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Rethinking Violent Behavior

Assessing the importance of procedural justice and police legitimacy in Lützerath

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Abstract

The research question examined in this paper focuses on *to what extent procedural justice and police legitimacy influenced the willingness of climate activists to use violence against the police in Lützerath*. Within a single-case study on Lützerath, semi-structured interviews were conducted with three climate activists and two police officers, each about their perceptions of police legitimacy, procedural justice, and the use of violence. Using a coding scheme, the interviews were then analyzed to answer the research question and its sub-questions. The study is relevant since it is a known fact that the perception of the police can influence the behavior of protesters in significant ways. However, qualitative research about violence of climate activists against the police, especially in the protest of Lützerath, remains rare. It is now interesting to understand possible trigger for the use of violence since it can examine whether a specific police treatment can prevent confrontations between the police and climate activists and could moreover help to develop effective strategies for its prevention, whilst also demonstrating results for future research. The findings demonstrate that procedural justice and police legitimacy can influence activists' understanding of violence, however, the response behavior was different for all respondents.

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1. Introduction

The urgency for climate action has provoked a wave of protests across the world with several activists advocating for sustainable and fair climate policies. However, not only the sole need for environmental justice has become a political issue, but also the measures that are taken by activists to ensure political change. Not infrequently, peaceful protests have degenerated into violent escalations between law enforcement and activists, and tense atmospheres between police officers and climate activists seem to be no longer a rarity. This was also observable in Lützerath, a small village in Germany, which became one crucial symbol for environmental justice in the past year.

1.1. Political Background

Although the expansion of the area Garzweiler II in Germany was already determined in 2005, the operation did not receive much media attention until last year (Schwarz & Waldow, 2023). The energy company RWE bought the area to mine approximately 1.3 billion tons of coal that lay underneath the ground to secure the energy supply in Germany and hence, produce 35 million tons of lignite every year which is considered the most harmful energy source due to the immense carbon dioxide release and environmental damage through its mining (BPD, 2023; RWE, 2023; Schwarz & Waldow, 2023). This resulted in the resettlement of several villages in 2006 - including Lützerath with its nearly 100 residents (Schwarz & Waldow, 2023). The operation is incomprehensible to many climate activists. For several years now, thousands of people in Germany have been protesting for a just and sustainable climate policy. It is argued that the limit of 1.5 degrees, that Germany as one of the UN member states agreed to at the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference, cannot be achieved (deutschlandfunk, 2023; Herpich et al., 2022; Mattauch & Springmann, 2019). In 2020, in order to stop the operation, some activists started barricading themselves in empty buildings in Lützerath, set up a protest camp and lived in a constructed infrastructure (deutschlandfunk, 2023; Schwarz & Waldow, 2023), and after the last resident left Lützerath in October 2022, and it was determined that the village would be completely demolished mid-January, a large-scale demonstration against the operation was announced for the 14th of January (Schwarz & Waldow, 2023). The district of Heinsberg, where Lützerath is located, announced a general disposition prohibiting any residence in the village and emphasized that activists who do not leave the village voluntarily will be removed through clearance measures by the police (ZDFa, 2023). On Saturday, the 14th of January, about 15,000 people, including Greta Thunberg, demonstrated against coal mining and the clearance of Lützerath (ZDFb, 2023). Although most of the activists embraced a peaceful protest, during the clearance of the village and the during the demonstration, some encounters between activists and police officers escalated and developed into violent clashes in which several activists and police officers got hurt (ZDFb, 2023). Both sides accused each other of using disproportionate violence. Whilst climate activists state that the

police unrestrainedly and systematically went after peaceful protesters, police officers testify that harsher measures only happened when there was no removal on the part of the activists, even though it was already asked several times (Saul et al., 2023). Generally, the political public seemed to be in favor of the police. Christiane Hoffmann, the deputy government spokesperson, stated that the clashes were triggered by participants who did not accept police instructions (Saul et al., 2023). The State Chairman of the Police Union, Michael Mertens, also spoke of massive attacks by some of the demonstrators and an intended provocation of violence (ARD, 2023), whilst the Minister of Interior of North Rhine-Westphalia, Herbert Reul, moreover, defended the behavior of the police and spoke of a highly professional operation (Saul et al., 2023). However, the question of why those encounters have escalated remained unanswered.

1.2. Research Question and Aim

This research aims to investigate the willingness of climate activists to use violence in Lützerath by examining the role of procedural justice and police legitimacy in the protest. Literature and research have already discussed the effect of those two on compliance and cooperation with the police, however, there is the need for a further step and examining how a disregard of these can not only cause non-compliance but furthermore encourage potential violent behavior. For a functioning democracy and for building effective strategies to prevent the escalation of conflicts, it is crucial to understand what drives and triggers violence. Regarding this context, this paper will focus on the following research question:

To what extent did procedural justice and police legitimacy influence the willingness of climate activists to use violence against police officers in Lützerath?

This question seeks to understand the impact of procedural justice and police legitimacy on potential violent behavior and helps gather a detailed and nuanced understanding of perceptions and experiences in Lützerath, whilst contributing to a comprehensive analysis of response behavior of activists. To answer the research question, the following four sub-questions were formulated, which will be answered by analyzing five interviews of police officers and climate activists in the analysis section.

SQ1: In what ways did the climate activists in Lützerath perceive or consider the police as procedurally just and legitimate during their encounters with the police officers?

Understanding how activists perceived the police officers in terms of procedural justice and legitimacy is essential for gaining insights into whether these influenced their willingness to embrace a peaceful protest or resort to violence.

SQ2: How do the climate activists justify, if any, violence against police officers?

This question enables to examine underlying factors that affect the use and understanding of violence beyond the reasons of procedural justice and legitimacy. Hence, it demonstrates the importance of those two concepts.

SQ3: How do the police justify, if any, violence against climate activists?

By asking for justifications of police officers to use violence during the protest, their perspective, feelings and behavior is being portrayed and the role of climate activists in these is being discussed. This enables a more overall understanding of the encounters.

SQ4: How do both think the use of violence in Lützerath could have been prevented?

Asking about prevention measures is not only valuable for practical implications but also enables understanding both views which can examine to what extent both think procedural justice and legitimacy do play a role in shaping violent behavior and which factors they view as more important.

1.3. Knowledge Gap and Relevance

Although there is much literature on the effects of procedural justice and police legitimacy on compliance between the police and the public, there is little to no qualitative research on how procedural justice and police legitimacy influences violent behavior of, specifically, climate activists. To that, not only the dynamics in Lützerath, but Lützerath itself is due to its actuality clearly under-researched. Therefore, it is essential to find out how illegitimate and unjust behavior can be a possible trigger for violent attitudes and behavior. Any new knowledge can help prevent escalations of conflicts and can help understand Lützerath in a context. This is not only relevant for political matters since it can have significant implications on policy-making by highlighting the importance of both these concepts but furthermore help understanding activism which can lead to more productive engagement between activists and police officers and can actively hinder incidents that lead to a decrease of police legitimacy. Activists that stand for the preservation of our world and a functioning and respected law enforcement are crucial in a liberal democracy - hence, it is crucial to find out how to better the relationship between both.

