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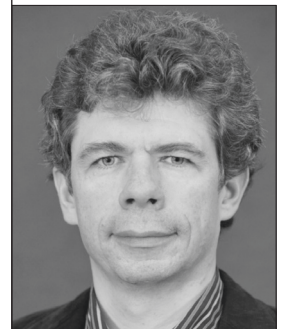
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# Police and Adolescents in Multi-Ethnic Societies

Findings of a comparative survey of adolescents in German and French cities

The German-French research project POLIS (“Police and Adolescents in Multi-Ethnic Societies”) investigates the relationship between the police and adolescents in German and French cities based on systematic, empirical surveys in order to explore the causes of tensions and potential for protest. The key findings of a survey of adolescents involving more than 20,000 respondents reveal a contrast between Germany and France with respect to the attitudes of adolescents to the police and their experiences in relation to the police. For adolescents in German and French cities, interactions, and in some cases multiple interactions, with the police are nothing out of the ordinary. In Germany, however, adolescents with a migration background are not stopped or checked more frequently by the police than native adolescents, and the overwhelming majority of the respondents find treatment by the police to be fair and have great confidence in the police. In France, the experiences of native adolescents and of adolescents of African origin in particular differ markedly. The survey findings indicate that this minority is treated in a discriminatory and unfair way by the police, with the result that the adolescents concerned lack trust in the police.



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## INTRODUCTION – FRAGILE TRUST OF ADOLESCENTS IN THE POLICE

The fact that adolescents, in particular male adolescents from ethnic minorities and living in socially disadvantaged areas, are among those demographic groups whose relationship with the police is most troubled is nothing new. Male adolescents (and young adults) have the highest rates of criminal behaviour and relatively frequently encounter police officers who consider them to be potentially disruptive to public order. The divide between members of ethnic minorities and the police, with the latter representing the majority society and the state, is particularly great, and the

police often meets with accusations of discrimination. Such issues generate latent tensions, which in some cases erupt into violent protests against the police. Collective youth violence against the police, however, is not a phenomenon that is observed to the same degree in all European societies. France, Great Britain and most recently Sweden have experienced strong outbreaks of violence, while Germany has been spared to date.

The causes of violent youth protests have been researched for some time now. French researchers have pointed to the lack of social and political integration of ethnic minorities, their often precarious living situations and problems in rela-

tions between the police and adolescents, especially after the massive riots in Paris, Lyon and many other French cities in 2005 (Lagrange/Oberti 2006; Roché/de Maillard 2009; Jobard 2009; Mucchielli 2009). There is empirical evidence of discriminatory police practices towards ethnic minorities in France, particularly those of North African background (Jobard/Lévy 2009). It therefore hardly comes as a surprise that trust in the police in France is significantly lower among members of ethnic minorities than it is among the majority population (Roux et al. 2011). The less numerous German studies paint an overall less negative, but inconsistent picture. While some research points to a wide-spread sense of discrimination among adolescents with a migration background, other studies indicate that there are only minor differences regarding the degree to which adolescents with or without a migration background trust the police (Celikbas/Zdun 2008; Gesemann 2003; Heitmeyer et al. 2005; Oberwittler/Lukas 2010). Some German-French comparative studies have already been carried out that provide indications of national differences in various respects, from social and political integration to everyday police work (Gauthier 2012; Loch 2009; Lukas/Gauthier 2011; Tucci 2010).

The model of procedural justice developed by the American legal psychologist Tom Tyler based on Max Weber's term "legitimate rule" (Tyler 2007; Tyler/Jackson 2013; Tankebe 2012) provides a suitable theoretical framework for analysis of the relationship between the police and adolescents, according to which trust is indispensable for successful police work. The success of the police depends on support by the public and voluntary compliance of citizens based on their acceptance of the actions of the police as legitimate. Such voluntary compliance re-

volves around those concerned feeling that they are treated fairly and respectfully by the police. All experiences of unfair, disrespectful or even brutal treatment by police officers will inevitably undermine the legitimacy of the police in the eyes both of those actually affected and those who hear about such incidents. That effect is even more marked among migrants since unfair and unequal treatment by the police is also interpreted by them as an implicit message that the police, and implicitly the majority society as a whole, holds them in lower esteem than native citizens. By contrast, the perception of citizens that the police is effective plays a lesser role in terms of overall trust. That is likely to be particularly true for adolescents, whose perspective of the police is not yet that of the demanding taxpayer. Cars set alight and stones thrown at police officers are the most dramatic expression of the lack of legitimacy of the police in the eyes of adolescents. However, everyday tensions during police checks or lack of willingness to turn to the police in the case of conflicts or crimes can also be seen as indications of a problematic relationship of trust between the police and adolescents.

