Community policing in the Global South

Evidence from six field experiments

Graeme Blair, UCLA and EGAP

With Jeremy Weinstein & Fotini Christia
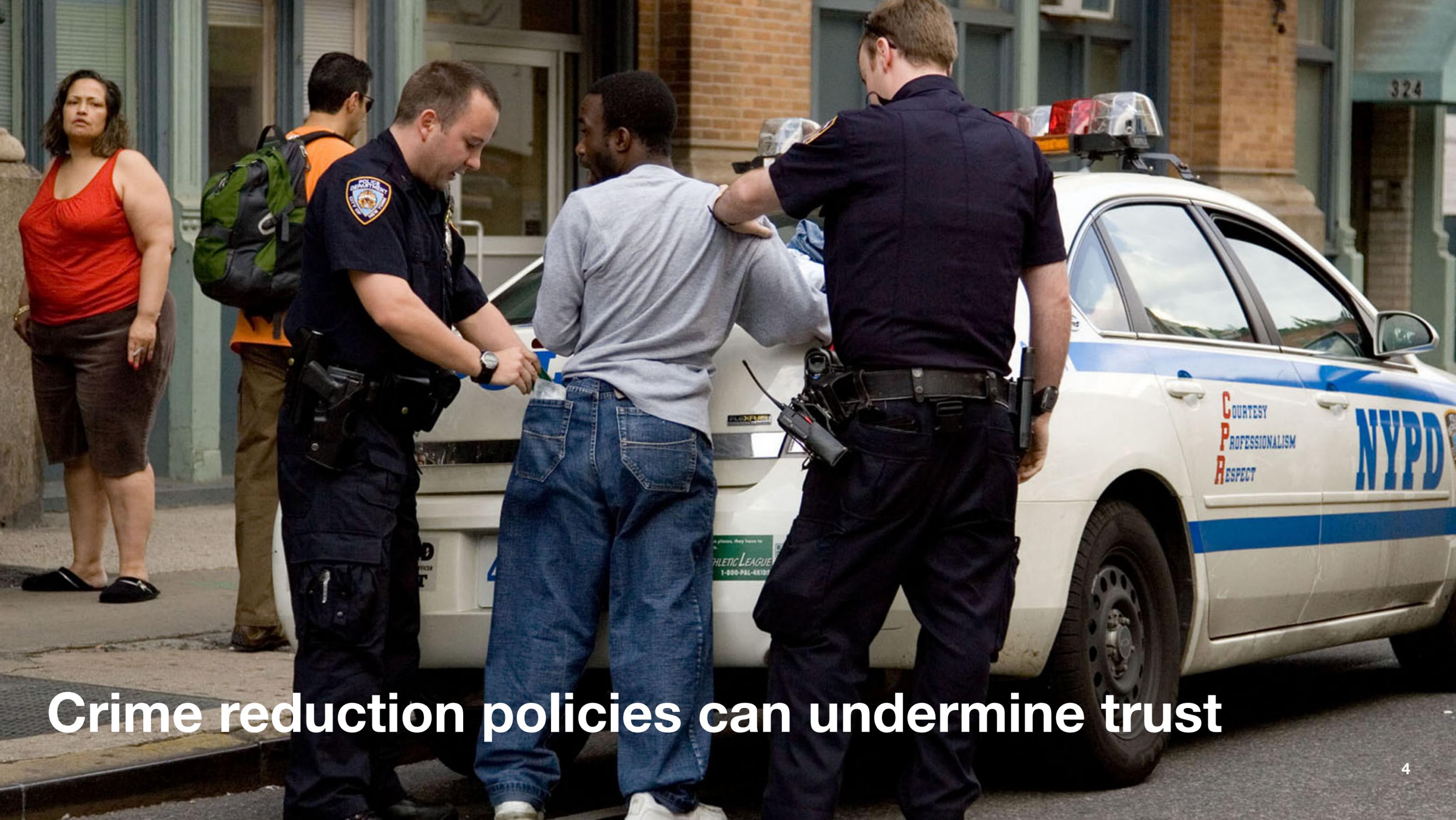
Citizen trust

↓

Police effectiveness

Citizen trust

⬇

Cooperation

⬇

Police effectiveness

Crime reduction policies can undermine trust

Crime reduction policies can undermine trust

Crime reduction policies can undermine trust

Can we reduce crime *and* build positive community-police relations?