2. Theory

The need for and importance of climate activists that stand and protest for global climate protection is being more and more recognized in research (Scheidel, 2020) and even though it is a thing of nature that protests are disruptive since they are aiming for a specific social change, they are not necessarily violent (Langa et al., 2017). Hence, the question of how protests and encounters between police officers and climate activists turn violent and how it is preventable is of particular importance. Previous studies showed that the intertwining of police legitimacy and procedural justice regarding citizens' behavior and their interdependence play a significant part in violent outbreaks and escalations of conflict (Maguire et al., 2018). The following chapter will provide a theoretical framework for the qualitative analysis on procedural justice and violent behavior, as well as police legitimacy in the protest of Lützerath. For this to happen, it is important to explain the key concepts in this study first, highlight the connection between them and thus establish a foundation for understanding the motivations and behaviors of climate activists.

2.1. Defining Police Legitimacy

Legitimacy is a complex concept that was tried to be defined by multiple actors over the past years. It is so important since it can influence the behavior and reactions of citizens to authority figures to a vast extent. Beforehand, it is important to state that in this paper, the legitimacy of the police and not the legitimacy of a state as a whole will be discussed. Sargeant et al. state that legitimacy can be understood as a feeling that leads citizens to believe that an authority or institution is entitled to enforce laws (Sargeant et al., 2011). Tyler figured that people feel they need to obey the law because they have the belief that authorities are trustworthy and have the right to "dictate behavior" (Tyler, 1990, 4), and furthermore there is the feeling that the police are entitled to "call upon the public to follow the law [...] and have an obligation to engage" in cooperation (Jonathan-Zamir & Perry & Weisburd, 2021, 3). Hence, this concept refers to the degree to which the public has trust and confidence in the institution and is willing to obey said authorities (Beetham, 1991; Bolger & Walters, 2019; Mazerolle et al., 2014). Legally, the police institution is given legitimacy, the right to rule, by the state and in addition, a power monopoly with the competence to use force in order to serve the interest of the state (Harmon, 2008). The law also states that the police are enabled to use force following the principle of proportionality and compliance with legal requirements since they function as "agents of social control" (Feld, 1970, 738) that maintain public order and enforce the law. Further, they are, in fact, trained and prepared to and have the authority to use force and dispose of a set of instruments to deal with disorder and any expectation of violence (Feld, 1970). The use of force is given because it can be necessary to achieve social control, especially in protests (Jackson et al., 2013; Leary, 1965). Yet, changes in police legitimacy can be quite dangerous - they can affect the degree to which people comply with laws in their everyday lives (Tyler, 1990). Unjust force and the sole presence of police at

demonstrations can turn into negative perceptions of police legitimacy (Nägel & Nivette, 2022). When encounters between climate activists and police officers are tense and few even turn violent or the police engages in behaviors that are considered illegitimate (e.g. unnecessary use of force), such encounters can consequently and significantly weaken police legitimacy (Van Leeuwen et al., 2015, Van Leeuwen & Van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2016), automatically resulting in non-compliance. A way to maintain this legitimacy is through procedural justice (Mazerolle et al., 2014).

2.2. Defining Procedural Justice

Previous research suggests that police legitimacy is linked to public perception of fairness in police's exercise of their authority (Bolger & Walters, 2019). Van Leeuwen et al. (2015) figure that behavior is "shaped by the perception of their surroundings" (Van Leeuwen et al., 2015, 82). The concept of procedural justice, short: PJ, has become predominant regarding the question of police legitimacy (Schaap & Saarikkomäki, 2022). Because when looking at factors that shape the perceptions of police legitimacy, procedural justice is a powerful and significant instrumental one. PJ states that the reason why citizens comply with authority figures is not only due to sanctions or the use of force but because of procedural justice (Sargeant et al., 2011). The concept tries to explain "how the behaviors of authority figures influence people's motivation to cooperate with orders [...] from [...] authority" (Snipes et al., 2019, 2). Hence, it seeks to explain particular responses of citizens to the decisions of authorities and is moreover there to prove to the citizens that they live in a society where values are shared, even with authorities (Shaap & Saarikkomäki, 2022; Tyler & Lind, 2002). The concept is of importance regarding climate protests because it shows that, when protesters view their cause as significant, they are especially sensitive to the treatment of the police (Snipes & Maguire & Tyler, 2019). PJ states that citizen's perception that authority figures, here police officers, behave in a just, neutral, impartial and transparent way has positive effects on them obeying the law and on compliance with them (Bolger & Walters, 2019; Pfeiffer & Farren, 2018; Snipes et al., 2019; Jonathan-Zamir et al., 2021). These perceptions are assessed through encounters with police officers (Snipes et al., 2019). Studies revealed that the quality of treatment has even positive effects on the acceptance of unfavorable outcomes, meaning here, that even though climate activists sought to keep Lützerath, they are more likely to accept its clearance if the whole procedure of it was perceived as fair and transparent (Schaap & Saarikkomäki, 2022, Tyler & Allan Lind, 2002). This, moreover, decreases the chance of resistance and rebellion against police officers (Snipes & Maguire & Tyler, 2019). Furthermore, Snipes et al. figure that PJ plays a significant role in shaping violence-related attitudes and behaviors (Snipes et al., 2019). "When protesters perceive police as engaging in unjust use of violence against them and their peers, they develop more violent attitudes toward the police, which in turn are associated with greater self-reported violent behavior toward the police" (Snipes et al., 2019, 3). Also, Maguire et al. (2018)

find that “attitudes toward violence among protesters appear to be heavily influenced by how police treat them” (Maguire et al., 2018, 529). Hence, the use of violence against police officers seems to be strongly associated with perceived unjust behavior, especially when climate activists view themselves as peaceful protesters (Maguire et al., 2018). Consequently, the police institution can have a significant impact on influencing a protest situation (Feld, 1970). The perception of fair police behavior seems to be so powerful that even non-violent movements can break into violence when being exposed to police aggression and provocation (Maguire et al., 2018, Snipes & Maguire & Tyler, 2019). Thus, PJ is politically relevant since it is expected to increase the legitimacy of an authority (Jonathan-Zamir & Perry & Weisburd, 2021). It is said to influence the citizens' internalized sense of duty to listen to authorities and obey the law and any positive and fair perceived behavior is less likely to escalate in a violent manner (Maguire et al., 2018, Mazerolle et al., 2014). Lastly, it is important to state which behavior of the police can be considered procedurally fair. Jonathan-Zamir, Perry and Weisburd (2018) deliver a framework of PJ, making it suitable for social groups and since demonstrators can be considered as such, this framework is also suitable for this case. The four constituent elements of PJ that are deeply connected are:

2.2.1. Voice / Partnership

“Where people feel that they have control over decisions, they believe that the procedure is fair” (Tyler, 1990, 7). This element of PJ requires the police to give climate activists an opportunity to express their views before any decisions are made about them (Jonathan-Zamir & Perry & Weisburd, 2021). Hence, it is important to find out if the climate activists were given a voice to express their concerns before the police cleared the property. This aspect includes the police listening to the needs of the group and giving them sufficient information about their intentions during the clearance, also known as a certain feeling of partnership between the two (Jonathan-Zamir & Perry & Weisburd, 2021).

2.2.2. Neutrality / Transparency

This element means the unbiased, just and impartial manner in which one is treated (Jonathan-Zamir et al., 2021; Mazerolle et al., 2013). The police should be neutral during the clearing of the protest and be transparent during their decision-making with the climate activists. Unequal treatment can lead to negative perceptions (Nägel & Nivette, 2022). Snipes et al. (2019) figured that, in protests, where perceived unjust force was used by the police, this force was the primary determinant of support of violence against the police. When the police act violently out of no given reason, climate activists are “more likely to become rebellious [...] and may embrace the use of violence as a legitimate protest tactic” (Maguire et al., 2018, 527).

