


ARTICLE

# Legal cynicism, intrusive policing, and the dynamics of police legitimacy: evidence from Brazil's largest city

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## Abstract

Public experiences with the law in some neighborhoods are marked by an overwhelming police presence alongside deep-seated beliefs that legal agents are disinterested in ensuring public safety. This mutual experience of intrusive policing and legal cynicism has important implications for people's recognition of the legitimacy of legal authority. In the context of a global city in the Global South, this study provides a quantitative assessment of the dynamics of perceived police intrusion and cynicism about police protection and the implications of those experiences for beliefs about the legitimacy of legal institutions. Drawing on a three-wave longitudinal survey representative of adult residents of eight neighborhoods in São Paulo, Brazil ( $N = 1,200$ ), I demonstrate that perceived police intrusion and cynicism about police protection (a) are two sides of the same coin, being produced by similar social forces and dynamically reproducing each other and (b) operate to undermine police legitimacy. Integrating the legal cynicism and procedural justice theoretical frameworks, this study shows that intrusive as well as unheeding and neglectful policing practices can contribute to delegitimizing legal authority. I conclude with a discussion about the distribution of repression and protection and highlight the urgency of exploring public-authority relations in the Global South.

## Abstract (Portuguese)

Experiências públicas com a lei em alguns bairros são caracterizadas tanto por uma presença excessiva de forças policiais quanto com crenças enraizadas de que agentes da lei não têm interesse em garantir a segurança pública. Essa experiência mútua de policiamento intrusivo e cinismo legal tem implicações importantes para o reconhecimento público da legitimidade das autoridades legais. No contexto de uma cidade global na América Latina, este estudo oferece uma avaliação quantitativa das dinâmicas de experiências de policiamento intrusivo e cinismo a respeito da proteção oferecida pela polícia e das consequências dessas experiências para crenças na legitimidade das instituições legais. Com base em dados de um survey longitudinal de três ondas com residentes de oito bairros em São Paulo, Brasil ( $N = 1200$ ), demonstro que as percepções de intrusão policial e de cinismo a respeito da proteção oferecida pela

polícia (a) são dois lados da mesma moeda, sendo produzidos por forças sociais similares e se reproduzindo dinamicamente entre si e (b) operam para minar as crenças na legitimidade da polícia. Integrando os quadros teóricos do cinismo legal e da justiça procedimental, este estudo demonstra que práticas policiais baseadas tanto na intrusão excessiva quanto na negligência sobre proteção podem contribuir para deslegitimar a autoridade legal. Concluiu com uma discussão a respeito da distribuição de repressão e proteção e destacou a urgência de explorar relações entre público e autoridade no Sul Global.<sup>1</sup>

**Keywords:** legal cynicism; intrusive policing; police legitimacy; procedural justice theory; Brazil

**Palavras-chave:** cinismo legal; policiamento intrusivo; legitimidade da polícia; teoria da justiça procedimental; Brasil

Public experiences with legal authority are sometimes characterized by a disparity between over-scrutiny and under-support. Especially in large cities in the United States and Latin America, residents of disadvantaged neighborhoods face an overwhelming presence of the state in their daily lives, with legal institutions seemingly over-regulating public behavior and implementing zero-tolerance approaches on small illegalities, while also facing a neglectful absence of legal authority which fails to promote social welfare (Prowse et al. 2020). For example, previous research has noted disparities between overregulation and under-support in immigration detention and healthcare provision (Ryo 2016; Van Natta, 2023). One area in which public–authority relations are frequently characterized as mutual experiences of intrusion and neglect is law enforcement, as race-class subjugated urban communities experience both predatory and neglectful policing (Campeau et al. 2021; Soss and Weaver 2017). Ethnographic studies often describe how members of poor communities of color are repeatedly stopped, questioned, and harassed by law enforcement agents, while also reporting high levels of victimization and fear of crime, both of which are usually attributed to unresponsive policing (Carr et al. 2007; Haldipur 2019).

This unequal distribution of repression and protection (González 2017) is a process that Rios (2011) named the *over-policing-under-policing paradox*. Yet, twin expectations of intrusion and neglect in the neighborhood hardly constitute a paradox. Particularly in contexts with a historical legacy of inequality and authoritarianism (González 2020; Magaloni et al. 2020), policing can operate to ascribe identity and protect the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion (Waddington 1999). Collective experiences with legal authority in over-policed communities are usually characterized by distorted responsiveness (Prowse et al. 2020): a pervasive presence of the state via aggressive and intrusive policing accompanied by neglectful policing in areas where there is public demand for more state presence, such as the prevention of serious and violent crime. Zero-tolerance law enforcement practices are usually associated with public cynicism about the ability of the police to offer protection to neighborhood residents (Kirk et al. 2012), and residents of neighborhoods characterized by shared collective memories of police abuse and legal cynicism are more likely to be more critical of the police and file complaints about police misconduct (McCarthy et al. 2020). Rather than paradoxically, it is possible that perceptions of police intrusion and cynicism

about police protection go hand in hand, potentially reproducing each other over time.

But if public relationships with the legal authority in such urban communities are grounded in reciprocal beliefs that law enforcement agents repeatedly intrude upon the lives of residents and are disinterested in ensuring public safety, this dynamic must have consequences for how people recognize and judge the authority of the state (Beetham 1991). Public beliefs about the legitimacy of legal authority are crucial to the well-functioning of society (Tyler 2006): when citizens recognize legal authority as the rightful authority, they tend to voluntarily comply with the laws and cooperate with legal institutions (Sunshine and Tyler 2003; Papachristos et al. 2012; Jackson et al., 2021). According to procedural justice theory (PJT), legal authority can gain or lose legitimacy depending on the extent to which its agents communicate to citizens that they are trustworthy to exert power in normatively appropriate ways (Oliveira and Jackson 2021). This framework has been applied to research on topics such as policing, legal socialization, and welfare provision (Jackson 2018; Tyler and Trinkner 2017; Van Natta 2023). While previous studies highlight the importance of procedural fairness in the exercise of legal authority to enhance legitimacy judgments (Mazerolle et al. 2013; Oliveira et al. 2021), it is possible that other types of state action also contribute to boosting or undermining legitimacy beliefs (Huq et al. 2017). Given how public experiences with legal institutions in some neighborhoods are based on disparities between over-policing and under-protection, it is possible that perceptions of police intrusion and cynicism about police protection also operate to undermine public judgments about the legitimacy of legal institutions.

This possibility is the launchpad of this study. Drawing on PJT, legal cynicism theory, and previous ethnographic evidence on over-policed and under-protected neighborhoods, this study draws on unique longitudinal survey data and provides a quantitative assessment of the dynamics of perceived police intrusion and cynicism about police protection and the implications of those experiences for legitimacy beliefs. First, I question the paradoxical nature of these experiences and explore the extent to which public perceptions of police intrusion and cynicism about police protection are dynamically related, being produced by similar social forces and mutually reproducing each other over time. Second, I investigate whether public perceptions of police intrusion and cynicism about police protection, above and beyond perceptions of procedural (un)fairness, undermine beliefs about the legitimacy of legal institutions. It is possible that such experiences with neighborhood policing are perceived as messages of oppression, marginalization, and neglect (Oliveira and Jackson 2021), operating to effectively exclude whole communities from the body politic (Bell 2017).

Crucially, this study investigates these questions in the context of a complex and highly unequal city in Latin America: Brazil's largest city, São Paulo. Large cities in the Global South remain largely understudied even though some communities face similar, if not worse, social challenges as race-class subjugated urban communities in the US. Brazil is one of the ten most unequal countries in the world (Souza 2018), and the city of São Paulo is a complex metropolitan area with more than 20 million residents, more than 500,000 robberies, and hundreds of police killings every year. With high rates of interpersonal and state-sanctioned violence, fear of both crime and police are central to public–authority relations (Jackson et al. 2022). São Paulo residents are

frequently exposed to violence – and, in some neighborhoods, organized crime is so intrinsically part of people’s daily lives that it is already part of the social fabric of the city (Feltran 2020). Similarly, people expect police officers to use force even in routine circumstances (Oliveira 2024), and episodes of police brutality are persistently common (González 2020).

In a way, São Paulo is the ideal setting to advance knowledge on legal cynicism and legitimacy beliefs and explore the dynamics and consequences of intrusive policing and cynicism about police protection. To address these issues from a quantitative perspective, this study draws upon data from a representative three-wave panel survey of adult residents of eight neighborhoods in São Paulo throughout 2015–2018. I use longitudinal survey data to, first, examine whether perceptions of police intrusion and cynicism about police protection mutually reproduce each other over time, and whether they share similar correlates; second, to explore whether they undermine police legitimacy beliefs.

Findings of this paper contribute to current law and society research on legal cynicism, policing, and legitimacy in three ways. First, I provide quantitative evidence that builds on and expands previous qualitative evidence on the over-policing–under-policing paradox; namely, that it is hardly a paradox, as perceptions of police intrusion and cynicism about police protection go hand in hand. Second, I contribute to our knowledge of the relationship between legal cynicism theory, as developed by urban sociologists (Kirk and Papachristos 2011; Sampson and Bartusch 1998), and PJT, as developed by social psychologists (Sunshine and Tyler 2003; Tyler 2006). Specifically, this study advances knowledge on PJT as it shows how other types of police behavior beyond procedural fairness – e.g., repressive policing and the absence of protective policing, features usually emphasized in the legal cynicism literature (Hagan et al. 2018) – can also operate to undermine legitimacy beliefs, weakening the social bonds between the public and legal authority. Third, this study highlights the importance of investigating public–authority relations in the Global South. Building on the increasing but limited evidence from studies on legal cynicism and police legitimacy in non-Western contexts (see Jackson 2018), this paper emphasizes the importance of studying the dynamics of authority–citizen relations in settings where urban violence, organized crime, and police brutality directly affect city life.

The paper proceeds as follows. I start by discussing dynamics of intrusive policing and cynicism about police protection, with focus on their conceptual framing based on current research on legal cynicism and police legitimacy. I then move on to the discussion on consequences of perceived police intrusion and cynicism about police protection for legitimacy beliefs, providing a more thorough theoretical framework based on PJT and legal cynicism theory. In the next section, I discuss the Brazilian and the São Paulo context and its substantive relevance to the literature. Next, I present the data, methods, and measures; I then share results reflecting dynamics of perceived police intrusion and cynicism about police protection and their consequences for police legitimacy in São Paulo. Finally, I present the discussion and the conclusions.

### Legal cynicism and intrusive policing

In a study focused on neighborhood dynamics in Oakland, California, Rios (2011) described how policing was a constituent part of the lives of young boys of color.

