

Attitudes among Occupy DC participants about the use of violence against police

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ABSTRACT

Social movements often embrace nonviolent civil disobedience strategies. At the same time, social movements sometimes attract participants with different temperaments and different views on the morality or utility of using violence against police. Moreover, the use of force or procedurally unjust tactics by police may influence these views, instigating rebellion and support for the use of violence against police by protesters. This paper examines the nature and correlates of attitudes toward using violence against police among Occupy DC participants in Washington, DC. Data are drawn from a survey of 136 Occupy DC participants. We provide descriptive statistics that summarise Occupiers' attitudes toward the use of violence against police, and test hypotheses about factors that may be associated with these attitudes. Our findings show that a non-trivial subset of participants appears to embrace the use of violence against police, and that these attitudes toward violence are associated with perceptions of the extent to which police treat protesters in a procedurally unjust manner.

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Introduction

On 17 September 2011, Occupy Wall Street – located in Manhattan's financial district – burst onto the political and social scene. While comprised of a diverse *mélange* of political, economic, social, and environmental justice interests, the movement focused on producing a radical realignment of seemingly unjust power relations in the United States and abroad. The movement was fuelled primarily by concerns with social and economic inequality. In reference to the wealthiest 1% of the population, the Occupy movement rallied around the slogan: 'We are the 99%'. Despite lacking clearly outlined goals or a specific vision for the future, Occupy Wall Street spawned the growth of a robust worldwide protest movement. One source estimated that at the movement's peak in late 2011, there were more than 1500 Occupy sites worldwide, including more than 1000 in the United States (Occupy Tech 2015). A number of these sites, including Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, Oakland, and Philadelphia drew large crowds, with some Occupy encampments serving as home to hundreds of residents before eviction, and some protests or 'actions' attracting thousands of protesters. The Occupy movement led to widespread arrests as well as conflict between police and protesters in many locations, including Washington, DC, the site of the research reported here.

The Occupy movement's public pronouncements routinely claimed an adherence to nonviolent principles of social change.¹ Yet the movement attracted a wide range of participants with heterogeneous backgrounds and goals. Our initial visits to Occupy sites in several cities revealed that the

movement's participants varied widely in their perspectives on which types of tactics the movement ought to embrace. While many participants embraced the use of peaceful tactics, some members appeared to endorse the use of more aggressive tactics, including property damage and/or interpersonal violence, as a means of stimulating social change. Thus, an important empirical question is the extent to which Occupiers truly adhered to their stated principles of nonviolence, especially given the level of fragmentation in the movement.

The scientific literature on police–protester dynamics has grown considerably in recent years. Some of that research has been carried out by social movement scholars who focus on state repression of protests by police and other government officials (e.g. Opp and Roehl 1990, Earl 2003, Earl *et al.* 2003). A related body of research has examined the historical evolution of police strategies and tactics used in response to protests (e.g. McPhail *et al.* 1998, Vitale 2005, 2007, Noakes and Gillham 2006, 2007, Gillham *et al.* 2013). Other research has been carried out by social psychologists who apply theories of crowd psychology to the study of police–protester interactions (e.g. Stott and Drury 2000, Reicher *et al.* 2004, Drury and Reicher 2009). A common theme that has emerged across these different streams of scholarship on protest policing is the interdependence of the relationships between police and protesters. The attitudes and behaviours of each are thought to have a strong influence on the attitudes and behaviours of the other (Carey 2006). This interdependence plays an important role in the initiation and escalation of violence (Adang 2011). This paper focuses on just one important aspect of that interdependent relationship: the extent to which protesters' observations and perceptions of police behaviour influence their attitudes about the use of violence against the police.

As we will demonstrate shortly, multiple streams of research on protest policing suggest that when police treat protesters in a manner that is perceived as unjust or violent, protesters are more likely to become rebellious and defiant and may embrace the use of violence as a legitimate protest tactic. This logic is consistent with a theory and research on procedural justice and the perceived legitimacy of police. This body of scholarship argues that perceptions of the extent to which legal authorities behave in a procedurally just manner influence people's internalised sense of duty or obligation to obey the law (e.g. Tyler 1990, Tyler and Huo 2002, Johnson *et al.* 2014, Lowrey *et al.* 2016). Although most of the procedural justice literature does not focus specifically on attitudes toward the use of violence, it does encompass people's felt obligation to obey the law, including laws regulating the use of violence. This literature also suggests that people who perceive that they have been treated unjustly by the police or other legal authorities are more likely to rebel or become defiant (Sherman 1993, 2010, Paternoster *et al.* 1997). Thus, procedural justice theory provides a potent framework for understanding protester responses to the perception that police treat them and their peers unjustly.

This paper relies on data from a survey of 136 Occupy participants in Washington, DC to examine their attitudes toward the use of violence against police. We situate our research within existing scholarship on procedural justice and legitimacy on the one hand and protest policing on the other. While some research has examined attitudes toward violence in previous social movements, this is the first study to our knowledge to investigate the sources of protesters' attitudes about the acceptability of using violence against the police.

