstrated that organizational justice was associated with greater perceived legitimacy of the agency, less cynicism, and less psychological distress among officers. In turn, these outcomes were all directly associated with commitment to democratic policing in the form of increased support for community policing and procedural justice during citizen interactions, and decreased support for the use of coercive force. We are unaware of any studies that have explored the relationship between perceived organizational justice and attitudes toward CACs, but based on the available literature, we developed the following hypothesis:

> *1. Deputies who perceive their command staff and organization's policies as more fair will afford greater legitimacy to their CAC.*

**Self-Legitimacy**

Another potential antecedent of officers' perceived legitimacy of CACs is the confidence they have that their authority as police officers is morally justified – that is, their self-legitimacy (Bottoms and Tankebe, 2012). Studies have established a positive correlation between self-legitimacy and outcomes like organizational commitment and identity, as well as a negative correlation between self-legitimacy and cynicism (Bradford and Quinton, 2014; Tankebe and Meško, 2015). Recent research suggests self-legitimacy is also associated with endorsement of

democratic policing. For instance, Bradford and Quinton (2014) demonstrated that officers with greater self-legitimacy were more committed to exercising procedural justice with citizens and protecting their due process rights. In the US, Wolfe and Nix (2016a) found that self-legitimacy was strongly associated with officers' willingness to engage in community partnerships. Again, we are not aware of any studies that have explored the direct relationship between self-legitimacy and attitudes toward CACs. However, given the overlap between these aforementioned manifestations of democratic policing and CACs, officers who possess greater self-legitimacy should be more embracive of (or less worried about) the transparency and oversight that a CAC may provide. Accordingly, we test the following hypothesis:

    *2. Deputies who express greater self-legitimacy will afford greater legitimacy to their*

    *CAC.*

**Public Scrutiny**

A third possible predictor of officers' evaluations of CAC legitimacy is the extent they believe citizens support the police. In recent years, there has been growing concern about criticism of the police, such that the U.S. citizenry is waging a "war on cops" (Maguire et al., 2017; Morin et al., 2017; Nix et al., 2018). At least one study suggests officers believe the media is generally biased and hostile toward their profession (Nix and Pickett, 2017). Further complicating matters, the same study revealed that those who felt the media was more hostile toward police were more likely to believe the public is distrusting of them and more fearful of being falsely accused of misconduct.

The idea that police officers are distrusting of citizens is nothing new. Ethnographic studies of police organizations carried out nearly half a century ago suggested that police officers harbored cynical attitudes toward citizens, viewed them as unsupportive and "out to make the

police look bad" (Van Maanen, 1978:322), and embraced an "us versus them" mentality (Skolnick, 2011). Sparrow et al. (1990:51) provide the following illustrative quote from a police officer:

> *No one else understands the real nature of police work. That is, no one outside the police service – academics, politicians, and lawyers in particular – can comprehend what we have to do. The public is generally naïve about police work…Members of the public are basically unsupportive and unreasonably demanding. They all seem to think they know our job better than we do.*

Distrust of citizens and support for aggressive styles of policing remain prevalent elements of police subculture (Paoline, 2003). These attitudes serve as barriers to policing reforms including those that emphasize democratic ideals (Schulhofer et al., 2011; Skogan, 2008). Indeed, one recent study demonstrated that alignment with such a "traditional police culture" was associated with less support for exercising procedural justice with citizens and more support for using coercive force (Silver et al., 2017). Likewise, it seems unlikely that officers who are afraid citizens are out to get them or make them look bad would be receptive to the idea of giving citizens a voice in agency disciplinary decisions and other matters. Therefore, our final hypothesis is as follows:

> *3. Deputies who feel public scrutiny has increased recently and made their job more difficult will afford less legitimacy to their CAC.*

**Methodology**

**Research Setting**

Our data were obtained from a survey of a metropolitan sheriff's department in the southeastern US. It is the largest law enforcement agency in its state, with 666 sworn deputies employed at the time of our study. It has five divisions – Uniform, Criminal Investigation, Special Projects, Professional Standards, and Administration – each under the command of a Chief Deputy. The Uniform Division is responsible for patrolling the seven regions of the county, which was home to approximately 398,000 residents according to 2015 American Community Survey 5-year estimates. Roughly 47% of the residents are white and 46% are African American. The median household income in 2015 was $49,131. According to the Uniform Crime Report, there were 2,357 violent crimes and 8,991 property crimes in the jurisdiction in 2015.