### **THE GERMAN-FRENCH POLIS PROJECT**

The above was the starting point for the German-French POLIS ("Police and Adolescents in Multi-Ethnic Societies") research project of the Max Planck Institute for Foreign and International Criminal Law and the Institut d'études politiques-PACTE at the Université de Grenoble. The project comparing the two neighbouring countries was aimed at studying the background to differing experiences and potential for conflict in the relationship between police and adolescents. Supported by the joint "Projets franco-allemand en sciences humaines et sociales" programme of the

German Research Foundation (DFG) and the Agence Nationale de la Recherche (ANR), POLIS focuses on the micro-level of everyday interactions and experiences and the mutual perceptions of police officers and adolescents, enabling the degree and causes of tensions and conflicts to be identified and those factors that influence how much trust adolescents of various social and ethnic origins have in the police to be investigated. The internationally comparative approach of the study increases the variance at the macro level, which influences the results concerning the behaviour and attitudes of adolescents, as well as police behaviour.

Qualitative and quantitative study approaches were combined for the comparative research project and applied in two German cities and two French cities that are comparable in terms of size and resident structure. We looked at two large cities with roughly a million residents (Cologne and Lyon) and two medium-sized cities with around 300,000 residents (Mannheim and Grenoble). In these cities around half of adolescents now have a migration background. The qualitative and quantitative surveys were carried out in the four cities in a largely identical form. A standardised school survey with a largely identical questionnaire and significant sample size (approx.  $n = 7,300$  in Germany, approx.  $n = 14,000$  in France) was performed in all the cities as part of the POLIS project. The research project also included extensive participatory observations of everyday police work and qualitative interviews with police officers (Hunold 2013a; id. 2013b; Schwarzenbach 2012). Below is a presentation of the key findings of the quantitative pupil survey, with the emphasis on descriptive findings. They are based on an extensive report of the results, which is available free of charge on the website of the Max Planck Insti-

tute as a PDF document (Oberwittler et al. 2014).

The pupil survey was conducted between autumn 2011 and spring 2012 in Cologne and Mannheim. It was performed jointly in Cologne by the Max Planck Institute Freiburg and the Institute of Sociology and Social Psychology of the University of Cologne. The extensive questionnaire contained questions about the socio-demographic and family background of the pupils, their school, leisure behaviour, delinquent behaviour and finally also their relationship with the police. It looked in detail at the attitude of adolescents towards the police, the number and type of their interactions with the police and their specific experiences during such interactions. The structure and size of the sample enables general statements to be made about adolescents aged between 13 and 16 in Cologne and Mannheim.<sup>1</sup>

Before coming to the results, we would like to describe the demographic composition of the sample. For the analyses, we have mostly used a very narrow definition of migration background according to which both parents or at least three grandparents must have been born abroad. Accordingly, a respondent is not considered to have a migration background if only one parent was born outside of Germany. Based on that definition, around 2,400 (34 %) of the adolescents surveyed had a migration background.

We only distinguish in some analyses between the various countries or regions of origin and between “native German” pupils whose parents were both born in Germany (and no more than two grandparents were born outside Germany) and pupils with a mixed German and migration background who have one parent born in Germany and one born abroad and fewer than three grandparents born abroad. Adolescents whose parents or grandparents

are from Turkey constitute the largest ethnic minority in both Cologne and Mannheim (20.5 % in Cologne and 18.6 % in Mannheim). Further frequent countries of origin are Russia, the former Yugoslavia and Poland. A significant proportion of the sample has one parent from Germany and one parent who was born abroad (9.9 % in Cologne and 11.5 % in Mannheim). As expected, the proportion of pupils with a migration background is highly dependent on the type of school – the proportion is particularly high at lower level schools and comprehensive schools and significantly lower at grammar schools.

