Can Community Policing Improve Police-Community Relations in Low-Income Countries?

Robert A. Blair[*]   Guy Grossman[†]   Anna M. Wilke[‡]

October 24, 2022

Abstract

Community-oriented policing (COP) is one of the most widely touted mechanisms for building bridges between police forces and the communities they serve. But evidence on the effectiveness of COP is surprisingly scant. We present results from one of the first randomized controlled trials to evaluate COP in the Global South. The COP initiative we study was locally designed and funded by the Ugandan government. We find no evidence that the program reduced crime, enhanced perceptions of safety, improved attitudes towards the police, or strengthened norms of cooperation with the police. We explore a variety of potential explanations for these results, including both supply-side factors (e.g. resource constraints within the Ugandan police) and demand-side factors (e.g. low baseline trust). We find no evidence that overcoming these obstacles would make COP more effective. Taken together, our findings point to some potentially inherent limitations of COP in low-income countries.

[*]Brown University, Department of Political Science and Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs, 111 Thayer St., Providence, RI 02912

[†]University of Pennsylvania, Department of Political Science, 133 S. 36th St., Philadelphia, PA 19104

[‡]Washington University in St. Louis, Department of Political Science, 1 Brookings Dr., St. Louis, MO 63130

Controlling crime and maintaining security are among the most basic functions of any modern state. The task of achieving these goals naturally falls first and foremost on the police. Police forces are likely to be more effective at preventing and investigating crimes when they establish mutually respectful relationships with civilians (Tyler and Huo, 2002). Police officers also constitute the first "face of government" for many citizens (Soss and Weaver, 2017, 584). Police-community relations are thus emblematic of state-society relations more generally, and improving police-community relations is a first-order concern around the world.

Community policing (or community-oriented policing, COP) has been heralded as one of the most effective reforms for building trust and encouraging cooperation between police officers and citizens (Skogan and Hartnett, 1999).[1] COP is believed to improve police-community relations by enhancing the quality and frequency of contact between civilians and the police (e.g. via town hall meetings), and by increasing community involvement in policing (e.g. via neighborhood watch teams). As citizens become more willing to cooperate with the police, the police may become better able to deter criminals (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2015), leading some advocates to contend that COP reduces crime (Gill et al., 2014). Yet despite widespread adoption of COP globally (Brogden and Nijhar, 2013), its efficacy for reducing crime and increasing citizens' trust and cooperation with the police remains understudied and poorly understood, especially in the Global South.

Most existing studies of COP are focused on rich, consolidated democracies (e.g. Dunn et al., 2016; Peyton, Sierra-Arévalo and Rand, 2019). Findings from these studies are mixed, though generally positive (Gill et al., 2014). Evidence from low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) is limited (Blair et al., 2021). It remains unclear whether lessons learned from high-income countries will generalize to LMICs. On the one hand, police forces in LMICs

---

[1]Other popular reforms include increased minority and gender representation within police forces (Amaral, Bhalotra and Prakash, 2021; Miller and Segal, 2019), procedural justice training (Canales, 2021; Weisburd et al., 2022), and increased police presence, including "hot spots" policing (Blattman et al., 2021; Chalfin and McCrary, 2017).

operate under more severe resource constraints and tend to suffer from higher levels of corruption and nepotism (Tankebe, 2010). Trust in the police also tends to be lower in LMICs (Gallup, 2020). COP may prove to be less effective in these contexts. On the other hand, positive interactions with the police may be more impactful in settings where such interactions are rare (Sukhtankar, Kruks-Wisner and Mangla, 2022), and citizen cooperation may be especially valuable where police forces are more resource constrained (Blair, Karim and Morse, 2019), making COP *more* effective in LMICs. How these countervailing forces balance out is an open question.

In this study we experimentally evaluate the impact of a locally designed and funded COP program in Uganda. Uganda offers an important test case for the effectiveness of COP in low-income countries. The few existing studies of COP (or COP-like) interventions in LMICs have focused on countries where police forces are resource constrained, but where they are nonetheless (largely) insulated from political interference by democratically elected governments (Blair, Karim and Morse, 2019; Karim, 2020). This is not the case in Uganda. As in virtually all authoritarian regimes, the Uganda Police Force (UPF) is subject to political influence, and the ruling party has a history of misusing the UPF's coercive capabilities to advance its partisan aims, especially in the months preceding national elections (Curtice and Berhlendorf, 2020).

Meanwhile, Ugandans of all political stripes face challenges of crime and insecurity that the UPF is constitutionally mandated to address (Wagner et al., 2017). Based on results from focus group discussions held prior to the launch of our study, we posit that COP may improve citizens' perceptions of rank-and-file UPF officers at the local level and increase these officers' responsiveness to the citizens they serve, even as the UPF as a national-level institution remains politicized and allied with the ruling party. Establishing closer, more cooperative relationships between civilians and local UPF officers may, in turn, mitigate crime and insecurity. To our knowledge, these propositions have never been rigorously tested in any authoritarian regime. (We discuss the ethics of our study and the precautions we took

to limit risks in SI Section B.)

The "homegrown" program we evaluate represents a realistic best-case scenario for COP in a setting like Uganda. The program was designed by the UPF in collaboration with the Youth Integrated Development Organization (YIDO), a local civil society group with years of experience training Ugandan police officers. It was inspired in part by Uganda's earlier attempts at community policing. Crucially, while the UPF has received donor support for COP in the past (notably from USAID and Irish Aid), we did not fund the COP program we evaluate here. The Ugandan government provided all the human and financial resources for COP, which the UPF had already embraced (at least in principle) by the time of our evaluation. This is important both for the ethics of the study and for the scope of our findings: because the program was locally designed and funded, we can make more reliable inferences about the likely impact of similar interventions as they might realistically be implemented in the future.

We study the effects of the program using two waves of surveys (baseline and endline) reaching nearly 3,500 citizens, 288 village heads (or LC1s), and more than 200 police officers and commanders throughout rural Uganda. Unusually for studies of COP, our data thus captures views on both the "supply side" and the "demand side" of community policing. We combine these surveys with administrative data on crime and allegations of police abuse, which we collated, digitized, and geocoded through repeated visits to UPF stations and posts around the country. We complement our quantitative data with qualitative insights gleaned from focus groups, detailed first-hand observations of town hall meetings recorded by YIDO and the Uganda office of Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA), and recurring phone calls with village heads and police officers serving the communities in our sample. We use these qualitative data to help contextualize our quantitative results.

We find that Uganda's COP program significantly increased the frequency of interactions between civilians and the police (in particular during town hall meetings), and that it also increased the prevalence of neighborhood watch teams (NWTs) and the frequency of NWT

patrols. Yet despite this increase in police-community contact, we find that COP had weak or null effects on almost all of our pre-registered outcomes.[2] Most notably, we find little to no evidence that the program increased citizens' approval of the UPF or improved their assessments of the intentions, capacity, or responsiveness of UPF officers. Nor do we find evidence that the program improved UPF officers' sense of accountability towards the communities they serve. Perhaps unsurprisingly given our other results, we also find no evidence that the program strengthened norms of crime reporting, enhanced perceptions of personal safety, or reduced the prevalence of crime.

Our study's null results run counter to our pre-registered hypotheses. We conduct an extensive set of descriptive and heterogeneous treatment effect analyses to explore potential explanations for these disappointing findings, and to attempt to identify conditions under which COP might yield more promising results. We begin by ruling out the possibility that our results are an artifact of flaws in our research design—in particular, spillover, attrition, and low statistical power. We then consider a variety of possible "supply-side" explanations related to the UPF—including resource constraints, high officer turnover, and principal-agent problems arising from a lack of top-down supervision—as well as "demand-side" explanations related to the attitudes, behaviors, and demographics of citizens themselves (e.g. the "stickiness" of citizens' pre-treatment perceptions of the police).

None of these factors can easily explain our findings. For example, we find little evidence that treatment effects are larger among stations that were relatively better resourced, that suffered from less turnover, or that were easier to supervise at baseline. These results suggest that simply fixing implementation challenges—which are inherent to COP programs around the world, including in rich democracies (Gill et al., 2014)—is unlikely to make COP more successful, at least in a setting like Uganda. We similarly find little to no evidence that treatment effects are stronger among citizens who expressed especially favorable (or unfavorable)

---

[2]Our pre-analysis plan (PAP) was pre-registered prior to endline data collection. We have produced an anonymized version of our PAP for purposes of peer review.

views of the UPF at baseline; among those who tend to be disadvantaged under prevailing localized mechanisms of dispute resolution (e.g. women), and who therefore might have been more likely to benefit from increased police presence in their communities; or among those living in ruling party strongholds, who might have been more likely to expect (and perhaps receive) preferable treatment from the police.

