



# **The Role of Digital Media in Shaping Police-Community Relations**

By Annemarijn van der Kroef

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Under Supervision of Guus Meershoek and Guus Dix

**Faculty of Behavioural and Social Sciences**

**UNIVERSITY OF TWENTE.**

## Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of digital media showcasing police misconduct on perceptions of police legitimacy among Dutch students, with the leading question being “*To what extent does digital media impact the perceptions of police legitimacy among Dutch students?*” Drawing on Tyler’s police legitimacy theory and Gerbner’s cultivation theory, this research employs a pretest-posttest experimental design along with in-depth interviews. The sample contained eight participants, who engaged in interviews before and after watching the documentary ‘*de Blauwe Familie*’, which is about institutional racism within the police. Qualitative and quantitative data on perceptions of procedural fairness, sense of moral obligation, trust and confidence in the police, and respect for police authority were collected and analysed.

The results indicate a slight decrease in participants’ perception of procedural fairness after exposure to the documentary. However, there is not enough statistical evidence to support a relationship between documentary exposure and police legitimacy perceptions. The subjective data gathered from in-depth interviews provided deeper insights into participants’ perceptions of police legitimacy. The findings highlight a complex interplay between media exposure and public perceptions of law enforcement and the need for further research on the topic.

**Keywords:** police legitimacy, digital media, police-community relations, procedural justice, Gerbner's cultivation theory, Tyler's police legitimacy theory, moral obligation, police misconduct, institutional racism.

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## Introduction

The police is an important aspect of society for maintaining public safety and harmony. At the same time, issues of social control have intensified, such as cybercrime, terrorism, protests and civil unrest, mental health crises, migration and border control, and environmental crimes, which require the police force to expand their actions and responses (Dunham and Alpert, 2015). In the Netherlands, the police have three primary responsibilities encapsulated in the Dutch phrases ‘beschermen, begrenzen, en bekrachtigen’, which translate to ‘protecting, limiting and empowering’. Protecting entails safeguarding citizens and intervening in emergency situations. Limiting involves restraining and resolving disruptive and unlawful behaviour, and empowering entails fostering safety and cooperation within the community (Politiewet, 2012). Besides the police playing a crucial role in maintaining public safety and harmony, the contribution of the public is also crucial. By involving the public in policing efforts such as community policing or neighbourhood watch programs, the police can gain valuable insights into local concerns. This so-called co-production of the police and the public enhances community safety and mutual trust (Reiss, 1971). Thus, it is vital that law enforcement and the public community sustain a good relationship based on mutual trust and respect.

However, instances of police misconduct occur within law enforcement from time to time. Such incidents may include racism, brutality, corruption, poor judgement, excessive force, or negligence. These examples are unfortunately not exhaustive. Such instances of police misconduct can in some instances dramatically erode public satisfaction with the police (Weitzer, 2002). Media in the form of for instance news reports, social media and entertainment media have the power to bring such instances of police misconduct to light, which is why media plays such an important role in police-community relations.

In contemporary society, where media plays increasingly significant roles and its usage continues to grow, the relationship between law enforcement agencies and the public is increasingly influenced by various forms of media (Miethe et al., 2019). These different forms of media have the potential to shape individuals' perceptions of policing practices, trust in law enforcement authorities, and the legitimacy of law enforcement. Building on the police legitimacy theory of Tom R. Tyler (1990), which revolves around the different factors contributing to the perception of police legitimacy by the public, and the cultivation theory by George Gerbner (1969), which poses that long-term media exposure shapes perceptions of reality, this study seeks to explore the impact of digital media on perceptions of police legitimacy. Understanding how digital media portrayals of law enforcement influence individuals' attitudes and beliefs is crucial for enhancing police-community relations and promoting public trust in the justice system. The leading question of this study is therefore *“To what extent does digital media impact the perceptions of police legitimacy among Dutch students?”* Addressing this question will contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between media, perceptions of law enforcement and public trust in the system. With the use of a quasi-experiment, this study will delve deeper into the impact of digital media on beliefs and attitudes by measuring the impact of a documentary about police misconduct on Dutch students' perceptions of police legitimacy.

To explore the topic gradually, several sub-questions have been identified that will provide a more nuanced understanding of the topic. The first sub-question that will be explored is *“To what extent do direct personal experiences with law enforcement shape Dutch students' perceptions of police legitimacy?”* This will be done through in-depth interviews with Dutch students and is largely led by Tyler's procedural justice theory, which posits that past experiences with law enforcement can shape an individual's perception of legitimacy of law enforcement. To

dive further into students' perceptions of the police, the sub-question "*To what extent do Dutch students voluntarily comply with the law?*" will be explored. This question will likewise be answered through in-depth interviews with Dutch students and is largely led by the idea posed by Tyler (1990), that an individual's perception of legitimacy about law enforcement affects their willingness to comply with the law. Finally, the question "*To what extent does exposure to a documentary about police misconduct impact the legitimacy of the police among Dutch students?*" will be posed in order to investigate to what extent the documentary '*de Blauwe Familie*' affects how legitimate the police is perceived by Dutch students. The idea that digital media, in this case in the form of a documentary, can exert influence on a person's beliefs and attitudes about certain topics is largely led by the cultivation theory posed by George Gerbner (1969), which will be further elaborated along the course of this paper.

Existing knowledge already provides extensive research on the effects of different kinds of media on police-community relations. Studies have explored how digital media such as the news and social media have the power to shape attitudes, trust and legitimacy perceptions regarding the police (Intravia et al., 2017). However, owing to the increasing prominence of digital media, there remains a gap in understanding the direct impact of police-related documentaries or other entertainment media specifically, on the public's perception of the police. This knowledge gap highlights the need for research capturing the effect of a documentary on the public's perception of the police. It was decided to examine the impact of police-related documentaries on students' perceptions in particular, due to their formative stage of development, their fairly homogeneous demographic characteristics and due to their substantial digital media consumption (Meijer, 2023).

This paper will proceed by providing a detailed overview of the theoretical framework that underpins this research, followed by an outline of the methodology used in this study. An analysis of the findings will then be presented, leading to a discussion and implications of the results. The paper will conclude with final thoughts and reflections, future directions for research and a concise answer to the research question.

### **Theoretical Framework**

To delve deeper into the impact of digital media on perceptions of police legitimacy among Dutch students, this section will explore and operationalize two fundamental theories: the police legitimacy theory by Tom. R. Tyler, and the cultivation theory by George Gerbner. By examining these two theories, it can be clarified to what extent the media has power to shape perceptions of police legitimacy. Tyler's police legitimacy Theory will serve as a guideline to define the concept of legitimacy, as well as to identify the components of police legitimacy, which will be investigated in this study with the use of an experiment. To further explore how media exposure is able to influence people's beliefs and perceptions, the cultivation theory by Gerbner will be discussed. In addition to these theories, previous research on media and police-community relations will be explored.

#### **Police Legitimacy Theory**

An overarching theory developed by Tom R. Tyler is called the 'police legitimacy theory', which focuses on understanding the factors that influence individuals' perceptions of law enforcement and their willingness to comply with the law. Tyler states that there are two kinds of perspectives on why people obey the law, which are the instrumental perspective and the normative perspective. The instrumental perspective focuses on how individuals comply with the law based



on external factors, such as the punishment or consequences for breaking the law. The normative perspective focuses on people's compliance with the law based on their personal morals. It considers people's attitudes about what they believe is just, which leads to voluntary compliance when they believe it is appropriate (Tyler, 1990). Tyler mainly focuses on the normative perspective, which is about the personal values of the public that lead to their perspective on police legitimacy and compliance with the law, because he believes that the instrumental perspective is no longer effective, and "Legitimacy is the normative factor of greatest concern to authorities" (Tyler, 1990).

Tyler's police legitimacy theory posits that individuals are more likely to comply with law enforcement when they believe that the police are fair, respectful and legitimate. Police legitimacy encompasses various components according to Tyler (1990), including procedural justice and fairness, moral obligation towards following the law, trust and confidence in the police, and respect for police authority, all of which contribute to shaping perceptions of legitimacy and promoting law-abiding behaviour.

The core of Tyler's theory lies with legitimacy, which refers to the perceived rightful authority of in this case the police. A central component of police legitimacy as articulated by Tom R. Tyler is procedural justice and fairness, which posits that an individual's perception of the police is largely determined by their perception of fairness in past and current legal procedures. In other words, this means that when individuals perceive legal procedures, including personal interactions with the police, to be fair and respectful, they are more likely to view the police as legitimate authority figures. As a result, they are more likely to comply, even if the outcomes may not be personally beneficial for them (Tyler, 2004). Tyler's procedural justice theory contains four pillars: fairness, respect, voice, and neutrality. Together, these pillars

contribute to an individual's perceptions of procedural justice in their interactions with the police (Tyler, 2004).

Moral obligation also plays a significant role, considering that when individuals perceive the law enforcement as legitimate, they feel a moral obligation to obey them (Tyler, 1990). Moral obligation signifies that an individual holds the belief that cooperation with the police and abiding by the law is the right thing to do, according to their own personal values. Moral obligation is important because it results in voluntary compliance and support.

Another significant component of police legitimacy according to Tyler (1990) is trust and confidence. When individuals have trust in the police and have confidence in their competence as well as their fairness and integrity, they are more likely to perceive them as legitimate. Additionally, the public should hold the belief that the police will act in their best interest.

Finally, respect for police authority is explored in Tyler's police legitimacy theory. For the police to be perceived as legitimate by the public, they must recognize and accept their power to enforce laws and maintain social order. To be perceived as a legitimate authority means that the public acknowledges the right of the police to have power and to make decisions. When the public sees the police as having legitimate authority, they are more likely to comply and support law enforcement (Tyler, 1990).

All four of these components of police legitimacy interact with one another and together they contribute to an individual's perception of legitimacy towards the police and their willingness to comply with the law (Tyler, 1990). Examining the police legitimacy theory allows for a foundation for exploring how Dutch students' perception of legitimacy of the police in the Netherlands has changed after watching the documentary '*de Blauwe Familie*'. Focusing on each of the components provides for a deeper understanding of the concept of police legitimacy.

### **Importance of public perception of police legitimacy**

It is crucial that the public perceives law enforcement as legitimate for several reasons. Most importantly, police legitimacy enhances cooperation and compliance with the law by the public. When individuals perceive the police as legitimate, they are more likely to voluntarily comply with laws and regulations. In turn, this contributes to maintaining social order and stability. Positive police-community relations also reduce the likelihood of crime and conflict (Sunshine & Tyler, 2003).

### **Cultivation theory**

Another theory that serves as a theoretical framework of this study is the cultivation theory developed by George Gerbner, which examines the long-term effects of media exposure on viewers' perceptions of reality. Using cultural indicators, which Gerbner defines as tools to study the messages and themes that are most common in media, researchers can investigate how media might influence the viewer's thoughts and beliefs (Gerbner, 1969). Within his theory, Gerbner introduces the concept of 'mean world syndrome', which he characterizes as a phenomenon where frequent viewers of television, particularly those who consume a large amount of violent content, view the world as more dangerous than it is in reality. Gerbner's research highlights that prolonged exposure to mass media in the form of television can create a distorted view of the world, due to exaggerated or fictionalized realities that are presented in mass media. This suggests that frequent television viewers may develop a shared set of beliefs that reflect the television world, impacting their real-world behaviour and perceptions (Gerbner, 1969).

