Self-legitimacy of police officers in Slovenia

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Abstract

Purpose – In recent years, several studies on self-legitimacy of police officers were conducted; however, few have tested the unstable nature of legitimacy in different time periods. This paper aims to focus on the self-legitimacy of police officers and its impact on pro-organizational behavior in 2013 and 2016.

Design/methodology/approach – The study took place in eight regional police directorates in Slovenia. The number of participants amounted to 529 police officers in 2013 and 478 police officers in 2016 that have completed a paper and pencil survey that was pretested using a convenience sample of police officers studying as part-time undergraduate students.

Findings – Overall findings revealed organizational commitment as the strongest predictor of self-legitimacy of police officers in Slovenia. The invariance of the “core variables” and their influence on the self-legitimacy of police officers in different time periods was confirmed. Their perception of individual legitimacy, organizational commitment, education and years of service influenced pro-organizational behaviors of police officers.

Research limitations/implications – Limitations of the study can be seen in the sincerity of participating police officers and the nature of self-legitimacy, which operates differently in different societies.

Practical implications – The results could be used for the improvement of policing in a young democratic country.

Social implications – Legitimacy, procedural justice and other components of policing in a democratic society need to be tested globally, especially in young democracies. This study is an example of an ongoing, follow-up endeavor of researchers and the national police to reflect upon the development of policing.

Originality/value – The paper has confirmed the invariance of relations with colleagues, supervisors’ procedural justice and audience legitimacy on the self-legitimacy in different time periods and societies.

Keywords Police, Slovenia, Policing, Self-legitimacy

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Williams (2005) argued that the differences between legitimate and illegitimate power lie in the power-holders’ ability to honor citizens. The concept of legitimacy as dialogue recasts the relationships between the citizens and the state (police as a representative of the state) as dialogical and relational in nature. Those in power in a given context make a claim to be the legitimate rulers, and then members of the audience (citizens) respond to them. Power holders might adjust the nature of the claim in the light of the audience’s response . . . and this process repeats itself (Bottoms and Tankebe, 2012). However, legitimacy dialogues depend on the specific feature of time and place in which they occur, consequently, the feature of legitimacy
can be variable. As Bottoms and Tankebe (2021) pointed out, the importance of factors influencing legitimacy varies in different social contexts.

The complexity of the dual nature of legitimacy, that is the perceived legitimacy of power holders and their perception of individual legitimacy, is best seen in its unstable nature (Hacin and Meško, 2020; Meško et al., 2017). In recent years, studies exposed the role of organizational factors (e.g. Tankebe, 2019), the differences in perception of legitimacy between different actors in the criminal justice (Meško et al., 2014), the impact of cultural setting (Reisig and Meško, 2009) and the effects of self-legitimacy on behavior and decision-making (Tankebe and Meško, 2015). However, the number of studies that would test the unstable nature of legitimacy in different time periods is limited. For example, Hacin et al. (2019) tested the self-legitimacy of prison officers in two time periods and confirmed that self-legitimacy varies over time.

The present study adds to this literature in two ways. It draws on the data from a survey of police officers in 24 police stations in Slovenia in 2013 and 2016 to examine the unstable nature of self-legitimacy of police officers. Moreover, the effects of self-legitimacy on police officers’ pro-organizational behavior in two time periods are studied. The paper proceeds as follows. First, a theoretical analysis of self-legitimacy and variables related to legitimacy is provided. Second, methods for testing theoretical assumptions are delineated. Lastly, findings from the statistical analyses are presented and their implications are discussed.

The concept of self-legitimacy
Tankebe (2019) argued that criminology has recently undergone a legitimacy revolution. Nevertheless, during this process, the power-holder legitimacy (i.e. self-legitimacy) was often neglected in the legitimacy studies that predominantly focused on the subjects of power. Self-legitimacy can be described as power-holders’ recognition of their individual entitlement to power. In other words, it focuses on the self-recognition of the moral validity of power (Bottoms and Tankebe, 2013). Barker (2001) argued that legitimation is the first and the most important power-holders’ attempt to justify power to themselves. Legitimate authority (in this case, self-legitimacy) is shaped by relevant agents, who include: (1) power-holders and their staff, (2) subjects of power and (3) third parties whose support or recognition may help confirm it (Beetham, 2013).

