

Policing Practices to Build Legitimacy and Trust in the Global South

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What policing practices are most effective for building **community trust in the police** and fostering **public perceptions of police legitimacy** in the Global South?

Why trust and legitimacy?

Important for police forces everywhere

But arguably **especially important in the Global South**, where police forces operate under severe resource constraints

... and where criminal justice system is just one of many potential venues for adjudicating crimes and resolving disputes

Purpose of the report

Summary of evidence for **six policing practices** to build trust and legitimacy in the Global South

- 1 Community policing
- 2 Saturation (“hot spots”) policing
- 3 Body-worn cameras
- 4 Procedural justice and soft skills
- 5 Integration and descriptive representation
- 6 Militarization and constabularization

Purpose of the report

Not a meta-analysis

Not advocacy for or against particular practices. Evidence is generally too weak for that (though I'm open to being more prescriptive)

Some methodological asides

Trust and legitimacy can be conceptualized and measured in many different ways

- I cast a wide net

Lots of research on policing in Global South is purely correlational

- I focus on studies that credibly attempt to establish **causality**
- There are undoubtedly some studies that I missed. I welcome your suggestions

Some methodological asides

Some policing practices are often implemented in tandem, or are hard to distinguish in practice (e.g. community policing vs. problem-oriented policing)

- I draw distinctions where possible, and limit my review to just one practice when necessary

Community policing



Possibly the most **widely adopted** policing practice to build trust and legitimacy around the world

Promoted by US government, EU, UN, International Council of Chiefs of Police, etc.

Yet **remarkably understudied**, especially in Global South

Community policing

Typically involves some combination of:

- increased **police proximity to communities** (e.g. through foot patrols and town hall meetings)
- increased **community involvement in policing** (e.g. through neighborhood watch teams)
- increased **devolution of decision-making authority** to officers

Sometimes conceptualized as a “model” of policing rather than a set of “practices.” But almost always studied as the latter

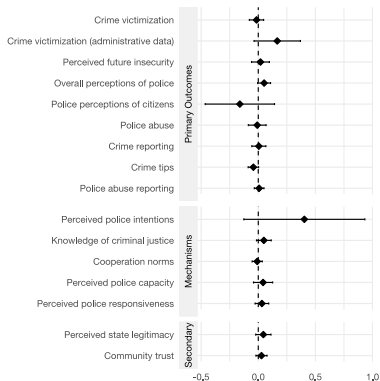
Community policing

Evidence from Global North suggests community policing increases satisfaction with police and improves perceptions of police legitimacy (Gill et al. 2014)

Evidence from Global South is limited and mixed, but discouraging overall

Community policing

Six-country randomized controlled trial finds no evidence that community policing improves perceptions of police, increases crime reporting, or induces other forms of citizen cooperation with police (G. Blair et al. 2021)



Source: G. Blair et al. (2021)

Community policing

Experimental and quasi-experimental studies from Liberia, Brazil, and Papua New Guinea suggest community policing can sometimes improve perceptions and increase crime reporting (R. Blair et al. 2019; Cooper 2019; Magaloni et al. 2020)

... but **effects seem to vary depending on contextual factors**—in particular, whether non-state actors already provide security

... and whether citizens already have access to non-state security providers (e.g. chiefs, gangs)

Community policing

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- require **greater investment in communities** as well—something most community policing programs in Global South do not really contemplate

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- require **greater investment in police forces**
- require **greater investment in communities** as well—something most community policing programs in Global South do not really contemplate
- demand more **stability** at all levels of police hierarchy than is typically feasible

Saturation (“hot spots”) policing

Increasingly common in Global South

Primary goal is to reduce crime, but may also build trust and legitimacy indirectly (e.g. if citizens credit police for making communities safer)

Extensively studied in Global North with generally promising results, but evidence from Global South limited (Braga et al. 2019)



Saturation (“hot spots”) policing

Can include many different tactics, and can be integrated into other policing practices (e.g. community policing at hot spots)