This department has its own CAC – a diverse group of 26 residents of the county that includes ministers, retired military veterans, academics, and community leaders. The council has three primary duties:

1. Review citizens' complaints against deputies

2. Review disciplinary actions against deputies

3. Review departmental policies and procedures

The Sheriff meets with the council approximately four times per year. The council reviews cases to determine whether they believe the department's actions were appropriate or not. If not, Internal Affairs revisits the case. Members are appointed by the Sheriff and serve indefinitely.

**Survey Administration**

In February 2015, the first and second authors invited all sworn deputies (N=666) to participate in an online survey that focused broadly on organizational climate within the department. To encourage participation, deputies were informed that their identities would remain anonymous, data would only be analyzed in the aggregate, and only the researchers would have access to the raw data. The survey was also endorsed by the agency's deputy advisory council – a group of respected employees who represent the interests of their colleagues at routine meetings with command staff. No incentives were offered for participation. Of the 666 deputies eligible to participate, 567 submitted a survey, resulting in an 85.1% response rate. For the purposes of this study, we were interested in deputies' attitudes toward their CAC. However, we recognized it was possible some deputies would not be aware the council existed. Therefore, we included a filter question that asked "Do you know what the CAC is?" Approximately one-half of our sample (50.7%; n=288) answered affirmatively (see Figure 1). Accordingly, we restricted our analytic sample to these 288 deputies who indicated familiarity with the CAC.[1]

[Figure 1 here]

**Dependent Variable**

Our dependent variable captures deputies' perceived legitimacy of their CAC. We asked respondents to indicate their level of agreement (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree) with the following statements: "The CAC makes recommendations that have the community's best

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[1] An anonymous reviewer pointed out that deputies assigned to patrol might be more likely to indicate familiarity with the CAC, given the CAC likely focuses on these deputies who are more visible to the community. A chi-square test of independence indicated no significant differences in CAC familiarity across assignment [$\chi^2$ = .057 (1), p = .81]. Furthermore, there were no significant differences across race [$\chi^2$ (1) = .79, p = .37], education [$\chi^2$ (4) = 4.251, p = .37], or military background [$\chi^2$ (1) = 1.020, p = .31]. However, there were significant differences in CAC familiarity across age [$\chi^2$ (3) = 30.511, p > .000], gender [$\chi^2$ (1) = 9.502, p = .002], and experience [$\chi^2$ (4) = 26.534, p < .000], such that older, male, and more experienced deputies were more likely to report being familiar with the CAC.

interests in mind," "The CAC helps maintain our agency's legitimacy in the eyes of the public,"

and "The CAC helps maintain our agency's community policing efforts." The mean Kaiser-

Meyer-Olkin (KMO) index of factorial simplicity was 0.70, indicating sufficient sampling

adequacy (Kaiser and Rice, 1974). Principal factor analysis indicated that responses to the three

items loaded onto a single factor (loadings >.70), and Cronbach's alpha demonstrated adequate

internal consistency ($\alpha$=.88). Therefore, we averaged responses to the items to form a mean

index, *CAC legitimacy*. Higher scores on the index reflect greater perceived legitimacy of the

council. The mean of the index was 3.72. As shown in Figure 2, roughly 60 to 65% of the sample

agreed or strongly agreed with each of the items included in the index. Approximately one-third

of the sample felt neutral about each of the three items, while the remaining 3% disagreed or

strongly disagreed with each. Descriptive statistics for the dependent variable and all other

variables included in our analyses are presented in Table 1.