Community policing

Community policing

A strategy for encouraging the public to act as partners with the police in preventing crime and promoting security based on the specific needs of the community

Green and Mastrofski (1988), Skogan (2004), Skogan and Hartnett (1997)

Preview

We find community policing is not a general purpose solution to reducing crime and building trust

We do not find effects on crime and find mixed and largely null
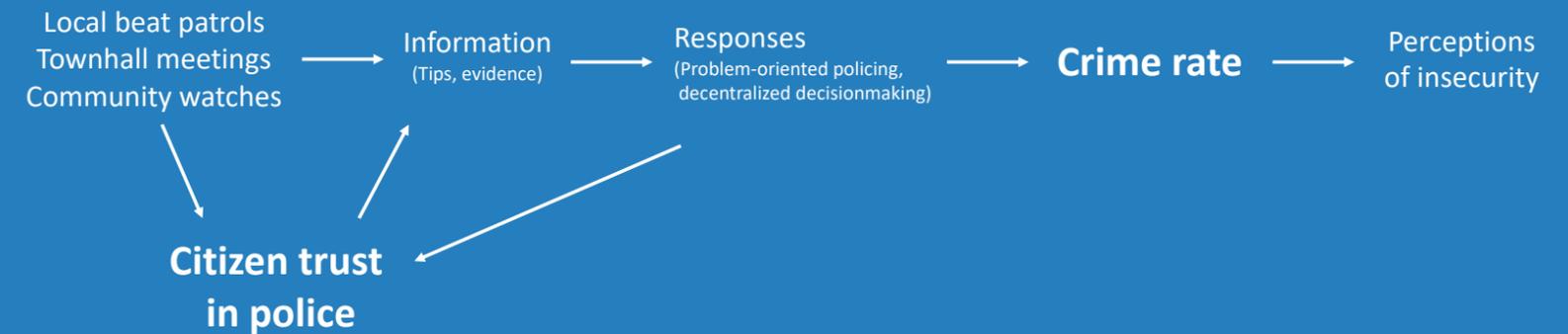
Community policing

Frequent, local beat patrols

Decentralized decision-making

Community engagement

Problem-oriented policing

How might community policing work?
A theory of change

Local beat patrols
Townhall meetings → More crime prevention tips → Responses (Problem-oriented policing, decentralized decisionmaking) → **Lower crime** → Decreased perceptions of insecurity

Citizen trust

Local beat patrols
Townhall meetings
Community watches → Information (Tips, evidence) → Responses (Problem-oriented policing, decentralized decisionmaking) → **Crime rate** → Perceptions of insecurity

Citizen trust in police

Akerlof and Yellen (1994), Blair, Karim, and Morse (2019)

Who advocates for community policing?

Police agencies on every continent

30% of U.S. police agencies, 90% of largest

"Key operational philosophy" – Intl. Chiefs Council

Core training for postwar police in Iraq, Afghanistan

"Essential" part of UN Peacekeeping police training

Key policy response in 2020-2021 protests

Existing research on community policing

— **Past studies: U.S., U.K., and Australia**

— **Patrols, problem-oriented policing reduce crime**

— **Mixed (and limited) evidence on effects on trust**

— **Almost no evidence from the Global South**

— **Few examine components of community policing together**

Metaketa Study

Metaketa Study

Six contexts in the Global South

Randomized trial method

Community policing intervention

Standardized surveys

Randomized trial design

Goal: compare outcomes in places with community policing to those without

Problem: police agencies with bad community relations may choose to adopt community policing

Solution: use a lottery to pick which areas adopt community policing

How projects developed

Six teams, 20 researchers, had developed partnership with relevant police agency who wanted to learn about community policing

