

## Article

# Corporate Social Responsibility and Sustainability through Institutional Legitimacy in Police Forces

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**Abstract:** This paper analyses the effect of institutional legitimacy on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and sustainability in police forces through their methods and procedures (procedural justice) that determine citizens' trust in the police, which theoretically influences organised coexistence in human communities (social effectiveness). CSR can increase collective well-being through legitimacy, sustained by police action. An anonymous citizen survey was carried out to verify the theoretical proposal to inquire about their opinions on the legitimacy, methods, and community relations between Spanish police forces and the community. The hypotheses were analysed with a structural equation system. The practical implications aspire to know the citizens' opinions about the methods and procedures used by the Spanish police and their relations with Spanish civilians. Finally, citizens consider that police actions and procedures are institutionally and legally regulated competencies, and, therefore, citizens cannot influence them.

**Keywords:** corporate social responsibility; sustainability; Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); procedural justice; social effectiveness; police forces; structural equations



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## 1. Introduction

The Spanish police recently celebrated their 200th anniversary. Throughout these two centuries, they have changed their name and even their symbols and uniforms, parallel to the different political regimes that governed Spain, until they reached the current National Police Corps or National Police. Regardless of the names and denominations, they have always maintained a spirit of adaptation to society and a capacity for innovation that has culminated in the implementation of the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Plan of the Spanish National Police, published by the Resolution of 18 September 2023 and incorporated as one of the objectives of the Strategic Plan 2022–2025 of the Spanish National Police.

Through this CSR Plan, the National Police seek to acquire new commitments to sustainability in a complex, globalised, multipolar, and constantly evolving world, being aware of the impact that the police generate on their environment in order to promote socially responsible action.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set by the United Nations (UN) in its Agenda 2030 [1] offer a shared vision, a roadmap with which organisations can begin to

strategically align CSR initiatives with sustainable development agendas [2,3]. However, a review of the literature shows that there is very little information on the relationship between CSR activities and the SDGs and on the role of business in this process [4,5].

To this end, they are committed to becoming a more human, sustainable, and excellent police force aligned with the SDGs. Specifically, the Spanish National Police are committed to contributing to goals 3° Health and well-being; 4° Quality education; 5° Gender equality; 6° Clean water and sanitation; 7° Sustainable and clean energy; 8° Decent work and economic growth; 9° Industry, innovation, and infrastructure; 10° Reducing inequalities; 11° Sustainable cities and communities; 12° Responsible production and consumption; 13° Climate action; 16° Peace, justice, and strong institutions; and 17° Partnerships for the goals [1].

CSR and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) guide the planning of strategic measures rooted in sustainability principles. This approach promotes responsible management practices across various sectors that significantly impact citizenship [2,6,7], including areas such as citizen education [8].

Although the CSR Plan is already in application within the Spanish National Police, it is still in the process of being fully developed. This paper aims to contribute to its development and implementation by proposing the application of Institutional Legitimacy as one of the most solid and sustainable mechanisms available to the police to achieve their objectives. Specifically, the authors construct a theoretical framework to study the latent variables or factors within “Legitimacy and Trust”, “Improvement of Procedures”, and “Community Relations” with the goal of enhancing the understanding and effectiveness of CSR.

Our research contributes to the body of knowledge by utilising survey data from the Spanish police forces, and to the authors’ best knowledge, it is the first to examine legitimacy from the stakeholder point of view in the security domain, based on Suchman’s definition of legitimacy, which we will discuss in the literature review. It also addresses limitations found in recent research, such as that by Li et al. [9], who highlighted the role of legitimacy as a dimension but did not fully explore its implications in the security domain. By comparing legitimacy in the security context, our study provides deeper insights into the causal relationship between CSR, procedural justice, and legitimacy. These concepts converge within a socially responsible system where actors have established “norms, values, beliefs, and definitions” [10] p. 574. Additionally, our article employs a Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) approach in quantitative research to illustrate the relationships between these variables. The findings demonstrate how these elements interact within three dimensions, contributing to the exploration of sustainability through the Institutional Legitimacy of the police forces in Spain.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Corporate Social Responsibility and Sustainability

In the last two decades, the debate on the strategic potential of CSR and sustainability has intensified. A significant challenge for organisations has been aligning their sustainability policies with the SDGs and their associated administrative and managerial requirements [11]. This alignment necessitates a firm commitment to adopting and integrating sustainable practices across all levels of operations [12–15]. The EU, through its main bodies (the European Commission, the European Parliament, and the European Council), has introduced various initiatives, both binding and advisory, aimed at promoting CSR and good governance. These efforts seek to enhance transparency and improve the reliability of evaluation and validation processes [16].

In 2001, the European Commission’s Green Paper: Promoting a European Framework for Corporate Social Responsibility, defined CSR as “the voluntary integration by enterprises of social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in their relations with their stakeholders” [17] p. 3. This document initiated a debate within the

Union on ways to promote and implement CSR in European and international enterprises through innovative practices.

In this regard, the European Alliance for CSR initiative established eight priority areas for action by the European Commission. These initiatives led to the development of a set of practical tools aimed at addressing gender equality, responsible management in supply chains, and improving dialogue with investors on the non-financial performance of companies [17]. Additionally, the European Commission has published various communications on CSR to support these efforts further.