Self-legitimacy of police officers can be crudely explained as the confidence that they have in their authority as law enforcement officers (Bradford and Quinton, 2014; Tankebe and Meško, 2015). Self-legitimacy refers to power-holders belief in the rightness of their individual authority or role (Tankebe, 2019). Self-legitimacy of police officers is not static but is an ever-going process of internal discussion and quest to cultivate and sustain an identity as a morally valid authority (Bottoms and Tankebe, 2012; Dunn, 2013). Herbert (1996, p. 805) wrote that the police officers seek moral justification for their personal authority as “proud and noble warriors protecting the peace from the chaotic and turbulent anarchy of evil”. Inability or rather lack of effectiveness in this everlasting battle with crime may weaken police officers’ self-legitimacy; however, the converse is also true, as lack of self-legitimacy may diminish individual and collective police capacity to tackle crime and violence (Tankebe, 2019). Police officers with a more positive perception of individual legitimacy tend to engage in behaviors that are beneficial for their organization and the community (Nix and Wolfe, 2017). The self-legitimacy of police officers partially explains their decision choices and the attitudes that are sometimes expressed in those choices. Tankebe (2019) established a positive influence of self-legitimacy on the external procedural justice of police officers.

Tankebe (2019) highlighted a recognition triad, consisting of supervisors, peers and clientele (audience – citizens). The effect of these three elements, which can be called
“core variables” influencing self-legitimacy, cannot be overlooked (Hacin and Meško, 2020; Meško et al., 2014; Tankebe and Meško, 2015). Supervisors’ recognition is seen in organizational justice. Supervisors’ fairness [1] consists of distributive justice (the evaluation and comparison of the outcomes, e.g. evaluation of wages [2]) and procedural justice (the assessment of the quality of decision-making, fairness and honesty in the procedures) (Clay et al., 2005; Greenberg, 1982; Wolfe and Piquero, 2011). Tyler and Smith (1999, p. 228) argued that fair treatment of people favorably influences their status and social importance and shapes their sense of their own social identity. A fair treatment affirms the individuals’ normative status within the organization (Tankebe, 2019). Perceptions of fair treatment from supervisors influence police officers’ commitment to procedural justice, police-public interaction and adherence to organizational rules (Haas et al., 2015; Tankebe, 2014; Tyler et al., 2007). A feeling of supervisor recognition influence greater self-legitimacy (Nix and Wolfe, 2017; Tankebe, 2014; Tankebe and Meško, 2015).

Barbalet (2001) argued that the foundation of one’s self-esteem could be found in social relations. Consequently, it could be argued that trust and respect between colleagues influence individuals’ perception of self-legitimacy and prevent the wide spreading of cynicism. Tankebe (2019) suggested that deference exchanged between equals connotes recognition and constitutes an exercise in identity and status recognition. Relations with colleagues form an informal network in the organization, which is important for the normative orientation of police officers and affects their pro-organizational behavior (Tan and Lim, 2009; Tankebe and Meško, 2015). Although some studies (e.g. Nix and Wolfe, 2017) found no evidence for peer influence on self-legitimacy, there is evidence of a potential role of peer recognition on self-legitimacy (Meško et al., 2014; Tankebe and Meško, 2015) and peer influence on the views and behavior of police officers (especially in the context of police misconduct) (Long et al., 2013; Kutnjak et al., 2016). Peer recognition in the form of good relations between colleagues may be positively associated with police officers’ self-legitimacy.

Audience legitimacy refers to the way police officers believe their community views them. As Nix et al. (2020) stated, this belief is founded on the judgment made on how citizens actually behave toward them. Perception of audience legitimacy shapes police officers’ orientation toward their job and influences how they interact with the public. Their perception of their individual legitimacy in the public eye can explain how they approach their job (Muir, 1977; Nix et al., 2020). For example, Kang and Nalla (2011) found that police officers who perceive greater audience legitimacy express more support for a democratic approach to policing, while Jonathan-Zamir and Harpaz (2018) found that a positive perception of audience legitimacy influences police officers’ use of procedural justice in interactions with citizens. Tyler (2011) argued that police-citizens encounters present a teachable moment for confirming police legitimacy with citizens. However, police officers in such encounters have an opportunity to learn how much the public recognizes the moral validity of police authority (Tankebe, 2019). The audience legitimacy plays a significant role in police officers’ attitudes toward work, as disrespect for police authority influences the way police officers treat citizens (Mastrofski et al., 2002; Reisig et al., 2004). Tankebe and Meško (2015) confirmed that positive relations with citizens mattered for the police officers’ self-legitimacy.