Teams worked with steering committee to *harmonize* interventions and measures

Ethics review in each site

Study countries

Brazil, Colombia, Liberia, Pakistan, Philippines, Uganda

Santa Catarina State, Brazil

Crime low relative to elsewhere in Brazil, but high in absolute terms

Organized crime present

<u>Partner:</u> Santa Catarina Military Police

<u>Locations:</u> 196 neighborhoods

<u>Duration:</u> 7 months

City of Medellin, Colombia

In 1980s, most violent city in the world; police had fearsome reputation

Marked improvement in crime, but little increase in citizen trust

Partner: Medellin Metropolitan Police

Locations: 347 police beats

Duration: 12 months

City of Monrovia, Liberia

New police force constituted since end of civil war in 2003

High crime and vigilantism

Limited state reach

Partner: Liberian National Police

Locations: 100 neighborhoods

Duration: 11 months

Sheikhupura region, Pakistan

Lower crime rates than other contexts, but police are among least trusted institutions in Pakistan

Police constrained in investigating major crimes

Partner: Punjab Police

Locations: 108 beats

Duration: 6 months

Sorsogon Province, Philippines

Citizens associate police with Duterte's drug war taking place in other parts of the country

Low-level insurgency

Partner: Philippines National Police

Locations: 298 barangays

Duration: 17 months

Nationwide in Uganda

Police serve dual role: prevent crime, maintain power for Museveni

Trust in police is low, but middle of pack in Africa

Partner: Ugandan Police Force

Locations: 72 police stations

Duration: 13 months

Six diverse study sites

	Political freedoms	Regime type	Corruption score	Income group
Brazil	Partly free	Democracy	45 / 100	Upper mid.
Colombia	Partly free	Democracy	39	Upper mid.
Liberia	Partly free	Democracy	32	Low
Pakistan	Partly free	Autocracy	31	Lower mid.
Philippines	Partly free	Autocracy	46	Lower mid.
Uganda	Not free	Autocracy	26	Low

Intervention

Locally-appropriate increase in community policing practices

Intervention components

Townhall citizen-police meetings

Increased frequency of foot patrols

Citizen feedback hotlines

Community watch forums

Interventions by site

	Townhall meetings	Foot patrols	Citizen feedback	Watch forums	Duration (months)
Brazil	Semi-Annual	-	WhatsApp Groups	-	7
Colombia	Bi-Monthly	-	-	–	12
Liberia	Bi-Monthly	Bi-Monthly	-	Yes	11
Pakistan	Monthly	Frequent	Hotline	Yes	6
Philippines	Small groups	Weekly	Hotline	-	17
Uganda	Bi-Monthly	-	-	Yes	13

Outcomes

1. Security
2. Perceptions of police
3. Police perceptions
4. Citizen cooperation

Coordinated data collection:

17,000 citizen interviews

650 officer interviews

Crime data on 600 neighborhoods, villages

Ethics of working with the police:

Beyond academic review

Unit-specific assessment of risk

Risk monitoring, mitigation plan

Overall findings:

No impact on security, trust, or cooperation

Limited positive results on some citizen attitudes, but only in some contexts

Primary Outcomes
- Crime victimization
- Perceived future insecurity
- Overall perceptions of police
- Police perceptions of citizens
- Police abuse
- Crime reporting
- Crime tips
- Police abuse reporting

Mechanisms
- Perceived police intentions
- Knowledge of criminal justice
- Cooperation norms
- Perceived police capacity
- Perceived police responsiveness

