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Compliance with lockdown restrictions (e.g. social distancing) is important if the Covid-19 pandemic is to be brought under control. In a liberal democratic state, the bulk of such compliance has to be voluntary and consensual. Thus far, this seems to have been the case in the UK, with police intervention rarely necessary. However, police are needed in a minority of cases, and lockdown fatigue and the easing of restrictions over the coming weeks and months may pose significant challenges to police organisations tasked with both enforcement and maintaining widespread voluntary compliance.

People have many reasons for complying with laws and regulations, but the most commonly cited are:

- < Moral judgements, e.g. believing a behaviour proscribed by law is wrong
- < Group solidarity and a desire to uphold social norms
- < The legitimacy of the rule-maker/enforcer – a moral duty to obey the law and police
- < Habit – we do what we are used to do
- < Deterrence – fear of the legal consequences if one were to break the law
- < Self-protection/self-interest

Academic research over several decades has found support for most of the above, although there are important caveats. Notably, deterrence-related factors (fear and severity of punishment) have been shown to be only weakly correlated with compliance in many situations. The risk of getting caught can be important in some circumstances, for some people, at some times. The severity of sanction appears almost irrelevant – increasing fines and prison-terms appears to have very little effect on behaviour. Morality, social bonds, legitimacy and habit are far stronger predictors of compliance behaviours.

Research on what police can do to motivate compliance with the law has similarly tended to conclude that presenting a credible deterrent threat has only a weak and inconsistent effect. While some forms of activity, e.g. hotspots policing, do appear to motivate compliance among target populations – and presumably do so via some sort of deterrent effect – evidence for a positive effect on crime in most other areas is thin. Indeed, invasive police powers such as stop and search have proven to be largely ineffective, with significant negative collateral consequences including reduced trust and engagement. Instead, a consistent and growing body of work suggests that police activity experienced as procedurally just (respectful, open and accountable, explaining decisions and listening to people, making unbiased decisions, and conveying trustworthy motives) can motivate compliance, and does so in a way that is more sustainable and durable than the presentation of deterrent threat. Procedural justice enhances the legitimacy of the police and the wider justice system and, relatedly, strengthens the social bonds between individuals, justice actors and the wider social groups within which both are embedded. Both legitimacy and social bonds shape, in turn, compliance with police directives and the law.

In the first weeks of the lockdown the