Organizational behavior can be defined as an individual’s actions in support of the organization, which surpasses his duties (Katz, 1964). It is a form of pro-social behavior (Bateman and Organ, 1983). Organ (1988) argued that for pro-organizational behavior, the following conditions must be met: (1) discretionary behavior of an employee that is not in the description of his duties and is the result of a personal choice, (2) the reasons for such a behavior is not in acquiring rewards but to support colleagues and the organization and (3) this kind of work is not in the work description and is not rewarded. Two fundamental
forms of such behavior are compliance with the rules and altruism (Marinova et al., 2010). Tankebe and Meško (2015) identified the self-legitimacy of police officers and relations with colleagues as variables positively associated with the pro-organizational behavior of police officers.

The study of self-legitimacy of police officers – methodology
The study took place in eight regional police directorates (three police stations per directorate) in Slovenia. The survey instrument was developed in English and later translated into Slovenian (Tankebe and Meško, 2015). It has to be emphasized that in the 2016 study, a modified questionnaire from the 2013 study was used, resulting in a reduced number of previously measured items. Consequently, certain variables used in the 2013 study were modified (i.e., self-legitimacy, relations with colleagues and audience legitimacy), while operationalization of others remained the same (i.e., supervisors’ procedural justice and pro-organizational behavior). This was necessary to examine the unstable nature of the self-legitimacy of police officers. Moreover, two new variables (i.e., satisfaction with pay and commitment to the organization) were introduced, measured in both research periods but not used in the previous studies. The questionnaire(s) included questions about participants’ perceptions of self-legitimacy (e.g., relations with colleagues, supervisors’ procedural justice and audience legitimacy), organizational commitment, satisfaction with pay, pro-organizational behavior and demographic characteristics. The survey was pre-tested using a convenience sample of 30 police officers studying as part-time undergraduate students at the Faculty of Criminal Justice and Security, University of Maribor, Slovenia. The data in 2013 and 2016 were collected at the individual police station during daily briefings in June 2013 and 2016. Surveying was implemented by trained assistants from the Faculty of Criminal Justice and Security, University of Maribor. The surveying began with the introduction of the study. It has to be noted that there was no dropout from the participation after the introductory explanation. The number of participants amounted to 529 police officers in 2013 and 478 police officers in 2016 who have completed a paper and pencil survey that took them about 30 min. However, only respondents who have fully completed the questionnaire were included in the sample (469 police officers in 2013 and 441 police officers in 2016). The data were put in the SPSS database and further analyzed using factor analyses (principal component method, rotation varimax), bivariate and regression analyses.

Participants
The participants in the study were police officers from 24 different police stations in Slovenia (the same police stations were selected in both time periods) surveyed in 2013 and 2016, representing approximately 5.5% of police officers. Males presented the majority in both years (approximately 80%). Regarding the age, most participants in 2013 were between 30 and 39 years and in 2016 between 35 and 44 years. In terms of formal education, in 2013, 73.8% finished high school, 12.4% completed vocational college and 13.9% had graduate degrees. In 2016, 62.1% finished high school, 26.8% completed vocational college and 11.1% had graduate degrees. Regarding years of service, in both periods, most police officers had 16 years or more of experience. In both periods, approximately 60% of respondents worked in predominately rural settings. These data were largely representative of the composition of police officers in Slovenia, in particular in terms of gender (women represented 24.2% of police officers in 2013 and 25.4% of police officers in 2016), average age (the average age of police officers in 2013 was 39.7 years and 41.2 years in 2016) and education (35.4% of police officers in 2013 and 40% of police officers in 2016 achieved some form of higher education) (Ministrstvo za notranje zadeve, Policija, 2014, 2017).
Measures

Self-legitimacy. The variable self-legitimacy of police officers was operationalized using five survey items: (1) I feel that I represent the values of the public in the community (Factor loadings [FL] = 0.69); (2) The powers I have as a police officer are morally right (FL = 0.69); (3) I am sure that I have enough authority to do my job (FL = 0.71); (4) I am always sure that my requests to members of the public will be obeyed (FL = 0.63) and (5) I am not always sure that I can convince members of the public as to why the laws I have to enforce are morally proper (FL = 0.63) (see Meško et al., 2014). Items featured a 5-point Likert-type response ranging from “Strongly disagree” (coded 1) to “Strongly agree” (coded 5). Self-legitimacy was a summated scale that exhibited an adequate level of internal consistency (Cronbach’s α = 0.69, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was 0.77) and was coded so that higher values corresponded to greater levels of perceived self-legitimacy (Mean = 18.12, SD = 3.25).