[Figure 2 here]

[Table 1 here]

**Independent Variables**

**Organizational justice.** Our first hypothesis was that deputies who perceived greater

fairness from command staff would view their CAC as more legitimate. We presented

respondents with eighteen items that captured their perceptions of procedural (e.g., "Command

staff considers employees' viewpoints"), distributive (e.g., "Command staff treats employees the

same regardless of their race or ethnicity"), and interactional justice (e.g., "Generally, command

staff treats employees with respect"), and asked them to report their level of agreement

(1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree) with each. A complete list of the items is available in

the Appendix. The mean KMO of .95 indicated sufficient sampling adequacy, and responses

loaded onto a single factor (loadings >.61). Furthermore, Cronbach's alpha indicated strong internal consistency (α=.96). Thus, we averaged responses to the eighteen items to generate a mean index, *Organizational Justice*, whereby higher scores represent greater perceived fairness by the agency's command staff.

**Self-legitimacy.** Our second hypothesis was that respondents with greater self-legitimacy would have higher evaluations of CAC legitimacy. To capture respondents' level of self-legitimacy, we presented them with a series of statements adapted from Tankebe (2014b). Specifically, they were asked to indicate their level of agreement (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree) with the following five statements: "I have confidence in the authority vested in me as a law enforcement officer," "As a law enforcement officer, I believe I occupy a position of special importance in society," "I believe people should always do what I tell them as long as my orders are lawful," "I am confident I have enough authority to do my job well," and "I believe law enforcement is capable of providing security for all citizens of this county." The mean KMO was .73, indicating sufficient sampling adequacy. Responses to the items loaded onto a single factor (loadings >.43) and Cronbach's alpha suggested acceptable internal consistency (α=.66). We averaged responses to the five items to create a mean index, *Self-legitimacy*, with higher scores indicating greater confidence in one's authority as a police officer.

**Public scrutiny.** We also hypothesized that deputies who perceived higher levels of public scrutiny in recent months would perceive the CAC as less legitimate. Deputies were asked to report their level of agreement (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree) with three statements: "In general US citizens' views of the police have gotten worse over the past 6 months," "Over the past 6 months, county residents' perceptions of law enforcement have gotten worse," and "Over the past 6 months, it has become more dangerous to be a law enforcement

officer because of negative publicity surrounding law enforcement."[2] The mean KMO was .60

and responses loaded onto a single factor (loadings >.51). Moreover, Cronbach's alpha suggested

acceptable internal consistency ($\alpha$=.65). We averaged responses to the three items to generate a

mean index, *Public Scrutiny*. Higher scores on the index reflect a belief that public attitudes

toward the police have gotten worse, and that it has become more dangerous to be a police

officer, over the previous six months.

**Controls**

We included seven control variables in our multivariate models in an effort to minimize

concern that any observed relationships between our independent and dependent variables were

spurious. Specifically, we accounted for the respondents' gender (1=male), race (1=nonwhite),

education level (1=bachelor's degree or higher), assignment (1=patrol, 0=other assignment), and

military experience (1=yes) with binary variables. We controlled for respondents' age with an

ordinal variable (1=21 to 30, 2=31 to 40, 3=41 to 50, 4=51 or older) to help ensure anonymity.

Likewise, respondents' tenure with the agency was measured with an ordinal variable (1=less

than one year, 2=1 to 5 years, 3=6 to 9 years, 4=10 to 15 years, and 5=more than 15 years).

**Analytic Strategy**

The first step of our analysis was to examine the bivariate relationship between our

dependent variable and each of our three key independent variables of interest. This step served

to establish preliminary evidence that each of the correlations were in the hypothesized

directions. Furthermore, the fact that none of the correlations exceeded |.56| suggested that

multicollinearity would not be a concern in the second step of the analysis (Tabachnick and

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[2] The survey was administered approximately six months after the fatal shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson. An incredible amount of media attention during this time was devoted to police use of force and public criticism of police.

Fidell, 2013). The second step entailed a multivariate analysis. We ran a series of four ordinary

least squares (OLS) regression equations because our dependent variable approximated

normality (skewness= -.251, kurtosis= 3.708). The first three equations included each of our

three key independent variables separately. In turn, the fourth included all three simultaneously.

This process served to help us determine if any of the independent variables appeared to be more

closely associated with deputies' attitudes toward the legitimacy of the CAC. As an additional

check for multicollinearity, we post-estimated the variance inflation factors, all of which were

less than 1.44. These values fall within acceptable ranges and suggest that multicollinearity is not

a concern in the results below (Belsley et al., 1980).