### EXPERIENCES IN INTERACTION WITH THE POLICE

#### Frequency of interactions with the police

We asked the pupils whether they had had any interactions with the police in their city (Cologne or Mannheim) in the last twelve months, and if so, how often. We listed various common reasons for interactions with the police and asked the adolescents to detail the reasons for interactions and their frequency.

In total, approx. 43 % of the pupils had had at least one interaction with the police during the last 12 months (prevalence rate) and 25 % of the pupils had had several interactions with the police. That very high rate, however, needs to be qualified, since it can be assumed that the telescoping effect led to an overestimation of prevalence. The telescoping effect in survey research signifies the fact that respondents tend to perceive distant events as having taken place more recently than they actually did (Gottfredson/Hindelang 1977). Based on enquiries concerning the last police interaction, we know that some of the reported interactions occurred further back than twelve months in the past. A significantly higher proportion of older pupils and

pupils at general schools and comprehensive schools had had multiple interactions with the police than other pupils. The most frequently named reason was being stopped or checked by the police (19 % of the pupils surveyed). Adolescents, however, had also had interactions with the police in cases involving criminal behaviour, whether as a witness (10.4 %), victim (6.2 %) or suspect (7.6 %). There were also frequent interactions with the police on the roads, involving adolescents as traffic participants (6.5 %) or as witnesses or victims of traffic offences/accidents (together 10.1 %). Finally, 12.9 % of the adolescents had interacted with the police on their own initiative and approached a police officer to ask for help or to ask another question.

In Figure 1 (see page 31), the prevalence rate is shown broken down by ethnic groups and gender. First, it is clear that, with the exception of adolescents from a mixed German and migration background, there is no ethnic group with a higher prevalence rate for interactions with the police than native German adolescents; adolescents with a former Yugoslavian/Albanian or Polish migration background even have significantly lower rates. Second, it can be seen that girls in almost all groups have significantly lower rates of interaction than boys, with the exception of adolescents with a Polish or Russian migration background, where girls have almost equal rates of interaction to boys.

In order to focus more closely on the experiences of the adolescents with regard to potential conflicts, we grouped together the following reasons for interaction: “as a suspect of a crime”, “as a road user” and “I was stopped or checked on the street” under the category of “police check/suspicion”. It is also true of the “police check/suspicion” category, that barely any difference can be observed between adolescents with and without a migration background

(see Figure 2). Adolescents with a migration background overall even had fewer interactions with the police than native German adolescents, a tendency that was even confirmed in the category of the most frequent interactions (five times or more).

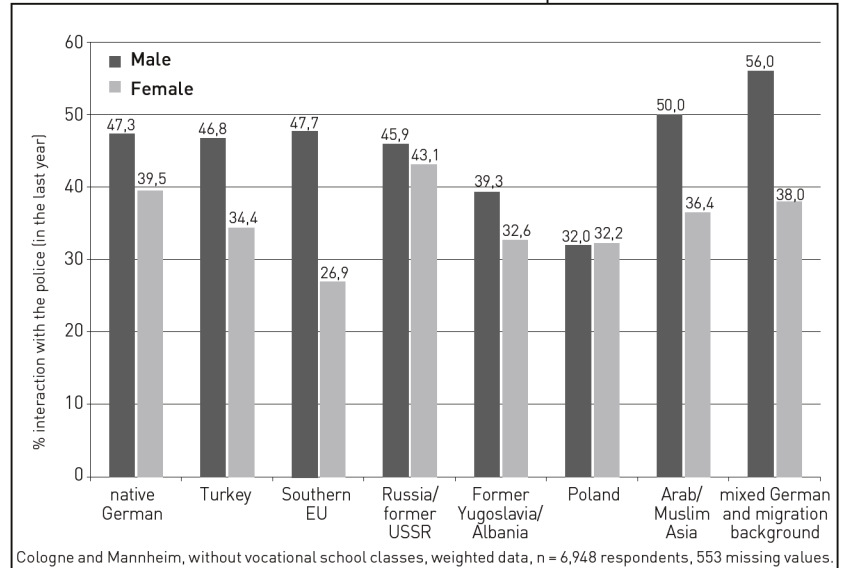
Further analyses showed that the probability and frequency of interactions with the police are correlated with the behaviour of the adolescents. For instance, adolescents with greater experience of alcohol and more delinquent tendencies are more likely to have interactions with the police owing to being checked or suspected by the police. For example, 63 % of boys and 56 % of girls who had already been drunk at least five times in their life had had at least one interaction with the police in the last year. These findings suggest that the police decides whether to stop and check adolescents on the basis of problematic and delinquent behavioural tendencies rather than ethnic background.