As with any study focused on a single country, we cannot be sure how far our results will generalize. Nonetheless, the obstacles to COP in Uganda are endemic in low-income countries and are likely to arise in many if not most of the developing country contexts where COP is currently being embraced. Indeed, a recent meta-analysis of six community policing field experiments (including this one) reports similarly disappointing findings (Blair et al., 2021). We extend beyond this meta-analysis by rigorously testing an extensive set of potential explanations for the apparent absence of treatment effects. Taking advantage of a rich collection of covariates from our baseline surveys as well as administrative data, we show that treatment effects do not appear to be larger in contexts or for people that should be most susceptible to the effects of community policing. Taken together, our findings suggest that merely addressing the obstacles to COP on either the supply or demand side is unlikely to yield more encouraging outcomes. Our study thus points to potentially important scope conditions on the usefulness of COP for improving police-community relations and reducing crime in low-income countries.

Theoretical framework

Police forces are tasked with deterring crime and ensuring the safety of citizens. The more competently and fairly they accomplish these goals, the more legitimate they and the rest of the state apparatus are generally perceived to be (Sunshine and Tyler, 2003). In the best cases, civilians and the police establish a mutually beneficial equilibrium in which citizen cooperation improves police effectiveness, effective policing increases citizen trust, and citizen

trust induces further citizen cooperation (Tankebe, 2009). Citizen trust in the police may be important not just for improving crime reporting and prevention, but also for sustaining citizen cooperation with other government restrictions and extractions. One recent study from Uganda, for example, finds that trust in the police is positively correlated with citizen adherence to public health regulations during the COVID-19 pandemic, likely because of the key role the police have played in enforcing those regulations in Uganda and other low-income countries (Blair et al., 2022).

But a mutually beneficial equilibrium between citizen cooperation and police effectiveness often fails to materialize in practice. Citizens may resist cooperating with police forces for a myriad of reasons, including lack of access to the police; misunderstanding of the criminal justice system; concerns about police misconduct, fairness, or capacity; and social norms that discourage cooperation. When choosing whether to report crimes or otherwise assist the police, citizens likely weigh the expected costs against the expected benefits (Blair, Karim and Morse, 2019). In environments characterized by incompetence, corruption, and resource constraints, citizens may calculate that the costs of cooperation are simply too high. As a result, they may bypass the police altogether, relying instead on illegal or extrajudicial mechanisms of dispute resolution (e.g. vigilantism and mob justice), or allowing crimes to go unsolved (Blair, 2020; Wilke, 2020).

These dynamics are likely to be especially severe in authoritarian regimes, where the police are often (rightly) perceived as instruments of the ruling party. Even authoritarian governments rely on feedback from citizens to promote social welfare, provide public goods, and ensure regime stability (Tsai, 2003). But citizens who do not identify with the ruling party may be especially reluctant to engage with the police and may in some cases actively withhold information that they believe will be used against them and their communities. Of course, even in authoritarian settings, not all rank-and-file police officers are loyalists of the regime, and many are at least nominally committed to providing security irrespective of citizens' partisan affiliations. But the reputation of the police force may spill over onto

the reputations of individual officers, diminishing citizen cooperation and hindering police effectiveness.

The promise of community policing

Community-orient policing (COP) aims to ameliorate these problems by increasing the quantity and quality of contact between police officers and civilians (Skogan, 2004). While the specifics vary across settings, COP typically involves creating opportunities for dialogue between civilians and police officers (e.g. through town hall meetings), increasing police presence at the beat or neighborhood level (e.g. through foot patrols), and enlisting citizens to monitor and report crimes (e.g. through the formation of neighborhood watch teams). The theory underlying COP holds that mutually respectful communication and proactive, highly localized policing practices can improve police-community relations, even in settings where distrust runs deep (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2015). Mitigating this distrust is the primary goal of COP.

COP is believed to reduce the costs and increase the benefits of citizen cooperation through multiple interrelated mechanisms. Perceived costs are reduced by increasing citizens' access to the police, improving their understanding of the criminal justice system (e.g. through information provided during town hall meetings), and mitigating citizen concerns about police corruption and abuse, and about possible social sanctions for engaging with the police. Perceived benefits are increased by enhancing citizens' perceptions of police capacity and responsiveness (e.g. through interpersonal interactions during foot patrols). Community policing may also change the behavior of police officers themselves, who may become more empathetic, or may develop a greater sense of accountability towards the citizens they serve.

A secondary (downstream) goal is to reduce crime. COP is predicated in part on the idea that the efficacy of any police force depends crucially on citizen cooperation (Greene and Mastrofski, 1988). If citizen cooperation is thought to be important in high-income countries such as the US and UK, where the concept of COP originated, then it is likely

to be especially vital in LMICs, where police forces tend to operate under much tighter resource constraints. Citizens are a source of valuable information about where crime is being committed, and who is committing it. While police forces could, in principle, gather this information on their own, doing so is challenging, time-consuming, and labor-intensive. Where citizens consistently provide reliable information, police officers can better allocate their limited time and resources. COP may also induce citizens to value the presence of the police and develop a preference for greater government spending on policing, thus helping overcome resource constraints. Finally, COP may have a direct deterrent effect on crime as a function of greater police presence at the local level.

Few (if any) other models for improving police-community relations have been as influential or widely embraced as COP. In sub-Saharan Africa—the focus of our study—COP has been adopted in one form or another in the Democratic Republic of Congo (Wisler, Monti-Ohannessian and Coya, 2021), Eswatini (Kyed, 2018), Ghana,[3] Guinea,[4] Kenya,[5] Mozambique (Kyed, 2009), Namibia,[6] Nigeria (Campbell, 2020), Rwanda,[7] Sierra Leone (Albrecht et al., 2014), Somalia (Tait, Probert and Gossar, 2019), South Sudan,[8] and Zambia (Musonda, 2019), among other countries. COP has been embraced outside of Africa as well, including in Belize,[9] East Timor (Wassel, 2014), Iraq,[10] and Nicaragua (McNeish, Prado and Ehrlich, 2019). The US, EU, UN, International Council of Chiefs of Police, and a variety of other donors and international organizations now advocate COP and have in-

---

[3]See the Ghana Police Service's Community Policing Unit.

[4]See Guinea's "Partners for Security" program.

[5]See the Kenya Police Service's page on community policing.

[6]See the Namibian Police Force's page on the "Make Your Region Safe" initiative.

[7]See the Rwanda National Police's page on "Policing in the 21st Century."

[8]See, for example, the UN Mission in South Sudan's community policing training program.

[9]See the Belize Police Department's page on community policing.

[10]See, for example, the Community Policing Forums established by the UN Office of Migration in Iraq.

corporated it into their police reform initiatives around the world (Blair, 2020; Blair et al., 2021).

Whether these initiatives can succeed in LMICs remains an open question, both theoretically and empirically. On the one hand, resource constraints arguably make community policing especially attractive in LMICs. If citizen cooperation is key to effective policing, and if COP enhances citizen cooperation, then it may improve the effectiveness of LMIC police forces even while other material and logistical resources remain scarce (Blair, Karim and Morse, 2019). On the other hand, enhancing the quality and frequency of contact between civilians and the police is a resource-intensive endeavor in and of itself, and LMIC police forces may not have the capacity to implement COP successfully, at least without large, unsustainable infusions of funding from foreign donors. Other obstacles may also impede the effectiveness of COP, including both supply-side factors (e.g. principal-agent problems or high officer turnover) and demand-side factors (e.g. citizen fear of the police). And yet COP initiatives continue to proliferate throughout the Global South. Understanding whether these initiatives can succeed despite the structural and operational challenges inherent to policing in LMICs is thus a first order concern, with important theoretical and policy implications that remain largely unexplored.