## **Results**

Table 2 displays a pairwise correlation matrix for the dependent and independent

variables along with each of the controls. Each of the independent variables was correlated with

CAC legitimacy in the hypothesized direction. At the bivariate level, organizational justice

($r=.559$, $p<.01$) appeared most closely related to perceived legitimacy of the CAC. The

correlation between self-legitimacy and CAC legitimacy ($r=.132$, $p<.05$), though statistically

significant, was much weaker. As hypothesized, deputies who perceived greater public scrutiny

($r= -.253$, $p<.01$) perceived the CAC as less legitimate, at least at the bivariate level.

Interestingly, deputies assigned to the patrol division ($r= -.144$, $p<.05$) also viewed the CAC as

less legitimate relative to their colleagues in other divisions.

[Table 2 here]

Table 3 displays each of our OLS regression models. In Model 1, we regressed the

dependent variable onto our organizational justice index along with each of the seven control

variables. The model was statistically significant and explained nearly 38% of the variance in

deputies' evaluations of CAC legitimacy. As expected, the organizational justice coefficient was positive and statistically significant ($b$=.561, $p$<.01), net of the demographic statistical control variables. Note, however, that deputies with military experience expressed significantly more favorable attitudes toward the CAC than those without military experience ($b$=.236, $p$<.01).

[Table 3 here]

Models 2 and 3 regressed CAC legitimacy onto self-legitimacy and public scrutiny, respectively, along with each of the controls. Note that each of these models explain far less variation in the outcome ($R^2$=.05 and .09, respectively), and Model 2, as a whole, was not statistically significant ($F$-test=1.64, $p$>.05). Still, both self-legitimacy and public scrutiny were significantly associated with the outcome in the hypothesized directions, net of the controls. In Model 4, we ran a fully saturated regression equation that included all three of the key independent variables along with the controls. The results indicated that perceptions of organizational justice ($b$=.562, $p$<.01) were the most closely connected to CAC legitimacy. In fact, the effects of self-legitimacy and public scrutiny were reduced to non-significance in this model after the inclusion of organizational justice. Military background ($b$=.237, $p$<.01) was statistically significant, but a comparison of the standardized coefficients suggested its relationship with CAC legitimacy ($\beta$=.176) was much weaker than that of organizational justice ($\beta$=.622). With these findings in mind, we now turn to a discussion of our study's implications.

**Discussion**

Democratic policing integrates the public into police decision making and considers citizens' views on agency policies and strategic decision-making (Manning, 2015). Such efforts have been the focus of key transitions in the history of policing and police-community relations. For example, rampant corruption during the political era of policing gave way to a more

professional style of police beginning around the 1930s that sought to increase the efficiency, and thereby effectiveness, of policing (Walker, 1998). In the late 1970s and early 1980s, we witnessed agencies adopt community-oriented policing philosophies to increase transparency and integrate the public into police decision making (Reisig, 2010). These changes sought to improve the public's trust in the police by adhering more wholly to the Peelian principle that the police are the public and that the public are the police—the essence of democratic policing.

Police agencies have used many strategies to ensure they deliver democratic policing to the public. Some departments have fundamentally changed their structure and philosophy to work more closely with their communities to identify problems (Greene, 2000; Maguire, 1997). Several agencies have gone as far as implementing front porch roll calls—rather than holding briefings in the station house, they routinely meet in a community member's front yard (Fox, 2016; Kulmala, 2016). A re-emerging trend, and one advocated by President Obama's Task Force on 21st Century Policing, is the establishment of CACs in an effort to provide more participation, voice, and transparency to the public. Broadly speaking, these entities strive to integrate the public into decisions that impact their community. Providing a voice and increasing transparency sends the message to the public that they are valued members of society and are active partners with the police. By extension, CACs may serve as a vehicle for improving communication and cooperation between the police and public and deconstructing barriers between them.