They were frequently stopped by officers, could easily recognize police hotspots in the community, and would constantly hear of friends getting arrested. Similarly, in the context of New York City, Haldipur (2019) reported how residents of racial minority communities often experienced multiple police stops a week, with officers repeatedly intruding upon their lives. Policing was so deep-seated in some neighborhoods' culture that police behavior would become predictable and manipulable (Stuart 2016).

These are just a few examples of ethnographic evidence on over-policed neighborhoods, where the state becomes deeply present in residents' everyday lives via punitive social control (Rios 2011, p. 35). Yet, residents of such neighborhoods often report precisely the opposite as well: state neglect. With high victimization rates, such locations usually are among the most unsafe urban communities, and residents typically perceive legal agents to be unresponsive and ill equipped to provide protection. Campeau et al. (Campeau et al. 2021, p. 9) showed how recently arrested suspects in Cleveland felt neglected by law enforcement "precisely when they are most in need of police response." An 18-year-old girl from Philadelphia interviewed by Carr et al. (Carr et al. 2007, pp. 458-459) summarized this perception of constant police intrusion combined with cynicism about police protection: "I see cops so often in my neighborhood, but when I see something bad going on, I look around and say 'where are the cops?'" In Latin American cities, this dynamic can be even more extreme. According to González (2017, p. 500), lack of safety is often framed by residents as the police's failure to provide citizens with their right to protection – quoting a woman in São Paulo who expressed cynicism about police protection during a local security council meeting: "What is being done so that we will be protected? We don't want to file police reports anymore, we want protection!"

This is what Prowse et al. (2020) named distorted responsiveness: neighborhoods can be characterized by both intrusive and neglectful policing. Under-served and economically marginalized communities experience an overwhelming police presence that intrudes upon their lives but does very little to protect them and limit crime within their community (Weaver et al. 2019). This scenario is often described in large and highly unequal urban centers both in the US (Bell 2017; Carr et al. 2007) and in several places in the Global South – including Brazil's largest city, São Paulo (González 2020).

### *Cynicism about police protection*

Ethnographic evidence suggests that residents of race-class subjugated urban communities tend to distrust legal authority and feel like legal agents cannot be relied upon to provide their community with minimum public needs, such as public safety and security (Bell 2016; Carr et al. 2007). Public beliefs that legal agents, especially police officers, are not willing to allocate resources to ensure the protection of members of a community have been previously framed as one dimension of *legal cynicism* (Kirk and Papachristos 2011). A concept originally developed by Sampson and Bartusch (1998), legal cynicism among members of the public entails two complementary dimensions (Hagan et al. 2020): a moral dimension focused on alienation from social norms, as emphasized by Sampson and Bartusch (1998), and a law enforcement dimension focused on distrust of police officers' ability to ensure public safety, as developed by Kirk and Papachristos (2011).

The first dimension, known as *moral cynicism* (see Sampson 2012), draws on the Durkheimian notion of anomie and is defined as a “state of normlessness in which the rules of the dominant society (and hence the legal system) are no longer binding in a community” (Sampson and Bartusch 1998, p. 782). With focus on moral judgments about the law and the social norms, this dimension of legal cynicism has been widely used by sociolegal researchers. For example, Nivette et al. (2015) showed how moral cynicism is fostered in adolescence in function of negative experiences with the police and as a cognitive neutralization technique and Sampson et al. (2005) provided evidence that adolescents growing up in neighborhoods characterized by moral cynicism are more likely to engage in violent behavior. Beyond the criminal legal system, Adam et al. (2022) showed that deleterious neighborhood characteristics are associated with beliefs in the code of the street through the development of moral cynicism, whereas Ryo (2016) argued that immigration detention facilities in the United States contribute to foster moral cynicism among noncitizens and immigrant detainees.

The second dimension, referred to as *cynicism about police protection*, is focused on legal institutions and law enforcement agents. Emphasizing public expectations of police behavior, it is defined as a cultural frame through which “the law and the agents of its enforcement, such as the police and courts, are viewed as illegitimate, unresponsive, and ill equipped to ensure public safety” (Kirk and Papachristos 2011, p. 1191) – i.e., this dimension highlights perceptions that police officers are disinterested and incompetent and notes that sometimes individuals may believe in the substance of the law but have antagonistic views toward police officers. Sociolegal research drawing on this dimension of legal cynicism includes studies demonstrating evidence between cynicism about police protection and greater likelihood of criminal behavior and arrests (Kirk and Matsuda 2011) as well as diminished willingness to cooperate with legal authority by reporting crimes to the police (Hagan et al. 2018; Matthew et al. 2016). Beyond the criminal legal system, Hagan et al. (2016) relied on this dimension of legal cynicism to study Arab Sunni victimization and insurgent attacks in Iraq, whereas Sendroui et al. (2022) linked legal cynicism with system avoidance among Romani minority groups in Central and Eastern Europe, arguing that this cultural frame operates to enhance social inequality.

There have also been other theoretical extensions that build on the legal cynicism literature. For example, expanding legal cynicism beyond its moral and its law enforcement dimensions, Bell (2017) introduced the concept of legal estrangement, which focuses on the structural conditions that breed this cultural frame and highlight the collective process of public detachment and alienation from the law. Beyond communities’ relationship with the law and the legal institutions, legal estrangement is a systemic mechanism that leads to a cultural orientation of distrust and social exclusion, reflecting widespread perceptions that law enforcement agents operate to exclude poor communities of color from society (Bell 2017, p. 2067).<sup>2</sup>

This study is focused on the law enforcement dimension of legal cynicism, *cynicism about police protection*, while also considering Bell’s (2017) remarks about the structural conditions that breed cultural perceptions that police officers operate to exclude poor communities from the body politic. As a cultural frame, cynicism about police protection consists of the lens through which individuals observe, perceive, and interpret the performance of law enforcement agents. Legal cynicism theory is ecological, and this cultural frame would primarily be produced by neighborhood exposures

to concentrated disadvantage and abusive policing practices (Kirk and Papachristos 2011). Cultural tools emerge as an adaptation to neighborhood social disorganization (Sampson and Julius Wilson 1995): in disadvantaged neighborhoods, people develop a shared understanding that legal institutions will not provide them with any type of security. Cynicism about police protection is therefore fostered in neighborhoods where most residents are exposed to pervasive segregation and economic subjugation (Kirk and Papachristos 2011, p. 1198; Hagan et al. 2018). Similarly, neighborhood variation in the way justice is administered influences this dimension of legal cynicism, particularly repeated police harassing behavior and insufficient attempts at controlling crime (Kirk and Papachristos 2011, p. 1199; McCarthy et al. 2020). Residents then adapt to their neighborhood conditions and develop cultural tools through which they interpret the functioning and viability of the law and the police, especially in terms of their (un)responsiveness and (dis)interest in providing security and protection.

At its core, the dimension of legal cynicism emphasized by Kirk and Papachristos (2011) refers to public skepticism about the legal institutions' ability to ensure public safety; people are cynical of the law and the legal institutions when they perceive legal agents to act carelessly and disinterested in offering protection to community members (Hagan et al. 2018). This connects directly with some ethnographic evidence describing the "under-policing" part of the "over-policing-under-policing paradox," as ethnographers often indicate that residents are skeptical about the ability of the police to ensure public safety (Bell 2017; Rios 2011). For example, Carr et al. (2007, p. 459), while discussing sources of negative disposition toward police among members of underprivileged communities, mentioned that some respondents "complained about slow response and echoed a sense of under-policing often common in disadvantaged neighborhoods."

### *Public perceptions of police intrusion*

Rios (2011) suggested that predatory policing was a constant part of young people's lives in some disadvantaged neighborhoods. According to ethnographic evidence, residents of such neighborhoods perceive an overwhelming police presence that intrudes upon their lives to the extent that policing becomes part of their daily routines (Bell 2016; Carr et al. 2007; Stuart 2016). Perceptions<sup>3</sup> of an over-policed environment therefore relate to beliefs that law enforcement agents frequently intrude upon the lives of neighborhood residents, harassing them, and acting as if they were above the law.

Public perceptions of police intrusion have previously been studied by legitimacy scholars. For instance, in a study with young men aged 18–26 in New York City, Tyler et al. (2014) explored respondents' generalized neighborhood experiences with police and measured their overall expectations of intrusiveness during police stops, whereas Tyler et al. (2015) investigated the degree to which people believed that police officers would normally treat them as objects of suspicion using data from a survey representative of the US adult population. More recently, scholars have focused on widespread perceptions that police officers tend to intrusively overstep their authority beyond normative boundaries of appropriate police behavior (Trinkner et al. 2018).

Previous research suggests that neighborhood variation in policing is a product of neighborhoods' structural conditions (Joel and Oliveira 2022; Kirk and Matsuda 2011), with residents of more disadvantaged places receiving substantially more police

scrutiny (Shedd 2015). For instance, William and Reisig (2003) showed that, net of previous criminal activity, police officers tended to use force more frequently in disadvantaged neighborhoods, and Omori et al. (2022) demonstrated that police use force more often in Black and Latinx neighborhoods. In São Paulo, one study indicated that only 15% of the city districts accounted for 50% of all police killings in 2014 (Sinhoretto et al. 2016), and Oliveira (2024) showed that neighborhood social disorganization antecedents are directly associated with higher probabilities of being stopped by the police at gunpoint.

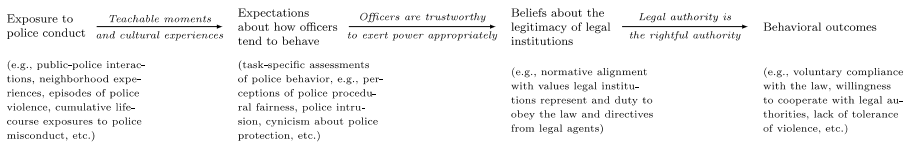
Perceptions of police intrusion reflect public expectations that police officers tend to intrude upon the lives of neighborhood residents – overstepping their authority, paying too much attention to petty illegalities, and engaging in intimidatory practices, which resonates with ethnographic descriptions of over-policed neighborhoods (Haldipur 2019; Rios 2011). Intrusive policing practices are linked to an excessive state provision of repression (González 2017): the state makes itself present in the neighborhood, but by over-regulating public behavior. By coercively intruding upon the lives of citizens, legal institutions can exclude people from the political community they are embedded in (Bell 2017), effectively operating to shape how whole communities experience citizenship in their everyday lives (Soss and Weaver 2017).