Procedural justice and legitimacy

Procedural justice theory asserts that people's appraisals of the extent to which authority figures behave in a procedurally just manner can have powerful implications for people's willingness to obey authority and other beneficial social outcomes (Tyler 1990). In criminology, for instance, research finds that when people perceive that police officers and other legal authorities treat them in a procedurally *unjust* manner, they view the institution of policing and even the criminal law as less legitimate and worthy of cooperation or compliance (Tyler and Huo 2002, Sunshine and Tyler 2003, Johnson *et al.* 2014, Maguire *et al.* 2016). Procedural justice theory has transformed the way social scientists think about people's decisions to obey the law or cooperate or comply with

the directives of legal authorities. According to Tyler (1990), these decisions are not only shaped by instrumental considerations such as the likelihood of being caught and punished, but also by normative concerns such as whether the law or those who are charged with enforcing it are legitimate and worthy of voluntary cooperation and compliance. In the context of policing, these legitimacy assessments are heavily influenced by the extent to which police officers treat the people with whom they come into contact in a procedurally just manner (Tyler 1990, Tyler and Huo 2002, Sunshine and Tyler 2003, Johnson *et al.* 2014, Lowrey *et al.* 2016). A key policy implication of this scholarship is that by treating people fairly and respectfully, police officers can stimulate law-abiding and cooperative behaviour among the populace.

Of particular importance for this paper is the notion that when police officers treat people in a procedurally *unjust* manner, they undermine the legitimacy of the law and its agents, reduce the likelihood of cooperation and compliance, and potentially increase the likelihood of outright defiance or rebellion (Sherman 1993, 2010, Paternoster *et al.* 1997). For instance, Sunshine and Tyler (2003, p. 514) note that ‘unfairness in the exercise of authority will lead to alienation, defiance, and noncooperation’. Similarly, Sherman’s (2010) discussion of defiance theory, which is closely related to procedural justice theory, suggests that unjust and inappropriate behaviour on the part of legal authorities can ignite ‘a moral intuition to defy or resist the status quo’. The pattern of relationships elucidated in procedural justice theory is consistent with the findings of social movement and crowd psychology scholars. For instance, Hess and Martin (2006, p. 249) note that ‘repressive events that are perceived as unjust have the potential to generate enormous public outrage against those seen as responsible’, a phenomenon they refer to as ‘backfire’. Similarly, Stott and Drury (2000) describe how protesters’ attitudes and behaviours toward police changed after being subjected to unjustified uses of force by London police. Although the effects postulated in procedural justice theory are consistent with evidence from multiple streams of research on protest policing (as we will demonstrate shortly), procedural justice theory has not yet been directly tested in the context of protests.

Only one study to our knowledge has directly examined the influence of procedural justice on people’s attitudes toward the use of violence. Based on data from a sample of London residents, Jackson *et al.* (2013) found that procedural justice had an indirect effect (through legitimacy) on people’s attitudes toward the acceptability of using violence to achieve political goals. Jackson *et al.* (2013, p. 491) speculate that

repressive tactics, if experienced as unfair, may weaken individuals’ beliefs that it is wrong to use violence and may yield counterproductive long-run effects ... illegitimate and procedurally unjust policing opens up the space for citizens to use private or extralegal force to achieve certain goals.

They conclude that aggressive or punitive styles of policing may undermine the perceived legitimacy of the police, while more consensual styles of policing are more likely to preserve police legitimacy and less likely to stimulate public support for the use of violence.

Protest policing

The scholarly literature on protest policing is large and diverse and is comprised of research and theory from multiple disciplines. Providing a comprehensive account of this immense body of scholarship is beyond the scope of this paper. Here we provide a brief summary of certain aspects of the literature that are most directly relevant for this study.

Decades of research have examined the use of force by police in their efforts to disperse protesters or repress social movements (e.g. Marx 1970, Stark 1972, Moore 1998, Ericson and Doyle 1999, McLeod and Detenber 1999, Earl 2003). In some cases, the use of force by police is justifiable. If protesters behave violently, then police may be warranted in using a reasonable level of force in response. At the same time, there are good reasons to believe that the use of excessive force by police is not uncommon during protests, and that such force may lead protesters to rebel and embrace the use of violence against police (Reicher *et al.* 2004, Vitale 2005, 2007, Maguire *in press*). Several studies of

protester–police interactions from civil rights movements during the 1960s and 1970s help illuminate how confrontations with police can lead nonviolent protesters to adopt more militant tactics. For instance, Escobar (1993) showed how police response to protests shaped the nature of the Chicano Rights movement in Los Angeles during the late 1960s and early 1970s. He found that ‘for the Mexican-American community, the consequences of the struggle between Chicanos and the LAPD were even more profound ... and convincing than the rhetoric of any sixties activist’, with the LAPD’s repressive tactics convincing ‘even conservative Mexican Americans’ that equality may require some form of potentially violent collective assertion of rights (Escobar 1993, p. 1514).

In some social movements, violent resistance takes on an almost romantic or heroic tone. For instance, in his famous 1964 speech in Cleveland, Ohio, Malcolm X warned that armed struggle may become a reality in the Civil Rights Movement, noting that if some sort of action is not taken to address racial inequality in America quickly, then:

... we’re going to be forced either to use the ballot or the bullet ... We will work with anybody, anywhere, at any time, who is genuinely interested in tackling the problem head-on, nonviolently as long as the enemy is nonviolent, but violent when the enemy gets violent. (Bloom and Breines 1995, pp. 106–107)

Malcolm X’s stance highlights the symbiotic character of violence on the part of protesters and agents of the state during social movements.