Establishing and empowering a CAC, therefore, may be beneficial to a police agency and its community for many reasons. The problem is that CACs may lack legitimacy in the eyes of officers because they are comprised of "outsiders." The degree to which officers perceive their CAC as a legitimate oversight committee likely impacts how successful the council is in

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achieving some of the goals discussed above. A largely unexplored empirical question remains: what factors are associated with officers' evaluations of CAC legitimacy? We sought to answer this question by analyzing survey data from a sample of sheriff deputies in a southeastern agency. One significant finding from our study was that only about half of the sample indicated they were aware their agency had a CAC. This is interesting because their CAC oversees all citizen complaints, deputy disciplinary decisions, and policy changes. The CAC's deliberations have a direct impact on the responding deputies' working environments. Regularly discussing the CAC with members of an agency is an important first step for departments attempting to gain buy-in from their officers.

A more positive finding, however, was that among those deputies who were familiar with their agency's CAC, most had a favorable evaluation of its legitimacy. It is important to note that the agency we surveyed has relatively high levels of community support and a positive relationship with its residents. The Sheriff has been re-elected to the position several times since the mid-1990s and is well-liked in the community and within the agency. Such characteristics may help explain why our data demonstrated relatively positive views of the agency's CAC. At the same time, however, variation existed in deputies' attitudes. Thus, understanding what explains deputies' perceived legitimacy of the CAC is a critical question.

Consistent with prior research that examined the predictors of support of democratic styles of policing, we found that perceptions of organizational justice, self-legitimacy, and public scrutiny were all related to deputies' evaluations of CAC legitimacy in the expected directions. However, when all three key theoretical variables were included in a single regression equation, only the organizational justice effect remained statistically significant. This finding adds to a growing body of evidence demonstrating the benefit of organizational justice within police

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agencies. Prior research has revealed that organizational justice is associated with beneficial work-related outcomes among officers—greater support of agency goals, less cynicism, and greater agency trust (Bradford and Quinton, 2014; Wolfe and Nix, 2016a). Our study shows that another beneficial outcome of organizational justice is officer buy-in to an important mechanism of democratic policing—greater perceived legitimacy of CACs. Achieving perceived legitimacy of CACs appears important because it may lead to a situation where officers can learn from citizens' viewpoints, learn from mistakes, make corrective action when necessary, and ultimately improve the quality of service provided to the community. Additionally, CACs may provide a great opportunity for members of the public to witness how well trained, self-controlled, and professional their officers are. Having officers fail to perceive the council as legitimate, however, may create obstacles for agencies attempting to fulfill these goals. Ensuring a climate of respectful supervisor treatment, open lines of communication, and transparency with subordinates will likely cultivate greater perceived legitimacy in an agency's CAC.

Another key finding was that the organizational justice effect confounded the relationship between self-legitimacy, public scrutiny, and CAC legitimacy. This is consistent with prior research showing that organizational justice evaluations outpace the role of perceive negative publicity on officers' orientations toward the public (Wolfe and Nix, 2016a). Thus, police managers can help shield their officers from the potential harmful effects of public scrutiny by ensuring organizational justice within their agencies (Nix and Wolfe, 2016). This seems particularly relevant to police managers in a time of tense community relations around the US (Wolfe and Nix, 2016b).

Our study was not without limitations, which provide avenues for future research. For one, our sample comes from a single sheriff's department in the southeast that has relatively

good community relations. Views of CACs in jurisdictions lacking public confidence may be fundamentally different than those observed here. Future research should attempt to build on our findings by exploring officers' perceptions of CACs in other agencies, particularly those with strained community relations. Because this was the first study of its kind, we may have unintentionally failed to account for other potentially important predictors of CAC legitimacy. For example, officers' perceptions of other governing bodies (e.g., city/county council, mayor, city manager) may also impact officers' views of their agency's CAC (Crank and Langworthy, 1992). If officers believe the implementation of a CAC or its decisions/recommendations are influenced by politics, for example, this may have a negative effect on officers' evaluations of the committee's legitimacy. Relatedly, the Sheriff handpicks community members to serve on the CAC. It is possible that a more democratic and transparent selection process would improve deputies' perceptions of the council. Finally, it would be interesting for future researchers to explore how officers' evaluations of CACs change over time and determine what factors explain those changes. Can high profile or controversial use of force investigations or officer disciplinary recommendations influence officers' perceptions of their CAC?