Throughout the years, the cultivation theory has evolved with the rise of new forms of mass media. In this day and age, the emergence of the Internet has introduced new forms of

media that can be consumed besides television, including social media platforms, streaming services, online news outlets, video-sharing websites and podcasts (Lau, 2014). In addition to providing alternative ways to access videos and news, these new forms of digital media, particularly social media, often present a distorted view of reality, as the content that is shared often portrays an idealized version of reality (Nevzat, 2018).

### **Rising Media Consumption**

As discussed in the cultivation theory by Gerbner, alongside the factors contributing to the public's perception of police legitimacy discussed by Tyler (1990), media also serves as a significant contributing factor to perceptions of police legitimacy. Several studies have shown that the public receive the majority of their knowledge, including that about crime and law enforcement, from different kinds of media, such as television, radio, print, online news, and social media. Digital media is increasingly surpassing print media such as newspapers in popularity. Recent studies have shown that the average Dutch person consumes 132 minutes of television every day (Nationaal Media Onderzoek, 2023). Additionally, the use of social media increases every year, with people between the ages of 12-25 being the main internet-users in the Netherlands (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2021).

The shift from print media to digital media has several underlying reasons (Meijer 2023). First, almost every household in the Netherlands has access to internet and mobile devices, making online platforms easily accessible. Second, online media have become popular mainly due to the fact that it is highly convenient. It offers not only text, but often also video, audio and other interactive elements, providing for a more engaging user experience. Furthermore, digital media allows for on-demand news and information, often free of charge. Lastly, the rise of digital media goes hand in hand with the rise of social media platforms, such as Twitter, Instagram,

Facebook and TikTok, where news is provided and public engagement and discourse is encouraged. Digital media is expected to continue to grow even more in the future.

Especially among young adults (18-24), which is the age category that mostly consists of students, the consumption of digital media is increasing. According to the Digital News Report (2023), 83% of all young adults in the Netherlands use one or more social media platforms as a source of news (Lauf & Schut, 2023). The reason why social media is such a popular source of news among young adults is due to the visual presentation of the news. They find the news easier and more exciting to read, as well as quick and efficient (Meijer, 2023).

Both print media and digital media have the power to influence an individual's opinion and beliefs on certain topics. Shaping the public opinion is an unavoidable consequence of the media, but it can be harmful in some ways. Media have the power to exert influence on what the public perceives as important through agenda-setting; certain topics are prioritized. In a similar way, the algorithm of online media personalizes content where individuals are exposed to only information that reinforces their own beliefs, limiting different perspectives. Additionally, news is often framed in a way that can shape how individuals interpret news, guiding viewers or readers towards specific perspectives (Vonbun et al., 2016). This is dangerous because it can sometimes reinforce stereotypes and bias. Finally, there is the risk of the spread of misinformation and fake news through the media (Xiao et al., 2021)

### **Current and Past Research**

Current and past research on police-community relations commonly used positivist research traditions which often include surveys and experiments, which can capture perceptions easily. Interpretative research traditions are also common, where qualitative techniques like interviews and observations are used to delve deeper into subjective experiences. There have been a number

of studies published on the topic of media and police-community relations. Most of these studies make use of quantitative data derived from large-scale surveys.

A study by Dowler and Zawilski (2007) about the impact of media consumption on attitudes towards police misconduct and discrimination revealed that individuals who consumed a lot of network news were more likely to believe that police misconduct happened frequently than people who did not consume network news often. Additionally, their study revealed that police dramas and crime solving shows affected attitudes towards police misconduct and discrimination. The effects of eight different types of media were studied with the use of survey data from a sample of more than 1000 respondents. The results indicated that there was little effect of media on attitudes towards police misconduct and discrimination.

A different study by Miethe et al. (2019) explored how different sources of media depicting police force incidents affect public opinion. The findings indicate that short video clips of police force incidents strongly influence public opinion negatively, and that transparency from police departments is needed to overcome this problem. The study investigated this by using an online sample of 581 adults who were asked to rate four different videos.

Another study that reveals interesting insights about media and police-community relations is by Intravia et al. (2019) and its purpose is to capture the relationship between different kinds of media and fear of crime. The study builds on the cultivation theory which states that prolonged media exposure can cause fear of crime, among other things. Survey data from a large sample of students indicated that social media plays a big role in causing fear of crime.

### **Documentary Exposure**

Having defined the concept of ‘legitimacy’ and its components, and having explored the relationship between media exposure and attitudes, it can be investigated whether digital media in

the form of the documentary *'de Blauwe Familie'* has an effect on Dutch students' perceptions of police legitimacy. Considering the theoretical framework of this study, the expected outcome of this experiment is that the documentary will lead to a negative shift in the participants' perceptions of police legitimacy, as the documentary highlights police misconduct in the form of racism.

The research question "*To what extent does digital media impact the perceptions of police legitimacy among Dutch students?*" prompts an exploration grounded in Tyler's police legitimacy theory and Gerbner's cultivation theory, which provide a framework for understanding how media affect perceptions of police legitimacy. 'Police legitimacy' in this case, refers to the belief that police actions are appropriate, just, and morally justified (Tyler, 1990). This study focuses on digital media in the form of a documentary.

### **Hypotheses**

To determine whether there is a statistically significant difference between participants' perceptions of police legitimacy before and after viewing the documentary about police misconduct, the following hypotheses were formulated for each component of police legitimacy. The expectations are based on the idea posed by Tyler (1990) that police legitimacy encompasses four components, and the idea by Gerbner (1969) that media exposure can change attitudes and beliefs. The hypotheses will be tested with the use of paired t-tests.

#### ***Procedural Fairness***

Null Hypothesis (H0): There is no significant difference in perceptions of procedural fairness before and after viewing the documentary.

Alternative Hypothesis (H1): There is a significant difference in perceptions of procedural fairness before and after viewing the documentary.

### ***Moral Obligation***

Null Hypothesis (H0): There is no significant difference in the sense of moral obligation before and after viewing the documentary.

Alternative Hypothesis (H1): There is a significant difference in the sense of moral obligation before and after viewing the documentary.

### ***Trust and Confidence***

Trust and Confidence Null Hypothesis (H0): There is no significant difference in trust and confidence in the police before and after viewing the documentary.

Trust and Confidence Alternative Hypothesis (H1): There is a significant difference in trust and confidence in the police before and after viewing the documentary.

### ***Respect for Authority***

Respect for Police Authority Null Hypothesis (H0): There is no significant difference in respect for police authority before and after viewing the documentary.

Respect for Police Authority Alternative Hypothesis (H1): There is a significant difference in respect for police authority before and after viewing the documentary.

## **Methodology**

This section outlines the research design and methods employed to study the effect of digital media on perceptions of police legitimacy among Dutch students. Moreover, this section will discuss the gathering and handling of the data.



## **Research design**

The purpose of this research is to investigate potential changes in perception of police legitimacy after watching a documentary about police misconduct. To guide this research, a mixed-methods approach was employed. The qualitative method allowed for a deep exploration of participants' perspectives and experiences, while the quantitative method allowed for objectively measuring changes in participants' perceptions. In order to measure the changes in perception about the police among the participants, a quasi-experiment was performed. Quasi-experiments are experiments with which effects of an intervention can be measured (Mark & Reichardt, 2009). There are several types of quasi-experiments, but this study will employ the one-group pretest-posttest design, which is a design that involves measuring participants' outcomes or characteristics before and after they receive an intervention. In this design, all participants serve as their own control, which means that each person acts as their own comparison, helping to see if the treatment had an effect (Mark & Reichardt, 2009).

The independent variable, or the intervention in this study, is exposure to a documentary called '*de Blauwe Familie*'. The documentary provides an insightful exploration into the lives, experiences and misbehaviour of Dutch police officers, and gives voice to whistleblowers within the police organization who have reported incidents of racism, abuse of power, discrimination, and failed leadership to their employer. The dependent variables being studied include participants' perceptions of police legitimacy identified by Tyler (1990), which comprise of perceived fairness of police actions and procedures, sense of moral obligation towards following the law, trust and confidence in the police, and respect for police authority.

The pretest is an interview with the participants before they have watched the documentary and serves as a control, to determine what their perception of the police is before

the documentary. After the intervention, participants are interviewed again to determine if their perception of the police has changed due to the intervention. The one-group pretest-posttest design is the most effective way to study this, because any differences in perception towards the police can be directly assessed by comparing the before and after measurements. As a result, a direct causal relationship can easily be identified if there is one.

The before and after measurements were done with the use of semi-structured interviews with participants. By asking relevant questions before and after the intervention regarding the participants' perceptions of the police, possible differences can easily be measured. The approach of these interviews is a combination of phenomenological and hermeneutic. A phenomenological approach allows for a deep understanding of participants' lived experiences and perceptions, while a hermeneutic approach allows for a shared dialogue which can interpret these experiences and perceptions (Flick, 2018). Although most researchers studying the effects of media on perceptions of police employ surveys, the decision was made to make use of in-depth interviews instead, to gain a deeper understanding of participants' perceptions.

## **Sample**

The sampling method of this research is a convenience sampling method, which is based on availability and willingness to participate (Flick, 2018). The documentary lasts about 50 minutes and each interview takes up to fifteen minutes, which makes the experiment time-consuming. This is one of the reasons why the decision was made to not use a random sample or a purpose sample, but a convenience sample.

The sample consists of eight Dutch students from either Secondary Vocational Education (MBO), Higher Professional Education (HBO) or Academic Education (WO), which all fall under the category 'Dutch students'. The rationale behind using samples from all three levels of

higher education, is to measure potential differences in responses based on educational level. The recruitment process involved selecting individuals from my academic and social network.

The reason why students are being used as a sample is because firstly, students are typically homogeneous, which means that they vary little in demographic characteristics, such as age and educational background. Furthermore, students are typically people around the age of 18-25, which is an age group that regularly consumes digital media (Meijer, 2023).

### **Data collection**

The data utilized in this mixed-methods study consists of subjective and numerical data from in-depth interviews conducted with Dutch students from varying educational backgrounds, including MBO, HBO, and WO levels. Other demographic factors that were included in the data collection were gender and age. As this study aims to investigate the impact of digital media on perceptions of police legitimacy among Dutch students, all interviews were conducted and transcribed in Dutch.

This choice of data is appropriate within the context of a mixed-methods design as it allows for a deep exploration of participants' perceptions, attitudes, and experiences related to the Dutch police force. By engaging in open-ended conversations, the interviews facilitate the exploration of multifaced viewpoints, providing rich and detailed insights into the participants' understanding of and interactions with the police. At the same time, numerical Likert scale responses facilitate comparison of pretest and posttest results and enabled statistical analysis.