2.2.3. Dignity / Respect

The question that arises here is whether the rights of the climate activists have been recognized and whether their very existence and cause of the group were respected by the police (Jonathan-Zamir et al., 2021). Research finds that disrespectful and undignified behavior of the police reduces the willingness of citizens to comply during encounters (Mazerolle et al., 2014; Sargeant et al., 2011). Especially when there is a feeling of “us-versus-them” attitude, it is significant to ensure respect towards the group (Schaap & Saarikkomäki, 2022).

2.2.4. Trustworthy Motives

The last element constitutes the concerns of police officers for the well-being of climate activists (Mazerolle et al., 2013). Did the officers enable the group to safely carry out their demonstrative activities and took proportionate measures to ensure that there was no delegitimizing of the group (Jonathan-Zamir et al., 2021)? This refers to the extent activists have trust in the police institution and the aspect of their safety being ensured.

2.3. Defining Violence

It is important to shortly explain violence as well which might be the most complicated due to the variety in definitions. This is significant because this research seeks to measure the willingness of climate activists to use violence, however, violence can have different manifestations and does not necessarily include only physical confrontation but can also imply verbal abuse, property damage or coercive behavior. This research will rely on the definition of Raval, who states that violence can be understood as conflicts between two or more persons, where one side uses physical means that have at least the intention to harm or threaten the other part (Raval, n.d.). However, violence of climate activists and violence of police officers do differ which is of importance to state here. Whilst the police have the monopoly to use power, as stated before, which is retrieved through the legal system, climate activists as normal public citizens, have not (Feld, 1970). This enables the police to use violence lawfully in specific situations where it is justified, for example, to protect the state and violence in this sense refers to the use of, for example, tear gas, arrests, batons, or physical and verbal assault (Nägel & Nivette, 2022). However, this legitimacy of power can be limited and even disappear if the police exploit and abuse their power (Beetham, 1991). This can lead to violence or the willingness of climate activists to use such, which, in this paper, refers to the thought of or the actual assault with any physical means that intend to hurt the police officers. The willingness to use violence further refers to a certain readiness to use violence against the police.

Several studies show strong support for the hypothesis that people who believe that the police treat them in a fair manner (here: procedural justice) are more likely to also believe that the police share their values and beliefs and therefore have the authority to enforce the law (here: police legitimacy) (Bolger & Walters, 2019). And when this previous research claims that perceived procedural justice and police legitimacy is linked to compliance and cooperation with the police, it should be logical that perceived unfair treatment can cause disobedience and non-compliance (Snipes et al., 2019). In this study, a further step is taken by researching if this unfair treatment that evidently leads to less perceived police legitimacy can trigger not only the sole disobedience of an activist but also the willingness to use violence against the police. Although there certainly are a great variety of contextual factors that influence violent behavior, this research focuses on only one aspect of that interdependent relationship: the extent to which protesters' perceptions of procedural justice and police legitimacy in police behavior influences their willingness to use violence against the police. The knowledge about the violence incidents that happened make it likely that the behavior of the police was seen as unproportionate and unfair. Lastly, another significant aspect to mention for this research is that it will only focus on the willingness to use violence, not necessarily on the actual use of it. I am aware that the sole thought of using violence is different from its actual use, however, it still is relevant since this can show which behavior can trigger potential violent outbreaks and be used to prevent it. Through this theoretical section, procedural justice theory is now observable in terms of perception of voice, transparency, disrespectful or violent behavior and trustworthy motives and police legitimacy can be measured by examining the perception that the police had the right to enforce laws in Lützerath and is seen as an authority by the citizens. The willingness to use violence will be measured through perceptions of violence, any thought or the actual use of physical means that were intended to hurt the police during the protest. In the analysis section, this theory will be evaluated to determine whether there is empirical evidence supporting this assumption.

3. Methods

This chapter provides an overview of the research methodologies like the research design, data collection and data analysis method that have been used in this paper and the motivation behind those choices will be explained. Furthermore, limitations of the whole approach will be mentioned. The research carried out in this paper is qualitative and explanatory in nature. Since this research aims to analyze the perception of climate activists about police behavior and then examine their willingness to use violence, this method is appropriate because qualitative research enables a description and better understanding of how people experience a given research issue and allows for exploring those experiences in depth and in detail (Mack, 2005). The research approach is furthermore deductive since it seeks to test the theory of procedural justice and police legitimacy rather than developing a whole new one. To that, regarding the aim of the research, qualitative methods remain rare since current research is more concerned with measuring compliance and cooperation rather than understanding people's judgments and experiences (Schaap & Saarikkomäki, 2022). This makes qualitative research not only appropriate but also pertinent. To build a better understanding of legitimacy and police behavior and activist responses, information on experiences and interactions between police and climate activists are of high need.

3.1. Case Description

For the research design, a single-case study was chosen. This is suitable since it allows for an in-depth investigation of the context, experiences, and perceptions of those involved in the incidents of violence, whilst providing enriching qualitative data that can explain and reveal underlying dynamics and motivations that have been in the dark before (Gustafsson, 2017; Yin, 2017). Lützerath was selected as a single case because this research tries to understand how the propensity for violence develops under a specific circumstance, here the behavior of the police in Lützerath and it was thus significant to look for a case where violent incidents occurred, and activists perceived the treatment of police officers as illegitimate and exhibited a willingness to use violence. It is, hence, a representative case in that sense that it can examine the relationship between and the influence of procedural justice and police legitimacy on the willingness to use violence in protests. This research design is moreover highly suitable for examining perceptions of climate activists, the impact of unfair treatment on police legitimacy, the justifications for violence and potential strategies for preventing police violence since they enable insights into unique situations and allow gathering an abundance of information about a specific individual or even a whole group.

3.2. Data Collection

To collect data, semi-structured interviews were conducted. This is an appropriate method to collect data because it offers the possibility to understand subjective perceptions of climate activists and police officers

and gain a detailed description of these. Interviews are not only crucial since they provide firsthand knowledge and perspectives on confrontations that escalated in Lützerath but also because they are able to ensure data of personal experiences and viewpoints and are furthermore a highly flexible instrument since they enable the interviewees to talk about their perceptions in their own words instead of choosing from fixed responses. This creates meaningful data that is “unanticipated by the researcher” (Mack, 2005, 4). Through interviewing, researchers are able to examine a detailed reflection of opinions, feelings and perspectives and ensure a deep exploration and explanation of those whilst it as a tool helps uncover unseen factors influencing the willingness to use violence (Mack, 2005).

3.2.1. The Interviews

To ensure ethical considerations and protection of the interests and rights of the participants in the research, the interviews were only conducted under the condition of informed consent. The respondents were informed that all information is treated confidentially, while the whole process will furthermore adhere to ethical guidelines and regulations from the university the whole time and neutrality is ensured at all times. To that, the respondents only referred to their own experiences to ensure the protection of other personal information as well. The questions that were asked to the interviewees had been prepared beforehand, however, the open-ended nature of semi-structured interviews guaranteed that it was still flexible in the sense of having no direct consistent order and follow-up questions were made possible, meaning the responses of the interviewees determined the next questions that were being asked. Interviews with both climate activists and police officers were conducted to provide a more balanced understanding of the interactions and dynamics between these two and the questions that were asked have been different for the climate activists and the police officers. However, there were three main topics for both that could be identified:

Questions asked related to the perception of procedural justice

Questions asked related to the perception of police legitimacy

Questions asked related to the perception of violence

Furthermore, questions about the general motivation to attend the climate protest for climate activists and questions about strategies and tactics of the police for the police officers were asked in the interviews. These should help to generate a general picture of the dynamics of the protest by allowing insights into activists' motivations, police responses and evaluations during the protest. Since this design is a case study that researches a specific situational context, it was further necessary to look into other contextual factors that might be able to explain violent sentiments. That is why not only questions regarding police legitimacy and procedural justice were asked, but also any other explanation was allowed. This furthermore enabled to examine the significance and impact of procedural justice and police legitimacy on climate activists'

propensity for violence in Lützerath. The interviews lasted around 24 or 40 minutes. Whilst the interviews with the police officers were performed face-to-face, the interviews with the climate activists were conducted via the application Zoom.