The US is a democracy, and our government agencies purport to serve our interests and desires. As a result, we have witnessed further integration of the community into police decision-making processes over the years. This move toward a more democratic style of policing is necessary to ensure community trust, perceived legitimacy, public cooperation, and compliance with the law (Tyler, 1990; Tyler and Huo, 2002). Agencies that do not actively pursue strategies for community integration risk sending the message that the public's voice is not valued. This could ultimately erode trust, legitimacy, cooperation, and compliance over time. CACs are one way for agencies to deliver democratic policing to the public. Having such a council does not

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mean that agencies, their executives, or their officers need to bow to public opinion. After all, the police have their own set of expertise that is distinct from that of the public. But, agencies should not ignore the voice and opinions of citizens who sit on such councils. Democratic policing is policing that acknowledges the role of the public in helping police itself.

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Table 1. Descriptive statistics.

| Variable | N | Mean/% | SD | Min | Max |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| CAC legitimacy | 285 | 3.527 | .636 | 1 | 5 |
| Organizational justice | 287 | 3.641 | .754 | 1 | 5 |
| Self-legitimacy | 287 | 4.144 | .547 | 2 | 5 |
| Public scrutiny | 288 | 3.578 | .766 | 1 | 5 |
| Male | 272 | 80.5% | —— | 0 | 1 |
| Nonwhite | 267 | 27.3% | —— | 0 | 1 |
| Age | 274 | 2.741 | .981 | 1 | 4 |
| Bachelor's Degree | 273 | 56.0% | —— | 0 | 1 |
| Experience | 267 | 3.543 | 1.180 | 1 | 5 |
| Patrol | 269 | 39.8% | —— | 0 | 1 |
| Military | 272 | 39.0% | —— | 0 | 1 |

Table 2. Pairwise correlation matrix.

| Variable | | $Y_1$ | $X_1$ | $X_2$ | $X_3$ | $X_4$ | $X_5$ | $X_6$ | $X_7$ | $X_8$ | $X_9$ | $X_{10}$ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| $Y_1$ CAC legitimacy | | 1.000 | | | | | | | | | | |
| | N | 285 | | | | | | | | | | |
| $X_1$ Organizational justice | | .559** | 1.000 | | | | | | | | | |
| | N | 284 | 287 | | | | | | | | | |
| $X_2$ Self-legitimacy | | .132* | .264** | 1.000 | | | | | | | | |
| | N | 284 | 287 | 287 | | | | | | | | |
| $X_3$ Public scrutiny | | -.253** | -.333** | .006 | 1.000 | | | | | | | |
| | N | 285 | 287 | 287 | 288 | | | | | | | |
| $X_4$ Male | | .018 | .014 | .023 | -.117 | 1.000 | | | | | | |
| | N | 269 | 271 | 271 | 272 | 272 | | | | | | |
| $X_5$ Nonwhite | | -.022 | -.062 | .141* | -.039 | -.035[a] | 1.000 | | | | | |
| | N | 265 | 266 | 266 | 267 | 263 | 267 | | | | | |
| $X_6$ Age | | .104 | .184** | .120* | -.155* | .094 | .168** | 1.000 | | | | |
| | N | 271 | 273 | 273 | 274 | 270 | 264 | 274 | | | | |
| $X_7$ Bachelor's degree | | .016 | -.069 | .001 | .122* | -.205[a] | -.151[a] | -.086 | 1.000 | | | |
| | N | 271 | 272 | 272 | 273 | 269 | 265 | 270 | 273 | | | |
| $X_8$ Experience | | .078 | .000 | .041 | -.114 | .097 | .033 | .461** | .027 | 1.000 | | |
| | N | 264 | 266 | 266 | 267 | 263 | 259 | 265 | 265 | 267 | | |
| $X_9$ Patrol | | -.144* | -.230** | -.012 | .089 | .370**[a] | -.126[a] | -.260** | -.107[a] | -.212** | 1.000 | |
| | N | 266 | 268 | 268 | 269 | 265 | 262 | 267 | 267 | 263 | 269 | |
| $X_{10}$ Military | | .075 | -.080 | .084 | -.056 | .419**[a] | .308**[a] | .116 | -.254*[a] | -.046 | .218*[a] | 1.000 |
| | N | 269 | 271 | 271 | 272 | 268 | 264 | 269 | 270 | 264 | 267 | 272 |