On the other hand, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) guidelines, last revised in 2011, include a section (Section V) dedicated to the environment. This section emphasises the need to protect the environment, public health, and safety and to conduct activities that contribute to the broader goal of sustainable development [18].

CSR involves promoting excellence in companies, particularly in the areas of working conditions and production processes [19,20]. It encompasses three dimensions of sustainability: economic, social, and environmental development [21,22]. Additionally, it considers more recent aspects of sustainability and the roles of various stakeholders, focusing on their impact on citizenship, the environment, and competitiveness [23–26].

CSR began to be discussed in the last century, with Bowen [27] indicating that companies should set their objectives and policies and make decisions based on societal values. Frederick [28] p. 60 was the first to state that “social responsibility in the final analysis implies a public posture toward society’s economic and human resources and a willingness to see that those resources are utilized for broad social end and not simply for the narrowly circumscribed interests of private persons and forms”. More contemporary authors relate corporate governance to markets and stakeholders through the lens of CSR strategic policy, emphasizing ethical and responsible behaviour, as well as economic and business involvement in the implementation of the SDGs [29,30]. Academic discussions on CSR often emphasize its role as a strategic policy that enhances business performance, offers competitive advantages, and contributes to the developmental progress of countries [31,32].

Among the opportunities for new contributions in the field of CSR, authors such as Barrera-Martínez et al. [33] highlight the institutional evolution that considers CSR a key factor in contributing to society. This perspective is grounded in institutional theory and stakeholder perspectives. Consequently, in public administration contexts, such as public safety, CSR is accompanied by measures that enhance its sustainability. Both public and private companies implement CSR and sustainability strategies across various dimensions [34,35].

## 2.2. Institutional Legitimacy

Legitimacy is a resource that institutions can use to improve their CSR performance, social acceptance, and objectives. It covers many activities, public, as a resource to gain credibility in foreign host countries [36] or bonding in Transnational Norm-Building Networks (TNNs) [37], or private, as in the tourism industry [38], controversial industries such as oil companies [39] or the tobacco industry [40], rating agencies [41] or accountancy firms [42], or multinational gold mining industries in foreign countries [43].

Legitimacy is a mighty tool to gain reputation in foreign host countries through political Corporate Social Responsibility (PCSR) measures [36] or environmental management initiatives (EMIs) [38] or to reduce default risk in international investments [41] and to avoid reluctance in controversial industries [39,40].

The present work aims to extend the concept of legitimacy based on corporate responsibility to the public provision of security, and it drives sustainability in the economic, social, and environmental realms. If a police corps, like the Spanish police, lasted two centuries long, it proves its resilience and sustainability throughout history.

CSR is closely linked to sustainability: CSR strategies indeed bolster the environmental performance of a company and therefore its sustainability [32]. The tool to achieve CSR

and sustainability in organisations is legitimacy, which has been widely studied over many decades.

Suchman's classic definition of legitimacy is perhaps the most common: "Legitimacy is a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions" [10] p. 574. It refers to the obligation of a certain authority or institution beyond self-interest and in the pursuit of socially valuable goals [44], making them socially responsible and sustainable. It is based on the stakeholders concept of Freeman [45] and on ethical, responsible behaviour of the organisations [46,47].

Lindblom [48] states that legitimacy is dynamic: the stakeholders continuously evaluate corporate output, methods, and goals against an ever-evolving expectation. The legitimacy gap will fluctuate, although a given corporation has not taken any voluntary action to promote change. Indeed, as expectations of the relevant publics change, the corporation must make changes accordingly, or the legitimacy gap will grow as the level of conflict increases and the levels of positive and passive support decrease.

Amos [49] uses an organisational legitimacy theory (the strategic approach) as a theoretical lens for understanding and appreciating disclosure practices. Wang and Cardon [50] highlight the role played by leaders and communication strategies in bolstering the value of organisational legitimacy. They state that leaders are encouraged to achieve high rates of social presence in order to link with stakeholders and employees. Also, managers with greater power and legitimate authority are urged to reach higher sustainability levels and enforce environmental responsibilities, justifying that achievements, rewards, or incentives for work performance are appropriate [51].

Joutsewirta and Vaara [52] emphasise that legitimacy is defined by rhetorical narratives and discourses constructed by the dominant ideology and power relations in a given society. In a globalised world, however, they become more important because they produce global advantages: increased access to the resources provided by stakeholders; product and brand differentiation; improved external and internal trust [53]; increased environmental sensitivity and sustainability that, therefore, makes it easier to enforce external regulations [38]; positive impact on public and stakeholder opinions [53]; generation of corporate reputation; and potential advantage to expand in a multicultural environment [54]. The last cited authors also present legitimacy as a developmental stage in a firm's internationalisation process. Acuti et al. speak of the dynamic character of legitimacy because it must adapt to a changing environment [55].

Pava and Krautz [46] set the criteria to evaluate the legitimacy of CSR: (1) local knowledge, (2) level of responsibility, (3) shared consensus, and (4) relationship to financial performance. Afterwards, we should refer to these principles again when referring to social effectiveness.