### *Is there really a paradox?*

Perceptions of intrusive policing and cynicism about police protection are therefore hardly a paradox. As noted in previous research on the “over-policing–under-policing paradox,” public exposure to predatory policing and widespread skepticism about the ability of legal institutions to ensure public safety go hand in hand (Carr et al. 2007; Rios 2011). As highlighted by Prowse et al. (Prowse et al. 2020, p. 1449), race-class subjugated communities collectively experience the state through what they call distorted responsiveness: the police are pervasively proactive in relation to contexts that do not seem to ensure anyone’s safety and absent in situations people would expect legal institutions to offer protection. Rather than a paradox, previous ethnographic evidence suggests that “over-policing” (i.e., perceptions that police officers tend to intrude upon the lives of citizens) and “under-policing” (i.e., perceptions that police officers are disinterested in ensuring public safety) are two sides of the same coin.

Indeed, they seem to be produced by similar social forces. Research indicates that poor, racialized citizens who live in neighborhoods characterized by concentrated disadvantage are exposed to both intrusive and neglectful policing (Bell 2017; Carr et al. 2007), suggesting that perceptions of police intrusion and cynicism about police protection are informed by similar social attributes (e.g., race, socioeconomic status, and neighborhood structural conditions). Put together, evidence from previous studies even suggest that these experiences of neighborhood policing could potentially be dynamically related to each other, mutually reproducing each other over time. For example, the collective experience of policing via distorted responsiveness is so longstanding in some communities that, as suggested by legal cynicism theory, exposure to abusive police behavior can foster deep-seated beliefs in the incompetence and unresponsiveness of the criminal justice system (Kirk et al. 2012; Matthew et al. 2016), whereas, at the same time, such skepticism about the legal system can lead to more perceptions and complaints about police misuse of force (McCarthy et al. 2020).





**Figure 1.** Theoretical framework outlining the theorized causes and consequences of public beliefs about the legitimacy of legal institution.

Drawing on those insights, the first part of this study focuses on dynamics of intrusive policing and legal cynicism and investigates the extent to which perceived police intrusion and cynicism about police protection are indeed two sides of the same coin, exploring whether such perceptions mutually reproduce each other and whether they share similar correlates.

### Judgments about the legitimacy of legal authority

Is it possible that increased perceptions of police intrusion and widespread skepticism about police protection also operate to undermine public beliefs about the legitimacy of legal authority? The legitimacy of an authority figure can be defined as the recognition, in the eyes of those who are asked to abide, of its right to govern (Beetham 1991; Coicaud 2002). Applied to legal institutions, this definition implies that it is the citizens, who are subject to the power of the law, who judge legal authority's claim to power (Jackson and Bradford 2019). Such empirical judgments generally refer to both assent and consent to the law's right to govern – i.e., they reflect whether citizens believe that legal institutions share their normative values about the appropriate exercise of power and whether they accept legal authority's right to dictate appropriate public behavior (Tyler 2006; Tyler and Jackson 2014). Therefore, to gain legitimacy, agents of the law need to communicate to citizens that they share and respect public normative expectations about the proper exercise of legal power. To the extent that people expect that law enforcement agents will exert power in normatively appropriate ways (i.e., according to key legitimating norms), their judgments about the legitimacy of the law and the legal institutions are enhanced (Oliveira et al. 2021; Trinkner et al. 2018). Figure 1 graphically displays this theoretical framework.

What exact criteria people use to judge the normative appropriateness of the exercise of authority is an empirical question (Trinkner 2019), and expectations about how power should be wielded tend to be a product of neighborhood exposure to structural conditions and life-course experiences with the law (Oliveira and Jackson 2021). According to Tyler's relational account of police legitimacy, legal institutions can build legitimacy when they exert power with procedural fairness (Sunshine and Tyler 2003). PJT is grounded on the group value model and the group engagement model (Lind and Tyler 1988; Tyler and Blader 2003), which highlight the importance of identity-relevant normative police conduct. Essentially, legal agents enhance legitimacy beliefs by signaling to citizens that they are a valued part of the group legal authority represents. When agents of the law emphasize high-quality interpersonal treatment (treating citizens with respect and dignity) and decision-making (making decisions in open, transparent, and neutral ways, and taking citizens' concerns into

account), they communicate status and value, signaling to citizens that they are valued members of society and therefore strengthening the social bonds between individuals, authority figures, and the superordinate group that legal institutions represent (Lind and Tyler 1988; Tyler & Blader, 2003). Empirically, perceptions of police fairness are generally found to be strongly associated with legitimacy beliefs (see Jackson 2018 for a review of the international literature; see Mazerolle et al. 2013 for a meta-analysis), including in Brazil (see Jackson et al. 2022; Trinkner et al., 2020; Oliveira et al. 2020).

Yet, there might be other elements of police conduct beyond procedural fairness that could also send relevant identity-related messages to members of the public and thus enhance or undermine public judgments about the legitimacy of legal authority (Huq et al. 2017; Oliveira and Jackson 2021). I build on Mackenzie's (2021) point that messages of oppression, marginalization, and neglect have special moral significance, as they can potentially shape people's identities, autonomy, and sense of self-respect, and suggest that public perceptions of police intrusion and cynicism about police protection can also operate to damage legitimacy beliefs.

By repeatedly engaging in intrusive policing practices and interfering in the lives of community residents, officers can send messages of oppression and marginalization, propelling some people to a cultural understanding about the functioning of the law not in terms of safeguard and protection, but in terms of confrontation and suspicion. Indeed, Tyler et al. (2014, p. 766) showed that "more police intrusion of any type in the lives of people in the neighborhood was linked to lower legitimacy," and Trinkner et al. (2018, p. 4) suggested that "increased intrusion by legal authorities can be *in-and-of-itself* delegitimizing." Similarly, when legal agents are perceived to act disinterested in ensuring public safety, they can pass on messages of marginalization and neglect – which could lead to widespread expectations that law enforcement agents operate to exclude disadvantaged groups from society (Bell 2017). For example, Jackson et al. (2023) demonstrated that perceptions of under-policing in Black communities in the United States are an important factor in the delegitimization of police in the 21st century.

Above and beyond procedural fairness, intrusive and unheeding policing practices can contribute to a sense of *otherness* and group exclusion – fostering perceptions that state resources to protect and serve are mostly allocated to other groups and communities within society and thus weakening the social bonds between individuals and legal authority. This could contribute to the reproduction of cultural orientations toward the law based on an understanding that "the legal system and law enforcement, as the individual's group experiences these institutions, are fundamentally flawed and chaotic, and therefore send negative messages about the group's societal belonging" (Bell 2017, pp. 2086–2087).

### Intrusive policing and legal cynicism in São Paulo, Brazil

With more than 20 million people in the metropolitan region, São Paulo is one of the largest and most unequal cities in the world. Nationally, Brazil is an extremely violent country: it has an average homicide rate of 27.8 per 100,000 inhabitants (Cerqueira et al. 2020) and the largest number of victims of murder in South America (UNODC, 2013). Yet, Brazil's largest city has substantively different figures: after a huge drop in the 2000s, the homicide rate in São Paulo is around 10 per 100,000 (Nery et al.

2012) – considerably lower than in cities like Philadelphia or Chicago. However, despite this relatively low rate, São Paulo is a city where violence is pervasive and part of its social fabric (Feltran 2020) and where even the rule of law is unevenly distributed (Willis 2015). While in most neighborhoods legal institutions function properly, several peripheral communities have seen increasingly bureaucratized criminal gangs starting to claim legitimacy and occupy a power vacuum where the state has been negligent. Organized crime governs extensively, ruling large urban populations across enormous swaths of territory (Lessing and Denyer Willis 2019) and providing residents with security and protection (Feltran 2020). In areas where they dominate, criminal gangs impose their own set of rules and procedures,<sup>4</sup> governing through coercion and the constant threat of violence (Dias and Darke 2016).

On the other hand, legal institutions are also overwhelmingly present in the lives of most residents. The *São Paulo Military Police* (PMSP) is an authoritarian and militarized organization that relies heavily on aggressive tactics to tackle crime (González 2020; Oliveira 2024). Every officer<sup>5</sup> carries a firearm (Pinc 2006), and survey estimates suggest that around half of all investigatory police stops in the city tend to involve officers pointing a gun at the citizen (Oliveira 2024). González (2020, p. 77) suggests that the PMSP “exemplifies the stubborn persistence of distinctly authoritarian modes of coercion.” Beyond aggressive policing tactics, police brutality remains one of the most distinctive characteristics of the PMSP: in 2017, 940 civilians were killed by (on and off duty) police officers (Mariano 2018), a similar number of deadly victims of police violence in the entire United States in 2016 (González 2020); according to the *Anuário Brasileiro de Segurança Pública 2021*, out of the more than 8,000 violent deaths in the city in 2020, almost 10% were police killings (Bueno and de Lima 2021). Accordingly, fear of the police is high, and a public image of the institution as “just another violent gang” has cultural currency (Jackson et al. 2022).

Historically, police forces in Brazil represent a deep-seated authoritarianism that mark state–citizen relations (Schwarcz and Starling 2015). Their emergence is linked to the colonial period, and the first bureaucratic organization that claimed the monopoly in the use of physical force in the country was created to protect Portugal’s dominance over the local population in the territory (Batitucci 2010). The threat of physical violence has been historically perceived as the only way to exert authority, and until this day legal socialization in Brazil is marked by pervasive violence (Renan et al. 2022). Overall, the historical legacy of authoritarianism marks Brazilians’ collective experiences with state coercive forces (Pinheiro 1991).

In this context, state provision of repression and protection can shape how individuals experience citizenship (Soss and Weaver 2017): according to González (2017, p. 495), deficient security provision produced constrained and stratified citizenship in Latin American cities – effectively excluding some groups of people from the body politic. At the same time, public *support* for police brutality is also paradoxically popular, especially in disadvantaged neighborhoods (Caldeira 2002); for example, González (2017, p. 502) describes that during a local security meeting in a low-income neighborhood in São Paulo, after a police officer announced that a suspect had been shot and killed, residents reacted with applause and support. The notion that the state exaggerates the distribution of oppression through heavy-handed policing and at the same time neglects its responsibility to provide protection can lead some citizens to a

cultural understanding that violence is necessary for security (Kirk and Papachristos 2011).