Numerous social movement scholars have argued that protesters are more likely to adopt violent tactics in the face of repression (Lichbach 1987, White 1989, Gupta *et al.* 1993, Rasler 1996). Attitudes toward violence among protesters appear to be heavily influenced by how police treat them. In the face of state aggression (e.g. violent police confrontation), even movements that are ostensibly nonviolent may begin to justify or rationalise the use of violence. Nonviolent civil disobedience approaches, whether based on principled or strategic motives, are premised on the notion that activists must remain committed to them even if provoked by police (Sharp 1973, Conway 2003). Yet, research has found that activists’ commitment to nonviolence sometimes ‘breaks down in the face of police provocation: protester violence is primarily the result of police violence’ (Kritzer 1977b, p. 638). The behaviour of police is an explicit component of Kritzer’s (1977a, p. 121) theory of unconventional political action, which posits that the use of violence by protesters results from three factors: ‘normative attitudes toward violence, perceived efficacy of violence, and provocations by police, either in the form of violent police actions or other provocative police tactics (such as arbitrary arrests of demonstrators)’. Although there is a tendency in the media and in law enforcement circles to treat police behaviour during protest events as resulting entirely from protester behaviour, the evidence suggest that the relationship between these phenomena is not nearly so simple. As Kritzer (1977b, p. 630) argues, outbreaks of violence at protest events are the product of ‘a dynamic process resulting from the interaction of police and protesters’.

A study emerging from the US civil rights movement found that college students who participated in a street protest believed more strongly in the necessity of violence to produce social change than a nationally representative sample of college students. The same study found that respondents who were more cynical about existing social institutions (operationalised as a belief that courts are unfair) were more likely to believe in the necessity of violence to bring about social change (Blumenthal 1973). In a national study of justifications for the use of violence, almost 20% of US men reported that ‘some property damage or personal injury’ was necessary to achieve social change (Kahn 1971). About 10% of respondents said that ‘protest involving extensive damage and some death’ was required. Furthermore, the study also found that perceptions of the extent to which police used violence was positively related to people’s support for the use of violence. Kahn (1971, p. 19) attributed this latter finding to the possibility that perceptions of police violence make ‘counter-violence either necessary or justifiable’. Dercole and Davenport (1974, p. 139) asked research subjects (students in a psychology class) to engage in a matching exercise that involved selecting the appropriate response of protesters and police to the actions of the other. They found that ‘at very low levels of government repression the protester’s most appropriate reaction was

less violent than the government's repression; at higher levels of repression the most appropriate protester reaction was to respond more violently than the government action'.

Another body of scholarship that has explored the interdependence of police and protester behaviour is based on crowd psychology. Research in this genre has found that in protests and other crowd events, the social identities of crowd participants can be heavily influenced by the behaviour of the police. Specifically, when police crack down on crowds in ways that are perceived by crowd participants as unjust, moderate crowd members tend to join with more radical members in opposition to the police (Stott and Drury 2000, Reicher *et al.* 2004). Put differently, as a result of police crackdowns, moderates may 'change their views about the authorities and hence about their own identity in relation to the authorities' (Drury and Reicher 2009, p. 712). When protesters view themselves as engaging in lawful and constitutionally protected behaviour, and they view the police as engaging in indiscriminate and illegitimate enforcement actions, then the whole crowd may 'unite around a sense of opposition to the police and the authorities they are protecting' (Drury and Reicher 2009, p. 713). As a result of these dynamics, protesters may 'experience a greater willingness to defy, rebel against, or use violence against the police' (Maguire *in press*). Taken together, the research evidence summarised in this section provides support for the idea that police behaviour may influence people's attitudes toward the use of violence against the police.

The present study

Existing research shows that violent attitudes and behaviours vary greatly both within and between social movements. Based on this line of research, we examine attitudes toward violence among Occupy DC protesters. Though the Occupy movement described itself as a nonviolent movement, some participants may have embraced violence as a means for bringing about meaningful social change. Existing theory and research from multiple disciplines have highlighted the links between protesters' attitudes toward violence and the nature of their interactions with police. Much of this scholarship is consistent with social psychological and criminological investigations of procedural justice, which find that people are more likely to obey (and less likely to rebel against) authority figures who behave in a procedurally just manner (e.g. Tyler 1990, Tyler and Huo 2002). Based on scholarship from the study of procedural justice and protest policing, we test the following two hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1. The extent to which respondents embrace violence is negatively associated with their perceptions that police in the area behave in a procedurally just manner.

Hypothesis 2. The extent to which respondents embrace violence is positively associated with the extent to which respondents have experienced or observed police in the area using force unjustly against protesters.