As important as the application of the legitimacy principle is the public communication of its use. Acuti [55] speaks of the active dimension or implementation of legitimacy policies and the presentation of these policies to the public. Adomako and Tran [47] emphasise that their dissemination improves a company's public image, increases stakeholder support, and allows access to more resources, but it is essential for the company to avoid unethical behaviour and to give an image of false legitimacy. Aligned with this, Acuti [55] speaks of hypocrisy to describe the behaviour of institutions that intend to apply sincere legitimacy policies but otherwise manipulate public opinion and their stakeholders. The effect, when unmasked, is reputational failure. Hadani [56] emphasises the previous trustworthiness of the company's responsible or irresponsible behaviour, as they affect credibility and future development expectations.

Diez Martín et al. [57] study strategies that enable legitimacy development in companies. In particular, an organisation can maintain its legitimacy by developing surveillance and/or protection strategies. To the traditional dimensions (regulatory, pragmatic, moral, and cultural-cognitive), social-sociopolitical legitimacy is added by the authors as the acceptance of previously existing norms in a society [58] and, in that sense, social legitimacy

directly influences business performance [59]. Gordo-Molina and Diez [58] conducted a comparative study of articles published in Web of Science and concluded that the impact of legitimacy is related to the public acceptance of an institution or its social prestige. There is a basic similarity in employing legitimacy for increasing social value and orientation driven toward stakeholders (society as a whole). We, therefore, consider exploring the police's socially responsible and sustainable behaviour on the basis of legitimacy and social responsibility, concerning citizens' opinions of what policing behaviours are deemed responsible and socially worthwhile or otherwise.

We adhere to LaFree's Doctrine of Legitimacy [60], which we deem congruent with Suchman's [10] (see above). LaFree argues that social institutions participate in a web of social relations by shaping a shared value system consistently with the legal and regulatory norms that authorise it to exercise its powers to prevent and respond to crime [44,61]. The police rely on public perception to enlist citizens' support and discretionary cooperation [44]. Yet, at the same time, police (and other institutions) provide citizens with guidance as to what behaviours settle the socially accepted norm by contributing to informal social control [62]. Through these processes, LaFree explains that public institutions, including the police, create and reinforce shared norms and values and clarifies which behaviours are expected and desirable [61]. Acceptance of legitimacy in a social group reinforces normative behaviour, increases predictability in social interactions, and reinforces interpersonal trust that other citizens also share the same value system, making it sustainable through generations: the new norm is legitimised, and new members are educated through the socialisation process about the norms set by institutions.

The sociologist Max Weber [63] initiated a debate about social legitimacy and its influence on individual behaviour by considering legitimacy to be a motivator to comply with the rules set by authority figures voluntarily. For Weber, legitimate power in modern democracies is achieved through authority acting with legal rationality.

When citizens perceive authority to be legitimate, they are inclined to internalise obligations as personal responsibilities and to act consistently with authorities' commands, even if a given behaviour contradicts self-interest and even when it is contrary to their moral judgment of what would be right or wrong [64–66].

### *2.3. Legitimacy and Procedural Justice*

Police legitimacy is a constructed concept [67]. The police achieve legitimacy through practices and procedures that are in accordance with the law and social expectations and respect human rights [68,69]. These practices and procedures make the difference between a socially acceptable or unacceptable use of the police force for citizens [61]. They are known as procedural justice, understood as the procedurally appropriate way in which police officers act, who are reverent of citizens' rights and proportionate in their use of police means [70]. However, if the population sees authorities as unfair and disrespectful, social trust is damaged in three ways: (1) little confidence in legal authorities reduces their legitimacy in the public's eyes; (2) the less the authorities are seen as legitimate, the more disobedience and resistance to their orders and instructions they will encounter; (3) public support for Institutional Legitimacy and willingness to cooperate with the police and the justice system will decrease.

We could compare procedural justice with the company's trustworthiness, as identified by Hadani [56]. In both cases, the previous behaviour of the police or a given company strongly predicts the future expectations of the stakeholders and, therefore, their future behaviour.

To summarise, St. Louis and Greene [71] point out two dimensions of citizens' understanding of legitimacy: substantive legitimacy, when they believe that the rule is reasonable, and procedural legitimacy, when they understand that it is fairly enforced: when citizens understand that the police and judges fairly enforce the law, they agree to voluntarily comply [66]. Conversely, when they perceive it to be applied in a biased way, voluntary compliance crumbles [71].



#### 2.4. Social or Collective Effectiveness: More Resilient Neighbourhoods, More Cooperative Societies

According to St. Louis and Greene [71], in communities that have high crime rates, there is an inverse correlation between the demand for police services and promising opinions of the police. Although police demand is higher than the average, neighbours are reluctant to cooperate with the police. At the same time, they perceive their communities as being more insecure than others and police forces as not very legitimate or trustworthy. This bolsters a spiral of non-collaboration, social demoralization, and public environment wreckage, which turns certain areas into crime black spots that, ultimately, drive to deterioration.

Conversely, social trust and engagement can improve communities in three ways: promoting participation to solve priority problems and the functioning of public services; making public services more accountable and efficient; and improving collaboration with the police by increasing their legitimacy [72,73] because higher police legitimacy levels are associated with higher collective efficacy [74,75].