The data collection process involves semi-structured interviews, allowing for flexibility while ensuring that key topics are addressed (Barriball & While, 1994). Questions are designed to explore participants' feelings, beliefs, and interpretations, while encouraging them to reflect on their personal experiences and other influences shaping their perspectives on the police.

Participants were asked about their attitudes, prior contact with law enforcement, any changes in beliefs or opinions and their reflections on aspects that may have influenced their views. To minimize social desirability bias, confidentiality was ensured and the importance of honest responses without fear of judgement was emphasized (Chung and Monroe, 2003) The interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and later transcribed to ensure accuracy during analysis. Transcription is crucial for qualitative data analysis because it converts spoken communication into written form, which facilitates in-depth analysis of interviews (Kowal & O'Connell, 2014).

### **Materials and instruments**

In this research, several tools and materials were employed to collect and analyse data on the impact of a documentary on participants' perceptions of police legitimacy.

The intervention used in this study is a documentary called '*de Blauwe Familie*' and it focuses on institutional racism within the Dutch police force. During the 50-minute video, several real-life cases of racism within the police force are explained by victims. These 'whistleblowers' of the police share their story on why they joined the police, what happened during their career and why they decided to leave their job. The reason why this documentary specifically was selected is because it gives an accurate, real-life representation of what goes on within the police force, from the perspectives of victims of racism.

The goal of the creation and publication of this documentary was to raise awareness on institutional racism being a fundamental issue within the police in the Netherlands (Felten et al, 2021). The results of this documentary being published were grotesque: within 24 hours after publication, the Dutch House of Representatives watched the documentary and passed a motion that requires the police to have a conversation with all participants of the documentary. On top of

that, the Dutch police publicly recognized that racism is a structural problem within the police force, and stated that in the future, immediate firing will be the consequence of racism. Perhaps the most significant change that the documentary has brought is that the Dutch Police Academy now requires all officers-in-training to watch the documentary *'de Blauwe Familie'* (Control Alt Delete, 2022).

To guide the interviews, interview guides were created and employed (See Appendix B), facilitating the semi-structured interviews. Interview questions were guided by key theoretical concepts from Tyler's police legitimacy theory (1990), by focusing on the four components of police legitimacy that he identified: procedural justice and fairness, moral obligation, trust and confidence, and respect for police authority. Interview questions about these four topics allowed for a deep, incremental exploration of participants' perception of police legitimacy. Furthermore, participants were asked to explain whether the documentary had any effect on their perceptions of police, which is guided by Gerbner's cultivation theory (1969) which posits that media exposure changes attitudes and beliefs. By inquiring about the documentary's impact, the interviews aim to explore the extent to which media exposure, as suggested by Gerbner, influences participants' perceptions of police legitimacy.

During the interviews, audio recording equipment was utilized to capture the pretest and posttest interviews. This facilitated reliability and data analysis. Consent to record, as well as informed consent was ensured with the use of a consent form that participants were given the chance to read and sign before the experiment. The consent form included information about the purpose of the research, the voluntary nature of the participation, the research procedure, the time requirement, potential risks, benefits and incentives, confidentiality, refusal and withdrawal rights, the handling of the data, and contact information of the researcher (Thomson 2013). The

informed consent is crucial for maintaining ethical standards and protecting the participants rights. To further protect the participants, their data was anonymized and recordings and transcripts were securely stored.

For the interviews that were conducted in this study, both open-ended questions and Likert scale questions were utilized. The open-ended questions allowed participants to provide detailed and personal responses, which offered insights into their perceptions and experiences regarding their perceptions of police legitimacy, before and after watching the documentary. Additionally, Likert scale questions were used, which required participants to rate their responses on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 indicated a strong disagreement and 5 indicated a strong agreement. The Likert scale is a tool in research for measuring attitudes, perceptions and opinions quantitatively. The rationale behind the utilization of the Likert scale is due to its ability to capture the intensity of participant's feelings. Other benefits of the Likert scale are that the results are numerical, which facilitates interpretation, comparison, and statistical analyses of pretest and posttest results, and the easy and understandable nature of the Likert scale for participants, as it is a widely recognized scale (Batterton and Hale, 2017). Thus, the Likert scale questions facilitated interpreting the results, while the open-ended questions provided explanations behind the ratings, as well as personal experiences and examples.

For the analysis of the findings, several kinds of software were used, including ATLAS.ti, RStudio and Excel. This facilitated the coding of responses, the identification of patterns and the exploration of relationships within the data.

### **Data analysis**

The methods of data analysis in this study involve both qualitative and quantitative techniques to uncover participants' perceptions of the police. In order to analyse the subjective data from the

interviews, it was carefully interpreted with the use of thematic analysis, which helped to derive meaningful insights and conclusions from participants' responses. A coding scheme was developed based on the key points of investigation, some of which are concepts of trust, experiences with police, influence of media, moral obligation, respect for authority and procedural justice. This method allowed for the identification and coding of themes and patterns within interview transcripts, with the use of the coding software ATLAS.ti. By analysing these themes and patterns, changes in perceptions of police legitimacy were identified by comparing them before and after the intervention to understand any changes over time (Flick, 2018). Thematic analysis allows for a deep exploration of participants' experiences, which in turn provide valuable insights for the leading question of this investigation.

Additionally, to analyse the numerical data, a dataset was created in Excel containing all numerical data derived from the Likert scale questions during the interviews. As there were multiple Likert scale questions per component of police legitimacy, the responses were averaged for each participant, meaning that each participant had a mean score for each component of police legitimacy before watching the documentary, and a mean score for each component after watching the documentary. These scores were then made into a dataset (See Appendix A) that contains the demographics of each participant as well as their pretest and posttest scores for each of the four components of police legitimacy that were measured. This provided a clear overview and facilitated comparing pretest and posttest results, as well as visualizing the results through graphs.

In addition to this, RStudio was employed to perform paired t-tests, which were used to determine whether the difference in participants' 'perceptions of police legitimacy before and after the intervention were statistically significant. Paired t-tests were utilized because they facilitate

comparing the means of pretest and posttest results, to assess changes in perceptions (Wilkerson, 2008). RStudio was then utilized to derive other statistical information such as standard deviations and degrees of freedom.

Mean scores were not rounded off during calculations, however the scores presented in this paper are rounded off to two decimals, as well as standard deviations and t-statistics. P-values are not rounded off to ensure accuracy.

### **Ethical considerations**

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the ethics committee of the Faculty of Behavioural and Social Sciences at the University of Twente. This approval ensures that the research adheres to ethical guidelines and protects the rights and well-being of participants.

Prior to participation in the experiment, all eight participants were provided with a consent form containing detailed information regarding the research objectives, potential risks and benefits. Additionally, they were given the opportunity to ask questions at any point during the experiment.

Anonymity and confidentiality of participants is safeguarded throughout the entire research process. All data collected, including audio recordings, transcripts and any other materials, were anonymized to ensure that the participants' identities remained confidential. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym in the form of a letter, ranging from A to H. Additionally, any personally identifiable information that was shared during interviews was removed or altered. The storing of data in this study is adherent to the guidelines for research ethics and data management.



## **Analysis**

This section will analyse the findings of the experiment that was conducted regarding participants' perceptions of police legitimacy before and after watching a documentary about police misconduct. An answer to the sub questions will be provided along with data visualizations. Moreover, a statistical analysis is carried out and detailed, as well as an analysis of covariate demographical factors.

### **Analysing Procedural Justice and Fairness among Dutch Students**

As Tyler (2003) points out, previous contact with law enforcement can change an individual's perspective on law enforcement, whether these experiences were positive or negative. This phenomenon is called procedural justice, and it means that individuals take the fairness of previous procedures or encounters with the police into account when judging their legitimacy (Tyler, 1990). To answer the sub-question "*To what extent do direct personal experiences with law enforcement shape Dutch students' perceptions of police legitimacy?*", procedural justice and fairness were studied, which revealed insights into the relationships between individual encounters and trust in law enforcement.

To measure whether procedural justice also was a significant factor among Dutch students, it was assessed with the use of several open questions and Likert scale questions during in-depth interviews before and after the intervention of a documentary about police misconduct. Seven out of eight students that were interviewed had experienced one or more encounters with law enforcement before. However, only one of them stated that this encounter had changed their perspective on the police. Qualitative data from these interviews revealed that the encounters that the seven participants had experienced with the police were not regarding large offenses or major

rule-breaks, which could have been the reason why they have not impacted their perception of police much.

Participants' perception of fairness of their previous encounters was measured with an incremental approach; several questions were asked regarding the previous encounters, about the pillars of procedural justice that were identified by Tyler (2003): respect, voice, fairness and neutrality. The interview questions were about the overall fairness of the encounter, the participants' ability to express their own concerns or opinions, the extent to which the police explained the reason behind the encounter, and the perceived fairness of the outcome of the encounter. All encounters with the police were taken into account, including getting pulled over, getting fined, or filing a report. Responses indicated that seven out of eight participants experienced no issues with prior police encounters.

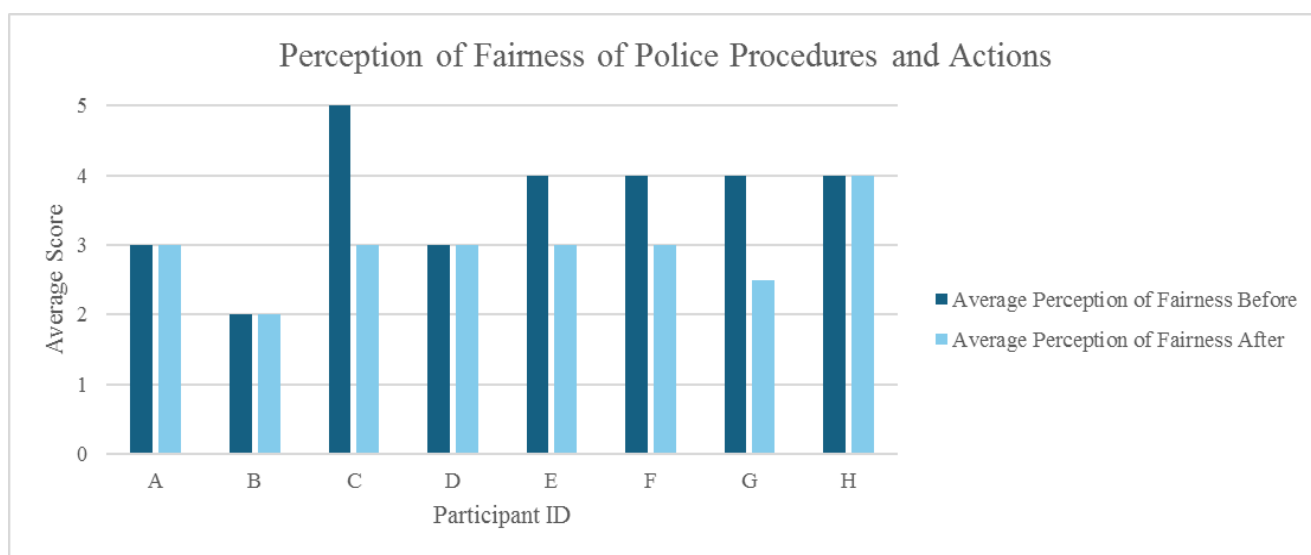
In addition to questions about personal experiences, all participants were asked to rate on the Likert scale of 1 to 5 how fair they perceived the procedures and actions taken by the police in their community, to their knowledge. Before watching the documentary, the average perception of fairness of procedures and actions by the police in their community was 3.63 out of 5 on the Likert scale. Some participants stated that, even though they believe that procedural fairness is adequate, there is room for improvement. One participant stated *"It should comply with the law, and they should sometimes respond. However, I feel that sometimes it is exaggerated, there is too much beating around the bush, and it takes too long"*. After watching the documentary, the average perception of fairness decreased to 2.94 out of 5. This observed change of 0.69 in perception about procedural justice and fairness indicates that after watching the documentary, participants perceived the Dutch police as less fair and just. Responses from participants varied. On the one hand, participants were sceptical about the reliability and validity

of the documentary, stating that *“You do not really know if these are just a few bad experiences that have been highlighted, or if this is the general situation”*. Others expressed concerns about procedural fairness, saying that *“If you cannot even cooperate together, how do you expect to avoid having prejudices when you apprehend someone? Whether it is a man or a woman, or anything else?”* Another participant matched this attitude, saying *“I think if you cannot even show respect to each other, how can you do that towards others?”* Overall, participants shared the belief that they do not experience racism and racial prejudices themselves, due to their white identity. However, many acknowledge that instances of racism by police officers occur and emphasize their disapproval.

