

Effect of policing and public security on physical security

Community policing was shown not to affect reported crime in six countries, but a problem-oriented policing approach in Kenya had large effects, and "Confidence Patrols" in Liberia reduced assault and domestic violence.

Geographic region: South Asia, Latin America & Caribbean, Sub-Saharan Africa

Effect size: Large effect ($g=0.453$)

Confidence in study findings: Low (3 studies with 22 effect sizes)

Short summary

Policing and public security interventions may include community policing strategies and deployment of retrained police officers. Overall community policing show large effects. While community policing seeks to improve trust and decentralize decision-making, it often falls short in enhancing police legitimacy or state capacity and makes no difference to the number of reported crimes. However, interventions that foster strong community partnerships and adopt problem-oriented policing to address local issues like insecurity and youth unemployment can improve physical security.

Long summary

The intervention

Policing and public security interventions vary in design, scope, and target populations, often addressing underserved or high-crime areas. It may include interventions which deploy retrained police officers to rural communities to improve security, reduce crime, and expand access to law enforcement. There are also community policing strategies which combine foot patrols, community engagement, and decentralized decision-making to foster trust and collaboration and so more effective policing. In some areas, such interventions focus on addressing localized challenges, such as cattle rustling, youth unemployment, and community cohesion, by strengthening partnerships between security agencies and local populations.

How the intervention is expected to affect this outcome

Policing and public security interventions can be designed to improve physical security by addressing underlying barriers to trust and collaboration between citizens and law enforcement. By increasing police presence and accessibility, these interventions aim to reduce crime, enhance perceptions of safety in homes and communities, and ensure freedom of movement. Initiatives like Liberia's "Confidence Patrols" focus on bridging the gap between state security and populations historically excluded from equitable access to justice, fostering perceptions of fairness and reducing reliance on biased customary systems. Community policing strategies emphasize collaborative problem-solving, frequent foot patrols, and community meetings, which are intended to rebuild citizen trust in the police and encourage cooperative behaviors, such as crime reporting. In Kenya's "Nyumba Kumi" initiative, the emphasis on decentralized decision-making and local partnerships is expected to empower communities to take active roles in maintaining security, while also promoting the perception that the state values their safety concerns. Across all interventions, improving the visibility, responsiveness, and capacity of police is expected to shift citizen perceptions of security

institutions, reducing conflict vulnerability and creating an environment where communities feel safer and more secure.

The evidence base

This cell includes three impact evaluations and one qualitative study.

Three primary studies were included: one involving six field experiments conducted in Brazil, Colombia, Liberia, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Uganda; another conducted in Liberia; and the last one employed in Kenya. The qualitative study was conducted in Indonesia.

Evidence findings

There is a large effect of policing and public security interventions on physical security. However, there is high heterogeneity. A study of community policing in Kenya in a county with persistent violence found that community partnerships combined with problem-oriented policing had large effects. And using "Confidence Patrols" in Liberia improved property rights and reduced assaults and domestic violence. However, in the latter case there were unintended consequences from resistance from local authorities or limited community buy-in. And an evaluation of community policing in six countries found no effect on reported crime.

Included studies

Blair et al. (2019) analysed the "Confidence Patrols" program in Liberia. This involved deploying teams of newly retrained, better-equipped police officers on recurring patrols to rural communities across three counties: Bong, Lofa, and Nimba. This initiative aimed to increase citizens' knowledge of the police and Liberian law, enhance security of property rights, and reduce crime, particularly in areas governed by customary authorities like chiefs and secret societies. The program was part of a broader effort to decentralize security and justice provision in rural Liberia, especially as the UN peacekeepers withdrew. The study employed a randomized controlled trial design, focusing on 74 communities with at least 500 residents, near usable roads, and with limited prior exposure to the program. These communities were grouped into nine geographic blocks, with four communities in each block randomly assigned to treatment and the rest to control. The evaluation began in June 2014 and continued until September 2015, with most treatment communities visited four or five times over 14 months. Findings suggest that the program did not improve citizens' perceptions of the police, courts, or government, but did improve property rights, and reduce assault and domestic violence. There was also some evidence of backlash from the customary sector, with increased reports of the "bush devil" appearing in treatment communities (a controversial ceremonial figure that secret societies use to maintain social order, often at the expense of non-members; Isser et al., 2009). The study is rated low confidence because of the lack of information on attrition rate and unclear evaluation questions.

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, and community meetings. 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. Findings show that there were no significant improvements in citizens' perceptions of police intentions or capacity. And there was no significant difference in crime reports to the police. Finally, there was no significant

improvements in perceived state legitimacy, with some variability in Liberia and Uganda. The study is considered to have low confidence due to 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.

Nyapara and Sakataka (2015) evaluates the effectiveness of the Nyumba Kumi initiative, a community policing strategy introduced to enhance peace and security in West Pokot County, Kenya. The region faces persistent insecurity due to factors such as cattle rustling, youth unemployment, and lack of community cohesion, with much of the population carrying weapons. The initiative aims to improve collaboration between security organs and local communities by fostering partnerships and decentralized decision-making and adopting problem-oriented policing strategies. Data were collected from interviews, surveys, and community discussions with stakeholders, including residents, police officers, and local leaders. The analysis includes both discourse and regression methods. Multiple linear regression is used to measure the relationships between community partnerships, citizen involvement, participative management, and decentralized decision-making on peace and security outcomes. The regression analysis highlights that community partnerships through community policing significantly contribute to peace and security. While improvements in security were noted, challenges include limited community buy-in, persistent cattle rustling, and inadequate collaboration between citizens and law enforcement. The study is rated low confidence due to its little description of the intervention and the evaluation questions, and weak study design.

Confidence assessment

Overall low: This cell is rated overall low as it has less than 4 impact evaluations. All the studies included here are also rated low based on individual assessments.

Other outcomes in this study:

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

Social cohesion / feelings of trust and acceptance of diversity

Human security / government performance