3.2.2. Sampling - The Participants

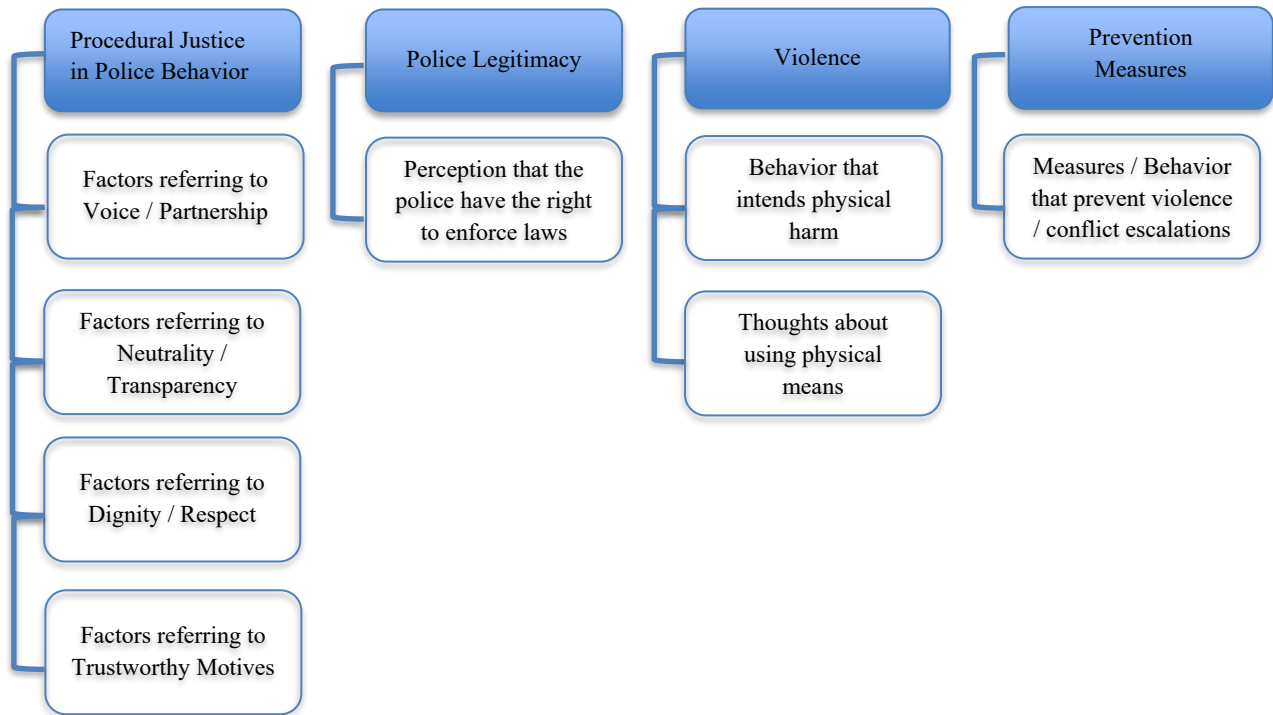
For the sampling process, purposive sampling was chosen, meaning the participants were selected because of particular criteria, relevant to the research question (Mack, 2005). The characteristics that were important in this study were that the interviewees had been participating in Lützerath, either as climate activists or police officers and had encounters with each other. And even though this research does not seek for generalization to the population, it was still important to try to have every subgroup included in this research. That is why it was important to look for all genders to ensure higher trustworthiness of the results. Nevertheless, since the aim is to deeply understand a specific context, sampling is not of high relevance because case studies do not seek to generalize to the whole population at all but rather understand a specific phenomenon or group of people. However, careful consideration of the participants was still given.

3.3. Method of Data Analysis

The interviews were audio-recorded, so a transcription from spoken language to down-written text had to happen. For the transcribing, the intelligent verbatim transcription method was used. This method includes writing down every word but leaving out irrelevant words like hesitations or stutters (McMullin, 2021). Limitations are that some data like emotions and pauses are lost in this process. Since the data is not numerical, a coding scheme was developed to organize and analyze the text in a systematic manner. The interviews were read manually several times which assured that recurring themes could be identified. The data was checked manually in this research since it facilitates the protection of sensitive data.

3.4. Coding Scheme

After transcribing the interviews, the data was interpreted to extract significant information for the research question. This research is deductive, meaning it was known which categories to look for beforehand. The content of the data was thematically analyzed with a coding scheme that allowed the organization of the data to identify key themes. The key concepts in this research were the theory of procedural justice and police legitimacy and its impact on the use of violence. The relevant elements of the theory concern the four chosen keywords that aim to observe any harm, disrespect, disproportion use of force and so on whilst it was tried to orientate on categories that enable to answer the four subquestions. The coding scheme is important because it serves as a filter to put out any irrelevant parts.



Coding Scheme

3.5. Validity and Reliability

Both, reliability and validity are essential in research, however, more difficult to be ensured in qualitative research (Brink, 1993). In this paper, both were tried to be ensured by carefully designing the interviews before conducting them. The procedures were planned beforehand to guarantee the measurement of the same concept that was defined in the literature section during each interview with the participants. Still, it is important to note that there have been different questions for the climate activists and different questions for the police officers. To that, validity is assured by anonymization and the safeguarding of sensitive data that can identify the participants. This was regularly checked throughout the analysis process. Reliability is moreover ensured by transparency of the whole research through presenting the concrete procedure in detail, from the research question to the selection of the participants to making the whole process understandable and comprehensible in this section. Any biases are also being acknowledged to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings and allow an ongoing critical reflection of the methods and own thought processes. Furthermore, it was only referred to the terms used by the participants.

3.6. Limitations

In this section, the limitations of the methodology will be acknowledged. There are problems that come with conducting interviews, such as the participants in general. Whilst some interviewees have been more

responsive and were naturally articulate, others were less open. This can lead to important information being unintentionally withheld. To that, the process of conducting interviews was very time-consuming, which can internally lead to conducting fewer interviews because of the duration of the whole process. Moreover, weaknesses regarding the research design must be acknowledged, because case studies are not generalizable since they focus on specific groups (Yin, 2017). Even though this paper does not seek to generalize the findings of this study to the whole German population, it is problematic that it is in general very difficult to draw reliable conclusions due to the small sample size. Furthermore, some biases are unavoidable in qualitative research, so it is crucial to prevent them from having a huge impact on the research as far as possible. The subjectivity bias, stating that the perception of the researcher does play the primary role in analyzing and interpreting data and the researcher deciding what is relevant and what is not (Willis, 2014), is sought to be avoided by organizing a reliable coding scheme that is used to be reminded of the research goal throughout the study. Another limitation in this study is the interviewee bias, also known as the social desirability bias, which occurs when the interviewee gives answers they believe are more socially acceptable but differ from their true experiences and hence has the potential to invalidate interview data (Mack, 2005). This was ensured to be avoided as far as possible through the promise of anonymity and informed consent to generate honest answers. Another limitation that is important to acknowledge is that verbatim transcribing and the English translation of the interviews can unintentionally result in the loss of important information. This is tried to be prevented by re-reading manually and working as immaculately as possible.