Figure 1 reveals the observed changes in perspective among all eight participants. It can be seen that four out of eight participants perceived the procedures and actions of the police in their community as less fair and just.

**Figure 1**

*Perception of Fairness of Police Procedures and Actions*



*Note.* The figure illustrates the mean scores of all eight participants on their perception of fairness of police procedures and actions, derived from interview responses.

## **Analysing Moral Obligation among Dutch Students**

To answer the sub-question “*To what extent do Dutch students voluntarily comply with the law?*”, moral obligation should be studied. Whether or not individuals obey the law depends on their own attitudes on how they should behave. In other words, it depends on their personal moral obligation. Having moral obligation encompasses feeling personally committed to obeying the laws, irrespective of whether there is a punishment for breaking the law (Tyler, 1990).

During the experiment, moral obligation was measured among participants with the use of one open-ended question and two Likert scale questions. First, the participants were asked how important they think obedience to the law is in maintaining social order and cohesion. All participants gave similar answers which indicated that they all thought it was of great importance that the law was obeyed by everyone, in order to keep society safe and harmonious. The following quotes derived from pretest interviews illustrate these thoughts: “*They are important to keep everybody safe. Not just yourself, but also the people around you*”. This point of view is shared by most participants and highlights their belief that adherence to rules is crucial for safety. Another participant matched this statement, saying “*Sometimes they work against you. For example, if you get a fine, you think, well, I would have preferred not to get it, but they are there to protect you and your loved ones*”. This quote highlights the understanding that, despite rules and regulations coming with personal inconveniences sometimes, they are in place for the protection and well-being of society. Others expressed a more ambivalent attitude towards following rules, saying that “*On the one hand, it is very important of course, because otherwise it would really become chaos. But of course, I do not think a minor violation is such a big deal*”. Another participant echoed this statement, saying: “*If someone drinks one beer where it is not allowed, that does not matter much to me. I would rather they go after people who drive at 500*”

*km an hour somewhere*". Another participant remarked "*Because you have traffic rules and all that. I do think you should stick to them, but when it comes to other things, I think there are other factors at play*". These statements indicate that, while students do recognize the importance of rule-abiding behaviour, the context and intent of violations should be taken into account.

To dig deeper into the participants' sense of moral obligation, they were asked to rate on a scale of 1 to 5 how fair they thought it was to get a fine or a punishment for breaking the law. Answers varied only slightly, and the result was that the average feeling of moral obligation was a 4.5 out of 5 on the Likert scale before exposure to the documentary about police misconduct, which indicates that there is a high initial level of moral obligation to comply with the law among Dutch students. To investigate whether digital media in the form of a documentary about police misconduct had any effect on the participants' sense of moral obligation, the same questions were asked after they had watched the documentary. There was a minimal change observed post-intervention, with the average sense of moral obligation among participants being 4.38 out of 5 on the Likert scale. This change of 0.12 resulted from one participant changing their response, which indicates that the intervention had limited impact on the perceived moral obligation among Dutch students.

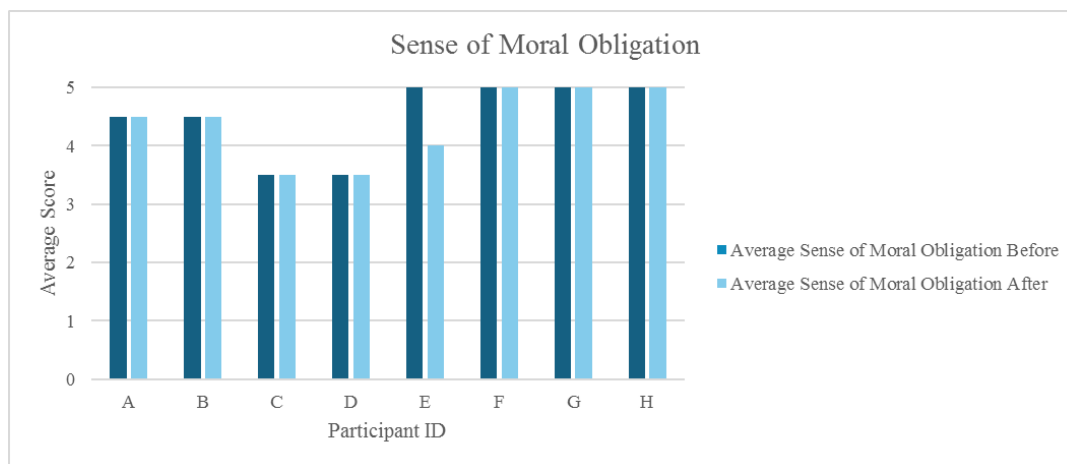
What that can be drawn from these findings is that Dutch students generally maintain a strong sense of moral obligation to comply with the law and that the documentary about police misconduct had little measurable effect on their perceptions. One participant stated that "*If there is a fine, no matter who it is from, if it is justified I think it should be paid*". Other participants remarked that, while they still feel a great sense of moral obligation, they sympathize with people who do not have a good relationship with the police: "*I have never really had any problems with the police, but if I have to empathize with other people, then yes, I would feel obligated to obey*".

*the law. But not out of a moral sense, rather because I would not want to have to deal with the police”.*

To visually illustrate the results on moral obligation among Dutch students, a bar chart was constructed representing the average Likert scale scores between the pretest and posttest phases. As shown in Figure 2, the initial average score was 4.5 out of 5 during the pretest, indicating a high sense of moral obligation. After the intervention with the documentary about police misconduct, the average score slightly decreased to 4.38, indicating minimal change.

**Figure 2**

*Sense of Moral Obligation*



*Note.* The figure illustrates the mean scores of all eight participants on their sense of moral obligation towards following the law, derived from interview responses.

### **Analysing the Effects of Documentary Exposure**

When exploring the question *“To what extent does exposure to a documentary about police misconduct impact the legitimacy of the police among Dutch students?”* ‘legitimacy’ was incrementally explored through four components: procedural justice, respect for police authority, sense of moral obligation, and trust and confidence in the police. These four topics were then

further dissected into several interview questions to conduct a detailed exploration of the participants' perception of police legitimacy.

Two components have already been discussed: procedural justice and moral obligation. As stated before, the perceptions of fairness of police procedures and actions, or procedural justice, changed slightly from 3.63 to 2.94. Moral obligation showed a minimal change from 4.5 to 4.38. The other two components, which are trust and confidence and authority, also revealed interesting insights.

### ***Analysing Respect for Police Authority among Dutch Students***

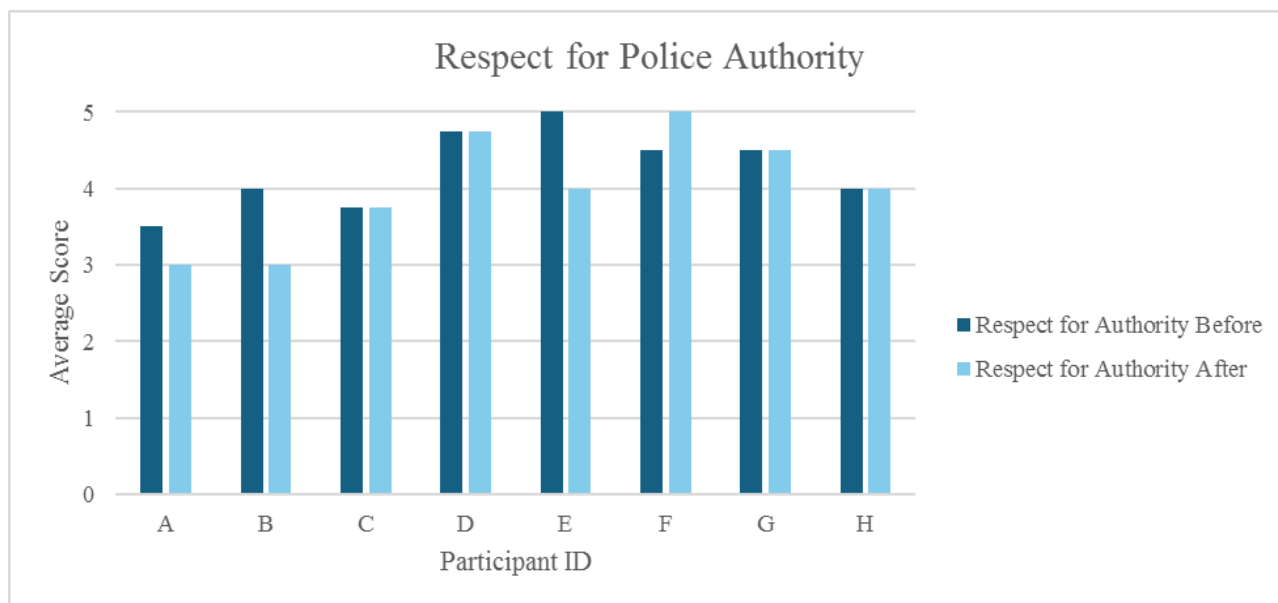
Dutch students' respect for police authority was explored with the use of two open-ended questions and two Likert scale questions. First, participants were prompted to explain their perceptions regarding the primary role of the police in society. Although responses showed slight variation, they revealed that many participants regarded ensuring public safety, harmony, and security the most important responsibilities of law enforcement. When asked which words come to mind when thinking about the main goal of the police, one participant responded "*I think enforcement and order. Those are the concepts that first come to mind for me regarding the police*". Subsequently, participants were asked to reflect on their emotional responses to the presence of the police. Responses varied, with some expressing a sense of security in the police's presence, while others described feelings of unease and potential unrest. One participant responded "*It is always nice to have some security present. At the very least, you know you can go somewhere with problems*".

