

The effect of policing and public security on access to justice, rights and public services

Police deployment can increase use of state dispute resolution services, but does not displace non-state services, and may even undermine utilization of formal institutions for dispute resolution. Overall there is a small positive effect.

Geographic region: Middle East and North Africa, South Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, Global

Effect size: Small effect ($g=0.045$)

Confidence in study findings: Low (2 studies with 4 effect sizes)

Short summary

Policing interventions, such as deployment of police to polling stations and community policing programs in conflict-affected regions, have a small effect on use of state dispute resolution services. The deployment of Afghan National Police to polling stations reduced citizens' willingness to use courts or police for dispute resolution, largely due to negative perceptions of police corruption. In contrast, the Community Auxiliary Police (CAP) programme in Papua New Guinea improved perceptions of procedural justice, increasing trust in law enforcement and some use of state dispute resolution services, but people also continued to use non-state dispute resolution services.

Long Summary

The intervention

This cell examines two interventions. One of which is the deployment of the Afghan National police to polling stations during the 2010 parliamentary elections to prevent insurgent violence and enhance public trust in the electoral process. The other is the Community Auxiliary Police (CAP) program, which assigned unarmed community members with police powers to enforce local laws, particularly regarding gender-based violence. Officers operated within their own villages, bridging the gap between the state and rural communities.

How the intervention is expected to affect this outcome

In conflict-affected regions, securing elections through police deployment is expected to increase public engagement with state institutions, improving governance and social safety net access. Similarly, community policing programs seek to enhance law enforcement reach, promoting trust in formal dispute resolution mechanisms over traditional or informal alternatives. However, the effectiveness of these interventions hinges on public perceptions of law enforcement. If police are viewed as corrupt or abusive, citizens may disengage from formal institutions, weakening social safety nets. Conversely, when policing fosters procedural justice and community trust, engagement with legal and social support systems can improve.

The evidence base

This cell includes 2 impact evaluation studies and 3 qualitative studies. The study settings include: Afghanistan (1 study), Papua New Guinea (1 study), Indonesia (1 study), Nigeria (1 study), and global (1 study).

Evidence findings

Increased police presence at polling stations significantly reduced citizens' willingness to use courts or police for dispute resolution. Meanwhile, the Community Auxiliary Police (CAP) program improved procedural justice perceptions (P), increasing trust in law enforcement and formal dispute resolution mechanisms, though they also continued to use non-state dispute resolution mechanisms.

Included studies

Condra et al. (2019) examine the effect of security provisions in Afghanistan where the government deployed varying levels of Afghan National Police to polling centers to safeguard against insurgent violence. This intervention aimed to secure the election process and enhance public trust in the government amidst a backdrop of significant pre-election violence and concerns about insurgent attacks. The study utilized a quasi-experimental design, leveraging the unintentional variation in police deployment across polling centers with similar histories of violence. This allowed the researchers to isolate the effects of police presence on voter turnout. Data sources included internal government records, event-level violence data, certified voter turnout numbers, and pre- and post-election survey data from potential voters. Findings revealed that increased police presence at polling centers led to a significant decrease in voter turnout, averaging a 30% reduction compared to centers with fewer police. This decrease was not attributed to voter anticipation of election-day violence but rather to negative perceptions of the police as corrupt and predatory, which discouraged voter interaction with security forces. This is a high- to medium-confidence quantitative study.

Cooper (2018) analysed the Community Auxiliary Police (CAP) program in Papua New Guinea aimed at enhancing policing in areas with limited state presence. The program empowers selected community members with police powers, including arrest and investigation, to address local offences, particularly focusing on gender-based violence. These officers are unarmed and operate within their own communities, providing a bridge between the state and remote villages. The study employs a randomized controlled trial design, conducted in the Autonomous Region of Bougainville. It involves 39 villages and a sample size of 1,950 households and 45 candidates. The randomization was implemented through a lottery system at the Council of Elders level, resulting in cluster-level assignments for households and individual-level assignments for candidates. The study also includes a historical analysis using panel data from villages with CAP officers. The findings indicate that while the presence of community police does not significantly reduce the number of criminal incidents, it strongly reduces the perception of violence against women and property crime in the community. There is no significant evidence that experience with community policing affects trust in government, propensity to vote with the chief, or knowledge of government. Citizens do not switch to solely rely on state dispute resolution services, but continue to use non-state services when it may be to their advantage. The study is rated medium due to its partial description of the evaluation questions.

Confidence assessment

Overall low: This cell is rated low as it has less than 4 impact evaluation studies. The study findings also tend to be inconsistent.

Other outcomes in the study:

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

Community and state governance / government performance

Human security / political security