We test these hypotheses using data from a survey of Occupy DC participants. Occupy DC was a protest movement that emerged on 1 October 2011 in Washington, DC's McPherson Square, a federally owned public park located about two blocks from the White House.² Protesters established an encampment with individual tents that enabled protesters to sleep in the park overnight and communal tents containing food, supplies, books, and informational materials. Using McPherson Square as their base, Occupiers engaged in regular marches and protests in various locations around Washington, DC, several of which resulted in confrontations with police. On 30 January 2012, US Park Police announced plans to enforce a ban on overnight camping, though protesters would be allowed to continue their vigil in the park as long as they did not sleep there. Many protesters ignored the ban and police warnings about impending enforcement action. This led to a noteworthy confrontation between police and protesters on 4 February 2012, when US Park Police wearing helmets and carrying riot shields and batons forcibly evicted protesters from the park, erecting temporary barricades and removing tents and bedding used for overnight camping. In the scuffle, eight protesters were arrested and someone threw a brick that struck a police officer in the face (Gowen 2012). Occupiers continued to maintain a presence in McPherson Square after the eviction, with one protester telling a reporter: 'if we can't sleep here, that does not end the movement' (CNN 2012).

Data and methods

Between 29 February and 31 March 2012, we administered paper-and-pencil surveys to 136 Occupy DC participants over six different data collection occasions. On three of these six occasions, we recruited participants before and after the daily General Assembly (GA) meetings held in McPherson Square. One occasion took place during a planned 'action' that began at McPherson Square, stopped at the offices of American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) in downtown Washington, DC, and ended in front of the Monsanto Corporation's DC offices a few blocks away. Another took place during the 'Carnival of Resistance', a day-long celebration of Occupy DC's six-month anniversary at McPherson Square. Finally, one took place in a residence where a number of Occupy participants were living. The survey respondents represent a convenience sample of Occupy participants. The population of interest was comprised of anyone over the age of 18 present at an Occupy DC site, event or action who self-identified as an Occupy participant. We attempted to reach the entire pool of active participants in Occupy DC by inviting all Occupiers present to participate. Most Occupiers present on any given occasion agreed to be surveyed.³

Due to the relatively small size of the movement in Washington, DC (relative to Oakland and New York, for instance), our goal was to survey the entire population of participants, not a sample of them. This presented a number of logistical challenges. There was no master list of Occupy participants. The movement's boundaries were porous and ill-defined, with people routinely floating in and out of the fringes of the movement. There was a core set of die-hard participants that tended to show up at most events or actions. Imagine a series of concentric rings, with those closest to the centre representing people with greater levels of commitment and participation, and the outermost rings representing the fringe members, including the online lurkers and the people who have attended only one or two events. We believe the survey respondents captured the perspectives of the core and the inner rings, constituting the movement's most active participants, very well.⁴ By the last day of surveys, there was evidence that we had saturated the population, with many people reporting that they had already participated. We chose to end the survey process when it seemed that we were beginning to wear out our welcome by asking people repeatedly to participate who had already done so.⁵

The survey itself consisted of one sheet of paper with questions printed on both sides. With only one exception, the questions were closed-ended. The survey consisted of a customised optical mark recognition (OMR) form in which participants provided responses by filling in bubbles. The completed surveys were then later processed using an OMR scanner. The survey focused primarily on respondents' perceptions of laws, legal authorities, and lawbreaking. Many of the questions focused on respondents' perceptions of, observations of, and interactions with 'police in the area', which the instrument defined as police officers located in and around the area where Occupy protests took place. For Occupy DC, this referred primarily to the US Park Police (which is in charge of policing McPherson Square and Freedom Plaza, both of which are considered federal parks), and Washington DC's Metropolitan Police (which is responsible for policing most of the city outside of federal government property). The questions about police did not focus on a single event or interaction, but on respondents' experiences with police in the area throughout their involvement with Occupy DC. The survey also asked a series of general demographic questions.

Our analysis of the survey data relies on a combination of univariate descriptive statistics, bivariate measures of association, and multivariate regression analyses. The bivariate measures are used for preliminary analyses. For the multivariate analyses, we chose a Bayesian estimator that performs well with small samples and missing data.⁶

Results

To examine support for the use of violence against police among Occupy participants, we relied on three survey questions that asked respondents about the extent to which they find it reasonable to use violence against police 'in order to bring about meaningful social change'. [Table 1](#) lists the three

questions and provides a summary of responses. The results demonstrate clearly that a subset of respondents in this ostensibly nonviolent social movement embraced the use of violence against police. If we collapse the 'somewhat reasonable' and 'very reasonable' categories into one category for ease of interpretation, 31.5% of respondents find it reasonable to use minor forms of violence against police (pushing or shoving them), 16.9% find it reasonable to use moderate forms of violence against police (hitting or kicking them), and 10.9% find it reasonable to use severe forms of violence against police (throwing harmful objects or using a weapon against them). While a majority of respondents finds it unreasonable to use violence, there is clearly wide variation in attitudes toward violence among Occupy DC participants.