Neighbours who picture themselves as part of a community are more likely to bond together to solve common problems [76–78]. Sampson et al. [78] called this behaviour collective efficacy, meaning a shared sense of trust, common values, and reciprocal expectations by neighbours to exercise informal social control together by building social capital and mitigating crime and insecurity levels, even in socially disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

Sampson et al. point out that it creates a sense of community by compensating adversity with solidarity [78]. This feeling is independent of friendship or other personal ties. Collective efficacy is the product of a neighbourhood socialisation process that begins when individuals who would otherwise remain isolated can communicate and share their ideas and anxieties. This kind of connection creates recognition and a sense of belonging, with joint interests, expectations, and concerns, including collective security.

An increasing number of neighbours experience more trust and solidarity with their fellow citizens, develop and share the same system of norms and beliefs, and are willing to act to benefit other community members. Individual or collective actions convey a sense of common responsibility and are not undertaken by the possibility of threat or reward but in the hope of reciprocal behaviour [71]. The consequence is that neighbourhood members act in common to watch younger members' behaviour, worry about intruders or molesters, or minimise disorderly conduct. Communities with high social engagement and, therefore, considerable efficacy can counteract their neighbourhoods' potential structural disadvantages and achieve better outcomes. This is likely the case of companies with high levels of legitimacy through CSR practices.

Social controls do not need to be strict. Informal social control also increases social efficacy [79]. Different authors provide plenty of evidence for the positive influence of social efficacy on security problems [51,76,80,81].

Conversely, structural disadvantages reduce neighbourhood cohesion, informal social control, and collective efficacy [82–84]. Higher crime levels deteriorate social coexistence [85]. We can highlight the work of Snell [86], who studies the relations among the neighbourhood type, the crime level, and failed coexistence due to fear of crime and, therefore, supervised insecurity. Steptoe measures insecurity problems, health, and living standards as stressors in depressed neighbourhoods [87]. Warner correlates the lack of social control in communities with high drug abuse levels [88].

The antidote to such deterioration is to enhance legitimacy through procedural justice by reinforcing social efficacy. High police legitimacy levels influence the enhancement of social efficacy because police actions increase the perception of their legitimacy by, in turn, enhancing a community's collective efficacy. So, their effect is beneficial in both directions [75]. In this way, the police can increase the sense of legitimacy and social efficacy by promoting the quality of their services and minimising their wrong actions, which are understood as those that do not comply with procedural justice.

This social efficiency concept is linked with concern about the social economy to promote collectivity and people's initiative when it comes to generating social capital, as

defined by several authors [89], and fulfills two components (relational and structural) of social capital, as reflected by Nieves-Nieto and Briones-Peñalver [90].

It also fits well with Pava and Krautz's [46] criteria for legitimacy of CSR: (1) local knowledge, or close bonds among neighbours; (2) level of responsibility, a shared responsibility in a common community; (3) shared consensus, which is paramount in this case, because, otherwise, there is no common ground to build social effectiveness; and, finally, (4) relationship to financial performance. Unluckily, this last criterion is difficult to gauge due to the public character of security not prone to being valued or measured on economic terms.

### 3. Materials and Methods

#### 3.1. Hypotheses Based on the Theoretical Framework

The present work hypotheses are based on the following concepts:

**Legitimacy and trust:** Legitimacy is the social cement that enables organised coexistence in a human community based on norms that sanction deviant behaviour and facilitate permanent and stable social bonds [10,63]. The legitimacy perception fosters citizens' trust in both the CSR domain [91] and the police [92–94].

**Improved procedures:** Transparency in policing by informing citizens about their methods and allowing them to sustain their expectations and demands is a basic requirement for police legitimacy [95–97]. If any citizen does not have a clear idea of what to expect from the police, the assessment of police legitimacy performance becomes useless and, therefore, untrustworthy.

**Procedural justice:** Operational performance is defined in procedural justice terms by considering policing techniques, methods, and procedures [68,69,94]. Citizens' perceptions of police work and their contribution to generating social value depend on what types of interactions are settled: proper, swift, and respectful procedures improve relations with the community and vice versa.

**Community relations:** These relations reflect a given society's opinion of the performance of law enforcement. Good operational performance and policing practices reinforce the police's sense of social commitment and contribute to improving its image that, in turn, improves intrasocietal coexistence with a multiplier effect on welfare [76,78,80,81]. This concept represents the fundamental importance of the Citizen Participation Principle. Considering the importance of the stakeholders' perspective [45], we focus our questions on social groups with a record of harsh relationships with the police, such as youngsters and depressed neighbourhoods with a high ranking of antisocial acts.

Accordingly, the following hypotheses can be formulated (Figure 1):