Secondary
- Perceived state legitimacy
- Community trust

-0.25   0.00   0.25   0.50   0.75

Impact of community policing

37

Estimated treatment effect with 95% confidence intervals

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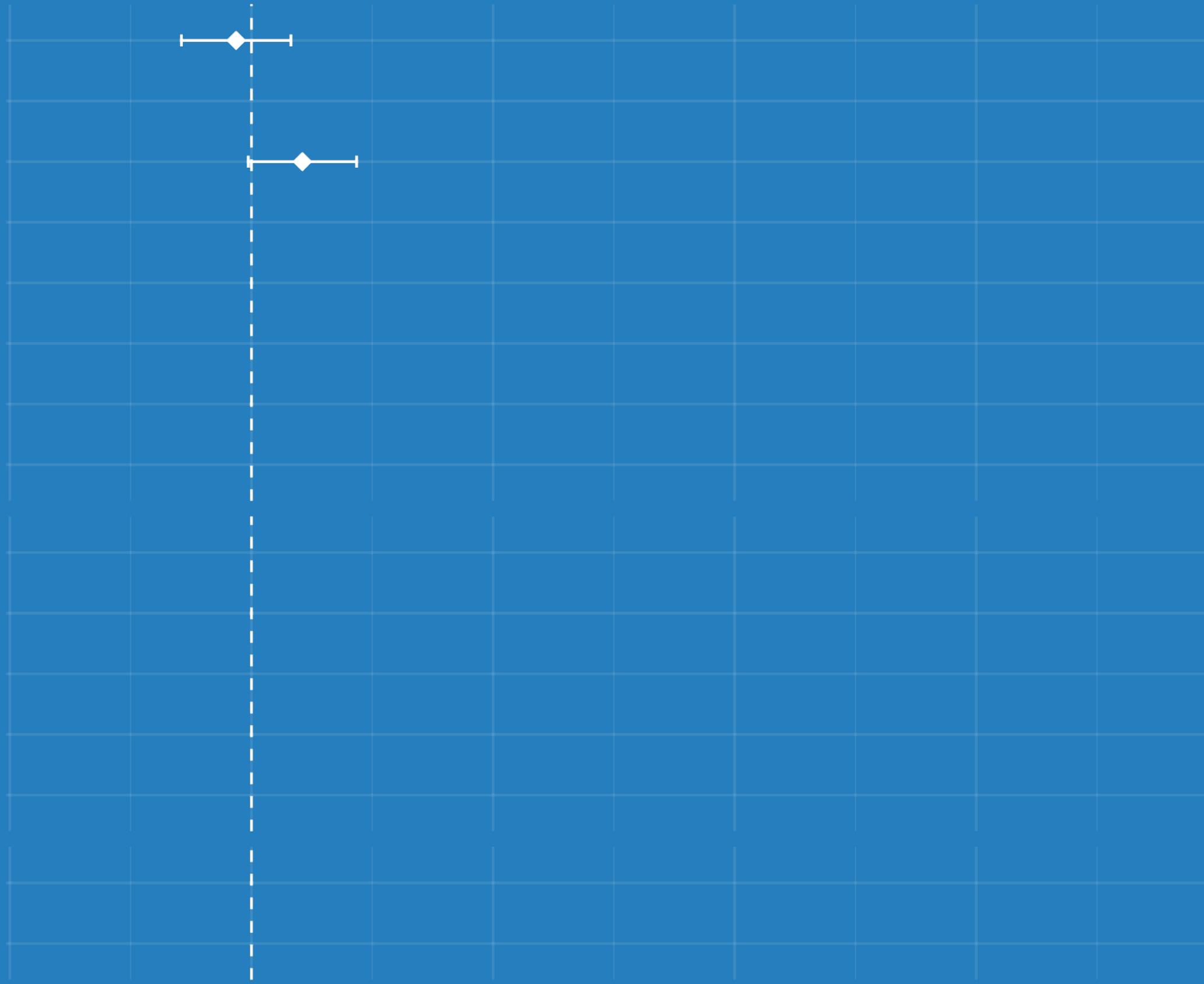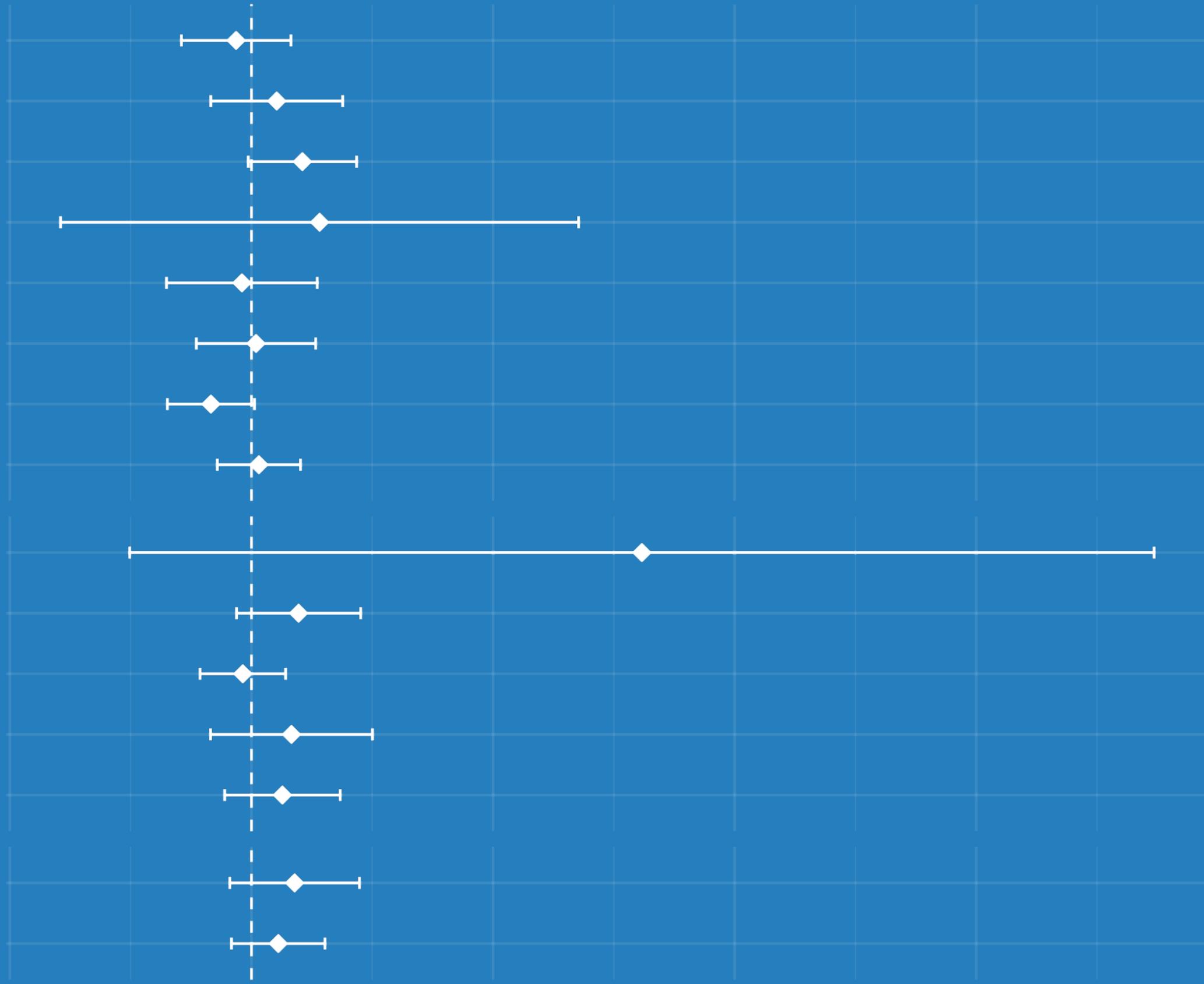- Perceived state legitimacy
- Community trust