Perceptions of procedural justice

Next we test Hypothesis 1, which posits that Occupiers' stated willingness to use violence against the police has a negative association with their perceptions that police behave in a procedurally just manner. To measure attitudes toward the use of violence against police, we created an additive index from the three variables listed in Table 1. The resulting index has a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.89, indicating that it is internally consistent. The index scores range from 3 to 15, with a mean of 6.5. A higher score indicates that the respondent finds the use of violence against police more reasonable. To measure perceptions of procedural justice, we created an additive index from the seven variables listed in Table 2. The resulting index has a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.89, indicating that it is internally consistent. A principal axis factor analysis confirmed that the 7 items intended to measure procedural justice loaded on just one factor. The index scores range from 7 to 35, with a mean of 14.6. A higher score indicates that the respondent perceives the police to behave in a more procedurally just manner. The two indices have a bivariate correlation of -0.284 ($p = .002$), a statistically significant negative relationship. Greater support for the use of violence against police is associated with perceptions that police behave in a procedurally unjust manner. This result provides support for Hypothesis 1 at the bivariate level.

Experience with police use of force

Next we test Hypothesis 2, which posits that Occupiers' attitudes toward the use of violence against police have a positive association with their experiences or observations of unjust uses of force by police. To measure respondents' perspectives on unjust police use of force, we created an additive index from the seven variables listed in Table 3. The index scores range from 0 to 21, with a mean of 9.6. Higher scores indicate that the respondent reports having experienced or observed a greater frequency of unjust use of force by police.⁷ We examined the correlation between the index measuring respondents' attitudes toward the use of violence against police and the index measuring unjust uses of force by police. The two indices have a bivariate correlation of 0.092 ($p = .336$), a weak positive

Table 1. Occupier attitudes about the use of violence.

Please indicate the extent to which you find the following actions reasonable in order to bring about meaningful social change ...'	Very unreasonable	Somewhat unreasonable	Neutral	Somewhat reasonable	Very reasonable	<i>n</i>
Using minor forms of violence against the police (pushing, shoving)	30.8%	17.7%	20.0%	16.9%	14.6%	130
Using moderate forms of violence against police (hitting, kicking)	46.2%	16.9%	20.0%	10.0%	6.9%	130
Using severe forms of violence against police (throwing harmful objects or using a weapon)	66.4%	9.4%	13.3%	7.0%	3.9%	128

Note: *n* = number of observations.

Table 2. Occupier perceptions of procedural justice by police.

'Police in the area ...'	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	<i>n</i>
Treat people with respect	24.6%	33.8%	26.2%	12.3%	3.1%	130
Take time to listen to people	30.8%	33.8%	26.9%	4.6%	3.8%	130
Treat people fairly	36.2%	34.6%	20.5%	7.9%	0.8%	127
Respect people's rights	42.5%	27.6%	18.1%	10.2%	1.6%	127
Act professionally	24.0%	24.0%	30.4%	18.4%	3.2%	125
Are honest and trustworthy	48.4%	24.2%	24.2%	2.3%	0.8%	128
Explain their actions and decisions	55.5%	26.6%	13.3%	3.1%	1.6%	128

Note: *n* = number of observations.

relationship that is not statistically significant.⁸ Protesters' experiences or observations of unjust use of force by police do not appear to be associated with their attitudes toward the use of violence against police. This result leads us to reject Hypothesis 2 at the bivariate level.

A multivariate model of occupier attitudes toward violence against police

Our preliminary analysis examined the bivariate relationships between indices measuring Occupiers' attitudes toward the use of violence against police and perceptions of police. While these bivariate tests are a useful first step for understanding the factors that influence attitudes toward the use of violence against police, they fail to account for the multiple variables that might simultaneously influence respondents' attitudes. Therefore, we estimated a multiple regression model in which the index measuring attitudes toward the use of violence against police served as the dependent variable. The principal independent variables included the substantive measures included in Hypotheses 1 and 2. In addition, we included four control variables: the respondent's race (white = 1, else = 0), the self-reported extent of the respondent's participation in the Occupy movement ('full or regular' participation = 1, 'partial or occasional' participation = 0), the respondent's recollection of his or her attitudes toward police before joining the movement (measured using a five-category Likert scale), and a composite measure of the respondent's stake in conformity.

We included the latter measure because a regular theme in the social movement literature is the sense of alienation that serves as a major source of motivation for participating in protests (e.g. Jasper 1998). We expected to observe variation in the extent to which participants in social movements feel alienated from or connected to conventional society and its institutions, therefore their stake in conformity will presumably vary. Moreover, criminologists have found that people with a greater stake in conformity are less likely to embrace violence of various types (Toby 1983, Sherman *et al.* 1992, Paternoster *et al.* 1997). We measured stake in conformity by constructing a rough proxy based on three variables: whether the respondent is a college graduate (yes = 31.6%), whether the respondent is employed full-time (yes = 25.7%), and the respondent's age (mean = 28.9, sd = 11.9). We combined these three variables into a single measure using principal components analysis. The results of this analysis suggest that the three variables comprise one component.⁹ A higher principal component score reflects a greater stake in conformity.

Table 3. Occupier perceptions of unjust uses of force by police.

'Police in the area have unjustly ...'	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Frequently	<i>n</i>
Threatened to use force against a protester	4.8%	9.7%	50.8%	34.7%	124
Grabbed, pushed, hit or kicked a protester	4.8%	10.5%	51.6%	33.1%	124
Used pepper spray or another chemical agent against a protester	55.1%	22.0%	13.6%	9.3%	118
Used a TASER or stun gun against a protester	16.8%	42.0%	29.4%	11.8%	119
Used a K-9 against a protester	73.8%	13.9%	8.2%	4.1%	122
Pointed a gun at a protester	79.0%	11.8%	5.0%	4.2%	119
Arrested a protester	4.9%	4.9%	24.6%	65.6%	122

Note: *n* = number of observations.

