

Researchers

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Timeline

2017-2018

Sample Size

298 villages

Research Implemented by IPA

No

The Impact of Community Policing on Attitudes and Public Safety in the Philippines

Abstract

How can community-oriented policing practices be implemented in a way that sustainably increases trust in the police and reduces crime in areas where state legitimacy is low? In the Philippines, researchers examined the effects of a community policing program on attitudes towards the police and public safety outcomes. The intervention combined community engagement with problem-oriented policing. Researchers found that the intervention had no effect on the main outcomes of interest including crime victimization, perceptions of insecurity, citizen perceptions of police, police abuse, or citizen cooperation with the police. These results are consistent in all countries examined under the Metaketa initiative: Brazil, Colombia, Liberia, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Uganda.

Policy Issue

Low legitimacy and lack of trust limit state capacity in providing public goods and services. This problem is particularly pertinent to policing, where officers need information about what is happening in the community to provide services effectively and efficiently. Citizens give the police information about which problems are most pressing, the location of crime hotspots, concerns about suspicious people or activities, and reports of crimes that have occurred. The police use this information to allocate their limited resources to prevent crime and ensure public safety. When citizens don't trust the police, this whole mechanism gets crushed.

Collaboration between the police and the community (a.k.a. community policing) may increase citizen trust and enhance police ability to enforce the law, particularly in contexts in which the state's legitimacy is challenged. However, few studies have explored the effects of these types of interventions on trust and crime indicators. This study aims to do so as part of a multi-country effort by the Metaketa Initiative.

Context of the Evaluation

The study was conducted in The Sorsogon Province of the Philippines, an area still considered a "hotspot" for activity in the longstanding communist rebellion of the National People's Army (NPA). While this is currently a low-level insurgency and violent altercations are relatively rare, the NPA is entrenched in the fabric of many communities of Sorsogon province and competes with the state over the provision of many services, including public safety. In Sorsogon, as in the rest of rural areas or neighborhoods in urban areas, policing services are provided by Tanods. Tanods are semi-professional community officers that deal with minor crimes such as theft, harassment, and public nuisance. In rural areas with limited police presence, Tanods provide a conduit through which citizens can report more serious crimes without making a costly and time-consuming trip to a municipal police station. However, there is little institutional incentive for collaboration between Tanods and the national police and virtually no oversight.

Details of the Intervention

Researchers evaluated the effects of a community policing program on attitudes towards the police and public safety outcomes. The intervention combined community engagement with problem-oriented policing and was implemented in two phases.

During the first phase, villages were randomly assigned to a comparison group or a program group in which national police officers engaged with citizens as part of the large-scale project "One Sorsogon". The objective was to relay information about ongoing crime-reduction efforts and gather information from citizens about their community's most pressing problems. In some villages, an existing but little-used SMS tips hotline was advertised to encourage citizens to send relevant information to the police.

During the second phase, problem-oriented policing teams were created to identify the most pressing issues in each village and develop specific plans to target those issues. Each team received a budget to conduct monthly meetings and implement their public safety plan. Program villages were randomly assigned to either a team integrated by tanods only or a team integrated by tanods and police officers. In addition, some program villages received top-down accountability from the Mayor's office and some from the Department of Interior and Local Government Provincial Office.

Researchers conducted surveys before the program began, after approximately half of the villages had received the program and at the end of the intervention to collect information on citizen trust, perceived state legitimacy, victimization, and crime rates. For this last indicator,

researchers also used administrative data.

Results and Policy Lessons

Researchers found that community policing had no effect on the main outcomes of interest including crime victimization, perceptions of insecurity, citizen perceptions of police, police abuse, or citizen cooperation with the police. These results are consistent in all countries examined under the Metaketa initiative: Brazil, Colombia, Liberia, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Uganda.

Given the diversity of analyzed countries, it is unlikely that researchers selected hard cases in which community policing was unlikely to be effective. They also obtained extraordinary access to the police's internal data and conducted rigorous surveys of both citizens and the police, including a crime victimization survey. They measured community policing on five key possible outcomes: crime incidence, citizens' perceptions of safety, citizen's perceptions of police, police accountability, and citizen crime reporting. Consequently, researchers are confident that community policing in the Global South is not, by and large, delivering the benefits that its advocates claim. It does not appear to reduce crime, and it does not lead to improvements in citizen trust in the police.

At least in the short term, community policing, as it was implemented in these countries, does not lead to a virtuous cycle of citizen cooperation with police efforts to fight crime.

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