Following these open-ended questions, participants were asked to rate their agreement on two statements using the Likert scale: "*The police have the right to exercise authority*", and "*I respect the authority of the police*". Figure 3 visualizes the answers to these two Likert scale

questions which determine the respondent's respect for police authority. Prior to the intervention, the average respect for police authority of Dutch students was 4.25 out of 5 on the Likert scale. This indicates that there was a relatively high level of respect for authority of the police among participants. One statement by a participant that most participants shared was *"The police simply have the final say"*.

The post-intervention results show that the average perceived authority among participants declined to 4 out of 5 on the Likert scale. This decrease of 0.25 indicates that some participants have less respect for authority of the Dutch police after watching the documentary about police misconduct. One participant which's respect for police authority did not change, stated that *"I could act rude or confront them if I were to have an incident with the police. However, that is separate from the reason I might be stopped or something similar, so I do not see the point in that"*. Others expressed concerns regarding the power and authority of the police, saying *"If the police really start making distinctions based on race or if you are truly discriminated against, then I can well imagine that authority is no pleasure"*, and *"If you have to take at face value what was said in the video, then that is certainly more than regrettable, so my respect has in a certain sense definitely diminished"*.



**Figure 3***Respect for Police Authority*

*Note.* The figure illustrates the mean scores of all eight participants on respect for police authority, derived from interview responses.

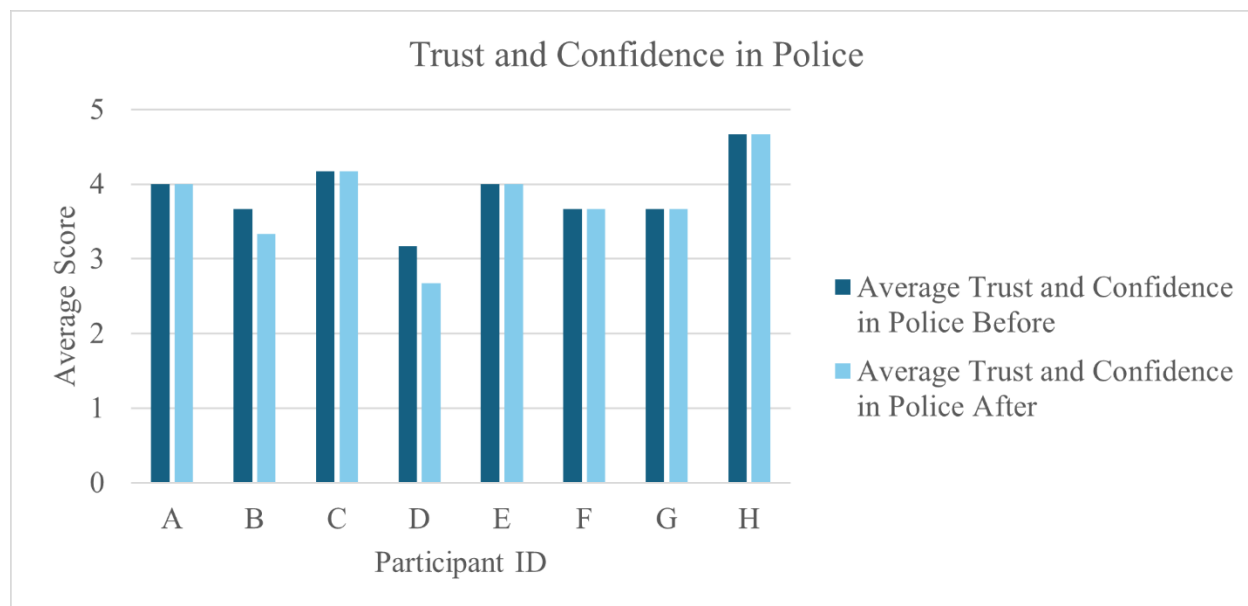
***Analysing Trust and Confidence in Police among Dutch Students***

In addition to the other three components, trust and confidence was also measured during the experiment. To delve deep into Dutch students' feelings of trust and confidence in the police, several interview questions were identified, including two open-ended questions and three Likert scale questions. First, participants were asked to rate their trust in the police when it comes to protecting their community, to enforce the law and to do the right thing. With the use of open-ended questions, the topic was further explored by asking participants what caused them to trust or distrust the police, and if there were any incidents or events that contributed to this.

The average feeling of trust and confidence in law enforcement among Dutch students was 3.88 out of 5 on the Likert scale prior to the intervention of a documentary. One belief that was shared by almost all participants was that *“The police are still the police, and if you cannot*

*trust them, then I think you cannot really trust anyone anymore*". Generally, participants expressed a positive attitude towards the trustworthiness of law enforcement in the Netherlands, saying *"Even though I do not always agree with where they stand and how they act, I do think they generally have our best interests at heart"*, and *"I generally behave quite decently towards the police. That usually gets reciprocated, but I understand it may not be the same for everyone"*.

Post-observations indicate a minimal decline in the feeling of trust and confidence to 3.77, indicating that the intervention in the form of a documentary about police misconduct only slightly impacted the students' trust and confidence in the police, with a decline of 0.11. Figure 4 visualizes the scores that were given by the participants with regards to trust and confidence in the police in the Netherlands. It can be seen that only two out of eight respondents noted a decrease in their trust and confidence in the police after watching the documentary. From the students that did not change their perspective after the documentary, the belief was generally shared that *"Personally, I am not the target audience of what I gathered from the video. However, I can very well imagine that this significantly undermines trust in the police for many people"*. Another participant echoed this by saying *"In general, I think we do well, as every field has its pros and cons"*. Others expressed more changes in their trust and confidence in the police, saying *"Something has changed because I used to think that everyone at the police treated each other fairly. That there was no racism. But I have come to realize that is not the case"*.

**Figure 4***Trust and Confidence in the Police*

*Note.* The figure illustrates the mean scores of all eight participants on their trust and confidence in the police, derived from interview responses.

**Statistical Analysis**

To measure whether the observed differences between the students' perceptions of police legitimacy before and after the intervention of a documentary is statistically significant, paired t-tests were performed for each factor of police legitimacy that was measured, using a significance level (alpha) of 0.05 (Thisted, 1998).

After conducting a paired t-test for procedural fairness, it was found that there was a significant difference in perceptions of procedural fairness before ( $M = 3.63$ ,  $SD = 0.91$ ) and after ( $M=2.94$ ,  $SD = 0.56$ ) participants viewed the documentary about police misconduct ( $t(7) = 2.43$ ,  $p = .04517$ ). These results indicate that students' perception of procedural fairness decreased after exposure to the documentary, thus rejecting the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ), meaning that there is

significant evidence that supports a relationship between documentary exposure and perceptions of procedural fairness.

When performing a paired t-test for moral obligation, it was found that there was a slight change in sense of moral obligation before ( $M = 4.50$ ,  $SD = 0.65$ ) and after ( $M = 4.38$ ,  $SD = 0.64$ ) participants viewed the documentary about police misconduct ( $t(7) = 1$ ,  $p = .3506$ ). This indicates that students' sense of moral obligation slightly decreased after exposure to the documentary, but this change was not statistically significant, thus not rejecting the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ), meaning that there is no significant evidence to suggest a relationship between documentary exposure and sense of moral obligation.

The t-test for trust and confidence revealed that there was an change observed among students in trust and confidence in the police before ( $M = 3.88$ ,  $SD = 0.44$ ) and after ( $M = 3.77$ ,  $SD = 0.60$ ) watching the documentary about police misconduct ( $t(7) = 1.49$ ,  $p = .1794$ ). This indicates that there was an observed decrease in trust and confidence in the police among students after watching the documentary, but this change was not statistically significant, thus not rejecting the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ), meaning that there is no significant evidence to suggest a relationship between documentary exposure and trust and confidence in the police.

Finally, the t-test for respect for police authority was conducted, which revealed that there was an observed difference in respect for police authority before ( $M = 4.25$ ,  $SD = 0.52$ ) and after ( $M = 4$ ,  $SD = 0.74$ ) watching a documentary about police misconduct ( $t(7) = 1.32$ ,  $p = .2275$ ), which indicates that there was a decline observed in respect for police authority after watching the documentary, but this decline was not statistically significant, thus not rejecting the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ), meaning that there is no significant evidence to suggest a relationship between documentary exposure and respect for police authority.

The results of the t-tests thus indicate that the relationship between perceptions of procedural fairness and watching a documentary about police misconduct is significant, as the p-value is lower than alpha. However, the t-tests of the other three factors, which are moral obligation, trust and confidence and respect for authority, reveal that evidence of a relationship between these variables and watching a documentary about police misconduct is not strong enough.

### **Demographic Confounding Variables**

It is important to determine whether demographic factors affected the results, and to account for them in this study. There were three key demographic variables measured: age, gender, and education level. These three factors can significantly influence perceptions of law enforcement, potentially affecting the outcomes of this study.

#### ***Education Level***

Education level, which is categorized as MBO, HBO and WO, was analysed in order to understand its impact on participants' perceptions of police legitimacy. Bar charts were employed to compare the results of fairness, trust, moral obligation and authority ratings across these three levels of education.

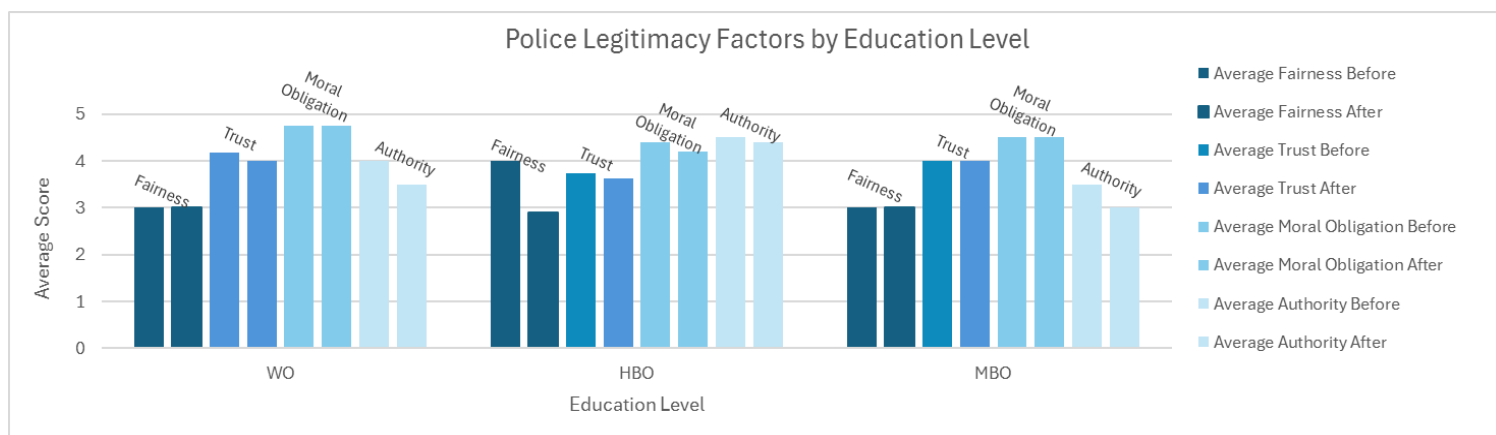
Figure 5 illustrates the varying impact of participants' educational level on their perceptions of police legitimacy. The analysis reveals different patterns in perceptions of fairness across different educational levels. Generally, perceptions of fairness of police actions and procedures remain consistent across educational categories, however participants from HBO level go in a separate direction, potentially indicating a decreased perception of fairness post

documentary viewing. This outlier suggests that the documentary only had an effect on participants from HBO level.