Relations with colleagues. Participants’ judgments about the quality of relations with their colleagues on the police force were captured using three survey items: (1) I feel that my colleagues trust me (FL = 0.88); (2) I feel supported by my colleagues (FL = 0.91) and (3) My colleagues treat me with respect (FL = 0.86) (see Prislan et al., 2017). Each item featured an ordinal response option ranging from “strongly disagree” (coded 1) to “strongly agree” (coded 5). The scale possessed a high level of internal consistency (Cronbach’s α = 0.86, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was 0.72). Relations with colleagues was operationalized as a summated scale (Mean = 11.94, SD = 2.16). Higher scale values reflected more favorable assessments of relations between police officers.

Supervisors’ procedural justice. Participants’ judgments about the fairness of their supervisors were measured using seven survey items: (1) I feel that my supervisor treats me with respect and dignity (FL = 0.84); (2) My supervisor usually gives me an explanation for the decisions he makes that affect me (FL = 0.85); (3) My supervisor takes account of my needs when making decisions that affect me (FL = 0.85); (4) I am treated fairly in my police force (FL = 0.69); (5) The decisions of my supervisor are equally fair to every officer (FL = 0.87); (6) Decisions by my supervisor are always based on facts, not personal biases (FL = 0.85) and (7) My supervisor inspires the best in me to do my job (FL = 0.81) (see Prislan et al., 2017). Each item featured an ordinal response option ranging from “strongly disagree” (coded 1) to “strongly agree” (coded 5). The scale possessed a high level of internal consistency (Cronbach’s α = 0.92, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was 0.92). Supervisors’ procedural justice was operationalized as a summated scale (Mean = 22.69, SD = 6.42). Higher scale values reflected more favorable assessments of supervisors’ fairness.

Audience legitimacy. Participants’ perception of audience legitimacy was captured using three survey items (Most people believe . . .): (1) The police treat them fairly (FL = 0.85); (2) Police officers always obey the law (FL = 0.86) and (3) Police officers take time to explain the reasons for their decisions (FL = 0.78) (see Meško et al., 2014). Each item featured an ordinal response option ranging from “strongly disagree” (coded 1) to “strongly agree” (coded 5). Audience legitimacy was a summated scale that exhibited an adequate level of internal consistency (Cronbach’s α = 0.77, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was 0.68) and was coded so that higher values corresponded to greater levels of perceived audience legitimacy (Mean = 9.52, SD = 2.09).

Satisfaction with pay. Participants’ satisfaction with pay was captured using four survey items: (1) I am satisfied with my present pay (FL = 0.89); (2) I am well paid considering the conditions of work (e.g. duties I undertake and hours of work) (FL = 0.92); (3) Considering how much I work, I am satisfied with my pay (FL = 0.91) and (4) Overall, I receive excellent allowances (FL = 0.81) (see Prislan et al., 2017). Each item featured an ordinal response option ranging from “strongly disagree” (coded 1) to “strongly agree” (coded 5). The scale possessed a high level of internal consistency (Cronbach’s α = 0.90, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of
sampling adequacy was 0.84). Satisfaction with pay was operationalized as a summated scale (Mean = 6.64, SD = 3.16). Higher scale values reflected greater satisfaction with pay.