**Direct and indirect perceptions of (disrespectful) police conduct**

We asked the adolescents about their specific experiences during their last interaction with police officers to learn more about the nature of the interactions between police and adolescents. We wanted to find out how adolescents perceive the conduct of the police. We were also interested in how the pupils describe their own behaviour (or that of the group) towards the police, since the course and style of interactions can be influenced by both parties. Of course these perceptions of adolescents are subjective and do not necessarily reflect the experienced situation correctly. Nevertheless, these subjective assessments are certainly relevant with regard to the attitudes of adolescents to the police.

The vast majority of adolescents surveyed in Cologne and Mannheim reported having positive to very positive experi-

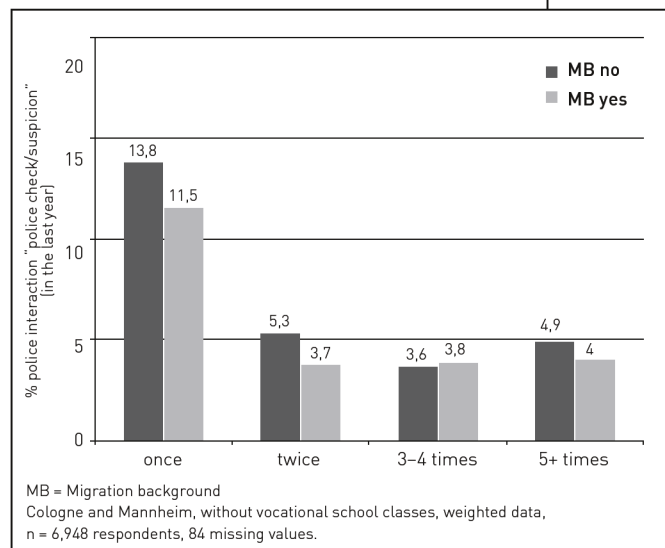
Source: Oberwittler/Schwarzenbach



**Figure 1: Interaction with the police (in the last year) broken down by migration background and gender**

ences of interactions with the police. Only very minor gender-specific and ethnic differences are found. Girls tend to rate the conduct of the police more positively, and pupils with a migration background tend to rate it more negatively, but these differences are not significant. Attitudes and behaviour towards the police can be

Source: Oberwittler/Schwarzenbach



**Figure 2: Police interaction "police check/suspicion" (in the last year) broken down by migration background**

coloured both by a person’s own experiences and by indirect experiences that they have heard about from others. We therefore asked the adolescents about their indirect perceptions of disrespectful conduct of police officers towards other people in the area of the city where they live in the last twelve months. Such indirect perceptions can either refer to interactions between police officers and third persons that are observed by adolescents or to reports that they have heard from acquaintances. A third of native German adolescents and 43 % of adolescents with a migration background perceived disrespectful conduct by police officers indirectly (see Figure 3). That means there are more marked differences between the perceptions of native German adolescents and adolescents with a migration background when it comes to indirect experiences rather than their own experiences. The latter group are significantly more critical of the conduct of the police.

