

ATT BLI POLIS

Från utbildningens förväntningar till gatans norm

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ABSTRACT

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As the principal user of legitimate force, the police play an important role in any society. The most obvious and important task is to guarantee that rules and laws will be respected, thereby preventing society from falling into chaos. Yet another task is to safeguard the democratic rights assigned to each and every member of society by the constitution. In order to carry out its task, special powers are vested in the police. However, precisely because of the far-reaching authority given to the police, any democratic society must restrict the use of police powers in order to prevent the police from becoming too independent.

In this dissertation, the discussion of legitimate authority revolves around potential areas of conflict. For example, the need to act within the law implies the weighing of the rule of law against quick and concrete results. Second, the authority of hierarchies is challenged when an officer breaks the law. The autonomous officer typically chooses not to report the bad behavior of colleagues, while transgressions should be reported to supervisors according to the legalistic perspective.

The process and factors that come to shape the recruits' perceptions of the police role – i.e. the idea of the purpose of police work and how those tasks are best carried out in practice – are examined by utilizing both longitudinal survey data and qualitative panel data. The first study covers two cohorts of Swedish police recruits, while the interview-study follows 24 recruits during their academy years and their initial years as sworn officers. Both studies show stable support for the legalistic perspective during academy training. However, during on-the-job training, the recruits become more positive towards non-legalistic practices. There is, for example, some effect of age and gender: young male recruits are somewhat more prone to adopt Dirty Harry-inspired measures – that is, achieving essential ends by tarnished means.

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