To estimate the model, we chose a Bayesian estimator implemented in Mplus.¹⁰ The results from our regression analyses are provided in Table 4. The middle column provides point estimates of the fully standardised regression coefficients, drawn from the medians of the posterior distributions. The asterisks associated with the Bayesian estimates summarise the *p*-values based on the posterior distributions. The independent variables jointly explain 20.4% of the variance in attitudes toward violence. Since Bayesian analysis is still relatively unfamiliar in criminology, we also provide supplemental estimates from a conventional ordinary least squares (OLS) regression (see Table 4). We found no meaningful differences between the Bayesian and OLS findings.

The results are similar to the bivariate findings presented earlier. Consistent with our earlier support for Hypothesis 1, Occupier perceptions that police behave in a procedurally just manner are negatively associated with their support for using violence against the police. The standardised regression coefficient for this variable had the greatest magnitude among the variables in the model ($\beta = -0.280$), suggesting that perceptions of procedural justice are more influential than the other independent variables. Consistent with the bivariate findings that led us to reject Hypothesis 2, experiencing or observing unjust uses of force by police is not significantly associated with respondents' support for using violence against the police ($\beta = -0.136$). Of the four control variables, only race and stake in conformity are associated with support for the use of violence against police. Nonwhite respondents are more likely to support violence than white respondents. This variable has the second largest standardised effect ($\beta = -0.219$) in the model. The respondent's stake in conformity has a significant, negative association with support for the use of violence against police ($\beta = -0.195$). People with a greater stake in conformity are less likely to support the use of violence against police. Level of participation (partial or full) in the Occupy movement, and attitudes toward police before joining the Occupy movement were not significantly associated with support for the use of violence against police.

Discussion

Previous research on social movements indicates that views on the use of violence are often disparate even within a single movement. Consider the diversity of tactics embraced by civil rights participants, from Martin Luther King, Jr.'s nonviolent marches to Eldridge Cleaver's declaration that 'the violent phase of the black liberation struggle is here' (Bloom and Breines 1995, p. 131). Our findings from a survey of Occupy DC participants confirm that attitudes toward violence continue to be problematic in social movements today. Occupy DC described itself on its website (www.occupydc.org) as 'a nonviolent occupation of public space in solidarity with Occupy Wall Street and Occupy movements everywhere'. Yet, a non-trivial subset of Occupiers appears to have supported the use of violence against the police in spite of the movement's public embrace of nonviolent methods. The descriptive statistics alone constitute a unique contribution to the literature: 31.5% of respondents reported that they find it reasonable to use minor forms of violence (pushing or shoving) against police, 16.9% reported that they find it reasonable to use moderate forms of violence (hitting or

Table 4. Regression results (fully standardised coefficients).

Independent variables	Bayes	OLS
Perceptions of procedural justice	-.280**	-.266**
Perceptions of unjust police use of force	-.136	-.132
Stake in conformity	-.195**	-.231*
Race (white = 1)	-.219**	-.246**
Level of participation in Occupy (full = 1)	.138	.172
Attitudes toward police before joining Occupy	.091	.039
Explained variance (R^2)	20.4%	20.3%
Number of observations (<i>n</i>)	136	99

**p* < .05.

***p* < .01.

kicking), and 10.9% reported that they find it reasonable to use severe forms of violence ('throwing harmful objects or using a weapon') against police. These figures are especially striking when considering that protesters were not being asked about responding to an explicitly described provocation by police. Instead they were asked whether they viewed these forms of violence against police as reasonable 'in order to bring about meaningful social change'.

Our study was not able to assess the extent to which police find it reasonable to use violence against protesters, though while carrying out surveys we did observe police using minor but unjustified use of force against protesters. In one instance, US Park Police officers observed a protester wearing a hat with the logo of the US Park Police on it, a hat that can be purchased in area stores, and seized it from him against his objections. As a small crowd gathered around to observe this incident, a police officer yelled at the crowd to back up, and then quickly began shoving people back before giving them the opportunity to do so on their own. During the study, several protesters shared stories with us about police using force against them, the most serious of which involved charging protesters with horses on the day their encampment was evicted. Unfortunately, we were not able to interview police about the extent to which protesters used violence against them. Clearly, understanding the attitudes of both police and protesters about the use of violence against the other would have provided a more balanced assessment.

A recent wave of scholarship in criminology has highlighted the importance of people's perceptions of the procedural justice and legitimacy of authority figures in their decisions to obey the law (Tyler and Huo 2002, Sunshine and Tyler 2003, Johnson *et al.* 2014, Lowrey *et al.* 2016). Here we relied on this body of research to determine the extent to which respondents viewed the police as behaving in a procedurally just manner. Fewer than 10% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that police: treat people fairly (8.7%), take time to listen to people (8.4%), explain their actions and decisions (4.7%), or are honest and trustworthy (3.1%). These are troubling deficits in protesters' perceptions of procedural justice by police. Our multivariate model confirmed that respondents who perceive the police to be procedurally unjust are more likely to view violence against police as a reasonable mechanism for achieving social change.