4. Analysis

In this chapter, the analysis will be carried out by analyzing the transcripts of the respondents with the help of the coding scheme, in depth and in detail. Before, a short overview of the respondents will be given for clarity.

Respondent 1 - Climate activist (they/them), Respondent 2 - Climate activist (she/her)

Respondent 3 - Climate activist (he/him), Respondent 4 - Police officer (he/him)

Respondent 5 - Police officer (she/her)

4.1. Perceived Procedural Justice and Police Legitimacy

In this subchapter, the first question about what ways the climate activists considered or perceived the police as procedurally just and legitimate during their encounters will be researched. This was measured by seeking the four PJ elements voice and partnership, neutrality and transparency, dignity and respect and trustworthy motives and any statements about the perception of police legitimacy in the answers of the climate activists.

All respondents participated in the large demonstration in Lützerath on Saturday and observed violent clashes between activists and police officers. Whilst Respondent 3 did only observe some, Respondent 1 and 2 were personally affected by these outbreaks of violence. Respondent 2 explains that she had seen and experienced so much violence from the police during the demonstration on Saturday that she cannot even remember every incident (RES2, 129). However, she and Respondent 1 had a similar experience when both committed trespasses in a larger group to get back into Lützerath (RES1, 64 & RES2, 130). They state that the police officers who were standing before them announced they should not come any further, otherwise, immediate force would be used on them. Although they did not move, the police formatted and went after them, causing both Respondents to get hit on the head and suffer injuries (RES1, 69 & RES2, 139). They criticize this behavior since the police did not communicate their intentions clearly enough beforehand and behaved ruthlessly.

[...] I got hit in the face, baton against the shoulder, all kinds of things, bruises [...]. And a friend next to me at that moment [...] pretended to be unconscious [...] and they kept hitting him with a baton [...], even though he was practically hanging there, not moving anymore, eyes closed (RES2, 139). They could have simply gone into the communication first [...]: "Go back [...], otherwise we use force". Just say that beforehand, [...] don't just start beating us up without any regard to faces [...] (RES1, 79).

Respondent 2 recalls other situations of perceived disproportionate police violence, where the wellbeings of activists have been ignored. She refers to incomprehensible arrests of activists and incidents where there

was clearly the intention to harm activists (RES2, 119). She speaks of a situation in which she has been in a sit-in, surrounded by police officers, and a friend of hers was asking to leave it due to health reasons (RES2, 127). However, the police refused to let him get out which she considered violence as well (RES2, 128). Moreover, Respondents 1 and 2 perceived the police as partial. Standing together with RWE employees and only embracing confrontational tactics against climate activists created a feeling for Respondent 1 that they were “super against us” (RES1, 206). They expressed the wish for a clearer separation and neutrality since the police have nothing to do with the energy company RWE (RES1, 181). In contrast, Respondent 3, who participated in the protest as well, had a more positive perception of the treatment of the police. He recalls that the police were acting fairly and kindly, and there has been no disproportionate behavior towards him nor against others that he had recognized (RES3, 102). He expresses professionalism and respect from the police and recalls encounters in which police officers and him became personal:

They let us protest and we, explicitly our group, were asked to leave in a friendly way. [...] they also announced beforehand that we should remain calm [...]. A policeman, for example, also asked us how things were going. I thought that was cool (RES3, 202). I once had a conversation with a policeman and [...] we talked briefly. And he was super friendly [...]. (RES3, 104).

When asked specifically about the fairness of police behavior, all three respondents had different perceptions. Respondent 1 thinks that the police partly did a good job regarding safety and fairness, however, did explicitly say that the used violence was disproportionate, and that the police has not been neutral (RES1, 167). They emphasize that the police did pay attention to safety in the sense that no activists put themselves in danger (RES1, 167). However, they state that this failed most of the time because they used force. Regarding fairness, they state “*theoretically they could have proceeded even more violently, but they did not. I still thought it was too much, but [...] it could have been worse*” (RES1, 172). Being asked about the incidents on Saturday, Respondent 2 states that she did not perceive the police as fair and they did not fulfill their job (RES2, 188). She finds that many of her boundaries have been crossed because the police have not let paramedics or journalists do their job freely and she further observed violence against parliamentary observers (RES2, 247). Respondent 3 answers that the police did fulfill the principles of fairness in any case and refers to experiences of “friendly” (RES3, 203) behavior and neutrality of the police and did not perceive any non-proportionality during the protest (RES3, 137).

The police behaved [...] professionally. That also relaxed me [...], because they let us [...] demonstrate in peace. We were [...] satisfied that everything went so well for us. And we didn't see any sense in [seeking confrontation] [...]. I just didn't see myself there and felt sorry for the police in this protest, because they were so nice. And quite honestly, I was then also more willing to go [...] (RES3, 153). I think everyone can tell that they guaranteed safety [...] (RES3, 210).

Being asked about police legitimacy, the respondents had different opinions as well. Whilst all three are being critical of the police institution in general, the perceived behavior did influence their view about the police during the protest. Respondent 1 tells that even though they never felt the police have been a friend to them, they still had a good view of and respect for the police before (RES1, 120), but Lützerath had a huge impact on them, causing the police to particularly lose “legitimacy [...] especially during protests” for them (RES1, 197). Even though they find the police necessary because they ensure security in the country, regarding their authoritative abilities, the police lost immensely, and they cannot take instructions of the police seriously anymore (RES1, 195). They also noticed that the police have become rather an opponent they fear and feel uncomfortable with (RES1, 118). Respondent 2 clearly shows dissatisfaction and criticism with the institution of the police per se and expresses during the interview that she does not think that they had any right to interfere in Lützerath at all (RES2, 283) and are rather representatives of capital interests than maintainers of safety, which she does neglect (RES2, 107). When asked about her view of the police, Respondent 2 answers that there is little to no change in her attitude towards the police due to their encounters, except for a certain emotionality that arose due to her personal affection (RES2, 98). Although she observed some professional behavior of the police, she states that she does not approve of the police (RES2, 175). Respondent 3 recognizes the importance of the police to enforce and protect the law and does not think that the police represent an illegitimate system (RES3, 131). He also reports that he did understand why the police were present in Lützerath (RES3, 184) and inform that his view about police legitimacy, and their trustworthiness, was enhanced and strengthened during the protest (RES3, 235). He states:

If they are as friendly as they were to me [...], then you definitely trust them more (RES3, 235). When I notice that they accommodate us in some way, I trust them not to harm us, but just to do their job. That was also the case in Lützerath. [...] In Lützerath, I had regained my respect (RES3, 184). For myself, I can say that the protest has brought a lot for me. I am surprised how the police behaved [...] they have definitely strengthened my positive view. [...] I found the[ir] behavior, for the first time again, actually quite strong. [...] I also noticed that I was also calmer throughout the day (RES3, 264).