Moreover, the analysis shows that individuals with higher education levels show a more profound shift in their trust and confidence in law enforcement after watching the documentary compared to those with lower education levels. This suggests that education level may influence how individuals perceive trust in the police, underscoring the need to account for educational background when researching trust in police among students.

Examining moral obligation, figure 5 demonstrates that students at WO level show the highest sense of moral obligation towards law enforcement. Notably, the documentary only appears to have influenced participants from HBO level, which indicates that educational background causes a variance in responses when it comes to moral obligation.

Finally, figure 5 visualizes the relationship between the perceived police authority and educational level. Participants from HBO level show the highest levels of perceived police authority. However, the observed effects of the documentary are more noticeable among WO and MBO level participants. This underscores that educational background can shape perceptions of police authority and responsiveness to visual material of police misconduct.

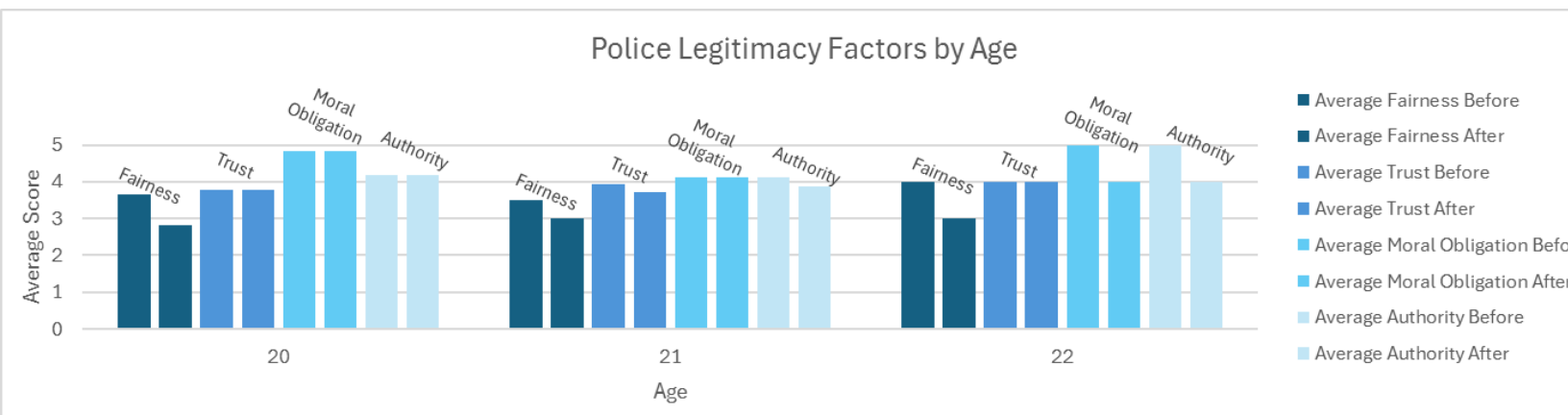
**Figure 5***Police Legitimacy Factors by Education Level*

*Note.* Each component of police legitimacy is assigned a different shade of blue, with the left bar representing the pretest results and the right bar representing the post-test results.

**Age**

Age is another demographic variable that can influence perceptions of police legitimacy. To study its effect, bar charts were employed to examine the relationship between age and pre-and post-documentary ratings of fairness, trust and confidence, moral obligation and authority.

Overall, upon examining the demographic factor of age, it can be seen that there is minimal variation observed among the different ages of participants, which are 20, 21 and 22. Nonetheless, subtle distinctions can be made. The results shown in figure 6 indicate that older participants showed a higher perception of fairness of police procedures and actions. This highlights the importance of considering age as a potential factor in studying perceptions of police legitimacy.

**Figure 6***Police Legitimacy Factors by Age*

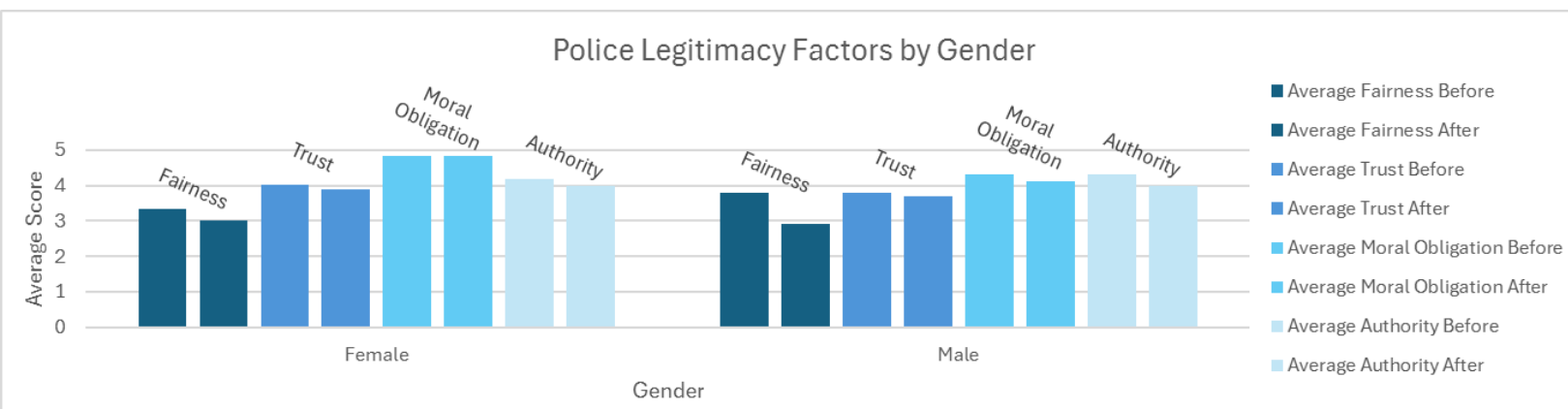
*Note.* Each police legitimacy factor is assigned its own shade of blue, with the left bar representing the pretest results and the right bar representing the post-test results.

***Gender***

Gender is another demographic factor that can potentially influence the results of this study. To study the impact of gender on the participants' perceptions of police legitimacy, differences in responses between female and male participants were examined. Bar charts were created to visualize the distribution of all police legitimacy factors across both genders, which makes comparison easy.

Figure 6 illustrates the impact of participants' gender on their perceptions of police legitimacy before and after watching the documentary about police misconduct. Overall, there is minimal variation observed in responses between female and male participants, however the analysis shows that female participants have a higher sense of moral obligation than male participants, both before and after watching the documentary. This highlights the importance of accounting for the demographic factor 'gender' when studying students' perceptions of police legitimacy.



**Figure 7***Police Legitimacy Factors by Gender*

*Note.* Each police legitimacy factor is assigned its own shade of blue, with the left bar representing the pretest results and the right bar representing the post-test results

**Composite Scores**

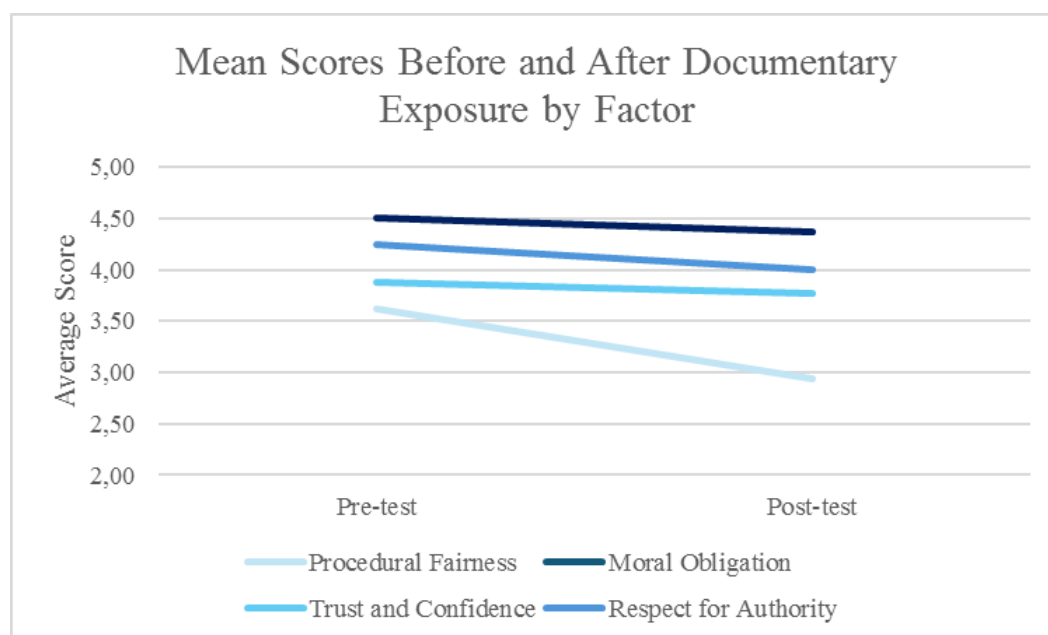
In order to measure police legitimacy, it was divided into four components for this study: procedural fairness, moral obligation, trust and confidence, and respect for authority. To give an overview of whether the overall police legitimacy has changed due to the intervention in the form of a documentary, composite scores were calculated.

The pre-intervention composite score was measured by adding the means of the four factors, considering that they each carry the same weight (25) and dividing this number by the number of factors, which is four. The result is that the pretest composite score is 4.06 out of 5 and the post-test composite score is 3.77 out of 5 on the Likert scale, which is a decrease of 0.29.

Figure 8 visualizes the declines in each factor, which contribute to an overall decreased perception of police legitimacy among participants.

**Figure 8**

*Mean Scores Before and After Documentary Exposure by Factor*



*Note.* The figure illustrates the declines in each component of police legitimacy after the intervention: Procedural fairness, moral obligation, trust and confidence, and respect for authority.

## Discussion

### Key Findings

The findings of this study reveal that changes were observed for every component of police legitimacy post-intervention. There was especially a significant change in participants' perception of procedural fairness after watching the documentary '*de Blauwe Familie*'. The decline in trust and confidence in the police, as well as the sense of moral obligation, was minimal. Respect for authority experienced a relatively greater decline, while perceived procedural fairness showed the most significant decline post-intervention. Despite these observed changes, only the change in

'procedural fairness' proved to be a statistically significant decline after performing paired t-tests. The effects of the demographic variables 'educational level', 'age' and 'gender' proved to be minimal.

### **Interpretation of Findings**

The significant decrease in perceptions of procedural fairness of police actions and procedures suggests that exposure to digital media in the form of a documentary about police misconduct can negatively impact students' perceptions of procedural fairness, which aligns with findings of other studies regarding the influence of media on police-community relations.