These findings are consistent with research on procedural justice and legitimacy which suggests that people who perceive that authority figures behave in procedurally unjust ways are less likely to view their authority as legitimate and less likely to comply with their directives. Procedural justice theory applies to authority figures of many types, including parents and employers, but a subset of the research focuses on legal authorities like police officers, judges, and prison guards (Reisig and Mesko 2009, Henderson *et al.* 2010, Johnson *et al.* 2014). This body of research confirms that people who view legal authorities as procedurally just are more likely to cooperate with them, comply with their requests, and to obey the law (Tyler 1990, Tyler and Huo 2002, Sunshine and Tyler 2003, Johnson *et al.* 2014, Maguire *et al.* 2016).

Though our substantive focus here is on attitudes toward the use of violence, our measure of this construct can also be thought of as an inverse measure of obligation to obey the law, which is how legitimacy is conceptualised in much of the procedural justice literature. In other words, people who express support for the notion of using violence against the police are expressing an unwillingness to obey the law. Thus our finding that people who perceive the police as behaving in a procedurally unjust manner are more willing to view the use of violence against police is akin to concluding that procedural justice is associated with obligation to obey the law (more specifically, laws regulating the use of violence against police officers).¹¹ Criminological research has demonstrated that procedural injustices by legal authorities can generate rebellion or defiance among a variety of populations, including prison inmates (Reisig and Mesko 2009), spousal abusers (Paternoster *et al.* 1997), and juvenile offenders (Hipple *et al.* 2014). Similarly, research suggests that employee perceptions of injustice in the workplace are associated with support for workplace aggression (Kennedy *et al.* 2004). Based on the expansive body of research on procedural justice, it is no surprise that Occupy participants find the use of violence against police more reasonable if they view the police as behaving in a procedurally unjust manner.

Our findings with regard to the effects of procedural injustice are consistent with results from research on crowd psychology, particularly the elaborated social identity model (ESIM; Reicher *et al.* 2004, Reicher 2008, Drury and Reicher 2009). Outlining the details of the model is beyond the scope of this article, but in general it provides a powerful explanation for crowd conflict, especially between police and crowd members. An important part of the ESIM perspective is the idea that in crowds, people's social identities can be strongly influenced by the behaviour of outsiders, particularly the police. When police crack down on crowds in ways that are perceived as unjust by moderate crowd members, the moderates may begin to side with more radical crowd members against the police. When protesters view themselves as engaging in lawful and peaceful behaviour and police treat them as a threat to public safety, even moderate crowd members tend to become more defiant in response to the way the police are treating them. Thus, ill-advised police actions can both instigate and escalate crowd conflict and violence as the crowd unites 'around a sense of opposition to the police' (Drury and Reicher 2009, p. 713). These insights have led to the development of new public order policing strategies that have helped to reduce crowd conflict and violence in several Western European nations (e.g. Stott *et al.* 2007, Holgersson 2010, Stott, Scothern, and Gorringer 2013).

Given widespread clashes between police and protesters throughout the Occupy movement, we also sought to measure Occupier perceptions of unjust uses of force by police. More than 90% of Occupiers perceive that police have unjustly arrested a protester occasionally or frequently. Similarly, 85% of Occupiers believe that police have unjustly 'grabbed, pushed, hit or kicked' a protester or 'threatened to use force against a protester' either occasionally or frequently. The unjust uses of force described by respondents were mostly minor or moderate, with fewer respondents perceiving more serious uses of force like using a K-9 against protesters or pointing a gun at protesters. That said, numerous respondents commented that a shortcoming of our survey instrument was that it did not include an item on using horses against protesters. During the eviction from McPherson Square, officers on horses were perceived by protesters as particularly violent.

Although the majority of respondents report that police have used force unjustly against protesters, the multivariate findings reveal that these perceptions are not associated with respondents' attitudes about whether it is reasonable to use violence against the police. It is not clear why procedural injustice influenced attitudes toward violence but unjust use of force by police had no effect on these same attitudes. One likely possibility is that use of unjust force by police was rare in Occupy DC and therefore not nearly as salient as the much more regular and less serious forms of procedural injustice that Occupy participants perceived in their interactions with the police. Occupiers described what they perceived as an ongoing, daily campaign of harassment by police. According to the Occupiers, this campaign involved police behaving in impersonal, rude, and overly harsh ways with them, seizing their property, and subjecting them to unequal enforcement of the laws. For example, the Occupiers explained that they had placed a donation jar on a table to solicit donations from the many people who walked through the park where their encampment was located. Police warned them to remove the donation jar or they would be arrested. Yet donation jars are ubiquitous in Washington, DC and the people or groups putting them out – including musicians, the homeless, youth groups, and the Salvation Army – are not routinely threatened with arrest for the same offense. If this explanation for our findings is valid, then unjust use of force by police should be associated with attitudes toward violence in places where the use of force against protesters was more common, more severe, and generally more salient in the lives of Occupy participants (like New York or Oakland). This is merely speculation on our part, and it should be treated as a testable hypothesis.

