Testing procedural justice theory in Belgium and Sweden

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Procedural justice theory assumes that trust in procedural justice and in the effectiveness of the police are important issues for building the legitimacy of the aforementioned institution. Additionally, the perception of police legitimacy, as a result of public trust, is necessary for the recognition of police authority. When citizens recognize the right of the police to determine authority, they are assumed to feel the obligation to obey the police and ultimately comply with the law and cooperate with the police. This theoretical framework is mainly tested in Anglo-Saxon countries. Hence, the purpose of this contribution is to test the key assumptions of procedural justice theory in the Belgian and Swedish context using data of the European Social Survey (ESS). Attention is paid not only to the role of procedural justice, but also to the role of deterrence and the role of personal morality to explain the willingness to cooperate with the police and compliance with the law. This allows us to compare the impact of procedural justice with the impact of other possible determinants. We used Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) to do the analyses. The results suggest that the reason why people cooperate with the police is different in both countries.