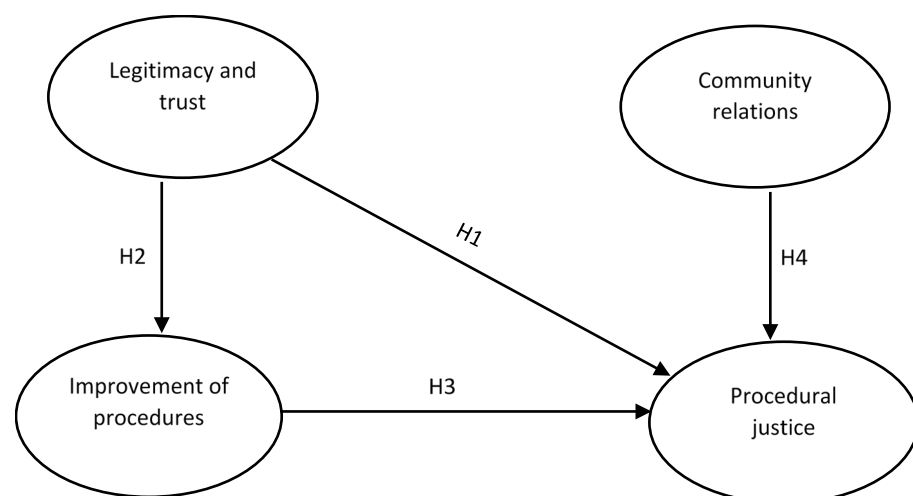


Figure 1. Formulated hypotheses.

**Hypothesis H1.** *Legitimacy and trust in the police influence procedural justice.*

**Hypothesis H2.** *Legitimacy and trust influence knowledge of the police and the methods they use.*

**Hypothesis H3.** *The means and procedures used by the police influence procedural fairness.*

**Hypothesis H4.** *Police relations with the community influence procedural justice.*

### 3.2. Empirical Study

The information to back the hypotheses comes from a survey completed via an Internet link for the anonymous and voluntary answering of a questionnaire while the present research work for a doctoral thesis was underway as part of the Legal and Business Sciences Program at the Polytechnic University of Cartagena, Spain. The survey pursues citizens' opinions of their experiences and opinions of the police forces in the Spanish security context.

The survey was disseminated through different organisations in the Murcia Region and the Alicante Province (Spain): CROEM, the University of Murcia (ISEN-Associated Center), the Catholic University of San Antonio, the Polytechnic University of Cartagena, and various associations and public/private organisations related to the Citizen's Participation Detachment of the General Directorate of the Police. The possibility of the survey's recipients voluntarily and anonymously disseminating it to their contacts was also offered. Anonymity ensured that responses were not conditioned by bias concerning opinions for or against the police.

The survey population included five thousand (5000) potential candidates, of whom 421 individuals responded to the survey from January to July 2022. The individuals surveyed were predominantly male (see Table 1), and their ages ranged between 18 and 82 years.

**Table 1.** Gender.

		Frequency	Percentage
Valid	Male	304	72.2
	Female	117	27.8
	Other	0	0
	Total	421	100.0

To the author's best knowledge, this is the first study of its kind within Spain. The only comparable study, however much different, is that by Achutegui [98], who carried out a qualitative study using 40 surveys of minors as part of the Basque Government's Protect Program.

The completed surveys were electronically processed and entered into a data collection matrix that validated the results obtained from the submitted surveys.

A fact sheet on the empirical research is attached in Table 2:

**Table 2.** Fact sheet of the empirical research.

Population	More than 5000 residents from the Murcia Region and the Alicante Province
Data collection method	Web questionnaire
Sample size	421 valid answers
Collection period	Between July and September 2022

The survey explores different aspects of respondents' views of the Spanish policing model and the activity of police forces, as shown in Table 3.



**Table 3.** Questionnaire items, sorted by concept.

Concepts	Items	Description
Legitimacy and trust	4.1	Security forces are necessary to maintain order and security.
	4.3	Exercising in society should be reserved for professional law enforcement bodies.
	8.2	It is important for citizens to be more aware of the role played by security forces.
Improvement of procedures	8.3	Security forces should publicise their procedures and ways of operating in society.
	8.5	Security forces should use gradual procedures in the use of force.
Community relations	7.2	There is a mutual trust relation between security forces and society.
	7.5	Security forces care about young people
	7.6	Law enforcement action improves security in troubled neighborhoods
Procedural justice	11.7	I believe that procedures to encourage citizen collaboration should be improved.
	11.8	I believe that the good administration of the security forces improves the performance of their duties.

### 3.2.1. External Model: Structural Equations (SEM)

Structural equation modelling (SEM) was used to analyse the questionnaires. It is a statistical procedure that tests the functional, predictive, and causal hypotheses through a “partial least squares” (PLS) analysis. We employed Smart PLS 4.0 software.

PLS-SEM analysis has two different parts: a measurement model (external), to gauge the relations between constructs and their indicators, and the structural model (internal), which analyses the relations between constructs [99].

PLS-SEM aims is to find the prediction that maximises the explained variance in the dependent variable [100] and whether to confirm or discard the previous hypothesis.

The measurement model (external model) assesses that the indicators reflected in PLS are congruent with the measures of “individual item reliability”, “construct reliability”, “convergent validity” [101,102], and “discriminant validity” [100].

The “individual item reliability” is gauged by the simple correlation with the corresponding latent variable or “standardised loadings” ( $\lambda$ ) [103]. The validity is adequate when the item has a  $\lambda$  over 0.707 on its respective construct [104]. Standardised loadings higher than 0.7 are desirable [105], but even if  $\lambda$  has values higher than 0.6, it can be considered significant and adequate [106]. The results shown in Table 4, in bold, comply with these criteria.