**Organizational commitment.** Participants’ commitment to the police force was measured using eight survey items: (1) I feel a strong sense of belonging to my police force (FL = 0.82); (2) I am in a safe environment, I like to tell people I am a police officer (FL = 0.69); (3) I feel that my police force deserves my loyalty (FL = 0.66); (4) Even if it were to my advantage, I do not feel it would be right to leave my current police force (FL = 0.67); (5) I feel a sense of duty to the people in the community in which I work (FL = 0.62); (6) I have found that my values and my organization’s values are very similar (FL = 0.63); (7) Most days, I feel enthusiastic about my job (FL = 0.75) and (8) I find real enjoyment in my job (FL = 0.77) (see Prislan et al., 2017). Each item featured an ordinal response option ranging from “strongly disagree” (coded 1) to “strongly agree” (coded 5). The scale possessed a high level of internal consistency (Cronbach’s $\alpha$ = 0.85, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was 0.87). **Organizational commitment** was operationalized as a summated scale (Mean = 25.37, SD = 6.11). Higher scale values reflected greater organizational commitment.

**Pro-organizational behavior.** The variable pro-organizational behavior of police officers was operationalized using three survey items (How often they had . . .): (1) Volunteered to do things not required in order to help my police department (FL = 0.82); (2) Helped your supervisor even when not asked to do so (FL = 0.83) and (3) Put extra effort into doing your job well, beyond what is normally expected (FL = 0.73) (see Tankebe and Meško, 2015). Items featured a 4-point response ranging from “Never” (coded 1) to “Three times or more” (coded 4). **Pro-organizational behavior** was a summated scale that exhibited an adequate level of internal consistency (Cronbach’s $\alpha$ = 0.69, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was 0.65) and was coded so that higher values corresponded to greater levels of pro-organizational behavior (Mean = 8.74, SD = 2.78).

Five socio-economic variables were included in the regression analyses to control for spuriousness. The following binary-coded variables (1 = yes, 0 = no) – gender (male), age (35 years or older), education (mandatory level of education for police officers), years of service (11 years or more) and type of the environment (urban) were included.

**Findings**

Prior to the regression analyses, Pearson’s correlation test was conducted. The test was performed as a preliminary assessment of the predictors that influence the self-legitimacy of police officers and correlation analysis – testing the problem of multicollinearity. Table 1 displays results from the bivariate analysis. All included variables were correlated with self-legitimacy. Organizational commitment was the strongest correlate of self-legitimacy. With Pearson’s test, the problem of multicollinearity was reviewed, examining high correlations between independent variables. Correlations higher than 0.80 should be deemed

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**Note(s):** *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01**
problematic (Field, 2009). Results of the test rule out threats of multicollinearity, and further diagnostic tests confirmed the initial assessment; the variance inflation factor (VIF) for variables was less than 1.80.

In the first step, the examination of predictors of self-legitimacy by applying multiple regression analysis with robust standard errors tackling the problem of the clustered nature of the data took place; the results of which are displayed in Table 2. The first key question was to establish factors that explained the police officers’ belief in their individual legitimacy. Model 1 considers the influence of demographic variables in combination with “core variables” used for explaining self-legitimacy: relations with colleagues, supervisors’ procedural justice and audience legitimacy (see Tankebe and Mesko, 2015). These variables accounted for 27.6% of the variation in self-legitimacy in 2013 ($F = 21.83, p < 0.001$) and 30.1% of the variation in self-legitimacy in 2016 ($F = 23.24, p < 0.001$). As can be seen from the results, in 2013 police officers’ perception of their individual legitimacy was influenced by: (1) supervisors’ procedural justice ($\beta = 0.23, p < 0.001$), (2) relations with colleagues ($\beta = 0.23, p < 0.001$), (3) audience legitimacy ($\beta = 0.22, p < 0.001$) and (4) type of the environment ($\beta = 0.12, p < 0.05$). Moreover, results of regression analysis for predicting self-legitimacy of police officers in 2016 highlighted: (1) relations with colleagues ($\beta = 0.29, p < 0.001$), (2) audience legitimacy ($\beta = 0.26, p < 0.001$) and (3) supervisors’ procedural justice ($\beta = 0.17, p < 0.001$) as variables that influence police officers’ perception of their individual legitimacy. Overall findings indicate the invariance of “core variables” of relations with colleagues, supervisors’ procedural justice and audience legitimacy. All three variables were associated with increased belief in self-legitimacy. Specifically, being treated procedurally just by one’s supervisors, having good interpersonal relations with colleagues on the job and beliefs that the public perceived police officers to be legitimate influenced one’s self-legitimacy. Additionally, in 2013 police officers who worked in urban settings felt more legitimate. However, the influence of this variable did not persist in 2016.