Studies in Global South generally focus on **increased presence without accompanying changes in tactics**

Saturation (“hot spots”) policing

Again, **evidence from Global South is limited but discouraging**

Only two studies of saturation policing in Global South that both (a) credibly attempt to establish causality and (b) measure trust and legitimacy—**both in Colombia** (Blattman et al. 2021; Collazos et al. 2019)

Neither finds evidence that saturation policing improves perceptions of police, builds trust in police, or increases satisfaction with police

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- aggravate **tensions**, especially if officers use aggressive enforcement tactics or target historically marginalized communities
- require **changes in tactics**, not just in presence
- only work to reduce **crime**, not to build trust or legitimacy

Body-worn cameras

Beginning to spread to Global South



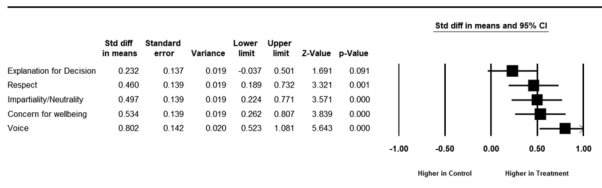
For citizens, primary goal is to **curtail use of force and induce more respectful treatment** (which, in turn, may build trust and legitimacy)

For police, primary goal is to **encourage compliance and disincentivize frivolous or malicious complaints**

Body-worn cameras

Evidence from Global North is mixed, but **evidence from Global South is promising** (Lum et al. 2019; 2020)

RCT in Uruguay finds that BWCs during traffic stops improve scores on procedural justice indicators, strengthen perceptions of safety and fairness, and increase satisfaction among drivers (Ariel et al. 2020; Mitchell et al. 2018)



Source: Ariel et al. (2020)

Body-worn cameras

Quasi-experimental study in Turkey similarly finds that BWCs:

- improve drivers' perceptions of interactions with traffic officers
- increase confidence in traffic officers more generally
- build trust in police as a whole
- encourage cooperation with police (Demir et al. 2020; Demir and Kule 2020; Demir, Braga, and Apel 2020)

Body-worn cameras

More indirectly, **two RCTs in Brazil** find that BWCs reduce use of force, especially in “low-risk” encounters (Barbosa et al. 2021; Magaloni et al. 2019)

... but that officers may resist BWCs, or may intentionally avoid interacting with citizens while wearing them

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- ... or when **baseline levels of accountability** are especially low
- Maybe citizens interpret BWCs as signal of increased **capacity**
- Or maybe evidence is too weak to draw this conclusion in the first place

Procedural justice and soft skills

More a philosophy than a policing practice per se

Posits that cooperation with police depends on perceptions of police legitimacy, which in turn depend on **belief that police will treat citizens fairly and respectfully**

Implicit in many “soft skills” training programs



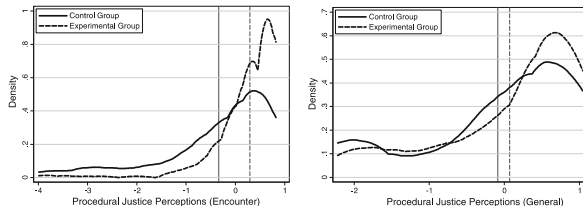
Procedural justice and soft skills

Very widely studied, including in Global South

... but almost all studies are **observational and cross-sectional**

- Some verge on tautology
- Few demonstrate causality

Procedural justice and soft skills



Source: Sahin et al. (2017)

With that caveat, **evidence from Global South is promising**

RCT in Turkey finds that PJ scripts during traffic stops improve drivers' perceptions of the arresting officer, though not of the police more generally (Sahin et al. 2017)

Procedural justice and soft skills

Experimental and quasi-experimental studies in Mexico, Colombia, and India similarly find that PJ and soft skills training:

- induces more procedurally just beliefs and behaviors among officers (Banerjee et al. 2021; Canales et al. 2021)
- improves officers' attitudes and sense of accountability towards citizens (Canales et al. 2021; García, Mejia, and Ortega 2013)
- increases victims' satisfaction with police (Banerjee et al. 2021)

Integration and descriptive representation



Aims to build trust and legitimacy by increasing **representation of historically under-represented groups**—especially women and ethnic minorities

Typically involves quotas or creation of specialized units or stations (e.g. all-women police stations in India)

Integration and descriptive representation

Evidence is again limited but discouraging

Two experimental studies in Liberia find that:

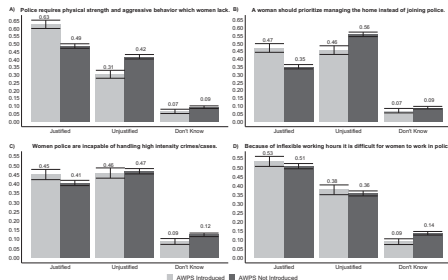
- teams with more ethnic minority officers are **more discriminatory** against ethnic minority civilians (R. Blair et al. 2021)
- teams with more female officers are **no more sensitive** to crimes that disproportionately affect women (Karim et al. 2018)

(Though neither study measures citizens' attitudes directly)

Integration and descriptive representation

Quasi-experimental study in India finds that all-women police stations:

- do not increase crime reporting
- are associated with diminished perceptions of female police officers, including among women (Jassal 2020)



Source: Jassal (2020)

Integration and descriptive representation

Another **experimental study in India** finds that female police officers are perceived as less legitimate when responding to “gendered” crimes, including by women (Jassal and Barnhardt 2021)

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- Integration may need to be accompanied by **broader institutional reforms**

(There also may be compelling normative reasons to pursue integration regardless of its effects)

Militarization and constabularization

Like saturation policing, **primary goal is to reduce crime**, but may also build trust and legitimacy indirectly



Militarization and constabularization

Militarization: equipping police officers with military-grade weapons and hardware; relying on paramilitary police

Constabularization: deploying actual soldiers to conduct domestic policing operations

- Uncommon in Global North, but increasingly common in Global South, especially Latin America

Militarization and constabularization

Evidence is mixed and somewhat puzzling

Experimental and quasi-experimental studies from Colombia, Brazil, and Mexico find that constabularization:

- exacerbates human rights abuses (R. Blair and Weintraub 2022; Flores-Macías and Zarkin 2021; Magaloni, Franco-Vivanco, and Melo 2020)
- has at best no effect on crime (R. Blair and Weintraub 2022)

Another **quasi-experimental study from Mexico** finds that joint operations between military and police have similarly adverse effects on human rights (Magaloni and Rodriguez 2020)

Militarization and constabularization

Yet **experimental studies from Colombia and Mexico** find that militarization and (especially) constabularization are **very popular** among citizens (R. Blair and Weintraub 2021; Flores-Macías and Zarkin 2019)

...and that exposure to even ineffective or counterproductive constabularization:

- increases crime reporting
- improves perceptions of military
- strengthens demand for military involvement in domestic policing and other aspects of governance (R. Blair and Weintraub 2021)

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- Maybe citizens interpret them as **signal of government's commitment to fighting crime** (“penal populism”)
- Maybe status quo is so bad that any alternative is better

Some concluding thoughts

Based on existing evidence base, (a) BWCs and (b) procedural justice and soft skills seem to be most promising

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We need **more, better evidence**

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- Especially true of community policing
- All the more reason to study these interventions more carefully moving forward

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- ... especially presence of **non-state security providers**, who often have legally delineated roles in adjudication and dispute resolution in Global South
- Integrating these actors could avoid backlash among citizens invested in alternatives to police

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- Can they be induced to apply language from PJ scripts outside the context of a study?
- Etc.

Some concluding thoughts

These are answerable questions, but few studies ask them

Answering them could help avoid disappointing results

Thank you

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