There were observed changes among all components of police legitimacy, suggesting a potential relationship between documentary exposure and perceptions of police legitimacy. Additionally, subjective data from the interviews revealed that some participants genuinely changed their perspective after watching the documentary. However, due to the statistical insignificance of all components except procedural fairness, and due to some participants not mentioning a change in their perspective while others did, further research is needed to explore the relationship between these variables. An insignificant p-value does not mean that there is no relationship between documentary exposure and perceptions of police legitimacy, it simply means that the evidence of a relationship between documentary exposure and perceptions of police legitimacy is not strong enough (Goodman, 2008).

The significantly high p-values in this study can be resulted from the relatively small sample size of eight in this study. The choice to conduct the study with a sample size of eight students was intentional. In-depth interviews allowed for a deep exploration of participants' perceptions, providing subjective insights that complemented the objective numerical findings. The qualitative data thus provided a deeper understanding of the context and reasons behind the

quantitative data, offering valuable insights and broader implications that statistical analysis alone might have missed.

Another potential reason why some results proved to be insignificant is because the single documentary viewing might have been too brief or insufficiently repetitive to produce significant changes in students' perceptions or moral obligation, trust and confidence in the police, and respect for police authority. As Gerbner (1969) posits in his cultivation theory, prolonged and cumulative exposure is often needed to cause a change in attitudes or perspectives.

### **Limitations**

Despite the careful design and implementation of this study and its methods, there are some limitations that need to be acknowledged that may impact the validity and generalizability of the findings.

First, a documentary was the exclusive form of digital media that was used. Enhanced insights can be gained from researching the effects of other forms of digital media on perceptions of police, such as news media, social media and fiction.

Second, convenience sampling was used. While this method was practical and not time-consuming, it introduced biases that may affect the generalizability of the results. More specifically, the sample may not be representative to the entire population of Dutch students, which is racially diverse. As a result of convenience sampling, the sample contained a lack of diversity; all participants had the same racial background, which is white. Given the documentary's focus on racism within the police force, this study may not capture the perception of police legitimacy among different racial groups. This lack of diversity presents is that the study may overlook perceptions of police trust and legitimacy among those who are directly affected by racial bias. Additionally, all participants live in the province Overijssel. As a result,

the findings may not be generalizable to students throughout the rest of the Netherlands. This limitation of absence of racial diversity underscores the need for further research involving a more diverse sample to better understand the impact of such documentaries on various demographic groups.

Another potential limitation of this study is the risk of social desirability bias. Social desirability bias is a response bias that may occur during interviews, where participants provide answers that they believe are more socially desirable or acceptable, rather than truthful answers (Chung and Monroe, 2003). In the case of this research, participants may give responses that indicate that they perceive the police as less legitimate due to the instances of racism projected in the documentary *'de Blauwe Familie'*. Although social desirability bias was accounted for during this study, social desirability bias maintains a risk which can provide misunderstanding of findings, as well as invalidity of findings (Chung and Monroe, 2003).

## **Implications**

This study is original in researching the effect of a documentary about police misconduct on perceptions of police legitimacy, however, the results of this study highlight the need for further research into the interplay between digital media representations of police and public perceptions of police legitimacy. Researching the effect of other forms of digital media, such as social media, fiction, and entertainment media from streaming services could offer broader perspectives and may reveal new insights about the topic. Additionally, studying the effect of digital media on a broader range of demographics, such as variety in race, age, residential areas, and previous experience with law enforcement, could also yield new insights into the topic. Expanding the study like this will allow for a deeper exploration on the effects that digital media can have on the public's perceptions of law enforcement.

Digital media, for example in the form of documentaries, have the power to raise awareness on certain topics, such as racial profiling. Participants in this study mentioned that digital media can influence perceptions of police negatively, however in a similar way, media can and should be used to positively influence perceptions of police or raise awareness about fundamental topics such as racial profiling.

As Chermak & Weiss (2005) suggest, the police should maintain a positive relationship with the media, as well as cooperate with the media to manage challenges and to enhance public perception. This also means that law enforcement should strive towards a police-community based relationship built on trust, transparency and accountability (McAnich, 2019).

Hence, police are recommended to cooperate with the media by using it to positively influence perceptions of police and raise awareness about fundamental topics, as well as to use media to build a relationship with the public based on transparency, trust and accountability.

## **Conclusion**

This study aimed to investigate the impact of digital media on Dutch students' perception of police legitimacy, drawing upon Tyler's police legitimacy theory and Gerbner's cultivation theory as a theoretical framework. Through a pretest-posttest experimental design along with in-depth interviews, this study aimed to research this topic by exploring whether exposure to a documentary about police misconduct influenced participants' perceptions of police legitimacy. The findings of this research provided several important insights into the interplay between digital media and perceptions of law enforcement.

Police legitimacy, according to Tyler (1990) can be divided into four categories: procedural justice, moral obligation, trust and confidence, and respect for authority. Overall, the

results suggest that digital media in the form of a documentary had a slight change on students' perceptions of police legitimacy. A careful analysis of these four categories showed that all four categories of police legitimacy, especially perceptions of procedural fairness and respect for police authority, diminished after the intervention of watching the documentary '*de Blauwe Familie*'. Subjective statements from some participants during interviews also indicated that there was a change in perception of police legitimacy after the intervention.

Dutch students showed a strong initial sense of moral obligation towards obeying the law. After exposure to the documentary, there was very minimal change in their perception or moral obligation, highlighting that students find maintaining social order, harmony and safety highly significant, regardless of external factors such as police misconduct portrayed in digital media. In addition to this, students generally showed positive personal experiences with law enforcement, which did not significantly alter their perceptions of police legitimacy. However, the documentary led to a significant decrease in perceptions of procedural fairness among some students.

Finally, there was a moderate decline in both trust and confidence in the police and respect for police authority among some students, after watching the documentary. However, these changes proved to be statistically insignificant after performing paired t-tests.

Together, these four categories reveal an individual's true perception of police legitimacy, according to Tyler (1990). The analysis revealed that there was an average overall decrease in perceptions of police legitimacy from 4.06 out of 5 to 3.77 out of 5 on the Likert scale, which is a decrease of 0.29. The subjective and numerical observations underscore the potential for digital media to influence public perceptions of law enforcement legitimacy. However, considering that the t-test results generally showed a statistically insignificant relationship between watching the

documentary and perceptions of police legitimacy, and considering that some participants showed no change in perspective after watching the documentary while others did, the evidence that supports a relationship between watching a documentary about police misconduct and Dutch students' perceptions of police legitimacy is not strong enough, and further research is necessary.

This study contributes to the existing research about media and police-community relations by specifically examining the impact of digital media in the form of a documentary on perceptions of police legitimacy among Dutch students, which is an underexplored context and demographic.

It is recommended that police maintain a positive and cooperative relationship with the media to address issues and enhance public perception, which in turn fosters positive police-community relationships based on transparency, mutual trust and respect.



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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Participant Demographics and Interview Data

Participant	Age	Gender	Education	Experience	Fairness		Trust		Moral	Moral	Authority	Authority
					Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Obligation	Obligation	Pre	Post
A	20	M	MBO	Yes	3	3	4	4	4,5	4,5	3,5	3
B	21	F	WO	Yes	2	2	3,67	3,33	4,5	4,5	4	3
C	21	M	HBO	Yes	5	3	4,17	4,17	3,5	3,5	3,75	3,75
D	21	M	HBO	Yes	3	3	3,17	2,67	3,5	3,5	4,75	4,75
E	22	M	HBO	Yes	4	3	4	4	5	4	5	4
F	20	F	HBO	No	4	3	3,67	3,67	5	5	4,5	5
G	20	M	HBO	Yes	4	2,5	3,67	3,67	5	5	4,5	4,5
H	21	F	WO	Yes	4	4	4,67	4,67	5	5	4	4

*Note.* Participant identifiers (A-H) are used to anonymize individual responses. Demographic variables include age, gender (M/F), and educational level. "Experience" indicates whether participants had previous interactions with law enforcement (yes/no). Pre and posttest scores measure participants' ratings on procedural fairness, moral obligation, trust and confidence in police, and respect for police authority before and after viewing the documentary "*de Blauwe Familie*."

## **Appendix B: Interview schemes**

### ***Pre-test interview scheme***

#### **Voordat we beginnen:**

Bedankt voor het deelnemen aan dit onderzoek. Het doel van dit onderzoek is te onderzoeken wat de invloed van bepaalde media is op iemands perceptie van politie legitimiteit. Het volledige onderzoek zal ongeveer 1 uur duren.

Voordat we beginnen, zou ik graag uw toestemming willen bevestigen voor dat dit interview zal worden opgenomen voor onderzoeksdoeleinden en willen bevestigen dat u het ‘Informatieblad voor onderzoek Politie Legitimiteit’ heeft gelezen en begrepen.

Voelt u vrij om de vragen zo open en eerlijk mogelijk te beantwoorden. Er zijn geen goede of foute antwoorden en uw eerlijke antwoorden zullen bijdragen een beter begrip van het onderwerp van dit onderzoek. Als u niet genoeg informatie beschikt over het onderwerp, probeer de vragen dan te beantwoorden voor zover u weet of wat uw gevoel zegt. Er zijn geen foute antwoorden

Als u vragen heeft, dan mag u ze op ieder moment stellen.

#### **Achtergrondinformatie over het onderzoek:**

Tijdens dit onderzoek ga ik een aantal vragen stellen over uw mening over de politie in Nederland. Hierbij gaan we in op uw verleden met de politie, uw vertrouwen in de politie en andere aspecten. Bij sommige van deze vragen wordt er van u gevraagd om te antwoorden op een schaal van 1 tot 5. Deze schaal werkt als volgt:

1= Sterk mee oneens

2= Mee oneens

3= Niet mee eens en niet mee oneens

4= Mee eens

5= Sterk mee eens

Of:

1=Zeer slecht

2=Slecht

3=Neutraal

4=Goed

5=Zeer goed

### ***Demografische informatie van de participant***

Participant kenmerk:

Leeftijd:

Gender:

Opleidingsniveau:

### **Onderwerp 1: procedurele rechtvaardigheid en eerlijkheid**

1. Bent u ooit in aanraking geweest met de politie?

Dit kan bijvoorbeeld zijn in de vorm van een waarschuwing of aangesproken zijn, een boete krijgen, staande gehouden zijn, of aangehouden zijn, of een andere ontmoeting.

- a. Kunt u deze ervaring met de politie omschrijven?
- b. Wat was er gebeurd waardoor u met de politie in aanraking kwam?
- c. Indien er meerdere interacties waren: Welke interactie met de politie is u het beste bij gebleven en waarom?