**ATTITUDES TO THE POLICE**

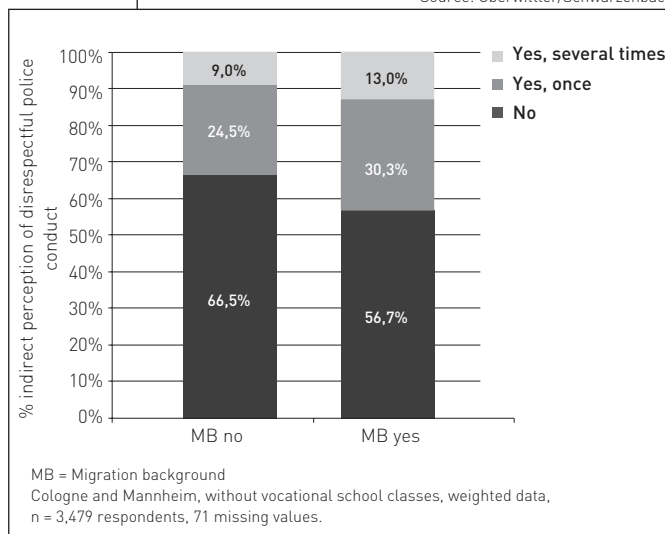
Behaviour, experiences and attitudes do not necessarily coincide. In addition to their specific experiences of interactions

with the police, we also asked the pupils about their general views and attitudes towards the police. We were interested in positive and negative aspects of trust in the police and the legitimacy of the police in the eyes of adolescents.

Overall, the pupils in Cologne and Mannheim have a very positive attitude towards the police. Around three-quarters of adolescents agreed that “the police can be trusted” and almost 90 % agreed with the statement that the instructions of police officers should certainly be obeyed. Adolescents with a migration background have an overwhelmingly positive attitude towards the police, although it is slightly worse than that of native German adolescents. That difference is especially marked with regard to those statements measuring negative attitudes to the police. The proportion of adolescents with a migration background agreeing with these statements is particularly high. 43 % of respondents with a migration background compared to 35 % of native German respondents found that the conduct of the police towards adolescents was disrespectful, and as many as 46 % of respondents with a migration background compared to 24 % of native German respondents agreed with the statement that the police treats foreigners worse. Native adolescents and adolescents with a migration background also differ (though not very markedly) with regard to the two statements expressing hypothetical behavioural intentions: 36 % of the adolescents with a migration background (vs. 29 % of native adolescents) would “never go to the police even in the case of a serious problem”, and 9 % (vs. 7 % of native adolescents) would get involved if other adolescents were to riot against the police.

With regard to the question about possible use of violence against the police, it makes particular sense to break down the results by gender since the potential for violence

Source: Oberwittler/Schwarzenbach



**Figure 3: Indirect perceptions of disrespectful police conduct broken down by migration background**

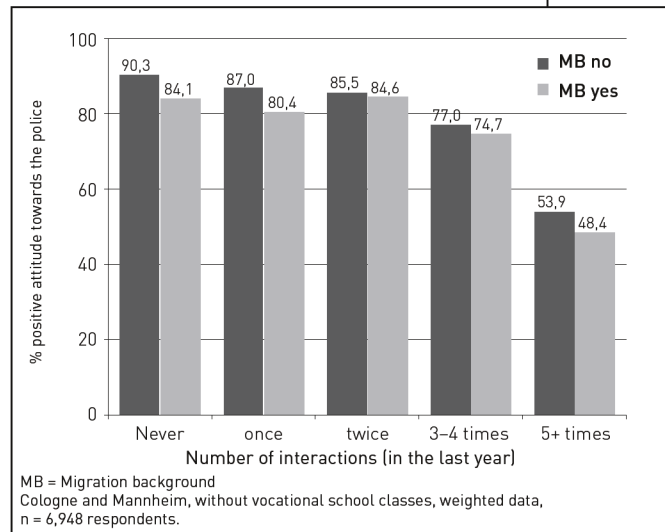
of girls is, as expected, significantly lower than that of boys. Indeed, 13 % of boys (12.3 % of native German boys and 14.3 % of boys with a migration background), but just 3 % of girls answered the hypothetical question about participating in violent protests against the police in the affirmative. Though these figures are not very high, they indicate that roughly one in eight male adolescents in the survey expressed the potential for protest against the police.

A close correlation between the experiences of adolescents in relation to the police and their attitudes to the police can be seen in Figure 4. Adolescents' opinions of the police worsen only with more frequent police interactions, especially from the fifth interaction onwards, while one or two police interactions do not seem to result in a significant worsening of opinions on the police. Again there are no significant differences between adolescents with and without a migration background.