*NOTE:* Correlations are Pearson's r (two-tailed test) unless otherwise noted.
[a]Tetrachoric correlation (Spearman's rho; two-tailed test).
*p<.05;**p<.01

Table 3. The effects of organizational justice, self-legitimacy, and public scrutiny on CAC legitimacy.

| Variable | Model 1 | | | Model 2 | | | Model 3 | | | Model 4 | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | $b$ | SE | $\beta$ | $b$ | SE | $\beta$ | $b$ | SE | $\beta$ | $b$ | SE | $\beta$ |
| Org. justice | .561** | .050 | .621 | — | — | — | — | — | — | .562** | .056 | .622 |
| Self-legitimacy | — | — | — | .155* | .078 | .128 | — | — | — | -.044 | .067 | -.037 |
| Public scrutiny | — | — | — | — | — | — | -.192** | .054 | -.227 | -.022 | .048 | -.026 |
| Male | -.011 | .093 | -.007 | .059 | .114 | .034 | .026 | .113 | .015 | -.014 | .093 | -.008 |
| Nonwhite | .013 | .078 | .009 | -.119 | .095 | -.082 | -.100 | .093 | -.069 | .020 | .079 | .014 |
| Age | -.043 | .041 | -.064 | .040 | .049 | .061 | .039 | .048 | .059 | -.042 | .041 | -.063 |
| Bachelor's degree | .107 | .070 | .080 | .020 | .086 | .015 | .066 | .085 | .049 | .113 | .071 | .085 |
| Experience | .059 | .033 | .107 | .007 | .040 | .013 | .000 | .039 | -.001 | .058 | .033 | .105 |
| Patrol | .001 | .076 | .001 | -.175 | .092 | -.131 | -.153 | .090 | -.115 | .006 | .076 | .004 |
| Military | .236** | .075 | .175 | .139 | .092 | .103 | .142 | .091 | .105 | .237** | .076 | .176 |
| Intercept | 1.433** | .242 | — | 2.955** | .357 | — | 4.303** | .282 | — | 1.688** | .388 | — |
| $F$-test | 17.78** | | | 1.64 | | | 2.86** | | | 14.23** | | |
| $R^2$ (Adj. $R^2$) | . 375(.354) | | | .053(.021) | | | .088(.057) | | | .377(.351) | | |
| N | 246 | | | 246 | | | 247 | | | 246 | | |

*p<.05;**p<.01

Figure 1. Percentage of respondents who indicated they knew what the CAC was (N=567).
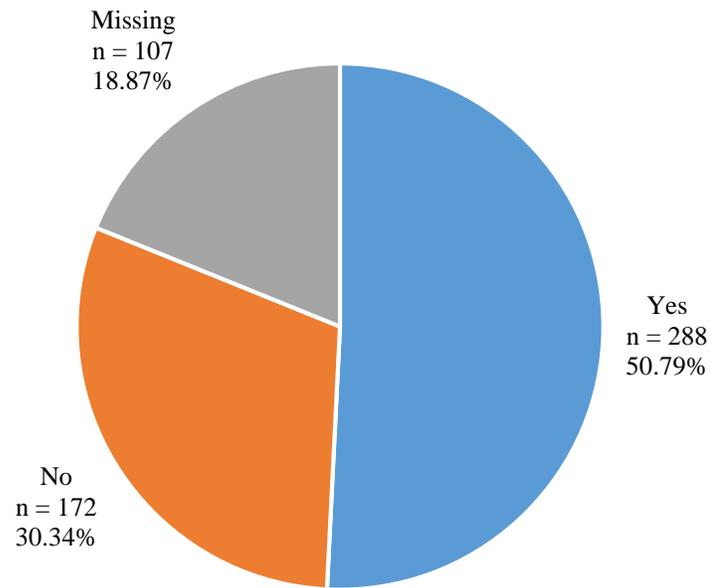
Figure 2. Perceived legitimacy of the CAC (restricted to those who indicated they knew what it was; N=288).