Hypotheses

Building on the discussion above, we pre-registered the following hypotheses regarding the expected effects of the Ugandan COP program on our primary outcomes:

Security of life and property

P1a. (−) effect on crime victimization

P1b. (−) effect on citizen perceptions of insecurity

Citizen perceptions of the police

P2. (+) effect on citizen approval of the police

Police perceptions of and behaviors toward citizens

P3a. (+) effect on police empathy, accountability, and perceptions of the seriousness of police misconduct

P3b. (−) effect on police abuse and bribery

Citizen cooperation with the police

P4a. (+) effect on reporting of crime victimization

P4b. (+) effect on reporting of crime prevention tips

P4c. (+) effect on reporting of police misconduct

Demand for government spending on the police

P5. (+) effect on citizen demand for government spending on the police

Reporting to and referral from local authorities[11]

P6a. (+) effect on citizen reporting of crime victimization to local authorities

P6b. (+) effect on local authority referrals of crime victimization to the police

We also pre-registered the following hypotheses regarding the program's expected effects on our secondary outcomes:[12]

Perceived costs of citizen cooperation with the police

---

[11]In Uganda, like in many LMICs, local authorities serve as liaisons between citizens and the police. We therefore test whether COP increases crime reporting not just to the police themselves, but also to local authorities, who are then expected to refer those cases to the police.

[12]In our PAP we distinguished between mechanisms and secondary outcomes; we ignore that distinction here. Results for all pre-specified hypotheses from sections 3.2 and 3.3 of our PAP are included either in the text or in the appendix. The exceptions are results pertaining

S1a. (+) effect on citizen perceptions of police intentions

S1b. (+) effect on citizen knowledge about the criminal justice system

S1c. (+) effect on norms of citizen cooperation with the police

Perceived returns to citizen cooperation with the police

S2a. (+) effect on citizen beliefs about police capacity

S2b. (+) effect on citizen perceptions of police responsiveness to citizen feedback

Trust in the criminal justice system

S3. (+) effect on trust in the courts

Trust in other community members

S4. (+) effect on trust in other community members

Crime and policing in Uganda

Uganda is an instructive setting for studying the effects of community policing in a low-income country setting. Uganda is in the mid-range of the World Bank's ranking of low-income countries in terms of economic development (as captured by GDP per capita) and human development (as captured by HDI). Electoral authoritarian regimes like Uganda's are common across the Global South, and especially in sub-Saharan Africa. As we demonstrate in Figure 1, the number of police officers per capita in Uganda is near the African median,

---

to our secondary treatment arm and separate analyses of index sub-components related to violence against women specifically. These analyses yield null results and are available on request. We also exclude results pertaining to the more exploratory hypotheses pre-registered as ancillary in section 3.4 of our PAP. For compactness, we also exclude some of the pre-specified analyses of heterogeneous treatment effects, which produce almost uniformly null results.

at least among the 17 African countries for which these data are available, suggesting the UPF is not an outlier in terms of the resources it enjoys. And while baseline levels of trust in the UPF leave much room for improvement, they too are close to the median among African countries, as Figure 2 shows. These parallels suggest lessons learned in Uganda may be applicable to other African countries, and potentially to other low-income countries as well.
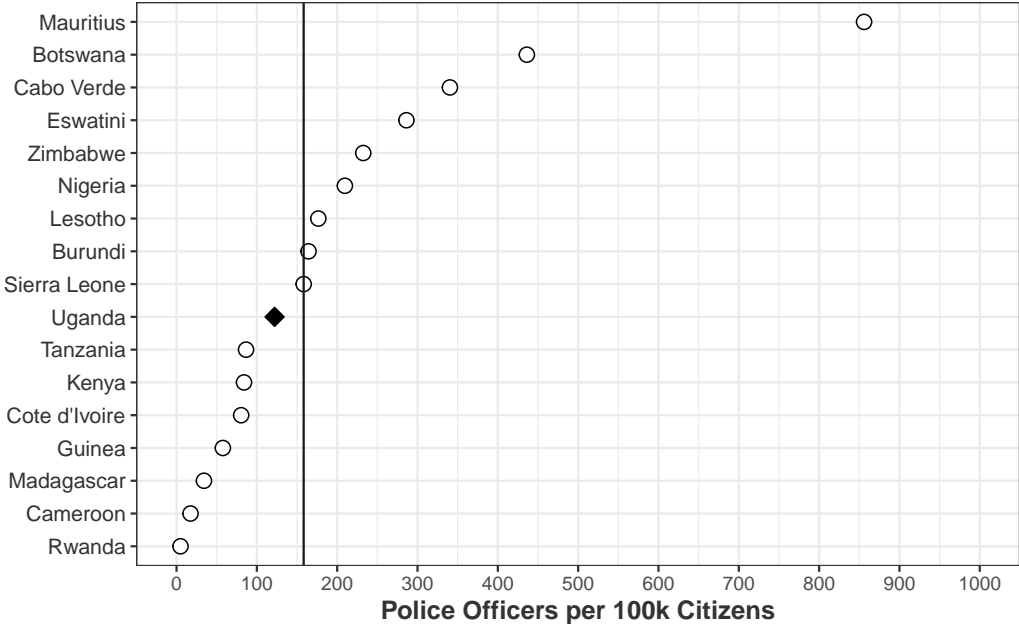

Figure 1: Police officers per 100,000 citizens across Africa. Source: UN Office on Drugs and Crime. Vertical line shows the median across countries.

Outside Kampala, the capital and largest city in Uganda where police headquarters is located, the UPF is divided into regional and district units. Each district has a central police station that provides supervision and resources to sub-district police stations and posts (i.e. beats). A mapping exercise we conducted at baseline found that the average station in our sample supervises 1.3 posts (with a minimum of 0 and a maximum of 8) and covers about 39 villages. The average number of officers deployed to stations and posts is 5 and 3, respectively. Only 10% of stations receive a monthly fuel allowance; none of the posts do. The average station in our sample has 1 motorbike; the average post has 0.5. None of the
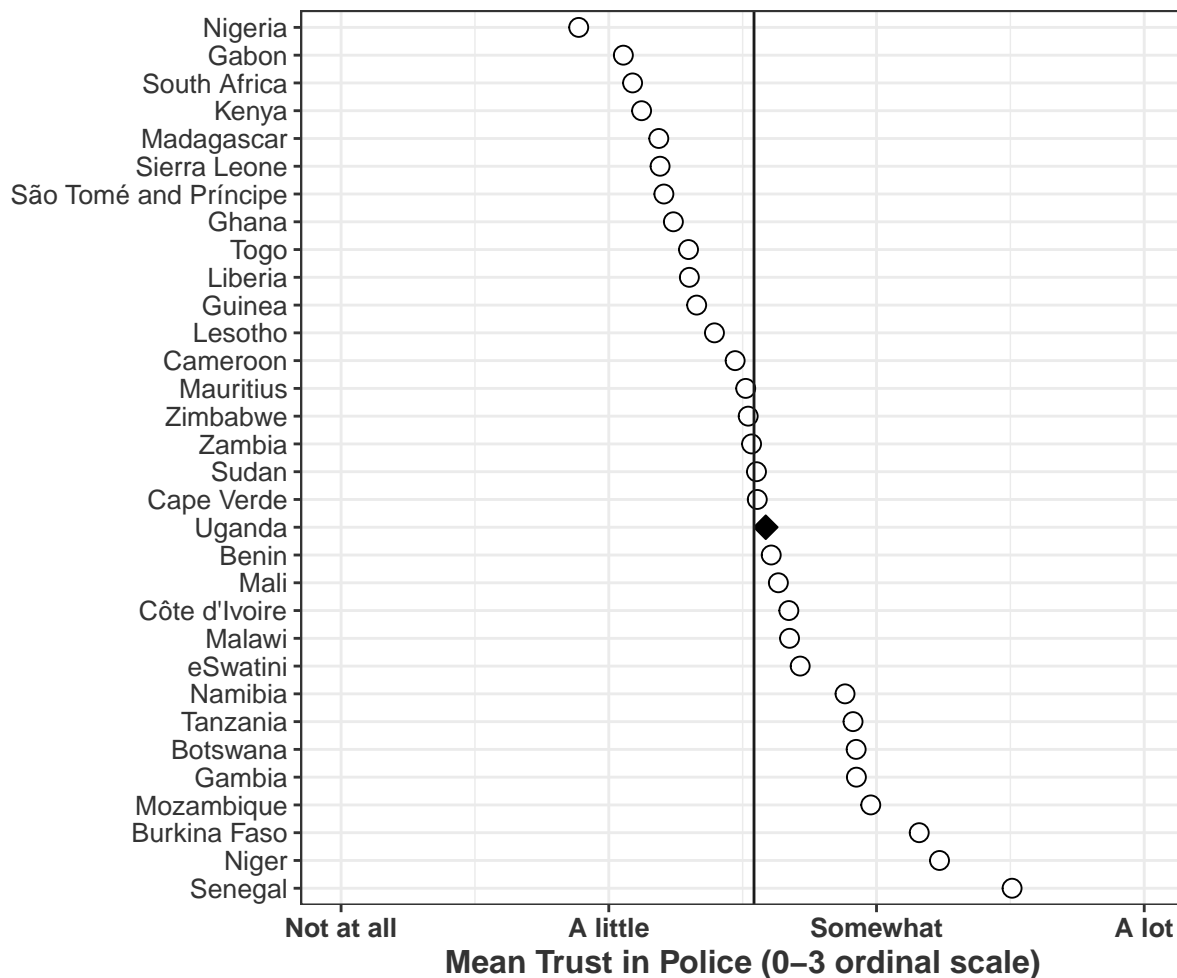
Figure 2: Trust in the police across Africa. Source: AfroBarometer round 7. Vertical line shows the median across countries.

posts or stations in our sample has a functioning computer.