**COMPARISON BETWEEN GERMANY AND FRANCE**

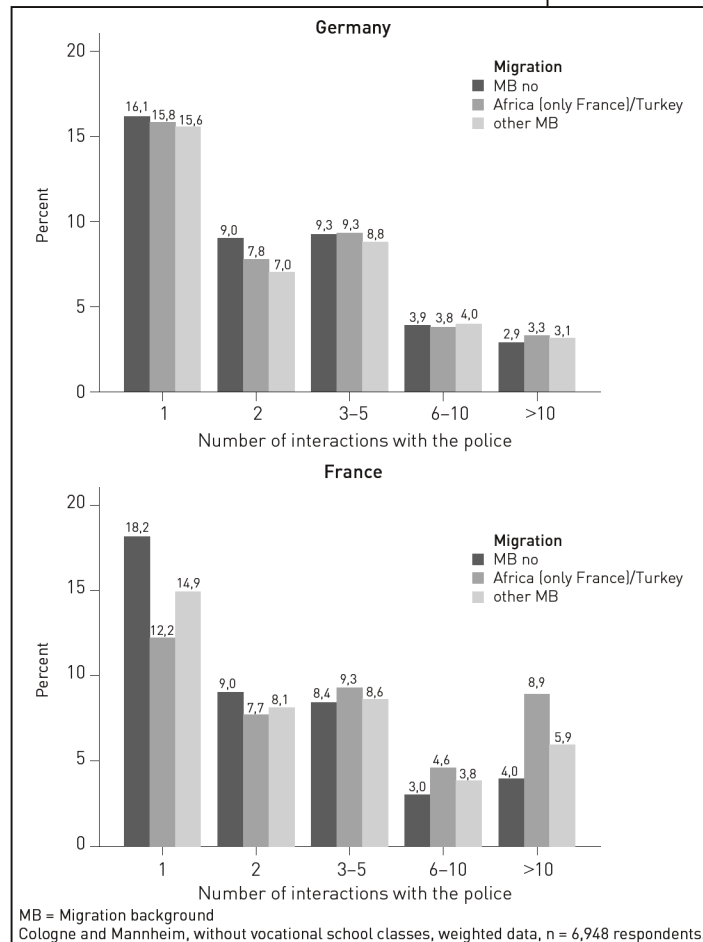
Following this presentation of the results from the two German cities, we would like to make a brief comparison with the findings of the French pupil survey. Are the known differences between Germany and France in terms of violent protests against the police reflected in our survey results? In the following figure, we compare the behaviour and attitudes of adolescents with and without a migration background towards the police in Germany and France. The largest group of origin with respect to each country is considered separately from the other groups for the purpose of better comparison. In Germany that consists of adolescents of Turkish origin, while in France it comprises all adolescents whose parents or grandparents immigrated from African countries (predominantly the North African countries of the Maghreb).

Source: Oberwittler/Schwarzenbach



**Figure 4: Positive attitude to the police broken down by frequency of interactions with the police and migration background**

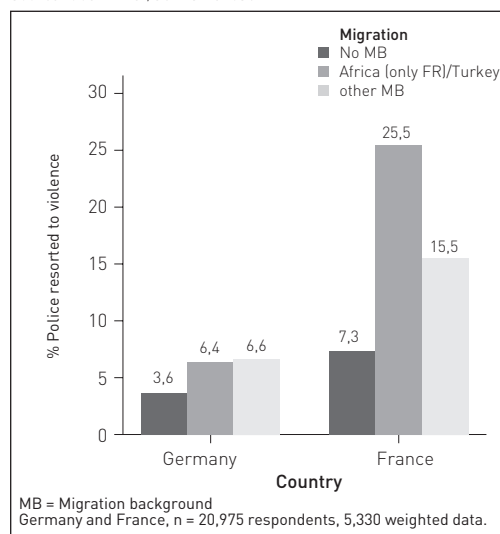
Source: Oberwittler/Schwarzenbach



**Figure 5: Frequency of interaction with the police in Germany and France broken down by migration background**

Significant differences between Germany and France can be seen when the number of interactions with the police of the surveyed pupils broken down by migration status is compared (see Figure 5, page 33). In Germany, the differences between native adolescents, adolescents of Turkish origin and adolescents with a different migration background are very small and not significant. In France, by contrast, considerably more adolescents with an African migration background report frequent interactions with the police than adolescents with other backgrounds. Around twice as many adolescents of African background as native French adolescents had had ten or more interactions with the police, and the proportion of adolescents with a different migration background reporting ten or more interactions is also significantly higher than that of native French adolescents reporting the same. These findings could point to discriminative checks being performed by the French police, though it still needs to be examined what types of interactions with the police were reported in detail and what factors influence the frequency of the interactions.