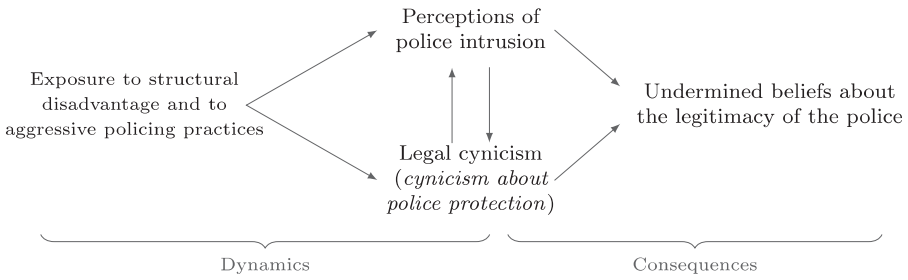
### *Police legitimacy in São Paulo as a coercive-consensual continuum*

Jackson et al. (2022) explored the nature of public beliefs about the legitimacy of legal institutions among São Paulo residents. Scholars measuring legitimacy beliefs usually seek to distinguish between legitimacy-based reasons to obey the law (grounded on normative recognition of legal authority as the rightful authority) and coercive-based motivations to obey (grounded on fear and instrumental obedience) (e.g., Pósch et al., 2020). But in São Paulo, echoing the style of policing tactics that often combine consensual and coercive elements, the two motivations could not be empirically differentiated; instead, they formed one single scale moving from instrumental and fear-based reasons to normative and legitimacy-based reasons to obey police officers' commands (Jackson et al. 2022).

Drawing on cross-sectional data from a 2015 survey of São Paulo residents, Jackson et al. (2022) developed a novel measurement model of police legitimacy using a latent trait analysis approach. First, they conducted a content analysis of an open-ended question asking why respondents thought they should or should not obey the police even when they thought the police were wrong. Responses of those who said they should obey the police were classified either as “normative duty to obey” or as “coercive obligation,” whereas responses of those said they should not obey the police were classified as a type of either “disobedient protest” or “rejection of authority.” The authors then combined this nominal four-category variable with other survey items tapping into normative alignment with the police and fear of the police and fit latent trait models – and a one-trait solution had the best model fit. Reflecting the nature of police-citizen relations in São Paulo, they named this single trait reflecting police legitimacy beliefs a “coercive-consensual continuum.” Normative alignment and the “normative duty to obey” and “disobedient protest” categories had positive trait loadings, whereas fear of the police and the “coercive obligation” and “rejection of authority” categories had negative trait loadings. This suggests that people who fell on the negative side of the continuum tended to fear police, believed that officers usually act in normatively inappropriate ways, and reported an instrumental obligation to obey officers; and people on the positive side of the continuum had normative connections based on the belief that officers act in normatively appropriate ways and that police have rightful authority (Jackson et al. 2022). In this study, I build on this previous work and operationalize public beliefs about the legitimacy of the police among São Paulo residents as a coercive-consensual continuum.

### **Current study**

This study is focused on the dynamics and consequences of perceived police intrusion and the law enforcement dimension of legal cynicism (cynicism about police protection) in the context of São Paulo. First, I ask whether perceptions of police intrusion and widespread cynicism about police protection mutually reproduce each other over time, and whether they share similar correlates. Second, I explore whether they contribute to undermine public beliefs about police legitimacy. Figure 2 translates the argument into a conceptual model.



**Figure 2.** A conceptual model of the dynamics and consequences of perceived police intrusion and cynicism about police protection.

First, I build on the ethnographic evidence from previous work (e.g., Carr et al. 2007; Rios 2011) and examine whether perceptions of police intrusion and cynicism about police protection are two sides of the same coin: Public expectations that police officers will repeatedly intrude upon the lives of neighborhood residents could increase perceptions that law enforcement agents are neglectful about ensuring public safety; but, likewise, widespread cynicism about the ability of legal institutions to ensure public safety could enhance beliefs that officers constantly overstep their authority. With this process involved, I hypothesize that perceptions of police intrusion and cynicism about police protection reproduce each other over time, somewhat following the logic of a vicious cycle. Making use of longitudinal data from eight neighborhoods in São Paulo, I assess the extent to which they are reciprocally related.

- **Hypothesis 1.1:** Changes in perceived police intrusion are positively associated with changes in cynicism about police protection.
- **Hypothesis 1.2:** Changes in cynicism about police protection are positively associated with changes in perceived police intrusion.

Still focused on the dynamics of intrusive policing and legal cynicism in São Paulo, I explore whether perceived police intrusion and cynicism about police protection are both associated with other factors related to structural disadvantage and aggressive police behavior. Cynicism about police protection is partly produced by neighborhood exposure to concentrated disadvantage and direct experiences of police misconduct (Kirk and Papachristos 2011). Similarly, given that poorer communities tend to be consistently more over-policed (Joel and Oliveira 2022; William and Reisig 2003), it is reasonable to expect that perceptions of police intrusion are also partly produced by exposure to concentrated disadvantage – as well as by direct experiences of intrusive police behavior, such as the experience of being stopped by the police at gunpoint (a surprisingly frequent experience among São Paulo residents; see Oliveira 2024). As such, residents of poorer neighborhoods and those who were more exposed to abusive policing practices should have higher scores of both cynicism about police protection and perceptions of police intrusion.

- **Hypothesis 1.3:** Residents of neighborhoods characterized by more structural disadvantage have higher average scores of cynicism about police protection.

- **Hypothesis 1.4:** Residents of neighborhoods characterized by more structural disadvantage have higher average scores of perceived police intrusion.
- **Hypothesis 1.5:** A recent police stop at gunpoint is associated with increases in scores of cynicism about police protection.
- **Hypothesis 1.6:** A recent police stop at gunpoint is associated with increases in scores of perceived police intrusion.

The second part focuses on the implications of intrusive policing and legal cynicism for public judgments about the legitimacy of legal institutions. My hypothesis is that perceptions of police intrusion and cynicism about police protection undermine legitimacy beliefs. The rationale here is twofold. First, I anticipate that expectations of police intrusion and cynicism about police protection consist of (de)legitimizing norms: people expect legal power to be exerted without the twin harms of excess and neglect. Second, I hypothesize that the experience of distorted responsiveness (Prowse et al. 2020) sends negative identity-related messages of marginalization and carelessness which could signal to members of the public that they do not belong in the superordinate group that legal institutions represent (Mackenzie 2021). The context is the city of São Paulo, where policing's governing principle involves undue coercion, so police legitimacy is measured as a coercive-consensual continuum.

- **Hypothesis 2.1:** Cynicism about police protection is negatively associated with police legitimacy judgments.
- **Hypothesis 2.2:** Perceptions of police intrusion are negatively associated with police legitimacy judgments.

### Data and methods

I draw upon data from a three-wave population-based survey representative of residents of eight neighborhoods in São Paulo in 2015, 2017, and 2018,<sup>6</sup> on the extent and nature of citizens' experiences with the police and their attitudes toward the law and legal institutions. Given that dynamics of over- and under-policing should vary considerably by neighborhood, sampling procedures build on a previous study about São Paulo's extremely high levels of spatial heterogeneity (Nery et al. 2019).

Nery et al. (2019) performed a cluster analysis of nearly 20,000 census tracts in São Paulo using information about their urban, criminal, demographic, and structural characteristics from 1980 to 2010. Eight patterns emerged – i.e., eight categorical types of tracts – and made the point that nonprobability survey designs often under-represent some and over-represent other types of tracts. For each of those eight patterns, the authors selected a highly representative contiguous area with about 20–50 census tracts each and referred to these contiguous areas as *key areas*; they were designed to substantively represent the eight patterns that form the city of São Paulo. In the current study, sampling procedures were employed to represent adults residing in the eight key areas.

In each key area, a two-stage cluster sampling design was used: the first stage involved randomly selecting ten census tracts based on a systematic probability proportional to size (PPS); the second stage involved selecting 150 respondents, each following demographic quotas calculated based on census information (gender, age, and education).<sup>7</sup> In mid-2015, 150 adult residents were selected in each area, thus totaling a sample of 1,200 respondents. In early 2017, 928 of those responded to the second wave of the longitudinal study; in mid-2018, 801 respondents completed the third wave of data collection. The attrition rates of 22.7% and 13.7% are lower than the 25% rate which was expected by the researchers. I assume dropouts to be missing at random.<sup>8</sup> The sample is fairly representative of the adult population in each of the eight areas; and even though it was not designed to represent the adult population residing in the city of São Paulo, demographic characteristics are similar: 53% of the respondents are female (52.7% in the population), 56% are white (60.6% in the population), and the average age is 40.2 years (37 years in the population). 9% of the respondents belong to social class A,<sup>9</sup> the wealthiest segment of society, 8% to social class B1, 24% to social class B2, 25% to social class C1, 24% to social class C2, and 10% to social classes D and E, the most economically deprived; this class composition is also similar to the composition in the population.

### *Variables and measurement strategies*

#### *Cynicism about police protection*

To measure the law enforcement dimension of legal cynicism, adapting from Kirk and Papachristos (2011) original scale, survey respondents were asked to react to the following statements: “laws protect me,” “police in my neighborhood ensure my safety,” and “the police are doing a good job in keeping the streets of my neighborhood peaceful.” Items were measured using a five-point Likert scale (ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree” for the former two items and from “very good” to “very bad” for the latter). Measurement modeling was conducted using pooled confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to ensure longitudinal equivalency. The pairwise maximum likelihood method was used to handle ordinal indicators and missing data with logistic function links (Katsikatsou et al. 2012). Derived factor scores reflecting cynicism about police protection are then used throughout the manuscript. A full account of the measurement models can be found in Appendix A, and a list of all survey items used in this study can be found in Table 1.

#### *Perceived police intrusion*

To measure perceptions of police intrusion, I use survey items adapted from Tyler et al.’s (2014) scale of perceived police intrusion, Tyler et al.’s (2015) scale of personalized police suspicion, and Trinkner et al.’s (2018) scale of perceived bounded authority. Respondents were asked about the extent to which police officers in their neighborhood “act as if they were above the law” and “follow and harass people,” each measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” Measurement modeling follows a similar analytic strategy: pooled one-factor CFA model using pairwise maximum likelihood to handle ordinal indicators and missing data, with derived factor scores reflecting perceptions of police intrusion subsequently used.

