

The Role of Procedural Justice in Shaping Trust and Legitimacy towards Private Security Guards among Youth

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Private security guards hold control over policing in contexts where much of young people's life takes place and that are important spaces of youth socialization, especially in contemporary urban areas. In governing these places, they implement a social order and enforce norms, that often go beyond legal norms. As such, security guards exercise power, control and regulate conduct, mostly of young people. However, little is known about youths' trust and perceived legitimacy towards these policing agents. Drawing on a survey, this study examines young people's trust and perceived legitimacy towards security guards and which factors predict that. Moreover, this study tests the procedural justice theory, which has been applied to a wide range of authorities, but scarcely tested in security guards. Findings from a sample of 631 high school students from the Metropolitan Areas of Lisbon and Porto (Portugal) show that procedural justice is the strongest predictor of both trust and legitimacy. Perceptions of security guards' role as important for the security of society, as well as of their legality of action, are also robust predictors of trust and legitimacy. In turn, performance judgments (perceived risk of detection and effectiveness) only slightly predict trust and legitimacy. The implications of these findings for policing research and for the private security sector practice will be discussed.

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