Source: Oberwittler/Schwarzenbach



**Figure 6: Agreement with the statement “The police resorted to violence” in Germany and France broken down by migration background**

There are also very marked differences in some cases regarding the nature of the interactions. In Germany just under 4% of native German adolescents and approx. 6.5 % of adolescents with a Turkish background or a different migration background reported that the police resorted to violence during the last interaction, while in France the equivalent figure for native French adolescents was 7 %, while it was over 25.5 % for adolescents with an African migration background and 15.5 % for adolescents with a different migration background (see Figure 6). That indicates that the risk of adolescents of African origin experiencing police violence is more than three times higher than for native French respondents, more than four times higher than for adolescents of Turkish origin in Germany and seven times higher than for native German adolescents. The conflict-ridden nature of interactions between the French police and adolescents is underlined by the fact that in France significantly more respondents in France than in Germany reported having put up a resistance during their last interaction with the police. While in Germany the proportion of those doing so is below 2 % in all groups of origin, it is 7.5 % among native French adolescents and 17 % among adolescents of African origin.

Given that, it is not surprising that the French police enjoys significantly less trust among adolescents with a migration background than the German police does (see Figure 7, page 35). Not only are the averages on the “attitude to the police” scale consistently lower in the three ethnic categories in France than in Germany, but the differences in trust between adolescents with an African migration background and other adolescents in France are far greater than the respective differences between adolescents of Turkish origin and other adolescents in Germany. Adolescents with

an African migration background are the only group in this comparison whose attitude to the police on average is even below the neutral mid-point and therefore in the negative range of the scale.

A further dimension is the concentration of socio-geographical disadvantages. The characteristics of the French situation include the fact that the youth riots took place in the “banlieues”, the suburbs that are plagued by ghettoisation and neglect. In order to study the influence of socio-geographical factors on the experiences and attitudes of adolescents in both countries, we grouped the surveyed adolescents into neighbourhoods based on their addresses. Figure 8 showing the average legitimacy values for all neighbourhoods with at least 15 surveyed adolescents provides a first descriptive insight into possible correlations between the degree of social disadvantage and the legitimacy of the police. Here again an overall lower level of trust is found in both French cities, and there are also considerably stronger correlations between trust in the police and the degree of socio-geographical disadvantage as shown by the steeper slope of the lines of best fit for the cities of Grenoble and Lyon (round dots). In the socially disadvantaged quarters of Lyon average trust in the police is significantly below the neutral mid-point on the scale (2.5), while the line of best fit is relatively flat in the case of Cologne and Mannheim (square dots). That means that trust in the police is barely influenced by the socio-geographical disadvantage of the neighbourhoods in which adolescents live in the two German cities. Even in the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods of Cologne and Mannheim, the level of trust that adolescents have in the police is similarly high to that of the average for the whole city. In later analyses the socio-geographical conditions should be regarded as

Source: Oberwittler/Schwarzenbach

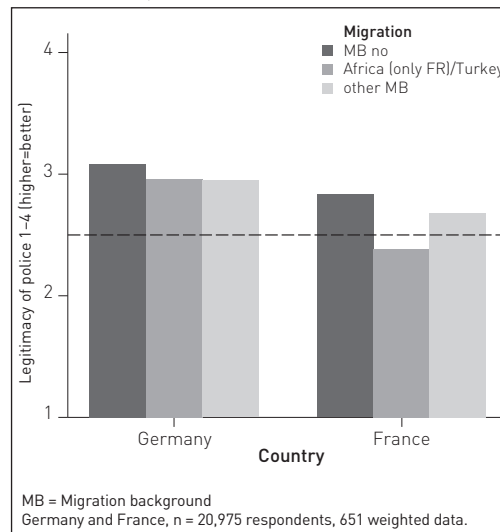


Figure 7: Legitimacy of the police broken down by migration background in Germany and France

context variables together with individual factors as part of multi-level analyses.