Conclusion

In *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*, Martin Luther King, Jr. (1963/1994) wrote: 'Nonviolence demands that the means we use must be as pure as the ends we seek'. Our findings suggest that a subset of Occupy

DC participants did not embrace the movement's nonviolent public claims. Proponents of nonviolent civil disobedience strategies argue that the strategy is only effective if accompanied by the 'disciplined commitment of activists to non-violent resistance, even in the face of police violence' (Conway 2003, p. 521). Our findings reveal that the embrace of violence by some protesters is strongly associated with their perceptions of unjust treatment by police. Thus, both protesters and police appear to be enmeshed in a toxic dynamic, each responding to the perceived missteps or misdeeds of the other.

Notes

1. For instance, the New York City General Assembly's (n.d.) *Principles of Solidarity* document notes that the Occupy movement's participants are 'autonomous political beings engaged in non-violent civil disobedience and building solidarity based on mutual respect, acceptance, and love'.
2. A separate group calling itself 'Occupy Washington DC' established another camp in Freedom Plaza, a largely concrete space located on Pennsylvania Avenue. Due to resource constraints, we did not attempt to survey protesters at Freedom Plaza.
3. Tracking refusals was not useful because such refusals were often temporary. Occupy protest sites were busy places, with people participating in a variety of meetings, events, and actions. People who refused on one occasion often agreed to participate on another occasion. Some remembered us and some did not; we sometimes remembered them and sometimes did not. As a result it was not possible to calculate a meaningful refusal rate.
4. The first question on the survey asked respondents to identify as nonparticipants (defined as observers, sympathizers, or supporters), 'partial or occasional participants', or 'full or regular participants'. Only the latter two categories were permitted to fill out the survey.
5. Estimating the size of Occupy DC is challenging for many reasons. Well-established methods exist for estimating the size of crowds at individual events, including protests, political rallies, and mass demonstrations (McPhail and McCarthy 2004). However, Occupy DC was not an individual event; its participants were involved in numerous events (perhaps hundreds), some small and some very large. Many of these events attracted other participants who were not directly affiliated with Occupy DC and therefore crowd estimates from these events are not particularly useful. We attended several Occupy DC meetings and protests of various sizes, most of which were quite small because only a fraction of participants showed up. Thus, while it is common to estimate the size of an individual event, it is much more challenging to estimate the size of an ongoing movement like Occupy DC.
6. Bayesian methods are known to have better small sample performance than frequentist methods, like maximum likelihood, that are based on asymptotic (large-sample) theory (Asparouhov and Muthén 2010). The Bayesian method used here also provides useful tools for dealing with missing data, thus enabling us to avoid losing cases due to incomplete survey responses. Bayesian methods for addressing missing data have been shown to outperform more traditional approaches (Asparouhov and Muthén 2010).
7. Given the nature of the indicators, we treat this as a formative index in which the indicators are viewed as *causes* of the concept rather than effects (Bollen and Lennox 1991, Maguire and Johnson 2016). This approach differs from the more common reflective specification in which the concept has a causal effect on its indicators. Reflective specifications are often used to measure perceptual or attitudinal constructs in which the indicators are theorized to share a common cause. Formative specifications, while less common, are appropriate for those instances where a construct results from the combination of its indicators. Under such circumstances, conventional measures of reliability such as coefficient alpha are not meaningful (Bollen and Lennox 1991).
8. An anonymous reviewer questioned whether dropping the 'arrested a protester' item from the index measuring perceptions of unjust uses of force by police might strengthen the relationship with willingness to use violence. After dropping the item, we found a slightly weaker relationship between perceptions of unjust use of force by police and willingness to use violence against the police ($r = 0.052, p = .584$). While police and protesters clashed on several occasions, the use of violence by police against Occupy DC protesters was significantly less dramatic than in other cities like Oakland and New York. Therefore, the unjust uses of force experienced or observed by survey respondents were likely less severe than those experienced by Occupiers in some other cities. Thus, these findings may not be generalizable to protest movements that involve greater levels of violence between police and protesters.
9. Only one component had an eigenvalue greater than one, and this component explained 51% of the variation. The three component loadings ranged from .57 to .80.
10. Our Bayesian regression analysis relies on iterative Markov chain Monte Carlo (MCMC) algorithms to 'obtain an approximation to the posterior distributions of the parameters from which the estimates are obtained' (Muthén 2010, p. 8). Our diagnostics revealed that a natural log transformation of the dependent variable provided the best fit to the data. Multicollinearity was not problematic (the largest VIF was 1.4).

11. We are grateful to an anonymous reviewer for pointing out that people may be more willing to break the law in the context of a protest than in other settings that do not involve crowds. The procedural justice literature focuses primarily on individual-level decisions about complying with the law. In a crowd setting, these decisions may be more complex due to both group-level dynamics and perceived anonymity (McPhail 1991). Little is known about the nature and effects of procedural justice judgments in group or crowd settings. Integrating procedural justice theory (which operates primarily at the individual level) with theories of crowd behavior could provide some useful insights about how crowd participants perceive and respond to police and other authority figures (Maguire *in press*, Maguire & Oakley *in press*).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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