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RESEARCH

RESEARCH ARTICLE SUMMARY

COMMUNITY POLICING

Community policing does not build citizen trust in police or reduce crime in the Global South

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INTRODUCTION: More than one-fourth of the world's population lives in conditions of insecurity because of high levels of crime and violence, especially in the Global South. Although the police are central to reducing crime and violence, they are also often perpetrators of unjust harm against citizens. We investigated the effects of community policing, a set of practices designed to build trust between citizens and police, increase the co-production of public safety, and reduce crime. Community policing is meant to improve outcomes by increasing engagement between citizens and police through increased foot patrols, community meetings, and the

adoption of problem-oriented policing strategies that address concerns raised by citizens. When cooperation leads to effective police responses, this approach reinforces citizen trust and facilitates further cooperation, creating a virtuous cycle. Community policing has been implemented around the world on every continent. However, although there is evidence for its positive effects in rich countries, there is no systematic evidence about whether community policing effectively generates trust and reduces crime in the Global South.

RATIONALE: Working in partnership with local police agencies, we conducted six coordinated

field experiments in Brazil, Colombia, Liberia, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Uganda. We collaborated with the police to implement locally appropriate increases in community policing practices. We planned for risks involved in partnering with the police by soliciting reports of police abuse and carefully selecting the areas we worked in and the police units we partnered with. We randomly assigned areas to either the community policing practices or a control group. Our interventions reached approximately 9 million people in the treated areas. At end line, we surveyed 38,362 citizens and 474 police officers and obtained crime data from the police. We conducted experiments in multiple settings with common measures to strengthen the generalizability of our findings and pre-registered a joint analysis of the six studies to reduce the risk of publication bias.

RESULTS: Increases in locally appropriate community policing practices led to no improvements in citizen-police trust, no greater citizen cooperation with the police, and no reduction in crime in any of the six sites. Despite strong consensus from leadership in each country at the outset, the police implemented the interventions unevenly and incompletely. Although citizens reported more frequent and robust exposure to the police in places where community policing was implemented, we have limited evidence of police action in response to citizen reports. These implementation challenges common to police reform may have contributed to these disappointing results: a lack of sustained buy-in from police leadership, frequent rotations of police leadership and their officers, and a lack of resources to respond to issues raised by citizens.

CONCLUSION: At a time when police departments around the world are considering reform efforts to foster greater trust between citizens and the police, it is more important than ever to ask hard questions about the evidence base for the most popular reform proposals. In contexts with limited resources and incentives to change, the results of our coordinated experiments deliver a clear message: Community policing does not, at least immediately and on its own, lead to major improvements in citizen-police relations or reductions in crime. Structural reforms to the police may be needed to successfully reduce crime while building greater police accountability to citizens.

Reprints of articles of interest are available in the full article online. Please contact: blair@brown.edu or anna.wilke@columbia.edu.
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Community Policing in the Global South



Community Policing Practices



Evaluating Community Policing...



Evaluating community policing. In six field experiments across the Global South conducted in partnership with local police agencies, we assessed the effectiveness of community policing. We found that community policing does not improve citizen-police trust or cooperation and does not reduce crime.

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Community Policing Does Not Build Citizen Trust in Police or Reduce Crime in the Global South

Working in partnership with local police agencies, we conducted six coordinated field experiments in Brazil, Colombia, Liberia, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Uganda. We collaborated with the police to implement locally appropriate increases in community policing practices. We planned for risks involved in partnering with the police by soliciting reports of police abuse and carefully selecting the areas we worked in and the police units we partnered

with. We randomly assigned areas to either the community policing practices or a control group. Our interventions reached approximately 9 million people in 516 treated areas. At the end line, we surveyed 18,382 citizens and 874 police officers and obtained crime data from the police. We conducted experiments in multiple settings with common measures to strengthen the generalizability of our findings and preregistered a joint analysis of the six studies to reduce the risk of publication bias.

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