Police-community relations in Uganda have long been strained by political bias and excessive use of force against civilians (Wagner, Hout and Namara, 2020). While Uganda holds periodic elections, their credibility has deteriorated over time. Since 1986, the country has been ruled by the same party (the National Resistance Movement, or NRM) and president (Yoweri Museveni). While the NRM undoubtedly enjoys pockets of popular support, to retain power it resorts to politicized prosecutions of opposition leaders and—most relevant for our purposes—intimidation by security forces. The UPF also engages in more routine

acts of malfeasance. In our baseline survey, a majority (57%) of respondents agreed with the statement that the police are corrupt and are primarily interested in pursuing their "personal interests" rather than serving their communities. In Uganda, as in other African nations, the police have also played a lead role in enforcing public health restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic, in some cases further aggravating police-community tensions (Bariyo, 2022; Blair et al., 2022).

Meanwhile, crime is common throughout Uganda, including in rural regions. Most of our baseline survey respondents (65.1%) had witnessed or heard about at least one crime in their village in the past six months, and in all 288 villages there was at least one respondent who had witnessed or heard about at least one crime, with an average of 4.1 reports per village. Against this backdrop, COP was first introduced in Uganda in 1989, with the Kampala Police Station designated as a pilot site. The UPF ostensibly expanded COP throughout the country in 1993 but did not introduce any formal mechanisms to ensure nationwide implementation, and take-up was inconsistent. While the UPF drafted a COP manual in 2011, it was not widely implemented beyond rudimentary training at the district level.

Indeed, in a qualitative evaluation conducted in 2013, Irish Aid concluded that "while there is strong political will and leadership by the Inspector General to implement community policing across the [UPF], the UPF has yet to develop a roll-out plan, a re-training program, and a means of monitoring implementation" (Carton et al., 2013, 4). Notwithstanding past haphazard implementation, at the time of our study interest in COP remained high within the UPF and among other government stakeholders, especially the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) and the Ministry of Justice. This ensured a degree of local ownership and commitment, which is key for the success of government programs (Honig, 2018).

The COP intervention

The COP intervention we study was designed to create opportunities for more positive, mutually respectful interactions between civilians and UPF officers. In early 2018, the UPF formed a working group to determine what a COP program should entail given the UPF's organizational structure and resource constraints. The working group comprised senior UPF officers and representatives of local civil society groups, led by YIDO. The working group's efforts resulted in a detailed COP manual specifying requirements and standard operating procedures. The manual was designed to be realistic, scalable, and sustainable, such that rank-and-file officers would be more likely to comply. We played no role in writing the manual, which reflects what UPF officers and civil society groups believed would be most effective. We also made no in-cash or in-kind contributions to the UPF: unlike many field experiments in low-income countries, the intervention was self-funded by the implementer.

YIDO conducted a series of two-day training sessions for all participating UPF officers to introduce the new COP program and ensure standardized implementation across study sites. The program consisted of three components:

1. **Town hall meetings** to establish more constant police presence in communities; educate citizens about police responsibilities and obligations; build rapport between citizens and the UPF; encourage crime reporting to the UPF; and brainstorm local solutions to local problems. UPF's target was for town hall meetings to take place once every two to three months per village.

2. **Foot patrols** to create opportunities for more interpersonal interaction and direct dialogue between citizens and UPF officers than is typically possible in the context of a town hall meeting. Officers were instructed to walk each village and go door to door speaking to residents. During foot patrols and town hall meetings, UPF officers were also expected to disseminate information about UPF oversight and accountability mechanisms UPF's target was for foot patrols to take place once a month per village.

3. **Formation of Neighborhood Watch Teams (NWTs)** to create cadrs of residents who better understand police procedures and resources, and who are tasked with monitoring crime and establishing a more direct line of communication between civilians and the police. Importantly, NWTs were explicitly forbidden to make arrests or adjudicate criminal cases.

Research Design

Sampling frame

YIDO trained UPF officers on the standard operating procedures described above in 36 randomly selected police stations from 13 districts[13] across Uganda. The UPF chose these 13 districts for inclusion in the study, using two selection criteria: equal representation of Uganda's four regions, and, within each region, relatively high crime rates. We then listed all police stations and posts within each of the 13 districts. Given the UPF's resource constraints, we considered it unlikely that COP would be effective in urban locations; we also expected that UPF officers would be less politicized in rural areas. We therefore excluded central police stations (located in district capitals) and stations covering parishes with populations greater than 90,000. In addition, we excluded police posts with peculiar jurisdictions: for example, those protecting universities, hospitals, or bus stations. Finally, we excluded posts that had only one officer assigned to them.

We then randomly selected one post per station. In places where the station had only one post (18 stations), we selected that one; in places where the station had no posts, we selected the station itself (32 stations). The result was a sample of 72 relatively rural, relatively high-crime police posts and stations spanning Uganda's four regions. For simplicity we refer to these as "police stations." For each police station in our sample, we identified four villages

---

[13]Mbarara, Lira, Mbale, Gulu, Mityana, Kamuli, Jinja, Tororo, Iganga, Kabale, Rakai, Arua, and Ntungamo.

for subsequent data collection. We asked the UPF to provide a list of villages (1) located in the same parish as the station and (2) under the jurisdiction of the corresponding station. We randomly selected four villages from each of these lists. In parishes with fewer than four villages, we selected the closest village from an adjacent parish that still fell under the jurisdiction of the same station.

Randomization

Our unit of randomization is the police station. We block randomized within each of the four regions of Uganda in order to maximize the degree of similarity between treatment and control units.[14] We organized stations into blocks of four using the Mahalanobis distance between covariates, then randomly assigned two stations to the treatment group and two to control in each block of four. For each of the 36 stations in the treatment group, we then randomly selected two of the four study villages under the station's jurisdiction to receive additional training and resources for NWTs. All analyses in this paper marginalize over this secondary treatment arm. (We find no evidence that the secondary treatment arm affected any of our outcomes of interest.)

Data and measurement

Administrative data: We measured crime as reported to the UPF using administrative data. Before the intervention began, we collected baseline data on all crimes reported to all UPF stations in our sample from March 1 to May 27, 2018. We collected the same data at

---

[14]We used the 2014 census to construct 11 blocking variables at the station level: population; % male; average age; % literate; average household size; average years of education; average number of meals eaten per day; % involved in an occupation other than subsistence agriculture; a standardized household asset index; a standardized household quality index; and a standardized index of social services available. We also constructed six additional blocking variables for the number of posts, parishes, villages, and police officers under the jurisdiction of the station, as well as distance to Kampala and to the district capital.

endline, after the intervention was complete, from July 15, 2019 to January 15, 2020.

Citizen survey: We conducted baseline and endline surveys with citizens, administered in person by local enumerators from IPA Uganda. The baseline took place between June and July 2018. We randomly selected 12 households in each village in our sample from a roster of all households in the community. To ensure gender balance, we sampled six men and six women per village; female respondents were interviewed by female enumerators. Households in which the randomly selected respondent was unavailable to be surveyed the same day were replaced. The result was a stratified random sample of 3,456 respondents. Wherever possible we interviewed the same respondents at endline, replacing them only when they were unavailable or had died or moved away. In total, we replaced 510 out of 3,456 citizen respondents, for an attrition rate of about 15%. Reassuringly, as we show in Tables SI-1 and SI-2, we find no evidence of differential rates or patterns of attrition across treatment groups.[15]

Police officer survey. We measured UPF officers' attitudes and behaviors using baseline and endline surveys. The baseline took place between June and July 2018. In each of the 72 police stations and posts, we interviewed the Officer in Charge and, whenever possible, the Community Liaison Officer and Child and Family Protection Unit officer. Among the more junior officers, we randomly selected as many as needed to reach a quota of 5 respondents per station, for a total of 217 officers. We sought to interview the same officers at endline, though by that point many had been reassigned to different locations, or were otherwise unavailable. Among the 198 officers we interviewed at endline, only 44 had also been interviewed at baseline. The rest were randomly selected replacement officers. In Tables SI-1 and SI-2 we again show that attrition does not appear to be correlated with treatment

---

[15]Another study in Uganda draws on our sampling frame to conduct a follow-up cell phone survey designed to test the relationship between trust in various government institutions (including the police) and citizen compliance with public health restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic (Blair et al., 2022). Beyond the shared sampling frame, this latter study is unrelated to the community policing program we evaluate here.

assignment.