**Table 4.** Loadings for the measurement model ( $\lambda$ ).

Items	Description	Variables			
		Legitimacy and Trust	Improvement of Procedures	Procedural Justice	Community Relations
Item 4.1	Security forces are necessary to maintain order and security.	<b>0.877</b>	0.428	0.359	0.409
Item 4.3	Exercising in society should be reserved for professional law enforcement bodies.	<b>0.864</b>	0.377	0.376	0.408
Item 8.2	It is important for citizens to be more aware of the role played by security forces.	0.458	<b>0.852</b>	0.436	0.253
Item 8.3	Security forces should publicise their procedures and ways of operating in society.	0.102	<b>0.594</b>	0.233	0.087
Item 8.5	Security forces should use gradual procedures in the use of force.	0.337	<b>0.722</b>	0.352	0.225
Item 11.7	I believe that procedures to encourage citizen collaboration should be improved.	0.288	0.403	<b>0.840</b>	0.123
Item 11.8	I believe that the good administration of the security forces improves the performance of their duties.	0.435	0.447	<b>0.909</b>	0.225
Item 7.2	There is a mutual trust relation between security forces and society.	0.218	0.253	0.113	<b>0.589</b>
Item 7.5	Security forces care about young people.	0.457	0.192	0.187	<b>0.869</b>
Item 7.6	Law enforcement action improves security in troubled neighborhoods.	0.389	0.241	0.172	<b>0.859</b>

Construct reliability is assessed by composite reliability ( $\rho_c$ ) [100], Cronbach's alpha [107], and Dijkstra and Henseler's rho ( $\rho_a$ ) [108].  $\rho_a$  have intermediate values between Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability [109]. According to Nunnally and Berstein [110], one of the two measures takes a value of at least 0.7 for modest reliability as a reference point.

The results are shown in Table 5. HTMT values differ from 1, implying they are significant [99]. The reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity of our constructs are confirmed. So, it is the external model.

**Table 5.** Composite reliability ( $\rho_a$ ), Cronbach's  $\alpha$ , convergent reliability ( $\rho_c$ ), and discriminant validity coefficients (HTMT).

	$\rho_a$	Cronbach's $\alpha$	$\rho_c$	AVE	Legitimacy and Trust	Procedural Improvement	Procedural Justice	Community Relations
Legitimacy and trust	0.682	0.681	0.758	0.862				
Improvement of procedures	0.640	0.610	0.533	0.771	0.639			
Procedural justice	0.733	0.699	0.766	0.867	0.598	0.717		
Community relations	0.733	0.676	0.614	0.823	0.671	0.437	0.284	

The "average variance extracted" (AVE) and "loading factors", and their level of significance, are reflected in Table 5. The reliability and convergent validity of reflective constructs are evaluated by rho ( $\rho_a$ ), AVE, the "factor loading values", and their level of significance [108]. Construct reliability is assessed by composite reliability ( $\rho_c$ ) [100]. A  $\rho_a$  over 0.707 validates the reliability of the measurement [106].

"Discriminant validity" (how a given construct differs from the others) is obtained by HTMT (heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations) [111]. Fornell and Larcker [101] propose using the mean shared variance between a construct and its measures (AVE). It is significant when it is higher than the mean shared variance between a construct and the rest of the model. In a practical way, the square root of each construct is higher than its correlation with any other construct. The HTMT criterion of Henseler et al. [111] accepts the discriminant validity when its ratio of correlations is less than 0.85.

### 3.2.2. Internal Model: Validation of the Structural Model

The structural model aims to validate the hypotheses of our model through the corresponding empirical study.

The model's quality searches the endogenous relations between our hypotheses. Hair et al. [100] set the criteria of quality, which are the path coefficients ( $\beta$ ) and their confidence intervals and the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) [112].

Standardised path coefficients ( $\beta$ ) are used to analyse the significance of all relations in the structural model. Chin [113] estimates that the standardised path coefficient should have values over 0.2 or, more correctly, more than 0.3. If the  $\beta$  value is less than 0.2, there is no causal relation, and the hypothesis is rejected. In some cases, the relation could be significant if the confidence interval differs from 0 (zero) [109]. See Figure 2 (hypotheses testing).

According to Hair [114], bootstrapping detects standard errors, t-statistics, and confidence intervals. Bootstrapping assesses the statistical significance of the path coefficients [107]. Also, bootstrapping confidence intervals of standardised regression coefficients confirm or refute the formulated hypotheses.

The theoretical model's accuracy is the strength of the structural relation between constructs, using the  $R^2$  values (i.e., variance explained) for the latent dependent variables. The confirmatory values must be equal to or exceed 0.1 [115].