| | |
|---|---|
| The CAC makes recommendations that have the community's best interests in mind. | 1.39%, 13.19%, 50.00%, 32.29%, 2.78%, 0.35% |
| The CAC helps maintain our legitimacy in the eyes of the public. | 1.04%, 14.24%, 52.08%, 29.51%, 2.78%, 0.35% |
| The CAC helps us maintain our community policing efforts. | 1.39%, 9.03%, 50.00%, 36.11%, 3.13%, 0.35% |

■ Missing  ■ Strongly agree  ■ Agree  ■ Neutral  ■ Disagree  ■ Strongly disagree
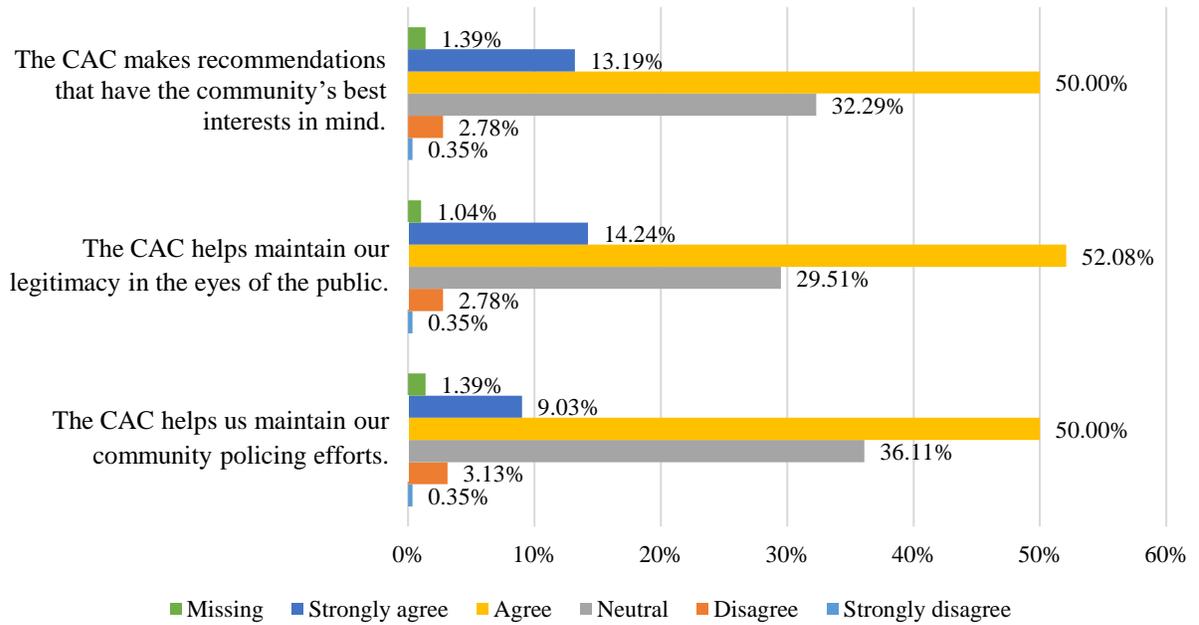
Appendix

Organizational Justice Items

1.  My agency's policies are designed to generate standards so that decisions can be made with consistency.
2.  My agency's policies are designed to allow employees to have a voice in agency decisions (e.g., assignment changes, discipline).
3.  My agency's performance evaluation system is fair.
4.  My agency's investigation of civilian complaints is fair.
5.  I understand clearly what type of behavior will result in discipline within my agency.
6.  Landing a good assignment in my agency is based on whom you know (reverse coded).
7.  If you work hard, you can get ahead at this agency.
8.  As an organization, my agency can be trusted to do what is right for the community.
9.  I trust the direction that my department's command staff is taking our agency.
10. I feel confident about top management's skills.
11. Command staff considers employees' viewpoints.
12. Command staff treats employees with kindness and consideration.
13. Command staff treats employees the same regardless of their gender.
14. Command staff treats employees the same regardless of their race or ethnicity.
15. Command staff clearly explains the reasons for their decisions.
16. Command staff clearly explains the reasons the agency makes policy changes.
17. Generally, command staff treats employees with respect.
18. I trust that command staff makes decisions that have the agency's best interest in mind.