Model 2 introduced police officers’ satisfaction with pay and organizational commitment (see Prislan et al., 2017). The introduction of new variables presents a deviation from the previously used models on the self-legitimacy of police officers in Slovenia (Tankebe and Mesko, 2015). In combination with variables form Model 1 these variables accounted for 33.9% of the variation in self-legitimacy in 2013 ($F = 23.46, p < 0.001$) and 37.8% of the variation in 2016 ($F = 26.12, p < 0.001$). As can be seen from the results, in 2013 police officers’ perception of their individual legitimacy was influenced by: (1) organizational commitment ($\beta = 0.31, p < 0.001$), (2) relations with colleagues ($\beta = 0.18, p < 0.001$), (3) audience legitimacy ($\beta = 0.15, p < 0.01$) and (4) type of the environment ($\beta = 0.09, p < 0.025$). Moreover, results of regression analysis for predicting self-legitimacy of police officers in 2016 highlighted: (1) organizational commitment ($\beta = 0.35, p < 0.001$), (2) relations with colleagues ($\beta = 0.22, p < 0.001$) and (3) audience legitimacy ($\beta = 0.17, p < 0.001$) as variables that influence police officers’ perception of their individual legitimacy. Overall findings indicate that the strength of “core variables” was reduced by introducing new variables (supervisors’ procedural justice was replaced by organizational commitment). However, relations with colleagues and audience legitimacy remained strong predictors of police officers’ perception of their individual legitimacy. As the sizes of the standardized regression coefficients show, the effect of organizational commitment was the strongest predictor of self-legitimacy.

Pro-organizational behavior refers to undertaking work above and beyond the requirement of the job (contractual requirements). It differs from organizational commitment, which is a more basic concept as it refers to values and emotions relating to police officers’ day-to-day work. There is evidence that the pro-organizational behavior of police officers is shaped by relations with colleagues, fair treatment of supervisors, perception of organizational perceptions and self-legitimacy (Bradford et al., 2014; Tankebe and Mesko, 2015). Identifying “what” drives an individual to largely discretionary behaviors, not often
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<th>2013</th>
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<td>Years of service (11 years or more)</td>
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<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.09</td>
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<td>Type of the environment (urban)</td>
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<td>0.09</td>
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<td>23.46***</td>
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Note(s): aBonferroni correction was applied to adjust for multiple testing; p-values lower than 0.025 are marked as followed: *p < 0.025, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001
formally rewarded but of utmost importance for promoting the effectiveness of an organization (Organ, 1988), is essential as these individuals are the driving force behind the effectiveness and further development of the organization. In the following step, the investigation of correlates of self-reported pro-organizational behavior of police officers took place. Multiple regression analysis with robust standard errors tackling the problem of the clustered nature of the data was used. Results are presented in Table 3. Model 1 considers the influence of self-legitimacy combined with demographic variables used for explaining pro-organizational behavior (see Tankebe and Meško, 2015). These variables accounted for 12.9% of the variation in pro-organizational behavior in 2013 ($F = 11.29, p < 0.001$) and 9.4% of the variation in pro-organizational behavior in 2016 ($F = 7.51, p < 0.001$). As can be seen from the results, in 2013 police officers’ pro-organizational behavior was influenced by: (1) education ($\beta = -0.24, p < 0.001$) and (2) years of service ($\beta = 0.14, p < 0.001$). Moreover, results of regression analysis for predicting pro-organizational behavior of police officers in 2016 highlighted: (1) years of service ($\beta = 0.20, p < 0.001$), (2) self-legitimacy ($\beta = 0.18, p < 0.001$) and (3) education ($\beta = -0.14, p < 0.01$) as variables that influence police officers’ pro-organizational behavior. It seems that police officers with a greater perception of their individual legitimacy and those who achieved higher education and have more experience, more frequently engage in pro-organizational behavior. As the sizes of the standardized regression coefficients show, the effects of education (in 2013) and years of service (in 2016) were the strongest predictors of police officers’ pro-organizational behavior.

