

The effect of policing and public security on feelings of trust and acceptance of diversity

Policing and public security measures, such as community policing practices, have a small effect on the feelings of trust and cooperation. There is low confidence in the study findings.

Geographical region: Latin America and Caribbean, Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia

Effect size: Small effect ($g=0.08$)

Confidence in study findings: Low (1 study with 1 effect size)

Short summary

Policing and public security measures (e.g., community policing practices), aimed at fostering trust and cooperation between citizens and police while reducing crime, did not improve trust and acceptance of diversity in the Global South. Across six field experiments in Brazil, Colombia, Liberia, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Uganda, the interventions did not reduce crime, improve citizen-police trust, or increase citizen cooperation, largely due to inconsistent implementation, resource limitations, and structural barriers within police systems.

Long Summary

The intervention

Policing and public security interventions involves measures such as increased foot patrols, community meetings, and problem-oriented policing strategies to build trust and improve safety. The interventions are tailored locally to address citizen concerns and increase engagement. These measures have been implemented globally, with limited systematic evaluation in the Global South, where crime and police distrust remain high.

How the intervention is expected to affect this outcome

Community policing seeks to enhance citizen trust in police by increasing their visibility and responsiveness and fostering cooperation. It assumes that by addressing community concerns and engaging citizens regularly, the police can reduce crime and improve safety outcomes. The intervention is predicated on building a virtuous cycle of trust and collaboration between citizens and law enforcement.

The evidence base

The cell contains one study which presents a meta-analysis of field experiments conducted in Brazil, Colombia, Liberia, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Uganda.

Evidence findings

Community policing practices did not produce significant improvements in citizen trust in the six sites. The overall impact on key outcomes such as trust, and citizen cooperation was negligible. Structural barriers, such as inadequate resources, leadership turnover, and institutional challenges, undermined the effectiveness of the programs.

Included studies

Blair et al. (2021) analysed community policing as a reform strategy aimed at building trust between citizens and police by increasing engagement through foot patrols, community meetings, and problem-oriented policing strategies. This approach creates a virtuous cycle of cooperation and trust, ultimately reducing crime. The intervention has been implemented globally, but its effectiveness in the Global South remains uncertain. The study involved six field experiments conducted in Brazil, Colombia, Liberia, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Uganda. Researchers collaborated with local police agencies to implement community policing practices tailored to each context. The interventions reached approximately 9 million people across 516 treated areas. The study design included random assignment of areas to either community policing practices or a control group, with data collected from 18,382 citizens and 874 police officers.

The findings show that community policing did not lead to improvements in citizen-police trust, cooperation, or crime reduction in any of the six sites. The meta-analysis shows that community policing generally does not produce significant effects on most outcomes across the countries studied. There was no significant improvement in how citizens perceive the police or how police perceive citizens. There were no significant improvements in citizens' perceptions of police intentions or capacity. No significant improvements in perceived state legitimacy or community trust, with some variability in Liberia and Uganda. Overall, the estimated treatment effects are close to zero, with none showing significant p-values after adjusting for multiple testing. Confidence in study findings is low because of the absence of detailed information on the attrition rate. While the study involved a large sample size, with surveys conducted on 18,382 citizens and 874 police officers, there is no explicit mention of attrition rates in the document.

Confidence assessment

Overall low: This cell is rated with low confidence as it only includes one study.

Other outcomes in the study:

Violence and atrocity prevention / nature and scale of violence and atrocities

Community and state governance / government performance

Human security / Physical security