Table 1. Average response of all survey indicators by wave

Construct	Survey items	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3	Factor/trait loading
Perceived police intrusion	• Police officers act as if they were above the law in my neighborhood	3.44	3.42	3.33	4.35
	• Police officers follow and harass people in my neighborhood	2.84	2.86	2.74	1.44
Cynicism about police protection	• Laws protect me (reverse coded)	3.48	3.27	3.11	0.68
	• Police in my neighborhood ensure my safety (reverse coded)	3.01	3.11	3.04	1.00
Police legitimacy	• The police are doing a good job in relation to keeping the streets of my neighborhood peaceful (reverse coded)	2.96	3.05	2.96	0.93
	• The police act in accordance with what you believe is right and wrong	3.17	3.08	3.14	1.506
	• People are afraid of the police	3.87	3.44	3.33	-0.601
	• Do you think you should obey the police when you believe they are wrong? (1 = yes)	0.69	0.74	0.73	
	• Why do you think you (should/should not) obey the police even when you believe they are wrong?				
	- (Yes) Normatively grounded duty to obey	0.31	0.33	0.34	0.511
	- (Yes) Coercive obligation to obey	0.40	0.41	0.41	-
	- (No) Disobedient protest	0.08	0.09	0.07	0.083
	- (No) Rejection of authority	0.21	0.17	0.19	-0.159

(Continued)



Table 1. (Continued.)

Construct	Survey items	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3	Factor/trait loading
Perceived procedural fairness	The police in your neighborhood:				
	• Explain clearly why they pull someone over	2.91	2.83	2.89	1.00
	• Make impartial and just decisions	3.15	3.12	3.17	1.11
	• Pay attention to the information people provide them with	3.32	3.32	3.30	1.18
	• Treat people with respect	3.67	3.69	3.70	1.09
–	Police stop (0 = no recent police stop)	0.38	0.24	0.24	–
–	Police stop at gunpoint (0 = no recent police stop or recent police stop with no guns)	0.17	0.12	0.12	–
–	Race (1 = white)	0.57	0.56	0.56	–
–	Gender (1 = male)	0.47	0.46	0.46	–
–	Social class: A	0.09	0.09	0.08	–
–	Social class: B2	0.08	0.08	0.09	–
–	Social class: B1	0.24	0.23	0.24	–
–	Social class: C2	0.25	0.27	0.26	–
–	Social class: C1	0.24	0.24	0.24	–
–	Social class: D/E	0.10	0.09	0.09	–

Note. Estimated means/proportions reported. Unless stated otherwise, all survey indicators were measured using a five-point Likert scale.

### *Police legitimacy (coercive-consensual continuum)*

To measure beliefs about the legitimacy of the police among São Paulo residents, I replicate Jackson et al.'s (2022) measurement model and estimate a coercive-consensual continuum. This construct is measured by the survey items with exactly the same wording as the ones used by Jackson et al. (2022),<sup>10</sup> including items tapping into normative alignment with the police (“the police act in accordance with what you believe is right and wrong”) and fear of the police (“people are afraid of the police”), each measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from “never” to “always”), as well as a binary indicator of duty to obey the police (“do you think you should obey the police even when you believe they are wrong”) and a nominal indicator of duty to obey reflecting the reason why respondents thought they should (“normative duty to obey” or coercive obligation) or should not (“disobedient protest” or “rejection of authority”) obey the police – these four categories were obtained using a supervised machine learning text classification model based on Jackson et al.'s (2022) original content analysis – see Appendix A for more details. All these indicators were used in a pooled latent trait model estimated using maximum likelihood, and derived trait scores were subsequently used to measure police legitimacy beliefs. Higher scores indicate police legitimacy, as reflected by respondents who believe that legal authority is appropriate and should be obeyed based on normative reasoning. Lower scores indicate instrumental and coercive motivations to comply with legal directives, as reflected by respondents who are fearful of the police, believe officers should only be obeyed out fear of sanction or violence, and do not share values with legal authority.

### *Time-varying covariates*

To measure recent exposure to aggressive policing practices, I use a binary indicator reflecting whether respondents recently experienced a police stop at gunpoint. Respondents were first asked whether they “were stopped by the police (*over the last two years/since our last interview*) in the state of São Paulo” (yes or no). Those who answered “yes” were then further asked whether during that stop “police officers pointed a gun” at them (yes or no). While this practice might seem too extreme and rare from a western perspective, it is not uncommon for police stops in Brazil to involve the threat of firearm use: while about one third of the respondents reported having been stopped by the police, almost half (47.1%) of those self-reported encounters involved a gun being pointed at them.

Another key time-varying covariate included expected police conduct, particularly in terms of perceived procedural fairness. Respondents were asked about the extent to which police officers in their neighborhood “clearly explain why they are stopping or arresting people,” “make impartial and fair decisions,” “pay attention to the information provided by people,” and “treat people with respect,” each measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” Measurement modeling followed the similar analytic strategy as other latent constructs: pooled CFA model for ordinal indicators estimated with pairwise maximum likelihood, with derived factor scores reflecting perceptions of procedural fairness subsequently used. A full account of measurement models assessing the scaling properties and empirical distinctiveness of latent variables can be found in Appendix A.

### *Time-constant covariates*

Other covariates included are constant over time at the individual level. One of them is the neighborhood where respondents live, coded as the eight key areas used in the survey design (only respondents who did not move to a different neighborhood were contacted at waves 2 and 3). Because of how the eight key areas were selected, they are proxy for structural differences between neighborhoods (Nery et al. 2019). Other individual-level covariates are self-reported race,<sup>11</sup> gender, and estimated social class.

### **Police–citizen relations by neighborhood**

Table 2 displays some information about the eight neighborhoods, including descriptive statistics of key variables. It is possible to see how different the neighborhoods are, both demographically and in terms of perceived police conduct. Areas 1 through 4 are characterized by different levels of structural disadvantage, with a high proportion of young residents and high homicide rates (both in the area itself and in neighboring locations). Most residents in these areas belong to social class C1 or lower. In line with previous knowledge about Brazilian demographics, these areas also tend to be more racially diverse, with about half of their residents self-reporting as white. Area 4 is the only distinctively non-white neighborhood, with only 31% of the respondents self-defining as white.

These areas are also characterized by an excessive police presence. On average, between one third and half of residents of these neighborhoods reported being recently stopped and questioned by PMSP officers, and around half of all those stops involved an officer pointing a gun at residents. In the distinctively non-white area 4, 65% of all recent self-reported police stops were at gunpoint. Residents of area 4 also tend to perceive officers repeatedly intruding upon the lives of their neighbors to a greater extent than residents of other areas, as well as higher levels of cynicism about the ability of the police to ensure public safety.

Areas 5 and 6 are characterized by less structural disadvantage. With lower homicide rates and fewer young people residing in the neighborhood, most residents belong to social classes B2 and C1. Area 5 is racially diverse, with approximately half of its residents self-identifying as white, while area 6 is a more predominantly white neighborhood: two thirds of the respondents residing in this area self-identify as white. Even in such areas police conduct seems to rely on aggressive strategies, as respectively 50% and 40% of all recent self-reported police stops in areas 5 and 6 happened at gunpoint. Residents' perceptions of police intrusion and cynicism about police protection seem substantially lower than those of residents of areas 1 through 4.

By contrast, areas 7 and 8 constitute wealthier neighborhoods. With a predominantly white population (80% and 87%, respectively), these areas are characterized by lower levels of violence and residents who belong to wealthier segments of society (mostly to social classes A, B1, and B2). Residents also report lower levels of perceived police intrusion and cynicism about police protection and are stopped by police officers less frequently than residents of other neighborhoods. In comparison, police conduct seems to rely less on aggressive practices in these areas, as approximately one quarter of all self-reported police stops involved an officer pointing a gun at residents. Yet, these numbers reflect how coercive police behavior generally is in São Paulo: even

Table 2. Characteristics of the eight neighborhoods

	<b>Area 1</b> (economically precarious, racially diverse)	<b>Area 2</b> (remote and peri-urban, racially diverse)	<b>Area 3</b> (structurally disadvantaged, racially diverse)	<b>Area 4</b> (poor, predominantly non-white)	<b>Area 5</b> (middle class, racially diverse)	<b>Area 6</b> (middle class, predominantly white)	<b>Area 7</b> (affluent, predominantly white)	<b>Area 8</b> (wealthy gated communities, predominantly white)
<b>Criminal patterns</b> ⊥	High homicide rates	High homicide rates	High homicide rates	High homicide rates	Low homicide rates	Low homicide rates	No homicides registered between 2000 and 2010	Low homicide rates
Population	26,068	15,361	41,371	14,862	21,740	29,230	38,721	23,286
Proportion of youth (16–24 year-olds) [0; 1]*	0.25	0.26	0.24	0.21	0.18	0.17	0.13	0.20
Proportion of whites [0; 1]*	0.49	0.45	0.43	0.31	0.51	0.65	0.80	0.87
Average social class [1 (A); 6 (E)]*	4.31	4.04	4.46	4.43	4.1	3.79	2.8	2.1
Proportion of police stops [0; 1] (0 = no recent police stop)*	0.35	0.43	0.41	0.42	0.37	0.40	0.34	0.33

(Continued)

Table 2. (Continued.)

	<b>Area 1</b> (economically precarious, racially diverse)	<b>Area 2</b> (remote and peri-urban, racially diverse)	<b>Area 3</b> (structurally disadvantaged, racially diverse)	<b>Area 4</b> (poor, predominantly non-white)	<b>Area 5</b> (middle class, racially diverse)	<b>Area 6</b> (middle class, predominantly white)	<b>Area 7</b> (affluent, predominantly white)	<b>Area 8</b> (wealthy gated communities, predominantly white)
Characteristics								
Proportion of police stops at gunpoint [0; 1] (0 = recent police not at gunpoint)*	0.42	0.53	0.47	0.65	0.50	0.40	0.28	0.22
Average scores of perceived police intrusion [-1.53; + 1.19]*	0.07	0.06	0.08	0.23	-0.01	-0.08	-0.18	-0.20
Average scores of cynicism about police protection [-1.21; + 1.36]*	0.11	0.06	0.05	0.02	-0.01	-0.09	-0.10	0.05

Note. \*Sample means of variables at first time point reported. Variable ranges shown in square brackets. † Criminal patterns are described according to Nery et al. (2012), who classified census tracts in São Paulo based on their own and their neighboring tracts' homicide rates. "High homicide rates," in this case, refer to areas with a higher homicide rate than both the average for the city and their neighbors' rates – often consisting of at least 15 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants.

in wealthier neighborhoods, police officers drawing their firearms during police stops is common.