4.2. Climate Activists and Violence

Whilst the two police officers state that violence came mostly from protesters that are just attending the protest to get into escalations with police officers by intent (RES5, 140), all activists expressed their motivation to participate in the activists out of solidarity and the necessity to stand against the operation of RWE (RES1, 31 & RES2, 24 & RES3, 17). Although Respondents 1 and 2 assured that no kind of hard violence was initiated by activists, only as a defense or due to high anger (RES1, 55 & RES2, 196), Respondent 3 states he saw how activists were searching for confrontation and approached the officers

(RES3, 88). Nevertheless, all three of the interviewees expressed that they have not used violence against the police in the protest of Lützerath and are not in favor of using it as means (RES1, 40 & RES2, 35 & RES3, 27). Therefore, it is important to understand how any violence could be justified in their eyes and what influences their understanding of violence. It seemed that the behavior of the police was able to shape their understanding of violence. While Respondent 3 states that the kind behavior of the police and their nice appearance and demeanor towards him prevented and mitigated his anger and reach for aggressive means like storming into the property of RWE during the protest (RES3, 176), the understanding of violence on the side of Respondents 1 and 2 were shaped negatively. Respondent 1 communicates that their general view and their own willingness about the use of violence have been challenged during the protest due to the actions of the police and let them take steps they would not normally take. They think that those encounters shaped the willingness for more confrontation, not necessarily including violence against police officers, but seeking the conflict, since they got attacked regardless of standing still or resisting the instructions (RES1, 129). Not only her enhanced readiness for more civil disobedience in other protests but her general understanding of the use of violence was influenced. Although they do not want to use violence as a means to protest for climate action, they can better understand why people resort to this means. Due to the violent incidents in which they were exposed to being hit in the face, their willingness to become more physical has moreover been affected.

[...] When I was in this confrontation situation, I briefly thought about [using violence]: Then I decided against it, I just tried to push the police officer away and this is not violence, but it is a step to create pressure. [...] Without the situation, I would not have been ready to push a police officer (RES1, 289).

Respondent 2 is the only interviewee who comes close to using force during the protest. She describes a situation where she was in a group that decided to lift and push a fence behind which police officers were standing, so another road could be blocked by them (RES2, 57). Being numerically stronger, they succeeded, and she explains that there was the possibility of someone getting hurt. Nevertheless, she took that into account because she did not define this as violence, since the police were not exposed to being hit in the face or rocks being thrown at them. The willingness to use force here arose not because of particular police behavior, but because she wanted to stop the clearance of Lützerath. She furthermore asserts that her behavior depends on what she thinks is needed at that moment to prevent things she perceives as wrong (RES2, 42). Although the three respondents did not want to use hard violence on police officers, Respondents 1 and 2 can better understand why activists used this means in Lützerath and state that it is justified and logical if one is brutally and disproportionately attacked by the police (RES1, 54 & RES2, 239 & RES3, 262). Respondent 2 states that *“the experience of Lützerath did change my understanding a bit, so that I ask myself: “[...] What is violence and where is it legitimate to use violence in order to prevent greater*

violence? I don't think I have a final opinion on that, but I wouldn't overall condemn it (RES2, 70). Whilst Respondent 1 and 3 do not consider violence for them personally, Respondent 2 also has the view that a violent approach should not be judged and might be necessary to do what is right. She further explains that the demand for non-violence in a protest movement can be divisive, since, although there are people that embraced another means than she did, she does not want to distance herself from those because, after all, they are fighting for the same thing (RES2, 259). Not only do the respondents think that violence can be justified due to self-defense, but the first two think that emotions like anger play a crucial role in using violence (RES1, 56 & RES2, 217). Respondent 3 moreover states that he did not even consider the use of violence or any confrontation because the police did not give him any reasons to use force (RES3, 124). He thinks that any violent behavior from him during this protest would not be justified because the police did not give him any incentive and hence prevented him from the thought of using violence. Yet, he expresses understanding for the use of violence when they had been attacked disproportionately by the police and voices that he would not have ruled out having acted in the same way and being more affinitive for non-cooperation (RES3, 250). In addition, Respondent 3 explains that this police behavior actually had been very valuable to him (RES3, 119). He states that he normally reacts to the behavior of the police, however, in Lützerath, he did not feel the need to hit them and was willing to follow their instructions (RES3, 121).

4.3. Police Officers and Violence

Even though the protest was peaceful most of the time, Respondents 4 and 5 also experienced violence in Lützerath. This chapter focuses on the question of how police violence can be justified and how the police perceived their tactics in Lützerath. It is important to differentiate here, since the police have, under the principle of proportionality, the legal possibility to use force when necessary (Feld, 1970; Nägel & Nivette, 2022). Nevertheless, both respondents are in favour of using communicative strategies rather than violence and think it should be the last to resort to when everything else fails (RES4, 108 & RES5, 322). When it comes to the justification of violence, Respondent 4 explains that violence only functions as a countermeasure, depending on the attitude and behavior of the climate activists, saying that they experienced rocks and pyro technique being thrown at them (RES5, 69). No violence would be used if there is compliance with police instructions (RES4, 123). Both respondents agree that there was no disproportionate force and illegitimate action by the police would have been illuminated if there was any (RES4, 138). Respondent 5 moreover finds the term of disproportionate behavior of the police critical, since it had already been disproportionate for the activists that they have entered “their premises” (RES5, 149). Both state that the operation was fair, and that the safety of climate activists was prioritized at all times (RES4, 54 & RES5, 210). The two also show understanding in regard to the cause of the climate activists in Lützerath (RES4, 34 & RES5, 292), and Respondent 4 furthermore expressed that he thinks a “certain

civil disobedience” (RES4, 266) is fine, however, both draw the line regarding the use of violence by climate activists. For Respondent 4, the violence of climate activists could have been justified if the police had attacked them without prior announcement, however, he states that this did not happen and both justify that violence only occurred when communication failed (RES4, 370 & RES5, 302). When asked about the argumentation, that activists only embraced violent means when they had to defend themselves against police violence, Respondent 4 answered:

They have registered an assembly, [...] they are welcome to go on their assembly route, that is also legitimate, but you may not leave it [...]. And this argumentation that they react to the violence of the police officers, I find weak. [...] Because if we would go in front of them and beat them and just hit them, that they would then defend themselves is a different story, then it would also be unlawful from the measure that we have taken. But it is announced. “Leave, otherwise...”. And this is announced again. “Leave this area and don't try to get in there or we will use force”. [...] Of course, if someone was unjustly beaten by a colleague, I can understand that they defend themselves. But that [...] is rather a justification of their violence (RES4, 359).

Both emphasize that communication is always tried in the beginning to make them leave the property voluntarily, however, both also voice that when this means of talking is unsuccessful and they engage in illegal action, there is the legal basis that forces them to take one step further (RES4, 128 & RES5, 84). Furthermore, Respondent 4 assured that they have been more than fair to the climate activists, so when there has been use of force by the police, it has for sure been proportionate or necessary (RES4, 170). For Respondent 4 and 5, the clearance has been successful regarding fair treatment of the climate activists during it and furthermore tactical aspects (RES4, 420 & RES5, 196).