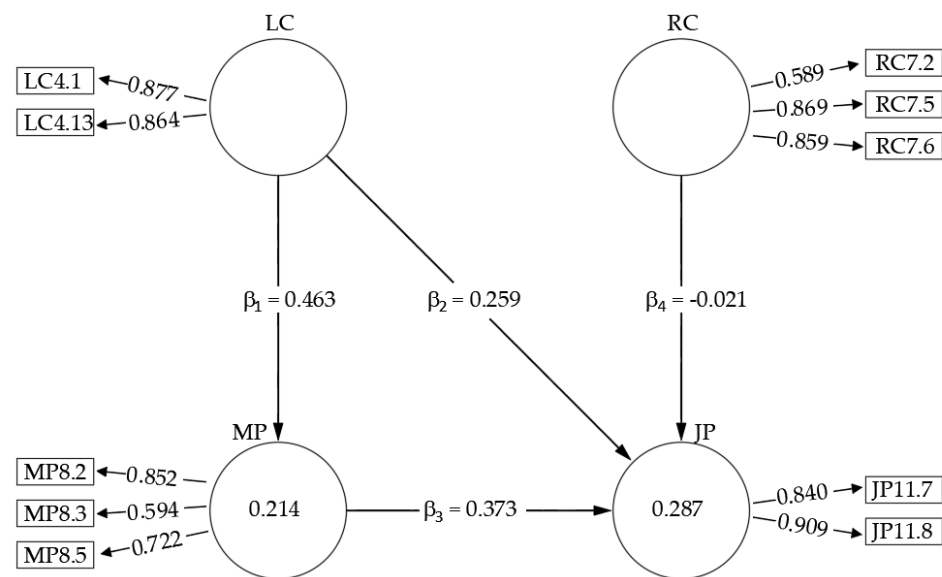


Figure 2. Hypotheses testing.

$R^2$  (coefficient of determination) is a measure of the model's predictive reliability [100].  $R^2$  values of 0.75, 0.50, and 0.25 mean substantial, moderate, and low predictive efficacy, respectively [114]. As we can see in Figure 2 (hypothesis testing), the  $R^2$  values are 0.214 and 0.289, which means that they present different degrees of predictive ability due to the few items making up the construct. However, these values do not invalidate the model's predictive ability.

#### 4. Results

As reflected, we use Cronbach's  $\alpha$ ,  $\rho_a$ , and  $\rho_c$  to estimate construct reliability. Cronbach's  $\alpha$ ,  $\rho_a$ , and  $\rho_c$  should be higher than 0.70. Our results come close to or are higher than these values, AVE is above 0.5, and the results are between 0.771 and 0.867. As a result, the model shows good performance in terms of the construct reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity, and it reveals a good role of the indicators in reflecting the theoretical concepts in the model. Internal consistency also appears.

The table also shows that discriminant validity is met for all the model's constructs according to the Fornell-Larcker criterion [101], which is also reflected in the HTMT ratios that fall below the values of 0.85 in the table [111].

The model's predictive quality is based on the structural relation between constructs. The analysis is performed by means of the  $R^2$  values (variance explained) for the latent dependent variables. For any relation between constructs, desirable values should be at least equal to or be higher than 0.1 [115].  $R^2$  is a measure of the model's predictive ability [116] and, therefore, measures the explained variance of the construct. According to Hair et al. [115], values of 0.75, 0.50, and 0.25, respectively, indicate high, medium, and moderate levels of predictive ability. The values of the present model present moderate but sufficient predictive ability.

#### 5. Discussion

As reflected in the theoretical presentation, legitimacy is paramount for institutions' acceptance and development and long-lasting existence. Different authors [57–59] insist on the value of legitimacy based on existing norms in society being accepted, understood as the acceptance of the institution that embodies those norms by society or, subsidiarily, in measuring the institution's prestige [58]. The police in contemporary societies play the role of maintaining legal norms. Thus, questioning citizens about the potential acceptance of the police is a coherent strategy. In their article, Diez-Martín et al. [57] include theoretical proposals on the attainment and maintenance of legitimacy by institutions and propose

that one of the ways to maintain legitimacy is through “security and protection strategies”. From the results presented in the empirical model, it can be concluded that the model is reliable and consistent and in accordance with the parameters used in this type of study, as we can see in Table 6.

**Table 6.** Hypothesis testing. Bootstrapping confidence intervals.

Hypothesis	$\beta$	Standard Error	Confidence Interval		Accepted
			2.5%	97.5%	
Hypothesis 1	0.463	0.455	0.273	0.597	YES
Hypothesis 2	0.259	0.249	0.108	0.379	YES
Hypothesis 3	0.373	0.371	0.26	0.476	YES
Hypothesis 4	−0.021	−0.009	−0.094	0.083	NO

Regarding the validation and verification of the theoretical proposal, the results show that the first, second, and third hypotheses are validated by the significant relations that are determined among them. The fourth hypothesis does not present such validation, at least as far as the results are concerned. Although not confirmed by the empirical study, it might be significant because it differs from zero [109].

Citizens understand and value the legitimacy concept based on trusting police performance, and both concepts influence policing methods and procedures. In that sense, technology and innovation strategy facilitate the collaboration between the citizens and police. Conversely, illegitimate exercise will undermine citizens’ confidence in the police. In the same vein, trust and legitimacy are based on knowledge of the police, their methods and procedures. Suppose citizens do not have swift knowledge and do not know what to expect of the police. In that case, it will be difficult for them to be confident about their performance, undermining legitimacy and effectiveness.

Finally, the hypothesis that community relations (focusing on disadvantaged groups) influence methods and procedures (procedural justice), as suggested by the desk study, is not confirmed. Respondents may have interpreted that police procedures are a public competence based on legal precepts and, therefore, common civilians have no power or chance to change these procedures.

## 6. Conclusions

This research proposes to abandon the definition of security as a response to risk and threat and to focus on the needs of the citizens by implementing a police CSR strategy encompassing the social dimension of sustainability and aiming at promoting citizens’ well-being and social cohesion within their community of reference. In this sense, integrating CSR and sustainability into police force doctrinal orientation in security matters fits perfectly within the United Nations concept of human security, placing people at the centre of interest.