## Dynamics of intrusive policing and legal cynicism

### *Estimation strategy*

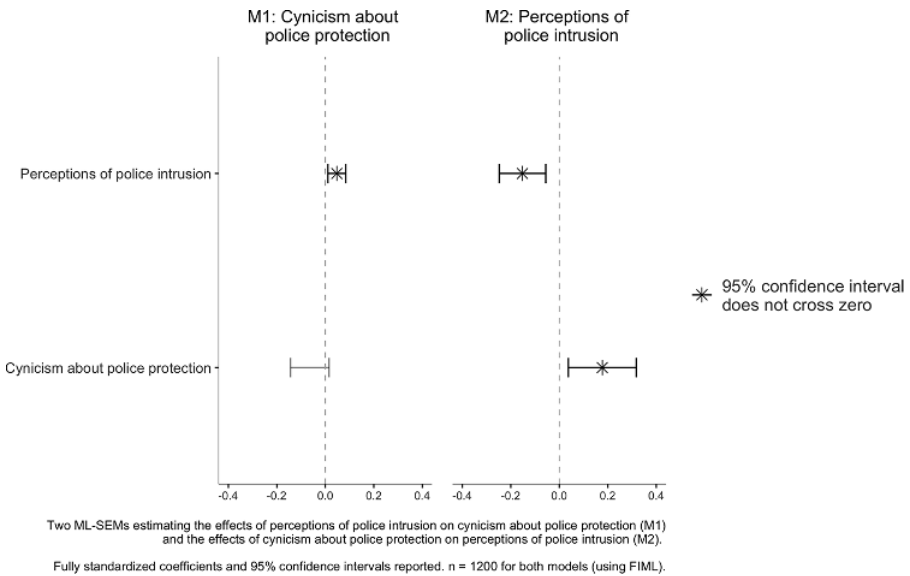
The first set of hypotheses states that perceptions of police intrusion and cynicism about police protection are mutually dependent, reproducing each other.<sup>12</sup> In order to assess this reciprocal relationship, I investigate whether changes in perceptions of police intrusion are associated with changes in cynicism in police protections, and vice versa.

The standard estimation strategy to depict reciprocal relationships involves fitting a cross-lagged panel model (CLPM). However, CLPMs have recently been criticized because the inclusion of autoregressive parameters alone is not enough to handle stable between-unit differences. To overcome this issue, I rely on Allison et al.'s (2017) dynamic panel model with fixed effects estimated with maximum likelihood using the structural equation modeling framework (ML-SEM).<sup>13</sup> The ML-SEM models time-constant between-unit differences using a latent variable reflected by scores of the dependent variable at each time point (except the first one) with loadings constrained to 1 that is correlated with all independent variables, thus effectively functioning in a manner equivalent to standard fixed-effect estimators and controlling for time-constant unobserved heterogeneity (Allison 2009). Crucially, the ML-SEM method allows for reverse causality by assuming sequential exogeneity, which means that estimates are not biased to potential effects of the dependent variable on the explanatory variables over time. According to Leszczensky and Wolbring (2019), this is the best analytic strategy to handle reverse causality.

Following Allison et al.'s (2017) recommendation to explore a reciprocal relationship, this study fits two separate ML-SEM models: M1 focuses on the effects of cynicism about police protection on perceptions of police intrusion; M2 focuses on the effects of perceptions of police intrusion on cynicism about police protection. Each model accounts for temporal stability of latent constructs, controls for time-constant unobserved heterogeneity, and focuses on changes over time. As such, M1 and M2 should provide strong evidence for or against Hypotheses 1.1 and 1.2. In addition, both M1 and M2 include a set of important independent variables that permit the assessment of Hypotheses 1.3 through 1.6. Such independent variables are either time-varying – such as whether respondents self-reportedly experienced a recent police stop at gunpoint – or time-constant, including dummy variables for the neighborhoods where the study took place, self-reported race, gender, and social class. Robust standard errors are used to address potential heteroskedasticity, and full information maximum likelihood is used to handle missing data.<sup>14</sup>

### **Results**

Two ML-SEM models were fitted: M1, predicting cynicism about police protection; and M2, predicting perceptions of police intrusion. Results from both models are partially displayed in Figures 3 and 4. Figure 3 displays results related to Hypotheses 1.1 and 1.2 and focuses on the reciprocal relationship between perceptions of perceived

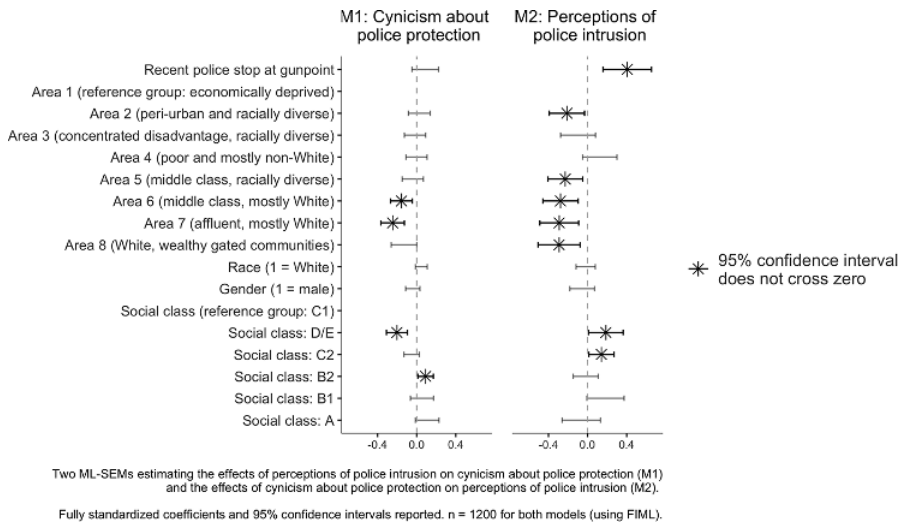


**Figure 3.** ML-SEMs exploring the reciprocal relationship between cynicism about police protection and perceptions of police intrusion.

police intrusion and cynicism about police protection, whereas [Figure 4](#) displays partial results of the same two models, but now related to Hypotheses 1.3 through 1.6 and focused on the social forces producing those outcomes.

First, results broadly suggest that perceptions of police intrusion and cynicism about police protection are reciprocally related, as they are both significantly and positively associated with each other. A one-standard-deviation increase in the scores of perceived police intrusion is associated with a positive change of 0.05 standard deviations in the scores of cynicism about police protection, whereas a one-standard-deviation increase in cynicism about police protection is associated with a positive change of 0.18 standard deviations in perceived intrusion. These results, which take into account reverse causality and time-constant unobserved heterogeneity and focus on within-unit change over time, suggest that the more people expect officers to repeatedly intrude upon their lives, the more skeptical they become about the ability of legal institutions to ensure public safety – and vice-versa. Perceptions of police intrusion and cynicism about police protection are dynamically dependent, simultaneously feeding each other, as predicted by Hypotheses 1.1 and 1.2.

They also share similar, though not identical, correlates. For instance, residents of area 1 – the reference group, a racially diverse neighborhood characterized by high levels of concentrated disadvantage – have similar expectations about the law and the police as residents of other structurally disadvantaged neighborhoods, such as areas 2–4. On the other hand, residents of wealthier and predominantly white neighborhoods, such as areas 6–8, tend to have significantly lower average scores of both perceptions of police intrusion and police cynicism than residents of area 1;



**Figure 4.** Two ML-SEMs exploring the correlates of cynicism about police protection and perceptions of police intrusion.

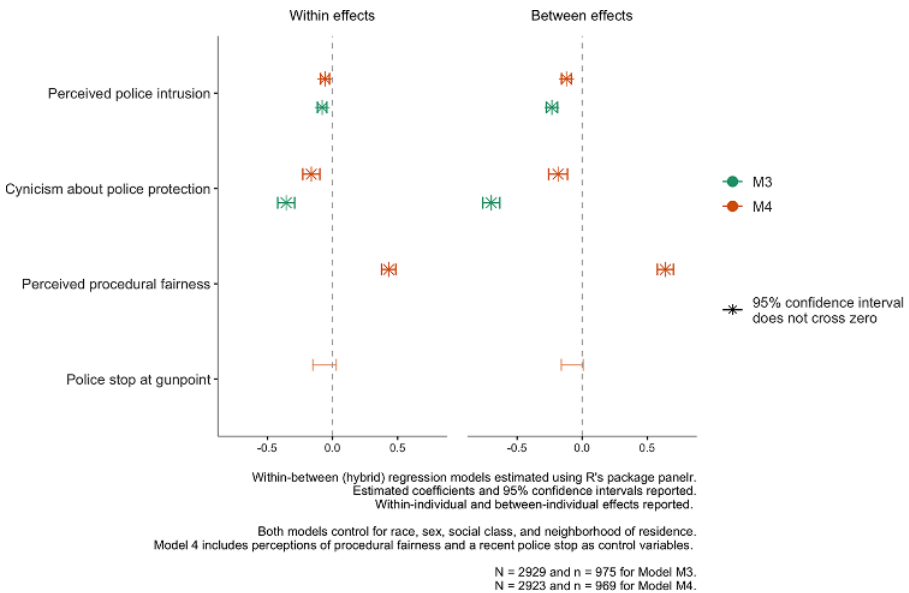
although, interestingly, residents of area 8, a very wealthy neighborhood characterized by a large prevalence of gated communities, have undistinguishable scores of cynicism about police protection as members of area 1. In addition, a recent experience of being stopped by the police at gunpoint is significantly and positively associated with changes in perceptions of police intrusion (an increase of 0.41 standard deviations), but not with cynicism about police protection. Overall, public expectations of law enforcement agents constantly interfering with the lives of neighborhood residents and widespread skepticism about their ability to ensure public safety share key predictors, most notably related to exposure to neighborhood structural conditions.

### Police legitimacy beliefs

#### Estimation strategy

The second set of hypotheses is focused on the implications of intrusive policing and legal cynicism for public judgments about the legitimacy of legal institutions. Drawing on the “within-between” (hybrid) model specification that combines the desirable aspects of both fixed effects and random effects econometric methods (Allison 2009; Long 2021), I assess whether cynicism about police protection and perceptions of police intrusion are associated with undermined legitimacy beliefs. While within-person change over time is crucial for understanding the extent to which perceptions of police intrusion and cynicism about police protection are associated with changes in legitimacy beliefs, between-person differences are also substantially interesting in this application. Similarly to Allison et al.’s (2017) dynamic panel model, the within-between model is not biased by unobserved time-constant heterogeneity but allows





**Figure 5.** Two within-between (hybrid) regression models exploring the association between cynicism about police protection and perceptions of police intrusion and beliefs about the legitimacy of the police.

for the inclusion of time-constant covariates as it simultaneously estimates separate within effects (focused on change over time) and between effects (focused on differences between individuals). Two within-between models are estimated predicting respondents' scores of police legitimacy across the three waves: M3 includes perceptions of police intrusion and cynicism about police protection as the main independent variables and controls for race, gender, social class, and neighborhood of residence; M4 adds perceptions of procedural fairness and police stops at gunpoint, two known predictors of police legitimacy in Brazil (Oliveira 2024). The rationale for having two separate models is to assess changes in the magnitude and statistical significance of any associations. Models are estimated using R's package *panelr* (Long 2021).