In Model 2, self-legitimacy was replaced with the following variables for explaining pro-organizational behavior: relations with colleagues, supervisors’ procedural justice, audience legitimacy, satisfaction with pay and organizational commitment. Once again, the introduction of new variables presents a deviation from the previously used models on police officers’ pro-organizational behavior in Slovenia (Tankebe and Meško, 2015). These variables accounted for 19.5% of the variation in pro-organizational behavior in 2013 ($F = 11.02, p < 0.001$) and 12.9% of the variation in pro-organizational behavior in 2016 ($F = 6.35, p < 0.001$). Results showed that pro-organizational behavior of police officers in 2013 is influenced by: (1) organizational commitment ($\beta = 0.25, p < 0.001$), (2) education ($\beta = -0.23, p < 0.001$) and (3) years of service ($\beta = 0.14, p < 0.01$). Moreover, results of regression analysis for predicting pro-organizational behavior of police officers in 2016 highlighted: (1) years of service ($\beta = 0.21, p < 0.001$), (2) organizational commitment ($\beta = 0.18, p < 0.01$) and (3) education ($\beta = -0.14, p < 0.01$) as variables that influence police officers’ pro-organizational behavior. As the sizes of the standardized regression coefficients show, the effects of organizational commitment (in 2013) and years of service (in 2016) were the strongest predictors of police officers’ pro-organizational behavior. Overall findings indicate the invariance of organizational commitment, education and years of service. It seems that police officers’ perception of individual legitimacy does not have a strong influence on their pro-organizational behavior.

A $t$-test was conducted to test the differences in coefficients included in regression analyses in 2013 and 2016. Significant differences were found for factors audience legitimacy ($t = -1.17, p < 0.01$) and satisfaction with pay ($t = -8.22, p < 0.001$). No significant differences were found with other factors (self-legitimacy, relations with colleagues, supervisors’ procedural justice, organizational commitment and pro-organizational behavior). However, testing the significance of the difference between two regression coefficients with a $t$-test can lead to incorrect conclusions (Paternoster et al., 1998). Consequently, a $z$-test was performed to test the equality of regression coefficients. Results showed no significant differences in coefficients included in regression analyses in 2013 and 2016. Overall, results suggest that variables influencing the self-legitimacy of police officers are stable through time.
Table 3. OLS regression analysis: predicting police officers' pro-organizational behavior

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model 1 Robust</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Model 2 Robust</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Model 1 Robust</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Model 2 Robust</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
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<td>β</td>
<td>B</td>
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<td>β</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-legitimacy</td>
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<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.18**</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.06</td>
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<td>Supervisors' procedural justice</td>
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<td>0.00</td>
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<td>0.09</td>
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<tr>
<td>Audience legitimacy</td>
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<td>0.06</td>
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<td>Satisfaction with pay</td>
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<td>0.06</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>Organizational commitment</td>
<td>0.25**</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.25</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.18**</td>
<td>0.06</td>
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<td>-0.02</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
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<td>0.12</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
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<td>Age (35 years or older)</td>
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<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.05</td>
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<td>0.13</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
<td>-0.13</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
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<td>Education (mandatory level of education for police officers)</td>
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<td>0.09</td>
<td>-0.24</td>
<td>-0.53**</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>-0.23</td>
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<td>Years of service (11 years or more)</td>
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<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.29**</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.44**</td>
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<td>0.20</td>
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<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.09</td>
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<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.06</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>11.29***</td>
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<td></td>
<td>11.02***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7.51***</td>
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<td></td>
<td>6.35***</td>
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<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
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<td>19.5%</td>
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<td>9.4%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>441</td>
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Note(s): *Bonferroni correction was applied to adjust for multiple testing; p-values lower than 0.025 are marked as followed: *p < 0.025, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001
Discussion and conclusion
The paper’s primary focus was to contribute to the emerging body of literature on police self-legitimacy by testing the potentially unstable nature of legitimacy over time. The first significant finding is that among police officers in Slovenia who responded to the survey, the “core variables” (relations with colleagues, supervisors’ procedural justice and audience legitimacy) that influence the self-legitimacy of police officers have withstood the test of time, which indicate that self-legitimacy is more stable than it was estimated (Hacin and Meško, 2020). The similarity of the results on factors influencing self-legitimacy of police officers differs significantly from findings on temporal instability of self-legitimacy tested on the sample of Slovenian prison officers (Hacin et al., 2019). It can be suggested that self-legitimacy is more unstable in certain environments and groups than in others. Further research is needed. Among the variables included in analyses, relation with colleagues was the most important factor in predicting police officers’ self-legitimacy. The evidence suggests that staff (peers) who work with power-holders and spend a lot of time with them have the greatest influence on their perception of individual legitimacy. It seems that power holders are not primarily concerned whether their image of themselves is recognized and approved by ordinary people. Nevertheless, it could be argued that police officers in smaller settings (more than half of the respondents in the current study worked in rural settings) are more familiar with the local population and are concerned about their status among them. As Tankebe (2019) suggests, the interdependence, mutual respect and recognition of police officers by their supervisors may be even more consequential in the modern world, where technology has replaced a significant portion of direct interaction. The second significant finding refers to alternative paths for explaining the self-legitimacy of police officers. The introduction of the variable organizational commitment decreased the strength of the “core variables” and exposed the strength of police officers’ affiliation with the organization. It seems that commitment that an individual feels to the organization is more important than supervisors’ fairness in the procedures. It can be argued that police officers evaluate their own legitimacy, primarily on the comparison of their own values with those of the police organization, as supervisors can be “good or bad”. In the hierarchical nature of police organization, “fair or not fair, you have to follow orders” of your supervisor. Contrary to a submissive position in relation to supervisors, identification with the organization evokes feelings of belonging and shields police officers from negative effects deriving from the nature of their work and the hierarchical nature of relations within the organization. Police work is not just a job, but it is a profession, for which (most) police officers have a calling. Beetham (1991) argued that individuals recognize the legitimacy of institutions not only because they adhere to standards of good behavior but also because they regard these institutions as representatives of particular normative and ethical frameworks. However, supervisors’ role (i.e. good supervisors with exemplary behavior) in evoking police officers’ greater organizational commitment by promoting procedural, distributive and interactional justice cannot be overlooked (Nix and Wolfe, 2017).