Zo niet, sla antwoord 2-6 over

2. Werd u tijdens deze interactie met de politie eerlijk en rechtvaardig behandeld?



- a. Waarom wel of niet?
3. Had u het gevoel dat u tijdens deze interactie of interacties uw zorgen, perspectief of meningen kon uiten?
    - a. Waaruit bleek dat?
  4. Hoe tevreden was u met de uitkomst van deze interactie?
    - a. Waarom vond u het terecht of onterecht?
  5. In hoeverre legde de politie tijdens de interactie de redenen achter hun acties of beslissingen uit?
  6. Hebben uw eerdere persoonlijke ervaringen met de wetshandhaving uw algehele perceptie van de politie beïnvloed?
    - a. Zo ja, op welke manier?
  7. Op een schaal van 1 tot 5, hoe belangrijk vindt u het dat de politie eerlijk en rechtvaardig handelt in hun interacties met het publiek (1=Zeer onbelangrijk, 2= Onbelangrijk, 3=Neutraal, 4=Belangrijk, 5=Zeer belangrijk)
    - a. Waarom vindt u dit wel of niet belangrijk?
  8. Op een schaal van 1 tot 5, hoe eerlijk vindt u de procedures en handelingen die door de politie in uw gemeenschap worden gebruikt? (1=Zeer oneerlijk, 2= Oneerlijk, 3= Neutraal, 4= Eerlijk, 5=Zeer eerlijk)
    - a. Waarom vindt u dit wel of niet eerlijk?
    - b. Heeft u voorbeelden van procedures en handelingen die u wel of niet eerlijk vindt?
  9. Op een schaal van 1 tot 5, hoe sterk bent u het eens met de stelling: “*De politie in mijn gemeenschap behandelt iedereen eerlijk en onpartijdig*”? (1=Sterk mee oneens, 2=Mee oneens, 3=Niet mee eens en niet mee oneens, 4= mee eens, 5= sterk mee eens)

**Onderwerp 3: vertrouwen**

10. Op een schaal van 1 tot 5, hoeveel vertrouwen heeft u in de politie om uw gemeenschap te beschermen en te dienen? (1= Helemaal geen vertrouwen, 2=Weinig vertrouwen, 3=Neutraal, 4= Veel vertrouwen, 5= Volledig vertrouwen)
11. Op een schaal van 1 tot 5, hoeveel vertrouwen heeft u in de politie om in uw beste belangen te handelen en de wet goed te handhaven (1= Helemaal geen vertrouwen, 2=Weinig vertrouwen, 3=Neutraal, 4= Veel vertrouwen, 5= Volledig vertrouwen)
12. Op een schaal van 1 tot 5, in hoeverre bent u het eens met de stelling: *“Ik vertrouw erop dat de politie in mijn gemeenschap het juiste zal doen”* (1=Sterk mee oneens, 2=Mee oneens, 3=Niet mee eens en niet mee oneens, 4= mee eens, 5= sterk mee eens)
13. Op welke factoren baseert u dit vertrouwen of het gebrek eraan?
14. Zijn er ervaringen of gebeurtenissen geweest die uw vertrouwen in de politie hebben beïnvloed? (Voorbeelden: TV, historische gebeurtenissen, persoonlijke gebeurtenissen)

**Onderwerp 4: morele verplichting**

15. Hoe belangrijk vindt u het om de wet na te leven, voor het behoud van sociale orde en harmonie?
- a. Waarom wel of niet?
16. Op een schaal van 1 tot 5, hoe erg bent u het eens of oneens met de volgende stelling: *“Ik voel de morele verplichting om te voldoen aan de aanwijzingen van politie, zoals het betalen van boetes of het volgen van de (Verkeers)regels”*? (1=Sterk mee oneens, 2=Mee oneens, 3=Niet mee eens en niet mee oneens, 4= mee eens, 5= sterk mee eens)
- a. Waarom wel of niet?

17. Op een schaal van 1 tot 5, hoe eerlijk vindt u het om een boete of straf van de politie te ontvangen voor het overtreden van de wet? (1= Erg oneerlijk, 2=Oneerlijk, 3=Neutraal, 4=Eerlijk, 5=Erg eerlijk)

- a. Waarom wel of niet?
- b. In welke situaties wel en in welke situaties niet?

### **Onderwerp 5: respect voor autoriteit**

*Uitleg: Autoriteit is de macht of het recht om beslissingen te nemen en gedrag aan te sturen. Het is het respect en erkenning die mensen geven aan iemand.*

18. Hoe beschrijft u de rol van de politie in de samenleving?

- a. Wat is het doel van de politie in de samenleving volgens u?
- b. In hoeverre vindt u dat de politie voldoet aan de verwachtingen van deze rol?

Op een schaal van 1 tot 5, beoordeel de volgende stellingen: (1=Sterk mee oneens, 2=Mee oneens, 3=Niet mee eens en niet mee oneens, 4= mee eens, 5= sterk mee eens)

19. *“De politie heeft het recht heeft om gezag uit te oefenen”*

20. *“Ik respecteer de autoriteit van de politie”*

21. Wat voor een gevoel brengt de aanwezigheid van politie u? Bijvoorbeeld, u bent op een evenement en u ziet dat er politie rondloopt. Hoe voelt u zich daarbij?

- a. In welke situaties wel of niet?

### **Aanvullende vragen**

*Uitleg: Legitimiteit is de mate waarin iets of iemand wordt beschouwd als rechtvaardig en acceptabel door de samenleving of betrokken partijen. Het gaat vooral om erkenning, vertrouwen, geloofwaardigheid en aanvaardbaarheid.*

22. Op een schaal van 1 tot 5, hoe legitiem vind jij de politie in Nederland? (1=Zeer illegitiem, 2=Illegitiem, 3=Neutraal, 4= Legitiem, 5=Zeer legitiem)
- a. Waarom wel en niet legitiem?
  - b. Zijn er gebeurtenissen of andere feiten waarop u dit baseert?
23. Vindt u het belangrijk dat de politie als legitiem wordt beschouwd door het publiek?
- a. Waarom wel of niet?
24. Is er nog iets anders wat u over dit onderwerp zou willen zeggen? Is er iets dat u bent vergeten?

### ***Posttest interview scheme***

U heeft zojuist een documentaire over wangedrag van de politie, met name met betrekking tot racisme binnen de politiegemeenschap, gezien. Nu wil ik u graag enkele vragen stellen over uw huidige perceptie van de politie, en of en hoe deze documentaire uw perspectief heeft veranderd.

#### **Onderwerp 1:**

1. Wat waren uw gedachten en gevoelens tijdens het kijken naar ‘*De Blauwe Familie*’?

#### **Onderwerp 2: procedurele rechtvaardigheid en eerlijkheid**

2. Op een schaal van 1 tot 5, in hoeverre bent u het eens met de stelling: “Ik geloof dat de politie iedereen eerlijk en onpartijdig behandelt”? (1=Sterk mee oneens, 2=Mee oneens, 3=Niet mee eens en niet mee oneens, 4= mee eens, 5= sterk mee eens)
3. Hebben de incidenten van politiewangedrag die in de documentaire werden getoond uw perceptie van de eerlijkheid van de politie beïnvloed? Zo ja, op welke manier?
4. Kunt u voorbeelden uit de documentaire geven die uw mening hebben beïnvloed, indien van toepassing?

#### **Onderwerp 3: Vertrouwen**

5. Op een schaal van 1 tot 5, hoeveel vertrouwen heeft u in de politie om uw gemeenschap te beschermen en te dienen? (1= Helemaal geen vertrouwen, 2=Weinig vertrouwen, 3=Neutraal, 4= Veel vertrouwen, 5= Volledig vertrouwen)
6. Op een schaal van 1 tot 5, hoeveel vertrouwen heeft u in de politie om in uw beste belangen te handelen en de wet te handhaven? (1= Helemaal geen vertrouwen, 2=Weinig vertrouwen, 3=Neutraal, 4= Veel vertrouwen, 5= Volledig vertrouwen)
7. Op een schaal van 1 tot 5, in hoeverre bent u het eens met de stelling: *“Ik vertrouw erop dat de politie in mijn gemeenschap het juiste zal doen”*? (1=Sterk mee oneens, 2=Mee oneens, 3=Niet mee eens en niet mee oneens, 4= mee eens, 5= sterk mee eens)
8. Heeft de documentaire twijfels opgeworpen over de betrouwbaarheid van de politie?
9. Indien van toepassing: Waarom is uw gevoel van vertrouwen in de politie veranderd?

#### **Onderwerp 4: Morele verplichting**

10. Op een schaal van 1 tot 5, hoe erg bent u het eens of oneens met de volgende stelling: *“Ik voel de persoonlijke morele verplichting om te voldoen aan de aanwijzingen van politie, zoals het betalen van boetes of het volgen van de (Verkeers)regels”*? (1=Sterk mee oneens, 2=Mee oneens, 3=Niet mee eens en niet mee oneens, 4= mee eens, 5= sterk mee eens)
11. Op een schaal van 1 tot 5, hoe eerlijk vindt u het om een boete of straf van de politie te ontvangen voor het overtreden van de wet? (1= Erg oneerlijk, 2=Oneerlijk, 3=Neutraal, 4=Eerlijk, 5=Erg eerlijk)
12. Hebben de incidenten van politiewangedrag die in de documentaire worden getoond uw perceptie van morele verplichting beïnvloed? Zo ja, op welke manier?

#### **Onderwerp 5: autoriteit**

Op een schaal van 1 tot 5, beoordeel de volgende stellingen: (1=Sterk mee oneens, 2=Mee oneens, 3=Niet mee eens en niet mee oneens, 4= mee eens, 5= sterk mee eens)

13. *“De politie heeft het recht om gezag uit te oefenen”*

14. *“Ik respecteer de autoriteit van de politie”*

15. *“De incidenten van politiewangedrag die in de documentaire worden getoond, hebben mijn respect voor politieautoriteit ondermijnd”*

a. Zo ja, op welke manier?

16. In het licht van de documentaire, bent u anders gaan denken over de rol van de politie in de samenleving? Op welke manier?

### **Onderwerp 6: implicaties**

17. Op basis van wat u in de documentaire heeft gezien, denkt u dat er beleidsveranderingen of hervormingen moeten worden doorgevoerd om kwesties van politiewangedrag aan te pakken en het gezag van de politie te verbeteren?

a. Kunt u dat uitleggen?

### **Aanvullende vragen**

*Uitleg indien nodig: Legitimiteit is de mate waarin iets of iemand wordt beschouwd als rechtvaardig en acceptabel door de samenleving of betrokken partijen. Het gaat vooral om erkenning, vertrouwen, geloofwaardigheid en aanvaardbaarheid.*

Op een schaal van 1 tot 5, hoe legitiem vind jij de politie in Nederland? (1=Zeer illegitiem, 2=Illegitiem, 3=Neutraal, 4= Legitiem, 5=Zeer legitiem)

18. Wat maakt de politie voor u legitiem of illegitiem?

a. Heeft u hier voorbeelden van?

19. Zijn er nog andere factoren die van invloed kunnen zijn op uw mening over de politie die we niet hebben besproken?
20. Wat denk jij dat de rol van media is bij de relatie tussen burger en politie?
- a. Denkt u dat dit een positieve of negatieve invloed kan brengen?
  - b. Denkt u dat dit kwesties, zoals deze te zien zijn in de documentaire, kan oplossen?
  - c. Wat denkt u dat de rol van entertainment media, zoals deze documentaire, kan zijn in de relatie tussen burger en politie?