Survey of village heads: Especially in low-income countries, police forces do not operate in isolation from other local actors. Where the police face resource constraints, other local authorities often play an important role in facilitating police work. In Uganda, each village local council has a chairperson (LC1) who regularly convenes community meetings and serves as liaison between the community and the police. We measure the attitudes of local authorities using a survey of LC1 chairpeople. LC1 chairpeople were only interviewed at endline. We managed to interview the LC1 chairperson in each of our 288 study villages—a response rate of 100%.

Additional outcomes: We pre-registered that we would analyze treatment effects on several additional outcomes that we do not address in the body of the paper for compactness. These include three measures of citizens' perceptions of their specific local police station (as opposed to the police in general), as well as several behavioral measures. Specifically, respondents were asked at the end of the interview whether they would be willing to share their contact information with the UPF to facilitate cooperation, and whether and how much of their survey compensation they would like to donate to their local NWT. As we show in Tables SI-19 and SI-20, we find no evidence that the intervention affected these outcomes.

Estimation

We estimate the sample intention-to-treat effect (ITT) of the COP program using an OLS regression of the form

$$\boldsymbol{y} = \alpha + \tau \boldsymbol{z} + \boldsymbol{X}\boldsymbol{\beta} + \boldsymbol{B}\boldsymbol{\gamma} + \boldsymbol{\epsilon},$$

where τ denotes the sample ITT, $\boldsymbol{z}$ denotes assignment to treatment, $\boldsymbol{X}$ denotes covariates, $\boldsymbol{B}$ denotes block fixed effects, and $\boldsymbol{\epsilon}$ is a vector of error terms. The covariate matrix $\boldsymbol{X}$ includes, where available, a baseline measure of the outcome and an indicator for missing

values in the baseline measure, which have been imputed as zeros.

Outcome measures are standardized by subtracting the mean and dividing by the standard deviation at baseline (or among the control group if no baseline measure is available). To combine individual items into indices, we first impute missing values for each item separately in the treatment and control groups using a linear model with all other components of the index and block fixed effects as predictors. We then take the average of all items in the index. Finally, we standardize again. Analyses of individual dependent variables address missing values through listwise deletion. For analyses based on our surveys of citizens, local leaders, or police officers, the unit of analysis is the respondent, and we cluster our standard errors at the police station level. For analyses based on administrative data, the unit of analysis is the police station and standard errors are heteroskedasticity robust. Following our PAP, we use the Benjamini-Hochberg correction to adjust for multiple comparisons across our primary hypotheses. Exploratory analyses of heterogeneous effects do not adjust for multiple comparisons.

Results

First stage

In Table 1 we find that Uganda's COP program was successful in increasing both the frequency of police-community interactions (especially via town hall meetings) and the degree of community involvement in policing (via NWTs). 28% of respondents in treatment villages were able to recall a town hall meeting with UPF at baseline; this share increased to 45% at endline. In control villages, the share was 30% at both baseline and endline. (Based on focus groups conducted prior to the start of the intervention, we suspect that most meetings in control villages were informal and not focused on COP, though we cannot be sure.) Similarly, more NWTs were formed in treatment relative to control villages, and these NWTs were significantly more active in treatment villages. We find no evidence, however, that the

Table 1: ITT on compliance with COP program

	Foot Patrols	Vehicle Patrols	Community Meeting	Existence NWT	NWT Patrols	Compliance Index
COP	−0.039	0.056	0.311***	0.203***	0.180**	0.151***
	(0.069)	(0.061)	(0.070)	(0.076)	(0.083)	(0.046)
Control mean	0.22	0.03	0.04	0.63	0.6	0.3
Control sd	1.21	1.03	1.02	1.37	1.54	0.84
Unadj. p-val.	0.574	0.365	0.000	0.010	0.034	0.002
Sample	C	C	C	C	C	C
Block FE	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
BL cov	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Miss. ind.	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Adj. R^2	0.122	0.053	0.078	0.057	0.093	0.140
Num. obs.	3452	3451	3451	3418	3378	3456
N Clusters	72	72	72	72	72	72

***$p < 0.01$; **$p < 0.05$; *$p < 0.1$

Outcomes are standardized using baseline means and standard deviations. Analyses in columns 1-5 rely on listwise deletion. The index in column 6 is constructed by imputing missing values in and averaging the other five measures and re-standardizing the index using the mean and standard deviation of the corresponding baseline index. Numbers in parentheses are standard errors that allow for clustering by police stations. The row "Unadj. p-val." shows p-values for two-tailed tests that have *not* been corrected for multiple comparisons. The row "Sample" indicates all measures are taken from the citizen survey (C). All analyses include block fixed effects and control for a baseline measure of the outcome. Missing values in baseline covariates have been replaced with zeros and we control for an indicator for missingness in these covariates.

COP program increased the rate of foot patrols: UPF officers conducted foot patrols in some treatment communities, but they did so infrequently, and typically as a reactive response to criminal complaints, rather than a proactive attempt to build trust and familiarity with civilians.

Qualitative field reports compiled by YIDO and IPA Uganda provide additional insights into the nature of these town hall meetings. (Unfortunately, we do not have qualitative field reports on NWT patrols.) A total of 353 meetings were held as part of the intervention between June 2018 and November 2019. The number of attendees ranged widely, from a low of five to a high of 224. The LC1 chairperson was present at almost all meetings; women's group and youth group representatives were present at 41% and 25% of all meetings,

respectively. Topics of discussion ranged widely, with the most common topics related to the formation and functioning of NWTs, discussed in over half of all meetings. Other topics were variable and sometimes only indirectly related to crime: truancy and the need to educate local youths (discussed in roughly one-third of all meetings); drug and alcohol abuse (roughly one-quarter of all meetings); health and sanitation (roughly one-fifth); domestic abuse and sexual and gender-based violence (roughly one-fifth); and gambling (roughly one-seventh), among others. This is typical of COP, which is designed to involve police officers in the more quotidian challenges facing communities, drawing on citizens' knowledge to identify and address "the social issues that create crime, disorder, and fear" (Gill et al., 2014, 401).

Treatment effects

Despite the increase in police-community interactions and community involvement in policing in Table 1, we find little to no evidence that the COP program affected most of the outcomes we measured. As we show in Table 2, we find no evidence that the program reduced the prevalence of crime as measured in our survey (H1a). This result is robust to aggregating multiple types of crime into a single index, to distinguishing between violent and non-violent crime, and to disaggregating crime by type.[16] The result also holds for property destruction and violent disputes over land use or boundaries. In contrast, if anything the program appears to have *increased* the number of crimes recorded by the UPF, though interpretation of this result is ambiguous: most crimes in rural Uganda are never reported to the police, and the apparent increase in crime in the administrative data could be an artifact of increased crime *reporting* (or potentially of improved record keeping among UPF officers in treatment stations, perhaps due to the additional COP training they received from YIDO).

Given the apparent absence of a treatment effect on crime as reported by citizens, it is perhaps unsurprising that we find no evidence that the program improved citizens' perceptions of security (H1b). This result again holds for the index and all its components. Nor

---

[16]Disaggregated results are not reported for compactness, but are available upon request.

do we find evidence that the program improved perceptions of the police (H2). Residents of treatment communities were no more likely to express trust in or satisfaction with the police, and no less likely to feel intimidated by the police. We similarly do not find evidence that the program improved empathy, accountability, or perceptions of the seriousness of police misconduct among police officers (H3a). Perhaps relatedly, we find some evidence that the program increased police abuse and bribery (H3b), a result driven by a small increase in the reported frequency with which respondents made "unofficial payments" to the police (though this result is no longer statistically significant after correcting for multiple comparisons).