### Results

Results of two within-between regression models predicting scores of police legitimacy can be found in Figure 5. M3 shows that, net of neighborhood of residence, social class, self-reported race, gender, and other time-invariant potential confounders, individuals who expect police officers to repeatedly intrude and interfere with people's lives and who are cynical about the ability of legal institutions to ensure public safety have lower average scores of beliefs about the legitimacy of the police (differences of -0.23 and -0.70 points in the police legitimacy scale, respectively, for every one-standard-deviation increase in each scale). Crucially, considering three waves of data (each 18 months apart), every one-standard-deviation increase in scores of perceptions of police intrusion and cynicism about police protection is associated with negative

within-respondent changes in scores of police legitimacy – changes of  $-0.08$  and  $-0.36$  points, respectively.

Results remain statistically different from zero even after controlling for key predictors of police legitimacy among São Paulo residents, such as perceptions of procedural fairness and a recent experience of being stopped by the police at gunpoint. Respondents who expect officers to be intrusive and are cynical about security provision by legal institutions have substantively lower average scores of police legitimacy (differences of  $-0.12$  and  $-0.19$  points, respectively, for every one-standard-deviation increase in each scale). Shifts in perceptions of police intrusion and cynicism about police protection also remain associated with within-respondent changes in scores of police legitimacy over time:  $-0.06$  and  $-0.16$  points, respectively, for every one-standard-deviation in each scale.

Beliefs about the legitimacy of the police are measured as a coercive-consensual continuum (Jackson et al. 2022), so negative coefficients imply shifts toward the coercive side of the continuum. As people increase both their expectations that police officers tend to intrude upon people's lives and their skepticism about officers' willingness to ensure public safety, they tend to start challenging legal authority's claim of power by questioning whether it is the appropriate and rightful authority and, at the same time, developing a coercive relationship with legal agents in which the law should be obeyed mainly out of fear and dismay. This set of results provide evidence in favor of Hypotheses 2.1 and 2.2.

## Discussion

Sociological scholars have long studied the disparity between over-scrutiny and under-support provided by legal institutions. Ethnographic evidence from previous studies suggests that race-class subjugated communities experience legal authority via distorted responsiveness (Prowse et al. 2020): with a neglectful absence of the state in areas where the public expects more state intervention, such as social policies tackling economic inequality and promoting social welfare; and simultaneously an intrusive and sometimes oppressive presence of the state in areas where residents expect less state intervention, such as the overregulation of small illegalities and zero-tolerance approaches on immigration (see, e.g., Ryo 2016; Van Natta 2023). This study adds to this body of evidence by looking at disparities between over-scrutiny and under-protection in public experiences with legal authority via public experiences with neighborhood policing. I examine how police institutions provide an unequal distribution of repression and protection, with predatory and aggressive policing practices alongside high rates of violent victimization and perceived disinterest of legal agents in ensuring public safety (Carr et al. 2007; Rios 2011). Crucially, I demonstrate that the mutual experience of an intrusive and neglectful state via over- and under-policing has implications for the public recognition of the legitimacy of legal institutions (Beetham, 1991), contributing to citizen–authority relations characterized by antagonism and coercion rather than healthy cooperation.

Such disparities in public–authority relations are particularly prominent in Latin American cities, as economic inequality, urban violence, and police brutality are pervasive issues in the region (González 2020; Magaloni et al. 2020). Using São Paulo, Brazil, as a key motivating example, I contribute to this sociological literature by providing a

quantitative assessment of public–police relations characterized by distorted responsiveness, exploring the dynamics of the twin harms of intrusive excess and careless neglect by the police in this global city in the Global South. The study has two key findings. First, I discuss how the over-policing and under-protection of certain communities, rather than paradoxically, can be framed as two sides of the same coin. Second, I discuss how public experiences of legal institutions via distorted responsiveness, characterized by perceptions of intrusive policing and cynicism about police protection, can send relational messages of exclusion and oppression, weakening the social bonds between the public and the state and undermining the legitimacy of legal institutions.

### *Over-policing and under-protection as two sides of the same coin*

In the first part of the study, I question the degree to which public experiences with legal institutions characterized by distorted responsiveness actually constitute a *paradox*. It is only a paradox based on the assumption that policing ensures public safety; once this assumption is questioned, these experiences are not at all paradoxical. As shown by numerous scholars, including by Rios (2011) study of young boys of color in Oakland when he first coined the expression “over-policing–under-policing paradox,” experiences of over-policing and under-protection tend go hand in hand. Residents of disadvantaged communities experience the worst of both worlds: the pervasive and oppressive presence of a state that acts to coerce potential offenders and suspects and the lack of safety and protection produced by a neglectful state (Carr et al. 2007; Prowse et al. 2020). The first key finding is that dynamics of public expectations of police intrusion and skepticism about legal institutions’ interest and competence to ensure public safety are two sides of the same coin.

Using longitudinal data and dynamic panel models (Allison et al. 2017), evidence for this claim is twofold. First, I demonstrate that perceived police intrusion and police cynicism are dynamically related, mutually reproducing each other over time (i.e., Hypotheses 1.1 and 1.2). Models M1 and M2 suggest that perceptions that officers repeatedly intrude upon residents’ lives and a deep-seated belief in the unresponsiveness and incompetence of the criminal justice system are so intertwined (even though they are distinct latent constructs, as per the measurement models in Appendix A) that they are represented by a type of vicious cycle: the more citizens perceive legal institutions to be intruding upon their lives, the more cynical they grow about legal agents’ interest in ensuring public safety; and as citizens expect legal authority not to care about the provision of security, the more they expect the police to interfere and abuse of their power.

This vicious cycle is characterized by the idea that, on the one hand, aggressive policing tactics do not signal to those subjected to such intrusive practices that police are there to protect them; rather, such practices can communicate that those citizens need to be protected *against*. When citizens are treated as objects of suspicion by law enforcement agents (Tyler et al. 2015), they develop cynicism about the ability of the police to ensure public safety. On the other hand, members of the public with deep-seated cynicism toward legal institutions tend to have more antagonist and critical views about police, being more prone to file complaints about police misconduct (McCarthy et al. 2020) and to expect inappropriate police behavior (Slocum & Ann Wiley, 2018). The mutual expectations of abusive policing practices and carelessness

and neglect, by mutually feeding each other, can then inform cultural tools available to residents of some neighborhoods in their relationships with legal authority (Kirk and Papachristos 2011; Sampson and Bartusch 1998).

Second, perceptions of police intrusion and legal cynicism (as measured by skepticism about police protection) are produced by similar social forces. Models M1 and M2 also show that residents of neighborhoods characterized by concentrated disadvantage and racial heterogeneity expect officers to overstep their authority and, at the same time, fail to ensure public safety to a greater extent than residents of more affluent and white communities – as foreshadowed by Hypotheses 1.3. and 1.4. Citizens react to their environmental conditions and develop cultural interpretations about the functioning and viability of the law and the legal institutions. As demonstrated here, structural conditions such as concentrated disadvantage, racial heterogeneity, and violence seem to produce expectations that legal agents *both* repeatedly intrude upon people's lives *and* are disinterested in offering protection to neighborhood residents. As predicted by Hypothesis 1.6 but contradicting Hypothesis 1.5, recent experiences with aggressive policing (e.g., a recent police stop at gunpoint) are only associated with increases in perceived intrusion, not police cynicism. Among potentially several other factors beyond the scope of this paper, expectations of police intrusion are produced both by neighborhood conditions and recent exposure to abusive policing practices, whereas cynicism about police protection seems to be produced mostly by the structural conditions in which citizens reside.

This study contributes to previous knowledge and provides quantitative evidence on the idea that perceptions of police intrusion and cynicism about police protection are two sides of the same coin. Residents of disadvantaged neighborhoods experience the state via distorted responsiveness (Prowse et al. 2020), being subject to both invasive/intrusive and neglectful policing. If the state, among other characteristics, is marked by the duty to offer protection to citizens and oppression to those who defy the law, mirroring decades of studies about a twisted provision of repression and protection by the state in Brazil (Pineiro 1991; Schwarcz and Starling 2015), this study contributes to the idea that residents of some neighborhoods end up neglected on both fronts: facing the coercive arm of the state via intrusive policing but still feeling the lack of safety due to disinterested and unheeding neighborhood policing.

### *Delegitimation of legal institutions*

In the second part of the study, I investigate the implications of widespread expectations of police intrusion and cynicism about police protection for public judgments about the legitimacy of legal institutions. Using longitudinal data and “within-between” (hybrid) models regressing police legitimacy scores, models M3 and M4 provide evidence supporting Hypotheses 2.1 and 2.2: both public perceptions of police intrusion and cynicism about police protection are negatively associated with legitimacy beliefs. Above and beyond other known legitimating norms in Brazil, such as people's expectations of procedural fairness (Jackson et al. 2022), citizens' expectations that police officers constantly interfere with their lives and are disinterested in providing security contribute to damage public judgments about the appropriateness of legal authority's claim of power.

Why? PJT can offer some insightful explanations. The broad theoretical framework, based on the group value model and the group engagement model (Lind and Tom 1988; Tyler and Blader 2003), sustains that social bonds between subjects and an authority figure are enhanced when subjects develop a sense of belonging in the superordinate group the authority figure represents. This sense of belonging can therefore be fostered by communicating to subjects that they are indeed valued members of this group. PJT then applies this logic to the legal context and suggests that when law enforcement agents exert power in normatively appropriate ways, they can enhance the social bonds between the public and legal authority – e.g., because fair process signals group status and value, exerting police power communicating procedural fairness should enhance legitimacy beliefs (Sunshine and Tyler 2003). Extending this argument, one possible explanation for the empirical findings of this study is that, above and beyond signals of group status and value via procedural fairness, law enforcement agents can also send other relational signals that strengthen or weaken such social bonds. It is possible, for example, that when legal agents exert power in intrusive and neglectful ways, they send negative identity-related messages of oppression, marginalization, and dereliction – all of which could signal to members of the public that they do not belong in the group legal authority represents, propelling them to lose faith in legal authority’s right to rule and authority to govern.