-0.25   0.00   0.25   0.50   0.75

Mixed attitudes findings

No change in core trust outcome

Improvement in perceived police intentions in Liberia, Pakistan

Small improvement in perceived police capacity in Colombia

What works where

Little site heterogeneity

Little heterogeneity by community type (prior crime, trust, communal trust, state legitimacy)

Inferential threats

1. Crime displacement

2. Compliance

3. Short duration of intervention

Why did community policing fall short?

Lack of prioritization by leadership

Rapid rotation of line officers and leadership

Limited capacity to address community concerns

Rapid officer rotation

In many sites, officers are regularly rotated between stations

	Officer rotation rate
Colombia	15 months
Pakistan	1 month
Philippines	2.75 months
Uganda	17 months

Capacity and resource constraints

	Officers per capita	Budget per officer
Brazil	1:473	$56,000
Colombia	1:333	$18,000
Liberia	1:950	$3,642
Pakistan	1:560	$3,400
Philippines	1:991	$18,000
Uganda	1:910	–

Policy implications

1. Structural reforms are needed for incremental changes to police practices to yield changes to security or citizen trust

Policy implications

2. Efforts to improve citizen-police relations shown to be effective in Global North may fall short in police agencies without resources to respond to community concerns

Policy implications

3. Rapid rotation of line officers and station leadership may interrupt police reforms

Where do we go next?

Change incentives of leadership

Embed officers for longer periods

Pair community engagement with citizen accountability tools

Research team

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Liberia: Benjamin Morse, Lily Tsai
Pakistan: Ali Cheema, Ali Hasanain, Jacob Shapiro
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Metaketa IV: Community policing

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Paper in *Science* magazine

Cambridge University Press book in 2022