The second significant finding refers to the pro-organizational behavior of police officers. Findings suggest a limited role of self-legitimacy in predicting police officers’ pro-organizational behavior, which is unstable over time (the role of self-legitimacy was confirmed only on the sample from 2016). Nevertheless, evidence supports the claim that police officers with a more positive perception of their individual legitimacy tend to engage in behaviors that are beneficial for their organization (Nix and Wolfe, 2017). Moreover, Tankebe and Meško (2015) confirmed the positive association between relations with colleagues and police officers’ pro-organizational behavior. Such association could not be established in the present study. Moreover, organizational commitment, education level and years in the service were identified as variables positively associated with police officers’ pro-organizational behavior. It seems that police officers who identify themselves with their organization are more willing to engage in actions in support of the organization that surpasses their duties (Katz, 1964).

The idea for the study on legitimacy developed from a debate between researchers and the Slovenian police representatives in 2012 when the police maintained public order in violent
demonstrations against the government and corrupt politicians. Research findings from the national project on legitimacy and self-legitimacy of police officers were presented to police chiefs from all Slovenian regions (Meško et al., 2016) and later translated into police practice emphasizing the awareness of legitimate and just procedures, proper communication in the police organization, fair treatment of citizens and respect for human rights in police procedures, peaceful resolution of potentially dangerous incidents and preventative orientation in policing. The current study confirms the continuity of applied changes in the police organization from almost a decade ago. The declared priorities of the Slovenian police imply that legitimacy and self-legitimacy perspectives enhance police officers’ awareness of their role in a democratic society and the importance of fair and legitimate policing implemented by trained professionals with respect for human rights.

The first limitation of the study can be seen in the sincerity of participating police officers. A possibility exists that participants gave socially desirable answers in the process of surveying due to fear of disclosure and possible sanctions from their supervisors. Finally, as Tankebe (2019) suggested, the nature of self-legitimacy operates differently in different societies. The current and other studies (for example, Hacin and Mesko, 2020) confirmed this suggestion. Consequently, cross-cultural comparative studies should be implemented to explore these matters. Future research should address all these limitations and combine quantitative research with qualitative research to obtain even more in-depth insight into police officers’ perception of individual legitimacy and its effect on their behavior and decision-making.

Notes
1. The terms justice and fairness are used interchangeably throughout the paper.
2. Satisfaction with payment influences an individual’s perception of supervisors’ fairness and one’s perception of individual legitimacy (Hacin and Mesko, 2020).

References


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