We find no evidence that the program strengthened citizens' preferences to report to the police in hypothetical scenarios of crime, or that it increased reporting of actual crimes by victims or witnesses as measured in our survey (H4a). Nor do we find evidence that the program increased reporting of crime prevention tips to the police (H4b). We do find suggestive evidence of increased reporting of police misconduct (H4c), a result driven by an increase in citizen complaints in the UPF's own records. While this result is consistent with the apparent increase in unofficial payments to the UPF, it is not statistically significant after a multiple comparisons correction. Unsurprisingly given the null effects on crime, citizens' perceptions of safety, and citizens' attitudes towards the police, we find no evidence of an increase in citizens' demand for more government spending on policing (H5).

Table 2: ITT on primary outcomes

	Crime Victimization	Perceived Insecurity	Approval Police	Police Empathy	Police Abuse	Report Crime	Report Tips	Report Abuse	Demand Spending	Report to LC1	Referral by LC1
COP	−0.003	0.017	0.004	−0.109	0.075	−0.011	0.010	0.223	0.024	−0.003	0.158
	(0.026)	(0.037)	(0.036)	(0.080)	(0.036)	(0.018)	(0.022)	(0.106)	(0.037)	(0.094)	(0.115)
Control mean	0	-0.08	0.13	0.18	-0.04	0.01	0.01	0.06	0	0	0
Control sd	0.53	0.63	0.76	0.51	0.62	0.32	0.6	0.55	1	1	1
Adj. p-val.	0.978	0.900	0.978	0.501	0.225	0.900	0.900	0.225	0.900	0.978	0.501
Unadj. p-val.	0.905	0.655	0.921	0.182	0.040	0.568	0.647	0.041	0.511	0.978	0.176
Sample	C	C	C	O	C	C	C	C/A	C	LC1	LC1
Block FE	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
BL cov	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	no	no
Miss. ind.	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	no	no
Adj. R^2	0.052	0.044	0.135	0.155	0.029	0.045	0.065	0.154	0.002	0.010	0.040
Num. obs.	3456	3456	3456	198	3456	3456	3456	3456	3456	288	288
N Clusters	72	72	72	72	72	72	72	72	72	72	72

***$p < 0.01$; **$p < 0.05$; *$p < 0.1$

Except for "Demand Spending," outcomes are indices of several items. Outcomes are standardized using, where available, baseline means and standard deviations, and otherwise, control group means and standard deviations. Indices are created by imputing and averaging across individual items and re-standardizing the resulting index. Numbers in parentheses are standard errors that allow for clustering by police stations. The row "Unadj. p-val." shows p-values for two-tailed tests that are *not* corrected for multiple comparisons. The row "Adj. p-val." shows p-values that *have* been corrected for all comparisons shown in this table. Significance stars are based on corrected p-values. The row "Sample" indicates whether measures stem from the citizen (C), officer (O), or leader surveys (LC1), or from administrative data (A). Analyses include block fixed effects. Where available, we control for a baseline measure of the outcome. Missing values in baseline covariates have been replaced with zeros and we control for an indicator for missingness in these covariates).

In a setting like rural Uganda, where the nearest police station may be many miles away, and where citizens may not know how to contact the police by phone, it is possible that residents of treatment communities reported more crimes and crime prevention tips to the UPF *indirectly*, for example by reporting to other local authorities (e.g. LC1s) in the expectation that these reports would eventually be referred to the police. We explore this possibility using our survey of LC1s. We do not find any evidence that the program increased village heads' expectation that citizens would report crimes to them (H6a). Nor do we find evidence that the program increased village heads' willingness to refer cases to the police (H6b).

Our results in Table 2 suggest that Uganda's COP program had no effect on most (if any) of our primary outcomes. Table 3 suggests that—with the exception of crime in the administrative data—the program had no effect on our secondary outcomes either. We find no evidence that the program improved citizens' perceptions of the UPF's intentions (S1a); that it increased their understanding of Uganda's criminal justice system (S1b); or that it strengthened norms of citizen cooperation with the police (S1c). Nor do we find evidence that the program enhanced citizens' beliefs about the UPF's capacity (S2a) or its responsiveness to citizens (S2b). Finally, we find no evidence that the program increased trust in the courts (S3) or in other community members (S4). These results are robust to removing baseline covariates, and to the exclusion of 510 replacement respondents that were only interviewed at baseline.

Discussion

We find little to no evidence to suggest that Uganda's COP program achieved its intended goals. While the intervention did increase the frequency of contact between citizens and the UPF (in particular through town hall meetings) and the degree of citizen involvement in crime control and prevention (especially through the formation of NWTs), our results

25

suggest that these changes were not accompanied by a reduction in crime, an improvement in citizens' perceptions of the police, or changes in most of our other outcomes. What explains these disappointing results, and what can we learn from them about the prospects for COP in Uganda and other low-income countries?

We begin by ruling out the possibility that our findings are artifacts of possible flaws in our research design. We consider three potential problems in particular: (1) low statistical power, (2) attrition correlated with treatment assignment, and (3) spillover. None of these explanations seems especially valid in our case. (Some of our analyses pertaining to spillover were not pre-specified and should be interpreted as exploratory.) As we show in SI Section C.1, our study is sufficiently powered to detect even relatively small treatment effects on our primary outcomes. We further demonstrate in SI Section C.2 that while we observe some attrition between baseline and endline (especially in our survey of UPF officers), attrition does not appear to be affected by treatment.

Finally, as we discuss in SI Section C.3, while we observe secular trends in some (though not all) of our primary outcomes between baseline and endline in the control group, we find little to no evidence to suggest that these trends are a function of spillover. Intuitively, the risk of spillover in our study is very small: because we randomized at the post (or station) level, and because most posts have jurisdiction over an entire parish (or, in the case of stations, an entire sub-county), treatment and control communities are almost always located in different parishes. Indeed, in seven of the 12 districts in our study, all sample villages in the district are assigned *either* to treatment *or* to control. Even in the remaining districts, our sample consists of police stations, posts, and villages that are relatively far apart. The average distance between control stations and the nearest treatment station in our sample is 16 km; the average distance between control villages and the nearest treatment village is 14.2 km. These are long distances in rural Uganda, where roads are rough and most citizens do not have access to a vehicle. More formal diagnostic tests in SI Section C.3 confirm that spillover is unlikely to explain our null results.

Table 3: ITT on secondary outcomes

	Crime Admin	Police Intentions	Citizen Knowledge	Cooperation Norms	Police Capacity	Police Responsiveness	Trust Courts	Trust Community
COP	0.513*	0.007	0.008	−0.032	−0.019	0.028	−0.021	0.019
	(0.257)	(0.026)	(0.012)	(0.022)	(0.024)	(0.041)	(0.043)	(0.038)
Control mean	1.04	0	-0.06	-0.07	0.15	0.22	0	0.07
Control sd	1.62	0.5	0.31	0.56	0.64	0.84	1	0.85
Unadj. p-val.	0.051	0.793	0.529	0.151	0.425	0.496	0.622	0.629
Sample	A	C	C	C	C	C	C	C
Block FE	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
BL cov	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	yes
Miss. ind.	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	yes
Adj. R^2	0.780	0.128	0.011	0.014	0.046	0.087	0.010	0.066
Num. obs.	72	3456	3456	3456	3456	3456	3456	3455
N Clusters		72	72	72	72	72	72	72

$^{***}p < 0.01$; $^{**}p < 0.05$; $^{*}p < 0.1$

Except for "Trust Community," outcomes are indices of several items. Outcomes are standardized using, where available, baseline means and standard deviations, and otherwise, control group means and standard deviations. Indices are created by imputing and averaging across individual items and re-standardizing the resulting index. The number of observations is smaller in column 7, because we do not impute individual outcomes. Numbers in parentheses are standard errors that allow for clustering by police station. The unit of analysis in column 1 is the police station. Hence, we only use heteroskedasticity robust standard errors. The row "Unadj. p-val." shows p-values for two-tailed tests that are *not* corrected for multiple comparisons. The row "Adj. p-val." shows p-values that *have* been corrected for all comparisons shown in this table. The row "Sample" indicates whether measures stem from the citizen (C), officer (O), or leader surveys (LC1), or from administrative data (A). Analyses include block fixed effects. Where available, we control for a baseline measure of the outcome. Missing values in baseline covariates have been replaced with zeros and we control for an indicator for missingness in these covariates.

Next, we consider several potential "supply-side" obstacles to COP related to the structure and capacity of the UPF. (These analyses were not pre-specified and should be interpreted as an exploratory attempt to understand the results of our analyses that were.) First and most obviously, it is possible that many UPF stations simply did not have the resources to implement COP successfully. COP is resource-intensive: it requires that rank-and-file officers establish a frequent physical presence in the communities they serve—what is sometimes described as adopting a "turf orientation" (Skogan, 2006, 37)—and that they work with communities to solve problems that generate fear, insecurity, and disorder, even when those problems seem only tangentially related to crime. All of this requires resources that the average UPF station may not have.