4.4. Prevention Measures

In this section, it is sought to answer the question of how the respondents think that the use of violence could have been prevented in Lützerath. All think that communication is a crucial factor that can influence the behavior of each other and is endorsed by all. Respondent 3 ensures that his perception of police behavior in Lützerath prevented him from even thinking about using aggressive means and had a positive impact on his cooperation with the police, and strengthened police legitimacy (RES3, 193). He expresses that “*a friendly, legitimate behavior, where they also pay attention to neutrality and so on [...]*” helped him trust the police and prevent him from getting angry (RES3, 238). However, Respondent 2 thinks that the problem of non-cooperation and violence lies way deeper than that (RES2, 310), and also the police officers seem to recognize that, while fair behavior is significant in order to maintain respect for the police and safety rather than outbreaks of violence, there will always be individuals who fundamentally disagree with the police as a system and there is no possibility to talk to them (RES4, 110 & RES5, 219). Both police

officers state that even though communication is important, fair behavior is not necessarily the key to non-violent behavior (RES4, 217 & RES5, 248). Respondent 5 thinks that communication works more for those who have strict boundaries when it comes to breaking laws in general, however, there are also hardcore activists that do not want to cooperate at all (RES5, 310).

[...] I believe that for those who are prepared to use violence, it makes no difference whether I stand there nicely and say: Please, please (RES5, 248).

Respondent 4 agrees with that by arguing that violence can only be prevented when activists are willing to do so and there are some that just want to embrace violence as a means (RES4, 235). Respondent 5 additionally thinks that a reason for violence is the weakened police legitimacy, and even if violence is not the right way to enhance it, measures taken by the police in protests should be more intimidating and be enforced more consistently and consequently (RES5, 348). Respondents 1 and 2 find it complicated to establish trust and enhance legitimacy during the protest because many from the climate scene are not convinced of the police in general, yet, Respondent 1 thinks that a peaceful, nonviolent approach and rather conversations and solution-finding than going for confrontations, helps (RES1, 266). Although Respondent 2 also perceived some activities of the police during the protest as positive, such as police communication or thoughtful actions such as paramedics bringing warming blankets when they sat on the cold ground (RES2, 187), she believes that the relationship between the police and her could not be changed structurally because their actions interfere with her general attitude. She thinks that the police were not legitimized to be at the protest in the first place and since they have not been there rightfully, communication would have been pointless anyway, even though it can be a measure that ensures that fewer people are getting hurt (RES2, 86). She also criticizes the monopoly of violence the police have and is in favor of a rather accompanying function of the police, who only serves as a maintainer of safety (RES2, 111). Respondent 1 and 2 further discussed uncertainty regarding the prevention of conflict situations in Lützerath. Regardless of a better treatment of the police, Lützerath was about the goal. The activists were concerned about preventing coal mining; this had been important to the activists, not their general relationship with the police (RES1, & RES2, 87). For Respondent 4, communication works in most situations (RES4, 109), but both police officers agree that there are always people who are seeking confrontation because they want to get into conflict with the police by intent. They describe it as follows:

[...] a lot is attempted with communication and those who seek confrontation [...], you will never get to them with communication, because they want us to use violence so that they can then say: "I have been harmed!" [...] They don't want anything else, except that they get into conflicts with us [...] (RES5, 140).

Moreover, both police officers also think that escalation could have been prevented when climate activists could bring more understanding to their professionalism, separating private opinions from professional duty

and considering that they might be impartial and understand their reasons after all (RES4, 427 & RES5, 169). Whilst Respondent 1 and 3 think that their reactions to violence and behavior is influenced by the actions of the police, Respondent 2 states that the police is not her standard for what is legitimate and what is not.

I think my limit of what I do and what I don't do has never depended on how the police acted [...]. The violence has simply led to the fact that one has become more careful, and in the end, it has also created fear, because I was also really afraid of being hurt [...]. I would say I didn't think that I don't have to obey the laws anymore [...] it has also shaped me very much, to make these personal experiences with it simply in the long run. Even before, I didn't feel comfortable when the police was present - now I'm afraid when the police is present (RES2, 209).

It is noticeable that all think that a non-violent approach with communication, neutrality and respect for each other is significant. However, most of the respondents agree that there are other factors than police behavior that influence the use of violence and sometimes its embrace is not preventable at all.

5. The Sub-Questions

Before answering the research question, this chapter will summarize the findings and answer the sub-questions shortly.

In what ways did the climate activists in Lützerath perceive or consider the police as procedurally just and legitimate during their encounters with the police officers? Regarding the elements of the procedural justice theory, it is observable that for Respondents 1 and 2, the four constituent elements of fairness have not been fulfilled, mostly due to the fact that they think the police used unproportionate violence on them that has not been communicated beforehand which can be traced back to the principle of voice and partnership, as well as dignity and respect and trustworthy motives (RES1, 108 & RES2, 119). Even though both perceived some positive aspects in their police work, they state that neutrality was not ensured (RES1, 189 & RES2, 247), which shows that the principle of neutrality and transparency was not met as well. And even though they did not particularly use the terms from the procedural justice theory, it is clear that they felt not respected or dignified by the police. Talking about their experience, it is noticeable that they perceived police behavior as ignorant, ruthless, and thoughtless regarding their well-being and safety. Both had the feeling that the police intended to harm them, which created a breach in police legitimacy for Respondent 1 and created an increase in the willingness for more civil disobedience in regard to climate protests since they cannot take the police instructions serious anymore (RES1, 195). Whilst Respondent 2's negative perception of police legitimacy did not change extensively through the perceived unfair treatment of the police except for a certain emotionality that rose due to feelings of fear when seeing the police, Respondent 3's perception of police legitimacy got strengthened. He, in contrast to the other two activists, perceived the police behavior as fair and professional and stated a feeling of respect and friendliness, which increased his trust in the police and an increased willingness to follow their instructions (RES3, 195). Being asked about the perceived fairness, he stated that they fulfilled every point (RES3, 202). *How do the climate activists justify, if any, violence against police officers?* Whilst all climate activists do not consider violence as a means they themselves want to embrace in the protest, they state that they have thought about its use while being treated unfairly and express their understanding of the use by other activists (RES1, 287 & RES2, 70 & RES3, 262). All agree that violence can be justified in self-defense and sometimes due to emotionality, however, Respondents 1 and 3 are more reserved in supporting violence of other climate activists while Respondent 2 states she will not condemn other activists that use it when fighting for the same cause (RES1, 139 & RES2, 259 & RES3, 167). Respondent 2 was furthermore the only person that risked injuring somebody, not by the use of direct force, but by moving a fence to push police officers. The justification here was to block another road and stop the clearance rather than intentionally and offensively harm police officers due to their behavior (RES, 57). To that, all activists showed that their motivation to attend the demonstration was solidarity, whilst the police officer stated that violence mostly comes from

people who attend protests for that exact reason. *How do the police justify, if any, violence against climate activists?* In contrast to climate activists, the police is trained and prepared and allowed to use violence in order to enforce laws. And even though both police officers are against the use of violence and prefer communicative strategies, they state that the use of force was justified when they had to defend themselves against violence of climate activists or when communication measures and instructions were ignored and failed (RES4, 128 & RES5, 315). However, both are sure that no disproportionate violence was used since it was always necessary to prevent them from getting back into Lützerath and legitimized by the law when communication failed (RES4, 166 & RES5, 84). *How do both think the use of (police) violence in Lützerath could have been prevented?* All agree that communication should be tried to de-escalate situations and non-violent approaches should be embraced all the time. However, Respondent 2 states that the problem in Lützerath was that the police had been there in the first place, and thinking they are not legitimate to be there at all cannot be saved by fair procedure (RES2, 86) and also Respondent 1 acknowledged the fact, that even though there might be fair behavior of the police, Lützerath was important to the activists after all (RES1, 277). Respondents 4 and 5 support this view by stating that there are always people who want to embrace the use of violence and there is no possible way to get to them with friendly strategies (RES4, 269 & RES5, 134). Respondent 3 is the only one that stated that his thoughts of resorting to aggressive means was prevented due to the kind behavior of the police that was able to tone down his anger and he was more willing to cooperate and, in the end, leave Lützerath without seeking confrontations or conflict (RES3, 87).