Further analysis of these very clear differences will include looking at the reasons for these differences, which in some cases are very marked, between the German and French cities. First, police conduct, which is shaped by organisational structures and cultures that differ

Source: Oberwittler/Schwarzenbach

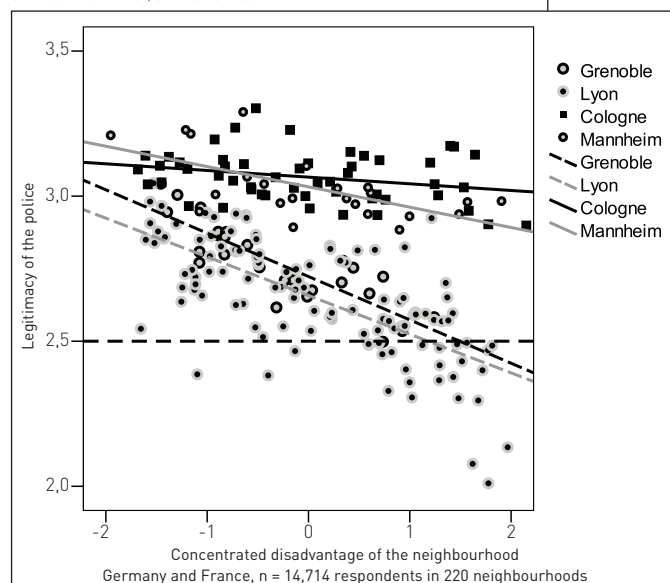


Figure 8: Average legitimacy of the police broken down by socio-geographical disadvantage of neighbourhoods in Germany and France

considerably, can be assumed to be a probable cause of the tense and latently violent interactions between the police and adolescents. General social conditions, in particular the degree of socio-economic disadvantage and socio-geographical segregation processes may well contribute significantly to the emergence of crime, violence and conflicts.

### CONCLUSION

The findings of the pupil survey paint a very positive picture overall of the relationship between adolescents and the police in the two German cities. The vast majority of the pupils have a positive attitude towards the police, despite the very high proportion of those who had actually had one or several interactions with police officers. It should be emphasised in particular that adolescents with a migration background did not have more frequent interactions with the police. Indeed, they even had somewhat less frequent interactions with the police, even when looking only at cases of being stopped or checked by the police (i.e. interactions initiated by the police). That finding clearly refutes the assumption that the police in Germany carry out discriminatory checks and is also consistent with our participatory observations of everyday police work in Mannheim and Cologne.

In addition, it was shown that the vast majority of respondents rated the conduct of the police during these interactions positively. However, there were also a significant number of adolescents (approx. one-third of respondents) who felt that

they had not been treated fairly and respectfully by police officers, and a smaller minority that reported provocations and insults by police officers. In addition, the proportion of adolescents, and in particular those with a migration background, that reported having themselves observed or heard from others of disrespectful conduct by police officers towards third parties was fairly high.

In comparison to the German findings, the results from the French cities indicate a considerably more troubled relationship between the police and adolescents with an African migration background in particular. This group was stopped and checked significantly more frequently by the police, reported significant conflicts with the police including being subjected to violence and themselves putting up a fight, and as a result lacked trust in the police. In addition, the frequent checks on adolescents originating from the Maghreb creates the impression of ethnic discrimination by the French police.

According to these findings, the French police does not have a problem with adolescents in general or with adolescents with a migration background, but specifically with adolescents originating from the Maghreb. That, however, does not reveal anything about the causes of this troubled relationship between the adolescents and the police. The qualitative findings of the POLIS project on the conduct and self-perception of police officers, styles of interaction of the police and adolescents during police checks, and the organisational conditions of police work in the two countries provide starting points for further analysis.

<sup>1</sup> The composition by school types in the sample has been weighted to take into account the distribution in the population in Cologne and Mannheim.

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