As we show in Table SI-10, however, we find little to no evidence that Uganda's COP program was more successful among stations that enjoyed more abundant resources at baseline. We do not find any evidence of treatment effect heterogeneity across stations above and below the median on an index of resources. (This and all other heterogeneous treatment effect analyses are robust to using the 25th or 75th percentile as the cutoff instead.) Of course, it is possible that *no* or only very few UPF stations have the resources necessary to implement COP successfully. But as Figure 1 illustrates, Uganda falls close to the median of the distribution of police capacity (as measured by police personnel per capita) across countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Given that COP is currently being implemented in many low-income countries whose police forces operate under similar or more severe resource constraints, this interpretation implies that community policing is likely to yield equally disappointing results in many of the settings where it has been adopted in recent years.

Second, it is possible that turnover among rank-and-file UPF officers diminished the effectiveness of COP in Uganda. As discussed above, many officers in our baseline survey had been reassigned by the time of our endline; while we do not know the rate of turnover among officers who were *not* in our baseline sample, we see no reason to expect it to be much lower than the rate among those who were. Turnover may undermine reforms by

complicating officers' efforts to establish a rapport with citizens. In our case, this problem may be further compounded by the fact that newly deployed officers did not receive any additional training in COP before being reassigned to the stations in our sample, potentially limiting their impact. But as we demonstrate in Table SI-11, we find little to no evidence that COP was more effective in stations with lower turnover rates.[17] Again, it is possible that *no* UPF station has a turnover rate low enough for COP to succeed. But given that turnover is a pervasive problem among Global South police forces (Banerjee et al., 2021)— and, indeed, among police forces in the Global North as well (Wilson et al., 2010)—this interpretation again implies that community policing is unlikely to succeed in many of the places where it is currently being implemented.

Third, it is possible that the absence of treatment effects is a result of principal-agent problems. COP is time-consuming, and rank-and-file officers may have incentives to revert to more passive approaches to policing if their performance is not being monitored. In a setting like Uganda, where many stations are located far from their respective district headquarters, and where rough roads, resource constraints, and unreliable cell phone networks make it difficult to track rank-and-file officers' behavior (Wagner, Hout and Namara, 2020), principal-agent problems may have hindered implementation of COP. Yet in Table SI-12 we find little evidence that Uganda's COP program was more impactful in stations that were located closer to district headquarters, where barriers to monitoring were likely less severe. As we show in Table SI-13, we similarly find little to no evidence that the program was more successful among stations with fewer officers from the lowest ranks of the UPF, who may have been more prone to shirking due to their inexperience.

Next, we consider several potential "demand-side" impediments to COP that originate with the attitudes, behaviors, and demographics of the communities involved. (Again, these

---

[17]This analysis should be interpreted with care, because conditioning on turnover may induce post-treatment bias if the COP intervention affected turnover rates (though Tables SI-1 and SI-2 show we find no evidence of such an effect).

analyses were not pre-specified.) First, it is possible that some citizens were so intimidated by the UPF that they were unwilling to interact (much less cooperate) with UPF officers even in the context of a COP program, thus weakening the program's efficacy. Interestingly, and contrary to this expectation, we show in Table SI-14 that respondents who reported feeling intimidated by the police at baseline were *more* rather than less likely to report exposure to the UPF as a function of the intervention. But we find little to no evidence that the intervention had weaker (or stronger) effects on attitudes towards the UPF or cooperation with UPF officers among this subgroup of respondents.

Second and conversely, it is possible that some citizens were so satisfied with the UPF's status quo approach to policing that any possible improvements in their perceptions of the police (and other outcomes) were subject to ceiling effects. As we show in Table SI-15, however, this does not appear to be the case: we find no evidence that the program was less impactful among respondents who reported higher levels of satisfaction at baseline. Again, Figure 2 illustrates that attitudes towards the police in Uganda are not atypically favorable or unfavorable relative to other African countries, suggesting that if baseline levels of satisfaction and intimidation are barriers to COP, they are likely to be barriers in many of the African countries where COP is currently being embraced. Nor, for that matter, do we find evidence that ceiling effects more generally help explain our disappointing results: in Table SI-16 we demonstrate that the program was no more or less effective among respondents with high baseline values on each of our primary outcomes.

Third, it is possible that while the program generally failed to achieve its intended goals, it was more successful among specific subgroups that were especially likely to benefit from increased police presence in their communities. Previous studies have suggested, for example, that women tend to be disadvantaged under the localized and often informal mechanisms of dispute resolution that pervade many African countries, especially in rural areas (Blair, Karim and Morse, 2019; Isser, 2011). It is possible that COP may be more effective among women, who may be more likely to benefit from easier access to, and closer coordination

with, the police. But in Table SI-17 we find no evidence that this is the case.

Fourth, given UPF's reputation as an ally and instrument of the ruling NRM party, it is possible that COP is more impactful in NRM strongholds, where citizens may be more receptive to increased police proximity. It is also possible that UPF officers discriminate against opponents of the ruling party when responding to citizens' complaints, limiting the effectiveness of COP except in NRM strongholds. But this does not appear to be the case either, as we show in Table SI-18. While we find some evidence that the intervention induced a larger increase in the frequency of interactions between citizens and the UPF in NRM strongholds, we find little to no evidence that the program was otherwise more successful in these areas.

Finally, it is possible that Uganda's COP program was only effective among citizens who were directly exposed to it in some way. Our baseline and endline surveys consist of randomly selected residents from each village in our sample. While we find a positive and statistically significant treatment effect on the frequency of contact between these residents and the UPF, many respondents in our sample likely did not interact with UPF officers during the intervention, and some may not have known of the intervention's existence, potentially diminishing its efficacy. To probe this explanation, we replicate all our analyses using only our sample of LC1 chairpeople.[18] As discussed above, qualitative field reports suggest that LC1s were almost always present during town hall meetings. LC1s are also responsible for organizing NWTs, and they more generally serve as liaisons between their communities and the police. But we find no evidence that the program was more successful in our LC1 sample. In any event, as Blair et al. (2021) argue, if COP is to fulfill its promise, its effects must extend beyond the relatively small pool of residents who interact with police officers during COP activities.

In general, these analyses yield little evidence of treatment effect heterogeneity. There are a few exceptions: for example, the positive effect on crime reporting does appear to

---

[18]For compactness we do not report these results here, but they are available upon request.

be smaller among respondents who reported feeling intimidated by the police at baseline (Table SI-14), and (weakly) larger among respondents who expressed higher baseline levels of satisfaction with the police (Table SI-15). The positive effect on reporting of police misconduct also seems (weakly) smaller among respondents who felt intimidated at baseline (Table SI-14). But these statistically significant estimates are few, and we are careful not to over-interpret them given that most of our estimates do not reach conventional levels of statistical significance.

Conclusion

Taken together, these results cast doubt on the prospect that Uganda's COP program would have been more effective in the absence of supply-side or demand-side obstacles. We find little to no evidence that the program was more successful among stations with more resources, lower turnover, better monitoring, or more experienced officers. Given that our sample spans all four regions of the country and encompasses stations with varying levels of accessibility, turnover, experience, and resources, we see no reason to expect COP to be more successful in most other Ugandan communities. Nor do we find evidence that it was more successful among subgroups who may have been especially likely to benefit from increased police presence— women, for example—or that our null findings are artifacts of ceiling effects, or of sampling respondents who were not directly treated.

It is of course possible that COP is an effective mechanism for improving police-community relations and reducing crime when the conditions are right, and that the conditions simply are not right in rural Uganda. It is possible, for example, that even the best-resourced police stations in rural Uganda still lack the funds, equipment, and personnel necessary to sustain a COP program that requires frequent travel to villages for town hall meetings and foot patrols. But these constraints are likely to exist in many if not most of the low-income countries in which COP is currently being adopted. Our data suggest that marginal improvements to

program design or implementation would not be enough to generate the benefits that many ascribe to COP, at least not in low-income country contexts. Governments, donors, and police forces may need to explore other mechanisms to improve police-community relations in the Global South.

References

Albrecht, Peter, Olushegu Garber, Ade Gibson and Sophy Thomas. 2014. *Community Policing in Sierra Leone: Local Policing Partnership Boards.* Copenhagen: Danish Institute for International Studies. DIIS Report 2014:16.

Amaral, Sofia, Sonia Bhalotra and Nishith Prakash. 2021. "Gender, crime and punishment: Evidence from women police stations in India." *Working paper* .