Human security means placing people at the centre of the interest of policing by focusing on welfare and social development as fundamental elements of this new security. This is achieved by exercising legitimacy.

The way in which citizens from the surveyed Spanish regions (Murcia and Alicante) perceive legitimacy is through the correct performance of the police in what is called procedural justice.

The effect of its settlement is to increase social effectiveness by increasing social capital in communities. This is another way of contributing to social progress and value generation by applying people-centred security.

With this empirical study, citizens were consulted about the above concepts by studying their opinions with a structural equation system (SES). From the interrelations and results that derive from this study, it can be concluded that:

H1: Legitimacy and trust in the police influencing procedural justice is confirmed. Respondents believe that the concepts of legitimacy and trust underpin procedural improvement and good governance in the police.

H2 is also confirmed: Legitimacy and trust influence knowledge of the police and policing methods. The greater the legitimacy, the more knowledge there is which reaffirms the principle of transparency in institutions' actions.

Finally, H3: The means and procedures used by the police influencing procedural justice is confirmed, confirming the present work's theoretical model.

H4: Police relations with the community influencing procedural justice is not confirmed. The opinions regarding police performance in relation to young people and troubled neighbourhoods do not correlate with the employed means (procedural justice). The explanation for this lack of correlation may be due to the fact that the surveyed sample does not identify the relation of the police with citizens and with the intervention means applied by the police. It may also be because the interpretation of the police's relationship with generic groups (young people, conflict areas) is not identified with concrete actions (graduated use of force, police means and procedures, etc.), or, finally, respondents consider that police procedures are institutionally and legally regulated competences and, therefore, citizens cannot influence them.

Overall, the work of the police exercised in the above terms (legitimacy, transparency and procedural justice) is understood and valued by interviewees. Therefore, a conscious and strategic use of these resources by police forces increases the social capital and value of their actions and, according to the "social effectiveness" concept, it increases citizens' well-being.

Police forces should be encouraged to develop specific policies and operating procedures that promote institutional legitimacy, as formulated in the theoretical model, transparency in disseminating information by the police, and improvements in methods and procedures. These are the "virtuous triangle" of police action, which increases the value and social capital of their action by improving "social effectiveness" and well-being in citizen coexistence in line with people's concern and their quality of life, as intended by new human security.

### *6.1. Theoretical Contribution*

This study theoretically integrates the concept of Institutional Legitimacy with CSR within the context of police forces. It advances the idea that police legitimacy is not just a matter of legal authority but also involves ethical responsibilities and community engagement, which are central to CSR. This integration offers a novel framework for understanding police-community relations and the role of police forces in societal well-being. It reinforces that fair and transparent procedures are essential for gaining public trust and ensuring effective law enforcement. The introduction and validation of "social effectiveness" as a measure of organised coexistence and community well-being is a significant theoretical contribution. This study suggests that police legitimacy and procedural justice contribute to social effectiveness, linking policing practices to broader social outcomes. This expands the scope of traditional policing research by incorporating community-level impacts. The study demonstrates that transparency and public knowledge of police methods enhance legitimacy and trust. This highlights the importance of information dissemination and public education in policing strategies, suggesting that transparent communication is a key component of effective police work. By enclosing police legitimacy and procedural justice within the context of human security, this study extends theoretical discussions to include welfare and social development as fundamental security elements. This people-centred approach broadens the conceptualisation of security in policing literature.

### *6.2. Social Implications*

This study reinforces that legitimacy and procedural justice are crucial for public trust. Increased trust can lead to higher citizen cooperation, more crime reporting, and



a sense of community security, contributing to overall social harmony. When enhancing procedural justice and transparency, police forces can increase social capital, fostering stronger community ties and improving collective well-being. This aligns with the concept of social effectiveness, where organised coexistence and mutual trust are foundational. Transparency can lead to a more informed and engaged community that understands and supports police efforts, reducing misunderstandings and conflicts.

### 6.3. Study's Limitations

This study is not without limitations. First, there is a geographical limitation, as the study has not been extended to the whole of Spain but only to the provinces of Alicante and Murcia. Therefore, the results cannot be extended to Spain. The study also has a limited scope of application, focusing on certain academic and social institutions. We also acknowledge the underrepresentation of foreign residents among the sample and the low presence of groups potentially hostile to police activity in the survey.

### 6.4. Directions for Further Research

To complement this study, it would be relevant to assess the moderating variables, such as age, gender, and level of education. This identification would make it possible to develop specific information and relationship policies for these groups, which would improve perceived legitimacy and community relations.

Future research could focus on understanding the long-term effects of procedural justice reforms and community engagement initiatives. A longitudinal study would be appropriate. Also, comparing the effects of institutional legitimacy and procedural justice on public trust in police forces across different regions or countries would be relevant. This could provide insights into cultural and systemic differences and their impact on policing practices. It would be also relevant to explore the reasons behind the disconnect between general community relations and procedural justice perceptions. This could involve qualitative research, such as interviews or focus groups, to gain deeper insights into community members' views and experiences. A final suggestion would be to assess public perceptions of the implementation of the CSR Plan of the Spanish National Police.

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