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Can Community Policing Improve Police-Community
Relations in an Authoritarian Regime? Experimental
Evidence from Uganda*

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Abstract

Throughout the developing world, citizens distrust the police and hesitate to bring crimes to their attention—a suboptimal equilibrium that makes it difficult for the police to effectively combat crime and violence. Community policing has been touted as one solution to this problem, but evidence on its efficacy in developing country contexts is sparse. We present results from a large-scale field experiment that randomly assigned a home-grown community policing intervention to police stations throughout rural Uganda. Drawing on administrative crime data and close to 4,000 interviews with citizens, police officers, and local authorities, we show that community policing had limited effects on core outcomes such as crime, insecurity, and perceptions of the police. We attribute these findings to a combination of turnover, treatment non-compliance, and resource constraints. Our study draws attention to the limits of community policing's potential to reduce crime and build trust in the developing world.

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February 01, 2022