Banerjee, Abhijit, Raghabendra Chattopadhyay, Esther Duflo, Daniel Keniston and Nina Singh. 2021. "Improving Police Performance in Rajasthan, India: Experimental Evidence on Incentives, Managerial Autonomy, and Training." *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy* 13(1):36–66.

Bariyo, Nicholas. 2022. "In Some African Nations, Armed Police Enforce Covid-19 Vaccinations." *Wall Street Journal* . February 28.

Blair, Graeme, Jeremy M Weinstein, Fotini Christia, Eric Arias, Emile Badran, Robert A Blair, Ali Cheema, Ahsan Farooqui, Thiemo Fetzer, Guy Grossman et al. 2021. "Community policing does not build citizen trust in police or reduce crime in the Global South." *Science* 374(6571):eabd3446.

Blair, Robert A. 2020. *Peacekeeping, Policing, and the Rule of Law after Civil War.* New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Blair, Robert A., Sabrina M. Karim and Benjamin S. Morse. 2019. "Establishing the Rule of Law in Weak and War-Torn States: Evidence from a Field Experiment with the Liberian National Police." *American Political Science Review* 113(3):641–657.

Blair, Robert A., Travis Curtice, David Dow and Guy Grossman. 2022. "Public Trust, Policing, and the COVID-19 Pandemic: Evidence from an Electoral Authoritarian Regime." *Social Science & Medicine* 305:115045.

Blattman, Christopher, Donald P. Green, Daniel Ortega and Santiago Tobón. 2021. "Place-Based Interventions at Scale: The Direct and Spillover Effects of Policing and City Services on Crime." *Journal of the European Economic Association* 19(4):2022–2051.

Brogden, Mike and Preeti Nijhar. 2013. *Community Policing: National and International Models and Approaches.* London: Routledge.

Campbell, John. 2020. "Nigeria Launches Community Policing Initiative." *Council on Foreign Relations* . September 15.

Canales, Rodrigo. 2021. "Shaping Police Officer Mindsets and Behaviors: Experimental Evidence of Procedural Justice Training." *Working paper* .

Carton, Joe, Antoinette Cunningham, Mark Downes and Michael Kennedy. 2013. Evaluation of the Irish Aid/An Garda Síochána programme to support community policing within the Ugandan Police Force. Technical report.

Chalfin, Aaron and Justin McCrary. 2017. "Criminal deterrence: A review of the literature." *Journal of Economic Literature* 55(1):5–48.

Curtice, Travis and Brandon Berhlendorf. 2020. "Street-Level Repression: Protest, Policing, and Dissent in Uganda." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 65(1):166–194.

Dunn, Kevin Mark, Rosalie Atie, Michael Kennedy, Jan A Ali, John O'Reilly and Lindsay Rogerson. 2016. "Can you use community policing for counter terrorism? Evidence from NSW, Australia." *Police Practice and Research* 17(3):196–211.

Gallup. 2020. "Global Law and Order.".

Gill, Charlotte, David Weisburd, Cody W Telep, Zoe Vitter and Trevor Bennett. 2014. "Community-oriented policing to reduce crime, disorder and fear and increase satisfaction and legitimacy among citizens: A systematic review." *Journal of Experimental Criminology* 10(4):399–428.

Greene, Jack R and Stephen D Mastrofski. 1988. *Community Policing: Rhetoric or Reality.* Praeger New York.

Honig, Dan. 2018. *Navigation by Judgment: Why and When Top-Down Management of Foreign Aid Doesn't Work.* Oxford University Press.

International Association of Chiefs of Police. 2015. *IACP National Policy Summit on Community-Police Relations: Advancing a Culture of Cohesion and Community Trust.*

Alexandria, VA: International Association of Chiefs of Police.

Isser, Deborah. 2011. *Customary justice and the rule of law in war-torn societies.* US Institute of Peace Press.

Karim, Sabrina. 2020. "Relational State Building in Areas of Limited Statehood: Experimental Evidence on the Attitudes of the Police." *American Political Science Review* 114(2):536–551.

Kyed, Helene Maria. 2009. "Community Policing in Post-War Mozambique." *Policing and Society* 19(4):354–371.

Kyed, Helene Maria. 2018. "Street Authorities: Community Policing in Mozambique and Swaziland." *PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 41(S1):19–34.

McNeish, John-Andrew, Skarlleth Martinez Prado and Hugo FrÃ¼hling Ehrlich. 2019. "Community-Based Policing in Nicaragua: Do the Claims of Communitarian, Proactive and Preventative Hold True?" *Journal of Human Security* 15(2):7–20.

Miller, Amalia R. and Carmit Segal. 2019. "Do female officers improve law enforcement quality? Effects on crime reporting and domestic violence." *The Review of Economic Studies* 86(5):2220–2247.

Musonda, Francis Xavier. 2019. *Challenges of Implementation of Community Policing in Zambia: Case of Kabwe and Kitwe Districts.* Beau Bassin, Mauritius: LAP LAMBERT Academic Publishing.

Peyton, Kyle, Michael Sierra-Arévalo and David G Rand. 2019. "A Field Experiment on Community Policing and Police Legitimacy." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 116(40):19894–19898.

Skogan, Wesley G. 2004. *Community policing: Can it work?* Wadsworth/Thomson Learning Belmont, CA.

Skogan, Wesley G. 2006. The Promise of Community Policing. In *Police Innovation: Contrasting Perspectives*, ed. David Weisburd and Anthony A. Braga. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press pp. 27–43.

Skogan, Wesley G and Susan M Hartnett. 1999. *Community policing, Chicago style.* Oxford University Press.

Soss, Joe and Vesla Weaver. 2017. "Police Are Our Government: Politics, Political Science, and the Policing of Race–Class Subjugated Communities." *Annual Review of Political Science* 20(1):565–591.

Sukhtankar, Sandip, Gabriele Kruks-Wisner and Akshay Mangla. 2022. "Policing in patriarchy: An experimental evaluation of reforms to improve police responsiveness to women in India." *Science* 377(6602):191–198.

Sunshine, Jason and Tom R Tyler. 2003. "The role of procedural justice and legitimacy in shaping public support for policing." *Law & society review* 37(3):513–548.

Tait, Sean, Thomas Probert and Abdirahman Maalim Gossar. 2019. *Community-Police Dialogue and Cooperation in Somalia: Lessons Learnt.* Copenhagen: Danish Demining Group.

Tankebe, Justice. 2009. "Public cooperation with the police in Ghana: Does procedural fairness matter?" *Criminology* 47(4):1265–1293.

Tankebe, Justice. 2010. "Public confidence in the police: Testing the effects of public experiences of police corruption in Ghana." *The British Journal of Criminology* 50(2):296–319.

Tsai, Lily L. 2003. *Accountability Without Democracy: Solidary Groups and Public Goods Provision in Rural China.* New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Tyler, Tom R and Yuen Huo. 2002. *Trust in the law: Encouraging public cooperation with the police and courts through.* Russell Sage Foundation.

Wagner, Natascha, Matthias Rieger, Arjun Bedi and Wil Hout. 2017. "Gender and policing norms: Evidence from survey experiments among police officers in Uganda." *Journal of African Economies* 26(4):492–515.

Wagner, Natascha, Wil Hout and Rose Namara. 2020. "Improving police integrity in Uganda: Impact assessment of the police accountability and reform project." *Review of Development Economics* 24(1):62–83.

Wassel, Todd. 2014. *Institutionalising Community Policing in Timor-Leste: Police Development in Asia's Youngest Country.* San Francisco, CA: The Asia Foundation.

Weisburd, David, Cody W Telep, Heather Vovak, Taryn Zastrow, Anthony A Braga and Brandon Turchan. 2022. "Reforming the police through procedural justice training: A multicity randomized trial at crime hot spots." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 119(14):e2118780119.

Wilke, Anna M. 2020. "How Does the State Replace the Community? Experimental Evidence on Crime Control from South Africa." *Unpublished Manuscript* .

URL: *https://anna-wilke.com/wilke$_s$tate$_c$ommunity.pdf*

Wilson, Jeremy M., Eric Dalton, Charles Scheer and Clifford A. Grammich. 2010. *Police Recruitment and Retention for the New Millennium: The State of Knowledge.* Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation.

Wisler, Dominique, Silva Monti-Ohannessian and Rafael Avila Coya. 2021. "Impacts of Community Policing on Security: Evidence from Mbujimayi in the Democratic Republic of Congo." *Police Practice and Research* 22(1):522–541.

Acknowledgement