6. Conclusion

The goal of this research was to examine the extent to which procedural justice and police legitimacy play a role in shaping the willingness of climate activists to use violence. In this chapter, the findings will be discussed, limitations will be acknowledged, and the research question will be answered.

6.1. Discussion

A substantial body of research suggests that procedural justice and police legitimacy are highly intertwining concepts that can influence the willingness of an individual to obey or comply with authorities. In this paper, a further step was taken to see how the willingness to use violence can be influenced by these concepts. However, this research exposes more varied findings than this body suggests. Unexpectedly, Respondents 1 and 2 criticized the behavior of the police in terms of neutrality, professionalism and respect, yet, the cause of keeping Lützerath was more important to them than the process which can be noticed by the fact that they are unsure if violent confrontations could have been prevented there, and hence contradicts the theory of procedural justice that states a fair process makes the result more acceptable. This was not the case in Lützerath for both of them. In contrast, Respondent 3 is in line with the argumentation of the theory since he expressed that any thought and willingness to use violence was prevented due to the kind and friendly behavior of the police. He also showed that the encounters, in opposition to the encounters of Respondent 1 and 2, have been positively personal and that he was willing to cooperate and leave the protest peacefully and that, reversely, if being treated unfairly, he would have been ready for more civil obedience. Also, Respondent 1 states they are being more ready for civil obedience after the protest and that the police put them in a situation where they thought about violence and were more ready to resort to physical means by pushing a police officer away which would not have been the case if they have not been attacked. Respondent 2, in contrast, stated that her behavior or willingness to break laws or use violence was never influenced by the behavior of the police or her view about the police in general. Any fair procedure would not erase her perception that the police were not legitimized to be in Lützerath, however, her attitude was shaped in the sense of rethinking her understanding of violence in general. Likewise, the understanding of violence of climate activist 1 has been shaped since they have a higher understanding of why activists resort to violence now. So, *to what extent did procedural justice and police legitimacy influence the willingness of climate activists to use violence against police officers in Lützerath?* Procedural Justice Theory and Police Legitimacy state that when being treated fairly, citizens are more likely to view the police as legitimate and hence are more willing to cooperate and comply to the law, which results automatically in not resorting to violence. Snipes et al. (2019) state that PJ is one essential determinant to shape the support of violence and regarding the findings, this seems to be true for two of the three climate activists. It is evident that points of procedural justice like neutrality, transparency and partnership are important to shape

the view about the police and do influence response behavior of Respondents 1 and 3, who both reacted to the behavior of the police - one by being more affinitive to push a police officer due to unproportionate behavior, and the other, being positively influenced, not thinking about violent responses at all. It can be said that the perception of unfair treatment by the police caused a breach in the perceived police legitimacy for Respondent 1, causing them to consider self-defending techniques like pushing officers away that they did not consider before and making them more ready for civil disobedience. For Respondent 2, it is clear that her behavior was never influenced by police behavior nor by police legitimacy. She still rejects the institution, however, it influenced her feeling of fear when being surrounded by police officers. Respondent 3's thoughts of even considering the use of violence was prevented through positive perceived police behavior which enhanced his view of police legitimacy. He did not embrace civil disobedience, or violence. Furthermore, both police officers state that police behavior and legitimacy is not necessarily a significant indicator for climate activists' violence, but rather depends on a general affinity to use violence. These findings indicate that illegitimate behavior of the police is rather influencing disobedient behavior and the breaking of laws whilst legitimate behavior is enhancing the willingness to obey police instructions instead of resorting to direct violence against the police. Yet, the realization of this is just as important. According to the interviewees, it was found that police behavior perceived as fair can significantly influence emotions that can either lead to the relaxation of a situation or its intensification. Illegitimate behavior, especially violent behavior by the police, evokes further emotions like anger and fear among climate activists. Nevertheless, the climate activists as well as the police officers think that the problem of the willingness to use violence in Lützerath lies far deeper than just in police behavior and legitimacy and that other contextual factors seem to be important for the use of force, namely, the rejection of the state and its institutions per se, emotions like frustration and people who want to embrace violence rather than fight for climate action. Future research should therefore also include these factors in order to gain a better understanding of the dynamics and interplay between procedural justice, police legitimacy and violence. This study clearly shows that fairness in procedures is not always an indicator for perceiving the police as legitimate and hence is not necessarily as significant in shaping violent attitudes as stated before. Procedural justice should continuously be treated as only one way to improve police legitimacy, however, one should not forget that the behavior of the police can push activists into corners in which physical defense is perceived as the only solution. Conclusionary, it has to be noted that PJ and police legitimacy did have an impact on one respondent's willingness for non-violent behavior, whilst it influenced the willingness for more civil disobedience for the first respondent and had no effect at all on the second respondent.

6.2. Practical Implications

This research sought to contribute to existing literature on the interplay of police legitimacy and procedural justice and its influence on the use of violence. The findings serve valuable insights by advancing an understanding of those concepts and enabling to fill in the knowledge gap about the violent dynamics in Lützerath that have been under-researched, and furthermore present other valuable contextual factors that might be important to consider. This research can not only have practical implications for the development of peaceful strategies to prevent outbreaks of violence since police officers and climate activists have both been able to tell their reasonings, but further it shed light on the cruciality of communication strategies and a mutual understanding for each other. All in all, this research emphasized the importance of building a better understanding of the relationship between law enforcement and climate activists, which are both essential to a functioning democracy.

What should not be left undiscussed is the answer of Respondent 1 who was thankful that the police has not been more brutal against them and hence think they have been treated somehow fairly. It is certainly a problem because a democracy, in which behavior that uses means that are contemplated “not that aggressive”, is considered fair, cannot be desirable and therefore, it shows the necessity to pay more attention to police violence after all.

6.3. Limitations and Suggestions

It is important to state again the limitations of this research. Besides the limitations that arise due to the use of qualitative methods like generalizability in single-case study designs and biases in interview research, it is, too, important to keep in mind that this research was limited in words and time. This also restricted the possibility for a more exploratory analysis of Lützerath in which underlying factors were researched more in detail and also all information from the respondents being used in this paper. Further research should take a closer look into other contextual factors since emotions seem to play a crucial role in regard to the use of violence. Additionally, it would be interesting to find respondents that had already used hard violence in the protest of Lützerath to examine their experiences and perceptions and whether their affinity to use violence was rather response behavior or an attitude matter. Moreover, a more dedicated study with further more samples that have actually embraced violence in Lützerath might be able to illustrate the relationship between PJ and police legitimacy better. Since qualitative research remains rare, more qualitative or mixed-methods studies on procedural justice and police legitimacy should be used to create an overall better understanding of both concepts and there is the need for a rethinking of PJ since it seems that process does not necessarily create higher acceptance for the outcome, nor a strengthened police legitimacy for all respondents.

The social debate about coal and climate did not begin, nor end with Lützerath. Climate action is a fundamentally, indispensable issue, and protests are part of the path to a healthy debate that enables harmonious togetherness. However, violence is not. The prevention of clashes between police officers and climate activists is to be prevented and this issue must become more important in research.

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8. Appendix