These are early thoughts that build on previous research suggesting how other experiences of police behavior beyond procedural fairness could also send relational signals to enhance or undermine legitimacy beliefs (see Huq et al. 2017; Jackson et al. 2023). But it is reasonable to suggest that perceptions of police intrusion and cynicism about police protection consist of legitimating norms among São Paulo residents. In a global city in South America where urban violence and organized crime are urgent social problems faced by residents, intrusive policing practices that potentially neglect the provision of security and fail to ensure public safety could lead to public–authority relations based on fear and coercion and contribute to weaken the social bonds between citizens and legal authority. The Brazilian state has a longstanding authoritarian past, and people have historically been socialized to believe that power can only be exerted with coercion and violence (Pinheiro 1991; Schwarcz and Starling 2015). Results of this study suggest that, by engaging in intrusive practices and fostering widespread beliefs that legal agents do not care about safety provision, police forces in São Paulo can contribute to foster beliefs that legal authority is not the rightful authority – which, as previous research on police legitimacy suggests, could lead to a decrease in people’s willingness to voluntarily comply with the law and cooperate with legal institutions and an increase in public tolerance of the use of violence.

### Limitations

Limitations should, of course, be acknowledged. First, this study was carried out in the context of São Paulo, which is a specific social setting in the Global South. More research about the dynamics and consequences of over- and under-policing is needed in other contexts, both in the US and elsewhere. In particular, the relationship between perceptions of police intrusion and cynicism about police protection and legitimacy beliefs needs to be assessed in other contexts. Second, this study only reported associations as no attempts to identify causal effects were made. All data analyzed here

are observational and causal claims could not be made without unreasonably strong assumptions. Third, I did not engage in ecological analysis as only eight neighborhoods were included in the study. Ideally, ecological surveys are necessary to properly assess spatial dynamics, including public–authority relations in areas where criminal governance claims legitimacy (Lessing and Denyer Willis 2019). Fourth, measures of perceived police intrusion and cynicism about police protection used in this paper can still be improved upon. Future research should explore different survey items tapping into expectations of police interference and skepticism about the extent to which law enforcement agents care about providing members of the public with protection. Finally, this quantitative assessment of the dynamics and consequences of police intrusion and cynicism focused on attitudinal measures. Future research could extend this and include administrative and behavioral data to investigate policing practices, contacts, and activities in certain neighborhoods that could reflect over- and under-policing.

## Conclusions

I started this study with the idea, largely documented by neighborhood ethnographies in the US and Latin America, that residents of some neighborhoods often experience an overwhelming presence of legal authority that intrudes upon their lives, and yet feel neglected by the law, which is rarely there to protect them. This has been described as an apparent paradox: the state makes itself excessively present but at the same time not present enough, and communities face simultaneously over-scrutiny and under-protection (Bell 2016; 2017; Campeau et al. 2021). This distorted responsiveness (Prowse et al. 2020) by the state in disadvantaged communities manifests across various domains where the public depends on legal authority. For example, immigrant populations and noncitizens in different countries are largely excluded from safety-net resources such as healthcare and other institutional support while, at the same time, facing heavy-handed and over-inquisitive detention practices (Ryo 2016; Van Natta 2023). Similarly, low-income families often encounter invasive procedures when accessing welfare benefits, including rigorous eligibility checks and frequent monitoring, while also receiving inadequate support from the state to meet their basic needs (Feely et al. 2020). Even gig economy workers are subject to extensive surveillance and high levels of scrutiny, with constant monitoring of their performance and productivity, while lacking basic employment protections (Harpur and Blanck 2020). This dual experience with legal authority, where the state is both everywhere and nowhere, can lead to system avoidance and contribute to expand social inequality (Sendroui et al. 2022), ultimately compromising people's inclusion in the body politic and their very status as citizens (Bell 2017; Soss and Weaver 2017).

This study added to this body of literature by assessing the extent to which public–state relations characterized by over-scrutiny and under-support also contribute to undermining the legitimacy of legal authority (Beetham 1991). I use public experiences with law enforcement across different neighborhoods in the city of São Paulo, Brazil, as my empirical example – a context in which citizens face epidemic levels of violent crime and at the same time are fearful of police officers who often use violence to wield their power (González 2020; Magaloni et al. 2020). As previously suggested by ethnographic accounts of over-policed communities (Carr et al. 2007; Haldipur 2019), some

people's experiences with policing are characterized by repeated intrusive and harassing behavior by police officers alongside failures to control crime and ensure public safety. I drew on the theory legal of cynicism, specifically Kirk and Papachristos's (2011) law enforcement dimension of legal cynicism, to show how perceived intrusive policing and cynicism about police protection are two sides of the same coin: they reflect people's experiences with legal authority via distorted responsiveness, with the state being simultaneously absent and pervasive (Bell 2017; Prowse et al. 2020).

Crucially, this distorted responsiveness undermines the legitimacy of legal authority. When legal agents over-scrutinize and intrude upon citizens' lives while also failing to provide sufficient support and protection, they send relational messages of oppression, marginalization, and neglect that signal social exclusion – weakening the social bonds between the public and authority, undermining law-related values, and shaping people's identities (Bell 2017; Oliveira and Jackson 2021). While this study focuses on policing, its implications extend far beyond the criminal legal system. In various domains – such as immigrant populations facing the threat of detention and lack of access to safety-net resources or marginalized communities of color subjected to frequent monitoring and limited welfare support – the over-scrutiny and under-protection by legal institutions contribute to their own delegitimation. When legal authority fails to offer adequate support while excessively regulating citizens, it breeds a climate of distrust and legal cynicism, ultimately leading people to start questioning its legitimacy. Future sociolegal research on public–state relations can gain valuable insights from this integrated approach, combining legal cynicism theory and PJT, which highlights the importance of legal authority's treatment of citizens in shaping legitimacy judgments.

**Supplementary material.** The supplementary material for this article can be found at <https://doi.org/10.1017/lsr.2025.10>.

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The second language abstract in this paper was written by the author, Thiago R. Oliveira, who takes full responsibility for the accuracy of the translated abstract and is a proficient speaker.

## Notes

1. The second language abstract in this paper was written by Thiago R. Oliveira (University of Manchester). Thiago R. Oliveira takes full responsibility for the accuracy of the translated abstract and is a proficient speaker.
2. There have also been other extensions that build on the legal cynicism literature, such as research on legal consciousness, defined as “the ways in which people experience, understand, and act in relation to law” (Chua and Engel 2019, p. 336; see also Merry 1990). Alston (2024), for example, combined both frameworks in his study about activists' use of mobile phones to record episodes of police misconduct.
3. I use the expressions “perceptions” and “expectations” of police behavior interchangeably in this study to keep the prose crisp. I am drawing on Oliveira et al. (2021) to conceptualize perceptions of police

behavior as task-specific public evaluations and expectations of police conduct: core characteristics and actions of the police that lead them to be more or less trusted to do things they tasked to do (see also Joseph et al. 2017). When citizens make assessments that officers tend to intrude upon people's lives, they learn to expect officers to act intrusively – i.e., officers are then perceived as untrustworthy to avoid acting in intrusive ways.

4. Rules and procedures include, for instance, the prohibition of killings (Dias and Darke 2016). Previous work suggests that organized crime is at least partly responsible for the huge homicide drop in the 2000s (Ciro et al. 2018).

5. With 83,000 sworn officers, the PMSP operates under a rate of one officer for every 530 residents in the state of São Paulo. The PMSP is the police department in charge of street-level policing in the whole state of São Paulo, not just the city. For comparison purposes, the Chicago Police Department has approximately 12,000 sworn officers and a rate of one officer for every 220 residents, and the Philadelphia Police Department has approximately 6,300 sworn officers and a rate of one officer for every 250 residents.

6. The gap between waves of data is approximately 18 months.

7. In each selected census tract, interviewers randomly selected one household to start, and then went door to door asking residents to take part in the study until they completed their demographic quotas. Unfortunately, the company hired to conduct the data collection did not report the refusal rate. All interviews were conducted face-to-face, in Portuguese, at the respondents' place of residence using Tablet-Assisted Personal Interviewing (TAPI).

8. A binomial logistic regression model predicting dropouts at the second wave indicates no association between perceptions of perceptions of police intrusion at T1, gender, race, social class, or age and the probability of dropping out at T2. The only significant predictor was perceived cynicism about police protection at T1: an increase of one standard deviation in the scores of this variable was associated with a decrease of 4.6% in the probability of dropping out (marginal effects at the mean). Respondents at T2 have slightly more negative views of the police. In terms of the probability of dropping out at T3, the only significant predictor was age, where every year was associated with a small decrease of 0.3% in the probability of dropping out.

9. Social classes are assigned following the *Critério Brasil*, a system of social class assignment based on respondents' economic positioning and buying power. It consists of a point-based system for the economic classification of households developed by the Brazilian Market Research Association (ABEP). In 2016, D-E households had an average monthly income of 768 BRL (approximately 230 USD) while A households had an average monthly income of 20,888 BRL (approximately 6,420 USD). The CCEB 2016 report is available at <http://www.abep.org/criterio-brasil> (visited on 08/01/2021).

10. Two surveys were fielded using the same instrument: a 2015 cross-sectional representative survey of the adult population residing in the city of São Paulo and a 2015-2018 three-wave panel survey representative of the adult population residing in eight neighborhoods in the city of São Paulo. The original content analysis of open-ended responses was conducted using the cross-sectional data.

11. There are officially five racial groups: white (Caucasian), black (Afro-descendant), mixed race, Asian-descendant, and indigenous. I dichotomize racial groups for the sake of simplicity and because whiteness is what more clearly communicates social privileges in Brazil, but by no means do I imply that the other four groups are homogeneous. For a discussion on racial inequality in Brazil, including how to measure racial identities, see Bailey et al. (2013).

12. Previous research has framed this type of mutual relationship as Granger causality (Hamaker et al. 2015), although such relationships cannot be causal as they form a cyclic relationship; considering the causal inference literature, there are no statistical methods that can depict mutual causal relationships (VanderWeele 2015). For this reason, I refrain from implying mutual causation and use the expression *reciprocal relationship* instead.

13. In the same spirit, Hamaker et al. (2015) developed the random intercepts cross-lagged panel model (RI-CLPM), which explicitly distinguishes between-unit variations and within-unit change over time, thus providing estimates that are not biased by reverse causality and time-invariant unobserved heterogeneity.

14. Given that some parameters were constrained to equality across waves, no observations were dropped to estimate the model. Models without full information maximum likelihood, with unconstrained parameters, and considering only respondents who took part in the study at each time period were estimated as robustness checks. Results remain virtually unaltered.



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